

CHILD STORIES

NOW RESCUED, JEFFREY RECOUNTS YEARS OF TERROR

By the time he was sixteen, he was already raping, maiming and killing as a child soldier in the Lord's Resistance Army, a rebel terror group in northern Uganda headed by the maniacal Joseph Kony.

We'll call him Jeffrey. To use his real name could bring dire consequences.

As a young teenager, Jeffrey was abducted from his village near Gulu. While recounting the event he explained that, typically, children like him are required to kill right away so that they have "blood and shame" on their hands. Under the threat of torture and execution, Twelve year olds, ten year-olds, eight year-olds, are forced to bludgeon or hack somebody to death before they are taken from the village and brainwashed to do the bidding of a purely evil man. As such, many children are the very instruments used to cause their own orphaning.

Regardless of who they are forced to murder, the children start to think of themselves as evil, damned beings...unforgiveable, unredeemable. In that state, they can be further exploited to do diabolical acts of violence and hatred.

Jeffrey's indoctrination into a cult of fear occurred over a two-month period. He was partly held in bondage by the threat that Kony's army would kill his family if he tried to escape. There was also the dread of death by dismemberment. Kony frequently would arbitrarily accuse two or more of them of wanting to escape and then employ a machete to take them apart, "piece by piece" in front of all.

Jeffrey's first task was to serve as a slave to Kony's militia. He was subsequently sent out as a spy to sell alcohol to government soldiers stationed in various barracks in the area. He would report back and, when the moment was right, signal when to attack the soldiers in a state of drunkenness.

It wasn't long before Jeffrey was required to carry a gun and pull the trigger himself. His particular troop of children killed about twenty Ugandan soldiers every week in an ambush. Kony's young fighters were told to use only one bullet per soldier, to slowly pick off their targets one by one. Cold, calculating and deadly accurate.

Jeffrey's personal tally after four years of imposed service as a child soldier in the Lord's Resistance Army includes six villagers hacked or beaten to death, "hundreds" of people maimed, and "many, many" Ugandan soldiers killed.

Young girls were brought back from ambushed villages so that Kony could pick from among them and rape "two or three at a time." Jeffrey explained that, often, the older girls would escape into the bush when they attacked a village. Only the youngest remained to be immediately molested, forced upon by the fighters, or taken into captivity to continually meet the ongoing sexual demands of the troops.

Many of the soldiers didn't want to keep these young girls in bondage. On a couple of occasions Jeffrey took a girl with him to fetch water and, upon arriving at the water source, told her to run and never look back. Allowing a slave to escape meant that he would have to spend a month in solitary confinement under harsh conditions. It was a worthy sacrifice to him.

Over time, Jeffrey's family in the village was exterminated, person by person, by other squads of LRA rebels.

Jeffrey now had nothing to lose by attempting escape. He no longer had a family to preserve. He no longer was held captive by the threat of their execution.

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His chance swiftly came.

During a particularly bitter gunfight with government troops, Jeffrey laid low in the bush and held his fire. He tried to preserve all his ammunition just in case he would have to fight his way out. At some point, he determined that the government forces were getting the upper hand in the battle.

After most in his attack group had died, he threw his arms into the air, right in the vicinity of Ugandan soldiers.

From captivity to captivity, Jeffrey was taken prisoner.

Quite unexpectedly, Jeffrey was released from prison in Kampala after just three months. Three months in exchange for four years of terror. During those months, Jeffrey told the establishment what he knew about the LRA.

Although his family was dead, Jeffrey headed back to the only home he ever knew, Gulu. There he learned to be a carpenter. Now blades were used to shape and create, not tear down and destroy.

One evening, Jeffrey entered into the village of his upbringing. He heard the rustling in the bushes but had no time to react. As the LRA rebels flooded into the village again, he prepared himself for what was to come.

Jeffrey was once again a captive of the Lord's Resistance Army.

Jeffrey knew he couldn't spend another four years or more raping and killing. He couldn't orphan any more children. He knew that he would have to die instead.

This particular LRA group wasn't aware of Jeffrey's past abduction and service. They had therefore pressed him into carrying bulky supplies instead of a weapon. Freedom, amazingly, came just three days after his capture as government troops encountered the militia and the Ugandan forces emancipated the young slaves.

Jeffrey enjoyed carpentry, but he now knew he needed to directly engage this evil. He enlisted in the Ugandan army to apply his LRA knowledge and training for good.

Now, ten years later, Jeffrey has completed his service to the country and is employed as a private security officer for a family in southern Uganda.

Jeffrey lives in a slum, but knows that he is blessed beyond measure. Material things are of little or no consequence. He is happily married with two young children – a boy and girl.

It took ten years for Jeffrey to tell this story, partly out of fear of retribution and partly out of a desire to keep it bottled up and silenced.

But there are many stories like this, stories that need to be told. Only by exposing the truth can we truly understand and confront the evil.