

## Preface

Writing has always been therapeutic to me. I've always known I wanted to write a book, but I didn't know about what. I knew I had a story to tell, but I wasn't sure if it was okay to share so much about myself and how people would receive it. So I journaled. And then I stopped because I had no privacy. Then I started again, trying to make my writing illegible so no one could read it—not even me.

I'm a forty-two-year-old woman from Edo State in Nigeria. I grew up in Lagos, Nigeria with my parents and my brother and sister. We were upper-middle-class when I was younger. When I was about eleven, my dad left paid employment and started his own company. We became the family of an entrepreneur.

My mom was a seamstress. We moved from company-provided housing in the city to the suburbs, or the "boonies," of Lagos. That was when I started to see that things were changing, but my parents made sure they maintained a certain level of our old life. In the first few years, my dad's business flourished, and then after a couple more years, he started to realize that he was indeed a scientist and not a businessman. He also was not cut out for the business landscape of Nigeria. He was not ready to sacrifice his integrity to get ahead. So we lived the saying, "Your reward is in heaven life."

We managed. We all graduated from the best elementary school in Lagos: Corona Schools Apapa and Gbagada. I'm sure it was tough for my dad, but he made it work. By the time I was in high school, things were different, but we managed and were a very close and loving family. My mom still did not work—my dad still assumed the responsibility of taking care of the expenses in the home. It wasn't even a conversation. I grew up seeing my dad doing what it took to provide for us. Oftentimes, that meant late deliveries of big envelopes of money to my already-agitated mother. No matter what, my dad came through.

The stress, however, took its toll. He became hypertensive. My mom slowly started to do her part, but the roles were never misunderstood. The role of the provider was always my dad's. That was their agreement. But they also were a team, and they picked up the slack for each other. It is for those times when you cannot do it, like my dad, that you save up your support credits. (This is like the analogy that you pay into the bank with the hope of withdrawing one day. My dad had paid in for years, and he was now withdrawing. My mom remembered and had no hesitation to step up.) I saw this with my parents. My mom knew that if and when my dad could, he'd show up.

It was with this upbringing that I came to the United States of America, bright-eyed and bushy-tailed. Naive as all get out. I came to go to college, and again my dad paid my fees and supported me for most of my time in undergrad. I wanted to be a corporate lawyer, and then I changed majors to computer information systems because it sounded cool, and I didn't want to take a million bar exams because my plan was always to go back home to Nigeria after getting my master's degree. I didn't know that I would fall in love and decide to stay in the U.S. No regrets!

I dated and lived my life, but I never realized how important our upbringing is in shaping our lives. I know we say it, but I didn't get it until I was thirty-seven years old. I remembered my friends' parents and their interactions. I remembered my parents. And now I observed my friends back home and here in the United States and how they dated and spent their money, how they lived their lives,

their values, and their attitudes. And I started to see what the old wives meant by upbringing and how it affects us.

I was easygoing, not a fighter, very trusting, and a people pleaser. It was uncomfortable for me to ask for money. I was very independent, scared to assert myself and take what's mine. And part of me was broken. The part that was broken didn't attract the right type of partner.

I dated my ex-husband for three years, and in that time we lived together. I gave into a lot of things that I should have had boundaries or been stronger about. I ignored a lot of things I should have not ignored. I did not fight or recognize problems when I should have stood my ground. I shared my weaknesses and deep secrets too early. I made myself vulnerable. Most importantly, I did not know myself before adding another human to my equation. It didn't add up.

My forty-second birthday is on Monday, August 24, 2020, during this unfortunate COVID pandemic. I am almost divorced with three children. I have way too much responsibility. This is not at all where I imagined myself to be at this time in my life, but it is what it is. I tried very hard to keep my family together at great financial, emotional, spiritual, and physical cost to myself. Family is very important to me, and I will never give up on family. I am sharing my story with you with the hope that it resonates, causes you to reflect, see your worth, leave destructive habits and relationships behind, and help you course-correct.

I have made many mistakes and have had many, many blessings. But I have also seen a lot, and I want to share this with you. I am what some call an "empath." Some may ask throughout this book, like my friends have asked me, "Why didn't you fight?" "Why didn't you speak up?" I did as much as I could with what I knew how to do at the time. I also lost myself on this journey, but I am finding myself again and healing. Writing this book is a key tool in my healing journey. This book is about a girl who went through life blind. Blind as a young girl, blind as an immigrant, blind as a girlfriend, blind as a woman, blind as a mother, and blind as a partner or wife.

Please hear my heart in these words. I found myself in a situation that just didn't go as planned. I have tried to be as candid as I can, but with being candid comes the uprooting of some feelings that I am honestly still resolving on my own. So some may feel I have said too much, but I cannot share a half story. I have also had many say to me, "You shouldn't write a book while you're still hurting." I appreciate the feedback, but I also do not want to write to you three to five years from now, when I am brand new. How will you know that process? How will you grow? How will I help you with my perfect story, all tied up nicely with a bow? How will you know how I achieved my peace? I would have forgotten, and I don't want to forget.

So let me write to you now, when it is fresh. My friends who advised me to wait mean well, but I am different. I will send my message and try not to write bitterly, but I cannot please everyone. Learn what you will. I have to present this story from my viewpoint and hope that it does not come off as me being negative or bitter. I am not bitter, just hurt—but I am also not staying in my place of hurt. I am moving on with my life, and I honestly see more clearly now. I feel my peace growing more and more. I no longer depend on others for my happiness or peace. I look above to the Lord, and He has blessed me with three beautiful gifts in my children.

My children, please understand that the stories I share are not meant to cause you pain but to prepare you for life outside of our home and how cruel the world can be. It is not to shed a bad light on anyone, but to make you aware that life must be lived intentionally and that when choosing acquaintances, friends and even partners, you do have the right to be picky and stick to your values, which I hope I have instilled in you. Please know that I am your mother and I love you dearly, but it is my job to let you know where I made mistakes and may have misled in what life looks like. This book is my vehicle to do that.

My hope for this book is to help everyone see different perspectives and to see how your experiences and viewpoints influence how you live your life. I also hope that it gives you the courage to stop living in brokenness, decide to choose another path, and heal.

I don't claim to have the answers. I just want to share my personal experience and the conversations I have had with several people—both men and women—to help provide a different point of view.

“Don't apologize for opening your eyes.”

—SE