

Irene



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Her childhood was fragmented by war, and her body was torn apart by disease. But Irene refused to let her circumstances dictate her life.

Irene was born as her nation was nearing the beginning of a 14-year civil war. The 1980s were a tumultuous time in Liberia, as momentum gathered for the 1989 start of full-fledged war in the country. Her family moved to neighboring Cote d'Ivoire in 1992, fleeing the unrest in Liberia. They left ten years later and returned to a Liberia still at war, when the fighting spread to Cote d'Ivoire.

And, when she was three, Irene developed a condition called noma, a bacterial infection that eats away tissue. Irene's face never fully developed, damage was done inside her mouth and nose, and scars covered her face. She could never confidently smile, because the noma stole most of her teeth, as well.

Now 23 years old, she doesn't remember a life outside this reality. But she is working to craft a future that isn't limited by it.

Irene received surgery onboard the Mercy Ship to correct much of the damage the noma did. Surgeons reconnected her gum to the inside of her mouth and rebuilt parts of her face that were harmed by the disease. And—as the final piece—in February, Irene received new teeth.

She has an ambitious goal for her life, a dream to help people whose lives are affected by sickness, just as hers has been. She has a compassion in her that was built, in part, by the years of ridicule and pain she has endured: *"I feel for people. I love people. I don't like to see people being disappointed or downhearted because I know what it means, I know what it is. I care for people and I love to be around people, so I want to be a help to people. I want to stretch my hands to people. If God gives me the means, I will do that."*

Irene's dream is to serve her country as a medical professional. She is currently in her first year at the University of Liberia, where she is studying biology. She plans to become a nurse—or even a doctor, if finances allow. She dreams, too, of receiving a scholarship to go overseas to complete her schooling. To Irene, nothing seems impossible.

"God has shown his mercy to me through the Mercy Ship. I know for sure that He's a God who never fails."