



Travel Journal: Uganda

We (pianist Ken Rodgers and I) were greeted by Ricky Anywar who is the Director of Friends of Orphans, which is the organization that made the invitation to me. It was raining here when we met, and he told us that when it rains, God is pouring his blessings down on us. He thought of our coming as God sending him a blessing. We were honored to be thought of in that way. We knew, however, that we too will receive many blessings while here.

We were driven to the guesthouse at Makerere University. This is where we will stay until the afternoon of the 14th. There we met Jeofrey, who is a special assistant in the Friends of Orphans organizations. He gave us some important information on the history of Uganda and the nature of the current problems. We were driven around the city and continued to talk about the situation in Uganda and saw the places where the rich people shopped. We had dinner and went to bed. Here, you must sleep in a mosquito net!

In the morning, we went to Parliament to meet with the opposition leader in the government. His name is Morris W. Ogenga-Latigo. It was a very good meeting. He is from the northern part of Uganda, where we will be traveling. He was pleased that we will be going there. He plans to meet us while we are in the north. He would be considered the minority leader in the Uganda government. His slogan is: One Uganda, One People. We will be giving concerts outdoors at the displaced people's camps. We will also be visiting the projects of Friends of Orphans and meeting with other officials. Ricky Anywar wants us to help build confidence and bring hope to the struggling people in Northern Uganda.

We then traveled to Northern Uganda. Here, we have been meeting with organizations that are involved in peace building in the region. We have spent the last two days in Gulu. We have visited the night commuter center where young children come at night so they won't be abducted by the Lord's Resistance Army.

We also visited the cultural center of Gulu where we learned about the Acholi people. The Acholi people are people of the north, and the Lord's Resistance Army has brought a great fear of destruction to their communities. Ninety percent of the people in the region have been displaced. They either have left the area or are in internally displaced camps. We have not yet been to a camp, but will visit one later today. I will perform on June 18th in Kitgum at one of the camps. It is amazing to meet these lovely people. They are determined, peace-loving people who will prevail.



The war has subsided over the past year, and there is hope that progress is being made to resolve the situation. There is no clear articulated reason for the war. We have met many professional Ugandans who are working on rebuilding the north and working toward peaceful means to end the conflict. Even when members of their group have been involved in killing their own people, they have rituals of forgiveness to repair relationships. While there is much work to do to repair the infrastructure of the north, relief and service organizations from all around the world are involved and assisting.

On June 17, 2006, I traveled to Kitgum with pianist Ken Rodgers, photographer Greg Ebersole and host Ricky Richard. The Uganda roads in the north are in great need of repair, so we moved slowly.



Travel Journal: Uganda (Continued)

When we arrived in Kitgum, after settling into our guesthouse, we began meeting significant leaders in the Kitgum community. We had a very good evening hearing the stories of the people who suffered from the war in the Kitgum area. Despite their suffering, they are people who are committed to improving the conditions in the area and to building peace. We were honored to meet them.

On the 18th of June, we attended a Sunday afternoon concert, which was held at the center of the city in a beautiful park. People walked to the concert from miles around. The local concert promoters did a very good job of getting the word out about our coming. As a result, we performed to over 10,000 people. Most of the people there came in from the internally displaced camps. Not only did we perform for them, the local people performed for us. We heard youth choirs and witnessed beautiful African dance. We were there for about three hours had a great time connecting with the people of the Kitgum region. It was beyond a doubt one of the highlights of our trip.



On the morning of the 19th, I attended a Christian secondary school in Kitgum. There I had a chance to talk with students and to sing for them, we also sang several songs together. These students live in the hope that the war will soon end. All of us have the responsibility to assist them in making their hopes come true. The people in this war-torn area represent the future of humankind.

From Kitgum, we traveled to the Pader District. This district was developed after the war was in full swing. People from visages and farms were relocated to this area.

We were there from June 19 to the morning of the 23rd. While there, we visited internally displaced camps and schools and met many new people. One of the highlights was going to the childhood home of Ricky Richard. It was the place where he was abducted as a young boy. Earlier on this trip he gave me the details about his first abduction. It was a painful story. It was a moving moment for us to see his childhood home and to hear about his hopes to return there and continue his family's legacy. We are hoping that the war will end soon so that he can go to back to his family home.

Another highlight was attending the graduation for the formerly abducted women who were training to be tailors. I had the honor of giving them their certificates and congratulating them. Also part of the afternoon was the laying of the cornerstone for the Anthony Brown Baritone Comprehensive School. The entire event took five hours with singing, dancing and speeches given by many local dignitaries. When I arrived, a group of young people sang a song in which they were welcoming me, their brother, back home. It was a moving moment.

I addressed the crowd before laying the cornerstone. I told them: "My ancestors left here approximately 400 years ago. They were sold or stolen and sentenced to a life of mistreatment where they were raped, beaten, and made to work against their will. I stand on their shoulders and have come full circle to represent them and to receive this honor."

The crowd broke out into applause after hearing these words. I will never forget that moment. I will have a long-term relationship with the people in the Pader District and with the Anthony Brown Baritone Comprehensive School. I hope to return there someday. I also want to assist them in raising money for the building of the school.

The people of Pader were gracious and Friends of Orphans did a wonderful job of planning activities that would help us understand the unique problems of the region.