

Hustle Towards the Door of Light

A Memoir of Struggle, Faith, and the Journey from Village Life to Adulthood

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Dedication

To my late brother, Ojakol Micheal, whose soul departed in 2003—may your soul rest in eternity. Your guidance and memories continue to inspire me every day.

To my late brother, Okorikol Charles, whose soul departed in 2012—may your soul rest in eternity. Your guidance, support, and memories continue to inspire me every day.

Acknowledgments

I thank the Almighty God, my family, and all those who supported me through my journey. Special thanks to my childhood friends Nywaranda, Ecuken, Bosco, and others who shaped my early years.

In all this, I must make a clear distinction between the men who shaped my life. My father, whose spirit I carry in my name Opuko, passed away in 2024, a year after I graduated from the military academy. His lessons, guidance, and the quiet strength he instilled in me were always present, even in the heat of village games and the struggle of school.

My late brothers, Ojakol Micheal and Okorikol Charles, may their souls rest in eternity, left behind memories of camaraderie, laughter, and guidance during my childhood. Their absence, along with the eventual passing of my father, reminds me of how fleeting life can be—and how much of the foundation of courage, discipline, and resilience comes from those who came before me.

What troubles me most about these memories is that I never had a mature conversation with them, never had the chance to truly discuss life and home. We were separated just like that, without any proper, heartfelt discussions as sons of the same mother—all left to the will of the Almighty God.

In Memory of My Beloved Mother

To my late mother, whose soul departed in 2019, may you rest in eternal peace. That year marked one of the most remarkable years of pain I have ever endured, a time that tested my heart, my spirit, and my understanding of life. Your love, sacrifice, and guidance shaped every step I took, and your absence is felt deeply every day.

Though gone, your lessons remain alive in me, in the choices I make, and in the strength I carry forward.

Preface

This book is a recount of my life, from my early days in Omosingo village, through childhood adventures, struggles in school, and the lessons that molded me into the person I am today. It is a story of perseverance, faith, and resilience, highlighting the hustle that leads toward the door of light.

CHAPTER ONE

I may not clearly remember my very first day at school, but there are moments from those early days that have never left my mind.

One of the funniest and most frustrating things I remember is how I could not write the number zero. No matter how many times I tried, it just would not come out right. Even when I practiced from home, following my late brother Ojakol Micheal, who was ahead of me by about two classes, I still struggled.

May his soul rest in eternity. I truly miss him, and the whole family misses him. We were growing together before the unfortunate events of 2003 that led to him disappearing from our lives forever.

One day, while I was at school—I think I was in Primary Three—my brother Ojakol Micheal, whom I closely followed, was in Primary Seven.

It was toward the evening when I heard shocking news: **he had cut one of his fingers while cutting cassava stems for planting at school.** This activity was being done under the direct supervision of the headteacher, Oluka.

The news unsettled me deeply. I was overwhelmed with fear and concern. Without thinking much, I rushed in panic to see what had happened.

I still remember the moment clearly—his fellow pupils were helping him return from the garden where they had been cutting cassava stems. The sight alone shook me deeply.

That is a day I will never forget in my life.

It was one of the earliest moments that made me understand something important—life is full of hurdles and uncertainties, and sometimes pain comes when you least expect it.

Another thing that confused me as a young boy was how some older and taller pupils were promoted to the next class, not because of academic performance, but because of their age. To me, it made no sense at all. I could not understand that kind of system.

But that was how things were.

The Boys I Grew Up With

Among the boys I grew up with, one stood out in a special way—Opio Ryamond, popularly known as Nywaranda. Among his brothers, he was also known as Eriyesa, a name that came from the way he saw the world, shaped by a natural condition in his eyes. To us, that never made him less. If anything, it made him more unique.

He was strong, bold, and full of confidence. The kind of boy who did not fear trying anything, even when it was risky. Many times, we followed his lead—sometimes into adventure, sometimes into trouble.

We also had Elungat Mourice, popularly known as Ecuken, Bosco, and many others who formed the circle of boys I spent my childhood with. We were always together—moving from one place to another, looking for what to do next, whether it was hunting, playing, or just exploring.

We were not just friends.
We were what I can call village warriors.

That name was not given to us by anyone. It came from how we lived—tough, fearless, and always ready to face whatever came our way. In our world, strength was respected, boldness was admired, and fear was something you tried your best to hide.

Each one of us had a role in that group. Some were known for strength, others for skill, others for courage. But together, we formed something stronger than individuals.
A brotherhood built by the village itself.

Hunting Days and the Law of the Wild

Hunting was part of our life growing up. It was not just about getting food—it was about proving yourself among your peers. In the village, hunting built confidence, respect, and identity.

We used different tools depending on what we were hunting. One of the most common was a strong wooden club locally known as *elungi*, also called *ebela elungi*, meaning strong. It was not just any stick. It was heavy, well-shaped, and required real strength to use. When handled by someone experienced, it could bring down small animals with a single, well-aimed strike.

We mostly hunted small animals like hedgehogs. In those days, they were many. You could move through the bush and easily come across one. Today, they are no longer as common as they used to be, which tells you how much things have changed.

Hunting also had its own unwritten rules. If you went out with others and came back empty-handed, you had to be ready for shame. Along the way, others would mock you, shouting:

“AMUNO AIKOD!”

It meant your effort was useless—that you had only gone to escort others and carry what they had killed.

That alone pushed you to try harder the next time. No one wanted to be known for coming back with nothing.

When we succeeded, the story continued at home.

Sometimes, what we caught was not immediately killed. It would be kept in the kitchen, covered with a saucepan or basin. But those animals did not give up easily. Throughout the night, they would struggle—hitting the metal, turning, pushing, trying to escape.

If it was kept in the same house where you were sleeping, then sleep became a problem. You would lie there in the dark, listening to it:
knock... knock... knock...
Again and again.

That sound alone could keep you awake until morning. At times, you even feared it might somehow escape. But that was part of life.

Hunting taught us patience, resilience, and the reality that nothing came easy. You had to go out, try, fail, try again—and face whatever came with it, whether it was success or shame.

Aluru (Aluriek) – The Ground Feeder

During the millet harvest season, there were birds we locally called Aluru or Aluriek. These birds mostly stayed on the ground, feeding on fallen grains.

To catch them, we invented a clever method: we set small traps using thin threads, positioned so that when the bird stepped into it, the thread would catch it by the neck.

These birds were prized for their taste and fat content. When roasted, their dripping fat could even extinguish the fire—proof of how fatty and rich they were.

The Fashionable Fruit Tree Bird

Another bird we loved to hunt was green with a slightly red chest, heavy and strong. These birds fed on fruit-bearing trees, which we knew as Ebyong, Erere, and Ekungur.

One day, we hunted very close to home. Ocela spotted a bird perched at the very top of a tall Ebyong tree. He aimed carefully with his catapult and released the stone.

For a moment, the bird acted as if nothing happened. Then it twisted its head. Something was wrong.

The bird fell—thirty meters from the top—through branches and leaves, heavy and struggling, until it finally landed on the ground with a loud thud.

We watched in awe. Ocela, proud and silent, simply said:

“You don’t joke with this.”

That was Ocela, the village warrior, at his best.

The Joy of Hunting Together

Bird hunting was never just about the kill. It was about teamwork, skill, laughter, and learning.

- Nywaranda Opio taught us patience—how to watch the bird and wait for the perfect moment.
- Ocela and Oridok showed precision and strategy.
- Younger boys, like me, learned from the elders, developing focus and cunning.

These lessons were more than hunting—they were about life itself: observing carefully, thinking ahead, and acting boldly.

Fun and Games at ADIIRO Swamp

Not every adventure in our village was about hunting. Some days were reserved purely for fun, laughter, and testing courage. One of the most memorable spots was a swamp called ADIIRO, near Mzee Onyait, along the Kokorio-Toroma road.

Around a tree known as Ekarukei, enormous anthills became our playground. The boys and I discovered a way to make them even more exciting:

- We poured water over the anthills, turning them into slippery slides.
- Then we grabbed EDODOI, a locally improvised sliding board, and launched ourselves down at full speed.

Sometimes, the boys would sabotage the slide in funny ways—making the surface extra slick or adding small tricks that sent you tumbling unpredictably.

The results? cuts, bruises, and scars—but we wore them proudly. Each mark was a badge of courage, proof that you had dared to be part of the adventure.

It was a place where pain and laughter lived side by side, where every slip, tumble, or scrape was a lesson in resilience, daring, and friendship.

Those moments at ADIIRO swamp were more than play—they were a training ground for life, shaping the fearless spirit of every boy who dared to challenge the slippery anthills.

Football, Pain, and the Spirit of Village Warriors

In our village, football wasn't just a game—it was life itself. Every boy I grew up with had a field somewhere, even if it was just a patch of bare earth with dust and stones instead of grass. I played daily with my friends: Opio Nywaranda, Ecuken, Imalingat (nicknamed Ipworose), and myself, known as Opuko, a name my father gave me.

Football was thrilling, dangerous, and raw. Injuries were normal. You risked scrapes, bruises, and even worse. If you got hurt, no one carried you off the field—you found your own way home, hoping to avoid further punishment from your parents.

The strongest among us was Nywaranda. Facing him one-on-one felt like charging a bull. His legs were powerful, unyielding. Even the bravest boys risked serious pain. Once, young Bosco dared to challenge him, only to end up tumbling off the field, clutching himself in agony.

Other village warriors added their own flavor to the game:

- Kenyenji—notorious for his powerful kicks
- Ocela and Oridok—Nywaranda's older brothers
- Anyida, Omogol, Omongot, Ekellot from Ominya village

Since our homes bordered Ominya and Omosingo, we played anywhere and everywhere—bare grounds, near swamps, or at Atapar by Mzee Ibaata Gaudesio's home. Football followed us even on chores, like fetching water.

Instead of going straight, we would stop to play near the borehole or on flat grass around the swamp. One game became two, then three, and sometimes we forgot why we had gone in the first

place.

Returning home late meant punishments—missing meals or enduring canes. At night, your legs might fall asleep, but your eyes stayed wide open, yearning for rest and food. That was village life.

On the other side of Omosingo, some boys had tasted town life. They were clever, skilled, and elusive. They dodged our strongest hits, often making us fall instead. Among them were:

- Ojuri Daudi
- Ariko, son of the veteran teacher Emugenyait
- Opumar Ben, younger brother of Daudi

From them, we learned that football was not just about strength, but about skill, intelligence, and control.

Village Geography and Cross-Village Adventures

Our village life was never confined to one field or one patch of earth. Football, exploration, and mischief carried us across Omosingo, Ominya, and even to Atapar by Mzee Ibaata Gaudesio's home.

Each place had its own challenges and stories.

We moved constantly, switching between dusty bare grounds, flat grass near swamps, and neighbors' yards, chasing the ball and testing each other's skill. It wasn't just play—it was survival, strategy, and learning the landscape. Sometimes, we ran across long paths, barefoot, dodging thorns, rocks, and puddles left by the rain.

Other times, we had to climb small embankments, jump streams, or sneak past grown-ups who would scold us if we lingered too long. The terrain itself was part of the game, shaping our agility, stamina, and courage.

Instead of going straight to fetch water or return home, we would detour to play by a borehole or a flat patch near a swamp. One game became two, then three. By the time we remembered our

chores or errands, we were already late—and the risk of punishment loomed large.

On the far side of Omosingo, some boys who had tasted town life played differently. They dodged, feinted, and teased in ways we had never experienced before. The combination of village toughness and town-style cleverness made each match unpredictable.

These cross-village adventures weren't just about football. They taught us territorial awareness, endurance, and strategy, preparing us for challenges far beyond the dusty fields of childhood.

Every trip, every scramble through the bush, every narrow escape shaped the spirit of the village warriors we were becoming.

A Childhood Lesson in Love

Even in the midst of mud, football, and endless village adventures, something quietly began to bloom in my life—love.

Her name was Amuyan Hellen. She was beautiful, shy, and charming, with a smile that could light up the dullest day. From the very first moment I noticed her, I wanted to be near her.

Our Primary One classroom wasn't much of a classroom at all—it was the big mango tree outside, with stones scattered around to act as benches. Sometimes, there weren't even enough stones for everyone.

Hellen would often sit on the ground, surrounded by sand. I couldn't help myself. I moved closer, wanting to sit near her. I gently touched her hand, and she would smile shyly and move away.

This small back-and-forth became a kind of game between us, playful and innocent. Even as a child, I could sense the natural attraction between a boy and a girl, though I didn't fully understand it at the time.

Those moments taught me something important: connection, attention, and curiosity can spark early lessons in human relationships. Even at that age, love wasn't about words—it was about

noticing, following, and learning from small gestures.

As the years passed, schoolwork and responsibilities began to take over. That little game faded into memory, but the impression it left never disappeared. Even today, I remember her fondly. I

imagine she is walking her own path, facing her own struggles, just as I continue to build mine. A childhood crush, small yet meaningful, became part of the story of my growing up—a

reminder that even in the hustle of village life, tender moments quietly shape us.

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CHAPTER TWO

My First Steps into School Life

A New World Begins

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from home, following my late brother Ojakol Micheal, who was ahead of me by about two classes, I still struggled.

May his soul rest in eternity. I truly miss him, and the whole family misses him. We were growing together before the unfortunate events of 2003 that led to him disappearing from our lives forever.

Another thing that confused me as a young boy was how some older and taller pupils were promoted to the next class, not because of academic performance, but because of their age. To me, it made no sense at all. I could not understand that kind of system.

But that was how things were.

Reporting to School Alone

When I first reported to school, I was scared.

Very scared.

What made it even harder was that I did not go with my usual group of village warriors. It felt like I had been taken out of my normal life and placed into a completely different world.

I later realized that some of my friends, like NYWARANDA, may have been studying from Ongatunyo Primary School, where they could see each other across the Toroma-Akurao road every day.

However, after a few weeks, I started seeing familiar faces. One of them was Elungat Mourise, also known as ECUKEN. Seeing him gave me some comfort. At least I was not entirely alone anymore.

Guided by Those Ahead of Us

There are people you never forget in life, especially those who helped you find your way when you were lost.

One of them was a son of IBAATA GAUDESIO, a legendary teacher who later passed on in 2023.

May his soul rest in eternal peace.

His son, OKURUT, who was ahead of us by about three classes and studying in Primary Four, took

time to guide us. He walked me and his younger brother, Obwalinga Mourise, around the school. He showed us where he sat, how things were done, and helped us understand the environment. That simple act meant a lot.

There was also ELUNGAT JAMES, who joined us. Even though he started with us, he was older and more mature. Because of that, he was promoted to another class before even completing his first term exams in Primary One.

That was something I found surprising

A School Without Nursery

One thing to understand about our village is that nursery school was not something we knew.

We did not pass through kindergarten or any early learning stage. We simply started directly in Primary One.

You arrive, you sit, and you begin.

No preparation. No soft landing.

Just life as it is.

Classrooms of Wood and Survival

The classrooms themselves were another story.

Some were built with wood and mud. They helped, but when it rained, you could feel like the whole structure might collapse on you at any moment.

As for us, at one point, we studied under a big mango tree.

That tree was our classroom.

Large stones were placed under it, and those stones acted as our desks and benches. That was where we sat, learned, and tried to understand the world through education.

We were lucky in one way. Most of the time, when it started raining, we had already gone back

home. But on a bad day, the rain would find us there.

Our books would get wet.

Our clothes would be soaked.

But even then, we did not go home immediately. Instead, we would continue playing in the mud, making the situation even worse.

By the time we finally returned home, we looked completely different.

Sneaking Past Mother

Going back home like We would try to avoid being seen by our mothers, especially mine. If she saw the state I was in,

there would definitely be consequences.

So we would sneak in quietly, trying to change into another pair of trousers if one was available.

But even that was not guaranteed.

In the village, having enough clothes was a challenge. You made do with what you had.

A Uniform That Was Not a Uniform

School uniform did not come immediately.

In fact, I only got something close to a uniform around the third term.

When I first reported to school, I wore a red “cansu”-like cloth. To be honest, it looked more like what a young girl would wear.

And yes, I felt ashamed.

But I did not stop going to school.

I kept going.

Because somewhere inside me, I had developed a strong desire to learn and to be part of that environment.

My mother tried her best. I remember she would collect clothes for me from different places,

including her relatives and other people who were slightly better off.

It was not easy, but it was enough to keep me moving.

The Village Warriors at School

Some of the boys I grew up with eventually joined school life as well.

Among them was NYWARANDA, who came a few weeks after I had already started. Seeing him again brought back that village energy into school life.

BOSCO, on the other hand, was younger and did not join immediately. He later came when I was already in Primary Three. There were also older boys like OCELA and ORIDOK, brothers to NYWARANDA, who

reported to school earlier.

They belonged to a different category. These were what I would call the mature warriors. You could even say they were retired village warriors trying to adjust to school life.

But OCELA was something else.

OCELA and the Day of the Tipper Truck

OCELA had a habit of coming to school late.

Not just late in the day, but late in style.

There were days you would see him arriving at school hanging on top of a truck that was bringing building materials. Just imagine that.

One particular day, he came riding on a tipper truck, together with the workers on it.

As they arrived and came down, one of the teachers, a strict and well-known man who had previously served as a headteacher in other schools, saw him.

He called out, "OCELA!"

OCELA responded.

He was told to come closer.

What followed was not pleasant.

The teacher grabbed him and pinched his ears so hard that they almost bled. Then he beat him with a cane and chased him all the way to his class, Primary Two, where he had been promoted.

That moment stayed in my mind.

Not just because of the punishment, but because it showed the kind of life these boys were living.

They were fearless, wild, and not easily controlled.

OCELA did not stay long in school. He eventually dropped out before even completing exams in that class.

His brother ORIDOK continued with his education.

As for NYWARANDA, even though he joined us, I do not clearly remember seeing him in the classes that followed. Life was already taking different directions for each of us.

A First Crush at School

Sometimes I wonder—when does love really begin? I can say with certainty that for me, it started at school, though back then, I barely understood what it was.

Her name was AMUYAN HELLEN. She was beautiful, shy, and charming, with a smile that could light up even the dullest day. From the very first moment I noticed her, I wanted to be near her.

At that time, our classroom for Primary One wasn't much of a classroom at all—it was the big mango tree outside, with stones scattered around to act as benches or desks. And honestly, there were so many of us that sometimes the stones weren't enough.

I would often see HELLEN sitting on the ground, her small form surrounded by sand. I couldn't help myself. I moved closer, trying to be near her. I gently touched her hand, and she smiled, shyly moving away.

Of course, that only made me follow her even more. It became a game between us—one I didn't

fully understand at the time, but it taught me something I now recognize: the friction that exists when two young hearts are drawn to each other.

As we moved on to the next classes, life and schoolwork began to demand more of our attention. Slowly, the game faded, replaced by the challenges of learning, growing, and figuring out why we even went to school in the first place.

Even today, I remember her fondly. I imagine she is walking her own path, facing her own struggles, just as I am still building mine.

Discovering My Hidden Strength

Sometimes, I still marvel at the way life quietly reveals our hidden abilities.

When I was in Primary School, I was terrified of participating in outdoor activities, especially running competitions. I always felt I wasn't good enough, convinced I would be the last to finish.

Yet, there were moments after school, during informal races with my friends, when I tested myself quietly. To my surprise, I often ended up beating them—even those who had already shown up on the official field earlier that day.

Why was I like this? I didn't understand it then.

It wasn't until I grew into my twenties that I truly realized what was happening. My hidden ability to run, first glimpsed in childhood, became a real strength during long-distance running was more than a physical challenge—it was a test of stamina, endurance, and mental strength.

We were often tasked with races of nearly 60 kilometers, sometimes expected to complete them within two hours. To my astonishment, I could not only finish these grueling runs, but often return well ahead of the majority. While some of my colleagues returned around 10 or 11 a.m., and female trainees often returned around noon or even 2 p.m., I frequently arrived closer to 8 a.m., before the required time.

Those who failed faced punishment—they were denied food and had to wait until supper, enduring both physical and mental strain.

It was in these intense, grueling moments that I truly discovered something about myself: I had resilience, quiet strength, and an ability to endure. A strength that had been hidden since my childhood, quietly growing within me, only to emerge when life finally demanded it.

Completing Primary School and Facing the Unknown

So how did I finally finish my primary education?

I sat for my Primary Leaving Examinations (PLE) for the very first time at **Atoroma Primary School**, after I had shifted from Omosingo in 2004. This move came after a very difficult year—2003—a year that changed the course of my life.

That was the year we lost my brother, Ojakol Micheal, to the LRA rebels. He had been taken to study at Soroti Community Secondary School by one of our uncles, Opeded Simon, who had generously offered to support his education privately. It was an opportunity full of hope—one that was suddenly cut short.

During that period, rebel attacks were widespread across Northern Uganda and the Teso region. Many people lost their lives, and countless families suffered destruction of property and deep emotional wounds.

The account of what happened to my brother came from a witness—our own brother from the IRARAK ITUDAI clan. He had been studying at the same school and survived the attack. He later narrated how he narrowly escaped death, with a bullet passing so close to his head that it brushed through his hair.

That same brother, as I write this today, went on to serve as a police officer—a Community Liaison Officer—and is now the current chairman of our clan, IRARAK ITUDAI of Ongatunyo.

After that painful loss in 2003, I changed schools and transferred to Atoroma Primary School in 2004. It was there that I sat for my PLE examinations.

By this time, I felt that I was finally progressing. I believed I was moving forward in life.

But I did not know that the real journey had not yet begun.

When the results came back, I had passed with 14 aggregates. It was a good result—something that should have opened doors for the next stage of my education.

But instead, it opened a question.

A very heavy question.

Who was going to pay my school fees?

At that time, I was even fortunate to have sat for PLE, because primary education was free. Secondary education, however, required money—something we did not have.

That was the first time in my life I asked myself a deeply troubling question:

“Now that I have passed, who will take me forward?”

I searched for the answer within myself, but I could not find it.

I became immersed in thoughts and uncertainty about my future.

Then, something unexpected happened.

A relative approached my father—or perhaps my father approached him. To this day, I cannot clearly say who initiated the conversation. But what I remember vividly is the moment my father returned home.

That evening, he gathered us as a family and shared the news.

One of our brothers from the IRARAK ITUDAI clan, a teacher by profession, had expressed interest in supporting my education. He had offered to pay my school fees for secondary level, having seen that I had performed well in Primary Seven.

That moment marked the beginning of a new chapter in my life.

A chapter I had not planned for.

A chapter that would test me in ways I could not yet imagine.

CHAPTER THREE

When the Journey Almost Ended

This is the point where, interestingly, my fear and confusion about education truly began—caused by the inability of my family to pay my school fees.

This chapter walks through some of the roughest times of my life—the struggles, the disappointments, and the difficult situations I passed through to become who I am today.

When that brother of mine expressed interest in supporting my education, he approached my parents and requested to take on the responsibility of paying my school fees. Whether his intentions were genuine or not, only he knew. But at that time, to us, it felt like hope had finally come.

He enrolled me in Senior One (S.1) at Toroma Secondary School, near Toroma Traditional Mission. I remember it clearly.

However, to my surprise, he only managed to pay twenty thousand shillings as a deposit for the first term. At that time, the total school fees per term at Toroma Secondary School were forty-five thousand shillings.

With that deposit of twenty thousand, I was able to stay in school for only three weeks.

After that, I was sent away.

The school administration demanded that I clear the balance before I could continue attending classes.

I had no choice.

I decided to go and find him.

I walked all the way to his home in Ongatunyo.

I may not remember the exact date, but I remember the moment clearly. I found him in the morning, seated in the compound. His chair faced the center of the compound, but he had turned his head toward the banana plantations nearby. I could not tell whether he had already seen me approaching.

I greeted him.

He responded.

Then he turned again and continued looking toward the banana plantations.

I sat down near him and immediately told him why I had come. I explained that the school administration had sent me away because the balance of the fees for Term One had not been paid. I reminded him that he had only given twenty thousand shillings as a deposit.

To my shock—and to my disappointment—he remained silent.

He kept looking toward the banana plantations.

He did not respond.

He did not turn back to look at me again.

I sat there, waiting.

But nothing came.

That moment has never left my mind. Even today, I still struggle to understand it. It made me realize something very difficult—that sometimes, people can be unexpectedly cold.

I had expected at least a response.

Even if he did not have the money, he could have told me:

“I am sorry, I cannot help you right now.”

That alone would have been enough. I would have taken that message back home and explained it to my parents.

But instead, I was met with silence.

A silence that said everything.

To this day, I still see him around, but there is nothing much to say. I do not know whether he truly intended to support my education, but his story in my life ended there.

And just like that, my journey in secondary school stopped.

I returned home to Omosingo village.

I did not go back to school.

There was no one to pay my fees.

Yes, I had two elder brothers—Okorikol Charles and Olinga Joseph—but they were already struggling to take care of their own families. They were peasant men, doing their best to survive. I could not bring myself to burden them further.

The one relative who had shown interest in helping me—a teacher by profession—had simply withdrawn without explanation.

And that was it.

That was the year 2005.

I stayed at home.

With no school.

With no clear future.

And with one question in my mind.

The Year I Stayed Home

The year 2005 marked a turning point in my life.

After the disappointment at school, when I was sent back home for failing to clear my fees—and after the painful silence from the very person who had promised to support my education—I found myself seated at home, uncertain of what the future held.

That moment was not just about missing school.

It was the beginning of confusion, frustration, and deep reflection.

For the first time in my life, I faced a question that had no immediate answer:

Who was going to educate me?

I had passed my Primary Leaving Examinations. I had the ability. I had the desire. But I did not have the means.

At home, everyone was trying to survive.

My elder brothers—Okorikol Charles and Olinga Joseph—were already struggling to build their own families. They were not in a position to take on the burden of my education. I understood that, even at that age. I could not push them further. Life had already placed enough weight on their shoulders.

The relative who had promised to support me had disappeared from the responsibility without a word.

And so, just like that, my journey in education came to a halt.

Learning Life Outside the Classroom

Now that I was home, I could not just sit idle.

Life in the village does not allow idleness.

I started working.

I worked in our family garden, helping my parents with digging, planting, and other daily activities. Beyond that, I began working in other people's gardens as well—doing whatever small jobs I could find to earn something for survival.

The work was not easy.

It required strength, patience, and endurance. But it also taught me something that school had not yet taught me—how to survive with my own hands.

Little by little, I began to collect small amounts of money.

Not much. Just bits.

But those small amounts mattered.

When I finally gathered enough, I gave the money to my mother. She used it to buy me a female goat.

That goat became one of the greatest blessings in my early life.

The Goat That Changed My Story

The goat was not just an animal.

It was hope.

By the grace of the Almighty God, the goat began to give birth—and not just single kids, but twins.

Again and again.

The goats multiplied.

What started as one slowly became many.

Through the care and management of my mother, the small investment began to grow into something meaningful. Over time, those goats were exchanged, and eventually, they brought me something greater:

A cow.

For me, that cow was not just livestock.

It was progress.

It was proof that even from nothing, something could be built.

The Journey to Usuk

When the cow was finally acquired, I had a decision to make.

At first, I thought of giving it to Mzee Opio, the father of my cousin brother, Emitoit John, to take care of it.

But my elder brother, Olinga Joseph, advised against it.

He told me clearly:

“If you take that cow to another person, you will incur the costs of its care.”

He was right.

In our society, when someone keeps your animal, they must benefit in some way. That is the tradition. That is the understanding.

Instead, he told me:

“I will take the cow to my place in Usuk and help you take care of it as it multiplies.”

Since he was my elder brother—the second born in our family—I trusted him.

We agreed.

And so began another journey.

We moved the cow from Omosingo, Toroma, all the way to Aketa in Usuk.

It was not an easy journey.

We walked on foot.

We had a bicycle, but it had to be rolled most of the way. There were moments when we had to stop and rest along the road. The journey was long, tiring, and demanding.

But we pushed on.

By the time we reached Aketa in Usuk, it was around 6 p.m., moving toward 7 in the evening.

Exhausted, but satisfied, we had delivered the cow.

Growth... and Silence

My brother took care of the cow.

In time, it produced its first calf—a female.

That calf grew.

I saw it once when it had already become strong and mature.

At that moment, I felt proud.

It meant that what I had started—from a single goat—was continuing to grow.

It meant that my efforts were not in vain.

A Painful Discovery

As time went on, life moved forward.

I eventually found my way back into education through the support of my uncle, who later became a Member of Parliament in 2017 through a by-election. Through his help, I reached university.

At one point during my studies, I decided to visit my brother in Usuk to check on the cows.

I expected to see progress.

I expected to see what we had built continuing to grow.

But what I found was something else.

I was told:

“Your cow was sold.”

Not the original cow—but its first-born calf.

The one that had grown.

The one that represented expansion.

The one that was supposed to secure my future.

It had been sold.

And I had not been consulted.

The Return of Educational Hunger

So back to my secondary education, after my brother Etukoit kept quiet on me, I came back home, digging, helping parents but much as I was doing so my heart was always ringing to be at school, I felt out of place, I felt wasted because I was now immersed in a village, I was helpless but one thing I can say is that, with focus, determination, and God fearing, you will reach where the Almighty has destined you and me to be as I have of recent learnt to dedicate myself to the Almighty God such that he fully takes control of my life, for I can't do much without him, Almighty God is my director above all my redeemer, I stepped here, if it wasn't focus and not knowing what you as individual wants in life, I would have remained totally wasted and who knows may be immersed into illusions of drunkards as they believe drinking alcohol is one step away from forgetting one's problems, to me it's one way to forward the problems ahead.

So when I stayed home for the whole term a period of almost 2 to 3 months, before I made up my mind to return back to primary level not because I had academically failed to be secondary or senior but because no one could pay my school fees, my parents tried everything possible there was no one out. I remember one time my dad unreasonably thought of renting out one piece of land, I told him father please don't because I knew even if it's to sell all those pieces of land at the time, it would not help to finish my education up university, so the reason why I returned back to p.7 from now my village school not again where I had passed from Atoroma, I returned back to my home school because I was targeting to repeat p.7 PLE exams such that I can hopefully get division one, because sub-counties had promised to sponsor first graders, even this was a rumour at the time, but I didn't care to verify the claim, I had a task at hand and that was to work hard to ensure that I get division one, when I returned and entered p.7 class, now in second term, everyone was surprised and asking who the heck I was, especially the new comers, although majority knew me already at Omosingo, the issue now was why has he come back but later I think they got to understand, here I was with

guys like Emorut David, Emiat, Ocen son to former LC.3 Kapujan, late I malingat of osugoro, among others.

So i sat PLE exam again (second time) in 2005, when results returned, I was unfortunate again not to get division one as I had hoped, maths took me badly this time, I almost failed maths of 2005, I scored credit six, English I got credit four, and the rest I got distinction two, I was what, when something isn't meant for you it can't be, when it's not your time, you can't change anything, so this time again I returned back home, continue to help my parents, digging on people's gardens looking for away out to survive.

As i did this for the whole term now at home, someone by the names of Okude, a student teacher by the time I returned to omosingo, learnt that I was basically sitting at home, came and asked my parents to take me to some school in Soroti town, to repeat p.7 again, for the third time, I asked myself why take me to repeat I never understood that logic until at later time, when I got to know that, director of that school had learnt a business strategy of looking for kids who can be sharpened well to score for him first graders, when he had many first graders, many pupils get attracted to his school something he achieved with my lot, because truely we scored division ones, thanks to that director his name was called Ebyeu Charles, a man of his own character but irrespective of his strategy we felt much privileged when we passed well at school because while we were there he had promised us for another sponsorship now at the secondary level, this is something that could save me, make me or help me get chance to study secondary, because no one could raise my fees.

I completely this school, I remember my dad through the motivation of mother came and paid me a visit, at his age, I was shocked and surprised that he managed to ride his bike to see me his son, I felt happy at the same time I felt like crying because I asked myself, how could Mzee at his age manage to come see me better than even my able bodied brothers, but nevertheless, that's the love of dad, I felt it, till today, I never forget that moment, much as he didn't contribute to my school fees, that was worth it at his age, my dad showed a concern together with mother who had prepared for me items like groundnuts, sugar, soap, mangoes from the village. For the time, I truly felt the love of my parents.

Silence Over Conflict

In many families, such a situation would cause serious conflict.

Arguments.

Bitterness.

Long-lasting division.

But I did not react that way.

By that time, I had grown—not just in age, but in understanding.

I kept quiet.

Even as my brother tried to explain himself.

He said:

“I sold your cow to help our sister, Anume Betty, go to school.”

I listened.

But deep inside, I could not ignore the truth.

I, too, was a student.

I, too, had needs.

I, too, could have benefited from that cow—through school fees, clothing, or basic support.

But in their thinking, there was an assumption:

That anyone who had gone to the city—especially Kampala—was already okay.

That once you are in the city, you no longer need help.

That you have made it.

But that was not the reality.

I was still struggling.

Still studying.

Still in need.

A Lesson I Never Forgot

Looking back, I realized something important.

People do not always think beyond their immediate understanding.

Sometimes, they act based on what they believe is right—without considering the full picture.

Other times, they simply choose their own path, even when it affects others.

My brother made his choice.

And I made mine.

I chose peace.

I chose silence.

I chose to move forward.

But that moment stayed with me.

It taught me a lesson I have never forgotten:

Not every investment you make will return to you the way you expect.

And not every person you trust will carry your vision the way you do.

Moving Forward

That year—2005—was not just a year of staying home.

It was a year of awakening.

A year of learning life from the ground.

A year of building from nothing.

A year of disappointment—but also growth.

What I did not know at the time was this:

The journey had only just begun.