

The Lovelight Stories

PODCAST

Ep. 3 | Life After Trauma with Simone Gordon

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00:01.80

lovelightstories

Simone Gordon, it is an absolute pleasure to have you on the love light stories podcast today.

00:08.74

Simone Gordon

Um, thank you so much for having me, how are you Stephanie?

00:09.82

lovelightstories

I am so Good. It's been so fun to get to know you a little bit and I just cannot wait for everyone here to hear about your story because you have been called the black fairy godmother by many people across the country. Ah, can you just tell us a little bit about how you came to get that name?

00:33.31

Simone Gordon

Well, how I got the name the black fairy godmother is a very chilling story. I lost my job at a fortune 500 company and during that time during my job loss, my son was diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder. So at the time when he was diagnosed, you know the doctor provided me with resources and I followed through like any other mother would. I followed through with the resources and organizations that was in a pamphlet. I contacted the children hospital I contacted many organizations that would assist children who have autism and I kept getting a door shut. I even went to social services for food stamps and other resources. And for some reason either people were not picking up their phone...The doors were being slammed or they just did not have funding, so I got defeated. I really did, and I decided to keep researching keep googling and I got tired like any other parent would. I never thought in many years that I'll be facing hardship. Because I always had a job since I came out of high school I always worked hard and anyone who knows me out there before the Blackberry can vouch for me to say that. So I decided to go on social media – Facebook, and I asked people where can I find resources for my son.

01:57.28

Simone Gordon

And at the time it was a Facebook follower who instantly said, "hey there's a group that you can join and they help marginalized mothers like yourself". I joined that group, I introduced myself,

and my son and explained my situation, and there were 4 women. They were just strangers and they took a chance on me. They stated they can go on LinkedIn and try to find a connection at the Children's hospital, and said, "I could contact the children's hospital where your son is on a waiting list". It shouldn't take that long for a child to get resources.

02:23.18

lovelightstories

Ah.

02:32.69

Simone Gordon

So she went ahead and emailed or messaged the chairperson at Children's Hospital, that's in my state, and within a day or so I received a call and all of a sudden my son was able to get a spot with services. For six months almost a year, I'm calling back and forth to the children hospital asking for assistance and they're like you're on a waiting list on a wait list on a waiting list and my son at the time was 2 going on 3, but when she had someone to call their child was instantly able to get services. Now mind you, I am a black woman and I come from a urban community this young woman who called was Caucasian and she came from a suburban area with great insurance. My insurance is medicaid. And how that works is when you're on Medicaid and medicare there's a fee schedule that doctors get paid on and it's fixed. It's not like they can build any type of cents and dollars you know, paid insurance that you have.

03:36.19

lovelightstories

A.

03:45.88

Simone Gordon

So when they were looking at my son they would look, at he's a fixed paid patient versus a child who has regular insurance, but they'll get more money so the next person said hey you need to go back to school, like do you have dreams and aspirations? I said I always wanted to become a nurse. But I flunked out of college because I was taking on too much responsibility working. Well get back in school, I said well it's not that simple, because I owe a bill to the community college. I owe I believe 796 um or 764 I forgot but it was in the seven hundreds. She said well me and my husband will pay for you to get back in school and pay the balance. How does that sound? I said okay, well I'll take it. And they enrolled me part time into school. They made a check payable to Ss County College and June third of this year I graduated with my associates. And soon to be going into my bachelor's and then there was another woman who said hey I don't have much but I have a target card in each month I can help you get depends and wipes for your son, because there are pull-ups that are paid through the insurance.

04:43.18

lovelightstories

Congratulations by the way.

04:59.20

Simone Gordon

But they're not great because when as a child urine through them. That's it. It goes through their clothes. It's just not feasible. You know so all of these resources all of these women decided to take a chance on me.

05:17.60

Simone Gordon

I'm getting all these blessings I said to myself. Hey, there's a lot of women that are like me who need the same resources the same blessings. I want to create something where they could become stabilized too, and they could get the emergency assistance too. So those 4 women decided to grab a friend and family that they know. And we wanted to create something big so we started fundraising on Facebook I started getting the attention of you know? Ah Elizabeth I mean um, Jennifer Passeloff who then gave the attention to Liz Gilbert and they both said to me, you need to go on Instagram where you would get a better audience. So I went ahead and I went on Instagram to get a better audience and I went from a hundred followers in um, starting in October 2019 and in the end of December of 2019 I was 13000 worldwide.

06:04.76

lovelightstories

Wow.

06:08.35

Simone Gordon

We continuously just kept changing lives and there was a mom in Maryland who was facing eviction and within 30 minutes we raised a thousand dollars and her name was Teresa and she gave me the name, The Black Fairy Godmother, and it just stuck. People all over just started calling me the black fairy godmother. So that's how I got the name and that's the story on how it all started.

06:31.78

lovelightstories

Wow. I Love that mental depiction too of the Black Fairy Godmother essentially just overnight or within minutes being able to rally the communities around us and find assistance where it's needed most in that moment. It's just such a beautiful, beautiful picture. So backing up to your story...you were struggling to find resources for your son. What are some of the things and pieces of assistance that he actually needed at that time?

07:06.34

Simone Gordon

Well, he has autism spectrum disorder and he really needed something that is called physical, therapy, speech therapy and occupational therapy. And I did not know who to go to. Also I applied for food stamps. But when you go to social services, there's like a circus you know every day you have to go and bring a piece of paper you have to stand in line and he needed more assistance and at that time they were saying I was not eligible for food assistance because I was getting unemployment at the time you know. He needed special education. He needed school. I had to be his voice and do all those things for myself because there are advocates out there but sometimes you have to pay for these advocates. And I don't have you know the money to pay for an advocate.

07:59.94

lovelightstories

Right? right? and with the food stamps specifically too. I know there's this threshold, if you will, that once you reach a certain level of income you no longer qualify for the food stamps but oftentimes when you take on a second job or a third job, that pushes you over that threshold. And yet, the amount that you're making doesn't necessarily still make your life stable enough where

having those food stamps really would help fill the gaps. And then you have to find perhaps more childcare and it's kind of this vicious cycle, right?

08:36.28

Simone Gordon

It is because at the time I was getting unemployment and they were telling me that I was 2 to \$5 over the threshold. So I didn't qualify.

08:48.30

lovelightstories

Right? And 2 to \$5 is a drop in the bucket when you're talking about taking care of a family and a son who has autism and all of the things you've talked about, and that's something personally that I learned a couple of years ago and it just really threw me for a loop and made me realize, ok that's a piece in our system that's broken. We need to figure out how to fix that. I don't think we've figured that out yet. But it's interesting for people who don't know that, I think to come to understand that.

09:20.82

Simone Gordon

I mean I'm trying not to get emotional. People don't understand. They think that they see things on a web website that's black and white that you can apply for this, you could apply for that and you'll experience hardship and you'll automatically get it. That's not how it goes, Stephanie, at all. And you see many people giving up and just doing Instacart and Uber and Lyft or sometimes you see people to go stealing money I mean a stealing food is not that they are just doing it just to do it. They're doing it to feed their family to survive and when you go to a lot of these social services organizations there's a lot of politics into that. It's a lot and you know and it's bad enough that a person or a individual is not able to feed themselves or pay their rent or pay their electricity bill these are working class citizens these are your school teachers that are teaching our kids. These are the janitors that are making sure that the places that we go to are sanitary these are crossing guards. Most of the time some police officers don't even make a lot of money, so we're talking about everyday citizens who are taxpayers who are falling behind the traps and that's the awareness I'm making on my platform.

10:42.24

lovelightstories

Yeah, yeah, so important. Thank you for that awareness and what you do every day because it's it's so true that people that are working very hard day in and day out and that our society couldn't function without, and they are struggling behind the scenes to keep their families afloat and it's such a good reminder for any of us that do forget.

11:14.10

lovelightstories

In that moment of you said six months to a year trying to find these services for your son - I mean first of all, that's a long time. During that time period how did you feel?

11:26.97

Simone Gordon

I felt like and I want to be honest, like every other mother who's probably hearing this every other young mother in the urban community I felt like, you know I'm doing the right thing I'm taking care of my baby. You know I worked on my life but just because I'm going through a hardship people look at me differently. They look at me like I'm dirt they look at me like I'm lazy. They look

at me like I'm not following all the steps and all the so-called protocols that people have in life, and I did it all. It's just that I fell through hard times and you don't know how it feels to hit rock bottom when you go through it and especially when you have a child with special needs. Especially when you're a single mom, and dad walks out on you and he's not there. These are not choices that we make. These are just circumstances that just falls in our lap. I didn't you know, stay in that rut for so long because I was in depression mode. But what got me through was many of the doors that was slamming I just kept going because I had my son and I knew eventually one door is gonna open and I didn't know it was 4 doors with 4 strangers that got me here today.

12:53.86

lovelightstories

Wow yeah I can definitely see how easy it is to create a stereotype and apply that to everyone who's struggling and like you said you did everything right, and you were doing everything you could. You're a hard worker and you fell upon hard times, and all of us fall upon hard times. It just depends on the situation, the scenario, the environment we're in, the different things and it could be any 1 of us at any point in time that could be right there. Essentially, that's why you've created the Black Fairy Godmother Foundation, right? Yes, okay so let's jump into that the foundation itself...Um, let's see there's so much I want to ask you about this.

13:52.60

lovelightstories

I guess first of all give us another quick overview of how it works and how you reach out to people.

14:01.49

Simone Gordon

Well um, the Black Fairy Godmother Foundation is now a household name and many people reach out to me. They reach out to us directly through our website. We have a vetting process. We have to vet people because we are a 501c3 charity and Guidestar approved. We have transparency so we want to keep that. The same way these women vetted me is the same way I'm vetting these families. You go to our website, you fill out the form completely, we ask for their ID. We have to verify people's addresses. We need full documentation. Most people on our platform when they ask for utility assistance and rent assistance provide us with that information. Um, also when people ask for food, we do give it to them. And how the angel food assistance phone works is on the application you would drop down the food that you need any allergies that you have and we only spend up to \$300. All the food is delivered through Instacart or Walmart. Because we have a partnership with Instacart. Okay, so how that works is many mothers or individuals because we have senior citizens and individuals with disabilities who need food. We would um you know, ah put the order in and we also include a bouquet of flowers.

15:34.14

Simone Gordon

The reason why I include a bouquet of flowers because it takes a lot for a person to ask for food and it takes a lot for a person to say I'm hungry and there's nothing more fulfilling than to giving a person their flowers. And letting them know that this too shall pass. So that's the reason why I make sure a bouquet of flowers is sent with every purchase of groceries that a family receives. And they'll get that knock and the groceries will be right at their door. And we just make that happen and it's just a beautiful thing. We have people crying with people taking pictures and you know they have toiletries...we just had someone yesterday who reached out to us. She had no utilities since August the fifteenth. The fifteenth and within 24 hours we were able to get those utilities on just this morning. So that's the impact that we have.

16:35.22

lovelightstories

Wow.

16:49.41

Simone Gordon

Many don't always see what we post, but the beautiful thing about it is all of my volunteers are hardworking people. Some of them have disabilities. We don't receive any salary. Now, there are other people that are on Tiktok who are doing the same work that we're doing and we've been doing this work for 8 years - October will make nine years that we have been organizing in doing the work that we do assist marginalized families across America because I am a woman of color and because I speak on many issues that may seem political to some we don't get the notoriety that most have that most Caucasian men would get There's one who just started the same thing that I'm doing, and he's up to 1,000,000 followers on Tiktok and he raises seventy thousand a week he drives a Lamborghini. Me I still live at home with my family which I love because my mother and father are my biggest supporters, especially with the growth and development in raising my nonverbal son. So I let my audience know that I'm just like you working class that just want to make another human being happy, safe, and stable.

18:15.57

lovelightstories

Wow yes, and you are doing that, one person at a time! I want to ask, do these people that come to you, are they often coming to you with repeat needs or do you just help them 1 time? How does that work?

18:33.60

Simone Gordon

So here's how it works: some families just need one-time assistance. Then we have some women who are in domestic situations or sometimes a person is homeless. We will help them up to ninety days. We'll help them with the mercy assistance, with the hotel or Airbnb, then we'll reach out to our followers to see if we have any realtors or anyone who can help them because some people don't have the income or they don't have great credit so we try to find them an apartment. And once we find them a place, we will automatically put it on Instagram um, their Amazon list and furnish it. So it depends. We have a program where we will help you within ninety days to become stabilized. Then there's a 1 time shot where you just need your utility bill paid. You'll be all set so there's 2 ways that we work here with our program.

19:28.60

lovelightstories

And essentially both of those are taking someone from a state of crisis in an emergency and helping them bring themselves to stability, right? So There's not this sense of dependency that occurs. The focus is on getting back to stability, right? Yes I Love that so much and it aligns so well with creating that space for human dignity and worth and self-value and everything, because as you mentioned it takes a lot for someone to ask for food. That's part of why you gave them flowers, and I could see that being a thread throughout the whole process where these are people that just fell into a hard time and are looking to find stability again.

19:48.83

Simone Gordon

And yes.

20:25.74

Simone Gordon

Absolutely. And that's the issue with a lot of people who don't understand and go, "Well, it's just that simple. They can go to a shelter." Do people know that shelters don't have security and at shelters like all you do is get a bunk? And you have a set time to take a shower, a set time to eat. Do they know that sometimes families who come to shelters, some shelters will call child protective services? This is why people don't always go to shelters. They sleep on a subway because their children are all they have. Or a mother will stay in a domestic situation because she doesn't want her children to be split apart. These are the things that many people don't talk about, and these are the things that are happening. That's why my foundation I try to place the family in an extended stay hotel. You know until we get an apartment or like an air bnb, or to see if they have any family that's in another state where we can relocate them to another state. These are the things that are not talked about.

21:35.71

Simone Gordon

Shelters do not stabilize families. They keep them for 30 to 60 days and put them out and get what they can get from the state. We care about these families. I care about these families and how I structure it, is that I always wanted a transitional home. Because I want to transition people's lives where they'll be able to have their first apartment. I want to be able to say, I started with the Black Fairy Godmother Foundation transitional home look where I am now. And that's where we here in America are failing families. We're not giving them hope and that's what they need. Hope, and that's what I provide before I go to bed at night. I know I don't have a luxury car or live in a luxury house, but the void that is filled in my heart is knowing that I fed someone for the day, I housed someone for the day, or I have a family that's smiling for the day, and that's it.

22:40.89

lovelightstories

And yeah, that's what matters That's what matters. So you're saying when a family or a mother will bring their children to a shelter, they'll sometimes call child protection services.

22:54.62

Simone Gordon

That is correct because the child did does not have a home, you know, a child is homeless and that's considered abandonment. Some shelters do that because we had some families who had to run away from shelters or leave the shelter because of it.

23:08.90

lovelightstories

Um, see that's something that doesn't make sense to me. I understand the need for stability and everything from a systematic standpoint, but pulling a family apart while they're experiencing a crisis does not seem like the humane answer, because that causes even more trauma for the family and for the children, and it's just a sad situation. So, I guess another area of our system to be improved upon, right?

23:44.77

Simone Gordon

Absolutely.

23:47.39

lovelightstories

Wow. Okay, so you've told me that you have a partnership with Instacart and you also work with Walmart, and also you have your Fairy Dust Scholarship Program with Tori Burch, right?

24:01.59

Simone Gordon

Yes.

24:04.60

lovelightstories

Okay, so how do those programs work?

24:08.11

Simone Gordon

Well, let's talk about the angel food assistance fund. That is one of, I'm trying not to get emotional, when a when a human being does not have food, when you're in a cafeteria and you see some of your co-workers that just sit there...not just sitting there just to be sitting there. They don't have anything to eat because the little bit of money that they have left they want to make sure their children are eating right.

24:40.44

lovelightstories

Um, yeah.

24:44.98

Simone Gordon

But with the angel food assistance fund is that we are the angels that are providing the funding for someone to eat, so when a family says I need food and they come to the foundation they fill out the angel food assistance fund form. That's on the application, they put the food that they you that they desire. They put the formula, or the baby pampers that they need or the toiletries that they need. Within 24 to 48 hours or same day most likely, it's always same day, we will put that on Instacart and Instacart has waived our fees for delivery. We don't necessarily have to tip the drivers but we always tip anyway because that's just how we do. You'll get a knock on the door, and we tell the drivers to make sure they pull out the flowers and give it to the family and give them the food. And when I say we have videos of families just crying and saying, Thank you, they thought that this wasn't going to happen and then we see pictures of them showing how they have food. How the children have lunch, how the babies have formula, the babies have diapers or the mothers are able to clean their children's clothes for the day. That's an angel and all of my followers are angels whether it's \$5 or \$20, whatever they're donating. You are gifting to families who are just like us that are in that cafeteria or on that bus or on that train. So that's the angel food assistance fund.

The Fairy Dust Scholarship Fund means a lot to me as well, because Kimberly and Steve from Washington paid my past due bill at a community college, and helped me start my life over. Where I graduate from community college, many mothers who are experiencing trauma have children believe in their heart that once they have children they're not able to dream. They know

they're not able to educate themselves and they're not worthy enough because they're single mothers. That scholarship fund is dedicated to those mothers to put them back into community college, put them back into trade school. And let them know that there's always life after trauma. You don't always have to be that trauma or be stuck in that trauma like mode of "I'm never going to be able to achieve". We are the strongest. When Tory Birch gave me that \$5000, I said to them "I'm going to create a scholarship fund that's called a Fairy Dust Scholarship Fund to give single mothers a chance in life the same where I had a second chance".

27:52.91

lovelightstories

Beautiful, beautiful and you have other programs too that people can check out. One of the ones I'd like to highlight and just talk a little bit about is your Christmas program for families, because Christmas is coming up. And that might be 1 way that people could get involved with you as the black fairy godmother and become fairies and angels themselves. So can you share a little bit about the Christmas program and the joy that you bring to families?

28:24.80

Simone Gordon

Ah yes, to be a part of the Christmas program! It's gonna make you cry, it's gonna make you scream, and it's going to make you happy, and it will help you connect with some of these families as well with the angel with the wishlist angels - that's what we call you guys. There are many families who don't have the means to have Christmas. We have a lot of families in the south who have a lot of poverty I mean we service all families across America but we get a lot um a lot of the kids are writing to us saying that they don't have beds. They don't have shoes. They don't have socks. They don't have electronics. So this is how we do it: each kid and their parent will create an Amazon wish list. So for example, if there's 3 kids in the family, each kid would pick 3 items and 1 electronic. You would take that wish list and you would share it on your social media platform or share with friends and family and ask them to buy those kids a gift. So for example, if you have 500 Facebook friends and there are 17 items on that Christmas list and 1 of the most expensive items is a laptop that's like under \$200 you can raise that money for that laptop and give it to that family who doesn't have, or raise the money for a kid who needs a mattress.

29:56.57

Simone Gordon

I guarantee if you put a post that you are assisting a family who needs Christmas, if 1 person on my friends list will buy item off this list to make this Christmas magical, people will do it. We had so many wishlist angels that were taking 3 to 4 to 5 lists and just sharing it on their social media and we were posting videos of families. We even have families and shelters who needed Christmas and their kids were able to ride their bikes in a parking lot or play video games. It was just a magical thing and I do it every year because there are Christmas drives. There are firefighters. There are police officers that give out toys and dolls. But there's nothing like a kid writing a wish is saying I wish I could be like my friends at school who's getting the same thing. Just because of a person's circumstances and they're having a hardship, doesn't mean that they're not worthy of wishing or having. You understand? So that's the beauty of the wishlist angels.

30:58.99

lovelightstories

Yeah.

31:06.14

Simone Gordon

Last year we were able to give to 522 families, not children, but marginalized families across America - because of the efforts of people sharing the wish list and doing everything that they can to make sure they have Christmas. These are Amazon and Target wish lists. And you could also save them for your taxes and then the year before that I caught covid and we did about 322 families in the year. Before that, it was 152, so this is the beauty of community. If you want to become a wishlist angel, you just go to our website and sign-up that says "BFG Wishlist angels sign up" and you just sign-up on a form. Put your information in, explain to us whether you want an Amazon list or whether you want a target list. And there's like 5 questions that you would have to fill out and then we will email you a list. As soon as you complete your list, let us know and we will send you testimonials and pictures of the families and let you know the beauty of what you're doing is just changing lives and making these kids feel good, despite the hardship that they're going through.

32:18.75

lovelightstories

Wow, I love that you also just stay connected and share pictures of the families and those stories so that those who are helping can actually see the beauty that's coming of that and stay connected. I think that's really important to people and certainly important to me as I think about giving and doing that as well. So thank you for sharing all about that program.

I do have 2 wrap-up questions for you, but before we do that, since we're kind of on the mode of how to find things, can you share with everyone how to actually find you on social media and follow along with what you're doing too?

33:03.76

Simone Gordon

Absolutely, you can always go to our website at www.theblackfairygodmother.org or go to Facebook and Instagram @theblackfairygodmotherofficial. It's the verified account. We have a checkmark, and you can always go there and check upon the needs and where to find me and you can always ask questions I'm always good at answering them to the best of my ability as soon as possible.

33:35.66

lovelightstories

Love your passion, Simone! I Love it so much! Okay, so my final questions: The first one is, what would you say to someone going through what you went through or something very similar?

33:49.58

Simone Gordon

When you're sitting in that room or you're sitting wherever you're at and you're trying to figure out what to do, don't give up. Look at your child, look at your medications that you may have to take, look at your circumstances. Don't be afraid to ask someone for help if you are in a domestic violence situation and you don't have family. Whether it's a high school friend, whether it's a Facebook friend, someone needs to know that you're not safe. And if you have children, there are researchers out there that you can Google or you can even write a small note to a school teacher or someone that you know. Feel free to Google resources, feel free to just joke on social media and say "hey I wonder who can treat me for lunch?" You just never know who's able to bless you.

To everybody else who are looking at people who you see someone going through a hardship in the workplace, or at the doctor's office, or at the supermarket, try to talk to that person because

just taking 5 minutes of a person's time and just talking to them, your wisdom might change their life. And that's the food for thought that I want to share with everybody. You don't always have to have money, you know.

35:22.85

lovelightstories

Yes, well yes, you basically just answered my second question, because I was going to say, what would you say to those who haven't gone through something similar to what you've gone through? ...and you just answered that! But if you do want to add anything else, you certainly can, otherwise we can wrap it up.

35:45.61

Simone Gordon

I want everybody to do something. I know that you have to live your life, and you can't be stuck looking at everybody who's going through so much. But if you could take once a month to donate your time to individuals and marginalized urban communities, just once a month at your job get a jar, get a mayonnaise jar. See what daycares have kids that are without diapers. Do a diaper drive. Do a toy drive at a local community. Where kids that are at daycares or who are in preschool who may need Halloween costumes or may need a Halloween party but it's so unsafe that they're not able to trick-or-treat. There's ways that you in your business or your company you work for can give back to urban communities. You don't always have to go through these big organizations, because with some of these big nonprofits, the money doesn't always go to the communities. It goes to their marketing and their salaries and I'm here to tell you that as a CEO of a nonprofit and an Executive Director, we need you guys.

37:03.38

lovelightstories

Yes, well Simone it has been an absolute pleasure to get to know you and I hope we can stay in touch. I'm sure the people listening here are going to want to hear more from you at some point and be following along. So, thank you for sharing what you do, your story, your heart with us. You can really tell that this is coming from a deep place of love and support. Thank you for everything that you do.

37:34.61

Simone Gordon

And thank you so much for having me and thank you for this platform for sharing the stories of many people who can be the light of the world.