

Michelle L. Whitlock, author of "How I Lost My Uterus and Found My Voice: A Memoir of Love, Hope, and Empowerment"

Michelle developed her keen sense of leadership, resilience, drive and survivorship early in life. She was born in 1975 and raised in Silver Spring, Maryland just outside the Nation's Capital. Abandoned by her mother at age three, Michelle and her two sisters were raised by her struggling single father. He suffered a serious injury in 1986 and was never able to work again. As the middle child, Michelle emerged as the leader and care-taker (with the help of the grandmother) for her two sisters and often her father, as he was in and out of the hospital.



During high school, Michelle watched as her father battled bouts of depression and drug abuse. Determined to have a better life, Michelle began working her senior year. Her father died when she was just twenty-one. Michelle remained the family anchor against the storm, while her sisters fell into the devastating clutches of addiction and mental illness.

After taking a few years off from school to save money, Michelle went back to school where she learned the delicate balance between full-time work and full-time school. A member of The Phi Theta Kappa Society, she earned an Associates of Arts in Business Administration in 1997 from Montgomery College. She went on to Columbia Union College and graduated 'Cum Laude' in 2002 with a Bachelors of Science in Organizational Management.

Michelle was busy climbing the corporate ladder; giving no thought to motherhood in late 2001, when at just 26 her world came to a screeching halt—she was diagnosed with HPV and cervical cancer. The GYN-oncologist told Michelle she needed a radical hysterectomy immediately, which would leave her unable to bear children. Having no children, Michelle in her feisty way, set out to find other options. She researched treatments, sought out a second opinion and challenged her doctors with the difficult and often uncomfortable questions. In the end, she opted for a radical trachelectomy—a fertility saving procedure.

Although this procedure has good success rates, Michelle is not one of them. Just two short years later in 2004, at 29 her cancer returned, only days after her boyfriend proposed. Doctors urged her to undergo a radical hysterectomy once again. Michelle refused, determined to find a way to save her fertility, she sought out a reproductive endocrinologist and convinced physicians to give her eight weeks before performing the surgery she dreaded.

In those eight weeks, Michelle with the help of physicians harvested eggs, created 7 embryos— her ‘maybe babies’, flew to Jamaica, got married, and ten days later checked into the hospital to begin treatment. Michelle underwent the radical hysterectomy, a partial vaginectomy and removal of some lymph nodes; followed by 5.5 weeks of radiation and chemotherapy.

Suddenly she found herself about to turn thirty with a whole host of new conditions courtesy of her cancer treatments: menopause, sexual dysfunction, and radiation damage to both bowels and hips. She found herself faced with reality that she would never be able to create life inside herself. It was devastating both physically and emotionally. Michelle spent her first few years married trying to piece back together her shattered life with the help of her loving husband.

On October 27, 2009 Michelle’s dream of becoming a mother was realized with the birth of her daughter, Riley Grier Whitlock thanks to the help of a gestational carrier.

Today, she has worked for the same Retail Company for over twenty years. She climbed the ladder from a part-time sales associate to an executive, who has achieved many successes and awards along the way. Determined no other women should suffer from this preventable disease the way she did, Michelle started sharing her story. She has combined her years of leadership, resilience, and survivorship with her passion for education to help empower thousands of women across the Nation. Michelle is devoted to erasing the stigma associated with the HPV virus (now linked to seven cancers) and to helping women reclaim healthy, satisfying intimate relationships after cancer.

Please check out her award-winning memoir, [How I Lost My Uterus and Found My Voice](#)

Advocacy Positions:

- Board Member, Fertile Action (2010—Present)
- Board Member, Concerts for a Cure (2009—Present)
- State Chair, Women’s Cancer Subcommittee of the Tennessee Cancer Control (TC2) (Fall 2011 - Jan 2013)
- Director, The Pearl of Wisdom Campaign to End Cervical Cancer for Tamika & Friends Inc (2009—2011)
- Chair, West Region Women’s Cancer Subcommittee of the Tennessee Comprehensive Cancer Control Coalition (TC4) (2008—2010)
- Chapter Leader of The Mid—South Chapter of the NCCC (National Cervical Cancer Coalition) serving TN, AR, & MS. (2008—2010)