

Powerful Women

Empowering Women to Empower the World

by Ashleigh Eisbrener

Flood waters threaten downtown New Orleans as water continues to rise throughout the city, overtaking the space where families once stood just hours before. Memories and close belongings ripped away by flowing currents rushing through the city, destroying buildings, roads, cars – everything. As the water begins to top off, its fresh green hue quickly turns to a stagnant, polluted black. Families are separated, homes are leveled and priceless possessions are lost. Residents feel isolated, angry, confused, sad and frustrated.



Valeri Bocage

It's easy to lose yourself along with all your washed-away belongings, but one strong woman took the loss and made it an opportunity to start a new life. Meet Valeri Bocage, just one of hundreds of thousands of women who lost everything to Hurricane Katrina. Following her devastating loss, she moved to San Francisco to fulfill her dream of empowering women to empower the world.

Two years ago she started Powerful Women International (PWI), a foundation to help women live their dreams and begin to network and support each other across the world.

She believes fulfilled women improve

not only their own lives, but the lives of their mates, families and communities. PWI has grown quickly with connections now in Chicago, New York, Houston, North Carolina, Sierra Leone, New Orleans, Los Angeles, Kenya and Russia.

Valeri took the time to give us the scoop on her and her recent undertaking, PWI.

Suburban Woman: Losing everything to Hurricane Katrina, how did you take your loss and turn it into something positive?

Valeri: I knew I could not go back to the life I had with family and friends scattered all over the United States. I had to look forward. I got support from positive people around me. For me I pray often and am spiritually grounded. Not religious, but I believe God has only His best for us. I believe in speaking out loud about what our wants in life are and that we all have a purpose. Once we find that purpose, life unfolds to our desires like a rose. I believe my purpose is to empower others, and my target is women and children.

Suburban Woman: What was your vision for PWI, and how did you put it into action?

Valeri: I started sharing it with others. My vision was to empower women wherever they are in life. I feel if women get together to support each other, women will prosper and fulfill their dreams. My goal was to bring this worldwide and for women to network globally. I believe once a woman is happy and fulfilled she brings that energy and excitement to others around her and it becomes like a magnet for a positive change. I can see people helping each other get to the next level and dreams being fulfilled.

Suburban Woman: How does it feel to watch something you started blossom so quickly?

Valeri: I feel great about it blossoming; however I don't always look at

how it is growing. My concern is training and helping people live their dreams. In January I was doing the planning for 2009, and it was then I realized all the connections we have made. I want people to be happy and live their dreams and that is where my focus is.

Suburban Woman: You've recently been doing a lot of networking in Africa, how did you build this connection?

Valeri: A member of my PWI team, Jill Dubreuil was going to Kenya to do an art show and visit a friend. We talked before she left about finding someone there to be a regional director and start a connection. One of the ladies she spoke with, Grace Gitaka, asked how she could become a regional director for PWI. She had been praying about God helping her to help the people in Kenya to prosper.

Suburban Woman: You adopted the Wholistic Care & Counseling Center in Africa. What was it that made you want to be part of this school?

Valeri: When I first heard that Oprah had a school for girls in Africa I was so inspired and said one day I would like to have a school for children in another country. I spoke with Grace in Kenya, and she had a school for children that needed help and was also the founder of Wholistic Care for single mothers. I visited the school and clinic and worked with the kids to have them focus on their dreams and not their circumstances. It was so fulfilling to see their little hands go up to share what they wanted to be after I told them it is not about their present circumstances. We adopted both the school and the clinic to help them. Many of the kids live at the school and have lost their parents to sicknesses or don't know who their parents are.

Suburban Woman: The Wholistic Care & Counseling Center needs clothes, shoes, toys, books and more. Who can be contacted and where can the items be sent?

Valeri: People can call our office at (415) 503-1184 or send donations to Powerful Women International Foundation, P.O. Box 420626, San Francisco, CA 94142.

Suburban Woman: What is your message to women across the world who are letting their circumstances hold them down?

Valeri: Remove or cut off any negative talk or people around you. Surround yourself with people that can support you with what you want. Change your conversations to more positive conversations. We become what we keep speaking. Get involved with a charity, or a way of helping others, this will keep your focus off of your own circumstances and allow you to become more positive about your personal life. Deal with circumstance as much as possible, but do not allow it to get you down. Tell the truth about everything, hide nothing. This makes you free to endless possibilities. Look at how what has happened can put you on a positive course for your life, like starting an organization, a new career, going back to school, getting a new home you want, etc. Stay focused on the future, and use the past to boost you to the next level.

Suburban Woman: Tell me about your upcoming Chicago event.

Valeri: Anyone is welcome. The event is October 30, 2009 from 2pm-6pm and is focused on women, but men may attend. We will have exhibit tables and speakers. I will speak and Monica Pierre from New Orleans, who is a motivational speaker and author will also be speaking. Please join us. <http://10302009pwichicago.eventbrite.com>.

For more information about PWI, visit powerfulwomenintl.com, and for questions or to start a group, call (415) 503-1184.