

FROM DESPAIR TO DETERMINATION: A PHOTOGRAPHER'S JOURNEY

I sighed as yet another rejection email popped up on my computer screen. My photography portfolio was getting me nowhere. Between caring for my mother and working odd jobs just to pay rent, I barely had time or energy left to pursue my passion.

Lugging my camera bag to the park one sunny afternoon, I found an empty bench and collapsed onto it, feeling defeat creep over me. Then I noticed an elderly lady nearby, engrossed in painting the landscape. Her sure strokes and intense focus stirred something in me, and I instinctively raised my camera to compose a shot.

Just then the lady turned, catching my gaze. To my surprise, she smiled and beckoned me over. Introducing herself as Hikmat, a renowned artist who lives on the outskirts of Oshogbo, she studied my portfolio and offered insightful feedback. Hikmat's words reignited the spark within me. As we parted ways, she left me with a challenge: "What story do you want your photographs to tell?"

Over the next few weeks, I threw myself into conceptualizing a new body of work. I explored themes of invisibility and identity. As I photographed overlooked spaces and people on the margins, I saw my world with fresh eyes. My encounters with strangers facing their struggles filled me with compassion.

When a local gallery announced an open call, I submitted five of my best photos. To my astonishment, I was selected, with the curator praising me "raw and moving perspective." On the opening night, I watched with pride as museum visitors were drawn into my images, seeing what I saw. With restored passion, I finally felt empowered to turn my lens on life and find the beauty in even its difficult moments.

I made a promise to myself in the gentle glow of the museum to never stop making the best lemonade out of the bitter lemons life hands me.