

Phillip Panek Biar

Age: 24

Region: Bahr al Ghazal

It was midday in 1989 and I was 9 years old. I was out looking of the cattle on the other side of the river from my home when people came running and ran right past us. Arabs on horseback followed, shooting people and capturing children.

The SPLA lead us on a 3-month walk to Ethiopia where I went to school and learned the A-B-B's. But war broke out and we fled to the border with no food or medicine for the sick. Most of the boys died crossing the Gila River with soldiers chasing us. Even if you could swim, someone would jump on you to cross and both would drown. Many people died of disease or were killed by lions.

Many people lost hope.

Eventually, I crossed a very hot desert to the Kakuma Refugee Camp. The wind was always blowing and everything you ate was covered in dust.

I lived in the camp for 9 years. Sometimes we had to wait 14 days to get food. I can't say I was happy to come to America because only Lost Boys could apply to leave. I didn't know what to expect, how I would get a job or what qualifications I needed.

We heard some of the Lost Boys in America were homeless, but still the only hope for the future was to come here.

I'm currently going to Glendale community College and studying global business. I'm working as the Cow Project Coordinator at the AZ Lost Boys Center. We have raised almost \$60,000 to be used for scholarships. I also worked at PetSmart.

Last June I went to visit Sudan through the Aid Sudan Foundation. Our mission was to help dig wells to provide clean water and teach games like soccer. I had 3 days to leave the group and visit my village. I walked, which took most of the day, but my father was impatient and met me on the road. I went back to the river and thought about what happened and how I left that place. It was a kind of healing. My grandmother wanted me to stay, but I said no, I have to go back to school.

I like the freedom I have here and being treated with fairness and equality.

Even though I don't have much money, I can help a friend still living in Kakuma and my father, which is good.