



Lost Boy No More

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Introduction

The first time I heard Abraham Yel Nhial tell the story about the Lost Boys of Sudan, I didn't want to consider such tragedy existed in today's world. I didn't want to believe that children crossed Sudan on foot and faced the perils before them without the aid of parents or adults. I couldn't imagine a civil war lasting two decades. This couldn't have happened. We live in a civilized world.

The more I listened, the more I felt drawn to this proud race of courageous African young men. Curiosity kept me spellbound. How did they survive disease, hostile government soldiers, starvation, and wild animals? I desperately needed to know more. A survivor stood before me, a young man who proclaimed that God had carried him safely through enormous odds.

When first asked to write Abraham's story, I refused. The subject matter was too painful, and I knew I'd shed more tears than write words. But God had a plan, and He wanted the plight of the Lost Boys of Sudan to reach the world. As I talked with Abraham and his story began to unfold, I recognized an incredible faith in God. When I interviewed other Lost Boys, I saw the same intimacy with the Creator. For the first time in my life, I realized how very fortunate I was to live in a country where there is an abundance of food, clothing, shelter, and medical attention. I had no need to fear the government of my country because

the officials voted into office care about their people. A deep conviction of selfishness washed over me.

Children are the world's most precious treasure. Most adults will do anything to protect them, but what if children are suddenly forced to fend for themselves in a land beset by civil war? Such is the scenario for the estimated sixteen thousand Lost Boys who began their trek across Sudan, homeless, without the love of parents or family, frightened of the world around them. Each moment was a living nightmare. They struggled to survive and claimed their companions as family with an inexpressible bond stronger than the forces against them. While many made it to safety, others did not. The unfortunate ones died from starvation, disease, wild animals, and enemy forces. Death often looked more appealing than the bleak outlook for the future. These boys held on to a fragile thread of hope, that, by some miracle their lives would be spared.

An estimated two million civilians have given their lives in the civil war, while four to five million more are displaced either in government-controlled camps or in refugee centers outside of Sudan.

Not one single factor caused the civil war but rather the causes lie in the religion, politics, and economics of the region. The Islamic government of Khartoum has declared a jihad (holywar) against southern Sudan. The war's purpose is to force Muslim traditions and practices on all of the people. If this is accomplished, the government will have control of not only the people, but also of the valuable resources of the south. The three causes of the civil war are woven tightly into a ball of hatred, with neither side willing to sacrifice its fundamental beliefs in order to establish peace.

The black Africans of the south are spurned by the northern government due to their faith, their ebony-colored skin, and their participation and leadership in the civil war that has raged in varying degrees throughout their land since Sudan became an independent nation in 1956. The south has born the atrocities of the war, as the plight of the Lost Boys depicts.

The journey on which you are about to embark will take you from a pastoral village in southern Sudan to the United States. Abraham expressed his desire for readers to have an overview of what is happening in Sudan, the history of his country, and a deep appreciation for its oppressed people. The problems in Sudan did not develop overnight, and the solutions will take a commitment from all sides to establish a lasting peace. The Lost Boys are the remnant of an oppressed people, a proud people who love their country and dream of a day when their children can live and walk in a free Sudan.

I will never be the same and neither will you.

At that time a gift will be brought to the LORD of Hosts from a people tall and smooth-skinned, a people feared near and far, a powerful nation with a strange language, whose land is divided by rivers to Mount Zion, the place of the name of the LORD of Hosts. ISAIAH 18:7

Chapter One

Who Are Abraham Nhial and the Lost Boys of Sudan?

If the LORD had not been on our side when men attacked us, then they would have swallowed us alive in their burning anger against us. Then the waters would have engulfed us; the torrent would have swept over us; the raging waters would have swept over us. Praise the LORD, who has not let us be ripped apart by their teeth. PSALM 124:2ñ6

SOUTH SUDAN 1987. Fear seized nine-year-old Abraham Yel Nhial and held him captive. Paralyzed by the stories his father had told about the murdering soldiers from Khartoum, the capital of his country, Abraham reached deep inside for courage. The thundering beat of drums from a nearby village warned of danger and echoed terror across the new morning sky. Abraham knew enemy soldiers marched toward the Dinka villages. They came to loot, steal cattle, and carry away women and children as slaves. His mind raced with questions. If only someone would tell him what to do.

If you hear the drums telling us that the enemy is coming, run, his father had said. They kill all who get in their way.

But Abraham couldn't bring himself to obey. Had his father gotten the family to safety? What would happen to the village called Geer where he lived with his grandmother? He stood alone in the middle of Nyakrar, the fenced cattle camp, surrounded by the longhorn cattle so precious to his people. Even here, he was a day away from Greer and his beloved grandmother. If he left the cows, he would be neglecting his responsibility. Abraham trembled.

He wanted to hide. His heart pounded so hard that he thought it would burst through his chest. He must get back to Wun Lang, his father's village along the Lol River, but that was two days away.

The drums continued. He pressed his palms against his ears in hopes the sound would stop, that the warning meant nothing. If he cried loud enough, his uncle might find him, reassure him that danger had passed. Maybe Abraham's uncle would take him to his father's village to show him the enemy had not brought destruction. When no one answered his pleas, Abraham began to run. His stomach churned at the thought of the enemy taking his father's cows or worse yet, harming his family. He had to see for himself - to see if he could find help. Abraham wrestled with the fear and the desire to take on the role of a man.

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