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“Never again will there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not live out his years; the one who dies at a hundred will be thought a mere child; the one who fails to reach a hundred will be considered accursed. They will build houses and dwell in them; they will plant vineyards and eat their fruit. No longer will they build houses and others live in them, or plant and others eat. For as the days of a tree, so will be the days of my people; my chosen ones will long enjoy the work of their hands. They will not labor in vain, nor will they bear children doomed to misfortune; for they will be a people blessed by the Lord, they and their descendants with them.”

Isaiah 65:20-23

Mama Goma gave birth to baby Mervielle, French for “Marvel, or Wonder”, in 1999. At that time, the second civil war was just beginning to reach the Equateur region. A stormy evening that August, Mama Goma had been in labor for more than seven hours at home, because it was far too dangerous to venture out to the clinic amidst the fighting. After this long labor with no anesthesia, Mama Goma and her husband decided they had to call a nurse to come to help them in their home. They weren’t sure if Mama Goma or the baby were going to make it. The phone network was down, yet they called and called again to get through to the nurse. They finally reached him, Praise God! After explaining the emergency situation, the nurse gave all the advice he could over the phone before he broke the news – “I cannot come to your home, it is too dangerous for me to leave. God be with you.” This was their last hope. Mama Goma was sure that this would be the end of her, her baby, or them both. She prayed that God would spare their lives, and help them find a way out of this terrible mess.

By the grace of God and a sliver of hope, Mama Goma gave birth to a healthy baby girl that night, and her own life was spared. The answer to one prayer led to requests for many others. Fighting in their neighborhood increased and their family was forced to flee to the jungle, where they lived for six months without decent shelter, eating fruit and bugs to survive, and all the while caring for a newborn.

Fast forward 14 years later, Mervielle is one of the brightest kids in her neighborhood with potential of being a transformational leader in her community. She has been raised to value herself as a girl, and she knows that she is just as capable as the boys in her class. Her dream is to help orphaned children go to school and receive the education they deserve. Her community is peaceful now, and she has no memories of the time of war her family lived through.

Hope was that August night. Hope is Mama Goma not giving up or abandoning her newborn child to save the rest of her children as they fled to the jungle. Hope is that ray of light that was barely visible in those months, where every mother in Gemena wondered if there could be any future for their children.

And now after many years of peace, and life starting to come back to the area, hope continues to grow. Maybe, just maybe people in this community can see their children continue on to University. And hope beyond all hope, they might one day find a job and have financial security for themselves and their own families.

Let hope grow.