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*Lisa J. Shannon , Zainab Salbi (Foreword)*

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Lisa Shannon had a good life — a successful business, a fiancé, a home, and security. Then one day in 2005, an episode of *Oprah* changed her life. The show focused on women in Congo, a place known as the worst place on earth to be a woman. She was suddenly awakened to the atrocities there — millions dead, women being raped, children dying in shocking numbers. It was then that Lisa realized she had to do something — and she did. *A Thousand Sisters* is Lisa Shannon's inspiring memoir. She shares her story of how she raised money to sponsor Congolese women beginning with one solo 30-mile run and then founded a national organization, Run for Congo Women. The book chronicles her journeys to the Congo, meeting the sponsored women and hearing their stories. Along the way Lisa is forced to confront herself and learns lessons of survival, fear, gratitude, and love from the women of Africa. *A Thousand Sisters* is a deeply moving call to action for each person to find in them the thing that brings meaning to a wounded world.

## A Thousand Sisters: My Journey Into the Worst Place on Earth to Be a Woman Details

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# **From Reader Review A Thousand Sisters: My Journey Into the Worst Place on Earth to Be a Woman for online ebook**

## **Kyla says**

Whew, this is a tough one. On the one hand, you have to admire someone who takes up a cause unrelated to her with her whole heart, throwing family and jobs under the bus...but then you want to know why. Why this cause and not the hundreds of others? She attempts to answer this question by traveling to the Congo - but then seems intent on merely totting up the atrocities. How many of you have lost children? she would ask, pressing for details. For what purpose? An accounting of atrocities to make sense of it all? To be fair, she seemed aware of the tenuous moral position she was in - a white North American woman trying to fix things in a place she knew nothing about - but that doesn't make her meddling any more palatable to read about. Icky.

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## **Tara Chevestt says**

This is going to come across as heartless to some people, but I had mixed feelings about this book. First, I must applaud the author, Lisa Shannon for setting aside a pretty comfortable life to travel to the Congo of Africa for 5 weeks and meet these women in need. Also, this is a situation that needs to be made known to the rest of the world.

The women of Congo are dealing with not only mass genocide of their villages, but also mass rape. It's so bad, they have a hospital full of women suffering from fistula. (I would rather not explain what that is.) They all have tales of suffering and despite the fact that their tales were so similar the book grew repetitive, this book gives them a voice.

I had three issues preventing me from giving this 5 stars. 1. I didn't buy this book to learn about Lisa Shannon (No offense intended to her) and the parts about her fiance, the man named "D", and her father's death were not necessary and didn't interest me. 2. More in depth information would be nice about the African people's beliefs and culture. Why are they in the situation they are in? What made them this way? I not only want their sob stories, but I want to know what is going thru their heads. I found myself thinking, "Ok.. You are broke, you have eight children and one in the womb and why do you keep this up, woman? Four of your children will be raped and suffer fistula and the other four will probably rape and pillage to save their own sorry arses." I dont' get it. What is going on in their heads? I read the political stuff, I want the personal stuff. 3. I realize Lisa Shannon and the others are trying to help the women of Congo, but is making the women dependent on the U.S. dollar the answer? Anyone ever heard the saying, "Give a man a fish, feed him for day. Teach him how to fish, feed him for a lifetime..?"

Potential readers need to be prepared for some violent and sad stories in this one.

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## **Charlotte says**

I simply can't watch horror movies or read Stephen King books but I can and do read books about real people and real events that are far more horrifying than fiction. The tears they bring remind me that I am still human

- one very, very lucky human. "A Thousand Sisters" is not a long book but the story is moving, sad and, hopefully, inspirational.

Reading "Half the Sky" which laid bare the atrocities women around the world are suffering and the work that is being taken on by NGOs spurred me to sponsor two "sisters" of my own, one in Rwanda and one in the Congo, through Women for Women International [<http://www.womenforwomen.org/>]. In "A Thousand Sisters" Lisa Shannon, first exposed to Women for Women's work on the Oprah show, takes the reader on her own journey from exposure of the plight of women on Oprah through raising funds and awareness to sponsor, literally, a thousand sisters in the Congo to her own dangerous journeys to this "worst place on earth to be a woman" to meet her sisters and to see first-hand what these women face. The tale is graphic, emotional and difficult at times to read but we all need to know and make known what much of the world ignores about the lives of these strong women raising children under the most appalling circumstances. Please read both "Half the Sky" and "A Thousand Sisters" - yes, you will cry and may find it very difficult to continue but feeling a tiny bit of their pain is a small price to pay to broaden our perspective and help us help them.

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### **Carolyn Carrier says**

I'm...fairly conflicted about this book, but I think most of my issues stem from the writing style and its deficiencies--I'm hoping some things just don't come across in the reading. I should start by saying that I think this is an excellent book for an introduction to the atrocities of the Congo if you're still uninformed. It is a huge, horrific problem that has not garnered nearly enough international attention and help (perhaps because the Congo isn't known for its oil surplus?). In many respects, this is an eye-opening and necessary read, and it should also be said that, despite my issues with her, Lisa Shannon was an advocate for the Congo when almost no one else was, and she should be commended for her pioneering work.

Having said that, the tone of this memoir is often off-putting. Lisa goes to the Congo intent on bonding with her sponsored "sisters," and is otherwise unprepared for the reality of abject poverty and systematic rape, torture, and murder. She writes as if completely unaware of her privilege as a white woman from the United States--she is put off by the Congolese women's constant asking for more money and treating her like a *muzunga* (essentially a well-off white person who can help them), wanting to really revel in her Oprah moment of sharing and crying with them. It comes off *incredibly* narcissistic and naive. And never mind that despite hating being treated like a *muzunga*, she constantly acts like one--bringing money and trinkets to every village (a welcomed act, it should be noted, but certainly one that marks her as a fount of giving), intervening in a mother's decision to listen to her child's doctors when they say there is nothing else to do for him (again, heartwarming in the end, but smacks of the "I'm the white, civilized person here and *I know what's best for you.*"), etc. The most appalling anecdote to me was when she received a village gift of a goat--Shannon is a vegetarian herself (again, a choice she is able to make because of privilege) and does not want to eat the goat, but is touched by the gesture, considering how expensive the animal must have been. The villagers expect her to appreciate the goat and want to have a celebratory feast. Shannon, in an act of what she tries to pass off as selflessness, gifts the goat to the village. She then, in an oblivious act of privilege, tells the villagers that this goat is special, and that they are never to eat it. Now clearly, as a vegetarian, the thought of killing an animal for any purpose is certain to make her squeamish. But she had *just* marveled at the poor villagers' generosity, knowing full well how long someone has to work to buy a goat, and then had the AUDACITY to proclaim that she, as a Very Important White Girl, deems this goat sacred, and they can never ever ever put it to its sorely needed use, even when she's long gone and back in her comfortable, air conditioned house in Portland? If you're not tasting bile by this point, I'm surprised.

So, all in all, I suppose I can recommend the book as long as you take it with a hefty pinch of salt and are prepared to deal with the short-sightedness of the author.

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### **Eileen Souza says**

This is the best book that I have read on the struggles in the Congo. I'll admit that I am biased, because I sponsor a woman in the Congo through Women For Women Int., and participate in the annual Run For Congo Women in Tempe, AZ each year. However, I believe that Lisa did an excellent job of sharing the true story of the conflict in the Congo and it's impact on people - even when it meant showing her own weakness/embarassments/mistakes as she attempts to change the way that women are treated in the Congo.

The things that I found most interesting were the number and variety of local militias, their control for power, and the subsequent impacts on the local people who they are "protecting". I was most concerned with the cultural taboo on saying anything bad about another Congolese person - so that the people translating would actually change who the players were to "protect" the local militias. If Lisa hadn't been actively listening to the original speaker, she would have missed that crucial piece of the puzzle - if people are saying that different groups are torturing them, how does the rest of the world combat the people who really are torturing them? This isn't to say that Rwandan Interhamwe aren't doing horrible things - but they aren't the only ones.

I thought overall the book was presented in a very easy to read/understand. It had lots of information, but was not like reading a history or text book. It was the true story of a woman who knows something horrible is going on across the world, and feels a need to make as much of a difference as she can there.

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### **Sabrina Rutter says**

I had a hard time understanding this book at first. I'm not really into politics at all, so I have no real concept of anything of that nature. The beginning of the book gives an indepth description of the politics surrounding the war in the Congo, but for someone like me it was rather confusing, and I admit boring. I pushed through it though and as I read I began to really grasp everything.

I have to warn you that this book will make you cry. Lisa tried to keep this book "clean" (without adding a bunch of indepth descriptions of the gore), but she gives enough to make ones imagination run wild with the mildly told real life horror stories. I say mild, but theirs nothing mild about them really. I just imagine that hearing all the details would be far worse than the brief descriptions we read about throughout, so mild is the only way I can really say it. The stories are still enough to rip your heart out and tear it to shreds.

After reading this book I feel so useless. The problems in the Congo are so massive I don't know how these people will ever recover a normal lifestyle again. I'm sick inside to know how evil this world is. Innocent people are killed for not having salt, or money. To some in the Congo, salt is more precious than human life. Lisa explains why all of this is happening in the Congo, and yet there's still a bunch of why's left that go unanswered.

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### **Angie says**

There is a life that women in Congo live that is so horrific, I'm still numb from reading about it, and I haven't

been able to even partially fathom what i read about. Rape is a cultural norm in Congo. Rape, and murder. I thought about this while i was in the process reading the book, as I drove my car down a safe street late at night, as I rode my bike down a safe path in the middle of the day, as I sat in my living room and felt secure that my house would not be stormed, I would not be dragged out and kidnapped as a sex slave, nor would my loved ones be tortured and murdered right in front of me.

I could not cry during the reading of it; I'm not sure I would have been able to stop.

I am deeply disappointed that all the footage that the author took on her visits to Congo did not get used in a documentary. This story, as horrific as it is, needs to be--MUST be--told. However, there is the documentary, The Greatest Silence: Rape in Congo. I think I should combine the information from that with what the book provided and try for a less numb and shocked response, and more of a active and helpful one.

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### **Eileen Oviatt says**

I was really hoping I'd like this book, but I can't even begin to say that I did. This was such a self-centered book that barely touched on the surface of what should be a very poignant topic. Every time Shannon came close to describing something about her experience, it was ruined with her personal feelings - that really don't add a thing to (and often take away from) the book. The worst point was when Shannon described another's "white girl angst" when this book is nothing but her own "white girl angst."

The book was peppered with personal relationship information that really had no reason to be in the book. I understand that this is a memoir, but the topic is far more important than the author's journey in this case. I wish that Shannon, the publisher, anyone had realized this before publication.

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### **Louise says**

Many cringe on reports of genocide, starvation, mutilation, etc. Their sympathy/empathy might be engaged, but few do anything about it. Upon learning of the plight of the women of the Congo, Lisa Shannon made a commitment to do something to help them.

After organizing marathon fund raisers in the US, Lisa went to the Congo. I was thrilled to see that the money she raised went right to the needs since it appears that Women for Women has almost no administrative costs. That this charity is working and succeeding is the one of the few rays of light in the book.

Lisa connects with the women she has sponsored; she describes their lives and tells some of their stories. She visits other NGOs and service groups. On pp.90-91 there is a very revealing confession of a former militia fighter. He was taken as a child and coerced into burning villages and other atrocities. The plight of Generose, one of Lisa's sponsored sisters, is told on pp. 150-1 and is the saddest most horrible experience I have ever read.

The book shows how the needs of the women in the Congo are huge. Everyone is hungry. Many need medical attention. Many women need surgery for fistula, (a horrible condition I had never heard of before) which often occurs after a brutal rape usually involving a large or sharp object. Everyone needs a safe place

to live. A cow or a goat can make a huge difference in a family's standard of living.

The contrast in the living environment and attitude of the Congolese and those staying at the Orchid Safari Club shown as is how difficult it is to adjust to life in the US when you have been exposed to this other world. When Lisa speaks to US audiences, her sponsors often censor her remarks since unvarnished experiences are too raw for their audiences.

This book helps to call attention to a war, that dwarfs any recent conflict, yet receives very little news coverage in the US. I salute Lisa and others who bravely and selflessly work to alleviate the lives of people like those in this book.

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## **Linda says**

This is a chronicle of horrors. Lisa Shannon, a successful filmmaker from Portland,OR, videotaped interviews with Congolese women who have suffered atrocities beyond imagining. Her interviews, translated as the women spoke, were, according to the author's note in the front of the book, transcribed directly from video for this book. Shannon, who gave up a thriving career to plunge herself into a war zone founded RUN FOR CONGO WOMEN. This organization funds sponsorship for Congolese women to return to some normalcy after losing everything in ghastly war situations. This "run" is designed to educate us all, as our "sisters" collect pledges in a sponsored running event, of which all profits go to the women in the Congo. Shannon's efforts as well as backing from Oprah Winfrey, Alice Walker and other well-known folks have shed light upon the scantily publicized genocide in Congo. Lisa Ling, a journalist, has called "... Eastern Congo, 'The worst place on earth. And the most ignored.'" Shannon's knowledge of the situation in Congo began with an Oprah Winfrey show where Zainab Salbi, Founder of the Washington D.C.- based nonprofit WOMEN FOR WOMEN INTERNATIONAL appeared with Lisa Ling. Ling gives a short history of the conflict in the Congo starting with the 1994 Rwandan genocide. WOMEN FOR WOMEN haven's are where Shannon often visits with the women who have been ravaged. This organization's website [www.womenforwomen.org](http://www.womenforwomen.org) may be accessed to sponsor a Congolese woman for \$27.00 a month. Shannon's idea of running (biking, swimming or whatever) for Congo involves asking 12 friends to join you on a short run, each pitching in \$30.00. ([WWW.RUNFORCONGOWOMEN.ORG](http://WWW.RUNFORCONGOWOMEN.ORG)) Other ideas for getting money to Congo women are included in Shannon's book under a section WHAT YOU CAN DO FOR CONGO RIGHT NOW. Reading this book in a book group and then watching Shannon's film THE GREATEST SILENCE: RAPE IN THE CONGO might be an informative and generous evening spent giving ourselves to the our sisters in the Congo.

P.S.

I found this information on a comment by Penny responding to a somewhat negative review by Tara, about this book:

Here's an interesting graph from the Worldwatch Institute depicting what the world spends on luxury items vs how much is needed for essentials for all: The website is

Table 1-6: Annual Expenditure On Luxury Items Compared With Funding Needed To Meet Selected Basic Needs

| Product | Annual Expenditure | Social or Economic Goal | Additional Annual Investment Needed to Achieve Goal |
|---------|--------------------|-------------------------|---|
|---------|--------------------|-------------------------|---|

|        |              |  |              |
|--------|--------------|--|--------------|
| Makeup | \$18 billion | Reproductive health care for all women | \$12 billion |
|--------|--------------|--|--------------|

Pet food in Europe and United States \$17 billion Elimination of hunger and malnutrition \$19 billion  
Perfumes \$15 billion Universal literacy \$5 billion  
Ocean cruises \$14 billion Clean drinking water for all \$10 billion  
Ice cream in Europe \$11 billion Immunizing every child \$1.3 billion

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### **Christina Mitchell says**

I have difficulty reading memoirs of Western women experiencing the reality of violence in the global South. I have no right to say this, mind you. I am a Western woman...a white woman on top of that. I tread lightly in what I am about to say, mainly because I know that I could be labeled a hypocrite. With that danger in mind, I will proceed to trumpet the efforts and determination of Congolese women. I have been to the eastern Kivu provinces and while I learned much, what I learned most of all is that Western women need to stop depicting Congolese women as victims. Shannon's account does bring out the strength of women...but not the strength that shows that Congolese women are organized, they do fight against what is happening, they do rescue each other, they are capable of running NGO's, hospitals, schools, food pantries...all without manipulating and asking for money in a constant stream as Shannon writes. I want to scream at the top of my lungs to Eve Ensler, Alice Walker, and others to STOP!!!!!! Congolese women have always been politically active and committedly strong throughout the country's long history of adversity. There are AMAZING grassroots women's organizations that are struggling to compete with Shannon, Oxfam, Doctors Without Borders, and other Western-run, international orgs for money. The DRC is the country of the Congolese...they insist they have the knowledge and the ability to stop the war and rebuild. That is the story I want to hear. I want to hear about the Congolese women in Portland, Oregon (THEY ARE THERE, I HAVE SPOKEN WITH THEM, THEY HAVE ORGANIZED TO HELP THEIR FRIENDS AND FAMILY BACK HOME), who have organized to run a marathon to send money to the DRC - not Shannon. Strangely, Congolese organizations in the U.S. are never heard from. Perplexing to say the least.

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### **Lisa says**

I found this book took a long time to read, not because of the difficulty of the text (the author wrote in a very accesible style) but because of the content. I found I had to set it down frequently and digest what I had read. With that said, it isn't necessarily gory, but shocking in it's brutality. We need to be aware of what is happening to people in other parts of the world. I can't fathom why we accept the evening news reporting on celebrity gossip (Tiger Woods, Michael Jackson, Anna Nicole Smith, et. al.) when there is actual news to report. Thank goodness for Lisa Shannon and her willingness to visit Congo and come back to share what she found there. Once you know we can't turn away, no matter how uncomfortable we feel. Ms. Shannon humanized statistics and has given us all a call to action.

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### **Genna says**

I can say with confidence that this is one of the most abysmal books I've ever read. I read this last year and am just now writing a review on account of how angry it made me. If you're looking for a prime example of self-important white people traveling to war-torn nations they know nothing about to save the helpless,



suffering villagers with their money and whiteness, this is the book for you. Our great hero sees an Oprah special on the brutalities taking place in the DR of the Congo and decides she is the perfect person to make a difference in this dark place! Lisa Shannon raises some money by running 30 miles and then sets off for a dangerous country she knows nothing about and doesn't speak one word of the language in order to save the Congolese women by giving out hugs and cash. Tack onto this a few poorly translated and butchered Swahili phrases that she was too lazy to check the spelling of and a seemingly endless list of specific atrocities she essentially bullies women into revealing to her and we arrive at Shannon's dismal, embarrassing memoir.

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## **Elizabeth says**

This read a bit like the Congo version of “eat, pray, love”. Although in Lisa Shannon’s defense, she’s not nearly as self absorbed as Elizabeth Gilbert. I read this book after I was turned off by “half the sky” and wanted to read a book that would educate me about sex trafficking and violence against women. This book did a fair job, but I can’t help but brace myself against the inevitable ethnocentricity of the author. Please stop using names and pictures to document these women’s stories. They deserve privacy and respect. Also, she should’ve eliminated the anecdotes from her personal life. No one was reading it to hear about her life or even reaction to the things she saw and heard. I was hoping for a more journalistic documentary of the Congolese problem. But got more of a voluntourism account. I know it’s a hard line to walk, but Catherine Boo does an excellent job in the book, “behind the beautiful forever”, so I know it can be done. I couldn’t help but wonder what her purpose or goals were/are to help. Simply offering money is supremely helpful and has been documented by researchers studying the most effective humanitarian efforts, but it felt a bit exploitive when she just goes there and takes their pictures and asks their stories as if they owe it to her and their sponsors. What was the purpose? It didn’t even seem like Relaying the information to us as readers was the purpose. Maybe the problem was that she isn’t a writer or a journalist, but in this case, it might have been better to outsource the writing.

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## **Kelly says**

Shannon did a really valuable thing, but, I can't help but see how self serving it is. She did pull herself out of a depression by helping others, but the whole fact she keeps emphasizing that it was from Oprah was just weird to me. It never felt authentic in the way that Greg Mortenson was authentic in his quests. The writing in this book is terribly disorganized and disconnected. A co-writer would have made this a more enjoyable read. As it is, I couldn't even read it through to the end, but instead, I skimmed. I got her points immediately. It's a shame, since I'm sure there's good content buried in there somewhere.

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