

James Mabok Choch

Age: 23

Region: Upper Nile

I am the oldest son. I had two brothers and sisters. In Sudan, my brothers and I looked after 200 cows, and many sheep and goats. My sisters worked at home. When I was little I played with rats, moles and hedgehogs. I used to catch snakes inside my home and kill them.

When I was 7 years old, our village, Kachago, was attacked and burned down. It was five o'clock in the morning and I was asleep. Arab men wearing green uniforms came on camels, horse, and cows and shot people. I know that my uncle was shot. People ran in different directions into the forest. I was separated from my family.

I traveled with about 1500 other boys and girls from different villages. On the way there was hardly any food. We traveled long distances without water or food. When we found wild fruits, there was not enough for everyone, so we had to share. I was also exhausted and at times I would sit down to rest my feet. My feet and legs were cut from the grass. Some children were killed by wild animals.

I stayed in Itang in Ethiopia and in Panyido. The best thing about the camp was getting an education. I learned math, English, science, and arts and crafts. Sometimes, local bad people could come into the camps and kill people.

When I thought about coming to the United States, I was afraid of traveling by airplane. The first time I was on a plane was when I came to the United States. I was scared that I might die.

In Sudan, you live with your family until you get married. Men and women marry at about the age of 20. The women cook and wash the clothing. The thing that surprised me most about American culture is that when you are 18, you can move out of your family's house even if you are not married. I think that you should live with your family until you are married, and not until you are 18.

My first job in the United States was working at the Goodwill for 3 years. I am taking GED classes in Phoenix. I would like to study computer technology. I am trying to get a job through Job Corps.