Living With the Noise

I was twelve the first time I learned what a gunshot sounds like when it isn’t in a movie. It doesn’t crack. It thuds, low and close, and then your whole body goes still before your mind catches up. In Bentiu, that sound became something like weather. You didn’t ask if it would come. You asked when, from which direction, and whether you’d have time to grab your little sister’s hand before you ran.

People who haven’t lived through this always want to talk about the visible wounds, the burned homes, the empty markets, the lines of people walking with everything they own on their heads. But nobody warns you about the quieter injury, the one that doesn’t show up in a clinic. It’s the way your chest tightens at the sound of a motorbike backfiring. It’s how you flinch at a slammed door years later, in a place that’s supposed to be safe. It’s not knowing how to just rest, because some part of you is always listening for what’s coming next.

I remember nights in the Protection of Civilians site, lying on a mat listening to my mother pretend to sleep. I could tell she wasn’t by her breathing. We were both awake, both afraid, both saying nothing, because what was there to say? Fear like that doesn’t need words. It just sits in the room with you, patient, the way an uninvited guest sits.

Growing up this way teaches you to survive, but it doesn’t teach you how to feel safe again once the guns quiet down. That’s the part people forget. The conflict ends on paper, in an agreement signed somewhere far away, but it doesn’t end in the body. It doesn’t end in the way you still count exits in a room, or the way certain smells like smoke, diesel, something burning can pull you back to a moment you thought you’d buried.

I lost friends. Not to old age, not to illness, but to bullets, to displacement, to the slow erosion of hope that makes some boys pick up guns just to feel like they have some control over a life that keeps taking things from them. I understand that impulse even as it frightens me. When you’ve been powerless so many times, power, any power, starts to look like relief.

What kept me from disappearing into all of it wasn’t a program or a pamphlet. It was small, human things. An aunt who still made tea in the mornings like the world hadn’t ended. A teacher who kept holding class under a tree even when the school building was gone. Friends who laughed with me, not despite what we’d seen, but almost in defiance of it, because laughing meant we were still here.

I am still learning what healing looks like. I don’t think it means forgetting. I think it means learning how to put the listening down, to hear a sound and let it be only a sound.

Story by M.K

Revision #1
Created 2 July 2026 22:26:14 by ForYouPage .Org
Updated 10 July 2026 23:02:59 by ForYouPage .Org