WHILE WE HAVE THE CHANCE

Lessons on Love, Life, Family & the Relationships That Shape Us

A Personal Reflection on Becoming, Belonging, and Loving Well

by Nina Rose

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DEDICATION

For my two beautiful girls.

May you always know your worth, love deeply, live fully, and have the courage to build lives that are entirely your own.

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INTRODUCTION

While We Have the Chance

This is not a book about having life figured out. I don't.

It is a book about what life has taught me while I have been busy living it - as a daughter, immigrant, young woman, friend, wife, mother, provider, and someone who has had to learn when to hold on and when to let go.

I grew up in Trinidad surrounded by family and dreaming of a bigger world. At twenty, I left home and started over in New York. Part of me was chasing opportunity. Another part of me was escaping a relationship that had become frightening. I could not have known then where that decision would lead.

New York gave me independence, friendships, adventure, work, laughter, and eventually love. Marriage and motherhood gave me an entirely different understanding of family. Along the way, I also learned that some of the people we expect to remain forever will leave, while people we never expected can become family.

The older I get, the more I understand something simple: possessions, titles, money, and circumstances change. What stays with us are the relationships we built, the love we gave, the lessons we learned, and the way we treated people while we had the chance.

These pages are my reflections on those lessons.

CHAPTER 1

The Life I Imagined

I grew up in a small town in Trinidad, where life was simple, familiar, and, for the most part, quiet.

There was comfort in that kind of life. Family was never far away. Everybody seemed connected to everybody else, and there was always someone who knew you, knew your parents, or knew where you came from.

My father's family played a particularly important role in my childhood. He had several sisters, and my aunts became some of the most influential women in my early life. I was also the first grandchild on my father's side of the family, which came with a certain amount of attention. Some might say I was spoiled. I might even agree.

But I was surrounded by family, and before I understood anything about romantic love, marriage, motherhood, heartbreak, or sacrifice, family was my first understanding of what love looked like.

Still, even as a young girl, I wanted more. Not because Trinidad wasn't enough. Trinidad was home. It gave me my beginning, my family, my culture, and so much of the woman I would eventually become. But I dreamed beyond what I could see.

Growing up in a small Caribbean country, the world outside seemed enormous. I wanted to experience it. I wanted opportunities. I wanted success. I wanted to build something for myself, although at that age I couldn't have explained exactly what that something was. I just knew there had to be more for me.

I attended one of the country's top all-girls high schools, graduated, and began thinking seriously about my future. Somewhere inside me was this persistent feeling that my life would eventually take me beyond Trinidad.

What I didn't know was how - or why - I would eventually leave.

When Love Becomes Fear

My first serious relationship taught me about love in a way I never expected. It became toxic. Eventually, it became physical.

There is something incredibly confusing about being hurt by someone who claims to love you. At that age, I didn't have decades of life experience to tell me what to do. I didn't have the perspective I have today. What I did know was that I needed to get away.

For me, getting away didn't mean moving across town or taking some time apart. It meant leaving the country.

So at twenty years old, I packed up my life and left Trinidad. I left my family. I left the place where I had grown up. I left everything familiar. And I came to New York.

People often talk about immigration as a pursuit of opportunity - the courageous person who leaves home in search of the American dream. That was part of my story. But it wasn't the whole story.

I wasn't only running toward something bigger. I was also running away from something that had made me afraid.

Sometimes the decisions that ultimately change our lives aren't perfectly planned. They aren't made because we suddenly become fearless. Sometimes we make them because staying has finally become scarier than leaving.

Twenty Years Old and Starting Over

New York didn't know me. And I didn't know New York.

I was twenty years old in a country that wasn't mine, away from the family that had always surrounded me, suddenly responsible for figuring out what came next. There was no blueprint.

I worked. I struggled. I learned. I lived. I made mistakes. And somehow, little by little, I found my way.

The girl who had grown up surrounded by family now had to learn how to depend on herself. Looking back, I think that period changed my understanding of relationships forever.

When you have experienced love mixed with fear, you don't simply walk away and forget about it. You carry pieces of that experience with you. Sometimes those pieces protect you. Sometimes they build walls around you.

For almost ten years, I didn't enter another serious relationship. Maybe part of me needed those years. I needed to discover who I was without someone beside me. I needed to build a life that belonged to me. And perhaps, without realizing it, I needed proof that I could survive on my own.

Eventually, love would find its way back into my life. But first, New York would teach me how to live.

What Life Taught Me

- Home can be the place that raised you without being the place where your entire story has to happen.
- Love should never require you to be afraid.
- Leaving isn't always giving up. Sometimes leaving is the first decision you make toward saving yourself.
- You don't always need to know where the road ends. Sometimes you just need enough courage to take the first step.

CHAPTER 2

A Little Girl From Trinidad Takes Manhattan

When I arrived in New York at twenty years old, I didn't have some perfectly mapped-out plan. I had ambition. I had determination. And apparently, I had absolutely no intention of sitting still.

I stayed with my cousin for about a week. Within that week, I found a job, and shortly afterward, I moved out.

My cousin wasn't exactly thrilled about that decision. While I was staying with her, I was contributing toward the household bills, so having me leave wasn't necessarily convenient for her. But I hadn't come all the way from Trinidad to simply become comfortable in someone else's life. I needed to build my own.

Maybe that sounds stubborn. Maybe it was. But there was something inside me that needed to know I could make it on my own.

The Job That Started It All

My first real opportunity came when I found a bookkeeping job in Brooklyn. I didn't realize it then, but that job would become the beginning of so much.

There is something about receiving your own paycheck in a new country, paying your own bills, and knowing that whatever happens next depends largely on you. It's frightening. But it's also incredibly freeing.

For the first time, my life felt entirely mine. And I intended to live it.

I worked hard, but I played hard too. I went out. I partied. I discovered restaurants. I went to movies. I explored neighborhoods and tried new things. I wanted experiences.

After growing up on a small island, New York seemed endless. There was always another restaurant, another neighborhood, another person to meet, another place to discover, another adventure waiting somewhere beyond my apartment door.

I wasn't going to spend my twenties watching life happen around me. I wanted to be in it.

Moving On Up

Eventually, I left my first apartment and moved into a bigger place in Queens. That alone felt like progress.

Then an opportunity came along that I couldn't have imagined when I first landed in New York. I got an apartment in Manhattan, right in the middle of the city I had once only dreamed about.

Times Square. Rockefeller Center. Hell's Kitchen. The New York City I had seen from thousands of miles away was suddenly outside my front door.

For a girl who had grown up in a small town in Trinidad, there were moments when it didn't feel real. I'd gone from knowing practically everyone around me to living in one of the biggest, busiest cities in the world. And somehow, I made it feel like home.

Everybody Knows Your Name

I've always been someone who makes friends. I made them at work. I made them in my neighborhood. I made them simply by going about my life.

Then a new restaurant opened on the corner called Gossip. I walked in on opening day. I was their first customer.

Neither they nor I could have known that this neighborhood restaurant was about to become such an important part of my New York story.

Gossip became my Cheers - the place where everybody knew my name. I could walk through the door and immediately feel familiar. When you have moved thousands of miles away from the people and places that raised you, familiarity means something different. It becomes its own version of home.

Whenever family came to visit from Trinidad, I took them there. Friends came? Gossip. Relatives came? Gossip. Someone was visiting New York for the first time? I knew exactly where we were going.

I introduced the people from my old life to the people who had become part of my new one. Looking back, I realize I wasn't just finding places I liked. I was creating community wherever I went.

My Sex and the City Years

For about seven years, Hell's Kitchen was home. Those years were very New York.

If I had to describe that chapter now, I'd probably call it my own version of Sex and the City - minus the television cameras and designer wardrobe budget.

I worked. I went out. I laughed. I dated. I ate at great restaurants. I met people from everywhere. I experienced the city. And I made memories.

There was an independence to those years that I didn't fully appreciate while I was living them. Nobody needed me to come home. There weren't children waiting for dinner or school forms that needed signing. I wasn't somebody's wife. I was simply me. And I loved her.

That's something women can forget after marriage, children, careers, and responsibilities arrive. There was a woman who existed before everyone needed something from her. She had dreams. She had favorite

restaurants. She stayed out too late sometimes. She laughed until her stomach hurt. She made spontaneous plans. She had an entire identity that belonged only to herself.

I am grateful I got to know that woman. Because later, when life became much more complicated, I would need to remember her.

Downtown

After approximately seven years in Hell's Kitchen, another chapter began. I moved downtown to Wall Street.

This was post-9/11 New York, when there was a concerted effort to bring residents and life back downtown. Young professionals were moving in. People were building careers, starting businesses, and figuring out adulthood.

There was an energy among us. We came from different places and different backgrounds, but so many of us seemed to have something in common: we were trying to build something.

A career. A future. A life.

Maybe that's why I fit in. Because I had been building from the moment I stepped off the plane.

New York taught me that being alone and being lonely were not the same thing. I learned how to take myself to dinner. I learned how to enter a room where I didn't know anyone and leave with friends. I learned how to make money and manage it. I learned how to create a home.

For almost a decade, there was no serious relationship defining my life. Those weren't years spent waiting for a man to arrive. I was already living.

I learned how to have a life before I built a life with someone else. When you know who you are before becoming someone's partner, you understand that another person can add to your life without becoming your entire life.

Eventually, after nearly ten years of protecting my independence and my heart, I would meet someone. For the first time in a very long time, I would have to decide whether I was willing to make room in the life I had built for love again.

What Life Taught Me

- Starting over doesn't mean your life has to become smaller. Sometimes starting over is exactly how it becomes bigger.
- Independence isn't loneliness. There is power in discovering that you genuinely enjoy your own company.
- Home isn't always where you were born. Sometimes you build little pieces of home in an apartment, a neighborhood restaurant, a friendship, or among people who learn your name.
- Don't spend your single years waiting for your 'real life' to begin. Those years are your real life too.

- Before you become somebody's wife, somebody's mother, or the person everybody depends on, get to know the woman who belongs entirely to herself. You'll need her later.

CHAPTER 3

People, Timing & the Circles of Life

For nearly seven years, I lived downtown on Wall Street. By then, New York wasn't the intimidating city I had arrived in as a twenty-year-old girl from Trinidad. It was home.

I had built a career. I had built friendships. I had created a life for myself. I had lived in different parts of the city, experienced things I could only have imagined as a little girl, and most importantly, I had learned how to stand on my own.

I wasn't searching desperately for someone to complete my life. My life was already full. And perhaps that's exactly when love had room to find me.

Then I Met Him

I eventually met the man who would become my husband through a mutual friend.

It's funny how something so ordinary can completely change the direction of your life. A mutual friend. A meeting. A conversation. Two people whose paths happened to cross at just the right moment.

At the time, you don't necessarily stop and think, This person is about to become one of the most important people in my life. You just meet someone. Then you talk. You spend time together. You learn each other's personalities, habits, and imperfections. Somewhere between ordinary days and unexpected moments, a relationship becomes a life.

Now, roughly twelve years later, I can look beside me and see my husband and our two beautiful daughters. There really isn't anything more I could ask for.

But getting older has made me think differently about how we arrive at these places in our lives. I think about timing. I think about the people who introduced us. I think about the relationships that existed before him, the friendships that came before our children, the people I once couldn't imagine living without who are no longer part of my life, and the people I never expected to become important who somehow became permanent.

Life has a strange way of making circles.

Some People Are Bridges

There are people we meet who we assume will be in our lives forever. Sometimes they aren't. Then there are people who enter quietly and somehow become family. And there are others whose purpose we don't understand until much later.

I've come to believe that some people are bridges. They may not be meant to walk beside you for the rest of your life. They may simply be the person who gets you from one chapter to another. That doesn't make the relationship meaningless. It might actually make it incredibly important.

A person you no longer speak to may have introduced you to someone who became your lifelong friend. A job you hated may have connected you with someone who changed your career. A relationship that broke your heart may have taught you exactly what you would - and would not - accept from the next person.

Even the mutual friend who introduces you to someone can unknowingly alter the course of generations. Had one small interaction been different, my husband and I might never have met. Without that meeting, there would be no us, and no two beautiful girls with pieces of both of us running around in this world.

Not Everyone Is Supposed to Stay

One of the harder lessons I've learned is that longevity isn't always the measure of a meaningful relationship.

We tend to believe that if a friendship ends, something went wrong. If a relationship doesn't last forever, we call it a failure. If someone who was once close becomes distant, we wonder what happened.

Sometimes something did happen. Sometimes there was betrayal, disappointment, jealousy, resentment, or hurt. But sometimes life simply happened.

People got married. People had children. People moved. Careers became demanding. Priorities changed. We changed.

The person who fit perfectly into your life at twenty-five may not fit the same way at forty. Accepting that can be painful.

I've learned that distance doesn't always break a bond, and proximity doesn't always create one. Some bonds survive time, distance, marriage, children, careers, and different seasons of life. You don't have to constantly prove them. They're just there.

The Circles We Don't See

When I look back now, my life seems almost like a collection of circles.

Trinidad gave me my first family. New York gave me another kind of family. Work brought people into my life. Restaurants brought people into my life. Friends introduced me to other friends. Eventually, one friendship led me to my husband.

Then my husband and I created a family of our own. Suddenly I wasn't only someone's daughter, niece, cousin, or friend. I was someone's wife. Then I became someone's mother. Twice.

One life keeps opening the door to another. Maybe that's what makes life so unpredictable and so beautiful.

You don't always recognize an important moment while you're living it. Sometimes the night you almost stayed home is the night you meet someone who changes everything. Sometimes the friend you thought would be around forever is only there long enough to introduce you to the person who will be.

Sometimes the ending you're devastated by makes room for a beginning you couldn't yet see. And sometimes you have to look backward before the pattern makes any sense.

Twelve Years Later

Twelve years later, when I look at my husband and our daughters, I don't see a perfect life. I don't believe such a thing exists. Marriage isn't perfect. Parenthood certainly isn't perfect. Families aren't perfect. People aren't perfect.

But I see a life that the twenty-year-old version of me could never have imagined.

That girl left Trinidad because she wanted something bigger for herself and because she needed to escape something that had become painful and frightening. She couldn't have known that thousands of miles away, years into the future, there was a man she hadn't met yet. She couldn't have imagined her daughters' faces.

Maybe we're not supposed to know.

Maybe part of living is trusting that every person we encounter doesn't have to remain in our story for that encounter to matter.

Some people become family. Some become memories. Some become lessons. Some become bridges. And a precious few become the people who walk beside us through chapter after chapter.

The older I get, the less I try to force everyone into the last category. I can appreciate someone for the part they played without demanding that they remain forever.

Sometimes a person leaving your life doesn't erase what they meant while they were there. And sometimes someone you meet almost accidentally becomes the person sitting beside you twelve years later, looking at the two beautiful lives you created together.

Life is funny that way. It closes circles you didn't even realize were open.

What Life Taught Me

- Not everyone who enters your life is meant to stay forever.
- Some people are destinations. Others are bridges.
- A relationship doesn't have to last a lifetime to have changed your life.
- Don't underestimate an ordinary introduction, an unexpected friendship, or a seemingly insignificant moment. Some of the biggest changes in our lives begin without announcing themselves.
- The right love isn't only about finding the right person. Sometimes it's about meeting them when you're finally ready to recognize them.

CHAPTER 4

And Then I Became a Mother

Nothing prepares you for motherhood.

People can tell you what it's like. They can tell you that you'll be tired, that you'll worry, that you'll love your children more than you ever thought possible. But until another human being enters this world completely dependent on you, you don't really understand it.

Then I became the mother of two girls. And everything changed.

The things that mattered so much to me in my twenties didn't necessarily stop mattering. I still loved experiences. I still loved restaurants, adventures, traveling, laughing, and enjoying life. But my perspective changed.

Before motherhood, I was responsible for me. If I failed, I dealt with the consequences. If I made a bad decision, I figured it out. If money was tight, I adjusted. If I wanted to take a risk, it was my risk to take.

Then suddenly there were two innocent little girls looking to me. I had brought them into this world. Now it was my responsibility to help them find their way through it.

That realization changes you.

The Family I Couldn't Recreate

Motherhood made me think differently about my own childhood.

Growing up in Trinidad, family was everywhere. My father's sisters were a major part of my life. I had aunts, cousins, and grandparents around me. There were people to visit, people to stay with, people to talk to, and people who simply belonged to my world because they were family.

I didn't realize what a privilege that was when I was a child. Children rarely do. You assume that's simply how life works.

But somewhere between immigrating to America, building my own life, and the years passing, many of those relationships changed. Some became distant. Some disappeared altogether. Life happened.

When I became a mother, I suddenly realized that I couldn't give my daughters exactly what I had growing up.

That hurt.

They wouldn't necessarily know what it was like to say, I'm going by my aunt. They wouldn't automatically have a house full of cousins to grow up alongside. They wouldn't have the same extended network of family surrounding them that had surrounded me.

Of course, there are a few cousins whom I love dearly and who love and look out for my girls relentlessly. Those relationships mean even more to me because they are genuine.

But the big family experience I remembered from Trinidad? My daughters weren't going to have it in the same way.

For a long time, I think part of me felt guilty about that. After all, I was the one who left. I was the one who moved thousands of miles away. I was the one who built a life somewhere else.

Although I knew why I had left and knew that leaving had changed my life for the better, motherhood made me confront something I hadn't thought much about at twenty: every new life we choose comes with something we leave behind.

Trying to Fill the Empty Spaces

So I compensated. Maybe sometimes too much.

I worked endlessly. I wanted my girls to have everything they needed and as much as I could reasonably give them. I wanted a stable home. I wanted them to feel secure. I wanted them to have experiences.

I wanted them to know that no matter what happened outside our home, they could come inside and know they were loved.

Most of all, I didn't want them growing up wondering why somebody didn't call, why a cousin didn't reach out, why a relative didn't acknowledge them, or why someone who was technically family didn't behave like family.

Children don't understand complicated adult relationships. They simply understand who shows up.

I wanted to protect them from feeling the absence of people who didn't. But motherhood has taught me that you can't protect your children from every disappointment.

You cannot force someone to be an aunt. You cannot force someone to be a cousin. You cannot manufacture closeness simply because two people share blood. And you cannot make someone love your children the way you believe your children deserve to be loved.

What you can do is make sure they never confuse somebody else's absence with their own worth.

If someone doesn't show up for you, that does not mean there is something wrong with you.

Blood Isn't the Only Definition of Family

As I've gotten older, my definition of family has changed.

When I was a child, family was simple. Family was blood. Motherhood complicated that definition.

I've seen relatives become strangers. I've seen friends become family. I've watched people with absolutely no biological obligation to my children love them, celebrate them, ask about them, and show up for them.

I've learned to value presence more than titles.

A title doesn't make someone family. Consistency does. Love does. Showing up does.

The person who remembers the birthday matters. The person who checks in matters. The person your child knows she can call matters. The person who celebrates your child's accomplishments without jealousy or competition matters.

Those people are part of your village whether you share DNA with them or not.

Maybe my daughters didn't inherit the exact village I grew up with. But that doesn't mean they can't have one. It just means we have had to build ours differently.

Raising Girls in a Different World

I'm raising two girls in a world completely different from the one that raised me.

Social media. Phones. The internet. Constant comparison. Instant gratification. Pressure to look a certain way. Pressure to behave a certain way. Pressure to grow up too quickly. Information coming at them from every direction.

When I was growing up in Trinidad, life moved differently. That doesn't mean everything about my generation was better. It wasn't. But it was different.

Parenting cannot simply be about recreating the rules we grew up with. We have to prepare our children for the world they're actually going to live in while still holding onto the values we don't want the world to take from them.

I want my daughters to understand kindness, respect, integrity, work ethic, independence, and gratitude.

I want them to understand that everything doesn't have to be posted. That everybody who smiles at you isn't your friend. That attention isn't the same thing as love. That popularity isn't character. That having more doesn't make you better. That they should never have to make themselves smaller so someone else can feel bigger.

And especially because they are girls, there is something else I desperately want them to know: love should never hurt you.

Perhaps that lesson means more to me because of my own story. I know what it is like to be young and mistake unhealthy behavior for something you are supposed to tolerate.

My daughters will make their own mistakes. There will be relationships I can't choose for them. There will be heartbreak I can't prevent. But if I can give them anything from my experience, I want to give them the confidence to recognize when something isn't right.

I want them to know they can leave. I want them to know they can start again. I want them to know they can build a life for themselves.

Because their mother did.

The Weight of Being Mom

Motherhood is one of the greatest feelings I've ever experienced. But we don't talk enough about the weight that comes with it.

You are raising human beings. You're trying to provide for them financially while being emotionally available to them. You're working, cooking, planning, remembering appointments, school events, birthdays, clothes, activities, forms, friendships, and a thousand tiny things nobody else realizes are living inside your head.

You're trying to protect your marriage. You're trying to maintain friendships. You're trying to be a daughter, cousin, employee, wife, and mother. Somewhere underneath all those titles, you're still supposed to remember to be yourself.

Some days I do that better than others.

There have been times when I have worked tirelessly because I wanted to provide. Times when I've worried whether I was doing enough. Times when I've probably done too much because I was trying to compensate for something I believed my children were missing.

That's the strange thing about being a mother. You can give everything you have and still lie awake wondering whether you've given enough.

Eventually, though, you have to accept something: your children don't need a perfect mother. They need a present one.

They need someone who loves them fiercely but also teaches them how to stand without her. My job isn't to make sure nothing bad ever happens to my daughters. That's impossible.

My job is to give them enough love, values, confidence, and strength that when life inevitably happens, they know who they are.

Building Our Own Version of Family

My daughters' childhood will never look like mine. I've finally realized that it isn't supposed to.

They aren't two little Trinidadian girls growing up surrounded by aunts and cousins on an island. They're growing up in America. Their experiences, opportunities, relationships, and struggles will be different.

I can't recreate Trinidad for them. What I can do is take the best pieces of what Trinidad gave me and bring those pieces into our home.

The importance of family. Respect for people. Hard work. Hospitality. Looking out for one another. Laughing together. Food bringing everybody to the table. Knowing that home should be somewhere you can always return to.

Maybe family isn't about recreating what you had. Maybe it's about taking what was good, learning from what wasn't, and intentionally building something better with the people in front of you.

I once thought I needed to give my daughters the childhood I had.

Now I understand that my responsibility is much simpler - and much harder.

I have to give them the childhood they need. And every day, I'm still learning what that means.

What Life Taught Me

- You don't fully appreciate the village that raised you until you're trying to raise children without it.
- Blood can make you relatives. Showing up makes you family.
- You cannot protect your children from every person who will disappoint them. But you can teach them never to measure their worth by who failed to show up.
- Providing for your children means more than giving them things. It means giving them values strong enough to survive a world you won't always be able to protect them from.
- Motherhood isn't about raising children who will always need you. It's about loving them enough to raise women who, one day, won't.

What Really Matters

The older I get, the more I realize how much time we spend chasing things that don't last.

Money comes and goes. Jobs come and go. Homes change. Possessions get old. People enter our lives, and sometimes, people leave.

The things we once thought would make us happy eventually become ordinary, and the things we took for granted often become the things we miss the most.

Life has a way of teaching you that.

When I was younger, adults would say things that went completely over my head: You'll understand when you're older.

I hated hearing that. What did age have to do with understanding?

Now I know. It wasn't really age they were talking about. It was experience.

You understand differently once you've lived. Once you've loved. Once you've lost. Once you've struggled. Once you've raised children. Once you've had friendships end that you thought would last forever. Once you've watched people you trusted disappoint you. Once you've been surprised by the people who showed up when you never expected them to.

That's when those old sayings start making sense.

Perspective Changes Everything

At twenty, I thought about life differently. I wanted adventure. I wanted New York. I wanted independence. I wanted success. I wanted to experience everything.

And I'm glad I did.

I don't look back at that young woman and think she had her priorities wrong. She simply had the priorities that belonged to that season of her life.

We aren't supposed to think at twenty the way we think later in life. If we did, what would be the point of living all those years in between?

Life is supposed to change us. Marriage changes us. Children change us. Friendships change us. Heartbreak changes us. Success changes us. Failure definitely changes us.

As our lives change, our perspective changes with them. And when your perspective changes, so does your vision.

The Things We Collect

We spend so much of our lives collecting things: money, clothes, cars, homes, titles, promotions, achievements.

None of those things are inherently bad. Work hard. Build something. Enjoy beautiful things. Travel. Eat at the restaurant. Buy something you've worked hard for. Celebrate your accomplishments. Live.

But don't confuse the accessories of your life with the substance of it.

Because eventually, almost everything you own will belong to somebody else, be thrown away, be sold, or simply stop mattering.

What remains is much harder to measure.

How did you make people feel? Were you kind when you didn't have to be? Did you show up? Did you love people while you had them? Did you apologize when you were wrong? Did you forgive when you could? Did you protect the people who trusted you? Did your children know they were loved? Did your partner know they mattered? Did your friends know you valued them?

And perhaps just as importantly: did you treat yourself with the same kindness you were so willing to give everyone else?

People Come and Go

I've had enough years behind me now to understand that not everybody stays.

Some people leave because of conflict. Some relationships slowly fade without any dramatic ending at all. Sometimes you simply stop calling each other. Sometimes life gets busy. Sometimes you grow apart. Sometimes you outgrow each other.

And sometimes you finally realize that the relationship you were desperately trying to preserve had already ended - you were just the last person willing to admit it.

I've learned not to measure every relationship by whether it lasted forever.

Some people gave me beautiful memories. Some gave me lessons. Some gave me both.

There are people I may never speak to again whom I can still appreciate for who they were to me at a particular moment in my life.

Growing older has taught me that you can release someone without rewriting the entire relationship as bad.

Something can have been beautiful and still be over.

Love Looks Different Now

My understanding of love has changed too.

When you're young, love can feel like excitement. Butterflies. Passion. Someone calling constantly. Someone wanting to be around you every second.

But life teaches you that attention and love aren't necessarily the same thing.

Love gets quieter as you get older.

Sometimes love looks like someone making sure you got home safely. Someone sitting beside you when there's nothing useful to say. Someone remembering the thing you forgot. Someone taking care of the children because you are exhausted. Someone who sees you at your least impressive and doesn't suddenly disappear.

Love isn't always dramatic. Sometimes the strongest love is remarkably ordinary.

It's consistency. It's consideration. It's respect. It's being there.

The Real Wealth

When I think about the little girl growing up in Trinidad, the twenty-year-old arriving in New York, the young woman living her Sex and the City years in Manhattan, the woman who fell in love, the wife I became, and the mother raising two girls, I see different versions of the same person.

Each version wanted something different. Each version thought she understood life. And each one had more to learn.

I still do. I hope I always will.

But today, my definition of wealth is different.

Of course money matters. Anyone who has ever struggled financially knows that pretending money doesn't matter is a luxury in itself. Money provides security. It creates opportunities. It can give your children experiences and education. It can relieve enormous stress.

But money cannot manufacture a meaningful life.

You can have beautiful things and still feel empty. And you can sit around a table eating something simple with people you genuinely love and feel like the richest person alive.

That's perspective.

One Day, They Will Understand Too

Sometimes I hear myself talking to my daughters and suddenly realize: I've become the grown-up.

I'm saying the things adults once said to me. I'm giving advice they probably think is outdated. I'm warning them about people. I'm talking about values. I'm telling them that something they believe is the end of the world really isn't.

And I'm sure there are moments when they're thinking, Mom just doesn't understand.

But I do. That's the funny part.

I understand because I once stood exactly where they're standing. And someday they'll understand because they'll stand where I'm standing.

Not because I convinced them. Because life will.

Life is the teacher none of us can avoid.

One day, they'll fall in love. They'll have their hearts broken. They'll succeed. They'll fail. They'll meet people they think they'll know forever. Some of those people will disappear. Others will surprise them by staying.

Whatever happens, their perspectives will change. One day, something I told them years earlier will suddenly make sense.

They'll probably roll their eyes when they realize their mother was right. I hope I'm around to enjoy that moment.

If I Know Anything Now

I don't have life figured out. Nobody does. But I know more than I did at twenty.

I know that peace is valuable. I know that family is more complicated than blood. I know that friendship requires effort from both sides. I know that you cannot force people to love you properly. I know that walking away can sometimes be an act of love toward yourself.

I know that money solves certain problems but cannot solve the ones that live inside you. I know that children need your presence more than your perfection. I know that some people deserve another chance and others deserve a closed door. I know that tomorrow isn't promised.

And I know that, in the end, people aren't going to remember every possession you owned or every accomplishment you collected.

They're going to remember who you were to them.

Maybe that's what matters most. Not simply that we lived, but that while we were here, we loved well.

What Life Taught Me

- Your priorities are allowed to change. That's not losing yourself. That's growing.
- Money matters, but it is a tool - not a measure of the value of your life.
- Some relationships are lifelong. Others are seasonal. Don't destroy yourself trying to turn every season into forever.
- Growing older doesn't automatically make you wiser. Living, loving, losing, learning, and paying attention do.
- When everything else is stripped away - the titles, possessions, accomplishments, and appearances - what remains is surprisingly simple: Who did you love? Who loved you? And how did you treat each other while you had the chance?

EPILOGUE

While We Have the Chance

I started life surrounded by family on a small Caribbean island and eventually found myself building a new life thousands of miles away.

I have been the girl who dreamed of more, the young woman who had to leave, the immigrant trying to find her footing, the woman enjoying every corner of New York City, the friend, the wife, and the mother who now worries about two girls finding their own way.

If life has taught me anything, it is that none of us gets to hold on to every season.

Children grow. Friendships change. Parents age. Relationships evolve. Homes change. Careers change. We change.

That can be frightening, but it can also be freeing.

Because if nothing is guaranteed forever, then perhaps our responsibility is to appreciate what is here now.

Call the person. Take the picture. Sit around the table. Say I'm sorry. Say I love you. Go on the trip when you can. Laugh loudly. Protect your peace. Let people go when holding on is destroying you. And show up for the people you say matter.

We spend so much time assuming there will be another opportunity.

Another birthday. Another dinner. Another conversation. Another chance to make things right.

Maybe there will be.

Maybe there won't.

So love people while you have them. Live your life while you have it. And whenever possible, leave people better than you found them.

Because in the end, the greatest thing we leave behind may not be what we owned or what we accomplished.

It may simply be the love people remember receiving from us.

And we only get to give it while we have the chance.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Nina Rose was raised in Trinidad and moved to New York at age twenty, where she built a career and a life from the ground up. Her experiences as an immigrant, wife, mother of two daughters, friend, and woman navigating changing relationships inspired While We Have the Chance.

Her reflections center on family, resilience, motherhood, personal growth, and the relationships that give life meaning.