

REFLECTIONS AND OBSERVATIONS

The narratives document the diversity of the learners and the diversity of their experiences. Even when participants were from the same or neighbouring country, they often had very different stories to tell. Some reported having happy and positive experiences in the countries and refugee camps in which they lived, while others reported having only negative experiences and memories. Many suffered the loss of a parent, or other family member, because of war while others did not. Likewise, some were separated from their parents and sought asylum with aunts, uncles, or family friends, while the families of others remained intact.

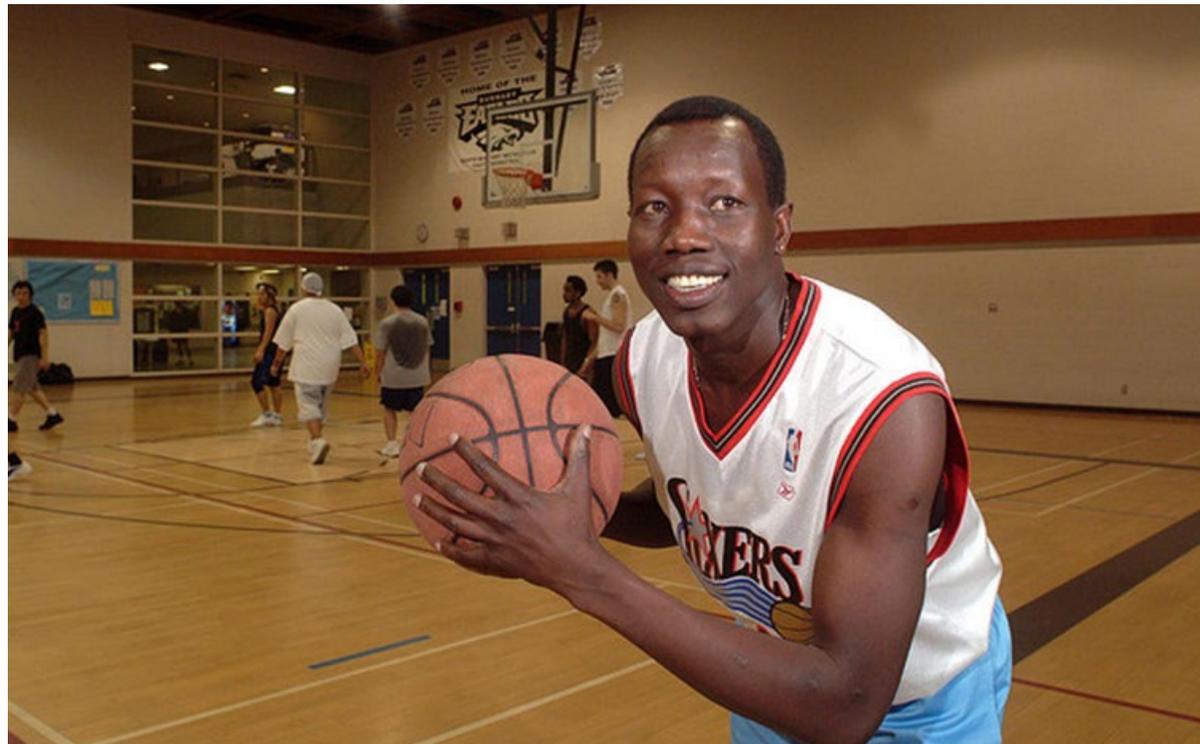
The nature and quality of the refugee camps or places of asylum also varied greatly. While some participants found safety and stability, and had their basic needs of shelter, food, and water met at their refugee camps or places of asylum, others did not. Access to education prior to arriving in Canada also varied significantly. Some of the participants were from relatively privileged families and had continuous access to education. Those from less privileged families experienced disrupted schooling or did not attend school at all.

The narratives also provide insight into the challenges of restarting life in a new and very different country. Resettlement in Canada was difficult and traumatic for some and a relatively pleasant experience for others. But the common reference in all the narratives was the importance of school in their new lives in Canada. School restored or maintained their hope for a better future. The narratives highlight the supports and programming that helped the participants achieve success in school and also tell of the barriers or inadequacies encountered in their school experiences.

All the narratives stress the importance of receiving EAL programming and supports for newcomers. All but one participant recommended that EAL supports and accommodations

be provided for a longer length of time, because many found the transition to non-EAL classrooms challenging, disruptive, and difficult.

Ultimately, the narratives point to the incredible strength and resiliency of children and youth from refugee and war-affected backgrounds. Through the participants' stories we learn of their will to survive and the power of support and relationships at school in helping them overcome the effects of war and the challenges of restarting their lives in a new country.



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