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**Fanning the Flames of the Diabetes Epidemic**

**By Lyndia Grant-Briggs**

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INTRODUCTION

It is my pleasure to introduce to you, a new Diabetes Prevention Education, Public Relations Campaign established under the name Fannie Estelle Hill Grant, started by me, Lyndia Grant-Briggs, after the loss of my mother who succumbed to Type 2 Diabetes on Christmas Day, December 25, 2000. I noticed a fire burning in the Diabetes health arena, and it is still burning out of control. The diabetes prevention and education public relations campaign was started in an effort, to "Fan the Flames", and put out the fire.

Fannie Grant was 73 years old, a homemaker, who loved her family very much, and she believed in preparing wonderful home-cooked meals for the family. You name it, and we had it. We would have desserts any day of the week. Mama enjoyed cooking, cleaning and washing clothes, and although she raised nine children of her own, she always had room for other needy children.

In our early years, from 1945-1965, Mother was the wife of a sharecropper in North Carolina, but they moved the family to Washington, D.C. in 1965. So for more than 30 years, Mother Grant, our father and all of us children called the Washington Metropolitan Area home.

Our family learned that Mother had Type 2 Diabetes after a major stroke she had back in 1988-89. She lived 11-12 years after the diagnosis. Lyndia and her Sisters, (The Grant Sisters) pledged to begin the educational prevention campaign while they visited with and/or cared for their mother during her last year of life.

After moving back home to North Carolina, Mother Grant enjoyed her latter years in a very peaceful way. Us children purchased her a new home, took over all of the mortgage payments, and she was happy. Mother Grant enjoyed living on this wonderful 227-acre farm, near Kinston, North Carolina. She was one of the heirs to this wonderful farm left to her family by their father, and my grandfather,

## Fanning the Flames of the Diabetes Epidemic

Floyd Hill.

She enjoyed walking around the farm, following my father, Bishop Benjamin Grant, around the garden as he worked. She enjoyed shopping with her sisters going to yard sales. Shopping gave her considerable joy near the end of her life.

Mother suffered numerous strokes, seven to ten to be specific. During one stroke, she lost the use of her tongue and couldn't speak at all. Mother Fannie's kidney failed, she was receiving kidney dialysis for the last two years of her life, she had high blood pressure for many years, and both of her legs were amputated above her knees.

### The Problem

We wanted to know more about the disease that took our mother in such a brutal fashion. There was so much pain and suffering prior to her death. Mother Grant was a Christian, she was an Evangelist who preached the gospel in churches throughout the Washington D.C. Area, and everyone loved her and called her Ma.

Our mother was very special, and as her oldest daughter, I promised to carry out a public awareness campaign, to educate millions of people regarding the causes and preventions of Type 2 Diabetes. In educating the general public, I feel a lot better, because my mother's living shall not be in vain. My sisters and I have been blessed over the past 20 years, we've had lots of success in publicizing several major events, we coordinated a major festival, called Georgia Avenue Day in Washington, D.C. The festival and parade attracted more than 200,000 people, major corporate sponsors and celebrities. We worked for two Presidential Inaugural Committees, one was for the Republicans, George Herbert Walker Bush and for other for the Democrats, President Bill Clinton, for two D.C. Mayors, Marion Barry and Sharon Pratt Kelly, and three D.C. City Councilmembers, Charlene Drew Jarvis, Frank Smith and Eyde Whittington. Another major achievement was an appointment that I received as project director by Councilman Frank Smith, to erect the Spirit of Freedom Memorial, a new national African American Civil War Memorial located in Washington, D.C. This monument pays tribute to 209,145 United States Colored Troops who fought in the American Civil War.

As you can see, Mother Grant passed down some strong self-worth values. She taught us that we can do anything that we want, and that we can be the best at whatever we choose. The business of public relations is "in my blood." There was no way that I could see the devastation caused by Diabetes and understand this disease, and do nothing about it. I wanted to know "what happened to Mother, how did this happen, could we have done something differently, if only we had known that an improved diet and regular physical exercise could have made a difference."

I know that I've been chosen to get the word out regarding this disease that's burning "out of control" in the African American community. It has been extremely hard to continue to live without our Mother, but in sharing this information with others, it gives me some relief from my grief.

So, what exactly is Diabetes? Diabetes mellitus is a group of diseases characterized by high levels of

## Fanning the Flames of the Diabetes Epidemic

blood glucose. It results from defects in insulin secretion, insulin action, or both. Diabetes can be associated with serious complications and premature death, but people with diabetes can take measures to reduce the likelihood of such, according to recent studies found by the National Institute of Health. Some researchers believe that African Americans, (Hispanic Americans, Asian Americans, and Pacific Islanders were also included in the study) inherited a "thrifty gene" from their African ancestors. Years ago, this gene enabled Africans, during "feast and famine" cycles, to use food energy more efficiently when food was scarce. Today, with fewer such cycles, the thrifty gene that developed for survival may instead make the person more susceptible to developing type 2 diabetes.

The problem dates back to the beginning of the slave trade, documented as beginning in 1790, and for those enslaved ones, food was still scarce, thus the "thrifty genes" protected them. If you research the documentations found on record at the National Archives and Records Administration, slaves received rations. It really doesn't matter what the diets were of African people hundreds of years ago, as they roamed around freely on the African continent, in townships like Johannesburg, Freetown, Rwanda, Sudan, South African and Sierre Leone. What does matter is the fact that those Africans who managed to survive the slave trade here in America, arrived on the shores very strong. The majority of them worked in the fields from sun-up to sundown, six days per week, and in many cases, seven days/week. Slaves ate scraps, like hog mauls, chitterlings, pigtails, pig feet, pig ears, and they drank milk from a trough along side other animals.

African people became Americanized, they were no longer in their homeland, so to live, they had to eat whatever was made available to them, they were fed last, after the horses and the pigs had been taken care of, whatever was left was given to those enslaved people — scraps, left-overs, garbage. In an effort to create a delicious meal, the women worked at creating recipes that they could all enjoy. They loved collard greens with fat back meat, and learned to bake sweet potato pies, cleaned chitterlings and made them into a delicacy to be eaten on special occasions. They made pots of beans seasoned with ham hocks, or pigtails, and they seasoned with pork.

They made home-made biscuits from self-rising, white flour and lard, and they learned to make hush puppies, candied yams, lots of potatoes, and they ate plenty corn bread, so even until this day, African people who became African Americans beginning in the late 1700's, had a very different diet than Euro-Americans. Even though this wasn't a "good" and "healthy" diet for the slaves, they ate it, they enjoyed it, and they were able to sustain themselves easily. They worked so very hard in the fields 12-16 hours a day. But of course, since they had the so-called "thrifty genes" which allowed their bodies to preserve food in an appropriate manner, when food was scarce, seems that was probably a good thing, since the enslaved didn't always have ample food supplies.

There is a bright side to this though, as they worked, they were receiving strenuous daily exercise, which kept them healthy. It really didn't matter what the slaves ate, because what they ate, in today's standard would have fattened them too, but it didn't, because they burned it off every day out in the fields working. It was a vicious cycle. They ate, and they worked off the carbohydrates. They ate and they worked off more carbohydrates, and they didn't die from diseases back then, as they do today, diabetes or cancer, and don't think that their bowels didn't move regularly as well, thus eliminating all of the colon cancer, they eliminated the toxins from their bodies through sweat and perspiration. They may have been tired, but they had healthy bodies. So all of these diseases that are out of control

## Fanning the Flames of the Diabetes Epidemic

today, like Diabetes came along later due to the many lifestyle changes of Americans.

Let us all learn a very important lesson from this bit of history: According to all legislations and laws today, African Americans can Be whatever they want to be, they can Do whatever they are capable of doing, and they can Have whatever they can manage to work hard enough to achieve. We know that this is a true statement, when you look around and you see such role models as Oprah Winfrey, the queen of talk shows, Bill Cosby, Michael Jordan, we have had several black Miss America's, including the current reigning queen, we have Tiger Woods, the best golfer of all times and The Williams Sisters, who have broken all records. The list goes on and on. Today, we live in fabulous homes; our children can now go to college, (sidebar: yet we have more African American men in prison today, over 900,000 than we have in college today, only 600,000, that's another article.)

The trouble with this whole thing is, African Americans continue to enjoy many of the delicious foods handed down to us by our ancestors, our diets haven't changed very much, but we've forgotten one very important ingredient, our ancestors worked 12–16 hour days, performing physical labor. They received the necessary exercise daily, therefore, they didn't get sick with diabetes, and all of the fat was burned off in blood, sweat and tears.

Today, in order for us to get proper exercise, we must plan to have physical exercise at least 30 minutes daily, one-hour is preferable, but no less than 30 minutes. That's not a lot, compared to the amount of time our forefathers worked, but according to studies done by the National Institute of Diabetes & Digestive & Kidney Diseases, the little time we manage to put in, while exercising for 30 minutes, 3–4 days/week can prevent the occurrence of Diabetes.

Today, we continue in the tradition of eating our "soul food" diets, very much the same as we did 200 years ago, except today, most of us don't use lard, and we can eat all we want. We've graduated to vegetable oils like Crisco and other vegetable oils. (Olive Oils are better for us, less cholesterol). Families today still enjoy foods, which include far too many carbohydrates like macaroni and cheese, desserts, and lots of bread. We have enjoyed these foods for hundreds of years, but now, we sit at computers, walk out to our cars, drive everywhere, including to the grocery stores, we don't have to walk to school for miles any longer, we can ride the school buses, and exercise has all but been eliminated. America is overwhelmingly FAT, even our children in many cases are overweight and/or obese.

It's a simple problem, bad diets that includes too much junk food from fast food restaurants, and a lack of strenuous exercise. How many times have you pigged out, after a hard day, then, you fell asleep? That food is fattening you up, just the way that it does for newborn babies. Remember how babies eat and sleep, and soon, you notice their little legs beginning to get a little meat on their bones. But you can almost look at them grow and gain weight. But they are still babies, and that's what they need, nutrition to grow.

For adults though, it's a different story, we have already grown up, and all we can do now is grow OUT!!! We just keep getting BIGGER and BIGGER and BIGGER! We look bad to ourselves and to others, we can't fit into our nice clothing, we have to keep buying fat clothes. And worst of all, our hearts cannot stand this, and neither can the rest of our organs. (I give a speech entitled "Let Not Your

## Fanning the Flames of the Diabetes Epidemic

Heart Be Troubled" – How to have a healthy mind, body & spirit). It's no wonder that our starvation genes are reacting the way that they have, this so-called "thrifty gene" that is found in African Americans seems to store even more of this foreign food that we continue to ingest into our bodies. We came from strong, lean backgrounds, Africa has never been a "fat" nation, but as African Americans, we have Americanized our bodies so badly, that our health problems are out-of-control!

If you take a look at the stats provided by the National Institute of Health, Today, diabetes mellitus is one of the most serious health challenges facing the United States. The following statistics illustrate the magnitude of this disease among African Americans. 2.8 million African Americans have diabetes. On average, African Americans are twice as likely to have diabetes as white Americans of similar age.

Approximately 13 percent of all African Americans have diabetes. African Americans with diabetes are more likely to develop diabetes complications and experience greater disability from the complications than white Americans with diabetes. Death rates for people with diabetes are 27 percent higher for African Americans compared with whites National health surveys during the past 35 years show that the percentage of the African American population that has been diagnosed with diabetes is increasing dramatically. The surveys in 1976–80 and in 1988–94 measured fasting plasma glucose and thus allowed an assessment of the prevalence of undiagnosed diabetes as well as of previously diagnosed diabetes. In 1976–80, total diabetes prevalence in African Americans ages 40 to 74 years was 8.9 percent; in 1988–94, total prevalence had increased to 18.2 percent—a doubling of the rate in just 12 years. Prevalence in African Americans is much higher than in white Americans. Among those ages 40 to 74 years in the 1988–94 survey, the rate was 11.2 percent for whites, but was 18.2 percent for African Americans Regular physical activity is a protective factor against type 2 diabetes and, conversely, lack of physical activity is a risk factor for developing diabetes. Researchers suspect that a lack of exercise is one factor contributing to the high rates of diabetes in African Americans. In the NHANES III survey, 50 percent of African American men and 67 percent of African American women reported that they participated in little or no leisure time physical activity.

### Conclusion

In furthering the causes of this Diabetes Educational Prevention Campaign, the first order of business has been to make my very own Lifestyle Change. My Mother was buried on December 30th, 2000. When I returned home to Silver Spring, Maryland, it took a few months before I could go on, the grief period was extremely hard, but the first order of business, was to begin a regular exercise routine. Walking became my exercise of choice — two to four miles three to four days each week. Some weeks I walked, and continue to walk, five days, even six days a week, and recently, I've added "walking up and down the stairs in five minute increments, for 12–15 minutes. There is an extreme difference in the way that I look and feel. The pounds and inches have been steadily coming off.

I've changed my diet. I'm now drinking green mineral drinks each morning, (you can buy green drinks at organic stores); and I'm no longer eating white bread. In fact I don't eat very much bread at all, but when I do, it is whole grain or wheat bread, brown rice, more fresh fruits and green leafy vegetables. I enjoy using my juice machine for fresh green spinach and carrot drinks.

## Fanning the Flames of the Diabetes Epidemic

Recently, I found myself with excellent health results from my physical examination. My cholesterol level was low, at 126, and my glucose levels were average. My blood pressure was 120/80, which is fine for me, and I feel wonderful too. There is one area that I'm still working on, and that is my Ideal Body Mass, IBM. I'm still overweight, but I've lost 30 lbs., and still counting.

If you are reading this article, and you're at risk for Type 2 Diabetes, consider making a major Lifestyle Change. It's very simple: 1–Change your diet, eliminate most of the carbohydrates from your diet; 2–Exercise regularly for the rest of your life, and 3–Get rid of the extra pounds, work toward maintaining your ideal body weight. If you make this promise to yourself, to change your life, you will be "Fanning the Flames of the Diabetes Epidemic in America," and soon the fire will be put out, but it will take millions of people to join this fight. Won't you begin today? You don't have to get Diabetes, it can be prevented, you don't have to lose one limb to this vicious disease, nor do you have to lose your kidney. Change your life, and enjoy your Thanksgiving Dinner – with all of the trimmings, but the next day, get back to the business of getting fit and staying healthy.

## END ##

Lyndia Grant–Briggs is an author, her book, "Destiny's Door – Turning Milestones Into Stepping Stones" was recently self–published and is available for \$15.00. Lyndia is an Inspiration and Motivational Speaker, with 20 years experience. She has spoken for major federal agencies, local government and she has worked as special events manager for two U.S. Presidents, two big city mayors, and three city councilmembers. Lyndia also served as project director of a new national monument in Washington, D.C. The monument will be turned over to the federal government, in a ribbon cutting ceremony by the President of the United States later next year, 2004.

### **Diabetes Awareness: There's No Substitutue for Good Friends**

**By David Anderson**

#### **Diabetes Awareness: There's No Substitutue for Good Friends by David Anderson**

Was there a time when you relished the idea of giving dinner parties?

What a great opportunity to bond with old friends, try out a few new recipes, and find a reason to clean up the house!

Has diabetes robbed you of the enjoyable events involving your friends and family?

Diabetes has an ugly characteristic of wrecking the lives of it's victims by forcing them into seclusion.

If you have been neglecting the enjoyable events of your life, please take action to control your diabetes. With a "proactive" mind–set, you can control and beat diabetes!

You, your friends, and especially your family will love you for taking control. Get back to the fun things in life,,, Take control of your diabetes.

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Ask your doctor about diabetes and have your blood sugar checked several times a year.

For more information about diabetes, including a Diabetes Quiz and a Free booklet, visit our website at:

<http://hope4diabetes.com/info>

This 20 page FREE booklet will provide you with in–depth information on comprehensive diabetes care. The 7 principles, or steps, will help you to understand, manage and diagnose your potential diabetes risk.

It could help you live a longer and more active life. The booklet is Yours absolutely FREE – No Risk! Share it NOW with the people you love and want to Keep alive!

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