



# We Turn Tax Burdens into Tax Payers!

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## I'M READY TO TAKE ON THE WORLD!

By Gillian Dowlou



In 2011, an optimistic and determined Latoya set out to accomplish her dream. “My whole adult life I have always had a dream of being an executive in the entertainment industry,” she stated. Upon relocating to California from New York, Latoya found a roommate and registered with a staffing agency. A few months later her dream came to fruition when she attained a position at a television network as Executive Assistant to the President. “I was making good money, I moved into my own apartment, and I purchased a car. I had everything I thought I needed and wanted,” she said. In addition to career success, Latoya began a new relationship and things were going pretty well at the time. From 2011 to 2013 Latoya was living her dream; she had no idea that the rug was about to be pulled from under her feet.

After coming to the realization that she was in a verbally abusive relationship, Latoya ended her relationship. While trying to repair the damage to her self-image, Latoya was blind-sighted by news that her grandfather—the man who raised her as his daughter— had died unexpectedly. Latoya took a week off from work to travel to the east coast to bury the only father she knew. Two weeks after her return to work, a heart-broken and grieving Latoya encountered another misfortune: she, along with everyone in her department at the television network, would be laid off.

Latoya recalls, “Losing my job and grandfather within three weeks was too

much for me. I was devastated.” During this time, Latoya shares that she isolated herself by staying in her apartment for months. She sold her car and all her possessions to pay rent. Eventually, she had nothing more to sell and was evicted from her apartment. Feeling desperate, she asked to stay with her verbally abusive ex-boyfriend. “He constantly ridiculed me and called me the ‘b-word’ so many times it was as if that was my name. He broke me down when I was already broken.” Latoya recalls. She knew she needed to leave this living situation. She stayed in shelters and she couch-hopped. She stayed with a woman whose boyfriend physically attacked Latoya, breaking her eye socket, chipping her tooth, and fracturing her nose.

One day while at the library Latoya was approached by a gentleman who asked, “Are you homeless?” Feeling embarrassed and defensive Latoya admits, “I was denying it to myself, so my first response was...no!” The gentleman continued with “Are you sure, because I know something that can really help you.” This gentleman began to tell Latoya about Food on Foot (FOF). Latoya recalls her first day at FOF: “Jay looked at me and said, ‘So what are you going to do to make it? If you are going to make it, you have to put your head down and get out of your own way.’ Every day I came to FOF, I felt a little stronger and a little more committed. I felt that FOF had my back. After 5 or 6 weeks, I felt that I needed to be there on Sundays. I felt good there,” recalls Latoya.

On Sunday, September 27, 2015 Latoya became a Gray Shirt. When asked about the future Latoya shared: “I now feel I have a strong foundation within myself and with the support of Gillian, Tali, and Jay, I'm ready to take on anything, even if the rug gets swept up from under me again.”

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