



CHTI Graduate INTERVIEW

Mr. AMVELIO LOTABO LOOTUK LOOLEPIO

How much better to acquire wisdom than gold. Proverbs 16:16

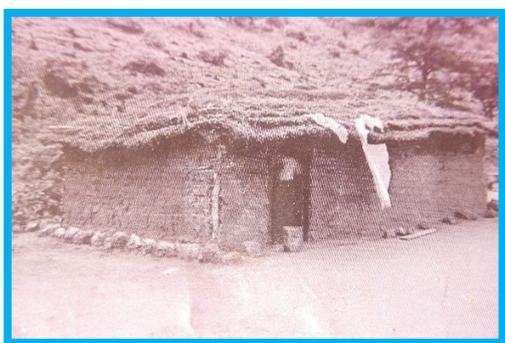
Mr. Amvelio Lotabo Lootuk graduated from Solidarity with South Sudan, Community Health Training Institute (CHTI) as a Registered Nurse in 2022. Recently, he took a break from his work in Holy Trinity Peace Village Kuron Primary Health Care Centre to reflect upon his life and accomplishments for this interview.

I am twenty seven years old and the sixth child of ten (7 boys and 3 girls). Three of my siblings have already passed. My father was a catechist in the Catholic Parish of Namurupus. My father was in favor of education. No one in the entire clan had ever been educated. I was the only one. Now there are other young ones from my clan in the Primary School.

When my father passed, my mother, who was the second of four wives, was defenseless as the father's relatives took everything away from her except the children. She was desperate to save her children. Typical Toposa childhoods include playing in the bush, hunting for small animals, and taking care of cattle and goats. My childhood ended when my mother became destitute. I had to grow up fast.

I joined first year primary school in 2005. This was the first year that Kuron Peace Village opened a Primary School and I was so little but determined to study. There were two groups at the school and only a handful of teachers. I was put in the Primary One group.

I was young in school when my father died. So, I suddenly was struggling to pay for all the stuff I needed and the fees. I would stay and do casual labor during the school breaks to earn money. It was actually a hard life which, I will never forget. When my dad unexpectedly died, my uncles wanted to take me out of school to look after cattle. I resisted with all my might and told them I wanted to study. Now, today, years later, these same uncles are happy to see the benefits of my struggles and education. There is a little increase in the educational levels in my community. However, there are still no others from my immediate family in school. I want to help my siblings and their children to attend school.



Eight years of Primary was finished and I went to Loa Secondary School. I was sponsored by Dr. Margaret Itto, Board member of the Kuron Peace Village. There were eight of us sponsored like that but I was the only one to graduate from Senior



Four in 2017. I found that it was so easy that I had everything paid for now. I could relax and focus on my studies instead of the constant worry about money. My God helped me with these wonderful supporters.

But we had a big scare in 2016 when the civil war broke out. At that time, I was supposed to sit for exams but the civil war delayed me one year. When that war broke out, we students had to run to the refugee camps in Uganda. We had nothing. We arrived tired, hungry and with only our clothes that we were wearing. Dr. Itto knew where we were and she called us back to Torit after some days. We stayed with her for a few days and then we were sent to Kapoeta. There was fighting all around. A boy like me could easily be captured and used as an unwilling foot soldier. I felt I was protected by God.

Finally, in 2017, I was able to sit for the exams and my marks were very good. I was proud of myself for all the years of hard work, uncertainty and struggle. After that I went to Peace Village and served as an intern for one year in the Peace Department. I wanted to become a nurse because I liked science when I was in Secondary School. My father always admired health workers. I kept that in mind all those years and when I mentioned this to Emeritus Bishop Paride Taban, he gave me the chance to go to Wau and study nursing. I like the idea of saving lives instead of killing for cattle raiding.



Figure 1 Bishop Paride greets children at the Primary School in 2005

In January 2019, I went to Wau and attended the Community Health Training Institute (CHTI). Peace Village sponsored me. My first impression of the CHTI was how great it was in that compound. Water was everywhere, even in my room! I never had that before. It was like I was dreaming and living a rich life. We had electricity and food and it was delicious. People there were from all over the country and I found this very intriguing. People were very social and kind and I was blessed to have such colleagues.

Sr. Esperance welcomed all of us and said: *“When you chose to be a nurse, you need to be committed. If you are not committed, you could be a killer. You cannot make a mistake or a person could die from your lack of effective treatment. Remember that all the time you are studying”*. These words made me think deeply about my commitment and I focused on my books.

I also remember something Dr. Thomas, from Catholic Secretariat of South Sudan, said to me. *“Since you are the first in your community to come to CHTI, you have to change yourself first and then return to change your people.*

I quickly learned there was no fooling around in CHTI. My biggest challenge was reading. We were always reading and writing and attending classes and practicals. We studied and studied hard. It pushed me seriously.



Figure 2 At CHTI with colleagues and Teachers. Mr. Amvelio is second from the left

The first time we were being taught by a doctor who was a very good teacher. That first assignment, I think it was anatomy or physiology, which was very well taught, put me in shock of the work load! I wondered if I could do it? So now, by the Grace of God, I continued and graduated as an RN. Dr. James Albino is now my role model. I learned so much from him.

Another teacher, Mr. Michael from Uganda, drove me to be committed. The way he was teaching us and the advice he gave us was very well explained and I understood his lessons very well.

Sr. Esperance was more than the Principal, she was a mentor and just like a mother to not only me, but to many students. She really cared about us and showed impartiality amongst the various groups.

At first it was hard for me to keep the time. Everything in CHTI was done punctually. If you were even five minutes late you would find trouble. We had to learn how to sit in classes many hours. For me, as a Toposa, that was a big challenge to my cultural background.



The student diversity was so impressive. I had in mind from previous stories that Nuer and Dinka were hostile. But I found my colleagues were most social and kind. This is one thing that has left an indelible impression on me. When I first went to Wau, I thought I would be lonely and like an outcast. The reality was that the people there were so good to me. We were all just like a big family. I will never forget that lesson. Even at our graduation so many people came to support us and congratulate us and they took the time to come to that ceremony.

During my three and one half years in Wau, what impressed me was how much everything was available. There was meat, fruits and vegetables in surplus. In my area we were always hungry. but in Wau we were fed well. I learned all these different foods and it was part of my cultural education and expanding my mind.

Tutors were always ready to help the students and they were very hard working. They were committed to their work. This made the entire compound environment conducive to learning. We did our practical work at the Comboni Hospital and it was well organized.



I feel my education at CHTI was one of the best in South Sudan. When we compared our work in the hospitals with those from other schools, we found that we were better prepared and instructed. We had a demonstration room at the institute that was outstanding and fully equipped. On final exams the CHTI students were always the best even though we are not allowed to cheat, even a little. I thank our teachers for being so professional and strict with us as it made us the best.

In 2022, I graduated as a Registered Nurse. Now, I have returned to Holy Trinity Peace Village - Kuron working at the Fr Matthew Haumann Primary Health Care Centre. (about 280 km north of Kapoeta Town) The life here is tough. There are many challenges. It is not like Wau or the CHTI. We workers suffer the hardships of isolation, lack of water, and shortage of supplies. But I see this also as part of my journey. God took me from poverty and gave me all those opportunities. I learned that I could do anything as long as I keep my strong will power and determination. I am now thinking to support many of my family and clan members. I want them to also have a chance to be educated. Of course, in the future, I want my own family and land. However, right now I am focused on my work and my people. We must all help to build this country into a united and peaceful place.



*Above all, I thank God, the Almighty for providing me with the strength, courage, hope, and guidance during times when it seemed to be impossible and difficult to finish my study as well as guidance in conducting this research study.

My gratitude also goes to CHTI administration for accepting me to carry out my studies on the campus and to my dearest tutors for the tireless effort, they rendered for me to acquire all the necessary skills and knowledge. More gratitude goes to my mentor, Sr. Maria Fe Divino, SSpS, who was always there for me and for the tireless contribution she rendered for the success and completion of my research.

My greatest thanks also go to my family members especially my late father Joseph Lootuk, my mother Irene Lokorot, and all my siblings and relatives for the care and support they gave to me up to this state of my life.



*...from Amvelio's Research Paper...

(Source: Interview 08.July.2022 by Gabe Hurrish, Maryknoll Lay Missioner, Kuron Peace Village)

