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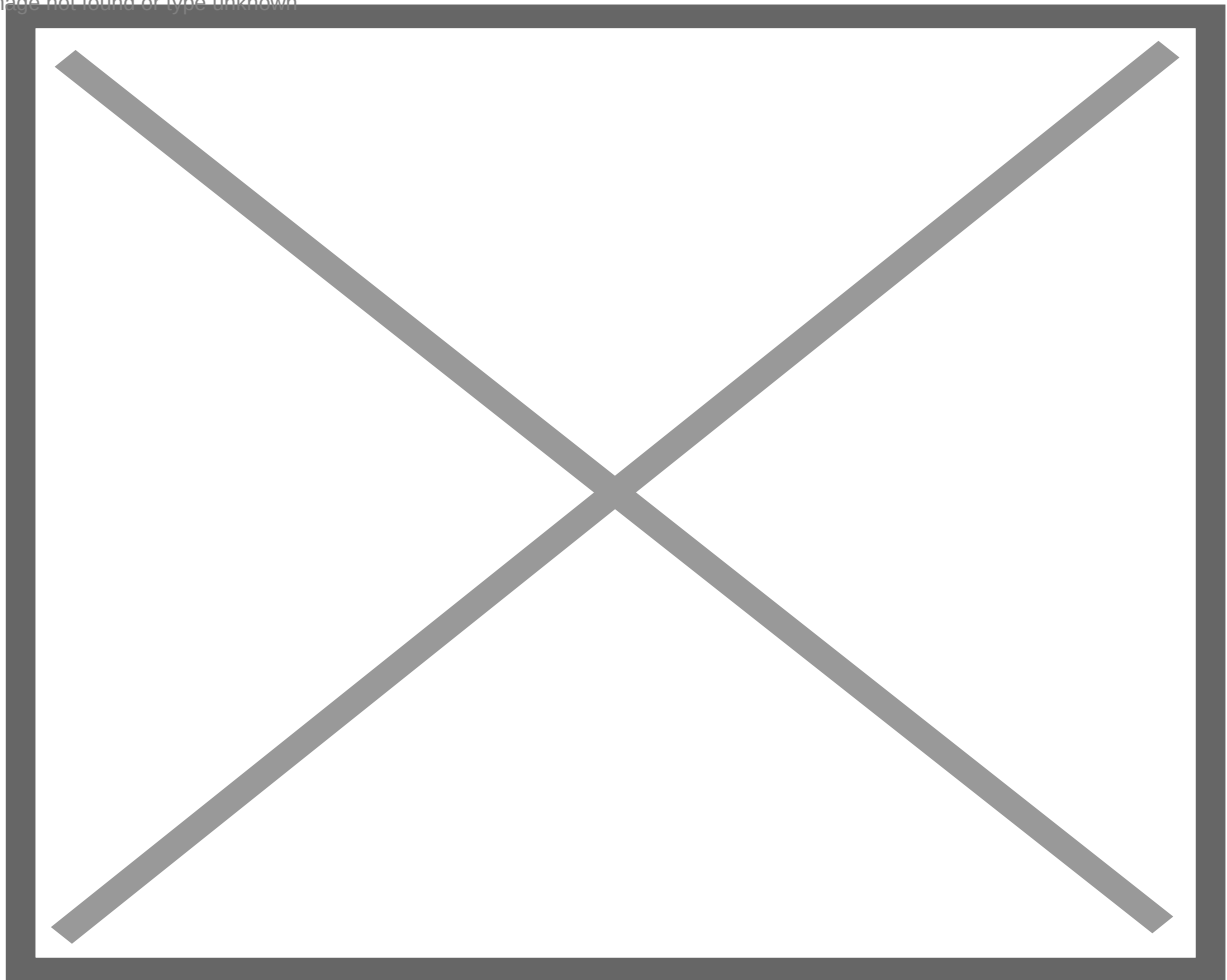
From Boutique to Bali: Dr. Simmonds Builds Global Movement Rooted in Purpose, Healing, and Sisterhood

From her boutique in the USVI to international retreats in Bali and Greece, Dr. Simmonds has cultivated a movement that empowers women to heal, build trust, and thrive through community, all while supporting survivors through her nonprofit Hope.

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Dr. Khnuma Simmonds.

From her boutique storefronts to her series of international women's retreats, serial entrepreneur Khnuma Simmonds has become a familiar name across the Virgin Islands. An original member of Women in Business, she returned to the Live with Laura set with host Laura Forbes on Sunday to share her insights on female entrepreneurship in the territory.

Dr. Simmonds reflected on the origins of Girlfriendism, a movement that emerged during the height of the Covid-19 pandemic. As restrictions cut off access to in-person social spaces—such as My Girlfriend’s Closet, the brick-and-mortar boutique she owns—Dr. Simmonds turned to virtual platforms to maintain connection, using online talks and fashion shows to engage her community.

When gathering restrictions lifted, the desire for intentional, in-person interaction lingered. In response, the first Girlfriendism retreat was launched in 2021. “It has grown now into this beautiful global movement supporting entrepreneurs, creatives, survivors and advocates across the globe,” Dr. Simmonds said.

She describes herself as an “intuitive entrepreneur,” explaining that “I make moves based on what I feel called to do,” a mindset reflected in the evolution of Girlfriendism International. It leads to a meaningful, if unpredictable, journey, she added: “because sometimes you're called to do something and you don't always know why.” The answer, she believes, comes later. “Trust your purpose...trust your calling...the answer will flow after,” she declared.

Since that first gathering, Simmonds and her network of approximately 30 “Girlfriends” have immersed themselves in cultures around the world, holding retreats in Greece, Bali, and Thailand, and building an expanding global network of women along the way.

“The women who are coming on these trips are coming with intention,” said Simmonds, emphasizing that the Girlfriendism retreats are much more than vacations. “We're coming with the understanding that we want to bond, connect and trust other women,” she said. “Trusting women is something that I think is a challenge for a lot of us in our community.”

The retreats offer what she calls a safe space to form deep, intentional friendships—something she argues is increasingly critical in a world weighed down by stress and isolation. Simmonds pointed to research connecting strong social bonds with better brain health, lower dementia risk, and longer life expectancy.

Promoting friendship and emotional connection, she added, is also key to undoing the deeply rooted stereotype of the “independent black woman.” “Just because we can doesn't mean that we should have to carry the burdens of the world by ourselves,” Dr. Simmonds said. “Just because we can be strong doesn't mean we don't deserve soft spaces to land on...places where we can cry on someone's shoulder and say ‘this is what I'm going through.’”

“That's the power of friendship,” she concluded.

In addition to her entrepreneurial work, Dr. Simmonds also spoke about her nonprofit organization, Hope, which offers services for survivors of sexual and domestic violence. “Even though I left, the work didn't leave me,” she said, referencing her prior role as executive director of the VI Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Council.

Hope supports survivors who seek to rebuild through entrepreneurship and creative outlets. “We want people to understand that being a survivor is not your only identity. It is a part of the journey.”

For Dr. Simmonds, creating space for healing, support, and growth isn’t just a mission—it’s destiny. “Sometimes you're just called to do a thing. It's part of your ministry and your purpose.”

