

The World Report I-Can Planting Seeds In Belize

PART 1 OF TWO PART STORY:
By Dennis Freeman

Monique Brown is on a

mission. She feels duty and honor bound to expose the Amer-I-Can Way to women and girls around the world. Monique returned to the country of Belize as a member of an U.S. delegation that was invited to the Central American nation by Ms. Shabazz, who currently serves as Ambassador-At-Large for Belize. The delegation assembled in Belize to participate in the 2nd Annual Sacred Essence Women's Summit.

Under the auspices of an extension of the Amer-I-Can Program for Social Change, Monique is launching Amer-I-Can Women and Girls. Her foray into Belize afforded her an opportunity to collaborate with Ms. Shabazz and to introduce to others the virtues of the 'responsibility of self-determination'. The summit culminated a yearlong endeavor spearheaded by Belize's leading women organizations and youth focused groups. The efforts are pointed at strengthening Belizean families and promoting bi-national partnerships through acts of kindness and goodwill towards those Belizeans most in need. The primary activities during the group's stay in Belize consisted of: (1) A Junior Ambassadors Greeting: Summit Host Mentees; (2) The Title Summit and Panel Discussion (Care Box for PUMA Day School); (3) Landscaping A New Transition House (4) Visit with the Ladies of Kolbe Correctional Facility; and Curb Appeal at St. Catherine's Academy for Girls.

The catalyst of the Sacred Essence Women's Summit is undoubtedly Ms. Shabazz. It is understandable that the eldest daughter of Betty and El - Hajj Malik Shabazz (aka Malcolm X) would create a means for women and girls to elevate themselves. It is also comprehensible that the wife of a legendary community activist and American icon, Jim Brown, join forces to affect positive social change. Over the past two years these two dynamic women have shared visions and sought ways to create synergy and results. Ms. Shabazz, who founded the Pilgrimage Foundation, acknowledges Mrs. Brown's devotion to nurturing and sewing spiritual life into women and young girls. Further, Ms. Shabazz said she invited Mrs. Brown because she believed that she could have participation when she came to Belize last year, whether it was planting, teaching, nurturing young women, girls and inmates."

In turn, Monique said that she was in Belize to support the work Ms. Shabazz is already doing in Belize. Consistent with the tenets of the Amer-I-Can Program for Social Change, Monique is simply looking for means to collaborate. "Amer-I-Can is life management skills training, and Ms. Shabazz has been doing work in Belize to educate and empower the community, particularly a "significant impact on the lives of the women and young girls in Belize." "This is all specifically (the women's summit) based on the nature of the women, based on their giving hearts," Shabazz said. "It's based on what they've involved themselves in here (the U.S. delegation) and how it will fit; such as their ability to adjust to another culture. And Monique is superb at it. Not only is she the spouse of the founder of Amer-I-Can, she is also the visionary who created a forum especially for women and girls. The reason she was invited was because of her dedication and hands-on

young women and girls. Amer-I-Can's usefulness here is to support Ms. Shabazz's goal of empowerment by exposing the women of Belize to "the responsibility of self-determination"; most importantly, this is more of a spiritual thing and I just want to share and help. It's about connecting spiritually with other women. It's about learning to accept ourselves, to value ourselves. It is an ongoing bonding experience," Monique said.

During the course of her time in Belize, Monique observed in the women, and especially in the young girls, an extremely low level of expectation. "Too many of the women and young girls aspire to only work menial jobs; for example, when one young girl expressed her ambition it was to become a waitress. I spent time with the only female doctor on the island and it was eye-opening to know that many of the young girls were unaware that a female was practicing medicine in Belize. So, I took every opportunity during the time I spent in Belize to encourage the young women to set their sights higher."

The opportunities for Monique to integrate the Amer-I-Can methodology into the women's summit occurred during the various events. "I was able to communicate with the young girls who served as Junior Ambassadors that hosted us. At every opportunity I subtly injected aspects of the curriculum into the discourse. While working with the Ministry of Human Development and Hand in Hand Ministries, creating a more homely environment at a new transition house, I helped plant vegetation and joined in the presentation of a gift box to Darla Rosada, Director of Haven House – the only safe house for women and children fleeing domestic violence.

When we visited the Ladies at Kolbe Correction Facility I conducted an impromptu 'feeling session' as a means of opening the minds of these women to the possibilities of self-determination. And when we participated with the students from St. Catherine's Academy

for Girls and members of Youth for the Future in beautifying the seaside wall of the historic school, I worked side-by-side with the women and girls, washing and painting the walls. I must add that the designs we painted were the creation of Ms. Shabazz and they reflected the school's royal blue and bold yellow colors."

According to Monique, the Amer-I-Can Women and Girls would like to bring life management skills training to women and girls so that they can overcome adverse circumstances and conditions. "I believe that men should be the head of the household and, if they take that responsibility as a learning experience, they can affect positive changes in the family. He needs to lead with kindness, benevolence and respect. Many times men suffer from their unfavorable conditioning; they need to learn to be a new man – to lead with respect. All responsible men take care of their families, they take care of their children, they do not go to jail, or if they have been to jail, they do not go back. They should be pillars of strength."

Armed with a dedication and determination to affect positive change through the growth and expansion of Amer-I-Can Women and Girls, Monique Brown has returned to the United States resolute: "When I left Belize last year, I was so full. This time I felt determination. I didn't want to leave without having planted any seeds there. I'm very excited about what we accomplished – and I'm more excited about the prospects for implementing Amer-I-Can Women and Girls throughout the United States and wherever in the world women and girls can benefit from exposure to life management skills training – the Amer-I-Can Way," Brown exclaimed.