



## AN INCONVENIENT TRUTH

**“And the Winner is... Scott Feinberg’s Awards Season analysis.” May 13, 2007**

It is hard to think of any film that manages to elicit as many different emotions or thoughts as the documentary *God Grew Tired of Us*, a remarkable work by Christopher Quinn. Narrated by Nicole Kidman, executive produced by Brad Pitt, and heavily promoted by Africa enthusiast Angelina Jolie, the film tells the stories of several young men who, as boys, were forced to flee their war-torn country without their parents, walked over one thousand miles to refugee camps in Kenya, and were then offered a dream-like opportunity to pursue a better life in America. One can get a sense, just by watching the trailer, of the moving story that ensues as these men try to acclimate to a totally unfamiliar culture while still trying to maintain their own and fight for those they had to leave behind.

So why haven’t you heard about this film? That’s the million dollar question.

In January 2006, *God Grew Tired of Us* premiered at the Sundance Film Festival, where it won two of the highest honors--the Best Documentary Audience Award, voted for by festival attendees, and the Grand Jury Prize, selected by a five-person jury that included Academy Award winners Alexander Payne (*Sideways*) and Zana Briski (*Born Into Brothels*) and Academy Award nominee Andrew Jarecki (*Capturing the Friedmans*).

Then, in May, Newmarket Films acquired the rights to distribute the film. In a press release, Newmarket co-founder Chris Ball said: “After seeing *God Grew Tired of Us* at Sundance, I was determined to acquire the film for domestic distribution. I loved it and I could see that the audience was totally captivated by the resilience and spirit of these young men. This is a tremendous □word-of-mouth□ movie which will capture the hearts of a wide audience. We plan a passionate grassroots marketing campaign to bring this inspiring and touching film to the American public. □”

In January 2007, the film premiered in Los Angeles. The film’s three primary subjects were joined on the red carpet by Kidman, Pitt, and Jolie, as well as Catherine Keener, Dermot Mulroney, and many other notables. However, despite the media attention of that night and overwhelmingly favorable reviews, the film never seemed to gain traction at the box-office, and petered out of theaters by March, having grossed just \$262,000.

Perhaps this shouldn’t come as much of a surprise to me--after all, I know first-hand how hard it is to get people to pay more than passing attention to the situation in Sudan. But it still saddens me, because people not only missed a chance to learn about the problems plaguing that

far away part of the world, but also missed a wonderful film that makes you reflect upon your own life, question your own behavior, and ultimately appreciate your own good fortune, while hoping to see a better life come to others. It is not at all a stereotypically slow-moving, preachy, monotonous documentary, but rather a fast-paced, respectful, and lively (great music) look at people who are as foreign to us as we are demonstrated to be to them.

It is my great hope that sharing these thoughts--as well as a transcript of a very informative

December 2006 interview I conducted with John Bul Dau, the central and, to me, most impressive Sudanese man in the film--will convince you to check out *God Grew Tired of Us* when it is released on DVD later this summer. I have no personal affiliation with the film and I have nothing to gain in saying this, so I hope you'll take my word that it would be well worth your time.

*\*Exclusive\** Interview with John Bul Dau  
conducted by Scott Feinberg

[Note: Dau is from Duk County, Sudan. He and 56 other boys fled the village in 1987 and began a long journey to Kakuma, Kenya, where they resided in a United Nations refugee camp until 2001, when he and several of the other 'lost boys' were offered the chance to live in America. He came to New York, where has worked sixty hour weeks, earned his associate's degree from SUNY-Onondaga Community College, and is now working on his bachelor's degree in public affairs at Syracuse University. He has become a public spokesman for and started two nonprofit organizations to help the people of Sudan.]

For the sake of those who may not be familiar with the situation in Sudan, can you explain a bit about the history and what the situation is there today?

Well, if you talk about our country— Sudan is the largest country in Africa. Sudan is in East Africa. And ever since U.K., or British, gave us independence in 1956— War between the north and the south had already begun in 1955, and that Civil War went on for many years until 1972, and peace was signed that is known as Addis Ababa Agreement. And that peace was signed, and again, in 1983, war broke out again between the north and the south, and it went on until 2005. And, you know, all of this war has been ignited by many factors. One, the country is ruled by Muslims in the north—that is, they declare Sharia law has become the law of the land, which means if you are Muslim or non-Muslim, you gotta observe that Sharia law. The population is so big in the south, and about ninety-eight percent are Christian in the south, whereas only two percent, maybe, are Muslim, whereas in the north, ninety-eight percent are Muslim, but they are pure, pure Persian. But in that country where Christians are, of course, majority, some groups say we will have to be subjected to Islam, I mean, to Muslim, or to Sharia law. We didn't want it. That caused war. The other thing that caused the war, too, is the resources, such as oil. The oil in Sudan comes from the south and the north exploit it, and sell it, and get money and develop the north only. Whereas, you can see in the south, you don't even have hospitals, there are no medical clinics, there are no good roads, there are no high schools—there is nothing. It's the same country; it looks like a different world. Whereas in the north, it's so developed and has a lot of things. So these guys were exploiting things—the natural resources that are extracted from the south are taken to develop the north only. We have no problem; we can develop the whole country, but they were not. Number three that caused the war, too, is about color. In the United States or other

Western countries, they think, “Well, this guy’s a black.” Well, we are all black, but the Arabs don’t think so. They think when you are a little bit brown, then you are patriot. And then those who are completely black—like myself—the Africans, are treated like second-class citizens in their own country. So they have been discriminated against because of their color. The fourth is, you know, in the south, we have a lot of rainfall and cultural products, whereas in the north it’s so dry. So I can go on and on, what caused the war between the north and the south. And that is why, today, we are called the ‘lost boys,’ because of the recent war that is 1983 until 2005.

How did the film come about? When did you first become aware that this was something that would be made?

I was not aware of the journalism. But in 2001, what we call the Church World Service were doing a process for us to come to America. When they selected people to come to America, they put their name on the public board. So one day, I saw people looking at the board, so I said, “Maybe my name is up. Let me go and see it.” And so I got there. I saw my name on the board saying, “John Dau, you are going to Syracuse, New York.” I was so, so happy. And I looked around and I saw Christopher Quinn with a camera, and I thought this guy was sent by the United States government. I went to him. I said, “You know what? I am happy that I am going to America, but what about other guys that are remaining behind in Africa, in this camp? Can they go to America too? Can you go and ask your government?” And he said, “Well, okay. If I go there, then I will ask my government and see if they can bring some of the lost boys, also.” And I said, “Okay.” And then, as I was leaving, he said, “Can you answer some questions for me?” I said, “Okay.” And, believe me, this guy—I never got rid of him! So that’s how I got to this film. I never looked for it, never been selected to do so, but it just came like that.

Maybe you can clarify something for me. I’ve always heard the term ‘lost boys,’ and I think I understand who it refers to, but maybe you can give a better definition of who the lost boys are... Well, I think the ‘lost boys’ was given to us by the media—I don’t know who. But I think why we were called the lost boys is because of the civil war in our country. And in 1987, you know, most of our villages in the south were attacked, burned down, destroyed, women were raped, our cattle were looted, young women were taken as wives, and young boys were killed. So, in that midst, we ran away. Most of the lost boys ran away because we believed that there was a mandate given to the soldiers of the north that, “You gotta kill those guys, kill the young boys.” You know? Because if they do so, then there will be no resistance again; they will not join the S.P.L.A.—Sudan People’s Liberation Army. So it went on and on, and most of the parents—you know, knowingly—pushed their children to run away. Especially the boys. And then some of the attacks took place in a cattle camp where boys and young men were. So that, you know, resulted in having lost boys come to Ethiopia. And we came to Ethiopia—one by one, three, five, ten, or fifty, or one hundred—until we accumulated there to become, like, twenty-seven thousand lost boys there, and some girls, and there were also some adult women there also. But the majority were the boys. So that is why we became ‘lost boys.’ Why? Because we had no parents. We had no relatives or something like that. We were on our own, taking care of ourselves through the desert from place to place. And that is because we had no parents with us—I think that’s why the media call us the ‘lost boys.’

When was the last time you saw your family? And do you know what has become of them?

Well, it was in 1987 until 2004, because I brought my mother and my sister here to America,

and they are okay. My father also is doing well in Africa. He stayed behind. And some of my brothers and sisters are still in Africa, though they are doing very well. About three of my uncles, including their wives and their children, have all been killed at war.

I think it's obvious from having heard what you have to say, but in your own words, why do you think people in America and around the world should see this film? And what do you hope they will come away from it thinking or doing?

Well, I think, what I hope for people to see is that it let's people know what has been going on in Africa in southern Sudan. The average American does not know the war, and I think this is a very good opportunity to see how the other human beings degraded fellow beings. I want them to see that. And, on the top of that, I want them also to take action. Take action by stopping the war, especially the one going on now in Darfur, or in some other part of the world where some unknown war is taking place but people are not getting involved. I thought let that stop on us. But if there are some other wars that are active, you better get in and help, because when you are not getting in or getting involved, the lives of those who are weak are going to be destroyed and they will never get it back, as in our case. We never enjoyed our being young in our country, never got our parental care. So we lost that. We will never get that. But if people would have listened or, you know, come in to help us, we would have been better off than now. So what people would take away is that, please, get involved with anything you can. Whether it is only just by word of support—do it! You want to do it in any different resources. Just get involved and do it. Because we believe today this generation must be citizens of the world; they just can't keep a boundary saying that "I am an American," "I am Sudanese," something like that. All in all, if you keep those boundaries of saying "I am from Sierra Leone," "I am from Somalia," that will even keep the other guys away, those who could help. So I'm saying that, you know, please help other people who can never help themselves. So that's what I want people to take away.

What are your plans and hopes for your own future?

The plan and hope for my own future is— I got my associate degree at Onondaga Community College. I'm now pursuing my bachelor's degree in Syracuse University right now. I am building a medical clinic in Africa right now—raised about one hundred and seventy thousand dollars to build that medical clinic to benefit people of the south. I am going to be actively involved in a humanitarian kind of capacity and, if I can get it, I want to become an advocate, because I know first-hand—I have been to that situation and I know how bitter it is to be in that situation. So I want to be helping people, working for people, and working for the little guys, those who have been really neglected. That's what I want to do. That's my future, that's what I want to do with it. I want to use the remaining part of my life for the good of the community—not for only myself, but for the good of the community.

If people want to help support your efforts with the clinic and with other things, is there a web site or a number where they can donate money to you?

Yeah, they can do that. They can go to [www.directchange.org](http://www.directchange.org). I have my organization called American Care for Sudan Foundation—if you type in that, too, it will lead you into that.

[Note: Dau, assisted by members of the First Presbyterian Church of Skaneateles, New York, prepared a conceptual proposal for a medical clinic to be built in Duk County, the Sudanese

village in which he was born and from which residents currently must walk seventy-five miles for medical care. In October 2004, the proposal was presented to a foundation in Skaneateles and was well received. Soon thereafter, the tax-exempt American Care for Sudan Foundation was born. Its by-laws call for a nine-member Board of Trustees composed of three 'lost boys' and six task force members. Dau currently is serving as the foundation's president.]