

The journey towards becoming a graduate of the Class of 2008 from the College of the Holy Cross began for David Akuei many years before and many miles – in fact oceans – away. David was born Wau, capital of the West Bahr el Ghazal state in Southern Sudan, in 1983. He was the baby of his immediate family - with two older brothers and two older sisters – but enjoyed growing up with an extended group of cousins that lived nearby, several of whom were his exact age.

The year that David and a number of his cousins were born is significant in the history of Sudan. It was in 1983 that civil war was reignited by President Gaafar Nimeiry's attempts to extend his power by unifying Sudanese states, in violation of the terms of the Addis Ababa Agreement, signed in 1972 and granting the south considerable autonomy. In response, many southern Sudanese came together to form The Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), a militia committed to the preservation of an independent south.

David was too young to be of interest to the SPLA as a recruit, but was nonetheless affected by their struggle for sovereignty. War was waged in and around Wau for the entirety of David's childhood, but became unbearable on a particular day in 1993. On that day, chaos consumed the town and masses began to flee. David, playing with two of his cousins at the time, was swept up into the crowd, following the direction of adults collecting children and encouraging them to walk south in hopes of finding a safer place. There was no time for discussion, with either his older siblings or his parents. In just a moment's notice, twelve-year old David and his two cousins were on their own, following a path which would eventually be traveled by 27,000 others – now known as the Lost Boys – fleeing towns in Southern Sudan for the relative safety of Northern Kenya.

All David knows is that the journey was long and hard; whether it was several weeks or several months is less important than the fact that David eventually made it to Kakuma Refugee Camp. His successful journey, David attributes, in part, to the occasional kindness of people he met along the way that would offer respite in the form of a meal or shelter for the night. In Kakuma, it was the United Nations that provided for David, and did so for the next eight years of his life. While in Kakuma, David lived with a cousin with whom he had made the trek from Wau and one of his half-brothers, attended first primary and then secondary school, and waited for his name to appear on the list of those who would be relocated to either Australia, Canada, New Zealand, or the United States, all of which were accepting Sudanese refugees.



David's turn came in 2000 when he found his own name on a list posted in a building that served as a community center in Kakuma and then went the next day for an interview with an immigration officer who asked David why he wanted to leave his Kenyan home. David's response – "I just want safety" – proved to be his ticket and shortly after (after participating in what he now acknowledges was an absurd orientation session ostensibly preparing him for American life and culture), David was on another journey, this time to Winchester, Massachusetts and the home of his new family.

The Gutman family welcomed David, at that time a freshman in high school, into their large family which included four young children of their own as well as three other Sudanese refugees. School wasn't easy, but David soon got used to its rigors, and settled into his new life in America. David graduated from high school and went on to college, all the while managing to hold a part-time job in a department store. David now lives with the same cousin who accompanied him through the various stages of his life in their own apartment in Woburn. He aspires to pursue a career in business management and to, one day, return to Wau to visit his family that remains living there. But, for now, celebration is in order in honor of David and the phenomenal accomplishment that is his college graduation.

CONGRATULATIONS, DAVID, AND BEST OF LUCK!