

Spotlight on: Joan Blake

September 2017

Biography



Joan M. Blake is an author, speaker and mentor. Based on the challenges that she has faced in her own life, she has written inspirational books including [*Rise Up: How to Overcome Your Battles Utilizing Faith and Belief in God*](#), and other works, to help people deal with and overcome their daily life-issues.

Her speaking engagements include retreats and workshops that she conducts for women and families. Originally from the island of Trinidad and Tobago, Joan continued her education in the Boston area and obtained an MBA as well as a MA degree in Urban Ministry. She and her husband are the parents of two sons and two daughters and several grand-children. She lives with her husband and daughter in the Boston area.

[Find Joan's work through the Sharon Public Library!](#)

Interview

1. According to your biography, you are originally from the island of Trinidad and Tobago. What brought you to Massachusetts at first, and what inspired you to stay?

During the process of filing for my permanent resident visa to come to the USA, and through my research to find somewhere to live, I became fascinated by Boston's diversity and its excellent colleges; I chose Massachusetts because I wanted to attend college to finish my undergraduate degree in Business Management and to obtain a job.

The same year that I graduated, I got married. I started a family a year later. During that same period, my extended family came to live in Boston. I did not want to uproot my immediate family and lose the deep friendships that I had cultivated nor the love and support of my extended family; I was inspired to stay in Massachusetts.

2. What was your experience of moving to the United States like? What was the best part of the process? the most difficult?

Moving to the United States, my first time traveling out of the island, was exciting as I would experience the independence that I longed for. The best part of the process was meeting new friends, building lasting relationships and getting an opportunity to attend a great college. The most difficult part of the process was leaving family and friends and the festive holidays we celebrated.

3. Can you tell us a little bit more about what you've written?

[Standing on His Promises: Finding Comfort, Hope, and Purpose in the Midst of Your Storm](#) is a memoir that gives the reader glimpses of my life in Trinidad as well as my life in America, including the joys and sorrows that we have had as a family. This devotional book, used for individual or group study, gives the reader tools to find purpose and overcome adversity in his/her life. At the end of every chapter, the reader gets to join in and journal his/her own thoughts concerning the issues discussion.

[Prayer and Meditation: Finding Comfort, Hope, and Purpose in the Midst of Your Storm](#) includes poems, thoughts, and prayers from my personal journals and those that I created for the publication. This book is designed to give readers tools to deal with conditions such as fear, anxiety, loneliness, guilt, anger, un-forgiveness, resentment, procrastination, and to help those who need comfort during difficult times.

[Prayer and Meditation for Teens: Finding Comfort, Hope, and Purpose in the Midst of Your Storm](#), used for individual or group study, is a devotional book which discusses some of the issues that young teenagers face and which aims to help them respond to those issues through the art of journaling.

[Prayer and Meditation: Biblical Help for Parents When They Do Not Know Where to Turn](#) provides tools for parents to cope with their teenagers.

[Rise Up: How to Overcome Your Battles Utilizing Faith and Belief in God](#) is a spiritual guidebook for men and women of all ages and faiths, which contains everyday as well as biblical stories with which readers can identify; this book gives encouragement, strength and help to those who feel insignificant, who are struggling to find purpose in their lives, who feel unloved or unwanted and who feel hopeless because of their difficult past. This book will inspire readers to rise from every situation that holds them captive.

4. There's been a lot of buzz about journaling recently, especially with the rise of bullet journaling. Do you have a preferred system or method of journaling that you recommend to others?

[Bullet journaling](#) is a planning tool that keeps one organized; I believe it could be used in conjunction with any other form of journaling. If you enjoy writing your feelings and thoughts, create a personal journal, or if you enjoy travel, create a travel journal. You can post your entries on the computer or use a simple notebook or journal to write your entries, which can be as little as a few sentences or a paragraph. Decide how often you will write—daily, weekly, or monthly—but don't be hard on yourself if you forget to post an entry. For those who prefer posting their entries on the computer, I recommend that they back up frequently to prevent losing their data.

5. Are you a journaler yourself? If so, what does your personal journaling routine look like: online or analog? frequency? theme(s)?

I am a journaler and I write three or more entries each week in analog form. I enjoy writing about my thoughts and feelings as they relate to the events that took place on a given day or week. I use some of the journal entries in my book publications and I review my journals for self-reflection.

6. It looks like your writing has acted as a springboard into additional work as a speaker and mentor. Is that the case, or was it the other way around? How did you manage the transition from one to the other?

I believe that mentoring acted as a springboard to my writing because I wanted to write so that others could be helped. I used the tools that I gained from mentoring seminary students to help my readers understand and deal with the root causes of their problems and how to overcome their past hurts. However, my writing acted as a springboard to my speaking. When I first published Standing on His Promises, I started with book readings, but soon it became clear that people needed more, so I began creating workshops such as "Facing Your Fears for Teens" and "Dealing with Life's Challenges for Parents" while using my books as resources. Helping parents and teenagers with their daily struggles made sense. Managing the transition from one to another in the past came naturally and was timely. When I was mentoring students, my speaking occurred less often, as I was busy writing. Since writing more books, I have had more speaking engagements and less mentoring. I will continue to mentor, write and speak as the opportunities arise.

7. I see that much of your work is geared toward families, and particularly families with teenagers. Have you noticed that there is a specific need for support among this group? or were they the most responsive to your writing?

Yes, I have noticed in addition to the struggles that parents experience with their own life-issues, that they must deal with the emotional turmoil their teenagers face because of peer pressure and difficulties dealing with relationships.

8. About how long does it take you to write, edit, and publish one of your books? How do you balance your life as a writer with your life outside of writing—raising a family, attending to daily life, and so on?

Writing, editing, and publishing one of my books takes approximately two years. Because our younger daughter has suffered with a disability and currently lives with us, balancing my life as a writer, coordinating all aspects of her care in addition to attending to daily life, is extremely challenging. I regularly work out at the gym, meet friends for tea or lunch, occasionally visit my grandchildren, attend church services and take two well-needed weekend retreats annually.

9. As a professional mentor and inspirational writer, what one piece of advice would you give to the people reading this interview?

My one piece of advice to readers reading this interview is: Become that precious gem by using your present and past obstacles to channel opportunities awaiting you, so you can live your life to the fullest and affect changes in the lives of others.

Joan's Recommendations

Freedom: My Book of Firsts by Jaycee Dugard, who was kidnapped at the age of 11 and lived in the backyard of the man who captured her for 18 years in fear and terror. Through a process of self-discovery she understands that self comes first and that life goes on regardless of your experiences. Rebuilding comes one moment at a time.

Susan Boyle: Dreams Can Come True by Alice Montgomery. All of us have dreams to be realized but in the face of opposition, we must be determined to fulfill these dreams. Susan Boyle suffered a lack of oxygen during delivery which caused her to have a slight disability during her young age. She continued to be shy while her parents kept her home to protect her, allowing her to sing in local talent shows. After her parents' passing, Susan Boyle entered the Britain Got Talent contest at age 47 and became a sensation when she sang "Dreams Can Come True." Though she went through anxiety and anger in the wake of comments made by her critics and by not winning the final, it proves that anyone can move from obscurity to what they dream.

Speak Up with Confidence by Carol Kent. If you are afraid of public speaking, this book will give you the tools to overcome your fears.

The Success Journey by John C. Maxwell. Life is a journey of failures and successes that one experiences until one arrives at attaining your dreams.

A New Kind of Normal: Hope-Filled Choices When Life Turns Upside Down by Carol Kent. This is a tale of an author who knows that you cannot force life to adjust to your expectations. Rather you must adjust to what life brings.