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Week 10 Reading

APA Referencing

Sayer, R. (2015). *More to the story: Conversations with refugees* (pp. 120–137). Margaret River Press.

Referencing for Family History

Rosemary Sayer, *More to the story: Conversations with refugees*, Margaret River Press, Witchcliffe, 2015, pp. 120–137.

and explain that this was now their signature and this mark needed to be used on all documents. When I told them we would help them to learn to read and write, or speak English if they couldn't do so, the joy of it was almost too much for some.

I wished every new refugee could be met by someone like Chris.

One refugee family who came to know Chris's warmth and support firsthand was the Makur Chuots from South Sudan, and Chris wanted me to meet Susan Makur Chuot, who worked at the Edmund Rice Centre. Susan had been employed in the Multicultural and Aboriginal Youth Sport and Leadership Program since February 2012 and was the sports liaison officer and local parks manager.

'You'll love Suzy,' she enthused as we gathered up our things to walk across to the second Edmund Rice office space.

She was right.

AKEC'S STORY

A young Australian role model

The siren sounded, starting the fourth quarter, and Akec (Susan) Makur Chuot jumped high after the umpire's bounce to tap the ball into the clear. The tall ruck player bent low to pick up the ball, sidestepped around two opposition players and ran at full pace, long legs effortlessly eating up the distance between the centre square and the goals, ready to boot the football home for six points.

The small but loyal band of Swan Districts supporters sitting on their fold-up chairs and on rugs around the suburban oval in the warm afternoon sunshine broke into loud applause.

'Wow, she's like a female Nic Naitunui,' one of them said with delight.

Akec—or Suzy, to most of her friends in Australia—is one of Western Australia's most exciting female AFL players. Unlike the West Coast Eagles star ruckman Naitunui, whose family had migrated from Fiji, Akec and her family came to Western Australia as refugees from a camp in Kenya, fleeing war-torn South Sudan in 2005, when she was twelve years old.

It was half-time at the footy, and I wandered over towards the player huddle so I could hear what the coach was telling the players. I watched as the coach moved players' names around on her magnetic whiteboard. As the huddle broke up, Akec saw me.

'Thanks for coming,' she said, giving me a warm hug.

'It's a terrific game. You're smashing them.'

She laughed as she headed back on to the field.

As the second half got under way, I scanned the field and noted that, like most AFL men's teams at a senior level, there was a good selection of talented Aboriginal players in both teams. I wondered

how many of the other players, like Akec, had come from countries outside Australia and had taken up the national game.

Unlike some of the refugees I had met, who felt more affinity with soccer, the football they saw as the world game, Akec had taken to Aussie Rules. She was, however, equally at home playing both codes. Before settling in Australia, she had played soccer in Kenya at the refugee camp that had been her home. She also played basketball in Australia but, despite pleas from her club mates, refused to take it seriously, even though she could have been playing at an elite level.

Considering her all-round athleticism and love of sports, there were probably many sports at which Akec could excel. Last year she went on a week-long athletics tour of the Pilbara, promoting the sport to young Aboriginal athletes. Her brother is an outstanding Western Australian track and field athlete, and his coach had asked her to join his coaching team after seeing she had a good rapport with young Aboriginal girls, who he was keen to involve more in the sport.

This was my fourth meeting with twenty-two year old Akec, and we had been in regular contact via text. She would keep me up to date with her footy and I would tell her about my hockey games. My Saturday afternoon hockey competition hardly rated next to her accomplishments, but she seemed interested. When I let her know that we had made the finals, she texted back: 'awesome news!'

This young woman had drawn me in at our first meeting with her passion and enthusiasm for life. I had driven one evening to a Girrawheen neighbourhood restaurant called Nyan South Sudan—the brainchild of Akec's sister, Ayor, a former international fashion model.

The restaurant is located on the outside of a sprawling suburban shopping centre in a grcup of Vietnamese, Chinese, Middle

Eastern and other speciality restaurants that seemed to attract good patronage from the locals, judging by the busy car park. African handicrafts and some jewellery were displayed around Nyan South Sudan's simple one-room restaurant furnished with wooden chairs and tables.

I could see Akec sitting at a table with her mother, Helena, when I arrived. As I opened the glass door, bursts of laughter mixed with the sounds of clanging pots and pans greeted me from the back of the restaurant.

'Come and meet my mum and I'll make you a cup of tea,' Akec said, introducing me to a tall, imposing woman who looked completely at peace with herself. Helena Yar Enock was dressed in brightly coloured African clothes. We shook hands as I sat down, and she smiled at me.

Akec and Ayor told me about the family story and we agreed it would be good for Akec to feature in the book. Helena had sat quietly through most of this discussion, and I turned to ask her what she thought of the idea. While her English was good, the girls did a fair bit of talking in Dinka and there was much nodding before she told me she was happy for Akec's story to be told.

Helena stood to leave. Her Australian home now was just across the road from the restaurant, with her children and grandchild, but she had been home to South Sudan twice in the previous six months to see her parents and two older sons who were working and studying in the country. It was far from safe for them there, with the civil war once again raging, but it was where they wanted to be.

The world's newest country has been engulfed in a bitter conflict from its earliest days, with the army loyal to the Dinka President Salva Kiir pitted against forces loyal to the former Vice President Riek Machar, from the Nuer tribe. The highly respected think tank the International Crisis Group has reported in recent years that the situation has been compounded by nearly two dozen armed groups

in South Sudan fighting, with different agendas. In the January 2014 report, the International Crisis Group wrote:

*horrific violence and displacement continued, largely due to protracted tribal conflicts, exacerbated by uncontrolled government militias ... insecurity and national economic crisis are crippling the country.*³⁰

In February 2015 United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon urged both leaders to put the interests of their people ahead of their own in order for peace to flourish in the war-torn country. Compromise, he said, was desperately needed.³¹

Since mid-2013, some 1.4 million South Sudanese have been internally displaced across the country, and at the beginning of 2015 the United Nations recognised 250,000 people as refugees.

'I worry about my family in South Sudan,' Helena told me, heading out the door after gently kissing my cheek.

After that first meeting with Akec and her family, I had pondered about the meaning of home as I drove away from the restaurant and down the freeway, towards the lights of the city. It is a simple word, but one with complex definitions and meanings. For most, it starts out as a place where you are born and grow up and where you live with your family. Home is a place where you make memories; hold family gatherings and celebrations; love, laugh, eat and sleep, feeling comfortable and secure. It is a place from where you go to school, play, study, and maybe even plan your future. I remember my childhood home from the 1960s in Hobart, Tasmania, in a simple weatherboard house where Mum, Dad, my five brothers and I squeezed into three bedrooms. It wasn't just the physical structure that made our house a home; it was the emotional security that it provided.

The commentator, traveller and writer Pico Iyer says that home can be many places:

Whole lives will now be spent taking pieces of many different places and putting them together into a stained glass whole. Home is really a work in a progress. It's like a project on which they're constantly adding upgrades, improvements and corrections. ³²

But what if you don't get to choose your home and where you go? What if some of the key concepts of home—safety, security, family, traditions and love—are torn apart and your home is destroyed or taken away, or you are forced to flee from it in fear for your life? Then, as many of the refugees I have interviewed have told me, 'your home is whatever you can carry around inside you to begin again.'

Most of the people whose stories are told in this book had early memories of a home before they were forced to become refugees. Akec did not. Her main home from birth until the age of twelve was a refugee camp in the north-western region of Kenya, 95 kilometres from the Sudan-Kenya border in a place called Kakuma, a Swahili word meaning 'nowhere'. The refugee camp was established in 1992 to serve Sudanese refugees forcibly displaced from their homes due to war or persecution. At least 2 million people were killed in Sudan's second major civil war between 1983 and 2005.

Since its establishment, Kakuma has swelled into a sprawling desert slum where numbers go up and down, depending on the state of various African conflicts. It now also serves refugees from Somalia, Ethiopia, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Eritrea, Uganda and Rwanda. Just as there was in the early 1990s when Akec and her family arrived at Kakuma, there is once again a humanitarian crisis in South Sudan.

When Akec's family fled from war-torn southern Sudan in the early 1990s, tired and exhausted and with only the things they could

carry, life was difficult. They stayed in different parts of Kenya, barely surviving, before moving into a refugee camp. Kakuma was an overcrowded settlement of tents and shacks in the desert, with around 50,000 refugees receiving aid from the United Nations. Additional land was urgently needed to house the continuing flow of refugees. Twenty years on, it is still crowded and now inhabited by nearly 150,000 refugees. Refugees describe it as equally a sanctuary and a prison.

To try and understand what it might be like there, one night when I couldn't sleep, I propped myself up in my bed with my iPad and watched hours of YouTube videos of the Kakuma Refugee Camp. The irony of being tucked up in a soft bed with a fluffy doona did not escape me. Through the moving images of video after video, mostly produced by different NGOs, I watched daily life unfold in this moderate sized sprawling 'city' of tents, shacks and thatched roof huts in a desert frequented by dust storms.

Refugees arrived at a reception centre at the camp, where their basic needs were met: simple food rations including flour, wheat and cooking oil, water, shelter and blankets. Over the coming weeks, refugees would be vaccinated and assessed, before being moved to a permanent location in the camp—usually a plot of dirt with a tent that they could call their own. Soon after, they were shown how to make mud bricks so they could build a small hut, which would become their home. Some moved into existing huts if they were lucky and had some family already at the camp.

Even with free health care from the United Nations, different types of support from aid workers with NGOs, and food provided by the World Food Program, disease and malnutrition were an enormous problem at Kakuma. Then there was the potential for violence, sexual attack and abuse. Despite this, life had to go on and people tried to put some structure and routine in their days, with the help of an incredible network of support agencies that

operated in the camp. There were schools for children to receive a basic education. There was counselling. There was organised sport. Not everyone coped, but somehow, a bright little girl called Akec did.

When we met for our first interview session, she talked about the camp:

Kakuma was home to me. It is all I remember of my early childhood. It was okay for me because I didn't know anything better or different. My parents made it as loving an environment as they could, and because of their extraordinary efforts I had food, shelter and safety. I ran about being a normal kid.

Even though I was born in South Sudan it was never really my home. I never got to know it, to love it or to understand it. Obviously I still have family there and it's my heritage, which is really important to me, but it doesn't have my heart. I have been back to visit several times since we came to Australia and it's very hard for me, because I just don't fit in there. My language is all wrong, my dress is all wrong and I feel all wrong there.

Akec went to the camp school and liked it. She described it as tough learning in a tough environment with tough love.

If you did something bad, you were punished and had to write the alphabet in the sand outside the classroom until you learned how to behave. The best thing about going to school in the camp was the daily emergency protein biscuit distributed by the UN. It was part of the deal—finish the day at school and get one of the biscuits. I can still remember the taste. Man, all the kids loved them!

I'm not sure the UN understood the biscuits were such a winner in ensuring school attendance.

Helena always seemed to be able to find a way to make some extra money by cooking and selling things throughout the years, and she would use this to move her family in and out of the refugee camp to Nairobi, depending on circumstances and conditions, so that her children could get a better education. Profit-making ventures in refugee camps may seem anomalous; however, in many camps around the world, the more energetic and entrepreneurial refugees are able to create small trading businesses, buying and selling fruit and vegetables or small essential items. Others have skills like hairdressing, for which they can charge a small fee.

Helena knew that education was the key to escaping the poverty trap. For years she struggled to make ends meet, until good fortune brought some financial help from an uncle who had been resettled in Australia by the United Nations. The sense of helping one's family is strong within most refugee families, and the South Sudanese community is committed to transferring money to family left behind. This enables those living in the refugee camps to access better food and services. It reminded me of how hard and bittersweet the joy of resettlement must be for the lucky refugees who found a new home in another country, knowing there were others still waiting in the camps.

In Nairobi, when the family were able to spend time outside the camp, Akec and her brother Mangor attended the Sud Academy. The academy, situated on a busy road between the communities of Uthiru and Kawangare, on the outskirts of the city, is a small school that was started in 2002 specifically to help Sudanese refugees. Refugees are often unable to attend Kenyan schools, due to massively overcrowded conditions in the country or lack of money. The Sud

Academy helped to shape Akec into the young woman she is today, giving her not only an education but a sense of belonging and hope for a brighter future. It educates pupils from many different areas of southern Sudan, where intertribal conflicts and war are rife. At the academy, tribal differences are downplayed and students are encouraged to participate in civil debates among themselves and with Kenyan students, to envisage a brighter future in their countries and throughout Africa. The Christian school is largely funded by Canadian NGOs and it achieves a high academic success rate.

That school had such an amazing impact on my life. But I wonder why these Canadian people were so kind to us refugees, paying for us to go to school and learn so much. These people were there for kids like me that they didn't even know. Can you believe that? Every month or so, the school's donors would send packages of clothes, soccer balls, softballs and other stuff for us, too. We thought it was really cool and so generous.

I thought about the number of times that I had not donated some small amount to an NGO because I was not sure that it would help or make a difference.

'Look at this, Rose,' Akec said, handing over her mobile phone. Within seconds, Google had enabled her to show me images of the Sud Academy.

Her face glowed as we both looked at the school compound on her phone screen, with two rows of simple wooden classrooms and an open area between. Akec pointed out a room where food was cooked, the toilets and a playing field out back. It was obviously basic, and I found myself comparing it in my mind to the beautiful grounds of the convent school where I had studied, with its perfect classrooms, gardens and playing fields. But then I realised that the

physical structures did not matter, because, like me, what Akec remembered most was her teachers.

One particular teacher was amazing. I can't remember her name, but I remember her face, her interest in me, her smile and the way she helped me learn. She was such a good woman. After my mum, this was the woman who showed me I could be someone in my life. I probably did not understand it that way at the time, because I was just a kid, but she made a real difference to me.

I believe teachers are among the most undervalued professional people in our society. Like many people, I can name several teachers from my schooldays, as well as one remarkable university lecturer, who had a profound influence on my life, on the person I became, and on the career path I followed. As I listened to Akec's story, I hoped that the teacher she spoke of, who had worked in undoubtedly overcrowded and difficult conditions at the Sud Academy many years ago, knew what a difference she had made to one of her refugee students. I suspected she may have influenced more than just Akec's life.

'My mum was the key to our survival, though,' Akec reminded me again.

It was really tough for her, looking after eight kids in Kakuma. Some people would only rely on their fortnightly assistance from the UNHCR, but my mum knew we needed better food than that to be healthy and survive.

Akec and her family were among the lucky ones. In 2005 they were advised by the United Nations that Australia would accept them as refugees. They had been waiting twelve years for a country, any country, to offer them a place where they could start a new life.

You keep applying. You keep waiting. You keep hoping. It was so exciting for all of us when we finally heard we were leaving the camp and being accepted into Australia as refugees. We flew to Perth via Dubai, and that was pretty amazing because it was my first time on a plane travelling outside of Kenya. I just kept walking around and around in circles at the Dubai Airport, looking at all those expensive shops with all those ritzy things. There were escalators everywhere and I had my mouth open all the time, saying to Munn: 'Oh my God, what is this place?'

The family had attended briefing sessions about Australia in Nairobi, but all Akec could remember as an excited twelve-year-old was being shown pictures of kangaroos and other Australian animals and iconic Australian landmarks like Uluru and the Sydney Opera House. I hoped that the sessions had been more useful for the adult refugees moving to Australia.

It was cold when we arrived in Perth and I remember I was wearing this big brown and white jumper. I was kind of expecting snow, even though I knew it didn't snow in Western Australia, only in the mountains on the east coast.

When Akec arrived in Australia, she was determined to make the most of every opportunity given to her and started intensive English classes before joining Year 8 at Aranmore Catholic College in Leederville with a burst of enthusiasm. The school describes itself as having a proud tradition of valuing children from many ethnic backgrounds, reflecting the multicultural diversity of Australia.

I have only good memories of school, and my teachers were amazing. They did more than just teach in the

classroom. They came to soccer and sporting events, as well as family celebrations. Two teachers, Claire Smith and Kate Simeon, inspired me greatly and they are still part of my life today. How special is that? I made two good friends in the early days of arriving at Aranmore and the three of us are still close today. One is an Aussie girl and the other is a Malaysian girl. I also got to know a group of other Srdanese kids at Aranmore and we all came to the Edmund Rice Centre in Mirrabooka to do after-school sports, which were great because they helped us get a handle on our new country and make more friends.

Akec's optimism paid off. At school she continued playing soccer, which she had started at the Sud Academy and in which she excelled. She was also picked in the Catholic schools state team and travelled to China to represent Western Australia two weeks after the Beijing Olympics. The city had been abuzz with sports and spectators from around the world.

It was a great experience for a kid who used to be in a refugee camp. Although I guess I was a bit of an oddity, being this really tall, black person in China, and I got sick of having my photo taken.

Akec finished Year 12 with reasonably good grades, decided she wanted to pursue a career in the fitness industry and began studies at TAFFE. I told her she was making this all sound too easy. She paid tribute again to her munn, for making the transition from refugee camp to a new home in Australia so smooth, and to the support they had received from a wonderful sponsor family who helped them on their arrival.

'We were made very welcome by the Western Australian community,' she told me.

Unfortunately, Akec could not finish her Fitness Certificate because she seriously injured her knee playing soccer. She had to undergo major surgery and intensive rehabilitation for many months. It had put her studies and her soccer on hold, but it was during this time that she met Joe Moniodis, the youth programs coordinator at the Edmund Rice Centre, who convinced her to come down and have a run in the Edmund Rice Centre AFL Lions team that he was coaching. From here, Akec went on to play for the Mount Lawley Hawks, before transferring to Swan Districts, where she won her first grand final in 2014. Meeting Joe was important for other reasons, too: he saw her leadership potential and offered her a job.

Akec became one of the managers in the Multicultural and Aboriginal Youth Sport and Leadership Program, which helps hundreds of young people in the cities of Stirling and Wanneroo. In her job, Akec also provided cross-cultural training for many sporting clubs across the metropolitan region.

I try to explain to people that titles and labels should not define who a person is. I ask all people I meet not to judge a person based on how they look. It sounds simple, but gosh it's hard for many Australians. Thankfully, I have only ever received a couple of negative racist comments since we made Australia home.

I was pleased to hear that, as I knew this had not been the case for all refugees.

I just treat everyone with respect and hope I am treated the same. It would be really nice if more people sat down

with people from different backgrounds and asked about their story and got to know them, I reckon.

In her determination to help people better understand different cultures, Akec organised the inaugural Authentic Africa United Dance and Music Festival in 2014, to help raise awareness of different cultures from African countries living in Western Australia. It was a great success, and she is planning to make it an annual event.

I wanted to do something for the big African community in WA as a whole that would showcase different groups doing something that we all love doing, which is singing and dancing. I hope it helped raise awareness in the general community too. Everyone seemed to have a great day.

As I got to know Akec more, we chatted about the Australian Government's policies on refugees and asylum seekers, and I wondered why she was not upset or angry.

There's no point in being angry. I just feel sorry for many politicians because they don't know the personal stories of the asylum seekers and refugees that they are talking about as one big problem. They just don't know how lucky they are. They have been born and brought up in this beautiful country in safety and with a home. I don't understand how they can't have more understanding for people who have been less fortunate than them. I know that politicians have to balance a lot of issues and have other agendas to manage, but I feel really sorry for some of them as human beings when I listen to how they speak about other people. They are sad individuals.

I felt humbled by this young woman's compassion, but as an Australian I remain angry with my government's treatment of refugees and asylum seekers. Australia prides itself on being a civilised, kind and inherently decent country. Sadly, when it comes to our treatment of refugees and asylum seekers, our actions do not support the beliefs and values that we espouse. I accept that Australia cannot settle all those who would like to come here, but I do not accept our refusal to treat them with compassion and respect. We used to believe in giving people a fair go, a hearing and humane treatment.

Akec told me:

When I am working with some of the young kids in our sports programs down at the oval and I look into their eyes, I can tell they have seen terrible things. I played sport this afternoon with a group of young kids who came as asylum seekers on a boat and have been accepted as refugees. They stared at me blankly when I tried to connect with them. Their eyes worry me ... some of those little children from Afghanistan and Iraq ... it's their eyes that stay with me. I wonder what they have seen and what they have experienced.

Akec and I discussed the circumstances of asylum seekers coming to Australia by boat, allegedly taking the place of people in refugee camps in countries in Africa, the Middle East or Asia who could come to Australia.

People make this argument all the time and they don't understand all the issues. It's too simplistic. If you do even the most basic research, you understand that many refugees don't have camps to go to. There aren't lists to

get on in some countries and there certainly aren't orderly queues. Everyone has their own personal reasons for doing what they need to do to stay alive. I don't think you can understand that unless you have experienced it. If you waited twelve years in a refugee camp for the United Nations to find you a place and you were one of the lucky ones—good on you. If you escaped with only the clothes on your back, no passport or papers, and somehow managed to get the money together to pay someone to smuggle you out through various countries to save yourself or your family—good on you too, I say. I don't have the answers to the problems of finding homes and helping every refugee around the world, but surely everyone can show a little more kindness and understanding?

Akec understood their courageous search for a sense of belonging because she knew many personally and had listened to their stories.

All asylum seekers coming to Australia should be treated with respect as human beings. We can't talk about people like they are objects. We have to start relating to each other more as human beings with names and feelings and families.

A few of the people I interviewed asked me when I thought people would stop referring to them as refugees. I was never sure how to answer that question. Some communities in Australia and overseas use terms like 'new arrivals' or 'migrants', both of which seem preferable to other terms generally used here, such as 'illegal refugees' or 'illegals'. In the 1950s, immigrants and refugees were called 'new Australians'. The term seemed to carry the expectation that people would adopt Australian ways as quickly as possible. 'Old Australians' were, at the same time, encouraged to be 'good

neighbours' and help new arrivals blend in. At the heart of this policy of assimilation was the fear that postwar European settlers would form enclaves, decline to contribute to the wider community, and threaten Australia's social cohesion.

Then in the 1970s and 1980s we embraced the term 'multiculturalism', proud that we could welcome so many people to our country, share our home with others and all of us could benefit from an enriched society. Sadly, multiculturalism seems to have fallen from favour in some parts of Australia, misunderstood and maligned as the set of ideas that guided our community for several generations. We used to have whole government departments dedicated to multicultural affairs; now we have the Department of Social Services, which is responsible for settlement and multicultural affairs among many other things, and the Department of Immigration and Border Protection. Despite what is happening with some government policies, and ongoing debates about whether to use the word 'cosmopolitan' rather than 'multicultural' because it sounds more modern, social researcher Hugh Mackay reminds us that the terms do not really matter because

somehow, over the centuries—and especially over the past half-century—we have managed to cobble together a society so enriched by its diversity that we can now claim to be a shining example to the world of how to get multiculturalism right.³³

I had certainly been pleased to see it thriving in places like Mirrabooka, Karanning and other parts of Australia.

Being a refugee sat comfortably with Akec as long as people saw her as a human being first.

I am not ashamed to be a refugee. It's who I am. I came to Australia seeking refuge and this country has given me

that and so much more. I love my life and my home in Australia. I am very lucky.

I could not help thinking we were the lucky ones to have Akec call Australia home.