

# Who tells your story?

I am from Sudan, or what is currently called South Sudan, in the capital, Juba. I remember when the people would take the kids' things and put them in the fire. It was just that ridiculous, and so we ran away to the church for our sister. I grew up in the church so we ate whatever was given to us. The sport we played the most was soccer. The reason we played soccer was that we didn't get to play basketball in our school right there or even tennis, only soccer. The languages I spoke in Sudan were Dinka, Arabic, and some Judo because my grandma was in a distant tribe so I knew a little bit of French and a little bit of English. They started a war between the North and South in 1955, then in 1972, they signed an agreement. In 1977 the president of the South canceled the agreement and said it wasn't buyable, so in 1983 they started the war again but that's why I didn't stay longer in the South and went to the North. In 1984, when I was 13 years old there was a battle between the South Christians and the North Muslims, so the North started fighting the South again. They destroyed our homes and they killed everybody. At the time I was in school. At 7 o'clock, the mayor came into our classroom and said: "Hey guys, we need any child to go with a family to go to the North." Around 9 o'clock, the North started to burn the houses down. I don't remember much about that day. The day my village was destroyed I went to the church with the other kids from the village because everyone knew each other and a sister of the church took us in.

At the time they closed the schools because of the war against the North, and in 1984, I was forced

to move and met a sister at a Catholic school. During my time there they made our student lease list in order to come to the North to escape the war that was happening at the time. I was one of the few students to be added to the lease list. When I came to the North I didn't know the language and I didn't know anybody. I think I was around 14. I was looking for an education at the time, but nobody would take me in. I would go to someone's house to stay there for the night, then in the morning, I would work in a grocery store. I would go up to the elderly people and help them load their food, and I would get paid a quarter to 1 dollar. I used the money I received for food. I saved up the rest of the money and used it to buy books. I used those books to get a better understanding of things and I had to study Arabic.



During my time in high school I went to a different high school in the North while they were invading the South. In the North they only spoke Arabic so the Arab teacher and Arab kids would speak Arabic and I wouldn't understand them sometimes. They would say "Go to lunch, but

you're not going to eat today because your state didn't bring money for you, so you cannot eat." So I said, "No" and I went back to the bakery and I started working at the bakery. I worked in the bakery in the morning, then in the afternoon, I would go to school. School went from 1 pm-6 pm until I finished my high school years. At that time, my mom came to look for me and she found me, but I couldn't support her. I was supposed to be a doctor because I'm smart, but I couldn't afford things, so I took statistics, health classes, and I worked for Emma Safe Hollen and in a hospital.

During my time working in a hospital, I worked in the statistics department until I had a problem with the Islamic government. They came and told me and the other employees that we had to be Muslim, otherwise you were fired. I chose my Lord Jesus and God. It was better to lose my job than to change my faith. I worked at Emma Safe Hollen until I met my wife at the age of 25. I met my wife in the church, we were a singing team so I led a singing group and I was the president of the young community in the church. We met through the church. I met her and we were just talking and getting to know each other. Our first kiss was in 1993. We had our wedding day on December 26, 1994. In South Sudan the wedding traditions are different. My family and her family sat down and they talked. After that, they made a house and they brought things to my house. We were just very happy. Our first baby was Abok. I was really happy the first time we saw her and to see the person we raised. At that time my wife was nice. We met and discussed everything but she changed once we came to the US. She was nice to me but she just changed. I don't want to ask her why she just put

everything on me. I didn't have a problem until now, but she's the one who makes everything hard for me.

Then in 2000, I had a problem with the government. The problem was someone came and said "This office is for Muslims" and they arrested me and took me to someplace for 7 days. On the last day some people took me and put a gun on me and said you have to choose one: join a gang or run away, so I decided to run away. Then they gave me a document and they dropped me off somewhere. They gave me a little bit of money in order to get a bus ticket and plane ticket to Egypt. Once I was in Egypt for about one year my wife finally came to be with me. Then we left for America together. I didn't prepare for anything. I just filled out my application and told them my situation and sent it to the UN. Once they approved my situation they took me from Egypt to America. When I was finally in America I found my people. I hadn't seen them for 30 years, and it was good to see them. When you are with your family you can talk to them about some things for a long time. It feels like you are better, that's how it feels.

What I did not like about moving to America was learning English. Sometimes people will say something bad about me and I don't understand, but I don't care. I don't care what they mean. If you don't like me, then it's ok, it's their problem, not mine. But some people are good. I believe in human morals more than money. I believe in human equality and the Judge and Law, but being in the U.S.A. not everyone's the same under law. The business people control the law, and this is why I don't like it, not because of America or the people, but the system. Business people control

everything so this is supposed to be the people and politics of the people to control the law. The first time I came to America I lived in this apartment and I used to smoke. Somebody came up to me saying "I need a cigarette," but it was the last cigarette I had, so I told him I didn't have any. This guy use to come every day, but that day was the day I only had one, and so I told him, "I don't have it right now" and he told me "What the fuck? African, go back to your country." That was the first time I experienced racism. The second time was when I drove for Uber and they gave me different directions. It was at another place, because if you give someone the different directions, the Uber app would call you, so I would have to tell the people who requested the Uber to come to where I was, and they told me to "Go back to Africa, Mother F\*\*\*\*\*." I also faced some racism at Walmart when they told me "go back to where you came from," especially during Trump's time. It made me feel mad for a while. I got over it, but I don't know why some people are like that.

I don't know exactly why my life is difficult. I try everything in my power to make things right but people always bring me down. For me, America didn't change anything, I'm still suffering. Nothing changed, I just work to pay the insurance, pay them for the house to live in, pay taxes, and pay the bills. All the money I get I give to them. I don't get anything from the US. When I was in my country I worked two jobs: in a hospital and at Emma Safe Hollen. My life was better, but I came here thinking that I could work and go to school and finish my education.

I miss Sudan so much because it's my birthplace and my family was there, so I missed them for

over 30+ years. If I ever die, that's the place I would like to be buried because everybody around there loved me. I miss Sudan so much to the point that if I get tired here in America, then I will go back to Sudan because I don't want to go to a nursing home here in America. I love my family and I love everybody, so I have to make something for them before I retire. That's my struggle, but I don't know if I am going to make it or not. Something I've learned in my life is to not give up or surrender, to love everybody, to be yourself, and to listen more to see how others are feeling. I have also learned to talk less and slow your thoughts a little bit, to be calm, to love your country, and lastly, to not follow other people's bad actions and be a leader in the community. Something I am proud of is seeing my family around me. It makes me happy and just makes my day better.

story told by: Garang Madot