Grace (Gealey) Byers can currently be seen as Anika Calhoun on the hit FOX series *Empire*, which returns for season three in the fall of 2016. Byers was raised in the Cayman Islands by her African American mother and Caucasian father. Both of her parents are deaf and thus, she was raised learning sign language and understanding what it meant to be a child of deaf adults (CODA). Although people treated her parents as “deaf and dumb” and Byers as “too light” or “too dark,” these challenging experiences made her strong and committed to following her dreams.

Byers moved to America alone to attend the University of South Florida in Tampa, where she received a B.A. in Theater Arts. During her time at USF, acting afforded Byers the opportunity to communicate viscerally – a desire that stemmed from her childhood. Following college, Byers attended the University of California Irvine’s graduate program and obtained her M.F.A in acting. A successful showcase took her from Los Angeles to New York City, where Byers performed professionally. Several theater productions, short films, and national commercials led her to Chicago, where she is currently based. In her free time, Byers is involved in Saving Our Cinderellas, a movement that helps and empowers young girls and women to stand up against bullying, address social issues, and uplift one another in support of positive interests.

From near-death experiences to a unique childhood, Grace (Gealey) Byers shares her personal philosophies with audiences. She believes in taking the time to be still and become aware of oneself, and to have compassion and grace for one another. She feels that there are always opportunities for growth, that each person has their own complex and intricate story. On a more personal level, Byers discusses the discrimination she faced in moving to America, the social and cultural adjustments she made after moving, and the importance of celebrating life in the moment.