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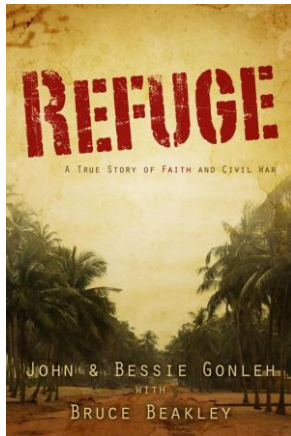
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Experience the Life of a Refugee Family *Tracing God's Hand When All Seems Lost*

“On the third day of the attack, I happened to be looking out my living room window when an army jeep drove right onto our front lawn. Rebels started piling out. Wide-eyed, I screamed, ‘Bessie, get the children and hide!’ Small bodies ran past me as Bessie yelled her orders. In just seconds, it was quiet again. I stood alone, watching. There was nothing I could do...”

--John Gonleh



Dallas/Ft. Worth, TX—It was Christmas Eve, 1989. The Gonleh family had just finished pulling out the decorations for the western-style tree that was shipped all the way from Norway to their comfortable home near Monrovia, the capital city of Liberia. Their celebration was cut short by a cryptic radio announcement by Liberian President Samuel Doe. “The country should pray,” he said. “Our nation has been attacked. We are at war. If you see anyone who looks like they don’t belong, you should report it to the authorities.” With those few words, the whole country was thrown into panic. In the ensuing chaos, the Gonleh home was burned to the ground. John Gonleh, along with 100 other men, was tortured and then gunned down in an open field. He would be the lone survivor of this mass execution.

In their new book, *Refuge*, John and Bessie Gonleh, together with their friend and co-author Bruce Beakley, share the unbelievable true story of their flight from their war-torn homeland to a new life for their family in America, a journey nearly twenty years in the making. As they recount the details of their harrowing escape, the tragedies and triumphs are strung together on a thread of faith.

The Gonlehs were devoted Christians, but the ravages of war and the loss of three of their children would push their faith to the breaking point. They battled hunger, disease, and the daily possibility of death at the hands of rebel soldiers—children armed with automatic weapons. Surprisingly, at one point during their journey Bessie became a mother figure to a group of these soldiers, who seemed for a moment more like Peter Pan’s lost boys than cold-blooded killers. John and Bessie’s belief in God’s provision sustained them in their most difficult times, but they were only human. Even as they witnessed great miracles, they struggled against crushing doubts—doubts so powerful that John, a Baptist minister, nearly succumbed to the temptation to become a murderer himself.

Refuge interprets the Gonlehs’ heartbreak with emotional and spiritual integrity. There is no neat, tidy resolution, no dishing out of platitudes or denial of harsh reality. “Our family has suffered much. Many times we don’t agree with what God allows to happen because it hurts us,

or those we love, and we can't understand His purpose. Those are difficult, painful times. But we believe the Bible," John emphasizes. "It says that for believers, all things—including good things, bad things, and even horrible things—work together for good, or God's best purpose, for every Christian. That's why we refuse to live in fear."

In *Refuge*, first-time author Bruce Beakley has crafted a masterpiece. Beakley communicates John and Bessie's experiences with awe and inspiration. "This book exists because of John and Bessie's faith, their dependence on invisible guidance. I think the whole world should hear it," he says. "From the very first page, I could visualize the scene in my mind's eye. My goal was simply to translate that vision to the reader."

Beakley has raised the bar for books of this genre. His evocative, precise language and attention to plot and setting depict both the beauty and suffering of African life with a cinematic flair. From the first page, he captures readers and thrusts them into the action. The Gonlehs spent months traveling through the Liberian bush with their six children, seeking refuge in tribal villages as they made their way to the border of Ivory Coast. Their youngest child died from a mysterious disease during the journey. They spent years in United Nations camps for displaced persons in both Ivory Coast and Guinea. One of their daughters was confirmed dead in an attack in Ivory Coast, and another has been missing since the same day. During their years as refugees, the Gonlehs were also blessed with the births of two more children. Readers will feel an overwhelming sense of relief as the story reaches its conclusion, finally reuniting the youngest Gonleh children with their parents in America.

This book holds a powerful appeal for a variety of audiences. For Christian readers, John and Bessie's choice, time and again, to praise the Lord and trust His purposes in the midst of their struggle will make for an unforgettable story. For those who desire a deeper understanding of current events and African culture, the book's vivid firsthand descriptions of civil war, child soldiers, the exodus of displaced people, and life in a United Nations refugee camp put a human face on the present crises in places like Uganda, Darfur, and other parts of Sudan. It is impossible to read this book and remain unchanged by it. Readers will never look at Africa—or life—in the same way again.

Refuge: A True Story of Faith and Civil War
by John & Bessie Gonleh with Bruce Beakley

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