



**Feeding the Forgotten Children  
of Post-War Liberia**

**Disappearance  
of Childhood**

**BESTWÄ**



# About the Program

## Program

BESTWA  
(Building Everyone’s Success Together in West Africa)

## Program Commitment

BESTWA operates a feeding program that serves about 600 children each weekday at two locations in Buchanan, Liberia. A supporting partner, World Children’s Fund, provides financially for a portion of the feeding program. WCF also routinely dispatches ocean cargo container shipments of nutritious rice meals into Liberia for both the children enrolled in the BESTWA feeding program and other vulnerable people in the surrounding community.

## Program Location

Country: Liberia  
City: Buchanan  
County: Grand Bassa  
Feeding Site #1: Gorzohn community  
Feeding Site #2: Fairgrounds community

## Program Impacts & Significance

BESTWA (Building Everyone’s Success Together in West Africa) was founded by Andy Perkins in 2004. Andy was born in the United States, but began traveling to Liberia in 1998 and was “hooked” by Liberia’s people and their extreme humanitarian need. Since 1998, he has devoted both his personal resources and time to the development of humanitarian aid and programs in Liberia. In addition to Andy’s leadership, BESTWA has a local Liberian board of five, who assist with daily program logistics.

Board Director, Daniel Mellish, field director of operations, is a prime example of the commitment and compassion of BESTWA’s team. He and his wife, Victoria, reside directly adjacent to the feeding location in Gorzohn. Their home is constantly

surrounded by upwards of 400 children, noisy, boisterous and hungry for both food and attention. In addition to the Mellish’s own seven biological children, they are raising an additional six children as their own. The love and dedication they demonstrate every day for these children, the future leaders of their country, is palpable.

In addition to the feeding program, BESTWA constructed a Well-Baby and Maternal Clinic, also located in Buchanan. Perkins estimates that the clinic serves about 150 women and their babies per week. BESTWA is currently constructing a new birthing clinic, located on six acres in a geographic area known as “Four Houses Community” in Buchanan. According to Perkins, only about 6% of all Liberian women give birth in a medical facility. He hopes the new clinic, which should begin operating in late 2014, will save the lives of both Liberia’s mother’s and their infants. ■





# Liberia—A Troubled Past and Uncertain Future

Charles Taylor, warlord and former president of Liberia, sits in a high security prison in Great Britain serving fifty years for his heinous crimes against humanity. At the same time, 3.5 million Liberians wake up to begin their day. They wonder what has happened to their country and where they will get their next bit of food.

The children suffer most. Many are orphaned. They have lost parents, siblings and relatives. They have witnessed murder and executions. They and their older siblings were recruited to work as child soldiers. These are the children and adolescents of post-war Liberia.

To understand present day Liberia, you have to look back. Yes. Liberia has had peace for ten years, although United Nations peacekeeping forces are still on the ground and have been since the signing of the 2003 cease-fire agreement. The impacts of Liberia's civil strife are apparent everywhere, even in the capital city of Monrovia, with a population of more than a million.

This once bustling country has been reduced to a primitive nation. Imagine no running, clean water, no electricity, no phones, no internet, no government, no law, no order, no economy, no food. Millions were displaced during the conflicts and an estimated 250,000 killed.

The violence uncorked in 1980, when Samuel Doe led a military coup into the presidential palace. President William Tolbert was murdered. Thirteen of Tolbert's top governmental ministers were marched through the streets of the Monrovia, mocked, then lined up and shot in a public execution on the adjacent beach. Doe took his place as

the de-facto leader of Liberia and later had himself elected president. Rebels executed Doe in 1990, lead by Charles Taylor, king of guerilla war and anarchy. Doe was tortured and his barbaric death was recorded and made public. By the mid-1990s, most of Liberia was controlled by rebel factions. Civil war raged until the signing of the cease-fire agreement and Charles Taylor left Liberia.

Experts estimate Liberia's civil wars claimed the lives of one out of every 17 people in the country and uprooted most everyone else. It completely obliterated Liberia's once-viable economic infrastructure. Re-building Liberia has been a slow process. The strategic destruction included targeting the country's physical infrastructure, such as its power grid, telecommunications, ports, roads and bridges. The chaos also included looting and destroying homes, schools and hospitals.

Today, most Liberian women cook over fire, using wood or charcoal. Water is gathered from wells or rivers, as water no longer flows through city pipes. Life is hard. When the sun goes down, the country goes dark. Cheap flashlights from China, candles and a few generators operate, assuming people have the cash for diesel and batteries. The average worker makes less than two USD per day. Unemployment rages. The average family consists of eight. The math simply does not work. The economy is sputtering. No jobs.

The people say there are too many days in the month, and not enough food or money. This is Liberia. It is a land of suffering, but also a testimony of human resilience and hope.

Humanity survives on hope. For the children in the BESTWA feeding program in Buchanan, Liberia, hope arrives each day on a plate filled with hot, nutritious food. ■



*This once bustling country has been reduced to a primitive nation.*





# Getting There

Thirty hours after leaving the west Coast of the U.S., I landed in Monrovia, Liberia. I stayed overnight in Monrovia and departed for Buchanan the following morning, which is located about 120 km southeast of the capital city. I travelled by car to the BESTWA feeding sites.

What was once an arduous and minimum eight-hour trip by vehicle, has recently been reduced to less than four hours. Prior to the recent road improvement and paving, the dirt was so saturated with water during the rainy season, it was nearly impossible to travel between the two cities without a four-wheel drive vehicle. The road is notable for being new, paved and free from massive potholes. Check points along the way serve as a constant reminder of Liberia's violent past. They require numerous stops between the two cities, exiting the vehicle if asked, providing passports and answering tedious questions.

In Buchanan, I spend my nights under a mosquito net in BESTWA's partially constructed maternity clinic. My days are spent interviewing and photographing children and staff at two feeding sites. My hosts from BESTWA graciously provided meals cooked over a charcoal fire outside and boiled water for my daily bucket bath.

When World Children's Fund International program Director, Doug Kendrick arrived in Buchanan, he visited both feeding sites, toured the local area and was honored by a formal celebration hosted by the community that included singing and speeches. The community arrived in force to thank BESTWA and World Children's Fund and their donors for the positive impact their support is making in Buchanan.

A 12-year-old girl from the village, stood and said, "As abandoned children of post war Liberia, we are grateful to the international donors for helping us.

Remember us, the children, who have been abandoned due to poverty and the death of our parents."

Without a doubt, Africa is a world of its own. More than fifty countries occupy the continent, but West Africa, suffers its own unique brand of chronic poverty. Liberia is no exception. As a journalist, I document and capture the stories of people around the globe who survive and thrive because of the humanitarian aid supplied by NGO's and committed donors from around the world. However, Liberia's children steal my words. Their plight forces me to discard the political and academic definitions of poverty and suffering I cling to. My vocabulary no longer seems adequate. I am overwhelmed by the missing pieces in these children's lives.

I have lost track of how many countries I have visited in Africa, or how many times, and the number of flights. But, I will never forget the children in Liberia. I count them as perhaps the most needy children I have interviewed or photographed anywhere in the world.

**T**he BESTWA feeding program in Buchanan is saving the lives of these innocents. After meeting and talking with them, I want more for them. I wish simple things for them, like a toy. I also hope for complicated things on their behalf, including dignity, peace and the opportunity for an education. Literacy. Empowerment. I pray they will have the opportunity to change the trajectory of their lives and eventually their country.

I have promised them that we will carry their stories with us and remember them. No one can save the whole world. But, together, we can rescue and restore one child at a time. ■

Below, the community turns out to thank BESTWA and its donors for the positive impact their support is making in Buchanan.

At right, a map showing Liberia's location.



Doug Kendrick with BESTWA Board Director, Daniel Mellish, field director of operations, below, and some of the participants of the feeding program.



Below: BESTWA founder Andy Perkins, with WCF International program Director, Doug Kendrick, at the Well Baby Clinic in Buchanan.





# How can one describe daily life and chronic poverty in Liberia?

“Put everything you own in a bucket. Go and live in a field. Cook over an open fire on the ground. Collect and carry your water. Hang on by a thread during fourteen years of relentless conflict. Scrounge every day for food and try to ignore your hunger and the starvation of your children. That is what poverty looks like in Liberia,” said Andy Perkins, founder of BESTWA, and director of the feeding program in Buchanan, Liberia.

BESTWA provides hot, nutritious meals to some of Buchanan’s most hungry and vulnerable children. The feeding program currently serves more than 600 children, ages three to fifteen. Five days each week, they arrive hopeful and hungry at two separate locations and are served a hot meal. For most, it is their only consistent food source.

Buchanan is rural and its people poor. Small, cheaply constructed market stalls dot the main street in the center of town. People scrape by selling vegetables or fruits. The selection is sparse. Children sell bananas along the road. Another child walks by with a bucket filled with “sandals” on his head. He is selling cheap, plastic flip-flops.

Since the feeding program has been instituted in Buchanan, the local mayor has praised it for its impact on the reduction of petty theft in the market.

Previously, hungry children roamed the stalls grabbing fruits or vegetables from unsuspecting vendors. “These children are not your typical thieves. They are starving. Without the feeding program to sustain them, their days consist of devoting all of their energy and time focusing on finding food to survive,” said Perkins. ■





Cooks Emma, Willamina and Mary arrive early in the morning at the Gorzohn feeding site and begin preparing meals for more than 400 children. They clean fish, strip greens and cook rice in massive pots over open fires. Amos Morris, the site monitor, takes roll and checks each child in. There are always more children present than enrolled in the program. The waiting list is never ending. The officially registered children are fed first. Many other children show up standing in line for several hours in hopes of receiving left over scraps of food. Children cry when they realize all the food has been disbursed and they are left with nothing. It is stressful for the administrators of the program because there are always more children than food.

“I know I could not walk a mile in their shoes,” said Perkins, referring to the children. “We are working to feed and care for as many as we can.”

Despite being so hungry themselves, a few of the children gather rice from their own plates and carefully hand it under the space at the base of the thatched enclosure where they are served. They place small lumps of rice into the out-stretched hands of children outside who are not as lucky.

A few kilometers away, at the Fairgrounds feeding site, cooks Sarah, Nancy and Kumba are also busy preparing lunch, chopping peppers and stripping sweet potato greens. Pastor Allieu Fallah Barbue walks three hours round trip each day to and from the site, where he monitors and oversees the feeding of the two hundred plus children waiting expectantly for their lunches.

“These children live and survive in pitiful conditions,” said Barbue. “They are the future leaders of this nation and we need to feed, educate and prepare them for service to others. I pray that every donor who is supporting this work in Liberia will be blessed.” ■



Despite being hungry themselves, a few of the children gather rice from their own plates and carefully hand it under the space at the base of the thatched enclosure, into the out-stretched hands of children outside who are not in the feeding program.









# Because you give, they live.

During our recent visit to the west African country of Liberia, our team conducted site visits and interviews with children at two BESTWA feeding site locations in Buchanan, on the coast of Liberia.

*So many share in the same tragedies, their stories begin to sound alike—but, every child is unique. Each contains a human soul, and suffers daily in real and tangible ways.*

All of the children expressed their gratitude for the hot, nutritious, life-saving meals they receive Monday through Friday afternoons. For most, it is the only food they can count on. The meals vary and include rice, cassava, peppers, sweet potatoes, tomatoes, ginger, palm oil and various vegetables.

Children in the feeding program arrive barefoot and partially clothed. Their apparel is dirty, torn and often several sizes too large, or small. A young boy of about 11 years old stands in line for lunch wearing nothing but snug underwear and a shirt unbuttoned because it is also several sizes too small. He is not embarrassed. Other children take no notice. This is everyday life in Liberia.

English is spoken in Liberia, but because of a fourteen-year civil war and unrelenting poverty, these children have not had the luxury of consistent education and a local translator was utilized.

Many of the children have lost parents and family to war, militants, starvation and disease. The children frequently have difficulty maintaining eye contact and speak quietly when questioned about their daily lives. The common denominator among all of them is the constant focus on food and survival. Very few children talk about future dreams or express preferences unless pressed. Theirs is a day-to-day existence.

What is hidden and locked in their young souls? Their eyes are too deep and somber to belong to children. These children of post-war Liberia share the same burdens and responsibilities as adults. They do not belong to football clubs, chat about sports, take dance classes, study piano or ride bikes through the village. They survive.



They collect water, scrounge for food and assist with daily chores. It is not a carefree life filled with play and frivolity. Most do not attend school. The costs for school uniforms and fees are out of reach. The average household size is eight children. Sending one's children to school each day also eliminates a child's ability to spend time scavenging for food or providing manual labor to benefit the family.

Sadly, the narrative of their life stories can begin to feel common. So many share in the same tragedies, it easy to confuse the details of one saga with the next. But, each child is unique. Each contains a human soul, and suffers every day in real and tangible ways.

Because of your donations, these children can live. These daily, nutritious meals bring hope and provide strength and encouragement to these vulnerable children. ■



**Princess, 13**  
Princess has been enrolled in the BESTWA feeding program for two years. At 13 years old, she has the equivalent of a first grade education. She has lived with her grandmother since she was four. Although her grandmother sells charcoal, which is a staple for most families for cooking and making fires, she does not earn enough money to pay the fees required to send Princess to school. Princess' father is deceased and she does not know what happened to her mother. People in the community who were aware of the financial struggles told Princess and her grandmother about the BESTWA feeding program. "I like to play kick ball," she says. However, neither she, nor anyone she knows personally owns a ball.

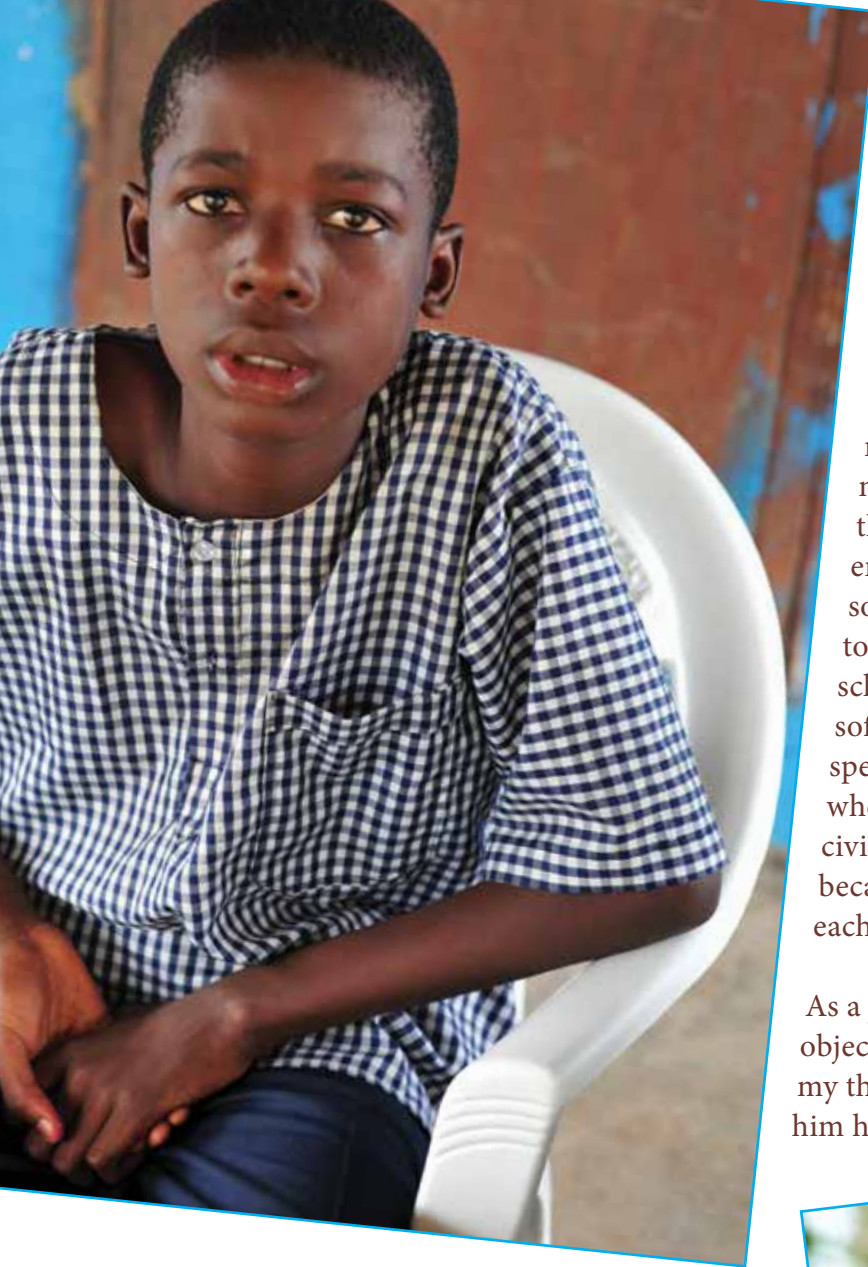
"It truly is a pitiful situation," said Francis R. Joe, who assists with feeding program administration. He speaks both Bassa, the local language and English and helps our team interview children, like Princess. "We have thirteen-year-old adolescents who thankfully are receiving one meal each day, but are in great need of education if we are going to change their future."

## Beatrice, 11

Beatrice has not attended school since she was in Kindergarten. Her mother died last year and Beatrice has been living with her grandmother. She lives in the "Water Tower" district and walks each day to the feeding site. Before being enrolled in the feeding program, she says she did not have lunch each day or food available to her. She says she feels healthier and better physically. "I like to jump rope, when one can be found and I would like to be able to go to school." Beatrice has two siblings who are also living with her grandmother. Her younger sister is also enrolled in the feeding program. None of the three children are enrolled in school.







Charles, 12

Charles is fortunate. He is enrolled in the feeding program and also attends school. He is in grade 6. His father died last year and he is living with his aunt. His mother has moved further into the interior of the country where she lives in a rural area and works as a farmer. His aunt has no other children and sells small trinkets at the market to earn money. Because Charles is enrolled in the feeding program, it alleviates some of the financial burden and his aunt is able to pay the tuition fees and purchase his required school uniform. He is tall and angular. He speaks softly and emanates sadness. He brightens when speaking about school, says he enjoys math and when probed reveals his desire to someday be a civil engineer. “I have more energy and strength because of the food and it helps me get through each day.”

As a journalist, my job is to stay out of the way and objectively tell his story. Instead, I feel a lump in my throat. I would like to give him a hug and assure him his dreams will some day be a reality.



Abraham, 11

His previously white T-shirt is ripped and worn. He attended grade one, but his single mother can no longer pay his school fees. He has two other siblings who are not enrolled in the feeding program and do not attend school either. He lives in Kaytor Town, which is about a 15-minute walk for him each day to the feeding site. He says occasionally his mother is able to find something for dinner, like rice. Generally, the hot meal he receives each weekday through the BESTWA feeding program is his only food. With Abraham enrolled in the feeding program, it eliminates some of the pressure of his mother to provide food to all three children in the family. Abraham does not own a ball, but enjoys football. He says he is very thankful for how he feels after eating each day.

Meshal, 9

Meshal has never attended school. He lives with his grandmother who cares for him along with five other cousins. His parents along with the parents of the other five boys died over the years from sickness, disease and from the effects of the civil war. The grandmother sells salt at a small table at a local market. Both the grandmother and Meshal are grateful for the life-saving meals that Meshal has been receiving for the last year. Meshal would love to own a football and hopes to someday attend school.

John David, 11

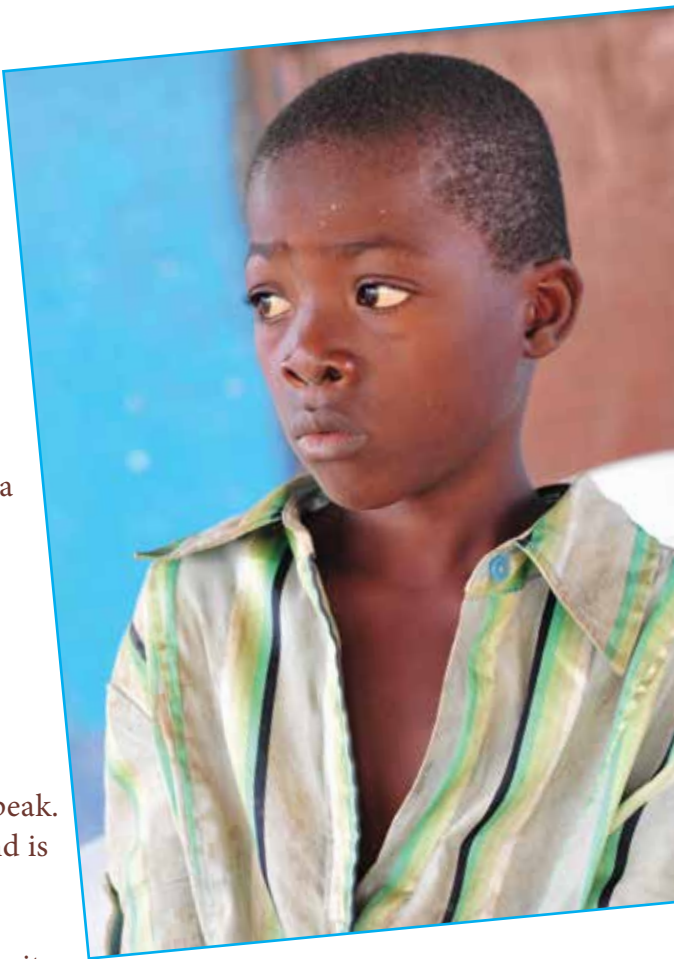
John David is small for his age. Like many children in Liberia, he suffers from stunting which occurs from chronic malnutrition. It affects both physical growth and developmental progress. It is challenging to understand him speak. He is slow and halting. He stops frequently in mid-sentence and is distracted easily.

He has lived with his grandmother in the Fairgrounds Community since he was a baby. He remembers his mother, but not his father, who died when he was very young. He has attended education up to a Kindergarten level. His grandmother cares for a total of 8 children, including John David. It is an impossible feat to feed the five boys and three girls who all rely on their grandmother for survival. Some of the other siblings earn money working at a local well, where they draw and deliver water in large tubs they carry on their heads.

John David loves the potatoes and greens he receives at lunch. He says he has more energy and feels much better each day when he wakes up in the morning since being enrolled in the feeding program.

*“No one has yet fully realized the wealth of sympathy, kindness and generosity hidden in the soul of a child. The effort of every true education should be to unlock that treasure.”*

—Emma Goldman





## Benwesseh, 7 Harrison, 11 Caregiver, Sarah Nyeah

**B**enwesseh has lived with his grandmother, Sarah, since he was 9 months old. He is the child of Sarah's first-born son and she says her son died of starvation. Benwesseh's mother left to find work and has not been back to the village for nearly seven years. His cousin, Harrison, has lived with Sarah since he was four years old. Harrison's father was killed during the civil war. His mother also left to try to find work and has not been seen for many years. The three of them live in a hut in Tinway town. The boys have been enrolled in the BESTWA feeding program for about two years.



"We are making our way, with many thanks to the feeding available for the boys," said Sarah. "When we can't eat, you always take care and look out for us," she said.

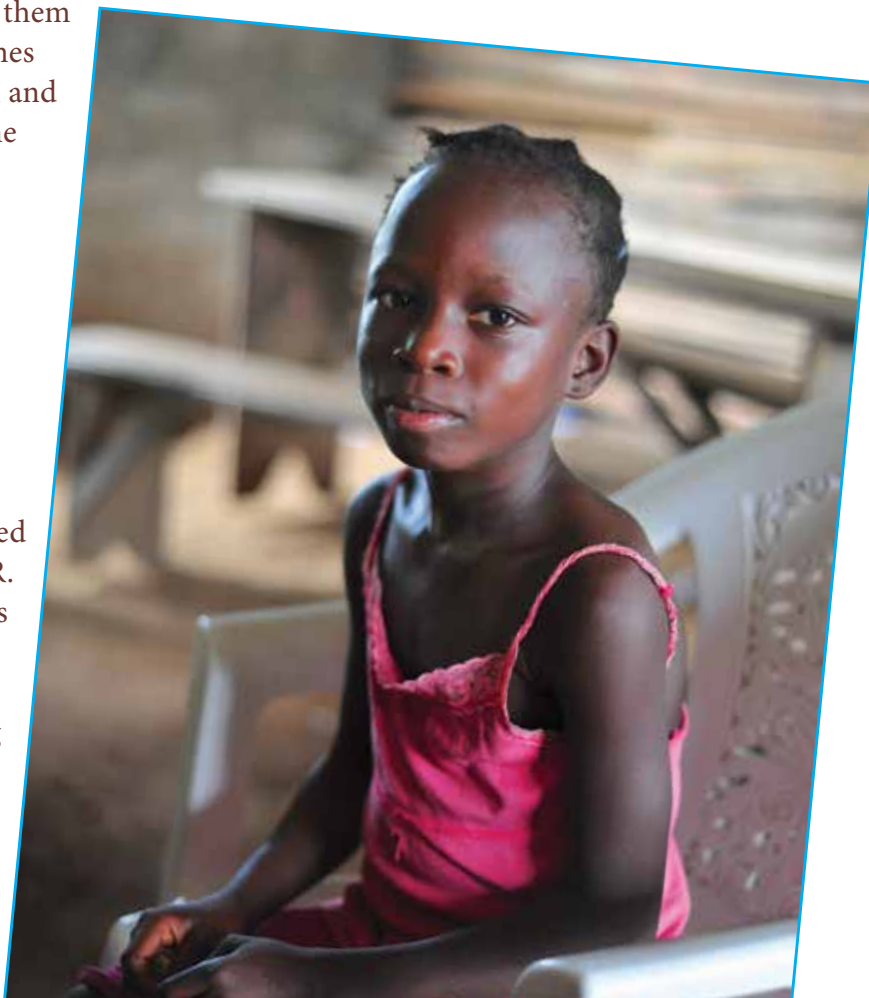
On Saturdays and Sundays, when the feeding program is not available, Sarah says she tries to come up with something small to feed the boys, like dry rice or soup. Benwesseh has never attended school. Harrison has attended kindergarten. Both boys sleep on the ground and do not own either a mattress or mat. They do have a blanket. Between the two boys, they own 10 pieces of clothing.

The boys do not have a ball, but friends take socks and tie them together to create a large, round knot so they can play games of football. Harrison helps earn money by selling charcoal and peanuts. Although he has only been inside of a car once, he would like to become an auto mechanic.

"It is by the Grace of God and kindness of others, we have made it this far. I am thankful. My hope is that I can raise these boys so that they will have a happy life," she said.

## Ruth, 10

**R**uth lives with her mother and her three-year-old sister in the Fairgrounds community. Her father died and her mother has been ill with malaria. Francis R. Joe, who assists with feeding program administration, says that in addition to being enrolled in the BESTWA feeding program, she and her younger sister survive with the help of neighbors and the community. She walks to the feeding location site despite being born with a physical disability that makes it painful to walk. She says she likes to play with friends. She has never attended school, but hopes she can grow up and do something to help others.



## Ellen, 11

**L**ike many children, Ellen cannot "tell time," nor does she own a watch or have a clock in the hut she shares with her grandmother in Tinway Town. "I see other children walking in the afternoon and then I know it is time to start toward the feeding program site." She says sometimes she gets there early and the food is not yet ready, but she enjoys seeing the other kids and engaging with the staff who prepare and serve the hot lunches.

As a younger child, she attended Kindergarten, but has not been in school for six years. Her father died and she has no memories of her mother. She likes to help her grandmother prepare the packets of charcoal that they sell at the market.

She sleeps on the dirt floor of their hut with a blanket that was given to her several years ago by a Red Cross worker. In addition to the pants and shirt she was wearing, she owns two other pieces of clothing. She says she likes jumping and playing hopscotch by scratching lines in the dirt. When she grows up, she says she would like to be a social worker and help other poor children.

## Nanu, 12

**N**anu lives with her mother in the Fairgrounds Community. Rebels killed her father. She has one sister and two brothers also enrolled in the feeding program. None of the children attend school because their mother cannot afford the school fees. Her mother earns money buying cassava, cooking and selling it on the street as a vender. The little money she earns is barely sufficient to feed the four children. Nanu likes music and loves to sing. She does not have a radio, but loves listening to music. She also likes playing kickball. No one has a ball, but they improvise with socks tied into knots. She sleeps on a mat on the dirt floor with her two other siblings and they share a clothing wrap for a cover. "I love to come each day, see my friends and eat the good food," she said.





Mark, 7

Grandmother, Yarnie

Mark has lived with his maternal grandmother, Yarnie, for the past two years. His mother and the baby girl she was attempting to deliver both died in childbirth. His father died shortly thereafter. Liberia boasts some of the highest infant and mother mortality rates in the entire world. One in eight woman will die giving birth. Less than 25 percent of all children born in Liberia survive to the age of five. Yarnie sells Fufu, dough made from boiled and ground Cassava, a staple in Liberia. She bags it and sells it at the local market. Fufu in Western Africa is the equivalent of mashed potatoes to Europeans and Americans. Unfortunately, it does not generate enough income to feed herself or Mark, let alone pay for schooling. Mark dreams of becoming a “real footballer” and having a football of his own some day. His favorite lunches include palm butter, which is used to make a sauce.

“We are thankful to those we have never met who make a way for Mark to survive,” said Grandma Yarnie. “I have already lost my own daughter, son-in-law and unborn grandchild. It is enough pain for one family.”

Emanuel, 7

Mother, Teta

Emanuel lives with his mother, Teta and his three-year-old sister in the Fairgrounds Community. They live in a one-room hut with seven other extended family members. His mother has a fourth grade education and can not find any work to help buy food or pay for Emanuel to attend school. His father dropped dead recently at the age of 34. Emanuel has been enrolled in the BESTWA feeding program for about one year. His health has improved since receiving the nutritious meals. When he arrived, according to program administrators, he had little hair, was malnourished and sickly. His favorite food to receive during lunch is beans. He stands in line waiting for lunch wearing a T-shirt and underpants. He wears his only shoes, plastic sandals, which he calls “flips.”

“The feeding program really helps. I worry less about Emanuel and finding food. Knowing he has at least one meal each day helps us survive as a family,” said Teta.

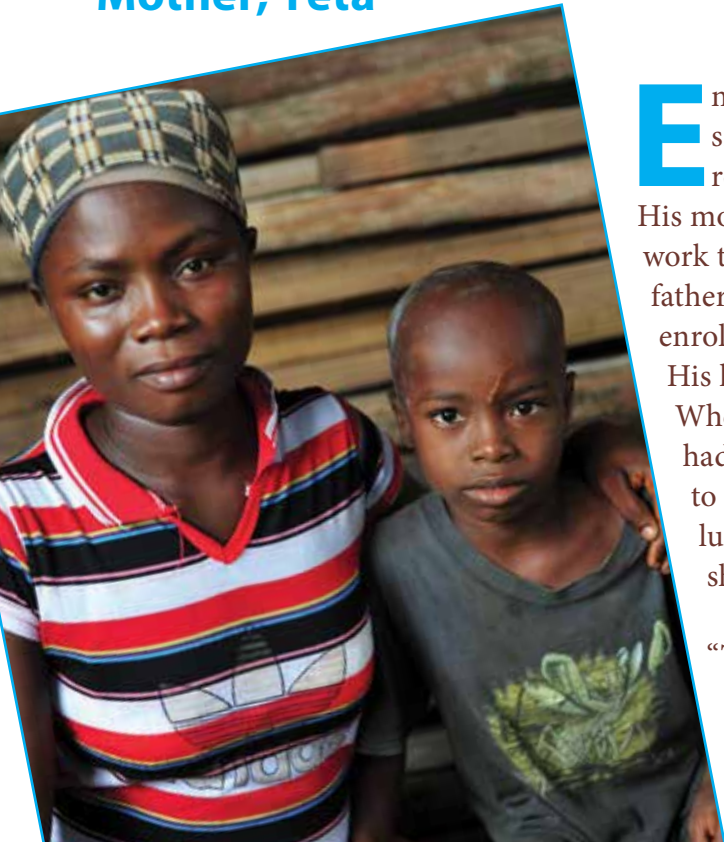


Geto, 10

Geto lives with his grandmother. He has a Kindergarten equivalent education. His parents moved to the interior of the country in an attempt to find work. The last census conducted in Liberia calculated that nearly 70 percent of the population was living on less than one US Dollar per day. Official unemployment has been historically reported as high as nearly 90 percent of the population. Geto’s family is no exception. After his parents left to seek work, his grandmother heard about the feeding program. By staying with his grandmother and being enrolled in the BESTWA feeding program, Geto is assured of getting a nutritious meal each weekday. He says he hopes his mother and father will return to his village. He likes football and would like to become a tailor one day



A few more photos of our interviewees.





# PROGRAM NEEDS

## Hand in Hand—Eradicating Hunger and illiteracy

A goal for the BESTWA feeding program in Liberia is to increase donor funding to allow the children enrolled in the Buchanan feeding program the opportunity for an education.

The years of civil war in Liberia created a near complete collapse of the education system. Families and children were forced to abandon their communities multiple times in search of food and safety. Schools were closed down and educators, along with other adults and children, were killed in the conflict or fled. School buildings were looted and destroyed along with teaching materials and libraries.

Primary public education is both free and compulsory in Liberia. However, an unofficial survey of the children in the BESTWA feeding program in Buchanan, estimated that more than 40% of them do not attend school. All of them, without exception, indicated attending school as a desire.

The rebuilding of the education system in Liberia is still a work in progress. Classes are back in session and viable schools exist in the communities where the children in the feeding program live. This issue is money. Although education is “free,” students are required to pay ancillary fees to the school and buy uniforms, supplies and books. If a child had \$150 USD per year in sponsorship, it would cover the costs of a uniform, required tuition fees, supplies and books for the school year.

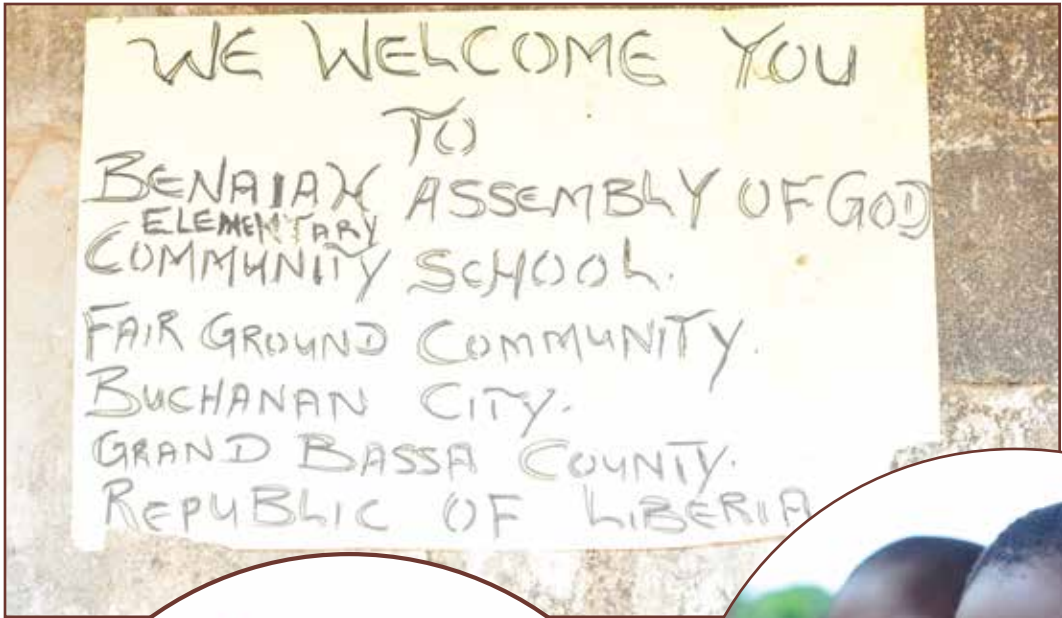
The average working father may earn about \$35 USD per month, or around \$420 USD per year. The school fees alone for a single child could easily wipe out a quarter of a family’s annual income. The typical

Liberian woman has more than nine pregnancies in her lifetime. Although an estimated one in eight woman die in childbirth and approximately twenty percent of all children born do not survive to age five, families are still large. In addition, surviving adults, grandmothers and aunts often take in orphaned children who lost their parents during the intense civil conflict, to sickness, disease, or in many cases, lost their mother in childbirth. In Liberia, the need for basic necessities like food, usurp education, which is considered a luxury.

World Children’s Fund is partnering financially to provide for a portion of the Buchanan based feeding program. However, for BESTWA to meet its objectives that no child should go hungry and that no child should be denied an education, the individual donor base must be expanded.

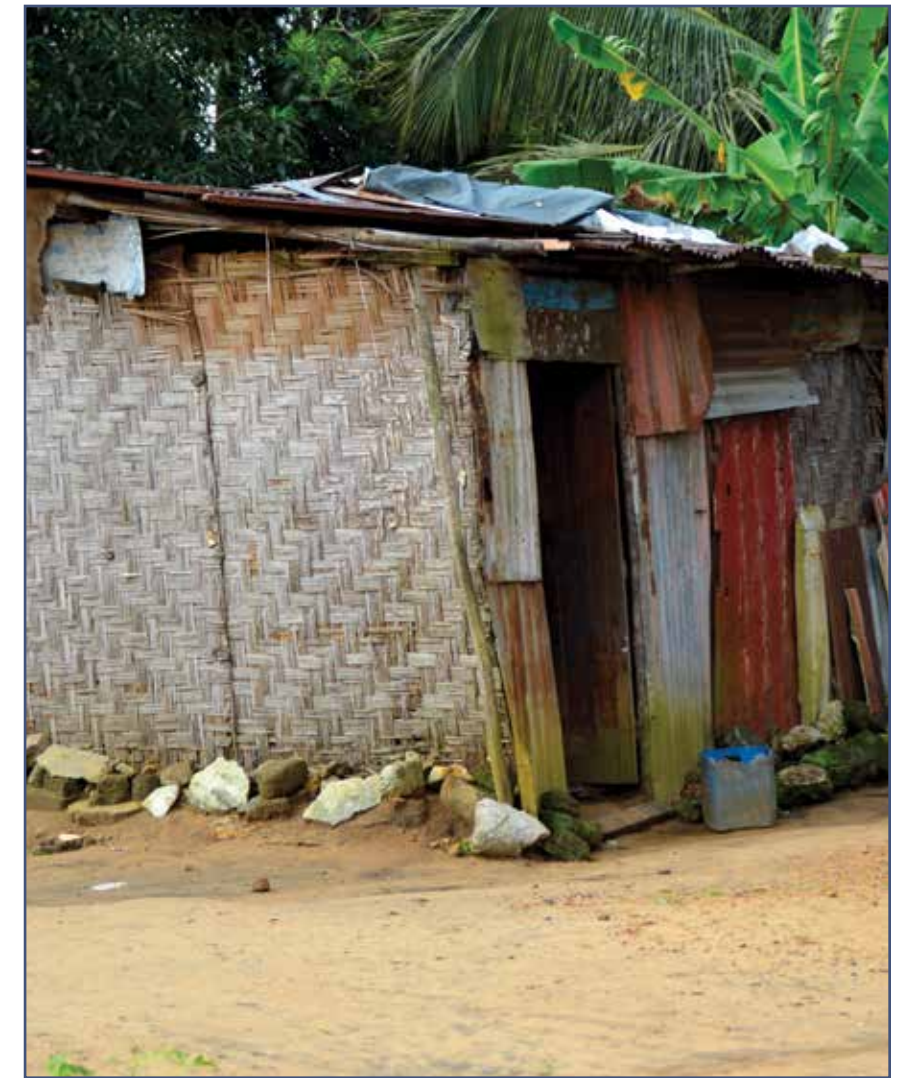
### Feeding Program Expansion

The list of hungry and malnourished children waiting for entry into the feeding program in Buchanan is endless. More children show up every day than there is food available on site. Expanding the feeding program in Buchanan to include more children requires new monthly sponsors to cover the cost of food and education. BESTWA also needs to raise additional funds for the purchase and operation of a vehicle to deliver the bulk supplies two times each week to the feeding locations. Currently, the cooks and staff locally purchase perishables, like greens and fish. However, the team rents a vehicle to procure and distribute the heavy bulk items, including things like rice, oil and charcoal. The rental vehicle available is inadequate and the on-going rental costs are inefficient. ■





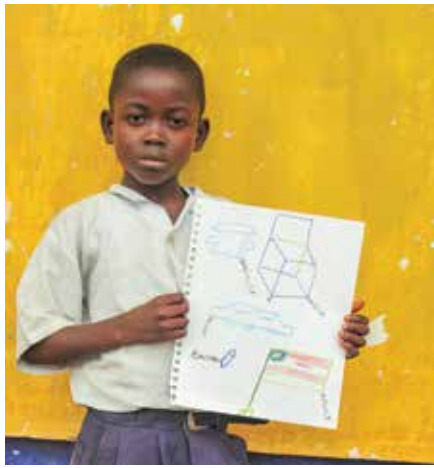
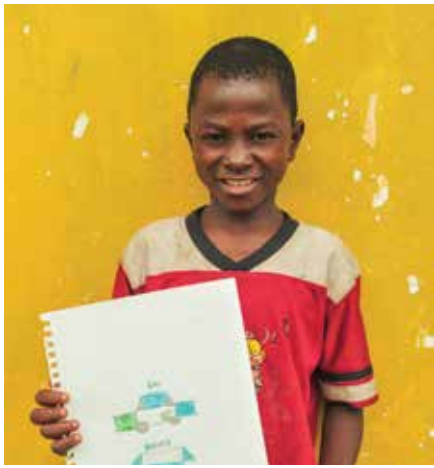
**B**ESTWA receives ocean cargo containers dispatched by World Children's Fund that are delivered into Monrovia's Freeport multiple times each year. Each container is filled with up to 250,000 rice meals. BESTWA donors pay for the shipping and transport costs of the containers. The nutritious rice meals are specifically formulated for malnourished children and contain rice, soy nuggets for additional protein, vitamins and minerals. The majority of the meals serve children in the Buchanan feeding program, but also help feed others in the nearby communities. One group of grateful beneficiaries is the elderly, whose deplorable living conditions in the Buchanan "Old Folks Home" is pictured below. The energy of the children who live on site with their caretakers creates much needed light and laughter. ■





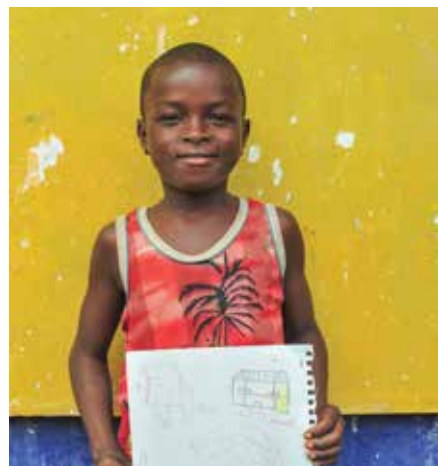
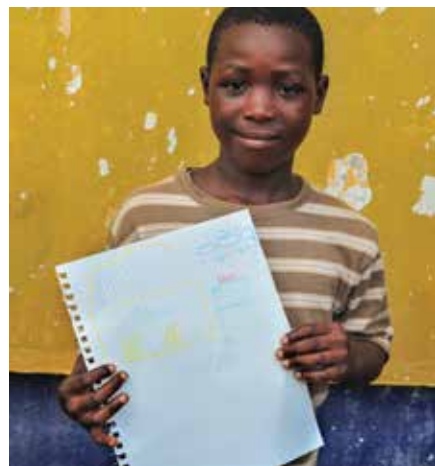
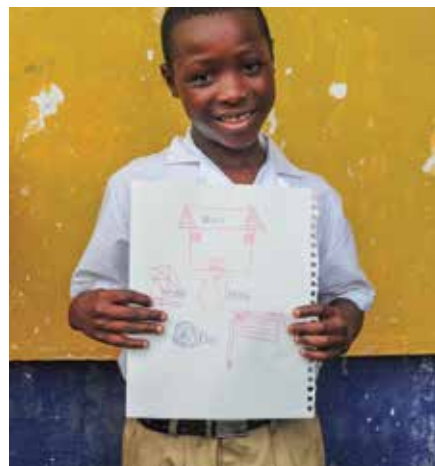
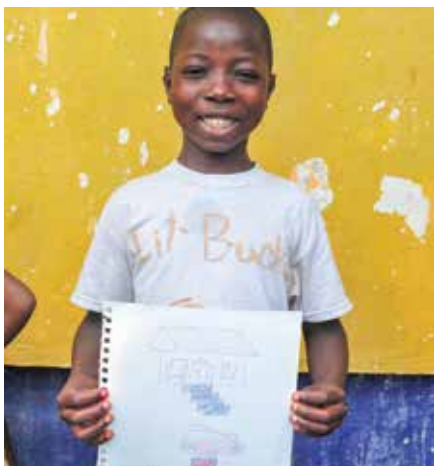
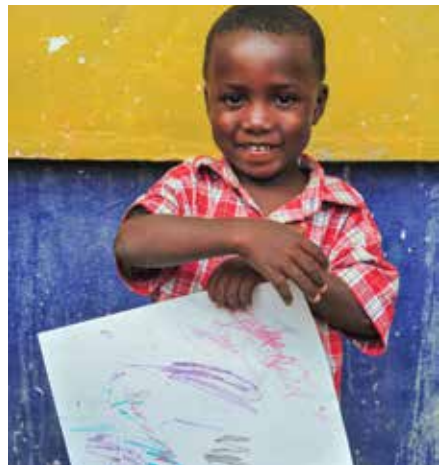






**Coloring Project**

Our art project was a highlight for both the children in the feeding program and the team. Most of the children do not have access to crayons, art supplies or paper. It was a treat for all. ■





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# The Woman Behind the Stories

Kathryn Hess

Portland, Oregon, USA

Kathryn is a unique kind of journalist. She travels all over the world to monitor, write about and photograph people giving and receiving aid in some of the most impoverished places on earth. She frequently works with non-governmental and humanitarian aid organizations, as an independent observer, documenting aid programs in action. Her reports and stories provide project administrators and donors a window to the real impact their help brings to others. She usually writes without a byline and is more comfortable working anonymously behind the scenes. However, she recently shared two excerpts from her personal travel journals with us, to give a sense of her experiences, and what she documents along the way.



## A Lesson from Zambia

Yesterday, I took a flight from Zambia an hour north to a lodge, where I am going to recharge my batteries for a couple of days between program and field visits in Africa. I will visit nine countries before returning home.

My luggage has been missing for several days. The airline lost it between Kenya and Zambia. I have been traveling with the clothes on my back, my camera equipment and laptop. I borrowed a pair of men's boxer shorts and two clean T-shirts from a friend. Customer service at the domestic African airline and their concern about my luggage is nonexistent.

I turned in the clothes I have been wearing to be laundered. It was hard to give up the only remaining pair of pants and shirt I have with me.

I inquired a few hours later about my precious pants and shirt, only to be informed that the laundress had washed my white blouse using rocks to scrub it, which ripped holes in it, then put the torn, white blouse in boiling, hot water with my navy blue cotton cargo pants. My lightweight white blouse is now pale blue with holes. The pants have shrunk to a child's size. Apparently the regular laundress is not here today because her sister was returning from the fish market yesterday and was killed by an elephant.

## Kathryn's Stats

### Recent Travel

- Botswana
- Burkina Faso
- Ethiopia
- Haiti
- India
- Kenya
- Liberia
- Malawi
- Mozambique
- Nepal
- South Africa
- South Sudan
- Uganda
- Ukraine
- Zambia
- Zimbabwe

## Working With

- Mother Teresa Children's Foundation
- World Children's Fund
- Medical Mission International
- Global Assistance
- Foreign Mission Foundation
- Child Survival Fund
- Gandhi World Hunger Fund

What have I learned today? Everything is relative. I can live with less. The people around me do every day. My pants are not important, nor is my formerly white blouse. Africa, feel free to take me on.

I am starting to understand I can survive anything, especially the inconveniences of travel in developing countries. Over the years, I have seen so much suffering. It hits me full force how amazing it is to be one of the few people on this earth with choices. I can board a plane at any time and return back to the fantasy-land where I was born.

## The Lost Boys & Me

I am visiting the John Dau medical clinic today. John is one of the lost boys of Sudan, who fled from his village when it was attacked. He walked across Sudan to Ethiopia, then to a refugee camp in Kenya. Eventually, years later, he and 3,000 young men received refuge in the United States.

I first heard about the "Lost Boys of Sudan," watching Oprah Winfrey interview some of them about their trek from Sudan to Ethiopia. Even then, it made me cry. How do children walk across an entire country alone? Even as an adolescent in the United States, I was not allowed to go to the shopping mall without an adult.

Along the way, the boys watched their friends die from animal attacks, drowning, gunshots, starvation and thirst. The lucky ones made it to refugee camps. I was stunned by their courage and resolve to survive.

Later, flying in a small plane over northern Kenya, the colorless, dry terrain shocks me. It looks like a place God forgot. Once on the ground, it is clear. This place is inhospitable, even in a vehicle with air conditioning. I cannot imagine the horror of walking across it for months seeking safe haven. Driving to an emergency food distribution site in the Turkana region, I see a rough, hand-printed sign on a piece of old, rusted metal, pointing to the turn off to the boys' refugee camp.

This voyage has made me emotional, frequently feeling the urge to cry. When I was at the district hospital in Lodwar, Kenya, today I spent time photographing and talking to children in the pediatric wing. Many of the rooms have been upgraded, but it is still a dank place. It smells like death and speaks of suffering. I keep fighting off feelings I can normally hold at arm's length. It was a tiny baby that pushed me over the edge. She was dehydrated and starving—all alone. No mother. She was dirty and her cloth diaper was grimy. At that moment, it was more than I could take.

Then, I remember: I am the hands and feet. My calling is to go where others may not want to travel. **My job is to relay the stories of the invisible.** We all have gifts of service and love to offer others. Today, I vow to live more intentionally, to focus on what I can do. Perhaps the stories I carry back may encourage others to share their gifts of time or resources and they will be encouraged to stretch out a hand to lift up the forgotten. Serving the world starts in the same place for all of us—right where we are, one person at a time. ■





# Sticks in a bundle are unbreakable

—African Proverb



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