

Don Estill

Thu, 12/26 3:07PM 52:11

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

black women, women, people, speaks, dynamic, world, film, hear, feel, incredible, beautiful, moving, amazing, talking, mother, metoo, walk, burke, care, don

SPEAKERS

Don Estill, Omkari Williams



Omkari Williams 00:20

Hello, and welcome to Stepping Into Truth. I'm your host Omkari Williams, and I'm very glad that you're here with me today. This is the podcast where we take on the issues of race, gender and social justice. And I love these conversations that I have with people doing work in these realms. But these conversations aren't just meant to be intellectually interesting. They are meant to move us into action, action in our personal area of passion and interest. Right now, we are at a critical moment in history, the climate crisis, women's rights, criminal justice reform, immigrant rights and the list goes on. Each of us is being called to act. But what action looks like depends on who we are, what we care about, and what we have to offer. There is no one way of being an activist. Each of us needs to find our way.



Omkari Williams 01:14

My guest today, filmmaker Don Estill is doing activism his way. Let me first tell you about Don and then about the film that he's making. Originally from New York City and raised in Kansas City, Missouri, Don Estill left home at 16 to work as a model. His career took him to Europe and South Africa. Eventually settling in New York, he continued working as a model and actor. In 2008, he moved to LA where in addition to his acting, he also started working as a private chef, and that would eventually lead him to producing. One of his clients was the late Alison Shearmur, former head of Paramount Studios. She was the

producer of American Pie, the Jason Bourne franchise, and the standalone Star Wars movies. She was one of the first to encourage him to follow his dreams of producing film. That encouragement led him to creating the film, She Speaks. Wanting his first production to be something he was passionate about, She Speaks was the obvious choice of subject. Don says the voices of black women are often misunderstood and overlooked. She Speaks will shine a light on the depth and richness of these voices, and showcase how and why black women are the future. She Speaks is a documentary that elevates the voices of black women. It gives us, the viewer, an opportunity to hear from a group of women that are systemically marginalized and often taken for granted. Yet they are also the ones who are making the most effective changes within our society. They are our mothers, healers, nurturers, and a great deal of the time our financial stability, a burden that's been laid on their shoulders, not because they have chosen to do so, but more out of necessity. We are part of a society that dictates to all women how they should look, act and be. And within that are black women who are consistently forced to accept the devaluation of their very existence, working twice as hard for half as much. In She Speaks, we hear their own words about their struggles and their joy. How in spite of all things weighted against them, they continue to shine, we get to see what true strength looks like. She Speaks is a chance for us to appreciate and value the power and beauty of black women. And I am so happy to welcome Don to the podcast. Hey.



Don Estill 03:40

Hello, thank you.



Omkari Williams 03:41

How are you? Oh, you're so welcome. I'm so pleased that you're here.



Don Estill 03:45

Thank you. I'm doing great, actually. That was beautiful.



Omkari Williams 03:50

Oh, thank you. Thank you. I just sort of looked at what I saw of the little clip that you sent me and you know, here we are. And I want to start with this. Because when we first spoke, I was so struck and moved by your commitment to this subject. And it was immediately clear to me that you are truly passionate about this, and about elevating black women. And I'd love to have you talk about what your inspiration for making this film was.



Don Estill 04:24

So one of the biggest ones was Tarana Burke. I don't know if people know who she is. But she's the, she is the founder of the metoo movement.



Omkari Williams 04:33

Yes.



Don Estill 04:33

And she had written this open letter, it was on Twitter, and she was discussing how she was applauding the things that were going on within the meteor movement. Women who were just calling out men left and right and she was applauding that but she also said that she could not help but feel erased from a movement that she had begun. So I kept reading more and more what she was talking about and her friends were coming to her to her defense and understanding what she was saying by that statement, you know. So it led me to call first my sister in law and to ask her as a black woman, "Do you ever feel that you were not heard?". And that was a four hour conversation. I kid you not. It was a four hour conversation.



Omkari Williams 05:24

Wow.



Don Estill 05:24

And it was, yeah, it was it was painful. It was eye opening, but it was also really painful to hear her say the things that she was saying, you know? Things that I just had just overlooked and had, I feel maybe, just had assumed because she's such a she's such a strong individual to actually hear her say that she felt so small and so little, and so ignored, was painful to hear.



Omkari Williams 05:55

Yes.



Don Estill 05:56

You know, and I also started calling a few other of my friends, also to other black women. And it was it was the same conversation but in different ways. And that led me a lot just to want to actually pick up a camera, and to actually just document some of the words that they were saying, but then also to, to create the documentary that I'm doing now too. So I wanted to shed a little bit of light because I see black women as incredibly I hate the word strong, but I, you know, I always go back to, my, my mother raising me and my brother on her own, completely raising two boys on her own, and also attending school and working a full time job at the same time. If that's not strength, I don't know what that is, you know? Like to me, you know. And it was a because I grew up in it it's you just assume that that's what everybody does.



Omkari Williams 06:56

Yes.



Don Estill 06:56

And it's and it's not.



Omkari Williams 06:59

No, but it's It was your normal.



Don Estill 07:01

But it was my normal. Yeah, it was my normal. And that's what I see every time I see black women, that is my normal when I look at Black women. And then to hear them say that they just feel completely erased is painful to hear that, you know?



Omkari Williams 07:21

Yes. Yes. So, what's the message that ultimately, in in the perfect world, that you want to send with this film? What do you want people to walk out of this film, feeling and thinking?



Don Estill 07:38

Well, first of all, I want them to hear these voices, especially the women that we've been interviewing, but to look at Black women in a completely new light. To, there, I feel like

there is this sort of, how do I say that? This discourse in how black women are shown in the media, you know? There's the one where they're always the strong black woman, or they're the sassy black woman. You know, there's all these, stereotypes that are around black women. And we're looking to, to change that, you know, to actually black women in the light that I see them, that the director sees them and which are these soft, beautiful feminine women who are human beings who have struggled and who have every other thing going on like everyone else, but yet, still get up every morning, and still go out and do the things that they do. And they do it with such grace and with such dignity. And I think that needs to be shown. You know, that grace, that beauty and that dignity needs to be shown around black woman.



Omkari Williams 08:45

That's so lovely. And you touched on something that I found to be so true in my experience when back in the days when I was acting, there were so few roles that were open to black women. It felt like you either were, as you say, you know, the sort of strong one, or you were the sassy one or you were the attorney or you were the maid. I mean that you know it did you feel like there was a range of humanity of our humanity depicted in these characters. And that was, I mean, it's one of the reasons that I ultimately quit the business. I was just like, I'm done with this. This is too narrow.



Don Estill 09:31

And it's depressing.



Omkari Williams 09:33

It is and it's improved a bit.



Don Estill 09:35

Right,



Omkari Williams 09:36

But not as much as I think sometimes people think it's improved.



Don Estill 09:42

That's exactly right to know if you know it's hard. It's very hard. I think that out here in Hollywood, there is a bit of lip service that is paid to appease certain things for certain amount of time.



Omkari Williams 09:57

Yes.



Don Estill 09:59

They will tout diversity and they will prop up one or two diverse faces. But it still is the same thing that goes on. There isn't really a huge change. It is, it is changing. I don't want to say that it's not changing. It is changing, but not as rapidly as it should be. And the doors are still not open wide enough to accommodate all, is what I think.



Omkari Williams 10:26

Yeah, I completely agree. I completely agree. And I feel that part of the dynamic that happens is that we feel like, okay, so Hollywood, and I'm going to reference Hollywood



Don Estill 10:41

Sure



Omkari Williams 10:41

because so much of how we engage in the world is determined by what we see, and Hollywood has a disproportionate impact on what we see. So you have you have a character like Olivia Pope on scandal and that makes the powers that be in Hollywood feel like they've made all this progress.



Don Estill 11:04

Right.



Omkari Williams 11:05

It's just this one character in a very, very narrow realm of the human experience, and this very rarefied realm, and yet it makes people in Hollywood feel like well, I, you know, we have Scandal, we have this lead character here, or we have Blackish, or we have, you know, all of those shows. And, yes, it's great that we are seeing that, but for the powers that be, and the powers that be in Hollywood are overwhelmingly white and male, still.



Omkari Williams 11:40

And male, yes.



Omkari Williams 11:41

For those powers that be to think that they have actually accomplished the goal of real diversity and real exploration of the humanity of black women is laughable. I mean, it's just it's laughable and it's on all of us to keep pushing. Because if we don't, they're just going to feel like, "We've got this. And we can keep moving."



Don Estill 12:08

And we can keep moving.



Omkari Williams 12:10

Yeah, yeah. to the next thing.



Don Estill 12:12

That's absolutely true. Yeah.



Omkari Williams 12:13

Yeah, it's part of the reason I'm so happy that you're doing this. And I have to say that this is a subject I would have expected to be taken up by a woman. And I am delighted that a black man is taking this on, because I think,



Don Estill 12:27

Thank you.



Omkari Williams 12:27

Oh, you're so welcome. But I think one of the patterns that's been set up in our society is one where black women are often not strongly supported by black men. So it feels very important that you're making this film and I I'd like for you to speak to that if you could that whole dynamic.



Don Estill 12:45

You know, when I first, when I first shopped the idea around a little bit, I did get a lot of, "Wouldn't be better for a woman director to do this?". So my answer to that is the reason why we wanted to do it with with a black man behind the camera and one producing is that I do think that there are that women are making like this effective change there that's going on out here. And a female director probably would have had a different take on it. But what we are creating is a love letter to black women. It is where we come from, the director and I both. It is about our mothers, our grandmothers, our cousins, it's about our you know, our aunts. You know, these are people who have been, like very, very influential in my upbringing and his upbringing also true as well. And I think that there is a different take when the person behind the camera that is actually listening to you is a black man, that there is a different dynamic that occurs. I think than rather than having another woman Women talk to each other differently than they talk to men. And we weren't the ones that were talking. We were the ones who were actually listening. And I think that created a different dynamic. I know with the piece that you saw, that I'd sent you. I think it would have been a different conversation if it had been a woman behind the camera. I don't know. I don't know how else to say that. But it's just it would have been a completely different conversation. Now with that, I feel like there is a lot of trust that has to go on to have that conversation that she had. And there is I feel like a safety that's different that you would get from another woman having a black man listen to a black woman. There is a safety that is there. I'm still trying to you know, gather my words properly to say this. There is a, I don't want to say a, comfort but there is a you have my back. There is an understanding that was there with us on those days that we shot of like I, I have your back, I am listening to you. And I have your back. And I think it's in a way that two women can't do that for each other, but a male and the female dynamic. Can.



Omkari Williams 15:27

That's interesting. I mean, I think I think I understand what you're saying. I mean, I do because women certainly do have each other's backs.

 Don Estill 15:35
Oh my gosh, the sisterhood is incredible.

 Omkari Williams 15:37
But it's different. It's it's definitely, it's more, there's a shared experience a commiseration.

 Don Estill 15:45
Right,

 Omkari Williams 15:46
You know, and and that just adds a different dynamic to it than the experience of telling someone who hasn't had this experience. What this is like and having them say I hear you, and I've got your back.

 Don Estill 16:02
I hear you, yes. Absolutely.

 Omkari Williams 16:04
Even though I don't share this experience, this specific experience. There's a difference to that dynamic. And I think that that's not an unimportant aspect to it. I hadn't thought about it before, honestly. But when you say it, I think, yeah, if I were talking to a black man about some, some aspect of what it's like to be a black woman, that's a very different conversation than me speaking to another black woman.

 Don Estill 16:33
Yes, it's that difference. But it's again, it's how we communicate. Because you're right there's a commonality between two women, you can understand where she's coming from. I have not had the experience of being a black woman. I've had the experience of being a black man. So I know part of what your experiences are. But the other part of it is the male privilege, I guess that you would say that. we have. Also the history of us as a people, you know, through from slavery times up until today, you know how we're ripped apart from each other how black women were forced to carry, the weight of things, how

they do all sorts of things that, you know, go into that dynamic between black men and black women. We wanted to say that I see you. Which I think you said that before is like, I see you. I see you and I love you. And I am here for you. Yeah, tell me what it is that you need. Tell me what it is that you want to hear. And that's what we are trying to, to do with this. You know, I always call it it's a love letter to black women, you know, from us. And it is we absolutely hear you and we absolutely see you and we want to do better. We want to do more. And what is it that we can do to uplift you as well? You know, like, I know that you're doing a lot of things on your own. But it's also we want to, not sharing your uplifting, but to help bring it up even more. You do that.



Omkari Williams 18:12

That's beautiful.



Don Estill 18:14

Yeah, that weight off of your shoulders. Or, you know, yeah, thank you. It's from my heart. I don't even know how else to say it is just from just a depth of the bottom of my heart. You know,



Omkari Williams 18:26

I think that that's really, really apparent to anyone listening to this is how profoundly you mean this, and what a profound act of love and service this film is. And I just am so glad you're making this movie. I'm, you know, I'm really happy about that. I want to sort of switch gears a little bit here. So something that's happened in the last few years. One thing that we are hearing a lot more about, is the impact of black women in various arenas. Like if you look at the election of Democrat Doug Jones to the Senate from Alabama, that was completely driven by black women. Or Stacey Abrams, who was running for governor in Georgia and lost in an election that really had a lot of very shady stuff happening.



Don Estill 19:19

And still.



Omkari Williams 19:22

Yeah, right. I was living in Georgia then and I'm still bitter about this. But, you know, she's

gone out and started an organization to address voter suppression and accessibility to polls. And then Tarana Burke, who you mentioned, the founder of the #MeToo movement has brought the just amazing attention to the epidemic of sexual assault.

 Don Estill 19:48
Yes.

 Omkari Williams 19:49
And you know, I'm so proud of all of these women because they're just amazing, the ones whose names we know as well as the ones whose names we will never know. But who are is doing that daily work of elevating and fighting for the things that matter to black women to black people to anyone who really cares about equality. And I'm curious about in working on this project, if you can share without telling too much

 Don Estill 20:18
Sure.

 Omkari Williams 20:19
Just what are some of the stories that have most impacted you?

 Don Estill 20:24
There is this common theme with all of the women about sisterhood. The way that black women elevate each other is one of the most amazing things that I have seen. They all talk about when they are down, they reach out to other black women, their friends, they reach out to their friends. And there is always someone who has their back. You know, in that respect, there's always someone who has their back. In turn, what they do when they are uplifted is they turn around immediately and uplift someone else. And it's this sort of chain reaction. If you could call it that, but it's like this chain reaction of this. I don't get that as a male at all whatsoever. But watching them, I don't I just I don't... As a male, if I call my friends they would tell me to buck up, you know what I mean?

 Omkari Williams 21:23

Right.

D

Don Estill 21:25

They wouldn't sit there and listen to me, they would just be like, come on, dude. Just, you know, pull your big boy pants up and, you know, suck it up.



Omkari Williams 21:34

Right.

D

Don Estill 21:35

But they really, there's really this beautiful sense of like, they want each other to do well. They want you to do well, they want you to be well, they want you to do well. And whatever that takes from the other person, they're going to give that to you. I keep talking about it with awe because I'm because men don't do that for each other. I don't think.



Omkari Williams 21:59

Yeah, I don't think they do.

D

Don Estill 22:02

That the one thing that I saw that I just thought was so, it's incredible. You know, we talked to a few women who do different programs, different initiatives that they work on. And there's one that's called Mindful Beauty, which teaches hairdressers to notice when their clients are depressed.



Omkari Williams 22:21

Oh!

D

Don Estill 22:21

And then yeah, it's, it's really incredible. And so we are, hopefully at the beginning of the year, I think they start back up again, we get to watch the training process, where they're working with therapists and psychologists about things to like notice and things to like,

help ease them, not so much out of their their depression, but to like, get them talking to that they can guide them to like getting some more help, you know, and it's, it's just like that, to me is like really, really incredible. There was another common theme about the self care that they do for each other. So there's another woman who once a month, she opens up her home and they have a tea. And it's a generational tea so they have, like it's her grandmother, her nieces, and then the babies. And it's all just for women and they have a person who comes in and does spa days, they have a woman who comes in and does nails. And they have these issues and talking about they had a on their last one they had a vaginal steam. Like they do all these spa like sort of things to how do I describe this? It's like self care and...



Omkari Williams 23:29

Community?



Omkari Williams 23:30

Community. Yes, thank you so much. I'm getting all excited and stumbling over my words. In the sense of community because they they want to be together. Like they're all you know, people out here. We're always busy. We're always this we're always that. But this is their way to come together once a month. They sit down over a table. They sit down for a full day and it's just for them. Just for them.



Omkari Williams 23:55

That's really lovely. Just lovely



Don Estill 23:58

It's incredible. It's incredible. This is the best part when we asked her, do you even see the things that you're doing now, because she was talking about it as if it was just a Tuesday. And she was just going to work. It was like an everyday thing for her. And we are sitting there in awe. Like, how amazing and how incredible that is. And we'd asked her, why do you do that? And her answer was, she's like, "Sometimes we just get tired, and we just need it". So she says, "It's the one day that I take out. And I always make sure that I do it. I take it out for myself, I take it out for my mother, I take it out for my grandmother, I take it out for my nieces, for my sisters from my friends. And it's the one day where we can just let our hair down and just be ourselves and to not worry about anything, and to be in a safe environment. And to relax."



Omkari Williams 24:55

Yeah.



Don Estill 24:56

You know, and I again to me, brought up the weight that is carried. And she's doing all of these amazing things, all these women are doing all these amazing things. But we don't realize that that's such a weight that is carried. And not necessarily because you want to.



Omkari Williams 25:16

Right, someone has to.



Don Estill 25:20

Yeah, someone has to but not so much as your calling, but it's like they always step up to the plate. And that was one of the things also too that I felt just heartbreaking. Like, in a sense of, she didn't even think about it, you know, but she didn't even think she just did it. And it was just like, what can I do to ease that, you know, like that were, you know, like I'm looking at is like, what can I do to to ease you having to work like a full time job and doing all of these things that she's doing like she has a full time job and then she does all these other things that turns into another full time job on top of the full time Job, like once a month, she gets like a day of self care.



Omkari Williams 26:04

Yeah.



Don Estill 26:04

Like, one day out of every 30? One day out of every 31?



Omkari Williams 26:07

Yeah.

 Don Estill 26:08
That's not fair.

 Omkari Williams 26:11
No, it's not,

 Don Estill 26:14
it's not.

 Omkari Williams 26:15
And yet, and yet, you know, I applaud her for not only taking that day out for herself, but for expanding it to the other women in her life so that it's not only self care, but it is community self care. And it is an opportunity to sort of refill the well of, of sisterhood and, and shared experience and you know, and it's, it's, that's beautiful. That's just a beautiful thing that she's doing.

 Don Estill 26:51
It's amazing. One woman after another, we were always so stunned at the power that they have. And not in, not in the strong, you know, black woman sort of way but just that power as a human being to, to get up and do that on a daily basis. That is her life. Well, you know, we had another woman that we spoke to too. This was like, I guess how my family was growing up about it takes a village to raise a child. There was a young boy, her nephew, whose parents were drug addicts, and the mother had gone to jail and the father they didn't even know where he was and they were going to put into foster care. Now, she has a newborn child. And she has two little ones under the age of four. And she, they just newly married, she's been with the same man forever, but they just recently gotten married. And she never even thought twice about it. But she instantly took him in to her home.

 Omkari Williams 27:58
Wow!



Don Estill 27:59

Instantly, it wasn't even a thought it was like, he's not going into foster care. He's gonna come and be with family. And now this is 10 years later, and this kid is thriving. You know, it was all of that and she's the primary breadwinner in her family also to and with all of the things that she has going on, she still took even more time out to take in another one to care for. And that's what black women do. You really stop to think about that. The power of that the the greatness in that the beauty in that she never even thought for one second. She just saw family. And she her instinct is to nurture right? That's instinct is to nurture. Yeah, no. Yeah. without a thought. without, without, you know, not worrying about consequence. Not worrying about where money's coming. Any of the Think it was just simply just to nurture. You know, and it's Yeah.



Omkari Williams 29:06

And it's I think it's interesting that you say that because, you know, one of the things that I'm really aware of, I mean, and I remember as a kid walking down the street in New York, and you'd see black nannies with white children, and, and I was always kind of struck by that because I thought, well, who's taking care of their children? And how, but you know, these women had to work these women needed to be earning a living and that was part of how they were taking care of their children. And the ways in which they navigated those two worlds and sometimes you'd see them with their children and the child they were taking care of as well...



Don Estill 29:51

The child they were taking care of, that's right.



Omkari Williams 29:54

and, and I, I just remember kind of being in awe because even a kid could tell That was a lot to navigate, you know? Yeah. Okay, yes. Let's throw in some more children here, different ages and try and keep all of this together. And yet they did.



Don Estill 30:13

Yes.



Omkari Williams 30:14

I remember thinking, Wow. Wow. You know, and I think that people often dismiss the power and importance of that and they dismiss the contribution that these women have made to society because these women have raised these children who are now making decisions that affect all of us and so on and so forth. So, I just think it's something that people don't necessarily think about, and give proper credence and appreciation to



Don Estill 30:56

Appreciation to. Yeah, you're right. They don't there there's, again, it's like why really wanted to do this is to you know bring light to that yeah to bring some light to that you know I know that there are other people that are doing the same thing in their way but I but i just there has to be a recognition of black women at some point you know in a way that doesn't come from them. That it comes from everybody else. Because I feel like they're the group that is literally the most disrespected. Literally, they're just so taken for granted. And again like ignored you know consistently ignored consistently put on the backburner and consistently thrown away. You know, and it's just like we can't keep doing that anymore. Because they're also the ones who were consistently making changes. You know, and do that out of out of necessity Lucy McBath running for office in her state because her son was shot. Simply in a car driving away, and was shot.



Omkari Williams 32:04

You know, cause his music was too loud.



Don Estill 32:08

Yeah.



Omkari Williams 32:08

As if that's a reason anyone should be shot.



Don Estill 32:11

That's, exactly. I think of like Syabrina Fulton also, Trayvon Martin's mom and all the things she's been doing and it's just they don't do those things because they're choosing to. They're doing them a lot of times out of pain.

D

Don Estill 32:26

Yes, they're doing them, you know, Tarana Burke, like her self care and her taking care of herself was the creation of the #MeToo movement. That was how she got over her pain of what happened to her was to turn around and to help other women. And then you're erased from that? Twenty five years that's been going on. You know?



Omkari Williams 32:49

I can't even imagine how painful that is. And, you know, that makes me think of something that I've long said which is that the minority always knows more about the majority than vice versa. So women know more about men than men know about women. And it's a survival thing. You know, I mean, yes, technically speaking, there are more women than there are men in the world, right? But the power dynamic makes that irrelevant. And I think that when you look at any minority, but specifically, if you're looking at Black women, Black women have long understood how much work we need to do to understand how the power structures work, understand how to navigate the world. And being disadvantaged in two aspects in the society, being female and being black, we're trying to figure out how to make this life that we have here a powerful, good life for us. And that's a lot of wisdom that comes with navigating those worlds.

D

Don Estill 34:05

That's right.



Omkari Williams 34:05

And that wisdom then get spread out in the community. And I think that that's what we're seeing very clearly right now, even though people may not be paying a lot of attention to it, but between Tarana Burke, and Lucy McBath and Sybrina Fulton and all of these other women who are going out there and saying, okay, I've been watching, I've been studying up, I understand how this game is played. And now I'm going to take it, and I'm going to shift the rules because the rules are not working for me. And for women who look like me. So I'm going to shift up that energy. And I think that's, you know, that, to me is amazing to watch that happening.

D

Don Estill 34:47

Yeah. It's incredible to watch that happening to the women that you saw in the clip that we sent you. This thing that says at the end of it, and it's like it's it's sort of the mantra of

the documentary itself is we asked her what she would say, to her younger self or to other young black girls? And she says, "Walk down the middle of the sidewalk, take up space, because you belong there."

D

Don Estill 35:17

It's amazing, it's such a profound thing to say. Something so simple, but it's so true. It's like you don't have to make yourself small. You belong. where you are, you know, it's like you take up space like it's your world too. I was listening to the, I believe it was the Miss World who just won?



Omkari Williams 35:24

That is so great!

D

Don Estill 35:25

Like it's amazing, like, it's such a profound thing to say. Something so simple, but it's so true. It's like you don't have to make yourself small. You belong. where you are, you know, it's like you take up space like it's your world too. I was listening to the, I believe it was the Miss World who just won?



Omkari Williams 35:45

Oh, the Miss Universe.

D

Don Estill 35:46

Miss Universe, thank you. Who just won from South Africa and she essentially was saying the same thing to take up space.



Omkari Williams 35:56

Yeah.

D

Don Estill 35:56

Because you belong there. That space is rightfully yours to take? Also, you know?



Omkari Williams 36:02

Yeah,



Don Estill 36:03

And that's kind of like the, again, the common theme in all the women that's what they're sharing with a younger generation. That's what they're sharing with their sisters. That's what they learned from their mothers and from their grandmothers was how to like, in their own way, to take up space. Walk down the middle of the sidewalk.



Omkari Williams 36:24

That's just so perfect.



Don Estill 36:26

Yeah.



Omkari Williams 36:27

I had actually that exact experience. One day I was walking around the park in Savannah where I used to live. I was just out doing my you know, I'm going to do three laps of this park and then I'm done for the day. And I realized on the first lap, I realized, I'm moving to accommodate every guy who was walking coming towards me. I'm moving out of my pathway, even though you're obviously speed walking on top of everything else. I'm the one who's moving. So for the for the last two laps that I did that day I was like, I'm not moving. I'm just, they can move around me.



Don Estill 37:08

They can move around you. Yeah,



Omkari Williams 37:09

It was really interesting. It was interesting how hard it was at first to not move.

 Don Estill 37:14
Yeah.

 Omkari Williams 37:14
And it was interesting to see how many times we almost crashed because they were so used to people moving for them.

 Don Estill 37:23
For them.

 Omkari Williams 37:24
It didn't occur to them that they might have to adjust. And I was just, "well, if I get knocked over and then I get knocked over, but I am not moving."

 Don Estill 37:32
but you're not moving. And you shouldn't, again, you shouldn't have to.

 Omkari Williams 37:36
Exactly, and it felt It felt great to just sort of take up the amount of space that I take up. Which is not even that much space, you know?

 Don Estill 37:47
Not even that much space. Yeah.

 Omkari Williams 37:49
But I realized that that was an important thing to do. Was to stop ceding myself space to other people just out of habit.

 Don Estill 38:00
Right,



Omkari Williams 38:00

You know, if some elderly person had been walking towards me I would have moved. But that was pretty much what the bar was an elderly person or a woman with pushing a baby carriage.



Don Estill 38:11

Right. (laughter)



Omkari Williams 38:14

That was the bar. And it was really interesting to not to not just let myself push myself off to the side. So yeah, I love that, you know to walk down the middle of the sidewalk Yeah!



Don Estill 38:32

Yeah, walk down the middle... this. I just, it was such a fresh breath of air. It was just so refreshing to hear that. It wasn't anything other than just be yourself and allow yourself to, to be within that space. And for once, like you said, let everybody else walk around you.



Omkari Williams 38:55

Yes.



Don Estill 38:55

You know?



Omkari Williams 38:57

Cause why not? I mean,



Don Estill 38:59

Yeah. You've done enough we can at least do that, you know?



Omkari Williams 39:05

Exactly. It's my turn, you know? I get to have a turn. Yeah, it was it was more powerful than I would have imagined it to be. So I'm going to second that woman and say, walk down the middle of the sidewalk.



Don Estill 39:24

Walk down the middle of the sidewalk. Absolutely.



Omkari Williams 39:28

Our time is getting short. And I wanted to bring something else up here. came up in your bio. You mentioned Alison Schearmur, the producer. I hope I'm pronouncing her name properly. Yeah. And she was so important to you, because she really was behind you on this, "You should produce the film because that's what you want to do" journey. And I wanted to just bring that up, because I think that's a role that role of being a cheerleader. That black women take on all the time. We are cheering each other on, we're cheering our kids on and the kids have other people down the block. And we're cheering on the kids of of that we've helped raise. And it feels important to me to acknowledge how much of an impact black women is the cheering section for all these other people, black, white, Asian, Hispanic, how we fill that role and how important that is that we do fill that role and just how important it is to acknowledge the worth of that piece of who we bring to things that cheerleading piece.



Don Estill 40:46

Right. I again, I was her, the private chef for them and



Omkari Williams 40:52

She happens to be a white woman. Let me just make that clear.



Don Estill 40:53

She happened to be a white woman. Yes, she does.



Omkari Williams 40:55

But she still stepped into that cheerleading role that black women take on so often.

D

Don Estill 40:59

She did step into that cheerleading role. Yeah, she was when I had initially talked to her about it, she was like one of the first people I spoken to about it. I had, I'd spoken to a lot of people, but she was very adamant about me doing it, you know. And she, she said, "I've seen you". Like she was a person who observes, she observes everything. And she says, I've seen you take something so simple and make it so elegant. And she's like, I could imagine you behind the camera. And what you could do if you had just a little bit of money to tell a story, because the way that you do what you're doing right now, she's like, it's it's the most beautiful, elegant thing I've seen. So I can imagine like what you would do, given the opportunity, you know, and she told me to just follow follow my heart, you know, she, you know, she told me learn as much as I could, which I did. I spent a year actually just talking to other people. I would do little projects, here and there. You know, asking people how they did their job and not being afraid to like do those things, anything that I didn't know, I would just ask, that always brings me back to my mom, when I was younger, and an opportunity to go and to work in a foreign country. You know, my mother is looking at me, and she's saying to me, "you're never going to have this again. Do it." You know, like, don't worry about anything else. Do it. Like if God has put this on your plate, take it as a gift, and go and do it. You know. And so that's what I did. It was almost, my mother had just passed, and it was almost like my mother's voice talking through this woman, you know, yes. There's a gift that is being offered to you. There's help it's been given to you and take it and do it, you know?



Omkari Williams 42:55

Yeah.

D

Don Estill 42:56

I got to be really good friends with her friend, and he's sort of my mentor now, Matt Jackson. And he, he also was another person who was super instrumental in me doing this particular project. Because he told me to follow my, my, like you make your first piece about your passion and follow your heart. If you're passionate about your first piece you can, you can get people to look at it. You can get people to buy into it. You can get people you know, for that. And so when I started developing this, but it's it's taken on a different form, from when it first started, but it's also it's falling into what it is now and to what you are seeing. And it's something that's becoming really, really incredibly beautiful. And with

that on the encouragement. Some of the women that we've been interviewing, they know that we, like with anything out here, it's always a it's always a money factor. You know, getting a film made,



Omkari Williams 43:54

Right.



Don Estill 43:55

These women actually banded together once they After we did interview them, and we were talking about the next steps that we were doing, I'd been showing them pieces of what we have been putting together. Because I like to keep developing the trust. And this is what we're doing with your words. I want you to see what we are doing with your words. There's no exploitation, there's no anything. We just want the world to see your natural, beautiful selves. So with that, these women knew that we were having problems like trying to get our budgets met and to get more filming done. They all banded together to throw us a fundraiser, which is happening here in December.



Omkari Williams 44:35

Oh, my goodness.



Don Estill 44:37

Yeah. It's incredible.



Omkari Williams 44:39

That's so great.



Don Estill 44:40

You know, they are...Yeah, it's amazing. I remember. Tracy, she, you know, telling us, you have to continue this. You see this all the way through. And she's like, we would like to throw you a fundraiser to help doing that.



Omkari Williams 44:55

That's fantastic.



Don Estill 44:57

Yeah, we were so taken aback and so in awe. You know, just so again, in awe, you know, in awe. Like, here we are, "we just want to tell people the world how great you are" and here you are yet doing another great thing and it wasn't even like they blinked an eye. It was just done just straight from the heart. Yes, you know, because they really believe in this project, they really believe in what we are doing. And because they see that we really believe in them. They're helping us to make it come true and come to light, you know?



Omkari Williams 45:30

Yes.



Don Estill 45:31

They're literally helping our dreams to actually get this out into the world, to actually come true. And it's just it's another another, you know, little cherry on top of that sundae of how amazing black women are. You know, and how incredible they are, you know, and the constant encouragement like I get little notes from one of the women like every other day, or she'll send me a Bible quote. She's always telling me to keep my head up. She's always sending me love. She's always just some little note to let me know that she's thinking of me and the work that I'm doing. And to say that she sees me as much as I see her. You know, it's an incredible feeling. One, to have somebody love and care about you that much that they would take time out of their day to do those little things.



Omkari Williams 46:23

That's amazing!



Don Estill 46:25

Yeah, two, it's, again, the power and the beauty and the magic of black women that we want the world seats. That is who black women are. I just I don't know how else to say that is who they are. They are truly the fabric of our society. They're truly the fabric of our culture and of this world, I believe, because they do so much. You know, so much, even the

smallest little things that keeps everything going. You know, we have to honor that and recognize that.



Omkari Williams 46:57

I am so glad you're making this film. I am so glad. I think that Allison would have been really pleased that you're making this film. I sure you is in heaven over the moon thinking, "that's my son."



Don Estill 47:15

Yes, and I believe she's watching and protecting over me.



Omkari Williams 47:18

I'm sure she is. I mean, this is an amazing thing. I am going to put a link for your GoFundMe page for this, film.



Don Estill 47:28

Oh, thank you.



Omkari Williams 47:29

Into the episode Notes so that people can help this film get finished and out there so that all of us can see it. I knew. It's just truly an extraordinary, extraordinary thing. So our time is up. But, I just want to say, Well, I want to say a couple of things. One is, I wanted to say, first and foremost, thank you for doing this project. Thank you so much, because I feel like when this is finished, and when people get to see it, it's going to shift the dynamic and the discussion and the energy.



Don Estill 48:08

Thank you .



Omkari Williams 48:09

And that feels incredibly nurturing and incredibly important to me. So thank you so much.



Don Estill 48:17

Absolutely. That's beautiful, thank you.



Omkari Williams 48:19

I also. So I don't know if people are going to be able to see a little clip of this ahead of time or not. But if they are, are they? Have you decided?



Don Estill 48:34

Well, what we've done is on the night of the fundraiser, we are going to show the episode, the little clip that I showed you, we're finishing out her whole entire piece. So once we have shown that to like a larger crowd, we have a Instagram page, She Speaks documentary, we have a Facebook page, I will start putting that up. And so probably not until the beginning of the year, but I will start putting it up. You can even check out some of the things that we've done so far on our Instagram page and on our our Facebook page, like we put up little clips, here and there, not of all of the interviews, but just little things behind the scenes and everything. And yeah, some of that, and just some outtakes of, you know, there's a beautiful one with this wonderful woman called Sonja Marie. And she thanks us and we asked her what was on her heart. We had finished talking and we spent two hours with her. And we just asked what was on our heart right then and there. And she tells us and it's just, it's so just beautiful. You know, I hope everybody gets to see that because that's sort of the basis of what the documentary itself is.



Don Estill 49:00

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Omkari Williams 49:45

That's perfect. I will definitely have links to all of that so that people can find it. And also because this podcast is probably not going to air until after the first of the year, I may also have a link to the longer clip that Don just described.



Don Estill 50:03

I will. Yes, absolutely. I will definitely send it to you. Yeah, perfect. Yeah.



Omkari Williams 50:08

Well, this has been an incredible pleasure. I mean, I'm so happy we got to talk. I'm so happy you're doing this. Thank you.



Don Estill 50:20

It's fulfilling and healing. I, you know, I don't know how to say it, but it's just, it's, it's so fulfilling to do something that uplifts someone else. You know, and particularly black women. And it's also just so healing because I think we have so many issues within our own community. But this is the one time I felt like, at least for me, anyway, where the curtains and the mirrors and all those things were taken off, you know, and we got to just see each other.



Omkari Williams 50:55

Yes,



Don Estill 50:56

We just got to see each other. It was been it's been beautiful, like really beautiful. Support black women, y'all if you hear me out there.



Omkari Williams 51:06

Yeah, that is definitely the message. So, thank you again. And I just yeah, I'm really appreciative. And for all of you out there listening, I want you to remember that each of us has a role to play in addressing the challenges of our world. So be sure to follow the link that you're going to find in the Episode Notes to my website, where you will find

suggestions and guidance on creating your own way of being an activist in this world. Thank you for joining me for this episode, and I will be back with another episode very soon.