

# courage

## Blind courage: a story of personal strength and endurance

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*Young Jusu Camara seen guiding Pa Sekou through the camp market.*

Life in a refugee camp is never easy. More often than not, you flee your home with the clothes on your back and little more. For Sekou Camara, "Pa Sekou" to his friends, having been blinded makes his situation all the harder to bear.

Pa Sekou used to own a small but thriving coffee and cocoa plantation in Liberia, and the recent discovery of diamonds made his land even richer. Life was good for Pa Sekou and his family -- until civil war came to their county, and into their lives.

The first encounter was when rebels demanded money, or his son Jusu would be killed. Pa Sekou gave them \$1500 US dollars, all that he had. But when they came back a week later, he had no more to give. This time they were not so kind.

The rebels left Pa Sekou tied to a chair for one week. Each day they rubbed hot chili peppers and gasoline in his eyes. They taped his eyelids open and forced him to face the hot Liberian sun. By the end of that terrible week his sight was gone for good and, with no fight left, he was released, a blind, battered man.

Slowly Pa Sekou's wife Aisatu nursed him back to health. But when the rebels returned, they were relentless in their destruction, and burned his house and crops. In the confusion, Pa Sekou escaped with only his 3 year old son Jusu, and he could only hope that his wife and daughters had fled in the same direction.

Pa Sekou and his son arrived in Sierra Leone in February 2001, and settled in to life in a UNHCR refugee camp. With no word of his mother and sisters, it was up to the little boy to care for his sightless father as best he could, and make sure he was comfortable for the few hours a day that Jusu was at school. The two of them longed for Aisatu, all the time wondering if she was alive.



*Pa Sekou, Aisatu, Jusu and Jenne Camara (not shown) are a happy family once again.*

In December 2004, on his way to Friday prayers, Pa Sekou heard a familiar voice. Aisatu? He kept walking because it didn't seem real. Then he felt the arms of his wife around him.

On that terrible day, Aisatu had made it to Guinea with their daughter Jenne, another daughter had fled with an aunt, and a third had escaped with her uncle. Now, after searching for almost four years Aisatu had finally found them!

are now able to face the future with renewed strength and courage. He dreams of his beloved farm, and even though crops may no longer grow on his charred land, and without sight it will be hard to rebuild his life, he still lives in hope of returning one day.

Comforted by the knowledge that all the children are alive and well, Pa Sekou and his reunited family

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