Imagine you are me: a young Black professional fresh out of college, entering the corporate world for the first time. Thus far, you are the first person in your family to hold a white-collar job, so you have no idea what to expect in this new world. In college, you saw the special treatment that the white kids received from your professors, but you ignored it and didn’t let the favoritism stop you from doing your best. You kept your eyes on the prize, which was getting into the corporate world.

Congratulations! You made it! Six months after graduating, you land a job at one of the biggest advertising agencies in North America. Life is great, and your parents are super proud of you. You’ve been granted access to a whole new world of luxury lunches at some of the trendiest restaurants in the city and insider access to some of the best events around town. Each Friday begins with a catered breakfast in the morning and continues with beer club in the afternoon. You start to question if this is real life.

This question quickly gets answered, and the newness, thrill, glitz and glam of your job instantly fade the first time you experience racism from your boss. Sadly, you heard him make racist remarks in the past but chose to ignore them because you convinced your young, naïve
self that it was harmless fun. Then your boss begins going out of his way to make you feel like you don’t belong—to the point that other team members are speaking up about it. You begin to internalize the frustration and embarrassment you are feeling. You put on a brave face and continue to show up every day, until one day you wake up and your upper body is in grueling pain. You examine your body to see what is causing this pain because you don’t remember hurting yourself.

For months, the pain continues, day after day. You fall into a routine of work, eat, sleep and painkillers. The simple things that used to make you happy no longer do the trick. After going through this cycle for a while, a bump suddenly appears underneath your right armpit, and the pain level increases. You fall into a depression and can no longer physically or mentally do your job, so you resign.

After resigning, you visit your family doctor, who informs you of the cause of your pain. After the surgery, you begin to heal and start looking for employment again. You obtain a full-time, contract position for six months in customer service. Your life seems to be back on track until one morning, the pain and the bump reappear!

This time, the bump is infected. You immediately go see your family doctor, and a cycle of biweekly antibiotics and doctor visits commences. Your contract at work ends, and you are once again unemployed. You are in and out of different doctors’ offices, and no one, including yourself, knows what is wrong with you. Your stress level is through the roof, and you begin to question life again.
Then one day, I took matters into my own hands and started doing some medical research. I concluded that I had an autoimmune disease triggered by stress and quickly realized that in order to heal, I would need to make some serious life changes. I started doing some soul-searching to find out my true passion. I decided to enroll in post-graduate studies to begin a new career path.

Fast-forward one month into my post-graduate program, and the specialist informs me that, once again, I need to have surgery in order to remove the recurring cyst under my arm. He tells me that this may or may not fix the problem and could cause my situation to become worse, but the only other option is taking antibiotics for the rest of my life. Now I’m two months into my program, and unbelievably, I’ve had arm surgery twice. For months, my new routine is painkillers, homework and sleep; painkillers, homework and sleep. Finally, after six months, I start feeling like myself again. I’m halfway through the Fundraising & Resource Development Program, and things are slowly starting to look up.

As I began to heal, I was feeling well enough to start networking, through which I began to not only learn so much more about the fundraising and nonprofit industry but also meet incredible, like-minded individuals. I met a group of courageous, strong, and intelligent Black fundraising professionals. Through the support and influence of this group, I was able to obtain
a life-changing internship, which was a pathway to my first entry-level job as a professional fundraiser.

Today, when I look back on one of the darkest times in my life, I know that if I were a white woman, I would not have experienced the racism that triggered the autoimmune disease. I sometimes wonder in what ways my current story would be different. Would I be climbing the corporate ladder in advertising, like many of my white classmates?

What brings me peace in all of this is knowing in my heart that this current path in the philanthropic sector is the right path, and the universe was always there supporting me and helping me heal. Pushing through my pain and never giving up ultimately led to my breakthrough. I’ve come to the conclusion that nothing worth easily, and to truly obtain happiness and abundance, you have to allow yourself to feel in order to heal.
Kasharna Pusey is a passionate and dedicated Fundraising professional. Over the last two years, she dived into fundraising professionally and volunteering. In 2019, she was recognized for her volunteer work at PHAN (Peel HIV/AIDS Network). She is currently working as a Donor Relations and Fundraising Assistant at a national Canadian organization.

Kasharna has six years of dynamic work experience in customer service, marketing, advertising and sales. Her roles in these areas have enriched her with excellent communication and negotiation skills and a passion for fostering lasting relationships. She holds an Associate Degree in Communications and Media Studies from Sheridan College and recently completed her Post-Graduate Studies in Fundraising & Resource Development at Georgian College, where she achieved Dean’s list recognition three consecutive semesters.