

# The Duany's Amazing Fourney

*A family's flight from the killing fields of North Africa  
to the safety of Bloomington  
and back again—to help  
found a new nation,  
the Republic  
of South  
Sudan.*

BY Elisabeth Andrews

PHOTOGRAPHY IN BLOOMINGTON BY

Steve Raymer

PHOTOGRAPHY IN SOUTH SUDAN BY

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# ON

the eve of the championship game of the 1999 National Association of Basketball Coaches Classic, the November weekend that starts the college basketball season, University of Wisconsin senior and team captain Duany Duany prepared to challenge Syracuse University freshman Kueth Duany in a rare brother-vs.-brother contest. The tournament marked Kueth's college debut, and the sibling face-off was attracting attention from networks like ESPN and CBS. Their mother Julia had carefully stitched together a T-shirt that was half red, half orange, and she looked forward to cheering doubly loud from the stands.

First, though, she needed to have a talk with her children. She had raised five kids, and such family meetings were a staple of her strategy for keeping everyone focused. But while she had refereed countless arguments between them, this discussion wasn't about sportsmanship or playing fair. Nor was it an opportunity to offer tips on free throws or defense, although she'd attended hundreds of games at Bloomington High School North and would eventually send each child to college on a Division I basketball scholarship. Instead, Julia needed to tell them what was happening with their father, Wal.

"She had Dad on the phone. He had to go back to Sudan," Duany remembers. "We knew he wasn't just going for a trip there. The government was involved. We knew how much he could be in danger. Anything could happen. He could be assassinated. So we had to play through that."

The game went fine (Syracuse won), Duany led his team to the Final Four that season, and Kueth later surpassed that achievement by serving as captain of the Syracuse 2003 NCAA champions. But on the other side of the world, in the midst of a civil war that claimed more than 2 million lives and displaced at least 5 million people, Wal was establishing a very different family legacy. His contributions to the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, which led to South Sudan's independence, would shape both the country's future and that of the Bloomington-based Duany clan.

#### TOP TO BOTTOM

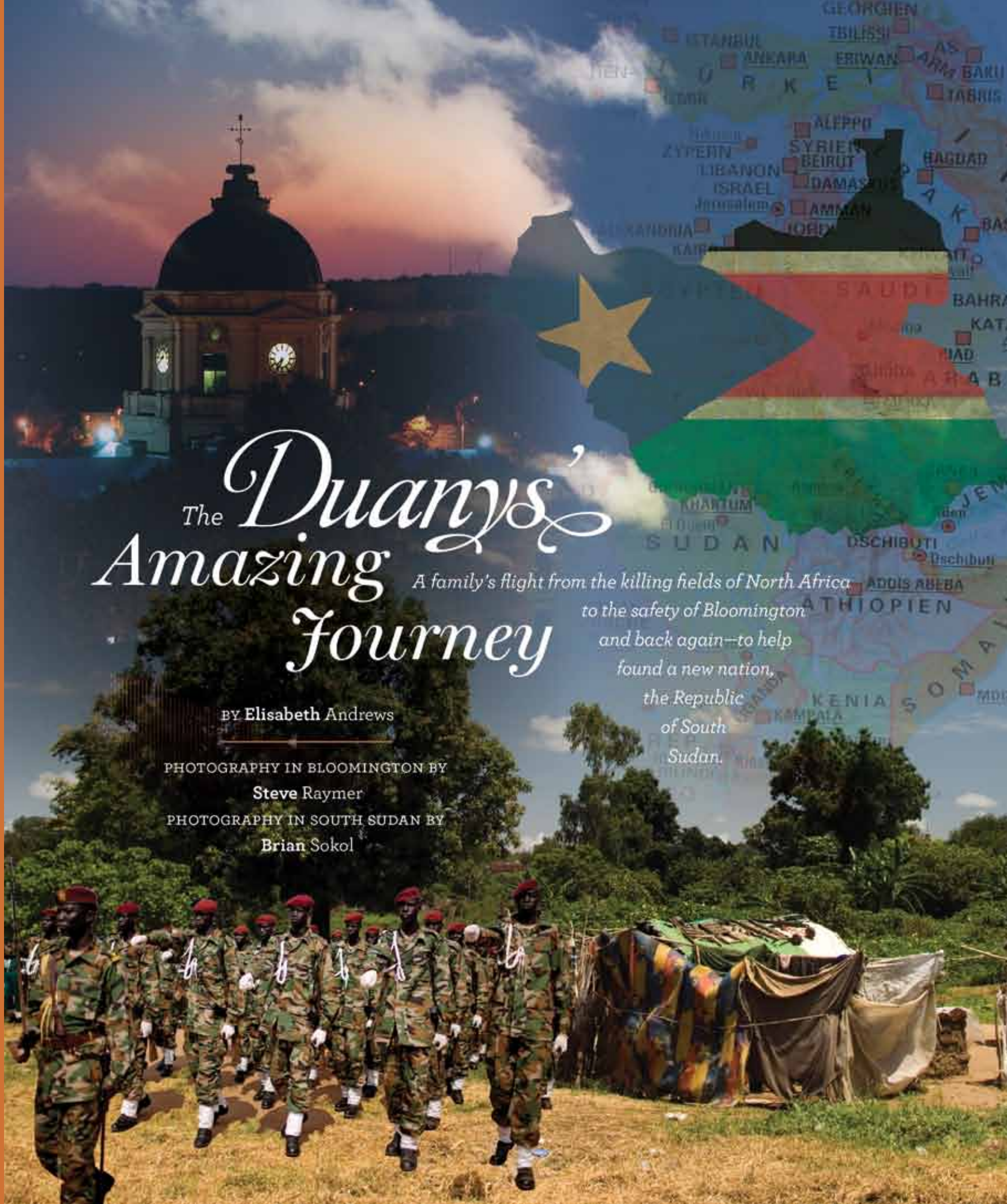
Wal (in light blue) at the Waat Lou Nuer Peace Conference, 1999.

The family at Duany Duany's wedding in 2010. Top row, l-r: Kueth with daughter Jinai, Bil, cousin Ger. Middle row: Nyagon and Duany. Front row: Julia, Duany's wife Cyndi, Wal, and Nok.

Julia (center) cheers for opposing teams as Kueth and Duany face each other at the championship game of the 1999 National Association of Basketball Coaches Classic.

Julia at the Juba marketplace in September 2011.

Kueth playing for Syracuse. As captain, he led the team to win the NCAA championship in 2003.



## DUANY WHO'S WHO



**WAL DUANY**  
Patriarch; former chairman of the South Sudan Liberation Movement.



**JULIA DUANY**  
Matriarch; under-secretary for parliamentary affairs in the Republic of South Sudan.



**DUANY DUANY**  
Eldest son; working to expand presence of Duany Group. In Sudanese tradition, the eldest son is often given the family name.



**NYAGON DUANY**  
Eldest daughter; orthopedic surgeon currently assigned to the Cincinnati Bengals football team.



**KUETH DUANY**  
Middle son; involved in Sport Revolution program to help Sudanese basketball players earn international college scholarships.



**NOK DUANY**  
Younger daughter; model and 2009 Miss South Sudan.



**BIL DUANY**  
Youngest son; coach for South Sudan's national basketball team.

Photos by Deckard Photography

**T**oday, both parents and all five Duany siblings—Duany, Kueth, their younger brother Bil, and sisters Nyagon and Nok—are involved in rebuilding the world's newest country. They jointly founded the Duany Group, a private company working to build infrastructure, schools, and health clinics and investing in South Sudan's agricultural and mineral resources. One arm of the organization, Sport Revolution, trains young South Sudanese basketball players and helps them earn scholarships in the United States. The Duany Group also runs a political news magazine, *The Parliamentarian*; Julia, as editor in chief, lends her insider perspective as South Sudan's undersecretary for parliamentary affairs. Wal, until last year a member of parliament, has moved into a consulting phase, although, he says, "If you want to appoint me to anything, I can consider it."

Political appointments, though, haven't always run smoothly for Wal. The last time he served as a government minister, he wound up tortured in prison for five months without trial, narrowly escaping into exile in Bloomington.

The story of how that happened, and how the Duany family returned to help lead the new Republic of South Sudan, begins with Wal getting arrested—not as a government official but as a child.

### "STIRRING UP TROUBLE"

From the beginning of the conflicts that have devastated Sudan since 1955, Wal has been "fighting for the liberation of my people," he says. He was born in 1947, just after the British and Egyptian governments that held Sudan in a condominium arrangement decided to unite the north and south

regions. Up until then, the two areas had been administered separately, which kept the primarily Muslim north distinct from the Christian and animist south. So when Sudan was granted self-governance in 1954, it was under a single northern, Muslim-dominated government, which did not sit well with the southern Sudanese.

Wal was in middle school when he first earned the notice of the northern police force. He, along with many boys in the farming town of Buong, was sympathetic to the southern soldiers who had mutinied against the northern army and started the First Sudanese Civil War in 1955. He hadn't yet learned that such opinions warranted secrecy, and soon found himself at the mercy of militiamen who warned him—with whips as well as words—against "stirring up trouble."



Photo by Steve Raymer

Far from subduing Wal, the arrest motivated him to commit to the rebellion and join a group known as Anyanya, meaning "snake venom." The name was a literal reference to the tactics of the rebel army, which used the deadly venom of the black mamba snake to poison not only food and drink, but also the ground, on which most Sudanese walk barefoot. "We terrorized and demoralized the enemy," he says. "We did whatever it took."

His dedication was rewarded when at age 19 he was selected to participate in a program that was as revolutionary as the war itself. The rebel movement sent 12 young officers overseas to be educated—something unheard of before that time. For a country that, to this day, is about 80 percent illiterate, the decision represented a turning point in South Sudan's international strategy. Wal was one of the 12 selected; John Garang, who later would head the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), was also in the group.

### COMING TO AMERICA

It was 1966 when Wal left South Sudan for Syracuse University's Maxwell School to study public affairs. He concentrated on international relations with a focus on the

Middle East, subjects he hoped would help him lead his country through and beyond the conflict. After completing both bachelor's and master's degrees at Syracuse, he went on to the State University of New York at Buffalo to pursue a Ph.D.

While he was away, the violence continued, ending some 500,000 lives. The great majority of those killed were civilians. Wal's education was interrupted, however, not by war but by peace.

"I was appointed to the regional government that was brought about by the Addis Ababa Agreement," he says, referring to the 1972 peace treaty that ended the first phase of the war. "Provided that [Sudanese President Gaafar] Nimeiry accepted me, I was to return to become a minister of cabinet affairs."

The regional-autonomy arrangement placed Wal, one of the most prominent leaders of the southern resistance movement, in the cabinet of his former enemy. Wal explains, "When you are a subject of suspicion, you can be appointed not because they trust you but because they want to watch you closer." Nonetheless, he rejoiced in an end to the fighting, and moved from Buffalo to Juba, the future capital of South Sudan.

## WAL DUANY

"When you are a subject of suspicion, you can be appointed [to a government position] not because they trust you but because they want to watch you closer."

### SELECTING A BRIDE

Besides, it was time for Wal to think about marrying. He was 25 already, and relatives had begun to wonder what might be wrong with him.

"The talk had started. Gossiping," he says. "The wife of my stepbrother was saying to me, 'We know some girls if this has been a problem.' I said, 'This is not a problem.'" Still, as the custom was for families to arrange unions, Wal agreed to marry a daughter of a well-known teacher, Benjamin Bil.

"Those girls were there and then the problem was how to choose among them," he says. "There were three girls ready to go. I wanted an educated woman, a person who was intelligent. I also wanted a taller lady. I didn't mind taller than myself. Julia was the tallest of them, so I chose Julia."



Julia, age 16, in 1972, when she married. Courtesy photo



Photo by Steve Raymer

## DUANY DUANY

"Next thing, we were in the New York airport eating Happy Meals at McDonald's. I thought, 'This is great!'"

### ABOVE RIGHT:

Wal and Julia's wedding in Wau, South Sudan, 1972. Courtesy photo

### OPPOSITE PAGE:

1. Kueth (left) and Duany chilling outside Tulip Tree in 1986. Courtesy photo

2. Kueth (with ball) and Duany practice their dunking skills after church in 1987. Courtesy photo

3. Wal earns his Ph.D. from Indiana University in 1992. Clockwise from top left: Nyagon, Wal, Duany, Nok, Bil, and Kueth. Courtesy photo

4. Bil at batting practice with a young friend in Tulip Tree. Courtesy photo

5. The family shortly after their arrival in Bloomington in 1984. Clockwise from left: Duany, Wal, Julia holding baby Bil, Nyagon, Nok, and Kueth. Courtesy photo



For her part, Julia was petrified by the arrangement. Just 16 then, she hadn't thought yet about marrying. She had finished training to become a schoolteacher—a rare privilege in a society that thought education corrupted women—and looked forward to beginning her career. When her father informed her that she would be Wal's wife, "A chill passed from my head, down my spine, and to my feet," she writes in her autobiography *Making Peace & Nurturing Life* (1st Books Library, 2003). "I wanted to hold on to something but I could not find anything. The only thing I could hold onto was my clothing. I hugged my clothes close to me at this difficult moment. I did not say a word. In Nilotic culture [the culture of the area along the Nile], a father's decision was not to be questioned by a good daughter."

Julia accepted her fate, and the two were married in October 1972. The night of the ceremony was perhaps the high point of the peaceful period in Sudan.

"President Nimeiry attended. The vice president, who was also a Muslim, was my best man," Wal says. "We had an Islamic ceremony in a Christian church. It was a moment that united our country. I thought, at that time, peace might really be possible."

Even with those high hopes, the southern leadership continued to operate a shadow government, always aware of the risk of renewed hostility. "They [the Sudanese leadership] were working secretly to suppress us, and we were working secretly against them," Wal says.

Meanwhile, the Duany family was growing. Julia gave birth to their first child, Urom, in 1974, but after enjoying perfect health for 17 months he contracted typhoid fever and died within days. Though her heart was broken, Julia welcomed a second pregnancy a few months later, and Duany was born in 1976. Nyagon, Kueth, and Nok soon followed, after which Julia became pregnant with Bil.

## IMPRISONED AND BEATEN

It was during that pregnancy that Nimeiry made an abrupt change to his policies.

"President Nimeiry decided that Sudan would become an Islamic republic," Wal says. "He called a meeting of his cabinet. It was not a consultation with good intentions. Some of us said, 'No, Mr. President, we cannot accept this. We can only advise you, drop this idea of making Sudan an Islamic republic because a lot of your Christian brothers in the south will not accept to become second-class citizens in their own country.' Nimeiry did not like that."

Those who expressed their objections were arrested. Some were released soon after, but Wal was one of several southern officials who remained in prison for five months without charges. "We were just toiling there, tortured there, beaten," he says. The northern military was also monitoring Julia. "We were under house arrest," she says. "They didn't want other people to come to us with information." Neither she nor the children could leave the house without an escort.

It was only after Amnesty International became involved with Wal's case that he was released back to his family. His government position, of course, had been terminated in 1983, and the Second Sudanese Civil War was starting. John Garang, one of Wal's early colleagues, had begun recruiting in earnest for the Sudan People's Liberation Army, taking boys as young as 7. Duany, at the time, was 8.

Wal and Garang disagreed on both the methods and purpose of the civil war. Garang wanted a unified, southern-dominated government, while Wal wanted an independent country separate from the north. Because of these differences, they were uncomfortable political allies, and the pressure to conscript the Duany children was very real.

Julia was the one to push for relocation to the United States. "She knew what was happening, that the war was pending," Wal says. "She said, 'I want my kids to go to school and to have a good education. I would like them to be educated in the United States.' I was rude, and I said, 'You don't know anything. You have no idea.' But she said, 'I know you. You are educated in the United States. That is good for me that my children could get something similar.'"

Wal realized that he could also continue the education he'd left unfinished ten years before. A friend from the U.S. Agency for International Development knew of an

opening at the Workshop in Political Theory and Policy Analysis at Indiana University, to which Wal quickly applied and was accepted. It took a good deal of coordination to get himself out of the country—what he describes as "under-table political activities"—but he was ultimately permitted to leave on his own, so long as his family remained in the country. "The government said, 'He is getting out of our sight. He is not going to cause problems,'" Wal says.

## ESCAPE TO BLOOMINGTON

Getting Julia and the kids out was another matter. She was able to persuade a northern doctor to falsely testify that her pregnancy required medical care in London, which enabled them to gain a three-month exit visa. By this time, though, she was more than eight months pregnant, which meant that even Wal's American friends couldn't get around airline regulations that cut off travel for women close to giving birth. It was ultimately the Netherlands that agreed to help them, flying the family on Royal Dutch Airlines.

Julia couldn't appear to be leaving permanently, so everything they owned had to be abandoned. Shepherding four small children and ready to give birth any minute, Julia boarded the plane in terror, certain she was going to be found out. "I didn't believe until we touched down in London that we were really going to make it," she says.

From young Duany's perspective, though, it was an exciting adventure. "At that time, they didn't tell us anything," he remembers. "We lived well in Juba. We had a government house, backyard, babysitters, cleaners. We were driven to private school in a big white Mercedes Benz. Then we didn't see Dad for a while, but we were just going to school, being kids."

"When we all went to London, we stayed with my uncle, Mom's brother, Dr. Bamaba Benjamin [now South Sudan's minister of information]. I remember when Mom first brought Bil back from the hospital. Next thing, we were in the New York airport eating Happy Meals at McDonald's. I thought, 'This is great!'"

Coming to Bloomington, though, meant giving up the luxuries of their former life. Instead of a sprawling estate with servants, the seven-person family squeezed into graduate student housing at Tulip Tree Apartment #218. But while they were the only Sudanese living at East 10th Street and the Bypass, there was no scarcity of children to play with.

"At that time, it was just families in Tulip Tree," says Duany. "There were kids from everywhere—Saudi Arabia, China, Qatar—an amazing mix of international people. You'd go up in the elevator and at each floor you'd smell a different type of dish."

The family arrived in October 1984. After adjusting to the time change and the weather (which would soon mystify Julia by bringing "cold ash from heaven"), the older kids were settled in school and at the Boys and Girls Club. With that after-school setting came the activity that would loom largest in the children's universe: basketball.

"I played tennis in Sudan, but when I got here it was all basketball," says Duany. At school, at the Boys and Girls Club, even at home, they would play. "We had leagues with Tulip Tree against Campus View," he remembers.

Julia also began classes, enrolling in the IU School of Education for her bachelor's degree. Because money was tight, she worked weekend nights serving food in a dormitory cafeteria. Wal was busy—not only with his doctorate but with continuing to direct the southern resistance from afar.





## Bloomington High School North Days

1. Senior Duany Duany jumps over the defense to score in 1995.

2. Nok and her escort, Justin Engelhardt, were members of the 1998 Homecoming Court.

3. Frank DiSilvestro and Nyagon were crowned King and Queen of the Jungle at the 1995 Prom. Nyagon was a junior.

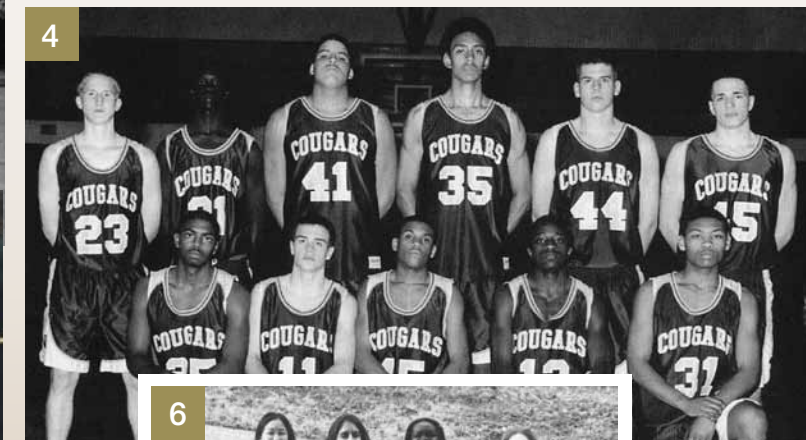
4. Bil's freshman basketball team in the '99-'00 school year was 20-0, a perfect season. His teammates included (back row) Dan Christy, Bil Duany, Sean May, Jared Jeffries, Clay Ludlow, Josh Girvin, (front row) Danta Horton, Errek Suhr, Scott May, Matt Kalua, Kelvin Boatner, and (not pictured) Nike Bridgwaters. Jeffries and May went on to the NBA and Suhr played for IU.

5. Duany sports a distinctly American flattop in 1993. *Courtesy photo*

6. Nok was vice president of her freshman class during the '95-'96 school year. Left to right: Annie Park, secretary; Elizabeth DiSilvestro, president; Nok Duany, vice president; Kristin Dovenmuehle, treasurer.



Photos 1-4, 6 courtesy of Bloomington High School North.



remember one time I was in sixth grade and I brought a C home. Dad said, "That's it. You're done."

Duany brought his grades up in a hurry, having already started receiving college recruitment letters. "I was five-ten or five-eleven then. I used to sneak into the HPER [IU recreation facility] at twelve years old and get on the court, playing guys who were nineteen or twenty."

### THE DUANYS REJECT BOB KNIGHT

In high school at Bloomington North, the 6'5" Duany was a basketball powerhouse. He was on all-star teams as a freshman and earned MVP for the first time as a sophomore. That was when Bobby Knight called the family in to talk about Duany playing for IU.

It took only seconds for Knight to blow his chances. "As soon as he opened his mouth he was just cursing his butt off. I was so embarrassed, sitting there with Dad," Duany remembers.

Wal still shakes his head recalling his disapproval. "I did not like it. That is not the way to teach our kids. I did not like the way he conducted himself in the presence of my wife and my son."

Duany wound up playing for the University of Wisconsin and studied behavioral science and law. His sister Nyagon, who was both North homecoming queen

### WAL'S SECRET LIFE

"This was not known by so many people. There were secret communications that we were using for the South Sudan Liberation Movement [SSLM]," Wal says. "When I came to Bloomington, we were using go-betweens, couriers. I would go to New York and to Washington to report."

Wal was not permitted to enter Sudan—especially after his family's escape—but he found ways to return throughout the '80s and '90s to assist with SSLM activities. "There are creative things that you can do because of the necessity of communication with your leaders," he says. "There was going back openly, but then there was going through the back door. You go to the Congo and then walk. You go to Uganda and then walk. It was difficult for me to get a visa to go to Khartoum [Sudan's capital], but I was going to Sudan."

The children were not informed about their father's whereabouts, because "we did not want to disrupt their education," Wal says. And while the kids (Duany and Kueth in particular) thought mostly about basketball, their parents ensured that grades wouldn't be neglected.

"They had a policy that you couldn't get anything lower than a B, or you couldn't play," says Duany. "I



Julia posed for this portrait for *Bloom* at the Dr. John Garang Memorial in Juba on September 26, 2011. Garang was the rebel leader who is considered the founding father of South Sudan. He perished in a helicopter crash in July 2005. *Photo by Brian Sokol*

and valedictorian, had scholarship offers for track and field, volleyball, and basketball. She chose to play the latter at Bradley University, where she studied premed. Kueth followed Wal's footsteps to attend Syracuse University—again, with a basketball scholarship—and major in information technology.

### JULIA RETURNS TO SUDAN

By this time, Julia had also become involved in working toward an end to the war. After finishing her undergraduate work, she too pursued a Ph.D. through the Workshop in Political Theory and Policy Analysis. (She and Wal became close friends and colleagues with another wife-and-husband team, the workshop directors, Nobel Prize winner Elinor Ostrom and her husband Vincent.) An African Dissertation Internship Award from the Rockefeller Foundation enabled Julia to return for the first time to her homeland in 1993, and to witness the "living nightmare" Sudan had become.

"It was very depressing to see the suffering and the devastation," she says, remembering the refugee camps where millions were starving and the violence that raged not only between north and south but also among different factions of the SPLA.

Eric Reeves, a professor of English at Smith College who has written extensively about Sudan, described this situation this way in the *Los Angeles Times*: "Sudan's civil war is, quite simply, the most destructive conflict of its kind since World War II. It is a humanitarian crisis without rival." As Julia traveled through refugee camps and rural villages, though, she saw that while violence had become equated with manliness, women were desperate for peace. She began to devise a strategy that would capitalize on this consensus. "I thought it would be better for people to talk about peace among themselves, as communities, to try to influence the liberation movement to begin talking about peace instead of singing the song of war," she says.

## JULIA DUANY

"I thought it would be better for people to talk about peace among themselves, as communities, to try to influence the liberation movement to begin talking about peace instead of singing the song of war."

### WOMEN FOR PEACE

After finishing her dissertation in 1994, Julia returned to Sudan to begin organizing women to advocate for peace. Together with Wal and his protégé Riek Machar (now South Sudan's vice president), she helped put together the Akobo Peace Conference. This was the first opportunity for women to openly tell the stories of what they had experienced, not only at the hands of the northern soldiers, but with the SPLA itself. With more than 5,000 people gathered, women described the rape, killing, looting, and destruction that their own people had committed.

The outcome of the conference was a boost to the local peacekeeping efforts of the United Nations and a resolution by the SSLM to support women's organizing efforts, such as the South Sudanese Women Association and the Sudanese Mothers for Peace. Back in Bloomington, Julia and Wal also started South Sudanese Friends International (SSFI) to spread the word about Sudan's crisis.

As the peace efforts gained momentum, the SSLM recognized the opportunity to seek international support for independence and requested that Wal return to Sudan full time to serve as the SSLM's chairman. Doing so would require, however, that he participate openly in negotiations—no more back-door visits—which would also make him a target. This was the telephone conversation Wal had with Kueth and Duany before the Basketball Coaches Classic.



Photo by Steve Raymer

## NOK DUANY

“Growing up in Bloomington, our parents were always involved in Sudan. Their advocacy for independence has been so much a part of our lives.”

Wal (second from right) at Sudanese peace talks in Kenya, 2004. To his left are Chris Jaeger of the United Nations Development Program and Ahmed Saad Omer, a representative of Sudan’s National Democratic Alliance of 13 political parties that formed to oppose the regime of Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir. To Wal’s right is South Sudan’s Minister for SPLA Affairs Justin Yac Arop, who was killed in a helicopter crash in 2008. *Courtesy photo*



## ACCEPTING THE DANGER

“That was the first time it really hit me hard, understanding exactly what Dad was doing,” Duany says. “I was sitting there on the phone call suddenly scared for his life. It just hit me all at once, like a head trauma. If he was going out there as the main guy, the leader, that meant he was the one they’d want to get.”

Having accepted the danger, Wal committed himself to unifying South Sudan toward independence. He began a “people-to-people peace process” of regional conferences that, he reported on the SSFI website in 2000, was “awakening people in both the north and the south to the absurdity of the political situation that they have been in for years.” He was also charged with developing a governing

body for the emerging state and drafting its constitution.

With grassroots support behind them, the SSLM gained strength, which was met with civilian bombings by the Sudanese government of President Omar al-Bashir. The world, however, had finally begun to take notice, including the U.S. and European Union. Between the mounting international pressure and the force of a coordinated effort on the ground, the SSLM succeeded in bringing Bashir to the table for peace talks beginning in 2002. This was the start of the process that culminated in the Comprehensive Peace Agreement of 2005, which ended 22 years of civil war and gave South Sudan the power to call a referendum on its independence.

Following the signing of the agreement, South Sudan put in place its first official government, designating Wal as a member of parliament and Julia as the undersecretary for parliamentary affairs. Both were charged with capacity building, using the skills they’d gained in the workshop with the Ostrows. “Our priorities are developing infrastructure, education, and health care,” says Julia. “We are also tasked with developing democratic principles and values in South Sudan—civic education. So the work that I did in Bloomington, looking at comparative education on a number of continents, has really helped me with my work here now.”

## THE FAMILY GOES BACK

The following year was another milestone for the Duany family: by 2006, all the children had finished college. Nok, who played basketball for Georgetown University (turning down offers of volleyball scholarships), graduated with a degree in finance, and Bil, who played for Eastern Illinois University, earned a degree in international business. That meant that, with the exception of Nyagon, who was completing her medical residency, all the kids were available to take a family trip to South Sudan.

“It was a real bonding experience,” says Duany. “We were all camping, sleeping in tents. It was the coolest thing to meet all these members of my family. The kids, we were like, ‘Okay. So now we’re in Africa.’ We had this imagination about it, but that was when it all became real.”

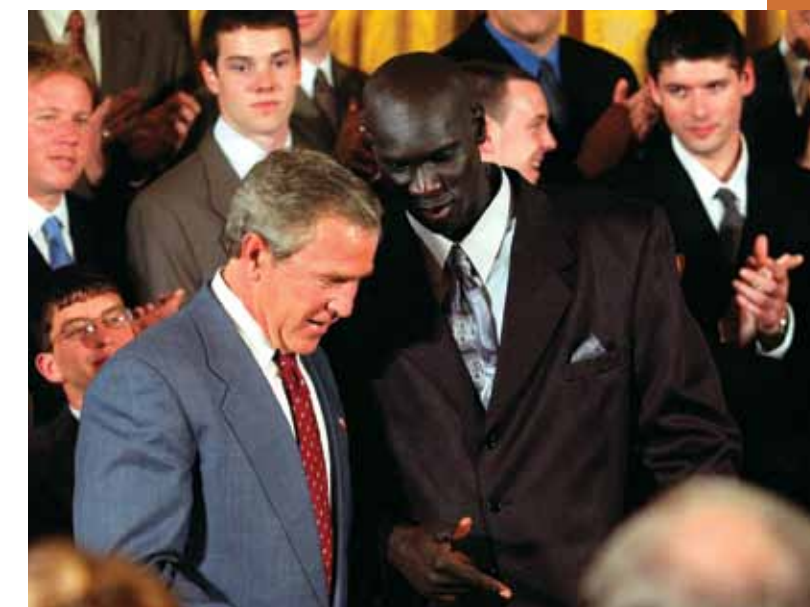
The family wasted no time in setting up the Duany Group, starting Sport Revolution, and reclaiming the land they had abandoned during their escape. Nok explains that even though the kids had been raised in individualistic America, they had no hesitation in joining their parents for this partnership.

“Growing up in Bloomington, our parents were always involved in Sudan. Their advocacy for independence has been so much a part of our lives,” she says. “We knew that when the time would come, when there was peace, we were ready. There was so much excitement to go back. It wasn’t even a question. This is our nation. This is what our parents were struggling for.”

Since that first trip, they have all been bi-continental, working from both Juba and Bloomington on a wide range of development projects. “We each have different skills from our training and experiences that we can use to give back,” explains Nok.

They’ve already built a nursery school, drawing on Julia’s professional thinking and her background as a teacher with the Monroe County Community School Corporation. Duany, Kueth, and Nok all played basketball professionally overseas, which prepared them for their work training hundreds of athletes to pursue international sports opportunities. Nok, who worked as a model in New York, helped put together the first Miss South Sudan competition (then, in the second year, won it). Bil is coaching South Sudan’s national basketball team, and Nyagon anticipates building a health clinic once she completes her orthopedic surgery fellowship in Cincinnati.

Kueth talks with President George W. Bush on a visit to the White House after leading Syracuse to an NCAA victory as captain of the basketball team in 2003. *AP Photo/Gerald Herbert*





(above) Jubilation in Juba on the eve of South Sudan's independence. AP Photo/Andrew Burton (opposite page, top left) Julia stands before a soccer field in Juba, South Sudan, on September 26, 2011. Trash litters the ground and stray dogs roam freely feeding on garbage as children play. Many play in bare feet on the improvised soccer fields in Juba. (opposite page, top right) Julia, flanked by her ever-present bodyguard, James, rests for a moment in front of a fruit and vegetable seller in Konyo Konyo market in Juba. The majority of the produce sold is imported from neighboring countries. According to Julia, Juba has become the second most expensive city in the world, surpassed only by Tokyo. Photos by Brian Sokol



Sudan," says Julia. "In terms of development, we need experts to come and help build this young nation, to partner with us." It's not even clear, at the end of the day, which town they consider their headquarters. "When we're in Bloomington, we talk about 'when we go home' and mean Juba," says Bil, "but when we're in Juba, we talk about 'going home' and mean Bloomington." Duany explains that whatever the family accomplishes in South Sudan, they will always be emotionally connected to Bloomington. "We didn't grow up with our extended family, but we had a whole community of people that are our friends to this day. They took care of us, and I think that's why we all excelled—because Bloomington was our village." ✨

**PHOTO CREDITS PAGE 64**

clockwise from top left

Monroe County Courthouse. —Nick Bauer

Waat Lou Nuer Peace Conference. —Courtesy of the Duany family

Duany's wedding. —Deckard Photography

Julia at the NABC Classic. —Courtesy of the Duany family

Julia in South Sudan. —Brian Sokol

Kueth playing for Syracuse in 2002. —AP Photo/Kevin Rivoli

Southern Sudanese soldiers rehearse an independence procession in Juba, southern Sudan on July 7, 2011. —AP Photo/Pete Muller



**BIL DUANY**

"When we're in Bloomington, we talk about 'when we go home' and mean Juba, but when we're in Juba, we talk about 'going home' and mean Bloomington."

**"FREE AT LAST! FREE AT LAST!"**

Duany, in particular, seems to have unbounded enthusiasm for South Sudan's economic potential. He is expanding the group's contracts into a number of industries and speaks in declarations that could have jumped off the pages of an investment brochure. ("More oil than Saudi Arabia! More pyramids than Egypt! You can catch three tons of Nile perch in a day!") But Wal, who has seen peace fall apart before, is more guarded in his optimism.

"We are still talking with Khartoum about many of the issues," he says. "There is a task force for oil. There is a task force for debt. These are dangerous issues that can take us back to war. We are not just talking about talking."

There's no doubt, though, that South Sudan has entered an era distinct from any one before it, as there was no such country until this year. The referendum on independence took place in January, and nearly 99 percent of the votes were in favor of separation. Independence was declared on July 9, 2011. Wal, Julia, and Kueth were present.

"There were thousands and thousands of people at the celebration in Juba," Julia recalls. "It was a sea of people all shouting, 'God bless South Sudan!' We were just crying and crying, the tears were coming down. They had the flagpoles, and as the flag of Sudan came down they were raising the flag of South Sudan. The wind was blowing the flag, and everyone was clapping their hands. You just couldn't believe it. We were shouting, 'Free at last! Free at last! Almighty God, we are free!' And we all thought, 'Finally, we can go home and sleep.'"

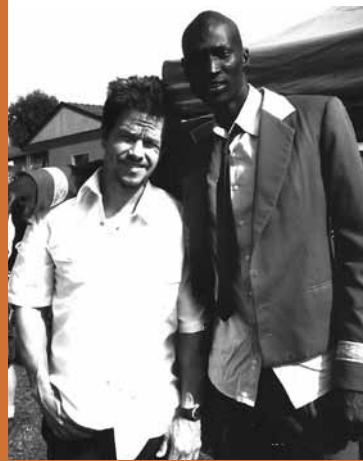
For the Duany family, though, home isn't just in Juba. After living since 2002 in a house built for them by Monroe County Habitat for Humanity, they finally have the resources to renovate a newly purchased Bloomington condominium. They have no plans to leave behind their American roots—in fact, they are working feverishly to strengthen the bonds between the two nations.

"The next project and mission for the Duany family is to connect Bloomington with Akobo as a sister town, and Indiana with our state of Jonglei, and the U.S. with South

Ger Duany and Mark Wahlberg on the set of I ♥ Huckabees. Courtesy photo

COMING IN THE NEXT ISSUE OF Bloom:

**The Story of Ger Duany**



Nephew of Julia and Wal Duany and one of the surviving "Lost Boys of Sudan."

His remarkable journey from a North African refugee camp to Bloomington, New York, and Hollywood.