

Meeting one's own capacity is a fear that must be confronted with unwavering bravery. A fear Amber Smith refused to permit to dictate or destroy her destiny.

By Brittni Drayton



Amber Smith stood tall as she watched her certainty crumble into doubt. With trembling hands, she held on to her faith as life took her on an unexpected journey.

Smith spent most of her childhood fully supported by a family who referred to her as “their prodigy child.” She was the second person to express interest in attending college, after her older sister, so she began to feel the pressure of the expectations that were placed upon her. With every intention to prevail, her mind began to betray her but her heart kept her grounded.

“I was under an immense amount of pressure, as a child, I was often compared to my mother’s younger sister who at a very young age was labeled a prodigy child. She was an amazing singer and an amazing child, and there were a lot of things paralleled between us. As I watched the trajectory of her life plunge, it stimulated a lot of fears in me and I began to wonder if I too would end up like her,” Smith recalled.

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Smith realized she was in the process of breaking generational cycles. It wasn't an easy decision for her to take a step back from school and put her own needs first.

"My mental health began to decline and I think I needed a break...I remember talking to my mom about it and her response was okay, summer vacation is your break. At that moment I understood she didn't understand what I was going through," Smith recalls.

Smith then decided to keep her family out of the situation after recognizing that she would have to overcome this mental battle alone. She said what she imagined her family wanted to hear: "I'm doing great, Mom, and yes, I'm going to classes."

When in fact she wasn't. Smith fought this battle herself since she was unable to tell her family her devastating reality.

Reflecting closely, she realized that her behavior had been self-sabotaging, but it did not explain why she was unable to come to stop it.

"I was stuck in imposter syndrome," Smith explained. "I remember I was working at this community service event, and I had to take a picture, we all did. However, the picture was posted on our internal website. As I stared at the picture on the screen before me, I just kept thinking 'Oh God, people who work here are going to see this,' and at that moment I began to spiral," Smith reflected. "I was in my head so bad that day, I had to leave work early. I was consumed by childhood trauma, and my insecurities, I remember feeling so overwhelmed on my drive home I had to pull over. I told myself I was tired of feeling like that. It was time to seek out therapy."

Months before what should have been her graduation, she was confident that she could no longer go on." I had to withdraw," Smith recalled. With the unknown in one hand and her needs in another, it was a tug a war game she knew she could no longer participate in.

"The first two months I was full of relief, this heavy burden I'd been dragging around for two years at the time, was finally off me. I felt like I could breathe again," she said.

Smith was still young, she knew she had time to decide what her next move was going to be. As she entered the workforce her roller coaster didn't end there. Smith struggled to find a healthy balance. "It was one of the most embarrassing, humbling experiences of my life. I had to go back home to Chicago with my tail between my legs... I remember the ride home from the airport with my dad and he asked me how I was feeling and I responded 'I just don't know.'"

Coming from a prayer warrior of a mother and the support of her loved ones Smith returned home. As she opened the door with a heavy heart her mother embraced her with open arms and words of wisdom.

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"That night my mother and father sat me down and my father said to me, 'There's but so many times God's going to call your name and he's going to allow you to ignore him. God was calling you and you were ignoring him to the point where he had to shake everything up.'"

Smith's father's words followed her and it wasn't long after she found herself breaking down crying in the shower, it was the beginning of the cleansing period she so desperately needed. It was just the next day when she attended church and the sermon the preacher was giving seemed to be specially crafted for her.

"It just fits my life so perfectly and I just found myself breaking down in the church. I never cried like that in church before. My mother just held me," she remembered.

Smith knew God was trying to connect with her and she found herself opening up. In the year that followed Smith's return home, she buried herself in work and refused a social life.

"I didn't want to see any of my friends. In my mind, if they had seen me home they would've known I failed and I couldn't have that."

"I was concerned because Amber has always been dedicated and determined so I knew something was up upon her return home," remembers her sister Eboni Smith. "I knew she needed to recharge and find that passion again."

Eboni Smith stands tall when predicting Smith will leave a major imprint on the world, Eboni's confident that within the next five years, her younger sister will succeed in any direction she chooses. After learning it isn't easier if you don't try, it was a pivotal moment when Smith applied for a job she knew she wasn't qualified for and to her surprise, she got the job.

"She saw something in me that I wasn't aware existed at that time," Smith recalled. Her once-dimmed light began to flicker as she excelled at her new job.

"I had to ask myself, 'Why fear success?' If I fail, okay! I've failed before. Just keep going and stay in the moment," Smith expressed. When asked if she were ever allowed to whisper anything to her younger self, she says "God got you, girl, worry not about the things that aren't within your control, it's already done. You're anointed whether you know it or not, release that hurt and utilize your support system."

While progressing quickly in her new position Smith gained the confidence and courage she needed to take on Howard University once again. Smith's older sister knew it was one of her younger sister's biggest accomplishments to get back into school and proudly described Smith as a "brave, intelligent and passionate beautiful woman. "She's killing it, she's been killing it, as we always knew she would."

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Smith continues to shine bright, she fought her way back into Howard University classes, with an expected date of graduating in May 2024. Designed and decided. To be that brave, that bold takes something. It was the recognition of Smith's power, once she saw it, there was nothing left to do but to unleash it, to embody it. Smith surrendered her fears and stood tall while screaming "No retreat."

"Yes, my journey didn't turn out the way I imagined it, they usually don't. I've been welcomed into doors I didn't believe I was qualified to enter and held a seat at the table. I'm in love with the person I've become, the woman I'm still becoming, I've banded fear and my future is surrounded by the emotion of excitement," Amber says with conviction.