

THE WHOLE WORLD IN SCHOOL 2020

# THE READING ROCKET



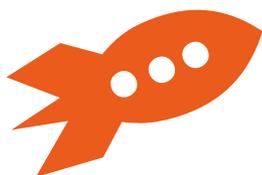
IN UGANDA



Red Barnet



OXFAM IBIS



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## PRIMARY LEVEL

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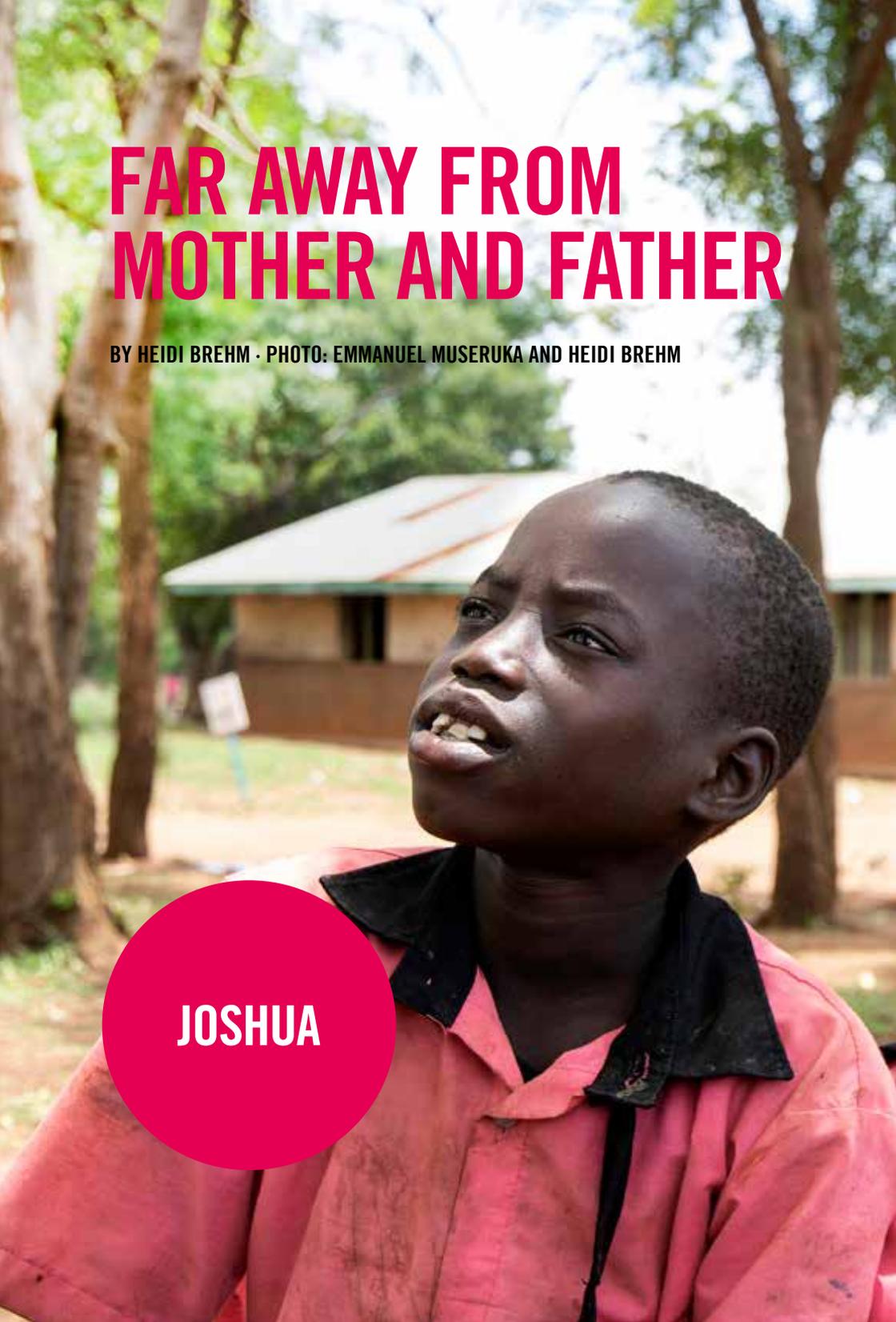
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# FAR AWAY FROM MOTHER AND FATHER

BY HEIDI BREHM · PHOTO: EMMANUEL MUSERUKA AND HEIDI BREHM



**JOSHUA**

**J**oshua looks up at the sky. He sees a plane cruising between the clouds. Where might it be going? Joshua dreams that he is the pilot. He lands in Gulu and visits his mother and father.

Joshua is 9 years old. He lives in the village Lugwar with his grandmother and little sister Sande who is 5 years old. Joshua likes to live with his grandmother. She jokes around and makes Joshua laugh. He is happy that Sande is with him. At school, she seeks him out. She always smiles. Her smile makes him feel happy and safe.

Joshua used to live in Gulu with his mother, father and five siblings. The family could not afford to send all their children to school. Joshua asks many questions and loves to learn new things. Because of that, it was Joshua and Sande who were sent off to live with their grandmother in Lugwar. She takes care of them and makes sure they attend school.



**Gulu was a busy place with many cars and a lot of noise. Everything is different in Lugwar. In the evening, when Joshua is lying under the mosquito net, he can hear the neighbour's pigeons cooing. Apart from that, it is quiet.**

**In the beginning, Joshua had no friends in Lugwar. Fortunately, he quickly met Oscar and Joffrey. Oscar is his neighbour in the village. They attend the same school and the same class. On one of the first days in school, the teacher asked them to solve a task together. Since that day, they have been friends.**





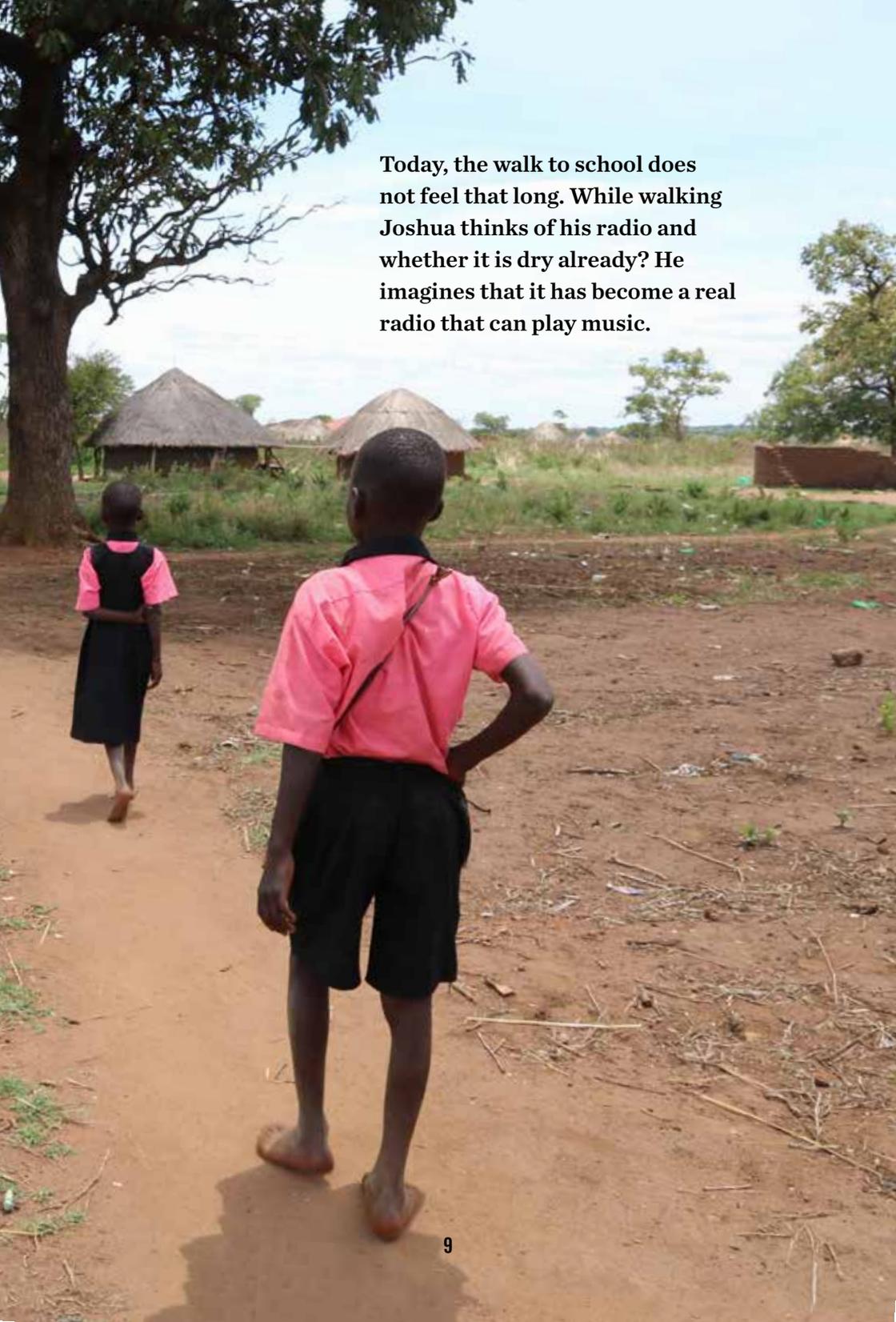
The boys are playing Kalikua. Kalikua is a game where you throw a spinning top on the back of your hand. When it spins, it should be tipped back down on the ground. If you are good, it spins fast and long. It hurts a little and bruises the hand when they play for a long time. Joshua likes it when the other kids at school watch the game and cheer on.

Joshua also loves to play football with his friends. It is hard to run in the heat. But it is fun. Even if the sweat is running down his face, and his bare feet get sore by racing around on the field.



All the students have a chore to do at school. These days Joshua is responsible for creating clay for art class. The red soil from the large anthills is soft. When it is mixed with water, it turns into clay. The soft clay feels nice in the bare hands. The clay can be shaped into just what you want. Joshua has modelled a house and a radio from the clay.

Today, the walk to school does not feel that long. While walking Joshua thinks of his radio and whether it is dry already? He imagines that it has become a real radio that can play music.





When Joshua and Sande return home from school, there is an hour until it gets dark. Joshua must collect water from the well before it gets dark. Fortunately, it only takes five minutes to go there. If he is lucky, the queue for the pump is not too long.



He always hurries home, so he has time to play. In the evening, they eat posho, which is a thick porridge cooked on cornflour. His grandmother also prepared fried white ants. They do not taste of much, but they crunch between the teeth. His grandmother has collected the ants from the anthills. They shoot up like small volcanoes in the fields surrounding the village.





After dinner, Joshua does his homework. He has a small solar cell. Every morning, Joshua places it outside in the sun in front of the house. It then charges and is ready for the evening. It gives power to his lamp, so he can see the letters in the book.

The background of the page is a blurred photograph. In the upper portion, there is a close-up of a thatched roof made of dry, brown straw or reeds. To the left, a person's dark-skinned arm is visible, wearing a colorful, patterned sleeve. The rest of the background is out of focus, showing what appears to be a traditional building with a light-colored wall and some greenery in the distance.

The bus ride home to Gulu takes three hours. The ticket is expensive. They can only afford to come home once a year. A whole year is a long time not to see his mother and father. Joshua often thinks of them. He thinks about what they are doing and if they also miss him.

This year he is particularly looking forward to visiting his family. He has a new little brother that he has not yet seen. Maybe his mother also has a surprise for him. Last year he got a new school uniform. Maybe his greatest wish will come true. Maybe he gets a radio.



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joshua](https://heleverdeniskole.dk/joshua)



**NYIRAMBERE**

# UNDER THE SOARING SUN

BY KATRINE BROCH HANSEN · PHOTO: EMMANUEL MUSERUKA AND HEIDI BREHM

Nyirambere grabs the hack. Without difficulty, she lifts it over her head and swings it back down into the heavy red earth. Slowly but surely, she moves down the row of tall corn plants. She knows exactly how to get rid of all the weeds. She has done it many times before. The sun is burning and sweat is trickling down her forehead.

Further down in the field, her mother's head peeks out between the cornrows. Nyirambere's little brother Bosko grabs a nap in the bundle on his mother's back. Nyirambere waves to her mother signalling that she has returned from school and is starting to work.

Nyirambere is 12 years old. She lives in the village of Kibuga with her parents and four siblings.

Big brother Joseph and three smaller siblings; the younger brothers Tumusiime and Bosko and little sister Esther. Both parents were born and raised in the village. Nyirambere and her siblings are all born here just like their parents. They know the area, the village, and the intricate small pathways as well as their own back pocket.



The village is situated in a beautiful and lush area with green fields. There is hardly any traffic on the small bumpy dirt roads. Men on mopeds and bicycles quietly drive by. They are going out to check their fields and crops.

### The clearing in the cornfield

The green and tall corn plants form an avenue towards the clearing. Right there in the clearing lies the family's house. The small house is made of sticks and sealed with clay. The rain eats away the layers, so the house often needs to be repaired with new clay. Next to the house, they have a hut where Nyirambere's mother cooks. Dense clouds are rolling in over the fields and the small courtyard. For a while, the sun is replaced by massive rainfall. Just like that the air is fresh and feels cool against the bare arms. Nyirambere enjoys the scent of wet grass after a rainfall. The dust in the fields and around the house settles nicely after rain.

Nyirambere helps with looking after the family's house. When she comes back from school, she sweeps the little courtyard.





An old large tree stands robustly in the middle of the courtyard. Sounds are coming from the green treetop. Hundreds of weaver birds are making their nests. The family's chickens run freely around the house. Two dogs are laying lazy and tired in the sun. They watch over the house and family's fields.

### **The fertile soil**

The cornfield is right next to the house. The family owns the land. The field is their safety and provides food for the family. Ever since Nyirambere was quite young, she has helped in the field. There is always something to do. Sowing the seeds, weeding, and harvesting. Once the corn is harvested, they start all over again.

The village Kibuga is surrounded by fields. The area is known for cultivating vegetables such as corn, cassava, and groundnuts. It rains regularly allowing the corn plants to grow quickly.







Corn is an important part of the diet for people in Uganda. The tropical climate makes it possible to harvest corn twice a year.

Nyirambere works on an equal footing with her big brother and parents in the field. It is not just their land that needs to be cultivated. Most of the time the family works on other peoples' fields. They farm the crops for others so the family can earn extra money. A half day's work can bring in approximately 10 Danish Kroner.

It is hard work to swing the hack with the sun burning on the neck. The soil is rough against the bare feet. In the dry season, the soil is rock hard and dry, and the crust causes scratches on her feet and ankles.

## The beginning of harvest

It is not only Nyirambere who is helping her parents in the field. Most children in the area help with work in fields. During the harvest season, they are especially needed in the fields. The teachers at the school can easily tell when the harvest starts. Many students are not going to school. The school is open anyway, but the days are short, so the children working in the fields do not fall too much behind. When you are a child in Kibuga, the days consist of school and work in the field. The most important thing is to help your family. While Nyirambere is working in the field, she is thinking about life in the village and the future. What life will bring her? She does not know yet. And that is okay too. Right now, it is all about getting the hack to swing according to her rhythm.

Nearly 800 students attend Nyirambere's school.  
In some classes, they are up to 130 students.

Find video  
and photos at  
[heleverdeniskole.dk/  
nyirambere](http://heleverdeniskole.dk/nyirambere)





**TREVOR**

# SUCCESSSES MUST BE CELEBRATED

BY HEIDI BREHM · PHOTO: EMMANUEL MUSERUKA AND HEIDI BREHM

**T**revor recalls the first visit to the village where his mother Hope grew up. The small houses without any electricity. Women and children were carrying heavy bottles of water home to the houses. Trevor tried to help the best he could. He felt how hard everyone was working. The rain made everything muddy and difficult. Most people in the village only spoke their local language and it was difficult for Trevor to get by with English. Everything was very different. Still, he felt at home somehow.

Trevor's mother grew up in a poor family. They were ten children in the family. Three of them passed away. Out of the seven siblings, Hope is the one who has succeeded the most. She knows from experience that you must work hard to create a good life in Uganda. She went to school in the village until 7th grade. To continue school, she had to move to the capital. She convinced her uncle in Kampala to take her in. During the day she was diligent at school. In the evening she would work and earn money to pay for her schooling.

## **A busy everyday**

Trevor is 9 years old. He lives in Nsasa Estate on the outskirts of Kampala, the capital of Uganda. Nsasa Estate is a whole new area. Most houses are large, and the gardens are surrounded by fences. Trevor is happy with the new house. He has his very own room. The new house also has a small garden where he can play and hang out with his friends. Sometimes they bring food out into the garden. They play that they are having a picnic.



Trevor lives with his mother Hope, his father Fred and sister Andrea who is 8 years old. The house has a garden where Trevor can play and have fun with his friends.



Trevor attends the private school Kabojja Junior High. It is a great school with good teachers. Everyone speaks English. You have to speak English. The teachers want to make sure that all students will be proficient in English. Therefore, no one is allowed to speak their local language and dialects. If they do, they get a fine. Trevor has never been fined. He has always spoken English with his family.

The students are busy. There are many tasks and submissions. At school, Trevor plays basketball and volleyball. He is also learning to swim. The school day is long. His father or mother drives him and his little sister, Andrea, to school and picks them up again when the school day ends at 16.30. When they return home, Trevor gets a little break and a cup of tea. Then he must shower and do his homework. If he is quick with his homework, he can play. The best he knows is to ride his bike. Together with Andrea and his best friend Brandon he bikes around in the new neighbourhood.

## A trip to Acacia Mall

Today, Trevor has received a big assignment back from his teacher. Hope picks him up at school. He knows she is going to ask about the assignment. Trevor opens the door, and Hope immediately asks, "How did it go?". Trevor smiles and proudly shows her mother the assignment. Her face melts into a big smile. Trevor knows what that means.

When Trevor and Andrea do well in school, or something goes well with his parents' work, they celebrate it. Today they drive to Acacia Mall, which is a large shopping centre. It has a fun play area for children. Trevor plays a computer game in 3D. When he is finished playing, they get a bucket of fried chicken from KFC.

Trevor's 10th birthday is just around the corner. He knows his mother and father are planning a surprise party. It is not completely secret, but it is a secret what is going to happen.



Last year, he was celebrated at his favourite restaurant Javas. Friends and family were invited to join and have pizza with Trevor. The waiters even sang him a birthday song and gave him a drawing kit. It was one of the best days of his life. He is excited about what will happen this year.

### Many opportunities

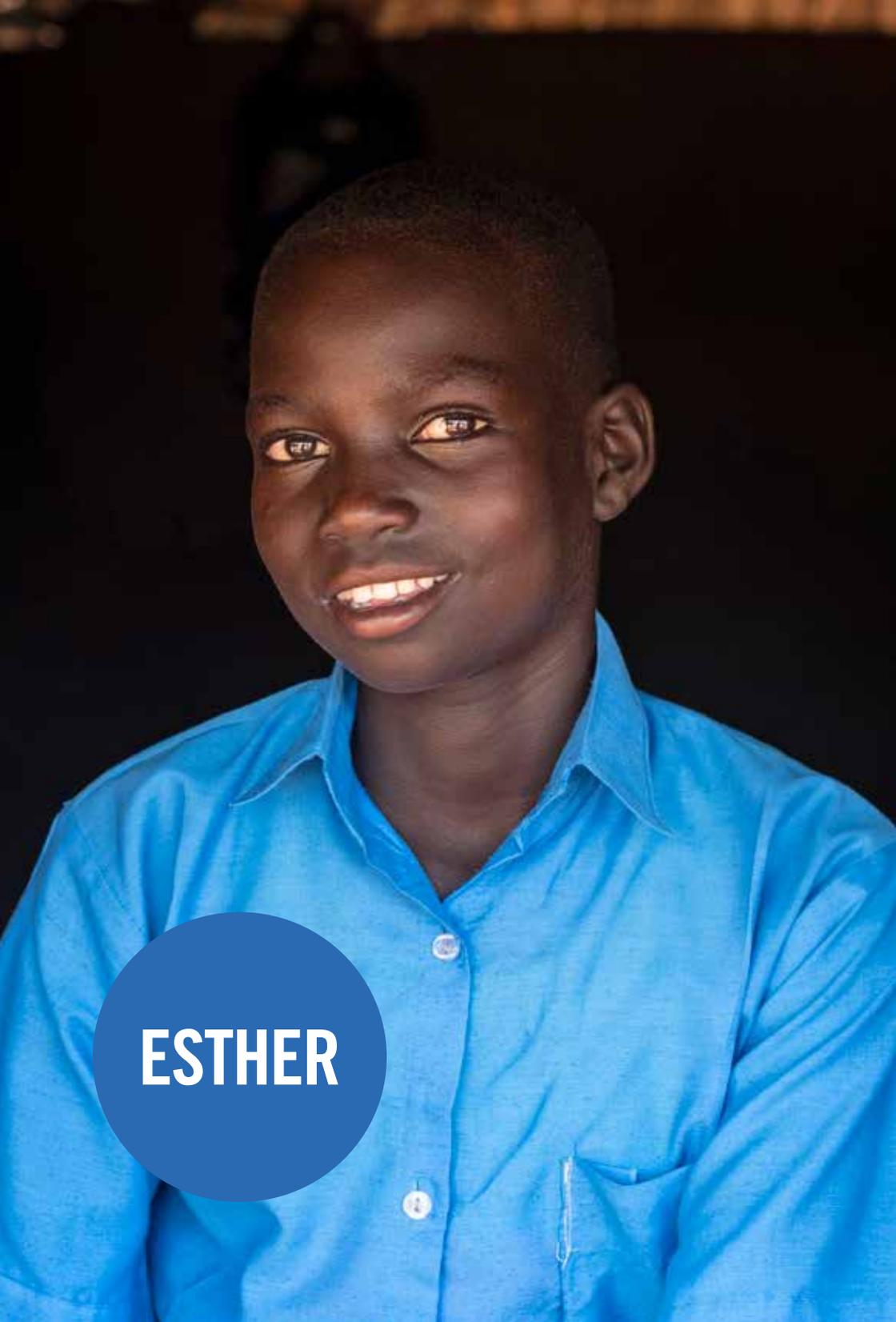
Trevor's mother often tells stories about her childhood and life in the village. Trevor knows that he is lucky. That he has far more opportunities than most children in Uganda. He does everything he can to do well in school. "I have to do well. It means a lot to my mother and father". Trevor can see the joy in their eyes when he makes an extra effort. The visits to his mother's village have reminded him that it is important to take advantage of all opportunities.

During the weekend, Trevor and Andrea are allowed to watch TV. The TV is in their parents' bedroom. Trevor and Andrea take turns in choosing what to see.



Trevor's favourite colour is red. He hopes his parents will make a red cake for his birthday and decorate the house with red things.

Find video  
and photos at  
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trevor](https://heleverdeniskole.dk/trevor)



**ESTHER**

# SHOTS IN THE NIGHT

BY HEIDI BREHM · PHOTO: EMMANUEL MUSERUKA AND HEIDI BREHM

Esther is sitting in the hut where she lives with her aunt and three younger siblings; Jane, Agnes and Jakob. It is nice to sit in the shade. It is very hot outside. The burning sun makes it difficult to do anything. Esther should go out and collect white ants for supper. But the thoughts are holding her back. The memories of her mother and father take over. She misses them terribly. She prefers not to think about that day two years ago when the rebels attacked her village in South Sudan. That day when everything changed.

## THE CAME AT NIGHT

Esther Ikulang is 14 years old. She used to live in the village of Liragore in South Sudan. The area was affected by the civil war. The rebels had stolen food from the village for a long time. They had also taken the family's goats.

One night they came back. This time they had weapons. Esther and her family were sleeping in their hut when they were awakened by the shots. Esther's mother and father quickly gathered the children. They ran as quietly as they could until they reached the outskirts of the village. Here they hid in a thicket.

Shots, screams and children crying. The sounds all mixed together. Esther's mother and father ran back to help more children escape. Esther and her siblings sat quietly in the bush and waited. They waited and waited. The parents did not return. The rebels had set fire to the village huts. The flames grew bigger and bigger. The light from the many burning huts illuminated the dark night. "It hurt my body. I could hardly move".

There were others hiding in the shrubbery. More people started running away. Esther knew she had to do the same. She picked Jakob up and placed him on her back. Jane and Agnes were old enough to walk by themselves. There was only one way - away. Away from the rebels towards Uganda, where they would be safe. For more than a week Esther and her siblings went through scrubs and along dusty small roads. When they passed villages, they would steel some food in the gardens.

### A new beginning

When they reached the border of Uganda, they were picked up by a bus. The bus drove them to a reception centre. There were many other people who, like them, had fled from South Sudan and had now reached Uganda. Many others who had also gone for days

Esther lives in the hut with her aunt and three younger siblings: Jane, Agnes and Jakob.

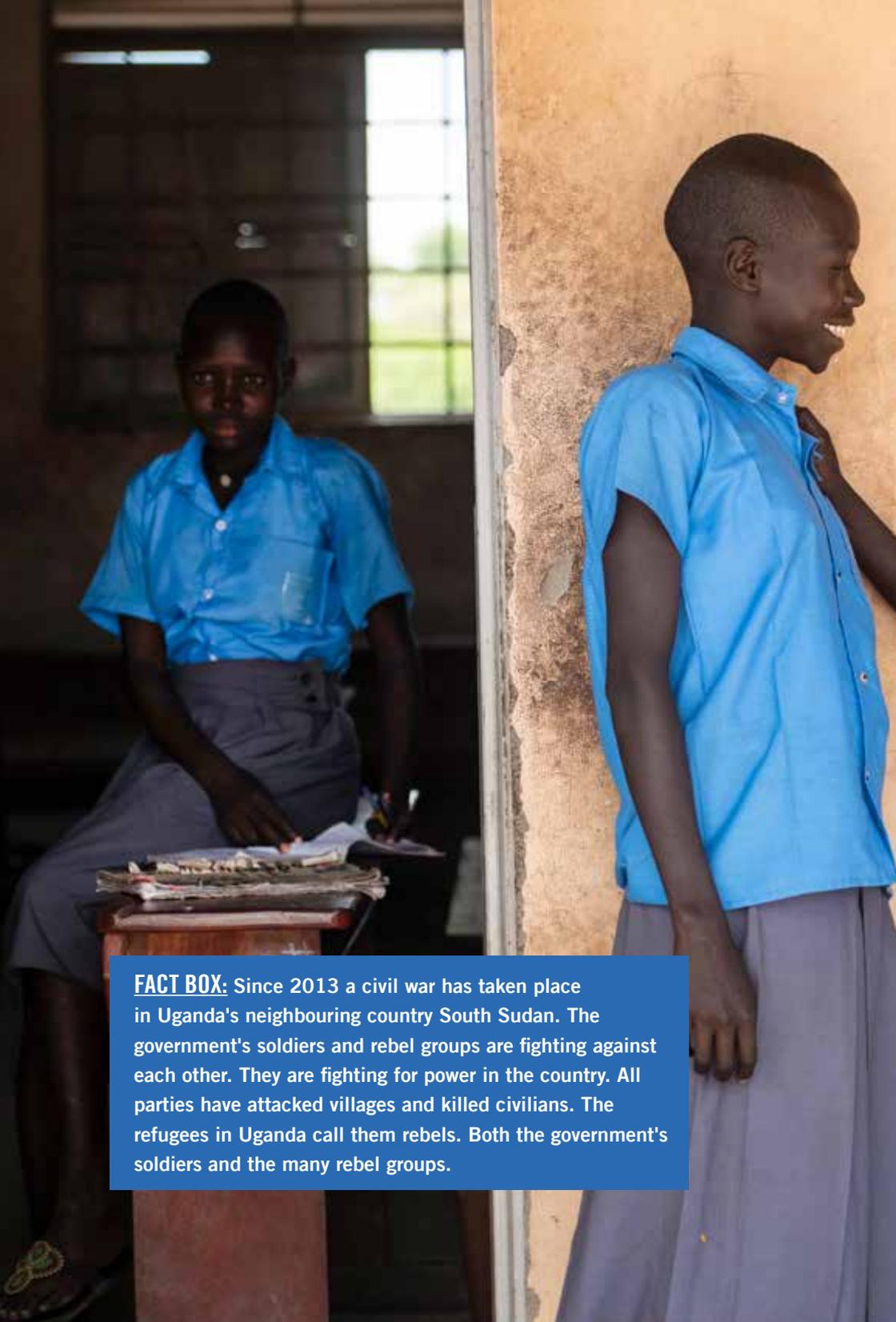




More than 1 million people from South Sudan have fled to Uganda because of the civil war. Palabek is not an actual refugee camp but an area where refugees are supported to establish a new life. More than 40,000 refugees live in Palabek.

could now finally breathe a sigh of relief. Suddenly, Esther heard a voice. "Esther! Esther, Agnes, Jane, Jakob". She looked up and saw her aunt. There, in the middle of the crowd, her father's sister Elizabeth stood. She ran to meet them. Esther was exhausted and at the same time extremely happy to see her aunt. "I cried and cried. It was as if my tears would never stop".

Esther's aunt had fled a few days before. It was pure luck that they met in Palabek. For a couple of days, they stayed in the reception area. They had to be registered. When the paperwork was done, they were given a small piece of land, which was theirs now. They got a canvas and beams to build a hut. They also received food, a pot and a pan. Now they could start a new life in Uganda.



**FACT BOX:** Since 2013 a civil war has taken place in Uganda's neighbouring country South Sudan. The government's soldiers and rebel groups are fighting against each other. They are fighting for power in the country. All parties have attacked villages and killed civilians. The refugees in Uganda call them rebels. Both the government's soldiers and the many rebel groups.





Esther helps her aunt. Before going to school, she collects white ants. They contain a lot of protein. When she returns from school, she baths her siblings and helps cooking.

### **We share memories and grief**

Esther had not been in Palabek very long before she happened to meet Teresa. They played and went to the same school back in South Sudan. Teresa fled the same terrible night as Esther. Her parents and a brother were shot. Luckily, Teresa reached the border with Uganda with her big brother.

Esther is happy to have Teresa close by. They often talk about the village in South Sudan and remember their homes and families. They share the same story and the same grief. Sometimes Esther gets sad when she talks to Teresa. Sad because she ends up thinking of her parents. She misses them. Still, it is nice to be able to share memories. The two girls do not have to say so much. With a few words, they understand each other.

## The school is my safe space

When Esther is in school, the bad memories disappear. At school, she is not meant to be the big one taking care of her younger siblings. At school, she can be Esther. Just Esther who plays and laughs. When school is out there is time to play and hang out with friends. The best thing is to skip and play dodgeball with the other girls. There are many other children at school who have also experienced terrible things. Most of them carry great grief after losing family and friends. "When we laugh and have fun together, we forget".

## When darkness takes over

During some evenings the thoughts return. Esther can almost hear the shots. She remembers how it was. She closes her eyes and thinks of her mother and father. Although they are not here anymore, they are always with her. Some days, sorrow and sadness take over. Other days it is the nice memories of her childhood that Esther thinks of.

They are 2000 students at Esther's school. Most of them are from South Sudan. Esther hopes she can return to South Sudan and work as a teacher when she grows up.

Find video  
and photos at  
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esther](http://heleverdeniskole.dk/esther)



A young boy with a bright smile is leaning against a green wooden door. He is wearing a white short-sleeved shirt. His right arm is raised, touching the top of the door frame. The background is a textured, light-colored wall. A blue circular graphic is overlaid on the bottom left of the image.

**BUSINGE**

# LIFE BY THE LAKE

**BY KATRINE BROCH HANSEN · PHOTO: EMMANUEL MUSERUKA AND HEIDI BREHM**

The soil is red and bone dry. In the distance, you can glimpse the reflections on the lake. It is Saturday and Businge is off from school. He is heading for the lake. Heading out for today's work. The village, where he lives with his family, disappears in the background. The boats in the bay are being prepared for a day on the water. Everyone is hoping that they will return home with a great catch. Businge has been here many times before. Either to fetch water or catch fish.

Businge is 14 years old. He lives in the village of Katanga in western Uganda. A few kilometres away from the village lies the great Lake Albert, which forms the border between Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Businge lives in the village with his family consisting of his mother, father and six siblings. Businge is the second youngest of the children.

## **We work as a team**

Businge's mother, Kasemira, runs a small café in the village where she is selling porridge. The cafe is a small dark room built of wooden sticks and clay. There is a door but no windows. Along the walls are small crooked benches for the guests. There are no tables, so you must sit with the bowl in your hands.

Businge's father, Beza-Bachwa, owns a small kiosk in the neighbouring village. The desk takes up most of the small space, and there are things and gizmos everywhere. Large buckets with chewing gum stand at the front of the counter. The shelves are

stocked with batteries and flashlights, and the floor is covered with stacked soda boxes. Bags of spices hang neatly on a row over a string in the ceiling.

The family work as a team and Businge must also help. “When I am not in school, I help my parents take care of my siblings, fetch water from the well and fish for Nile perch. On a good day, I can catch 10 fish and sell them for 5,000 shillings”. This is close to nine Danish Kroner.

It is not every day that the fish take the bait. On those days, Businge fetches water which he then sells in the village. Water is in short supply in the area and you must go far to get water. Therefore, children like Businge can earn a little money by carrying buckets and cans of water to the village. Each can of water can be sold for approximately two Danish Kroner. The money Businge earns on either fish or water, he hands over to his mother and father.

Businge likes math. He can quickly do the sum on groceries when he visits his father’s little shop.





Businge enjoys the recesses at school. Then it is time to play football with his friends.



## Back to school

Two years ago, Businge had to drop out of school. The family could not afford it. In Uganda basic education is free, but you must still pay for your school uniform, books, materials and fees to enter exams. During that time, he was earning money for the family by selling the fish he caught on the lake. He also sold water in the village.

Businge is all smiles. His family now has enough money for Businge to return to school. Last year he joined a special program with classes for students who have been away from school. The classes are planned in a way that allows students to catch up on the lost school years.



The family's toothbrushes are stuck and placed under the house roof. Here they are away from the rats.

Although the days are long, Businge is very happy to be back in school. "He smiles more and has become a happier son and more fun brother to his siblings," his father says. His parents are both very proud that Businge is doing well in school. He is one of the best in his class. His mother hopes that Businge will attend university when he gets older.

### **The essential water**

Although Businge is in school most of the day, he still helps at home. He sweeps the courtyard and helps babysit his siblings. But the most important task is to fetch water. A lot of water is needed for cooking, so Businge must take the trip to the nearest well both morning and evening.

## PORTRAIT STORY: LIFE BY THE LAKE

The well is homemade. It is not a real well, but just a big hole in the ground where the water gathers from a source below. It is the village's residents who have dug the hole. The water at the bottom of the hole is dirty and clay-coloured by the surrounding soil. Up along the sides of the well, small steps have been formed by the many children and adults who collect water from the hole every day.

The trip to the well cuts across flat and dry fields. The walk there is almost three kilometres. Businge carries the large and heavy cans on his head or in his hands. The walk back and forth to the well gives Businge plenty of time to think. On school, his family and the future. At home, his mother is ready by the fire. The water must be boiled before it can be used.





Businge usually goes fishing with a line and hook. Here he is helping other fishermen to empty fish traps.

### **Maybe the fish will bite?**

It's Saturday and Businge is looking forward to sailing out on the lake with his friends. When they sit there in the boat on the lake, they tell stories. Businge loves the calm where he can disappear into his own thoughts and imagine his friends' stories. Today, he envisions catching a giant Nile perch, which his mother prepares for dinner. He can almost taste it while sitting in the boat there in the middle of the big quiet and reflecting lake listening to stories.



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and photos at  
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businge](https://heleverdeniskole.dk/businge)



**PRELLAH**

# MY OWN WAY

BY KATRINE BROCH HANSEN · PHOTO: EMMANUEL MUSERUKA AND HEIDI BREHM

*It is just before dark. They are holding hands while they are running. Away from it all, out of the village, over dry and bulky fields to something else - something better.*

*Her heart is beating in her chest as she tries to keep up. They have agreed to run away together. Prellah and her boyfriend. Now it's really happening. They are leaving. They send each other a smile, and Prellah gets a bubbling feeling for the first time in a long time - something good awaits out there.*

## When my world collapsed

Prellah is 16 years. She is a hardworking school student and church singer. But behind her big smile hides a trace of sorrow. When she was 13, Prellah became an orphan. Her father passed away after a long period of illness. After the father's death, there was not enough money for school uniforms, books and exams for Prellah and her three siblings; Joffrey, Nathan and Grace. Prellah, therefore, had to leave school. "I was just at home and didn't do much. I didn't think of anything special", she recalls.

The headteacher at school, Samuel, knew about the family's situation and knew that Prellah was struggling. He was worried and keen to get Prellah back to school. He had for a long time worked hard to get the girls in the village to attend school. With Samuel's help and support, Prellah returned to school. But the stability was short-lived. Only a year after her father's death, Prellah lost her mother to cancer. Her world collapsed. She felt alone and

completely lost. "I was just empty and didn't know what to think or do. Where I should live or what would happen to me and my siblings".

### Family and chaos

Before her mother's death, her family lived with her grandmother and grandfather in another village. But after both parents passed away, Prellah and her siblings were sent to live with other family members in the area. Family unity goes beyond the immediate family in Uganda. The entire extended family of aunts, uncles and cousins play an important role, and all take care of each other - especially when there are losses in the family. Initially, Prellah still lived with her grandmother and grandfather. It was a hard time for Prellah. She missed her parents and siblings. Going to school was also hard. Prellah stayed home and the teachers at the school became more and more concerned about her.

In the area where Prellah lives, many adults are unable to read. They have not attended school and are unfamiliar with the school system. The teachers, therefore, play an important role in securing education for children and youth.





Many children and youth do not attend school. Either because their family cannot afford it, because girls are married off early and therefore stop going to school. Or simply because of far distances to school in the countryside.

After a while, Prellah moved to her aunt, but it did not make things easier. "I couldn't agree with my aunt. She thought my schooling was too expensive and was often irritated when I talked about the school and the things, I needed for studying". Prellah then had to take responsibility for her own schooling including finding money for school uniforms, materials and exams. She had to fend for herself.

### **F... it all, let's run away together!**

"It all became too much. I was no longer with my siblings. My parents were gone, and I didn't get along with my aunt. My thoughts were chaos, and my life was a mess. I just wanted to get away - away from it all. So, my boyfriend and I agreed to run away. It was our way out".



On Sundays, Prellah attends church. Prellah and her friend from the village play the drums during service.

Samuel quickly learned that Prellah and her boyfriend had run away. The school started a search and Prellah was found within a day. Her boyfriend managed to run away, but the school persuaded Prellah to come back to the village, her family and school. The last thing she heard is that her boyfriend went to Congo, where he lives now.

Upon her return, Prellah moved in with her cousin and his wife in the village. Fortunately, they get along fine, and they help Prellah the best they can.

### **My mother's wish**

Prellah misses her mother and father. She often thinks about whether a good nurse could have saved them. "Before my mother died, she told me to get an education. I want to achieve that". Prellah wants to become a nurse. In church on Sundays, she prays that she will do well in school. She dreams of getting a good job and

a big house, so she can bring her siblings home to the village. She has not seen them for almost two years and misses them. In the evening Prellah is back in school with her classmates. The school is the only place in the village with a solar panel that provides light so they can do their homework. The last few years have been close to breaking her, but the experiences have made her sure of one thing. She wants an education. Several of Prellah's girlfriends want to finish school so they can marry and start a family. But not her. Prellah sits there with her homework and thinks back on everything she has been through. She thinks about the time with her aunt and the time she ran off. "I wasn't thinking far ahead then. I just wanted to get away from it all", she thoughtfully concludes.

Every night Prellah meets up with a group of classmates at school. They help each other with homework and preparations for the next exam. They are focused and studying hard – leaving little time to talk.

Find video  
and photos at  
[heleverdeniskole.dk/  
prellah](https://heleverdeniskole.dk/prellah)





**INNOCENT**

# WITH THE HELP OF GOD

BY HEIDI BREHM · PHOTO: EMMANUEL MUSERUKA AND HEIDI BREHM

“The rebels are here! The rebels are coming!” It is an ordinary day. Innocent, who is 16, is in school. They have mathematics for the first two hours. Finally, there is a break. Innocent is talking to a group of friends while a sudden uproar takes place outside the school. Innocent knows that rebels attack schools and villages. Nevertheless, it feels unreal now that it happens here. Instinctively, he begins to run.

The fear is pounding in him. The only thing he can think of is whether they have already attacked the village. From a far distance, he can see it. It is empty. No one is sweeping in front of the huts. There is no smoke from fireplaces. No women making food. No one to see in the fields. Everything is quiet and empty.

Innocent hides between some bushes and quietly sit looking at the village. Deep down he knows. The rebels have already been there. Still, he sits there. He is hoping. Hoping his mother will stick her head out of the entrance door of their home. Hoping everything is just a bad dream. Thousands of thoughts are flying through his head. Do his mother and father live? Where are his siblings? Is he all alone now? Nothing happens. He knows he must move on.

**FACT BOX:** Since 2013 a civil war has taken place in Uganda's neighbour country South Sudan. Government troops and rebel groups are fighting for power in the country. The war is complex and concerns different ethnic groups' access to the country's resources such as land and oil. Both sides have been responsible for attacks on civilians. The refugees in Uganda refer to those who fight as rebels - whether it is government soldiers or one of the many rebel groups.



The family cultivate the little plot of land they received when they came to Uganda.

For several days, Innocent walks through the impenetrable landscape. From time to time, he sees others who also walk the same route. Everyone is on their way to Uganda. On their way to a place where they can feel safe. Innocent is walking in his school uniform. He has nothing with him beside the clothes on his back. At night he sleeps under the open sky, during the day he walks. The first few days he has nothing to eat. Fortunately, he passes an area with mango trees. He picks up the mangoes from the ground and eats them. They provide both fluid and energy. He manages with that.

### Finally arrived

When Innocent finally reaches the reception area at the border of Uganda, he has only one thing on his mind. His gaze wanders over the many faces. He scans the crowd. From time to time, he will notice familiar faces. He sees people from the village and students from his school. Suddenly, there in the middle of the crowd is his family. The joy flows through him and tears stream down his cheeks. While Innocent paves the way to his mother's open arms, he thanks God. He is confident that God held his hand over him and his family.

## PORTRAIT STORY: WITH THE HELP OF GOD

Innocent, his mother, father and two younger brothers Solomon and Tabantevit are waiting in the reception area for five days. They are registered and given a small piece of land in Palabek. They also receive food and materials to get started with a new life in Uganda.

### Help to the family

Innocent and his family have been in Uganda now for almost two years. He has become accustomed to living here. Every day he thanks God. Even though he is thankful that his entire family survived, life in Parlabek is not easy. The escape and the traumatizing memories of South Sudan have scarred them for life.

Innocent himself has built the family's huts. He lives in his own hut. In his culture, it is custom that all boys build their own hut when they are 13 years old. Living in his own hut marks that you have become an adult. Innocent enjoys the peace when he sits in his hut and reads from his Bible.





In the woodshop, volunteers provide their knowledge and help young boys like Innocent learn a craft. A set of four chairs and a table can sell for approximately 150,000 shillings. When the cost of wood is deducted, it gives Innocent a profit of what is equivalent to 143 Danish kroner.

It has been especially hard for Innocent's parents. They find it difficult to settle down. They do not have much to do. Most of the day they work on the small piece of land they received when they arrived. Innocent knows that they have a hard time thinking about the future. He sees the grief in their eyes. Sometimes it all becomes too much for them. He can smell when they have been drinking. Like many others in Palabek, it is an escape from the terrible memories. Innocent understands them, but he still hates when it happens. "It makes me sad when I see my mother and father are not happy".

As the oldest son in the family, he has a great responsibility to provide money for the family. In Palabek he is a carpenter apprentice and has learned to build furniture. Every Saturday, when he is off from school, he spends time in a small woodshop. Innocent has learned to build tables and chairs which he sells. This way, he contributes to the family's economy. It makes him proud when he can sell his items on the market.

### **God is always with me**

Innocent is very occupied with God and his faith. God saved his life, and with God's help, he can manage everyday life. Every night before going to bed, he reads the Bible. On Sundays, he attends the church where he sings in the church choir. During the week he meets other young people through the church's youth fellowship.

They practice the songs for the following Sunday service. But there is also time to talk and hang out.

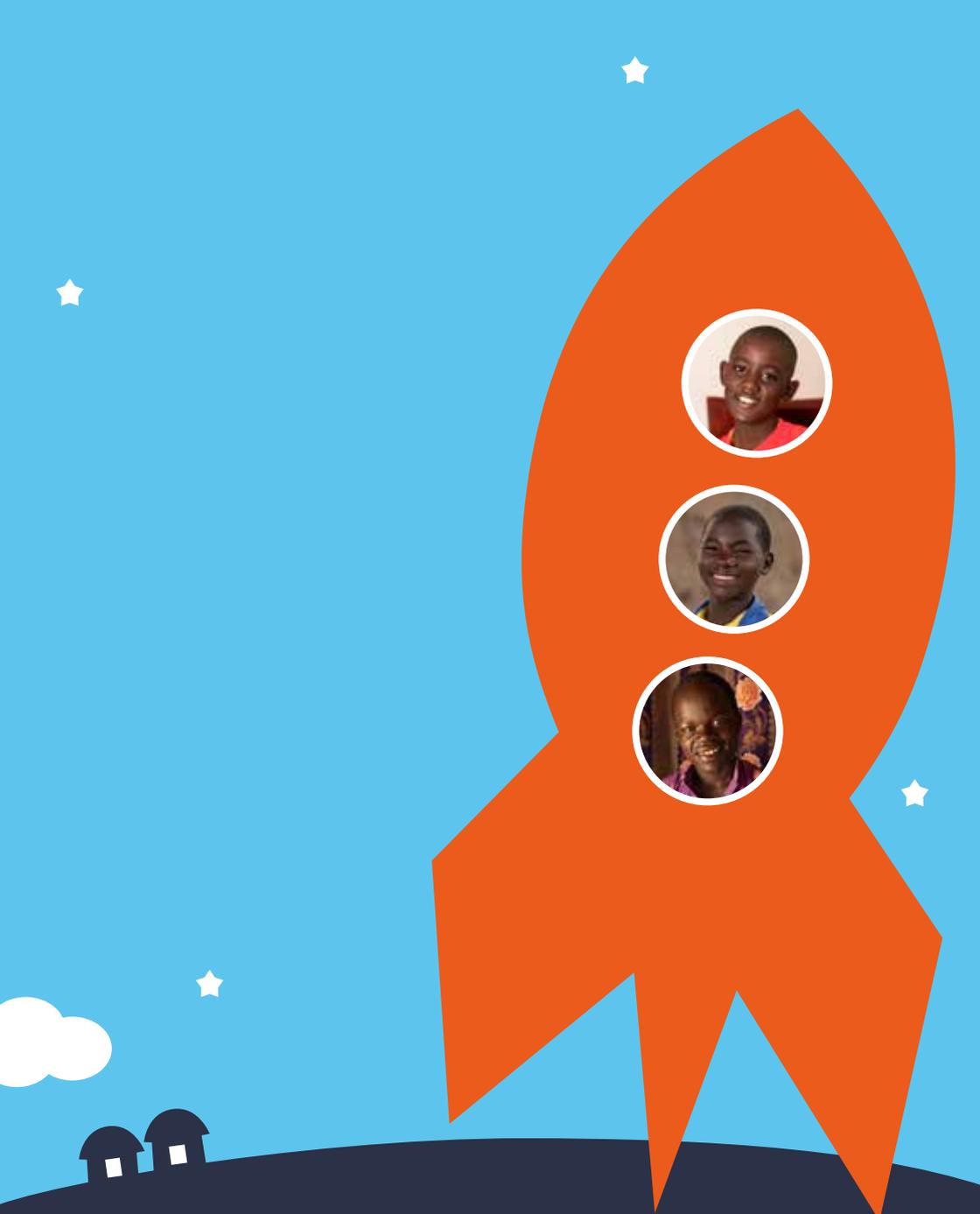
When Innocent is at church he relaxes and feels peaceful. The church and the youth fellowship provide great support. When it all gets a little too hard, he can always find comfort in the church's community. As a youth leader in the church, he also helps other young people. They come to him if they have questions about challenges and life in general. "The answers are in the Bible," Innocent explains.

### Hope for the future

Innocent has a dream for the future. He wants to help create peace in his country so people can return to South Sudan and live together. "We must learn to forgive each other. If we don't learn to really forgive each other, we will not be able to live peacefully together", Innocent relates. With God's help, he has made peace with his past. It does not mean it is all gone. It also does not mean that it is not difficult. But for Innocent it means that he can think positively about the future.

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