

Rwanda

WHERE ARE OUR STUDENTS?

It's a Miracle!

By Joan Oksenholt

"We heard gunfire during our evening meal," Sifa remembers. "The rebels were coming for us." Her family fled into the forest, hiding in bushes, ditches, and even rivers as armed rebels searched for Tutsis. Eventually, the violence became too much, and they fled through the forest to Rwanda, arriving exhausted and hungry at a refugee camp.

Life in the camp was far from easy. Their shelter was tiny, opportunities were few, and tragedy soon followed.

Sifa's father returned to Congo to care for the family farm. Later, her mother also left, overwhelmed by the hardship. At just 14 years old, Sifa was left alone to care for her four younger siblings. "I felt helpless and asked God to help me," she says. "God dried my tears and gave me strength."

Sifa became both sister and mother. She bought food, cooked meals, washed clothes, helped with homework, prayed with her siblings, and made sure they attended school. To care for her youngest brother, she even gave up her own education for a year. Despite the challenges, Sifa never stopped encouraging her family. "God loves you. I love you. Work hard in school. It's your chance for a better future."

Her sacrifice paid off. When Sifa returned to school, she excelled academically and earned an Impact Hope scholarship to attend an Adventist boarding school. One of her brothers also received a scholarship.

"It's a miracle, Sifa says. Now, as she pursues her dream of becoming a tailor, Sifa remains a powerful example of faith, perseverance, and love. She is deeply grateful for the sponsors who helped change her family's future. "You are doing God's work for His children," she says. "The blessings I have received are more than I ever dreamed of. Now our family has a bright future. Thank you!"



We Need a Sponsor!



RESPONSE IRANZI
Kirehe Academy
10th Grade



CHARLOTTE BUKURU
Gisenyi Academy
10th Grade



NADIA IRAKOZE
Gisenyi Academy
10th Grade



PRINCE NKURUNZIZA
APAER Academy
10th Grade

Sponsorship is Easy!

Visit [ImpactHope.org](https://www.impacthope.org) to select
your new sponsored student!



South-Pawed Elephant?

Elephants are left-trunked or right-trunked. Just as humans are left- or right-handed, elephants often prefer one side of their trunk for feeding and other tasks.



SUMMER EDITION!

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Sponsor Spotlight | SAM & CAROL

For more than six years, Sam and Carol have faithfully sponsored multiple refugee students through Impact Hope. Their commitment is rooted in a simple belief: God blesses us so that we can bless others. "You can't out-give God," Sam says. "We can't take any of it with us. God has blessed us over the years, and that's why we want to share."

Neither Sam nor Carol grew up wealthy. Looking back on God's faithfulness in their own lives, they feel a responsibility to invest in others, especially young people facing overwhelming challenges. "Those refugee youth have so little, and we have so much here," Sam reflects. "We have an opportunity to make a real difference in their lives."

One of the things that drew them to Impact Hope was knowing that students attend Christian schools where they can grow both academically and spiritually. They are also encouraged by Impact Hope's vocational training programs, which help young people gain practical skills for life after graduation.

When asked what they would say to someone considering sponsorship, their answer is simple: trust God and invest in people. Looking back, Sam and Carol say the most rewarding part has been knowing they have helped open doors of opportunity for refugee young people through education. "It's an awesome thing that Impact Hope is doing," Carol say. "Education changes lives. Vocational training changes lives. Seeing young people empowered with hope and a future—that's what makes it all worthwhile."



THE NEED IN RWANDA

Crowded camp life is very difficult. There is no electricity or running water

The UNHCR gives each refugee 20¢ per day

Refugee youth are bright and capable but access to education is out of reach for most

Less than 38% of Rwandan girls attend secondary school. That number is even less for refugees



Guns or Doughnuts | FROM A LIFE OF VIOLENCE TO A BAKERY

By Dick Duerksen

"I grew up in a Seventh-day Adventist family in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. After a long period of violence and insecurity in my home area, I decided to join my older brother and become a soldier in the resistance army. Our family-my parents and younger siblings-were constantly under attack, so I became a soldier to protect them.

Claude would rather talk about his work in the bakery than return to the fear-filled memories that overwhelmed him as a teenager. He had not wanted to become a warrior, but service with the resistance army seemed to offer hope for a better life. Instead, the insecurity worsened, and eventually his family fled to Rwanda, where they joined thousands of others as refugees.

"I stayed behind as a soldier with the resistance army, but by 2012 my older brother and I were tired of the army life, exhausted by everything we had gone through.

"It was during that time that I chose Jesus as my Savior. I realized life without Him could not satisfy me. I remember praying to God when I was in frontline fighting. There was so much shooting and killing that I felt certain I was going to die. I prayed that God would help me not die without seeing my mom, and He saved me."

One of Claude's worst memories was calling his mother and hearing her sobbing. "All my children are going to die!" she cried. That was when Claude decided to leave the army and join his family in a refugee camp across the border in Rwanda. One look at his mother's relieved face told him he had made the right decision.

Life in the camp was difficult. There were no jobs, little food, and few opportunities. An elementary school offered classes through grade nine, and despite his doubts, Claude returned to school.

"I didn't believe I could go back and succeed, but I gave it a try," he says. "I returned to school in eighth grade. I worked hard, and things started to improve."

Still, there seemed to be no path beyond ninth grade. Discouraged, Claude considered returning



to the Congo and the resistance army. Then a team from Impact Hope arrived in the camp offering scholarships for upper secondary education.

Hundreds of bright Seventh-day Adventist refugee students like Claude longed to continue their education. To attend secondary school, many would have had to walk miles each day through unsafe conditions. Seeing the need, several Adventist families visited the refugee camps and created a solution."There were several Adventist boarding academies in Rwanda, and all had empty beds," says Mindy Thygeson, president and cofounder of Impact Hope. "We began raising funds to provide scholarships for refugee youth to continue their education in safety. Today we offer more than 800 academy scholarships for students in the refugee camps."

"I was fortunate to be selected as one of the first candidates when Impact Hope was starting up," Claude says. "Many young people in the camp wanted this opportunity, and I felt truly blessed to be among those chosen."

Claude's scholarship made it possible for him to attend Gahogo Adventist Academy and continue his education through twelfth grade.

Claude graduated in 2018 and was later sponsored by Impact Hope to attend a one-year culinary arts vocational program. He immediately knew he had found his dream.

"Upon graduation from the culinary arts program, I got my first real job in the kitchen of a major Rwandan resort. Then Impact Hope contacted me again and invited me to become a culinary arts trainer at their new vocational training center, center for Hope."

Today, Claude leads the bakery program at Center for Hope, where refugee youth receive vocational training that can help them earn a living for life.

"Now that I am fully employed here in the bakery," Claude says with a smile, "I am earning enough money so that can pay my own way through university and earn a full degree."

As a couple of students interrupt with a baking question, Claude pauses to explain how to make mandazi-the East African doughnuts-perfectly round.

Then he continues: "When I think back to my days of desperation in the refugee camp, I thank God often that I did not go back to the army. Instead God has given me new and better ways to be happy and productive with Him. "Working with students reminds me of how Jesus walked with His disciples. He taught them, corrected them, encouraged them, and loved them deeply. I see my role that way-to walk alongside students, guiding and planting seeds of faith that God will grow in His time."

Then Claude smiles and asks, "By the way, may I offer you a mandazi?"

**The full story was originally published in the Adventist Review, November 5, 2025.*



Fun Facts About Mandazi

They're Not Really Doughnuts
Although often called "African doughnuts," mandazi are much less sweet than American doughnuts and do not have icing or fillings.

Swahili Influence
Mandazi originated along the East African coast and were influenced by centuries of trade among African, Arab, Persian, and Indian cultures.

A Refugee Camp Staple
In many refugee communities across East Africa, mandazi are made and sold by families as a small business because the ingredients are relatively inexpensive and widely available.

