Valerie Denise Jones

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BEFORE I DIE:

THREE MEN AND A BIRTH CERTIFICATE

A CRIME SCENE INSIDE A FAMILY ALBUM

A FIRST-PERSON INVESTIGATIVE DOCUMENTARY THRILLER

OFFICIAL FILM TREATMENT

Written and Directed by
VALERIE DENISE JONES

Anticipated Runtime: 12 Minutes

WHO TELLS THE STORYTELLER'S STORY?

Should filmmakers document their own lives before they die, or risk having someone else rewrite their history when they are no longer here to defend the truth?

For decades, Valerie Denise Jones has documented the lives, controversies, and accomplishments of others. Her broadcasting work sparked viral conversations; her editing and directing brought other people's stories to the screen. But who is documenting hers?

What happens when witnesses die, photographs disappear, and strangers are left to reconstruct a life they never understood? **BEFORE I DIE: Three Men and a Birth Certificate** begins with that uncomfortable question. This is a challenge to every storyteller who has preserved everyone else's history while postponing their own. If we do not tell our stories while we are alive, someone else may tell them after we are gone—and get them wrong.

THREE MEN. THREE UNFINISHED CONVERSATIONS.

RICKY HENRY KING. Valerie's uncle died on railroad tracks in 1982. Police closed the case as an accident, reportedly concluding that he was intoxicated and struck by a train. But family members remember his severed head facing his body. What did the official record actually say, and why did the family feel unable to challenge it?

JEFFREY. Valerie's sister Tangala became pregnant at seventeen. Valerie recounts a family account of a coerced abortion at an illegal clinic and a fatal infection associated with unclean instruments. The unborn baby matters as much as Tangala. Did Jeffrey later name a child after her? Can he help recover who Tangala was before tragedy silenced her story?

HER FATHER. Valerie was nineteen when her biological father died. While stationed with the Army in Germany, she dreamed of him shortly before receiving the news. She says relatives never told her how he died; she was left with funeral expenses and questions about missing property, his relationships, and possible other children. Why was the conversation she waited to have taken from her?

THE INVESTIGATOR. THE CLOCK.

Valerie is an award-winning editor, director, broadcaster, author, and U.S. Army veteran. She knows how to pursue leads, interview difficult subjects, find the pivotal detail, and make an audience care. But this time the investigation is personal. The surviving witnesses are aging; the records may be disappearing. The film follows her from North Florida railroad tracks to the search for Jeffrey, then to her father's life and death, tracing how one generation's silence becomes the next generation's inheritance.

She is not promising to solve a homicide or uncover a convenient twist. She is promising to **ask now, verify what she can, and preserve the answers—and the unanswered questions—before it is too late.**

CASE ONE: THE UNCLE THE POLICE CALLED AN ACCIDENT

JULY 17, 1982 | RICKY HENRY KING

BLACK. The sound of a train grows until it swallows everything. Then silence. Empty rails run toward the horizon. A name appears: RICKY HENRY KING. Police closed Ricky's death as an accident, according to Valerie's family account: he had been walking while intoxicated and was struck by a train. But one detail has haunted the family ever since. Relatives told Valerie that his severed head was found facing his body, appearing almost deliberately positioned.

THE QUESTION THAT WILL NOT DIE

"If a moving train did that, why did his head end up facing his body?" Valerie does not present the apparent arrangement as proof of homicide. She asks whether it reflects the collision, later disturbance of the scene, an incomplete family recollection, or something never explained to those who loved him. The official determination and the family's description are both essential to the story precisely because they do not sit comfortably together.

WHY NO ONE CHALLENGED IT

Valerie describes the surrounding area as a place her family understood through the fear and history of a sundown town. In that atmosphere, she believes relatives feared challenging authorities. The documentary will examine that remembered racial climate through historical sources and local voices without declaring, without evidence, that racism caused the ruling. What matters dramatically is the family's experience: the case was closed; the questions were not.

WHAT VALERIE WILL DO

She will seek the death certificate, any available investigative and medical-examiner records, newspaper coverage, maps, and willing relatives who remember the days following his death. The camera follows the process: a records request, a response, an interview, a contradiction, an unanswered call. Even a missing file becomes meaningful when it is shown as a documented absence rather than a convenient conspiracy.

THE TRANSITION

At the tracks, Valerie confronts the first form of silence: a death explained by authorities but never emotionally settled by family. The sound of the train gives way to the dry crackle of an old memorial clipping. Her next question is even more intimate: what happens when a family's decision costs not one life, but two?

CASE TWO: TANGALA, THE BABY, AND THE MAN NAMED JEFFREY

SEVENTEEN YEARS OLD

Tangala D. Jones was seventeen when she became pregnant by a man Valerie knows as Jeffrey. According to the account Valerie inherited, their grandmother forced Tangala to undergo an abortion at an illegal clinic. The family story holds that contaminated instruments caused a deadly infection. Tangala died. Her unborn child died too. The exact medical mechanism, the circumstances of consent, and who arranged the procedure are matters the film will seek to document; the emotional reality is that Valerie grew up with the absence of both a sister and a niece or nephew.

TWO LIVES, NOT ONE FOOTNOTE

The camera approaches Tangala through her real memorial portrait, not a reenacted clinic or an invented death scene. Valerie refuses to reduce her sister to a cautionary tale about abortion or shame. Who was Tangala at seventeen? What did she love? What did she imagine motherhood would be? What future might she and her baby have had? This is an investigation of a person whose choices, voice, and life have been buried under the account of how she died.

THE JEFFREY LEAD

Valerie wants to locate Jeffrey, not to ambush or publicly condemn him, but to ask whether he remembers Tangala and what he knows about the pregnancy and its aftermath. A family rumor says he named his first child after Tangala. Did he? Does a living person carry the name of the girl Valerie lost? Could that person hold a connection to Tangala that Valerie has never known? Jeffrey’s surname, current whereabouts, and willingness to speak must first be established; the rumor is a lead, not a verified fact.

THE SEARCH

The film will follow surviving relatives’ recollections, lawful public records, school and community archives, and respectful outreach to potential witnesses. No one will be identified as Jeffrey or his child on the strength of a name alone. The production will obtain consent before filming living private individuals and will protect the privacy of people who do not wish to participate.

THE TRANSITION

A memorial clipping is laid beside an empty place on a family tree. The camera holds on two blank branches: Tangala and the baby. Valerie’s next question moves from the child she never met to the siblings she may still have: what else was her family afraid to tell her?

CASE THREE: THE FATHER WHO DIED BEFORE THE QUESTIONS

A DAUGHTER'S UNASKED QUESTIONS

Valerie knew her biological father as a man she respected and loved. She also knew he lived an alternate life in Miami's world of pimping and prostitution. As a child, she did not dare interrogate him about it. She promised herself that when she became an adult, they would finally have the conversation. He died when she was nineteen. The conversation never happened.

THE DEATH SHE STILL CANNOT EXPLAIN

While stationed with the U.S. Army in Germany, Valerie dreamed that her father appeared in a heaven-like place and told her she could not come with him. Hours later, she recalls, the Red Cross informed her he had died. To this day, Valerie says she does not know his cause of death. The dream is her experience, not evidence of a supernatural event or foul play. It is the emotional doorway to a more grounded question: why was she left without an explanation of how her own father died?

THE FUNERAL BILL AND THE MISSING ESTATE

Valerie recalls that paternal relatives gave her no meaningful answers and that she was left responsible for funeral costs. She believes money, expensive artwork, jewelry, and other possessions disappeared after his death, while she inherited none of them. These are her allegations and recollections, not established findings of theft. The film will pursue death records, probate information where available, surviving correspondence, and willing relatives before drawing conclusions about any property.

THE CHILDREN SHE MAY NEVER HAVE MET

Her father's relationships, including accounts involving women he controlled and her mother's best friend, raise a different kind of inheritance question: did he father other children? One family rumor mentions a child named Rico. Valerie has no confirmed identification or kinship record. She will trace names and dates carefully and consider voluntary, consent-based approaches to possible relatives. A person's identity is not a plot twist to be exposed without care.

THE TRANSITION

Three questions converge: What happened to Ricky? What happened to Tangala and her unborn child, and where is Jeffrey? How did Valerie's father die, and who else might be family? The dream fades into a photograph of another man, one who arrived in Valerie's life just months before her father died. The story turns from what she lost to what helped her survive.

THE SECOND FATHER: WHY THIS JOURNEY IS PERSONAL

ONE FATHER GAVE HER LIFE

Riley P. Hannon Jr., a Navy veteran and retired postal worker, entered Valerie's life shortly before the death of her biological father. Riley was the father of her then-boyfriend, Jerry. He became the man who taught her to read more widely, travel, study languages, care for her credit, and pursue possibilities beyond the boundaries of her childhood. "One father gave me life. The other taught me how to live it."

THE RELATIONSHIP THAT TESTED HER

Gainesville is not a location Valerie visits for atmosphere. She attended school there, worked at Magic 101.3, developed the Magic Models, held the title Mrs. Alachua County, and raised funds for local charities and causes. While Valerie was away touring with Ebony Fashion Fair, she says Jerry became involved with a model she had recruited and later married that woman. Hurt and angry, she nevertheless helped him improve his credit and pursue work as a police officer before ending their relationship. She says he still calls. These are personal accounts, and the film will avoid presenting them as adjudicated findings about other living people.

WHAT THIS REVEALS

Valerie is not the polished, invulnerable detective of a television procedural. She is a daughter who avoided difficult questions, a sister living with grief, and a woman who can choose compassion while furious. She knows how betrayal feels. She knows the price of waiting. She knows that being respected in public does not mean being told the truth in private.

THE COMMUNITY ROOTS

Her Gainesville history provides credible avenues for the investigation: places she knows, people who remember her, and a community in which her personal and public lives intersect. The film can contrast present-day streets, archival station imagery, and her own memories, but every return to Gainesville has a purpose: a record, a witness, or a question that moves one of the three searches forward.

THE TRANSITION

From the intimate photograph of Riley, the film cuts to the red light of a radio studio. The woman who could not ask her father the hardest questions eventually built a career asking questions other people were afraid to ask. Now she has to use those skills on herself.

THE WOMAN WITH THE RECEIPTS: WHY VALERIE CAN DO THIS

SHE KNOWS HOW TO MAKE A STORY BREAK

Valerie Denise Jones is an award-winning editor, experienced director, author, and broadcaster. She has directed commercials and two films available on DVD and Tubi, edited television advertising and documentaries screened in theaters, and worked on professional productions and film-college sets. She has produced and hosted a Judge Joe Brown radio program for nearly seven years. This is her investigative documentary directorial debut, not her first time directing.

THE CELEBRITY MEDIA ENGINE

Valerie recalls breaking or amplifying viral Judge Joe Brown discussions involving Tina Turner, then–Vice President Kamala Harris, Harriet Tubman, and Sheryl Lee Ralph. She recounts a viral exchange with Dr. Umar Johnson; an interview with Mathew Knowles, Beyoncé's father; and a conversation with the creators of "Take Your Booty to the Poll." She says the program received recognition on The Breakfast Club and that her YouTube channel accumulated more than four million views. Existing uploads, analytics, timestamps, and permissions can substantiate the reach of these moments. The treatment does not attribute disputed statements to public figures without clips.

THE VIVICA A. FOX MOMENT

Years earlier, Valerie developed TRICK CANDY, a screenplay inspired by the world of her biological father. Following an American Black Film Festival pitch, she recalls actress Vivica A. Fox expressing interest in financing half the project if Valerie secured the remainder. Then Valerie's mother died, and grief interrupted the momentum. It is a firsthand account of an opportunity, not a claim of a signed financing agreement.

WHY THESE CREDITS MATTER

These are not celebrity cameos shoehorned into a family documentary. They demonstrate the storyteller's skill and the irony at the center of the film: Valerie can bring national attention to other people's controversies but still cannot get answers about her own father, sister, or uncle. She understands archives, interviews, pacing, and the difference between a compelling allegation and a publishable fact.

THE TRANSITION

A burst of familiar media sound gives way to the click of a silent microphone. Four million views cannot answer one private question. Valerie faces the lens. "I got everybody else talking. Now I have to get my family talking."

THE FILM: TWELVE MINUTES, THREE INTERLOCKING SEARCHES

00:00–01:20 | THE CLOSED CASE

A train. Silence. Ricky's name. Police ruled an accident; the family remembers a detail that refuses to fit. Valerie asks what the official record actually says. The film announces its mission: three men connected to three questions that cannot wait.

01:20–03:15 | THE RAILROAD

The first records request, the local landscape, and family recollections establish Ricky's story. Any available documents are distinguished from testimony on screen. The sequence does not promise a homicide revelation. It reveals how official closure and family closure can be radically different.

03:15–05:10 | TWO LOST LIVES

Tangala's real memorial image introduces the sister who died at seventeen after an abortion, according to family accounts. The unborn baby receives equal emotional weight. The name Jeffrey becomes a lead. Valerie asks whether he can be found and whether a child named after Tangala exists.

05:10–07:10 | THE FATHER'S LAST MESSAGE

A military-era photograph and Valerie's account of the dream lead to the news of her father's death at nineteen. She names what she does not know: the cause of death, the estate, the truth about his relationships, and whether other children exist. The possibility of Rico emerges as an unresolved branch.

07:10–08:30 | THE MAN WHO STEPPED IN

Riley's influence gives the film an emotional counterweight. Gainesville memories and the Jerry story reveal a woman who learned how to move forward without forgetting what hurt. This is not a detour: it explains why Valerie can face uncomfortable truths without losing her humanity.

08:30–10:15 | THE WOMAN WHO KNOWS HOW TO ASK

A rapid, rights-cleared montage of radio, celebrity interviews, professional film work, and the interrupted TRICK CANDY opportunity establishes her investigative instincts and editorial authority. She turns that experience toward her own records and family conversations.

10:15–12:00 | THE BENEFICIARIES

The three investigations converge in an evidence board: what is documented, what is remembered, and what remains unknown. A refusal, a missing record, or a new name is treated truthfully. The final gift is not a manufactured solution but an honest archive. "This is my living life insurance policy. And the people who come after me are the beneficiaries."

VISUAL LANGUAGE: A TABLOID PULSE, A DOCUMENTARY CONSCIENCE

THE LOOK

The film has the energy of a TMZ-style feature and the visual sophistication of a premium true-crime documentary. It uses punchy cold opens, quick cuts, urgent questions, striking close-ups, and hard transitions. But the source material is never sacrificed for spectacle. The audience should feel that every image is a clue and every silence might mean something.

THREE RECURRING IMAGES

RAILROAD TRACKS: the official answer that did not settle a family's questions. A MEMORIAL CLIPPING: Tangala and her unborn baby, whose absence has shaped generations. AN EMPTY FAMILY TREE: the father's unexplained death and possible siblings. These visual motifs connect the three threads without confusing them. Each return adds a new piece of information or a more precise question.

THE EVIDENCE SYSTEM

On-screen typography distinguishes OFFICIAL RECORD, FAMILY ACCOUNT, VALERIE'S FIRSTHAND MEMORY, and STILL UNKNOWN. Police findings are presented as police findings. The reported placement of Ricky's head remains attributed to relatives unless records corroborate it. The circumstances of Tangala's abortion and infection remain family accounts pending research. Missing estate property is Valerie's recollection pending documentation. The film never turns a question mark into a verdict.

THE SOUND

A train crossing bell becomes the first recurring sound. A needle of radio static carries us into Valerie's media years. A telephone ring marks an unanswered attempt to reach a witness. A page sliding into an archive box becomes the final sound. Silence is used deliberately: after a painful disclosure, the cut slows long enough for the audience to understand what a life, not just a headline, has lost.

THE PEOPLE

Only authentic family photographs and properly licensed archival materials will identify actual people. No invented images will masquerade as relatives, witnesses, or evidence. Interviews with private individuals will be voluntary; people who decline will not be treated as suspicious merely for refusing. The film seeks closure, not public humiliation.

THE TRANSITION

As the soundtrack narrows to a single ticking beat, the film shifts from dramatic questions to the practical route toward answers. The clock is not a device: every year that passes makes witnesses harder to reach and records harder to recover.

THE INVESTIGATION: WHAT THE GRANT MAKES POSSIBLE

THREE SEARCHES, ONE DISCIPLINED METHOD

Each thread begins with a lead and moves through an identifiable process: establish names and dates; request records; compare accounts; locate willing witnesses; film the attempt and its result; document unresolved gaps. The treatment proposes a search, not prewritten discoveries. Valerie's experience producing interviews and editing complex stories positions her to keep this investigation legible within twelve minutes.

RICKY | THE OFFICIAL FILE

Seek death and investigative records, archived news, relevant historical context, and family testimony. The central objective is to understand what police documented and why the family experienced the ruling as unresolved. The film will not suggest a named killer or assert deliberate placement of remains without substantiation.

TANGALA AND JEFFREY | THE LOST CHILD

Seek family and school memories, available lawful records, and careful outreach to Jeffrey if identified. The production will distinguish Valerie's account of a forced illegal abortion and fatal infection from what medical or other records can independently establish. Any alleged later child named Tangala will be approached with privacy and consent in mind; no DNA testing or identification will be coerced.

THE FATHER | DEATH, PROPERTY, AND KINSHIP

Seek the death certificate, probate or estate information where accessible, photographs, correspondence, and interviews with relatives willing to speak. Explore potential half-siblings through voluntary contact and corroborated relationships. The investigation will not treat unaccounted-for possessions as proven theft or imply foul play in the father's death merely because Valerie was not told its cause.

FEASIBILITY AND TIMELINE

The project is in development. Principal photography and post-production are planned for March 2027 or later. Grant funding will support targeted record searches, archive fees and licenses, lean-location filming, interview production, travel tied to confirmed leads, sound, editing, finishing, and appropriate legal review. The film is intentionally built around three focused inquiries, rather than a sprawling investigation that cannot be completed in twelve minutes.

THE TRANSITION

Whatever the records reveal, Valerie will have done something her family could not: preserve the questions alongside the answers. The final page explains why this is not only a personal film, but a story that can travel.

WHY THIS FILM. WHY NOW. WHY VALERIE.

THE AUDIENCE HOOK

A closed railroad death. A teenager and unborn child lost after a secret abortion. A father who died leaving his daughter a funeral bill, unanswered questions, and possibly unknown siblings. Each premise invites curiosity. Together, they form a narrative with escalating stakes and a clear protagonist. Viewers come for the mystery; they stay for the woman brave enough to expose her own uncertainty.

THE COMMERCIAL CASE

BEFORE I DIE has a concise, memorable premise suited to documentary festivals, digital audiences, and editorially ambitious true-crime and pop-culture outlets. Valerie brings an existing body of screen work, broadcast experience, a public-facing media history, and archival leads that may support publicity. Her accounts of viral interviews and a Vivica A. Fox financing conversation provide potential points of recognition; actual materials and rights will determine what can be shown. No distribution or platform commitment is implied.

THE EMOTIONAL CASE

The story is not a celebrity résumé with a family tragedy attached. The résumé explains the contradiction: a woman who knew how to make strangers speak could not make herself ask her father the questions that mattered. She waited. He died. She does not want to repeat that mistake with the people who remain. The urgency comes from the irreversible fact that witnesses do not live forever.

THE LARGER POSSIBILITY

The twelve-minute film is designed to stand alone. If records, witnesses, or family connections open new paths, it could serve as a proof of concept for a longer documentary or limited series. But its success does not depend on discovering a killer or a surprise relative. It depends on watching Valerie pursue three concrete questions with skill, courage, and restraint, and on seeing what that pursuit changes.

THE LEGACY | DOCUMENT THE DOCUMENTARIAN

Valerie’s wider call is to preserve the lives of the people who preserve everyone else’s. Ask the elder. Label the photograph. Save the interview. Record what is certain and what is remembered. Her closing line is not a metaphor for a payout: “This is my living life insurance policy. And the people who come after me are the beneficiaries.”

THE LAST IMAGE

Three folders lie open on a table: RICKY. TANGALA / JEFFREY. DAD. Some pages contain documents. Others are blank. Valerie closes none of them. The camera holds on her hand as she writes a single word across the top of the family tree: CONTINUE.