

Najat Dahiya

Age: 24

Region: Upper Nile

I was only 6 years old when the war broke out and the villages were bombed. People were getting shot with machine guns and I didn't know where to go. People hid in the bushes and trees. People ran to the different countries like Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, and Egypt, I was separated from my sister, parents, and five brothers. My brothers now live in Zaire.

From 1988 to 1991, lived in Pinyado in Ethiopia. The U.N and Red Cross provided food, medicine, and clothing. There was a bit of school but it was not very organized. We learned outside, under a tree, and had to sit on rocks or on the ground. We used our finger to write on the floor because we didn't have paper or anything to write with. Later on, we had better school supplies.

In January of 1991, left Ethiopia to walk to Sudan. Animals ate people and we did not have much food. We ate grasses along the riverbanks and ate wild fruits on the way. I had to cross the Gila River. The water current was very fast. The rebels were shooting people in the water. Many people lost their lives because they didn't know how to swim or they got shot.

When I got to Sudan, I stayed in Pinchalla for six months. Living conditions were not very good. After I left Pinchalla, I walked for one month and reached Kapola. I stayed in Kapola for three months. The town started to get bombed, so I walked to Niroz and hid in a bush for two days. The Red Cross found me and took me to hospital in Lomichoggio. I had an operation on my leg. I stayed there two months. The U.S. took me in a truck to Kakuma, where I stayed from 1992 to 2001.

Kakuma was an accepting place and there was no shooting. We got a better education in Kakuma than in Pinyado. The U.N. provided pencils, books, an exercise book and shelter for a school. We helped build our school out of mud along with the ropes, tar, wood, and nails. We made seats out of mud because we didn't have chairs. Other than the school, the situation in the camps was bad. We did not have enough food or water and would run out of rations. We only had one liter of water per person a day. We had three gallons of wheat flour to last 15 days.

A delegate came from the U.S in 1995 and talked to the elders about relocating to the U.S. The elders came to us and told us about the U.S. I fill out my paperwork to come to the U.S. and had four interviews. I had three interviews with the J.B.H. And a final interview with a man called Jeff from the I.N.S. I arrived in the U.S. on May 28, 2005 with 72 other Lost Boys.

The most difficult thing about living in the U.S. is adjusting to the culture. In my culture, you can stay home with your family and your friends. In the U.S. you stay alone and get lonely. It helps us here to have friends. In Sudan, we call married women "ma'am" if we don't know them. Some women in the U.S. don't like being called "ma'am". They don't understand that it is my way of showing respect. In Sudan, we call people "my sister" or "my brother".

The best thing about living in the U.S. is getting education. I go to Phoenix College for two hours a day and study business administration. I hope to transfer to ASU. I work at the Scottsdale Hyatt Regency as a Cook.

I give the U.S. a lot of thanks for allowing me to receive education because I had no future in Sudan. After receiving my degree, I can go back and make a difference in Africa. I will apply for citizenship in 2006 to become a citizen.