

EXCERPT FROM

**The Only Way
is Up**

**The Journey of
an Immigrant**

Folake Taylor

EXCERPT

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INTRODUCTION

I always have a lot to say. My mind is never idle and I have an opinion about everything, though I do not always express it. So I thought to myself, what better way to let it all out? Bingo, I will write that book people always said I need to write sometime in this life. The only problem is that being an incurable optimist—like Michael J. Fox—I have vague recollections of the bad times and very vivid ones of the good times. And no, I do not live in a bubble!

My dilemma:

“Will I be able to sound authentic?”

“Will people believe me or will they think I had life too easy and they cannot relate to me?”

It is hard for me to paint a clear picture of the challenging times but I will do my best, to give my story balance. I don't see myself as an authority on anything. This is not exactly an autobiography as I see no special reason for anyone to be interested in the story of my life since I am just regular like the next person. I do however draw on my life somewhat to explain my viewpoints. It's what I describe as *my mind unleashed*—mostly day to day life issues, controversial issues, politics, religion or spirituality and right versus wrong. This is from my perspective of course, which is also more often than not, a Christian outlook.

I hope someone somewhere finds something enlightening in this book. I write in a laid back manner which is mostly the way I think.

I grew up mostly in England and Nigeria and was a well traveled young person because my parents believed it was part of education. This gives me a slightly different and possibly well rounded angle on most things.

I am no Oprah or Suze Orman by any means but I may just touch somebody. I am also work in progress. There are a lot of issues that bother me on a daily basis that are

problems in our society. We are very similar yet different. It just depends on the issue but balance and compromise are pivotal. We can all learn from one another.

I love this country. That is why I live here. I want to effect changes in my community, in the United States, maybe the world someday. I in no way feel superior to anybody and do not want to be misunderstood as such, or as talking down to anyone. I say this because I hear negative comments about Bill Cosby—who by the way is an amazing leader and example—anytime he ventures to state the bitter truth, about the black community especially. Yet we cannot start to make progress if we do not accept where we are wrong. There is a popular saying that half of solving a problem is in acknowledging it even exists.

My book is intended to promote a lot of *old fashioned* family values. Just the other day a twenty-nine year old man from Knoxville Tennessee on minimum wage set a United States record for number of kids. He has twenty-one kids by eleven different *baby-mamas* and his name was on the court docket eleven times for child support issues—children’s ages ranged from eleven months to eleven years. Since the court can only take fifty percent of what he makes, each child can only get about two dollars a month from him at the end of the day. So that leaves the burden on the system and our tax payer dollars once again. Those are the kind of issues that make me ask myself, “How did it get so bad?” and “What can I do to help?”

I also want to bring hope to anyone who needs it that wherever you are in life, there is room for improvement. You can be better and you can have a better life. And these are not going to be things you never heard of by any means, at least not all of it. But it may be a slightly different view. It may serve to reinforce what you already knew or just be the reality check you needed to be more determined to implement these changes.

I tell it like it is much to my detriment at times. One thing you can be sure of in the pages of this book is my brutal honesty.

Who am I?

I CAME TO this country with three hundred dollars to my name! Even though I had graduated from medical school and been through one year of rotational internship in my country of origin, the exchange rate of our currency to the dollar left much to be desired and my pocket wanting. After paying for my airline ticket to the United States and stopping over in my country of birth for a week, that was all that was left. Little did I know that people depended on cars so much in the United States. This is quite unlike the situation in Europe and other places where affordable public transportation is the main means of transport.

I had a place to live rent free for a while and I was told to come with a low maintenance hairstyle, as black hair is expensive to maintain. This incidentally is where I am now with the hair—full circle with what I call my *wash ‘n’ go* hair! What I was not told however was that I could not get anywhere without a car in much of the Atlanta metro area. This was a matter of necessity and not a choice, as buses in the suburbs are non-existent or sparse at best.

I need to make one distinction here. My country of birth is the United Kingdom and that is the citizenship with which I made my entry into this country. And while that helped me in some situations, it did nothing for my immigration status. I was just another non-American.

I was born in Birmingham. Not in Alabama but in the West Midlands in the United Kingdom to Nigerian born parents while my father was studying for his doctorate in the seventies, thus making Nigeria my country of origin and giving me dual citizenship. Alright, it is not the usual *rags to riches* story and I am by no means the first person in my family to get an education. It was never rags but

there were no riches either. Education was not the problem. It was a plan. I was going to have an education. But how many people have done all the right things and not only did it not translate to financial success, it also meant a lot of debt? I am sure you know several if you're not one yourself. And in this economy, it is hard to catch up with any significant debt. I found myself in that boat.

As I came into this country, I effectively dropped from middle to lower class and stayed there for at least three years if not more. The glory does not come easy. There are no handouts. You have to work for it. I had experienced something close initially when I graduated from medical school in Nigeria and had moved to another city. For the first time, I had my old car by myself and had to pay bills, buy groceries and clothes, do my hair, pay for insurance, buy gas and fix the car when it broke. I quickly realized I could not afford the life I had previously lived on the allowance from my parents. I could always take food and other things from home in addition to my allowance. But now I had a real job, not a summer job. I was a big girl and I had to act like it. The reality of a drop in my standard of living however was nothing like when I moved to the United States. That was a jolt, the real reality check.

I love to help people. I help people directly for a living in fact. I also have always loved to write. So, maybe I can do both! Maybe I can be of assistance to people through my writing. I have spent a considerable amount of time on *facebook* and *twitter* in recent times discussing controversial issues and shedding light on various situations, though the jury is still out on *twitter*. I might as well channel that energy to my number one goal of helping to uplift people....

I did not pursue that fleeting thought of majoring in Psychology or even of specializing in Psychiatry after

medical school but I manage to find time to counsel sobbing patients out of the ten to fifteen minute allotted visit time. It almost feels like I draw patients who need to sob nowadays. They really do come to me to tell me what is wrong in their life and appreciate my input. It is a blessing, and I do not take the gift for granted. Some patients chose—or at least try—to stop going to their Psychiatrist because they feel I help them that much. I have to urge them to trust me on this because their Psychiatrist painstakingly invested several years in specializing in that field!

I decided to write this book as I lay in bed at the Normandie in San Juan, Puerto Rico beside my twenty month old who was *out cold* after a busy day out and about, as my husband watched the Lakers versus Denver semi-finals NBA game in the lobby. So, there I was watching *Larry King Live*, barely able to hear so as not to wake little Jordan.

Three females—Cheryl Sabang, Lisa Ling and Della Reese—were in the studio with Larry King on a panel and many others weighed in by satellite. Deepak Chopra and Lisa Nichols were also part of the discussion. The topic was *Women & Self Worth: Defining One's Self Could Be the Key to Complete Success*. They spoke my mind. It was no coincidence.

I started my first chapter on my blackberry right there. We had no laptop that weekend as my husband would not bring one, so as to really be off work!

Incidentally, earlier that same day in San Juan, I had taken many pictures of my husband and our little girl. And even as I was taking those pictures and watching the dynamics of their interaction, I had given a lot of thought to confidence and self worth with regard to our little girl and how happy and content she was most of the time. I thought about how to maintain that contentment as well as her father's role as her protector. I had pictured in my mind

how he would be the one to primarily teach her how to *hold her own* in dealing with any man—how to hold her head up high and command respect from a man, from anybody. He would show her as my father did me, how it feels to be treated like a lady, thus raising the bar so that she will never settle for less.

All the while, I was trying to envision his role in her future success through the confidence he can instill in her, which helps to buttress what I teach her about being a woman. This is because it all begins with believing in herself. The sense of self worth we help instill will breed confidence which then translates to success. When others see that confidence, they will believe in her. I have never lacked confidence or believed there was something I couldn't do if I put my heart to it. I was raised that way.

I had thought about how I intended to raise her to believe everything was possible and even the sky is not the limit. I have a confession. I stole that line from my brother. He always said since the age of sixteen:

“The sky is not the limit.”

He came up with an idea for a company at eighteen when he graduated from university as a Computer Engineer. That company is *Antigravity*. Yes, my brother is a genius—I can accept that.

I remember some quotes from *Larry King Live* that night even as I could barely hear the discussion. Thankfully there was also an online transcript. Here are a few of the more memorable quotes:

“It's important for a woman to be able to say, ‘I can take care of myself completely.’ That way, everything else is a gift.”

—Lisa Ling

Author and Oprah show correspondent

“Be yourself. Whoever you are, be that. Don't try to be something to make somebody else aware of you. Don't try

to be something to make somebody else appreciate you. Just be you, because you're unique. There's not another like me and never will be. And if you like what I got, you got to come to me to get it, 'cause ain't nobody else got none of it.”

–Della Reese

Author, singer and ordained minister

“I believe that we are the first examples of how the world is supposed to treat us. That the way that I treat myself, the way that I view myself, the way that I love on myself or the way that I choose not to love on myself, I'm an example to how others can and will treat me. And most of the time, we walk around as women looking for others to validate us and to validate who we are. And it's not until we fall in love with ourselves and then we become the example to others of how they're supposed to love us that the world will really begin to honor and celebrate us. We are the first examples. That's what self worth is about.”

–Lisa Nichols

Humanitarian, motivational speaker and author

Lisa Ling had this to say about herself—she struggles to let her husband do anything for her, even pay for a meal! That is one extreme. But then she did describe herself as a *fierce feminist*. We are a product of where we have been. Something made her that way.

Now, am I the only person that noticed each of these women is an author? Well, I just joined them!

My parents raised me to feel I could fly—and I do love the song *I believe I can fly* though I cannot say the same for the artist behind it, R. Kelly. I could walk into a room and be the only female or the only black person and not even really notice. It is obviously not a strange thing to be the only African in the building.

If anyone ever tries to put me down or make me feel less than what I am, I immediately retort with an

appropriate and fierce answer. I do this of course, without actually being *ugly* to the person. It is this kind of confidence that can make me pick myself up, buy a ticket and move out here as a single unattached female with all of my immediate family back in Nigeria. It did not matter. I could face anything.

And that is why it baffles me when I see some Americans who are hale and hearty that have no idea how to take advantage of the vast opportunity this country has to offer. This subclass of Americans instead capitalize on a sense of entitlement and just sit back and let the system take care of them. For many, it's an attitude that has been passed down to them and they are unaware it is possible to live a different and better life.

Unlike many families in the United States, I did not know many single parent families when I grew up. I definitely knew some but it was not even nearly the norm and mostly it would be because a parent had died. I will touch more on how and why this is a big problem later on.

And I believe this concludes my first chapter, typed up on my blackberry. That by the way, is light years from the lady who came to this country in May of the year 2000—exactly nine years ago—without a personal email address or ever owning a personal computer. I was literally petrified of the one my parents had at home. I definitely did not own any cell phone then.

The fact that my mother is a writer may somewhere in my subconscious have something to do with it—Mary E. Modupe Kolawole, author of *Womanism and African Consciousness*. Maybe this is my destiny!

I have to stop for now however. I have bilateral carpal tunnel syndrome and this kind of restricted repetitive motion is exactly what the doctor did not recommend!