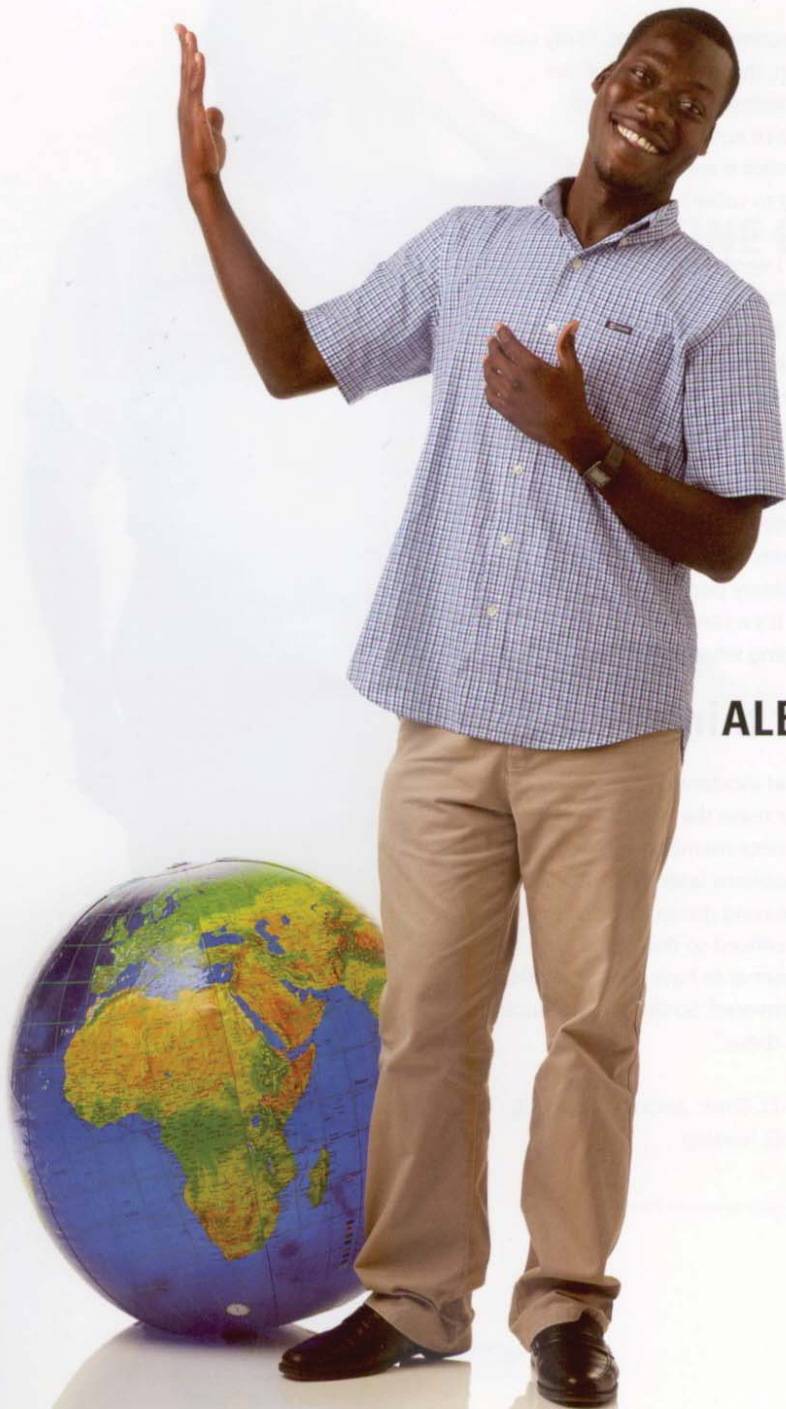


attitude shifter



class of 2011

I come from the small town of Gulu. It's in the northern part of Uganda. The district is popularly known for insurgency because that region of the country experienced war for a very long time.

During my years in Gulu University, I was interested in bringing about change in our community because so many children were being abducted by the rebels. When they escaped from the rebels and returned back home, some of them were stigmatized by people. When I was in the university, one of my commitments was that I needed to participate in changing people's attitudes toward these children. I was affected directly because my elder sister was abducted by the rebels. She spent close to nine years with the rebels, and she came back home. So you know, when you have been affected directly, your attitude toward the formerly abducted children also changes.

We came together — some university folks and I and some

from captivity with two kids out of forced rape, and my mother is keeping the kids right now. My sister is back in school studying nursing. She wants to become a doctor. We are so proud of her. The fact that she was able to return back home and start studying, it's really something amazing.

I like it in Uganda because that's where I will be able to effect any change. But I also like the opportunity to study here because I know I'm getting the best education to cause change back in my country.

I am one person who believes that however hard I work, I should also have fun. Fun is part and parcel of my life. Fun is part and parcel of my motivation. That's what re-energizes me. If I work very hard on campus, and I feel like my morale is low, I just go downtown and dance and listen to music, get together with friends and basically have fun. I've been having a lot of fun. I have also been doing a lot of hard work. Even in Uganda, that

ALEX OKELLO OUMA will change Uganda

community youth members — and formed a coalition that we called the Youth Coalition for Peace. Our main goal was to go out there to the community and tell people that, 'Hey, these are our children. They were abducted against their will. They were forced by the rebels to commit atrocities that they did not want to, so there is no need to stigmatize them. There's every need to welcome them back home and make them feel like part of the family and let them find a way of getting back their life.'

My sister escaped from the rebels in 2004. She returned back

is my lifestyle — work hard but have fun.

I am being sponsored as a Rotary Ambassadorial Scholar. When I was coming here, it was members of Rotary who were there to receive me at the airport. I am very grateful to them. It's like another home away from home. You feel you have everything that you need.

I have a very strong feeling to get back to my community and help. I believe that the only way to transform any community is through education."

— Alex Ouma '11, MA,
Peace and Justice Studies

(AS TOLD TO KELLY KNUFKEN)