

Dem Bois Podcast Ep. 109
Unapologetically Black, Trans, and Pregnant
with Keo Ruiz-O'Neal

Shawn Aaron: 00:01

2026 marks 10 years of Dem Bois Inc. That's 10 years of community care, 10 years of leadership rooted in love, and 10 years of turning visibility into possibility. And so, to honor this milestone, we've launched our 10 for 10 campaign. You're like, Shawn, 10 for 10, what's that? So, we are inviting you, our listeners, our supporters, our allies, and other folks in the community to give \$10 a month to help sustain the care, leadership, and visibility that trans men of color deserve. And so, 10 years is a very long time, right? That's a decade. Can you imagine raising a child from birth and then looking at them at their 10th birthday party and being like, wow, you've watched so much of their growth within that 10 years, right? That's the same for us. And so, Dem Bois Inc. over the 10 years, we have done a lot. And so, we have provided gender affirming surgery grants to trans men of color to obtain gender affirming surgeries. We started this podcast.

We are now in season four of the podcast in 2026. We created our "Visibility = Possibility" merch. We partner with Emilio and Zyon, both trans men of color to design what visibility equals possibility means to them. And it's reflected in our merch. We also partner with the black trans man Mo La Flo to create our theme song. And that's the music that you hear every time you tune into Dem Bois Podcast. We've done merch, we've done partnering. We have delivered care packages to trans men of color in need of personal hygiene items within our community. We have done a lot in 10 years. And so, imagine what the next 10 years would look like.

Donating \$10 a month says I believe in this work. I believe in the future of trans men of color, and I believe in what comes next. And so, if this call resonates with you, join us today. And we've even made it easy. You don't even got to go anywhere. Whatever platform you're listening to this episode, go ahead and open up the show notes and from there, you will be able to click the link to start your contribution to our 10 for 10 campaign. Your monthly support helps ensure Dem Bois can continue showing up for our community with intention care and impact. So, thank you for listening and thank you for believing in our mission. Okay. And I'm going to get out of here so you can listen to this episode. Take care.

[02:32 - 02:42 Musical Outro]

Shawn Aaron: 02:42

My next guest I had the privilege to sit down with is a married black trans man carrying his own baby. He is unapologetically black and trans. He has been medically transitioning for nine years before deciding to carry his baby and grow his family. He believes in the equality and serving the most vulnerable and marginalized of the population. And so within this episode, we talked a lot about family romance, conceiving as a trans man. We dipped a little bit into politics and the state of the world and how it's historically impacted us as queer and trans folks. This is a really great episode. Hope that you enjoy.

[03:25 - 03:45]

Dem Bois, Dem Bois, amplifying trans men of color voices, yeah, we here making noise. Making noise. Visibility equals possibility. You know, we Dem Bois yeah, Dem Bois yeah, amplifying trans men of color voices yeah...

Shawn Aaron: 03:45

Welcome to Dem Bois Podcast. I'm your host, Shawn Aaron he/him/his. My next guest is a married black trans man carrying his own baby. He is unapologetically black and trans. He bases his work on serving the most vulnerable and marginalized communities. Welcome to the show.

Keo Ruiz-O'Neal: 04:04

Hello.

Shawn Aaron: 04:05

Yes. I'm so happy to have you here. You want to go ahead and introduce yourself for folks who don't know who you are.

Keo Ruiz-O'Neal: 04:10

I'm Keo, he/him pronouns. Yes, I'm a married black trans man, currently 27 weeks pregnant. I have a dog and three cats. They are my first babies, so of course I have to introduce them too. I do a lot of advocacy work and professionally, I have done a lot of advocacy work, and I do a lot of my work focusing on Black people, on trans people. But really, worldwide, there's no stop to where my spectrum ends as far as advocacy work, I enjoy serving the most vulnerable of our population.

Shawn Aaron: 04:58

Yes, beautiful. And so where are you located, Keo?

Keo Ruiz-O'Neal: 05:00

I'm in Colorado.

Shawn Aaron: 05:03

In Colorado, nice. So you're going soon to have a house full of folks. So children, pets, all of the things running around and pulling for all of your time. One thing about cats, though, they don't really require much time. They just want to be fed, clean a little litter box and leave them to have alone. They're going about the day. That's one thing I like about cats. They're very, very independent.

Keo Ruiz-O'Neal: 05:25

Pretty much.

Shawn Aaron: 05:26

But children are definitely a different beast. And so I'm so happy for you and this journey. I really want to get into conversating about that a lot within this episode. We've had trans men on the show who have birth children, but this is the first, someone that is actively pregnant while we record an episode, which is amazing. So I want to say congratulations to you. That's amazing...

Keo Ruiz-O'Neal: 05:55

Thank you.

Shawn Aaron: 05:55

...and beautiful. Yeah. And so you're located in Colorado. And so I'm a little bit south of you. I'm in California. And so I love to ask my guests, how did that name, Keo, how did that name choose you?

Keo Ruiz-O'Neal: 06:10

Uh, wow. So this was maybe 11 years ago? No, no, no, no. Okay, no. I'm not that old. Okay, maybe like nine years ago. Okay, not much of a difference. About nine years ago, I was debating legally changing my name and I was playing around with a few ideas. I think I was a junior in college. I was playing around with a few ideas and nothing really stuck. I wanted to keep my initials K, C. My brother and I are 11 months apart. We're Irish twins and we share the same initials obviously besides our last name now.

So I wanted to keep K and C. K for my first name, C for my middle name. And I was playing around with just like different names. It just didn't go. It didn't like roll off the tongue. And someone had said on Twitter, I had put a poll out on Twitter when

Twitter was still Twitter and someone had suggested Keo. And I was like, okay, I like this. Like, what does it mean? You know? And it's Hebrew and it means God will increase. And so I was like, okay, I love this. I like it. Where are we going with it? What's the middle name? And this was also on Twitter. And so my middle name is Chaad with two A's. And it means warrior in African dialect. So God will increase the warrior. That's my name.

Shawn Aaron: 07:52

Whoa, that's beautiful. And picked from Twitter, unknowingly to the folks that's helping you pick this name, right? And for you to piece it together in that way, that is beautiful. I love that. And so did the name, the way it's spelled, the way you chose the spelling, was that the way that it was suggested to you or did you change the spelling?

Keo Ruiz-O'Neal: 08:13

Yeah, so Keo spelled this way and Chaad spelled this way as well.

Shawn Aaron: 08:18

Keo Chaad, I love that. That is a beautiful name. I love that.

Keo Ruiz-O'Neal: 08:22

Thank you.

Shawn Aaron: 08:23

That is amazing. And this is another first. I can't think of a time that I can remember that someone put out a poll for their name. So that's definitely different. And I love, with our identities, we have the ability to go in whichever direction we choose, right? However we want to do it, whether there's a... I know folks have said, excuse me, the folks have said they've gone through naming ceremonies with their chosen family and friends. Now I can say, I know somebody that did a poll and that's just beautiful, right? That we have that control of who we are and how we choose to select our names and how that name chose you. Because I believe it, even though other folks gave you names in the poll, that name chose you, right? It was given, I feel like it was gifted to that person on their mind and say, Hey, this is a name for this person. And then it was your choice to say, that's it, right. And to look it up... Man, everything about it. I love it. It's beautiful. I love it.

Keo Ruiz-O'Neal: 09:21

What's Community for?

Shawn Aaron: 09:24

Right. Use community for what they are for. Absolutely. Absolutely. I want to ask you another question too, because you said in your bio that you are unapologetically black and trans, which I love, by the way. And today before meeting you this morning, I helped somebody with their dissertation from an Ivy League school and they were interviewing trans men. And they're doing a study on the economic effects of transition. And so one of the questions that was asked of me, I thought was a really great question and I want to ask you. How do you feel as a black trans man? However that rings to you, how do you feel?

I answered it as how I feel as a black man. I did it in both ways. How I feel as a black trans man and how I feel as being seen as a black man, right? And being socialized as female at birth. That wasn't something that was privy to me, right? I had to learn it as I went along, right? And so now that meaning of being a black man means something different to me as opposed to seeing other black men, right? Whether it's been my brothers or people in my family to being a black trans man, right? Because I can't take away that experience and neither do I want to though some folks do live stealth, but that's not my choice, right? And so how does it feel for you? What does it mean for you to be a black trans man?

Keo Ruiz-O'Neal: 10:49

For me, it's about power. I feel very empowered to be a black man, to be a black trans man specifically. To be able to make this life for myself, to make this body work for me as a trans person, it's powerful. And to be black, I have always been raised to be proud to be black, to be encouraged to be black in all of its forms. And that didn't change, that has never changed. And coming out as trans, I feel even more of a need to be blacker than black. There are so many trans spaces that are very white. And like, you know, there are so many spaces that are trying to take black people out of it. And so for me to be in whatever position I'm in, whether it's through social media or it doesn't matter. Whatever position I'm in, you're going to know that I'm a black man, that I am a black trans man, and I'm very proud to be that because I see so much power in that.

Shawn Aaron: 11:59

Power. I love that to be to be settled in oneself brings power right. There is power in being black right and that's why they try to minimize blackness trying to erase blackness things that black folks have contributed to right because they know that there is power in it. And when you know your own power what can come from that right and that's why they are attempting to suppress it, but they can't suppress it right and so we are here, we will always be here.

Keo Ruiz-O'Neal: 12:28

And that's why I'm just going to be me even more.

Shawn Aaron: 12:30

Right, exactly. I love that. And unapologetically black. What does that phrase mean to you? When people say that, we hear that, right? That people say it all the time, unapologetically this, unapologetically that. But what does it mean for you to be unapologetically black?

Keo Ruiz-O'Neal: 12:46

For me, it just means that I'm not going to shrink myself in any way, or form for you to feel comfortable about my blackness. I'm going to give you me how you see it. You know, this is it. I'm not going to try to change or deconstruct myself into something less to make anybody feel comfortable. This is the black man that you get.

Shawn Aaron: 13:14

This is what you get. That sounds like an old grandpa like, this what you get. I love that. I love that. And so when was it for you that you kind of had a sense of who you are? And I'm talking about reflecting on gender and transitioning. And so when was that moment for you, wherever you want to start from in your journey?

Keo Ruiz-O'Neal: 13:40

I think I knew I wasn't assigned female at birth. I wasn't AFAB. I mean, wasn't, yeah, around like five, honestly, truly. Like I said, my brother and I are Irish twins and he is a cis man and I didn't like put it together that we were different for a very long time. And so I would like try on ties with him and like, you know, wear his clothes. And that didn't stop even after my parents discouraged it and like tried to beat it out of me. So, that continued through my childhood, my adolescence. But I think I really like settle into like, okay, I'm trans. Like I'm a trans man and I want to start medically transitioning, not just socially transitioning.

So, in high school, I identified as non-binary. That wasn't a term when I was in high school. I think I used like gender bender, something. And I used they/them pronouns. I did not like she/her pronouns. It never sat well with me, she/her pronouns. It never felt good. And even like being like a masculine lesbian, that didn't feel good either. So I just, used they/them pronouns. That was all throughout high school. And then it wasn't until I got to college, I was like, okay, I need my outside to match my inside.

And that's when I wanted to start medically transitioning. But I think I've always known that I was not she/her.

Obviously, yes, I am a science female at birth, but I did not feel... It just didn't, it never sat well with me ever. I have two brothers and two sisters, so I'm in the middle. So I can see, you know, I have both spectrums and I never felt like I was on the girl spectrum. Regardless of the things I like to do. I was a cheerleader, I was a dancer, and even still, like those are my passions, yes, but that didn't define my gender.

Shawn Aaron: 15:51

I love that and that didn't define your gender and so anyone could be a cheerleader, right? And it has nothing to do with you. And people are cheerleaders, both genders, right? And so I want to ask you, and so when you came to this, you know, you say you were five and so you said your parents beat, tried to beat that idea out of you, right? But then we get to an age where you came with me no more and you either going to take what I'm telling you or not. And I wanted to go back to your parents first. When you went back and told your parents, how did they receive you in that moment?

Keo Ruiz-O'Neal: 16:30

This was in high school. I had my brother's cargo shorts on, white t-shirt, my Jordans. They were pink, but they were Jordans. The Nike half calf socks. My dad was like, do you want to be a boy? I was like, maybe, maybe. And he's like, you're not, you will never be. And I was like, okay, just moving on about my day. So, fast forward to college, when I was going to start hormones, I didn't tell my mom. She found out through some web of social media. She's not even on social media. I don't know. But like mothers, they know everything, especially black moms. And she called me.

She called me crying. And I was like, what's going on? Like, who's dead? She's like, you can't. You can't start hormones. It's okay if you want to try, if you want to wear boys clothes, like I don't care, just please don't start. I'm like, this is who I am. There's nothing about me that's going to change in this regard. So I'm going to, I'm going to keep myself alive by starting hormones because throughout my entire childhood, I was very, very depressed because of gender, and because of how I was being perceived. And I just had to explain to her that this is something that's going to help me. Not anybody else, maybe not anybody else, but it's going to help me feel like me. And she didn't talk to me for like two years. Like she cut me off.

Shawn Aaron: 18:10

Cold turkey?

Keo Ruiz-O'Neal: 18:12

Yeah.

Shawn Aaron: 18:12

Wow! Okay

Keo Ruiz-O'Neal: 18:15

Yeah. Yeah, it wasn't until I was like a senior and I was maybe like right about to graduate that she kind of reached out. I think I was leaving the country for a month or something. And she had reached out. My father had told her. My father's reaction when I was in high school was like, well, like... He has come a long way. He came a long way at this time. And he was just like, what makes you feel like you're a man? And I just had to break it down for him. And he still didn't understand, you know, he still misgendered me. And he still has slip ups to this day but he understands now that I am a trans man. And this is who I am as a person and it's not going to change. And he sees a lot of power in that as well.

He's always like, you need to start your own nonprofit for just trans men, just black trans men. I'm like, what do know about that? So, my father has come a long way. My mom still has a long way to go. But she was the biggest like, you can't do this. Don't do this. Like I forbid you. And I'm just like, it's already done. The appointment's tomorrow. Yeah, my parents, they very... Well, my mother is very traditional Black Baptist Christian.

Shawn Aaron: 19:44

Say less. I know exactly that type. And my mom and my grandmother, the exact same thing, right?

Jackal: 19:56

Hey, this is Jackal from Stealth, a Transmasculine Podcast. Join me and my co-host Kai as we interviewed transmasculine elders about their experience growing into their authentic selves. The term stealth highlights two important facts. That one for our generation, we were often told to hide our past and live an underground existence, and due to that, our stories are very often overlooked. Throughout our lives each of us has had to navigate issues of disclosure which have impacted us in many ways. We also have a member section where you'll get to hear some amazing transmasculine history, from black jazz musicians to Mexican revolutionaries. We hope you join us for season five, as we continue to emphasize that transmasculine folk have always been here and that we will continue to be here. Be sure to check out our website, transmasculinepodcast.com.

Shawn Aaron: 20:51

And so how did your siblings react to you?

Keo Ruiz-O'Neal: 20:55

My siblings, they are probably my best friends. So they knew that I was queer. Like I've always been queer. Like I came out the womb queer. And so when I told them that I was starting hormones, this is probably a few days before my parents found out or I told my parents. My brother was like, I just want to say, this is you coming out like three times now. Are you done? And I was like, maybe. I don't know. But I never felt the need to come out with my siblings. I never felt the need to say, hey, this is who I am. They always just acknowledged it. and we moved on. My brothers, so I have one younger, one older. And they have always let me use their clothes, like anything that doesn't fit. they're like, here, take this.

Even I would go to school dressed one way, they would help me change in the bathroom, you know, like, okay, you put this with this, this looks good, wear this, like, you know. And they never had any issues that felt weird, especially my brothers, like black men. You think cis black men and you think like toxic masculinity. My brothers never had that around me. They never felt like, oh, you can't do this because you were born this way. They never felt that way. So it was very easy. It's always been very easy to just be myself with my siblings.

Shawn Aaron: 22:30

That's beautiful. And that's how sibling relationships should be. And it doesn't always happen, but that's how it should be. And just to think, parents think that this comes from nowhere. This does not come from nowhere. You just ignored the signs. You just ignored the messaging and the times I've told you and the times you whooped me because you don't want to hear it. No, this is, I have always been this way. Right. And just to wear your brother's clothing.

I know your parents saw you wearing your brother's clothes, right? And so it's like, where... Because your dad asked, right? Where is this coming from? How do you feel? And so it's like just listening to your child. That's the first thing, right? And knowing that this is what your child is saying. And I always say this of like how people allow their children to dictate what they want to eat for dinner or what they want to wear to school, right. But you won't listen to your child when they're telling you their inner feelings and who they are.

That's mind boggling to me. That's the most thing that you need to listen to. I don't care if you don't want crust on your sandwich, but I want to know what type of person are you on the inside, right? We want to listen to that, right? Because if you realize as

your child is growing up that your child, you know, I don't know, you know, they say the signs of a murderer, right?

If your child killing animals or acting weird at school or behaving certain types of ways, right? You'd be like, oh my God, what type of person is he going to grow up to be or she's going to grow up to be, right? But then the moment your child telling you, you ain't got to do the damn work. Your child is telling you who they are and you still don't want to listen.

Keo Ruiz-O'Neal: 24:03

It's right there.

Shawn Aaron: 24:04

Yeah, that's so crazy to me. So now though, how is your mom? Is she okay now?

Keo Ruiz-O'Neal: 24:12

She's something. I don't even know how to describe it, honestly. She still doesn't gender me correctly unless she's talking to someone who only knows Keo. Which like, sure, I'll take it, but come on.

Shawn Aaron: 24:34

Yeah, if you can do it then, you can just do it.

Keo Ruiz-O'Neal: 24:37

You can do it.

Shawn Aaron: 24:38

Yeah, yeah.

Keo Ruiz-O'Neal: 24:38

Yes, exactly. And for me, like for people to know me like my grandparents. They're old, they're grandparents, great grandparents at this point. They did not miss a beat like Keo, he/him, even now mean being pregnant Keo, he/him, he was giving birth to his baby like soon. And I'm just like, why can't my mother get it? Like, what is it about it? And I know that she is still misgendering me and dead naming me. It's just like, we don't talk that often, especially since I got pregnant. I don't know why she feels weird about it, but she does. So, we don't really speak about it at all, about the pregnancy or about like my gender at all. But I mean, she's better than what she used to be, I

guess. She's my mother. I mean, that's not an excuse at all. Like, I don't hold on to family relationships just because they're family. That doesn't mean anything to me.

Shawn Aaron: 25:49

Absolutely.

Keo Ruiz-O'Neal: 25:50

But she tries, and I try to take her trying in strides, so.

Shawn Aaron: 25:56

You know, just hear you speak about it. It's just the idea to me is that, you know... And grieving is a process, right? And sometimes we have to grieve the living. And so that means grieving whatever you thought this idea that you thought that your child was going to be or become, right? And you have to grieve that part because at the end of the day, I feel as a parent and you're soon to be a parent. This is your first child, correct?

Keo Ruiz-O'Neal: 26:26

Yes.

Shawn Aaron: 26:27

Soon to be a parent, and I have been a parent, and I ain't going to even lie to you, it's hard to be a parent. And you have all these dreams and aspirations for your child. But your job as a parent is to raise that individual to be great, and then everything else is their decision to be or make or whatever choice to make, whether it's career, if they ever want to get married, if they ever want to have children, if they ever want to have a pet, if they ever want to drive a car, right?

All of these things, and I'm just saying that right because my son was 21 before he drove. I'm like, damn it, don't you want to drive? Right, but that just wasn't a desire of his, right? So I had to lose this idea. My son didn't go to college. I had all these things of what I thought that my child was going to do. But at the end of the day, I know that we did a great job raising him to be a great person, right? In his job to do whatever else after that, because I know I did what I was supposed to do. That's on him. And I just have to love him right where he is, right? And so I think that's what parents have to do is kind of like grieve what we thought of what our child was going to be, because that ain't what they are, right? You did your part of raising them. They survived. They're now an adult. You went to college. All of these things, right?

So, it's like making sure your child stay alive. That's the most important part, right? Especially as a black child. That's the most important part, right? And so now your child is there and now allow your child to live their life because there are individuals outside of you. And so I think that's a good thing to segue to of being a parent because you are soon to be, I won't say soon to be. You are a parent, you are a parent right now. You are carrying a child so you are actively a parent. And so you're married, you're going to be giving birth to a child. How does that feel for you?

Keo Ruiz-O'Neal: 28:14

It's wild. Like if you were to tell five year old me like this is going to be my life, I'd be like, okay, sure. Even if you would have told 20 year old me that I would carry a baby, I'd be like, no. But just to be here, to have the support of my husband to be able to carry a child, it's really beautiful. I love being pregnant. And I'm sure like people are like, that's crazy, that's weird to say that, especially as a trans man. But it's not like this is my body, this is my body, this is something my body is able to do and it's something that I'm going to do with my body. So, to me it's not a gendered experience at all. I have the parts, they work, this is what it's doing. That's really how I feel about it.

But to be here in my life 29 now, married. We've been married for, it'll be six years early next year. We've been together for like 10 years. And just to be here in our lives, to be able to bring a child into this wild world, it's a really beautiful experience.

Shawn Aaron: 29:36

Yes, this wild world, this climate that we are in. And I definitely want to talk about that a little bit. But recently, I saw a post, and this is not my feeling. So I want to say, I don't want people to think this is me. I am happy for you, right? Congratulations. Like me, I always knew, I always had a sense of who I was, but I always knew I didn't ever want to carry a child. In reality, I never wanted children at all. Because for one, I never wanted to grow up to be the type of parent that my mother was. And so, that was a fear of mine. I don't want to be this angry parent that my mom was. And so was like, I don't want to pass that on to my children. And for some reason, I feel like as a child, I like, I ain't healed yet. I don't know why I didn't think I was healed. Right. I didn't do my work yet to be a better person, to be not like my mom. So, I knew I didn't want to have children.

And so I recently saw a video on Instagram. A black trans man to be specific and he was his disgust, I'm going to say disgust, because that's how he put it, portrayed it on trans men who give birth. He said, why would you want to go through all that? We don't want to see that shit is what he was saying on Instagram. We don't want to see it. Don't force it on us. Why would you transition to do this and that? He just had this

whole list of things of what he was going through that he was disgusted by. And so how do you combat that negativity, especially within our own community of people trying to police your body and police what you do? How do you combat those types of things in communication from people?

Keo Ruiz-O'Neal: 31:19

A lot of that is from people who are unhealed. But also, like, they have a lot of self-hate. Because those are the exact things that people told us as newly trans people. These are the exact things that we hear. Nobody wants to see that. Why do this if you're this? It doesn't make sense to me to spew that hate back at somebody that you once heard that hurt you. But I don't, for people who think that way, that's fine. Obviously, so I try, and a lot of what I post, a lot of what I do, I try to mitigate those reactions. Not the reactions, but the comments, because there are lots of younger trans people who follow me.

I get messages literally every day, like, I'm 16, I'm 17, I want to start T so bad. I was just worried about not being able to carry a kid. I want kids. I don't want kids, but I still want to start T. So just, just to have those, like have that kind of audience, I feel that responsibility to kind of like, just minimize it as much as possible. I can take the heat. I can, but when I was 16, 17, when I was younger, I couldn't have.

And that was what took a toll on my mental health. And so I just try to not, I wouldn't say educate, but I try to speak back to those people. Like in what world is it okay for you to demean someone else for what they are doing with their life and their body? When, if it was the opposite way, you would not want that. And that's just putting it plainly. It's hard to put yourself in someone else's shoes. I understand that. but to be someone of a marginalized identity and then to further try to marginalize someone, it doesn't make sense. Baby, it don't make sense.

Shawn Aaron: 33:35

It does not.

Keo Ruiz-O'Neal: 33:37

And so, it's hard for me not to get angry. Like, why are you doing this? Like where is it coming from? But a lot of it is also toxic masculinity. Like you feel like you have to be this macho man. You have to do everything and anything to make other people see that you are a man. But if that's who you are, that's who you are, you know, like nothing is going to change that. And again, it's very hard for me to wrap my mind around the idea of someone being hurt by these words, and then you using them to hurt someone else.

Shawn Aaron: 34:19

Yeah, and I would invite people to dig a little deeper. Just like you said, these are her people. I would invite people to dig a little deeper of where is that coming from? Who first told you that? Right? I remember when I first transitioned, there was an older black trans man that I was hanging around with at the time. And thank goodness I had enough sense, right? But some of the things that he said did stick with me for a long time. I had to work through. And one of the things he told me was, as a black man, you can't be around children.

What? That's ridiculous. Yeah. You cannot be around children. He said people will think you want to do something to their children or you... He was also one of those type of men who don't believe that trans men should have kids. And so, I was like, oh my God, I love kids. Other people kids. Right. But I was like, I can't be around kids. Like that really broke me down. like, wait, if he said he's older than me, this must be the experience so it's got to be true. I really had to work through that therapy. Right. And so I think about that of like people thinking of like inviting people to think of what really hurts you in that moment and where are you having this idea from. Right. And who gives you the permission to project that onto somebody else's life. Right.

You know, that's just like telling somebody don't smoke cigarettes or I don't drink alcohol. You can't tell me what the fuck to do. I'm going to do what I want to do because it's my body, and if I want to put nicotine in my body, I'm going to put nicotine in my body. No, it's not the same thing as carrying another human being, right? But it's the same thing. It's like, you don't have the right to tell me what to do with my body just like I don't have a right to tell you what to do with yours. And I also think, and I love that you kind of, not censor yourself, but you are thinking about younger folks that are looking at you right.

Keo Ruiz-O'Neal: 36:09

Always.

Shawn Aaron: 36:10

And I always say visibility equals possibility and it's giving folks that visibility to know what's possible in their own lives in the future. Right. So they don't have to pick and choose. Even though you're 16 and you probably with your parents, you can have an idea of who you want to be later in life once you transition. Right. And you don't have to have that limitations on your life. And just think, you know, I've mentioned this before of how if I didn't subject to myself to some of those that toxic masculinity even as I was coming up as a lesbian of what a masculine person can and cannot do. Where would I have been? Maybe I would have invited my own self to think about

children, right? But because I've heard some of those things and then I built my life around not doing some of the things that could have been made possible for me.

36:59

Thank you for tuning into this week's episode. So, from whatever platform that you're listening to this week's episode on, please be sure to give us five stars. And if there's something within this episode, whether it's the guest or something that I said, or maybe the guest said that resonated with you, be sure to go and leave us a comment on this episode or leave us a comment on the show. So, what happens is, if you feel like it resonated with you, I'm sure there's someone out there who hasn't even heard about Dem Bois Podcast. It may resonate with them, and actually it could save someone's life to hear these stories, right? Because we believe that visibility equals possibility, but there isn't any possibility if we aren't visible. So, if you go and leave comments, the more comments you leave, the more five-star ratings you leave, then this podcast will be available to more folks to see. And so, we want to be visible. We want to be out there. We want folks to know that we're here and that our stories are out there for them to listen to. And so, if you could do me a favor, please go ahead and rate the show or leave a comment. Until next time, see you on the next episode.

38:16

And so, bringing a child into this world is some tough work, right? In the climate that we are in I want to ask you about a little bit about politics and the state of the world right now, especially as bringing a child here and also as a black trans man. You want to speak more on that?

Keo Ruiz-O'Neal: 38:35

With the state of the world, I am honestly terrified. Like you said, being a parent is hard. It's scary. I'm scared as fuck. But just like, I can't help but think of the possibilities of my child. Like, no expectations whatsoever, but the possibilities of who she could be, what she could do, and how that will change me as a parent, as a person, like, and who everybody else around her, who else it will change to be able to be raised in the way that we are going to raise her in this black trans radical household. And to put that out into the world, a little piece of me, you know. I'm not saying she's going to be a reflection, but a little piece of me and my husband out into the world to change something, to do something.

I went to Spelman College, it's an all-women's HBCU, a choice to change the world. My mom's always saying that. And this is my choice. This is my choice. This little being that I am about to put out into the world is my choice in how I'm choosing to change the world. I'm not going to allow society, politics, I'm not going to allow

anyone in the White House to scare me into not doing what I want to do. I'm not going to allow them to take away my want, my fulfillment of being a parent. I'm not going to allow anybody to take that away from me because that's my joy. And I'm very serious about my joy.

Like I said, being pregnant has been a really beautiful experience. And I can't imagine giving this experience to someone else as in like having a surrogate carry my child. I can't even imagine that. I'm not going to allow that fear of carrying as a trans man in today's world, take that away from me. And so to be black and to be trans and to live in the society that we live in, it's scary. I'm not saying that it's not, it's terrifying. And to be a masculine person, to be a trans man, visibly pregnant, I haven't had any issues in real life. Obviously people online can yap all they want, but you're not going to say it's my face. But as far as like how I feel about being black and trans, again, it's powerful. I have never felt more powerful than being pregnant as a black trans man, to be able to be in this body, to have this experience, to be able to carry... Like how many men can say that they carried a child, you know?

Like to be able to be myself in all of its forms, in every way that my body can do things, I'm going to allow it to do things. Now, soon as this baby is out, we're going back on T immediately. But I have no regrets. I have no second thoughts. I have no qualms about carrying and birthing in this world. Because like I said, I'm not going to let anybody take my joy away.

Shawn Aaron: 41:57

I love that. Why would you let somebody take your joy when you bringing in like they say, a literal bundle of joy, right? So why would you listen?

Keo Ruiz-O'Neal: 42:05

Yeah.

Shawn Aaron: 42:05

Yeah. And so your power is in everything. Your power is in the change of everything that you're doing. Being a black trans man is in your power, right? You're changing the world in that way, right? Being trans, being black, giving birth, bringing a child into the world, being college educated, like all of these little tidbits are you, you know, contributing to the world in a way, right? And not wanting somebody to change it, that's powerful, right? Letting anybody change it. Letting anybody tell you what the fuck you can do with your own life is powerful.

And I want to ask you, just mentioned something, and I've always wanted to know this question myself. And so you say, once you give birth, you're going to go back on

T. Is there a reason, a medical reason, I'm sure there is, right, of why folks, once they want to give birth, have to get off of T?

Keo Ruiz-O'Neal: 42:59

Yes, so before trying to get pregnant or being on T, you don't get a cycle. And a cycle is what produces the eggs, it is how you ovulate. Now some people, they do still ovulate while on T. They can still get pregnant while on T and some people have. But for me, I just wanted to get, I just wanted to just go, just get through the process. And so I went off testosterone for, I think I was off testosterone for maybe like 10 months, nine, 10 months before I started the testing because we went through a clinic. And so they had to do all the testing beforehand. So, I was off testosterone for about nine, 10 months. It was a miserable nine, 10 months. I'm not going to lie. It's a lot.

I didn't have a cycle for like, nine years. So, it was a lot to readjust to, but I wanted to give my body that time to readjust to not being on T to give myself, my husband and I are best chances of getting pregnant. So yeah, so medically you should stop hormones in order to get your cycle in order to ovulate in order to get pregnant.

Shawn Aaron: 44:21

And so once you're pregnant, you still have to stay off T. there a reason behind that?

Keo Ruiz-O'Neal: 44:28

So, I haven't read the study on it, but there are studies that say that hormones can be harmful for the baby. There are some people who continue hormones because they don't know they're pregnant, because they didn't have a cycle, they didn't know they ovulated. But it can be harmful to the baby. Again, this isn't something I've delved into because I stopped before trying to get pregnant. But it can be harmful to the baby. And it could essentially cause a miscarriage in terms of where you are in your pregnancy. It's testosterone. You need estrogen. You need progesterone. You need all of the things to carry. And this is what they test for because I worked with the clinic. They tested for estrogen, they tested for estradiol and progesterone to make sure that I had high enough levels to be able to carry a pregnancy, not testosterone. It tanks both of those hormones.

Shawn Aaron: 45:38

Thank you for that information. That's very vital. didn't know. I personally didn't know that and I'm sure someone listening didn't know that as well. And so that was helpful. Thank you. And let's talk about romance a little bit because you mentioned it a few times husband, husband, husband. Let's talk about This husband of yours and so,

you know One of the things I wanted to kind of touch on is like one of the stereotypes of what they say oh. if you transitioned, you'll never find love.

I don't know if you heard that in your beginning phases, but to know that no, you can be a trans man, a black trans man, and still find love, still have someone that's going to love you, still can get married, still can have a family, right? And so, we want to talk about this husband of yours and love and how you came to this point in your romance where you're ready to continue on with a family.

Keo Ruiz-O'Neal: 46:30

So, I met my husband on Twitter. Again, Twitter.

Shawn Aaron: 46:34

Twitter. Twitter is coming to save the day. Yes.

Keo Ruiz-O'Neal: 46:39

I met him on Twitter when I was in college. And honestly, I fell in love with him right away. He is also a black trans man. And it was just kind of like, I don't know. He had posted a picture of himself on Twitter and I was like, okay. And I said something and he said something. We're just going back and forth on Twitter and we moved to the DMs. And it was kind of just like that was it. So, it turns out that I'm from Jersey. He's from Jersey. He was living in Jersey at this time. I'm in Atlanta. And I'm like, you know what, I got to drive up to Jersey to renew my license or something. So like, you know, let's meet.

And we did, and honestly, the rest is really history. So, he lives, or his mother lives where I grew up. We were both born in the same hospital, a year and a half apart. We never knew each other, never met, but somehow we are intrinsically connected. And it kind of just felt meant to be. So my husband, he didn't want kids when we met. And I'm just like, well, that's a deal breaker because I want at least one. And it was something not that we had to work through, but something that we talked through. And we kind of got on the same page of okay, one kid. And this was early on because like I said, I'm going to give you all of me, you're going to take it all, you know, unapologetically. And that was something that we had settled on. But we did talk about like, you know, when the time comes, whenever it comes, like we're going to have a surrogate.

Obviously that didn't happen. But that was something that we had agreed on. That was something that we had talked about and how we were able to move forward in our relationship. And he has been like the best support that I could ever have ever. When I had absolutely no one, when my mother stopped talking to me, I had him.

When my dad was being a weirdo about trans stuff I had him, you know, and it was just easy for me to just be all of myself with him. And a lot of it is because we have so many commonalities growing up in New Jersey, growing up with these black mothers. My mother didn't start off as a single mom, but she ended up being a single mom. And his mother is also a single mom. So we have we have so many things in common, siblings and so many things. And it was easy for me to just melt into him because of the way that he supported me, because of how he saw me. And there are a lot of things that are different. Like I said, he does not want to carry kids. He never wanted to carry kids. And I'm just like, okay, that's fine.

And he never thought I was crazy for wanting to carry kids. The only thing that he was hesitant on was the mortality rate of black people who give birth. And that's still something that's on his mind. But again, like he loves me so much that this is something that you know, he researches like every day, even before I got pregnant, just making sure that we have all of the resources that we need to make sure that I have a safe pregnancy and a safe delivery. And it's just like everything that he is, shows me every day that I deserve to be here and I deserve to be loved.

Shawn Aaron: 50:30

That sounds so beautiful. So beautiful. I love that for you all.

Pink Lady: 50:37

Hey you all, Pink Lady here. I am the producer for Dem Bois Podcast, and I am so excited to tell you about my production company, Pink Lady Productions. We collaborate with creatives like you who are driven to share your message by launching your podcast from A to Z and coaching you through the process. To learn more about our services, check out our website@pinkladyprod.com. That's P-I-N-K-L-A-D-Y-P-R-O-D.com.

Shawn Aaron: 51:11

So how did the hell did you get from Jersey, Atlanta to now Colorado? How did that happen?

Keo Ruiz-O'Neal: 51:17

So I was born and raised in Jersey. I went to school, I went to college in Atlanta. So that was four years of my life. He moved down there with me in that last year. And then I got a job in DC so we moved to DC. That was like two years that we lived in DC, and then the pandemic had started and everything went remote. And we were like, let's move to Colorado so we did..

Shawn Aaron: 51:47

I love that. Do you love it there?

Keo Ruiz-O'Neal: 51:49

I do. I love it so much. I love it so much. I can't imagine being anywhere else, honestly. Like I said, we've lived in a bunch of other places, but Colorado is our home.

Shawn Aaron: 52:00

Nice, and so you're used to the cold weather there then.

Keo Ruiz-O'Neal: 52:04

It's not that cold. It's not cold. East Coast got a lot of snow recently. Where we live, it's not that cold. Let me say that. Yeah, but we also live on the sunny side of the street. you live in Colorado, you know, you want to be on sunny side of the street. That other side, that's a whole different planet. Okay, that's Pluto over there. So yeah, we live on the sunny side of the street. So the snow melts the same day that it comes.

Shawn Aaron: 52:33

Okay, nice. Okay, because I couldn't do the cold. couldn't do the snow. I'm from the Bay Area, so I don't know what that is.

Keo Ruiz-O'Neal: 52:39

Okay.

Shawn Aaron: 52:39

I don't even own a coat. Okay. Only thing I have is hoodies. It should not get no colder than that. If it's colder than that, I don't want no parts of it and I probably won't go outside. And I don't like the cold at all. I go to bed with my heater on 80 degrees because I...

Keo Ruiz-O'Neal: 52:56

Oh, no, not 80.

Shawn Aaron: 52:58

Yes. I don't give a shit about that electric bill. I don't want to be cold at all. So that would work out for me. I would definitely want to be on the sunny side of the street.

So, I want to ask you too, like, now that you are expecting a child, you and your husband, how has your family come around? I won't talk about your siblings, because your siblings, you said, were cool. Your mother, your father, how are they coming around knowing that they're going to have a grandchild from you?

Keo Ruiz-O'Neal: 53:30

My dad, he was over the moon. Like we were expecting him to cry. He didn't cry. He's a cancer, but we're expecting him to cry, but he didn't cry. He'd probably cry and he just didn't, you know.

Shawn Aaron: 53:41

He cried in the car.

Keo Ruiz-O'Neal: 53:43

Yeah, probably. I call him every day or he calls me every day. If my husband's at work, I'll talk to him literally all day until my husband gets home from work because he's like, you're alone. I'm just, you know... He's a truck driver. So he's just riding around all day. So he'll call me and we'll talk all day. And he wants all the updates. He wants to know everything that's going on. I send him my bump date pictures. I take Polaroids every week. And he's like, wow, my goodness, you're growing. She's so big. Even my grandmother, his mother is so excited.

She's so old, but she's going to try to come out here when the baby's born. I'm like, grandma, please, we'll bring her to you when she's ready. But even still, I don't feel like he sees me as any different. I'm just like, he gets my bump day pictures. I have top surgery, so I don't have a chest. And so he shows them off, shows off my bump day pictures. Look, look, look, I'm having a granddaughter.

And so that feels really good to me to know that he still sees me as me. And my mom, she's just being weird. She's just being weird. So I try to talk to her. I try to give her the same updates that I give my dad. And she's just like, oh, I don't want to hear it. don't want to hear it. And so at first she was doing it under the guise of she doesn't want to know the sex of the baby, which is fine. That's fine. I knew she didn't want to know. But when I'm telling her like, oh, baby's measuring big this week or, you know, she was moving a lot or whatever the case may be, she's like, oh, okay, well, I got to go talk to you later. And I'm like, why are you being weird?

Shawn Aaron: 55:38

Yeah.

Keo Ruiz-O'Neal: 55:39

And it's hard. It was very hard in the beginning. We had a scary first trimester and it was hard not to have my mom, like just to call her and be like, this happened, I'm terrified. What should I do? It was really hard, but my mother-in-law and my husband's mom has been amazing. Like, amazing. She calls me every day, too. Like, we'd be on the phone for three hours, like, we are good girlfriends. Please, I need to take a nap. But she has not always had the best relationship with my husband, but in the past few years she has really come around and has been able to see him and see us and validate us in our relationship. And when she found out...

This is her first grandchild. So when she found out she was going to be a grandmother, she's just like, she did so much shopping. Then she shipped us like three boxes of clothes. And like I said, she calls every day. She checks in on the baby and she's like, let me see your stomach. So, I've had that support of a mom and that's been really nice. And it's really nice, I think, and healing for my husband as well to have that experience and to have me have that experience with her.

Shawn Aaron: 56:57

Yeah, that's beautiful. So, hopefully you got a big enough place. It looked like great grandma coming and mom and grandma is coming, and probably dad the way you talking to the dad.

Keo Ruiz-O'Neal: 57:09

Dad is already coming. Yes.

Shawn Aaron: 57:11

Yeah. So...

Keo Ruiz-O'Neal: 57:12

Yeah, I think he already bought his ticket honestly.

Shawn Aaron: 57:15

And you know what's so crazy, not crazy but sad, your mom is just going to miss out on that. You know, you kind of, you know, just what I was saying about parents grieving children, like sometimes we got to grieve our parents, right, even when they're alive, of like this relationship that we want to have, they just don't have the capacity to give us what we need, right? And so we kind of have to be at that place. So maybe she'll come around and if not, but then I don't know. Do you feel like if she don't, you rather her not be around because you don't want to subject your child to that?

Keo Ruiz-O'Neal: 57:50

Absolutely. Yeah. So I have two nieces. One that is my mother's biological grandchild and my brother has another daughter. So, this isn't her first grandchild. But she treats those girls like they are the queens and that it's beautiful. I love it. You know, I love that for them. I love that they're able to have that relationship with her that I was never able to have. But the way that she's trending right now. I'm not going to subject my daughter to question why doesn't grandma spend time with me? Why doesn't grandma come here? Why doesn't grandma talk to me? Why does the grandma call me? I'm not going to do that. I'm not going to have her questioning her worth to her grandmother. You know, we'll send our holiday cards and that could be it, you know.

If you want to call, great, but I'm not going to force that relationship of, especially taking my child across the country to see you and you are not even, you know, putting your all into this experience of being with her. I'm not going to have her questioning that relationship or questioning that love ever, ever. If anybody else ever showed signs of, well, I'll put this first. I'll say this instead of this or I'll skirt around your dad's identity. No, no. You won't have that relationship with my child and that's just that.

Shawn Aaron: 59:24

That's right. And you take that boundary up a notch when you become a parent. You're like you can fuck over me, you can say whatever you want to say to me I could take that but you're not about to do that to my child.

Keo Ruiz-O'Neal: 59:34

Absolutely not.

Shawn Aaron: 59:36

I love that. I love that. And so I want to ask you one last question because we're going to be getting out of here soon. And we talked about this a little bit. My son is 28. He's going to be 29. I have a two year old granddaughter. My son was with me throughout the transition process, right? He was a part of my naming process, all of that, right? And so, now I have a two year old granddaughter who calls me Papa, who adores me, right? And obviously she doesn't know about my gender journey yet, because she's two, right? She just know that's my Papa, I love my Papa and that's it, right? And so as you become a parent, when do you feel is the right time to... I mean, obviously you don't know, you can't predict it, because you don't know your child yet, because your child has to grow and whatever, right? And every child is different, but how, I should say how do you feel you and your husband will have that conversation about, hey, daddy is this, right? What type of conversation and how do you feel? Like, have you all talked about that?

Keo Ruiz-O'Neal: 1:00:43

Yeah, yeah, at length. I think so in the same way that we will share with her that she's donor conceived, it's going to be the same way to share with her that not only am I trans, but so is her papa but I was the one to carry her. And I was able to carry her because I am trans. That's something that I want her to take pride in and something that I want her to know and understand when she is able to know and understand and to be able to ask those questions and trust us to relay the information to her.

This whole spectrum of being donor conceived, of being carried by a trans man, her dad, I want her to understand when she's able to understand. So, as far as when we start those conversations about being donor conceived, that's going to start early. But as she gets older, not even when she gets older, that's going to start early to know that I carried her because I'm proud of that and I want her to feel that sense of pride as well. And to understand that like, everybody's different, everybody's bodies are different. And this is something that my body was able to do and bring you into the world. So, I don't feel like I need to hide it or like, you know, I don't know, not hiding it, not to say that I would, not to say that folks hide it, but it's just, I want her to know and to eventually understand that this is how she came into the world.

Shawn Aaron: 1:02:13

I love that. And I'm saying that people hide it. I want to tell you a little story real quick. I won't go into the depths of it, but I was in a group, all trans men, not all black trans men, but it was just all trans men from all walks of life. And next to me was a trans guy whose child was turning 18 and that child did not know he was a trans man.

Keo Ruiz-O'Neal: 1:02:41

For 18 years!

Shawn Aaron: 1:02:42

That was my reaction. Yes. He said he had no plans on telling his child.

Keo Ruiz-O'Neal: 1:02:51

Why?

Shawn Aaron: 1:02:53

I don't know. That upset me. That upset me. It really did. It shouldn't upset me because we just got through talking about people having a right to do whatever they want with their bodies and whatever, right? But yeah, that upset me. That why.

Yeah. So to know that the conversation is happening, that's how you make an impact on the world. Right. That's how you build a generation of folks that know and recognize trans people, that will fight for trans rights. Because no, my parents are trans identified. Right. No, because I know trans people. I'm around trans people. No, because, you know, because you're raised that way. Right. And I.

Keo Ruiz-O'Neal: 1:03:34

Yeah.

Shawn Aaron: 1:03:34

So, that is so wild to me. That was so wild to me that you plan not to your child. Yeah. I'm like, why are you even in this support group? That was my thought. Because you obviously have some issues that you haven't worked through with your internalized transphobia that you won't even tell your own child. Yeah.

Keo Ruiz-O'Neal: 1:03:54

How do you hide that? I mean...

Shawn Aaron: 1:03:55

I don't know.

Keo Ruiz-O'Neal: 1:03:56

I mean. I don't know. Maybe I'm just a very open person, but I don't know. That's confusing.

Shawn Aaron: 1:04:02

That's very confusing to me. I don't know how you hide that. I never hid anything from my son and I don't think he would fucking let me. I don't care if I was in the bathroom. He would be like, dad, look at this. I'm taking a shower. Can I look when, you know what I mean? Like there was no hiding. Why am I hiding this? This is my child. Why would I want to hide that from the person, the one person that I love the most, right? Yeah. So, Keo this is the part of the show where I love to ask my guests a random question. I got a long list of questions. I'm not going to ask them all to you. But this list is forever growing. Some have been given to me from previous guests of the show, some I just make up. And so I have 83 questions on this list. Pick a number between one and 83, and I'm going to ask you that question.

Keo Ruiz-O'Neal: 1:04:51

Nine. Let's do nine.

Shawn Aaron: 1:04:54

Number nine says, what is something you enjoy doing in your free time?

Keo Ruiz-O'Neal: 1:05:00

Either, there's a few things. And I try to do them all in one day, honestly, because that's just how my brain works. But either running, reading, or I crochet.

Shawn Aaron: 1:05:09

Oh, nice. Wait, and you try to them all in one day?

Keo Ruiz-O'Neal: 1:05:13

Yeah, I do. Tomorrow I plan on going to the gym. I also plan on getting halfway through the book that I started this week. And I have to finish the scarf for my grandmother for Christmas.

Shawn Aaron: 1:05:25

Oh my goodness. Okay, so do you crochet while you're reading?

Keo Ruiz-O'Neal: 1:05:29

No, actually I have to pay attention.

Shawn Aaron: 1:05:32

Okay.

Keo Ruiz-O'Neal: 1:05:33

I have ADHD, so if I'm reading, I need to just read.

Shawn Aaron: 1:05:37

Okay, so the running part, you still running while pregnant?

Keo Ruiz-O'Neal: 1:05:41

I try to, I am a long distance runner. So at least three miles. So, I do a mile and then I'm gassed. I got to go.

Shawn Aaron: 1:05:54

Wow, I didn't even know that. And so that's healthy to do.

Keo Ruiz-O'Neal: 1:05:58

Yeah, yeah, that's good for you.

Shawn Aaron: 1:05:59

Nice, nice. The baby's going to come out athletic. She going to come out athletic. I love that.

Keo Ruiz-O'Neal: 1:06:05

Yeah, yeah, she doesn't have a choice.

Shawn Aaron: 1:06:06

I love that. So, are you running your fastest pace, your fastest mile pace while you're running or are you just jogging? Just to stay...

Keo Ruiz-O'Neal: 1:06:17

Just jogging. Yeah.

Shawn Aaron: 1:06:18

Okay. Okay.

Keo Ruiz-O'Neal: 1:06:20

I just started back not too long ago, maybe like beginning of the second trimester. So, maybe like, I don't know when second trimester started. It's almost over at this point, but beginning of second trimester, I started walking and then I would increase my pace with a walk. And then I started running again.

Shawn Aaron: 1:06:36

Beautiful. I love that. I used to be a runner. I want to say used to because injuries kind of took me down.

Keo Ruiz-O'Neal: 1:06:44

Yeah, yeah, I got I get knocked out at least twice a year with injury.

Shawn Aaron: 1:06:47

Yeah, yeah, which is horrible. That's not nice. Especially if you enjoy something, you can't even do it. I don't like that.

Keo Ruiz-O'Neal: 1:06:53

Yeah.

Shawn Aaron: 1:06:54

Yeah, that's horrible. Keo, thank you so much for being a guest on this show. I really appreciate you. Is there any last words you would like to say to folks that are listening?

Keo Ruiz-O'Neal: 1:07:04

Folks that are listening, I'll say to trans people, younger trans people, especially, I'm young, but to younger trans people, I would say don't be afraid to be yourself in all of its forms. There is someone, there are people who are going to love you for exactly that.

Shawn Aaron: 1:07:23

That's so beautiful. Just like I always say, equals possibility. I love that.