



EXCERPT



Liberation Is Here
Women Uncovering Hope in a Broken World

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Nikole Lim is a speaker, educator, and consultant on leveraging dignity through the restorative art of storytelling. She is the cofounder and international director of Freely in Hope, a nonprofit organization that equips survivors and advocates to lead in ending the cycle of sexual violence. Freely in Hope operates in Kenya and Zambia, providing psychological counseling, health care, and high school and university scholarships for young women who desire to impact global communities through their rewritten stories. Nikole graduated with a degree in film production from Loyola Marymount University and is currently pursuing a masters in global leadership from Fuller Theological Seminary.

Liberation Is Not Just Near. It Is Here.

As a filmmaker and photographer, I have worked with international organizations to capture stories of people around the world, from the city of Los Angeles to the jungles of Vietnam. In each instance I make an effort to uncover their stories of triumph amidst oppression. After every photo session, I show them their portraits to ensure they approve. I want them to see themselves the way that I see them: strong, radiant, full of dignity despite what the world may have labeled them. I love seeing their eyes light up as they looked at their image. “Am I really that beautiful?” they exclaim, allowing their bodies to be seen in a world that overlooks their humanity. I love uncovering the hidden things of their story that help them discover beauty in themselves.

My work in photography and film has allowed me to experience stories not my own. But it wasn’t until I encountered stories of unspeakable trauma from survivors of sexual violence that my work took an unexpected turn. At the same time, my own journey toward healing began to unfold, where I have learned to allow my heart to be “wide open” in relationship with survivors of sexual violence. Here, my vocation found me.

This is a story of my struggle for liberation, and the oppressed who unexpectedly liberated me in the process.

This book follows the stories of three individuals: Nekesa, Mara, and Mubanga. (Some names and identifying details may have been changed to protect the privacy of individuals.) As survivors of sexual violence, these women’s relentless courage captured me. Building friendships with each one of them challenged me to change my career and start Freely in Hope, a nonprofit organization that equips survivors and advocates to lead in ending sexual violence. This book highlights their journey of healing from trauma. The wars and triumphs that have led to their transformation also transformed me. As they evolved in so many ways, Freely in Hope also evolved to support their audacious dreams by expanding its services in funding holistic education, leadership development, and storytelling platforms that prevent sexual violence in communities across Kenya and Zambia.

Encountering the monstrosity of these dark stories will be triggering. At the same time, exposing these stories is a gesture of pulling back darkness to bear witness to light. This book is an attempt to bring to you stories that have expanded my heart’s capacity to find love amidst life’s most difficult experiences. As the stories of these survivors have intertwined with my own, I now see the world as a strange juxtaposition—the unfolding of beautiful things from desolate places. I have learned to not only shoot “wide open” but also keep my heart wide open to both the beauty and the brokenness of the world. Before then, I didn’t know that the capacity of my heart was limited.

This book is for world changers, countercultural leaders, and perspective shifters—dreaming of the day when liberation is a fully embodied experience for all of humanity suffocating under the weight of oppression. For the little girl imprisoned in the city’s brothels to the young man afraid to verbalize the abuse of his boyhood, for the father relentlessly advocating for the rights of his child, for the mother caught in a cycle of no options, for survivors who are blamed for crimes they did not commit, let us move toward liberation together.



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My hope is that in these stories you may see a glimpse into the possibilities of your own story—

that hope is ever present in the midst of despair,
that unexpected healing emerges from brokenness,
that suffering has the potential to expand our heart's capacity for love,
that liberation arises from places of violent oppression.

May these stories be an invitation to experience the world through a new perspective—recognizing that liberation is not just near, it is here.

—Taken from the introduction



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