

# BLACK HISTORY

## Ex-POW Writes Black History Memoir

### 'I'm Still Standing' sets record straight

(AP) -- Shoshana Johnson survived gunshot wounds to both legs and 22 days as a prisoner of war in Iraq. Life wasn't so easy when she came home, either.

In a new book, the 37-year-old single mother describes mental health problems related to her captivity and tells how it felt to play second fiddle in the media to fellow POW Jessica Lynch, who was captured in the same ambush.

"It was kind of hurtful," the former Army cook said. "If I'd been a petite, cutesy thing, it would've been different."

Johnson, the nation's first female black prisoner of war, said she felt she was portrayed differently because of her race, either by media outlets that chose not to cover her experience or those who portrayed her as greedy when she challenged the disability rating she was given for her post-traumatic stress disorder.

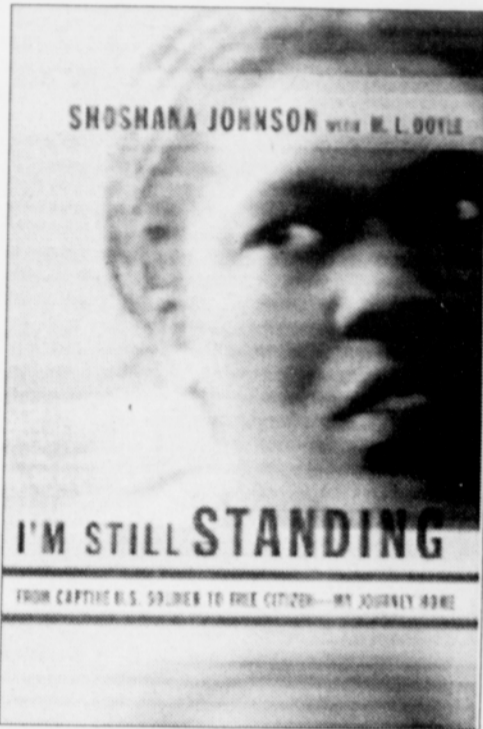
While the story of Lynch, then 19, remains firmly in the nation's collective memory from the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq, far less attention has been paid to Johnson, then 30, and four male soldiers from the 507th Maintenance Co. from Fort Bliss, Texas, who also survived captivity.

Johnson was rescued by Marines, about two weeks after Lynch's rescue. Months after returning home, Johnson left the military and today is enrolled in culinary school. She lives in El Paso, Texas, with her 9-year-old daughter.

Johnson's book, "I'm Still Standing," is being released in time for Black History Month. Johnson said she hopes that by telling her story, she can set the record straight and bring attention to mental health issues affecting veterans.

The day of the 2003 ambush, Johnson and Lynch were among 33 U.S. soldiers in a convoy that got lost in Nasiriyah en route to Baghdad. Their journey, Johnson said, was hampered by broken-down vehicles and malfunctioning equipment. Eleven were killed — including Johnson's friend Army Pfc. Lori Piestewa.

Johnson asked to be medically



*The nation's first black prisoner of war sets the record straight in her book, 'I'm Still Standing.'*

discharged from the military in part because she felt other soldiers resented her over the attention her POW status attracted.

She's also struggled with depression and nightmares. At times it was so bad, she writes, that her daughter, who was 2 at the time Johnson was captured, asked Johnson's parents, "Why is Mommy crying all the time?"

In 2008, she checked herself into a psychiatric ward for a few days.

"Even when I came home, I didn't think I'd ever get better. I didn't think the issues I had would ever ease," Johnson said in the interview. "But as time goes on and I stick with my therapy, it has gotten easier, and I know if I keep on the right track, I'll be OK."

It was hard at first to admit to having PTSD, she said, because she thought of it as something that happened to Vietnam veterans.

"When they started throwing out that word when I came home, I was like, no, that's not me," Johnson said.

Today, Johnson is training to be a pastry chef so she can make wedding and birthday cakes.

"It would just be nice to be able to celebrate those special moments with people," she said. "After everything that's gone on, I think those kinds of moments are very special."

After successfully fighting to receive improved disability benefits stemming from her PTSD, she was later asked to serve on the Veterans Affairs Department's panel on minority affairs.

She speaks proudly of the other POWs in captivity with her and keeps in touch with them. She said they schedule annual POW exams — the Defense Department is studying the effects of captivity — at the same time in Florida so they can see each other.

Contrary to speculation, Johnson said she was never angry at Lynch or



Shoshana Johnson

jealous of her.

"Jessica is my friend," Johnson writes. "I was her friend before the ambush and I'm still her friend now."

One of the most brutal things Johnson endured was a captor grabbing her chest. She tells in her book of mobs of Iraqi people coming to view her as a vehicle she was in traveled from town to town, with one villager slapping her and another

spitting on her. But while the men endured beatings during the captivity, she said she was treated better.

She describes acts of kindness, too, by the Iraqis. One doctor operated on her legs, which she credits with allowing her to keep them. Another doctor early in her captivity whispered to her that a woman Johnson assumed was Lynch was alive, which provided comfort.



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