

Yvonne G. Pearson Biography

Yvonne Ghyselinck Pearson was born on April 18, 1985, in Treichville, Côte d'Ivoire (a country located in West Africa), to Cecile Dobro Lakpa Ghyselinck, a caregiver, and Dr. Jean Paul Gilbert Ghyselinck, a French author and professor. Yvonne grew up in a multicultural environment, and her childhood was defined by many significant transitions and challenges, which impacted the woman she is today. At the age of five, Yvonne's life changed dramatically when her father became seriously ill with lung and liver cancer. Due to this traumatic death, Cecile sent Yvonne to live with her aunt and uncle, Pol and Cathrine Ghyselinck, in Belgium. This move was intended to provide Yvonne with stability while Cecile relocated to France to secure work and housing in order to provide for Yvonne and her older two sisters, Patricia and Lethicia.

Adjusting to life in Belgium was challenging for Yvonne. She was the only African child at her school, she struggled to make friends, and found it extremely difficult adapting to the cold climate and new European cultural norms. For example, her family attempted to cut her hair to make it more manageable, but it only worsened her hair's condition, adding to her struggles with identity and early childhood abandonment issues.

Yvonne reunited with her mother and sister Lethicia at the age of eight in France. Her family lived in a small studio apartment while her mother worked as a housekeeper at Disney World's Newport Bay Club hotel. In this period in her life, Yvonne experienced both joy and anger as she was forced to navigate life in yet another new country. Despite these challenges, Yvonne practiced Christianity and enjoyed running cross-country and practicing ballet.

Eventually, Yvonne experienced the extreme heartbreak of her father's death at the age of ten years old. Only two years later, in 1997, Yvonne, her mother and her sister Lethicia moved to Atlanta, Georgia seeking a better life, while her eldest sister, Patricia, remained in France. She specifically remembers arriving in the United States on the Fourth of July and indulging in her first Burger King Whopper!

In the U.S Yvonne attended Sequoyah Middle School and later Tucker High School. During this time frequent moves made it difficult for her to form long-term friendships, but she found ways to support herself and her extracurricular activities by braiding her friends' hair as a side hustle. It was through braiding that she met Jay Pearson, who became her close friend and later her fiancé. Jay proposed to her during a family reunion when she was just seventeen years old, marking a significant turning point in her life. At seventeen, Jay proposed to Yvonne during a family reunion, marking the start of their journey together. Around this time, she dreamed of becoming a flight attendant, inspired by her desire to travel the world and live the American dream she had seen on TV in France.

Yvonne pursued higher education at Georgia Perimeter College, earning an associate degree in Foreign Language. She married Jay at nineteen and became a mother at twenty-one with the birth of their first child, Feliz Pearson. Over the next decade, she had three more children: Lula, Charlie, and Jackson Pearson. While balancing motherhood and work, Yvonne initially worked alongside Jay at a real estate agency before becoming a stay-at-home mom. In 2013, she launched *Mélange Mode* (a french term for 'mixed fashion'), a fashion business inspired by her African heritage and European upbringing. *Mélange Mode* appeared in *British Vogue*, and Yvonne had the opportunity to collaborate with celebrities and large corporations and sell her products internationally.

However, in 2016, Yvonne's thriving career faced an abrupt halt when she was diagnosed with stage 4 lymphoma cancer. Over the next few years, she would undergo numerous chemo treatments, surgeries, and alternative therapies. She also faced multiple collapsed lung and organ failure along the way. After years of fighting and switching to immunotherapy and holistic treatments, she began to recover. Today she is thriving and embracing a new outlook on life, and rediscovering herself.

Today, Yvonne plays tennis competitively with friends and has re-entered the workforce in a corporate role. She cherishes time spent with family and friends and finds joy in the simple things. "Cancer has led me to appreciate the little things in life, like breathing," she says in our most recent interview (Pearson). She also claims that "being able to adapt is one of the most important life skills," which is evident throughout her life's journey (Pearson). She hopes to be known as "someone who practices being kind, and inspiring others to be the best version of themselves no matter their circumstances" (Pearson). Reflecting on her life from Cote d'Ivoire to Atlanta, Yvonne explains that "[She finds] joy in spending time with [her] family, playing tennis, and being able to use [her] lungs" (Pearson). Through her experiences, she continues to inspire those around her to live with strength and gratitude.

Work Cited

Pearson, Yvonne G. *Interview*. 2024, Georgia, Atlanta.