

# *MY NAME IS AB-DU NESA*



My name is Ab-Du Nesa and this is my story.

When I was eight years old, I was living in the northern part of Africa. My father had gone to war and had not returned. My family was hungry because the land where we lived was dry and cracked. Nothing would grow until the rain came again.

I used to follow the soldiers around our town. Sometimes they would give me small scraps of food to eat when they finished their meals. I put the food into a small bag to bring home. My mother would add water to make it go further and some salt to make it taste better.

I spent my days looking for work and for food. Sometimes the soldiers would pay me money to do special things for them. They would laugh at me, but it was OK.

When I got some money, I would buy goat's milk or rice. Then I would take it home to help my family.

I have a younger brother named Na-Suba. Sometimes he went with me in the morning. We would run after the cars and trucks asking for any money they might want to give us. It was a hard life, but we were doing the best we could.

My older sister Ja-Baan stayed home with our mother. She was learning to sew clothes, which my mother would take to the market to sell. The clothes were bright and colorful. The money we got from the clothes barely paid for the material needed to make new clothes to sell.

One day, while I was looking for something to eat, a white van stopped, and two big men grabbed me and put me inside. They closed the door, and the van drove off with me

inside. I do not know how long I was in the van when it finally came to a stop. The big men told me to get out, so I obeyed.

They took me inside a large building where there were many other boys sitting at long tables. I was told to follow another boy. I did as I was directed.

They gave me a plate of food. At first, I thought of my family and started to put the food into my bag, but one of the men told me to eat all of it now, so I did as I was told.

It was the first time I ever remember eating and not being hungry afterward. I felt guilty because my stomach was full, but my family was going to be hungry today since I was not there to give them any food.

When we finished eating, the boy led me to the back of the building. A man told me to take a shower. I had never taken a shower before. My mentor had to teach me how to turn on the water and how to use the soap.

After my shower, I went to another building. There were many others about my age in the place. They all stared at me as I walked by. They were sitting on their beds. Then I was taken to an empty bed and told this was where I should stay until someone came to get me.

I sat down and looked around. I had no idea where I was or why I was there. I wanted to cry, but I was afraid the other boys would think I was weak.

Three days went by. I stayed on my bed most of the time. We went to a big room for meals, and we had a few hours of playtime outside.

The boys played football, but I just sat and watched.

I did not know what was going on. No one told me anything. I just did what they said and followed the rules.

On the fourth day, about twenty of us were sent to the eating hall. They said we were to wait for further instructions. We sat and waited for a long time. They told us not to say a word to each other or they would beat us.

Then a big man in a white flowing shirt, with his head wrapped in a red cloth, entered the room. He had gold jewelry around his neck, and he had a long black beard. None of us had ever seen anyone like him before. He looked at each one of us very

closely. He looked into our eyes, examined our teeth and felt our muscles. He sent some of the boys back to the dormitory, and some of us he told to sit at a different table. I was one of those who went to the table.

They selected five of us. We were directed to get into a big truck. There were other boys were already in the truck, and they were covered with dust from the road. We asked if they knew where we were going, but they did not know any more about what was happening than we did.

The truck drove out into the desert. It was very hot, and we had only a little water. We tried to hide from the sun under the seats in the back of the truck, but it was still very hot.

It was dark and cold when the truck came to a stop. We arrived at a building surrounded by a very tall fence. On top of the fence was razor wire. I had seen this before where the soldiers slept in our town.

We went through the gate and stopped at a smaller building. They instructed us to get out. We stood in a line along the side of the truck. A man in a uniform greeted us. He looked at us from our feet to our heads and asked our names. He wrote our names on a piece of paper.

After he finished writing our names, he sent us to get into a line to eat dinner. I was so thirsty I drank the hot soup too fast, and I burned my throat a little.

We were dirty from the dust, and we had sand in our clothes, in our mouths and in our hair. They took us to a concrete building where they sprayed me with water. It felt so good even though it was cold. They gave me different clothes to wear. They were clean and a very different style from the clothes I was used to wearing. I never saw my old clothes again.

After that, they led us to a large room where there were about forty other boys. We were stared at us as we walked by. Some laughed, others yelled, and some even tried to hit us. I did not like any of them.

They gave me a hard bed to sleep on, but it did not matter. I fell asleep very quickly.

They woke us up very early in the morning. They told us to go outside and get into

line. I followed the example of the boys who were there before I arrived.

One of the boys did not wake up. The men picked him up and brought him outside. They took a whip and beat him five times. It made him bleed. The guards said the same thing would happen to anyone else who did not obey.

For three weeks, we had classes on how to speak the language. It was very different from the language we spoke in my village.

Every morning we did some stretching and exercises, and afterwards we ate breakfast, a piece of strange meat and some bread. The water tasted bad, but I was so thirsty I drank it anyway.

Three days later, after we finished breakfast, we went by truck to a place close by. The buildings were nice, and there were beautiful plants and palm trees along the road.

After we got off the truck, I went to a long building. When we entered, we came to a long hallway with many rooms on each side. Inside each room was a camel. They told me to go to the third door and wait. I did as I was told and waited until another boy came. His name was Jorba.

The man told him to teach me how to take care of the camel. Later Jorba informed me that I would ride the camel in a race that day. If I won, I could make some money to take home to my family.

My camel's name was Londo-Kurda. He was big and seemed fat to me. I had never been around camels before, so I had a lot to learn. Camels smell bad. They make a big mess every day. I had to feed him, clean him, and make sure that he did not do anything bad. Camels like to spit at you if they do not like you or if you scare them. Londo-Kurda spat at me a lot.

After lunch, I heard that I would race Londo-Kurda in the third race. I had never ridden a camel before so I watched the other boys as they prepared their camels for racing.

I climbed onto the fence and watched the first race. The camels are not very smooth. The boys bounced up and down and from side to side as they raced.

One of the boys fell off his camel and fell to the ground. He got hurt when one of the camels stepped on him. They had to carry him off the track. Later I saw a man beat the

boy. I never saw him again.

The third race came. I was so scared. As I rode Londo-Kurda, I just held on for my life.

I was told NOT to come in last. If I did, I may never see them again. My camel was fast enough to be in fifth place. I was just there for the ride. I did not know what I was doing, but at least I was not last!

Every day it was the same. I would clean my camel, and then I would race. Sometimes, I would race two or three times a day. Then I had night races as well.

The people who watched the races would yell and scream as we went by. I later found out they would make large bets on the races. If one of them lost a lot of money they would get very angry with the rider of the camel that did not win. Sometimes they would beat him or even kill him.

I do not know how long I stayed at that place. I learned to be a good rider, and I won many races. I learned more of the language, but I tried my best to remember my language and my home. I was hoping that someday I would go home to my family.

I earned a small amount of money every time I won. The first time I won money the older boys took it from me, so I learned how to hide the money from them. This money was different from the money in my home.

As I got older, I got bigger. As I got bigger, I did not win as many races. The smaller boys were lighter, and they would win.

One day the man who owned Londo-Kurda told me I was done, and that I could go home. He did not need me anymore because I was now too big.

I asked him where my home was. He told me he did not know. I asked everyone I could find where my home was. None of them knew what I was talking about. They sent me away.

I walked and walked until I came to a small town. It was just a few small buildings. The people there just looked at me. I tried to talk to them and ask for help, but they just stared at me. They had no idea where I was from.

I do not know how long I was in the town when a big man, who looked very

different from the others, came up to me and greeted me in my own language. I was very surprised. He asked my name. I told him I was Ab-Du Nesa.

He invited me to his house. Inside was very nice. He gave me some water and some food. He asked me to tell him my story. I told him everything that had happened to me. He asked about my family. I told him about my father going to war and about how my family needed me.

He asked me if I remembered where I was from. I told him I did not know the name, but I remembered that we lived close to the big river, and we could see a great mountain.

I ate, and then I slept in this nice man's house. The next morning, he introduced me to a man who also spoke my language. He told me he was going to go to the place I had described, and if I wanted to go with him, I was welcome to go. I agreed.

As we drove off, I waved at the nice man who had taken good care of me. He was helping as many of the boys he could to find their way home. He told me I was an exception. Most of the boys did not remember anything about where they came from.

It was a five-day journey. I could hardly sleep because I was so excited to be going home to see my mother and siblings.

When we arrived, I looked around the place where he brought me. Nothing was familiar. I was not home after all.

I thanked the nice man for giving me a ride, and then I began to ask people if they knew my family. I spent many days wandering around, begging for food and asking people if they knew my mother or my father. I described my village. Most of the people said many of the villages looked like that.

Finally, after about a week, I found a man who had known my father. I was so excited until he told me that my father had died in the war. I was so sad. He went on to tell me that he knew my mother and where she was living. He even offered to take me there.

It was about a day's walk. I felt like running the whole way. It was almost dark when we got to the edge of the village. I recognized where I was, and I said, "Goodbye" and "Thank you," as I ran to my house.

When I got to the house, I realized I was very different from when I left, and that I

might frighten my family if I walked into the house without knocking on the door, so I knocked on the side of the doorway.

A voice inside answered. "Hello?"

I did not recognize the voice.

"I'm Ab-Du, is my mother there?" I said.

"Ab-Du? Is that really you?" the voice answered.

Then a woman came out of the doorway.

"Ab-Du, I thought I'd never see you again!" my mother screamed as she hugged me and cried.

I went inside and found out that my younger brother Na-Suba had tried to keep the family fed, but he was too little. The police caught him trying to steal some food from a merchant. He was still in jail.

My sister was now working as a housekeeper in a city far from our village, and my mother had not seen her for a very long time. She sent money home every once in a while.

My uncle Shar-In had been taking care of the family until died in an accident.

My mother had survived by sewing clothes to sell at the market, but it was not a lot of money and she was getting older now, so it was hard to do the work.

I gave my mother the coins I had saved over the years. There was enough to get my brother out of jail and to take care of my family for a long time. I had finally come home, and I was able to take care of my family the way I had always wanted to.

**VOCABULARY** (*Match the word to its definition*)

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|----------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1. soldier ____      | a. water bath                    |
| 2. van ____          | b. not a normal thing            |
| 3. shower ____       | c. fighter in the army           |
| 4. examine ____      | d. look at closely               |
| 5. dormitory ____    | e. police, government            |
| 6. language ____     | f. large vehicle                 |
| 7. greet ____        | g. walk without a destination    |
| 8. exception ____    | h. sleeping place with many beds |
| 9. wander ____       | i. to say "Hello"                |
| 10. authorities ____ | j. dialect, spoken words         |

**TRUE OR FALSE**

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|---|-------|
| 1. My name is Ab-dabi.                      | T / F |
| 2. I was taken to another country.          | T / F |
| 3. I like camels.                           | T / F |
| 4. I have a brother.                        | T / F |
| 5. My father was in jail.                   | T / F |
| 6. I became a jockey riding racehorses.     | T / F |
| 7. I liked to eat rice.                     | T / F |
| 8. My mother was dead when I got home.      | T / F |
| 9. A nice man helped me to get home.        | T / F |
| 10. My sister was working as a housekeeper. | T / F |



## MULTIPLE CHOICE

1. What did I do to find food for my family? \_\_\_\_
  - a) begged
  - b) worked in a factory
  - c) went to war
  - d) rode a camel
  
2. What was my brother's name? \_\_\_\_
  - a) Nar-Isa
  - b) Nabu-Sa
  - c) Sarba-Du
  - d) Na-Suba
  
3. What happened to a boy if he overslept? \_\_\_\_
  - a) he dies
  - b) he is beaten
  - c) he is yelled at
  - d) he gets no food
  
4. What was the name of my camel? \_\_\_\_
  - a) Kurda-Londo
  - b) Londo-Kurda
  - c) Kurda- Duba
  - d) Londo-Mondo

**COMPREHENSION:** (*Write a complete sentence to answer the question.*)

1. Who gave me food or money sometimes when I was begging?

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2. How many men took me into the van?

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3. What kind of animal did I race?

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4. What did my mother and sister make to sell in the market?

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5. How did I get to the place where my camel lived?

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6. What happened to my father?

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7. Who came to the door when I got to my house?

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8. What did I bring home to my mother?

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9. What happened to my brother?

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10. What kind of work was my sister doing when I got home?

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