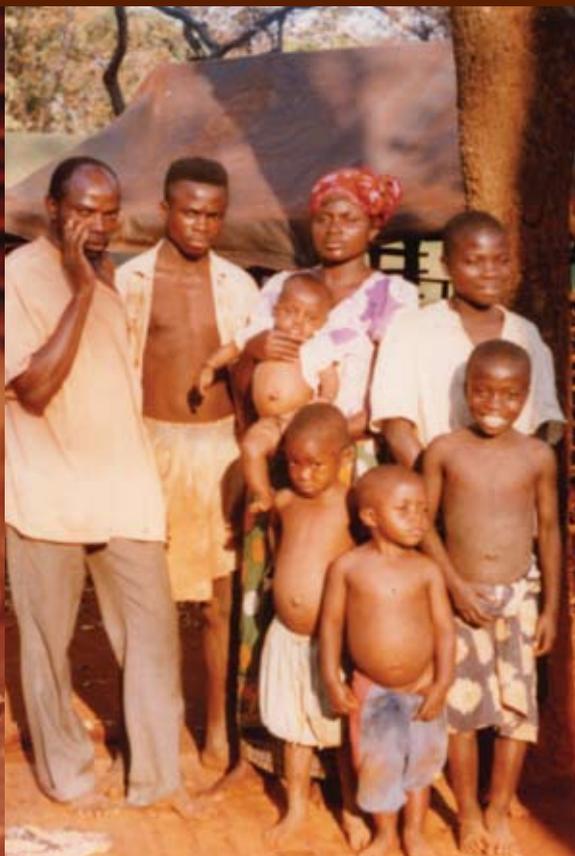




STORY Melissa Ellis PHOTOS Bob Weeks.
Some photos supplied.

THE SEARCH FOR SANCTUARY

Photos on this page show different families in the many refugee camps around Sudan. **BOTTOM LEFT:** This little boy is called Peter Hallam, named after the Australian Peter Hallam, who has helped his family.



THE HALLAM'S STORY

Sometimes in life you do not have to seek a purpose or a path – it finds you. And in the case of Peter and Sue Hallam it chased them across three continents.

For the past 16 years the Hallam's have helped hundreds of refugees from a myriad of countries to a fresh start in Australia: from the America's to Asia and now Africa, their Sanctuary Refugee Foundation has been providing exactly what its name implies.

Married in their native UK, the Hallam's immigrated to Canada just three days after the wedding, settling into their new home in

emotional start to the work initially."

Helping when they could while juggling other commitments, their lives were changed forever in 1986 after a Mexico visit to the home of an exchange student who had boarded with them in Canada.

From the comfort of their guest quarters in the mansion the boy called home, they picked up an English language newspaper featuring the story of a priest aiding refugees. A few days later they asked the exceedingly wealthy family if they could visit the area.

Accompanied by the family's chauffeur, the ostentatious car with its flag on the bonnet

discovered Coffs Harbour on their trip north and decided to settle there.

Retrospectively, it seems like no accident that their first neighbours were Vietnamese refugees who welcomed them to the area.

"Within a very short time I met his (the neighbour's) sponsor and that was the link that lead me to call the Department of Immigration, and that's how we got started," Peter said. "We actually registered in May 1988 and we had our first family in August."

Originally volunteers for the Department, buying furniture, organising schooling and even food in the fridge, the Hallam's would later set



The Anyar family and the Hallam family may have very different backgrounds, but they have a special bond of friendship which will never be broken. William Anyar is a survivor from Sudan who dreamt of a new life in the west, Peter and Sue Hallam's Sanctuary Refugee Foundation helped make that dream a reality: two very different perspectives which join to form one whole inspirational and poignant story. As told to Melissa Ellis.

Alberta where Peter was a hairdresser and had two salons.

Sue, a dressmaker, cared for their growing family of three sons, and sold crafts at the local market. It was there she met a representative from Catholic Social Services who invited her to become involved in refugee settlement when she had the time.

Sue said: "The first family we helped were from Guatemala in Central America and it was such a shock to know what they'd been through, what they'd seen. You see how your life is so comfortable and how much other people have suffered and you realise that you can make a difference, you can do something to help."

Peter added: "I had a training workshop with Catholic Social Services and met different refugees. One guy from Cambodia had been through the Killing Fields, so it was quite an

dodging washing lines in the street made an interesting contrast to the priest's battered VW beetle, parked right next to the altar.

After meeting with the priest, a tiny American man with "a little woolly cap" the Hallam's pledged to help refugees out of exile and into Canada. Sue credits this visit as the "trigger" for their future endeavours.

Deciding that the Canadian climate was too cold, the Hallam's moved to Australia, arriving in Victoria in November 1987 – on Melbourne Cup Day, with no taxis in sight.

A stranger and fellow Canadian took pity on the family of five with their 19 cardboard boxes and transported them in two station wagons to her own home, dismissing their gratitude by saying: "Whatever goes around comes around. I'm sure you'll be helping someone at an airport one day." It was a prophetic comment.

With relatives in Brisbane, the family

up their own independent service under the name of Sanctuary Refugee Support Group (now Sanctuary Refugee Foundation) which presently has six affiliated Sanctuary Groups.

Wherever people were displaced in the world, from Chile to Bosnia, the Hallam's were on hand to help, a tireless effort which has seen them bestowed Coffs Harbour's Citizens of the Year 2004 in the Australia Day Awards. Peter also said the couple took out a 2002 Austcare Humanitarian Award, a national, prestigious award.

While the awards recognise their efforts, the Hallam's work keeps things in perspective.

"We had situations with people arriving here with shrapnel still in their bodies," Peter said of the Central American refugees.

Sue added: "Nearly everyone that we help has experienced horror. They've lost everything most of them."



TOP LEFT: Sue reading one of the many emails she receives from desperate people looking for refuge in Australia.

BOTTOM LEFT: The Hallam's welcoming William, Josephine and Chu-Chu at Coffs Harbour Airport. ABOVE: Peter and Sue Hallam at their home.

About eight years ago, Peter said Sanctuary was approached by the National Council of Churches to host a visit from a priest from the southern Sudan, to explain why his people needed help.

Sanctuary's response was two-fold: they became a registered charity, raising \$17,000 for famine victims and collecting clothing and medicine for people living in refugee camps. They also started to help re-settle Sudanese locally, which is how they would later meet William Anyar and his family.

After working with cultures all over the globe, Peter and Sue said their first family from the Sudan was an entirely different experience, even for old hands.

For one thing, Peter didn't know what to stock in the fridge for that very first arrival.

"I asked: 'Do you eat everything?' And the reply was: 'I don't eat lion, but I do eat giraffe,' Peter said.

Sue added: "That was the first time we'd met anyone who hadn't heard of McDonalds or the Beatles. It was an amazing experience, that first family for us."

With visas only valid for a certain period of time, the biggest hurdle facing some refugee families is the cost of airfares they could never afford. As a result, Sanctuary decided to set up a Travel Loan Fund, paying the airfares for

families who would later pay them back, with the money then used to help another family.

It is a gift which keeps on giving and offers a practical solution to what is a huge hurdle for many.

Their three boys may be grown men living their own lives in other cities, but the Hallam's house is always busy and full of the voices of children, many too young to remember the horror their family has witnessed.

"The biggest happiness is the children because it's the children who come here and have a completely new life. They just sound like Aussie kids after six months," Sue said.

And on the other side of the world, there are also beautiful babies bearing the names of two amazing Coffs Harbour residents who have answered the cry for help and reached out across the globe.

"When you do something for an African in Africa sometimes when the mother gives birth, she will name that child after you and so Sue and I have got Susan and Peter Hallam's over there in Africa," Peter said smiling.

Sanctuary Foundation is constantly fundraising as part of their work. **If you would like to make a contribution, contact Sue and Peter Hallam by email: hallam20@hotmail.com or send to PO Box 6295, Coffs Harbour NSW 2450.**

WILLIAM'S STORY

For 10, long years surrounded by the devastation of war, death and poverty, William (Agar) Anyar focussed on his future, becoming single-minded in the quest to leave his troubled life in Africa for a new one in the west, a survival technique for the mind.

William's boyhood was spent fleeing from one war-torn country to the next, living as a refugee. It was a life, he explains, without a future.

The things he has seen as part of daily life are too gruesome for the 6.00pm news bulletin, the only link many of us have with international events, the only window into a kind of life we cannot imagine. A life filled with kindness and friendship but contrasted with injustice and cruelty.

William is living testimony to the power of hope and faith. Here sits a proud young man with his beautiful family, strong in his commitment to life in Australia. Finally given the chance he worked so hard for, William has grabbed it with both hands, ready to push it to its full potential.

In November 2003, William, his wife Josephine (Akuc Chol) and young daughter Michealina Achol Agar (nicknamed Chu-Chu) finally boarded the plane in Nairobi, Kenya,



ABOVE LEFT: William, Chu-Chu and Josephine enjoying the local beach and relaxing in the unit they now call home.

headed for Australia. His whole adult life had been dedicated to that moment.

William was born in Sudan and lived a happy village life with his family in the early 1980s. His mother worked as a midwife, his father was employed with the City Council, and he remembers learning Arabic in primary school.

But his ordinary existence changed forever in 1985 when his father, in the wrong place at the wrong time, was killed in crossfire during a local dispute.

His mother took her young family to live with relatives in the country, where William traded school for work as a cattle keeper. At just Year Three level, his education was now officially over, interrupted by circumstance.

While "following the cattle" the young William would test his hunting skills, using his spear to kill the beast of choice on the day. Although different from his former life, it was still a relatively carefree existence, engaging in swimming races and playing popular childhood games.

But life was about to take a turn for the worse. In the late 80s, William said war broke out, forcing the young man to leave his safe existence and grow up fast. During a dangerous gunfire exchange in his area, he was forced to pick up and flee in a hurry, without re-grouping with his mother or siblings.

When the shootings started William followed the advice of adults around him and ran for his life, accompanied by people who helped protect the young teenager and his group of friends on the three month walking trip to Ethiopia. William focussed on staying away from wild animals en route and gratefully accepted sustenance by kind villagers.

Comforted and encouraged by other adults who told the children their parents would most likely greet them at the other end, William was baffled and distressed that his mother had not arrived in Ethiopia as he expected. The family's separation was starting to look more permanent as the youngster had neither the resources or the know-how to get back to his mother.

There were other challenges also. William soon realised that life for a refugee was exceedingly hard, not only because of the living conditions – but because they had nothing to strive for.

"When you asylum-seek in another country, you're made to stay in a refugee camp whereby you are kept there to survive but not to have any future, there's no future for you," William explained.

"There's nowhere to study and people are angry all the time. Sickness is going around killing people. Even in the camp you have to use your mind to seek (re-settlement)" he said.

"Everybody wants to get out."

Four years later fighting broke out in Ethiopia and William and his friends left the camp to return to Sudan.

But it was not simply a case of picking up life as it was before, he may have come 'home' but still had no idea where his family was.

Managing to look after himself, William's life was again turned on its head by fighting in his homeland and in 1992 he left Sudan for the Kakuma Refugee Camp in Kenya. It would be his home for the next four years, surrounded by thousands of African people with varying nationalities.

Having been brought up well by his family, William had survival skills which are foreign to most westerners. He and his friends made circular huts to live in called "tukul's."

It was at Kakuma that William learned to speak English from American aid workers, and was provided basic food supplies from the United Nations. But Kakuma could also be a dangerous place and the desert conditions were extreme.

William said the major threat to his life and others, was from night raids from tribes living outside the camp who believed the food the UN was providing should be theirs.

With basic ingredients dispensed fortnightly, William and his friends "pooled" the food, able

feature the search for sanctuary



ABOVE LEFT: William, Chu-Chu and Josephine enjoying the beach and park. CENTRE: Josephine still cooks more traditional African food wherever possible.

to eat just once a day.

"The people in that area, it's a real desert, like the Northern Territory, no rain, no trees no grass, so the people who are living in that area will try and loot the food.

"They get angry and kill us, some have guns and some have spears and you can't take revenge," William said.

The matter of fact tone William uses prompts the question, 'did the killing happen often?'

"Yeah, yeah, it's a common thing," he said, nodding his agreement. "Sometimes they come with a gun or they come with a spear and you are like nothing here, they could come and kill one of you here... So you have to save your life and hide because if you try to help you will be killed also. You have no power," he said.

In 1997 William moved to Kenya's capital city Nairobi, adjusting now to the colder climate

and doing voluntary work with Jesuit Refugee Services (JRS) in return for a home and study.

Living in a two-bedroom apartment with eight people, William was still focussed on applying for re-settlement in the west. Over the past 10 years he had applied for Canada and America and then finally Australia, with the assistance of Sue and Peter Hallam from Sanctuary Foundation.

His desire for a new life was fuelled by his marriage to Josephine in the Year 2000 and the birth of their daughter in Nairobi in 2002.

Despite the Hallam's sponsorship for his new life, nothing was certain for William, who was torn between quiet excitement as his chances looked promising, and fear that at any time the whole request could fall apart.

William can rattle off all the dates he received significant communications. In September 2002

he lodged the form the Hallam's had sent him in the Australian Embassy in Nairobi and that December was invited for an interview.

After the interview in January 2003 he managed to find the money for his medical check-up, a compulsory part of the process.

William said: "I had to look for the money for the medical check-up and we managed because Peter and Sue had promised to pay for the airfare."

William passed the medical in February and received his approval visa to come to Australia in September last year, walking an hour and forty five minutes from his home to the Embassy to learn the good news.

Even then, extremely excited, William remained concerned he wouldn't make it, especially when a paperwork error slowed the process.

contemporary aboriginal art

Despite his fears, he gathered with jubilant friends to celebrate, singing with the music turned up loud and borrowing some money to hold a small party.

Sitting on the plane, with Josephine and Chu-Chu by his side, William was brimming with excitement, coupled with the obvious wonder and anxiety of coming to a new country. Told to be careful of Australian food, particularly the meat, William said he eyed the fare served on the plane with suspicion.

At Coffs Harbour airport, William and his family got to see Peter and Sue Hallam for the first time, the people who had acted on his behalf locally. They were also greeted by some of the local Sudanese community, a welcoming sight after such a long journey.

"They met us at the airport and I was really very happy and I was thinking I might come and stay with Peter or with another Sudanese," William said.

After the family had settled in William explained his reaction at learning he would not have to share the property with another family. "...I was like: 'How come? How could I just live here alone?'" he said, recalling the shock.

Surprised at having his own home and used to the safety of a group, William's next thoughts turned automatically to his family's protection.

"It was just the three of us, my wife, my daughter and myself in the middle of these strange people," William said honestly.

"I didn't trust anyone but ...now I go to school, my wife will be going to school, my kids will be going, we have no problems. Life is very good, the climate is not cold and already I've got my transport...I was really happy. Very thankful and happy."

William said Peter, Sue and the settlement helpers assisted him through every stage of his new life.

He laughs as he recounts his initial trouble understanding the language, not entirely convinced that Australians actually spoke English. Of all the initial hiccups he had envisaged, William didn't think he would need an interpreter, but he couldn't fathom comments such as: 'no worries' from people obvious to help.

Understandably after a couple of months William also began to crave African food and was grateful when other Sudanese families in Coffs Harbour introduced him to maize

flour to cook a staple food in the same way Australians eat bread or rice.

While Sanctuary Foundation has walked beside William and his family during the settlement process he credits other Sudanese families with providing: "the food and the chat."

Now that he doesn't have to worry about "fighting for his life" every day, William is focussed on his career.

Currently doing voluntary work, as well as an information technology course at TAFE locally, he hopes to gain enough qualifications to work with computers.

"Sometime, if God helps me and I really study hard, I want to be in network support," he said.

William's family are also delighted that wife Josephine is expecting another baby in February.

He is pleased at the opportunities his children will have and said Chu-Chu has the best of both worlds, learning his native Dinka language at home as well as English.

"When I was in Africa, I couldn't get (baby food). I knew that Chu-Chu was going to grow and I couldn't take her to school. But here now I don't have any problems. This time I'm not worried because everything is good for me here."

William, now 28, feels he has been lucky and is committed to "looking back" and trying to help others in his homeland, including his mother who he recently tracked down.

He had a three-way conversation through a radio operator to the Sudan in August and said his mother was happy to hear he was alive. William is also trying to assist his niece Atiang Akol Anyar who lives in Nairobi.

William's dream has become reality and he is dedicated to making it work. In his eyes all his future successes will reflect well on the Hallam's for the support they have provided him and he is paying back the airfare costs so that Sanctuary Foundation can help bring another family to the country.

"Now I have a chance to study, I have a chance to do everything, I've got to make it happen," he said.

"All human beings are the same: you can be stupid, you can be clever you can be rich you can be poor you can make yourself useless or you can make yourself very important. Whatever I get, I have to thank (them)." ■



DAISY BULLEN 'Untitled' Bidyadanga

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