



Sulino Chol is one of Sudan's lost boys, one of thousands of children displaced by civil war between Christians and Muslims in the 1980s. His parents

were killed during the war. He found his way to Kenya with a group of boys and lived in a refugee camp before coming to America.

BRYAN OLLER, THE

For 'lost boys,' adapting takes time

Sudanese refugees struggle to find a niche in Colorado Springs

By ANDREA BROWN
THE GAZETTE

Their villages were burned and their families decimated.

They endured violence, famine and pain.

It might seem, after all they've been through, the 120 Sudanese refugees in Colorado Springs would find life easy here.

Not so.

"To be new in another country is like a newborn child," said refugee Sulino Chol, 25, whose parents were killed in Sudan's civil war.

"It is hard. Everything is hard."

FUNDRAISER

Broadmoor Community Church, 315 Lake Ave., is having a fundraising dinner Wednesday for members of the Sudanese community. The family-style African meal includes fish and rice casserole, pasta dishes and breads.

Dinner - and an auction - is at 6 p.m. after the 5 p.m. showing of "Lost Boys of Sudan" movie.

The cost is \$10 with reservations; \$12 at door. Call 527-6733 or 473-1807.

Chol came to America two years ago from a Kenyan refugee camp. Others came around 2000 at the height of the U.S. government-aided refugee exodus from Sudan, still ravaged by war.

They are a determined bunch - yet for the most part, invisible.

Many local residents don't seem aware of the Sudanese population in their midst.

"One of the biggest needs is to hook up more connections with the community," said Peg Jergensen of Broadmoor Community Church.

The church is holding a benefit

dinner Wednesday for the r

A meal prepared by about a dozen Sudanese women will be served after the showing of "Lost Boys of Sudan," a documentary that follows two orphaned Sudanese refugees in a plight similar to Chol and several others here.

"We have to do something," Jergensen said. "They need more. They need automobiles. They need jobs. They are hardworking and want to succeed."

Their work schedules limit group unity.

Chol, for example, works

night as a security guard, getting off in time to head to college for day classes.

Refugees take what work they can get — cleaning hotel rooms, washing dishes, anything to get a paycheck. Many work more than one job and deal with layoffs and no benefits.

They struggle to earn enough to subsist — yet always send money to their impoverished relatives in Africa.

some by crocodiles. Some were shot by militia.

"When you get injured and no way you can walk," he said solemnly, "we leave him until he will die, alone."

Chol did what he could to help.

"I was the head boy," he said. "I take care of the younger ones. There were very little ones."

Upon reaching safety, he lived in a Kenyan refugee camp until he came to America.

A sponsoring agency helped him get a cleaning job at a hotel in Arizona.

"The weather was no good," he said. "I read USA Today news and compared the weather. That's how I found Colorado Springs."

He got a bus ticket here — to the home of a longtime friend and fellow lost boy, Thomas William, a housekeeper at The Broadmoor hotel and board member of the local Sudanese association.

Chol took a strenuous factory job, but a back injury disabled him for four months. Then he saw a television commercial for Blair College, promoting a program for Homeland Security specialists.

As someone whose life had been uprooted as a toddler by terrorists — he fled with his uncle, never to see his parents again, as his village burned during night prayers — helping to make the world a safer place appealed to him.

"I want to get those people out," he said of terrorists. "They made a lot of fear all over the world. They are no good."

The Blair degree helped him get a third-shift security guard job, and he's working on an associate degree at Pikes Peak Community College.

There's not much money left after paying his bills. Still, he sends at least \$100 to a sister and cousin in Africa every month.

He gets lonely. Even when wandering Africa, fighting to stay alive, the other lost boys were his family.

"In America, I am all alone," he said.

He isn't complaining, though. He has food, shelter — and shoes.

"It is better," he said.

2 BIRTHDATES, 1 PERSON

Paulino Chol has two birthdates.

One he doesn't know. That's his real one, the day he was born in a tiny village in southern Sudan to parents now dead.

The other is a date the U.S. government assigned to him — Jan. 1, 1981 — to process his move here from Kenya.

"I think I might be older," he said.

Chol is one of the "lost boys," the name given to thousands of boys forced from villages in southern Sudan by the violence and genocide of the 1980s. They roamed the nation in packs, surviving by their wits.

About 3,600 of the lost boys were eventually brought to the United States, many with the arbitrary Jan. 1 birthday and estimated birthyears.

When Chol describes his boyhood trek, he holds up a single index finger.

"I was this skinny," he said.

He's now in his mid-20s, lanky but no longer malnourished, with an angular face and a wide smile.

Chol says he was 10 or 12 years old when he was part of a throng of lost boys that journeyed to Kenya.

"We use our foot," he said. "One year and a half walking. It was hot. We don't have shoes. We were hungry, thirsty."