

A New Beginning

Overwhelmed yet overflowing with joy, my mind and my emotions struggle to take in the immensity of the situation, of finally being in America. Hello, my name is Raqiya, I am a ten-year-old girl from South Sudan. I thought it would be easier once we came, but now that I am here I find it a bit hard dealing with all of the changes and having to adapt to my new way of life. You see, my family and I have lived in a refugee camp in Uganda for the past three years. We fled Sudan because of the civil war that was going on. We have never had much, but we have always had joy. Here in America, it is so different. People have so much. Do they even realize it? I hope I never take for granted my new life in America and use the opportunities I have been given to someday help others, like me.

I remember vividly the day my mom was screaming with excitement, "We made the list! We made the list, Raqiya! We made the list!" I did not know much about the "list," but I knew that if we were on the list it meant we got to go to America, and from what I heard that was something to look forward to. That night I dreamt of having a great feast; eating kissra bread, miris stew, and drinking hilumur. The next morning I woke up early to gather the things I wanted to take. I took my doll which was made out of straw that I had received for my fifth birthday. Before getting on the plane, we were led into a room and people explained to us the things that they have in America such as toilets, showers, phones, and many other items in America that I did not know of.

Once we landed in New York, we looked around and found we were surrounded by big buildings and lights. In awe, my family and I stared at the sky, marveling at the dark clouds above us and the fluffy white mounds spread out on the ground. It was so cold and we had never seen nor felt anything like it. In Sudan, it was typically sunny and hot. When we finally made it

to the place where we were going to stay, called an "apartment," I was amazed at how huge it was. It had a room to cook food in, two other rooms, and a place to go to the bathroom. Back in Uganda, all we had was a tent; there were no rooms. We settled in and lay on the floor, all of us smiling and rejoicing in the fact that we were in the United States.

A week has passed and now that I am in school I realize that being here in America is more challenging than I had thought it would be. I have had to learn so much so quickly. It has been exciting, but I find that my brain is constantly exhausted trying to memorize new words and learn new information. Daily, my teacher shows me pictures, says the words in English, and then I repeat it. My classmates make fun of me for this. There are days that I go home crying and feel so alone, but then I realize how absurd it is to get upset. I realize that if I can live through what I have experienced in my life; escaping a civil war, living in a tent, and moving to a strange new world, then I can do anything. All in all, I am very happy living in America. I have a new friend, named Emma and I am enjoying science and math.

Over time, I have noticed quite a few differences between Sudan and New York. People back home do not have much, but they talk to each other, quite often, even if they do not know each other. Here in America, people are always staring at their "phones," looking down instead of looking around them. I find this very strange. Why not talk to the people next to you? Although America is different, and on a daily basis somewhat challenging, I am clinging to the hope of living what they call "the American dream," and to be given a chance to become something I never thought I could become back in Sudan. My dream of becoming a doctor and helping others is possible.

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