

Mansur (10) took us to the little hut that is now his room. With mud walls and a straw roof, it is not as hot as the tents in which most refugees live, but it is still very hot. It takes a couple of minutes for our eyes to adjust to the darkness, and then the drawings that cover most of the back wall reveal themselves.

Mansur wanted us to see the drawings he made, representing the last memories he has of his village in Darfur. They show images of war: men dressed in soldier's uniforms, riding in trucks with machine guns, shooting at the village. We see a small body in a corner of one drawing. "It is a baby that was shot and killed," Mansur tells us.



Mansur is now a refugee at Farchana, waiting for the day he can return home to a safe Darfur. He wants to be a doctor, but there will be little for him to do once he finishes primary school at this camp. Like other young men living in refugee camps, he wants to find a way to move forward and help his family, but he might instead be driven to join the rebels and try to fight for their land. He would much rather be a doctor.

I met Farha (14) at refugee camp Oure Cassoni, right on the Chad–Darfur border. Her father was killed during the attack that destroyed her village. She told us about the attack, a story we heard over and over again during our visit to the camps.



Sudanese government helicopters and planes break the silence right at dawn, swooping in, dropping bombs and shooting bullets. Then the Janjaweed ride in on camels and horseback, burning everything that can be burnt, killing men and boys, and brutalizing women and girls. Government soldiers shoot at villagers fleeing the attack. Farha, her mother, and her three sisters walked twenty–five days across the desert to make it to the refugee camp in Chad.

On the day we met Farha, she and her sisters had not seen or heard from their mother in 41 days. Her mother went back in to Darfur to look for a son that became separated during the attack.



The young Farha is in charge of her home at the camp. She takes care of her three younger siblings; she collects firewood and cooks; she washes clothes and fetches water. Going out to collect firewood puts her at great risk of being raped, which happens frequently outside of the camps. She also goes to school every morning. She would like to continue studying and become a teacher, but in a year there will be no more school for Farha, since school ends after the primary level at the camps.

Farha told me that, on windy camp afternoons, she and her friends get together to tell stories about their village in Darfur, about the way life used to be. They keep telling the stories, until they weep.

“My Name is Ahmat.

I have 16 years old. I come from Darfur state. Now, I am a refugee. I live in Kounoungo.”

That is how Ahmat introduced himself when we met him during our first i-ACT trip to the Chad-Darfur border in 2005. He talked about life in a peaceful Darfur, about being happy, playing football and dancing with friends, and about being together with family. Ahmat is charismatic and bright.



He wanted so much to continue his education, but he had finished primary school, and there are no secondary-education schools in the refugee camps.

He wanted to continue to grow, learn more skills, and improve on his English, so that he could then help his family, who had lost all that they had to the brutal violence of the genocide in their land.

We kept in contact with Ahmat, through aid workers and UNHCR. He made friends and corresponded with students in the United States. He joined, long-distance, their Student Task Force and dreamt about being able to have the educational opportunities that his new friends had.

On our second i-ACT trip in 2006, we brought with us a care-package from the Student Task Force to Ahmat. The packet could not reach him at this time because Ahmat had left for Darfur. His family told us that he had gone back to look for one of the few standing towns that might still have an operating secondary school.

Ahmat is still inside of Darfur. He is risking his life, as the genocide rages on, so that he can continue his studies and someday be a part of rebuilding a stronger Darfur.