

Maluak Mabil

Age: 24

Region: Upper Nile

I was born in Bor in 1981. I have four brothers and one sister. In 1987, at 3pm in the afternoon I saw people in uniforms carrying guns attacking our village. I ran into the brush to escape. I have neither seen nor spoken with my parents since that day.

I met up with my older uncle, who traveled with me to Ethiopia. It took us about fifteen days to walk from Bor to the Ethiopian border. I was lonely and confused. We only had the small amount of food we brought with us. We became thirsty and drank water mixed with mud to make our sore throats feel better.

I stayed in Panyido, in Ethiopia, where I eventually started class one in elementary school. My uncle joined the SPLA and left Panyido. When the Ethiopian government was overthrown in 1991, we left and went back to Sudan. Some young boys from Panyido were killed or kidnapped by the Ethiopian rebels. The trip back to Sudan was difficult because of heavy rain. When we arrived at the swollen Gilo River, I jumped in and swam across. Many people couldn't swim. The Ethiopian rebels arrived at the river and everyone jumped into the river to escape the rebels. People on the shore who could not swim would ask you "can you swim?" if you said "yes" they would jump into the water, climb onto your back, and wrap their arms around your neck. It was very difficult to swim with someone hanging onto your neck. You would be forced underneath the water and eventually, the person on your back would let go, and then you could swim to the surface alone.

After I crossed the river, I traveled to Pochala, where I stayed until January of 1992. I then went to Boma, Magos, Kapoeta, Narus, Lockichokio, and eventually Kakuma. In Kakuma, I attended school until I finished and received my Kenyan Certificate of Secondary education. I served as a community leader for the UHCR and did environmental conservation with the German Technical Corporation.

The most difficult thing about living in the U.S. is keeping a full-time job at the same time as going to school. I worked as a security guard at Showcase Honda and studied business management at Everest College. I am also a certified pharmacy technician, but I prefer to work with people and not just drugs. I feel unsettled. I will be happy when I finish my education and find a good job. I feel like I am still traveling on a journey.