

# WEDNESDAY'S WOMAN

## In 'Faith Under Fire,' LaJoyce Brookshire reveals that her Prince Charming was nothing but a frog



LaJoyce Brookshire (Photo by Elijah Muhammad)

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Lifestyles/Society Editor

Ask LaJoyce Brookshire who she is and quickly she'll tell you she's, "God's Girl!" Standing on her incredible faith, then as now, Brookshire says it's time to stop lying, start telling the truth, and begin to live life with the understanding that only the truth will make you free.

With *Faith Under Fire: Betrayed by a Thing Called Love*, (Karen Hunter Publishing/Pocket Books: January 2008) Brookshire takes a pause from fiction and breaks a ten-year silence as she shares the true-life account of marrying a man with full-blown AIDS. It's her story. A stunning memoir of survival against the odds and courage in the face of a troubled relationship and a terrifying illness. A chronicle of faith under fire.

Imagine the joy of being swept away by your very own Prince Charming, and the excitement of marrying him. Imagine starting a life together. Imagine discovering a side of him that you never knew ex-

isted — a controlling and explosive side. Imagine watching him slowly; inexplicably deteriorate before your eyes. Imagine his doctors telling you, "He has AIDS."

In this page-turning, astoundingly moving memoir, Brookshire tells the full story of her marriage to her first husband, who knew he was HIV positive at the time they wed but kept this information hidden from her — until his body betrayed him. Imagine how you would react. What would you do? Contemplate murder? Divorce? Live in denial? Or would you turn to God?

That's what Brookshire chose to do in the face of her husband's health crisis — and every other challenge life has presented: With her faith firmly planted and with God beside her at all times, she faced the deadly secret that had been kept under wraps by her husband — and by his family, who knew of his condition but revealed nothing. She stayed by his side, coordinating his care and even changing his diapers, until the end.

*Faith Under Fire* tells the story of a marriage tainted by lies, but it also tells much more — a

capsule portrait of the specter of AIDS facing African-American women today, it reveals how fear, ignorance, and secrets perpetuate the disease.

In a poignant narrative overflowing with her gutsy humor and vibrant spirit, Brookshire shares her faith in all of its richness. She offers a living testament to relying on God's strength through any ordeal, and shows how His truth is all we need to believe in, every day of our lives.

Brookshire was married to a man she thought was her very own Prince Charming...but then discovered a veiled side of him...He knew he had AIDS but kept this deadly secret from her until his body betrayed him. Brookshire's story of survival against the odds and courage in the face of a troubled relationship and a terrifying illness is a provocative page turner. The frightening statistics of HIV/AIDS infections in this country only prove that there are too many secrets in too many relationships — and many of them are harbored by families living in fear, ignorance, and denial.

With the AIDS statistics raging even higher for African American women, the celebrated author boldly shares her stunning truth after more than ten years of silence. With *Faith Under Fire*, Brookshire takes a pause from fiction and breaks a ten-year silence as she shares the true-life account of her ex-husband marrying her knowing he had AIDS.

The Black Church Week of Prayer for the Healing of AIDS is a powerful week of prayer, education and action. This national AIDS awareness campaign engages Black congregations to support, encourage and empower African Americans to take action toward stopping the spread of HIV/AIDS in Black communities worldwide.

During the National Black Church Week of Prayer for the Healing of AIDS, Brookshire played a pivotal role with her powerfully enlightening personal appearances, Brookshire travels the country talking about her experiences, lecturing in schools and churches and she has also contributed essays to *Souls of My Sisters: Black Women Break Their Silence, Tell Their Stories, and Heal Their Spirits* and

GHETTOOver GIRLS.

She began her career as a publicist, working with Queen of Soul, Aretha Franklin, Sean "Puffy" Combs, Whitney Houston and Kenny G.

In addition to writing, Brookshire is an ordained minister, with a doctorate in Naturopathy, as well as a Minister of Health and Master Herbalist degree. She is also a Certified Group Fitness Instructor; an avid lover of African Dance; and an advocate for literacy and abstinence.

In her many lectures and interviews, Brookshire covers how to take a book from concept-to computer-to-contract, as well as her experience as an entertainment publicist who has worked with the Queen of Soul Aretha Franklin, Sean "Puffy" Combs, Whitney Houston and Kenny G., to name a few; and how to break into the genres of publishing and entertainment.

Brookshire, the best-selling author of *Soul Food* and *Web of Deception*, takes a pause from fiction to share a true story more shattering than any novel. As author of the novel *Soul Food*, she is the first African American to novelize a major motion picture. She was chosen by HarperCollins Publishing to write the novelization from the movie's script on the strength of her first novel, the suspense drama *Web of Deception*. Due to Brookshire's expertise in marketing and publicity, *Soul Food* has out sold every movie tie-in book ever written before its release.

**Here's a stunning excerpt that will surely whet your appetite:**

**Chapter One: The Meeting**  
"It happened quite suddenly, my falling in love. You know the kind I'm talking about — that bam, love-at-first-sight kind of love. It was January 30, 1990. I was a part-time speech teacher at the Queens Broadcasting Center, in the Jamaica section of Queens, New York.

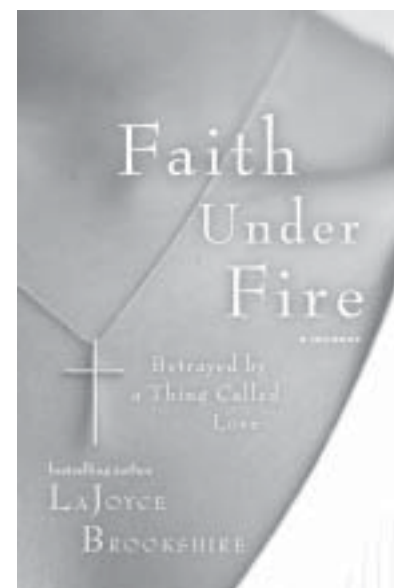
"My full-time job was as writer/producer of entertainment and information programming at the Sheridan Broadcasting Network at One Times Square Plaza in New York City. The day before, I had decided to take a "sick" day. I cleaned off my desk, returned all phone calls, and handed in the weekly scripts a day early — much to the delight of my executive pro-

ducer.

"On my "sick" day, I took a lengthy bubble bath, washed my hair, and lazed around until it was time to get to class. For some reason, I dressed carefully, in a red silk blouse, leather pants, and high-heeled pumps. It was quite snazzy attire for a teacher who was about to spend the next four hours correcting speech patterns for on-air hopefuls.

"About an hour into my class, I excused myself to make copies of handouts. On my way to the copy machine, I glanced into the recording studio and saw the tallest, finest honey-dipped colored man I had ever laid eyes on in my life. I ran to the office of the director, longtime on-air personality Johnny Allen, of New York City's KISS-FM, to inquire about the eye candy I had just glimpsed. Johnny replied, "Oh, that's Steven. He's a really nice guy." "Hmm, Steven," I said. "I have a brother named Stephen; what a coincidence."

"While at the copier, I took an-



LaJoyce Brookshire *Faith Under Fire* Book Cover

other long look at the honey-dip, giving him points on his name alone, before returning to my class. When we were saying good-byes for the evening, Johnny introduced me to Steven and I turned as red as my blouse, overwhelmed by his charming demeanor. Johnny announced that he had arranged for Steven to take me home. "Take me home? All the way to Brooklyn?" I asked.

"We were in Queens — a forty-five-minute train ride and easily an hour-plus drive away. "I'll take

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you all the way to Pennsylvania, if that's where you live," Steven said. I raised an "is this guy for real" eyebrow at Johnny, and he winked a sign of approval. "Let's roll," I said, gathering my things.

"On the ride home, Steven and I exchanged regular pleasantries, asked typical questions, and laughed a lot. He kept thanking God. I liked that part. Since I come from a Baptist-born-and-bred background, God is indeed at the top of my list. "Why do you keep saying 'Thank you, God'?" I asked. "I wasn't even supposed to be at the school tonight," he said. "I missed my final because I was in the hospital and I had to complete it tonight. So I'm saying 'Thank you, God' because I wouldn't have met you if I hadn't been in the hospital."

The reporter in me was piqued. "Why were you in the hospital?" "Bleeding ulcers." "Bleeding ulcers!?" I asked in disbelief, contorting my face. "How old are you?" "Thirty-one," he answered. "I've just had a lot of problems — a bad marriage and lots of stress in my job. But now that I've met you, all of that is about to change."

"We continued with pleasant conversation and before we knew it we looked up and had no idea where we were. We were lost somewhere between Queens and Brooklyn. The only way he knew how to get us out of the circle we seemed to be driving in was to go all the way to Manhattan and then to Brooklyn. Our one-hour ride turned into three hours.

"We finally arrived at my front door, where we exchanged numbers. He waited at his car to see that I had made it safely into my apartment. I looked out of the window to wave and he was still there, leaning against his car, looking up at my window. He acknowledged my wave with a beep of his car horn. As much as I hated to admit it, I was soaring from my evening with Steven.

"The next day at work in the studio, we had WBLS-FM on in the background while making preparations for our weekly syndicated production. All of a sudden, we heard deejay Buggy announce, "Here is 'Ready or Not' by After 7 for LaJoyce Hunter from Steven. He wants her to know that he's coming for her — ready or not!"

"My office mates and I screamed. And my phone started ringing off the hook. Everyone wanted to know who this Steven was. My reply was the same: Some dude I met yesterday!"

"Being in the radio and record business had some advantages, and one of them was access to the hotline number for the deejay booth at WBLS. The other was knowing Buggy personally. After fielding phone calls from friends, I called Buggy myself to inquire about how in the world this

Steven managed to get him to make such a declaration before and after "Ready or Not" played.

"I know Steven, too," Buggy told me. "He is a part-time producer with Vaughn Harper's Quiet Storm syndicated radio program for Japan." Vaughn Harper was the premier nighttime voice in New York and was like a father to me in the business. Buggy and I had always been really friendly with one another and he was like a big brother. He issued his stamp of approval: "Now Steven is someone I'd really like to see you with. I can vouch for him all the way."

"Really?" I said, knowing that Buggy had shared his disdain for the last guy from the station I had dated. "Yep. Really," he said, mindful of that previous situation. "Thanks, Bugs," I



LaJoyce Brookshire

said. "I'll keep you posted."

"Later that afternoon, a deliveryman brought two dozen red, long-stemmed American Beauties from Steven. This guy was really pouring it on and I loved it! I phoned to thank him for the roses and the dedication, and he invited me to dinner the following evening. We went to a very pricey restaurant on the East River and we both had lobster and champagne. He had another dozen roses at the restaurant for me.

"These are for you to keep at home," he said, as the others were for me to keep at my office. At least twice a week from then on, Steven romanced me with dinners at expensive restaurants. And between the dinners, we were always going to some event. As a producer of entertainment programming, I always had tickets to concerts, plays, or new movies in town.

"My responsibilities kept me out at least three nights a week. We always got two complimentary tickets to an event, so Steven became my new "hot date." The dinners became his way of controlling some of our outings since it was a given that we would attend a promotional event. We ended up going out five nights a week!

"For the first three months of our dating, Steven had roses delivered to my job every week until I told him to stop. It was established early on that we were both definitely in love. Like I said, it was love at first sight.

"It was signed, sealed, and delivered by the time we had sex, intensifying the blush of our

new love. Steven further locked in the relationship by introducing me to his mother and two sisters. They all lived in the family home in Lakeview, New York, a predominantly black middle-class Long Island town.

"We all got along extremely well, and his older sister and I could pass for sisters. We both have that café con leche (with lots of leche) skin, light-brown-eyes-and-sandy-hair thing going on. When we went out together people always asked us if we were sisters, and we'd just laugh and say, "Yes!" We did a lot of flaunting one another in front of our friends. It was mutual that there was nothing but love between us all.

"Steven's best friend, Stacey, and his wife, Claudette, were the best of our buddies. They were one crazy pair. We'd go to midnight bowling almost every weekend and win all of the trivia games, like guessing musical artists. Yeah, right! I'd only eaten and slept music for the last I-don't-know-how-many years. I was a shoo-in.

"We discussed many times if it was even fair for me to play because I was in the entertain-

ment business, but we'd just shrug and collect our prizes. The real superstar of that game was Claudette. We dubbed that girl "the foremost knowledgeable person about information that don't mean s-h-i-t." She needs to be a contestant on pop culture trivia shows; I guarantee you, she would win. To this day, Claudette and Stacey are permanent fixtures in my life.

"Steven and I were spending so much time together every night that he had a hard time getting himself to his job at Bayside BMW, where he was the assistant parts manager. He had practically moved into my Brooklyn apartment, too. But I refused to say that he "lived" there. That was against my religion. I wasn't playing house with anyone.

"Plus, my mother would have killed me! It was easier for him to bring a bag with his stuff in it every week for whatever we would be attending and leave for work from there. He definitely tried to move in on me, though, putting stuff in my closet. But I would take his clothes out of the closet that he'd leave hanging there and pack them for him ev-

ery day, and I refused to give him space in my drawer.

"Call me old fashioned, but it was bad enough that I was sleeping with this dude and he wasn't my husband. I knew better. At the time, I had a male roommate named Derrick. Now, his girlfriend Tina did live with us. They met at Columbia University. Derrick was an awesome budding attorney at one of the top law firms in midtown Manhattan, and Tina was an accountant.

"We needed to share the apartment because neither of us could afford the rent alone for the magnificent two-bedroom, two-bathroom apartment in Brooklyn's Clinton Hill section. Our rent was twelve hundred dollars a month in 1989! Steven offered to help pay my portion of the rent, but I flatly refused.

"By December 1, 1990 — just eleven months after our first meeting — we were married. The ride to the altar was rocky, as was all that followed the wedding. Here is my real-life tale — the tale of a woman betrayed by a thing called love, a tale of putting my faith under fire." *Copyright © 2006 by LaJoyce Brookshire*

## Some see Rev. Wright rant

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made.

By Tuesday, Rev. Wright absorbed media spotlight acting and performing, focusing on aspects that could eliminate the possibility of a nomination for Sen. Obama in the Democratic Party.

He opined on a theory that the US deliberately invented the HIV/AIDS virus to eradicate Blacks.

"Based on the Tuskegee experiment and based on what has happened to Africans in this country, I believe our government is capable of doing anything," Rev. Wright said.

He added argument to past sermons saying: (Minister Louis) "Farrakhan is not my enemy. He did not put me in chains, he did not put me in slavery, and he did not make me this color."

As if he was campaigning for an election, Rev. Wright challenged terrorism, the bombing of Hiroshima, mimicked Pres. John Kennedy's speech, and assailed Vice President Dick Cheney loyalty to America.

"I served six years in the military, how many did Cheney serve?"

Perhaps, in context and occasion with his congregation some of Rev. Wright's rhetoric may have appropriately registered familiar. However, to a national TV audience, Rev. Wright seemed a loose canon, combative, and harmful to the change Sen. Obama has consistently aspired.

Tuesday Sen. Obama responded.

"Let me say at the outset that I vehemently disagree and strongly condemn the state-

ments that have been the subject of this controversy."

"I categorically denounce any statement that disparages our great country or serves to divide us from our allies. I also believe that words that degrade individuals have no place in our public dialogue, whether it's on the campaign stump or in the pulpit. In sum, I reject outright the statements by Rev. Wright that are at issue."

"He does not speak for me. He does not speak for the campaign and so he may make statements in the future that don't reflect my values or concerns. I think people will understand that I am not perfect."

The Illinois front runner had earlier compared Rev. Wright to an uncle whose behavior is ignored by relatives cognizant of its valueless contribution to the entire family. Now it seems, the Black community would like to silence or reproach the pastor who they endorsed and supported throughout the months he was maligned and denigrated by the same media he has voluntary embraced.

"He is the biggest distraction." "CNN gave Rev. Wright 15 minutes. Whenever they give us big light, something is wrong," Chuck D said.

The former member of rap group Public Enemy added that Rev. Wright should have known that the media offer would not work in his favor but he also said the pastor should be free to express himself.

"I will not play any more speeches from Rev. Wright," Michael Baisden said on his daily, syndicated radio show aired on KISS-FM. "He needs to

shut up."

Some wondered why the candid preacher would accept an invitation to speak at the National Press Club.

"Unless he had an agenda, he should have known that it is chaired by a former Clinton employee."

Newt Gingrich echoed those same sentiments theorizing that Rev. Wright may be sabotaging the hopes of his twenty-year ally.

"Television is a very charming medium," a political pundit submitted, "it can make people act strange."

Time magazine's Joe Klein said he believes Rev. Wright is reflecting self aggrandizement. His assessment is that the pastor is working overtime to establish himself with mainstream media as a spokesperson akin to Rev. Al Sharpton.

CNN contributor Roland Martin agreed. He is of the opinion that the retired minister of the United Church of Christ may have gotten caught up in the media attention and may have lost focus.

There are those who contend that Sen. Obama should not have to denounce Rev. Wright, Minister Farrakhan or anyone.

Whoopi Goldberg said on "The View" "Rev. Billy Graham was spiritual advisor to many, many presidents and he regularly spoke negatively about the Jews, but no one ever asked any of those presidents to denounce Billy Graham."

In latter years, Rev. Graham apologized for his long-held negative viewpoint about people of Jewish heritage.

New York Sen. Clinton has remained mum on the recent flare-up however has stated she would never have had consulted Rev. Wright on issues of faith the way her rival had.