

## From Tragedy To Triumph

Cornerstone Children's Home rejoices to share six stories of transformation in the lives of our kids. The following stories will give you an idea of the uniqueness, tragedy and triumph of children living at Cornerstone.

### Brothers Charles, James, and Saidi



Charles A. (18), James I. (16), and Saidi D. (14) have survived unbelievable hardships in the course of their young lives. In 2003, these brothers lost their mother when she was abducted by the Lord's Resistance Army, a Ugandan rebel group that is notorious for capturing children, raping women, stealing property, and killing anyone who happens to be their path. A year after their mother's abduction, the boys had to deal with the death of their father. From 2004 till late 2006, the children stayed in the care of their uncle. Unfortunately, their uncle is an alcoholic and failed to provide them with adequate shelter and food. The boys had to sleep in a hut that was slowly falling apart.

In March of 2006, Cornerstone Children's Home began providing daily assistance to the boys, but due to space limitations Cornerstone couldn't give them a permanent place to stay. Late in 2006,

their home situation worsened as violence rose in Nimule. From October to November there were at least seven murders in Nimule. Many of the killings seemed to have been fueled by alcohol and post-war trauma. Soldiers from the Sudanese People's Liberation Army are oftentimes armed and intoxicated in the Nimule marketplace and elsewhere in town. Many of them haven't been able to adjust to life after the civil war that ravaged Sudan for over twenty years. And many are still trying to solve their disputes with the aid of automatic weapons.

Charles, James, and Saidi were exposed to (and threatened by) the drunkenness and despair that was and is pervading in Nimule. In November 2006, a soldier began randomly killing people near their uncle's home. Saidi, the youngest of the brothers, was playing with a friend when the shooting started. He and his friend fled from the

#### Inside this issue:

GENERAL UPDATE	1
CHARLES, JAMES AND SAIDI	1
TOMBIGO	2
EMANUEL MORI	2
ONEK	3
STORY CONTINUATIONS	4

## Tombigo



Justin Tombe (12) has been a part of Cornerstone since 2006 and is affectionately called Tombigo. His father was a soldier and was killed in 1996 during the infighting within the SPLA. His mother later remarried and settled in the nearby

town of Mugali. Due to insecurities caused by the Lord's Resistance Army, Tombigo's family was displaced in May 2006 and resettled in Nimule. Shortly after the displacement, Cornerstone accepted him into our program full time, because staff members discovered that his stepfather routinely beat him, forced him to beg for food, and was planning to abandon him before moving to Juba.

Tombigo says he likes living at Cornerstone, because there's good food everyday and he can speak and play with many other children. Recently, Tombigo revealed a talent for music. A missionary named Christian taught Tombigo how to play the guitar, and now Tombigo loves playing tunes (everything from "Happy Birthday" to worship songs). We are thankful for having the ability to ensure that Tombigo will grow up in a community that truly loves and values his life.

## Emmanuel Mori

Emmanuel Mori is a thirteen year old boy who started a new life when he became a part of Cornerstone Children's Home. Mori's parents are alcoholics and suffer from mental illnesses. Before



Mori came to live at Cornerstone, his parents would let him roam the town of Nimule. They didn't care if he ate or if he went hungry. They didn't care if he returned to their hut by evening or fell asleep in the open country. And they didn't care that he had started experiencing seizures that would throw him to the ground and cause his arms to legs to shake uncontrollably. When Mori was found by Reverend Samuel Juma and a missionary named Jason Sheaffer in 2004, his right arm was severely burned, because he had recently had a seizure and fallen into a fire. With the love and care of Samuel and Jason, he was nursed back to health and his burns were healed.

Mori has now lived at Cornerstone since its inception in 2005, and even though his thoughts and emotions are not as fully developed as they ought to be at his age, he suffers far fewer seizures because he is given medication to reduce the severity of his illness. With generous support from donors in America, Fulaa organized a trip to Uganda in 2006 to seek professional analysis and treatment of Mori's condition. Medical treatment in Sudan is still very poor. Unfortunately, the CT scan he received shows that his brain has atrophied. It is our hope and prayer that the brain damage progression will be halted and even be reversed. We invite you to pray for Mori. Despite his illness and trauma, Mori is a very happy child who loves to dance and knows every song in the church and on the radio. Like so many of our kids, he was starved for attention and love. Yet at our home he is receiving the care he so desperately needs, and we wish to continue to provide for him and for all of our children.

## Onek

Onek Brian is a sixteen year old orphan, who has shown himself to be a natural leader among the children at Cornerstone. On any given day you might find Onek helping his younger brothers, Aluma and Awilo, to learn their ABCs, or expertly repairing shoes and belts. You might find him installing a light fixture in the church or a sparkplug in the generator. You might catch him playing in an intense soccer match with his fellow peers or in quiet study with a Bible or a Science book in his hands. Onek devotes himself wholly to almost any task, and his many talents, his generosity, and his magnetic personality make him the perfect big brother for the smaller children at our home.

Onek's resilient spirit was shaped by tragedies that could have destroyed him had he not put his faith in God. He was born in Nimule in 1991 to loving parents. Less than a year later his father was killed in a brutal attack, which wasn't fully explained to Onek until he was an adolescent. In the intervening years between his father's death and his discovery of its details, the civil war in Sudan continued to escalate, ravaging the land and eventually convincing Onek's mother to take her family out of Sudan. In 1996, Onek, his mother, and grandmother crossed the southern border of their country and settled in a refugee camp in the Adjumani District of Uganda. Onek found some peace in the camp, but the stability was only a respite before another murder completely altered the course of his life.

In 1999, when Onek was eight years old, his elder brother came to visit. His brother had become a soldier in the Sudanese People's Liberation Army (S.P.L.A.) and was fighting for the independence of his family's homeland. Onek was happy to see him and hear his war stories. He sat listening to his brother talk about the Army's losses and victories against the Arab forces from Northern Sudan. He imagined the battles and imagined himself firing a machine gun like his brother and watching the enemies fall to the ground.

In the middle of the following night, the Lord's Resistance Army (L.R.A.), a merciless rebel group, besieged the refugee camp. The guns screamed out of the darkness, awakening Onek and his brother in their small hut. They quickly rose from their papyrus mat and fled into the bush where they took cover among the trees and underbrush. They listened to the sound of the rebels' weapons and the cries of their victims. They listened for their mother's voice, their mother's wail. They wondered if she had escaped like them, and if she might be hiding somewhere in dark folds of the forest, somewhere near to them, somewhere within reach. The sounds of the butchery faded away in the small hours before daybreak. A silence encircled Onek and his brother as they cautiously walked back to their home. In the dawn's cruel light they found their mother. She was lying in the dirt and lifeless. Onek saw the bullet holes in her body. He saw her blood on the earth. And he felt completely alone.

His brother immediately returned to his regiment in Sudan. Onek was left with his grandmother, who soon decided to leave the site of the L.R.A. massacre. In early 2000, Onek and his grandmother crossed back into Sudan and spent a few months in an Internally Displaced People Camp called Anzara, which was (and still is) within two miles of Nimule. In August of that year, they moved again, and settled a few more miles away in Longu. It was in Longu that Onek learned of the powers that conspired to end his father's life and of the foundations upon which his own heritage was built.

After one year in Longu, Onek's grandmother told him the harsh facts about his father's death. Members of the L.R.A. were the ones who carried out the murder. They approached Onek's father as he was laboring in his field and they shot him, then they burnt his crops and slaughtered his farm animals. His father was relatively wealthy and his own tribesmen were so inflamed with jealousy toward him that they paid the L.R.A. to kill him.

Onek's grandmother went on to explain that his father was a member of the Acholi tribe (a revelation that is roughly analogous to an orphaned English child learning that his dad was a full-blooded Frenchman). This discovery about his heritage changed Onek's understanding of his own identity. In Sudan a child of mixed heritage is always identified by his or her paternal tribe, but Onek was never told his father was an Acholi. He had always assumed he was a Madi like his mother. Upon realizing that he was, by traditional definition, an Acholi, he immediately sought more information about his tribe and, by extension, his father. His grandmother and other relatives were slow to reveal the truth, and he didn't learn much more until he was thirteen. What he found out was far from comforting. His father's brothers refused to assist his mother in the wake of his father's death. After learning of this rejection, Onek hasn't tried to connect with anyone in his father's family. He nurses a deep pain that was inflicted by those who refused to offer comfort to his

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## Charles, James and Saidi Continued

gunfire. As they were running, Saidi saw his friend abruptly fall to the ground, with a bullet in his back. Saidi's friend survived the injury and Saidi himself escaped unharmed, but shortly afterward Cornerstone decided to accept Saidi and his brothers as residents in the home (irregardless of the fact that accommodation was limited for the children).

The boys are very involved in all the activities at Cornerstone (from soccer matches to study sessions). Saidi, in particular, has shown an insatiable curiosity in both intellectual and spiritual matters. His enthusiasm for life and learning was weakened when he contracted meningitis in February 2007 and was admitted to the local hospital. Thankfully, Saidi recovered from the disease and his enthusiasm for living has never waned. Still, the experience was frightening and painful for him. He'd never been admitted to a hospital before, and he told the staff of Cornerstone that he was certain it was his time to meet Jesus.

Saidi and his brothers have faced many misfortunes, but the Lord's love and provision have always been with them. Despite their youth, the brothers possess extraordinary resolve. The same could be said about all of the children who call Cornerstone their home.

## Onek Continued

mother (and to him) when it was needed so desperately.

Onek prayed to God during this time. He prayed in his hut and at his church. He prayed for solace and for help, the very things that his father's family had failed to give him. In 2004, Pastor Juma John sent word to the churches in Longu that a program for orphans was being started in Nimule. Onek was soon registered and began attending the Cornerstone weekend program in early 2005. He felt that God had planned for him to become a part Cornerstone and that his prayers had been answered.

In late 2005 his grandmother grew seriously ill and his brother took him under his wing. Unfortunately, his brother was soon transferred by the S.P.L.A. to Yei, a city far from Nimule. His grandmother remained incapable of caring for him, and for a short period of time he was forced to live alone in his brother's home. The staff of Cornerstone became aware of the severity of his situation and soon afterward accepted him as one of the first full-time residents in the program. Again Onek's life was completely altered. Yet tragedy wasn't the force driving this latest change.

Onek believes that God was and is the architect behind his new life at Cornerstone, and now he wants to grow into the kind of person who will bend down, like God, to help those in need. He wants to attend a university to study engineering, and someday he would like to build houses for orphans and widows. He even wants to go to America to help the people who are suffering there. He believes that when you have the word of God in you then you have a duty to console and aid people. Onek is already the kind of person who will, at any given moment, stop whatever is engaging him in order to assist or save another human being. He didn't allow his spirit to be contorted into something terrible by the years of grief and hardship, but filled his spirit with love as if gathering love within himself was the only choice and the only way to live on earth.