

Dear Benjamin Ajak,

I will never have to walk across one thousand miles of desert and jungle barefoot. I will never have to wake up to the sound of gunfire, or have to go without food and water for days at a time, but you did. In your book, *They Poured Fire on Us from the Sky*, this is the incredible journey that you went through. It made me realize how truly lucky I am. I am lucky to live in this country, lucky to have abundant food and water, lucky to never have to experience the devastation that war can bring. These things I took for granted before I read your book. Now I have a deeper awareness of the suffering around the world, and I pay more attention to what is happening around me.

This change in thinking has greatly helped me in caring more for people who may not be as fortunate as I am. Before reading your book, war to me was a thing that happened in distant lands and would never affect me. I felt sympathy, but I never really knew what people caught in the war were feeling. Your book provided a firsthand account of what it is like to be a civilian in the midst of this chaos. In your book, you had to walk across Sudan, without parents, at the age of five. This story touched me. It opened my eyes to how other people live, and how they persevere through conditions I can't even imagine. I find myself wanting to get involved in helping improve people's lives. Whether it is helping someone that is getting bullied at school or donating food to a homeless shelter, you have inspired me to become more involved in my community.

Your book has also made me think about the many things I have but often take for granted. For example, when I want some water I simply walk over to the sink and get a drink, but what if water was unavailable or I had to walk ten miles to get it? What if I wanted food but the shelves were empty? In this society we can't imagine not having the basic necessities. We can't imagine them not being within easy reach. We are very fortunate to have these basic necessities in our country when many others don't. Once again it makes me think about how lucky I am to have all of these things.

Now that I know how other people live, I do not complain about what I don't have. If I compare myself to others, there is always something that I need, something that I am lacking in and must get. However, I have also discovered that I am living far better than most people in the world, and that many people are barely able to survive. Your book has helped me realize that I should be content with what I have, and should help others in any way I can.

They Poured Fire on Us from the Sky has made me think twice about my lifestyle. It has not only informed me of the hardships that you and others like you went through, but also how all people can be happy, regardless of their circumstances.

Riley Nelson, Grade 8
Minnetonka Middle School West, Excelsior

