

The Journey Not Over

By Barbara Rose



Whenever someone learns about the Lost Boys Of Sudan, they hear about the civil war that broke out in the 1980s. They hear about schools and churches and homes and villages bombed and burned. They hear about the killings and rapes and the little boys who ran into the forest or were away at cattle camp or somehow survived the initial attacks.

They learn how these boys (and now we know, girls) joined together and walked to Ethiopia to escape the war, starving and dehydrating and being attacked by wild animals daily. How life in the refugee camp was very hard and lonely. How a few years later they were forced out of Ethiopia, across the River Gilo where thousands died by drowning, crocodiles and bullets.

Their story continues with another, longer walk to Kenya, children again on their own. More starvation, dehydration, illnesses, animal attacks. And more death, always more death. Another long journey... ten long, hungry years in Kakuma... a dismal future.

And then, incredibly, an almost unbelievable opportunity to relocate to other countries, particularly the U.S., where life would be better, at least in terms of food, water, education and security. Many people hearing the story may think it ends with your arrival in America. As if that was the end of it.

But all of us in this room know the story continues and is as amazing in its potential as it was tragic in its past. You, the men and women of the Abek community, have not been defeated by the misery and indifference thrust upon you in your youth. Instead of ignoring the past, you use it as a foundation to embrace your mission - you choose to build the future and stretch your own opportunities into benefits for your entire community still in the Sudan, Kakuma and elsewhere in the diaspora.

You are committed to your work. You are committed to keeping your community strong so you can do what might not be done alone. You are committed to completing your educations... to building schools and health centers and water systems... to rebuilding homes and businesses... to rebuilding your community in the Sudan as a part of the larger Southern Sudan. Clearly, your journey is not over!

I am confident that among the Lost Boys and Girls I have met and worked with are tomorrow's leaders in and for Southern Sudan. You are the teachers and health care workers, the business men and women, the writers and the artists. Together you will lead the next generations to a better life, born from the lessons of the past.

You invited me here today as a guest of honor and I am truly appreciative. For I am proud of you and my association with you. I admire and am inspired by you. It is my privilege to help you achieve your goals and accomplish your mission. Thank you!