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CHIME THROUGH THE YEARS

## **“FROM HUMAN TRAFFICKING UNTO HARVARD COLLEGE”**

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*CHIME FOR CHANGE Through the Years: The Female Fabric is a series curated by CHIME Managing Editor Mariane Pearl featuring stories from the CHIME journalism platform archives by women around the world.*



Fourteen. That’s how old I was when the Lord’s Resistance Army raided my home village in Eastern Uganda. **As a teenager, I was quickly cast aside for sexual exploitation by the LRA Commanders in charge of triage. They wanted virgins, the younger the girl, the better.** I narrowly escaped them by following a crowd, a mass movement of bodies that got itself wrapped in a cloud of dust, and was later able to join my family.

Earlier my parents had had an argument. My father wanted to remain behind as the rebels closed in but he had asked my mother to flee with us children. She refused, insisting we should all stay and die together if need be, anything but leave my father alone.



*LRA Army soldiers*

It all changed when, from a distance, **my father saw rebels dragging young girls away from their homes. He then realised what danger we were in and we escaped in the moment.** We took advantage of the rebels' distraction as they scrambled around our property. If we had delayed our run by even a few minutes, it would have been too late. Fleeing was an excruciating decision for my father who had to leave behind his own 100 years-old father. To get away from his captors, my grandfather tried to climb a mango tree, but he fell and broke both his hips. Laughing, the rebels decided not to kill him but rather to leave him to die a slow and painful death. My grandfather first survived the ordeal and was confined to a wheelchair, but he later died of his injuries.



*LRA Army soldiers*

It was a treacherous journey that we took on foot, sometimes walking through the bushes to avoid being detected by the rebels. I can't say how much distance we covered, but we walked all day and arrived at the Catholic Mission at night. Along the way, I lost sight of some members of my family. Thankfully, everyone made it to the Mission, an internally displaced people's camp where I ended up going to primary school. In less than a year though, my parents, who were teachers by profession, obtained a transfer to a school in the capital city, Kampala.



*A little boy campaigning for girls' education*

We moved there as a family; we had lost all our material possession but all of us were alive! Also, my early experiences had left me with a burning passion to fight against the traffic of human beings. So, when the right time came, **I started working as a guard on the Kenya border with the Immigration Service of Uganda and contributed to the arrest of a particularly cruel fugitive LRA commander.** This man had kidnapped children in Northern Uganda, killed villagers and forced survivors to cook and eat human flesh. My colleagues and myself also rescued girls, some of whom were infamous LRA leader Joseph **Kony's 'countless sex slaves. Kony who was known for his sexual exploitation of children, also built an army of 66000 children soldiers.**



*Agnes working as a border guard*

After a while, I started feeling that working against human trafficking required an in-depth understanding of the reasons that both compelled and allowed it. My quest for knowledge and skills became more urgent. Thanks to a fellowship, I joined the University of Minnesota and specialized in Human Trafficking, Policy and Prevention. There, I also joined the Clinton Global Initiative with an anti-human-trafficking project in which I committed to train a thousand law enforcement officers. It also involved creating general awareness and building a rehabilitation centre for survivors of human trafficking in Uganda.



*Agnes at Harvard College*



For years, back in Uganda, I had rescued survivors of human trafficking and, sheltered them in my house, simply because there was no other facility available. I could not afford rehabilitation services, only shelter and share whatever food I had. My house was a temporary arrangement as I looked for other solutions, including relatives willing to take them in.

One of such survivors, Assya\* was a girl who had been genitally mutilated as a child and was married off before she had even healed. When she escaped her abusive marriage, her parents were furious. In their view, she had brought shame to the family. One night, her mother hit her when she refused to return to her abusive husband, but Assya managed to run away. Using a phone number I had shared during awareness campaigns, she called me at midnight. I took her into the house I shared with my mother and sister.



*Formerly trafficked girls working*

Despite our efforts to make her feel comfortable, Assya was self-conscious that she might be invading our space. I searched for a rehabilitation centre to take her in but she left a couple of days after she arrived, giving me no time. This experience broke my heart. I have never seen her again or found out what happened to her. Assya's story fuelled my determination to build The Dream Revival Centre for Survivors. It has not been an easy ride. **Most of our victims have confronted the likes of LRA whose cruelty the world was reminded of when the LRA, also known as Bobo Haram, more recently kidnapped schoolgirls in Nigeria. Just like they were coming for me back then.**

How to finance the refuge was a problem and required creative thinking. My plan was to save money from my student stipend while studying at the University. **I always knew where free food was served around campus so I could save my food money.** When I finally had \$1000 set aside, I laid the foundation stone for the Dream Revival Centre, it was in 2011.



*Dream Revival Centre*

After a while, construction stalled for five years due to lack of resources. But the world came and helped. I was awarded the 2016 Diane von Furstenberg International Award. It comes with a cash prize of \$ 50,000 that allowed me to complete the construction of the Centre and turn it into a full residential facility for survivors of human trafficking. It has a current capacity of sixteen beds with room for expansion. It offers shelter to female survivors as well as access to all our range of services and support systems. We help them rebuild their confidence and emotional wellbeing. We encourage them to revive their dreams. We provide comprehensive health care: the physical, psychological, and emotional needs are all attended to as well as social services support to help them become independent, fully functioning adults.



In 2013, I founded The Huts for Peace program, a community driven, self-help initiative by women who have been displaced, tortured, and subjected to gender-based violence by the Lord's Resistance Army. Using locally available materials, the women have so far constructed huts in two villages and provided care to over 120 children. The Huts attract community volunteers including men which greatly supports the process of peace and reconciliation, leading to collective economic empowerment. I further donated an ox-plough to facilitate agriculture. **The women feeding their families are spreading a message of peace**

and self-sufficiency which greatly helps to reduce the stigma against victims in these communities.



My work onward has been concentrated on raising awareness. But this is precisely what I do when I teach my Introductory child protection Harvard course. Or when I speak at world events, in all continents and major cities or at Universities or Summits. I give visibility to human behaviour at its darkest so we can attend to our flaws and raise the bar of what it means to be a human. And the rights you might expect to enjoy as such. Like not being broken, then sold for sex or forced labour before you even turn fourteen.

In 2017, I was invited by the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association UK, as one of counter trafficking experts to train parliamentarians. My project 'End child trafficking' is cited as a best practice and I contributed to a handbook- Legislating against Modern Slavery, Human Trafficking and Forced Labour, a practical guide to support Parliamentarians and clerks across the fifty-three Commonwealth Countries.

To all the children including fourteen-year-olds out there who are displaced, or have been trafficked, I say: don't lose hope. You could be footing, or in a caravan, on the ocean driven by tides, fleeing due to reasons beyond your control. Don't lose hope. Even when those you would expect to help you turn their back instead. Be creative and have a willingness to stay alive. At some point in my displacement, I recall running into the forest many times to pick up fish that birds had dropped as they fed their chicks. That kept me alive.

If you are in a refugee camp, take advantage of every opportunity offered to study- there is light at the end of the tunnel. Whoever knew that my fourteen years old self would rise taking advantage of so many different platforms speaking in your names, survivor.

One day, this could be you too.

#### Selected Honors and Awards

##### 2018:

– Commitment Mentor and Ambassador Clinton Global Initiative University (CGI U)

– Huts for Peace program – [Thomson Reuters Foundation article and documentary](#)

##### 2017:

- CGI U Alumni Honor Roll Award by former president Bill Clinton and Chelsea Clinton for the significant impact of my work over the past decade countering human trafficking and continued dedication to making a difference in the World we all share.
- Mentor Clinton Global Initiative University (CGI U)
- The Josephine S. Vernon award as Most Outstanding Fellow of the Mid-Career Master in Public Administration-Edward S. Mason Program at Harvard Kennedy
- Women in Public Policy Program Award Harvard Kennedy School
- Featured in the commencement issue of the Harvard gazette as one of the Stellar graduating students from across Harvard University
- Recognized by Harvard University commencement speaker Mark Zuckerberg for my counter human trafficking work and community service
- Commencement Speaker Boston University: Humphrey Fellowship Program Questrom School of Business
- Made the global list of 100 Vital Voices (VV100) most exceptional women

## **2016:**

- Elected to the Harvard Kennedy School Student Government (KSSG), to serve as Mid-Career Master in Public Administration class representative
- Recognized by The J. William Fulbright Foreign Scholarship Board's Annual Report to Senate for counter human trafficking work
- Received the 2016 Diane von Furstenberg (DVF) International Award at the Women in the World Summit/United Nations-New York.

Award given to 'recognize and support extraordinary women who are dedicated to transforming the lives of other women; women who have had the courage to fight, the power to survive, and the leadership to inspire

– Appreciation award, from the Ministry of Internal Affairs for exceptional and dedicated leadership as training coordinator- training of 300 new recruits for Immigration service (November 2015 – June 2016)

## 2015:

– Named one of 100 most influential people in Africa by New African Magazine.

– Global Freedom Exchange Award – Vital Voices and Hilton Worldwide Global Partnership to end child sex trafficking. To diminish the supply and demand to child trafficking by raising awareness and empowering front-line actors and communities to counter child trafficking

– Recognition/ Invitation by Hillary Clinton to join her, Melinda Gates, Chelsea Clinton, and other women leaders to launch the No Ceilings Full Participation Report (March 9th, 2015, New York), consisting of data points collected from more than 190 countries over the twenty years. This report highlights gains women and girls have made since the 1995 U.N Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing as well as the gaps that remain on the road to full participation.

– Organized the first ever, Africa-based Women In Public Service Project (WPSP) institute in Uganda, to train women leaders (Leadership for Transparent and Accountable Governance). WPSP was founded by U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in 2011, in partnership with U.S. Department of State and seven sister colleges

– Ambassador to "Let Girls Learn", The White House and the Office of First Lady Michelle Obama and the U.S. Peace Corps' powerful

collaboration to expand access to education for adolescent girls around the world.

- Ambassador to “Girl Rising”; acting as local community leader rallying people and organizations to take action, host events, and use innovative and creative ways to take action for girls everywhere.

- World Pulse Vocal Contributor badge recipient, in recognition of leadership in the World Pulse community, a leading network of tens of thousands including women from 190 countries, using the power of digital media

## 2014:

- Distinguished Leadership Award for Internationals from University of Minnesota. Awarded to Alumni, former students, and friends of the University who have distinguished themselves as leaders in their professional careers

- One of 40 Inspirational Women of Uganda, identified for having created impact in their local communities, regions, or nationally. Featured in the Inspirational Women of Uganda Directory distributed to schools and organizations to inspire others, by CEDA International and African Women Development Fund (AWDF)

- Global Freedom Exchange Award: A Hilton Worldwide and Vital Voices Partnership in recognition of emerging and established women leaders who are at the forefront of global efforts to prevent and respond to the destructive crime of child trafficking.

- Recognized as an outstanding Fulbright Alumni for achievements in the field of social entrepreneurship by the Fulbright Hubert H. Humphrey Fellowship Program and the Institute of International Education (IIE) Board, USA

- Special Invitation by U.S. President Bill Clinton, Hon. Hillary Clinton, and Chelsea Clinton to join them as a member of Clinton Global

Initiative (CGI) at the CGI meeting in New York, in recognition of my outstanding commitment of action to counter human trafficking as a member of CGI University

– Honored to participate in a high level J. William Fulbright Foreign Scholarship Board meeting and panel; Fulbright Effect: "How do we shape the future of Public diplomacy and global education?"

## **2013:**

– Selected one of 50 emerging Global Women leaders by the Women in Public Service Project (WPSP) for significant contributions to her Community (Peace building and development) and Country through leadership in Public Service (launched by Secretary Hillary Clinton in 2011)

– Selected to pay tribute to former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton when she received the 2013 prestigious Liberty Medal in Philadelphia, USA

## **2012:**

– Inspirational woman of Uganda award from CEDA International/ Mentoring walk Uganda for anti-human trafficking work and youth empowerment.

– Certificate of recognition from Rotary Club of Bugolobi-Uganda for raising awareness about human trafficking.

– Certificate of merit from Access Youth Initiative Uganda for contributing to youth empowerment and community service in Uganda

– Elected National Coordinator, Uganda-U.S. Alumni Association, an association committed to promoting networking among U.S. government-sponsored exchange alumni both within and outside Uganda and within different professions; contributing to Uganda's social and economic development and building lifelong relationships

among members (2012-2015)

## **2011:**

- Certificate of recognition from President Barack Obama and Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, on behalf of the Government of the United States of America, in recognition of the successful completion of a one-year program of graduate study and professional development at the University of Minnesota 2010-2011, as a participant in the Hubert H. Humphrey Fellowship Program.
- Outstanding Clinton Global Initiative University Commitment to action recognition/award for the rehabilitation of victims of human trafficking, creating awareness and training law enforcement
- Elected International Students representative to University of Minnesota Student Government
- Recognition in The J. William Fulbright Foreign Scholarship Board's 2010-2011 Annual Report to USA Senate for counter human trafficking work.
- Fundraised and partnered with Books for Africa USA and secured 92,000 books (since 2011) and school supplies to support education of vulnerable children in Uganda, including victims of trafficking and orphans

## **2009:**

- Immigration Achiever's Award from the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Directorate of Citizenship and Immigration Control, in recognition of an outstanding contribution to teamwork in the Directorate of Citizenship and Immigration Control

## **2007:**

- Certificate of merit for excelling as the best overall female student

in Leadership training at the National Leadership Institute-Kyankwazi, Uganda.

**2006:**

– Certificate of merit by Uganda Citizenship and Immigration Control Board for Distinguished and Invaluable Service to the Directorate as a Senior Immigration Officer and for the good example set to other Officers