

Didn't She Almost Have It All?

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The announcement of the death of Whitney Houston shook the entire world out of its routine and frenetic pace. February 11, 2012 has now become one of the famous, “Where were you when ...?” days. The body of one of the greatest female voices that has ever lived was found lifeless, voiceless and alone in a hotel bathroom. Questions as to: how? why?, inundated every conversation. So much talent, so much fame, so much yet to give; at 48 years of age Whitney who had made her comeback some years back had a fruitful future ahead of her.

Three months later, the official cause of death was determined; we have all had to relive the shock of her sudden departure. Quotes taken from Jen Chaney’s March 22nd article for The Washington Post’s Entertainment Section stated: The L.A. County Coroner’s office issued a toxicology report this afternoon that said the official cause of the pop diva’s death was “drowning and effects of atherosclerotic heart disease and cocaine use ...” In addition to cocaine, the toxicology report states that other drugs — illegal, prescription and over-the-counter — also were found in Houston’s system.... “Cocaine and metabolites were identified and were contributory to the death,” the document states. “Marijuana, alprazolam (Xanax), cyclobenzaprine (Flexeril) and diphenhydramine (Benadryl) were identified but did not contribute to the death.”

Whitney Houston’s talent has been chronicled as one of the world’s greatest. Her voice and her songs were the background music for the lives of an entire generation. For more than a decade she managed to supersede the usual “one hit sensations” typical of musical celebrities. We cannot forget songs like, “I will always love you,” “The Greatest Love of All”, “How Will I Know?”, “All the Man that I Need”, “I Wanna Dance with Somebody (Who Loves me)”, “Where do Broken Hearts Go?” Her voice remains indelible from our minds and her elegant presence on stage incomparable.

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Born in a Christian home in New Jersey, Whitney had the singular experience of having two of the greatest female artists of our time as her mentors: Aretha Franklin (godmother), and Dionne Warwick (Aunt). Her mother Cissy Houston brought her up with heavy doses of sheltered family life, private schooling and gospel singing. These women had been witnesses to Whitney's life and early on recognized that her talent was undeniable. When she opened her mouth to sing it was pure perfection.

A home-girl, Whitney's marriage to Bobby Brown on July 18, 1992, turned many heads. The questions as to the wisdom of this decision were printed in every tabloid and whispered in all social circles. Bobby Brown was the renowned bad boy from New Edition. He had a bad reputation and a bad temper but Whitney, as do many women, loved her man. Then in 1993, came Bobbi Kristina their beautiful doe eyed little girl who would often walk on stage to stand next to her mom while she sang. It seemed as if, after all, Whitney and her family were getting by. Whitney was even credited for toning Bobby down and shaping him into a more agreeable person.

Then, came the rumors of infidelity, jealous rages, fights, drugs, and alcohol abuse. It soon became evident that the family was on the rocks. It did not help that they signed up to be exposed in the now infamous *Being Bobby Brown* reality show. The show further highlighted the depths of their troubles. Whitney herself in 2009, on what was slated to be her comeback interview with Oprah Winfrey, admitted that all the stories were true and confessed to the hellish chamber of emotional and psychological abuse she lived within her marriage. Yet, she did not file for divorce until 2006, after almost fifteen years of willful degradation of her mind, body and soul.

Why did she stay so long? This is the million-dollar question we often ask of women who stay in abusive relationships. Unlike many other women in those circumstances, Whitney had the money and fame to just pack up and leave and not have to worry about her physical or financial

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wellbeing. There would have been more than a few who would have been willing to step up to the plate to become insightful advisors and protectors.

But like most women, Whitney wanted to have it all. She wanted a good man, she wanted a good relationship, she wanted her marriage to work; all of this while she became notoriously more famous, wealthier, and more loved than her husband. She wanted it all to work. Thus, she spent fifteen years doing whatever it took to make it work. In 1994 in an interview with *Essence Magazine*, she defended her man, "Bobby's got a good heart and a good soul. We work hard at our relationship. We do." During the 2009 interview with Oprah she shared how she kept them together, "I didn't do anything without him. I wasn't getting high by myself. It was me and him together, and we were partners, and that's what my high was — him. He and I being together, and whatever we did, we did it together. No matter what, we did it together." Whitney worked hard at her relationship because for Whitney marriage was as she later stated in the same interview, "what the Bible says, until death do us part."

Whitney Elizabeth Houston wanted to have it all; the perfect man, the perfect love, the perfect career, the perfect marriage, the perfect family. So, she worked hard at making it work; even when that meant that she would need to abandon values and reject all common sense to reduce self to nothing to make it work. Whitney's syndrome affects women from all social classes and of all ethnicities. The symptoms are often manifested in our self-determined quest to get a man and keep him, no matter the costs. Whitney's life remains a testament of the dangers of this illusion because this search often precludes our better judgment. Thus, in order to live within the illusions of this syndrome many women often find themselves sacrificing their children, their faith, their values, and even God. If to have it all we must abandon those things that are "just, pure and of good report" (Phil. 4:8), in the end, we may just lose it all.

Copyright © 2011 by **Norka Blackman-Richards**, is an educator, a writer and an empowerment speaker on women, education, diversity and generational issues. She is the

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