

# ZAC'S STORY

Zacharia Machiek's life began in a cattle camp in Cueibet County in South Sudan, around the village of Abyei Ajok. From the age of 6 or 7 boys and girls begin their duties cleaning the cattle yard around the camp.

They collected the dung for the fires and then taking the cattle out all day to water and pasture, bringing them back to the camp at night. They also have to defend the cattle from wild animals, including lions.

Zac's mother died when he was very young and he went into the care of his uncle, who was killed in a tribal war a few years later. Zac's father died when he was about 10 years old. According to custom, he had to dig his father's grave.

When the army from the North arrived, burning villages and killing civilians, Zac and other young boys fled and began a long walk into Ethiopia with men, women and children along with the Sudan People's Liberation Army, a trek during which many perished.

In Ethiopia Zac and other 'Lost Boys', orphaned during the war, or separated from their parents, were collected together in training camps forming the Red Army.

However the very disciplined military style of life felt strange to him, and he didn't feel safe. He decided to get back to southern Sudan and the cattle camps near the village. He describes how he barely survived: "Once me and a friend slept under a tree. A wild animal came through the grass and took my friend. He cried out. It was so dark I couldn't see anything. I was screaming out to him. There was nothing I could do." From the group of six boys from his village Zac was now the last one to survive. He eventually crossed over from Sudan to Kenya and found his way to the Kakuma Refugee Camp run by the UN After spending 10 years at a refugee camp with other lost boys, and a further 5 years in Egypt, a friend sponsored him out to Australia.

Zac has been living in south-west Sydney since 2003. He has had a variety of jobs, including family counsellor at Relationships Australia, security guard and fruit-picker. He is currently a 'stay at home' Dad, caring for his 3 children: Gloria, Adam and Jordan.