

Emma's Story

Story based on the original, as told by Emma Abiodun Macaulay

My name is Emma. This is my story. It begins when I was 5 years old and had just started school. I used to live with my Mum in a part of Freetown, the capital city of Sierra Leone. When war broke out in Freetown in May 1997 I had to go to Kabala, a town in the north of the country, to live with my grandma and grandpa.

My grandma was a well known midwife, a kind of nurse, who gave health care services to the people in Kabala. In fact her house was the clinic. Soon the rebels were to attack Kabala too. The day before the rebel soldiers attacked the town they visited the clinic and asked for treatment. Grandma asked them some questions to find out what was wrong with them but they refused to say anything. They looked around the place and then left.



Rebel soldier in Sierra Leone

Their unusual behaviour made grandma and grandpa suspicious and very worried for our safety. They decided to leave the house the following morning and take cover at a doctor's house. Later that day the rebels returned to my grandparent's house to ask for grandma. When they did not find her there they took all the valuables and set the house on fire. It was so dreadful for us all, especially grandma.

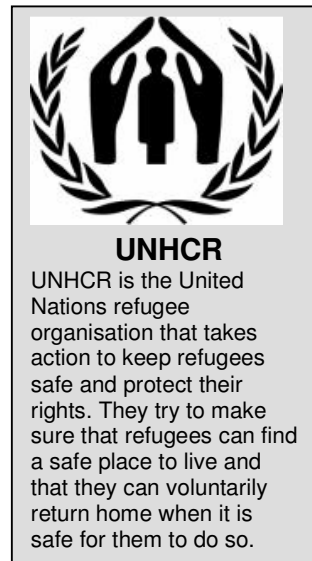
Worse was to follow. The rebel soldiers found out that we had gone to hide in the doctor's house and sent other soldiers after us. Grandpa wasted no time in deciding to break the fence wall at the back of the house and escaped with grandma and me. We ran and hid in a hole, as the rebels were after us. Grandma sprained both legs in the process and now she is in pain a lot of the time and cannot easily walk.

We had to travel partly by foot and partly by local transport to different areas of the country. We moved around for more than a year! Eventually we came to Coloma. Someone from a church was very kind and gave us a place to stay. We began to feel more secure but our peace was cruelly shattered when we heard that our house in Freetown had also been burnt. We had hoped to return one day.

Grandma could see that the people in Coloma needed a clinic to come to when they had health problems. The church opened a clinic that was run by grandma. With the money she earned from the clinic grandma was able to rent a house for us.

I went to a primary school in Coloma, and I learnt four languages: French, Foulah, Mandingo and Susu. I had to! Otherwise I wouldn't have been able to talk to people.

At last, in 2000, we returned home to Freetown through the **UNHCR programme** (see box). We were homeless but so glad to be back. A kind neighbour offered us somewhere to stay for a short time. Then we moved yet again to another new environment on another side of Freetown!



I continued my primary education and did well in my exams: 300 marks out of 400. I still enjoy French and use the other languages now and then. It is odd isn't it; if it were not for the war I would not have learned those languages. Most of my classmates cannot speak any of them. The only thing that's not so good is I have to go a long way to school every day and spend more money on transport than we can afford as my father is unemployed.



Not all girls are so lucky! Many miss out on an education altogether.

It might sound odd but having had some awful experiences fleeing from the rebels, living and feeling like a refugee, having to be brave and make so many new starts has made me a stronger person. I feel secure at the moment because the security police patrol our area at night. I am not sure how I'll feel when they leave.

Many children were displaced and lost when fighting broke out in Freetown because their schools were located far away from their homes. Their parents could not get to them quickly enough. Governments need to think about these things when they work out which schools to send children to.

With all the upset of the war and needing to run for safety, we lost touch with my mother. I don't know where she is. I hope she is safe and that we will meet soon.

I would like to say thank you to all those who are helping to promote peace in my country and in the world.

Web links for further information:

BBC Country Profiles: Sierra Leone

A brief history and key statistics: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/country_profiles/1061561.stm

Sierra Leone timeline, with links to other reports and features:

http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/country_profiles/1065898.stm

BBC News World Edition

Top news stories from across Africa <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/default.stm>

All Africa

A site offering news from over one hundred newspapers and news agencies across Africa.

Sierra Leone pages: <http://allafrica.com/sierraleone/>

One World Africa

The African arm of the One World independent media network; a network of people and groups working for human rights and sustainable development.

<http://africa.oneworld.net/article/frontpage/151/509>

UNDP Human Development Reports

Human development indicators, searchable by country or indicators.

<http://hdr.undp.org/statistics/data/>