

A Conversation with Lenuta Hellen Nadolu

AUTHOR OF 'GIVE ME COURAGE'



1. What initially motivated or inspired you to write Give Me Courage?

My story could be anyone's story, man, woman or child. It is a story of resilience, of never losing faith. I share with readers, my experiences and the lessons I learned from those who nourished me with love, from those who cared for me and from those who taught me how to find my way through hardship without losing the sight of my path and my final destination. I cried, I laughed, I fell and I rose many times, but one thing I always held close to my heart is my faith in life and in humanity. Where there is a will, there is a way. I just needed to find my path.

In today's world there are many who are struggling and it is easy to lose hope, to give up. I hope that Give Me Courage will simply inspire other people, particularly women, to keep reaching, keep striving. I want to encourage people to not lose faith in themselves, or in the basic goodness of others.

2. Was it difficult to relive the painful memories from the past when writing the book or have you come to terms with them?

The most difficult aspect was bringing my long-buried memories, my childhood memories, to the fore. A theme that flows through my book is how my formative years have provided the foundation of my life, of the person I am today. Reliving my buried memories, I realised just how powerful the human mind is. The struggles and challenges I experienced from early childhood have provided me with a reservoir of emotional strength and mental resilience needed to find my personal freedom in a distinctly patriarchal culture, to get through the ordeal of divorce in such a societal setting, to endure discrimination, and to settle as a refugee in a country like Australia. The memories are painful, but they have also been keys to my success.

A Conversation with Lenuta Hellen Nadolu

AUTHOR OF 'GIVE ME COURAGE'

3. **What was your most pivotal moment? When you knew that your life needed to change, must change, would change.**

It began the moment I found the letter in Victor' s briefcase. My fear that, like my mother, I was destined to become just one of many women became my reality. Given Ghanaian society's acceptance of polygamy and extramarital affairs, I would be expected to play the loyal wife and bear my husband's infidelities with good grace. I knew I could never do that.

4. **Do you ever think of yourself as two separate people – the Lenuta of the past and the Lenuta of today?**

Yes, very much so! My life is in two separate compartments, one before and one after I arrived in Australia. Looking back in time, the birth of the second compartment was defined by the strong feeling I had once I stepped on the Australian soil, the need to cut ties with my past. In the first compartment is a tumultuous life where I had to face insurmountable obstacles and in the second compartment it feels as the Universe poured the blessings of good life over me and my children.

At times my past still revisits me. I still have nightmares about trying to find my way out of a confined situation, and once I wake up, I feel nothing but gratitude to the country of Australia for giving my children and myself opportunities beyond our dreams. I feel gratitude toward our friends for lending us a helping hand and gratitude to the Universe for the gift of the beautiful life my family and I are fortunate to have.

5. **If you could go back and impart words of wisdom to your younger self, what would you say?**

Remain strong, stay determined, be loving and forgiving as the winds of fate sometimes blow you away. Regain your strength at the end of each passing storm. One of my favorite quotes is by the author Charles Dickens: "Have a heart that never hardens; a temper that never tires; a touch that never hurts."

A Conversation with Lenuta Hellen Nadolu

AUTHOR OF 'GIVE ME COURAGE'

6. **When you look at the world we live in today versus the one you grew up in, what do you make of issue of such as gender equality, racism and cultural bias in today's society?**

It is impossible to compare both worlds, the one I grew up in and the one I live in today. My experiences are a reflection of the extremes of both worlds, in terms of tolerance and acceptance of gender equality, racism and cultural bias. The painful memories in the world I grew up give me a deeper appreciation for the beautiful world I live in today.

From an early age I had to learn to advance through a society that did not tolerate a different skin colour, a different mother tongue and a different life style. As young as I was, my curiosity of why those differences were not accepted led me on my own path of learning through hardship, fighting prejudice, tradition and patriarchy. I was born and raised in communist Romania, where women were supposed to know their place while men learned from an early age that they were "important people" based solely on their gender. Boys were favoured and girls were told to stand back. Gender equality was a foreign concept in our culture but despite that I displayed a strong resistance to the inequality. I learned that standing up for my rights as a girl and then as woman can have dire consequences. Filled with determination and the willingness to endure I persevered in the face of great loss. Romanian society has a strong racist element running through it, maintaining one of the worst cases of social stigma in Europe, it's long-lasting and far reaching, touching people in a way that no other disgrace does. While in Romania my children were subjected to destructive racism. I couldn't tolerate it when they were spat on and called 'black crows' by my own people. In 1984, I fled to Australia where I claimed political asylum, and where I was able to build a new life for my children.

7. **Are you still hopeful and optimistic about the future?**

Yes, I am! I believe in the power of the human spirit and the goodness of others. By bringing awareness to social issues the gap between the abuser and the abused can be bridged. It is our social responsibility. Racism, discrimination and gender inequality have always being present. The degrees of the intensity and acceptance of such behaviour vary from race to race, culture to culture

A Conversation with Lenuta Hellen Nadolu

AUTHOR OF 'GIVE ME COURAGE'

and country to country. I hope that by interracial mixing we will come to understand that cultural differences can either unite us or divide us, can enrich our knowledge or deplete our knowledge, it is a choice we all make.

8. Was there ever a time when you resented your parents; particularly your mother for not being a stronger woman in terms of standing up for herself and her children?

At times I felt pain and disappointment but never resentment towards my parents. I wish I'd had a stronger mother who would have stood up for herself and her children, but at the same time, deep within myself, I felt and still feel that she did her very best considering her circumstances. With her lack of confidence and her untreated depression, most times she seemed physically and emotionally drained, her strength was missing. When faced with adversity, the thought of taking her own life was often present and verbalised. I still carry a vivid childhood memory of nights spent sitting by my window in terror, fearing my own mother would walk down to the family shed and end her own life.

My father became the center of my world once we moved to Bucharest. Having been taken away from maternal grandmother, he was filling the empty emotional spaces created by that separation, lavishing me with hugs and kisses. I trusted his love and his affection until the day he believed his mistress instead of me. I talk about this in the book, the horrible way she treated me. It was the first time I saw my father's anger directed towards me and his accusing words, "Why are you lying to me?" shattered my heart. In that moment, even though I was only five, I knew that something in my relationship with my father had been broken and would never be repaired. His betrayal left an emotional painful scar, but not bitterness.

9. What about men – how do you view them, and the issue of gender equality?

My view is that men and women should receive equal treatment and should not be discriminated against based on gender. I feel that gender equality is a birthright of us all and we all should be able to access and enjoy the same rewards, resources and opportunities. Unfortunately gender inequality has been around for thousands of years and it manifests itself differently according to race, culture, politics, country and economic situation and it is

A Conversation with Lenuta Hellen Nadolu

AUTHOR OF 'GIVE ME COURAGE'

also a factor of violence against women. Fortunately considerable attention to the issue of gender inequality is now being given at the international level by organisations such as the United Nations. I feel privileged to have been asked to be the guest speaker at the UNHCR charity lunch hosted last October 2014 in Sydney, Australia, in support for woman and girls in the Democratic Republic of Congo. My wish is that my story gives hope to those who believe in the sanctity of human rights for women all over the world. We must work together. Men must show more support for women in this area, and women must help other women.

- 10. Do you ever think the career you chose, cosmetology, was impacted by your own experience? Making woman look good so that they can feel strong and confident.**

I never thought of my career choice in this light! I think you are right! I believe that feeling good comes from inside but it is important for women to love what they see in the mirror. I love mirrors!

- 11. How has your life experience impacted the way you raised your own children, particularly your daughter?**

Education was the top of my priority list followed by hard work, respect and gratitude. Watching me working hard, six to seven days a weeks, most times 12 hours daily building my business, my children learned to look after themselves and after each other. They are all financially independent and secure providing for themselves. I taught them to always keep self-respect close to their hearts and regardless of the adversities they face on their path to always maintain faith in life, living and in the goodness of others.

- 12. You have two beautiful granddaughters. What is your hope for their future and the society that they will grow up in?**

I hope that by watching their strong, determined and loving mother they will follow in her footsteps. That they will always be free to follow their dreams and live in a world where they are not limited by gender or discriminated by race, religion or culture. We try as a family to maintain values and principles which hopefully will be passed on to them.