



UNIVERSITY OF
SASKATCHEWAN

College of Engineering

University of Saskatchewan
57 Campus Drive
Saskatoon SK
S7N 5A9 Canada
www.engr.usask.ca

COLLEGE NEWS

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Writing Poetry Heals U of S Engineering Student

Athiann Makuach Garang is an environmental engineering student with a passion for poetry. Athiann was born in Southern Sudan and left home with his uncles at the age of seven to escape a civil war. Arabs from the north had attacked his village and he witnessed the killing of his uncle and the abduction of women and children. They journeyed by night to avoid detection.

“My feet could not carry me but still we carried on. Our souls needed peace and safety,” Athiann writes. The Garang family walked for four months to cross the border into Ethiopia and they were placed into refugee camps. A change of government in Ethiopia forced them back into Sudan. After traveling from one refugee camp to another, they were finally granted permits to come to Canada.

It was in refugee camps where he started writing poetry about his experience and about his family. Apart from his skills with words, Athiann excelled in many other subjects in camp schools. He was recognized for perfect attendance, excellence in sports, and honours in mathematics, chemistry, geography, history and physics. He also showed an interest in environmental engineering at an early age. Athiann, along with his cousin, won first prize in the Kenya National Science Congress when they designed a cooking oven from oil barrels and tin cans. Athiann also worked with a Peace Education Team and volunteered with the National Council of Churches of Kenya.

After arriving in Edmonton, Athiann was accepted at NorQuest College where he earned honours in computers, communications, chemistry and physics. He also continued to write. His poem entry at the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination earned him an honorable mention.

To Athiann, poetry is a healing process, a way of letting go of the sadness of leaving his family and the loneliness of living on his own in Canada. Most of his poems are about growing up and the loss of innocence. His life experience has also influenced many of his poems. He hopes his poems will help people understand what is happening in Sudan, where his mother lives. After arriving in Canada, Athiann has also written poems about searching for an identity in this new country and has used his poetry to help others. "I use my poems to be a voice for other people," he says. "The only way I can aid them is through my words."

Athiann's works have been published in NorQuest College's *Circle of Writings*, *Boyle McCauley News* and *Billboard*, a Catholic Social Services newsletter. A submission to the Poetry Institute of Canada in 2005 was published in *Island of Dream*, and his most recent work is published in Grant MacEwan Community College's *Confluence Magazine* (August, 2009).

After he graduates from university, Athiann hopes to return to Sudan and rebuild his country.

*News story by Doris Wang
(Volunteer writer for the College of Engineering)*

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*Athiann Makuach Garang is a University of Saskatchewan
Environmental Engineering student with a passion for
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For more information, contact:

Anne-Marie Cey
Communications and PR Strategist
College of Engineering, U of S
(306) 966-1473