

## Angelina Jolie's Africa Journal

From February 22 through March 9, 2001, Ms. Angelina Jolie undertook a mission to learn about and assist refugees under the care of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Sierra Leone and Tanzania. Her journey, funded entirely by Ms. Jolie, was organized by USA for UNHCR with the generous and professional assistance of the Washington, Geneva and field offices of UNHCR. Presented here are the unedited thoughts and impressions of Ms. Jolie during and immediately following her trip. They are entirely her ideas, and do not represent the official position of USA for UNHCR or UNHCR. The text and the images accompanying it may not be reproduced without Ms. Jolie's permission.



USA for UNHCR's mission includes educating Americans about the lifesaving work of UNHCR. I hope that by reading these reflections, Americans will be moved to support UNHCR's work to help the very refugees and relief workers that Ms. Jolie met in her travel. USA for UNHCR is indebted to Ms. Jolie, not only for making these writings available, but also for the spirit of humanity that underlies her genuine and continuing interest in our cause.

On behalf of the entire UNHCR family, thank you.

Jeffrey Meer  
Executive Director  
USA for UNHCR

### Day 1 - Tuesday February 20<sup>th</sup>

I am on a plane to Africa. I will have a two-hour layover in the Paris airport, and then on to Abidjan in Côte D'Ivoire (Ivory Coast). This is the beginning of my trip and this journal. I do not know who I am writing to - myself, I guess - or to everyone whoever you are. I know my husband will read this, but I will try not to think about that as I write. I love him so much. I never want him to misunderstand me, and yet I know I need to write uncensored. I am not writing for the person who may read these pages but for the people I will be writing about. When I left my husband, he said he didn't want me to go because he loves me, but that he is supporting my need to go, and he is proud of me. I hope he is right. I hope I give him reason to be proud. I honestly want to help. I don't believe I am different from other people. I think we all want justice and equality. We all want a chance for a life with meaning. All of us would like to believe, that if we were in a bad situation, someone would help us.

I don't know what I will accomplish on this trip. All I do know is that while I was learning more and more every day about the world and about other countries as well as my own, I realized how much I didn't know.

I don't understand why some things are talked about and others are not. I don't know why I think I can make any kind of difference. All I know is that I want to.

I have done a lot of research and talked with many people in Washington D.C. at the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). I have read as much as I could. I discovered statistics that shocked me and stories that broke my heart. I also read many things that made me sick. I have had nightmares - not many - but they scared me.

I wasn't sure I should go. I'm still not sure, but - and I know this may sound false to some - I thought of the people who have no choice.

I have a beautiful family, a home, and my husband at my side.

It seems crazy to some of my friends that I want to leave the warmth and safety of my home. They asked, "Why can't you just help from here? Why do you have to see it?" And I'm not sure if I'm being crazy or stupid.

My Dad attempted to cancel my trip. He called USA for UNHCR, but since I am an adult, he couldn't stop me. I was angry with him, but I told him, I know he loves me and that I did feel as my father he should protect me from harm. We embraced and smiled at one another.

My Mom looked at me like I was her little girl. She smiled at me through her teary eyes. She is worried. As she hugged me goodbye, she gave me a specific message from my brother Jamie. "Tell Angie I love her, and to remember that if she is ever scared, sad, or angry - look up at the night sky, find the second star on the right and follow it straight on till morning." That's from Peter Pan, one of our favorite stories.

I am thinking about those people I have been reading so much about and how they are separated from their families they love. They have no home. They are watching the people they love, die. They are dying themselves. And they have no choice.

I don't know what it will be like where I am going, but I am looking forward to meeting these people.

My first stop is Paris for a few hours and then to Africa.

## **Day2 - Wednesday February 21<sup>st</sup>**

On the plane from Paris an African man wearing a nice blue suit and a warm smile, asked me if I was a journalist, I said, "No, just an American who wants to learn about Africa." He said, "Good!"

He seemed to be an important man surrounded by others in suits who greeted him as if to pay respect. As he got off the plane with the group he was traveling with, a few military men - one in front and one in back - led them out and a camera caught him as he greeted a man who must have represented another important group.

I write all this because when he asked me on the plane if I was traveling to other parts of Africa, I told him "Sierra Leone," and he said, "I am scared of that place."

I was met off the plane by a very sweet man with UNHCR. His name is Herve. He spoke French and very little English. I speak very little French. But I realized very quickly that smiles and gestures are all you really need sometimes. We stood next to each other in silence since my bags were the last off the plane.

I saw more military than civilians.

Everyone's bags are opened and checked.

I then met another man from UNHCR.

We talked in the car about how Africa is going through a civil war. It is not unlike the Americans before they became what they are today. When you think about that you realize how important it is to help and support them to help themselves to determine the future of fifty-two countries on this big, powerful continent.

If we consider them our allies and help them to build up, it will only help us.

I have discovered that The United States has helped a great deal and that should not go unnoticed. But compared to so many other countries we give less (per capita). With what we have compared to others ability to give, we give less.

Politics aside - on a human level - we should all be reminded of what is important and how we are truly equal.

We should help in the beginning when people are trying and forming, not when it is to late.

During the Cold War, Africa was split. They had gained independence in the 60's, but when the Cold War was over, Africa then needed help to strengthen the democracy.

They needed help for support to those people who stood for the same freedoms we all believe in.

There was a video I saw on Sierra Leone.

They had a march for democracy a few years ago, I can't remember what year but it was before the worst of the fighting had started.

If only we would have offered our help back then, perhaps it would not be this way now.

Our founding fathers were refugees.

The Native Americans became refugees.

The man, who welcomed me, spoke about his time in America. We both expressed an awareness of how little is told to the American people, or how sheltered they can be. Also, to their credit, when they do see what is happening around the world (from a special on CNN to occasional stories in the newspapers), most Americans do want to help, and they are very generous.

He told me he had been to Kansas City, Missouri for one Christmas. He also shared other stories of experiences he had in America. I thought about how he had taken the time to travel to The United States, because he "wanted to understand America a little better."

Very few of us have been to Mali (a country in Africa where he was born). And that could be why he was so welcoming. He wanted to share his country with me.

I checked into my room. This hotel must have been beautiful once and it is better than I had expected my accommodations to be. I feel wrong staying in this place even though it's only for a few nights. I am here in Abidjan to have meetings with UNHCR. On Saturday I will leave for Freetown in Sierra Leone to be with the refugees.

I do appreciate the proper shower and sleep. I know to enjoy it tonight and I am grateful.

### **Day3 - Thursday February 22nd**

I am sitting in a chair in a UNHCR office here in Abidjan. I am having a long morning.

I have come to understand many things, and yet there is so much I don't understand. Most of all I realized how little awareness I had of these people.

I am sitting under a sign - a poster for UNHCR. It reads, "IT DOESN'T TAKE MUCH TO BECOME A REFUGEE. YOUR RACE OR BELIEFS CAN BE ENOUGH."

I was allowed to sit in on an interview with 'Asylum Seekers.' UNHCR will listen to their stories and sometimes check on the information. They will help them if they can. They have to try to determine if they are eligible to be labeled a refugee, and therefore, seek asylum.

These 'asylum seekers' are here to apply for a chance to live in the borders of a country that is different from their own place of origin. They must prove their need for protection and support; that is, for whatever protection and support is available, and in many countries that is not much at all.

The young couple interviewed today lost contact with their two children. The husband was thirty. The wife was twenty-five (my age). They seemed much older. Their bodies so weary, their eyes so sad, desperate. They both spoke French and a little English and were very intelligent.

They made a kind of attempt to make me feel comfortable.

When they were introduced to me, it was explained that I was an American here in Africa to try to understand and to learn in order to help express situations like theirs to my country.

I was glad I felt they understood another person was trying to help, but after hearing their story, I felt helpless and yet full of purpose.

My country was once not unlike Africa, and we had a civil war.

These people are strong, smart people. Given the opportunity, and considering all the resources that are now tearing the country apart, they could be a very strong, rich country.

The presence of UNHCR, and others, may seem like they are not successful at times because of all that is still going on. But in learning the history of the refugee situation and understanding all the work that has

been done to help them, all of these dedicated workers have been very successful with their help.

We should all be very grateful.

I believe without their intervention the refugees would have no hope at all. Most of these groups of people would be dead and forgotten.

Everything would be in rebel hands and under the control of dictators.

We must continue to give support to help the countries in Africa who welcome the refugees and give them a home.

Our country and other countries will continue to have refugees crossing our borders unless we help strengthen the countries where they come from.

#### **Day4 - Friday February 23<sup>rd</sup>**

I was brought into another office room, I met Ioli, and she sat me down to teach me of more things. She had a wonderful energy and passion and a great laugh.

I learned about new computer technologies that help count, identify, and give I.D.(laminated cards) to refugees.

It was wonderful to hear of different donations of equipment that have been made and new ideas that will help.

Microsoft donated one hundred I.D. card machines during the crisis in Kosovo. Still, more technicians are always needed to operate them. It is amazing how many things must be thought of. They are now in the process of raising funds for a training program.

You realize how important these I.D. cards are. They are not only for protecting the refugees and proving their safe asylum. Most importantly, is that when they are registered, they are given an individual identity.

You can imagine what it might feel like to not be able to prove who you are - to have no name - proof of country or family or age.

Children with no I.D. can be forced into the army or into performing dangerous labor. They can be taken or withheld from school.

Every child has a right to safety and education.

At lunchtime, I went to a small market to buy some local crafts. While standing in one place too long my ankles began to itch.

In some areas the smell was rancid. I felt sick.

The strength of survival here is amazing to me.

They don't complain. They don't even beg.

Contrary to the image of this country, they are civilized, strong, full of pride, stunning people. Any aggressive feeling is pure survival. There is no time for casual or lazy behavior.

As I wrote that, I just realized I am writing as if I am studying people in a zoo.

I feel stupid and arrogant to think I know anything about these people and their struggles.

I am making observations of the people here in Côte D'Ivoire. This is the first and only place I have been to in Africa. I haven't even seen the refugee camps yet.

There are so many school children. The boys are in beige. They are wearing short sleeve shirts and pants. The girls are wearing white blouses and blue skirts.

In the markets there is so much gold and ivory for sale - even diamonds. Everything is piled on tables in small stacks. The floors are all of dirt. I met Demu's daughter and friends. They are all fourteen years old and attend an international school. They spoke many languages. They have lived all over the world. They are all funny and each of them a unique individual.

They dream of their futures. They all seem so much older than the teenagers in The United States.

They are all very politically aware. One girl asked me what I thought of our new American president, George W. Bush.

They also seem to know a lot about film. I hope they are seeing the good ones as well as the cool and silly ones. But here it seems just as important to laugh.

## **Day5 - Saturday February 24<sup>th</sup>**

We are waiting for the plane to fuel and for all of our passports to be checked. Iola is with me, we are getting off in different places but I'm happy to start the trip with someone familiar.

They just weighed my luggage and myself... 8 kilos... 4 kilos... and I weigh 55 kilos (whatever that means I don't know).

I am surrounded by so many nationalities.

A man in broken sandals pulled out a plastic scale, one you would stand on in your bathroom at home. It had two pink bunnies on it, very faded. Our luggage was spilling over it, as we weighed each piece. I can't imagine how they get it accurate.

I see a beautiful African woman in semi-traditional dress.

The plane is ready, but just before we take off, we are warned to use the bathroom. It will be hours before we are near one. Ioli and I go. Everyone else waits in the hot sun. No one boards, I realize why, Ladies first.

"Bon Voyage" and "Good Luck." They all say.

I am sitting in the plane now. I picked a seat with no air vent.

We have not yet taken off. I am already sweating. I lick it off my top lip. Everyone is smiling at each other, exchanging kind words and curiosities about what they are each doing.

They noticed the tattoo on my arm.

I was told the authorities have recently had the job of cleaning out rebels who are pretending to be refugees. They try to get a part of whatever small support is being handed out.

A woman said she saw many men being held (detained) for days having to prove their identity.

She asked why they were considered suspect.

"Because they have tattoos on their arms!"(a common tribal practice in Guinea and Sierra Leone.)

We laughed about the possibility that I could be considered a rebel by authorities.

Still, it makes you think the symbols we wear do express ourselves.

Symbols to some cause fear or are looked down upon.

I think of the choices I have made - the markings I have - the jewelry I wear:

my husband's name

his blood around my neck

my brother's initial

a quote about freedom by my favorite

American writer...

When I was picked up by the bus to the plane, there were two people who I had not yet met - a man in front and a woman sitting near me. They both seemed not to like me, or so I assumed by their distance. We did not introduce ourselves. I was intimidated by the man. I wondered if I was going to be trying to work with him. Later, I was ashamed to realize I had judged them. I should feel lucky to be in their company.

We just landed to pick up one more person. Now there are seven of us.

It got cooler in the air. It is a beautiful day. Most of us got out and stretched for a few minutes.

After a while the man turned to me and explained he was held captive by the rebels in Monrovia, Liberia for six days. They had trouble up to the last minute getting him out. He mentioned hours delayed in this airport.

When he and his wife and I finally spoke, I found them warm and kind.

Their silence and the distance I felt was their feeling of horror. We landed on the same ground he had been held captive.

Most people in this country have been through things I could never imagine.

As I stepped outside, I was told this area has no real hope. Almost everything here was burned down or shelled.

When rebels leave on foot sometimes they take hostages simply to carry stolen goods back home.

From the sky everything was so beautiful - the land, the lakes, the forest - all as far as I could see.

Army helicopters are the only aircraft in this airport.

Finally we landed in Sierra Leone, Freetown. As we drove through the streets we spoke of what has been happening here. RUF (Revolutionary United Front) called it "Project No Living Thing."

I notice hundreds of people are walking through the streets holding hands - survivors!

Painted on cars is "God Is Great" and "Love For Everyone - Hate No More."

You would think these would be the last people on earth to believe that, and yet you realize they have a deeper understanding because of all they went through.

Strange Custom:

On the last Saturday of every month everyone must stay home and clean their environment until 10 am. If you leave before then you must have a pass explaining why you have been given permission.

UNHCR Guest House

Saturday Night

Broken glass stuck into the top of the cement walls.

A guard pulls open the wooden gate.

A small off-white building with chipped paint and a few old cars.

I am greeted by smiles by most, stares by a few.

I am in Room #1. That's what the piece of paper says stuck to my door, I think they gave me the best they have.

I could hardly get water out of the shower. The room would be considered poor and run down by the people from the world I live in, but certainly not by the people here. They would consider it a palace.

I am very grateful.

Dinner was at eight. The three of us sat and talked about war - life - survival. They told me many things. I wish I could write every single thing down.

The television downstairs has one channel. If they are lucky, it will get CNN. It didn't tonight.

Time is different here. There is so much focus on survival. You simply live and enjoy the day and the people around you as much as you can.

People share.

I mentioned that this place is lacking in things not because I miss them but because I see the way the people who work here live.

Most of them are not making exceptions for themselves - some may be. I realize there are people in every group that are not good people. A few NGO and UN workers seem to be in a strange competition. They help each other, and yet sometimes criticize each other - trying to hurt.

But I do believe that even the critical ones have to be a certain kind of good person. You can't be a bad person if this is what you choose to do with your life.

## **Day6 - Sunday February 25<sup>th</sup>**

I had a strange dream - not bad - but enough to say a nightmare.

I was held at a checkpoint standing on a sidewalk with many women. I was trying to understand what was happening. I was having thoughts of being misplaced, remembering all the stories of sudden attacks - forcing people to run - some with bundles - some with nothing - not even family. I have been trying to get back to sleep for what must be about an hour now.

The roosters are screaming.

This place seems to echo noises. I can hear footsteps, and floors creaking. I can hear the noises of some animal, but I can't identify it, maybe a monkey.

I try to close my eyes a little longer.

Today is Sunday and not much happens until after prayers.

I put on a little walkman I bought at the airport. I listened to Billy Bob's music. I miss his voice. I would not be here without his strength and support. I miss my best friend - just being near him.

I just came back from a walk. I decided after breakfast I would take some time to see where I am. I was told this area is safe.

As soon as I was outside I put away my sunglasses. Even though the sun was blaring, I felt safer if people could see my eyes. They might feel I am not a threat.

Also, I did not want to flash anything of value, not because I feared theft, but because I felt bad. As I walked around people were living with so little.

Very soon my feet and pants are covered in red dirt.

One of the UNHCR security guards, a Sierra Leonean named William, asked if he could show me the area (the army barracks and the hospital). We started up the road and ran into George.

For over a year, George has been working at UNHCR cooking breakfast and dinner. It is a good job, but still, it doesn't provide enough money to hardly take care of himself, let alone his family. But he was not complaining. The only thing both of these men expressed was how beautiful this place once was. At one time, all the people were good to everybody. Now everyone suffers. They hope life here could one day be good again, but it's hard to keep up hope or believe that one day it truly will get much better.

I asked George about his family. He said his mother just arrived from a refugee camp in Guinea. I asked if she was okay. He said she is better now, but she still gets colds, because where she now lives, she has to sleep on the floor.

When George was taken by the rebels he said, "They came at night. We all tried to run. We just run and then of course you lose each other. My mother was so worried about me."

George has three children, "one I have not met" he said.

We walked by the hospital. It is a very old, small building with the paint almost completely removed.

There are two Red Cross tents. I would guess about five cots could fit in each tent. Maybe the reason there were no cots at all was so more people could fit on the floor.

Many people are out walking around today - most in what must be their Sunday best - colorful and clean. I don't know how they manage to have nice clothes, but this Sunday tradition is important to them. It is so beautiful to see.

We continued to walk the dirt road passing rocks, water, and streams of what I assume by the awful smell to be sewer water.

I could hear chanting and drumming. William and George pointed and said, "Church!"

The church was a small cement building with rubble around it. I looked inside and saw so many colorful silhouettes moving to the rhythm of the beating drum. Such beautiful people in prayer!

Since I have been here, this is the first time that I started to cry. I kept it to myself and walked on.

Little children walked by me. I smiled at them, and in return, they smiled the sweetest, biggest smiles I've ever seen.

One little boy asked in a very serious tone - defiantly - "Who are you?"

"Angie."

He giggled, smiled, and walked away.

Saint Michael's Lodge

UNICEF and Family Home Movement(FHM)

A little baby was put into my arms. No words could express how I felt.

Later, a small child put my hand into another woman's hand (an NGO American worker).

UNHCR is working with FHM to help separated Sierra Leonean returnee children.

A young African man was helping to manage the place. He was very nurturing to the others, very much a leader and a caregiver. He had very kind eyes.

I asked him questions as one would to get to know anybody. What does he love? Who is his family? I wanted to know who he was.

He does have family. Many of his brothers and sisters are at the university in Italy. He likes to travel, but he feels he can do good and is needed there.

He said he does have a few months leave coming up, and he would like to take courses in counseling trauma victims. He wants to help orphans, and refugee children, and child soldiers with their traumas. This need is often overlooked.

"Maybe they expect them to just bounce back."

He explained to me how in other parts of the world - when someone needs help - counseling is available.

It is different in Africa. Hopefully, you are helped and supported by entering or joining a community.

I met a boy who had just been fitted with a prosthetic leg. He was standing listening to news on a small radio. People tell me he is one of the brightest students. He is already walking well.

A boy of about eleven high-fived the nun showing us around. "Sistah!" UNHCR along with Saint Michael's are trying to help register and track families - reuniting them.

There is hardly any international news here. You only hear of the horrors nearby.

If only the wars and the worst of the people here are being reported, people hesitate in investing in building up Africa. It is such an overwhelming problem. What do you do? People here become dependent and don't want to leave the camps. I can understand why. Their homeland

is still dangerous and empty. There is no food at home. There are no jobs at home.

At the end of the day since it was Sunday and we had a day off, we drove to the water. The beaches here are so white! What a beautiful sight - white sand, light blue water surrounded by mountains covered in lush green!

I was handed a stick. "Write your name and your love's name down in the sand. When the sea washes over your names - you will be forever. I wrote our names, hardly finishing, as the waves came and washed over them. This land was named Sierra Leone, because upon first arrivals to these shores, it was thundering (like roaring lions).

## **Day7 - Monday February 26<sup>th</sup>**

7 am Breakfast Talk

In the countries with no diamonds, they are not getting their hands on good weapons.

Some governments or individuals are getting richer trading with the RUF. The United States and more countries in Europe should help the Sierra Leone Army, just like the British Army and S.A.S. are currently helping by training the Sierra Leoneans to defend themselves against the rebels.

FAWE

Girls are educated and taught skills. They are being helped to be independent.

Most of these young women were abducted and raped.

I went into a small room.

Two women were looking after about 10 babies.

Many of the women got pregnant when raped.

The babies didn't have toys or soft colored things.

They were on the floor. Beautiful faces.

As I approached, one baby started crying, almost screaming.

The women apologized and said, " he's scared because of the color of your skin."

When I was in the classroom I was introduced as the Good Will Ambassador with UNHCR. Maya, the woman with me, was introduced as the Protection Officer with UNHCR.

All the young women were very welcoming.

It was then explained to them that I am also an actress from California.

The woman who runs the school told them I was there to learn about them so I can support their programs.

They know hardly any movies. I didn't want to bring it up, but it seemed me being an actress made my visit more fun for them. What I do is a strange job for them to imagine doing.

Sometimes being an actress seems strange to me too, but I was happy about it today.

After spending some time together we began to communicate even without an interpreter. A little Creole is like very fast-condensed

English.

They asked me for my address. I thought for a moment about maintaining my privacy as I have been told to do so in The States, but they shared with me, and so I will share with them.

I want so much for these young girls to succeed. I also want to be a friend. I went to the chalkboard and wrote my name and my private address. I thought about my husband, but I know he will understand, and probably enjoy reading the letters too.

One girl held my hand and said slowly, " I would like to be your friend." She wrote her name down so I could recognize her letter.

Jui Transit Center

Plastic tents, dirt floors. It feels like nowhere. People walk around. Can't help themselves. Can't go home.

A man ran up to UNHCR workers. His hardworking hands begging for them to come quick.

They explained he wanted them to look at a boy.

I met the boy. He looked about twelve, but he could have been sixteen. It is hard to tell because of the malnourishment. He was very sick.

I didn't want to lean over and look. I kept a distance. I was a woman he didn't know. He was being examined by a doctor.

He was so young and yet seemed so aware of what was happening to him. His legs had become paralyzed. His stomach and his ribs seemed too wide. Later, I was told it looked as if he was operated on. His spine is severely damaged. Disease is eating away at his body. It is likely this all began with a gunshot wound and a poor operation.

Here he was being released from the hospital. There are no funds and no room to care for him past what is considered an emergency (by their standards).

To me, this was an emergency. Now the humanitarian workers will try to look for help - but this boy is one of millions like him.

I will never be able to forget his face. I will never forget the way he moved his legs with his hands.

UNHCR is in Africa to help these persecuted people, and to continue to support the many needs of these refugees. There is always a concern of running out of funding for all of the necessary programs.

I sat with leaders and chiefs and young women who live in the camps. I asked, "What do you want people to know?"

A young woman answered, "We continue to live in fear. We are scared of more girls being abducted and raped. We are scared of our young boys being taken off to war. We need this war to end."

A UNHCR worker asked, "Do you think America can help?"

The young woman quickly responded, "Yes, they are a super power! We want to go home. Our children need to go to school. We need proper food."

If only America was the place they think it is. It could be.

Someone asked the Elder Chief, "How does it feel in a camp?"

"We are embarrassed."

I have been told the funding is getting less as UNHCR is having to expand. Countries of asylum are now having problems - like Guinea. UNHCR is now handling Internationally Displaced People (IDPs) as well as Refugees.

So many other organizations are set for long term funding. UNHCR is set-up temporarily. They can't count on long term funding; therefore, it is difficult to set-up strong and lasting solutions. They really don't know if their programs will continue to be funded in months to come, and yet there seem to be more people in need than ever. The problem (the need) is not going away.

I met a UNHCR man from Jordan. He spoke of building a FAWA-type center for women in refugee camps or settlements in his area.

Waterloo Transit Center

The children here grab your hands and walk with you smiling and singing. They have nothing. They are wearing ripped dusty clothes and they are smiling.

The children came running. They are so happy to have what little they now have. They are no longer alone or in fear for their safety. Most of them had to walk, many, many miles for days with no food or water. Their tiny little hands grabbed on to mine. There was a child's hand around every finger of mine. More children grabbed on to my wrists - my arms. It was nearly impossible for me to walk. I wanted to take each and every one of them home with me.

They saw my tattoos. They found them funny. They asked, "Who stamped you?"

A woman told me her story. As she was talking she unwrapped her grandchild from her back, and began to breastfeed the baby. Her daughter (the child's mother) was suspected of being a rebel in Guinea because of her scars. She was killed.

Suddenly, one of the men I came with stood in front of me with his hand out, "Time to go. Get up please."

I could hear fighting.

It was an argument about moving to another camp. A refugee did not want to leave.

I've been told some refugees demand where they are to go, because they think they might find their family members in a certain camp.

We made our way past the argument to the car.

I noticed a man hitting a wall.

My companion shouted, "Lock your door!"

I did not feel frightened. I felt sad for the people in the camps as well as for the UNHCR workers who are unable to fulfill all the needs of all the refugees. When the refugees are upset, the UNHCR workers sometimes get the blame. These are workers affected by war victims.

It is hard to be prepared when the number of refugees and situations are always changing. So many people need help to stay alive. Many children going to school need medical attention - immunizations.

There are 22 million refugees. Two months ago I had no idea.

We need to help those who have to run to escape to survive.

Problems and numbers will increase until we stop these wars. Many of the children in Waterloo Camp have scabies. I would rather be infected than to ever think about pulling away my hands from these little children.

The bigger realization is that this was only one of the many things these children are living with. The visible conditions are not good. To be honest, they are awful. I'm sure most of the worst atrocities are not even visible. I just walked back into the room where I sleep. I washed my face and hands. I found myself staring at my hands.

I went to the amputee camp.

(IDPs supported by other NGO)

I have just been holding the pen in that spot for the last few minutes. I don't know what to write. No - yes, I do. I am angry. I hate the people who did this. I hate that everyone is suffering - the amputees, the refugees, the displaced persons, the people living in their war torn community - everyone. There are so many surviving with loved ones who have been maimed or killed. No one is living as they did before the RUF. I don't understand how it continues - how my country can claim it comes to the aid of these countries in need - when all the people here live everyday knowing there has been no justice - no vengeance - and no real peace. So how do you tell these refugees to start to build their lives back when they are sure that the rebels will just take it away again?

A man told me his story how he lost his hand (from the elbow down). "The lucky ones are amputated. We are left alive - but not all of us - many amputees died from loss of blood or infection".

The youngest amputee I met was a little girl one year old. She was three months old when they cut off her arm and raped her mother.

So many people.

A young man I was sitting with for a while told me his story. He was a businessman. "I sleep on the floor. I don't have enough food. I am grateful I am alive, but I can never go home. How will I ever trade again?" It was the look in his eyes that I can't forget - desperate, traumatized, shaky.

A man with no hands understood I was there to try to help. (I was introduced as a woman from America who is here to bring information back to the U.S. to try to get more help).

I have never wanted to succeed at anything more in my life.

The man with no hands put his arm out and smiled at me. I shook his wrist.

I felt humbled to be among such brave people.

Dinner At The House

Tonight we had fish and salad.

It was a big luxury, I was grateful but I had trouble eating. I felt so hollow.

Protection officers joined us. For two and a half hours we talked about problems. Everyone shared different projects they are working on or serious events they have witnessed.

So much was discussed - too much for me to write - and everything is always well documented by UNHCR.

A man from Jordan said, "With love and tolerance anything is possible." It's such a beautiful feeling to sit with different workers from all over the world - different ages, sex, nationalities - all with different stories why they are working with UNHCR.

Some UNHCR workers were once refugees.

They spoke about the boy I saw at Jui transit center. Another person commented, "The boy with the peaceful face"... - "Maybe it wasn't a gunshot wound..." - "Maybe he fell very far..."

One woman said, "He won't make it."

I shouldn't have been surprised by that, but I was.

A few cases in the camps will die without proper hospital care. We need to push for more approval from Geneva (UN). This all takes time.

It was explained to me that in the camps there are other victims who are not often discussed. I had never read or heard about what they revealed to me. Many refugees are forced to do the cutting. A gun is put to their head or a knife is put in their side. They are handed rusted swords or sharp glass. They are forced to cut hands, feet, or complete arms and legs of people they knew - quite often-family members.

These people are going mad. They are no longer able to function. In many cases, it becomes impossible for them to live with the guilt. There is hardly any counseling for them. There are barely enough funds for physical survival let alone help for their mental and emotional recovery. I can see how the refugees all try very hard to look after each other.

## **Day8 - Tuesday February 27<sup>th</sup>**

There was a loud wake-up knock at my door. It is 7 am. Today I am tired. I was worried I might have disturbing dreams. So I am glad that I slept so hard. I didn't dream at all.

I sat in the office for about two and a half hours going over information and having meetings to understand the organizations.

The boat was late. Finally, a call came in. "Time to move!" I grabbed my backpack. Another half hour has passed. We were handed a small bag of basic camp equipment. "In case you break down..."

Our car was in the garage all morning for maintenance. It's not much of a garage. The car is still not ready.

Everything here takes very long. The registration of the refugees on the boat is taking a while as well.

Many Government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) were there, three or four people from each group.

- \* International Medical Corps.
- \* Red Cross
- \* Save the Children
- \* UNHCR
- \* World Vision

\* International Organization for Migration

Since the time I woke up this morning, the refugees have been waiting at the docks in the hot sun, getting whatever food can be supplied (a small loaf of bread and sardines).

I asked how long the boat ride would be for them this morning.

"Eleven hours!"

Even though the sea was calmer than usual, many children were throwing up. Two hundred and two people were counted.

A woman walked there today to meet the boat. She is looking for her husband. He was not there. She was referred check at registration - a small table.

As we drive through the streets at the start of our five-hour journey - at almost every stop - beggars come up to the windows. There were blind and injured children - children severely handicapped for life. I asked if it was all right to give money. "No not in this public area. Everyone will come. It sets a bad precedent."

There are over 200 people on this journey. Behind us are two small trucks carrying all their belongings. These two small U-HAUL type trucks contain the lifetime possessions of over 200 people. It contains all they have in the world.

I don't know how the people in the trucks are coping after all they have been through just with this journey from Guinea. I can't imagine what it was like when they were running. How did they make it to Guinea in the first place?

We picked up more refugees in Waterloo. The count is now 387 people.

We are driving back to town to buy what we can.

These people are coming home. They were refugees in Guinea, but now they are not safe there.

They are coming home to live in camps. Their homes were all destroyed.

The areas they used to live in are now held by rebels.

They have no real choice but to live in camps with very little, and no real promise that the same people who destroyed their homes and killed and raped and maimed their family and friends, will not attack again. But if they are going to die they want to die in their home.

I can't imagine what they must be feeling.

They are packed in trucks and driven through the streets where they used to live free and happy.

Six trucks full of people

Two smaller trucks with all their belongings

We have been following in our truck for protection and support. We have just moved ahead to lead the way. We are the only protection vehicle so every half hour we check everyone by moving from the front to the back (switching position every half hour out).

We have just been informed there is no water packed for the journey. A woman (a UNHCR officer) is trying to make contact by radio. It is a bad connection. She is asking about how to find supplies along the way. We need to figure out the water supply.

We have also been told we will be arriving in the dark, because it has taken longer than expected to leave.

I was asked if I was still sure I wanted to go.

They said there is no reason to worry, but they would prefer I get off one stop before the final one. They said it would make them more comfortable.

I don't want to put myself at unnecessary risks, because I understand UNHCR would feel responsible. We agreed to make a decision when we get there. We would also have to figure out where we can stay.

Another protection vehicle just joined the convoy. Our driver signaled for them to take the back.

UNHCR is also here to make sure they clear all roadblocks and checkpoints.

We are now driving through the area where the British helped to clear out. The Westside Boys

Now we are on another road, but this road is not good. We need to go east. Our arms are out the windows signaling the trucks behind us to speed up.

I saw a man walking along the road. He was wearing shorts and very dirty. He was holding a machine gun and he was yelling - talking to himself.

Shells of burnt down houses are everywhere.

Cars and trucks must have exploded here to leave only a rusty turned over shell.

Beautiful Jungle.

Occasionally, I see small villages that are half burnt down and half built back up with wood and dirt (clay).

The few old schools and churches along this road appear empty and full of bullet holes.

After 8 pm we cannot enter.

Many people were upset at how fast we had to drive. "Sorry. Secure your children. The sooner we get there you can eat and rest. We do not want to travel too much in the dark."

They understood. Still, there seems to be no end to their difficult journeys. Even after today it is far from over. A little better maybe - still alive.

We are now about two and a half hours into our journey. One of the baggage trucks just broke down. Everything in it had to be unloaded and then reloaded into the second baggage truck. I don't see how they are going to fit everything into one truck. It seemed packed before.

We continue on while they transfer all the bags. They will try to catch up. I will never be able to express or translate who these people are, what they are going through, or why it is so important to help them.

I suggested that someone should organize a video camera so they can speak for themselves. They want very much to do that.

They don't want only the press to write what is important. They want to talk for themselves.

I thought when I came here I would be saddened and sick by all that has happened to these people and how they are living. Instead, I see their survival, their still smiling faces, kids holding hands, people (what seems to be everybody) working. I am in awe of these people.

Their Will

Their Hope

We stop to unload a few people in one area. The food seems to be in the truck that is far behind us - the baggage truck.

We are all sitting together outside. The heat is unbearable. I see so many refugees working - carrying wood and other things trying to settle this new area. I don't know how they do it.

Someone explained to me, morning is about getting supplies for breakfast (water - wood), eating, cleaning, and trying to sell or make things if they can.

Afternoon is about getting water and wood and making lunch.

It's the same at dinner.

All day is about survival.

UNHCR lost four staff members this year.

Every week, one humanitarian worker somewhere in the world is killed.

There is a great need for much more safety and protection. The limitation of help available causes daily frustrations.

The UNHCR agency has one of the highest rates of divorce, suicide, and depression.

Entering Area 91 a sign reads:

PLEASE DO NOT CUT HANDS

LET'S JOIN HANDS

We had to walk to a market to buy extra sardines and bread. Our supplies were only half the needed amount.

We are told a boy on the third truck is very sick. The nurse has very little medical supplies - none really.

UNHCR needs so much more funding for doctors, nurses, and medicine.

Operations are rarely performed smoothly here.

I am here with Nyambé, a UNHCR woman who has been accompanying me along my various appointments and activities. This is her first convoy and first visit to a camp not close to a transit center.

We went for medical supplies. We saw UN soldiers stationed in the area. It turns out they were from Bangladesh.

One of the soldiers did not want to help us. He said, "Go find NGOs." We looked back at the dusty roads, the poor towns people, and the little shacks.

"Where?" we asked.

Nyambé explained we are all brothers and sisters under the U.N. flag.

They asked if we were doctors.

We explained, "No, just workers."

They gave us a small bag with medicine for pain and dehydration.

After food is distributed, we check our bags.

Heads of families step forward for those not on the registration forms. A yellow paper card will allow a bread roll and a half can of sardines per person.

The sun is going down. We are trying to call ahead to get a place in BO one hour closer to prepare dry food rations for 400 people.

We will not make it to our final destination. We will head out again in the morning.

We had a flat tire on the second (of the two) baggage trucks. We have to move on as they change it. The first truck was left behind earlier in the day - mechanical problems.

UNHCR may have problems, but they are the only ones here to attempt this convoy.

No one is here taking pictures for CNN. It is just another day.

It is now 7:40 pm. It is pitch black outside. A man was walking towards us. He was from one of the trucks ahead of us. We pulled over.

"What's the problem?" we asked.

He said, "My truck has no headlights."

We are waved down at a checkpoint by young boys. They shine flashlights in our truck and hold the lights on our faces. They let us pass.

It is 9:30 pm. We arrived at Bo. We would spend the night here and move on at 7 am.

We met with Muhammad who was working there. He had prepared (with the others) three large bowls of bulgur wheat and three large bowls of beans.

We started to give out food with the woman who was clearly a leader of the group. It had already taken a while to unload all the refugees from the trucks, and everyone was very hungry.

I can't imagine how they were feeling. I was nauseous. I probably would have thrown up from the ride, but I did not have any liquids and I only ate bread for the last few hours. There was no bathroom along the journey so I drank no water.

I tried to help hand out cups and spoons, and make sure that the servers had enough plates. There were not enough metal plates to go around, so we tried to organize washing when the first to eat were finished.

The children were fed first, then the women, and finally the men.

Some referred to me as "pumwi," which means "white person."

Some called me "Sistah."

They were very kind to me. Aware I was there to help.

Most people would push and yell and be angry for all the time it had been taking and all they had been through.

But they have been through so much for years now and if anything I felt they were helping me to understand how it was done because I was new. Nyambé and I were told to sleep in a nearby motel. It doesn't feel right I am given this privilege, but I am so tired. I am deeply grateful.

They gave us rooms with fans, but mine is not working.

Out the window I hear people talking and very obscure '80's American music.

I just saw a fat jumping spider.

The bed board was once covered in plastic, but now it is mostly ripped off. There are no sheets on the bed, only a mattress cover.

I can't help but to love this room. The man who took me to it smiled when the door opened and said "Nice! Good!" Then he showed me the toilet and, with an even bigger smile, he said, "Look!" And then he flushed the toilet.

He just returned a moment ago to give me matches and a candle. There is no electricity from 1 am to 4:30 am.

Nyambé came into my room and we split what was left of the loaf of bread. It was too hot to eat so I saved my share for breakfast.

## **Day9 - Wednesday February 28<sup>th</sup>**

6:17 am. We are back in line and almost ready to start towards Kenema.

I hardly slept. It was so hot and the noise was constant. I kept thinking about how much better I had it then the refugees. I thought of how the mothers and babies might feel at night. I wondered why so few children were crying. I suppose they are used to these awful conditions, or maybe they are just too tired to cry.

This morning I discovered a big knife slice in my door. Nyambé said she noticed it last night when she was knocking.

I wonder about privacy, but I don't really care. It is too early and I am happy to be on the road again.

Many people with UNHCR are from the countries they are working for so it feels like (and is) their own people helping them. Communities and countries helping each other.

The Norwegian Refugee Council was also there to give support.

Finally arrived. Groups of people brought before on other trips ran out to see if they would recognize a friend or member of their family. A few people who had been travelling in the trucks screamed with joy when they recognized a friend. Each family group was given a plot of land to start building. They were given a small bundle of supplies.

The refugees need help to start projects that will make them independent.

It would be nice to have a workshop to teach them about gardening so they can grow their own food.

This new refugee area has only been a few weeks in existence, and already there are many little clay and wooden hut structures that are built.

At the office I saw about seven people waiting with very large bundles. Some women are pregnant. I was told these women are among the hundreds of people who came from Guinea. They came on foot and they need medical attention, registration, and placement in the camp.

We are at the airport. It is a small white building surrounded by nearby army campsites.

African troops are wearing UN hats and their flag on their uniform.

More British troops just arrived - in full uniform - carrying large sacks and guns. They all run in an orderly fashion as they disembark the helicopters and run to board the trucks.

We are told our plane was here, but it is not. So we wait - trying to stay out of the hot sun.

When the plane wasn't coming, we asked for an estimate. One hour. We all wanted breakfast, or at least coffee, so we decided to drive to a nearby café. It was little and dusty and great. A strange choice of African or Chinese. The menus were old, and I could hardly make out the words. We ordered and started to discuss the various things each person was dealing with. A lot of frustration. But as soon as we started talking, two minutes after we ordered, we heard the plane had landed, and we had to run. We laughed.

The local airline was understandably late from all the military activity. About ten of us crammed in. It was hot. Some music was playing I can't even describe. I think the words were in French. Once it started to play it never stopped.

When we finally made it, it was almost 2 pm. On the drive in I watched the people. Having a better understanding of their struggles.

I look out the window.

The romance of their bravery falls shadow to the very little boy trying to support gallons of water on his head. He is barefoot. It is very hot and I am sure he has far to go. And long after I am gone - or as someone might be reading this - he will still be doing it, as well as many other things. He is just a little boy. And he is one of the lucky ones - for now. He is not in the army. He has access to water. No one has cut his hands or feet off. And although he was very skinny, he seemed to be relatively healthy.

A photographer came into the office to ask questions about what is happening in the different areas, and could he have help or information on how to get into the areas of most conflict right now.

It is difficult because it is hard to access most areas. It has been hard to even get food to people in need there.

They tried to work out a route and different rides along the way where he could hitch a ride.

He is trying to help bring awareness so people can see what is happening and judge for themselves how they feel.

I am sure that most are images many of us don't want to see - but should.

He asked, where I was from.

"America"

"Ah! I have been a photographer for 10 years. American press don't buy these kinds of pictures. Other countries do."

Tonight I am scheduled to have dinner with Mr. Arnauld Akodjenou, the Representative of UNHCR in Sierra Leone. He is going to help me understand what is going on in this country - what is being done - what needs to be done - the politics.

I tried to clean the dirt off my boots and find clean pants. But I'm sure he understands. There was something nice about my clothes being so dirty and knowing why.

I don't feel I am able to help very much at all now, but I am starting to do something. And it feels very good to know, as time goes on, I will be able to help more.

On my way to dinner I was told he was going to be late. "There are problems. The police got wind of a demonstration tomorrow."

When I got to his home, I was led by a man with a flashlight. His property had two-foot high circles of barbed wire over the gates. Inside, every window was secured. Different types of metal or plasterwork were used so not to look like bars.

The more I learn about this man and the people here, the more I realize the risks they face.

Apparently, today was the end of the government term. Some people want to see a change in government. They want to take over. He is not sure exactly who will be demonstrating, but he mentioned probably some RUF.

The last time there was a demonstration, nineteen people lost their lives. On the day of that occurrence, he was stuck in his office. I think he said from 10 am to 4 pm. And when the vehicle was on it's way to finally get him out - it was hijacked.

He told me it was suggested after the last time of problems that they should move the office. Other U.N. agencies had left the area, but their landlord would have held them to \$55,000 for the agreed lease. They could not afford to move, and they did not feel it was as important as all the other things the money could be used for.

He spoke about his appreciation to the staff who are so dedicated. They continue to work there.

Also, in this area, the staff cannot have family with them. An emergency situation calling more of them to this area happened right after Christmas. Many have not seen their family in a very long time.

Tomorrow everyone will stay inside - everyone who can. Three people will have to make it to the wharf. Refugees are coming again from Guinea. Buses will have to be rented. Trucks could be targeted because of the U.N. I was supposed to help with registration or anything. I have been asked to please stay inside.

The American Embassy is one of the targets.

Nigeria, the United States, and England support the past term and don't want a change.

I hope I can get all these facts right.

I wish I could talk to my husband. I know everything will be fine, but I also must admit that I don't know anything about these situations, I suppose anything can happen.

It may seem silly, but I think I will pack up my backpack before I fall asleep - just in case I wake up and have to run out. The good thing is I am exhausted, and I think I will be able to sleep.

Also, I actually have a meeting tomorrow - a dinner with Joseph Melrose. He is the U.S. Ambassador to Sierra Leone. I will also be meeting with different NGOs (non-governmental organizations). I am not sure what will happen now. I don't really know what is going on.

## **Day10 - Thursday March 1<sup>st</sup>**

09:30 and no news.

A man came to hook up a better radio contact.

At breakfast we didn't talk about it at all.

We shared photos and stories about our families.

10:20. It looks like it may not happen. But no one will leave for the office for a few hours - just in case.

Maybe the fact that they were prepared to defend themselves stopped it. Apparently troops were guarding different headquarters, offices, and embassies since early this morning.

I had to go into town to pick up money from Western Union. Nyambé picked me up in her car so they could not see UNHCR on the work truck. Police stopped us and checked us.

We were at Western Union fifteen minutes early, but they would not let us in the office. They had strict orders. Most of the staff were leaning against the walls across the street.

In the office we hear from men who were at the wharf, and that about 485 refugees arrived today. They will stay in a transit center until tomorrow, and then they will go up by convoy - same journey as before only reversed. This time they are going home.

We also hear there is a rumor that the demonstration will start at 3 pm. Others say the police were already stopping them from assembling. The other rumor is that they will start demonstrating at the American Embassy.

We have tried calling to confirm my appointment with Ambassador Melrose, but we are told we have the wrong number. It must be security reasons, because we checked and it is the correct number.

I did notice bullet holes on the glass inside the embassy. At some point, people were here to attack and they got inside. Luckily, there are many different levels to "inside."

There was tremendous high security at the U.S. Embassy. I don't know why I thought it would be like visiting home. My country. It didn't feel that way at all. I was left outside as Nyambé was interviewed and I.D. checked. Then I was signaled in. They wiped down my bag and put the swab in a computer. I also had to walk through a metal detector. Once I was inside, everyone was very friendly.

We discussed how there were about 400 amputees in the camp that I saw, and many more in Bo and Kenema. Most of them there are staying together, but they have no support or funds.

I was told there are two new amputees. There had not been any at all in the last year. It had stopped. But around Ramadan - a child about one

and a half and another about eight - had fresh wounds. Their hands were cut off.

We sat in silence for a moment. Then he said, "It is very sad. There are always things that need to be done."

I later sat in on a meeting they were having on how to fix some of the convoy problems to help it run smoother. With lack of funds they have to shift things around. They depend on NGO's and other U.N. agencies to help in time.

They have to make adjustments and compromises. The lives of many people are affected by every decision, and they all hurt every time something is cut back.

The numbers are so high - 400 a day. Can we handle more? Where can we place them?

These refugees are already sharing their food rations. They are feeling so overcrowded. They are not welcoming new arrivals. It's not that it's their choice, but they will fight new arrivals for food. It sounds harsh, but it is survival.

As everyone talks, I notice their frustration and their fight to find solutions.

There is no air conditioner so they open the windows. Everyone now has to talk very loud, because we are on a street with many trucks passing by. Behind me there is a table with four photographs of the UNHCR staff workers who were killed in the line of duty in 2000. They look like very kind people. Sweet faces.

I had a wonderful dinner with Joseph Melrose. Other NGO officials were also there - most of them working for UNHCR. We talked all night about the different countries and situations.

We also managed to be very human and share some laughs. I don't know what I should or should not write about. There were many different opinions. I can write that I felt everyone in the room was working very hard to find solutions.

To understand or explain the RUF, or how and when they will be dealt with, is very difficult. Everyone seemed in agreement that they did not trust the RUF granting "Safe Passage" from Guinea to Sierra Leone - through their territory. I had wondered myself why the rebels would do that.

To steal supplies?

To take hostages?

To make human shields?

There is nothing else in it for them, so why else would they?

No answer.

There is a lot of funding for the refugees, but the majority is ear marked for areas where some projects are already well supported. Some camps have more than enough while other areas have hardly anything.

The organizations do not have the right to move that money around.

The amputees have had much support and press. It is wonderful people cared and stepped up with funds.

But as I understand it more now, many of the war wounded - even many of the amputees - were not all victims tortured directly by the rebels. I have been told that many doctors were forced at gunpoint by the rebels to do some of the cutting and mutilating. If they didn't obey these brutal inhuman orders, the doctors and their families would be killed. The camps for the war-wounded areas definitely need more funding.

## **Day11 - Friday March 2nd**

I am on a plane leaving Freetown, Sierra Leone flying to Abidjan Côte D'Ivoire (for one night).

I don't know what I am feeling.

A woman who was traveling with her daughter thanked me for coming. "It is nice for us to know we are thought of."

She was working with UNHCR and had also been in Guinea.

I wanted to thank her for her strength. I wanted to thank this country for allowing me to come here to learn as I have about such an amazing place and people.

But I couldn't speak. I was afraid I might cry.

As I was leaving Sierra Leone people said, "Please stay in touch. I hope you don't forget about us here." It was said with smiles - friendly. Of course I will never forget, but many people do.

There are places all over the world that need assistance. I was even surprised to hear of the problems in Ethiopia. I was under the impression that the situation in that country was better. I thought the worst was over because years ago so many stories of worldwide relief were in our news. Money and much awareness regarding Ethiopia was raised, and then it seemed to all go away. What I am reminding myself is that these problems do not disappear just because we do not hear about them. And in that thought - there is so much more happening around the world than what is communicated to us on the top stories we do hear.

We all need to look deeper and discover for ourselves...

What is the problem?

Where is it?

How can we help solve it?

As we were getting off the plane, the pilot told us there had been an explosion in Conakry.

Accident or attack?

We don't know.

Many people on the plane had just come from there. It is where the plane originally departed from this morning. They had been warned that an attack may be coming.

Suddenly, all of us who had just been talking, and happy to have arrived, were now all sitting in silence. We walked out of the plane very slowly.

I am now waiting in passport control. Many people are on their cellular phones. I don't know what they are saying, because their conversations are in French - but it is obvious there is a reason for deep concern.

Finally, I was told part of the army's ammunition depot blew up. Was it an attack or an accident? It doesn't sound like people were hurt. It is hours later and I am alone. I feel sick. I don't know if I ate bad food or if I am upset. Even though I am in a hotel tonight, I haven't been able to get through to home yet. I left a message and found myself crying. I am very worried about everything I have seen. And I realize that if I am scared, how do these brave women manage when they are forced to flee their home because of the war. Some of these women have not seen their husbands or their children in years. I can't stop thinking of all their different faces. I am also remembering that young boy with the sweet face who has severe spinal damage. He will never walk again. I am resting in a hotel, and he is still in the corner on that dusty dirt floor. I never cried when I was in Sierra Leone. With everything I saw, I never cried. Tonight I can't seem to stop crying. Tomorrow I will see new faces. Tomorrow I have to do more. I don't want to write anymore. I want to talk to my husband. I wish he was here with me. I feel nauseous. I finally spoke to Billy Bob. He gave the strength. I was able to talk to him about what I was thinking... what I was feeling. I could only talk to him. I feel better now. I don't even feel sick and nauseous anymore. Maybe it was just nerves. He told me when I come home he promised to hold me. I dream about his arms around me.

### **Day12 - Saturday March 3<sup>rd</sup>**

I am on my way to Zurich. There must have been five security checkpoints. Everyone's bags were inspected with flashlights on the tables near the runway. Our bodies were inspected with metal detectors. I wonder what the security worry is?

### **Day13 - Sunday March 4<sup>th</sup>**

Here in Zurich, Switzerland I am staying at the Dolder Grand Hotel on the lake. Everything smells like oranges and vanilla. There is snow on the ground. I saw a young boy in the lobby. Thought of the dusty little African boy carrying water on his head, sweating and trying so hard to focus. Both innocent cute little boys just separate parts of the world and they will grow up so different. What decides where we are born and into what kind of life and why?

I can't stop sleeping. I didn't realize I was so tired.

### **Day14 - Monday March 5<sup>th</sup>**

8:40 pm Swiss Air flight 292

I departed from Zurich bound for Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.

### **Day15 - Tuesday March 6<sup>th</sup>**

Before sunrise we prepared to embark the second plane, but there was no paging system so we weren't sure what time the plane was going to take off.

While waiting to board I was casually making new introductions when a UNHCR worker came rushing towards me... "We have to run!" The man who took our tickets gave us a scolding. I kept apologizing. I thought he wasn't going to let us on.

It was a very old propeller plane. A flight that would normally have taken 30 minutes took three hours. We landed on a dirt road in the middle of the most beautiful green land. The sun was out.

Next was a two and a half hour drive to the Head Quarters near the refugee camp. I was told to put on my seatbelt "so you don't bounce around so much."

It is a holiday today. I am not sure what it is for or about, but any reason to celebrate seems like a good idea here.

Some say they don't understand why with hardly enough food or supplies to survive, people sell their goods to buy impractical things, all for a wedding to come or a birthday. You realize that is what they are surviving for. They don't save up and wait for a magical day to come when it will all be better. They have to live each day for each day, as we all should.

We arrived not sure where we were staying or if there was any food for us anywhere.

We went to a market. I felt bad because I could buy food. The market was so dirty and poor. I was worried about the health conditions. If the food was safe to eat. I bought bananas and a loaf of bread a man had made.

It is hard to keep seeing people so used to living in such poverty.

A man was making sandals out of old tires.

Suddenly, I looked up and saw a man whose hands were tied to a goat. A crowd of what must have been forty people including children, were following him. They were surrounding him at both sides. He looked bloody and worn out. I realized some people were holding sticks. Someone hit the man on the back. The crowd cheered. Children were smiling. They hit him again. I felt sick.

I found the man I was with... "They are hitting that man. What are they doing? What's going on?"

He looked at them as they passed, and he asked a local man nearby to explain.

"He stole a goat and they are taking him to the police."

We decided to walk back.

We talked about law. We talked about how sometimes it is better to handle things in a community or "tribal law," and sometimes this way is really a problem.

Even the man I was with had never seen this before - a thief punished that way.

I am now at the field officers apartment, (compound they call it) her name is Alexandra, she lives in one of the homes in the compound. It is very modest, just what you need, a bed and a radio. It had been sprayed for mosquitoes. A very strong smell remained in the room.

She told me not to brush my teeth with the water. It can be muddy and brown. It is safe to shower in though.

She went out with a few others. They left a walkie-talkie. "Just in case you need help - call 5354." They weren't kidding, but I also know they would not have left me alone if they were really worried.

The thing is - if there is something that worries me - I doubt I will be rational enough to call.

I checked to see where she keeps her knives.

But I knew even after I grabbed one for security, I would just run.

## **Day16 - Wednesday March 7<sup>th</sup>**

I awakened to the sound of loud trucks, roosters, and birds. Voices seemed to be right outside my window. There is just a screen so everything that passes is all very loud. I don't know what language I am hearing. I listened as the sun came up. Then there was a knock, meaning it was time to get up.

Some refugee camp officers work seven days a week alternating every two months. They are then granted "VARI," which means voluntary absence for relief from isolation.

Alexandra and I talked over breakfast. We had coffee with dehydrated milk (as usual) and bread. She was happy to be able to offer me jam. Alexandra told me about a three-year-old girl who was raped. UNHCR is working on the laws to see to it the man is punished. It takes years to get justice for these children. It is all so "very frustrating."

Nyarugusu Camp (Congo Refugees)

We traveled on an already very bad dirt road that is now made worse from all the rain. So many people were stuck on their way to the Nyarugusu Camp.

Fifty-three thousand refugees all from the Congo are here for food distribution that is brought in two times a month.

There are 250 births every month.

All lost tribal member are brought here. Families are reunited. The numbers are always growing.

Food rations are continually being cut down because of lack of funds. Everyone gets less than usual.

The system is very complex. I hope to attach a paper to explain everything.

First I was working chute #4 able to help pass large bags in bulk to groups.

I was focused on families of five. The children ranged in age from one to ten years old.

We were not able to distribute any cooking oil because the truck bringing it to the camp was stuck on a bad road.

I had lunch with members of Christian Outreach Relief and Development (CORD).

We had cabbage, water, rice, and beans. I was starving.

Local refugees who made instruments wanted to perform for us. While we ate, we could hear the music.

I saw one little boy about three or four years old who climbed a tree to see inside the crowd.

There exists here a refugee youth program in this camp (under UNHCR TARP).

There would have been about 200 more children, but it is food distribution day.

The children I did meet were so warm and welcoming. They began to dance. I was told, "they could easily dance all day." At one point, I was signaled to dance with them. I did. The children seemed to find me extremely amusing.

Then it was explained to the audience that many refugee children, along with members of UNHCR, CORD, and myself, were going to perform a play about HIV/AIDS.

During the play, an AIDS awareness worker handed the kids condoms and told them "you have to use them if you don't get a blood test. Testing and condoms are available at all youth centers."

Three young men with streaks of white paint in their hair and made-up old man faces, come out limping using wood sticks for canes. Everyone laughed to hear them complaining and acting like sick old men.

It was all so beautiful to see.

In the story, one man has a daughter who he wants to be careful about dating a certain boy. He wants her to stay home. She goes out with the boy anyway. Later, she finds out that another girl who had slept with that boy has AIDS.

In the camp, the refugees design and print "AIDS Awareness" T-shirts. They gave me one. The children laughed when I began putting my T-shirt over my head and it got stuck. They all clapped and hugged me when I finally managed to get it on.

Our next stop was where men were building large structures with mud and bricks. I tried to help for a little while, but I found it to be very hard work.

I told one of the workers how I admired him for being able to work there every day all day long. He said, "Yes it is hard work, but it is for the children, so it feels good."

As I write this, we are driving on a dirt road that has just become blocked by a tractor. The tractor is once again pulling a bus that was stuck in the mud earlier today, and is stuck again.

All the children lined up to watch. They are laughing. It looks like the bus is a lost cause.

People are climbing out of the bus windows and walking into the bush.

Some stayed to make money pushing the bus.

Then, as we tried to drive around the bus, we got stuck in the mud.

Another tractor eventually came and got us out.

There was a hitchhiker on the road. "Sorry, we can't carry people with weapons."

That was certainly not a normal thing you would hear someone saying to a hitchhiker!

I am watching the refugees. I began talking and dancing with them. I feel I am making friends.

Someone once said, "You can learn more about someone in an hour of play than in a year of conversation."

I experienced something like that - of the same nature. And that is what I felt.

They asked for my address. We promised to keep in touch.

The sad thing is they know they will not be leaving the camp anytime soon.

But the spirit of these people, and their will to survive, continues to amaze me. I wish I could find a better word. I am inspired by them. I am honored to spend time with them.

I am back in the room where I sleep.

I am exhausted and very dirty.

Hot water comes from solar power, and the sun is not out, so the shower will be cold.

It is also getting dark, and no lights come on until 7:30 pm.

There is no electricity: from 12 am to 7:30 am or from 4 pm to 7:30 pm.

We laughed

"The things we take for granted!"

She's right. And as much as today has been a hard day, it felt very good.

To be with these people in this country, has made today one of the best days in my life.

But I remember I am only here for a short time. And I have a choice. I live very far away - comfortably.

I admire all the people who work here - all of them - in every aspect of organization.

Dark circles are under most of their eyes. They talk non-stop about how to solve problems - how better to help.

Sometimes - like tonight - they talk about the things they have seen.

THE 1994 GENOCIDE IN RWANDA

Hundreds of thousands of refugees were walking over a bridge that connects Rwanda and Tanzania. The river below them was full of dead bodies - over 40,000 bodies. They tried to pull out as many as they could. Now it is like a large burial ground.

Apparently, in 1996, England and the United States wanted to support these people in their desire to go back home. It was believed there was now peace in Rwanda.

Even though they knew they were going home, many of them felt forced. They trusted no harm would come to them. But it was not like the "voluntary repatriation" that is happening in Sierra Leone.

But it was not going to be safe to go back to Rwanda. There was no peace.

During the genocide, millions of people died.

But they all would rather die at home.

Alexandra helped me heat up a little vegetables and rice.

She is staying in tonight. She is tired. She has been traveling from one place to the next. She is looking forward to her seven days.

They have an option of going to Dar es Salaam in Tanzania or to Nairobi in Kenya. I thought, when I heard about the seven days out of isolation, they would go home, or at least to a place that most people would truly call out of isolation.

But Alexandra is happy to be near an office. She still has work to do.

She will be happy to go to a market and buy supplies and food.

I am so spoiled. I have only been gone three weeks and I have eaten more than the refugees eat during my stops between countries. And I can't wait to get to a market and to all the other luxuries of home.

Most of all, I can't wait to be able to be with my family, to know they are not in danger, and that they have everything they need.

I can't imagine what a mother or father or even a husband or wife feels when the people they love most in the world are suffering, and there is nothing they can do...

when a mother can't feed a child

when a father can't provide for his family

when a husband can't protect his wife

Alexandra spent today making birth certificates for the over 400 babies born in the camps she looks after. She works with the Red Cross, making it official.

It is only about 8 pm., but I am going to try to sleep soon. Not even because I am tired, but because there is nothing to do to keep me awake.

I have already read everything I had brought with me. I noticed

Alexandra's books on her shelf are from Holland. I can't read them.

It is now two and a half hours after writing the above. Now I am going to get ready for bed.

We have been talking about everything, even the dangerous situations she has been in with other stuff.

Sleeping with clothes and boots on and ready to run...

Alexandra's friend was one of the men who was killed – "slaughtered" - working for UNHCR.

They have no soap now for the refugees.

From now on only 80 percent of the food will be rationed.

World Food Program (another UN agency responsible for food distribution) also has cutbacks.

It's nobody's fault, but it is frustrating, and hard to explain to people who are just getting by with what is already thought to be the bare necessities... the basic nutritional supplement to remain healthy and with the right amount of calories... enough to stay alive. Now it has to be about 80% that amount, and still, they are lucky to have that.

We also talked about the women having no sanitary pads and what that must be like...

"In prisons here they don't have anything like that. They are locked in to live like animals - worse - they can't even clean themselves."

## **Day17 - Thursday March 8<sup>th</sup>**

Woke up to rain - a damp cold

The Roads

The Food Distribution

What happens to the camps when it rains?

I was scheduled to be picked up by a private studio plane on Saturday, because I had to do press and a premiere. I just got news no plane is coming because the premiere is cancelled.

You've got to love Hollywood.

I have hardly any supplies left - very little medicine, cash, and clean clothes.

I have no idea how to get back to L.A.

There are only eight-seater planes out of here every few days, and even then, they have long stopovers. Even with short distance flights, what should be a scheduled one-hour layover, quite often ends up being one day. They tried to find a seat for me tomorrow, but the plane is full. I have to fly to Zurich and Amsterdam in order to get to L.A.

UNHCR will continue to try to help me from their office in Dar es Salaam, but they are very busy with much more important things to do.

No need for me at a premiere, and suddenly, it's "find your own way home."

Mtabila Camp

95,000 refugees here (mostly Burundians)

UNHCR brought me to the nutritional and medical center, which is run inside the camp by the Red Cross.

My first job today was measuring the medicine powder at the therapeutic feeding center.

Under 5} extra nutrition

Pregnant} measured

I wanted to be careful not to measure a spoonful too short.

They have to monitor the children to make sure they are growing and not losing weight. The newborns are measured for height and weight and given vaccines. One little baby was scared and peed on the examining table. The mother used part of her dress to quickly wipe it off. There is not soap available. Keeping safe and clean is very hard for everyone.

Kitchen

a very small room

3 large clay pots on wood burning stoves

It was hard to see. All the smoke in the room hurt my eyes.

I helped make milk for the mothers. It comes dehydrated in bulk.

With a small plastic pitcher I took two liters of boiling hot water (I measured the best I could), and poured it into an old beaten up green plastic bucket. It's hard not to have the hot water burn your hands. You leave it in the bucket until it cools down (so it won't destroy the milk proteins), then you mix it.

Pediatric Ward

There were about fifteen small wooden beds lined up on each side of the room. Nets surrounded each bed - to try to prevent mosquito bites that can lead to malaria. Most of the nets have holes in them. It is very common in this area, almost impossible to avoid. Another big problem is diarrhea. To babies and small children the loss of bodily fluids is deadly. I have "Deet" spray on at all times and still I have been bitten by mosquitoes - and not just at night. I am also very lucky to have these malaria pills. The pills don't stop you from getting malaria, but they help prevent the severity of it if it comes.

An eight year old was sitting with her baby brother on her lap. They were sitting on the last bed. She had him wrapped up. The baby had lost 200 grams. He had diarrhea and he also might have worms.

This little girl saw her parents and her older brother brutally killed.

Somehow she escaped with her baby brother. The baby is so terribly skinny. I don't think he will make it. He is all she cares about. He is her only family.

Everyone who meets these two children is affected. one of the nurses had to quietly walk away. She began to cry, and one of the men walked her outside.

The little girl never looked up into anyone's eyes. She seemed very sweet. She just sat there looking out the window resting her chin on her little brother's head.

She was too weak to cry.

Protection Office:

I met a group of eight 13- to 16-year-old boys.

One of the boys, Misago, explained a rebel attack on February 12th 2001. Many people were killed or severely injured. They were attacked in the middle of the night. In the morning he saw all the dead bodies.

Hutu and Tutsi Tribe?

Misago walked with his friend for one week. They were picked up by a military truck.

The soldiers asked them, "Where are your parents?"

"Killed."

He is very soft spoken.

He heard about the camp through BBC radio.

Misago's father was killed in June, 2000. His mother was killed six months later in December. They had all been living together in a military camp

that was attacked. Misago crossed the border and came here. Now he is a refugee.

He is being interviewed to be registered in this camp, even though he is set to be transferred to another camp tomorrow.

I am so happy this place is here for him. Everyone likes him. In this office he can be a person - not just a number. Here he can try to get the help he needs.

Recruitment camps are set up by the government to try to group people together. You have to stay within the camp so not to be mistaken for a rebel.

It seems they are all caged - stuck - in the middle of this war.

Misago is also trying to trace his brother.

UNHCR officers started discussing his situation. He was scheduled to be moved with the other boys to a place (another camp) to build their own home.

These eight boys have only eaten recently because Venice (one of the UNHCR officers) had given money from his own pocket. The boys have been sleeping on the floor in the offices. They weren't able to get food because they weren't registered yet.

Another young boy came in. He was around 14 or 16 years old. He had been traveling on his own but he met another young boy crossing the border.

He kept looking at me - maybe because I was new, or maybe because I was trying so hard not to let tears fall. My eyes were watery. I don't know how many more stories I can hear.

"Father?"

"Dead."

He had been living with his grandmother. She was too old to run when they were attacked at night.

Both of the boys were dressed in shreds. Their dirty clothes were full of holes and so big they were falling off.

He looked as if he was going to cry at any time.

He was asked, "What do you want from UNHCR?"

He answered, "Help me find my grandmother."

I expected him to say food or shelter - something necessary for himself - but he just wanted for her safety. He wanted to see his grandmother.

Another boy walked in when the last left. His hands were at his side. His eyes were to the floor. He was about 14 years old.

The UNHCR officers had decided to try to talk to the head of the protection office to keep all the boys in this camp.

Three of the boys think they know in which other refugee camps they can find their relatives. They should stay here if there is a chance they can be reunited with them. It is possible the relatives have not been moved.

These eight boys are children, and they should be placed in a temporary shelter. They don't need a new camp where they have to register all over again.

The officials decided to not interview the rest of the boys. The third

boy (who had just walked in) was told it was not necessary to give an interview.

There was something about the way he slowly backed up out of the room, and bowed his head, that made me so sad. It was more than being polite. He was so submissive.

I have a feeling he was recently abused or traumatized - a young boy so defeated - his face so sad.

I pray these boys will be all right. It is scary to realize that they are only eight in over twenty million. What are their chances?

Many of the rest of the interviews for the day were cases of registration or follow ups on recent interviews and needs to be addressed.

It's good to know these people have an office to come to and have a voice.

There are so many refugees! You can imagine how many things can fall through the cracks.

UNHCR is here to protect the human rights of the refugees - their basic human rights.

Reinstatement:

Refugees are interviewed to state their case to become a citizen of a new country. They need a safe place to start a life again. Most of the people will live in camps hoping for peace one day so they can return to their own country.

Without the reinstatement they feel trapped - not even being a citizen of the place they now live in.

A nineteen-year-old girl came in. Her story was too complicated to write. She kept wiping tears away as she spoke. She wants to find her family. After living with them in a refugee camp, she became separated from them, and she was left behind. She believes her family was resettled in Canada.

A man came in who wanted to be reunited with his wife and children. He was separated from them in one of the camps, and then they were sent to Canada. He has found them but his ability to join them is a whole other matter.

He took out dusty photos his wife had sent him. They did seem happy in their new home. While pleading for help to be reunited with them, he pointed... "My wife."

"My son."

"My daughter."

"My baby."

I realize that unless all the right bureaucratic paperwork and processing is done properly, this man will not be able to get back to his family.

As we were driving away to go to our next stop, I saw the boys sitting together in the dirt. None of them were talking. They were all just looking out at the road.

I don't know what to do. Somehow I need to do something to help these people. If you could meet them - you would too.

Lunch At The Sheraton Inn

I think it's their joke, 'The Kasulu Sheraton Inn.' It's a small hut with dirt floors. We had rice and beans... again.

I love these field officers here. They talk about the crazy situations laughing occasionally. If they didn't I think they would go crazy.

The truth is many of the situations they are in are very dangerous. It is not at all a comfortable or easy life. But they care about these refugees so much they don't want to be anywhere else.

At one point they mentioned "the church" and "the bridge," but then they quickly said, "we can't talk about that." They said they still see the images. "Sometimes you just cry."

Sitting with these men (and Alexandra) I thought of how happy I was to know them - to know they exist. I wanted to meet good people working in a good organization so I could find a place to start learning and helping. I could not have found a better group.

I later found out what "the church" memory was. I didn't ask them because I could tell they didn't want to remember. Now I understand. I asked Alexandra when we got home.

She put her head in her hands, and then she looked at me. She wasn't here when "the church" genocide happened, but the story haunts her. During a crisis, maybe a thousand people (as many as they could fit inside), were hiding from the rebels. They packed into a church - thinking it would be the only safe place - a house of God.

The rebels found them hiding there and threw in grenades. Then they walked over all the dead bodies, stabbing them to make sure they were dead.

The UNHCR staff members I met this afternoon were among the people to find them. One woman was found alive. Dead bodies had fallen on her, covering her during the attack.

When they got there they found her rummaging through the bodies. She was looking for her husband and six children. No one else was alive. If I was her I would have wished to be dead. How do you survive something like that?

#### Burundi Drummers

Three men and about five children were gathered together. The men are starting to teach the next generation. They don't want to lose their culture.

As we drove up closer to them, there was the most wonderful sound - fast, strong, and passionate.

The men and boys took turns in front drumming and dancing.

I was told what they were chanting.

They wished me a good life!

These refugees are going through so much, and they are wishing me a blessing. They smile and dance and wish me a good life.

My life is so much easier than theirs. It is a strange feeling to receive this blessing, but I accept and I am deeply grateful.

## **Day18 - Friday March 9<sup>th</sup>**

I am in the car. We are about to leave to take a plane to Dar es Salaam. I am very lucky to be on this flight.

We got up at 6:20 am. There was no electricity. We were packing our final things with flashlights. I moved so quickly in the dark. I thought, "I am leaving today and I will be gone before I know it. "

It is very cold this morning, and I think about how cold it must be for the refugees in the small mud homes - the homes they made.

They have no electricity. They never know how much food will be available on distribution day. The nights can be so cold. They have to make firewood every day.

All the clothes on the children were rags. Some only wore small sheets of red cloth. Funds were cut for sanitary napkins, the red cloth was distributed during their menstrual cycle so the women could at least wrap themselves up, but it was explained to me that the women would go without. How they do it I don't know. The women would rather the children stay warm, or at least warmer.

It is cold and foggy. It took the little plane three attempts to land. We waited - our bags on the grass - looking out at the dirt landing.

I was so hungry. I grabbed the last of the bread as we were running out the door. No coffee this morning - no electricity.

We finally took off and arrived just in time to catch the second plane.

I am so tired and hungry but at least I know when I will eat. Very soon I'll have a hot shower and food.

I hope I will never forget how much I have learned. I hope I always appreciate all that I have.

I had no idea what people are going through all over the world. It is worse than I had imagined, and I know I have only begun to see things, I have only begun to understand.

I have been here in Dar es Salaam for a few hours, waiting to make sure I am on a flight to London with a connection to Los Angeles.

I haven't thought or felt anything other than "keep moving."

I am now on a British Airways flight to London.

I realize I am the dirtiest person on the plane.

"Do you want a paper? We also have magazines? Would you like Vogue or Vanity Fair?"

"No thank you."

I do say yes to any food they offer me - cashews, pretzels, Coke with lemon. I don't usually eat like this. I feel like a little kid.

They just handed me socks rolled up with a bow around them, an eye mask, a travel kit, and a sleep suit.

Suddenly, the idea of taking off this dirty jacket upsets me. It has been my blanket. I don't want to clean up or wash off this place. These three weeks have been a New World for me - a special time - I have changed. I like who I became here.

For some reason, taking off my jacket I feel I am detaching myself from all the people - the places...

The boy on the dirt floor holding his legs  
The 8-year-old girl with her little baby brother  
in her arms  
the man in the amputee camp who looked into my  
eyes and told me his story  
images like a slide show  
flashes of their faces  
their bare feet  
I am not sure what I feel. I have never felt so much.  
I have to sleep now.  
It is not hard to feel guilty leaving.  
From this moment on – Wherever I am, I will remember  
where they are.

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