

DESIGN YOUR LIFE

A Guide to Living Life with Intention



Carmen Veal
www.carmenveal.com

Chapter 1

My daughter Sania has Autism Spectrum Disorder and other major challenges that are undiagnosed and that contributes to her being completely unable to walk, talk, bathe, dress or feed herself. Besides the support of medical in the home health care, and the support of a couple of our relatives, I fight the battle alone.

I am a sole mom to the absolute sweetest soon to be 14-year-old child who doesn't have a malicious bone in her body. I love her with every fiber of my being but am not afraid to admit it...is...tough.

Dealing with this reality at the young age of 17 was no walk in the park. I was a teenage mom still in high school and living in a neighborhood surrounded by alcohol and drugs. I had no plan to go to college or any dream or passion for the project I planned to pursue after high school. I pretty much granted myself permission to be labeled a statistic. A clear shot of my life's theme becoming the bitter black woman navigating life in misery and in desperate need of repair.

I was depressed...and did the absolute worst thing I could have done as a result: I pretended to be OK.

On the outside, it looked as though I had life all figured out. It was a facade. I was living on paycheck to paycheck in a neighborhood surrounded by drugs and violence, and I eventually struggled with the reality of becoming a single mom. On the inside, I was an explosive mess of shattered pieces, hate, and shame. Darkness was a familiar place to me, of which I managed to become completely comfortable with. I accepted misery and enjoyed its company. It was literally fuel to my fire.

Until it no longer was;

One day I just wanted more. A better me. Help for my daughter. I wanted to feel good about myself and my life. I had no clue where to find any of this, though because I had no one to call and ask for help. So I did my own research. Yoga, meditation, therapy, self-help books became my reality and before I knew it, the desire to do better, be better, live better, became an addiction. I was quickly navigating a path of transitioning from a painful place into a peaceful one.

Fast forward years of work, trial and error, commitment to being the best possible version of myself: I am here. Living intentionally, in my truth and sharing my story. I've built three businesses, became a strong advocate for my daughter, and made amazing lifelong friendships, mentors and one of kind opportunities while navigating the world of self-care and entrepreneurship.

It had become my life's mission to practice fearlessness because living fiercely is hard. Being a strong black woman trying to make it through life is challenging, and doing so with the responsibility of another life was downright depressing.

Like most, I've successfully failed at life in many ways. All of which has ultimately lead to amazing lessons and feats. What I've found is this is the best space to evolve as a person. You find that you can... Grow. I've learned to take these experiences, label them so that I will be able to easily identify them and use it to determine and better understand the next lesson to be learned.

As difficult as it has been, more often than not, it has allowed me to be a better judge and be better prepared for the next season in my life. It also gave me the courage to live intentionally. This sounds like an amazing space to be in and it truly is. But it didn't happen overnight, it requires practice, daily practice to stay on track, and acceptance that you will be challenged every day in every possible way.

There are three balancing acts that supported my transition and allow me to hit the reset button, often. They allow me to be the best mom to my very special needy child, kick ass, boss running my own businesses and lover of my own self first, then everything and everyone else.

Yoga:

The journey of the self through the self; I've overcome migraines, heartbreaks, and many other adversities while practicing yoga. I recently fell in love with aerial yoga, which is teaching me a powerful lesson on learning when to hold on and when to let go. Practicing yoga teaches me life changing experiences that naturally leaks into other areas of my life. It's overwhelmingly powerful.

Therapy:

I visit my therapist usually twice per month. She helps me make sense of the mundane, day to day occurrences in my life, we work to unravel and unlearn the mental slavery I've been exposed to and have installed in my life growing up. Sometimes she helps me understand when I'm being way too dramatic and over complicated. Each of us needs an unbiased being in our world to tell us like it is. I have that with her.

Reading:

There is so much knowledge in a book. I've learned so much more than I could have ever imagined, simply by exploring pages inside of fiction, non-fiction and self-help books.

So, your first step toward shifting your mindset for success should be to accept your reality up until this point exactly as it is, especially the parts that you're least fond of. Your life has so much more meaning than the limits you're hindered by and limited to. So, rise above them knowing it's OK to not be OK. It's OK to hurt and be afraid, but it's also necessary you do what's best for you. Feel the pain, feel the fear, and push through it anyway.

Ponder on the message shared in this email. Sleep on it, and think of where you are and where you want to be.

Chapter 2

I shared with you my experience with journeying through living from a space of clutter and confusion. Now we will explore my transition to embracing the natural lifestyle and how it is literally turned my life and reality around. It began with me walking into my bathroom, grabbing scissors and chopping off ALL of my relaxed (chemically straightened) hair. It was both painful and liberating.

Let's backtrack a bit:

Considering the depressed space I was in due to my [daughter's autism](#) diagnosis and much like the facade I portrayed, I wore weaves for months while trying to grow through my personal struggles. Completely neglecting my then relaxed hair which eventually broke off in uncontrollable lengths. It was damaged beyond repair.

Not to mention during this time, my daughter Sania had developed intolerance to high fructose corn syrup. I recall the Nutritionist saying "just pay attention to labels and eliminate foods with it". What she hadn't told me is it's literally in everything processed. This basically meant I had to learn to cook meals from scratch using natural ingredients. Since I was already exploring some ways of natural living, why not go all the way?

Back on track:

After doing the big chop, I hid my natural hair for close to a year as I "didn't want to look like a boy" (something I actually regret doing now. I missed allowing myself the opportunity to experience this part of the process). I wore weaves and braids while my hair grew out long enough to my liking (at least chin length which is the length it was when I did the big chop). I had just taken braids out when my family decided we'd go to the World's Largest Pancake Breakfast in Springfield, MA. Rushed, I decided since I was going to the next state over, I could quickly shampoo, condition my hair + toss it in a high bun. No one my family would know.

During the ride, my sister lightly tugged my hair and says "Carmen, what did you do to make your hair so curly?" Confused I looked in the mirror like uhm, nothing...are you sure you see curls?" There were, in fact, gorgeous curls hanging out of my messy bun.

LIFE CHANGING MOMENT:

I realized there was something I needed to investigate the instant I got home (needless to say the pancake breakfast trip no longer sounded that exciting to me). Could black girls really have curly hair? If so, why on earth am I just learning about it and how can I make them stay!?

Hello, local beauty supply store! I instantly became a product junkie not knowing what to do to my hair or how to properly care for it. I could at least style it, though, thanks to my sisters, teaching me how to braid and twist hair while I was still in grade school.

I wondered what other women were doing with their hair that may be able to help me with my

own. What are the best products to use and how? What is this curl pattern I knew but didn't quite understand?

The questions continued to flow so I began to research natural hair. There wasn't a ton of information available at the time. Considering I had managed blogs with my first two businesses for the past few years, I could apply my skill to create what I knew was missing. I would create a natural hair blog and community for women of color. I learned about hair type, curl patterns, product ingredients to avoid and so much more.

After sharing this on my blog for the first few months, I craved the connection and support of women journeying the natural hair world. So I organized meetups, brunches, and expos that I advertised via my blog.

Fast forward three years, we are here. In reality...sharing the same space for the same reason and it's amazing. I have connected with SO many beautiful women, many of which are close friends and partners.

So, this is the growth. By accepting my reality and overcoming adversity, I was and am still able to encourage women and girls in this network to do the same. To GROW into the person they are capable of becoming.

People respect and support you when they know you're operating from an authentic space. We're all more alike than unlike. Share your strengths and weaknesses to encourage others. That's how I do it. And my blog network continues to grow.

I am able to make a living doing work that I love via events and marketing planning and having myself and hundreds of the women in this network featured in Essence, Naturally Curly, and Afroelle online magazines.

Not to mention the partnerships with amazing natural hair companies and beauticians who support the personal development side of the natural living journey. As a result, I was able to create a membership club that allows women to connect and understand natural hair, inner beauty, and wellness while pursuing their personal or professional life goals.

Even if your passion isn't like my own, the embrace of natural hair, the journey of acceptance and continuous growth applies to you too. Start with a problem you have and want to change. Work towards it and you'll find a path towards growth. The key here is education. Learning there is SO much information out there and so many amazing relationships and connections to build and nurture. All of which, will aide in us continuing to be the best possible version of ourselves.

This will support your outlook on life. You'll feel whole and have inner peace. You'll be more willing to stand up for yourself and as a result, others. And you will be rewarded in ways you

can't even begin to imagine.

To support women and girls on their own natural hair journey (and yourself if you choose to embrace the lifestyle), I have created a special gift, a thorough natural hair guide to help one understand the best practices for natural hair. You can check it out [here](#) to get ideas on how to create one of your own.

What areas of your life can use a little fine tuning and improvement? Jot them down and look forward to exploring them further.

Chapter 3

"Whatever the mind of man can conceive and believe it can achieve", a quote I read in *Think and Grow Rich* by Napoleon Hill.

I think this is the greatest way to accomplish anything big or small.

When I wanted to understand my natural hair, I created a plan. When I decided I would care more about my health and well-being I created a plan. When I wanted to launch my Membership club after a couple years of just blogging, I drafted a plan, the same for starting my non-profit organization and for-profit companies.

Each goal was accomplished in different ways but there was a plan of some sort either way. Some traditional in a sense where I took a pen to paper and drafted what I wanted and created an action plan on how I would achieve it. In non-traditional ways, I built the plane as it was flying. Meaning, I created a plan while in my pursuit to accomplishing other things.

It is amazing how life works...how I created things didn't always make sense but the goal felt right. While this worked well for me every time, it didn't take me long to realize I needed to make better use of my time. Work smarter, not harder, became a mindset change I quickly adopted.

I wrote down all of what I accomplished, including a timeline and began to draft a step by step plan. Talk about working backward! I ended up creating a roadmap using elements that I discovered was an outline of the structure I used. Without even realizing it, every blog, program, regimen I created made sense when I paired it with the outline I had just created. That "aha moment" clicked. I was able to develop a plan that would allow anyone to move from plan A to plan Z, no matter the project or task. After testing it on a few clients, I realized it worked. Everyone should use this system.

So here began a new component on my journey towards achieving my goals and helping others do the same. And it started with this:

"We have to focus on the big picture, the end goal and trying to be the best possible version of ourselves. Learn as much as we can, give as much as we can, find inspiration everywhere, work as hard as you can and still smile."

The inspiration necessary to help shape your mindset, followed by the tools to help you work towards achieving your goals in life like the women apart of my blogs members club, I want you to adopt this mission into your life as well. You'll find it opens amazing doors. Your life will never be the same. And that should be the goal, to be better than you were yesterday.

Think about what it is you would love to do or become and prepare to take the steps to design your life.

Chapter 4

OK, so now that we've addressed how our truths and our struggles make us who we are and how we can use them to grow, let's talk about you and your goals.

“Only one who devotes himself to a cause with his whole strength and soul can be a true master. For this reason, mastery demands all of a person.” – **Albert Einstein.**

It could be a skill, a desire and talent or passion project you would like to perfect. There's only one way to become good at something:

1. First, you must learn it by reading or listening to others who know how to do it, but most especially by doing. So say for instance you would like to become an event planner. The best way to start is to volunteer. Reach out to local organizations and inquire about helping out at events. You'll find most eager to have the extra help (especially nonprofit organizations).
2. Then do some more. At this point, you'll start to understand it, but you'll suck. This stage could take months.
3. Do some more. After a couple of months then years, you'll get good at it.
4. Do some more. If you learn from mistakes and aren't afraid to make mistakes in the first place, you'll go from good to great.

It takes anywhere from 6-10 years to get great at something, depending on how often and how much you do it. Some estimate that it takes 10,000 hours to master something, but I think it varies from person to person and depends on the skill and other factors.

Want to be a great writer? It's possible to be great within a few years if you have the God-given talent of Fitzgerald or Shakespeare, but most of us toil for over a decade and are still trying to get better. We're still learning, to this day, and if we look back on our first few years of writing — of any kind — we'll tell you we sucked (for the most part) back then.

Want to be a great blogger? Same deal. I'd been doing it for almost three years and am still only competent. I know some bloggers who've been doing it for, like, 7 years and they're still only ... well, they're pretty great by now. You have to do it, make mistakes, learn, really begin to understand it, and someday, if you stick with it, you'll be great.

There's no one who is great at his profession who hasn't been doing it for at least 6 years — no designer, no programmer, no carpenter, no architect, no surgeon, no teacher, no musician, no artist ... you get the point. I dare you to name one. Most have been doing it for over a decade, and are still looking to improve.

It takes desire, it takes drive, and it takes lots and lots of doing.

So here's the thing: don't get discouraged if you're just starting out. Have fun, like I did in the beginning. If you have fun, you'll learn to love it, and THAT'S when it clicks. When you love something, you'll want to do it all the time, sometimes late at night and often, you'll jump out of bed and want to do it before doing anything else.

And I can help. My member's club includes SO many amazing resources, mentorship, and opportunities that are organized, easy to navigate, follow and learn at your own pace, on your own time. And if you get stuck or need a little encouragement, my secret member's only group on Facebook will give you the extra support and encouragement unlike any other. I need you to do this for yourself because you deserve to be the best possible version of yourself.

Chapter 5

I believe every single one of us is beautiful and deserving of being the best possible version of ourselves. (Unknown)

The fact that you are still here reading this, is proof that you believe this too. And that you want to be in harmony with the source of peace and well-being.

That's the secret to sustaining your newfound freedom and success. The journey of keeping in sync with your peace and well-being.

My goal was to change my reality by becoming a better person. I tapped into the powerful world of self-care which naturally branched into the world of self-development. This in return, encouraged me to share what I learned with my growing community of Brown Skin Women and girls. As I grew, they grew, and so did the desire continue on this path.

I continued this cycle, being consistent with my life's mission by prioritizing inner peace and well-being. This is what resonates with my desire to live intentionally, wholeheartedly and happily.

While this Design Your Life Guide isn't rocket science, it's science. A process of learning and applying through observation (where you are in your life at any given time) and experiment (where you end up).

This process and guide are what changed my reality from poverty to stability, depression to mental stability and working a job I didn't like to being passionate and doing a job I love. And most importantly, sharing this and supporting women as they climb.

“I want to be in harmony with the source of peace and well-being”.

I have this written on a sticky note on my bedroom mirror. A gentle reminder and note to self.

Whether you are reading this to learn more about your natural hair, to experience the powerful benefits of mental wellness, or to explore growth through passion projects and entrepreneurship, CHOOSING to be in harmony with the source of your own peace and well-being should be the foundation on which you build your life.

And I want to support you through and through.

All you have to do is show up.



Design Your Life was birthed out my life's mission to practice fearlessness because living fiercely is hard.

Like most, I've successfully failed at life in many ways. All of which has ultimately lead to amazing lessons and feats. What I've found is this is the best space to evolve as a person. You find that you can... Grow. I've learnt to take these experiences, label them so that I am able to easily identify them and use it to determine and better understand the next lesson to be learnt.

I'm sole mom to the sweetest special needs child, serial entrepreneur, lover of life and all things inspiring. Design Your Life is my message to the world. My desire and decision to be the best version of myself. And to encourage others to do the same.

Carmen Veal

www.carmenveal.com | www.brownskinwomen.com