

Remembering Whitney

My Story of Love, Loss,
and the Night the Music Stopped

CISSY HOUSTON

with Lisa Dickey

with a foreword by Dionne Warwick



The Sweet Inspirations on our first trip to Europe in 1969. *Left to right: me, Estelle Brown, Sylvia Shemwell, and Myrna Smith.*



John Houston (*left*) in his army uniform during World War II. He could charm anybody, and you can see why in that smile.



Right after Nippy was born, the nurses took her all around the hospital to show her off. It was as if she belonged to the public from the start.



Even as a little girl, Nippy loved to perform. This shot of her and me dancing was taken in the late 1960s.

Nippy all dressed up,
and smiling big, for her
high school prom.



John and I had our differences at times, but we were always united in our
love for Nippy.



Before she went solo, Nippy (*seated, at right*) sang backup for me in some of my club shows in New York City. I always performed with a handkerchief to wipe the sweat from my face, and early on Nippy started doing the same.



My son Michael used to joke about Nippy's performances, telling me she should be in jail for stealing all my vocal techniques. But Nippy had a style and a talent all her own.



Nippy wasn't the only child in our family who sang backup for me—my older son Gary often sang with us, too.



Nippy singing with me at Sweetwaters, the spot we eventually chose for the showcase that led Clive Davis to sign her.



Although Nippy had sung backup for a while, she was nervous about going onstage alone. One night I finally decided that the only way to get her up there was to fake being sick. I convinced Nippy to perform in my place, and she never looked back.

Nippy and me
across the street
from New Hope
Baptist Church
in Newark, my
spiritual home and
the place where
we would one day
hold her funeral.





Nippy and me with Merv Griffin during the taping of her first television performance, on *The Merv Griffin Show* in 1983. She was just nineteen.



Nippy signed with Clive Davis because we all trusted him, and from the beginning he rewarded our faith. Clive really is, and always has been, the "Music Man." *Left to right: Merv Griffin, Clive Davis, and Nippy.*



Nippy surrounded by Omega Psi Phi alumni brothers, all volunteering at a Christmas party for homeless children sponsored by the Whitney Houston Foundation for Children.



Whenever Nippy was on the road touring, I always tried to come meet her. Word would get out that “Big Cuda”—as in “barracuda”—was coming.



Gary, Nippy, and me at our house on Dodd Street in East Orange. When the kids were younger, we loved to have people over for barbecues and swimming.



After Nippy became a star, she joined me in the U.S. Virgin Islands for a concert. She came to sing backup, but I asked her to take the lead on “Lead Me, Guide Me”—and she brought the place down.



I was as proud as a mother could be when my baby girl became a star.

BELOW: And I was even more proud that Nippy gave her all onstage, for her fans, night after night. No matter how she was feeling.





Before her debut album hit it big, Nippy opened for Jeffrey Osborne, pictured here with his daughter, on his tour in 1985.



There were times when I couldn't believe that the beautiful girl who sang so well was really my daughter.



When I met Winnie Mandela in 1988, I felt like I was meeting a kindred spirit. I could tell right away that she was a woman who wouldn't take mess from anyone.



Nippy with the royal family of Swaziland, following her concerts in South Africa in 1994.



Talking Nippy through the pain as she gives birth to Bobbi Kristina in 1993.



From the start, having Krissi changed Nippy. It was clear that caring for a child was something she was meant to do.



After Krissi was born, Nippy always joked, "Nobody ever comes to see me anymore! It's always, 'Where's Krissi? Is Krissi up?'"



Nippy, her nephew Gary, me, and Krissi on a family vacation.

Nippy thought about walking away from the music business after Krissi was born. A part of her just wanted to have a normal family life, but that never seemed to be possible.

(Photo courtesy of Laurie Badami)



I'm trying to get Krissi to look at the camera, but she's as stubborn as the rest of us.



Nippy always loved kids. Here she is with some of my grandchildren. *Left to right:* Krissi, Michael's daughter Blaire, Gary's son Jonathan, Nippy, Michael's son "Little Gary," and Gary's daughter Aja.

With Gary and Pat's daughter, Raya Houston.





Nipsey with Bobby Brown, his kids Bobby Jr. and LaPrincia, and Krissi in her pink hat. *(Photo courtesy of Laurie Badami)*



Our family friend Laurie snapped this precious picture of Nipsey and Krissi napping. *(Photo courtesy of Laurie Badami)*



She's a little fussy in this picture, but Krissi really was a sweet baby.



This shot by Ellin LaVar shows Krissi all ready for the sun in her floppy hat and bathing suit.



Here I am with Blaire, my son Michael's daughter. Of all my grandchildren, I think she's the one who looks most like me. *(Photo courtesy of Ellin LaVar)*

In 1997, Nippy spoke at the dedication ceremony when her elementary school was renamed the Whitney E. Houston Academy for Creative and Performing Arts. She'd come a long way from being that skinny little girl with the big voice in East Orange.



Bobby, Nippy, and Krissi at their home in Mendham, New Jersey.

Nippy was blessed
with such an
amazing voice.
I used to say to
her, “God was
good to you, baby.”
For all she went
through, I wouldn’t
be surprised if
sometimes she
wished otherwise.
*(Photo courtesy of
Ellin LaVar)*



Back when Nippy was a girl and would sing in church, I’d tell her, “Bring them to their feet, baby, and then drop them to their knees.” And Lord, she could do it. *(Photo courtesy of Ellin LaVar)*



Once, when Nipsey was touring in Germany, crowds had blocked all the roads to get to her concert—so she and Krissi ended up having to take a helicopter to bypass them. *(Photo courtesy of Ellin LaVar)*

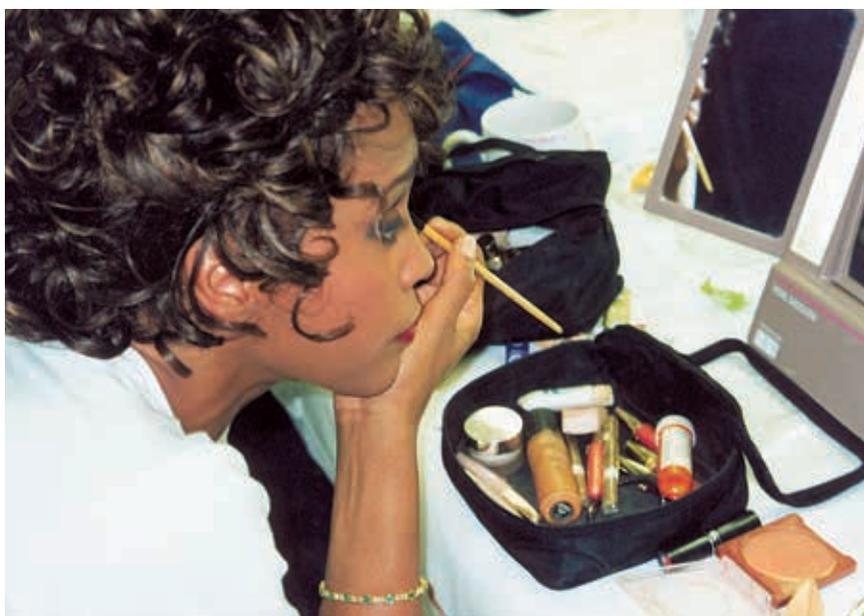
Not every three-year-old gets a chance to have a private helicopter ride, but I'm not sure Krissi was old enough to appreciate it. *(Photo courtesy of Ellin LaVar)*



Krissi poses with her dog Doogie before an awards show. *(Photo courtesy of Ellin LaVar)*



Nippy and her brother Gary onstage. *(Photo courtesy of Ellin LaVar)*



Another show, another dressing room. Nippy always took her work seriously, even when the pressures of touring started to wear on her. *(Photo courtesy of Ellin LaVar)*



I'm grateful that Nippy was able to leave her mark on the world, but I would trade it all just to have my baby back. *(Photo courtesy of Ellin LaVar)*



The long tours took a toll on her voice, but for years Nippy delivered electrifying performances. *(Photo courtesy of Ellin LaVar)*



Krissi joins Nippy onstage. Nippy also loved to bring Bobby out onstage to dance, too. *(Photo courtesy of Ellin LaVar)*



I love this family picture, taken in Monte Carlo during Nippy's 1998 European tour. *Left to right: front row, Krissi, Michael's wife, Donna, Nippy; middle row, Blaire, Toni Chambers, Bae White; back row, Laurie Badami, Robyn Crawford. In the pool, acting up: Gary.*
(Photo courtesy of Ellin LaVar)



Krissi in her Sunday best.
(Photo courtesy of Ellin LaVar)



I've been recording in studios since the late 1950s, and I've never gotten tired of it.

BELOW: Directing singers in the studio.





In the 1990s, I was fortunate enough to win two Grammys for Best Traditional Soul Gospel Album—for *Face to Face* and *He Leadeth Me*.



From working as New Hope Baptist Church's minister of music to directing background arrangements, I've always loved working with other singers.



I learned from my father that in singing gospel, you inspire others and strengthen your own faith. Singing with me in the backup choir are Gary (*fifth from right*) and his wife, Pat (*third from right*).



Nipsey loved working on her collaboration with Kelly Price (*left*) and Faith Evans (*right*), “It’s Not Right but It’s Okay.” (*Photo courtesy of Ellin LaVar*)



Sometimes, before going out onstage, Nipsey would say, “Okay, I’ve got to go be Whitney Houston now.” (*Photo courtesy of Laurie Badami*)



Nipsey was surrounded by people who worked very hard for her, including these talented backup dancers. *(Photo courtesy of Laurie Badami)*



By the time this video was shot in the late 1990s, rumors had started to circulate about what was really going on with Nipsey. But she still went out and did her job every day. *(Photo courtesy of Laurie Badami)*

Reverend Joe Carter, my pastor at New Hope Baptist Church, helped me celebrate at my seventieth birthday party.



Dancing with Gary, my firstborn.

My sons Gary (*left*) and Michael (*right*). From the time Nippy was small, her brothers looked out for her.



Sometimes I just
ache, wishing I could
hug my Nippy one
last time. I never,
ever thought she
would go before me.

*(Photo courtesy of
Ellin LaVar)*



Nippy, I will always love you.
(Photo courtesy of Ellin LaVar)