

Brave Girls

who Go to School
& Stay in School



Stories from Bundibugyo District

Hello Reader,

Everybody seems to know that what one plants is what one reaps. Farmers know well that plants struggle against many obstacles, such as weeds and weather, to survive and produce fruits. Fruits are the joy and benefit for the farmer. The more fruits that the plant yields, the happier the farmer will be.

Bundibugyo District Department of Education, in conjunction with USAID through the UPHOLD Project, launched a contest for pupils to write stories about girls who go to school and stay in school, despite the numerous obstacles that they face each day. The young, bright authors were recognized in December 2004, as part of World AIDS Day celebrations.

The young writers identified many weeds, or obstacles, that keep girls from completing primary school. The stories may be horrifying, and yet they are not fiction. These brilliant and courageous young people began stories to contribute to weeding the minds of social, economic and political attitudes that detour communities from bearing fruits.

Please enjoy the stories in a reflective manner.

Alice Mundaka,
UPHOLD Regional Director, Rwenzori Region
2005

What is a Brave Girl?

Before reading the stories, please consider and answer the following questions:

- 1. What makes a girl brave?*
- 2. How can bravery help girls complete primary school?*
- 3. Do you show bravery to go to school and stay in school?*
- 4. What are the benefits to a girl who completes primary school?*
- 5. What are the benefits for a family whose daughters complete primary school?*





PEACE

By *Kaya Kagimu Mukasa*

Based on a story by *Katendwa Nawme*

My name is Peace. I live in a small village. Girls there get married between the age of 11 and 18. Even if they don't get married, they get pregnant and give birth to babies.

I have a friend called Charity. We go to the same school. We are in the same class. We are in P.5. We even live in the same neighborhood. Every day we walk home from school together. Charity has a cousin called Ben. He is in P.7. He is much older than both of us.

One day, when we were walking home, Ben called her. Charity stopped to talk to him. I walked ahead and waited for Charity under the mango tree. It was a very hot day and the shade was nice and cool. There was a mango hanging on one of the branches. I hit it with a stone and it fell down. I ate it. It was nice and juicy. As I was eating the mango, I watched Charity and Ben talking. I wondered what they were talking about. They talked for a long time. I did not mind about it too much, because my mango kept me company. I did not want to share the mango because I was very hungry. Usually I share my things with Charity, but today ... no. I saw Charity and Ben laugh. I wondered what was so funny. She started walking towards me so I ate my mango faster and finished it before she got to where I was standing.

When Charity got to where I was standing she was still smiling. I asked her why she was smiling and she said that Ben had said funny things about me. I asked her what the funny things were, but she did not tell me.

A few days went by and we met Ben again as we were going home. He said "hello" and I also said "hello". And then I walked on. This time Charity did not remain behind to talk to Ben. She came quickly and we went home. She told me that Ben had said that he wanted to talk to me. I told her that I had already talked to him. She asked me what I had said to him and I told her that I said "hello" to him. She laughed and kept quiet.

We continued walking to school with Charity. A few days later we met Ben again. I walked quickly, but this time he followed me. He stopped me and greeted me. I greeted him back. He said to me, "I want to see the colour of your panty". I was shocked and annoyed. I did not want him to see my panty. I did not want anybody to see my panty because it had a big hole. I ran very fast and I got home. He did not run after me.



The following day I told Charity that I did not want her cousin Ben to disturb me. I told her to tell him. Then after that, he started writing letters to me. One letter read.

Dear Peace,
I love you and I will love you
until lake Victoria dries up.
Even if you don't want me
to see your panty, I want to
marry you.

Yours forever, in a lot of love.

Ben.

I wrote back
to him.

Ben,
I am not
interested.
Peace.

After a few days, as I was going home in the evening, I met Ben on the way. He tried to convince me to accept him. He said to me " Peace, you are so beautiful". I could not find any words to tell him. He continued. "Your neck is nice and long and your eyes are very beautiful and big". He spoke like his whole life was in the words he was saying. I was so embarrassed that I ran. He ran after me. I ran so fast and my heart was beating so fast that I thought it was going to jump out of my chest. I fell. He caught up with me. I slapped him and ran on. That was one of the days I was thankful for being the best runner in my class.

The next day he wrote to me a letter asking how could I embarrass him like that. Especially after he had said the nicest words in his life to me. He told me that he had spent sleepless nights to make up all those words. How dare I run away! He even told me that if I didn't agree to become his wife, he would take me by force.

I went home and told my grandmother because I was scared. I had kept the letters he had written to me. She went to the Local Council chairman and told him the story. Then my grandmother and LC1 came to school, and talked to my teacher. They called the boy and asked him questions.

At first he denied, but then they brought his exercise book. The handwriting in the exercise book was then same as in the letters. They even asked Charity about it and she also told them what she knew. They told her that if she didn't tell the truth she would be suspended.

Charity said that Ben had wanted to talk to me. They told the boy that it is all right to tell a girl that you like her, but when she is not interested, you must stop. They explained that continue to harass me was wrong. They asked him how he was going to look after me when we got "married". He did not have anything. No house, no property, not even cows to pay my dowry! Even his parents didn't know about his plans to "marry" me. Ben just wanted to use me and spoil my education.

The school authorities plus with the LC1, talked to Ben for a long time and said that they would be watching him closely for the next 3 months to ensure that he would not disturb me again or any other girl.

We were all very happy. Things went back to normal, or so I thought. What I did not realise was that Charity was really annoyed with me for being the reason his cousin was in trouble.

Even her parents and Ben's parents came to see my parents to complain. They say that Ben was unjustly reprimanded; after all, he had not done anything to me yet. It became a Local Council case once again and the Chairman intervened. He explained that Ben was being monitored so that he learns to accept girls' answers respectfully. He also explained that this was a lesson to the other boys. If there were planning to harass other girls, they would not do it for fear of being punished too. His parents then understood.

Charity also understood and we were friends again. We continued going to school and coming back together. We studied together and played together. It was really good. Soon, exams were approaching, so we studied even harder. We always wanted to get good grades in class. The morning of the English exam, we got to school and other pupils seemed to be excited. We thought that maybe they had got "examination fever" and we even laughed at them. When we got closer, we asked them what the matter was. They told us that they had decided by themselves to monitor another boy who didn't want to accept a girls' refusal!



Questions for Discussion

1. *What can girls say to a boy to show that she is really not interested?*
2. *What can happen to a girl who refuses?*
3. *Who can help a girl who wants to refuse a boy?*
4. *What can you do to help a girl who wants to refuse a boy, so that she may stay in school?*









JANE

By *Kaya Kagimu Mukasa*

Based on a story by *Muhindo Daphne*

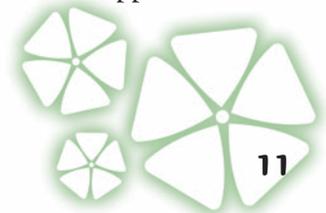
Jane is 14 years old. She is an orphan. Jane lives with her Auntie Petwa. They live near the trading center. She goes to the village primary school where most of the children in the village go. Jane likes going to school very much, but she is always late.

Auntie Petwa looks after Jane and pays school fees for her. She also provides Jane with a few basic needs. Jane has never met her auntie's husband. No one even talks about him. Sometimes she wonders if he is dead or alive somewhere. Jane appreciates that her auntie looks after her, but she is uncomfortable about how Auntie Petwa makes her money. Auntie Petwa sells alcohol to the men in the village.

Jane doesn't like this because every day, men come to their home and drink a lot of alcohol. They start off speaking with their normal voices. As time goes on and they drink more and more, their voices also become louder and louder. Sometimes Jane wonders who listens because they all talk or rather shout at the same time.

Sometimes the men come with women who are drunk. They all laugh loudly and say vulgar words. Sometimes they quarrel and eventually they fight. Sometimes if they are very drunk and they don't remember who won the fight, they fight again the following day. There are times when Jane is so hungry and these men come and offer to buy roast meat for her from the trading center. She refuses because she knows that they want to have sex with her. And when she refuses they abuse her and tell her bad words. One day one man told her that she should not be mean with her body, because when she dies, the maggots will enjoy it! Jane was hurt and upset by those words. She was scared of telling her Auntie because she doesn't have anyone else to look after her.

Jane was always late to class so the teacher was annoyed with her. She even punished Jane many times, but Jane did not change. One day, she called Jane to the staff room and asked her why she came late every day. Jane told her that she had to collect water and bring it to her auntie before she came to school. She also said that the well was far from their home. She also told the teacher that she was usually hungry when she came to school. This was because by the time she went for water, her auntie was still sleeping and there was no one else to make tea for her. When she came back, she was already late for school, so she just put on her uniform and ran to school. Jane also told the teacher everything else that happened at home. The teacher was touched and sympathized with Jane.



The teacher encouraged Jane and told her that she would help her with her studies. She also introduced her to some nice girls in the class. They become her friends. Their names were Tina and Ketura. They told Jane about the homes they come from.

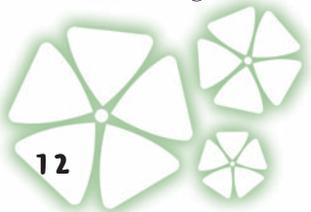
Tina comes from a family of 6 children and she is the last born. They live on a farm. The boys help their father with the animals, like milking the cows and looking after them. They also help him with the pigs and goats. The girls help their mother with the chickens. They feed the chicken. They also clean out the chicken house and collect the eggs. They eat some of the eggs and sell most of them. They also grow sweet potatoes, Irish potatoes, cassava and "matooke" (green bananas). They always have plenty to eat at home. Jane wished with all her heart that she would go and live with them so that she could have some decent food to eat. She told Tina that at home she would only have supper. Sometimes would not even find supper.

Jane told Tina about a day when her auntie bought meat and cooked it. When Jane came back from school Auntie Petwa told her that she had kept some food for her with meat. Jane could not believe her ears. Meat! Jane was very hungry and this news made her very, very, very happy. Since her parents died, which was many years ago, meat had become a luxury of important days only. She wondered what important day it was, but not for long, because she just wanted to eat her meat. She took off her uniform quicker than she had ever done before. The zip got stuck and she almost tore the uniform. She eventually managed to take it off and went to the kitchen to get her meat.

As she got to the kitchen, she stood in the doorway and looked in horror as their dog ate her meat! She could not believe it. How dare the silly dog eat her meat!

The dog was eating a bone, as it had finished all the meat from Jane's plate. She told it that it had behaved badly. The dog looked back like it did not understand what she was saying. It continued eating. Jane tried to chase the dog. The dog howled. It was confused at Jane's strange behaviour. If that dog were to play "football", it would be very good, because it ran fast with the bone. Jane could not catch it. Even though her friends felt sorry about the meat, they found her story very funny. Tina promised to bring some food for her.

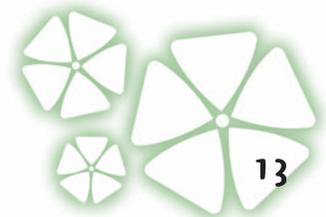
Ketura also told Jane about her family. They had small gardens of potatoes, cassava and matooke. They also had a very big garden of maize. They would harvest it and sell it at the main market in the trading center. She also promised to bring some maize for Jane so that even when she goes home and the dog has eaten her food, she will have something to eat.



Tina and Ketura brought food for Jane as they had promised. After a while, Jane became more attentive in class because she was not hungry anymore. She even put on some weight. Her friends even told her not to be afraid of the drunken men anymore. They advised her to lock the door to her room and keep quiet and pretend not to be there. They even told her that whatever chores she had to do, she should do quickly so that she goes to bed early. That way, if they don't see her for some time, they will think that she doesn't live there anymore and stop looking for her. She followed their advice and it worked.

Soon Jane became among the best pupils in the class. She was a lot more intelligent than her friends. She in turn helped them with their studies and they were also very happy. Very soon they became the three best girls in their class and their teacher was very happy and proud of all of them.

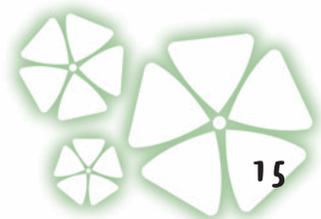
Jane thanked her teacher for introducing her to such nice friends. She promised her teacher that she was going to work very hard at school in order to get a good job. She also said that when she gets children, she would like her children to eat well, sleep well and go to a nice school so that they grow up happy and bright. Jane wants her children to have nice friends like Tina and Ketura.



QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. *What could help Jane attend school each day?*
2. *What could help Jane complete primary school?*
3. *How would you advise girls like Jane?*









HOPE

by Kaya Kagimu Mukasa

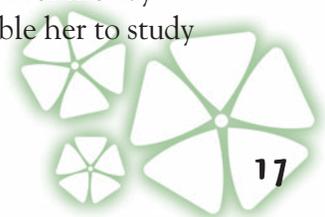
based on story by Kusemrere Harriet

Hope lived a very lonely life. She missed her parents very much, but she couldn't stay with them. They lived in the village which was very far from school. If she lived with them, she would not be able to go to school, because it was too far to walk everyday. Her parents were very poor, so they asked her relatives who had more money to take care of her. They gladly accepted. Hope's parents wanted her to go to school so that she would get a good job. They did not want her to end up being poor like they were. They couldn't afford to take her to school so they left her in the hands of her relatives. The problem is, that Hope's parents did not know what their relatives did for a living. They were Commercial Sex Workers! Not many people knew what they were doing, but some people knew.

They had a shop that sold all sorts of things. It was a nice shop, and it had many things. Behind the shop were two rooms, where the three of them stayed. Hope's cousins were called Jolly and Vicky. During the day they looked innocent, as they sold commodities from the shop. At night, it was a different story. Jolly and Vicky each owned a room. Hope would share a room with either of the cousins who did not have a customer for the night. Sometimes when both had customers, she would sleep in the shop with what ever she could find to make some sort of mattress. It could even be boxes pressed down and put together. Then she would use newspapers to cover herself for the night. In the mornings, she would have to go to school, like everything was okay at home. She was a very miserable girl.

At school, she had no friends. Children at school would tease her and call her "C of CSWs". (cousin of Commercial Sex Workers). Nobody wanted to be her friend. They all said that they did not want to be seen with the "C of CSWs". Some of the children at school went as far as saying that she was also a Commercial Sex Worker! This made Hope very sad, because she was not like her cousins. In fact, if anybody was sad about what her cousins were doing to earn a living, it was Hope. So many times she wished that she could change things around, but she couldn't. Her cousins paid school fees for her and gave her food and a place to stay. She had nowhere else to go, and no one else to pay for her school fees. At school, when the children teased her, she would be brave. Sometimes it would be too much for her and she would cry. She would always hide when she was crying, because she did not want anybody to see her.

They were times when Jolly and Vicky did not have many customers. Then money would be little. Those were difficult times for Hope because they would tell her to also go out and look for money. When she told them that she didn't know where she could find a job that would enable her to study and work at the same time, they told her to join their trade. It was very frustrating.



When she realized that she wasn't going to get any support or any friends, Hope decided to concentrate on her studies. She was determined to go through school and become somebody respectable.

School was the only place that Hope could escape to. When she woke up in the mornings, she was very happy. This was because she could study and learn at peace. Even when the children at school teased her, she would not say anything. She knew that that they didn't understand why she was in that situation. She could not even explain to any of them, because none of them was willing to listen to her side of the story. She only hoped that one day they would understand and stop teasing her. She also did not like the situation she was in, but she had no alternative. If she had an alternative she would definitely not live like that. Hope did not want anyone's daughter to have to go through what she was going through. It was humiliating, and always made her feel like she was less than the other children. It also made her feel like she was not good enough to be in the same school with other children who led normal lives and stayed in normal homes.

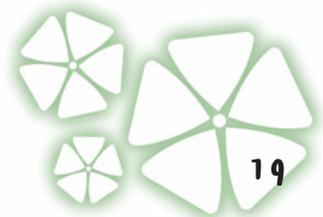
One day, Hope was feeling very lonely and left out. The children in her class found her and started laughing at her. They said that she looked very tired. This was true, but the reason they gave for Hope being tired that was the problem. They said that she was tired because she had been "working" the whole night. She looked at them and did not say anything. They went ahead to sing their favorite song "C of CSWs". When the children went away, Hope went to the football field, sat there and cried like her little heart would be torn out of her chest.

The Head Teacher found her. He thought that Hope was sick. Hope told him that she was not sick, but that the problem she had was as good as being sick. She explained to him what she was going through. The Head Teacher told Hope that what her cousins were doing was very dangerous because it could lead to pregnancy, HIV/AIDS and even death. He advised her to concentrate on her studies. He also promised to try and get sponsors for her so that she could find another place to stay. He also told her to ignore the children and concentrate on her studies so that she could pass her exams. The Head Teacher told Hope that the important thing for her was to focus on the truth. The truth was that Hope was a good girl, who was hard working in class. He told her to always tell herself these things. She would be a responsible lady with a good husband and children and have a respectable job in the future.

Hope was very grateful to the Head Teacher for his encouraging words. She took the advice seriously and concentrated on her studies. She ignored the children who used to tease her. After some time, even the children stopped teasing her because she would not react anymore. Hope continued to excel in her studies. She was in P.6, and her prayer to God was to save her family members before she got to P.7.

Questions for Discussion

1. *Who could help this girl stay safe and stay in school?*
2. *How can you encourage a girl like this to stay safe and stay in school?*



What is a Brave Girl?

Now that you have read the stories, answer the questions again.

1. *What makes a girl brave?*
2. *How can bravery help girls complete primary school?*

Have your answers changed? If so, how?



