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A Thousand Sisters: My Journey into the Worst Place on Earth to Be a Woman

Lisa Shannon
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"They said, 'Shut your mouth. Put your leg on the chair.' They took a machete and cut off my leg." Already an unimaginable scene, this was only the beginning of the most horrific event of Generose's life. She lives in the Democratic Republic of Congo, where the current conflict has killed more than 5.4 million people and rape has been used as a weapon against hundreds of thousands of women.

A Thousand Sisters, Lisa Shannon's first book, chronicles her transformation from an average American woman to an activist for Congo, and it provides a deeply personal view of the atrocities committed against the Congolese people—especially women—since the *genocidaires* crossed the border from Rwanda fifteen years ago. Shannon happened to catch an *Oprah* segment about Congo in 2005 and signed up to sponsor two women through the organization featured on Oprah's show. Over the next couple years she founded Run for Congo Women, organizing runs in several cities, and was eventually able to sponsor over 1,000 women.

In 2007 she traveled to Congo to meet with the women her foundation sponsored. Hundreds of them met with Shannon to share their stories of torture, rape, and murder, in the hopes that someone would hear them and come to their aid. One was Asende, a woman whose entire village was attacked. She was shot three times, and when she next opened her eyes discovered that she was the lone survivor in a sea of 500 corpses.

Shannon writes with a distinct voice marked by self-deprecating humor and unfiltered honesty. Her candid portrayal of her journey, including her missteps, allows the reader to identify with her and shows that it doesn't take a superhero to make a difference. She avoids melodrama in her frank portrayals of the brutal violence that marks these women's lives, remaining respectful of the pain they endure and capturing the spirit that helps them survive. She also provides a list of ten ways to help Congo, including the cost and amount of time needed for each one and Web addresses.

This is a story that appeals to the core of humanity, to the desire to end suffering and unspeakable crimes. Shannon writes about standing in a large room with hundreds of women who had been raped and asking if anyone had anything they wanted to say to American women. One woman stepped forward and began to cry: "She keeps talking through her sobs, repeating something about 'Mama Aa-mer-ee-kaa.' The translator simply says, 'She's crying for help from American women.'"
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