

## — America —

After nine years in the refugee camps the men knew they might soon be relocated, so they prepared to move. They watched for announcements daily to see if their names appeared on lists of American cities.

The Lost Boys' moves were sponsored by non-profit human service agencies in the United States and Australia.

The ones sent to Tucson received help from Jewish Family and Children's Services and the International Rescue Committee.

These agencies sponsored the boys in pairs, so they would be sure to have at least one other Lost Boy to live with.

In April 2001, the first of the Lost Boys left Africa. More than 70 Lost Boys took the 36-hour flight to Tucson. Some didn't eat the entire time because the food on the planes was foreign to them.

"The salad was like grass. I eat salad now, but not then," Abraham said.

When they arrived in the United States and went through Immigration and Naturalization Services, officials had to guess the boys' ages. Many were assigned a Jan. 1 birthday because they did not know their actual birthday or age.

After a conversation with his father a few years ago, Daniel said he thinks he is closer to 29, even though he is 24 according to legal documents.

Daniel is one of the lucky ones who has contact with his immediate family. The only people the men can call are family members who have moved to Uganda or Kenya. The men who have family there usually talk to them about once a week. Very few of them know where their parents are, except that they are somewhere in Sudan.

U.S. agencies found housing for the Lost Boys and paid their first four months of rent. They helped the men find jobs and get into schools.

The Lost Boys filled out I-94 forms, declaring their status as political refugees.

Once here, they applied for green cards, which can take up to a year to get. Some who applied later are still waiting for permanent cards.

After they have their green cards, it can take up to five years

for them to be eligible to apply for U.S. citizenship.

They speculate it will take longer, though. They moved to the United States between April and August 2001, before the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks. Since the attacks, the INS has been absorbed by the Department of Homeland Security, which could mean a longer wait for U.S. citizenship for the 3,800 Lost Boys in America. It also means the 1,000 still in Kenya do not know when they will be able to start life in a new country.

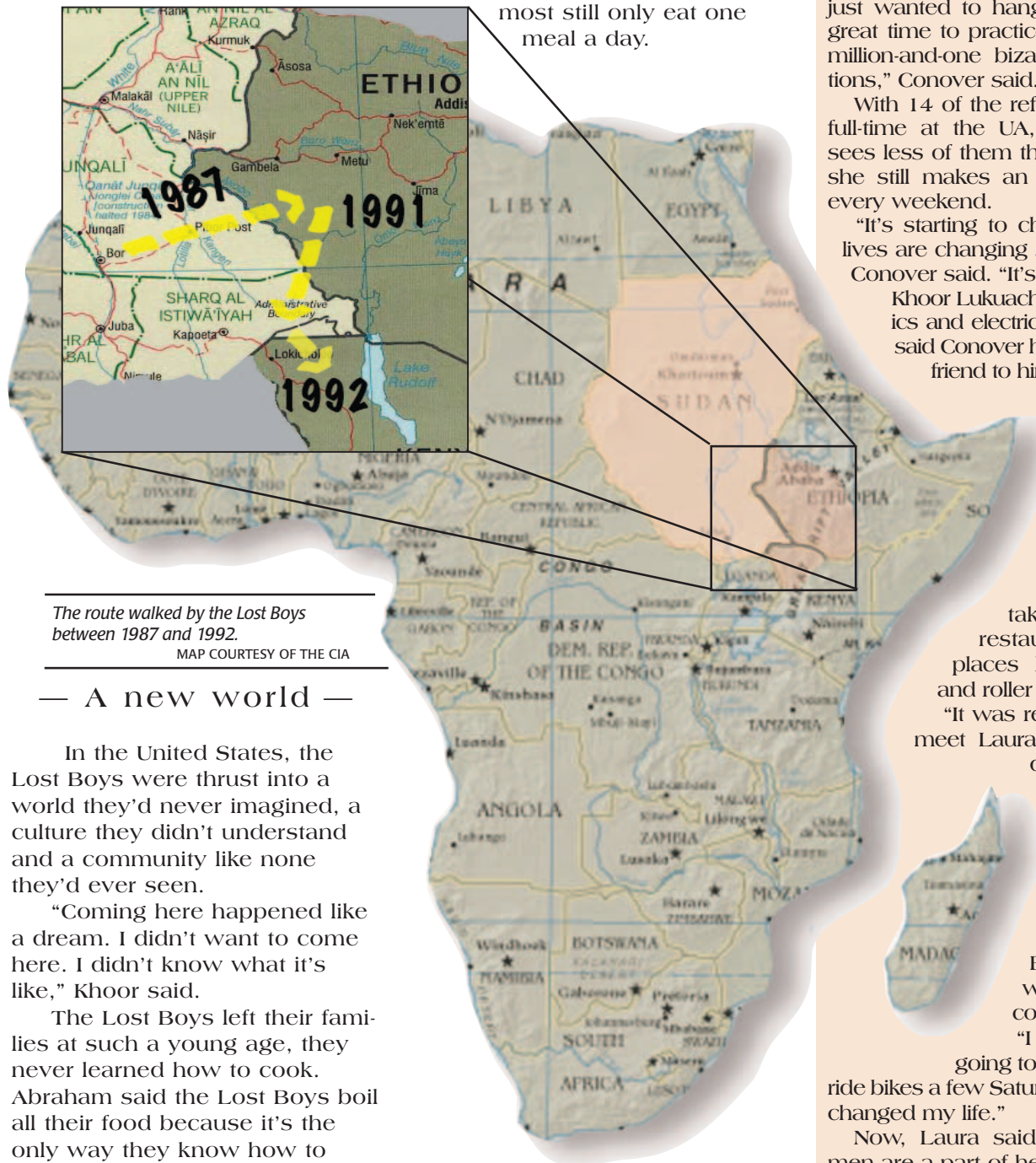
choose what to eat when they can see it first. Menus can be difficult sometimes, and they

“I wanted to die; I felt useless.

— Koor Malual

said they still haven't adjusted completely to the taste of American food.

They drink juice and soda. They cook rice, pasta and chicken, a change from the food they had in Kenya, although most still only eat one meal a day.



The route walked by the Lost Boys between 1987 and 1992.

MAP COURTESY OF THE CIA

## — A new world —

In the United States, the Lost Boys were thrust into a world they'd never imagined, a culture they didn't understand and a community like none they'd ever seen.

"Coming here happened like a dream. I didn't want to come here. I didn't know what it's like," Koor said.

The Lost Boys left their families at such a young age, they never learned how to cook. Abraham said the Lost Boys boil all their food because it's the only way they know how to cook.

For a weekend lunch, they chose a Chinese buffet. Bior Keech, 19, Daniel Keech's step-brother, said it is easier to



Because Bior lives in a guesthouse, attached to a house in which five other Lost Boys live, he doesn't use his kitchen. Instead of food, the counters and cupboards are full of basketball shoes.

Bior went to Amphitheater High School for two years, where he played basketball and ran cross country and track. He plays soccer with other Lost Boys on the weekends.

Bior said he liked high school better than college, because it felt more like a family.

The men came from a community culture in which everyone worked together and families were huge by American standards. Most of their fathers had multiple wives, because the larger the family, the

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The Lost Boys commemorate the beginning of the civil war in Sudan every May 16. The event includes ceremonial dancing and costuming, as seen in this May 2004 photo.

PHOTO COURTESY OF PETER AROK

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school, and yet you are 22 and you are at the university," Ayuen said. "And she told me, 'If you want, you can still go whenever you want.'"

Conover, now a third-year law student at the UA, said watching the first 10 refugees graduate from Pima Community College over the past two years was incredible.

"I was so proud of them," Conover said. "They've accomplished so much in such little time, after having everything ripped from them."

Laura said as time has passed and the men's reading and writing has improved, her visits with them have become more social.

"Sometimes they were already done with their weekly homework and they just wanted to hang out, and it was a great time to practice English and ask a million-and-one bizarre American questions," Conover said.

With 14 of the refugees now enrolled full-time at the UA, Conover said she sees less of them than she used to, but she still makes an effort to visit them every weekend.

"It's starting to change because their lives are changing so much right now," Conover said. "It's a little bittersweet."

Koor Lukuach Malual, a mathematics and electrical engineering junior, said Conover has been more than a friend to him and the others.

"A good friend is one who actually comes to see you sometime and say, 'How are you?' That is the kind of friend we need," he said.

Conover has also taken them out to restaurants, stores and places like bowling alleys and roller rinks.

"It was really a good thing to meet Laura," Ayuen said. "We did not know if we could meet people like that before."

Conover said when she first decided to volunteer with the Lost Boys, she thought it would be a short-term commitment.

"I just thought it was going to be teaching them to ride bikes a few Saturdays," she said. "It's changed my life."

Now, Laura said she feels like the men are a part of her family.

"They have so much to share because they are all brothers, they all come from the same tribe and it doesn't matter blood line," Conover said.

"They're all brothers and that's the way they viewed us, like sisters and brothers eventually. That was the gift that they gave us was that suddenly we had all these new brothers."

In February, Conover invited the men to her wedding where they surprised her by performing a traditional Dinka wedding blessing and singing and dancing at the ceremony.

"She's our best friend and she's getting married, and we need to show the love we had," Malual said.

"It's something I'll never forget," Conover said.

Conover said her relationship with the Lost Boys of Sudan has given her a new appreciation for life.

"It's a friendship like I've never known," she said. "It represents something a little bit magical that they are even here. They see every day as extra, and you can't help but pick up some of that good, contagious life quality."

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