

Interview with JaQuitta Williams

Sameera Gokal: What triggered your decision to pursue a career in journalism?

JaQuitta Williams: I was a Music major in college. I had a friend who was a Mass Communication major with a focus on TV news. One day she suggested that I consider a Mass Communication major since I didn't like mine. I always had a gift for talking ever since high school.

SG: Why did you leave your job at WSB-TV for CBS?

JW: I didn't leave my job. I left WSB-TV in September 2007 after going through a breast cancer battle, which included chemo and radiation. This completely changed my life. I didn't enjoy telling stories at WSB-TV about people dying. For that reason, I left news. In the meantime, I finally got to do things that I've always wanted to do, in the 20+ years of my career. I was on two shows, "Meet the Browns" and "House of Payne." I did some acting, radio and theatre. I was a guest appearance on CNN's Newsroom with Kyra Phillips. I worked with Robert Townsend, singing and acting on his Gospel Music Theater of Hope. I also did a mom's cooking show with my mom on Lifetime TV. If I were to die tomorrow, I knew I did what I've always wanted to do. I also did voice over and on-camera training videos for Home Depot. This was the best fun I had in my life for 1 ½ years. One day I was having a conversation with the News Directory at CBS. I then took upon the job as a primary anchor M-F plus specialty reporting called, JaQuitta's Close-ups, where I interviewed Ted Turner, Monique, Mayor Reed and many others.

SG: What is the most memorable moment of your career?

JW: The most memorable moment was my cancer diagnosis. People in the news say that it's not your job to implant yourself in the story. But I have been able to reach more people in my life that I never would have met. I have had young ladies email me saying that they have went on the journey with me. I met women who said they've had mammograms done because of me. One woman told me, "I remember your story, and it meant so much to me. You saved my life." Now that, as a journalist and woman, means more to me. You can definitely survive from breast cancer; it does not mean that you're going to die. This is the most impactful story in my career.

SG: I understand you are a breast cancer survivor. How does it feel and what awareness did you help raise for others?

JW: My first reaction was that I was afraid and thought I was going to die. I never thought I would have cancer. People usually associate cancer and death together. I learned to feel joy and grateful for it. It has made me a better me. I'm a better anchor and reporter because of this experience. I've gone through a journey that many people haven't. I think I'm forever changed. Regarding awareness, I have done several walks and speaking events, but I don't want people to remember me like this. But I have joined a support group called "Sisters By Choice," where I mentor women.

SG: What do you enjoy doing when you're not working?

JW: Spending time with family and friends, which is the most important thing. Having dinner with them, watching a movie, being in the house doing nothing and everything, and just laughing and talking.

SG: What is your favorite dessert?

JW: Anything chocolate, especially a chocolate cake. But I don't eat it a lot.

SG: What are some of your strengths and weaknesses as a person?

JW: My strengths are that I don't really fear a lot of stuff. I'm outgoing, I like to laugh, talk, have fun and take life as it is. My weakness is to get things right. Sometimes I put too much pressure on myself to get it right, whether it's job-related or relationship. But I don't always get it right. I'm still learning how to forgive myself.

SG: What advice would you give to aspiring journalists?

JW: A. Learn how to not wear your heart on your sleeves. Sometimes people can be great and not so great. B. Pay attention to what's going on in your community. Know who are your senators or elected officials. In order to be a good anchor, you must be a good journalist. You should be able to put a package together, ask good questions and can never be shy or not wanting to meet strangers. You must be a good writer, be able to think on your feet, and stand in front of the camera. You must be able to relocate. It may take several jobs to reach a job in Atlanta.