

Singleness

Straight from the heart of Africa, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Joelle Kabamba, an author, Church minister, social justice advocate, a philanthropist, and a Life coach, Joelle Kabamba is one of the early African settlers in Australia. When she first landed in Sydney with her family, she could hardly speak a word of English but could fluently speak French and three others African languages.

Now with two books to her name, Joelle's latest book titled: *'The Unexpected Gift – God's Biblical Perspective on Singleness,'* in which she unearths a fresh perspective on one of the most underrated seasons of our lives. Drawing from her own experiences, along with timely research, she shines some light on the way we can thrive and live successfully in our singleness. In this short interview Joelle shares her journey as a migrant and a writer.

Q1. Joelle could you, please tell us me about yourself?

Joelle: I am a daughter of two amazing humans who bore thirteen children, a sister to twelve siblings and aunty of eleven audacious nephews and nieces ranging from twenty-six to six years old, and lastly a friend to many. I enjoy being a woman of two cultures. – Rejoicing in my Congolese heritage, while embracing Australia as my home of over thirty years after migrating under Humanitarian program. This has given my unique perspective to speak as a thought leader to challenge current issues on some of the prejudices that confront the world today.

My heroine and dear late mother left us an incredible legacy of faith, love for God, people and to live generously. As well as a woman of faith, I love many things aside my family, culture. travelling, cycling, God's house- The church and playing my acoustic guitar on lazy Sundays. When time permits, I like to lose myself in my abstract paintings and walks along the beach or hiking. I also have a peculiar love of writing, these include poetry also known as spoken words, often based on real issues affecting the world around us.

Advocating for social justice and speaking for the vulnerable people has always been at the core of my being, anchoring my career in few spaces including human services and education. I have travelled to different parts of the world and worked on an array of projects both locally and internationally. From working in Africa assisting dying soldiers who contracted HIV/ AIDS virus during the 90's epidemic. From 2010 to 2018, within a team, I pioneered on a Not-for-Profit project assisting girls and women victims and survival of rape following the aftermath war of 1992 -1997 in DR Congo. Additionally, over the years I locally worked extensively in education in recent years as cluster leader with the Catholic Education and in former years as a high school Chaplain, including the State Chaplain with Toll logistic, one of the largest transportation businesses in Australia. And currently in community sectors assisting refugees and asylum seekers.

Q2. What brought you to Australia?

Joelle: Our move to Australia as a family was due to my father was persecuted by Mobutu's regime, the government in power at a time. – An amazing man, my father was a Professor at the University of Lubumbashi for over seventeen years, he then ascended to be the Dean of faculty. A Social activist along with some of his colleagues, they signed a petition and rallied to have their wages increased. That did not go well in dictatorship regime which robbed people not only of their basic human rights but also their freedom of expression. Looking back, it is ridiculous to imagine a child asking for a bread from his father instead he got demoted and incarcerated. The dictatorial government thought the petition was threat to the Government. Upon his release, we flew to the neighbouring country and eventually found a shelter in Australia.

Q3. When & how did you come to be a writer and why?

Joelle: Firstly, writing my first book came out of a need and not quite out of a yearning desire to be a writer. As a teenager my father identified a gift of writing in me. I can remember a conversation where he said you ought to consider writing about a topic of your interest, like Christianity – comparing faith in Africa and the West. I can remember very well walking away and thinking that was too far-fetched and writing isn't really for me.

As a young person both in Congo and Brisbane, some of my school memories were of me being bullied. Little did I know I would be returning to schools to work as a High School Chaplain for more than nine years, 'A blessing in disguise.' Firstly, young people always look for people who are genuine, authentic and can inspire them to. I was passionate about them and still do today. I hope to become a positive role model and invest in the future in inspiring our young generation.

Joelle: Secondly, the dreadful bullying I experienced became a driving force to help many students during my chaplaincy in schools. I began devising and implementing several programs to support kids and empowering them. Colleagues in other schools began using my materials as they saw the positive impact on kids. They started requesting that I also speak at their schools spurring growth in Youth Ministry. Through a conversation with a friend, also a chaplain, I suddenly said to her, 'I think I might have to write a book about it.' That same evening, I was on the phone to my father asking him about how to write a book, and there and then, the journey began. Ha! In my mind I always dreamt of one day cutting a CD, but oh! good grace, in hindsight God had something else in store for me!

Q4. Your first book was called 'The Chaplaincy Phenomena,' what inspired you to write this book, and what is it all about? Who is it written for? Where can we buy it?

Joelle: As I researched and read to be more informed, it became evident that literature on the work of school chaplains with Youth social issues were scarce. The value of having Chaplain positioned in schools is crucial. Schools are the pillars of society, hence, my desire to be positioned in their space as a role model to assist young people navigating their formative years from a place of strength was crucial. Writing about this magnificent work meant many more others will be inspired to join in, in positively influencing young lives as some of us were already doing so. It was also important to provide clear narrative and raise some awareness into the ministry of chaplaincy, doing such an amazing work positively transforming diverse communities in schools.

Lastly, I noted that every time I mentioned my role as a High School Chaplain, many were often surprised that such a role still exists in schools, let alone led by someone who looked like me. Contrary to popular opinion of traditional chaplains dressed in priestly garments and out of touch with reality of young people, could not be further from the truth. It was always refreshing and super

exciting every time when people see me. I embody the opposite and to witness how helpful my work in this space was, in terms of contributing building school communities.

Q5 In 2021 you published a new book called *The Unexpected Gift on Singleness*; can you tell us a bit about it? What messages are trying to send across?

Joelle: Young adults by the time they reach the age 50, 1 in 4 would have been singles all their life. In 2018 there were two million single households, the projection states in 2026 single households will surpass the traditional nuclear family. There is a 'SINGLE's anxiety at a rate that is unprecedented in the history of the Church today.

My new book's focus is on Christian Single Women of all kinds. It is a message to open conversation on what's often unarticulated struggles and sentiments of singleness, while also directing my readers towards a vision of flourishing in a God honouring way. Singleness is something we have or will experience at some point in our lives. Whether you've never been married, find yourself single again, or are content in your singleness, it is evident that there are unique challenges common to this phase of life.

A short segment of the book is a call to ministers like me to review possible ways to be inclusive of singles in our messages and community, if they are not already doing so. We are to present messages that is affirming and nurturing singles to be their best complete version of themselves in a God who sees them more than just their status. It is a book that inspire any reader to debunk the stigma surrounding singles, live a life of adventure, graced with dignity and power as they re-discover a new passion for life in Christ. A life with eternal impact!!

Q6 What are the challenges you have come across as Writer? How do you manage to overcome these challenges? (*Where do you draw your inspiration from?*)

Joelle: One of my first challenges I came across as a writer, was trying to write and express my thoughts within my mind I speak more than three languages. The English language is simple of the best. So, when you have French as one of your native languages it can make things all too complex. This sometimes, highlights how limiting English can be. This is why, I love that we have editors today who are continually asking you what you mean about every sentence and paragraph, ensuring they get your ideas as well as thoughts right.

In writing there are seasons when you have a few days dedicated to writing and walking away devastated because only one page has been accomplished. It so important to acknowledge, inspiration to write does not always flow easily and to celebrate when something is accomplished, whether a paragraph or whole chapter has been written well. I have learnt to welcome both because it is all part of the process.

After labouring and getting your craft to a T, the next phase is marketing and getting your book to the world which can be a challenge. Most authors get little in return because a large chunk is taken up by your publishers and the stores. This is why many authors like me, are opting out and self-publishing their own books. However, this means horning up on skills, one may not have marketing skills to bring the book to success.

My inspirations are drawn from tenacious spirit from some other women around me. I am forever inspired by them. Women who revolt against the odds when they could have given up. The stories

and characters in the Bible and Jesus Himself are also unique inspirations to me and to many. They continue to speak volume and hold more weight today than ever before at a time as the world needs hope and faith. These remarkable biographies continue to inspire me. 'If they made it through so, can we.'

Q7. What role should women writers play in our community?

Joelle: There is so much that can be said in this space. Women are incredible and I love their tenacity as I have shared earlier, it is super amazing when it comes to pulling a community and nurturing it, women are at the fore front. Looking back into history, women's stories were not written by them but through other perspectives. Today our role is to take up this incredible opportunity to re-write our stories through our own narrative. This can be done by providing some platform to inspire the next generation and acknowledge that they too would contribute to writing their stories and together we can keep building a strong legacy of sisterhood around the world.

As women, God gifts us to be nurturers and that might look quite different for each one of us. Let's leverage this strength wherever we are positioned in our workforce and society in general by nurturing the areas we are in, in our community needing attention and care. This might be the unemployed in your area, the youth without parental supervision, single mothers in need of respite or any other challenges you see around you. My encouragement is to be graceful and accommodating of each other's strength positioned in our community and doing so with grace.

A healthy competition progresses society, but we should not forget joining forces when required. As we optimize our competencies and keep on breaking new grounds, the outcome is seeing strong platform enabling vulnerable sisters in our society who may also need to be heard.

Q8. What type of help do you think Australian migrant and refugee's women writers need reach full potential?

Joelle: As Women from Migrant and Refugee's background, we can create our own agency platform and not wait to be given one or permission to build one. Be confident in who you/we are, settle the conflict within yourself that you are not good enough and stop fighting an invisible battle. We are not victims in every situation or at any point. Playing a victim role in every scenario can be crippling and leads us to serve as well as function from a place of hurt. This can be unhealthy and disempowering, at worse, those whom we trying to help suffer most.

The best place to start from, I believe is, first and foremost knowing 'Who We are.' What are our identity stems from, a place where our drive, values, and passion flows from. Hence, using our stories is a good foundation to build from, and acknowledge to not only merely speak from a victim's perspective. Our stories matter, so let us keep sharing them and create communities to celebrate and honour them.

Q9. What is your word of encouragement to other Australian women from Migrant and Refugee' background who are trying to become a writer?

Joelle: Stay grounded from your source of truth and don't let others deter it!!

I remember a senior manager from previous years ago, when I sent her a short email, she decided to correct it with a red ink. She proceeded to say I needed to get an English tutor, more than anything, it was her tone that disturbed me. Such comments can remind some of us of a similar experience with a schoolteacher, which can be such a character assassination. I looked at the situation from a different angle, unlike that manager, at least I speak more than one language, which I needed to

celebrate and not be made to feel that I was illiterate. Over the years I have grown in that area and continue to grow, I have never given up nor retreated because of the nay seyers. That, I believe is the difference, we are either going to believe the negative voice or we are going to press on and keep growing in our gift. So, regardless of whether your challenge is a language barrier, or familiarising yourself with technology, I encourage you to keep pressing on and keep on learning, don't give up on yourself and trust your community where you could get some help where needed.

Whatever is on your mind simply take the first step and start. To not second guess who we are. Our story is unique, and it matters. There are people waiting for our story to stir them to become better people as well.

Q10. How do you nurture yourself and (how do you manage stress?)

Joelle: Self-care is imperative for us all. I am a person of prayer and find my strength in my walk with Jesus Christ. I exercise regularly and take time to enjoy life with people in my community and including traveling. Finding things, I love to do is important and assists me in staying alert, present and keeps me dreaming.

To order Joelle's New book please click the link below.

https://www.amazon.com/Unexpected-Gift-Biblical-Perspective-Singleness/dp/0648865673/ref=tmm_pap_swatch_0?encoding=UTF8&qid=&sr=

or her website

<https://www.spacebetweenpublications.com/>

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