



INSPIRATIONS |



Lori S. Robinson is the author of the highly acclaimed book, *I Will Survive: The African-American Guide to Healing from Sexual Assault and Abuse*. Lori has traveled nationally and internationally increasing awareness and changing lives over the past 5 years educating people about the prevalence of sexual abuse. ILERA is honored to have Lori as our next INSPIRATIONS feature. Her commitment to empowerment and healing is exemplary.

DeShannon: *How do you think American society influences sexuality?*

Lori: America sends a schizophrenic message. The media beats us over the head with sexual messages and innuendos. But when it comes to having an adequate discussion about sexuality, we don't do a good job teaching youth about sex and their own bodies. People don't know how to process what they see from the media versus messages of abstinence and negative views of sex from many faith-based institutions. Overall, America's messages aren't healthy.

DeShannon: *What impact does your ethnic culture have on how you view your sexuality?*

Lori: African American culture is part of America so some of the same problems I mentioned before still applies. Sexuality is more complicated for us due to our history of being raped regularly during slavery. During the Reconstruction period black men were lynched, in many cases due to false accusations of raping white women. Because of this history, how we view sexuality has a lot of layers and it's complicated.

DeShannon: *How do you view your family's role in your sexual development?*

Lori: What role [laughing]? I love my parents but they dropped the ball on that one. I didn't get any information at all.

DeShannon: *Why do you believe it is difficult for families to discuss sexuality with their children, let alone the possibility of sexual abuse?*

Lori: It was a taboo subject for my parents' generation to talk about. If adults are not comfortable talking about sexuality among themselves, why would they feel comfortable talking to their kids? I think my mom didn't have an awareness of the sexual abuse of children. I did not know the extent of child sexual abuse until I began doing research for my book.

DeShannon: *If you had a child, what sexuality messages would you pass along to your son or daughter?*

Lori: I hope I wouldn't be over the top. I'd work on being comfortable having conversations with them so the discussion feels natural. I'd instill that sexuality is a healthy, normal human behavior. I'd also teach a boy or girl about consent and safety without it being a scary thing. I think I'd be pretty good.

DeShannon: *What do you think must happen for sexual abuse to decrease and be brought out into the open within communities of color?*

Lori: Men have to get on board with the whole program. Women have led because we are the majority of the victims. Men must take a leadership role working with other men and boys. I love the organization Men Can Stop Rape. They are based in Washington D.C. and have African American men in leadership roles. One of their key components is redefining manhood. Many men and boys are committing rape and don't even know it. If boys walk around thinking that the conquest of women equals manhood, we won't see a change. Many men and boys believe that sex is about taking something from women instead of mutual consent. We have to redefine sexuality and manhood.

DeShannon: *Your book, *I Will Survive* was published in 2003. What impact do you believe it has had over the last 5 years?*

Lori: The deepest thing that happened was when I received an email from an Angolan-born woman living in London. I opened it and discovered that she found my book in a library in London. She wrote about how much it helped her understand what happened to her. And she said it should be translated into different languages because it could benefit black people all over the world.

DeShannon: *Recently you launched a new website www.vidaafrolatina.com. What motivated you to create this?*

Lori: What brings me the most joy is connecting people of the African Diaspora in the U.S. and Latin America. I grew up in a place where there were few Latinos and no Afro-Latinos. Vidaafrolatina.com is about my identity as a black person in the Western Hemisphere. I want African Americans to know there are more blacks speaking Spanish and Portuguese in the Americas than

English. Only about 5 percent of Africans brought to this hemisphere during the slave trade were unloaded in the U.S. The other 95 percent were taken to Latin America and the Caribbean. I want to connect us.

DeShannon: *What cultural similarities or differences have you noticed between Afro-Latinos and African Americans when discussing sexual abuse – if any?*

Lori: I've spoken in Brazil, Costa Rica and Venezuela . I have not spoken to Afro-Latina audiences in America. My sense in the places that I've spoken is that there has not been an opening to discuss sexual assault that African Americans have had here. We have a larger middle class and in those countries, many black people are dealing with economic survival. With the exception of Brazil , I felt like they had less comfort discussing sexual assault than we do in the United States.

DeShannon: *In all of your travels nationally & internationally what has left you the most inspired when educating people about sexual abuse?*

Lori: I went to Brazil with my husband last summer. He is a professor and took some students. A Brazilian activist arranged for me to give a talk. Despite very short notice, the entire room was filled. Speaking out against sexual assault became a passion out of my victimization and survival process. It was great to share information about sexual assault with Afro-Brazilians and merge my two passions together.

For more information about Lori Robinson's book, *I Will Survive*, contact her at www.lorirobinson.com. To find out more about Lori's latest project, please visit www.vidaafrolatina.com.

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