

## GIRL FACT

A new report says of the estimated 300,000 child soldiers around the world, about 40 percent of them are girls. The girls are often front-line fighters or used as porters or cooks.

Many are sexually abused.

I AM AN  
EMOTIONAL  
CREATURE

### A TEENAGE GIRL'S GUIDE TO SURVIVING SEX SLAVERY

*Bukavu, Democratic Republic of the Congo*

I live in Bukavu, Democratic Republic of the Congo, but I think this guide applies to any girl anywhere in the world.

People ask me all the time how I survived. It wasn't that I was smarter or even stronger than anyone else. I didn't even know what I was doing. It was just that something inside me couldn't go along. My friends, they got taken at the same time as me. I don't think we will ever get them back.

RULE 1. GET OVER THAT GIRL THING: "THIS CAN'T BE  
HAPPENING TO ME"

When it happens, and trust me it happens to thousands of us, you will not believe it.

You will think, *These are just crazy soldiers fooling around. They must be bored or something. They couldn't be hurting me, grabbing my arms and legs all rough like this, throwing me into their truck.* Your brain will start telling you things. *They are old enough to be my*

*father. They know better than this.* This will be confusing. It will make you feel stupid. It will make you feel like what is happening is not really happening. It will make you will feel like you did something wrong.

I watched my best friends—Alisa, Esther, and Sowadi. We were on holiday. We took the boat together from Bukavu to Goma. We were joking around a lot on the lake—Lake Kivu. It's a really huge lake. It takes five hours to cross it. We were drinking Fantas and making fun of Esther's big crazy hair. We were going to Goma to swim and hang out. We went shopping. Sowadi bought these gold shoes. I remember thinking I wanted them too, but I didn't want her to think I was copying her.

As we walked out of the store and down this street, it didn't seem real. We were just shopping and now these crazy soldiers . . . that's why they didn't run. I wanted to run, but I didn't want to leave them. When we tried to refuse, that's when we got how serious it was. One of the soldiers, the real big one, started beating Alisa and she was screaming. My best friends were all screaming and crying.

I got very quiet. That's what I do. I wasn't going to let those soldiers know anything. That leads to

RULE 2. NEVER LOOK AT HIM WHEN HE IS RAPING YOU  
He will call your name in that grating, craving voice. He will beg you to look. He will turn your head with his big rough dirty hands. Never move your eyes to his. Close them if you have to. He is nothing. He isn't even there. He is a teeny tiny meaningless speck. He doesn't even exist.