

Jennifer Hudson Shares How God Got Her Through Death of Family

Oscar-winning actress and Grammy-winning singer Jennifer Hudson has been through, in her own words, “the highest of the highs and the lowest of the lows.” But from her struggles with weight issues growing up in a crime-riddled Chicago neighborhood to Hollywood stardom to the murders of her mother, brother and nephew, one constant has remained: her faith in Jesus Christ.

In an interview with *The Observer Magazine*, Hudson revealed how her faith helped keep her strong after the 2008 murder of her mother, Darnell Donerson, her 29-year-old brother Jason, and her 7-year-old nephew Julian King—the son of Hudson’s older sister, Julia. William Balfour, Julia’s estranged husband, was charged with the murders and, in 2012 was convicted and sentenced to three life sentences.

“You don’t know how strong you are until you are placed in that kind of moment,” Hudson said.

Her tumultuous life has long been grounded in the church, where she sang as a teenager long before her voice graced the airwaves or the silver screen. Looking back, through all the success and all the heartache, Hudson reflects on just how much she’s been through.

“It feels like another Jennifer life,” she says. “I don’t look the same ... So many things have changed. I sometimes think the only constant is my voice.”

Despite the pain the murders and their subsequent trial caused, Hudson stood strong in the faith in which her mother had raised her.

"There would be no point in faith if it wasn't tested," she says. "My mother always told me no matter how negative your life seems to be, you must always look for a positive."

Now a mother herself, Hudson credits her mother with levels of wisdom the depths of which she's only now realizing.

"Now she has gone, I realize she had a lot to say," Hudson says. "My brother, I hear him, too. When we were kids, any time my brother saw me crying he would be like 'Jenny, knock it off.' And that is what I hear him say when I cry now."

Hudson's upcoming album, *JHUD*, features a song ("Moan") written in her mother's memory. Though Donerson was a quiet woman, her faith and teachings powerfully impacted her children's lives.

Hudson's mother was the one who encouraged the Grammy winner to chase her dream of becoming a professional singer, even suggesting the *American Idol* competition that drew her a national following.

After years of success as a singer and actress, the 2008 murders brought her down to the "lowest of the lows." But even in the midst of unthinkable adversity, Hudson chose to rise above.

Together with her sister Julia, Hudson established a foundation in honor of her murdered nephew.

"We both wanted to find a way that we would not dread every birthday and holiday and family occasion again," Hudson says.

The two sisters also started Hatch Day, an annual event when they visit schools to distribute teaching supplies.

"My nephew was super into education," she says. "He used to call himself Dr. King. [My sister] can pour his blessings onto these kids and keep his memory alive."