

Putting Life's Challenges in Perspective

Every now and then when life's issues seem to be overwhelming it is important to put things into perspective. One young man helps me do that. His name is Junior.

By age 5 Junior had lost his father and by age 13, his mother had also died from AIDS and he was very sick himself. He became the first patient at a Children's AIDS Fund International supported HIV clinic in Kampala, Uganda. I met him when he handed me flowers during the clinic's opening ceremony.

Once diagnosed, Junior responded well to HIV treatment. Because Junior was without an adult guardian, a concerned American who met him and learned his story put a substantial amount of money in the bank to help with Junior's care and needs. In less than a year the money was gone and Junior was left alone and destitute by the greedy relatives who had used it for themselves.

Despite this very personal hurt and disappointment Junior continued in school, studied hard and looked forward to attending the largest local university. Through the generosity of donors who knew Junior's story he was able to enroll and decided to major in social work.

Just into his second year, at age 19, Junior's health became extremely fragile. He was diagnosed with kidney failure, had to begin dialysis and drop his studies. That was three years ago. Today, Junior is still on dialysis twice a week, hoping that one day there will be money for a transplant that might give him a better life. He works as he is physically able to contribute to his treatment.

Describing his circumstances, Junior wrote: Sometimes I sit

down, not under a tree or shade but anywhere and think to myself. Looking back at the things I have gone through, first my parents dying when I was young, then having HIV and now kidney failure. All I can say is that life has not been fair to me in very many ways. But still at the end of the day I kneel down and say: "Thank you God for the gift of life you have given me."

Next time life is overwhelming, think about Junior and the millions of other children orphaned by HIV around the world. And be thankful.