OUT OF EXILE

THE ABDUCTED AND DISPLACED PEOPLE OF SUDAN

EDITED BY

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WITH ADDITIONAL INTERVIEWS AND A FOREWORD BY

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AND AN AFTERWORD BY

EMMANUEL JAL

VOICE OF WITNESS

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McSWEENEY'S BOOKS
SAN FRANCISCO

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ISBN (Hardcover): 978-1-934781-13-5
ISBN (Paperback): 978-1-934781-28-9

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Foreword

THE AMPLIFICATION OF SELDOM-HEARD VOICES

by Dave Eggers and Valentino Achak Deng

This is the fourth book in the Voice of Witness series, but it is the first book that the series contemplated. Giving voice to the victims of the civil wars in Sudan was the very reason that the Voice of Witness was conceived.

It started in 2003, when we traveled together to Valentino's hometown of Marial Bai. It was the first time Valentino had been back home since he fled, as a young boy, almost seventeen years earlier. The town had survived many attacks by militias and the Government of Sudan both before Valentino fled, and in the years of war that remained. When we arrived in Marial Bai, there had been a year or so of ceasefire in place, and the town was beginning to recover.

During our time in the region, we sat down with three women who had been abducted by *murahaleen* raiders during the war, and had been brought to the North, where they were made to be slaves, serving as household servants and concubines. Save the Children and other

agencies had recently helped rescue these women—and thousands like them—and had begun returning all such abductees (women, men, children) to their homes in Marial Bai and throughout South Sudan.

For the women we interviewed, the return was extremely difficult. The women spoke little or no Dinka—the language of Marial Bai and much of the South—because they had been abducted at a very young age and were made to speak Arabic. They knew little of the beliefs, lifestyle, or customs of the South. And most significantly, two of the three women we spoke to had left children in the North, with the men who had enslaved and impregnated them.[1] When they spoke of their struggles since coming back, they wept, and thus the interviews were fraught and relatively brief.

After we spoke to these women, we were determined that their voices should be heard. Though we were both aware of the practice of slavery during the war between the SPLA and the Government of Sudan, we had not read extensive reports or narratives of such women's lives. So while we worked on telling Valentino's story—in what became *What Is the What*—we also made plans for a book of oral histories of the lives of Sudanese women during the war. The Voice of Witness series was conceived as a forum where victims of gross human rights abuses could tell their stories not in brief sound bites, but from beginning to end, encompassing the full scope of their humanity. We wanted to make sure that a reader knew the narrators not just as victims or statistics, but as fully human. In this way a reader has a far better chance at empathy, and is more likely to be outraged when the narrators' basic rights are trampled upon. When it comes to the lives of the Sudanese women we met and you'll meet in this book, a bit more outrage is surely warranted.

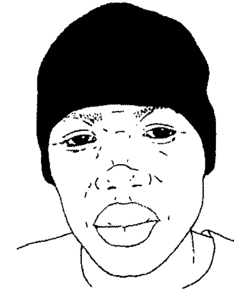
A few years after our trip to Marial Bai, *What Is the What* was published, and we embarked on many months of touring throughout the United States, speaking to audiences about the book and the continuing struggles of the people of South Sudan. When we were invited by Samantha Power to speak at the Carr Center for Human Rights Policy in Cambridge, we met a man named Craig Walzer. He was studying for degrees at Harvard Law School and the Kennedy School of Government, and had spent the previous summer in Khartoum and the surrounding areas, using much of that time talking to the refugees who were living in the camps near the city. We were very interested in the stories that Craig told, and when he told us that he would be returning to Khartoum the following summer, the plan for *Out of Exile* took shape. Craig would conduct interviews with refugees in Khartoum, Cairo, Nairobi, and Kakuma, and we would interview women in Marial Bai the next time we traveled there. In this way, our original plan to record the voices of women who had suffered silently during the war gave way to a broader plan, to give voice to women, men, and children who had unwillingly become victims of war—displaced, endangered, exploited, enslaved, tortured.

[1] One of our narrators, Achol Mayuol, provides a different outcome to this injustice.

The result is this book, *Out of Exile*. We had no idea that this chance meeting with Craig would produce a book of such scope and depth. He was able to foster such a warm and open atmosphere with the men and women he interviewed that the resulting narratives are stunning; each has novelistic scope and unparalleled candor. We feel that the narratives in *Out of Exile* are essential reading for anyone interested in contemporary issues in Sudan, and in the lives of refugees throughout Africa and indeed the world. When you read these stories, you will be moved, you will be enraged, and, we hope, you will never read a headline about Darfur or South Sudan, or indeed any member of the Sudanese diaspora, the same way again. There are as many stories, indelible and startling and tragic and inspiring, as there are Sudanese. As there are people. Let us keep our ears open to them.

— *Valentino Achak Deng, Marial Bai, June 2008*

— *Dave Eggers, San Francisco, June 2008*



MATHOK AGUEK

AGE: *23*
TRIBE: *Dinka*
BIRTHPLACE: *Aeyid, South Sudan*
INTERVIEWED IN: *Cairo, Egypt*

WE LIVE ANGRY LIVES

It took three months to find a member of a Sudanese street gang willing to tell his story. Mathok arrived to be interviewed with only fifteen minutes of advance notice. He spoke Arabic late into the night and left just as discreetly. During the three hours of interviewing, no subject was off-limits.

My name is Mathok. My father's name is Aguek. My family is from the village of Aeyid, in Southern Sudan. I was born in Gogrial, in Southern Sudan, on February 1, 1985. I am Dinka.

I was five years old when my family left the South to escape the war. I only remember cows, plants, huts, and lots of empty space, with mountains and forests. I only know that it was too dangerous for us. I was too young to remember anything else.

When we left our home in Gogrial, we didn't go directly to Khartoum. We stayed in the city of Tonj for a few years and then in the city of Wau for a few years—both cities are in the South. I was about twelve when we finally got to Khartoum. We left my mother in Wau, and she stayed there for five years, until my father brought her to rejoin us in Khartoum.

My mother is a housewife. My father was an officer in the Suda-

nese army—many southern men worked for the government, because it was a good job. My father is married to another woman as well as my mother. I was always closer with my father. He is a calm man. He is not taken by anger easily, but when he gets angry, he's very tough. There were always many children in his house—I have nine brothers and five sisters—and each of us had problems. He used to be so patient, but things would pile up, and then maybe he would explode over a small mistake. The house worked well, though. When troubles happened, we would solve them together.

In Khartoum, I didn't start school until I was about twelve years old. I hardly went to school because I worked so much. During the vacations, especially, I would work so much to prepare for the next school session, to get money for clothes and registration. I would work in the markets, sometimes selling water, sometimes selling plastic bags.

I loved to play basketball, so I would try to buy shorts and T-shirts. I have always loved basketball. When I was young, everyone used to play football, but I preferred throwing and catching the ball. Then I heard about basketball, and that was it. Basketball is my sport. I play the position of playmaker—I think you call it point guard in America. Manute Bol was a Sudanese man who played basketball in America, and he's my step-uncle.

My mother was very sick for a long time. She had problems with her heart, so she was very weak. After some time in Khartoum, my father saved enough money for my mother's surgery. I remember they had to put tubes in her heart. It was known to be a very difficult and serious surgery. When the surgery succeeded, and my mother recovered, there was momentous happiness for all. She still takes medications, but my mother is doing well.

The years in Khartoum after my mother had surgery were happy years, really. My father decided to have another child. Everyone was nervous, because my mother was still weak, but she delivered a

healthy baby boy for my father. They named the baby Motoum—in our language it means something like "experiment."

COMING TO CAIRO

My story of coming to Cairo begins when I failed my secondary school exams. I failed because of money, really—money controls my life. I had to work so much that I hardly went to school. When I failed the exams, it was the end of school for me. I stopped playing basketball, too, and just started working in the markets.

Things got better when I started selling cell phones. I started selling batteries, used phones, and phone covers. I would buy everything second-hand and then sell it. I'd buy something for thirty Sudanese pounds (US$15) and then sell it for thirty-five. I'd take the extra five for my pocket. I did well in this business. Sometimes I could make US$100 in a day. I started buying new clothes, going to new places. I had more freedom with this money.

With the cell phone business, I saved up some money, and I got this idea to come to Cairo and find another chance at education. That was my whole plan—come to Cairo, start school. I told my parents, and they refused. I just kept insisting and insisting. It was all I would speak about. After some time, they said, "Okay, if it is your wish, go." I got some more cell phones and sold them fast, and soon I had enough money to go to Egypt.

I got a visa with the help of someone I knew at the market, a guy who also worked at the passport office. He and my father helped get me out of my military service, too. I came to Cairo on the normal route, to Halfa, then a boat to Aswan and a bus to Cairo. I arrived in Cairo in October 2005. I was twenty years old.

I had this idea that everything would be okay in Egypt. The people in Khartoum who had been to Egypt said that life there was good. I heard I might also find a chance to go to Canada or the U.S.,

and that made me eager to come. I was also told that when you walk in the street, you might hear some abusive words, but I should just ignore it. That's exactly what happened here. I kept hearing bad words—*samara, hunga bunga, chokolata*—and I ignored it. But it did make me feel uncomfortable.

For the first two weeks in Cairo, I stayed with a friend I knew from our neighborhood in Khartoum. In Cairo, he shared a flat with several other Sudanese guys. Then my aunt came to the city, and she asked me to come and stay with her. I didn't really want to do it, but I took my bags and went to her flat.

As soon as I arrived in Cairo, I discovered that the situation was bad. I went straight to one of the schools near the bus station. They asked me for my certificates, but I hadn't brought any papers with me from Sudan. Someone told me to go to the American University in Cairo, because they have classes for refugees. The problem was that it was far from home, and it would be too expensive to get transportation there every day.

Within a week I got a job in a plastics company. They produced cleaning tools, and my job was to put together pieces of mops and brooms. Selling cell phones in Khartoum was a much better job. It gave me more freedom, and more money too. In Cairo, I would just go to work in the morning, and then spend the night in the apartment.

I only kept the plastics job for a few months before I dropped it.

I arrived in Cairo when the protests in Mustafa Mahmoud had already started. I heard about it as soon as I arrived. After a few months in the city, I went to sit with the demonstrators in the park.

I went because I heard that Sudanese were sitting there and asking for more assistance. By the time I got to the park it was winter, and it was cold. People wore blankets. I had my blanket with me, and I just sat down. Most of the day we would just sit, but I would help to get water and cook food, and I would help to keep order. There was a group of us young men that would help deal with conflicts and

troubles within the community of protesters. For example, someone would be sitting in a certain place inside the park, and he would move for a while and then come back, and he would find someone else sitting in his place. They would start to argue, and we would come and intervene. We would make sure nobody fought.

I wasn't there at the end of the protests. I was at home. Friends were calling me from the site, telling me that police were surrounding the place. I was too afraid to go there.

In the end, the protests did not help me at all. They helped nobody. They only created more hate between the city of Cairo and the Sudanese people here. I have no refugee registration card here in Cairo—I am not a protected refugee. And I am not a real refugee, I know. I came to Cairo by choice. But my family had to leave our village in Southern Sudan because of the war. In the past, our people lived in conflict, but I recognize that now the time is different. I just came to Cairo for opportunity. I understand why I am not a protected refugee, but I still think people like me deserve assistance here. This city is a difficult place for people like me.

LOST IN A DIFFERENT WAY

I will tell you about the Lost Boys. The Lost Boys are a Sudanese street gang, like the Outlaws, and the B.I.G. gang. Sometimes you can see them on the streets in Sudanese neighborhoods. My neighborhood of Abbassia is a Lost Boys neighborhood. People used to attack and steal from the Sudanese in Abbassia, so the young men agreed to get together to form a group to protect themselves. They got the name from stories about the Sudanese boys in Kenya who went to the U.S. The Lost Boys in Cairo are lost in a different way.

Until last year, I would just stand with them on the streets sometimes and talk to them. Most of them have no work or school, but some of them are good people. When I was at parties in other

neighborhoods, I found people would treat me with hostility, with anger, like I was their enemy. They would say, "You are living in Abbassia, which means you are one of the Lost Boys." I knew there was sometimes violence against enemy gangs and even just enemy neighborhoods.

Last summer they had a free English starter's course at the American University, and guys from the gangs went to the classes. I went along with them. Sometimes when I left the class, there would be guys from the Outlaws gang meeting me in the street, asking me for information concerning the Lost Boys. I kept telling them that I didn't know anything, that I wasn't with them. But I kept getting harassed, and they would chase me away. Eventually I quit the course, because I was too scared to keep going.

The threats got worse and worse, even in Abbassia, when another gang would come to fight. I saw people attacked and injured in front of me, in my own neighborhood. I knew that the Outlaws were sending spies to hang around Abbassia and check where the Lost Boys were standing that day. Those spies saw me with the Lost Boys, and so everyone thought I was a Lost Boy.

It was in 2007 that I finally joined the Lost Boys myself. I didn't even have to say anything—I just stood with them for longer and longer, and they started to know I was with them. Then I started taking swords, and I joined their attacks. With the Lost Boys, I have protection.

NOT JUST A FIGHT

What's going on between these gangs in not just a fight. The reason behind it all is that all of us boys had ambitions and things we wanted to do, but we failed to do them. Some of us want good work, but we can't find it. Some of us would like to study, but we can't find a chance. When you feel that you have nothing to do, and you spend

the whole day doing nothing... that's the reason why all of this is happening.

We stand on the streets and speak with each other about normal things, like girls, music, and basketball. We'll make plans about attacks. Sometimes, after that, we'll start an attack. We attack people from other neighborhoods. Sometimes while we are standing on our streets, we face attacks from the other gangs. When they come for us, we have to run and bring our hidden weapons. When one gang attacks another, some get injured, and others run away.

When we attack, we usually attack everyone who's out in the street. I attack people, too, but I don't like to injure them. I don't cut with my sword. I like slapping with the side of my sword. Sometimes I beat people with my hands. We attack gang members and other people; we attack Sudanese and Egyptians, also. We attack everyone.

When we attack, my only intention is to take the other gang's weapons. I don't steal people's things, but some of the other guys do. I'm against the idea of stealing. My calling is for the fighting and the weapons.

I've only had two incidents with the police. The first was to report my lost passport, but nobody ever found it. The second time was when a group of Sudanese attacked some Nigerians. The police came to our neighborhood and took us, but it was a mistake; we had nothing to do with it. They realized quickly that we were not the people they wanted. I spoke nicely to them and explained everything. They realized I'm not a troublemaker, and they released me even before we reached the station. But many other guys in the Lost Boys have been arrested, and we have all been chased before.

EVEN IF WE STOPPED FIGHTING

The Sudanese community in Cairo tells us to stop what we are doing. The Lost Boys did stop fighting for a while, but the other gangs did

not. When the Outlaws attacked us again, even the parents and older brothers understood that we needed to retaliate. They understood that even if we stopped fighting, the other side would not stop.

The difference between the Outlaws and the Lost Boys is that the Outlaws get money from the NCP.[1] During the protests at Mustafa Mahmoud, NCP agents from the embassy took some boys and got them drunk, then sent them back to the protests to start fights and make a mess so it would look bad for all the Sudanese community there. The NCP wanted this, because the people in the protests all opposed NCP rule. Those boys who got drunk with the NCP became the Outlaws.

If you ask the Outlaws, they will say that we are the ones who take money from the NCP. But you can just sit with each of our groups. Sit with us, sit with them, and speak about this. Their lies will come out.

We only get help from friends who left for abroad and have jobs in places like Canada or Australia. Sometimes we call them and say we are facing financial troubles, and they send us some money.

Some people in Cairo have tried to help us. There was a guy named Jacob—he was the one who helped start the English classes at the American University last year and asked the gang members to come. Unfortunately, it was too difficult to bring the Outlaws and Lost Boys in the same place to study, so the gang members didn't really come. I went, because at that time I still wasn't a member. Jacob started some smaller classes in Abbassia, too. People thought the classes were good, and our people, the Dinka, need these classes so much. But the classes stopped. I don't know why.

We still have parties for the gang. We play dirty music—crazy, fast music, and rap. I prefer the slower songs, though. It calms you. When you dance slow with a girl, you can dance quietly, and that

[1] National Congress Party. The ruling party of the Sudanese government.

is what I like best. I like to dance to the R&B singer named Joe—that's his name, just Joe. I like Celine Dion, Mariah Carey, R. Kelly, and Bob Marley. Until recently, I had a girlfriend named Abuk. She moved back to Sudan. Right now I don't see any good girls, but there are lots of girls who hang out with the Lost Boys. Maybe there will be a new woman coming to me.

I wear what Lost Boys always wear: a white T-shirt, because white matches with everything, and then a basketball jersey on top. I'm wearing black pants, and basketball shoes. I'm wearing my baseball cap because I just braided my hair, but the braids are still too short. I'm not ready to show it to people on the street. My style is hip-hop. I see singers dressing like this on the television and on the internet, and I want to dress like them. In the Lost Boys, we all dress like this.

I don't drink. Many of the guys in the Lost Boys do drink. Some drink a lot, and others drink with respect. Some smoke weed. I don't like drinking. I never drink at all. Nobody makes that a problem for me.

My life is better since I joined the Lost Boys. With them, I don't feel bored anymore. I feel like they are like my brothers. The thing that bothers me is that now there is peace in Sudan, but here in Cairo we are fighting. It's hard to believe. You know, the truth is we are all the same. We are Sudanese after all. I mean, Outlaws and Lost Boys are from the same tribes! Why do we fight each other here? Why don't we live in peace like before, without fear of each other?

We need a ceasefire among the gangs. We need people who will sit down with each party, listen to their problems and difficulties and start to solve them, separately. Solve Lost Boys' problems and difficulties. Solve Outlaws problems and difficulties. And then gradually join us together or bring us together in a meeting to mediate between us. We live angry lives. If nobody intervenes, the violence will continue.

One problem is that the Outlaws leader and the Lost Boys leader

are both in prison right now. We have secondary leaders in charge right now. Really, these days we just listen to anyone with a good idea about what to do or how to attack. With so many leaders in prison, or leaving Cairo, the gangs have now deteriorated. People say our gang is more deteriorated than the Outlaws. But I say, the good thing is that in the Lost Boys we have people with brave hearts. When we go on an attack, we run forward and we don't look back. The Outlaws know this, and that's why they are still afraid of the Lost Boys' attacks.

SOMETHING BAD IS GOING TO HAPPEN

On June 20, 2007, the refugee community of Cairo met at the American University for World Refugee Day. During the event, members of the Lost Boys hired vans and ambushed several members of the Outlaws on the street outside of the university campus. Maliah Bekam, age twenty-four, was killed when he was struck in the head with a machete. Several other people were injured.

I was at the American University Refugee Day. It was a celebration for the whole refugee community in Cairo, people from all countries. Everyone knew about the Sudanese gangs, though. They had metal detectors at the entrance to the event, and many security men to keep peace inside the event. The celebration was in a courtyard on the university campus. There were big buildings all around, and then a field in the middle where we had the celebrations.

Most of the gang members at the celebration were from the Outlaws. For a while, I was the only one around from the Lost Boys, and it was scary, since they were many, and I was only one. I heard threatening words. Guys were saying, "We are ready to kill you." They said it to Lost Boys, and even just regular people from our neighborhood of Abbassia. The tensions were getting high, and some people started to leave, but I remained.

One of the leaders of the Outlaws, a guy named Harvey, came up to me. He knows me, and he is afraid of me. He said to me, "Mathok, something bad is going to happen." He said that the Lost Boys should not be there. I said to him, "Whatever will happen will happen." I ignored him, and when guys came up to me making the hand-signs of the Outlaws, I ignored them, too. Some of the Outlaws starting dancing in a group, and one from the group took off his shirt, which had a photo of Tupac on it. He put the Tupac shirt on the ground, and they all started to dance around it. Tupac is like a hero to the Outlaws—they take their name from Tupac's rap group.

While the Outlaws were dancing around the shirt, one of the Lost Boys just broke into the group and starting stomping on the shirt, on Tupac's picture. A fight was about to start. All the Lost Boys ran to the south side of the field. I found out later that a group of Lost Boys had made a plan to send some of their younger members to the field and then to lure the Outlaws outside the event.

At that point I was far from the entrance, so I didn't see much of what happened. I saw people starting to leave, though, and I started running myself. I ran out of the celebration to the street, and I saw the trap. The leaders and elders from the Lost Boys were out there with swords. There was a fight. A boy from the Outlaws was slashed on the head, and he was killed. Another was stabbed in the back but he lived.

I ran away as fast as I could. In front of me, one of the Lost Boys was running, holding a sword with blood on it. I ran up to him and yelled at him to throw his weapon. He threw it. We were being chased by police, but we were too fast, and the officer just stopped, took the sword from the ground, and turned back. The guy running with me was confused, so some of us took care of him and we all got back home safely.

In the days afterwards, many of my friends were arrested. They are still in prison, and we do not know what will happen to them.

I AM NOT PROUD

I know that everyone will say we are not refugees, that we are criminals killing each other. Everyone will say we have no principles and no goals. You will say, "Refugees are people escaping from unprotected places and seeking protection. But look at you—facing problems and then making problems as well!" You will say to me, "You ask for a solution for your problem, and then you start another problem!" And when you say that, I will agree with you.

I tell you, I am not proud of being in the Lost Boys. But I was compelled to join, because it was my only chance for security. The Egyptian police do nothing for us. They only help if you pay them bribes. Besides, they have enough problems with their own citizens, and that is their priority. I didn't join the Lost Boys because I wanted to be like them, or wanted to fight like them, or because I admired the fame. As I have told you, I simply faced problems, and I could not go anywhere else.

Look at my life: Last month I worked and managed to pay my rent, but this month I don't know if I will have enough. My new job is at an advertising company. I'm there during the day, cleaning the place and making tea for the other workers. It's an okay job, because the people at the office are respectable, and they respect me. But I only make five hundred Egyptian pounds (US$90) in a month. It's not enough for eating and paying the rent.

All my family is still in Sudan. From time to time I speak to them on the telephone, and we speak of normal things. Last time I called, I heard that my second youngest brother had just started the second grade. When I left Sudan, he was just learning to walk. One of my sisters passed her exams and is going to study to be a doctor. Two other brothers are already at university.

My parents don't know I'm in a gang. They would be shocked. I would not dare to tell them about my life here.

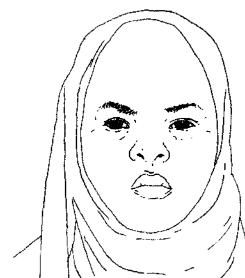
I have plans for the future: I want to travel either to Canada or Australia to study. Last year I applied for resettlement to Australia, but I was rejected. I will keep trying though, because I won't go back to Sudan. I can't return to the same place, with no education, with nothing.

I would like to study English. When my father studied in Southern Sudan, all his education was in English. I'd like to learn like that. I like reading philosophy, too. My cousin here has a lot of good books of philosophy. I like reading lessons about life, about how to simplify things, how to understand the world, and to express yourself, and to communicate.

I don't expect anyone to feel sorry for me. But people should understand that some of us need a hand to help us. I have no education, no money, no security. Without a hand to help me, I cannot be pulled up. This is the message that is important. I feel great sadness. I expected to do everything in Cairo, and I have achieved nothing.

I hope my story brings someone to advise me and support me, to help me educate myself, or find a better place. Maybe someone could help me improve my basketball. I play basketball at the big Italian church in Zamalek. We have a team called New Sudan, and we play in the league. It has nothing to do with the gangs. Everyone on our team is at about the same level of skill, but we need better players to come and help us improve our play. Maybe basketball teams in other countries can learn about our players and help us. I would love to play on the national team of my country someday.

{In October, 2007—six weeks after our interview—Mathok Aguek was killed in a fight between members of the Lost Boys and the Outlaws. He is buried in Khartoum, Sudan.}



NADIA EL-KAREEM

AGE: *18*
TRIBE: *Masalit*
BIRTHPLACE: *Greda, Darfur*
INTERVIEWED IN: *Cairo, Egypt*

LIFE, DEATH, THERE'S NO BIG DIFFERENCE

The outside of Nadia's building is dilapidated, with cement crumbling and bricks scattered in the stairwell. But inside is a clean, sparse, sunlit apartment. Nadia served cups of Sprite and spoke of the destruction of her village, the loss of her family, and her struggles to make a life in Egypt in the three years since. With her two-year-old daughter Sima rolling around quietly beside her on the couch, Nadia insisted that she wanted nothing other than to return to Darfur and to return now, no matter the danger. On the day of this interview, she was in the middle of negotiating a compromise with her husband. They would go back to Sudan, but to the capital city of Khartoum instead of Darfur. Nadia paused throughout her story to ask advice on the most efficient way to get back to her country. She wanted out of Egypt.

My name is Nadia el-Kareem, and I was born on March 7, 1990. My tribe is the Masalit. I was born in Greda, a village in Darfur. I do not know where in Darfur. I have no education, and I don't know north, south, east, or west. I know my village is close to the town of Nyala. It's a small village of normal people. People go to their jobs and then come home again.

My father would go out to the farm and then come back to his house to stay with his children. It was not his own farm. It belonged to an old man I saw only once in my life. My father was not an educated man.

My mother was just a housewife. She had to cook, and she had to take care of her kids. Sometimes she took the cows out to eat grass. She was smiley, she chatted a lot with people, and she hugged a lot.

I don't know where my father is or where my mother is, but on my way to Egypt I met a lady who said she knew my parents. She told me, "Your father and mother died." I have two sisters and people have told me they are also dead. I have one brother. I saw him die.

I had a normal life like any girl in Darfur. I would help the cows and goats get food and water. I would clean the house and help my mother cook. I was happy. People who can stay with their parents should be happy. My cousin Muna was my best friend. We didn't really play together, but we would do chores around the house together, and when we finished we would sleep. Since the conflict, I have no idea where Muna is either.

That is all I can tell you about my childhood. The experiences I have had now are enough to make me forget everything about my childhood.

THE VOICE OF GUNS

It was 2003 or 2004. I was not yet fourteen. My father was coming from the farm, and my mother was outside with the cows. I was cleaning the cows' pen. My mother came back from the field and she yelled to me, "Did you finish?" because she wanted to get the cows inside. At the same time, my father was coming back from the farm. My mother got the cows inside the pen and closed the door. My mother and I went outside together to greet my father. My brother and sisters were inside the house.

Three or four men came, wearing something around their heads. You could only see their eyes. They were armed. They were running on foot and they were holding guns. I don't know if they meant to shoot us, but they did shoot another man and his wife who were our neighbors. The armed men were speaking, but I was scared and didn't hear them. I didn't understand what they were saying. My parents told me I needed to run. They called my sisters and told them to run.

I had heard of armed people coming and shooting before. I had heard the voice of guns many times, but I had never seen anything like this before.

I saw the men shoot children from the village. A boy was playing. They shot him also. I don't know why. All of us just ran away. I was just thinking about how to run away.

It was a messy moment. My father was holding his work tools and running. We were running very fast, and we met another group coming from the opposite direction. It was another group of people fleeing the place. Everyone was confused and I don't know how, but this was when I lost my mother and father. My brother, Mohammed, took my hand, and we started running with the new group of people. We ran away to a quiet place. We tried to hide. I was trying to hide myself, and my brother was watching the area to see if people were coming to attack us.

Two or three people showed up. They looked the same, with covered heads and covered arms. Mohammed told me to hide behind a tree. They didn't see me. I hid myself well. It was a big tree and I made myself small. When they moved to one side of the tree, I moved too to hide myself. Mohammed kept watching. Then they shot my brother from the back, and they ran away. Two shots. Then they ran away.

Mohammed was bleeding. I tried to wake him up, but he didn't move. I tried to hear his breathing—nothing. I tried to make him

talk—nothing. So I moved. I ran. I kept crying, running, and crying and running.

I ran for maybe fifteen minutes. I met a man named Mahmoud and his brother. I hadn't seen them before. Mahmoud said he was also from Greda. He asked me, "Why are you crying?" I told him that my brother had died. They asked me, "How do you know he's dead? Maybe he's still living." I explained to them that I tried to hear him breathing and he didn't move.

We started running together. We ran for about two hours. We kept running, and they held me sometimes to keep me running. Mahmoud's brother said we would run to Nyala. It was my first time ever leaving my village.

Mahmoud is not short, not tall, not fat. Darker skin. A very normal, kind person. He's maybe thirty years old. He was very confused and scared like me. They were all afraid like me.

In Nyala, we arrived at the central station, and I met a woman I had seen during the attack. I asked her, "You were with us when the people attacked?" She said yes, and I asked her about my parents and about my sisters. The woman said to me, "I saw that your parents and one of your sisters had been shot."

THEY SAID IT WAS NOT TO BE

Mahmoud's brother had some money to take us on a lorry from Nyala to Omdurman. We just jumped on the lorry and they drove for so long. I remember I was very thirsty. I was traumatized and I just kept crying, but I didn't feel anything really. I can't even remember how long they drove. I just remember getting out of the lorry at Omdurman. Mahmoud and his brother woke me up and said, "We have arrived. We have to get outside."

I saw a big city outside: stores for cold drinks, many people walking in the street, and many cars. The first thing I said was, "Where

are we now?" They told me, "You are in Omdurman now." I asked him, "What shall we do here? I need my parents."

We went to live in a neighborhood called Dar-es-Salaam. Mahmoud's brother arranged the place. It was a room made out of mud with a small yard in front of it. Soon we had to leave though. I remember that one of the neighbors told Mahmoud and his brother, "You have to leave this place." Mahmoud went to the head of the neighborhood committee and spoke with him. I don't know the reason, but they advised him to leave the place. So we did. We went to live in a neighborhood called Khartoum Bahri. Mahmoud and his brother knew someone there, and that person helped get them a passport. They planned to go to Egypt.

I refused to go with them. I said, "What's my relation to you?" Also, it's illegal to travel with two men, to sleep with them in a house, and so on. All of this would cause trouble with the people and the government. In Sudan it's prohibited for an unmarried woman to travel with two men who are not relatives. They were definitely going, though. So I said, "Let's do what we need to do for this to be legal." Mahmoud said, "You are worried what the people will say about you for traveling with strange men." I said, "I don't care about the people. It's just not the right thing to do." Mahmoud said he would solve it. He said, "If you won't walk with strangers, then let us marry." Mahmoud was a normal age for Sudanese men to marry, but I had never heard of a girl my age, a thirteen-year-old girl, getting married.

We met a Sudanese man in the neighborhood and explained our story to him, and he agreed to act as my father for the ceremony. Then we went to a man responsible for making a marriage contract, and I was married to Mahmoud. The man gave Mahmoud a copy of the contract, and he gave a copy to me. But we stayed as normal. Mahmoud and his brother slept in one place, and I slept in a different place.

It was just in order to help me flee the country. Then they could put my name on Mahmoud's passport as his wife. If his passport says

I'm his wife, then it's okay; there's no problem for me to travel or to be with him.

In total, we were in Khartoum and Omdurman for less than a month. Of course, I was still scared. Sometimes at night I couldn't sleep. I recalled all the experiences. I saw images of killing, and I had nightmares. I heard the voices of the guns, and I would wake up and cry at night. No one ever explained to me why it all happened. I couldn't understand a reason for myself.

Still part of me wanted to return to Darfur, to search for my parents. Mahmoud and his brother reminded me that the woman in Nyala said that my parents and a sister were dead. I said I could search for my other sister at least and stay with her. They said if I returned I might be killed also. They said it was not to be.

We went to the railway station to take a train to Halfa, on the border with Egypt. While we were waiting for the train, this businessman came up and asked us, "Why are you going to Egypt?" We said, "We flee Sudan to be safe." He told us that there is an office there called UNHCR that could help us a lot.

We got to Halfa and then took a boat to Aswan. Then we took another train from Aswan to Cairo. We arrived at Ramses station and took a bus to the suburbs. Mahmoud and his brother were happy to have me with them. They treated me in a very good way.

We rented a flat, and Mahmoud told his brother to start searching for work. Then, just immediately, the next day, the flat owner kicked us out. I went to stay with a Sudanese family nearby, some people who knew Mahmoud's relatives. Mahmoud and his brother stayed with a group of single Sudanese men.

At the beginning, this family was okay to me. But after a while, you see, their place was very small, and I could feel they were not happy with the situation. It was difficult for me, because I was increasing their suffering in that small home. I told them I wanted to leave.

I told Mahmoud I could find work to help pay for a flat. Mahmoud said no, that I was too young. Mahmoud was working in a milk store, but the manager was only paying him two hundred Egyptian pounds (US$35) a month, and that's not even enough for transportation to the factory. Soon Mahmoud left the job, because it was better to just stay at home than lose money. His brother had a small job, earning three hundred pounds, but still it wasn't enough. That was when we went to UNHCR.

The first thing UNHCR did was ask Mahmoud, "Why did you marry Nadia?" They saw I was underage and that the marriage was illegal. The UNHCR worker took a copy of our marriage certificate, showed it to some other worker, and came back to us. He was very upset and he told Mahmoud, "This is a crime. How did you do this?" At that time, I tried to explain that I asked Mahmoud to marry me in order to flee from Sudan. Eventually he told Mahmoud to come back after two days and bring the original copy of the marriage contract.

We came back two days later with the original marriage certificate. The same man took the paper and our passport. Then an Egyptian woman came in and called my name. She took me outside and she told me, "I want to speak to you frankly." She asked me if Mahmoud treated me well. She asked about Mahmoud's brother—did he treat me well also? She asked me many questions. I was resistant and tired, and she gave me the impression that she just wanted to make sure I wasn't lying. After a while, the UNHCR man brought us yellow cards and asked us to sign them. They told me the yellow card was protection.

I HAVE NOTHING TO BE AFRAID OF, BECAUSE I'M COMPLETELY DESPERATE

We moved to the suburb called 6 October City.

Some people here treat me well, and some people treat me very badly. Some Egyptians say, "You are coming here to make trouble.

Life became very, very expensive after you refugees arrived." Sometimes men follow me on the street until I arrive here at my house. Maybe they just want to know which flat I live in. I don't know why they follow. I never speak to them.

For a while, Mahmoud got work as an assistant to a painter. We lived in basements, moved from one apartment to another. We lived simply like that for two years. On January 29, 2006, I gave birth to a daughter. Her name is Sima Amal Mahmoud. She's a very good girl.

When Sima was just a few months old, she became sick. At the time, Mahmoud had no job, so we had very little money. We were taking care of a building, and in exchange, the owner allowed us to live in the basement. Sima was having trouble with her eyes. They were red and infected. I went to UNHCR so I could add Sima's name to my yellow card and get some help for Sima's eyes. A lady at UNHCR took down the information. I told her that Sima was sick, and my husband had no work. She told me to go to Caritas, the Catholic relief services, and they would give us some financial assistance and care for my daughter. She said, "Go right now to Caritas, and I will email them to tell them to help you."

I went to Caritas with Mahmoud. The security man outside the office asked me, "Are you Nadia?" I said yes. He took me and my husband inside, and interviewed me, and made a file for me. Then they told me they couldn't give me any money now, but that I could come after a month for financial assistance. I told them that the lady at UNHCR had said we would get money immediately because our daughter is sick. After a long discussion, the Caritas lady told me, "Okay, we can give you some assistance now, but you have to go away. And don't come back here again." She gave me a name of a doctor, and two hundred or three hundred pounds (US$35, US$55) of financial assistance. I met the doctor and he gave me medication for my daughter.

Then things got worse. My daughter started having bad allergies

and problems with her chest. We had to take her to the emergency hospital a couple of times at night, so she could get oxygen to help her breathe. The man who owned the basement where we lived kicked us out.

When I got kicked out of the flat, Mahmoud wasn't home. He was out looking for a job all that day and night. I walked for hours, and then I had to sleep on the street with my daughter. I woke up when the sun came up, and I went to Caritas. I waited in line for hours, and then Caritas told me to go to UNHCR. By that time it was after two o'clock or so in the afternoon, and when I got to UNHCR, the Egyptian police officers told me the office was closed for the day.

I asked the policeman outside the building to please give me UNHCR's phone number so I could call them. I asked if they would call inside on their radio. I explained that I had slept on the street last night. The officer just said no. I asked again and he hit me with his hand. I fell down on the street and he even kicked my daughter. He put one foot on top of me and kicked me with his other foot. Another police officer came over and tried to separate us, but this man just said, "No, keep away." He took my feet with one hand and pulled my hair with the other hand, and kicked me. He insulted me with every dirty word you could imagine. Then, the last thing he did was kick his boot in my face.

I went back to our neighborhood to find Mahmoud. I could hardly hold Sima because I was tired and starving, and my daughter was vomiting. Mahmoud took us to live with a Sudanese family who offered us a room, but after just a few weeks we couldn't pay the rent and they kicked us out. I went back to UNHCR.

I met the security man outside of UNHCR, and I explained to him that I wanted to meet with an official employee. The security man said, "I'm the responsible man here. If you have anything to explain, explain it to me." I told him my problem, that we had nowhere

to stay and no money. The man told me, "Take your daughter and go away. You can't meet anyone official."

I became very upset at this point. I just told him, "Take my daughter. Take her and take care of her because I cannot feed her, and I am failing to give her the fundamentals of life. Take her." I gave him my daughter and started walking away.

I was really ready to leave her, in a way. I thought there was nothing I could do anymore to keep her from dying. I just couldn't take care of her. As I walked away, she started crying and I just started crying, too.

A man stopped me as I was walking away. He told me he was Dr. Ashram, the UNHCR medical coordinator. He gave me two pounds, and the phone number for inside the UNHCR office. I went to a phone booth and I called UNHCR. Dr. Ashram waited for me with my daughter.

When I called inside the office, the girl who answered the phone was very rude to me. I tried to explain to her that I wanted to meet with someone who could do something for me. She kept saying, "Why?" and "For what?" I tried to explain my problems with living and housing, and after some time she just hung up on me.

I went back to Dr. Ashram and I explained everything to him. He asked me to take my daughter back, and that he would try to find some solution and call me himself. I explained to him that I had nowhere to go, that all I really needed was money.

He said, "I understand, but I have no time, I can't help you now. I have so much work to do."

I said, "If you are going back into the UNHCR office, let me go with you, and let me just meet anyone to explain my problem. Let me talk to the chief, let me talk to anyone." I was being loud, and the policemen outside the office came over and stood next to me, trying to scare me. I told them all, "I have nothing to be afraid of because I'm completely desperate!" The police officer started shouting at me.

I shouted back, "I have nothing to lose, I have no house, I can't feed my daughter!"

I guess Dr. Ashram finally saw that I was facing a serious problem. He asked me to come with him. He stood me at the door of the UNHCR office, went in, and brought someone out to meet me. This man told me to go to Caritas for financial assistance. I explained to him, "I went to Caritas before, and they told me, 'Don't come back here again asking for money.'"

The UNHCR man did something very nice then. He walked with me to the Caritas office. He brought me in, and we met someone named Sammy. Sammy said, "We can offer you a place to live in a neighborhood called Badr City."

I went and asked some Sudanese people about Badr City. They told me it's very, very far away from Cairo, that it has no hospitals, no strong Sudanese community, no nothing. It is just an area of factory buildings. People told me, "Imagine if your daughter gets sick again. You won't be able to find a hospital." We were scared she would get sick one night with influenza or some bad infection, and we wouldn't have a hospital close to us. Mahmoud and I discussed it and decided we would not go to Badr City.

We stayed with friends for a few days, and then a good thing happened. I met a woman with a villa here in Cairo, and she needed a cleaning lady. She offered me work, and I continue to work for her to this day. Mahmoud gets some work from her also, working as a guard, or a driver, or helping to fix things. Sima comes with me when I clean. It's a good job, and the lady that hired me is a nice lady.

IT'S JUST BETTER TO DIE IN MY COUNTRY

Right now, in August 2007, the lady with the villa is in Sharm el-Sheikh on holidays. Before she left, she gave me three hundred pounds (US$55) until she returns. But she said after she returns

to Cairo, she will soon move to Kuwait. When she told me this, I explained my problems to her, told her about UNHCR and everything. When she heard it, she said, "If you want to go back to Sudan, I can buy a plane ticket for you and a train ticket for your husband to travel to Khartoum. And if you stay here in Cairo, I will give you about six or seven hundred pounds." She tried to advise me: "If you make your mind up to go back to Sudan, please stay in Khartoum. Don't go to Darfur because you might face the same fate as your family."

Just last week Mahmoud and I went to UNHCR one more time. This time we went to close our refugee files. If you repatriate to Sudan, they say UNHCR will give you train tickets, and maybe one hundred dollars each to help you in your first few weeks.

At UNHCR they asked us, "Why do you want to close your file?" I told them there is nothing here for me and I am suffering. They asked us, "Where are you going to live in Sudan?" My husband said in Khartoum. I said I would rather go back to Darfur. The officer—Hisham was his name—Hisham said, "If you will go to Darfur, I cannot close your file." And then Mahmoud said, "For sure, we will go to Khartoum."

Hisham asked us to sign some papers. He said to Mahmoud, "Call me this afternoon, and I will give you an appointment to go to the interior ministry." Finally, two days later, we got the appointment. Mahmoud had to go to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs first. They gave him a paper to take to the Ministry of the Interior, in order to get us an exit visa.

Now Mahmoud has a job for a few days, helping an old woman move some things. The job finishes tomorrow, and he will go to the ministry to see if we have a visa. We will go to UNHCR again to get assistance for closing our file. The lady with the villa will be back in a few days, and I will find out if she will help. It will be difficult, because she wants to give me tickets to travel, but UNHCR wants

to give us train tickets also. The lady has given me a lot, and I don't want to press her to change her offer.

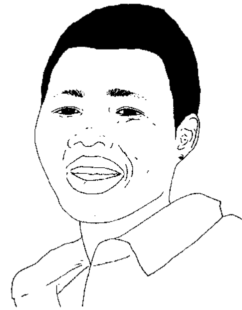
I am very ready to go back to Sudan. There are no benefits to going back, and I know there could be risks. I still want to go to Darfur, even though it's dangerous. Even in Khartoum there might be security risks. But it's just better to die in my country, in my home.

I have no feelings about UNHCR at this point. They did nothing for me. They didn't offer anything. They didn't help me. That is all I think. But I feel nothing. The same for Egypt. I live here, eat, and sleep like any eighteen-year-old. But Sudan is my country. What happened to my family was the work of criminals. It was the Sudanese government's mistake not to secure the lives of the Darfurians. But Sudan is my country. I hope the Sudanese government takes care of its citizens, and I hope UNHCR pays more attention to the refugees.

In Sudan, I will live in the same circumstances as here in Cairo. Nothing new will happen. I think my daughter's life will be the same as mine—no education, no nothing. We will all just stay like this.

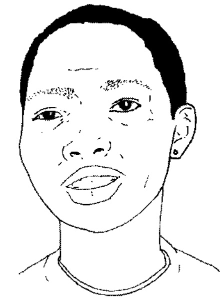
I guess I still have some hope. I haven't been there before—I have no experience about this—but I have hope to go to America or Australia. Everyone tells me that you can find a safe life there, and your daughter can find a good education. That would be a hope. Education and a stable life. I know in Sudan that will be impossible. And I know if I go back to Sudan, I will not get to Australia or America. But now it's all the same to me. If I can find work in Sudan, I will work in Sudan. If I can find food, I will feed my daughter. If I die, I die. Life, death, there's no big difference. God will make it easy.

{Several weeks after these interviews were conducted, Nadia returned to Sudan with her husband and child.}



MARCY NAREM

AGE: *18*
TRIBE: *Dinka*
BIRTHPLACE: *Chokulu, South Sudan*
CURRENT HOME: *Kakuma, Kenya*



ROSE KOI

AGE: 20
TRIBE: *Dinka*
BIRTHPLACE: *Chokulu, South Sudan*
CURRENT HOME: *Kakuma, Kenya*

HAPPY ARE THOSE WHO ARE MERCIFUL

The interviews with Marcy and Rose came along by chance. They had tagged along with their boyfriends, who were eager to tell their stories. Marcy and Rose sat quietly in the corner of a cockroach-infested room at the Kakuma Guest House. When asked to speak, they were hesitant, and agreed only if they could tell their stories together. Kakuma camp is their lives, they said.

MARCY: SUDAN IS FROM A TIME BEFORE MY OWN

My name is Marcy Narem. My father's name is Keng. My tribe is the Dinka, and I was born in a place called Chokulu, South Sudan, in the year 1990. I have two sisters and two brothers. My parents have passed, so I am in charge of the family. I look after us all, and I keep us all together.

In my mind, I only remember my home, but not the country of Sudan. I remember a big tree of mangoes, and all the land was very green. I remember being happy there, but that's really all. My father was a farmer—growing potatoes, cabbage. He was a nice man, very sociable to all people. He died when I was two.

I came to Kakuma Camp in 1995, during the war. I was five years old when I left Sudan. We took a truck from our village to here in Kenya. When I would ask my mother why we were here, she would say, "Because of the war with the Arabs." Everything that happened in Sudan is from a time before my own. After twelve years, I can say Kenya is my home, because this country has supported me for so long. Sudan would not do that for me.

When we ran from Sudan, my mother became sick, and I think she never recovered. I don't know what happened—I was too young to understand anything. Mother passed away three years ago. At the time, I was fifteen, and since then I've had the responsibility.

ROSE: I LOOK AHEAD, NOT LEFT OR RIGHT

I'm called Rose Koi. I am Sudanese by nationality. Like Marcy, I am Dinka, and I was born in Chokulu. This is how Marcy and I came to know each other.

I am twenty years old. I was born in 1988 or 1989, something like that. I don't have a birthday. I don't even remember Sudan or the place where I was born. I lost my mother when I was two years old, and my auntie took care of me after that. I have no idea about my father. It is impossible for me to find him, and I don't want to find him. My auntie told me that my mom was just a young schoolgirl when a man came and confused her and tricked her, and then she was pregnant; the man just ran away. When my mother died, I was left with my auntie. If she was a good auntie, I would have asked her more. But when I asked, she would answer so rudely that I was just too afraid to ask anything more.

My auntie took me to Kenya because of the war. I arrived in Kakuma Camp in 1997. From the beginning, my auntie would not allow me to go out and play with the others. She would just overload me with work and give me no time to read for school, or go to games.

She would have me work all day, so there was no school sometimes. And she would beat me. She loved her own children, but she would beat me. Sometimes when I would try to read, she would beat me and tell me I should go fetch water. She would even tell me to go fetch water while her own children were eating and then sometimes I wouldn't get to eat anything myself.

I've never had books of my own, because I don't have enough money. Sometimes other students would let me borrow theirs. Once I tried to get my auntie to give me money and she yelled at me: "I'm not the one who killed your mother! I have no money, even for my own children! Find your own money for your own books." I just cried, and I never asked again.

Life was like that for many years. It was 2005 when my auntie was beating me the most, and I think that was when I started to dream about my mom. I just dreamed I was at home with my mom. But when I woke up, there was nowhere to go.

My friends would tell me, "Don't even think about it. Just stay in school. Do what she says. If she beats you, just turn your mind away." Once my friends took me to a support group, though. It was when my auntie had told me to fetch water, and I refused, and she brought a stick that time and beat me on my head. You can see on my head where I had the bruise. I went to the support group, and they let me stay in the clinic for three weeks to heal. I enjoyed it a lot. I could invite my friends to visit, and we could just play, even at night. There was a counselor who talked to me and said that I could go back to the support group if my auntie beat me again. She did beat me again, but I didn't go back—there was nothing else to do, and it was most important that I just kept going to school. School is always my safe place. They say, "You go to school, you make yourself a life." I've got to finish school, so I look straight ahead, not left or right.

When everyone started talking about voluntary repatriation, things changed. So many people are going back to Sudan now! Last

year, my auntie decided to take her children and go back, too. I insisted: let me remain here! It was no question, I wanted to stay. And she let me. Two months ago she left. Now I live by myself in my auntie's old mud house. Now I am free to play and to read sometimes. I don't miss her, and I don't feel like I need to go back to Sudan.

If Kenya allows us to stay here for good, I will stay here for good. Only my auntie is waiting for me in Sudan—and when she was here, I wasn't comfortable. She's been gone for two months, and now I feel much better.

The life in Kakuma is quiet now that I am alone. I go to school most days. I like it—I mean, nobody supports me, so of course I like school. It is the best way for me to help myself and my future. My teachers are very nice to me—I am a dedicated student, and I keep coming, and I never fight. Other kids will steal pens and get in fights, but not me.

I like mathematics, although it is hard. But biology and chemistry—these are my best subjects, the ones that are the most interesting. If I could find a job in biology or something like that—wow!

Other than school, I just have to get my food. We follow a long line to get the food. You can't try to cheat in the line, because police are there and they will beat you if you cheat. You stand in line, sometimes for an hour or more. You show your cards, and you get your food. Neighbors sometimes will cook and share food together. My neighbor is Madeline, but she doesn't need to care for me really. I take care of myself. When I need help, my friend Agnes advises me—she has a mother, and she repeats her mother's advice to me about work, about boys, about the home and family. She is a good person to learn from. She has a mother and father, so she enjoys everything.

MARCY: I'M A STRIKER

I wake every day when the sun comes up. I wash and help my brothers

and sisters prepare for the day. Sometimes we eat a little for breakfast. When we are ready, we all leave for school. We come home around one o'clock in the afternoon, cook lunch, and prepare dinner using the staples that they give to us. We eat together—we pray for the food to be blessed by God, and we eat at the same table. Some people will disagree, but I like the food here! Sometimes they don't give enough—if there's not enough, what can you do? I can go to my neighbor and ask if she will share some, and sometimes she will help. Of course, the family helps each other most of all. My brothers and sisters respect me, and they listen when I advise them. They help me in many ways. I was sick with typhoid once, and my siblings took me to the hospital and cooked for me.

If there is time in the afternoons, I will go to the fields to play sports. When I play football, I strike—I'm a striker. I score. I know that in Sudan the girls aren't allowed to play football, so I feel lucky. In 2001, we flew in an airplane to Nairobi for a football match and a basketball match against a girls' secondary-school team. We lost both matches—they were so tall and we were so short, so we just had to foul, foul, foul! I think it was 108–52 in basketball, and in football we lost 7–2. I was crying! But I loved the plane ride.

I go to church every week. I read the Bible. I have my own Bible in my house. I read about Jesus, and Noah and his ark. Religion is very important to me. They say, "Happy are those who are merciful, and God will be merciful to them." I think about this a lot. I want to be with God in his mercy.

Jacqueline is my best friend. We play basketball and football together on the camp teams. Jackie had a boyfriend, but in 2001 the boyfriend flew away to Australia. Before he went away, though, they met together, and she became pregnant. Jackie came to me and told me, "I missed my period this month." She asked me if it meant she was pregnant. I said, "I don't know. Let us go and check with the doctor." The result was positive. She was pregnant. I went to the boy

and asked, "Are you the one that made my friend pregnant?" The boy denied it. He was angry and about to slap me, and I just said, "Oh, oh, excuse me." It was three days later that the boy flew away. Jackie was alone to have her baby girl. There were difficult years that followed, but Jacqueline will be okay. Her parents take care of the child. Recently she has even started playing football and basketball with us again. Since the boy left to Australia, we have heard nothing—not even greetings. But Jacqueline will be okay. I believe she will be able to find a husband.

Love can be scary for lots of reasons, not just pregnancy. The staff here makes HIV-awareness projects for us all the time. In Kakuma, many are infected by the disease. They say that AIDS has no cure—the only solution is to wait and to die. There is a place for testing. I went there one day and was tested. I am HIV-negative, so I know my status. It's better to know your status, and when I went, I told my friends to go also. When I get married, I will tell my boyfriend that we have to get tested first. If he is positive and I am negative, I will tell him to go his way, and I will go mine. A negative person and a positive person cannot be together, or else I will become positive also.

Kakuma hasn't really changed much over the years. There are more trees around the houses. They have changed the foods they give us—we get more flour, more oil. If you don't have another thing to support your salary, you only get what they give. And where would I get more money? I cannot work.

Sometimes I don't feel safe in Kakuma. I understand that we are refugees here, that we are visitors. But the hosts—the Turkana people—at night they will come and attack you and take what you have inside the house.[1] Clothes, food, they just take it away. I saw

[1] The Turkana are indigenous people of northwest Kenya. Kakuma Camp is located on their lands.

it with my eyes in 2004—Turkana came at night and attacked a woman who was my neighbor. They came in and they shot her in the arm with a gun. We started begging, please don't hurt her. The woman lived alone, so she was poor, with no food and no clothes. The attackers saw nothing they wanted, so they left.

Since I've been here, nothing has happened to me. Nobody notices me. I see UN staff, and people from the International Rescue Committee, but I never talk to them. I'm not one of the people who is quarrelling or fighting. I am just silent. If I am with my friends, I like joking with them and laughing, but I won't fight or quarrel. We tell stories about boyfriends mostly. I just say that I have a boyfriend and I'm proud of him—that he's a nice guy and good to me. It's best to stay out of trouble. One girl named Sophie was smoking and taking alcohol—there is a proverb, if you are walking with someone who is taking alcohol, it is like you are taking alcohol also. She doesn't respect her elders or her parents. Because of this, we cannot be friends any longer.

Life is different for girls here, of course. You find that girls drop out of school every year because of forced marriage. They can be fifteen years old, or even younger. Your family can just take you out one day and force you to get married. You will have no choice. The good thing about nobody taking care of me is that there is nobody to marry me off. I control myself. I improve myself.

I don't want to get married! Someday, yes, I would like to marry, but right now I'm not ready. If I got married right now, I could not take care of my brothers and sisters—I would have to care for my husband. So for now I go to school, and I help my brothers and sisters. Maybe I don't have to get married at all, ever! But you see everyone else living in marriage. If you see everyone carrying on in a group, and they're without you, how do you feel? It's like that.

In the camp, there are signs everywhere about women's rights. We learn women can do anything, even tell your husband to cook!

A man can even be in the kitchen, helping to cook while a woman is doing something else—washing clothes, or even just relaxing. The men don't understand, of course. Sometime they'll even argue and say that women belong in kitchens. I say, yes, I need to fetch water, wash clothes, and prepare food. But what if I need to see a friend sometimes? I hope that when I marry, my husband and I will share the kitchen. In a good marriage, there is no reason to quarrel about such things.

We learn about women's rights, but even if they didn't teach us, we would understand these things inside. During the celebration for Women's Day, they made speeches and celebrations for us, and they told the men: "You cook today! Let the women go for celebrations, and you stay and cook." Some men helped and prepared food for the women—some, but not all. Some of the men, oh, if you said, "You cook," they would slap you, or beat you. This happens a lot in Kakuma.

There are times when women come together to discuss life and news. But when that happens, they won't accept me—if I come to join, they will chase me away! They say, "We are women, and you are just a girl!" Even though I am responsible for my home, I am only sixteen, and I am not married. So they tell me, "Go search for your friends; there is no reason for you to be here." It is okay when they say this. I am able to take care of myself.

ROSE: I AM READY TO CHOOSE LIFE

The culture is changing—for so long, we never had these discussions. You could not get a man to work in the kitchen or to clean the compound. He would just be sitting and waiting. The men here don't work, so they're lazy—sitting, waiting for the food. If a man wants to drink water, he calls you and says, "I am thirsty." But now, it's really changing.

We are an important generation. In old generations, the dowry would keep people from marrying, or families would match people who had no interest in each other. Now it will be different. It is our generation that will bring new things. We are trying to change things for Southern Sudanese people. We will bring education and health. We are the right people to change things. The traditions, of course, are very important. But we know some traditions are harmful to us.

I feel free now—I am ready to choose life. After school, people will offer me work, and if it's good, I will take it; if it's not, then I won't. I'll get married sometime after I finish my school, and I'll go to college, and after that I'll marry. When you are a girl, it's only about marriage. It's a must!

My boyfriend's name is Amos. He's happy that I go to school. We are both doing our best, and when we finish, we will get married, and I'm happy about that plan. My husband will understand me—he will fetch water when I'm busy in the kitchen, and when he is in the kitchen, I will fetch water. We are going to help each other. Neither of us will work alone.

If I get work here, I think I will stay in Kenya a long time. But in the end, I depend on God. I pray, and I go to school, and if God hears me, I will be fine. I read the Bible sometimes: "Love your neighbor as you love yourself." If somebody tries to abuse me, I will think of the Bible, and I will love.

I just want to be in my home, to take care of my children, to have a good family, to get good work, and to be social sometimes. Mostly to have a good family.

I will not beat my children! Never, never, never. If I have children, I can only tell them stories about Sudan—I can tell them that when I was in Sudan, I was really in bad conditions. I will tell them that in Kakuma my auntie would restrain me and abuse me. This is really everything there is to my story.

Maybe I would go to Sudan if there were really peace. But I wonder, if I go, who will care for me? I have nothing to take care of myself. Where am I going to stay? I only know my auntie, and she abuses me.

Right now, I will remain in Kakuma thinking about my future. I won't think about the problems or even my auntie—just about school. If they allow some of us to stay in Kenya, I will stand in line to register to be a Kenyan citizen. Really, I do not want to go back.

MARCY: MANY ARE GOING BACK, BUT I DON'T KNOW

Now I am in my second year of secondary school. Two more years and I will be finished with my degree. Then I will choose whether to get married. I would choose a traditional marriage ceremony, not an official one. The people will come and dance, and celebrate, and maybe I will cook something for them. Normally in Sudan, there would be cows for a dowry, but here, they are just using money. If I marry a wealthy man, maybe the family will buy a cow or bull from the local Turkana, but that is rare.

I hear about voluntary repatriation to Sudan. Many are going, but I don't know. Even if I do go back to Sudan, where do I go once I get there? I don't know the place where my parents lived before. Who am I going to know in the country? You know, with repatriation they just pick you up, take you to a city in the South, and drop you there. What if you don't have anybody waiting for you? In Sudan, you can go to school if you pay money—but who would pay for me? They do not let girls play sports, but at Kakuma, they mobilize us to play. Here in Kenya we have everything—school, and food, and hospitals—they give us everything. In Sudan, you have to have land and cultivate food for yourself, because nobody will give you anything. If I went now with my brothers and sisters, we would

not survive. I would like to go to America, but it's very difficult for us. If I had a chance, I would go. But it's not likely.

I don't know if I will be happy in the future. Actually, I am thinking about my future—what am I going to be? I dream of being a nurse or a pilot. I remember flying to Nairobi, being high up in the sky, and I think it would be so great to be a pilot in a plane like that.