NSF- Personal Statement

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I’ve had many labels assigned me throughout my lifetime, daughter, mother, student, dancer, teacher, trainer, sales director, mentor, coach and student. The construct which best defines me is that of student. Learning has always been a powerful motivating premise in my personal and professional life. Learning has enabled me to earn the aforementioned labels. Being a lifelong learner has taught me creativity, diversity and commitment.

My destiny as a lifelong learner was preordained at the age of 10 days old; when in September my Haitian/French father was thrown in jail by the Haitian dictator Francois “Papa Doc” Duvalier and beaten near death. When released 2 weeks later he and my pregnant Haitian/Dominican mother gave up their dreams of a new house, and medical school for my father in Port-au-Prince and flew to New York City; where my U.S college educated father parked cars until he found work as a pharmaceutical technician. My father suffered from post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and relived his harrowing experience every September, right after my birthday. I was baffled by his experience until years later I learned about PTSD. I learned about his oft times erratic behavior and marveled that he was still a successful professional and supportive father.

Growing up I asked many questions, the primary one being why we could not visit the Haiti I learned about in encyclopedia Britannica. Finally when I was thirteen my father was no longer blacklisted and I returned to Haiti where my questions came fast and furious much to my maternal grandmother’s chagrin. Why were there so many poor people in such a beautiful place and why weren’t the privileged doing more to help? I learned that reconnecting to my cultural roots was important and that I had a lot to learn. I also began asking “how could I make a difference in my community and the world?” This question would consistently drive my purpose as a student.

My family moved to Costa Rica and I attended an international high school. It was challenging not knowing the language but I learned not only Spanish but about different Central American cultures. My learning capabilities expanded twofold, I could ask questions and research in French, English, Creole and Spanish. In 1975 my parents fulfilled their dream and returned to live in Haiti. I returned during summer breaks and worked in the tourism industry. The Haitian economy seemed to thrive and many exiled professionals like my parents returned to open businesses. Politically Haiti still had a tumultuous legacy to overcome. Socially the poor especially women had to fend for themselves. I became more politically active in school participating in the Dade County Chamber, the Haitian American Women’s Organization and National Association of Women Business Owners.

My consciousness as a minority woman in the corporate world was heightened where I experienced discrimination, sexual harassment and unfair pay practices. As a single mother mediocrity was never an option. I learned to excel and to be a role model for my daughter. I’ve
been fortunate to have mentors and collaborators guide and support my career so that I could learn to overcome the aforementioned issues and thrive. I worked in corporations run by women who empowered women such as Avon Products Inc. as the first Haitian-American International Trainer and Sales Director; and later on as the only Haitian-American Director and International Franchise Trainer for LA Weightloss. I looked for opportunities to empower minority women through various charities. I lectured at schools and conducted business seminars to be a role model for the Haitian and Dominican communities in Miami. I travelled throughout the U.S. and different countries mentoring, coaching and developing women professionally. I sought opportunities to learn attending lectures, symposiums and adding different certifications to my professional life. I learned how to be a better colleague, collaborator, leader and citizen. My daughter nurtured in this learning environment is a strong successful multicultural woman who is always learning. She graduated magna cum laude with a degree in Biology from F.I.U. and Master’s degree in medical science from Nova University.

The role of Board Chair of the Haitian-American Organization for Women in 2009 reignited my passion for research and propelled me to expand my knowledge of the nonprofit world. This quest led me to the Public Administration department at FIU. The diversity of the discipline engaged and challenged me to learn more. Minoring in Women’s studies reawakened my inner feminist as we explored the issues of income inequality and poverty among women around the world. I was reminded of the struggles of my Haitian sisters.

Then the January 2010 earthquake struck in Haiti and the reality of being an American of Haitian descent changed. My colleagues and I rallied various community leaders and politicians in order to collect money and supplies needed to send to Port-au-Prince. We also dealt with the challenges of the 100 children in the organization that lost many relatives; obtaining counseling for them and their families. I graduated magna cum laude with a Bachelor in Public Administration and as a graduate student in the Florida International Public Administration department, I was asked by one of my professors to assist in research she was conducting with the National Institute of Health in Haiti. My language skills and studies intersected with social research providing me the experience to perhaps impact the rebuilding efforts of my birthplace.

There is so much to do in Haiti especially when it comes to the socio-economic and political status of thousands of displaced women. The earthquake demolished the small gains women earned. More than ever women’s concerns have taken a backseat to those of men. An NSF fellowship will grant me an opportunity to make a difference and lend a voice to the poor women in Haiti. Women and children in many neighborhoods and tent cities are paying the intolerable price of poor or no education, and underfunded or nonexistent services. The future of Haiti depends on the opportunities created for women. An NSF fellowship will assist me in pursuing a PhD. in Public Affairs allowing me the opportunity not only to learn but to influence and teach at the university level. The international experiences, knowledge, discipline and maturity I’ve acquired make me a valuable asset to a NSF fellowship. This award will help me inspire other Haitian women.