

L'Tanya's Story

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If you or someone you know is a victim or survivor and needs help, please reach out to us, we are here 24-hours a day.

THIS STORY CONTAINS IMAGES AND DESCRIPTIONS OF ABUSE THAT CAN BE TRIGGERING.



L'Tanya was born on a hot July day in a village just north of New York City.

As she grew older and started school, L'Tanya's birthday fell during the summer break, when classes were not in session. Most kids rejoiced at the time off, enjoying a different routine and days that stretched longer. They looked forward to the season. Six-year old L'Tanya, however, had a grievance as her first-grade school year was winding down. That year, the children in her class received a small bag of candy from the teacher on their birthday. As summer approached, it occurred to L'Tanya that she wouldn't be around for her treats. She thought about this and respectfully—and boldly—approached her teacher to advocate on behalf of herself and her classmates with summer birthdays. The teacher listened, amused, before telling L'Tanya that she **“should be a lawyer.”** That June, kids with summer birthdays got a bag of candy from the teacher on the last day of school. L'Tanya walked out of the classroom satisfied, carrying her bag of treats, looking forward to the break. She also took her teacher's words with her, wondering what it would be like to be a lawyer, considering a life that she hadn't imagined before.

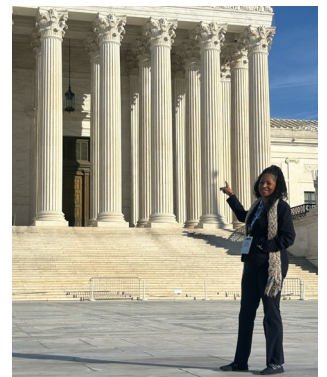
L'Tanya's mother died in early summer, one week after her high school graduation. A few months after her mother's funeral, L'Tanya's father left the home the family had been living in together. Without her parents she felt alone—unmoored—and so, as an eighteen year-old mother of three, she moved in with her boyfriend, the father of her two youngest children. **Shortly after they settled into his home, the man became abusive.** Within a few months it was severe. One night he threw L'Tanya across the living room in anger. She flew through the air. She remembers that she stopped breathing when she landed on the floor. The force knocked the wind out of her. Her children were in the same room, watching.

Her oldest daughter, who was three at the time, remembers her mother flying, gasping for air. That night, L'Tanya was afraid that the man, her abuser, would kill her. She called for help. She was connected with Center for Safety & Change and she left with her children for the Center's shelter.

L'Tanya and her children slept well at the shelter. They felt safe. L'Tanya attended groups during their stay. She felt moored. Through work with therapists and advocates, she explored the origins and extent of the violence she'd endured, realizing that her abuser had been emotionally manipulative throughout their relationship. The physical violence was another manifestation of that abuse.

With the support and resources provided by the Center, L'Tanya found that she had the tools and space to consider what she would need to do to start a new life without him. She imagined what that would look like. **During a support group one day, an advocate asked each participant to consider what they wanted to do with the rest of their life. L'Tanya recalled her early dream of becoming a lawyer.** From where she sat that day, she quietly considered the journey that she would have to take to make that dream a reality. The Center helped her develop a plan to leave the shelter with her children, mapping out the first few steps of that long and challenging journey.

L'Tanya is in her fifties now. She has been a practicing attorney for 22 years. She has served in a number of roles with different firms and organizations. L'Tanya worked as an advocate for Center for Safety & Change for a brief time and was involved in expanding a satellite office for the Center in the village in New York that she lived in as a child and teenager. She says that she was motivated to “give life to the office that gave her life” at a time when she needed support.



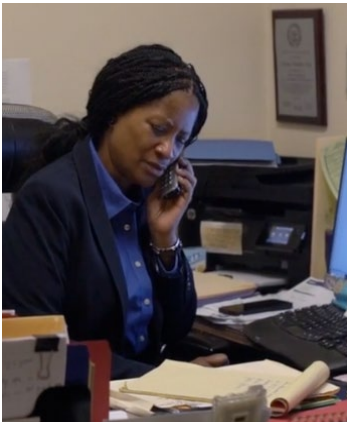
L'Tanya is clear that her time at the shelter gave her an opportunity to reset. It gave her another chance to remember what she wanted. With solid ground beneath her, the next steps of the path toward the life L'Tanya had imagined as a child were illuminated, brought into focus. This path has led to a number of impressive accomplishments. L'Tanya is recognized as a leader among colleagues and the members of the community where she lives and far beyond. She is a Life Member of the NAACP, serves as Co-Chair of the Mental Health Committee of the Rockland Coalition to End the New Jim Crow, is a member of RCENJC and former member of the Westchester Black Women's Political Caucus. She is former Co-Chair of the Rockland County Police Reform Committee for the Rockland County Sheriff's Department, former NAACP Legal Redress Chairperson, founding Member of the Rockland County Black Bar Association and former Candidate for Rockland County Executive in 2021. In 2024, L'Tanya was appointed to the RCC Board of Trustees by the Governor of New York. As a Trustee, she draws from her personal experience to ensure that the college supports students who are also balancing family obligations. L'Tanya is the proud mother of three incredible adults and grandmother of twelve.

she felt the energy of those she spoke to and saw their curiosity about the academic programs. She watched as seeds were planted, knowing that with some tending they would blossom into conditions that support impactful, beautiful lives for the advocates and the clients they serve. L'Tanya is clear that she has never thought of herself as a victim but as a survivor.



She understands that the Center is a place that many people go to not just to recover from what happened to them, but to plan for what is yet to come. It is a place to be seen by people who have been through what you are

going through, who understand the complexity of an identity and a life, who believe in you. It is a place that offers the space you need to revisit dreams, to imagine a life that you hadn't considered before. It is a place from which to take the next step forward.



L'Tanya currently works as a criminal defense attorney. She is particularly interested in working with younger folks who are entangled with complicated legal and criminal systems. She is

motivated to convince these systems to give young people additional chances. She believes that the appropriate resources and support, along with some grace can get them back on track or give them an opportunity to begin again. Those beliefs led L'Tanya to return to the Center for Safety & Change shelter recently to speak to advocates about the State University of New York (SUNY) Reconnect Program, an initiative she is involved with that covers the cost of college tuition for people who are 25-55 years old who would otherwise have a hard time pursuing higher education. As she spoke,

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