

# A Long Walk to Water

Written by Linda Sue Park : Illustrated by Jim Averbeck  
based on a true story

## Chapter One :

*a breakfast serials story*

### Southern Sudan, 2008

*Going was easy.*

*Going, the big plastic container held only air. Nya could switch it from one hand to the other, swing it by her side, or cradle it in both arms. She could even drag it behind her, bumping it off the ground and raising a tiny cloud of dust with each step.*

*There was little weight, going. There was only heat, the sun already baking the air even though it was hours before noon. It would take her an hour and a half, if she didn't stop along the way.*

*Heat, and time. And thorns.*

### Southern Sudan, 1985

Salva sat cross-legged on the bench. He kept his head turned toward the front, hands folded, back perfectly straight. Everything about him was paying attention to the teacher—except his eyes and his mind.

His eyes kept flicking toward the window, beyond which he could see the road. The road home. Just a little while longer—a few minutes more—and he would be walking on that road.

The teacher droned on with a lesson about the Arabic language. Salva spoke the language of his Dinka tribe at home. But in school he learned Arabic, the official language of the Sudanese government far away to the north. Eleven years old on his last birthday, Salva was a good student. He already knew the lesson, which was why he was letting his mind wander down the road ahead of his body.

Salva was well aware of how lucky he was to be able to go to school. He could not attend all year, because during the dry season his family moved away from their village. But during the rainy season, there was a school only half an hour's walk from his home.

Salva's father was a successful man. He owned many head of cattle and worked as their village's judge—an honored, respected position. Salva had three brothers and two sisters. As each of the four boys reached the age of about ten years, they were sent off to school. His older brothers, Ariik and Ring, had gone to school before him, and last year it had been Salva's turn.

Salva liked school well enough. But some days he wished he were still back at home herding cattle.

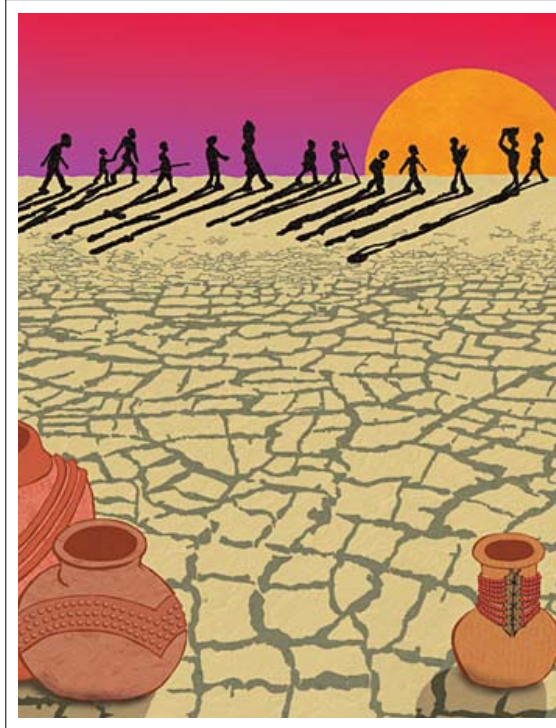
He and his brothers, along with the sons of his father's other wives, would walk with the herds to the water holes, where there was good grazing nearby. Their responsibilities depended on how old they were: Salva's youngest brother, Kuol, was now taking care of just one cow. Like his brothers before him, Kuol would be in charge of more cows every year. Before Salva had begun going to school, he had helped look after the entire herd and his younger brother as well.

The boys had to keep an eye on the cows, but the cows did not need much care. That left plenty of time to play.

Salva and the other boys made cows out of clay. The more cows you could make, the richer you were. But they had to be fine, healthy animals. It took time to make a lump of clay look like a good cow. The boys would race each other to see who could make the most and best cows.

Other times they would practice with their bows and arrows, shooting at small animals or birds. They weren't very good at this yet, but once in a while they got lucky.

Those were the best days. When one of them managed to kill a ground-squirrel or a rabbit, a guinea-hen or a grouse, the boys' aimless play halted and there was suddenly much



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work to do.

Some of them gathered sticks to build a fire. Others helped clean and dress the animal. Then they roasted it over the fire.

None of this took place quietly. Salva had his own opinion of how the fire should be built and how long the meat needed to cook, and so did each of the others.

"The fire needs to be bigger."

"It won't last long enough—we need more sticks."

"No, it's big enough already."

"Quick, turn it before it's ruined!"

"Hold it higher. That way the outside won't burn, but the inside will still cook."

The juices dripped and sizzled. A delicious smell filled the air.

Finally they couldn't wait one second longer. There was only enough for each boy to have a few bites, but oh, how delicious those bites were!

Salva swallowed and turned his eyes back toward the teacher. He wished he hadn't recalled those times, because the memories made him hungry. Milk. When he got home, he could have a lovely bowl of fresh milk that would keep his belly full until suppertime.

He knew just how it would be. His mother would rise from her work grinding meal and walk around to the side of the house that faced the road. She would shade her eyes with one hand, searching for him. From far off he would see her bright orange headscarf, and he would raise his arm in greeting. By the time he reached the house, she would have gone inside to get his bowl of milk ready for him...

CRACK!

The noise had come from outside. The teacher stopped talking for a moment. Every head in the room turned toward the window.

Nothing. Silence.

The teacher cleared his throat, which pulled the boys' attention back to the front of the room. He began speaking again, continuing the lesson where he had left off.

Then—

CRACK! POP-POP-CRACK!

ACK-ACK-ACK-ACK-ACK-ACK!

"Everyone, DOWN!" the teacher shouted.

Some of the boys moved at once, ducking their heads and hunching over. Others sat frozen, their eyes and mouths wide. Salva covered his head with his hands, but kept

looking from side to side in a panic.

The teacher edged his way to the window. He took a quick peek outside. The noise had stopped, but now the boys could hear people shouting and running.

"Go quickly, all of you," the teacher said, his voice low and urgent. "Into the bush. Do you hear me? Not home. Don't run home. They will be going into the villages.

Stay away from the villages—run into the bush."

He went to the door and looked out again.

"Go! All of you, now!"

The war had begun two years earlier. Salva did not understand much about it, but he knew that rebels from the southern part of Sudan, where he and his family lived, were fighting against the government, which was based in the north. Most of the people who lived in the north were Muslim, and the government wanted all of Sudan to become an Islamic country.

But the people in the south were of different religions and did not want to be forced to become Muslim. They began fighting for independence from the north. The fighting was scattered all around southern Sudan, and now, at last, the war had come to where Salva lived.

The boys rose to their feet. Some of them were crying. The teacher began guiding the students out the door.

Near the end of the line, Salva felt his heart beating so hard that its pulse pounded in his throat and ears. He wanted to shout, "I want to go home! I must go home!" But the words were blocked by the wild thumping in his throat.

When he got to the door, he looked out. Everyone was running—men, children, women carrying babies. The air was full of dust that had been kicked up from all those running feet. Some of the men were shouting and waving guns.

Salva saw all this with one glance.

Then he was running, too. Running as hard as he could, into the bush.

Away from home.

*to be continued ...*

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