

*"If you stay ready you don't have to get ready."*

- Sheryl Lee Ralph

Sheryl Lee Ralph was born December 30, 1956 in Waterbury, Connecticut, the daughter of Stanley Ralph, a Waterbury music teacher who wrote the state cantata "Nutmeg," and Ivy Ralph, a designer originally from Jamaica. She attended Driggs Elementary School and Notre Dame Academy before moving away to live in both Kingston, Jamaica, and Hempstead, Long Island, New York, where she starred in her high school's musical *Oklahoma!* In 1973, she was crowned Miss Black Teenage New York.

Originally a pre-med student at Rutgers University, she switched her major to English literature and theatre arts after her first encounter with a cadaver. In 1975, at age 19, she was the youngest woman to graduate from Rutgers University - to which she returned as commencement speaker in 2003. She was awarded a scholarship by the American College Theater and was named one of the top ten college women in America by *Glamour* magazine.

As one of the original Dreamgirls of the groundbreaking 1981 Broadway musical of the same name she earned a Tony Award Nomination and a Drama Desk Award Nomination for Best Actress. Her extensive film credits include *The Mighty Quinn*, *Sister Act 2*, *Mistress* and *Distinguished Gentleman*. Her performance in *To Sleep with Anger* won her the Independent Spirit Award for Best Supporting Actress.

On television, Ms. Ralph has starred in *Instant Mom*, *Ray Donovan* and *New Attitude*, and has appeared in *2 Broke Girls*, *Smash*, *ER*, *Barbershop*, *It's a Living*, the George Foreman series *George* and the comedy hit *Designing Women*. She was voted one of TV's Favorite Moms for her portrayal of loving stepmom Dee in the groundbreaking series *Moesha*, for which she received numerous NAACP Image Award nominations.

She has been a guest or guest-host on *HLN*, *ShowBiz Tonight*, *Joan Velez Mitchell*, *Dr. Drew*, *Entertainment Tonight*, *CNN*, *The Daily Show*, *FOX & Friends*, *Good Day NY*, *Good Day LA*, *CBS Morning News*, *CNBC Africa*, *The Martha Stewart Show*, *The Wendy Williams Show*, *The Michael Baisden Show* and *The Tom Joyner Morning Show* and has been featured in such publications as *TV Guide*, *Ebony*, *People*, *Jet*, *Entertainment Weekly*, *Essence*, *Bazaar*, *Vogue*, *GQ*, *Glamour*, *Time*, *Black Enterprise*, *The New York Times*, *the Los Angeles Times*, *the Chicago Tribune* and hundreds of others.

Her 1980s top-ten selling dance song, *In the Evening*, an infectious anthem to New York City, has received over 250,000 YouTube hits.

In her book *Redefining DIVA: Life Lessons from the Original Dreamgirl*, Ms. Ralph embraces the label DIVA (Divinely Inspired Victoriously Alive), proposing that a real Diva is a strong woman who respects herself and others and who promotes positive change.

A passionate health advocate and honored AIDS activist, Ms. Ralph is the founding director of the DIVA (Divinely Inspired Victoriously Anointed) Foundation 501(C)3, which she created in memory of the many friends she lost to HIV/AIDS. She also created the critically-acclaimed *DIVAS Simply Singing!*, an evening of song and entertainment that, after twenty-four years, is the country's longest consecutive running musical AIDS benefit.



Ms. Ralph has written, directed and starred in the critically-acclaimed one-woman show *Sometimes I Cry*, about the lives, loves, and losses of women infected and affected by HIV/AIDS, which has inspired viewers worldwide to test for their HIV status.

Ms. Ralph was awarded the first Red Ribbon Award at the United Nations for her unique use of the arts in HIV/AIDS activism. She is also the AIDS Ambassador for Jamaica's Ministry of Health.

As president of Island Girl Productions, Ms. Ralph wrote, directed, produced and starred in the award-winning film short *Secrets*, which was a finalist in numerous competitions. She also founded The Jamerican Film & Music Festival, which has produced five Showtime Filmmaker finalists in five years.

Ms. Ralph was awarded a Doctorate in Humane Letters from both Tougaloo College and Huston-Tillotson University for her AIDS activism and is an honorary member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority. *Essence* magazine named her one of the most Fierce & Fabulous Women in America for her HIV/AIDS advocacy. She has designed a line of socially - conscious T-shirts, RED RIBBON WEAR, Fashionable Philanthropy which offers socially responsible messages.

A mother of two, with a blended family of four children, she is married to Pennsylvania Senator Vincent Hughes.