

Sudanese refugee walking tall thanks to Madonna

“It takes a whole village to raise a child.” — *African Proverb*

On my initial meeting with Dora Wane, I was impressed by the way she carried herself. Dora, an almost six-foot-tall refugee from Sudan, is a striking presence with intricate braided hair, who is proud of her heritage.

Dora, 32, contracted a flesh-eating virus in her hometown of Juba that attacked her left leg in late 2006. In a war-torn country like Sudan, Dora beat the grim odds of survival. Doctors recommended and performed an above-the-knee amputation.

Lincoln, Neb., became Dora’s home in January 2007. Speaking through her interpreter, Hayfa Al-Helfi, Dora said, “I chose Lincoln because I had a friend from Sudan living here who could help me.” Dora had some issues with her residual limb and remained hospitalized at BryanLGH West for three months.

In October 2007, Dora arrived at Madonna as an outpatient at the urging of her caseworker from Catholic Social Services. She yearned for her independence and the return to enjoyable, daily activities with her seven-year-old daughter, Abola. Mid-way through her therapy, she endured another setback with her limb that sent her for a repeat stay at BryanLGH West.

Fast forward to April 2008, and Dora had gained enough strength to enroll in Madonna’s outpatient program again. Dora’s goals included getting fitted for a prosthesis and learning to walk independently. “Therapy was very hard for me,” she shared, “but I was determined.”

Reclaiming her independence was critical to Dora, who lives in an apartment with multiple stairs. “Dora had some setbacks with swelling in her limbs, but remained focused on her walking goal,” said Jessica Foster, physical therapist. “We tracked her progress along the way and celebrated each milestone,” Jessica added.

Walking with an above-the-knee prosthesis can be quite challenging, but Dora never gave up. Madonna Case Manager Nancy Hall said Dora’s fighting spirit was her strength. “Losing her leg in such a horrific way makes it a true miracle that Dora is walking today,” said Nancy.

Dora led an active life back in Juba, working at the local YMCA, playing basketball and gardening. Her dark eyes light up as she glances at Hayfa, stating that she hopes to find a job soon and aspires to be an interpreter for Arabic-speaking people in Lincoln.

Dora admires the way America “takes care of its



Dora received encouragement throughout her therapy from (L to R) Nancy Hall, Madonna case manager, Hayfa Al-Helfi, her interpreter, and her daughter, Abola.

people” and the many freedoms Americans enjoy. She expressed her gratitude for the care she received at Madonna. “Nancy Hall was so good and kept everything running smoothly for me,” Dora said.

With her therapy sessions winding down, Dora reflected on how far she’s come. She has graduated to using a single-point cane in public, but walks without assistive devices at home or in therapy. “I am able to vacuum and cook by myself again!” Dora stated confidently.

Dora smiled broadly as she walked toward the exit recently at the end of a therapy session. She strode upright and proud, trying to keep pace with Abola, who was skipping ahead. Just as the African proverb implies, it took the “Madonna village” to wrap their collective arms around this beautiful refugee and restore her independence.