**From War-Torn Sudan to the US, Lost Boys 'Inspire Us'**

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By Sasha Chanoff

When I first met the Lost Boys and Girls, orphaned refugee children from the Sudanese government's genocidal attacks on its southern people, I didn't imagine that they would one day become some of the most inspiring U.S. citizens in our country. Yet they have.

Their resettlement story is captured poignantly in the upcoming film " [**The Good Lie"**](http://www.thegoodliemovie.com/) starring Reese Witherspoon.

**RELATED:**[**New Movie Sheds Light on Lives of Lost Boys in the US**](http://abcnews.go.com/Entertainment/reese-witherspoons-movie-sheds-light-us-lives-sudans/story?id=25605064)

I know the story intimately. I first flew to Kakuma camp in northwestern Kenya in 1999 to teach cultural orientation classes when 3,600 Lost Boys and Girls were given a chance to resettle to America.

The movie highlights how they didn't have any idea what to expect: How to turn on a light, or shop in a supermarket, or what winter could be like.

To give them a sense of how cold it could be in the Midwest, I asked them to pass around a large chunk of ice, an idea that has been adapted as a scene in the movie.

Sitting in the dust and the heat under the acacia trees they would tell stories about surviving lion and crocodile attacks, dodging bullets and soldiers, hiding from bombers and watching their brothers, sisters and friends die of starvation and disease.

**RELATED:**[**How to Help the Lost Boys and Girls of Sudan**](http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/headlines/2014/09/how-to-help-the-lost-boys-and-girls-of-sudan/)

**Education Is My Mother and My Father**

Without parents to help them move forward, they needed to find another way. Education was the answer. In Kakuma camp, they often said, "Education is my mother and my father."

One young woman in my class said to me, "Sasha, girls have little access to education. We are often sold into marriage for a bride-price as teenagers. What opportunities for education do girls have in America?"

When she and the others started arriving on the East Coast and around the country, families and communities opened their arms and homes to these orphans. They went on to college, to graduate school. One became a doctor; others, teachers and social workers. A number of them have joined our armed forces. Across our country they are working, studying and building families. They've all become U.S. citizens now, and they've changed our lives.

**Reliving a Crisis**

Tragically, however, their refugee story is repeating itself in South Sudan, where war has started again. More than half a million people have fled to neighboring countries and tens of thousands are arriving in Kakuma camp, again. Millions are displaced inside South Sudan, almost a third of the entire country, and among them are many at risk of starvation.

For the Lost Boys and Girls, it's like they are reliving a nightmare, and some are going back to South Sudan to do anything they can to help.

One of the stars of "The Good Lie," Ger Duany, just returned from the sprawling Kakuma Camp in Kenya, where he met with his mother and other members of his family, reunited for the first time in 18 years. He also traveled to a camp in Gambella on the border of Ethiopia, where he found several of his sisters and brothers, living with their young children in flooded conditions as hundreds of new refugees arrive every day.

Ger and other actors and producers of "The Good Lie" are hoping the film can help raise money and awareness about the crisis. The producers have created [**The Good Lie Fund**](http://www.thegoodliefund.org/), which has already raised nearly $400,000, to support the newest refugees fleeing to and living in the Kakuma camp.

The fund also aims to draw attention to the Lost Boys and Girls here in the United States, the work they are doing and the successful organizations they have created.

**The American Dream**

Ultimately, this is one of the great immigrant stories in our country's history. Not because of what we have done for them, but because of what they have done for us. They inspire us. They humble us. They refresh our spirits. And they show us, that against all odds and in the face of impossible hardship and horror, the human spirit is made up of unbreakable matter.

If there's a lesson in the Lost Boys and Girls' story, it's that by unlocking their potential, we improve our country and ourselves.

*Sasha Chanoff is the founder of****[RefugePoint](http://www.refugepoint.org/)****, a nonprofit organization based in Cambridge, Massachusetts, that provides support for the world's most vulnerable refugees.*