



A
*Thousand
Sisters*

MY JOURNEY INTO THE WORST PLACE
ON EARTH TO BE A WOMAN

LISA J. SHANNON

Foreword by Zainab Salbi

founder of Women for Women International



SEAL PRESS



MORE PRAISE FOR

A Thousand Sisters

AND

LISA J. SHANNON

“*A Thousand Sisters* brings to unforgettable life dozens of the women and girls caught in the crosshairs of the worst, and most underreported, humanitarian catastrophe of our time. It takes us into a literal heart of darkness on a personal journey that is by turns enchanting and chilling, always achingly honest, and never less than beautifully reported and wrenchingly true. Lisa Shannon’s brave book helps teach us how to care, and why.”

—LISA F. JACKSON, PRODUCER/DIRECTOR,
THE GREATEST SILENCE: RAPE IN THE CONGO

“Lisa Shannon’s beautifully written memoir is for anyone who thinks one person can’t make a difference in the world. A page turning read, *A Thousand Sisters* could inspire the biggest skeptic. Hard to put down.”

—EMILY DESCHANEL, ACTRESS AND ACTIVIST

“*A Thousand Sisters* asks the question, ‘Can one person get off her couch and touch the lives of those in need on the other side of the world?’ This memoir answers, with poignancy and passion, ‘Yes, she can!’”

—JERRY FOWLER, PRESIDENT, SAVE DARFUR COALITION

A THOUSAND SISTERS
My Journey Into the Worst Place on Earth to be a Woman

Copyright © 2010 by Lisa J. Shannon

Page 225. Komunyakaa, Yusef. © 1998
“You and I Are Disappearing,” from *Dien Cai Dau*.
Reprinted with permission by Wesleyan University Press.

Published by
Seal Press
A Member of the Perseus Books Group
1700 Fourth Street
Berkeley, California

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form without written permission from the publisher, except by reviewers who may quote brief excerpts in connection with a review.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Shannon, Lisa, 1975-

A thousand sisters : my journey of hope into the worst place on earth
to be a woman / by Lisa Shannon.

p. cm.

ISBN-13: 978-1-58005-296-2

ISBN-10: 1-58005-296-7

1. Shannon, Lisa, 1975- 2. Women and war—Congo (Democratic Republic)
3. Women refugees—Congo (Democratic Republic) 4. War victims—Congo
(Democratic Republic) 5. Civil war—Congo (Democratic Republic) 6.
Humanitarian assistance, American—Congo (Democratic Republic) I.
Title.

HQ1805.5.S53 2010


305.9'0695082096751—dc22

2009025391

9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Cover and interior design by Domini Dragoone
Printed in the United States by Edwards Brothers
Distributed by Publishers Group West

FOR CONGO'S COUNTLESS QUIET HEROES
AND
STEWART SHANNON,
MY FATHER AND NOW SILENT GUIDE



When we stood close
Together and your eyes
Looked into my
Eyes, I felt that
Invisible
Threads passed from
Your eyes into
My eyes and
Bound our hearts
Together.

When you left me, and journeyed across
The sea, it was as
If fine threads still united us,
And they were tearing at the wound.

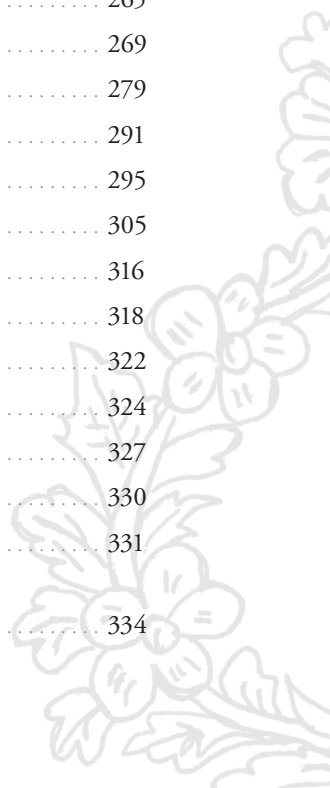
BY EDVARD MUNCH



Contents

	Foreword	10
	Author's Note	15
INTRODUCTION	Congo in a Nutshell	17
ONE	Congo Rushes	21
TWO	The Greenest Grass	27
THREE	Sometimes Death is More Like a Labor	31
FOUR	Lone Run	41
FIVE	Ms. Congo	49
SIX	I'd Like to Buy the World a Coke	63
SEVEN	The Real Thing	75
EIGHT	Souvenir	87
NINE	When I Cry	97
TEN	The Peanut Girl	106
ELEVEN	Militias in the Mist	109
TWELVE	Sugarcane	119
THIRTEEN	A Friend from Far Away	125
FOURTEEN	My Own Private Sister	131
FIFTEEN	Gift from God	139
SIXTEEN	Generose	147
SEVENTEEN	The Road to Baraka	155

EIGHTEEN	A Separate Peace	161
NINETEEN	An Odd Paradise	169
TWENTY	Water Water	177
TWENTY-ONE	The Long Drive Home	185
TWENTY-TWO	Orchid Safari Club	193
TWENTY-THREE	Mama Congo	201
TWENTY-FOUR	<i>El Presidente</i>	211
TWENTY-FIVE	Criteria	219
TWENTY-SIX	Parentheses	227
TWENTY-SEVEN	Goodbye Party	237
TWENTY-EIGHT	The End of Logic	247
TWENTY-NINE	These Fragments	265
THIRTY	In-Between	269
THIRTY-ONE	Missing	279
THIRTY-TWO	Salt	291
THIRTY-THREE	The Hidden Face	295
THIRTY-FOUR	Furaha	305
	Epilogue	316
	Memorial	318
	Key Terms	322
	Acknowledgments	324
	Bibliography	327
	About the Author	330
	Index	331
	Find Your Own Furaha:	
	What You Can Do Now	334





FOREWORD TO
A THOUSAND SISTERS

BY ZAINAB SALBI

THE CONFLICT IN the Democratic Republic of Congo has taken more lives than any other war since World War II, resulting in the death of more than 5.4 million people and the ongoing rape of hundreds of thousands of women. Despite these gruesome statistics, the conflict rages on amidst muted international response and blanket impunity for rape and war crimes in which all sides are implicated. It has been more than 10 years now, but every day, scores of Congolese people are still falling victim to some of the worst acts of violence known to humanity (if you can believe there can be a *worst act of violence*)—from the killing and mutilation, to the raping of women, men and children, violence continues to happen and the number of victims continues to grow. The world has yet to rise up with the political will to stop this war and the atrocities committed against not only the Congolese people but all of humanity as well.

It is hard not to be angry when you have witnessed the rape of your mother in front of your eyes, the killing of your child, the burning of your home, or the pillaging of all that you have worked so hard to build. The question for survivors is never their anger at injustice, but rather how to express that anger in a healthy way that can lead to building rather than destruction,