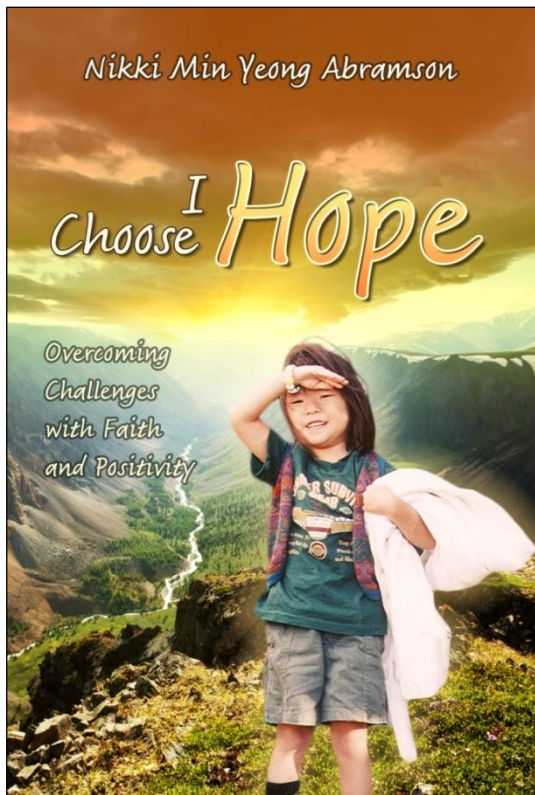


I Choose Hope

Overcoming Challenges with Faith and Positivity

By Nikki Min Yeong Abramson



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“As the title suggest, Nikki Abramson’s I Choose Hope is a story of just that: hope. Regardless of the many challenges she has been dealt in her life, Ms. Abramson has managed to maintain a positive perspective and now uses her story to motivate others. Her journey through adoption and a complex cultural identity, in conjunction with several medical conditions, are important reminders of our ability to persevere in the face of adversity.

As a reader, one needn’t share her same struggles to identify with the prevailing message that hope from within and help from others can provide a path to overcoming life’s obstacles.”

—Jack Pipkin, Executive Director, Muscular Dystrophy Association

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About the Author

Nikki Min Yeong Abramson is an author, motivational speaker, and life coach in Minneapolis, Minnesota. She holds a Bachelor of Arts degree and a teaching license in elementary education, early childhood, and computers, keyboarding, and technology. Nikki is also a performer and teaching artist, teaching others acting, improv, and choreography.

In 2012 Nikki founded Renew Hope, LLC a company dedicated to inspiring and empowering others through life challenges. Her mission is to change the world by inspiring others through her story, changing one person at a time.

I Choose Hope Summary

Being told by doctors at the age of five that she would die in her teens, Nikki learned how to live life in the present. Mentors toughen her how to overcome challenges through faith and believing in the power of positivity. In *I Choose Hope*, Nikki shares her personal journey as an international adoptee and her battle with serious, rare disabilities.

"Struggles are a part of life. We can either go through it with a cloud over our head, or we can look at it as an opportunity," Nikki says. She sees life as an opportunity to help others see their potential and to make a difference in their lives.

I Choose Hope-Overcoming Challenges with Faith and Positivity is an inspirational memoir and self-improvement book. This book includes pictures from Nikki's life as well as original illustrations. *I Choose Hope* is perfect for book clubs, high school classes, or church groups. It contains journal and discussion questions to guide personal reflection or group discussion. The book is available in print and as an ebook through Barnes and Noble, Amazon, and Smashwords. Learn more at www.nikkiabramson.com.



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Choosing hope through disability, injury, and adoption

Minneapolis, MN—When Nikki Min Yeong Abramson was five years old, her doctors told her she wouldn't live past her teens. Her diagnosis of mitochondrial myopathy—a rare muscle disease—caused Abramson to live every day with purpose. Her determination to choose hope in the midst of this, and other disabilities throughout her life, have given Abramson a passion for encouraging and motivating others to persevere.

Now, Abramson's stories of hope in the face of several disabilities and the challenges that come with being an international adoptee, are inspiring others going through life challenges in her new book, *I Choose Hope: Overcoming Challenges with Faith and Positivity*.

Abramson is a teaching artist, educator, and sought after speaker based in Minneapolis, Minnesota. She holds a Bachelor of Arts degree and a teaching license in elementary education, early childhood, and computers, keyboarding, and technology. Abramson is the founder of Renew Hope, LLC a company dedicated to inspiring and empowering others through life challenges.

“My goal is to help challenge and shape other people. I want them to know that there's someone out there who gets it, is walking alongside them, and cheering them on,” says Abramson.

Abramson started writing her story when she was bedridden after a devastating car accident and medical diagnosis of dystonia, a disease similar to Parkinson's that caused muscle spasms all over her body. This accident, right after graduating from college, changed Abramson's life.

“I realized that even though I couldn't depend on my strength or be out and about, I could still share my story. People started to tell me that I have an inspiring story and they encouraged me to write a book.”

I Choose Hope is a story of triumph in the face of adversity and an inspiration for anyone dealing with grief at the loss of shattered dreams. The book is available in print and as an ebook through Barnes and Noble, Rivershore Books, Amazon, and other online retailers. Learn more about *I Choose Hope* and Nikki Abramson at www.NikkiAbramson.com and www.RenewingYourHope.com

Endorsements



“The book offers a raw look into the life of a person who has experienced many challenges but who has found hope, healing, and joy despite the pain—both physical and emotional—and disappointments. Readers will be amazed at the inner strength, determination, and unbreakable spirit of Nikki, a woman who has indeed chosen hope and continues to walk in faith and trust in the One who gives her grace to take each step.”—**Sarah Easton, adoption social worker.**

“[Abramson’s] journey through adoption and a complex cultural identity, in conjunction with several medical conditions, is an important reminder of our ability to persevere in the face of adversity. As a reader, one needn’t share her same struggles to identify with the prevailing message that hope from within and help from others can provide a path to overcoming life’s obstacles.”—**Jack Pipkin, Executive Director, Muscular Dystrophy Association**

“This meaningful story really makes you think about your own. This strong, young woman encountered emotional and physical barriers that many people have not. It lets us know what it’s like to truly be different. Before I read this, I thought that being adopted was just like being biologically related to your parents. Now I know that this is not true. This, her medical issues, and more help remind us that everyone is fighting a war. Some people just don’t tell you. I’m glad she decided to tell us about hers.”—**Carmen Chavez, high school student, International School of Minnesota.**

“Nikki’s story of perseverance is moving and inspiring. It is tremendous to me that, although she has faced so many challenges, as a Korean adoptee and as a person diagnosed with dystonia, Nikki’s voice resonates with strength that is momentous and hope that we can all learn from. I am proud of her.”—**Sun Mee Chomet, actor and playwright of *How to be a Korean Woman*.**

“Nikki’s story is about a young person’s struggles with difficult life issues and the way she has managed to take the negatives and turn them into positives. I believe this book can help others who are in need of strength and encouragement to face their own life issues.”—**Dr. Dennis Dykstra, Physical Medicine and Rehab MD, PhD.**

Author Q&A



Q: Why did you write, *I Choose Hope*?

A: When I was bedridden for seven months after my car accident in 2011, I couldn't do very much. So I started to write journal entries on my CaringBridge.org site. I realized that even though I couldn't depend on my own strength or be out and about, I could still share my story. People started to tell me that I have an inspiring story a drive for life despite hardship and they encouraged me to write a book. I also wanted to honor and thank the mentors, doctors, teachers, friends, family members, and other people in my support network who encouraged and supported me since I was a little girl. I hope that my story will inspire, motivate, and empower others to face their own life challenges and unexpected transitions. Everything leads to this idea of hope. We can live with hope and not take life for granted.

Q: Tell us a little bit about your adoption story and issues that have played a role in your life.

A: I was born in Seoul, South Korea and adopted by American parents when I was six months old. One of my greatest joys in life as an adoptee is that I've lived with two different worlds. I have amazing parents and a great brother who have helped me connect to Korean culture. I was raised in Minnesota with the highest population of Korean American adoptees, so I've gone to a lot of cultural events to learn what it means to be a Korean American.

But adoption is a lifelong, complex, sticky, messy journey. There are a lot of things that are hidden underneath that nobody really talks about. Some of those things are grief, loss, abandonment, attachment, and self-esteem issues. My book talks about my journey with these issues. Adoptees are caught in between two different worlds. I don't really fit in the culture here, but I don't fit in the Korean culture there. Being an international adoptee has affected how people perceive me and the assumptions and expectations that are placed on me, as a person of color who feels white inside.



Q: You have mentioned you suffer from a rare disability from birth. How has this disability affected your life?

A: This condition has been really, really challenging because of the things I can't do. Walking long distances is a challenge. I wear glasses for reading. All of my muscles in my body get really sore, tense, painful, and tired really easily. So it has produced asthma in my lungs and scoliosis in my back. All of those things produce other disabilities and limitations and challenges in my life. That's also how I got this disability where I can't see geometric shapes and patterns. I have really learned how to control how much I do in a given day. And not overworking over overdoing myself.

Q: What is it like to have a disability that no one knows about?

A: I look normal, I think 99 percent of the time, and no one can tell I have a disability. It's nothing I try to hide or that not a lot of people know about, but it's just not apparent. People assume I don't need accommodations or don't need help with anything. People have been really mean to me. I have a handicap placard for my car, but people give me weird looks when I walk from the handicap spot into the store. Someone even slashed my parents' tires when I was nine years old. Recently someone left a note on my windshield that said, "Save the spot for someone who really needs it." It's caused a lot of inner turmoil. Do I fake a limp as I walk into the store? Or do I park far away and struggle to walk the long distance? There are a lot of people who have a "hidden disability" that greatly affects their lives, but it isn't obvious to others.

Q: After you graduated from college and were ready to start your career, you were in a car accident. What happened as a result?

A: I was going to be a teacher. That was the plan. Until I got in a car accident that changed my life. Shortly after the accident, my body started behaving in ways it hadn't before. I had no idea what was happening to me. All I knew was something had triggered muscle spasms and pulling. My neck just wanted to go to the right, my shoulder crept up to my ear, and my pelvis was spasming so much it would throw me out of bed.

On top of mitochondria myopathy, on top of scoliosis, on top of visual-spatial disease, on top of asthma, doctors told me that I was now suffering from a rare movement disorder called dystonia. It is similar to Parkinson's disease. The best way to describe it is an annoying kid constantly pulling your hair or pulling on your pant leg all day long. Constantly pulling, not letting go. Imagine how tiring that must be.

Q: How does your faith impact how you deal with these various challenges?

A: A couple of months after the accident that left me with dystonia and in bed, I was so discouraged. I cried out to God, "I can't believe you would allow this to happen to me." But I realized that God is all I have, all I need, and all I want. Without my faith, I wouldn't have written this book. I'd probably still be in bed. Because, I think that God has really revealed



himself to me. It's like he's saying to me, "Yeah, there are limitations in your life, but look at all the blessings you do have." Faith helped me press on and keep going.

Q: What is Renew Hope?

A: Renew Hope is my company that launched in 2012. Through Renew Hope, LLC I offer motivational and inspirational speaking and life coaching services. My company provides hopeful products as well as teaching, education, and performance. You can learn more about it at www.renewingyourhope.com

Q: What advice would you give to someone experiencing a debilitating illness or injury?

A: Be an advocate for yourself. It's not easy. I'm still learning what that means. How do you stand up for yourself when people mistreat you or don't understand you? Help people understand what your disability is, spell it out for people. But let them know that it's not what defines you.

In addition, it's really important to find people in your life that understand you, support you, and encourage you. Whether it's family or friends, teachers or church leaders, find people who can really encourage and motivate you. Having a mentor in your life who understands what you're going through is key. I'm in a dystonia support group that is really helpful. What's been a blessing to me, is how close our group has become. The reality is, because they've gone through similar things, grief and loss with your body, not understanding what's going on, visiting different doctors, trying all kinds of medications. They totally understand the challenges I go through. These people have been a major support for me, along with my family, friends, and faith community.

Q: How do you hope to make a difference through your book and through your work?

A: A major part of my work as a life coach is dealing with shattered dreams and loss. People who have experienced a death in the family, or a divorce, or financial trouble, are learning how to deal with these losses. I can relate, even though my challenges are different. When I was in the car accident, I lost my car. I lost control over my body. I lost my career or what I thought my career would be. I want to help people build their life up again.

It's like a broken mirror with all the pieces on the floor. How do you take these pieces and turn it into something beautiful? I want people to realize that they have a story and that their story is powerful. I want people to know that they are loved and cared about and valued. They bring something deep and meaningful to the table. I want to make a difference by encouraging them to journey within themselves.

My goal in life is to make a difference by inspiring others on their life journey. I want to let them know that there's somebody out there that gets it and is walking alongside them and cheering them on.

Media Questions



A selection of potential interview questions, for your convenience.

1. Share a little about your background and why you decided to write a book.
2. Besides authoring this book, what else do you do for your career?
3. What are some of the challenges you have had in your life?
4. Share about your adoption story and how being a Korean adoptee has affected your life.
5. You have mentioned you suffer from a rare disability from birth. What implications has this disability had on your life?
6. What was your school experience like?
7. What are the role of mentors in your life? What is the value in having a mentor?
8. What is dystonia and how did you come to suffer from this condition?
9. You have experienced much pain physically, mentally, emotionally and dealing with a huge loss in your life. What are some of the things you do to help in your healing process.
10. How has your story made a difference for other people already?
11. What kind of issues do you support people through as a life coach?
12. What else would you like readers to know?



Selected Excerpts from I Choose Hope

From Chapter 1: *Introduction: The Journey, Not the Destination*, pages 7 – 9

“Writing has become a way for me to express my deeply-felt need to get this message out—this message of hope. I am writing for the girl who struggled in school, for the boy with severe medical challenges, for the family who lost their loved one, for the twenty-year-old trying to find their way in the world, for the forty-year-old that lost his job, for the one who is overcoming...I am writing for you.

We all encounter challenges, whether we like them or not. I believe we should grow and learn from them. It is about how we choose to live and our perspectives in life. Do you see the glass half full or half empty? Are you living in the present or looking at the past? As you read this book, I encourage you to ask yourself:

1. Do I take life for granted? What can I do to appreciate every minute?
2. What are the battles that I am struggling with?
3. How can I overcome them?
4. What can I do to choose hope?
5. What does hope mean? What does it look like to me?

Maybe that means going to Barnes and Noble, buying a journal and a cup of coffee, and writing. Reflect upon your blessings. What are you called to do? Take a risk? Think outside the box? Maybe it is to just sit back, relax, and enjoy the ride. ...

... Many people ask me about the title, *I Choose Hope*, and how that came to be. Honestly, I feel like I was hit with it in a dream; not in a weird way, but in a “God” way. It has been on my heart since sinking my teeth further into telling this story. Here’s the deal: we all have choices we need to make throughout our days and our lives. Choices of what drink to order at our local coffee shop. Choices about whether we go to this college or that university. Choices about whether we take this job or that job; marry this person or not. Choices can be life-changing ones or small ones. Both are a choice. I believe that we need to choose hope. This is not a one-time choice, but a choice that we need to make over and over again. I have chosen hope and try to live out a life that is hopeful. I have learned to choose hope. It was a battle in many ways with the obstacles I’ve overcome, but I have learned to live in the present and choose hope through faith and positivity. ...

... If I can impact the life of one person, my job is done. While I am not teaching an academic subject like I thought I’d be doing, had studied to do, and poured my life into doing, I hope to use my teaching skills to share my thoughts on the ideas of overcoming, hope, motivation, inspiration, dedication, and love.



Sometimes the road is bumpy, and other times it is smooth sailing. Like in *The Wizard of Oz*, I have followed a 'yellow brick road.' This road may have curved a bit, but it was clear and evident where you go next. There were other times where the road was long, windy, and curvy, with little light showing which direction to go, like the ride Space Mountain at Disney World. You have no idea where you are going, as there is little to no light shining the direction the ride will go. Both roads have given me a perspective of life that I have learned and gleaned from, making me the strong person I am today.

My hope is that this book will inspire you and guide you down your own road. Open your heart and open your mind, so that we can truly journey on this road together.

Are you ready? Before you jump in with me, do me a favor. Close your eyes. Imagine you had ten more years to live. Just ten. Think about that for a minute. Now, think as though you were six years old and you are told you had ten more years to live. Just ten. What are your thoughts? How will you live? Now add on to this ten years; imagine yourself with an unknown medical history with little information about your birth family. What types of struggles will you encounter? Okay, now that you have this picture in your mind, let's go!"

From Chapter 6: *One Thing After Another*, pages 61-64

"Riding in a wheelchair is a humbling experience. Anyone that rides in a wheelchair would probably agree that people treat you differently than an able-bodied person. When a person is in a wheelchair, he/she sits low to the ground. When you are lower, you see the world differently. Being in a wheelchair made me feel disabled. Even though I was, I didn't like that term and didn't like being so low. I felt less competent than others. It was as though people saw the wheelchair and immediately thought person with a disability, rather than me, Nikki.

People sometimes seem as if I am invisible to them. It irritates me when people don't stop to open or hold doors for those in wheelchairs. This happens a lot. It is like people don't see people in chairs and they let the door shut in their face. I am here, too! I feel so much more compassion than I would have without the wheelchair; I know what it is like and how I would like others to treat me. I see it from both perspectives: as a person that can walk and a person in a wheelchair. When I am walking without my chair, I feel abled and like I can take on the world. When I am in the wheelchair, I feel disabled and unable to do as much as others. While I am grateful to have a wheelchair, it is hard emotionally for me to be in it. Our society puts a stigma on people with wheelchairs and disabilities.

I have always been leery of traveling because it takes extra steps for me to arrange for my wheelchair. The thought it takes going on trips and every step in planning to make sure a room is accessible and available, let alone travel arrangements, is a headache. There are

many countries and even states that are not wheelchair-friendly, especially those with bumpy and cobblestone roads.



Despite the struggle of being in a wheelchair, there are some plusses. Some people are not able to get out and walk and are wheelchair bound. I can get out of my wheelchair. When a person has a wheelchair, they often have a handicapped parking place. This often comes in handy at big events. One of the greatest features, in my opinion, is that I get to go ahead of the line for rides at Disney World or other venues. I feel privileged when I'm given special treatment like this.

Not many people know I use a wheelchair. It is not something that comes up in daily conversation. Some of my closest friends don't even know I use a wheelchair. It is nothing I try to hide; it is just not something people know about unless we go to an event or travel. It is always challenging to find people willing and able to push me in the wheelchair. I often don't want to be a hindrance to others or make others do heavy lifting with the wheelchair or make people push me. I hate getting the stares from people, like, "What's wrong with you?" and those who try to 'over help.' I also get people that don't understand or forget that I need a wheelchair to get around. Since I look 'normal,' people think I might have broken my foot or something. No matter how many times I get together with someone, they forget I need a wheelchair and it takes longer to get in and out of events. Sometimes I don't go places because it is too much of a hassle. It is another physical reminder to me of my health problems. I just want to be 'normal' and feel 'accepted.'

Another benefit, yet challenge, of this diagnosis is the privilege of having a handicapped parking sticker. This is what gave me hope. It gave me hope that I could participate in things I wanted to, by parking close to the entrance. It gave me hope to know that I could park closer and wouldn't get muscle cramps. It gave me hope. I am grateful for that. I am grateful that I can park closer to conserve energy. I am glad that I am able to have resources available to me. It gave me hope that I would be treated and viewed similar to others.

I have had a handicapped parking sticker ever since I can remember. This was just a part of me. Having a handicapped parking sticker is not as easy as it may sound, though. Sure, it is nice to have when shopping on Black Friday when there are no parking spots available or when you are at a huge event; however, often times it comes with much grief. I have often gotten ugly, evil stares, dirty looks, shaking of heads, and even mean comments. It makes my heart cry to see discrimination thrown out to people that don't deserve this, especially when they are so young. I know I don't look like I need a handicapped parking sticker, but I do. It saves my life. I am able to participate in things I wouldn't otherwise be able to. ...

... I feel as though every time I park in a handicapped parking place, whether I am alone or with others, I need to walk with a limp or walk in a weird way. I feel as though people are looking at me and judging me to see whether I am truly handicapped. I feel as though I



always need to be on my best behavior and get out of the car when no one is around. There are times in which I literally sit in the car until I don't see many people around and get out of the car. I've waited for five minutes at one time just to get out of the car, so fewer people would see me. Why can't I just be me and walk how I walk? I am sick of people judging me. I'd rather be safe than sorry, to protect myself.

Hope seemed to not be there. This idea of hope somewhere was lost. I couldn't understand what there was to hold on to when all I saw was darkness.

From Chapter 10: *Process, Learning, Reflections*, pages 146-147

"I learned it is okay to grieve. I have gone through every stage of grief probably twice. It is okay to grieve. It is okay to grieve the loss of these things—my car, my body, my dreams. At first, I wanted to just shut it all away and act like it didn't really matter to me. I didn't realize that it was okay to be where I was at and acknowledge that where I am at is where I am. I am still grieving. It is a process. It is a challenge. It's hard to lose things that are so important to you—your body, your brain control, your dreams. I had huge dreams for my life, still do, but am realizing that it takes time when you lose things you love and are so important to you. It is okay to grieve.

I have learned that we all have our own battles to fight. My health challenges are my battle I am fighting. For some people, it is battling weight loss; for others, it is battling a divorce; for others, it is financial problems. There are many different problems that we all deal with and face. When we face our battles, it is easy for us to think, "Why me? Why do I have to go through this?" But it is important to acknowledge that we all have our own battles to face and mountains to climb. Each one of us.

I have also learned and accepted that I am physically, mentally, and emotionally about fifteen years older than I really am. Physically, they say that with all my medical problems, I have a body of a forty-year-old. Mentally and emotionally, I am not on the same level as many of the peers my age. I have gone through more life experiences than the average person. At times, it is hard for me to relate to those that are my age. I accept where I am. Even though it sucks at times and I'd much rather be where many of my peers are in their life stages, I am learning to accept where I am at.

I learned to live in the present. Being told as a young child that you would die in your teen years was life changing. I never really understood the impact of that on my life until much more recently. None of us know what tomorrow will bring. However, I cherish every day and every moment I get 'to be' because I never know how much more time I will have here on this earth.



I learned that it is important to hold on tight for dear life. None of us know what tomorrow will bring. We can't predict the future. What we can do is surround ourselves with God and people who will cheer us on and push us towards greatness.

I learned that we all have choices in life. Every day we make choices about what we will do, what we will wear, what we will eat, but ultimately it is how we live that is important. We can choose to be positive, or we can choose to be negative. I can say, "Gosh, I dislike being stuck at home needing to rest," or I can say what an incredible blessing it is to have opportunities to do other things. It is all our choice and how we look at things.

Finally, I learned there is much more to life than just getting a job, getting married, having kids, buying a house—living the 'American dream.' We all want to live the American dream. Many of us desire these things. I realized there is so much more to life than this. Yes, these are all important. Yes, I do want and still desire all of these marking, defining moments. Yet I also know there is so much more to life. Going through these experiences helped me to really appreciate every moment of life. I don't want to take anything for granted.