



A Bridge between Two Sisters

By: Pamela Brannon

I took a remarkable journey to Uganda this summer and was able to spend a tremendous amount of time with our amazing dance troupe—watching them rehearse and prepare for our upcoming Tour of Light. I also got to spend time with some of our graduates; *one of whom (Irene Nassaka) died from complications due to AIDS while I was on the ground. I happened to visit her in the hospital two days before she died and I cannot express to you how heartbreaking and devastating that experience was for me.*

Irene is one of the first children I met when I became connected to Children of Uganda in 2000. Two years later, while I was in Dallas during the 2002 tour, Irene (who was our lead singer at the time) found out that her mother had died—also from AIDS. Gratefully, this was on a non-performance day and she had the opportunity to mourn a mother whom she had not seen in over a year. The experience was deeply painful for all of the children as it brought up memories of their own personal losses.

The next day, the children were scheduled to perform at a critical fundraising appearance. The artistic director of the dance troupe told Irene that, given her loss, it was entirely her choice whether to perform or not. Imagine my incredible amazement when I sat down to watch the children perform and out walked Irene center stage to

assume her lead singer role. I knew in that moment, that I had found my life's calling. I had never heard a more beautiful voice nor had I ever witnessed such incredible courage. She truly sounded like an angel. And that night, the children put on one of the best performances I had ever seen.

Fast forward to August of this year, and our current lead singer, Jessica, coincidentally happens to be Irene's younger sister. I was with her the evening of Irene's death and she was justifiably heartbroken. I shared the story of being in Dallas when Irene found out their mother had passed away. I was so humbled to also be able to share with her that Irene bravely took center stage the next evening to perform with the dance troupe.

Two days after Irene's death, the children were scheduled to record the CD for the 2012 Tour of Light. Jessica and her family had to travel a long distance outside of Kampala (more than 8 hours) to bury Irene in the family's village plot. She asked me if she should come back to record the CD and if she would be letting everyone down if she did not. I told her that the choice was entirely hers and that we would support her decision either way.

Imagine my sur-



Jessica



The late Tour of Light lead singer, Irene Nassaka, captures a once in a lifetime moment with U2's Bono

prise once again, when two days later and only one day after Irene's burial, Jessica showed up to record the troupe CD. She had traveled for nearly 24 hours and without eating so that she could participate in the recording. That happened to me my last day in Uganda and I was so touched by her grace and equal determination.

Our music and dance troupe has been working so hard and for more than one year to bring their remarkable performances to America. If you have the opportunity to attend a show and witness the talent and spirit of these remarkable children then I consider you blessed beyond measure.



Jessica performs with her fellow Tour of Light dance troupe members at the American Embassy in Kampala Uganda.

Inside

Exciting Tour Of Light News And Updates	2
Dancing for Uganda	2
Celebrating the 50th Anniversary of Peace Corps and USAID	2
New Primary Recruits: Jane & Paul	3
It's Not the Places You Go, But the People You Meet...	4
Bound for Success	5
Reflections	5
Food and Water Security <i>A Sustainable Future</i>	6
A Tribute to our 2012 Tour of Light Supporters	7
Message from the Executive Director	8



Exciting Tour of Light News and Updates!

So much has been happening on the ground and in the states in preparation for Children of Uganda's upcoming 2012 Tour of Light—our 15th anniversary tour since 1996. Our music and dance troupe has been training and rehearsing all year long—most recently, they were invited to perform at the American Embassy in Kampala, Uganda (read more below). The Tour of Light CD was recorded in September, costumes and instruments have been purchased and last minute touches are being put on performance routines during the troupe's final December training session. Back in the states, city coordinators and volunteers have been hard at work helping us fundraise for training and travel expenses, secure venue locations and promote the tour in their communities. We would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who has been involved in this worthwhile project. We can't wait to see you on the road!

2012 Tour Performance Schedule:

Jan. 9 – 16: San Francisco, CA	Feb. 9: Oxford, OH
Jan. 17 – 22: Los Angeles, CA	Feb. 10 – 16: Chicago, IL
Jan. 23 – 28: Washington, DC	Feb. 17 – 21: San Antonio, TX
Jan. 30 – 31: Charles Town, WV	Feb. 22 – 28: Atlanta, GA
Feb. 1 – 8: New York, NY	



Celebrating the 50th Anniversary of Peace Corps and USAID

Children of Uganda's *Tour of Light* music and dance troupe had the honor of entertaining a crowd of over 500 guests in attendance at the 50th Anniversary Peace Corps and USAID event held on September 15, 2011 at the U.S. Embassy, Kampala.

In attendance were a number of dignitaries who included the U.S. Ambassador to Uganda, Jerry P. Lanier, the Uganda Minister of Tourism Wildlife and Antiquities, Professor Ephraim Kamuntu who shared his experiences with USAID, plus an official of The Education Service Commission Dr. Geoffrey Mbabazi who shared his wonder-

ful memories with the Peace Corps.

Our troupe presented several traditional pieces which included the Baki-simba, showcasing the graceful movements of the girls in their colorful kikoyi costumes, as well as the Runyeye dance with the children adorned in rattles and raffia skirts.

A medley composed of loud drumming rhythms captivated everyone during the anniversary cake cutting. Throughout the occasion, background music was also played on Adungus and other string instru-

ments. It was a wonderful experience for the children and the audience only wished they could have performed longer.



Dancing for Uganda

On October 15th, a group of renowned professional dancers from the San Francisco Bay area came together to support Children of Uganda's Tour of Light with an event called *Dancing for Uganda* at Fort Mason Center's Cowell Theater. Volunteers graciously helped coordinate dance performances, a short documentary film, silent auction and a festive wine and cheese reception at the event.

One volunteer and dancer, Courtney Elizabeth, wrote the following blog post about her experience:

"Outside of work, a lot of my time this summer has been spent working for a great non-profit called the Children of Uganda (COU). As a dancer, I was really moved by their connection to the arts—

sometimes, I struggle with wondering if I should be in a career that makes more of a difference in the world, but COU gave me a fresh perspective on the true purpose of dance. When I saw these kids dance with such joy in the midst of so much brokenness and pain, I was reminded that we do the same thing here at SFB: we create a little bit of beauty in the midst of the crazy ups and downs of life."

We would like to take this opportunity to thank all of the dancers, volunteers and supporters who made *Dancing for Uganda* such a success. Proceeds from the event totaled an impressive \$20,000. Your support is tremendous and we are so grateful for your dedication on behalf of our dance troupe.

New Primary Recruits: Jane & Paul

Primary recruitment for the 2012 school year began this fall and two of these children, Jane and Paul, are featured below. The emotional, psychological and financial turmoil these young people and their families have endured demonstrates the growing need for Children of Uganda to focus not only on supporting the child, but the family and community as a whole:



Jane

Jane Nakawunde was born on February 2, 2005. She comes from the Nakagongo Village in Rakai district Uganda where she lives with her mother, sister and brother. Sadly, her father died of AIDS in 2010 and her mother is living HIV positive. Jane's family is so poor that they were unable to transport her father's body home for burial. Gratefully, friends gave her mother a small burial plot. Jane's mother is a peasant farmer, so she sells local produce to help support the family. The house where the family stays belongs to a relative who is allowing them to occupy the property as long as they tend to his garden. Her mother is a hard working, committed young woman despite her poor health situation. She is also very creative and produces handmade crafts, including

baskets and mats that she sells in the village.



Jane with her mother, Immaculate, and little sister, Marion, in their home village of Nakagongo.



Paul

Six year-old Paul Kato was born in the Lukonyi Village of Rakai district Uganda. His father passed away soon before Paul and his twin brother were born. With two small children and no source of income, Paul's mother was forced to split her family apart. Paul's twin brother was taken by a relative who agreed to provide for the child's wellbeing and education as best he could. Paul stayed behind with his mother; therefore, he has been unable to attend school like his brother. His mother worries greatly about the future of her children and relies heavily on the support of her mother-in-law (Paul's grandmother). However, his grandmother is also responsible for two other grandchildren; one of whom was left with her as an infant after the child's mother died.

In accordance with Uganda's National Strategic Program Plan of Intervention for OVCs, Children of Uganda will begin building



Paul is pictured here with his grandmother and cousins.

the capacity of families and communities through economic empowerment to help raise their household income and meet the cost of education, health care, food and clothing for all of their children. Currently, guardians are unable to provide these basic needs due to extreme poverty, disease and ignorance. Empowering the guardians of our students will have an overarching effect on our ability to serve more vulnerable children in their communities.

Jane, Paul and their fellow primary recruits will be available for sponsorship on the 2012 Tour of Light. If you would like to learn more about becoming a sponsor, please contact our office at (800) 531-9612, e-mail us at info@childrenofuganda.org or visit our website at www.childrenofuganda.org.

It's Not the Places You Go, But the People You Meet...

By: Pamela Brannon

I first met seven year-old Moses Nsubuga when our children with no known relatives arrived at Kiwanga for their second school term break. Moses was among this group due to the fact that his elderly and disabled grandmother—the boy's only remaining guardian—lives in a nearby village. Desiring to spend the holiday with her, Moses joined Aunt Maria (Kiwanga's Home Administrator) and me on a journey to the outskirts of Kampala. We arrived in what can only be described as a true Ugandan slum.

The moment Moses' grandmother Mary saw her grandson she jumped straight up—in spite of her crutch—and embraced him lovingly with tears in her eyes. Following the death of his father in 2008, Moses was abandoned by his mother who hastily remarried another man; as a result, Mary took responsibility for the small boy in addition to seven other orphaned grandchildren she cares for.

The difference between Moses and his cousins, all of whom lost parents to AIDS or



Moses

extreme poverty, was striking. The other children were withdrawn and clearly malnourished, while Moses appeared bright and confident. Although Moses had only been in our program for a little under a year, it was clear to me that a dramatic transformation had taken place.

Mary graciously invited us into their shanty home, which was nothing more than a dilapidated one room space divided by a sheet for sleeping and sitting quarters. On one side there were two beaten chairs that she graciously gave up for Maria and me to sit. Even though I could not understand Mary's Lugandan speech, what was translated for me as she held

my hand was a profound gratitude to us for taking care of Moses over the past year. She also expressed an earnest wish that we could provide for all of her children.

Gratefully—thanks to the generous support of our donors—that day we were able to share 100,000 shillings (about \$45 USD) to help Mary provide food and basic necessities for Moses and her family throughout

the holiday. Again, she cried tears of joy and conveyed her deepest thanks.



Moses is reunited with his grandmother on school term break.



Moses (prior to joining COU) is seen here on recruitment day with his grandmother, Mary, and orphan cousins.

Children of Uganda is not always able to provide funds for families during term breaks; as a result, many of our children return to school sickly, dirty and without clothes or requirements. More and more, we see the progress our children make during the school year regress when they return to a poverty stricken home life. In addition to education and food and water security, it is critical that we focus on family and community empowerment to stop the vicious cycle of poverty where it begins.

Imagine having to choose one child among eight for the chance at a better life. Moses' grandmother made this choice for him, but we feel strongly that all of her children should have the same opportunity. The day I met Moses could be seen as depressing or heartbreaking, but personally I felt more committed to our work and believe in supporting guardians to help provide a more holistic care of our children in Uganda.

Bound for Success

There are extraordinary people in this world that astound you with their humility and gratitude in spite of unimaginable odds. Paul Musisi is a person of this character and I had the great fortune of meeting him while in Uganda. Paul joined Children of Uganda's program in 1995 with his two sisters, Annet and Christine, when he was only four years old. Earlier that year, their mother died of AIDS and so the children were found living in a cave near Kiwanga with their mentally unstable father. Sadly, their father also passed away later that year so the children were left without any surviving parent or known relative.

From the beginning, Paul excelled in school. He scored a first grade on his P7 and S4 examinations and was awarded a scholarship for good performance. In advanced level (S5 and S6), Paul studied Biology, Chemistry, Mathematics and Agriculture and graduated at the top of his class in 2010. He was recently admitted to Makerere University to pursue a Bachelor

of Science degree in Ethnobotany.

Recommended for his academic excellence and infectious personality, Paul also served as librarian at our Ssanje Community Resource Center and Library. In the library, Paul mentored our students in reading and life skills training. He loved watching their self-esteem soar as they learned more about themselves and the world around them. These experiences afforded Paul with a deep and lasting compassion for our children.

So, how did a child with such a heart-breaking past rise up to achieve this level of success? Paul credits his standing today in great thanks to Children of Uganda, the late Sister Rose and his longtime sponsors Cesare Calari and Jennifer Johnson-Calari. This summer, Paul had the opportunity to meet his sponsor Jennifer for the first time. During their meeting, she treated Paul to another first—an ice cream cone! He talked about this visit on numerous occasions as it made a meaningful impact on his life.



Thanks to his generous sponsors, student Paul Musisi now has the opportunity to pursue his bachelor's degree from Makerere University.

The scars of losing both parents are still evident, but Paul has been sustained through Children of Uganda's care and his sponsors' ongoing love and support. When I met Paul, he was very excited to begin his university studies in August. Paul's passion to succeed and give back to Children of Uganda is so inspiring and we are confident that this young man has a bright future ahead.

Reflections

By: Terra Pennington

As I sit looking out my apartment window with the best view of all the skyscrapers surrounding my home—in an area literally called “Center City”—it's hard to believe that two months have passed since I returned from Uganda. Memories from my time spent at Sabina and Kiwanga Home still remain very alive in my mind and in my heart. From the first day when I was greeted at the gate until the last night at Sabina when I sat surrounded by lanterns and the sounds of children singing goodbye to me, my life was impacted every day by their stories.

There were so many poignant moments that it's difficult to narrow them down. Hilda's story is one that affected my time in Uganda in ways that I never could have expected. During my time there, Hilda's grandmother—who was her last remaining guardian—passed away. A few days later, her twelve-year-old cousin died. In the midst of her grief, Hilda gave me a great gift; she let me in. We would sit together in the outdoor kitchen near the bandas sometimes talking, sometimes just sitting in the

silence created when there are no words for such pain. She wrote a letter about her grandmother's life and we read it together. I then gave her a journal and she wrote down the pieces of advice her grandmother had given her about living life: “Study hard, Hilda”. “Be kind.” “Speak gently to others.” If I do these things, she will always be with me, Hilda said.

Some of my happier moments were spent playing with the youngest primary children—most especially, a spunky seven year old girl named Ziporah. One of my favorite games involved standing in the center of a circle and speaking of something called “wiggle waggle” that the person had on their shoes. My curiosity immediately got the best of me. “Ziporah, what is “wiggle, waggle?” “Oh Auntie, you don't know it?” She said with wide eyes. I shook my head, wondering in that moment how I could have missed something so important as the wiggle waggle. “Auntie, its power,” she said. “It's POWER! And I have it on the bottom of my shoes.” I believed her.



Volunteer Terra is all smiles with one of our adorable primary children.

As many others have said before me, the amazing thing about these children is that in the midst of suffering most of us will never experience, there is a spirit of joy, POWER and steadfast resolve to move forward. Hilda, Ziporah and all of their counterparts are not the Uganda of the future. They are the Uganda of today. When we stand with these, our most vulnerable little sisters and brothers, we are changed. It's true they need us; but the real truth is that we need them.

Food and Water Security

A Sustainable Future

By: Jan Smart

In 2008, we introduced the concept of permaculture (permanent agriculture) to our staff at Sabina Primary Boarding School with the intention of giving them the tools



Good nutrition feeds body, mind and spirit.

to grow more of our own food, store more water, teach the children sustainable agriculture skills, and move towards food and water security at our school.

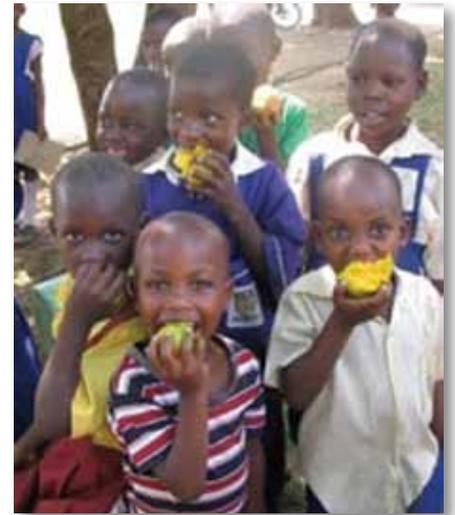
Our staff took up the challenge, in spades! We now have fruit trees producing mangoes, jackfruit, avocados, and pawpaw for our children. Thanks to new

water tanks that store wet season rain, our gardens also produce potatoes, carrots, beets, pumpkins, eggplants and other vegetables that add valuable nutrition to the school's staple diet of posho (corn-based porridge) and beans. Eggs from our chicken project are now a weekly addition to the children's diet, too, with surplus eggs sold on the local market.

But, perhaps the most vital crop reaped is the garden's new role as a learning tool, which sprang from the participation of seven of our teachers in a Permaculture Design Certificate (PDC) course held at our school in 2010. Those seven teachers have since drafted a new curriculum in partnership with the Department of Education that will integrate our permaculture-based garden into every classroom subject—sciences, math, arts, reading and writing, as well as agriculture.

Prue Gill, Australian teacher and Board Member of the Stephanie Alexander Foundation (which brings Kitchen Garden Programs into Australian primary schools) has visited Sabina on numerous occasions to help guide and instruct our staff. Prue shared the following after her most recent trip:

"It is inspiring to see how teachers at



Children enjoying a slice of jackfruit from the garden.

the school have embraced the garden, appreciating its beauty as well as its productivity. In the time that I was there, we explored the opportunities a garden creates to think imaginatively about teaching and learning, and we came up with a concept that places the garden at the heart of the education offered by Sabina. The hope is that every child who comes to this school will be able to live a meaningful life and produce food even in the absence of professional employment. We also aim to share the benefits of the garden with the whole school community, including the families and guardians of the children who attend the school."

Sign up to receive updates from our Food and Water Security (FWS) blog at <http://childrenofuganda-permaculture.blogspot.com>.

Stay Connected All Year Long

Sign up to receive COU's Mini-Pearls – a quarterly 1 page newsletter designed to keep our most loyal friends informed about our programs, news and events. You can also join our e-Pearls mailing list to receive monthly e-mail updates. Message us at pearls@childrenofuganda.org with your name and contact details to start getting Mini-Pearls at your doorstep and e-Pearls in your inbox!



Children of Uganda would like to take this opportunity to tribute our 2012 Tour of Light supporters

This list represents donations received directly through our office on behalf of the tour. We apologize for any unintentional omissions.

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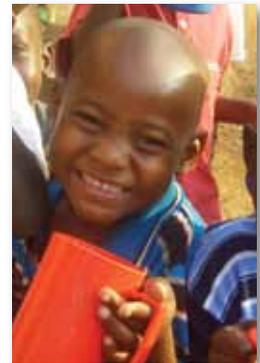
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Please remember us in your will



A traditional meal of rice, beans and maize in Uganda costs about \$1.50. How much do you spend on food and presents for the holidays? Your small sacrifice of a gift today will make a big difference for our kids.

Message from the Executive Director



Much of my history with Children of Uganda has involved travel. It's been a remarkable journey and one that has taken me all over this country and to Africa. Most recently, as I flew back from Uganda in late August—I had the good fortune of being seated next to a kind gentleman from the UK. As we made our way across the big pond, he asked what had brought me so far

from home. Without hesitating, I replied simply “my purpose.” My new acquaintance queried—what exactly was my purpose. I eagerly shared about Children of Uganda and the journey I had been on for more than a decade with our organization.

This latest edition of PEARLS OF HOPE is a voyage of sorts—one we hope you will take with us as we explore the stories and adventures of some of our most accomplished children and volunteers, as well as those of our newest and most vulnerable recruits. Our dance troupe is about to take off on a trip of a lifetime as they tour around the U.S. sharing their African culture and raising awareness of the AIDS pandemic and its impact on more than 15 million children worldwide. A recent graduate shares his journey from living in a cave as an infant to entering his first year of university in 2011. An American volunteer provides a snapshot of her trek to a place called Sabina and the lessons she learned

from her newfound traveling companions. We also find tremendous abundance of spirit as we visit a Ugandan slum and meet an elderly grandmother caring for 8 grandchildren.

The road has not always been smooth, but well worth the twists and turns I have experienced. What has remained constant is a deep calling within that I feel has chosen me and not the other way around. I was on a well-traveled path when I first became connected to our children and I had no intention of taking a detour elsewhere. Yet—all roads kept leading me back to Children of Uganda and the work that has today become my purpose in life. I look forward to meeting you on this road less traveled one day soon.

Pamela Brannon
Executive Director

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The mission of Children of Uganda is to support and empower hundreds of orphans and vulnerable children to lead successful and productive lives. Our vision is that all children in Uganda receive an education to become healthy, productive members of their community who assume leadership roles and positively impact Ugandan society.

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The newsletter was graciously underwritten by Gretchen Littlefield, designed by Heather Woods, and printing was provided by Pete Taylor and RWT Production, LLC