**The Lost Boys of Sudan Part One: The Long Journey**

*Written by* *Stephanie Kriner* *, Staff Writer, redcross.org*

**August 14, 2001** —  The sound of automatic weapon fire blasting through his small hut startled the small boy awake. He called for his uncle who lay beside him, but fell silent when he felt the pool of hot blood. Terrified and confused, the child fled barefoot into the dark woods where it seemed that thousands of others were running, in all directions.

Part of a swarm of fleeing children, John Deng James only knew that he had to somehow escape the horrifying scene. He had no way of knowing that those first harried steps were the beginning of an epic and torturous journey. Although James and the other children eventually stopped running, they kept walking. They walked for days, then weeks, and finally, months before realizing that they would never return home or see their families again. James belongs to a group of refugees referred to by aid organizations as the "Lost Boys of Sudan." Named after Peter Pan's cadre of orphans, some 26,000 Sudanese boys were forced by violence from their southern Sudan villages in the late 1980s. After walking hundreds of miles in search of peace and then spending nine years in a Kenyan refugee camp, James is among 3,600 Lost Boys whom the U.S. government is bringing to the United States and settling in cities throughout the country.

James was too young to notice the civil war that raged throughout southern Sudan. The roughly 1,000- mile journey seems an impossible feat for a 5-year-old boy, but when the pain in James' legs became too much to bear, one of the older boys would pick him up and carry him. When he had gone days without water, he sucked liquid from the mud, and when he was so weak from hunger that he felt he could not take another step, he ate leaves or wild berries. Some boys -- too exhausted to go on -- simply sat down and died of starvation or dehydration. Others lagged behind, becoming easy prey for lions. But James was one of the lucky few who made it.

"Some children died from eating poisonous leaves, and sometimes that dirty water we had to drink caused a stomach ache and you worried that you might die. But, you know, God was with us," he says softly in near perfect English (learned at the Kenyan refugee camp) while sitting in his apartment outside Boston.

Most of the Lost Boys, like James, are from the Dinka or Nuer tribes of Southern Sudan, where hundreds of villages have been burned, livestock stolen and families decimated. The systematic destruction and violence is considered one of the century's most brutal wars. Again and again, civilians have been targeted, their access to food often blocked as part of a military strategy resulting in widespread famine. According to U.S. State Department estimates, the combination of war, famine and disease in southern Sudan has killed more than 2 million people and displaced another 4 million.

As government troops blazed through southern Sudan — reportedly killing the adults and enslaving the girls — scattered groups of suddenly orphaned boys converged and headed toward Ethiopia, where they hoped to find peace and their families again. The orphaned boys trekked almost endlessly through sub-Saharan heat and wilderness. Older boys — some just 9 or 10 — looked after the youngest ones and small cliques of boys formed their own family groups. Their only relief came when Red Cross helicopters dropped them food or water. However, humanitarian groups could do little more to help them because of the raging violence in the region. The boys walked for roughly two months across Sudan to Ethiopia, where they spent about three years in various refugee camps until being forced away in 1991 by yet more gunfire. Chased by Ethiopian government tanks and armed militia, the boys frantically tried to cross the River Gilo, where thousands drowned, were eaten by crocodiles or shot.

After leaving Ethiopia, those who survived the river crossing walked for more than a year back through Sudan to Kenya, a destination for thousands of African refugees forced out of their homes by war or natural disaster. Emaciated, dehydrated and parentless, only half of the original boys — some 10,000 who survived the journey — arrived at Kakuma Refugee Camp in 1992. The majority of them were between the ages of 8 and 18 (Most of the boys don't know for sure how old they are; aid workers assigned them approximate ages after they arrived in Kenya). James was thought to be about 10. The young age of the refugees was not surprising — children under the age of 8 make up about half of some 50 million refugees worldwide.

Relief workers from the United Nations and Red Cross scrambled to provide them with shelter, food and medical attention. However, the needs were overwhelming, and many of the "boys" — which is how they, regardless of age, still refer to one another — who are still there continue to suffer from hunger, disease and dehydration. They receive subsistence-level food rations and a gallon of water a day for cleaning, cooking and drinking. Aid organizations, already struggling to help other refugees at Kakuma, can do little more. Some 65,000 refugees from seven African nations reside at the camp. They depend on humanitarian groups for food, water, shelter, medical care and education.

James shrugs off memories of the harsh conditions. "Eating one time a day really wasn't that hard," he says. Although he admits that always going to class on an empty stomach was difficult, even before learning that he would live in the United States James knew he could work to get more than what life had doled out to him. He recalls being so dehydrated and weak that he fainted one day at school in Kakuma. "I was hoping for my bright future," he says. "That's why I went to school."

It's still difficult for James to imagine a world without constant loss and fear. In Africa, he walked with a feeling of terror that has followed him here to the United States. When he first arrived, he was so afraid of the traffic rolling through Arlington's downtown, the Boston suburb where he was settled, that he sometimes needed 30 minutes just to cross the street. Such caution can even be seen in the guarded way that he speaks, slowly and contemplatively choosing his words, and the way he grows suddenly silent and deep in thought. "Some things are crazy on my mind," he says. "I wonder, who will I be in the future with all these problems. I think that sometimes I still have these problems."

Nine years and a horrific journey later, James is far from the terror that once consumed his life. But the nightmares continue. While lying in bed at night — his lanky body dangling over the foot of his twin mattress — 6-foot- tall James is haunted by nightmares in which he watches behind his back for hungry wild animals stalking him in the bush, swims with frantic strokes as crocodiles chase him in a swirling river and dodges the bombs that explode, taking the lives of others running all around him.

Believed to be 20 years old, James says he will never outgrow these horrible dreams. It's hard to believe that they actually happened to the mild-mannered Sudanese refugee, whose quick, easy smile raises chiseled cheekbones from a thin, angular face.

## Questions:

## What are the push factors that ultimately brought “The Lost Boys” to America? (identify at least 3)

## Critical Thinking: Why were/are neighboring countries like Chad, Egypt, and Ethiopia so unwilling to aid these refuges?

## Lost Boys of Sudan Part Two: Out of Africa, In to Boston

*Written by* *Stephanie Kriner* *, Staff Writer, redcross.org*

**August 14, 2001** — On February 14, 2001, James boarded a plane for the first time in his life and watched his world disappear: his tiny grass hut, the dusty, hot refugee camp and the friends who replaced a family he no longer remembers. He arrived in Boston in February without a jacket or winter boots, shocked by the unfamiliar pang of cold that slashed his bare face and hands.

In Boston, the International Rescue Committee, one of the organizations charged with helping the boys settle in the United States, matched him with four other Lost Boys — two of whom were strangers to James — as roommates. They were placed in a two-bedroom basement apartment in Arlington, a Boston suburb of mostly white young professionals. Younger boys are placed with foster families, but older ones like James are housed with other Lost Boys in apartments and are expected to support themselves within three months of their arrival.

James and his new roommates were terrified by the unfamiliar environment, unaccustomed to the cold and snow. "I was wearing very light clothes, and we'd never seen snow before," James says excitedly. "We were very terrified by this snow. … When we went outside, we couldn't feel our hands and our ears."

During their first few weeks in America, they huddled in the cramped quarters of their apartment. They had trouble regulating their sleep schedules in the dark basement — in Kenya, the sun shone brightly into their huts to wake them. They were hungry and did not know how to cook because in Africa the women prepared all the meals. Besides, they had never seen a stove or microwave before.

The five boys spent their days playing games they had learned at camp, such as Dominoes and chess, and talking about Africa. They had been overjoyed to be chosen among the few to come to America, but now they were wondering if they had made a mistake.

Neighbors brought them winter clothes from their own closets and offered to drive them to the grocery store where they learned to buy pre-cooked chicken and bread. Church groups and the International Rescue Committee offered help. But James and his roommates still felt homesick and disoriented.

## Questions:

1. What were some of the American customs and ways of life that were so new to the lost boys?

## Lost Boys of Sudan Part Three: A Friend in the Storm

*Written by* *Stephanie Kriner* *, Staff Writer, redcross.org*

**August 14, 2001** — In the midst of a harsh Boston winter that delivered three blizzards and many feet of snow, a neighbor - concerned that the boys had no proper winter clothes -- called the Massachusetts Bay Area chapter of the American Red Cross and reached Margaret Cole, a manager in the international services department. Cole, a peppy 75-year-old, is an experienced disaster worker and well-traveled international aid worker. She now works with immigrant populations throughout the Boston area, helping them daily to find local resources, food and lost relatives and signing them up for ESL and GED classes. Cole was instantly touched by the plight of the young immigrants. Unable to contact them by telephone, she decided to pay them a visit.

When she arrived, Cole realized why she could not reach them. The group of five towering young men - their heads nearly reaching the ceiling of their basement apartment -- looked down at her with wide bewildered grins when she asked why they had not answered her calls. They did not know how to use the phone. She looked around and noticed that they had only two chairs and their beds, squeezed into tiny rooms, appeared too short for their long legs. They had no television or radio and little food or clothes.

Cole was familiar with the needs of new immigrants to Boston's melting pot. The city has seen a recent influx of immigrants from Africa who arrive in desperate conditions, fleeing from conflict, hunger and drought. But she quickly realized this group of Sudanese refugees was in need of more attention than most. Many immigrants have family or friends already living in the United States -- these boys had nobody, and although they were actually grown men, they still seemed so young and naïve to be alone in an American city. "They were so isolated. I wanted to integrate and connect them with the community. That's their support system. Part of my goal was to do that so they would feel at home," Cole said.

Cole taught them to use the phone and started a clothing and furniture drive throughout the community. She enlisted help from local businesses, churches and other organizations, and soon their apartment was stuffed with a dining room table, desks, a television set and a computer. A local hardware store donated bikes to help them get around, and gave James his first job.

Cole went beyond her normal responsibilities as a Red Cross employee to help the Lost Boys in Arlington. Volunteering extra time to help them during her off-hours, she taught them to cook their own meals, navigate Boston's subway system, apply for jobs, balance their budgets, check out books at the local library and prepare for their GEDs.

"I've seen other refugees fall behind, and I wanted to be sure they can pay rent and have enough money left over for transportation and food," Cole said. At the same time, Cole wanted to ensure that the five newcomers did not become dependent on her or the Red Cross - especially after being supported by relief organizations for so many years at Kakuma.

Throughout the United States, Red Cross chapters are helping Lost Boys by offering referral and tracing services, food and ESL classes. Dozens of the boys have requested assistance with finding lost relatives. Although the Red Cross will continue pursuing the boys' requests, Eleanor Whitman with the International Services department at National Headquarters says that most of the cases have little hope. "So many people were killed that the chances are not very good," she said. However, through its global network, the American Red Cross was able to help one boy contact a lost sister-in-law who is now a refugee in Norway.

Questions:

1. In what ways did Margaret Cole help the lost boys?
2. Critical Thinking: What do you think would have happened to the lost boys without the help of Margaret Cole and others like her?

## Lost Boys of Sudan Part Four: A Bright Future

*Written by* *Stephanie Kriner* *, Staff Writer, redcross.org*

**August 14, 2001** — Six months after stepping off the plane into Boston's frigid winter, James contends with more than cold winter weather. He frets about paying the bills and finding a scholarship so he can go to college. He also worries about the 14-year-old brother with whom he was reunited at Kakuma. "I really need help in finding a way to get him here," says James, who sets aside $250 a month from his meager earnings to send to his brother. He has remained in contact with his brother through help from the Red Cross.

Dressed in a donated tie, collared white shirt and dress pants, James bikes from one job as a cashier at a local grocery store to another as a waiter - putting in about 65 hours a week. At first the young refugee - always eager to get ahead — tried to juggle three jobs. "I was working 80 hours a week but when I realized that I was getting tired and didn't have enough sleep, I quit one," he said.

Contrary to what they often envision, many immigrants find that their new lives are a daily struggle, says Margaret Cole, International Services, Massachusetts Bay Chapter. They come here with dreams of an easier life, but many, just like the Lost Boys, end up working minimum wage jobs and living in low-rent apartments at or below the poverty line.

The UN, which helped the boys prepare for the move, foresaw this problem and warned the Lost Boys at their cultural orientations at Kakuma that as the realities of everyday life set in, they could feel depressed, homesick and discouraged. Organizations working with the Lost Boys in the United States have noticed some of these problems among the young immigrants.

Cole has watched James and his roommates closely. However, although James has lost some of his initial enthusiasm over his new life, he remains optimistic about succeeding with his goals in the United States, she said. "When he was first here, everything was so new to him and he was so euphoric. Now he realizes that it's going to be a hard, long haul," Cole said. "He's more somber, but also more realistic when he talks about his future."

Just as he did in the refugee camp James continues to battle hardship by focusing on his studies. He spends his days off at the Arlington library, preparing to take the GED and to go to school by reading books on American history and doing research on Boston colleges.

The young man, who would have led a simple life of raising cattle if he'd never been forced from Sudan, becomes suddenly passionate when he talks about his goals. He says that he "must" get a college degree in accounting and agriculture. "I have a vision that I may be going back to Sudan. …The country depends on agriculture, and I want to make the economy stronger."

While Cole has seen dozens of immigrants fail to acclimate, she sees something else in James' future. "He's a real fighter," she says. "I can see him becoming a real leader in Sudan if he ever goes back."

As war and famine rage on in Sudan, it remains unclear whether James will be able to return home. However, for the first time in his long journey, James knows where he is going. "When I was walking, I didn't have a vision [of my future]. I was walking from problem to trouble and from trouble to problem everywhere. It was very hard for me," he said. "In the United States, you determine who you are, and now I have a vision of my future. I can go to school, I can work and I can do what I want. … You have to live where you feel happy… I cannot go to Sudan unless there's peace."

Questions:

1. What are James’s goals for his future?
2. Critical Thinking: Even though James and the other lost boys have been given new opportunities in America, why do immigrants like them begin to feel depressed?