

# One girl tells of life with rebels

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**L**ira, northern Uganda — It's hard to find anyone who will even try to protect the children of northern Uganda against marauders of the night.

Rebels took Sarah and about 40 other girls in June 2003 as they lay sleeping in a school dormitory.

"The watchman ran away and left us alone," she recalled while sitting at a table at the Rachele Rehabilitation Center. The Ugandan Army took the 18-year-old to the center after she escaped captivity from the Lord's Resistance Army.

As she talks, Sarah fiddles with the binding of a book called Children's Stories from Uganda.

Her story includes how on the same night that the watchman probably saved his own life, Sarah's became a hell of carrying heavy loads, walking from there to nowhere, being threatened — and learning to survive.

Sarah's most important lesson came early in her servitude. After several days of marching, Sarah and the other girls were taken to the haven of rebel leader Joseph Kony in southern Sudan. There, she recalls, the captives found many females Kony had taken as his "wives," that is, sex slaves.

The young women "welcomed the new girls, but at night they took us up to a certain house and told us to rest there. When we were asleep, eight of these women told me to come out.

"One lady slapped me and I was told to follow them. They took me an hour away to a river where some young boys who were Kony's bodyguards started talking in Acholi because they thought I didn't know it.

"They were saying, 'Today we are going to kill her.' "

They had weapons, a knife, a machete and a rope to carry out their plan.

One rebel, an abductee himself, overheard this plan and showed the courage and grace that the watchman had not: The boy took Sarah away, back to Kony's house. Kony ordered that she not be killed.

At that moment, "these people started fearing me." Sarah says she began to believe she would survive.

Of Kony she says, "He's also a human being like me. But there are some changes in him like when you are visited by evil."

Sarah escaped during a gun battle with government soldiers. As rebels fled, she hid in the bush, then came out holding her AK-47 high above her head.

Sarah has been reunited with her mother, father and four siblings: "When I saw them coming, I jumped up and ran to where they were. I cried and my dad carried me away."