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January 17, 2008

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## **OPINION BY BONNIE HENRY: 'Lost Boy' is found**

*BONNIE HENRY, ARIZONA DAILY STAR*

reunited with parents in sudan

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**Chris Garang**, 24, is helping his people in Sudan while studying nursing in Tucson

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They were waiting for him. As the pickup truck slogged through the mud, it was quickly surrounded by ecstatic villagers.

Some were dancing. Some were drumming. All were singing songs of welcome and thanksgiving for this young man, come from America.

Suddenly emerging from the crowd was his father - a man he had last seen when he was but a boy of 7 - engulfing him in his arms.

**Chris Garang**, one of thousands known as the Lost Boys of Sudan, was home.

"We hugged for a long time," says **Garang**. "My father didn't let me go. I was very happy."

Not far away, dancing with the other women, was his mother. "She was afraid it wasn't me. She didn't recognize me," says **Garang**. "Then she did. She gave me a big hug."

It had been 17 years since mother and son had seen each other, after **Garang**, now 24, was torn from his family during the civil war that inflamed southern Sudan two decades ago.

For the next 11 years, **Garang** would endure banishment, bombings, starvation and disease. In 2001, he was plucked from a Kenyan refugee camp and flown to America, settling in Tucson.

Here, he made a new life, learning the language, becoming a U.S. citizen, training to become a registered nurse - all the while wondering if his family was still alive.

Two years ago, he learned of a younger brother, now 13, born after the family's initial separation, only to be abducted and sold into slavery in Khartoum, the capital of Sudan.

On his modest salary working at a Tucson nursing home, **Garang** arranged to put his brother - who had escaped his captors - into a boarding school in Nairobi, Kenya.

Last May, **Garang** returned to his homeland for a two-month visit. Through donations, he arranged for thousands of dollars in medical aid to be shipped from Nairobi, Kenya, to Akon, in the Bahr-el Ghazal region of southern Sudan.

While in Nairobi, **Garang** also united with the brother he had never met.

Along with a handful of other volunteers, he then flew into Akon to work at a clinic built by JumpStart Sudan, a nonprofit organization that provides humanitarian aid to the Sudanese people.

There, **Garang** worked for the next seven weeks, passing out mosquito nets, giving shots, teaching basic first aid and treating wounds - all in a clinic with water drawn from a well and no electricity.

"We use the light of day, but there is nothing at night," he says.

During his time there, he treated a little girl whose snakebite had infected her flesh all the way to the bone.

He also cared for a woman carried by stretcher to the clinic over two days' time.

Infection had set in after the woman had undergone an unsuccessful Caesarean section performed by other villagers.

**Garang** cleaned her wound, changed the dressing day after day, gave her antibiotics. "After a week, she was in stable condition," he says.

Meanwhile, he was still trying to learn the fate of his parents.

"I talked with some people in my clan. Some said they did not know if they were alive. Some said they were. So I asked my cousins to go out and search. I sent them on motor scooters to four places, each about 50 miles away."

Three came back with no word. The fourth returned with a letter for **Garang**. It was from his father. "It said, 'Come as soon as possible.' "

**Garang** sent the courier back with a reply: "I am so glad you are alive. But there is no way I can get there."

His father sent back a pickup truck. Still, **Garang** stayed at the clinic for three more days, anxious to complete his work.

Finally, he and his friends from the clinic were able to climb in the truck and set off toward the town of Kwajok, where loved ones were waiting, some in ceremonial garb.

A bull was sacrificed for the feast. "People danced, people ate, many people came to the celebration," says **Garang**, who also took medical supplies to the town. "It went on for four days."

But sorrow also mingled with the joy. **Garang** learned that the younger brother with him on the night the family was separated had died.

Two sisters born later had also died. But two younger brothers, ages 10 and 8, were living with his parents, both now members of the Sudanese People's Liberation Army.

Following the celebration, **Garang** and his family drove to the town of Wau, his birthplace. From there, he began his flight back to America.

"My parents were on the runway, waving and crying. They thought I was going to be able to stay."

This time, the separation will be considerably shorter. Next week, **Garang** flies back to Sudan for three months, thanks to his fundraising efforts and to JumpStart Sudan. Once again, he'll be taking more medications and volunteering at the Akon clinic.

He'll work there for eight weeks, then see his parents for the last portion of his trip.

"I hope to go back every year," says **Garang**, who's already planning a trip for the summer of '09.

"When I was at the clinic, it made me feel good. You always have this guilt, of not doing enough."

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Did You Know . . .

More than 60 Lost Boys of Sudan now make their home in Tucson.

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for more info

For more information on JumpStart Sudan, log on to [www.jumpstartsudan.org](http://www.jumpstartsudan.org).

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