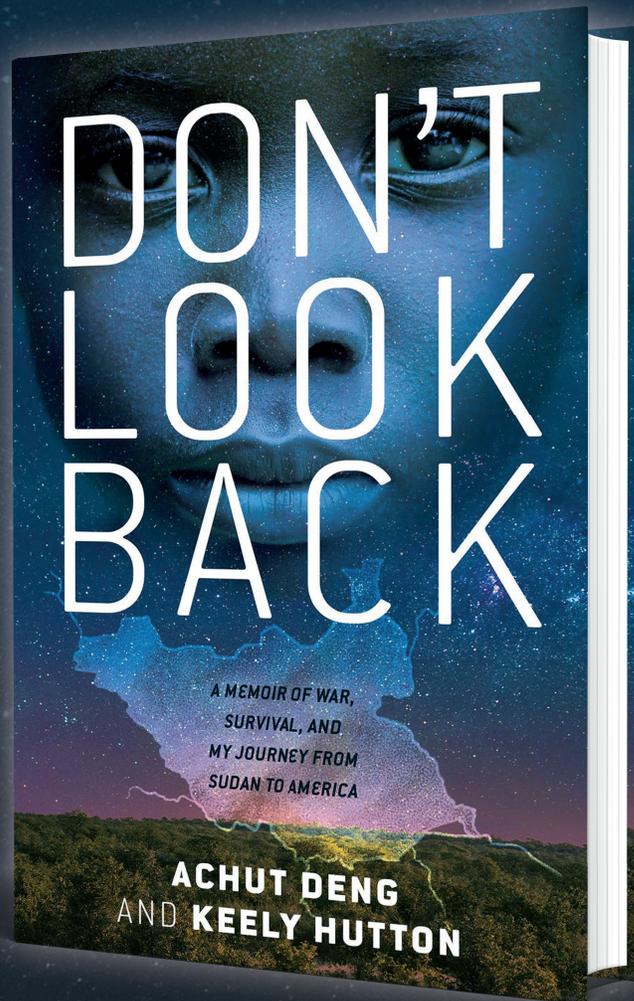


DON'T LOOK BACK

DISCUSSION GUIDE



ABOUT THE BOOK

I want life.

After a deadly attack in South Sudan left six-year-old Achut Deng without a family, she lived in refugee camps for ten years, until a relocation program gave her the opportunity to move to the United States.

When asked why she should be given a chance to leave the camp, Achut simply told the interviewer:

I want life.

But the chance at starting a new life in a new country came with a different set of challenges, some of them equally deadly. Taught by the strong women in her life not to look back, Achut kept moving forward, overcoming one obstacle after another, facing each day with hope and faith in her future. Yet just as Achut began to think of the United States as her home, a tie to her old life resurfaced, and for the first time, she had no choice but to remember her past.

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. This book starts with a short chapter set in Houston, Texas, in March 2001. The first words are: “They said I’d be safe here. They lied.” Then the memoir jumps back in time to Wernyol, Sudan, in 1988. Why start the book in this way when the rest of the story is told linearly? How do these first lines set the stage for the rest of Achut Deng’s story?
2. Achut Deng was born in South Sudan, a country in East Africa. What did you know about South Sudan before reading this memoir? What impressions did you have of the country, and what did you learn about South Sudan and Dinka culture while reading this book?
3. Achut Deng fled the war to a refugee camp in Kenya, but she says she could not escape death. What new struggles does Deng face in the refugee camp, and how do they compare to her experiences in South Sudan?
4. In 2000, Achut Deng moved to the United States and started a new life. When she was asked why she should be given a chance to leave the refugee camp, she said, “I want life.” Do you think Deng got the life she expected when she moved to America? What stood out to you the most about her first experiences in America? What do you think would be most difficult about moving to a new country at a young age?
5. This book is entitled *Don’t Look Back* in honor of the strong women in Deng’s life who encouraged her to keep moving forward. Does this feel like an appropriate title? How does the theme of not looking back continue to be woven throughout the memoir?
6. Looking at Achut Deng’s early life and the people she encountered, who do you think had the biggest impact on her and the way she sees the world? Why?
7. This book was cowritten by Keely Hutton, who dedicates the book “To those who see reflections of themselves in Achut’s story.” Do you see any reflections of yourself in Achut’s story? If so, what are they?
8. *Don’t Look Back* was inspired by a *New York Times* piece about Achut Deng and her time spent working inside the Smithfield pork factory during the COVID-19 pandemic. You can listen to the *New York Times* interview with her at nyti.ms/3RxNxsu. Does listening to her *New York Times* story offer any additional insight to what you learned from reading her memoir?