P.O.V.
Discussion Guide

LUMO
A film by Bent-Jorgen Perlmutt and Nelson Walker III
Co-directed by Louis Ableman and Lynn True

www.pbs.org/pov
Dear Colleague,

In the words of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, Antonio Guterres, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (the Congo) experiences the equivalent of "a tsunami every six months." Every day in the Congo, 1,200 people die from conflict-related causes. With an estimated 4 million deaths in the last decade, the conflict and its ongoing aftermath represent the greatest loss of life in any war since World War II.

Getting a grasp on the Congo — its wars, political machinations and bewildering ethnic rivalries — is difficult, perhaps contributing to the relative obscurity of the humanitarian disaster on the world stage. We only began to understand it ourselves when we spent the fall of 2004 in the frontier town of Goma. We were volunteers making medical informational videos for HEAL Africa Hospital, an NGO whose directors were our generous hosts.

Congo’s wealth of beauty and its tragic history could occupy any filmmaker for a thousand years, but we were compelled to choose this story because of its searing immediacy. Each day, as we filmed at the hospital, flatbed trucks arrived filled with women from the rural highlands. The passengers were all victims of systematic rape and torture, and all suffered from a debilitating condition known as traumatic fistula. Many were our age and became our friends. We knew this tragedy was ongoing, yet the world seemed to know nothing about it, and we felt helpless in its wake.

We returned to the Congo in the fall of 2005 eager to put a human face on this situation, something that we found interviews alone could not do. We decided that shooting in an observational style could personalize the disaster for a viewer in the same way that it had become personal for us.
Back at HEAL Africa we found our subject. Lumo was at the center of a group of girls going stir-crazy waiting for treatment, passing the time playing jacks, catching grasshoppers and singing hymns. When we asked whether anyone would like to share their story with us, Lumo was the first to step forward, cementing her reputation for brashness among the patients. Spending some time with Lumo, we began to look up to her — not because of the magnitude of her disaster, but because of the warm and mischievous spirit she retained despite that experience.

She is a profoundly normal young woman in many ways. Her hopes of marriage and a family were dashed by the injuries her attackers inflicted, but in her struggle to recover she distinguished herself with courage, as demonstrated by her will to return again to her village, a place where renegade militias continue to roam.

We are convinced that the extreme nature of the hardships faced by people in places like the Congo, Darfur and such other conflict zones around the world need not overwhelm our ability to empathize, as the “objective” point of view expressed in news reports often does. We believe that documentaries can allow us to see human suffering more clearly, and we hope that with empathy will come renewed efforts to bring such suffering to an end.

We also hope that after seeing this film, you will see these women as courageous survivors, and no longer as helpless victims. We also hope that you will understand the weight of official prejudice stacked against them and find ways to support their campaign for basic human rights.

Bent-Jorgen Perlmutt and Nelson Walker III
Filmmakers, Lumo
Table of Contents

5 Introduction
6 Background Information
   The Congo – General Information
7 Timeline of Conflict
10 HEAL Africa
11 General Discussion Questions
12 Discussion Prompts
14 Taking Action
15 Resources
17 How to Buy the Film

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The agonies of the ongoing conflict in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, on the Rwanda border, are deeply etched on the bodies of women. Like centuries of military predecessors, the Congo’s competing militias, armies and bandits have routinely used rape as a weapon of terror.

Lumo Sinai was just over 20 when marauding soldiers attacked her. A fistula, common among victims of violent rape, rendered her incontinent and threatens her ability to bear children. Rejected by her fiancé and cast aside by her family, she awaits reconstructive surgery. With the help of the staff at an extraordinary Congolese hospital, Lumo begins the long process of physical healing as well as the difficult journey to overcome the emotional burdens of shame and fear that rob her of a normal life.

The feature-length [52 minutes]1 documentary that bears her name tells Lumo’s story, tragic for its cruelties but also inspiring for her struggle and the dignity she displays. As an outreach tool, the film’s disturbing topics can facilitate a deep examination of one woman’s tragedy and healing process and, by extension, the scourge of rape that marks the war-torn politics of central Africa.

1 The festival version of the film is 72 minutes long.
The Congo – General Information

Since its independence from Belgium in 1960, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (the Congo) formerly known as Zaire, has been a hotbed of violence and conflict. Straddling the equator, the central African country has a tropical and humid climate. The Congo is surrounded by the countries of Angola, Zambia, the Central African Republic, Sudan, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi and Tanzania.

The Congo’s population, which is 56 million, comprises more than 200 ethnic groups. An estimated 65 percent of the population can read and write in French, the official language. The proportion of people who have entered primary school has decreased steadily since the wars began in 1993.

Rich mineral deposits, competing tribal groups, a brutal colonial legacy and vast stretches of forest have always made the nation ripe for foreign intervention and political chaos. The eastern Congo, where uncertain borders are remote from the capital of Kinshasa, has especially served as a haven and a battleground for Congolese insurgents and armed groups spilling over from wars in neighboring countries. The end of the Rwandan genocide sent thousands of Hutu militiaen, the *interahamwe*, responsible for the mass murder of Tutsis and moderate Hutus, fleeing to the Congolese forests, where they were pursued by the new Tutsi-dominated Rwandan army.

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Their struggle became entangled with a long-running insurgency against the crumbling Mobutu regime and cross-border tensions with other nations, helping to fuel the First and Second Congo Wars. The latter, lasting from 1998 to 2003, involved six African nations and some 20 armed groups and led to the death of nearly 4 million people, earning it the epithet "Africa’s First World War." Child soldiers, drugs, superstition and a virulent terrorizing of women characterized the fighting.

**Timeline of Conflict**

**1960:** After almost a century of colonization, the Congo declares independence from Belgium on June 30. The charismatic Patrice Lumumba is elected prime minister and Joseph Kasavubu becomes president of the Congo. Shortly after Lumumba takes office, he is dismissed and arrested soon after. Moise Tshombe declares Katanga an independent province and is elected president.

**1961:** Belgian- and U.S.-backed troops arrange Lumumba’s assassination. Later that year, Mobutu Sese Seko, an army general favored by the United States, seizes power in a coup, propping up a Kasavubu-led government, and begins disarming Katangese soldiers. That coup paves the way for what would be 32 years of corrupt anti-Communist rule.

**1962:** In the wake of Rwandan independence from Belgium, the majority Hutus seize power from the minority Tutsis, effectively switching roles of oppressor and oppressed. Tens of thousands of Tutsis flee to neighboring countries, with some forming a guerrilla army, the Rwandan Patriotic Front. Lying to Rwanda’s west, the Congo becomes entangled in the conflict between the two groups as refugees and rebels alike flee to the Congo’s eastern cities.

**1963:** Tshombe agrees to end Katanga’s secession.

**1964:** Kasavubu appoints Tshombe prime minister.

**1965:** Kasavubu and Tshombe are ousted in a coup led by Mobutu.

**1966:** Mobutu changes the names of major cities to local language names. The capital Léopoldville becomes Kinshasa.

**1971:** Mobutu renames the nation “the Republic of Zaire” and decrees that all citizens take African, rather than Christian, names. He becomes “Mobutu Sese Seko.”

**1973:** Mobutu nationalizes foreign-owned firms and forces European investors out of the country.

**1977:** Mobutu invites foreign investors back, without much success. French, Belgian and Moroccan troops help repulse an attack on Katanga by Angolan-based rebels.

**1989:** Zaire defaults on loans from Belgium, resulting in a deterioration of the economy.

**Sources:**


http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/3075537.stm
1990: Shortly after the fall of the Berlin Wall, Mobutu, responding to U.S. pressure, agrees to end the ban on multiparty politics and appoints a transitional government, but he retains substantial power.

1991: Following riots in Kinshasa by unpaid soldiers, Mobutu agrees to a coalition government with opposition leaders. He retains control of security apparatus and important ministries.

1993: Rival pro- and anti-Mobutu governments are created.

1994: The Rwandan civil war between the Hutus and the Tutsis spills over into the Congo, creating vast refugee camps in the east, sheltering 2 million Rwandan Hutus, among them the interahamwe, the perpetrators of the genocide.

1996: Using the refugee camps as a base, Rwandan Hutus launch raids on Zairean Banyamulenge Tutsis. Siding with the perpetrators of the Rwandan genocide, the Mobutu government threatens to expel all Tutsis from Zaire. In the autumn, Laurent Kabila and the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaïre (ADF-L) take on Mobutu. Banyamulenge Tutsis join with rebel leader Kabila to form the ADF-L. Aided by the new Rwandan Patriotic Army (RPA), they quickly capture much of eastern Zaire, and by the spring of 1997, they take the capital, Kinshasa, while Mobutu is abroad for medical treatment.

1997: Mobutu surrenders power and flees into exile in Togo. Eight days later Kabila declares himself president of the renamed Democratic Republic of the Congo.

1998: In June, Kabila sets a deadline for all Rwandan troops to leave the Congo. However, Kabila faces a dilemma: The RPA was instrumental in Kabila’s victory over Mobutu, and Rwanda is eager to maintain a presence in the Congo so it can stop Hutu guerrillas from using the refugee camps as bases from which to raid Rwanda. In August, Banyamulenge Tutsi soldiers, many loyal to their Rwandan officers, rebel against Kabila. The rebellion spreads: Rwanda and Uganda back various rebel groups, and Angola, Namibia and Zimbabwe send troops to assist Kabila, launching what would be the beginning of Congo’s civil war. The U.N. commission on illegal traffic in Congo’s natural resources finds all foreign troops to be guilty of looting the Congo. Kabila’s use of interahamwe as mercenaries against the Congolese contributes to the division and hatred of Rwanda in parts of the country that had had no other contact.

October 1998: The International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda sentences former mayor Jean-Paul Akayesu to three life sentences for genocide and crimes against humanity and for other violations, including rape and encouraging widespread sexual violence. This was the first time that an international court had punished sexual violence in a civil war and that rape had been declared an act of genocide.

1999: Rifts emerge between Congolese Liberation Movement rebels supported by Uganda and Rally for Congolese Democracy rebels backed by Rwanda. In an attempt to end a war that had pulled in six countries and dozens of rebel factions, all sides agree to end hostilities with a cease-fire. The Lusaka Peace Accord calls for a joint military commission of rebels and government, the deployment of U.N. peacekeepers, the beginning of a political dialogue and eventual elections.

2000: The U.N. Security Council authorizes a 5,500-strong U.N. force to monitor the cease-fire, but fighting continued. The U.N. force later grows to 17,000, the largest in the world. Despite the size of the army, violence is still prevalent.
2001: Kabila is assassinated by his bodyguard and succeeded by his son, Joseph. The International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia convicts Dragoljub Kunarac for rape, torture and enslavement. This is the first decision by an international tribunal to hold that the systematic rape of women during war constitutes a war crime under international humanitarian law.

2002: Mount Nyiragongo erupts and devastates much of the city of Goma. Rwanda and Uganda agree to troop withdrawals from the Congo. Joseph Kabila signs a peace agreement with rebel groups, giving them portfolios in an interim government, including the vice-presidency. The Belgian government officially apologizes for its role in the assassination of Patrice Lumumba.

2003: President Kabila signs a transitional constitution into law until elections can take place. Massacres continue in the eastern Congo as Rwandan Hutu militiamen who fear reprisals if they return to their home country attack civilians in order to get food and money. An interim parliament is elected and inaugurated.

2004: An attempted coup in Kinshasa fails. There is fighting in the east between the Congolese army and renegade soldiers from a former pro-Rwanda rebel group. Rwanda denies being behind the mutiny.


2005: On International Women’s Day (March 8), Alison Des Forges, senior advisor to Human Rights Watch’s Africa Division, releases a report on sexual violence in the Congo, urging the Congolese government to take greater steps in prosecution of wartime rape.

2005: Voters approve a new constitution, which limits the president to two five-year terms and paves the way for national elections.

2006: Thousands are displaced in the northeast as the army and U.N. peacekeepers step up the drive to disarm irregular forces ahead of elections. Following a run-off vote in the Congo’s first democratic election for a new leader since 1960, Joseph Kabila defeats rebel leader Jean Pierre Bemba. In April, a military court in Mbandaka finds seven army officers guilty of mass rape of more than 100 women at Songo Mboyo in 2003; this is the first time rape is tried as a crime against humanity in the Congo. In June, the U.N. Population Fund (UNFPA) reports that about 25,000 Congolese women have been raped in the course of the country’s ongoing violence. However, this number only includes women who have reported the violations and is likely much higher. In December, forces of General Laurent Nkunda and the U.N.-backed army clash in a North Kivu province, which prompts some 50,000 people to flee. The U.N. Security Council expresses concern.

April 2007: The Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda and Burundi relaunch the regional economic bloc Great Lakes Countries Economic Community.


June 2007: The Arch Bishop of Bukavu, Monsignor Francois-Xavier Mavy, warns that war can again break out in the east. Later that month, radio Okapi broadcaster Serge Maheshe is shot dead in Bukavu. He was the third journalist killed in the country since 2005.

2007: Although fighting has decreased in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, armed groups loyal to opposition leader Bemba continue to clash with government forces, despite Bemba’s departure for Portugal (ending the three-week stalemate in Kinshasa, where he had taken shelter in the South African Embassy). Local violence also continues in the eastern part of the country, where Tutsi, Hutu and Mai Mai militia and the national army all exact a heavy toll on civilians.

Sources:
CIA World Factbook;
www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/war/congo.htm;
www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/war/rwanda.htm;
http://www.madre.org/articles/int/b10/sexualrights.html;
http://news.amnesty.org/index/ENGPOL300202004;
http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/country_profiles/1072684.stm;

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HEAL Africa

HEAL Africa was founded in 1994 by Dr. Kasereka (“Jo”) and Lyn Lusi, initially to provide ongoing medical training for Congolese doctors. Physical treatment is not an adequate response to the needs of the victims of violence, so HEAL Africa focuses on leadership development as well as training and enabling healthcare providers and activists engaged in community-based healing that addresses the needs of the population’s diverse faiths. HEAL Africa’s training programs for medical specialists work with the University of Goma and the Medical University of South Africa and have links with the University of Ghent, Belgium, the University of Saskatchewan in Canada and the University of California at San Francisco.

HEAL Africa reaches out into the community in partnership with churches, mosques and social activist organizations, working to improve people’s health. Their programs include HIV/AIDS awareness and care; better nutrition through agriculture; solidarity groups providing services to rape victims, widows, orphans and the handicapped; orthopedic surgical services; and community-based rehabilitation for children with disabilities. The staff takes a holistic approach to healing, dealing with social, emotional and spiritual needs as well as treating physical ailments.

One of the services offered by HEAL Africa is surgery to repair fistula, a tear of the wall between a woman’s vagina and her bladder or rectum. Fistula can occur as a complication of pregnancy, surgery or injury. In the 1900s, fistula was a big problem in the United States, but is now virtually unknown in most Western nations due to improved prenatal and delivery care. In the Congo, fistula is common, as a result of violent rape or poor delivery care in childbirth. HEAL Africa has helped more than 1,200 women with fistula repair surgeries and brought physical and emotional support to more than 10,000 women and girls recovering from sexual violence. Income generation programs and family mediation services help rape survivors find their place again in their community as well as provide them with skills to help them live independently, if necessary.
Immediately after the film, you may want to give people a few quiet moments to reflect on what they have seen. If the mood seems tense, you may want to pose a general question and give people some time to themselves to jot down or think about their answers before opening the discussion.

Unless you think participants are so uncomfortable that they can’t engage until they have had a break, don’t encourage people to leave the room between the film and the discussion. If you save your break for an appropriate moment during the discussion, you won’t lose the feeling of the film as you begin your dialogue.

One way to get a discussion going is to pose a general question, such as:

- If you could ask anyone in the film a single question, who would you ask and what would you ask them?
- If a friend asked you what this film was about, what would you tell them?
- Did anything in this film surprise you? If so, what? Why was it surprising?
- What insights or inspiration did you gain from this film? What did you learn about the film’s subjects and/or about yourself?
Impact of Sexual Violence

• New York Times reporter Nicholas Kristof says, “We tend to think in this country of terrorism as something that is done with car bombs or suicide bombs, but in much of the world, terrorism is done with rapes.” What makes rape an effective tool for terrorists?

• Lumo observes, “When I got here, I was like someone who is dead.” What do you think she meant? In addition to the physical injuries, how has being raped affected Lumo and the other women who come to the hospital for help?

• Lumo says, “When you don’t have children, you are ashamed. If you get married and you don’t give birth to children, you will be rejected. Your husband’s family will tell him to abandon you.” How does this belief about womanhood relate to rejection of women who have been raped? How would you describe the relationship between this portrait of womanhood and the use of rape as a weapon?

• Describe your reaction to the footage of the women from the hospital walking in the protest march. In your view, in what ways was participating in a protest of violence against women beneficial and in what ways might it have been harmful? In what ways are such protests empowering and in what ways do they reinforce the victim status of these women?

• Imagine that you were part of the crowd at the protest listening to the government representative speak. After acknowledging that “the authorities have a large share of the responsibility,” he says, “sometimes the indecent clothing of our girls, or certain women, is the cause of these barbaric acts.” How would you respond to him? How might his comments contribute to an atmosphere that both prevents and facilitates sexual violence?
• Compare attitudes toward gender roles and sexual violence that you see in the film with attitudes toward women and rape in the United States. In the film, what are some of the attitudes you see regarding women and rape? What are some similarities and differences between the attitudes seen in the film and in the United States? In your view, what accounts for the similarities and differences?

**Healing**

• Lumo demonstrates incredible perseverance. What are the sources of Lumo’s strength? What kinds of things do people at the hospital do to encourage or enable that strength?
• From what (or whom) does Lumo draw comfort?
• What role does religion play in shaping Lumo’s beliefs about women and gender roles? What role does religion play in offering her strength and comfort?
• Women like Lumo experience a conflict arising from wanting to return home, but knowing that their village is not safe. What could be done to increase their sense of safety?

• Assuming that they could be identified, what should be done with the men (and boys) who raped Lumo and women like her?
• Hospital staff try to encourage the women and girls in their care to talk about what happened to them. What is the value of having people listen to their stories? What is the power of serving as a witness to the stories that the hospital patients tell?
• Lumo never went to school and questions the need for reading and writing: “Can those things do anything for you?” How would you answer her?
• A woman who is on the hospital staff says, “So we ask ourselves: How will this business end? What’s going to happen to these women? Will they always live a life of being raped?” How would you answer her? What can people do to bring “this business to an end?”
• Find ways to support rape crisis services or other programs that work to end violence against women in your community.

• Find ways to support organizations that provide medical and support services in the Congo, such as HEAL Africa, the hospital featured in the film. For information on aid opportunities, visit www.healafrica.org.

• Investigate U.S. policy on aid to the Congo and on conflict in the region. Talk with legislators to let them know what you want the United States to do.

• Convene a town hall meeting to address U.S. foreign policy as it relates to the ongoing violence in the Congo and/or other African nations.

• Organize a V-Day event. V-Day is a worldwide campaign to end violence against women. Playwright Eve Ensler promotes V-Day through readings of The Vagina Monologues in hundreds of cities around the world. In 2008, V-Day will focus on the Democratic Republic of the Congo. For more information, visit www.vday.org.

Women march against sexual violence. Photo Louis Abelman

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FILM-RELATED WEB SITES

Original Online Content on P.O.V. Interactive (www.pbs.org/pov)

P.O.V.’s Lumo Web site
www.pbs.org/pov/lumo

The companion website to Lumo offers exclusive streaming video clips from the film, a podcast version of the filmmakers’ interview and a wealth of additional resources, including a Q&A with the filmmakers, ample opportunities for viewers to “talk back” and talk to each other about the film.

THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

HEAL AFRICA
www.healafrica.org/

HEAL Africa’s mission is to provide holistic care to the people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, including training health professionals, strengthening social activists, and providing physical, spiritual and social healing. Their site provides information on their programs, allows visitors to make a donation and also links to articles referencing their work.

BBC
http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/country_profiles/1076399.stm

The BBC News website is a helpful starting point for general information about the Congo and a timeline of recent events as well as links to current news stories and a photo essay telling the story of two girls who survived rape.

AFRICAN STUDIES CENTER
www.africa.upenn.edu/Country_Specific/Zaire.html

This page on the website of the University of Pennsylvania’s African Studies Center provides a comprehensive set of links related to the Congo.

ALL AFRICA
www.allafrica.com

This website gathers reports from media organizations across Africa. Search on “Congo” for reports on events in the Congo.

U.S. STATE DEPARTMENT
www.state.gov/p/af/ci/cg/

This U.S. State Department site provides general information on the Congo as well as summaries of current U.S. policies governing its relationship with the central African nation.

U.N. MISSION IN THE CONGO
www.monuc.org

The official website of the U.N. peacekeeping force assigned to the Congo includes up-to-date reports related to human rights and political developments.
Human Rights and Rape in the Congo

**MS. MAGAZINE**
www.msmagazine.com/spring2005/congo.asp

This article by Stephanie Nolan, entitled “Not Women Anymore,” provides an excellent summary of the conflict in the Congo and the use of rape as a means to instill fear and implement genocide.

**DOCTORS WITHOUT BORDERS**
www.doctorswithoutborders.org/news/Congo.cfm

Annual activity reports from Doctors Without Borders include statistics on how many people have been treated for conditions resulting from sexual violence as well as a downloadable video from 2006 summarizing the ongoing situation.

**HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH**
www.hrw.org/reports/2002/Congo

The website of Human Rights Watch, an international organization dedicated to defending human rights across the globe, includes dozens of reports about the Congo and related conflicts, including this 2002 report entitled “The War Within the War.” For direct testimony from rape survivors, see http://www.hrw.org/press/2002/06/congo-testim0620.htm.

**AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL**
http://thereport.amnesty.org/eng/Regions/Africa/Congo

Each year, Amnesty International, a human rights organization that focuses on freeing political prisoners, produces a country-by-country report on the status of human rights. This link is to the 2007 report on the Congo.

Human Rights and Sexual Violence – General

**CENTER FOR WOMEN’S GLOBAL LEADERSHIP**
www.cwgl.rutgers.edu/index.html

The CWGL’s website includes essays and articles using feminist analysis to examine and advocate for human rights for women.

**WOMEN’S DIGNITY**
www.womensdignity.org

This Tanzania-based organization brings fistula repair and prevention to women in rural Tanzania.

**END FISTULA NOW**

The UNFPA campaigns worldwide to bring safe childbirth to all women, even in rural areas.

**UNICEF**
www.unicef.org/protection/index_38552.html

Through UNICEF, the United Nations has initiated a campaign to end the use of sexual violence against women as part of armed conflict. This link provides general information on the start of the initiative. UNICEF is a major supporter of Heal My People, the sexual violence program of HEAL Africa.

**GENEVA CONVENTIONS**
www.genevaconventions.org

The Society of Professional Journalists has created this searchable version of the Geneva Conventions, an international set of laws and treaties covering a wide range of topics, including rape.
To order Lumo, go to www.gomafilmproject.org or email info@gomafilmproject.org.

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P.O.V. Interactive
www.pbs.org/pov

P.O.V.’s award-winning Web department produces a Web-only showcase for interactive storytelling, P.O.V.’s Borders. It also produces a Web site for every P.O.V. presentation, extending the life of P.O.V. films through community-based and educational applications, focusing on involving viewers in activities, information and feedback on the issues. In addition, www.pbs.org/pov houses our unique Talking Back feature, filmmaker interviews, viewer resources and information on the P.O.V. archives as well as myriad special sites for previous P.O.V. broadcasts.

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www.americandocumentary.org
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Front cover: Lumo chats with friends.
Photo Nelson Walker III

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