

# Perspectives

# Removing a Ugandan girl's scars of war

**Carolyn Davis** is a member of the Editorial Board

When Jennifer Anyayo was 9, rebels set fire to her home in northern Uganda — with her inside. There was the smell of burning flesh as fire melted her face, her left arm, her chest, disfiguring her life. Now she is 15, in the operating room of a U.S. hospital, and that very same smell could signal hope and healing.

She is in a pre-op room at Fairfax Hospital, INOVA Health Systems, in Fairfax, Va., wearing a gown, and a surgical cap decorated with pictures of American flags. Jennifer awaits surgery for her burns.

Her journey started in the crowded and dirty displacement camp at Kitgum, where I met her in late 2004. From there, she moved to Gulu, a safer town, where she lives with Abitimo Odongkara, Uganda native and school director, Philadelphia homeowner, and one of the world's humble heroes.

A lot of children and adults in northern Uganda call Odongkara *mama* because of the nurturing she has given them amid violence, disease and want.

Even while she's here with Jennifer in the United States, Odongkara is working her magic in northern Uganda:

She is trying to move the rest of Jennifer's family from the camp in Kitgum to Gulu. That way, the family can be together and Jennifer's siblings can attend Odongkara's school.

On Dec. 24, Jennifer and Odongkara arrived in Philadelphia. The next week, Jennifer was examined by Craig Dufresne, a reconstructive and plastic surgeon in the Washington area. He, the hospital, and the other medical personnel all are donating their services.

It's now a few weeks later, and Jennifer is at this sparkling hospital in metro Washington — a place most Ugandans could not imagine.

Medical staff appear every few minutes. Odongkara not only is Jennifer's medical guardian in the United States but also her interpreter. The 71-year-old woman patiently explains who everyone is and what is about to happen.

Jennifer, just wanting the surgery to begin, rolls onto her stomach and buries her scarred face in the bed.

Finally, at about noon, anesthesiologist Robert Mesrobian leads her stretcher into the operating room. Odongkara accompanies Jennifer, dabs with a tissue at tears in the girl's eyes. As Jennifer drifts off, a shaken Odongkara leaves.

Monitors start beeping; Jennifer is turned over on

### All Join Hands

All Join Hands is an Editorial Board series on violence against children



### ONLINE EXTRA

To see photographs by Inquirer staffer Michael Wirtz of the surgery or read installments in the series, go to [go.philly.com/jennifer](http://go.philly.com/jennifer)



Jennifer Anyayo rests in a hospital bed in Fairfax, Va., next to a photo of her mother, Regina Adong. The 15-year-old girl will undergo a series of operations to reconstruct parts of her face.

MICHAEL S. WIRTZ / Inquirer Staff Photographer

her stomach, and overhead lights are focused on where Dufresne will make an incision on her scalp.

Dufresne works with steady hands. Skin is moved until there is room to insert a crescent-shaped instrument

called a tissue expander between her scalp and skull. He inserts two more under scarred skin on her chest. During outpatient visits in forthcoming weeks, Dufresne will slowly fill those balloons with saline solution to stretch

the skin.

In a corner of the room, I watch, and feel a surge of anger over the war in northern Uganda. I reserve my greatest disgust for the Lord's Resistance Army, the rebels who set the fire that

maimed Jennifer.

After almost two hours of working on her scalp, the surgical team turns Jennifer onto her back. Dufresne and the assistant resident surgeon make the incision on her chest, remove overgrown scars all over her body, and use a cauterizing pen on her skin. That is what causes the burning smell.

About four hours after they began, the doctors are finished. Much of what they have done is preparation for a more dramatic operation after there is enough new skin to move down Jennifer's hairline and reconstruct parts of her face. But even the immediate result pleases Odongkara and should make Jennifer smile after she awakens, despite the postsurgery pain. Dufresne has been able to pull down some skin near Jennifer's eyes by making small incisions and tightening ligaments. In what seems like only a few moments, he has enabled Jennifer's eyelids to close over most of her eyes — for the first time in six years.

That improvement is small compared to all of Jennifer's wounds. But it is a wondrous achievement, and one that begins to offset the destruction of war.

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# Is abortion-rights lobby ignoring Casey at its peril?

**JONATHAN LAST** from C1 the foremost abortion-rights lobby. But if you go to NARAL's Web site, you'll find not a word about Bob Casey. Not one blessed word. I called NARAL a couple of times to ask what the group thinks of Casey's candidacy. No one called back.

NARAL never tires of warning about the dangers of crazed antiabortion radicals such as Sam Alito, John Roberts and Rick Santorum. So maybe they're only bothered by pro-life Republicans. If so, then they don't understand the existential threat Casey poses to their position.

The National Organization for Women, on the other hand, has been jolted into hysterics by Casey. Last March, when Sen. Charles Schumer and Gov. Rendell were making room for Casey in the Senate race by shunting Barbara Hafer aside, NOW posted a petition condemning the Democrats for selling out their abortion-rights supporters. In the space of a few paragraphs, NOW claimed both that running an antiabortion candidate against Santorum "will result in sure defeat" and that "if we don't stop this losing strategy now, [Democrats will] use it again and again."

Ignore the ironies. What worries the people at NOW isn't that running a pro-life Democrat "will result in sure defeat." They're scared it might be a winning strategy. Because if pro-life candidates are the path to electoral success, Democrats will follow it as far as it leads.

So what do you do if you're an abortion-rights activist? You have three choices: Endorse Casey, oppose Casey, or keep quiet and hope he loses.

Kim Gandy, the president of NOW, says the first option is off the table: "No chance whatsoever that we would ever endorse [Casey] — under any circumstances."

As for active opposition,

Gandy says NOW's political action wing will meet later this month to decide whether to go to the barricades, but she explains that the decision will be a question of where the organization's resources can best be used. Translation: Maybe it will make a perfunctory demonstration against Casey, but don't count on it.

This would leave abortion-rights supporters sitting on the sidelines and hoping for a Santorum comeback. Which is the worst thing they could do to help their cause.

Interest Group Entropy is a strange thing: As groups become culturally irrelevant, they don't lose the ability to raise money or call attention to themselves. But as they become caricatures of their former selves, they lose the power to influence undecided voters and engage in the battlefield of ideas. This might not matter to, say, the NAACP or the Christian Coalition, because they've already successfully imposed their agendas.

But the question of what to do with abortion is still very much open in America. Science is constantly changing our understanding of life in the womb. The number of couples looking to adopt is ever increasing. Some liberal intellectuals, such as Benjamin Wittes, have begun to admit that *Roe v. Wade* was a poorly wrought decision. At some point in the medium-term future, the question of abortion might well be sent back to the states, and the two sides of the abortion debate may have to wage a serious intellectual fight in front of voters.

If that time eventually comes, and if abortion-rights activists have given Bob Casey a pass, they will have mortgaged their credibility to partisan politics. In the long run, they'll be unhappy with the trade.

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**What's an abortion-rights activist to do? There are three choices: Back Casey, oppose Casey, or keep quiet and hope he loses.**

# The wrong committee for investigating wiretaps

**KEVIN FERRIS** from C1 Senate floor, he said. (Why? So the nominee cannot defend himself? Keeps emotional spouses out of camera range?) Sen. Ted Kennedy (D., Mass.) says the confirmation process is too political. (Pause to let readers' laughter subside.)

With luck, the Alitos can tune this committee out after its expected vote on his nomination Tuesday. With NSA hearings scheduled to start next month, however, the shrill partisanship will ramp up again.

Of course, there *should* be hearings on the NSA affair. Even the President agrees. As Michael Franc, vice president of the Heritage Foundation, argues, the country is now putting in place the tools it will need to fight Islamic fascism for the long term, just as, in the late 1940s, Harry Truman and a bipartisan coalition created the institutions that would see us through the Cold War. Hearings, Franc says, could help set the agenda.

"Go back and look at the 9/11 commission hearings," he says. "There was good incisive questioning on big concerns that needed to be resolved by policymakers. ... In an open democracy, we need as many of those moments as possible to help understand what's at stake. Not just sound bites, but legitimate constitutional issues."

There's the rub. Will we get sound bites or incisive questioning from the Judiciary Committee? Or will witnesses merely be props in the back-and-forth between Democrats attacking the administration and Republicans defending it? Such antics risk ignoring the main issue.

"This is really about penetrating the communications of the enemy in a war where intelligence is more important than in any war we've ever had," says Andrew McCarthy, who prosecuted suspects in the first World Trade Center bombing. "We can't conquer their territory. We can't blockade them. Our only effective offense is to gather information to try to find out what they'll hit next and try to prevent that."

That's the sobering starting point for any hearings on the NSA wiretaps. And there are a host of questions to raise, many of which cannot be answered in an open, made-for-TV hearing:

How exactly does the NSA wiretapping work? Is it necessary? Does it help keep al-Qaeda in check? Is it preventing attacks, saving

American lives? Are we sure it's not targeting political opponents? And if it is necessary, how does the program continue? Does the president alone have the authority or does the Federal Intelligence Surveillance Act

(FISA), passed in the 1970s, need to be updated to fight a 21st-century war?

To answer these questions, the country needs leaders more focused on wartime enemies than political foes.

And right now there's good reason to suspect that the senators who grilled Alito are not up to the job.

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