

## My Name is Kita *by Marilyn Reeves*

My name is Kita. I am 14. I live in Mali in the valley of the Niger River. My people are called the Bambara.

Each day I walk through the fields to the nearby farms to see if there is work. My mother is sick and has no husband so we are poor. We do not own land, so I work in the fields of my neighbors. Some days I pick ears of maize, other days I help to hang the leaves of tobacco on racks to dry. Sometimes I help gather eggs and feed the chickens. I do not get money for this work, but most days the farmers will give me vegetables or grain to put in my basket which I carry on my head as I walk back home. This food I prepare for my Mother who cannot work. She has a sickness called AIDS. I also take care of my little brother Kutu, who is four. Some days I take him with me to the fields and some days he stays with our Grandmother. My brother Mishu no longer lives with us. He is off fighting in the war that never ends. So it is up to me to feed the family.

When I walk to the farms I do not walk on the roads, or the big boys will taunt me. Sometimes they grab ahold of me and laugh while they take turns hurting me in that place which always hurts since the men made the deep cuts that left me bleeding and in great pain. So I try to hide in the ditch when the big boys walk by. I am afraid of the snakes, but I am more afraid of the boys and their laughter.

There is a school down the road near the village where Mishu learned to read. They do not allow girls to go to school there, but Mishu taught me how to read. He also taught me numbers so I can count up to 20. There is no reason for girls to learn, the elders say, because girls will marry and have children. They will work in the fields and do the cooking and take care of the family. No need for school.

I one time saw a beautiful American woman who came to visit our village. She talked with the elders about letting girls go to the school. She said she would provide books and paper and pencils if we would be allowed to go to school to learn. She said in America women go to school so that they can learn to be doctors and teachers and business women. I do not know what means "business woman" but if I could go to school perhaps I would learn what that means.

Sometimes I dream that the beautiful American woman comes back and invites me to America, so I can go to school and learn to be a doctor. Then I could come back home and help my people with their sickness and maybe save my mother from the AIDS.

That is what I dream about while I am gathering grain in the fields or gathering eggs in my neighbor's henhouse. I dream about school. I dream about going to America.