

Cannon the Bear

Natalie Y. Jones

ABSTRACT

Dr. Katie Geneva Cannon was my mentor, member of my PhD dissertation committee, and like a mother to me. She was and remains a powerful influence in my life. I have titled this personal essay about Cannon, “Cannon the Bear,” to use the figure of the bear to convey the personality and presence of Cannon in the context of my personal experience. To illustrate this idea, I use three of her sayings that demonstrate the wisdom and love that make Cannon the epitome of womanism.

Introduction

One night in the summer of 2018, I sat on my bed feeling sick, tired, and crazy. I was recovering from surgery. Dr. Katie Geneva Cannon had passed away. My three-year-old niece came into my room. She never stayed long. She asked about a teddy bear that sat on a shelf. She pulled the bear from the shelf. I thought she would take the bear and dart out of the room as three-year-olds do. Instead she brought it to me. I asked, “You’re giving me the bear? Do I look like I need a huggy?” I took the bear and asked her, “I don’t remember the bear’s name, what should we name the bear?” My niece said, “Cannon, Cannon the Bear.” I was shocked. I am still in disbelief. She had never met or heard me talk about Cannon.

This incident led me to research the symbolism of the bear. I was again surprised. The bear empowers, guides, and helps heal. These characteristics were seen in Cannon. I use this symbol to paint a picture of the woman behind the titles, books and lectures. She was watchful, protective, loving, tender and fierce. Cannon was like a mother bear; she imparted mother wisdom in the tradition of womanism.

Cannon was my mentor, member of my dissertation committee and like a mother to me. She was – she is – a powerful influence in my life. In this essay, I highlight certain characteristics of Cannon as parallel to the symbol of the bear by discussing three of her sayings and how these tie into the meaning of womanism. I call this a form of *womanalysis* of those sayings as they relate to my real-lived experience with Cannon. The three sayings are: 1) “Do the work your soul requires;” 2) “Be gentle with yourself;” and 3) “Morning by morning,