



RETHINKING GOOD INTENTIONS

Written and performed by Nancy Edwards

ABOUT THE PLAY:

"Rethinking Good Intentions" is a compelling account of a Canadian community health nurse who volunteered with CUSO. In this solo performance, Nancy transports us to the rural villages of Sierra Leone, West Africa in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Village experiences rattled her cultural preconceptions, provoked her notions of social privilege, and forever deepened her global connections. Nancy's heart-warming and heart-breaking stories about public health work in the villages will make you laugh and cry. This new play is full of humanity.

Photo (left):

Women and children waiting to be seen at an antenatal and under-five clinic in a health centre in Bumpe Chiefdom, Sierra Leone (circa 1981).

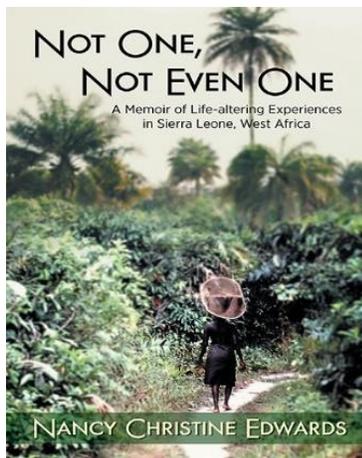
About the Playwright

I call myself a recovering academic writer. In my retirement, I've turned to stories that connect with hearts and minds. I wrap audiences in experiences of hardship, survival, and resilience that are buffered by humour, empathy, and hopefulness. I think the right blend of humour and poignancy shifts mindsets. My artistic goal is to bridge cultural divides and explore the bonds of our common humanity through story-telling. I'm thrilled to be the solo performer in my first play.

About the Play:

Rethinking Good Intentions is largely based on my memoir, which was released by Friesen Press in 2022. My love of theatre, my involvement in story-telling groups, and my respect for the strong oral traditions of the Mende people in Sierra Leone inspired me to write the play. I am performing *Rethinking Good Intentions* in five Fringe Festivals this summer (2024).

Information about my memoir, my writing journey, and links to resources about Sierra Leone are available on my website (www.nancyedwards.ca).



Gratitude

Many thanks to those who have provided guidance on my journey of life, public health work, and writing. A debt of gratitude to Flora Le (@sadec1965), an award-winning story-teller, for her excellent mentorship as I wrote and prepared to perform this play.

The Setting

Most of the stories take place in the rural villages of Bumpe Chiefdom. This was the catchment area of Serabu Hospital, a 124-bed hospital run by Irish Sisters. Serabu is a village of 2,000 people located about 30 miles from Bo (capital of Sierra Leone's Southern Province).

Scenes

Arriving

Easing in and messing up

Field work introductions

Field work realities

Transportation bottlenecks

Health messaging

Traditional birth attendants

Newborn tetanus

Colonial roots and slavery

Leaving Sierra Leone

Recounting stories

Main Characters in Order of “Appearance”

Nancy Edwards: Nursing instructor and CUSO volunteer.

Sister Hilary: Irish religious sister, physician in charge of primary health care program at Serabu Hospital.

Nancy & Kevin Reimer: Peace Corps volunteers.

Paul: Senior Sierra Leonean community health nurse working at Serabu Hospital.

*Joseph: Local driver for Serabu Hospital.

*Village and Paramount Chiefs.

*Traditional Birth Attendants (Granny Midwives) including Isatu and Kadiatu.

Sister Mary: Irish religious sister, Serabu Hospital’s administrator.

Mohammed, Edward, Samuel, and Bockarie: Sierra Leonean community health nursing students.

*Speak only Mende and Krio.

Examples of Mende and Krio words and phrases used in the play:

Mende (language of the Mende people, the second largest tribe in Sierra Leone):

Pomwei – foreigner

Bundu (also called *Sande*) – women’s secret society

Sowe – traditional birth attendant who is a leader (head) in the *Bundu* Society

Marcleate – injection (includes immunizations)

Krio (English-based Creole):

Pikin – child/children

Ow deh go deh go? – How are things going?

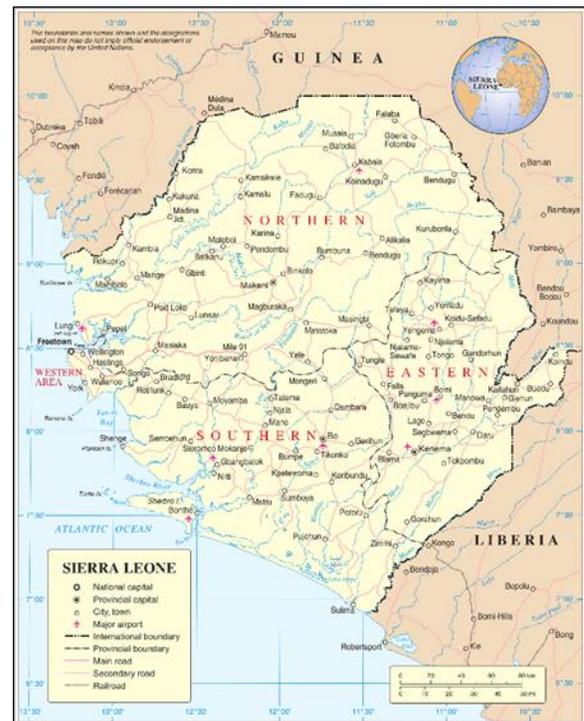
Belly woman – pregnant woman

Cuso International

CUSO (Canadian University Services Overseas) was established in 1961. The organization’s vision was for “a more connected world; a world where the social constraints people are born into wouldn’t dictate the entirety of their life.”

The organization is now called Cuso International. Since its inception, over 14,000 have volunteered in 100 countries.

Sierra Leone



Map No 3902 Rev. 6, September 2014, UNITED NATIONS. Reproduced with permission.

Colonial History of Sierra Leone

Sierra Leone is a small country of eight million people on the west coast of Africa. Freetown and its surrounds became a British crown colony in 1808. The protectorate (the area that is Sierra Leone today) was established in 1896. The country gained its independence in 1961. Freetown is the capital.

Freetown was known as the “Athens of West Africa”. Fourah Bay College was the seat of learning in colonial West Africa. The College was affiliated with Durham University in England (1876-1967). “Fourah Bay College pioneered the emergence of the earliest generations of West Africa's educated elite.”

(<https://www.cedol.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/Professor-Jonas-Redwood-Sawyerr-article.pdf>).

Ties to Canada

In 1783, emancipated slaves who had fought with the British in the American War of Independence, migrated to Nova Scotia where they had been promised land. They settled throughout Nova Scotia; the largest settlement was in Birchtown. Conditions were harsh. In 1792, 1,200 of the freed slaves in Birchtown returned to the African continent, naming and settling in Freetown.

Sierra Leone Today

Education

Sierra Leone's *Radical Inclusion Legislation* was passed in 2023. This Act aims to make primary and secondary education inclusive and accessible to all children. Dr. David Moinina Sengh (now Chief Minister of

Sierra Leone) has written about these efforts in “Radical Inclusion: Seven Steps to Help You Create a More Just Workplace, Home, and World” (2023).

Health

In 2007, five years after Sierra Leone emerged from the civil war, it was estimated that 1 in 5 newborns died of tetanus.

(<https://reliefweb.int/report/sierra-leone/scaling-child-survival-sierra-leone>).

A major initiative to eliminate newborn tetanus was launched in 2011. In 2020, it was estimated that 95% of newborns in Sierra Leone had protection from tetanus at birth.

(https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/71/wr/mm7111a2.htm#F1_down)

In 2012, legislation was passed that forbids Traditional Birth Attendants (TBAs) from independently attending deliveries outside of a clinical setting. It is estimated that 80-90% of deliveries in the country now take place in health care facilities. New roles for TBAs have been developed such as assisting with prenatal care.

Maternal mortality rates (MMR) in Sierra Leone remain very high but there have been some encouraging improvements over the last few years. In 2023, Sierra Leone's MMR was estimated to be 413 per 100,000 (Project Hope), a decline from 717 per 100,000 in 2019 (UNFPA, 2019). Some of Sierra Leone's current efforts to decrease maternal, newborn and child mortality rates are described here:

www.afro.who.int/countries/sierra-leone

Making a Donation to Support Work in Sierra Leone

I'm often asked about making donations to support work in Sierra Leone.

For those who live in Canada, consider a donation to CODE. This non-governmental organization has been engaged in literacy and education work for 65 years.

CODE helped support a small library of nursing and community health textbooks at Serabu Hospital when I lived in Sierra Leone. At that time, CODE was shipping and distributing textbooks and other learning materials to 85 lower-income countries.

CODE promotes every child's right to read. An example of their current work in fragile contexts including Sierra Leone is provided on their website: <https://code.ngo/tlfc/>



Scan to make
your one-time gift
online, or visit
code.ngo/donate

Note: All proceeds from sales of *Not One, Not Even One: A Memoir of Life-altering Experiences in Sierra Leone, West Africa* are donated to organizations that support the education of women and girls in lower-income countries.

www.nancyedwards.ca

For those living in the United Kingdom, consider making a donation to the Friends of Nixon Memorial Hospital Fund. Serabu Hospital (Serabu, Southern Province) and Nixon Memorial Hospital (Segbwema, Eastern Province) jointly offered the State Enrolled Community Health Nurse Training Program from the mid-1970s until the 1990s. I had the honour of teaching students from both institutions. Serabu Hospital was destroyed during Sierra Leone's civil war. The hospital was eventually rebuilt by a German organization but it does not offer a formal training program for nurses. Nixon Memorial Hospital was also damaged during the civil war. They have continued to advance the education of nurses. I had the pleasure of meeting several trustees from the Nixon Memorial Hospital Fund when I was in England in the fall of 2023.

This link (www.friendsofnixon.org) will direct you to their main website page, where there are details about their current priorities.

Donations can also be made to Friends of Nixon Memorial Hospital via their on-line giving platform using the QR code below:

