



## **P.O.V.'s "LUMO"**

By Bent-Jorgen Perlmutter and Nelson Walker III

Tuesday, Sept. 18, 2007 at 10 p.m. on PBS (Check local listings)

### **Filmmakers' Statement**

The Democratic Republic of Congo experiences the equivalent of "a tsunami every six months," in the words of U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees António Guterres. Every day there, 1,200 people die from conflict-related causes. With an estimated 4 million deaths in the last decade, the conflict and its ongoing aftermath represent the greatest loss of life in any war since World War II.

Getting a grasp on the Congo — its wars, political machinations, and bewildering ethnic rivalries — is difficult, perhaps contributing to the relative obscurity of the humanitarian disaster on the world stage. We only began to understand it ourselves when we spent the fall of 2004 in the frontier town of Goma. We were volunteers making medical training videos for HEAL Africa Hospital, an NGO (non-government agency) whose directors were our generous hosts.

Congo's wealth of beauty and its tragic history could occupy any filmmaker for a thousand years, but our story was the one that we were compelled to choose because of its searing immediacy. On each day as we filmed at the hospital, flatbed trucks filled with women arrived from the rural highlands. The passengers were all victims of systematic rape and torture, and all suffered from a debilitating condition known as traumatic fistula. Many were our age and became our friends. Yet the world seemed to know nothing about it.

We returned to Congo in the fall of 2005 eager to put a human face on this situation that we helplessly knew was ongoing, something we found that interviews alone could not do. We decided that shooting one "character" in a vérité style could personalize the disaster for a viewer in the same way that it had become personal for us.

Back at HEAL Africa we found our subject. Lumo was at the center of a group of girls battling the tedium of waiting for treatment by playing jacks, catching grasshoppers, and singing hymns. When we asked whether anyone would like to share their story with us, it was Lumo who was the first to step forward, cementing her reputation for brashness among the patients. Spending some time with Lumo, we began to look up to her — not because of the magnitude of her disaster, but because of the warm and mischievous spirit she retained despite that experience.

She is a profoundly normal young woman in many ways. Her hopes of marriage and a family were dashed by the injuries her attackers inflicted, but in her struggle to recover she distinguished herself with courage, as demonstrated by her will to return again to her village, a place where renegade militias continue to roam.

We are convinced that the extreme nature of the hardships faced by people in places like the DRC, Darfur, and such conflict zones around the world need not overwhelm our ability to empathize, as the "objective" point of view expressed in news reports often does. We believe that documentary can allow us to see human suffering more clearly, and hope that with empathy will come renewed efforts to bring such suffering to an end.

— Bent-Jorgen Perlmutter, Nelson Walker III

