

**Transcription of Krystal Livingston's Story**  
**From Flourishing Families Presents This Is My Brave The Show**

Good evening.

I Know.

I know that I will always be considered the baby of the family no matter how old I get. Although I have reached the ripe age of 50, been married, have 4 kids, and tend to be the keeper of the family, planning and organizing family events in my attempts to keep us connected and unified. I know.

I know despite the strength, the hope, and resiliency it's taken to be able to forge the path that I have for myself, my kids, my career, a path that's littered with desperate prayers, so many tears, so much trauma, heartache, and pain, I can almost guarantee you that when I call my mom, and I have a point to share with her, she's going to call me her baby. I know.

I know that although I react in exasperation because I'm usually telling her something serious, and I'm on my soap box, and here she goes calling me, "you ole' baby", and it completely deflates me and my flow. However, I know I've come to appreciate that pause no matter how much I scoff at it. Because I know for this Black woman, living with depression and social anxiety, a mother where three of my four children are living with substance use disorder, and two of those three have been chronically unhoused has changed me. I know.

I know, not knowing from one minute to the next if I'll hear news that one of them overdosed or their body has been identified is an insidious nightmare that I desperately want to wake from. I know.

I know as the dreams I had for my children, for my family, appear to be slipping away it's left me teetering in a constant state of fight or flight as the days turned into months and then years, and seeing my babies adjusting to the life of addiction, life on the streets, fear and separation, becomes the new norm right alongside shame and blame, because where did I go wrong? It is often what we as parents think. I know.

With these hurtful thoughts in mind I know, however, I am a fighter, not a quitter. I will step out from my comfort zone to seek the help and changes that we need, to seek and learn what I need to to advocate for myself and my family. I know.

As I sought help, however, I know the disillusionment that many attempts we've made to navigate mental health systems that says it's for everyone, but really it isn't. It devastated me because what should I do now?

I know that I learned no matter how many agencies have posted their policies regarding equity, diversity, and inclusion, that didn't necessarily mean us. The message was clear that we didn't fit. I know.

I know for many their bias will cause them to make assumptions about who are and govern the effectiveness of the care we will or won't receive when reaching out for support and services.

I know I'm tired of needing to be resilient, to identifying new tools, to advocate for change that should already be in place as I continuously learn how to navigate this tumultuous path chosen for me.

Regardless, I refuse to allow even that to stop me. I know the struggle we face has opened my eyes to a world that holds the darkest of dark and the brightest of bright. My friends, my family, and network of supports, they do shine so bright.

I know now a level of compassion, empathy, understanding, grace I know I would have never have gained without the struggles that we face.

I know now the adversity I've faced has provided unimaginable opportunities to grow and a multitude of doors to open.

I know now a sense of hope and joy and possibility. I know as a woman, a mom, a mental health professional, and advocate for change, I do have a voice that I will continue to fight to be the advocate that change agent and hopefully a bright source of light because I know that I am worth it. My family is worth it. We all are worth it. I know.

My name is Krystal Livingston, and this is my brave.

(applause)