

Judge Honors Bride's Wish On Same Day Nicole Paultre Picks Up Death Certificate, Her Request to Take Sean Bell's Name Is Granted

By Tatsha Robertson and Cynthia Gordy



After two weeks of living a nightmare, Nicole Paultre, the grieving fiancée of Sean Bell, the New York City man shot dead by police on the morning of their wedding, finally found a moment of peace.

Since her early days of dating Bell in high school, Paultre wanted nothing more than to take his name, even practicing the signature on her school notebooks. On Thursday, her dream came true: A judge of the civil court of New York signed an order to change her name to Nicole Paultre Bell, according to Sanford Rubenstein, her attorney, who shared the official documentation exclusively with ESSENCE.

ESSENCE spent the day with Nicole, her mother, Laura Harper—Paultre, her 3-year-old daughter, Jada, and the Reverend Al Sharpton, who has been helping Nicole ever since November 25, when her fiancé was fatally shot by undercover police officers. Nicole's day was busy. She collected Sean's death certificate, made an appearance on Sharpton's radio program, and went to the Social Security office.

"The first thing Nicole asked me to do for her, as her counsel, was to change her name to Bell to honor the memory of Sean Bell," said Rubenstein, standing outside his Brooklyn office, where he had presented the papers to her minutes earlier. "Today we surprised her by getting it done real fast with the court order declaring her name to be Nicole Paultre Bell."

Just after 4:00 A.M. on the couple's wedding day, police officers fired 50 shots at Sean and his friends who were attending his bachelor party in Queens. All the men were unarmed. Police officials have said Sean, 23, was driving away from the party when his car swiped an undercover officer and then rammed into an unmarked police van. Officials said undercover police hit Sean twice and Trent Benefield several times in the legs. Guzman, 31, says he was hit 16 times. He is still recovering in the hospital. Benefield, 23, was released on Tuesday. Rubenstein represents both men.

Over the course of the day, Nicole talked to ESSENCE about the tragic events of that fateful morning. "I don't think it's really hit me," she said in the car on her way to a radio interview with Sharpton. "I see [police shootings] on TV and we all know it's wrong, but I never thought it would hit home in my life."

A grand jury is looking into the case.

Nicole, the 22-year-old mother of the couple's two young daughters, was overcome with emotion Thursday afternoon as she stared at the paper with her new name. As her mother and Jada looked on, she could barely contain her happiness. After Sean's death, she said she had thought her chance to be Nicole Bell had been stripped from her forever.

"I was speechless," Nicole told ESSENCE of her reaction to the news. "It's a great feeling. This is what we wanted. This is in honor of his name."

Do you agree with the judges decision to grant Nicole's name change request? Click on the boards below to talk about it.

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nicole and family. you are all in my prayers....i'm so sorry for your loss.

-Crystal S

Yes I do agree my heart goes out to her and her childrens just keep on praying and let god have his way.

-Leslie Ridgley

I am sorry to hear about what happen in New York.

You need to sue the whole Police Dept. in NY. This is so crazy and this is what we face all the time. MLK would have protested this until justice have been done. Nobody should have to go through this pain and the kids will never understand this as they go through their pain. Stay strong and Put up a big fight into addressing this issue. God will be with you all the way until the end.

God Bless

Lisa R.

Wash. DC.

-Lisa R

To the Bell family. May god bless you. my heart goes out to you at this time. no one deserves such a tragedy. Nicole you stay strong your a princess. Godbless your children. the judge could not have granted a better decison Mrs Bell!!

-Scharmell

As as I was saying, you must not rest until justice is done. God Bless

-Danielle

To the Paultrie and Bell Family:

I think the judge did the right thing, it's the very least that he could do at this point. I just hope that this doesn't get pushed to the back pages of the newspapers in the weeks to come. When this tragedy first happened, it was all over the papers, but since the funeral is over, you can barely find it in the papers. Nicole, all you can do is give it to Him and he will see you through. This happened for a reason, we don't know why right now, but everything happens for a reason and you ca

-Danielle

Giving Nicole Sean's name is not going to bring him back, but at least she will get what she always wanted to be Mrs. Bell. You deserve the name and everything else that comes with it. Good luck and may you find peace within yourself and family. Take care of yourself and the kids.

-Melanie

YES, BY ALL MEANS SHE SHOULD BE GIVIN HIS LAST NAME.

MAY THE LORD BE WITH YOU AND THE GIRLS AT THIS TIME.

-MICHELYN CLINTON,MARYLAND

She deserves his name and all consideration due to her as his wife and mother of his children.

-V. Talley

Mrs. Nicole Bell,

I'm glad you were granted the name change. I pray that this will add some type of comfort to you. I also respect the way that you have carried yourself during this time. I will continue to pray for you and the children. I want you to know that your help comes from the LORD. When you get angry and feel like you can't take it anymore just seek GOD's face. Remember GOD will always take care of you and the girls.

-Brenda B.

Mrs. Bell,

I know there is nothing anyone can say or do to take away your pain. But, hopefully, just having the chance to know the type of love that you and your husband shared gives you some consolation. Just know that he's in Heaven watching over you and waiting for the day you two can be together again. Keep your beautiful spirit. You are an inspiration to all who see you.

-Beverly

I say why not? People change their names all the time. It's a simple request.

-C. Bell

IN TIMES LIKE THIS THE MOST COMFORTING ARMS ARE

THOSE WHO TRUST IN GOD AND BELIEVE IN HIS JUSTICE. WE HAVE SURCAME TO A WAY OF LIFE NOT FITTING FOR OUR BEINGS. WE NEED TO REGROUP AND UNITE TO RIGHT SO MANY WRONGS THAT HAVE BEEN HAND

DOWN TO US AND FROM US. WE NEED TO TRUST ONCE AGAIN IN JESUS AND ALLOW HIM TO LEAD THE WAY.

-BRATTY

To Nicole Paultre-Bell and family:

My sincere condolences to you and your family. Remember, vengeance is GOD's. Call on HIM and he will see you through. Sean will always be in your heart. He is asleep and when that time comes, you and your family will be with him again. "He's Just Away".

Respectfully,

Tamara - Cincinnati, OH

-Tamara L. Thurman

God bless you,

I feel very happy for you, I hope through this transition you will find a peace of mind and know that God love the both of you. And his blesses every situation. It was in his will for this to be for you.

-Liz Owens, Jacksonville, Florida

To the Bell and Paultre families, you have my deepest sympathy and are in my prayers. This was so tragic, a young black male who was doing the right thing by getting ready to marry his true love and baby momma. I give you Nicole a true strong black queen for hanging in there for your daughters and the rest of your family. May GOD be with you all always and forever and may he punish the cops that unjustly took your king away.

-Ina, Toledo

Yes. It was the right thing to do. she is the mother of his childrens, and had it not been for the police they were hours away from being husband and wife. She, the children, and both families are in our prayers.

-margaret

To the Bell and Paultre Families: My prayers and love go out to all of you at this time. Just know there are people praying for you through this difficult time, with God's hand guiding you, and that justice will prevail, and has begun with the judge granting the request of Nicole.

-DJ in Texas

Dear Mrs. Paultre Bell, Jada, Jadyn and Sean's parents & loved ones:

You all have my deepest sympathy. As well as the two brothers who are recovering physically and mentally from this tragedy. May GOD give you all PEACE in the near future. As for the survey or poll, the law states "that you obtain a MARRIAGE LICENSE (by the state) before a ceremony can take place". So YES, they were married officially by way of the Pastor as well as the Judge.

-Monica, DC

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-Monica

To Duane- again as a member of Nicole's family only two person have prompted me to respond. You should share a love in your life as Nicole and Sean share. He HAS and will continue to always be with her and the kids. He made sure that his family came first and took a stand before GOD..how about you? He loved Nicole and stayed by her side always..can you say that about a lady in your life...did you bring joy..only to have it cut down..well

-family of nicole

I give me deepest condolences and hope that everything work out in the family's favor. God will make things work out for you. Im glad that the court worked in your favor.

-P Furr

those two precious little ones as you navigate through life.

-Bonnie J.

Mrs. Nicole Paultre Bell,

Words cannot change how you feel or what your family is currently going through but rest in the fact that you are in God's Hands and your little girls carry the spirit of the wonderful young man you were to marry. As many have said before me- you were already married... the ceremony was only a public recognition of the obvious union and bond you two shared (will continue to share). Stay in God's Word and understand that all things happen for a reason and according to God's will. God Bless you and

-Bonnie J.

Condolences to you and your family, Mrs. Bell. You were married in spirit and soul already. The ceremony in from of God took place after Sean's passing. There is no denying his intent. The judge excuted the right order. Please take time for yourself. Use the support that you are getting. Pleasant holiday wishes in light of your lost.

-Alexis Powell

duane from gardena

u r clearly an insensitive idiot who has no regard for yourself. ur not funny or sarcastic or---whatever it is that ur trying 2 B--- while making your asinine comments. instead u r a simpleminded asshole who needs to get a life. i will pray 4u.

-swift-chicago

this is a stupid question that gives the opportunity of some idiot to pass an insensitive comment about this cold blooded mureder. it doesn't matter who agrees or who does not---who cares? she deserves that and more.nicole paultre bell has been given alittle bit of peace in the midst of her husband being killed by pigs on a day that was supposed to be the happiest day of her life. my prayers go out to her, her daughters, and Sean's family. i'm disgusted every time i think about it.

-swift-chicago

Upon hearing about this sad ordeal. I think it's only fair that Nicole gets to have his last name. He will always be with you in your heart Nicole. May god continue to watch over you and your family.

-Nanette Nathan

Living in NY, I awoke to the story of this senseless death as I awoke to pray. It is tragic. It is, without question, suspicious. I agree that with the wedding as imminent as hours away, Nicole deserves to carry the last name BELL. After all, her intention was to spend the rest of her life with him, building their family - together. Sadly though, that part of the dream will never be realized.

-Michelle Osborne

Mrs. Bell:

Keep your head up girl. No matter what that Duane person wrote about you not respecting yourself, I applaud you. You are a strong woman. No one is born with half the brains and know how that this Duane person must have been granted. Sean was ayoung man who knew what he wanted quicker than the

average Black man and that was making you his wife. 70% of other Black men, don't figure this out until a million kids out of wedlock and a million more lovers. You go girl. May God continue to bless you.

-Jacquief

My heart and prayers goes out to Nicole and her entire family. I applaud her strength and courage at this very difficult time. She has handled herself with such dignity and grace that only GOD himself could have given her. I pray that justice will be served for your husband and all the other minorities who may encounter such tragedies. I hope that Sean Bell's memory will make a difference when it comes to brutal crimes not just involving the police. No one should have to go like that. Again, my prayers are with you and

-S.BENT LETTMAN

God bless you. Yes she deserves his name. I pray that God continue to strengthen you at this time.

-Tanya- Chicago

GOD BLESS to you and your children. LOVE is something, unfortunately, that everyone does not get to experience. Rest in peace Mr. Bell and Mrs. Bell find comfort in the happiness you shared. I pray you find LOVE again and Mr. Bell will be there making sure all is well! Take care and don't miss a chance to tell your children how wonderful their father was. Enjoy each and every day of the rest of your life in LOVE & PEACE from the LORD above. Keep reading Essence and every month you will receive additional inspiration from

-Joy C.-Tamarac, FL

Stay strong for your family....I know we don't understand it now but everything is for a reason, God knows best!!!! You have to believe and trust in that. Best wishes to you and your girls. I have two girls also, I can't even fathom what you are going through.

-Jamila

To Mrs. Nicole Paultre Bell,

Keep your head up high and let GOD move through you and your family. I definitely agree with the judge's decision. You have definitely earned his last name. I know you weep b/c he is no longer on earth, but I know he is in a better place and is looking down on his family. GOD will have favor upon your life and your family. May GOD continue to bless you and your beautiful Children. Have a blessed and safe Holiday Season!

-Natasha T.

Yes. It was their wedding day he was celebrating not being a bachelor anymore. It was not his choice not to go on the wedding it was stripped from. My problem is where are the boycotts, where is the demand for justice like with Martin Luther Kings, the Malcom's we as African American people need that this shows that we are not free. Our young African American men are killing each other and being killed let's get back into the community and positive their. Put in our music on our tv shows stop the negativity and

-Sharon Jone, Mississippi

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Mrs. Nicole Paultre Bell,

My heart goes out to you and your beautiful family. My fiance and I have been together for 8 years since high school. I nearly lost him in a fire a few years back and I am grateful to have received a second chance. I cannot pretend to imagine what you are going through but my prayers go out to you. Stay strong and hold your head high. One day you both will meet again- for eternity.

Blessings

-AMG

Mrs. Bell, I honor you and your courage, I know that it's only God with the support of your Mother, family and friends! Keep looking! I've lost a husband but not like that!

-Vendetta

oops, got cut off: May the New Year bring you and yours peace and happiness.

-Racquel - BC, Canada

"Mrs." Nicole Paultre Bell, congrats to you on taking your would-be husband's surname. In my opinion, I believe this is right and appropriate. I would have done the same. As a newlywed bride, I would have just fell apart if this situation had happened to me. I admire you and give you big props for being so strong and courageous in such a tragic time. Take comfort in knowing you will meet again with Sean on that special day and we will live forever without any more pain and sorrow. Merry Christmas and may the new year b

-Racquel - BC, Canada

Condolences on the loss of your husband. Congratulations for pursuing your dream of having his last name. Pursue his untimely and unnecessary death to the highest of the court system.

-sm - north carolina

Dear Mrs. (Nicole Paultre Bell):

The remainder of my message to you was cut off. I just want you to know that I participated in the rally in New York City for your husband, Mr. Benefield and Mr. Guzman: You are not alone, New Yorkers, and people around the WORLD, stand beside you and them!!

Sincerely,

-Carol Garza - New York City

Dear Mrs. (Nicole) Paultre Bell:

Please accept my sincere condolences for the loss of your late husband Mr. Sean Bell. Like Christ died and rose again, He has allowed Sean to rise again through you and your daughters! I fully support the Judge's decision to grant your request, it was the only right and just thing for her/him to do.

It is my fervant wish that God will envelope you, your daughters, your family, and the Bell family, with peace and comfort, during this time, and for the rest of your lives. I participated in

-Carol Garza - New York City

DEFINITELY IT DOES NOT TAKE A ROCKET SCIENTIST TO FIGURE THIS ONE OUT. SEAN AND

NICOLE WAS MARRIED ALREADY ACCORDING TO THEIR MARRIAGE CERTIFICATE,the ceremony did not take place because of his brutally death by inexperience police officers.

-glo

I can remember preparing for my wedding day. I couldn't wait to become Mrs. Maria Angelo. I could not imagine what my life would be like if all of that would have been snatched away from me the day of my wedding. My heart goes out to you because you will not have that chance to live out your life with the man you have loved for so long. Hold fast to all of the good times that you had together, and share them with your daughter. You will be in my prayers.

Maria Angelo, Las Vegas, NV

-Maria Angelo

To Mrs. Nicole Paultre-Bell, I'm so proud that the Judge granted your request for the name change., and I would like to express my heartfelt sympathy to you and your family.....

-Mrs. Rhea A. Koonce

Mrs. Nicole Bell,

My heart aches for you and your beautiful little girls. I commend you for walking with your head high and carrying yourself with grace and dignity. God will never fail you. Your husband will be waiting for you at the Gates Of Heaven when God decides to call you home. Mr. Bell's family, may he continue to strenghten you in this hour of darkness. May God Bless you and may heaven always continue to shine on you and your family. With love and respect

--Katrina Sye South Jersey

Yes, I agree the judge did the right thing to grant Nicole the last name of Bell. After all that was her wedding day when her fiance was shot.

-Fran - Raleigh, NC

Mrs Bell,

It is the very least that the judge can do by allowing the name change. Hold your head baby girl. EVERYTHING HAS PURPOSE. Although this is a tragic loss, you have obtained an opportunity to speak on behalf of millions of people in our race who have experienced the same thing or some level of harassment by police officers. Take courage. YOU'RE ALREADY VICTORIOUS!!!

-Monita Lawing