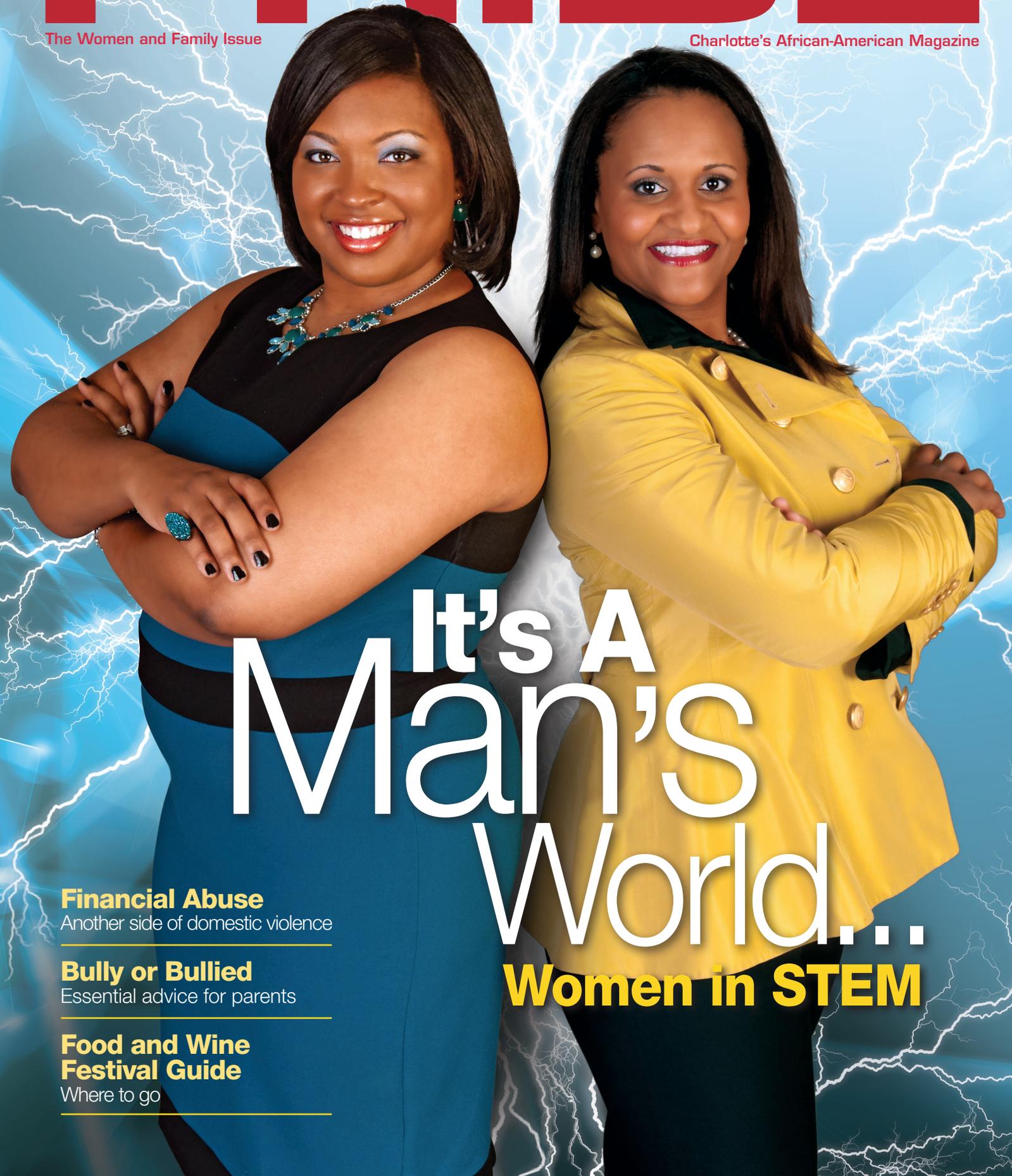


March - April 2015

# PRIDE

The Women and Family Issue

Charlotte's African-American Magazine



# It's A Man's World...

## Women in STEM

### Financial Abuse

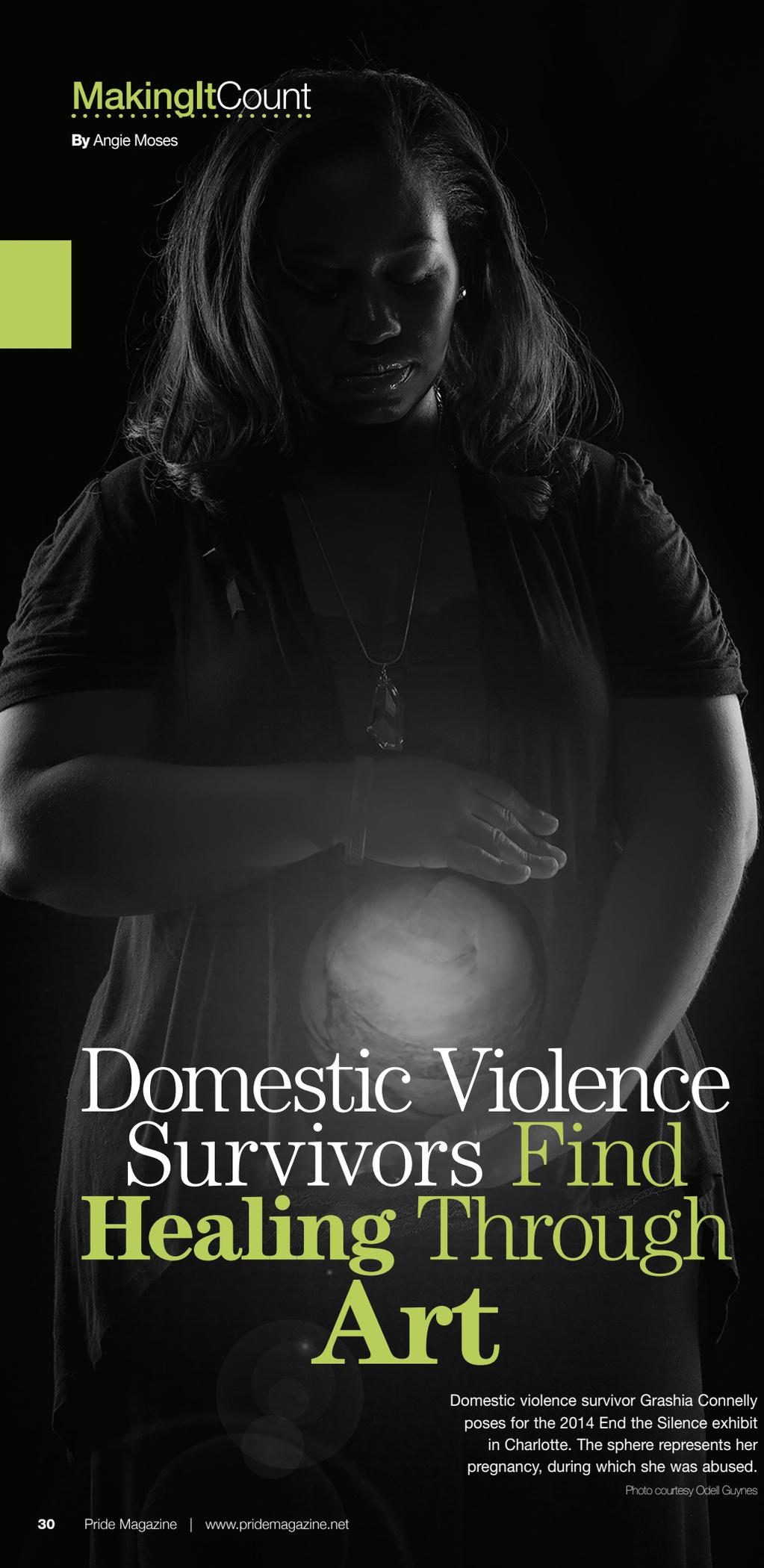
Another side of domestic violence

### Bully or Bullied

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# Domestic Violence Survivors Find Healing Through Art

Domestic violence survivor Grashia Connelly poses for the 2014 End the Silence exhibit in Charlotte. The sphere represents her pregnancy, during which she was abused.

Photo courtesy Odell Guynes

When a microscopic intruder slips underneath a mollusk's shell, the soft animal secretes a protective substance to seal off the threat. Then sometimes, the layers of protection form into a rare and beautiful pearl.

Pearls for Creative Healing in Charlotte helps victims of domestic violence with the second feat, making something beautiful out of something ugly. The nonprofit organization helps women go beyond merely surviving to thriving.

## Post-crisis outlet

Pearls empowers survivors through creative art programs and raises community awareness through public art displays.

While several local shelter-based programs help women in the midst of crisis, Pearls helps women in the post-crisis phase. Pearls fills the void that many survivors feel long after their abuse has ended.

Pearls founder and president Sandra Guynes says, "A lot of women come out of domestic violence, but they never really talk about it because of the stigma related to it. They never really deal with the issues of domestic violence to move forward and move on with their lives."

A victim of domestic violence herself, Guynes created Pearls in 2012, to give women an outlet for expression in order to help them heal. Pearls offers art workshops, retreats and an annual End the Silence photography event.

## Therapeutic release

Christine Davis, one of the workshop instructors, whose story was in the 2014 End the Silence exhibit, started painting silk scarves after she left an abusive relationship in 1989.

"It was the usual," Davis says. "My ex-husband was controlling me, not allowing me to have a job, not allowing me to take the car. I had to go donate plasma so I could afford diapers for our daughter.

"The triggering moment," she says, "was when he pushed me as I was holding our daughter, and we both fell to the floor. I followed the line I was taking, and I thought, 'I'm not having my daughter grow up like that.'

After escaping this abusive relationship, Davis found that silk scarf painting was a great way "to let out feelings and thoughts without using words."

She now likes to help other women tap into this alternative form of expression that perhaps comes straight from the subconscious before passing through the filter of language.

"Painting on silk—you're not always in control," she says. "Once the dye meets the silk, they interact together and do their own thing. For me, it's that you don't always have to be in control."

Sandra Guynes calls this "therapeutic release."

## The decision-maker within

When women first attend an art workshop, Guynes says that many get



Survivor LT Dixon holds up a sign highlighting her strength.

Photo courtesy of Picture This Photography

*Aside from the art, Pearls helps women end the silence about domestic abuse. And when women end their silence, they discover other women who have experienced similar trauma, and they help one another heal.*

#### Ending the Silence

Aside from the art, Pearls helps women end the silence about domestic abuse. And when women end their silence, they discover other women who have experienced similar trauma, and they help one another heal.

Guynes says that healing comes partly from the art and partly from the conversations that are happening around the table.

In other words, survivors of domestic abuse, when they gather together to make art, can become part of a strong, radiant strand of pearls.

To learn more about Pearls for Creative Healing, visit [www.pearlscharlotte.com](http://www.pearlscharlotte.com).

stressed about their creations.

“They take about 30 minutes just to decide on paint colors,” she says. “A lot of times, they’ll ask the facilitator what color to use.”

Guynes says, “When you have somebody making decisions for you, even deciding something so simple as what paint color you want to use, (you) can feel fearful. You’ve never had that kind of freedom before. And if you did make a decision, someone was judging you.”

But the creative process seems to release the decision-maker within. And workshop instructors encourage the women not to worry about perfection, neatness or prettiness.

“Part of what we do in our workshop,” Guynes adds, “is focus on how to tap into the inner child. No matter what I create, no matter how it looks, we don’t fix anything. You put it on the paper, and it’s there, and we have to accept it.”

Kind of like the past.



Art workshop teacher Christine Davis shows painted silk scarf to Baseemah El-Amin Hasan, during an End the Silence photo shoot.

Photo courtesy of Rae Images.