**EMMA’S STORY – copied from The Global Teacher (Leeds DEC)**

**Story based on the original, as told by Emma Abiodun Macaulay, Kabala Town, Sierra Leone**

My name is Emma. This is my story. I starts when I was 5 years old and had just started school. I used to live with my Mum at Kabala Town, as part of the capital city of Sierra Leone. When war broke out in Freetown in May 1997, I had to go to another town in a different region. I was going to live with my Grandma and Grandpa.

My granny was a well-known midwife, a kind of nurse who gave health care services to the people of her town. In fact, her house was the clinic. The day before the rebel soldiers attacked Kabala, they visited the clinic and asked for treatment. Grandma, the midwife, asked them some questions to find out what was wrong with them but they refused to say anything. They looked around the place and then left.

Their unusual behaviour made Grandma and Grandpa suspicious and very anxious for our safety. They decided to leave the house the following morning and take cover at the doctor’s house. Later that day, the rebels returned to the house to ask for Grandma. When they did not get any reply they took all the valuables and set the house on fire. It was so dreadful for us all, especially Grandma.

Worse was to follow. The rebel soldiers found out that we had gone to hide in the doctor’s house and sent other soldiers after us. Grandpa wasted no time in deciding to break the fence wall at the back of the house and escaped with Grandma and me. We ran and hid in a hole when we found out that the rebels were after us. Grandma sprained both legs trying to run away and now she is in pain a lot of the time and cannot easily walk.

We had to travel partly by foot and partly by local transport to different areas of the country. We moved around for more than a year! Eventually we came to Coloma. Someone from a church, who was very kind, gave us a place to stay. Grandma could see that the people needed a clinic to come to when they had health problems. The church opened a clinic that was run by Grandma. With the money she earned from the clinic, Grandma was able to rent a house for us. I went to another primary school in the neighbourhood. We began to feel more secure but, our peace was cruelly shattered when we heard that our house at Kabala Town had also been burnt. We had hoped to return one day.

While I was living in Coloma, I leant four languages: French, Foulah, Mandingo and Susu. I had to, otherwise I wouldn’t have been able to talk to people! At last, in 2000, we returned home through the UNHCR programme. We were homeless but so glad to be back. A kind neighbour offered us somewhere to stay for a short time. Then, we moved yet again to another new environment on another side of town, In spite of all the upheavals, I continued my primary education and did very well in my exams. 300 marks out of 400. I still enjoy French and use the other languages now and then. It is odd, isn’t it, if it were not for the war, I would not have learned those languages. Most of my classmates cannot speak any of them. The only thing that’s not good is I have to go a long way to school every day and spend more money on transport than we can afford, as my father in unemployed.

It might sound odd, but having some awful experiences fleeing from the rebels, living and feeling like a refugee, having to be brave and make so many new starts has made me a stronger person. I feel secure at the moment because the security police patrol our area at night. I am not sure how I’ll feel when they leave.

Many children were displaced and lost when fighting broke out in Freetown because their schools were located far away from their homes. Their parents could not get to them quickly enough. Governments need to think about these things when they work out which schools to send children to.

With all the upset of the war and needing to run for safety, we lost touch with my mother, I don’t know where she is. I hope she is safe and that we will need soon.

I would like to say thank you to all those who are helping to promote peace in my country and in the world.