

Tap Dak

Age: 22

Region: Southern Sudan

Everyone was running in different directions, running to save their lives. Our village was burned, people were shot and killed. I was nine years old when I was lost from my family. I never found my parents or learned what happened to them. I have six sisters and five brothers, but I don't know where they all are. One younger brother was shot during the war and last year I heard from my older brother who now lives in Australia.

I walked for months to Ethiopia. We didn't know when we would find food and worried about being attacked by wild animals and snakes. I lived in a refugee camp in Ethiopia for four years before the overthrow of the government. I walked back to Sudan and lived on the border which was being bombed. I was injured during the bombings and was in hospital for one year. I still have a bullet in my left arm. If it was removed, I could be paralyzed.

I finally arrived in Lockichokip, Kenya, U.N. headquarters and then to the Kakuma Refugee Camp, where I lived until I was 19. There were thousands of different people in the camp and you had to defend what you got from the U.N. We stood in line to get water which was only offered three times a day.

I was the first lost boy to arrive in Arizona in 2000. I'm totally independent. Here, I can do my own thing. Here, I'm equal with humanity. Here, I have a right to say no, but I must also be competitive, responsible, and achieve. My English has improved, but I want to improve my accent. Sometimes it's hard to communicate and know who to ask for advice. At one time I was working three jobs, but I was also the first one to buy a car. I also help two nephews.

I'm working in construction and studying to be a mechanical engineer. I like the practical and theoretical thinking and want to achieve in engineering through my own calculations. I have a long way to go.