



Change

ISSUE

Inspirational Woman

DESHAWAN SNOW

LISA MUNDEMBE-CHUMA

Interviews

1. Give us your "elevator speech" - a snapshot of who you are, what you do for a living, and how we should "know" you.

I'm an author, businesswoman, television personality, philanthropist, licensed minister, and proud mother of three boys. I'm best known for my starring role on the first season of BRAVO's hit television series, "*The Real Housewives of Atlanta*."

I feel that my purpose in life is to empower, encourage, and enrich the lives of teen girls and young women throughout the nations. I've learned that my pain is connected to others and every time I encounter another valley, I am bringing someone else out. It is my daily prayer that the Lord guides me to help other wounded women and teaches me to lead by the love of God and not by my emotion.

2. Please tell us more about Lil Shawnee books. Why did you start them and what are your future plans?

Lil Shawnee is a classic book series that provides empowering and encouraging messages perfect for tween girls in grades three to six. Nevaeh, Lil Shawnee's spiritual guide, provides a sprinkling of heavenly advice and a "you can do it" message to overcome negativity and build inner strength.



Although I have three sons, I decided to write a book series for preteen girls as an extension of my life's purpose (to empower, encourage, and enrich young girls/women). I have nieces and friends who have girls, not to mention I have boys in the same grades that the books target; so I understand the level of peer pressure and the type of things girls are exposed to at much earlier age. I feel it is necessary to start planting seeds in girls younger than the girls I serve in my foundation.

It is my prayer that through the storylines and nuggets of wisdom, girls are strengthened to make smart choices, avoid developing (or overcome) negative feelings about themselves, grow into self-confident women, and be equipped with skills in order to stay whole.

In addition to multiple books, my goal is to have an animated series and merchandising line (clothing, dolls, board and video games, bed and bath accessories, etc.).

3. I can see you have a foundation for young girls; why young girls?

I established the DeShawn Snow Foundation to assist teenage girls with low self-esteem issues, girls that face challenges and roadblocks like I did. I think it's important for girls to know that it does not matter what mistakes they've made, what labels they've been given, or what experiences they've endured - they can have life and have it abundantly! I believe that together we can make a difference and have a

substantial impact in steering our teenage girls toward successful life paths. "Together we can create stepping stones that create success and opportunities for every girl."

4. What are your personal mottos - what keeps you going daily?

I'm learning that healing is a process and that it will not happen overnight. And each day is different. So here are several different personal mottos that I draw on to keep me going:

- ◆ Don't take anything personal. Nothing people do or say is because of you. It is because of them. It has nothing to do with you. When you know what you are, and you don't have the need to be accepted, it won't affect you. Whatever someone else thinks or feel about you is their problem and not yours.
- ◆ I am beautiful. I am valuable. I am worthy.
- ◆ To know who I am, I have to forget who I was.
- ◆ I am not required to understand. My only requirement is to trust.
- ◆ God never ends on a negative. This may have been the end of a chapter, but most definitely not the end of my story.
- ◆ I am not a victim. I am a victor. There is something God is trying to teach me in the place; he just used this trial to get my attention.

- ◆ What doesn't kill me will make me stronger. I must not fight the process. The rough diamond that doesn't remain under the chisel will never become a precious jewel.
- ◆ The greater the anointing, the greater the sacrifice.
- ◆ Direction - not intention - determines my destination.

5. What advice would you give to other women who have dreams but are not sure or want to start businesses but are finding it difficult?

- ◆ Write it down. Put images (i.e. logo, etc.) all around you so that it is always in front of you.
- ◆ Put it in the atmosphere (make audible declarations).
- ◆ Get mentors. Ask questions. Research.
- ◆ Beware of the dream killers. Some things you may need to keep to yourself so that others won't talk you out of them.
- ◆ Never give up. No doesn't mean no, it just means not now.
- ◆ Everything you want is already done and waiting on you - NOT the other way around.



6. What are your takes/views on 'unity amongst women' because as a magazine this is what we stand for?

I feel that is vital for us to encourage, empower, and embrace one another. So often people feel that they can't share their experiences or contacts and I think that's nonsense! What is for you is for you and there is nothing that anyone can say or do to stop that (except for your own self).

We should never judge our inside by someone else's outside. Everyone has a story; it's just that not everyone chose to tell it. I feel we need to create environments so that people are comfortable taking off their masks and being transparent. As I mentioned earlier, our pain is connected to others. Each time we encounter another valley, we are bringing someone else out. Every one of us has the power to influence others.

7. Can you tell us about your relationship with other women in your life - girlfriends, sisters, mother, and grandmother?

I have three sisters (I'm the oldest)—no brothers and was raised by a single mother.

My grandmother helped raised me. She passed away in 1993. She comforted and nurtured me and taught me compassion.

My mother and I had a rocky relationship growing up (particularly my teen years). We “bumped heads” so much I think because we are a lot alike. Today we are very close. She taught me tenacity, how to be resourceful, and that I could be whatever I wanted to be. She used to always say to us, “What the mind perceives, it can achieve.” I admire her strength, courage, and ability to overcome.

My sisters and I have good relationships. I always tried to be a source of inspiration for them. I felt as the oldest, it was my responsibility to lead by example.

My younger sisters, Karesia (26) and Erica (31)- I am enjoying getting to know (as women). The sister right under me, Robin (35), and I are the closest. Although the things I am experiencing in my life now are not anything new under the sun, it is still a new experience for me. So Robin has been helping me navigate. She keeps me focused and tells me what

I need to hear (not what I want to hear). Her delivery isn't always eloquent, but it's on point and I am most thankful. Side ote: my hairstylist, or “therapist” as I call her, also gives me this type of no-nonsense advice. Her delivery is matter of fact as well, but in a different way. So between the two of them (Robin and Regina), they hold me accountable and don't allow me to play the victim.

I have a very small circle of childhood friends that I am still close with and they have been instrumental in my healing as well.

Toward the end of my teen years and into my adult life, I had to become really guarded and I didn't let a lot of people in (due to getting burned). Of course, I've had/have many associates; but only close personal friendships with a small group of people.

8. Have these relationships above positively impacted you at all?

One of the chapters of my book that we are pitching [Drawing Strength: How God Uses Your Challenges to Fulfill His Plan for You] is entitled, “No Woman is an Island.” In this chapter, I talk about how it is necessary to have the community of others. When we choose to isolate ourselves from others who will speak truth into our lives, we open ourselves up to believing the lies of the enemy. My public divorce has underscored my need for a few true friends to stick close like family. In addition to my family, my

very small circle of friends has helped me get through some very tough times. They all helped in their own way - whether it was giving it to me straight (no sugar coating), just being there to listen, or even just coming to the boys' games with me so I wouldn't have to be by myself (while my ex and his new family - along with my kids - sat across from me in the gym). I bless God for them!

9. What are the most rewarding things you have done for other women?

I'm a very loving and open person with my loved ones. I've always had a "what's mine is yours" attitude. I tried to always be there for them in whatever capacity they needed - whether it was just pouring into their life, helping them financially, going on spa trips, getting them surprise makeovers, giving away two-thirds of my closet (most recently). Often they would let me know how rewarding it was for them because it was something that they needed at that moment but didn't say anything.

It's been rewarding for me when I volunteered at two women's organizations, most recently the Atlanta Mission (shelter for homeless women and children; I helped in the child care center while the mothers got training, etc.). Several years ago when I lived in Philadelphia, I sat on the board and volunteered at Maternity Care Coalition (improving the lives of mothers and their children from newborns through age three).

10. What has been the best piece of advice you have been given?

One of the best pieces of advice I have been given is you can't change others, you can only change yourself. This nugget of wisdom is very relevant to my current journey. SELF-awareness is the initial key in determining one's degree of esteem. Rather than being knocked down, I am using each of my life experiences as a vehicle for self-growth and development. By me just focusing on myself, I'm learning that everything and everyone else will either fall in line - or leave. We as women need to not play small and definitely not be afraid of the greatness that is within us!

11. Besides your daily work, what else are you passionate about?

I'm passionate about my children and my spiritual, mental, and physical health.

12. What question should I have asked, that I didn't? (This is your opportunity to answer the question no one ever asks!)

I guess one question people may want to know is:

How are you doing now and what advice would you give someone that is experiencing something traumatic/life changing?

I am doing well. Healing is a process and I understand that it will not happen overnight. I have to know and trust God in a way that I have never had to before. Because of my strong foundation in my faith, I know that I have the victory and on the other side of this there is something great.

My advice would be:

1. Focus on something higher than the pain.
2. Accept the new reality by flowing with the change and not “camping out” in the valley.
3. Choose to respond by allowing the pain to make you stronger.
4. Don't let the experience define you. Be true to yourself. Don't be bitter, be better.

<http://lilshawnee.com/>

