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Leah Bassoff, Laura M. DeLuca

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For Poni, life in her small village in southern Sudan is simple and complicated at the same time. Stay in school. Beat up any boy who tries to show attention. Watch out for the dangers in the river. But then the war comes. When soldiers arrive in her village, and bombs begin to rain from the sky, there is only one thing for Poni to do. Run for her life. Though many of the villagers do not escape, she does. An unknown man carries her across the river, and then she is walking — a long, dusty trek across the African countryside with thousands of refugees. Along the way, many die from starvation, land mines, wild animals, and despair, but Poni does not, driven by the sheer will to survive and the hope that she can make it to the Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya, and one day be reunited with her family. Even more than the dramatic events of the story, it is Poni's frank and single-minded personality that carries this novel. In a heartbreaking final twist, she finds her mother just as she is about to leave for the U.S., and must make the hardest decision of all.

Lost Girl Found Details

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From Reader Review *Lost Girl Found* for online ebook

David Schaafsma says

We all by now are familiar with the Lost Boys of Sudan, told in various ways through novels, documentary films, memoirs, fiction. Some 4,000 boys came to the U.S. we now know. . . but in this book, we learn 89 girls were approved. Why is that we know more about the boys than the girls? This book, based on interviews, creates a composite of various girls in Poni, a survivor of the recent Sudanese war, and we get to see how it is that Sudan, Africa and the international community still focuses more on boys than girls, men than women. Like many Sudanese children, Poni all at once lost her family, her home, her village, all of her possessions, everything. This is a short YA approach to understanding the war and conflicts like it, which we get to experience sympathetically primarily through the lens of one girl character. It's pretty straightforwardly and conventionally told, no literary tricks, and is not too graphic, though we know and don't avoid dealing with the threats particular to women and girls. For a younger audience, from tweens to teens, we don't get too much sordid detail, but we get a few very specific images of horror to stay with us, to remind us what girls, children, like Poni had to go through.

And this is a survivor's tale, of course. I am alive, she writes movingly when she finally gets access to the internet, on a South Sudanese chat line, which manages to get her in contact with a cousin. The main trope of the book is Poni running, as her mother told her to do, and as she recalls Bambi's mother telling her to do as the danger approaches. How does she survive? She is faster on her feet, faster with her wit, works harder to get chosen to go to the U.S. But we know she is also just plain lucky to be one of the few to make it. Through Poni we get to see the trauma, but also the survivor's guilt. And it's not romanticized too much; the girls that make it to Kakuma, the U. N. camp, and to the German nun's protective compound after that, have to survive the almost continuous onslaught of predatory men. Poni faces danger and slight odds everywhere she goes. And the girls also have to survive their own complicated emotional states, some of them nearly destroyed psychically by loss and various atrocities. The focus here is on their positive spirit and will to live and thrive, but also the need to forget, to move forward.

This book is a valuable resource for all ages that helps fill the gap of knowledge for us about women and girls of Sudan, always less focused on than boys and men in that and any conflict or war. Full disclosure: Author Leah Bassoff was once my student at Teachers College, where she was licensed with me to teach English. She partners in her research with anthropologist Laura DeLuca here and in addition to giving us a sense of what girls in particular faced, we are given a bibliography of reading to do, a glossary of terms, and other useful resources. We have work to do if we read this book!

Lost Girl Found is the recent winner of the Colorado Book Award for Young Adult Literature in addition to winning various other awards. It's a necessary book, highly recommended for older children through teens. There's some lovely, lyrical writing, some poignant, moving passages, a couple surprises I won't spoil within the familiar survivor tale arc, and a few (but not too many, for young people, as I said) pointedly stark images for us to feel the truth of the situation.

Megan says

I'm not sure how I feel about a novel about a Sudanese refugee girl written by two white women. On one hand, Laura DeLuca has worked with Sudanese refugee youth and has firsthand knowledge on the conditions

of the situation. On the other hand, the book did feel a little white-saviorism. The protagonist is taken in by a white nun who helps her get to America where presumably everything is better. At the end she meets a woman from the refugee placement organization who she says she gets the feeling that she will tell her everything, even the not-so-pretty parts. That character almost feels like a self-congratulatory self-insert of the author who's worked with placing refugees in America.

There were several instances where Western involvement was criticized - a UN worker says it's impossible to help an individual because then everyone will want help and it's impossible to do that. The protagonist points out the unfairness of the well-stocked cafeteria of the UN building just down the road from the refugee camp where they get a cup of grain to last a week.

I'm glad that the plight of the Lost GIRLS of Sudan is being written about. I'm just not sure that white women should be the ones doing it. I would love to see a Sudanese woman writing a book about her experiences. THAT is whose voice should be present in an awareness campaign.

Meshkura says

This book was a great book to experience what other people in the world especially Africa go through.

Karen Ashmore says

We have all heard about the Lost Boys of Sudan but have seldom heard about the Lost Girls of Sudan because the U.S. approved almost 4,000 refugee boys for resettlement but only 89 girls. This is the story of Poni, a girl who survives the Sudanese civil war primarily through determination and her strong sense of self. She overcomes obstacle after obstacle from the soldiers who destroy her village, from the refugee camps, from the men who just see her as a replacement wife, to the orphanage in Nairobi, to earning refugee status with the U.S. government. It is particularly appalling to me how little food the Kakuma Refugee Camp has when the UN is a multi-billion dollar agency. The UN office, constructed next to the sweltering impoverished disease ridden refugee camp, has air conditioning (are you kidding me?), squash courts and a swimming pool.

Poni overcomes trauma that nobody should ever endure and eventually earns a scholarship to CU-Boulder. Yes, the Lost Girls do exist and many live right here in Colorado. Appropriate for both adult and YA readers, I highly recommend this book to anyone who needs to step outside the comfort zone of their own little bubble and see how much of the rest of the world experiences life.

Terry Maguire says

Poni's incredibly brave journey from war-torn southern Sudan to her trek across the desert and on to Kakuma Refugee Camp in Kenya is told with vivid description and many carefully researched details. At times it felt as though Bassoff was trying to incorporate & explain too many cultural details- but that's a minor criticism of this otherwise inspiring story of one girl's survival and eventual immigration to the USA. Though a middle grade novel some of the descriptions in this were quite graphic. A powerful read.

Tyler Wills says

Poni, is a south Sudanese girl enjoying life, but that's everything comes crashing downhill. In Sudan there is a fight between the North and South because of religious beliefs. This fight is so serious that the North bombs most of the South including Poni's village. Poni's whole family is killed, and she is the only survivor. Poni along with the other survivors take a long journey to Kakuma, which is where all the other survivors went. Kakuma has a scarce food supply and the people there are often mistreated and tortured for no reason. Poni does not like this, so she sneaks into the UN building to tell them what is happening. The woman then tells Poni about a camp for girls just like her that is ran by Sister Hannah. The woman tells Poni that she will take her to the camp in a few days. The lady never comes for Poni. Poni then decides to sneak out of Kakuma and take a bus to see Sister Hannah. When Poni arrives at the camp she has to do tons of chores in order to stay at the camp. Once Poni is done with all the chores she can go to school there. Poni is the smartest girl in her class. She is so smart that an organization that works with Sister Hannah allows her travel to Denver to go to college. That's a long way from Sudan...

I would recommend this book to anyone and everyone. You don't have to like adventure books to like this. This book is also like a mystery too because Poni has no idea if her family is still alive or if she will die. I also find this book interesting because Poni's point of view of things is quite interesting. Poni doesn't think like your average 15 year old. Poni is very intelligent and mature for her young age. The events that happened in this book jerk your emotions a lot I thought that I was actually in the book sometimes. This book informational because it helps you understand more about Sudan.

Overall I was completely satisfied with this book. Like I said earlier it was quite a quite interesting read. The book is so unpredictable that I could never guess what was going to happen next. I had no idea about the struggle that others just like me go through. What Poni went through would be my worst nightmare. Just reading this book made me think about how thankful I am to have such a good life. If there was one thing that I didn't like in this book it would be that, the book just kind of ended awkwardly. In the end it just says that Poni made it to Denver and that was it. I really thought that that was weird.

Jacqueline Ridge says

I found *Lost Girl Found* in my library in a section where it showed the YA books that were least checked out this year. *Lost Girl Found* had only been checked out twice, and while I think its cover (while pretty) is offputting, it is a clear example of why you shouldn't judge a book by its cover. It's definitely worth a read.

Lost Girl Found is a hard-to-put-down, heartbreaking tale of horrific events that happen to Poni as a lost GIRL of Sudan. Her strength, determination, and courage are unparalleled, and within minutes of beginning, I hoped for her survival with my whole heart.

Though I couldn't put it down, there are several parts which I disliked - most which center on the ending. SPOILER - Having Poni helped by a white UN woman and saved and transported to America by a white woman felt so wrong to me. She leaves behind her last chance to see her dying mother to "escape" Sudan, rather than embracing her traumatic yet loving childhood. There is no mention of her returning to Sudan after receiving an education, rather Sudan is portrayed as a place that is only survivable if a white person helps

you flee it. The ending left a bad taste in my mouth, though the book as a whole was engaging, emotive, and wonderful.

Emily says

This book had moments where you couldn't put it down, but the ending was rushed and unsatisfactory.

I like the female perspective on South Sudan.

Sherry says

Wow what a courageous girl. This story is about a young woman named Poni, stuck in the middle of a civil war and the struggles that she has to endure. I think it shows not only how strong people are, but some of the unbelievable hardships that the people of Sudan Africa face. Lost Girl Found is a book for every woman. A must read.

Audra says

This book opened my eyes to the African refugee experience in a completely relatable way. It was a quick and gripping read, which handled hard truths honestly without being explicit or overly graphic. I would recommend for kids older than 10. *Spoiler alert* Does include one brief scene where the protagonist watches, and then reflects on, a rape. Again, not lewd or explicit, but if you aren't ready to answer questions about this material, you should be forewarned.

Sue says

There are a number of books out there focusing on the Lost Boys of Sudan but this is the first I've seen on the Lost Girls. From the authors' comments, the boys get more visibility because they were in one area of the refugee camps whereas the girls tended to be placed with family groups. This is the story of Poni, a composite of interviews with many girls, and her experiences before the war, the time fleeing and in the refugee camp and ultimately having opportunity to come to the States.

Susan says

If you want to get your feet wet about the Lost Children of Sudan, especially the Lost Girls of Sudan, this book, while intended more for young adults, is a good book to read. It delves into some of the hardships that the Sudanese youth faced as their country, their families, and their lives were shattered. But it also gives a glimpse of hope. And redemption.

Linli says

A worthwhile read, but because of the content, I would pre-read first to see if a teen were ready for it.

Barbara says

After Poni watches as her best friend Nadai is married off at a young age to a much older man, she is even more determined than ever to go to school. The Sudanese girl is determined to avoid her friend's fate and beats up any would-be suitors. But violence comes to her quiet village, and Poni is separated from her family. She somehow makes it to a refugee camp in Kakuma where she is safe, yes, but conditions are deplorable, and the refugees are barely surviving. Even while being reconciled with Lokure, a village boy whose sweet written words have helped her endure her trials, she still longs for more and seizes the one chance she has for a better life. Readers will root for her to find a place where she can thrive even while having their hearts broken by all that she endures. While I applaud her spirit and determination, I always wonder about what happens next for the Ponis of the world and wonder about those left behind in the Sudan.

Senzelw'umusa says

it was good but i didnt like the ending
