

## **Brownstone Character Updates:**

Faith Michon, 45—Chicago native, business savvy, beautiful, timeless, widowed, no children, desirous of love and happiness again or for the first time...

I was 37 when my husband died. My life was a complete wreck for some years thereafter, but I hid it to the world. I functioned. If my Richard were still alive, I know he would be proud of me today. He always said, "Faith you're so powerful!" I never really believed him, and honestly I didn't find my business stride until I was 42. Yes, just three years ago. I didn't know what I could or if I could do anything without him. I made many mistakes, big mistakes, but God! It is difficult enjoying what I've built without him, but the truth is if he were still here, I may not have pushed so hard. It's amazing the blessings that arise from crises.

Richard passed away from prostate cancer at just 42. Yes, he was a young man. I had nothing but infinite time on my hands to focus on the businesses we were dreaming of building. In 8 years, I've managed to grow an at-home quasi entertainment business dream into the now lucrative, Eve Talent Management, representing some of R&Bs newest hit makers like local talent Shahari a favorite brownstone resident.

After some struggle with Richard's sister Patricia I also gained full ownership of the brownstone and manage it along with a couple of other properties in Chicago's Bronzeville neighborhood. All of the meetings, networking, and "business" dinners keep me extremely occupied, but at the end of the day, it's just me, my empty bed, and my memories. I want love and happiness. I simply don't know where to find it minus Richard.

Lauryn Ellis, 38—Chicago native, educated, travel required, in loved with an extremely handsome and hardworking black man, we live together, children probably not required, and marriage isn't necessary...

Is 10 years too long to be engaged to someone?

Most people think Micha (Mi-cah) and I are married because of the ring on my finger and the fact that we live, sleep, and eat under the same roof. Funny! Yes, we've lived together for 10 really great years. Truth is I don't need to take that walk down the aisle to prove anything to anyone. Our "situation" has worked well for us then and now. In the early days when I was still working toward my tenure as a professor of African American Literature, and Micha was getting his construction business off the ground we realized marriage could pose some issues, but we were committed and faithful to each other. We barely saw each other then, but we found comfort in those late nights and early mornings. We moved in together, and we made it happen. Many relationships would have crumbled under that kind of pressures we faced. Fact is we've been together longer than many of our friends who have since married, divorced, and remarried in the time Micha and I have been together, so much for 'I do'. Who needs it?

I suppose there isn't a good excuse not to move ahead now, but we've been together so long that it's not broken, so why fix it? We haven't had any major problems at least, not anything we couldn't get past. We talk about it and yes, sometimes we fight about it, but we always work it out. Our friends envy us. Our parents on the other hand have challenges with out choice of living arrangements, but hell—they're divorced! Why should things change? If he's unhappy, he knows he can leave any time, and so do I. Well, I wouldn't leave, because this is my place, but you know what I mean right? He knows I only want the best for him, and I know he adores me. If he ever wants to do something different...

Zoë (Deveaux) Stovall, 35—Southern roots, the perfect daughter, great mother, loving wife, unfulfilled, and desiring so much more...

Women always ask me what I did to get the “perfect” life I have. I never thought I did anything extraordinary; I just did what I thought I was supposed to do what everyone wanted me to do. My parents wanted my sister and me to go to college, so I went. My mom thought I would be a great nurse, so I majored in nursing. I graduated with honors from the University of Chicago with a nursing degree and worked for a few years at Cook County Hospital. The hours were grueling, but the pay fantastic. I must admit I didn't like the work, and I won't return to that profession ever no matter what mom thinks.

Five years ago I met and fell in love with Christopher. Today we're married. Christopher was, I'm sorry, is a beautiful, hardworking, blue collar, loving, Christian man, and I knew he would do right by me. I wasn't wrong. He loves me fiercely.

After our first year of marriage, I gave birth to our son, Christopher, Jr., and last year we had our daughter, Kai. I stay at home with them while Christopher works as a bus driver for the Chicago Transit Authority (CTA). We live in the brownstone surrounded by family and good friends. I know I've been blessed, and I'm grateful for my husband and children, but sometimes I feel stuck. I know I'm not perfect, but that's what everyone expects and thinks. I'm the one who everyone believes will always do the right thing and have the level head. One of these days Zoë is going to show them all. I'm going to put a little heat under my skirt like my sister Shahari. Is the world really ready for two Deveaux sisters?

Shahari Deveaux, 30—I tell it like it is whether you want to hear it or not. I can sing and write my ass off! Give me a pair Joe's Jeans, V.I.P. treatment at Saks 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue Shoe Salon, a fine man with money, a Betsy Johnson dress by day, a little black Armani dress by night, a pair of Jimmy Choos, a funky Fendi, and I'm down for whatever...

Since when does going after what you want make you a Bi@\*h?! I don't hear anyone calling Russell Simmons a Bi@\*h or Diddy. Well, I take back the latter, but you get the point! People have been reading me wrong from day one. Even as a young, yet well coiffed child, I was made out to be the delinquent. What the hell was that about mommy? My sister Zoë wasn't the type to rock the boat. But me? I not only wanted to rock the boat, I wanted to drive it and have hostesses serving caviar on it too! As a

matter of fact, forget the boat how about a yacht? I knew entertainment was my calling. Not only do I have the looks, but I'm damn talented—even if my parents don't recognize it. They wanted me to waste my gift on college and the evening news with some producer filling my head with stories scripts for ratings—NOT! I have my own voice. Sorry mommy and dad! I'm not Zoë. I'm doing me. This is my dream. My life!

There's finally buzz around my singing and songwriting. I've actually sold several of my songs to major record labels. Perhaps one day you'll hear Alicia Keys or Whitney blowing my lyrics. Hell, one day maybe you'll hear me singing my own shit. I'm booked locally and around the country most weekends, and the pay is pretty well. Thanks to Faith I am beginning to live my dream, but you know a sister can always use more paper.

Now, if I could only get the man thing in order. Don't get me wrong; I get approached ALL day by fine, educated, and financially stable men. I can date any night of the week, if I choose. I just don't do relationships, perhaps, because there's Damani?

We don't officially call ourselves boyfriend and girlfriend. Hell, I am a grown ass woman. I don't need a boyfriend. That's so passé anyway. I need a man! Oh, and we're not just sexing-it, kicking-it, or homie, lover, friends if that's what yall think. Our "relationship" is genuine, intimate, and complete. I love him, and he loves me. We simply don't define our status. There is no need, and there is no stress between us—usually. He laughs at my attempts to date, and believes I will find no man like him on the planet. I must admit I'm beginning to think he's right. Dayum I love him.

There are no other women in his life (well, I'm sure he's goes on dates, but they're harmless, and he's honest with those women about us). Why do I date? Friends say I have a fear of commitment. I don't believe I buy into that. Have I met anyone who'd make me change my mind or heart about Damani? No! I'm sure one day we'll settle down and do the husband 'wifey' thing. Good Lord what am I saying? I'm in no hurry! There are still lots of shoes to buy...

Josephine "Josie" Madrid, 23—Raleigh-Durham, NC. The youngest of the brownstone women, OK, let me just say I'm militant. I am not apologizing for that either. I don't do white men, truth is I have issues with white people in period. I'm certain they take issue with me too. I work hard. I am trying to do this life thing big, but I do want to stay true to me...

Chicago was supposed to be the start of a new chapter in my life, not a continuation of the same boring story of "little Josie" from North Carolina. Please never refer to me as "little Josie". Once Brisan Media offered me the Account Manager position in their Chicago office after college, I couldn't get on the plane fast enough! I didn't care what they were paying. Actually, a little extra research there might have helped me out a lot. Anyway...I just wanted out of the country.

My family wasn't crazy about me moving so far away from Raleigh to the city. My mother still can't understand why I'm "killing myself" working a full-time and part-time gig. I can't say I understand it either, but Raleigh wasn't the answer. There is a big world out here. I want to explore all of it. Chicago is not the final stop!

I'm a writer, well an aspiring writer. No, I am a writer. I write well. I just don't have the time to write enough. I've had a few pieces published locally, and I am shooting for national exposure.

The brownstone is no joke, and the rent is probably more than I should afford. I have to cough up my \$1800 every month, but I love it here! It's close to everything I need. I see people who look like me Black people. Unfortunately, that is changing. White folks are moving closer and closer, and with the possibility of the Olympics in Chicago well...more and more of the others are finding my urban locale more appealing and less expensive than the South or West Loop. Now ain't that it?

I guess I would be remiss if I didn't share a little about my love life such as it is. It seems everyone else has filled you in on theirs. I am dating Malik Andre Joseph (Oh, Malik is not his birth name, but it is his chosen name), my boyfriend of the past two years who was already in Chicago attending Roosevelt University when I arrived. Things worked well when it was long distance, but now that I'm here...I don't know, he just seems like one more person who's trying to control my life. He's smart, attractive, making a decent living, and he has big dreams. But this control thing is driving me crazy! They may call me "little Josie", but believe this I will not be controlled not by any man. I just want to be me—whatever that is. I want my work to matter to someone. I want to leave my mark on my community and the world, and if a man fits into that picture great. If not...