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They Poured Fire on Us From The Sky: The True Story of Three Lost Boys from Sudan

By Benson Deng, Alephonsion Deng, Benjamin Ajak, and Judy A Bernstein

Reviewed by Paula Johnson

In all of my years reviewing books, I have rarely come across a book as compelling and timely as *They Poured Fire on Us from the Sky*. This book is about a child's nightmare of being alone in the world, a nightmare for all who have seen the images of masses of humans: mothers, fathers, sisters, and brothers, who have been wiped off the face of this vast amazing country of Sudan by a brutal civil war that still rages today.

Alephonsion Deng, co-author, now works in the medical records department of Kaiser Permanente in San Diego. He has endured a life few ever know and survive. He is one of the Lost Boys of Sudan

In the mid 1980s, when their villages in southern Sudan were attacked by troops from the oppressive government in the north, thousands of young boys fled into the wilderness as their parents had instructed them, to avoid capture or death. As five and seven year olds, Benson, Alephonsion, and Benjamin crossed a thousand miles on foot, surviving starvation, thirst, wild animals, and disease along the way. Many boys never made it. Brothers, Benson and Alephonsion, became separated for five years, neither knowing if the other was still alive. After years on the run, experiencing and witnessing the horrors of a terrible civil war, they finally reached one of the most desolate refugee camps in the world where they languished for nine years, surviving on a half cup of corn meal a day. Finally in 2001, the United National High Commissioner for Refugees arranged for the US Government to accept them. If ever there were tired, poor, and homeless yearning to breathe free, it was these Lost Boys of Sudan.

This unforgettable story by Benson Deng, Alephonsion Deng, and Benjamin Ajak, with a forward by Judy A Bernstein, is a vivid portrayal of three of the more than

25,000 Lost Boys of Sudan who crossed the most treacherous part of Africa with the very human goal of surviving and uniting with their families again. Strangely, as you read, you almost feel that you are with these boys. The inspiration and hope of their story is so overwhelming that our day-to-day annoyances seem petty by comparison.

Whether it is the Lost Boys of Sudan, the Hmong of Cambodia, the Bantu of Somalia, or any other refugee group that has entered the American health care system, it is helpful for physicians, clinicians, and other health care givers to gain insight into the experience and culture of the patients by hearing the stories of their trauma. Although not everyone's experience is the same, unfortunately many are similar and they do have an enormous impact on the health of these people and their families.

Despite the sadness and suffering, the beauty in their written language and their tenacious spirits give us hope. Reading *They Poured Fire On Us From The Sky* has forever changed my skeptical mind about the future of this world. The boys are extraordinary examples of tremendous strength and fellowship to this day. A fast read, this book has much to teach while creating a vivid emotional experience. It brings alive the TV news coverage of the Sudanese civil war. It speaks on behalf of millions of children in Africa who are victims and cannot speak for themselves. The story of these Lost Boys is a gift to all who read it or who are touched by their lectures across this country. ♦

Editor's note: The authors have recently been honored with the National Conflict Resolution Center's 18th Annual Peacemaker Award for surviving one of the bloodiest conflicts on Earth, many years in UN refugee camps, and eventual relocation to San Diego where they have become productive men and teachers of peace. —VJF

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Every New One

... when you handle books all day, every new one is a friend and a temptation.

— The Historian, Elizabeth Kostova, American author