

## **MODELS OF ACHIEVEMENT**

### **EP4 SEG 1 DENG V10**

ANNETT SHUN WAH: Hi, I'm Annette Shun Wah, welcome to models of achievement. In this series we're exploring the successes and aspirations of extraordinary Australians who have discovered their own inspirational path through university study. These are personal stories from people of very diverse backgrounds. Current students and recent graduates revealing how education has transformed their lives.

Forced to serve as a child soldier in South Sudan, Deng experienced the horrors of war first hand. Now no longer carrying a weapon he has instead armed himself with a university degree.

DENG: My name is Deng and this is my story. My journey to Australia was unbelievable. When I grew up in Sudan I think my life was pretty much normal, like other normal kids. My family was big, my father had a farm there which when I went back last year the farm is still standing there, there was banana there, there's also just other plantation in the area. So it was quite amazing place to live when I was young.

It was 1985 when the Government of Sudan started taking villages. So what happened was my mother or my other relative were told that you have to give up a child. That child have to travel to a place like Ethiopia for education. It was compulsory, you had to comply with it.

In our family there were three of us that was basically gave up for compulsory conscription. So we were marched with other kids, with other kids took us over a month. We didn't have food, we didn't have anything, we were just eating on wild fruit. During the way when we were coming there it was actually we started knowing the signs of war, the atrocities of war, started getting - seeing people's skulls from the ground and their skull wasn't one, it was not two, it was not a dozen, there were thousands of skulls everywhere.

We went through various military training, proper military training, how to use the gun, hitting the targets, we were armed at the time. That was in '93.

Kids going to war, you know that they're not going to come back because they're going to put in everything they have. So we were slaughtered.

I received a bullet wound to my back so there were two of us so we were first to enter the town, do the raids and I was shot in the back running because you have got to run. So I crossed the town and went to the other side and about half a kilometre later somebody said, "Gee, you got shot. You're bleeding." So I look at my uniform, my military uniform and there was this blood flowing and when I look at the blood I just fainted and that's it. So I was taken back to the barrack and get treated and was taken back to Nadinka. And when my brother came two days later he said, "Look, I'm going to take you, I'm going to take you to Kenya." I'm saying, "Well you will be charged with treason because you are assisting a deserter" and then he say, "Well I'll do my best to take you out" and then I said, "Well good luck" but what his plan was is that we leave overnight. So I made my bed look like I was sleeping, I left my gun there with a rock there on top of it. So overnight we get in the trucks, I was basically in a sack, you know, those corn sack hiding myself in there and eventually crossed the border to Kenya.

And then went to United Nations compound and they issued me with a United Nations ID and a ration card was my ticket to Kakuma. My brother he happened to know, I think, Australian family and these couple they were quite happy to sponsor us and I don't know how Shaman, my brother, was and he convinced them to bring us to Australia.

We came here on the 26th of June 1998, it was really cold compared to the places that I were and I had my first McDonald's at Blacktown. That's how I got to Australia.

When I first came to Australia I moved to Blacktown and I lived here ever since. My first impression was wow, I'm going to study, I'm going to finish university but how to get to university was not there. I was not preferred from childhood to age of 13 nearly 13 and tried to, you know, start formal education.

There used to be a BP, petrol station in this area. This is where I learn, started learning English pretty much and you interact with customers on a daily basis, you get bikies come in and park their bike and they're making this noise and you say hello to them and they hello to you or they say a bad word to you and this is where I learn the good English and the bad words, bad English. So this is pretty much where my English start.

I was then introduced to TAFE and the TAFE is a great way to learn. I enrolled in diploma in accounting, I figure my accounting - because numbers are much easier to understand. So second year I decided to say look, I'm going to do - I'm going to go for advanced diploma so I passed my advanced diploma in accounting. In 2005 I decided say I'm going to uni.

Studying law degree was really hard. It's not - it was hard, it was even harder because of my background. Every time you go and write an essay and you give it to a lecturer and you come back with these red lines, red mark, somebody corrected and these red marks are actually telling you that you've got to do something about it.

When I realised that the next day I'm going to get my law degree I actually did lock myself up in the bed and cried and just to make sure I just done all the crying that I could because if I go back to - if I go to the graduation ceremony I will not look for more tears because it's already been shed and everything is done, I will look stronger and that's what I did. I think to be the first one to graduate with a law degree in my family is - you can't call it a privilege, you don't give it a name. Put it somewhere maybe I was feeling like more like Einstein, for example, yeah, I was feeling like that, I was feeling like I had done something positive to me and for my family. I even said if I die tonight my law degree will be sitting on a wall and my nephew and my relatives will have said "Oh, Deng was the first person to graduate with a law degree in his family" and I think that's a good honour to have that in your name.

This is the District Court, trial court, particular trial court where I spend most of my time getting trial dates and also getting the hearing date for the trial proceeding.

Adut for the defence, A-D-U-T.

I help in setting up Blacktown court program.

Your Honour, I'm actually puzzled my friend's in relation to the assault that had been allegedly committed.

It's to make sure that Sudanese get legal advice before they go to court.

One piece that she report twice a week and secondly, the defendant is now living in Campbelltown and that's quite remote for them to meet up and there's no reason why my client would be going to Campbelltown. Thirdly, there will be surety available and the surety of \$500 is to be in the name of Ms U, the neighbour who has known her for over 10 years when she was a little girl.

I'm that agent that explains the process from the arrest to how we get to court and where do they finish and once that is done you start having a community that is more understanding and the numbers that are turning up in court in Blacktown have decreased.

I'm happy with everything and if the court pleases, that's my submission.

It is the greatest thing that could happen to a person like me to be able to get education. It is just, you know, you can buy that, you can't put money in it, you can't put anything, it's life, what I think it is is it's just it's an opposite of the death of which I was going to face in South Sudan, it's the opposite of that. I'm born again, that's how it is. A lot of people think it's born again Christian but I'm born again educator and learning is a powerful thing. Knowledge is power and I've been given that bit of knowledge and I think there's always room for me to learn new things. If I can do it you would do it too. You would do it too. It's simple as that. You are even much better position than me. University is a way to go and that's how you need to open your eyes to the new world. It's your world and you need to know that.

My name is Deng and this is my story. Trained as a soldier. I was shot with a bullet back of my back. I came to Australia. I finished my law degree.

ANNETTE SHUN WAH: Deng graduated with a Bachelor of Laws degree and he continues to help and inspire members of Sydney's Sudanese community.

END OF TRANSCRIPT