

Asylum: A journey of faith and hope

Last year, more than 20,000 people came to the United States seeking asylum due to threat of persecution.

The Seruyange's fled from their home country of Uganda in search of safety for their two young children, but when they arrived found themselves alone in San Bernardino, having left behind their home, their family and their friends.



After a serendipitous encounter with The Salvation Army, the Seruyange's journey to freedom and safety brought them to a new hope and a new family that would change the course of their lives for the better.

Below is a transcript of the video edited for readability.

Steven Seruyange: When I left Uganda with my family, the first experience was like being blindfolded and being thrown in a different place. You had your own house, a very good job, a very nice car. But now, you have nothing.

Florence Seruyange: I had my own business. It was a good business. It was making money for me. I miss all that, and I also miss being with my family. I have a very big family back home.

Steven: Uganda is a beautiful country. You got family. You just drive ten minutes, and you're at your dad's and mom's house. It's different as compared to what it is here. So, the reason we left is mainly for the security of our lives.

That day was really dramatic. We didn't take anything with us: just a few clothes, our passports, eight hundred dollars. There we go.

Florence: From the stories we've heard about America, the movies we've watched, I thought everyone in America is rich. Life is going to be so smooth, you know we are going to start working immediately. We had no idea of what we would be facing.

Steven: That night was not easy because a lot of thoughts were running in our minds. We didn't have any money for dinner. You don't know where you are going to sleep. This guy had connected us to someone who had a house [the] in San Fernando Valley, but we're going to rent a room in that house.

So, about fifteen people that was sleeping in the house, fifteen in a two-bedroom house.

In Uganda, I was a banker for over ten years, trading treasury bills and bonds. Memories come up to your own house, own car. Now, you have nothing.

Florence: The place where we stayed, it was horrible. Each time they had the kids playing, they would be like, “No, no, no. We don’t want that noise. Take them out.” They made life very uncomfortable for the kids. I was so mad. I remember one time Skyla asking me, “But mommy, are we really in America?” Each night, we’re like, “Now, what are we doing tomorrow? What next?” You know we don’t know what’s next in our lives.

Captain Terry Masango: My name is Captain Terry Masango.

Captain Rutendo Masango: My name is Rutendo Masango, and I’m married to him. We’ve been married for twenty years. So, originally we were born and raised in Zimbabwe, Africa. I’m a third-generation Salvationist, and he is fifth generation. So we grew up going to a Salvation Army church.

Captain Terry: Things are way more relaxed back home in terms of structure. You always know when the service starts.

But you never quite know when it ends.

So, in June of 2018, I got a text from a friend we knew from [the] San Fernando Valley Corps. The friend said, “Oh, there’s this African couple that just arrived, would love for you to meet them.”

Florence: A week after we had come, we started looking for a church, and we came across The Salvation Army. When they said there are some captains that are from Africa, I got so excited.

Steven: They introduced us to the Masangos. The world calmed us like they had sinners for ten years.

Captain Terry: We went to lunch with them and just had a wonderful time with them, but also really captured by their story when they were explaining how they got here.

Captain Rutendo: We took them home that night. I was just shocked by their living condition.

Steven: We just kept on praying to God. I got so stressed. We were just living one day at a time.

Florence: The month was almost ending, and we didn’t have any money to pay for the next month. They said we have to do something. We are going to introduce you guys to our church family. We’re going to work out something for you guys. They took us to the food bank at The Salvation Army, and they told us, “Just get whatever you need.”

Steven: Captain Masango invited us to come for service here at the corps.

Florence: We were overwhelmed by the love.

Steven: People from the core gave us everything that you can think about. Towards the end of June, they came with the truck to pick us up. They drove us to Pasadena to the church apartment, and they told us, “You know what, just hang in here as we figure out what’s next.” I was like, “wow.”

You know, as a father, you have to provide for your family. But, I didn’t have the ability to provide. When I was not working, they provided for us every single thing.

Florence: Steven, he would volunteer every day at the food bank. It felt like a job, you know.

Steven: Skylar used to ask me like, “Oh, so daddy, which bank do you work in?” So, I took him to the food bank. I told him, “You know what? This is the bank I work.”

Interviewer: What’s your name?

Skylar Seruyange: Skylar Seruyange.

Interviewer: How old are you?

Skylar: Six years old.

Interviewer: Where are you from?

Skylar: Uganda.

Florence: We’ve never bought clothes for our children. All the clothes they have, they have been given. And still, we still get a lot of help from people here from our church family, a lot of help.

We had to wait for our paperwork to come through. Then, we started looking for employment, and then we got our own apartment. It wasn’t very easy, you know, leaving. This is the place I’ve known all my life, and then I have to leave. That one week, when we had just come, was very hard for us. I didn’t have that happy face that I have right now, but I was taken by surprise. Our kids have brownies here, American grannies, American aunties, American uncles. You know we feel like we have a family.

Captain Terry: This is a couple that was successful. Yet, because of the problems they were facing in Uganda, they ran away with the clothes on their backs. We were just compelled by God’s love to help fellow human beings, and Pasadena has become home because of what they’ve experienced through the community.

Steven: I think the most important thing is God. It is God because God, through the holy spirit, brings people in your life.

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