

Foss Family Reports Mission in South Sudan

Keiko Foss
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Deb Dawson is the president of African Soul American Heart, a non-profit she founded to build schools for orphaned girls in Duk Payuel in the Republic of South Sudan. (Photo courtesy of Keiko Foss).

Since 2008, my husband, John, and I were involved with *African Soul American Heart* (ASAH), a non-profit organization that builds schools for orphaned girls in South Sudan. John was a board member and the lead architect; he made three trips to South Sudan.



Keiko Foss (far right) and her son, Rygo, (wearing green) bid farewell to the staff and girls of the ASAH boarding school for orphaned girls. (Photo credit: <http://asahinsudan.wordpress.com>)

This year, we had planned to go together from May 17 to May 27, 2013. Unfortunately, he couldn't make it because he unexpectedly passed away on April 9, 2013. Instead, our son, Rygo, wanted to go in his stead, as he strongly felt that he should carry on his father's legacy of work and love for the orphaned girls.



Far left, Rygo Foss, and Dawson, far right, refer to John Foss' blueprint for a kitchen and dining hall for the school. (Photo courtesy of Keiko Foss).

I am so glad I personally went to see the site and progress. John's last plan was to design the kitchen and dining hall of the boarding school. Using his blueprint, Rygo and Deb Dawson, the president of the school, measured the land and marked it, making it ready to dig the ground and finish the project by August.

This work will help transform empty, dry land to a newly built fenced area with four “Tukuls”, which are cone-shaped mud huts, and two concrete dormitories, an office, a class room, a temporary kitchen and a volleyball court.

I found "peace, love and trust" there while I was staying at the humble village in Duk Puyael for a week. I also realized a "dimension of happiness" seeing the 33 content and happy ASAH Girls. They love and care for each other every single day. They constantly move, dance, laugh and talk together all the time in their Dinka Tribe language.

The girls eat mainly white rice and beans twice a day. They do not have breakfast. The portions of food are three times more than what I eat, but they are so slim and tall. They walk with pride as ASAH girls. Each girl has a sponsor, and they all have very good grades at school.



Keiko Foss spent three to four hours daily crocheting with the girls. (Photo courtesy of Keiko Foss).

On the second day after we arrived at the village, the entire community gathered to have a memorial service for my husband, John. The pastor offered a prayer and an elder spoke about the good memories of what John had done for the girls and the community. It was a very touching experience.

Deb Dawson, my son, Rygo, and I spoke to share our appreciation of their trust and support toward the ASAH project, which has the mission to “Empower, Protect and Educate Woman for the Future.”



Keiko (left) and her son, Rygo, (right) spoke at the John Foss memorial service. Keiko said a few words about what it meant to her husband to work on this project, Rygo spoke about how the the work his father had accomplished had impacted him and of his desire to see that it continues and that ASAH succeeds. (Photo credit: <http://asahinsudan.wordpress.com>)

I wish to express special thanks to community member Joseph Akol Makeer, who offered a bull for the big feast during the day we honored John. Joseph is a “Fargo Lost Boy” who dreamed of helping orphans in his home village of Duk Payuel, inspired the founding of ASAH.

This trip was Deb Dawson’s ninth trip to South Sudan. This time she memorized all the girls’ names and took such good care of each girl and gave us the best hospitality during our stay there.



A gathering of about 50 people attended the memorial service for John Foss. (Photo credit: <http://asahinsudan.wordpress.com>)

Rygo and Vika Robinson, Deb's daughter, engaged with the girls every day and played cards and volley ball with them. I did crochet with girls for three to four hours daily.

It was my dream to come to South Sudan and to fulfill my husband's legacy. I am so very happy that my dream came true. The land of Africa has so many rich resources with great nature and beauty. When the war and internal conflict ends, true freedom and ever-lasting happiness will surely come.