

To Rosenie Josiane Manigat

Read online with photographs and supporting records

Josiane,

I once judged you from Shirley's account of what she described as your betrayal of her brother, the pain she said he had suffered, and the ways she said his life had been ruined by what happened. I thought I could relate to his hurt, and I accepted her version without wanting to hear yours.

You deserved better from me.

When I got to know you myself, I discovered a fun-loving, caring person. I watched how deeply you loved your children and how much you were willing to sacrifice for them. I saw how you cared for your family and friends. You are a people person with a big heart, Josiane. Over time, my own experience of you changed the opinion I had formed from someone else's words.

You welcomed me into your home and invited me to every event. You would call to remind us and make sure I would be there. For at least ten years, I came to your home for Thanksgiving or Christmas dinner. We prayed, and then we ate. Your cooking was always exceptional. I would have felt embarrassed taking so much food home if you had not been encouraging everyone to take some.

I attended your children's graduations, and you came to my nursing graduation. You met my family, including my mother, and we dined together. I attended so many events at your house, and we traveled to Vermont together with a group of more than twenty people.

Your children slept over at our house many times. I gladly embraced your daughter as the godmother of my Bella. I gave your daughter her first car after her high school graduation.

To me, you and your children were family. We had welcomed one another into our homes and shared in our children's lives.

I remember occasions when Shirley saw that you had called my phone and asked whether something was going on between us. I understood those questions as jealousy, and I reassured her that nothing was going on. To me, you were family. I valued your kindness, our conversations, and the way you made me feel welcome.

Your fiftieth birthday celebration was the last event Shirley, the children, and I attended together as a family. We ate, danced, and celebrated in our matching yellow outfits. I remember the cruises, our trips to Florida as a family, and the conversations about family problems, life's challenges, and business ideas.

Those happy memories still matter to me.

I valued the way you continued to reach out to me. In early 2023, you called to ask why I did not want to go on the next family cruise. I felt you had noticed me pulling away and wanted to understand. You still expected me to be there, and that meant something to me.

Although you never asked me directly about the turmoil in my relationship with Shirley, I suspected you knew. Through that period, you continued to treat me with warmth. You did not make me feel unwelcome or unloved.

In mid-December 2023, you invited me for breakfast. We sat together and talked about life, family, the kids, business ideas, Haiti, and politics. I was thankful you did not bring up my separation from Shirley.

I was afraid that losing my marriage might also mean losing my place in the family.

Sitting with you that morning, talking as we always had, I felt that I still belonged.

You also invited me to Christmas dinner at your house, as you normally did. Only a few days before Christmas, you called to withdraw the invitation, saying it was not feasible for both parties. I understood that to mean Shirley did not want me there.

I understood the difficult position you were in and how uncomfortable having both of us there might have been. Still, after so many holidays together and the warmth of our breakfast, it hurt to feel that I no longer had a place at your table.

After that, I did not hear from you again until four days after Bella's death. Granted, I had not reached out to you either.

You loved Bella, and your children loved her. I remember that love alongside the kindness you showed me.

That is why the distance I felt after her death hurt so much.

I know Bella's death brought grief to you and your children too, and I do not diminish that grief simply because I was hurt by what happened afterward.

I am not writing this to embarrass you or erase the kindness you showed me over the years. Those years mattered to me. What happened afterward mattered too. And Bella connects both parts of that history.

On February 22, 2025, I found Bella unresponsive and performed CPR, trying to save her. The next day, I wrote to Shirley offering my condolences and asking that we put our differences aside to arrange Bella's funeral.

I was still in shock.

I reject the accusation that I deliberately harmed my daughter, and I wish you could understand what it felt like to face that suspicion while grieving her.

I later learned that on February 24, 2025, you accompanied Shirley and Renisha to a meeting with the District Attorney's office. My understanding is that allegations against me and a request to revoke my passport were raised there.

I was not in that room, and I cannot tell you which words were yours.

I want to understand what you were told, what you believed, what you personally knew, and what you yourself said at that meeting.

Those are painful questions to ask someone I had known for approximately twelve years. You had welcomed me into your home and known me as Bella's father. Whatever had happened between Shirley and me, I had lost my daughter.

Learning about that meeting left me feeling judged while I was still struggling to understand how she could be gone.

On February 26, you contacted me, offered your condolences, and told me you would be the family liaison coordinating Bella's funeral arrangements. You did reach out, and I want to acknowledge that. I have kept the messages.

I thanked you and asked what you had in mind for the funeral. You asked me to call. I replied, "I prefer to communicate via text." Your response began, "I will respect that," but you also explained that it would not be practical for you and that talking would be more productive.

The truth is that I wanted to talk to you. But I was afraid that my words might be taken out of context or used against me, so I preferred to keep our communication in writing. I wanted to participate in saying goodbye to my daughter.

Learning later about the February 24 meeting changed how I understood your insistence that we speak by phone. I came to believe you wanted me to say something you could take back to Shirley and Renisha and use against me, rather than simply include me in the funeral arrangements. I cannot know your intentions. But that belief explains why an exchange with someone I had trusted came to feel threatening.

At a time when I needed compassion and a place in planning my daughter's goodbye, I felt I had to protect myself even in a conversation with you.

At the funeral, I remember you seeming surprised to see me. You said hello and hurried inside. I wondered whether you were going to tell the others I had arrived.

What stayed with me was how far away I felt from the welcome I had known in your home.

For years, you had called to make sure I would come.

Now I was there to say goodbye to Bella, unsure of my place among people I had known for so long.
I thought you knew me, Josiane.

“A friend loveth at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.” — Proverbs 17:17, KJV

I think about those words when I think about our years together as family. We shared meals, celebrations, and happy memories. When Bella died, I needed that sense of family more than ever.

I understood that your ties to Shirley were closer than your ties to me, and I could understand you standing beside her in her grief. But was there no room beside her grief for mine? I was not asking you to defend me blindly. I needed compassion, a willingness to hear me, and the fairness to examine the facts before judging me. After all those years, I hoped I could count on that from you.

Once, I accepted someone else’s account of you without hearing your side. I was wrong, and knowing you personally taught me to reconsider. That is why I am asking you to examine what you have been told about me with the same willingness.

Sometimes the harm of an accusation only becomes clear when it is directed at you or someone you love. I hope you never have to experience that. But whenever someone makes an accusation this grave, I hope you will ask for clear, verifiable evidence, question the motives behind it, and distinguish what is known from what is suspected. The accusation itself should never become its own proof.

I am not asking you to take my side against Shirley. I am asking you to examine what you have heard before accepting it as the truth. At the very least, that consideration should have been given to me.

Because you knew and loved Bella, I am asking something else: if you or your children have photographs, stories, or little moments from her life that I may not know about, please share them with me. Whatever remains unresolved between us, I do not want those pieces of her life to be lost.

I still remember our breakfast in December 2023 and the warmth you showed me. Those memories are why I am speaking to you so personally.

I loved Bella, Josiane.

I hope that, whatever distance remains between us, we can make room for the memories of the little girl we both knew and loved.

Dukens Pierre-Louis
Bella’s Babe