

As I arrived at my heart's desired destination, in Ethiopia, I began my new life as an orphan and refugee at the same time. I started having a very bad time because I could not get my family out of my mind. I ate as much as I could but I could not gain weight because of all of the stress I had endured. I cried a lot because I missed my mother, father and brothers so much.

After three years in Ethiopia a war between the Ethiopian government and Ethiopian rebels broke out and that forced the Sudanese refugees to flee to the bordering towns of Pochala and Pakok. There we were back to our former life of starvation because there was no access for the United Nations to bring in food. We survived the period of hunger until the United Nations finally arrived with food and supplies.

In 1991 we began our journey to the border of Kenya and Sudan, and stayed in a town called Mairus until early 1992. In August of 1992 the whole camp was moved to Lokichoggio, in western Kenya, by the United Nations, and I became a permanent refugee.

I still had never heard from my father or brothers and I thought they were dead But in 1996 I received a letter from my brothers with bad news saying that my father had died in 1995, and that was the third tragedy in my young life. I was sad and stressed out even more than before but on the other hand I was glad that my brothers were alive. Sometimes only God is watching out for those who are in trouble, as my brothers and I were separated with no phone calls or contact. They were struggling with their own live and I was stuck in a refugee camp while being clueless and helpless. There was only one person watching over my brothers and me and that was God.

In 1997 the lost boys and unaccompanied minors resettlement in the USA was started and that was only for Sudanese children. This program was organized by God through the United States Government and the churches. We were given many process forms to fill out and the process was free for children under the age of eighteen. I went through the process and passed all of my interviews and medical check-ups. I couldn't believe it until I went for cultural orientation. I was given a book with a map of the fifty states and was told that I was going to the state of Virginia, on the 29th of November, 2001. Now the truth was revealed and I believed it.

I was settled in the Richmond area and went to Meadowbrook High School, in Chesterfield County, in 2001. In 2003 I graduated from high school and became the first person in my family to receive a high school diploma. I couldn't be anywhere else beside America. This is the greatest nation with a lot of loving and gifted people who put smiles on the faces of orphan kids like me! I thank God and everyone who has helped me with my life in America. I was desperately looking for help and received it in America, and I am blessed to be here and so are my two sons. I can only say thanks to those helpful people who have touched my life. I know that it's not enough but it comes from the bottom of my heart and I hope they will understand that I appreciate every single one of them and all they have done for me.

Thank you all,  
Peter

*If you feel moved to help these special young men pursue their college education, please support them with a financial donation. Refer to the Missions bulletin board and contribute toward specific credit hours or classes for Simon, Joseph and Peter. Make checks payable to Baylake UMC and indicate "Sudan Education Fund" in the memo line. For more information, contact Kathy Cronauer (460-8673) or any member of the Missions work area.*

# INVEST IN HOPE FOR THE PEOPLE OF SUDAN

## Support Baylake's Education Fund for the Lost Boys of Sudan

### The Power of Hope

If there was no hope that tomorrow would be a better day, then my horrible, narrow escape from the horn Southern Sudan at the age of five in 1987 would not be told at this moment. This escape came about when my village was attacked by the northern radical Islamic fundamentalist government's army due to political ideologies of ethnic cleansing, religious differences (Islamic versus Christian), and natural resources such as oil, diamonds, gold, and mercury. The attack accidentally separated me and my siblings from our lovely parents.

It was early in the morning when my peaceful world fell into a chaotic situation. I saw a large number of gunmen running in a zigzag manner who opened fire on our villages. In no time I heard the sounds of guns everywhere like a thunderstorm. It was almost dawn when my heart was soberly astonished by loud guns, and I was in a dilemma about where to go. Immediately, I found myself standing in the midst of our home compound alone.

Childishly, I tried to generate a lot of noise by crying, while at the same time looking for my beloved family members, especially my mother, but they were nowhere to be seen. Can you guess what came to my mind next? My subconscious directed me to run into the forest, even though it was full of dangerous wild animals. As I was running toward the forest, my grandfather, accompanied by two women and three men, came running, but they did not see me. He quickly looked back for whomever was calling him. Then I saw him fall down. I was shocked when I reached where he had fallen and saw blood coming from everywhere on his body. I put my hand on the left side of his heart to find out whether his heart was beating, but it was not.

I cried and I started running again, but I was slower this time because I was exhausted. Actually, at that very moment, my heart was seriously searching for God's help and it really came. I found myself running again, this time very fast as if I had a very new diesel engine driving me forward.

After covering a distance of two hundred miles, I met a number of people with whom I spent a few days before reaching another city called Biadit. When I arrived in Biadit, I could not even think of eating, the only thing that came to my mind was the question of where would my life be saved? We stayed in Biadit for a month, hoping we were in a safe place. But the terrible enemy planes were unmercifully bombing the area day and night. Then the decision was made by one of the elders with us that it would be better to move to another bordering country called Ethiopia. This part of the journey led me to learn the power of hope.

On our way to Ethiopia, I faced the problem of the blistering and burning of my feet due to the long, long walk without shoes. Actually, my feet were even bleeding, all the skin was gone, and they were so painful that I reached a point where I could not take another step. Thousands of us were in this endless line walking, but I finally crawled out of the line to the side of the road and lay down. I felt I was going to die, either right here or even if I could walk, I would just die later. My brother, Yor, who was seven, two years older than me, came over to me, and asked me why I was stopping. I showed him the bottom of my feet and told him I could not walk and that he and my sister should



**Simon Deng**

## Little story about myself

continue without me. He refused. He said to me, "Just walk very slowly then. Maybe somehow you will make it, or maybe we will find some help." He was carrying my little sister, Akur, on his back. She was two.

When I did not move, my brother began to cry and would not leave me. I can say that I began to learn hope from my brother's tears and from my little sister's eyes looking into my face. Somehow I had to find a way to go on; I could not cause them to stay and die with me. I thought of the many boys I had seen who removed themselves from the line and, when the line finally ended, they just stayed behind and died. So many hours and so many people walking had passed that I began to see the end of the line coming nearer and nearer. My brother was still next to me crying. Then one boy came out of the line and approached Yor, asking what was happening here. Yor explained my problem to him, and this boy, who was thirteen, said he would help by carrying me. He lifted me onto his back and carried me for the next 250 miles. His name was Chol Aleer, and I will never forget him. From Chol's kindness and from my brother and sister's love for me, I was taught the lesson of hope. Despair makes everything look impossible, but hope tells the truth that nothing is impossible.

It took us four weeks to complete the trip to Ethiopia. During the day, the enemy aircraft would be looking for us to attack us, so we hid in the bushes and under the trees during the daylight hours. When the sun went down, we traveled by night, but then we had to struggle with all the lions and hyenas hunting us at night. I saw many boys dragged off by animals. After reaching Ethiopia, we faced starvation and various diseases caused by the change in climate and the lack of housing. So many of our friends died, and we were forced to bury them. We were so weak and our muscles so tired, we could only dig graves about six inches deep, hardly enough to keep animals away at night. Whatever horror came toward me; I just remembered the hope that I learned. I would always hope that tomorrow would bring a better life than the life I was facing that day.

We stayed in Ethiopia for three years, but in 1991, the new Ethiopian president who took over no longer wanted us to be in his country. So we were forced to go back to Sudan again, where unfortunately the Arab soldiers were waiting to kill us. There was a very wide river called the Blue Nile, and we had to cross its tributary, the Gilo River, to escape the Ethiopian soldiers. We had no choice of anywhere else to go. Crossing this river, thousands of people drowned because they were unable to swim. Some also got shot by the soldiers, and some were eaten by crocodiles. However, I managed to cross it through God's help and because, while I was in Ethiopia, I had taught myself how to swim with some friends.

We then walked across Sudan again until we reached Kenya, a country bordering Sudan on the Eastern side. A certain city called Kakuma was where a refugee camp was established for us in 1992. I stayed there for nine years, but life was bad in Kakuma Refugee Camp because we survived on a cup of corn and a quarter cup of oil every fifteen days; this was the United Nations' food ration. Many of us suffered from malnutrition and anemia. Local Kenyans would also attack us for food and clothes. In Kakuma, we lacked proper educational facilities. Ten students shared one book, and each pencil was broken into four pieces. Each exercise book was also divided into two.

In 2001, the United States of America, along with the help of the United Nations, found a way for us to come to the United States. I can think of nothing worse than being separated from my lovely family as young as I was. It was a really bad experience, which I still have nightmares about. However, with all of these experiences, hope enabled me to pass through these hardships of life. Each time I faced a horrible event, I just held hope close in my heart and knew there would be some way to go on. An American poet, Wallace Rice, once wrote, "Hope is the patent medicine for disease and disaster," and in my case, this was very true. After my feet healed in Ethiopia, every step I took was with hope. Every time I needed hope, I found it. Hope somehow kept coming up from the bottom of my heart, and it kept coming from the people with me who struggled forward, and it kept coming from God. Without it, I would not have survived my harrowing situation. The enormous destruction that was caused by some people in my country threatened to kill me with despair, but other people showed me that this destruction and despair can never win in a fight against hope. Hope will always be the last one standing no matter what, because no one can stop human beings from giving hope to one another.



**Joseph Kiir Akol**

I'm always so thankful for the American people for allowing me to live in this great nation. And on the other hand, I everyday think and feel the suffering of my people in Sudan. But what can I do? God knows what I can do or help. As many of you know that many of the Lostboys of Sudan are living in this country, I'm one of them.

My name is Joseph Kiir Akol, from a family of six children, four boys and two girls. My father died when I was young, but my mother is still alive and I can't wait to see her since I haven't seen her for 21 years. I separated with them when my village was attacked by Arabs in 1987. It was at night time and I was sleeping, but I was awoken by the sound of gunshots and my sister said "let's go, let's go." We ran into tall grass and during that time, we missed each other. I ran on my own way without knowing whether she was killed or alive.

During that time, I was seven years old and I walked with many people for months to Ethiopia. I suffered for the needs of water and food. I didn't know how I would be alive, but with God and help from other people, I made it to Ethiopia. I lived in Ethiopia for four years without knowing where the whole family was.

When the war broke in Ethiopia in 1991, the whole refugees camp was moved to Kenya. Again I lived in Kenya for nine years and I was clueless about my family.

Nine years ago, the United States government allowed the Lostboys of Sudan to come to America. On January 28 2001, I was called for my flight and I arrived to Richmond on the 31<sup>st</sup> of the same month. Since then, Richmond has been my home city and I love to live here. I'm now schooling at J. Sargeant Reynolds Community College and I'm working at Wal-Mart as an electronics sales associate. Even though I have something to eat and live a good life, I always imagine and feel the needs of my people back home. Without forgetting what it means for us to live in this nation, I always say thank you for everything.



**Peter Adhum**

**My** name is Peter Adhum. I was born in 1983 in the Bhar-el-gazalle region of southern Sudan, in Aliab County along the Wile River bank. My mother's name is Akuch Atong Juk and my father's name is Adhum Kulang Mayom and I have two brothers. I was given only a few years to live with my family because my mother died of an unknown illness when I was just four years old. I became an orphan at a very early age and thoughts of my mother were always in my mind and caused me so much stress for the next ten years of my life.

In 1988 the war between Northern and Southern Sudan separated me from my father and brothers and this was the second tragedy of my early childhood. I fled alone into the wilderness with people that I did not know, but that did not matter because they could speak my language, which is dinka. While we were trying desperately to get out of the war zone we had no food or water ---all we ate was wild fruit and we drank stagnant rain water. Our hope was to reach the peaceful destination of Ethiopia and we had a very long way to go.

The older people kept their eyes on the younger ones like me, because we had to walk thousands of miles with no shoes and no bikes or cars to carry us. I walked for two days but then my feet gave up on me because they were covered in blisters making it too painful for me to walk. I had no idea how to make it to the neighboring country but then my kind aunt refused to give up on me and she carried me on her shoulders across the Sahara Desert to Ethiopia.