

*A message from Salva Dut*

This book is based on the true story of my life. I hope that because of the book more people will learn about the Lost Boys and the country of Sudan.

I was born in a small village called Loun-Ariik, in Tonj County, southern Sudan. And just as it says in the book, I stayed in refugee camps in Ethiopia and Kenya for many years before I came to America.

I am thankful to a great many people. The United Nations and the International Red Cross supported my life when I was in danger of starvation. The Moore family, St. Paul Episcopal Church, and the community of Rochester, New York, welcomed me to the United States. I am also grateful for the education I have received, especially at Monroe Community College.

And deepest gratitude to the people who have helped me with my project, Water for Sudan, Inc.—the schools,

churches, civic organizations, and individuals all over the country. Special thanks to the Board of Water for Sudan, and to the Rotary Clubs that have worked closely with me. My dreams of helping the people back home in Sudan are beginning to come true.

I overcame all the difficult situations of my past because of the hope and perseverance that I had. I would have not made it without these two things. To young people, I would like to say: Stay calm when things are hard or not going right with you. You will get through it when you persevere instead of quitting. Quitting leads to much less happiness in life than perseverance and hope.

Salva Dut

Rochester, New York

2010

*Author's note*

Some of the details in this story have been fictionalized, but the major events depicted are based on Salva's own experiences. I read his written accounts and interviewed him for many hours. I also read other books and accounts by and about Lost Boys. For Nya's part of the story, I was able to interview travelers who have seen the water wells being drilled in villages like hers; I also benefited from examining their video footage and photographs.

Known as the Second Sudanese Civil War, the conflict that is depicted in this book began in 1983. Many factions were involved and numerous changes in leadership took place over the duration of the war, but in essence, the opposing sides were the Muslim-dominated government in the north and the non-Muslim coalition in the south.

Millions of people were killed, imprisoned, tortured, kidnapped, or enslaved; millions more were permanently displaced, unable to return to their homes. Among those displaced were hundreds of thousands of so-called Lost Boys like Salva, who walked in desperation through southern Sudan, Ethiopia, and Kenya in search of safe haven.

Many of the Lost Boys who were able to return home after the war found that their families had vanished. Others languished in refugee camps like those Salva lived in. Some were eventually reunited with their loved ones, often after decades apart.

In 2002, nearly twenty years after the war began, the United States government passed the Sudan Peace Act, officially accusing the Sudanese government of genocide in the deaths of more than two million people. Three years later, a peace accord was signed between the north and south. The south was granted autonomy—the ability to govern itself—for six years. A referendum has been scheduled, during which the citizens of southern Sudan will vote whether to secede from the north and become an independent nation.

The war in Darfur, in the western part of Sudan, is a separate conflict, not covered by the peace accord. As of this writing, that war is still being fought between factions who identify themselves as Arabic and those who consider themselves African. The two wars, combined with several years of severe drought, have brought untold suffering to the people of Sudan.

In size, Sudan is the largest country in Africa and the tenth largest in the world.

Salva has seen his family in Sudan twice more since the events of this story, including a moving reunion with his cousins, the children of Uncle Jewiir. And amazingly, seven of the Lost Boys who walked with Salva from Ethiopia to Kenya met up with him again when they were relocated to the Rochester, New York, area.

As of June 2010, Salva Dut's nonprofit organization, Water for Sudan, had drilled dozens of wells in southern Sudan for Dinka and Nuer communities. The very first well was drilled in Salva's home village of Loun-Ariik. Salva now spends half the year in the United States raising money for the organization and the other half in Sudan drilling wells. You can learn more about the organization's work at [www.waterforsudan.org](http://www.waterforsudan.org).

I first met Salva several years ago when my husband and I learned about Water for Sudan. In 2008, my husband traveled to Sudan to see the wells firsthand. I am grateful for his help in answering my endless questions: This story could not have been written without him.

My family and I feel very fortunate to count Salva as a friend. It has truly been an honor for me to write this book about him.

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