PEACE FROM BROKEN PIECES
How to Get Through What You’re Going Through
By Iyanla Vanzant

New York Times best-selling author’s triumphant rise from the ashes

“Written with searing honesty about the pain and history that shaped her, this book will infuse you with the hope, strength, and courage you need to turn life’s greatest challenges into blessings. There is peace to be found in the pieces of a broken life. Please let the wisdom in these pages bring you that peace.”
—Cheryl Richardson, New York Times best-selling author of Take Time for Your Life, Life Makeovers and The Art of Extreme Self Care

“Using the rich material of her own life, Iyanla radically redefines what it means when ‘life falls apart.’ This nourishing and healing book teaches the most necessary lesson of all: Trust in the innate wholeness of the human heart and spirit.”

“What ever happened to Iyanla Vanzant?”

In the 90s, Iyanla Vanzant (pronounced ē-YÄN-lâ) emerged as one of the nation’s most beloved personal growth gurus. As a popular guest on Oprah, millions read her books and thousands gathered to attend her standing-room-only inspirational talks. Internationally renowned, Vanzant was fulfilling her mission to support others on their journey to personal empowerment. Outwardly, Iyanla was the epitome of self-confidence, however, deep inside, her soul grieved as her carefully crafted world began to crumble and fall to pieces.

Vanzant recounts the last decade of her life in PEACE FROM BROKEN PIECES: How to Get Through What You’re Going Through (SmileyBooks Hardcover, November 15, 2010, ISBN: 978-1-4019-2822-3). Peace lays bare the painful truths and private tragedies that defined her journey—from the price she paid for success during her meteoric rise as a TV celebrity on Oprah and Iyanla, to the dissolution of her 37-year relationship with the first man she had ever loved, and her daughter’s death from cancer on Christmas Day. Part metaphorical teaching story, part wrenching personal chronicle, this phoenix rising-from-the-ashes tale is about men and money, love and work, mothers and daughters, life and death, and the patterns and pathologies that families pass down through the generations—until someone gets clear enough to break free. “No matter how famous you are, how much money you make, or how ‘big’ you become in the eyes of the world, none of us is immune to the challenges of life and being human,” writes Vanzant.

Iyanla’s story is everyone’s story. As she investigates her family history and how she navigated the treacherous and often unconscious, self-destructive patterns, she discovers that
she not only lived these inheritances, she passed them on to her own children. In the face of Vanzant’s uncompromising examples, readers are prompted to hold up a mirror and examine their own lives in the context of the family they were raised in. “If we dare to recognize our harmful family patterns and legacies, we may be able to help succeeding generations avoid or circumvent them,” says Vanzant.

Vanzant explores:

- How her personal lie threatened to rob her of everything, including her spot on Oprah
- The roots of her dysfunctional family tree and its pathological patterns
- How her longing for her absent father left her in perpetual pursuit of the wrong man
- The uphill battle she faced on Iyanla, the show produced by Barbara Walters and why it may have been destined to fail from the start
- The toll the illness and death of her beloved daughter Gemmia took on her and the amazing spiritual lessons it demanded that she learn
- Why she could not save her fairy-tale marriage
- When faced with bankruptcy and foreclosure, how she turned loss into gain
- The steps she took to heal generations of family trauma

Courageous, poignant, and straight from the heart, the unforgettable story of Iyanla’s determination to find peace amidst the fragmented pieces of her life will inspire anyone who refuses to be defeated in the face of adversity.

If you would like to arrange an interview with Iyanla Vanzant, please contact Kira Citron at 646-484-4963.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR
Iyanla Vanzant is the founder and executive director of Inner Visions International and the Inner Visions Institute for Spiritual Development. The author of 13 titles—including five New York Times bestsellers and the Inner Visions CD Series—she is the former host of the television series Iyanla, and former co-host of the NBC daytime reality show Starting Over. She is a 2010 Black Girls Rock! honoree acknowledged on their national BET special. The proud grandmother of eight currently resides in Maryland.
Q&A WITH
Iyanla Vanzant

Author of
Peace from Broken Pieces:
How to Get Through What You’re Going Through

Falling to Pieces

Q. Your new book has an unusual title. What can your readers expect?
A. I am going to tell you a story about how a New York Times best-selling author ends up flat broke, looking for a place to live; how a 37-year relationship ends in divorce by e-mail. I am going to share the intimate details of how an internationally recognized spiritual teacher ends up on the edge of the bed in a million-dollar home slated for foreclosure, contemplating suicide. I am going to tell you about betrayal and the devastation it causes for everyone involved. I am also going to tell you about the power of friends, faith, and prayer.

In this book, I share what I have learned about having and not having a vision, and the cost of holding on to a vision that is not yours. I want people to know what I have learned about personality flaws, human weaknesses, a corrupted mind, a broken heart, and a depleted spirit. These are the pieces of my life that led to its total and complete collapse—pieces of a puzzle I didn’t even know existed until my life fell into pieces.

Q. You write about patterns of family pathology—based on relatives we may never have known. What does this inheritance look like?
A. For every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction. In my life, I experienced many reactions for which I could find no action, no first cause. This thing meant I had a propensity to think a certain way, to nurse certain emotions and beliefs, and to hold on to certain expectations and limitations. This thing, I came to believe, was a generational energy passed on to me through my bloodline.

Pathology is the study of the nature and origin of dis-ease, and disease is readily carried in the blood. The disease I discovered in my life experience was cancer. Not just the breast cancer that killed my mother or the colon cancer that stole my daughter’s life; I am not just talking about physical cancer. I am addressing pathology of mental, emotional, and behavioral disease—patterns that had infected the foundation of my life. I found it interesting, puzzling, and quite disturbing that although my mother had died when I was two years old, I had repeated many of her mistakes in relationships and parenting. Equally astounding was that while I had no conscious memory of her and little knowledge of her life experiences, I was like her in many respects. How I came to be like my mother was a missing piece of my puzzle. My story describes a pathology of abandonment and shame; abuse and self-abuse; betrayal and guilt; unworthiness and loss. My story is very much like my mother’s story. Her story was very much like her mother’s, who died when she was 13. And my story is very much like that of my daughter, whose mental and emotional pieces were shaped by my pathology, though I did not know it at the time.
I sense that many women live a pathology like this—of beliefs and behaviors passed down from one generation to the next, causing them to live lives plagued by low self-value and a diminished sense of worth.

Q. Was there one moment that you can pinpoint when your life shattered into broken pieces?
A. When your life starts to fall apart, it doesn't always happen all at once. One fell swoop of the universe’s backhand across your face might be more merciful. I had no idea that this was just the beginning of a collapse that would span seven years. It was October 1999 when the Oprah pebble landed, sending an unmistakable ripple through the river of my life. It was December 25, 2003 when the proverbial brick hit me in the head. And it didn’t stop there.

Childhood

Q. Childhood is a formidable and vulnerable time. What experiences shaped you during that period?
A. My early life was a series of emergencies that, under the strict guidelines of child welfare today, would have landed someone in jail and me in a foster home. Back then, it was considered nobody’s business outside of the family. Physical, emotional, and psychological neglect cripples more children than any hip-hop liner notes ever written. It is a form of passive abuse when a person responsible for a child’s care and upbringing fails to safeguard the child’s emotional and physical well-being. And whether caused by poverty, carelessness, or a chaotic home life, child neglect tends to be more common and more chronic than other forms of abuse.

A Star is Born

Q. After your meteoric rise to fame, you were in high demand as a speaker and teacher, yet you harbored doubt about yourself. Why?
A. Twenty-five years ago, when the spiritual movement was a virtual embryo, there was no money in it. Or perhaps I should say that if you were a person of color, there was very little money in it, unless you were a preacher. I make that distinction because my career emerged around the same time Marianne Williamson and Deepak Chopra both began to appear in large venues across the country before sold-out crowds. Although I had published and sold more books than either of them, I had yet to be invited to be a guest on the Today Show or Good Morning America, and Oprah was simply out of the question. I contented myself with doing things on a much smaller scale. I told myself that because I was doing good work, it didn’t matter. Somewhere inside, however, there was a cesspool that kept pumping not good enough into my brain.

The Personal Lie

Q. You describe a state of denial that consumes us called the personal lie. Can you talk about that?
A. When doubt is present in your consciousness it indicates a much more profound problem. The real problem is the personal lie. Everyone has one: It is a story that we tell ourselves about who we are and what we do and do not deserve in life. My personal lie, my foundational belief, was that I was not good enough. From welfare to law school wasn’t good enough. From self-publishing and selling books out of the trunk of my car to six-figure advances and being one of the most sought-after speakers in the country still wasn’t good enough. When I heard how people had learned from me, and how I had helped change their lives, I could breathe a sigh of relief, believing that maybe I was finally becoming good enough to matter. But the feeling was always short-lived.
Oprah and Iyanla

Q. You had a moment when you were on Oprah and seemingly on top of the world—then something happened. Can you comment on your experiences?
A. In the midst of my human madness of living out my personal lie, I got the telephone call that would change my life forever. I was invited to be a guest on The Oprah Winfrey Show. Within a few months Oprah premiered what she called Change Your Life TV, with a faculty of experts that included Dr. Phil, Suze Orman, and John Gray. I was invited to be a part of that faculty. It meant that I would appear on the show once a month. My area of expertise would be love and relationships. I was ecstatic about appearing on Oprah, but my personal lie led me to believe that even this accomplishment was not enough.

When Barbara Walters and her producers began wooing me to start my own show, I just thought, This is me, a poor, ugly, unworthy girl from Brooklyn, talking to an executive of a major television network, who, on behalf of Barbara Walters, is asking me what to do. I was amazed. I was scared to death. I was primed for self-sabotage. I had become so busy, so self-directed, I had lost touch with my inner voice and my sense of self. My marriage, my most intimate relationship, was failing. What better way to boost my sagging ego than to have the two most powerful women in the television world talking to me, courting me, wanting to make a deal with me?

Q. Why didn’t the Iyanla show become the success you envisioned it to be?
A. Buena Vista spared no expense in getting the Iyanla show off the ground. The production office was in the high-rent district of upper Manhattan, with the studio directly across the street. I had an assistant, a hairdresser, a make-up artist, an apartment, and a chauffeur-driven car on call. Yet, the day I arrived in New York, I realized that things were not as they seemed.

I soon discovered that my job was to read the te leprompter to deliver the message. It was nothing like I’d imagined. Also, I was constantly reminded that daytime television was geared for housewives in Middle America, rather than the urban viewers and readers who had heretofore been my primary audience.

The producers of the show simply did not share my vision, and through trying to please them I had forgotten to be myself: a powerful, insightful, compassionate, spiritually grounded coach, well versed in spiritual principles and the laws of the universe. And because I wasn’t paying attention, I was enslaved to the pattern rather than being empowered by the purpose. My purpose was to usher others on their spiritual path. It was not my purpose to do makeovers and soak almonds on national television!

Q. What was your biggest lesson learned from Iyanla?
A. I realized that the Iyanla show had never been meant to last. It had been a learning experience. I had just received a $10 million education in the art of television hypocrisy and the power of the pathology of my family of origin. I would need to pay closer attention to who I was and what I was creating in and for my life.

Q. You spoke very highly of Oprah in your book and about how you regretted leaving her show to start your own show prematurely. Were you ever able to mend your relationship with her?
A. I wrote Ms. O a letter. I admitted how disrespectful it had been for me to leave her show and end up, as I did, looking like a total fake on television. I asked for her forgiveness and explained that I
was in the process of forgiving myself. She said that I was not the first one who had been lured away, but that I was the first one who had ever apologized. She told me that it took a big woman to do what I had done. When I hung up the telephone, it felt as if a hundred-pound weight had been lifted from my shoulders. I sat very still for a long time. Then I had a thought, *If Oprah Winfrey thought I was a big woman, I had better start acting like one.*

**Relationships**

**Q.** As a relationship expert, your star was rising, yet your own most intimate relationship was falling apart. What went wrong?

**A.** It is hard for me to imagine that after loving someone for more than forty years of my life, I would arrive at a day when the mere thought of being in the same room with him would be distasteful. Now, don’t get me wrong; I wish him no harm. In fact, there is still a part of me that actually loves him. Fortunately, I am proud to say, today I love me more. Oh, but there was a time! A time when I was blinded and crippled by what I thought was loving him. Suffice it to say that we wanted to love each other. We really tried to love each other, and on a good day, we were convinced that we did love each other. I wish I could say that it was a real love, but today I choose to no longer deceive myself in that way. Today, I understand that I was hooked on my own denigration. I was hooked on my own dysfunction. There was a hook inside of me that got caught on proving to myself that I could never and would never have what I wanted. He just happened to be passing by when I threw my hook into the sea of life.

That’s the way it was for me back then: I thought I was experiencing true love, when what I was actually experiencing was self-abuse and self-denial. I could only learn to tell the truth about myself when it became too excruciatingly painful to hold on to the lie.

**Gemmia, Life, and Death**

**Q.** Your daughter Gemmia helped you launch your businesses and career, and you also praised her as your teacher. What did you learn from her?

**A.** This little girl, who almost didn’t make it into this lifetime, born with legs that bent the wrong way to a mentally and emotionally fractured mother, was more than just another human being—she was an angel in disguise. She taught me about life, about myself, and about the power of unconditional love. All that she taught me gave me a life. All that she taught me cost her life.

**Q.** How did you cope with Gemmia’s illness and death?

**A.** I didn’t. How do you watch your child die? How do you make sense of it? You don’t. You go through every day, day after day, with a huge wad of despair in your throat. At times you want to gag. At other times, you try to swallow it, but you can’t. Instead, you put your face in a pleasant position and you keep it there, no matter what you see or hear. When people ask you how you are, you lie and babble something ridiculous that even you don’t believe. When people ask you how she is doing, you just say that you are hoping for the best.

When you bring a child into the world and find yourself with the task of placing one last kiss on the face that you have washed and kissed and nuzzled just before you close the lid of that child’s casket, you know something that you wish that you did not. You see things that you would rather not. And you become clear about one thing: If you can live through burying your child, you can live through anything.
Q. Financial devastation is everyone’s worst nightmare. What went through your mind as you saw your perfect picture of success—beautiful family, gorgeous home, and abundance—shattering into pieces?

A. Bankruptcy! No way! I owed the money and I would pay it! This was my family’s home! I was a first-generation homeowner. My children and grandchildren knew this to be the place we gathered. But Gemmia’s care had depleted my savings. Filing bankruptcy would help me with the back taxes, but it also meant I would need to sell my house. It was unfathomable. It was devastating. It was embarrassing. I had a law degree, a master’s degree, and six credits toward my Ph.D. Maybe I could get a job, perhaps go back to practicing law. Then the pathology of guilt surged up from my DNA. Why didn’t I . . . How come I . . . I am being punished for . . . Guilt’s first cousin, shame, followed closely behind. Look what you did now! Everyone is going to know . . .

But I later realized that the house represented my fantasy of having a healthy family and a home where we all could feel safe and loved and protected. It represented the guilt I felt about achieving a level of success that no one else in my family had ever known. I had purchased that house with guilt money, and I now realized I could let it go. In that house, I felt responsible to take care of everybody and to make everything alright for everyone: Gemmia, my husband, my grandson, my granddaughter, and my staff. I had spent hundreds of thousands of dollars providing everything for everyone and working myself to death to do it.

The Comeback

Q. What did you learn about starting over as you struggled to recover from your daughter’s death, a failed marriage, and bankruptcy?

A. When you are starting your life over, with a new sense of self, who you once were is going to challenge you. Who you once were is going to dangle old carrots, old wounds and issues, in front of your face. When that happens, you will be tempted to revert to old feelings, old patterns of thought, and old patterns of behavior. When, however, you have made up your mind that the old you is dead and buried, when you have embraced a certain level of clarity about who you are and are not, as well as who you are choosing to be, you have a different response. You recognize that the new you has a different character, a different posture, a different presence than the old you had.

The new you is willing to get up, stand up, and step up for your honor and dignity. The old you may have behaved like a handmaiden, waiting to be told what to do and how to do it. The new you is the queen, ready and willing to take the throne of your life and rule your inner and outer kingdom with dominion, power, and authority.