

## Spotlight: Malong Maloul

In late 1983, Janjaweed crossed the tenuous border between northern and southern Sudan, ending the ceasefire that had been brokered a mere eleven years prior in Addis Ababa. They meticulously conquered villages one-by-one as they crawled southward, following the trails of civilians running for safety. Malong was among the runners, forced from his home village at a young age and separated from his family in the chaos.

Luckily, Malong made it to a nearby small town, Abyei, where one of his half-brothers lived. But, militiamen were on his heels, entering Abyei shortly thereafter and capturing Malong and other boys his age or older. Unwillingly alongside enemy soldiers, Malong was taken to yet another village next to Abyei, Muglet, where he would live in captive, surviving abuse and frequent beatings, including feet burning to prevent the prisoners from escape.

But, enslavement didn't sit well with the older boys who shared Malong's fate, so after one year (1989) they staged a get-away, bringing the young boys – Malong included – along with them. The young men then jumped on a train, headed directly north to the capital of enemy territory, Khartoum.

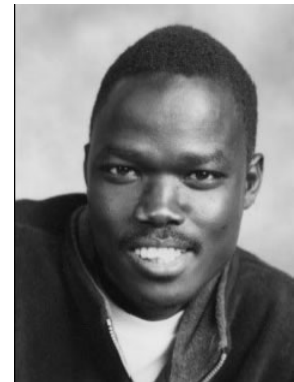
Malong describes the period that he was in Khartoum as intensely lonely. He was without family and, for the first year, without even anything to do to pass the time. Eventually Malong forged connections after he met up with a close family friend – someone who Malong now regards as an uncle – who invited Malong to live in his home, and began to attend school through Cambouni, a non-profit, Catholic educational institution the mission of which is to help the less fortunate in Sudan to attend school.

But even close friends cannot take the place of real family, and after several years, Malong decided to ignore all warnings and travel back south. Despite the horror stories of abandoned villages where all the men had fled and the women, children, and elderly had been killed, Malong insisted to travel deeply to south where he finally connected with family, including his mother and the elderly brother who took care of her. Sadly though, he learned that his younger sister was not alive.

By this time, it had been almost 11 years since Malong had last been in Abyei or his Twicmayardit village, but the situation remained precarious. Militias continued to threaten the residents, and Malong felt unsafe. Reprieve came by way of the United Nations whose representatives, told Malong about Kakuma, a refugee camp in Northern Kenya, and offered to take him there. With the blessing of his family that agreed that Kakuma was a safer alternative, Malong again set out on his own for Kakuma where he would live for the next year.

Very soon after his arrival, at least compared to most other residents of Kakuma, Malong was slotted to come to America. In 2000, he arrived in Arlington, Massachusetts where he moved into a group home with 7 other students and 3 “house parents.” Malong attended Arlington High School, and, after graduation, moved to Bronxville New York to attend Concordia College. There, Malong majored in English and Art and took particular advantage of his proximity to New York City to attend the theater with his Modern Drama class. Malong also developed a particular affinity for poetry writing, painting, and drawing.

While in college, Malong also took advantage of another special opportunity. Although the circumstances were far from optimal – his mother was ill with Meningitis – he got to travel back to Sudan where he was reunited with his family. No doubt that seeing her youngest son was the best medicine for Malong's mother who continues to gain her strength back every day.



**Congratulations, Malong, graduate of the Class of 2008!**