

NEVAEH* (SIERRA LEONE)

“I thought I had lived a lifetime.”

See [Mustapha's Refugee Learner Narrative for another perspective and additional information on Sierra Leone.](#)

Life before Canada

Birthplace and Family

Kushe. Hello. My name is Nevaeh. I was born on July 22, 1994, in a village in Sierra Leone. I am not clear what village it was because the civil war had already started and people were on the run trying to find a place of safety. In between all the running, that's when I was born. I lived in several villages and places in Sierra Leone. I was living in Gambia prior to coming to Canada and, according to my parents, I also lived in Guinea, but I was very young and I do not remember that time.

I belong to the Kpamende cultural group. My grandmother speaks several dialects and she and my mother speak Mende, the language of the Kpamende. My father comes from the Kono district and speaks Temne. At home we spoke Krio, the dominant language. I grew up with my Grani until she came to Canada. I had some “aunties” and “uncles” who were just friends of my family, but I mostly grew up with my Grani.

I have two brothers and one adopted sister. My adopted sister's biological mother was killed during the war and my mother took her in. My father worked in the diamond mines. That is where the war started. We did not hear from him for a while, so we thought that he was dead. Before the war, my mother worked for a non-government organization (NGO). She helped the NGOs with constructing buildings and houses for them. She also taught the blind and the deaf to read.

Sierra Leone had a civil war that affected my family and had a lot to do with the control of the diamond mines. I was separated from most of my family when rebels attacked my village. On that day and at the time, I was still very young and my Grani was holding me in her arms. Everyone tried to escape from the rebels. In the chaos of the moment, Grani and I were separated from my mother and my brothers and sister. This separation lasted for many years. For a while, Grani and I ended up living in Freetown, the capital city, after we escaped the village. We were living in a house with 15 or more other persons, all who were not related, and all who were strangers. We had to hide and be very quiet all the time because we were afraid of being found. I recall that there were times when, if someone knocked on the door, I would have to hide under the bed and be very quiet. We had to be in our homes by a certain time of the day or they



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* To protect the participant's privacy, pseudonyms have been used in this narrative.

SIERRA LEONE

Historically, Sierra Leone was a source country for the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Later it became a site for the repatriation of former slaves during the abolitionist movement.

Sierra Leone is a nation with a population of about 6 million people. It became an independent nation in 1961 after a long period of colonization by the British. From 1961 until the start of the civil war in 1991, political instability was common with several coups resulting in regime changes.

Sierra Leone has many natural resources and is rich in diamonds and other minerals. The illegal trade in diamonds became known as “blood diamonds” due to their role in financing and perpetuating civil war.

Civil War

The civil war began in 1991 when the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) began a campaign against President Momoh and captured towns on the border with Liberia. The brutal civil war in Liberia played a critical role in the fighting in Sierra Leone. Charles Taylor, the leader of the National Patriotic Front of Liberia, is deemed to have helped form RUF.

The conflict was not based on ethnic or religious divisions. It resulted in part from opposition to the corrupt ruling class and a fight for control of the country’s diamond mines. The war resulted in an estimated 50,000 deaths and the displacement of over 1 million citizens. Both rebels and government forces used a large number of child soldiers. RUF was notorious for atrocities committed during the war, such as mass rape and mutilation of victims.

The war came to an end in 2002. An UN-backed war crimes court was set up to try those who were primarily responsible for the atrocities committed. In April 2012, the court found former Liberian leader Charles Taylor guilty of aiding and abetting war crimes in the Sierra Leonean civil war.

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would “cuff” us. There were times when we had to hide in the sewage ditch. I remember vividly when a soldier came to our house and everyone fled to the back of the house and tried to be very quiet. One of the older men was having trouble staying quiet because there was a dead body close to where they were hiding and he started to cry. Someone put a hand over my mouth to keep me quiet. It was at this point that I too saw the dead body, and soon realized that the situation was very serious. I was five years old when I came to that realization.

The community was very caring; they gave me snacks and watched out for me. If one of them saw me somewhere where I shouldn’t be, they would take me back to my home. I often felt like I had many Granis. I was happy living in the community because of the sense of being looked after, but



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Sierra Leonean Refugees

During the height of the civil war as many as 2 million of the country's 6 million citizens were displaced, with some 120,000 fleeing to Liberia (even though that country was experiencing its own civil war and conflict) and 370,000 to Guinea. Others sought asylum in neighbouring countries such as Gambia, Ghana, and Nigeria.

Under UNHCR's voluntary repatriation operation from September 2000 to July 2004, more than 179,000 Sierra Leonean refugees returned home and many others returned by their own means. However, many Sierra Leonean refugees remained in refugee camps in neighbouring countries long after 2004. By 2008, around 43,000 refugees from Sierra Leone continued to live in exile, mainly in neighbouring countries, including Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Liberia, and Nigeria. As of 2012, there are still pockets of refugees who have not repatriated. For example, significant numbers of Sierra Leoneans remain in the Buduburam Refugee Camp in Ghana. Some of the people in the camp have little choice but to stay as they have no identification cards or paperwork.

Some of the camps that provided Sierra Leoneans asylum in Guinea included Sembakounya, Telikoro, Boreah, Albadaria, Kountaya, Kouankan, and the Mambya transit centre.

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© Kathy Roberts/Child Aid Gambia. April 2011. Makumbaya Lower Basic School in the Gambia. <www.kathyroberts.co.uk/what_katy_did/makumbaya_lower_basic_school_makumbaya_village_gambia_001.htm>. Used with permission. All rights reserved.

eventually as I got older I became aware of the fighting and the war. I would hear the older people speaking about the war. We were afraid.

I developed malaria while living in the house. My Grani made me herbal medicine for the malaria. Later, when I moved to the refugee camp, I was given medication. I lived with my Grani from my birth until I was reunited with my family. I have a very close relationship with my Grani.

We also lived in Gambia for a while. We had a house for the two of us then. All of the houses had metal roofs which were very sharp and had clay walls. Once I cut myself on the metal roofing.

Seeking Asylum in Gambia

Eventually, my Grani and I fled to Gambia to be safe. Seeking safety in another country allowed for the possibility of immigrating to a third country. I was very young but I know from what I was told that my Grani and I spent some time

in a refugee camp but I do not know the name of it. I think it was a large camp. I do remember being very bored in the refugee camp. There wasn't any school and there wasn't anything to do. I did meet some UN soldiers there and their presence made me feel safe compared to living in the house in Freetown. There were long waits in lines to get food. The only work that I could do was selling stuff, usually water. I would go and get the water in a container and then my Grani would help me pour it into plastic bags for selling. Sometimes I didn't get money for the water but I would barter with my customers for things we/I needed or that we could sell to someone else. It was hard living in the camp. I remember people pushing me when I was in line for food. I was very small and

Sierra Leoneans in the Gambia

According to a 2004 UNHCR report, *Refugee livelihoods: A case study of the Gambia*, Sierra Leonean refugees sought asylum in Gambia in primarily three locations, Basse and Bambali refugee camps, and as “urban” refugees in or around the city of Banjul. The Gambia at that point was considered to be one of the most “refugee friendly” countries in all of West Africa. In 2004, the Gambia has a population of approximately 1.5 million people. UNHCR estimated that there were approximately 12,000 refugees living throughout the Gambia, but other sources estimated the refugee population to range from 10,000 to over 30,000 persons. The refugee population in 2004 consisted primarily of Sierra-Leoneans (the majority) followed by the Senegalese (second highest), Liberians, Somalis, Ethiopians, Rwandans, Iraqis, and Eritrean.

Map Below: © UNHCR/Geographic Information and Mapping Unit. Excerpted from Map of Senegal as of December 2001. CC Licence. <www.unhcr.org/3ceb88514.html>.



malnourished and they took advantage of that. In that environment people changed, only caring about themselves, being greedy, and stealing frequently. My one and only good memory of that camp was the day I left.

School in Gambia

I remember attending school for a brief time in Gambia when I was about six or seven years old. My Grani had to pay school fees, the transportation, the books, the uniform, and lunches. She found it difficult to continue to pay the school fees and she tried to negotiate with the staff to find other ways to make the payments. She was not successful.

The entrance and stairway was on the outside of the school building. The school was a two-storey building. There was no railing to protect the students from falling down the uneven stairs and many fell and cut themselves on the metal roofing. I remember that many



© L. Taylor/UNHCR. November 27, 2008. Appreciation: Sierra Leonean women refugees in Guinea with transport vouchers to a safer camp. <www.flickr.com/photos/unhcr/3063348226/>. Used with permission. All rights reserved.

students had accidents on those stairs. The school had indoor toilets, but no one wanted to use them because the plumbing really wasn't very effective. The classes had about 35 to 40 students in them. Some of the classrooms had long tables for several students to sit at but in other classrooms there would be just two students sharing a table. Before classes began each day, there was always the singing of the national anthem outside in the school yard. The subjects were taught in English. I studied math and a little bit of French, but now I do not remember any French words.

I liked going to school, but the teachers were really strict, they didn't “baby” you. I didn't have my own textbooks, so I shared with another student. I am not sure, but I think that I had one teacher for all my subjects. In any case, if another teacher was

Liberian Refugees in Sierra Leone

Liberia experienced its own civil wars from 1989–1997, which was followed later by a period of rebel insurgencies from 2001–2003. Some Liberians fled to Sierra Leone seeking asylum even though Sierra Leone was experiencing its own civil war during much of these periods. As a result of conflict in Liberia more than 700,000 Liberians became refugees in neighbouring countries (Guinea [325,000], Ivory Coast [270,000], Sierra Leone [125,000], Ghana [8,000], and Nigeria [1,700]). In addition, up to 500,000 Liberians were internally displaced in the capital, Monrovia. Most Liberians suffered or witnessed atrocities.

By 2003, about 50,000 Liberian refugees were hosted in seven camps in Sierra Leone and UNHCR was expecting an influx of 30,000 additional refugees. In 2004, with the return of peace to Liberia after Charles Taylor's departure, some 350,000 refugees and 500,000 internally displaced persons were awaiting repatriation to their rural villages and towns.

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required to teach a specific subject, the teachers would move around from class to class.

One of the problems that I remember at that school was the competition between the students. I feel that the teachers should have focused on helping all students and on finding different ways to teach the students in the class, rather than making it a competition. Another problem was the use of student hallway monitors when the teachers had to leave the classrooms. These monitors would control



© R. Ochlik/UNHCR. December 2004. In 2002, the Kamara family fled the war in Liberia and settled in Jembe refugee camp in Sierra Leone, where they lived for almost three years. When UNHCR began repatriating refugees in October of 2004, the Kamaras decided to return home. <www.flickr.com/photos/unhcr/6774703524/>. Used with permission. All rights reserved.

the class by taking it to the next level. I remember getting in trouble in art class because I couldn't duplicate a picture. I was punished by the teacher who pumped (pulled) my ears. I thought then that it was my fault, now I know it wasn't. I should have not been punished in that way. When my Grani could no longer pay the fees, I had to leave school and went to work selling water and oranges. I thought about being a singer or an actor. Although I am quite shy, if you put a microphone in front of me or put me on a stage in front of an audience, I will start singing. I always loved the spotlight!

Immigration to Canada

I was still in a refugee camp in Gambia with my Grani before coming to Canada. I was about 8 ½ years old when I left Gambia. We had thought that Father was dead because many who worked in the mines had been killed and we had not heard from him. Actually, he was alive and managed to immigrate to London, England. Meanwhile, Mother and my brothers and sister had immigrated to St. John's, Newfoundland, Canada. It was pure luck that we eventually learned that Father was alive.

My brother attended an elementary school in St. John's. During the point when class pictures were taken in the school, one of his classmates was showing his class picture to his

Vocabulary of Trust

“Clearly many Sierra Leoneans had undergone significant ‘traumatic’ episodes during the war, but the vocabulary of trust and mistrust immediately took on greater significance in my research because it was the way that Sierra Leoneans described the world around them. It was the way they often understood their interactions with the State and with one another in personal relationships. Distrust was a topic of constant chatter and concern. Whom to trust? How to trust? They described a world where virtually no one can be trusted, not even fathers. In such a context, how do people live their lives and how does anything get accomplished?”

Carpenter, Shelby E. (2011). Trust Building in Post-Conflict Sierra Leone. In: Themes of Displacement, ed. Shelby E. Carpenter, Vienna: IWM Junior Visiting Fellows' Conferences, Vol. 27. <www.iwm.at/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=463&Itemid=362>



© Tommy Trenchard/IRIN. Youths campaign in Freetown ahead of presidential elections in November. CC License.



© L. Taylor/UNHCR. November 27, 2008. Hope: Young Sierra Leonean refugees in Guinea camp. <www.flickr.com/photos/unhcr/3063348286/>. Used with permission. All rights reserved.

mother. As my brother was the only black student in that class, he stood out. The classmate’s mother asked her son about the new student in the class. Her son said his name and the mother realized that she recognized the unique family name. Previously, the mother had worked in England, where she had met my father and had gotten to know him. She thought it might be his son. She contacted my father in England and that is how he came to reconnect and eventually be reunited with my mother and my siblings.

We were now the only members of the family who were separated and missing. My mother and father believed that Grani and I had been killed during the war and were dead. But they still decided to ask immigration and the UN soldiers to search for us. We were found in the refugee camp in Gambia, along with an uncle who had also sought asylum in a refugee camp. Once we were located, the process for reuniting my Grani, my uncle and I with our family in Canada began. My father also began the process of being reunited with the family in Canada. By that point, my mother and my siblings had been in Canada for about three years. After many years of separation, we were all going to be one family again.

Starting a New Life in Canada

I was very impressed with how Grani, my uncle and I were looked after on the trip to Canada. Every person involved with our journey, such as ticket agents, baggage handlers, and flight attendants, were very kind and generous with their time. When we landed in Montreal, we were met by a group who took us to a hotel, gave me toys and all of us warm clothing. We then flew to St. John’s Newfoundland and we were taken to a newcomers’ house.



© Canada Mathare Education Trust (CMETrust). A poster from an Ottawa screening of a documentary about Sierra Leone's Refugee All Stars. "Sierra Leone's Refugee All Stars have risen like a phoenix out of the ashes of war and enflamed the passions of fans across the globe with their uplifting songs of hope, faith and joy." <<http://cmetrust.org/news-and-events/past-events/ottawa-past-events/>>. Used with permission. All rights reserved.

CMETrust is a Canadian charity providing high school scholarships to students from Mathare, Kenya's second largest slum.

I thought that it was the most beautiful house that I had ever seen. "It couldn't get better than this!" I thought. We lived in temporary housing for a while. My grandmother was still my legal guardian, so we lived together in an apartment, but very near to my mother, and my brothers and sister. We all attended the same school. Eventually, Father was also reunited with the family.

My first memories and impressions of Canada were basically good. I remember how nice everyone was to my family and me. I couldn't get over the fact that I wasn't being pushed around and everyone was so gentle. We arrived in early January and the Christmas decorations were still up. I thought everything was so pretty, including the snow which I ate. The first time I saw snow was in Montreal. I loved it. Some of the snow was yellow, but it was only later that I realized it was yellow because dogs do their business in the snow.

My favourite part of living in Canada was going to school and the students who were in my class. It was a really friendly environment and the teachers were very passionate about helping me. Teachers actually sat down with me and gave me one-on-one help! I also was helped by a special EAL teacher who taught me basic vocabulary and explained many things to me. She taught me how to spell using a completely different approach from what I had experienced in Gambia. And best of all, it didn't involve punishment if I didn't get it right away. The EAL teacher was very patient and she understood what I was feeling. When I got frustrated with some task, the teacher would try a different approach. The biggest challenge I faced in school was that I was super shy and uncomfortable because I couldn't speak English well. I thought I was the only one who had an accent and I felt that I was the only one who was different. Also, I wasn't

accustomed to being around so many white people. There were five black students in the school and three of them were in my family!

I really don't remember having any negative experiences or difficulties during that time. The school and the support I received helped me adjust. There were likely some, but if there were any difficulties, my parents and Grani probably handled them. During the first few years in St. John's I lived most of the time with my Grani. We were still separated but living close by to my brothers and sisters and parents. But then my Grani and I made a third move, this time into public housing. From then on, I stayed with my parents and siblings during the school year because the school was closer to my parent's home. But I still spent a lot of time with my Grani because I liked to be with her, especially on weekends and in the summer.

The move to Canada literally brought my family closer together. After many years of being separated and thinking that the others were dead, we now were physically reunited. Now we could celebrate special occasions together. But, because my family was separated for a long period of time, we had to get to know each other. I remember feeling nervous about meeting the rest of my family for the first time. In the beginning there were a lot of little things which are part of getting used to each other that we had to overcome. But in the bigger picture what was most important was that we were all happy to be together and know that we still had each other. Looking back on those times and now having the opportunity to live and spend time with my parents and brothers and sisters, I realize that the discomfort and little difficulties we experienced at first were really nothing.

When I was in Grade 5, that summer, my father got a job in Winnipeg and moved there. Over time, the rest of my family joined him in Winnipeg. We didn't all move together at the same time; we arrived in Winnipeg in intervals. It was about a year before I was reunited with my Grani.

The Effects of War

Looking back I realize that in those first few years in Canada and my life in Africa, that my frequent frustration was part of the effects of being a refugee. I often wondered why people were at war and when it would end. It was emotionally draining. I also felt scared all the time. When I was frightened by something, I often feared I might not wake up in the morning. My reaction to being scared was to laugh very nervously. I still remember that the adults that lived with us in Freetown, when they were scared, they would often vomit or lose control of their bowels or urinate on themselves. I remember having nightmares. I felt paranoid all the time. One of my brothers who was with my mother was taken away to be a child soldier. He still experiences nightmares because of what he witnessed as a child soldier. He is receiving support through a church group. But now I feel that I have peace of mind. I greatly appreciate that fact and do not take it for granted.

Life in Winnipeg

By the time I came to Winnipeg, I was a teenager and I had been in Canada for three years. I felt much more comfortable, in school and in the community. I no longer felt that I was the "odd man out" and I found that there was more diversity in my Winnipeg schools than in Newfoundland schools. I wasn't treated any differently and I

felt very accepted. I made friends easier than in Newfoundland, partly because I was more comfortable speaking English by then.

My mother, however, had a harder time. She had difficulty adjusting to Canada because she had to return to school. She was already in her 30s and had her children to look after. Even though she had a university degree, her credentials weren't accepted here. My mother took a job as a home care worker, but the elderly person she was assigned to, was prejudiced, and did not like her. She made it difficult because my mother was African. The senior treated her very badly and had her daughter come and tell her that she felt uncomfortable having her around. Mother was shocked by the experience but then it motivated her to return to school. She now has a degree in women's studies and community development and is currently working in that field.

In Winnipeg, I was placed in a Grade 6 classroom in an elementary school. I thought at that time that I had already lived a lifetime. My school and experiences in Newfoundland prepared me for my schooling in Winnipeg. My Newfoundland EAL teacher helped me communicate with the other children on the playground and develop relationships. I did okay at the beginning when I was placed in a regular class. But, I wish that I had gotten extra EAL support like I had in Newfoundland. I found that it was difficult for me, especially grammar and spelling. My father was busy working and my older siblings were busy with their own life. My mother and Grani were still living in Newfoundland, so I had to do it on my own.



Mariatu Kamara was born in Sierra Leone. In 1999 at the age of 12, Mariatu had her hands cut off by rebel child soldiers. For three years, Mariatu lived in the refugee camps of Freetown and eventually immigrated to Canada in 2002. Mariatu lives in Toronto and has graduated from high school and is now attending college. She is the author of *The Bite of the Mango* which is based on her life experiences.

Mariatu has spoken publicly for the non-profit group Free the Children. She has also traveled speaking to high school students and organizations about her physical and emotional journey from a child victim of war in Sierra Leone to a successful author, public speaker, and student in Canada. She was recently honoured in New York City with a Voices of Courage award given by the Women's Refugee Commission.

In February 2008, Mariatu, a UNICEF Special Representative, travelled with UNICEF back to Sierra Leone and visited many of UNICEF's projects for children in that country. She now seeks to share her story and help raise awareness about the work that UNICEF does for children around the world.

Photo © Don Pollard/Women's Refugee Commission. Mariatu Kamara. Used with permission. All rights reserved.

The Bite of the Mango book video trailer featuring Mariatu Kamara can be viewed at <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PCsvUkFG4L>>.

An interview with Mariatu Kamara in Gemany (in English) as a UNICEF representative about child soldiers can be viewed at <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D92lvHRqJMU>>.

I know that my Grade 6 teacher tried to help me and was really nice, but everything was going too fast and I wasn't getting the type of help that I needed. I felt that everyone was super smart and I felt that I wasn't as smart as everyone else. When I went on to a different school for junior high in a different area of Winnipeg, there was a lot more emphasis on French than I had in Newfoundland. Also, I found that my Grade 7 and Grade 8 classmates had formed cliques. In the beginning, even though I didn't have as much as they did in material things (iPods, clothing), I was very friendly and made friends. Some of the students who were my friends in middle school went on to the same high school, but everyone started branching off into different groups.

In Grade 12, I still have some of the friends I made in Grade 10. Most of my friends are white. There aren't that many blacks in my high school. I was in choir and band from Grades 4 to 8. I joined the social justice club, the student council, and a drama club. These clubs were my interests and my strengths.

When I came to Winnipeg, it was about finding myself and finding out who I wanted around me. Like the saying goes, "Birds of a feather flock together." I never thought about that saying until I entered high school. For a while, I got involved with a group of young people who were different than me and were the wrong group for me. In high school you sometimes want to be with a certain group, to be like them, but not because of who you are. Once I realized that the group wasn't for me, that is when I became involved with people who were more like me. They had the same interests as me, such as social justice. Also, I became more successful in school. Coming to this realization, I

feel that I have developed my inner strength and I feel comfortable with myself.

Life Today and Hopes for the Future

In June 2012, I graduated from high school. I was very excited about graduating. In my Grade 12 year, I did everything that I wanted and wished to accomplish. I did an internship with a law firm. During that internship, I helped with files, warrants, and subpoenas. I was given many responsibilities. I am pleased that at the end of the internship, I was given a reference letter that stated that I acted in a professional manner. They even offered to help me prepare for the Law School Admission Test (LSAT).

I am lucky that I had such good school experiences in Canada and that I have been well-prepared for the next stage in my life. I am organized, punctual, and professional, and I can prioritize and plan. I feel that I have matured. Reflecting on my school experiences, the only thing I regret is not having had more EAL support beyond the three years that I got. I recognize that I still have some English language weaknesses, such as difficulties with spelling and writing. I believe that those difficulties could have been dealt with, with additional EAL support. I wish I had been able to advocate for myself when I was told upon entering school in Winnipeg that because I had EAL in St. John's, Newfoundland that I didn't need any more EAL support. I wonder why no one ever noticed my struggle. If I had gotten just one hour a day of additional EAL support, it would have made a really big difference, especially when it comes to English language skills.

I have had three jobs to date which I loved: a banquet server, a telemarketer, and a summer camp counsellor for refugee children for the Boys and Girls Club. I like to be busy. But now my goal is to become a lawyer. However, I care about more than having a good career.



Ngardy Conteh, Sierra Leonean-Canadian filmmaker, founded Mattru Media Inc. named after Mattru Jong, a town in Sierra Leone and the birthplace of her parents. She was born in Freetown, Sierra Leone and moved to Canada as a child. Ngardy was a scholarship track and field athlete and a graduate of the University of New Orleans Film and Video program.

Her film, *The Flying Stars*, had its world premiere in the fall of 2014, see <www.flyingstarsdoc.com>. Ngardy describes the film as "Bornor and Census are amputees who play organized soccer in Sierra Leone to cope with the horrors of war they suffered a decade ago. As they dream of playing internationally, they wrestle with nightmares that haunt their daily lives and threaten the very families they are trying to feed. Can Bornor and Census overcome their postwar trauma and score a victory for their children off the soccer pitch?"

Photo © Indiewire. 2014. Ngardy Conteh. <<http://blogs.indiewire.com/shadowandact/c0a7e8c0-8b11-11e1-bcc4-123138165f92>>. Used with permission. All rights reserved.

I want to give back to my community. I hope someday to start a non-profit organization for refugee kids and open an orphanage. Currently, I am helping with fundraising to build a school in Sierra Leone. I do so by speaking and telling my story at different schools and organizations and also by participating in car washes. Sometimes the donations are in the form of backpacks and school supplies.

I am excited about what the future holds for me. In September 2012, I will begin my studies at the University of Manitoba. I plan to enrol in International Studies and Development and then go into law school.

At this point in my life, I am very happy with how my life in Canada turned out and with my personal life. My family and my relationships with them are good. Of course we have the usual ups and downs along the way that any normal family experiences but, for the most part, our ties are still strong. I am very close to my brothers and sister and I feel sorry for those who aren't close to their siblings. I love mine so much because when you have problems with

your parents, your siblings are always there for you. I can't believe that I once almost lost them.

I am very grateful for everything that I have in my life and appreciate how things have turned out. I didn't know that I could achieve and be where I am today. Even after I came to Canada, I thought that I would always be that dumb kid in class and I wondered if I would ever be friends with the cool kids. Now, I realize that the most important thing is being true to oneself. There's no point in not being oneself. When you are yourself you will attract like-minded people.

Sierra Leone Refugee Resettlement, Inc.

Photographs from the Summer Program 2014 in Winnipeg.



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VIDEO RESOURCES

See [Caution Concerning the Use of Resources about War and Refugee Experiences](#).

Liberia: Conflict

A Lifetime of Violence: Reflecting on Liberia's Bloody Wars by International Reporting Project: CNN Seema Mathur tells a chilling tale of a former Liberian warlord, "General Butt Naked," who has found refuge in his religious conversion.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7MRzJeeD570>

Between War and Peace—Liberia by Journeyman Pictures: After fourteen years of anarchy, the international community is helping to stabilise Liberia. But how does a country move on after so many years of war?
www.youtube.com/watch?v=DXKyuZrd3Bg

Child Soldiers Cry—Liberia by Journeyman Pictures: This film looks at Liberian child-soldiers in rehabilitation, who are still haunted by their nightmares. This film paints a very human picture of the devastation of war. What can Liberia do to protect its future?
www.youtube.com/watch?v=-7PbhCmBoFY

Liberia: Refugees

Refugee Camp [A Week in West Africa—1 of 9] by International Rescue Committee (IRC): A visit to Jembe refugee camp in Sierra Leone shows Liberians who fled the civil war in their country.
www.rescue.org/video/refugee-camp-a-week-west-africa-1-9

Sierra Leone: Conflict

Sierra Leone's Blood-Diamond Hydra by Journeyman Pictures (2008): West Africa's civil wars were almost exclusively funded by the trade in 'blood diamonds.' But now, the UN and EU is tightening the trade in precious gems through the Kimberly Process.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zdtt1WWuMBM>

Africa—Liberia & Sierra Leone—Dancing with the Devil 1 of 2—BBC Our World Documentary by Travel Places & Culture: Humphrey Hawksley retraces Graham Greene's journey across Liberia and Sierra Leone and finds that despite huge amounts of international aid, the countries are still beset with a multitude of problems.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_SccCldtcB0

Sierra Leone—Overcoming the legacy of war by United Nations (2013): Sierra Leone's particularly brutal civil war left its people with a terrible legacy. Tens of thousands are now disabled, as a result of savage amputations of limbs by rebels.
www.youtube.com/watch?v=6uweqloiubk

Children on the Front Line: Sierra Leone by ProVention Consortium (2008): A Plan International film on how music can help prevent future conflicts and give youth an outlet to express themselves in post-conflict situations.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y-WUGDHv5I0>

Sierra Leone: Refugees

Performing in a Refugee Camp by POV: The Sierra Leone Refugee All Stars perform the song *Weapon Conflict* at the Sembakounya Refugee Camp in the Republic of Guinea.
www.pbs.org/pov/sierraleone/video_classroom1.php#.VHYxpmz4C70

Life in a refugee camp: Marie by WAtoday.com.au: "Marie Sesay was eight-years-old when she fled war-torn Sierra Leone for a refugee camp in Guinea where food was scarce and sanitation obsolete. Now aged 25 and studying in Sydney, she tells her story to mark World Refugee Day 2014."
<http://media.watoday.com.au/news/national-news/life-in-a-refugee-camp-marie-5529074.html>

Friends of Mabureh by mywildweb (2012): Describes the work being done to support CanSerra Primary School, which was recently built in Kissi Town, the former Waterloo refugee Camp near Freetown and is a recipient of many Canadian donations and support.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BPgrFECtSGs>

Sierra Leoneans in the Diaspora

Mariatu Kamara visits the Don Mills Library (2014) by Don Mills YAG: A visit to the library to talk about her book, *The Bite of the Mango*.
www.youtube.com/watch?v=8I6dit11PrA

UNICEF: Mariatu Kamara on the right to live safe from harm by UNICEF: Mariatu Kamara is UNICEF Canada's Special Representative for Children in Armed Conflict.
www.youtube.com/watch?v=m6B4q_YY8a4

Ishmael Beah—Child Soldier on George Stroumboulopoulos Tonight: The child soldier, of Sierra Leone, who witnessed and committed war atrocities talks about his new book.
www.youtube.com/watch?v=5K4yhPSQEzo

For additional resources concerning Sierra Leone, see the [Video Resources](#) provided at the end of Mustapha's narrative.