

Ombeni's New Home

How could Ombeni make friends if he couldn't speak their language?

By Amber Healey
(Based on a true story)

"I was a stranger, and ye took me in" (Matthew 25:35).

Ombeni frowned down at his lunch tray. The food at his new school was way too sweet. He wished he could just eat his mom's homemade rice and beans.

Ombeni and his family had only lived in the United States for a few weeks. Their home country was too dangerous to live in, so they had to move to the USA as refugees. Moving was hard. Getting used to his new school was hard too.

Ombeni found an empty spot near a group of boys and sat down. They all turned to look at him. One boy said something, but Ombeni couldn't understand him. He didn't know much English yet.

Ombeni tried to say something back. *"Jambo,"* he said. ("Hello.")

The boy looked confused. He frowned at Ombeni and turned away. Ombeni felt like curling up into a little ball, but he just sat quietly at the end of the table. Sometimes it felt like he was on an alien planet in this new school.

When school was finally over, Ombeni hurried and zipped up his coat. Back home, he never needed a coat, no matter what time of year it was. But here it was cold in the winter. The other children put on fuzzy gloves and hats, but Ombeni didn't have any of those things.

Ombeni could see his breath in little white puffs of air as he walked. He started to run so he could get home faster. He burst through the front door and almost ran into Mama.

JAMBO



"Ombeni! Punguza mwendo!"

she said. ("Slow down!")

"Sorry, Mama," he said, shivering.

Ombeni sat down and tried to warm up while his mom cooked dinner.

After a few minutes, Ombeni couldn't stay quiet anymore. "Mama, I don't want to go back to school! It's scary and lonely, and I can't make any friends. I miss my friends back home."

Mama stopped stirring and knelt down next to Ombeni. He quickly wiped away his tears. He didn't want Mama to see how sad he was.

"I know things are hard right now." Mama gave him a warm hug. "But they will get easier."

Ombeni looked away. "But how are things supposed to get easier if I can't understand anyone?"

Mama frowned. Ombeni could tell she was thinking hard. "Remember when we were in the refugee camp?" she asked. "Whenever I felt really lonely, I would look for people I could help. It always made me feel better."

Ombeni nodded. He remembered how Mama would always find people who came to the camp alone and show them where to go.

Mama smiled. "And think about Jesus! People were often mean to Him. But He always looked for people to help." She wiped another tear from Ombeni's face. "Sometimes when we're sad, the best thing we can do to help ourselves is look for ways to help other people."

Ombeni nodded. That sounded like a good idea. He wanted to be like Jesus.

The next day at lunch, Ombeni looked for someone to help. Lots of kids were sitting with big groups of people. Then he noticed a girl who was sitting at a table by herself.

He walked over to her and set his tray down. He waved and said, *"Jambo!"*

"Hi," she said.

Ombeni smiled big. The girl smiled back. Then they quietly ate their food together.

Ombeni felt happy. Things at this new school were still going to be hard. But he was glad to know there were people here he could help. ●

The author lives in Utah, USA.

