

Bio for Nicole Marshall, CSSJ New Orleans Member

My name is Nicole W. Marshall, I am a 38-year-old New Orleans native and a mother of seven remarkable sons. I am happily married to my husband Ronald, who is my lighthouse and castle on a high mountain.

I am also a survivor of relational violence and abuse--an invisible, quiet, yet often recurring theme in our society. Those demeaning, dehumanizing and brutally violent interactions between the x-factor and myself stripped layers of skin to reveal my true identity. I am, in fact, a warrior woman. Those same interactions required that I lean on the indomitability of the human spirit to sustain my fragile and broken spirit during a humiliating separation, devaluing divorce and an insensitive judicial process that awarded custody of my two younger sons to their father. That interaction also inspired me to take a stand, organize and become an advocate for survivors and perpetrators of the cancerous disease referred to as relational violence and abuse.

I am forever grateful that on August 19, 2016, my perception of life shifted in a positive way. This shift birthed forward energy and my newest organization, Pave it Forward. I created this organization to make good on my unyielding commitment to working towards significantly reducing the amount of violence that people experience by the hands and mouth of someone close to them, and to help those caught in the vicious web of an abusive relationship.

While I am still experiencing symptoms of post-traumatic stress/slave disorder(PTSD) as a result of the amount of relational violence and abuse I suffered by an x-husband, I am still inspired to continue my research and work until the residue of the quiet epidemic is eradicated from our society. Too often those who experience relational violence remain silent and hold in their pain while feeling helpless to improve their relationship. I was once that helpless person, but my experience prompted me to change and strive to make my life better. Giving back is important to me, so I joined a people's movement to end relational violence in my children's lifetime. I understand that it will take the input of every person and institution to see long-term, substantial changes, but the fight is worth it if we truly desire to heal our nation of this disease.

I also want to raise awareness about the historical roots of the trauma and abuse in contemporary Black relations. I have spent a lot of time talking to experts and relationship violence victims. I have learned that a part of relational violence is embedded in the fabric of our society, as African-Americans' hardships have been exacerbated by the trauma our ancestors experienced during slavery and Jim Crow. Plantation life has created destructive patterns of behaviors and acceptance of relational violence and abuse.

Upon learning this, I stopped looking at individuals and began to look at systems that have affected many generations and kept vicious acts of violence in place. Those systems include the police, courts, state and federal governments. Cleansing our DNA of the intergenerational curse will not be an easy feat, but the more I learn, the more I am determined to change and eventually break these systems.