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Hello, my name is Alisha Byrd-Clark and I'm from Salisbury, North Carolina. Rowan County,

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um, born and raised. Basically, been here all of my life besides going off to college for four years

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in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. I am the daughter of Patricia Byrd Sturdivant

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and I have a daughter Chastity Byrd and two sons Devin Brown and Rashawn Cook. Two grandchildren

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Ariana and Kyrie. So, I grew up on the west side of Salisbury and so close proximity to

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Salisbury High School, Knox and Overton. So those were the schools that I actually um

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went to. Basically, during my k-12 years that's actually where I resided. I'm with my grandparents

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who are now deceased Minnie and Jesse Byrd. And so, after high school I moved to Winston-Salem of

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course for four years of college at Winston-Salem State University and then came right back home.

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Rowan County is where it is. You know some people actually go off to college and never come back but

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Salisbury has always been the center of my heart and so I'm glad of the decision that I made to go

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off to college and then be able to come back and serve the community which I grew up in. It's funny

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how as an adult you consider your village being adults, but I consider my village being youth.

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That's where Gemstones & Compass Leadership Academy really, you know, centers around our

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youth. So, Gemstones & Compass Leadership Academy is an academy for at risk youth in our area

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and it's for ages 5th-12th grade. We um provide youth the skill set to unwrap their hidden gifts,

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talents, and abilities with a compass which stands for being Competent, Optimistic, Motivated,

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Persistent, Assertive, Studious and Successful. I started Gemstones out of it.

Comprised from

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a book that I wrote which is "Gemstones, Embrace Her, Become Her, Love Her" and I never knew that

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the book would actually turn into something so great. When I met Alex, he was working on Compass

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and so we just ended up merging both of our organizations together and came up

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with Gemstones & Compass Leadership Academy. So, with the hidden gifts talents and abilities

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and so we've seen such great things come out of young girls and young boys those who have been

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introverts at one point are just flourishing into the young ladies and men that we knew they had the

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potential of becoming and so even with Gemstones & Compass, we offer mentoring and tutoring

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opportunities but outside of that, community is important. So, we've been able to open up a food

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pantry to service anyone in the community in need. And so, that's one of the great parts because

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you just never know who might need what you have, and you might never know who have what you need.

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I remember him sending me a message on Facebook messenger asking me the protocol of my um,

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organization. And so we met for lunch one day and the rest was history. And it was just like

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he helped me you know, get my 501c3 status. And we talked about family, community, life, everything.

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And it was just like an instant connection. We became business partners and it's like our

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relationship just grew and flourished into so much more. And not long after that I became, you know,

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Alex Clark's wife. Alex was just an amazing man. Alex was the type of person that if you had a

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community forum, when he spoke people stopped. They listened. They took in what he had to say.

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He spoke from his heart. He was honest. He didn't sugarcoat anything. If there was an

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issue going on in our community, he was passionate about relaying what was going on without hurting

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anyone's feelings. He was just a, a catalyst for change. He was just a great roundabout individual.

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His presence is missed by so many. I feel like in such a short period of time

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he gave our community what they, what we needed during those years, and he has left a legacy,

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and big shoes to fill. He was a compass. I mean he was just a navigational tool for so many

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that just were indecisive about different things and just needed someone to talk to. He was always

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willing to listen, but he was always direct and willing to share his opinion no matter what. When

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Alex and I- it was long not long after we formed Gemstones & Compass. And so, one day in particular

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he got out of the car, and he was limping. And I was like, you know, "what happened? Did you sprain

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your ankle? What's going on?" He's like, "I have no idea what has taken place." And so, he reached

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out to his primary care physician. He got on it you know, real quickly with doing blood work and

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just running different tests and everything. And so, he ended up sending him to a neurologist um,

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at Lake Norman and he ran a series of tests. He went through acupuncture; I mean just so many

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different things. He had been poked and prodded on so much and still no conclusive diagnosis. And so,

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Dr. Brown ended up taking him through another series of tests and sending him somewhere else

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and that's when it came back that he felt like Alex had um ALS. So, we began attending the ALS

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clinic at Baptist and it was confirmed there. But we also went to the University of Illinois

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and for a second opinion. And so, the doctor there said MS and ALS mirrors each other so much

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and so he too felt like it was ALS. And so, not long after he got the second opinion

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and Alex had made this public service announcement about ALS and what he was experiencing. He felt as

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though people were wondering why he was limping, why his hands were a little bit different. Alex

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was such a prideful person but the thing about it was he came to the realization that him coming

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forward could actually save somebody's else life and so, he had to let that pride go. Not long

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after that we put together a fundraiser for a stem cell transplant. So, him and I went to West Palm

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Beach, Florida and he had a stem cell transplant done. Our hope was that it would slow down the

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progression of ALS which in a sense it did. But it was after he got the stem cell transplant Alex and

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I ended up getting married about a year later. Six weeks after we got married, he went into

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respiratory failure. Alex was on a ventilator for 30 days at Rowan Regional, well Novant.  
It's like

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he had to get a trache. He had to get a feeding tube and all of these different things to sustain

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his life. And so, he did. pretty well for about a year and a half and it's just like after that

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ALS just started progressing but even with ALS, Even with all that, he never missed the beat with

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ministering to those who needed it. He would go to dinner and dialogue with a vent

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in his wheelchair and he sat there and gave the men and the boys what they needed.

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And so even in that he never stopped and I, I would never forget Ms. Eppers from Salisbury

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High School had reached out to me, and she said, "Alisha we're doing Tuesdays with Maury.

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And she said, "I don't know if you've ever read the book," which I had. And she said, "but

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Maury is a story about a man with ALS" and she said, "with us doing uh problem-based learning,

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we want to incorporate someone who has ALS so that our students can actually get a visual of it."

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And so, I asked Alex about participating. He was like, "of course I'll do it!"

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Well not long after that Alex ended up back in the hospital and I will never forget him waking

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me up one morning like, "what about the babies?" And I'm like, "what babies? What do you mean,

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what about the babies?" And he said I promised the students at Salisbury High School that I would do,

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you know, an interview. That day I went over to Salisbury and talked to Luke. But I'm like,

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"I have a problem. Alex is in the hospital. How are we going to make this work?"

Because

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he was just a man of his word. If he said he was going to do something, he was going  
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to do it. I went to Salisbury High. Luke said, "Alisha, let me handle it." So, what he  
ended

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up doing was assembling all the students in the auditorium and we did a Zoom from the  
hospital.

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In the background you see the monitors going off. You hear all the beeping noises. But  
Alex is here

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on this Zoom screen answering questions that the students at Salisbury High School  
had. It was just

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like you could see some who were teary-eyed. You could. And I guess they were just so  
shocked at

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the fact that this man is in his hospital bed, but he still chose to keep his promise to us.

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Before I knew it the word had gotten around the hospital that Alex had done a Zoom  
with

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Salisbury High School students and they sent him these cards. That's the type  
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of man that he was. He was a man of his word. Even after that it was, I think two days  
later,

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Alex was almost out of here. His blood pressure had went up real high and it was just  
really

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really crazy. Like the attack of ALS had really kicked in after he did the interview  
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with Salisbury High School students. I remember one pastor coming in to see him.  
Telling Alex,

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"you've done more on your back than most men have done on their feet." Alex's thing to  
me was,

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"when I leave here, I want to leave empty." And he did. Because he poured out to so  
many people

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during those last days of his life and I know he, he did. He, he left the way that he  
wanted to.

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And it's my duty as his wife to make sure that those that are here now and those who  
are yet

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to come, know about the type of man he was. It's bigger than me. It's bigger than Alex.

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It's about the future leaders of the world, which are our kids.

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We owe them that. Regardless of your race, regardless of your agenda,

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we have kids that we have to uplift and build up. It's about them. They are a community.

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And if we can't get along because of the color of your skin and because of the gender you are,

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we have a serious problem. We are role models for our kids and that's what he stood for. That's what

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we stand for. It's bigger than me. It's bigger than Alex. It's about just making a difference.

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Here's My Story is funded in part by the Z Smith Reynolds Foundation. To share your story,

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please contact Rowan-Cabarrus Community College by emailing [heresmystory@rccc.edu](mailto:heresmystory@rccc.edu)