

Dallas Women Assist 'Lost Girls' of Sudan

Two Christian women are advocating for Sudanese refugees who sought asylum in the United States.



[] Priscilla Kuer and Elisabeth Akuen survived unspeakable horrors in their homeland of Sudan. A 20-year civil war in the nation's south followed by genocide in western Darfur left the women destitute. Today they are beginning a new life in the United States with help from two Christian women in Dallas who have unwittingly become advocates for the so-called Lost Girls of Sudan.

"Their innocence leaves them open to exploitation," said Beverly Parkhurst Moss, who with counselor Anne Worth, Ed.D., have helped the Sudanese women learn English, find jobs and gain citizenship. "They need so much."

Moss and Worth learned about the Lost Girls through the LoveOne refugee befriending outreach of Fellowship Bible Church in Dallas. "Our LoveOne program trained members of our congregation to befriend and come alongside refugees on a one-on-one basis," Worth said. "Both Beverly Parkhurst Moss and myself ... fell in love with the Lost Girls."

Inspired by the women's stories, Moss wrote *The Dark Exodus*, which recounts the experiences of 16 Lost Girls in their own words.

Half of the book's proceeds are used to support the Dark Exodus Foundation, through which Moss and Worth assist the women. So far, the foundation has put three of the women through culinary school, enrolled three others in a local college, and helped finance nursing training for two others. "This has become a life mission," Worth said.

Although the resettlement of roughly 4,000 Lost Boys in the United States is more widely known, nearly 100 Sudanese women also found asylum in the early part of this decade. Moss said fewer women left Sudan because many did not survive the rapes and beatings that occurred both in their villages and the refugee camps. Girls also were often "fostered" into families and given in marriage to older men who paid a sufficient bride price.

Kuer left Sudan five years ago and still has relatives living in refugee camps. She was a teenager when she awoke one night to the sounds of bombs pummeling her mostly Christian village. With the surviving adults, she and the other children walked by night to a refugee camp in Kenya, living off fruits and forced to drink their own urine when they couldn't find water.

Along the two-week journey, Kuer watched gunmen murder her father and brothers as they attempted to cross the river to safety. "To this day, no matter how I try, I cannot remember how I got across that river," she

told Moss.

At the refugee camp she met Joseph Deng, a man from her village who would become her husband. He immigrated first to the United States, landing a job in Dallas. She followed in 2003. Today the couple has two children.

Akuen, a mother of three, immigrated to the U.S. in 2006. Her husband is also a Sudanese refugee. She was just 10 years old when she woke up to the sound of bombs hitting her village in southern finding her father's body on the floor of their house, she hid in the bush and eventually walked barefoot by night to Kenya.

"Because I couldn't see where I was going at night, I stepped on thorns," she told Moss. "My feet began to bleed and swell. They hurt so badly I was forced to walk on the back of my heels. ... I knew I couldn't stop walking. If I did I would die like so many people who had died along the way."

Moss and Worth say their friendship with the Sudanese women has changed their lives. "Knowing the women has strengthened my faith as I see them expecting to receive God's promise of love and provision under the most difficult circumstances," Worth said.

"I feel like I was the one lost, not them," Moss said. "And since I've found them, everything else in my life has taken on a secondary

status, except for my
faith and a burning anger at what they've been through.”

Kuer hopes to one day become a lawyer, and Akuen aspires to help the elderly.

The women say their journey to the U.S. has taught them how to dream. “We are

human beings,” Kuer said. “We were not brought to America to live in shame and

fear. We have rights and we have dreams.” **-Marcia Davis-Seale
in Dallas**