

ELIZABETH'S ESCAPE

as told to Beverley Ovens, Overseas And Northern Outreach Coordinator

Elizabeth Adau Lual is a Dinka woman from Southern Sudan. She was born in Khartoum in 1967. At the age of 10 she went back to her ancestral land in Juba, Southern Sudan where she lived happily with her family. Later on she settled there with her husband until the Civil was started in Bor city in 1983.

1984. The war reached Juba. When Elizabeth was 17 years old she became pregnant with her first child, Rebecca. It was then that her family moved to Kongor where they thought it would be safer. It was only a short time later that the fighting reached their village and militants burnt down houses and murdered inhabitants indiscriminately. After the destruction, Kongor became the centre of famine in southern Sudan.

1988. During this period, the situation there continued to deteriorate for the villagers, and at the point of desperation, Elizabeth and her family decided to escape to Ethiopia. Along with them, thousands of people were fleeing for their lives, closely followed by the militants.

As the situation became more critical the desperate people ran through the bushes for many days without food or water, and many of them died from gun shot wounds, some drowned as they crossed rivers, and others died from sheer exhaustion. Through all this, Elizabeth, her husband, and some close relatives, managed to endure the journey as they reached the border of Ethiopia where they were resettled in a United Nations Refugee Camp.

There they were given a tent, clothes and food and lived there until 1991. Elizabeth settled with her Husband daughter Rebecca, her son Moses, and another 3 year old son.

1991. The war reached Ethiopia and once again Sudanese refugees had to run for their lives. Along with many others, Elizabeth and her family had to escape the rebel fighters and the Government bombers. During this run for safety, her husband, father, and brother-in law were all shot dead. Elizabeth was carrying her youngest son on her back as she fled for her life, and he was also shot dead. Because of the imminent danger, Elizabeth had no time to stop and grieve over the loss of her son and family members and friends. It was too dangerous to stop running. Many of those who were caught were murdered and a number of women and young girls were kidnapped. Many of Elizabeth's relatives were among those killed, and others have disappeared and have never been found.

1992. After many weeks of running from one place to another, Elizabeth and other Sudanese arrived at the boarder of Kenya, where by now the United Nations workers were throwing food parcels from vehicles and searching for refugees in the bushes. When the U.N. found Elizabeth and her family they were taken the new Kakuma Refugee Camp in North West Kenya.

Elizabeth hoped that the camp would be a safe haven for herself and her family, but instead, the living conditions were harsh, and violence was rampant. There was a severe shortage of food and water and many people were suffering from malnutrition.

The majority of people lived in shacks made of cardboard or huts made of mud, and choking dust storms often blew across the living area. However, as conditions worsened and the war intensified, Elizabeth found that some people in the camp were recruiting children to fight the war.

2000 July. Elizabeth was 7 months pregnant and she complained that she was mistreated and because of this she was put in jail. On the fourth day of incarceration, overseas counsellors were visiting the camp and came to see her. On hearing her story, the counsellors notified the protection officers to transfer her to the Kakuma Protection Area. When she arrived at the Protection Area she was informed that her children had been kidnapped and taken in the direction of Kenya's border.

U.N. officers immediately began tracking the kidnappers, but they were to find out later that they had been taken to Uganda. While alone in protective custody, Elizabeth became ill and was taken to hospital. Due to mishandling by the staff, she was informed that her baby had died while she was in jail.

2001 July. Elizabeth finally received a letter from her daughter Rebecca. In the letter she explained to Elizabeth that she and the other children had been kidnapped and taken to Uganda. There they met a person who knew Elizabeth and this person interceded on their behalf. As a result they were allowed to stay in a refugee camp in Uganda and not have to fight the war.

Rebecca also informed Elizabeth that her life was in danger and not to try to rescue her because if she did so they would all be killed. Sad and worried, Elizabeth believed she would find them, so she began selling some of her rations of food. After some time she was able to get money to Rebecca in the hope that she could pay someone to bring them back to Kakuma Camp.

2001 September. Rebecca was now 17 years old so she decided to gather the children together and escape her captors. They walked at night and continued during the dangers of the daylight as fighting was still raging all around them. Although the children witnessed people being killed, they hurried on and only stopped for short rests when Rebecca thought it was safe to do so.

Eventually, when the time presented itself, Rebecca used the little money they saved while travelling from the border of Sudan to Kenya to secure safe passage to Kakuma camp. The children arrived at Kakuma in October 2001 and were happily reunited with their mother, Elizabeth.

2002. Early in the year, two researchers from The University of New South Wales visited the Kakuma camp. While the researchers were on an inspection tour, Elizabeth had the opportunity of meeting them and relating her story to them. On returning to Australia, the researchers presented Elizabeth's story to various institutions for the purpose of raising awareness of living conditions in refugee camps.

Soon after, the Australian Government opened its doors to larger numbers of refugees from war-stricken countries of Africa. Through this, Elizabeth was offered the opportunity to come to Australia under the Refugee Visa Category. She arrived in Australia with her four children and her brother on 25th February 2003, and is now settled happily with her children in Wollongong, NSW, and her brother now lives in Queensland.

During years of living in Refugee camps and prisons; witnessing her husband, members of her family, the 3 year old baby she was carrying on her back shot dead while fleeing from one country to another in the hope of living a danger-free life, Elizabeth said that *Matthew Chapter 5 verses 1-31* were a great comfort, strength, and encouragement to her, especially in times of great despair.

Matthew 5:4 says; "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted." Elizabeth knew that God would be her only comforter, and that only God could comfort her. She knew that God would fill her with His Word which would give her the strength to go on.

Elizabeth said that Almighty God did continue to encourage and strengthen her through His word, and also through the fellowship of other Christians during the extent of her ordeal.

One day, *verse 13* spoke very clearly to Elizabeth, even though she had suffered both physically, mentally, and emotionally. She said that God wanted her to tell others about the Lord Jesus Christ and the hope in Him that they can have.

Verse 13 spoke God's word, and it said, *that she must be the salt of the earth, and that there was joy in serving the Lord, even though she was thrown down and trodden on by men; that she must not hide her light under a bushel; that she must let her joy and hope shine for Jesus.*

In verses 23 and 24 it says; *"If you bring your gift to the altar, and if you there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go, and first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift."*

Through studying these words, Elizabeth knew she had to forgive many people, and she was aware that the only way she could do this was through the Lord Jesus Christ.

Because Jesus has shown us that we cannot be reconciled with God until we are reconciled with men, Elizabeth had to ask God to help her to forgive those who had persecuted her, those who had murdered her family members and friends, who kidnapped her children who were later returned to her, in order to ensure that there would be no barrier between herself and God.

After overcoming many obstacles in her journey to freedom, Elizabeth has continued to grow in the love and knowledge of God by joining in Bible Studies, participating in Sudanese Christian meetings, and attending St. Michael's Anglican Church in Wollongong, where she also belongs to the MU Branch as an active member.