



INTERVIEW WITH *Annette March Grier*

Annette March-Grier is the Acting Executive Director of Roberta's House, she works tirelessly to increase the community's knowledge of children's grief and establishes relationships with foundations, social agencies and other mental health providers. She networks to expand their services to families in need.

Annette founded the Roberta's House Family Grief Support Center and is a bereavement counselor. She has facilitated bereavement programs for 26 years. She has presented numerous workshops on grief, stress, and holistic healing in various churches, schools, community centers as well as hospitals. Currently, Annette along with the March Family is the leading force to build a dedicated family grief support center in Baltimore City. Roberta's House will provide a confidential setting to facilitate the emotional, physical and spiritual healing for grieving children and their families where grief can be expressed and experienced safely.

Annette March-Grier is a member of the Association of Death Educators & Counselors, Trustee of Sheppard Pratt Hospital, a member of the Harbor City Chapter of Links Inc., and many other professional associations. Here is our exclusive interview with Annette March-Grier . . .



G&G: Annette March-Grier it is indeed a pleasure to welcome you to Grace & Glory. I am especially excited for the opportunity to talk with you. You are a member of one of the most progressive African American Family owned and operated businesses in Baltimore known as March Funeral Homes. Please tell us what it was like growing up and watching your parents build this empire from a mom & pop business.

Mrs. Grier: *Growing up in a funeral home was a unique childhood experience. First, as children we, my siblings and I, were often thought of as strange for living above a funeral home. We did not have many friends that played with us or visited our house. At home, I watched my parents work tirelessly all of the time from sun up until midnight most days. Up until the age of maybe 12 it was my job to awaken my father in the evenings around 9:30pm after his short nap to go to his second job at the Post Office. He would come home early in the mornings (7am) after working all night and prepare for funerals or meet with families. My mother would get us ready for school and then go downstairs to make-up and hair-dress the deceased ladies, meet with families, conduct funerals and make arrangements. Our home always had people flowing in and out.*

My parents had several employees that worked with them in the small row house funeral home. Besides our bedrooms, a kitchen (which everyone ate out of including staff) and a living room on the second floor; all of the other rooms were offices and of course the first floor was the parlor. My parents

worked all of the time and quality time with them was often spent at a church banquet or some type of affair.

Our parents had high expectations of us as children. First, was to get a good education and second was to never do anything to disrespect the family name or ourselves in the community. My father and mother both were very spiritual individuals and took a lot of pride in everything they did. They knew what is was like not to have and they were always helping someone. I watched how my mom took care of people with a big heart. I saw the business grow rapidly and the motivation that everyone around them had to do their best and be the best. Everyone always seemed to have high energy to shine around my parents. It wasn't hard to see why they and we were so blessed because they were always sacrificing and giving to others and the success of the business was always credited to God.

G&G: Mrs. Grier I understand the second generation joined your parents and created the family's corporate umbrella company Marcorp, Limited. Was it expected of you and your siblings to continue in the footsteps of your parents? Did you ever have any other interests besides this particular profession? You hold a Bachelor's Degree in nursing correct?

Mrs. Grier: *Our parents always told us to get a college education, (something that they could not afford in their time), and do something that you really want to do; they added you can always come back to help out in the business. For some reason, I always wanted to be a nurse. Now that I am older, I realize that this was a dream of my mother's that I fulfilled. I do*



The March Family

not regret it at all. Nursing has given me the wisdom and knowledge to care in a much more holistic and healthy way. It has given me the foundation to look at health physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually. Yes, I have a BSN.

G&G: The March Family is widely recognized in maintaining strong community relations. What interests you most about the funeral services industry? What motivated you to leave your post at the Johns Hopkins Hospital?

Mrs. Grier: *The funeral industry is an industry that is unique and often you are rejected by society. No one wants to talk about death or even face the reality. The funeral industry however, is a very caring and compassionate service industry and very much a ministry if you care about people. In this business you are able to help people sometimes at a time in their lives that can be most tragic. You are really able to see the value of relationships and value life in a more realistic way.*

I left Hopkins because, first I felt that I was not able to use my creative talent and gifts as a care-giver, and more important, I wanted to be on a winning team with my parents and my siblings. Our family was always excited about what each one of us did and those around us were always excited and proud for us. I wanted to be back in that environment with successful people, similar to like being on a winning team of football.

G&G: Which brings us to Roberta's House, which I believe is an awesome organization. Please tell us about the vision behind Roberta's House, how did it all get started? How have your educational and work experiences prepared you for the position of Acting Executive Director of Roberta's House?

Mrs. Grier: *After 26 years of facilitating Bereavement Support Groups and doing bereavement workshops for the churches, I had always desired to one day have a center or a dedicated place that bereavement support could be provided. Just before our mother's death, the children were discussing the old row house funeral home, at East North Avenue, and what*

we should do with the property. The property was rapidly deteriorating, almost synonymous with our mother physically dying. This was a tough decision, because this house/funeral home had a lot of sentimental value to us growing up. It also held a lot of history for us and for the community. I asked my siblings to allow me to pray about it and I then came back and suggested a bereavement center, named Roberta's House. In awe, they were all in full agreement. I told my mother our plans two days before she died, and she smiled gently with approval.

G&G: Mrs. Grier, how difficult is it to carry out the mission of Roberta's House? What types of situations are the most challenging that put you under pressure dealing with grieving children and how do you deal with these challenges and the pressure that go along with it?

Mrs. Grier: *The most and still is difficult is convincing corporate donors and foundations of how closely connected grief is to violence and academic failure. Most difficult with children is not being able to fix their situations or take away their pain.*

G&G: I understand that Roberta's House has more than 60 trained volunteers. How do you recruit volunteers and what type of training does the company offer? What about fund raisers are there any annual events? I believe there is something significant in store for the New Year, correct?

Mrs. Grier: *Roberta's House has more than 100 trained and 40 active volunteers. The recruiting is primarily from the church community, social workers, mental health practitioners, and educators. The program attracts them because they have also suffered a tragic loss personally and have the desire to give back. We offer a free 26 hour training course and you must have a clear background check along with the commitment of a minimum of 40 volunteer hours to the Roberta's House.*

This year we look forward in planning a Bingo Event 'For Healing Hearts' and a large event the latter part of the year! Significant for the New Year

is a Radio-a-thon to kickoff in March 2011 and Grief Awareness Sunday for children throughout the community in conjunction with churches in the Baltimore surrounding areas.

G&G: In what ways has the Roberta's House products and services been most successful over the years? What major problems/challenges does the company face today and what significant changes would you like to see in the near future for the company?

Mrs. Grier: *It has been very successful in reaching out to families and bringing many families together in their own tragic experiences. Also, in showing children and teenagers that there are adults and families that really care about them and increasing the awareness of grief with our children and educating our community about grief.*

The major challenge that Roberta's House is facing today is Funding and Resources to build a more dedicated center that will allow us to expand our program and have more suitable activities that are more attractive and creative to appeal to our children and teenagers. Activities such as creative play, art, music and movement to express their inner most emotions, feelings and thoughts.

G&G: Mrs. Grier, ending on a personal note, you are indeed a remarkable woman, to what do you owe your present success? If I asked the people who know you well to describe you, what three words would they use?

Mrs. Grier: *God's Favor & Trusting in God. The Support and Sacrifice of my Entire Family who believes in the Vision of Roberta's House and the reputation of my parents.*

Compassionate, Creative and Purpose Driven- 3 words that best describe me.

G&G: I thank you for taking the time to share with me and our readers your story. It is our prayer that God will continue to shine His face upon you and Roberta's House. Happy New Year!