

# Stories from World Relief: Life as refugees in Spokane

By Matthew Kincanon  
THE WORLD MESSENGER

In recent years, there has been a host of rhetoric throughout the United States against refugees; painting a picture of them as terrorists, drug dealers, murderers and rapists who would only act as a burden to the country. We often hear about how these people come to the U.S., but never about what life is like for them after they have arrived. We never hear about the obstacles they overcome, adjustment to the country nor what they have done since being resettled. According to the Washington State Department of Social and Health Services, the state has welcomed more than 130,000

refugees from 70 diverse nationalities since 1975. Also, a 2016 study from the Journal of Ethnicity in Criminal Justice found that, between 1970 and 2010, immigration was consistently linked to decreases in violent and property crime. World Relief Spokane's Jackson Lino and Pingala Dhital's stories show, amidst the fear mongering, that we forget refugees are people who come to the U.S. as a means of survival and were forced to leave their homelands. They did not come here by choice, but rather out of necessity to escape persecution and certain death.

## 20 years of resilience: The story of Jackson Lino

When World Relief Spokane resettlement specialist Jackson Lino first came to the U.S. in 2000, he was only a teenager and had to reacclimate from his native South Sudan. However, thanks to the love and care he received, he now works to help refugees and bring attention to what is happening around the world.

"When we came to the U.S., we did not know very much. We had nothing," he said. "I didn't speak any English and that was something that I hoped and dreamed for to achieve, in my future, was to learn English and to be successful at something."

The moment he landed in the U.S., Lino said he felt safe and that he found a place that he could call home where he could be somebody. However, he had to face trauma he received from Sudan after he arrived.

"There was a lot of trauma that I dealt with when I came," he said. "There was a lot of fear of loud sounds, there was a lot of anxiousness and there was a lot of worry whether someone's gonna come kidnap me or someone's gonna come and shoot me."

This trauma left him with trust issues, but the love and care received from volunteers at World Relief and people in Boise, Idaho helped him open-up and trust people again.

Lino came with several family members to escape religious persecution and were connected with a volunteer from World Relief Boise when they arrived. The organization helped them find housing, learn English, enroll in school and receive other forms of assistance.

Before settling into their apartment, Lino and his family were hosted by a volunteer. He said he remembered laying on the carpet and thought it was his bed because it was so comfortable before being told that



Photo by Matthew Kincanon

Jackson Lino is a refugee from South Sudan who came to the U.S. as a teenager in 2000 and now works to help refugees like himself.

he would be sleeping in another room.

Even though Lino faced problems with trust issues and racism, he said he saw his struggles as stepping

stones where he did not let the discouragement he faced bother him. He added that he also found love and

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## IN THE SHADOW OF THE THUNDER DRAGON: LIFE AS A BHUTANESE REFUGEE



Photo by Matthew Kincanon

Pingala Dhital spent 18 years in a Nepal refugee camp before resettling in the U.S., who now works at World Relief Spokane and has a son who graduated from Gonzaga University in 2017.

Eleven years ago, Pingala Dhital, a Bhutanese refugee, came to the U.S. after spending 18 years in a Nepal refugee camp, seeking to give a better life for family. Despite the challenges she faced along the way, Dhital now works at World Relief Spokane helping fellow refugees find work.

In 1990, the kingdom of Bhutan adopted an ethnic cleansing policy that discriminated against non-Buddhists, particularly Hindus and those of Nepalese descent. Dhital said anyone who protested was arrested and tortured by the government, and those released had to sign a voluntary migration form and leave the country.

This policy forced people out of the country and into a refugee camp in Nepal. Dhital said around 115,000 people were trapped in the camp before the U.S. offered to

*"I felt like our life was almost gone in the refugee camp."*

—Pingala Dhital

transfer over 60,000 of them.

Jerri Shepard, an associate professor at Gonzaga University who visited Bhutan while on sabbatical, said that tourists in Bhutan know very little about what happened to refugees like Dhital in the 1990s.

"It is easy for a tourist to revel in the wonder of this beautiful country, without having any idea of the stigma attached to and traumatic experiences of refugee families, especially of Nepalese descent," she said.

Dhital and her family were the first Bhutanese refugees to leave Bhutan and transferred to the U.S., where they received help from World Relief upon

their arrival in 2008. Through the organization, they were able to find housing, work and learned English.

After several months, Dhital got a job at World Relief Spokane while her husband started working at a window company and her children went to school. Her son, Satya, became a Gonzaga University graduate in civil engineering, graduating in 2017.

"Coming to Spokane offered opportunities for their children's education that never would have existed had they stayed in Nepal," Shepard said. "Although life is better in Spokane, there are still challenges and obstacles to overcome.

Dhital said the easiest part of adjusting to the U.S. was that she was able to speak a little bit of English and that World

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## Learn English at GU's GECO program

Gonzaga ESL Outreach Program (GECO) provides free English classes to immigrants and refugees in Spokane. During the class, students are separated into three groups based on their skill. Students are taught by Master of Arts in Teaching English as a Second Language (MA-TESL) students. Meetings take place on Saturdays from 10 a.m. — 12 p.m. at Gonzaga University's Rosaur Center in room 130.

For more information, contact GECO coordinator Andrea Hayes at ahayes3@zagmail.gonzaga.edu.



Photo by Matthew Kincanon

MA-TESL student Amanda Ron giving a lesson on values and ethics to one of the language groups.

## Take-part in World Relief's refugee simulation

World Relief Spokane will be holding refugee simulations throughout March and April. Richard Mandeville, refugee simulation coordinator, said that participants step into the role of a refugee seeking safety in a new country. They are given an insight into the vetting process and presented with unique challenges and stresses. These simulations cost \$35 per person and take place at World Relief Spokane at 1522 N. Washington, Suite 200. All proceeds go to supporting local World Relief operations.

The schedule for the following upcoming refugee simulations:

Wednesday, March 27, 5:30 — 8:30 p.m.

Thursday, April 4, 6:30 — 9:30 p.m.

Wednesday, April 10, 5 — 8 p.m.

Monday, April 15, 3:30 — 6:30 p.m.

Wednesday, April 17, 8:30 — 11:30 a.m.

Thursday, April 25, 11 a.m. — 2 p.m.

For more information, visit [worldreliefspokane.org/simulation](http://worldreliefspokane.org/simulation) and contact Richard Mandeville at [mandeville@wr.org](mailto:mandeville@wr.org) to book an experience.

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acceptance among members in his community, which helped him keep moving on to the next step and made adjusting to the U.S. easier.

“It’s not easy, it was hard and imagine coming from a country that you didn’t have opportunities and you didn’t have ways to be who you are,” he said. “And then you come to a foreign land where you’re basically a baby so you’re growing up all over again.”

Lino went to Centennial High School before going to Boise State University to study health and physical education. He moved to Fargo, North Dakota where he did youth ministry work for several years before coming back to Spokane and found a job at World Relief Spokane.

Even though he did enjoy youth ministry work, he always had a desire to work with the refugee population.

At World Relief, Lino does a lot of speaking engagements and shares his stories with his end-goal being to share unity, love and care for others with people to help them as a human race. He described

World Relief as pivotal to his growth where he has built connections and wants to show people who refugees really are.

“Jackson is one of the people that would give everything he has to make Spokane a better place to live in and also to help other people understand what is life like as a new person here in Spokane,” said Sajida Nelson, resettlement case manager at World Relief Spokane. “He goes above and beyond his ability to actually help people and help others. Not just refugees, but also the people that live in Spokane or even other cities as well.”

Lino said the name refugee is not something he would use to describe people like himself, but would rather use the word resilient. He added that refugees are people with ambitions, knowledge, guidance, culture and talent who come with the mindset of giving to the community, providing and adding their flavor of culture to it.

“All of those people that you see or hear about in the refugee camps, they’re not terrorists, they’re not

murderers,” he said, “they’re actually doctors, nurses, physicians, policemen, scientists, biologists, coaches and teachers.”

Lino said the millions of displaced people in the world are not trash but are people who are valuable and can give so much to the world, yet they are seen as poor people or terrorists. He added that the people seen in refugee camps did not choose to leave their homes or go to the camps but were forced to go.

“I am very fortunate that the U.S. accepted me and my family and helped us to feel safe, to feel like we belong somewhere and to give us a home because we didn’t have that in the past,” he said. “And even now I cannot go back [to South Sudan] and feel like that’s my home because I would not be coming back alive.”

Lino still practices his culture at home including speaking Arabic and has a community of fellow Africans he speaks with to make sure he does not forget about his culture and people.

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Relief was able to help find a family who would take her and her family into their home.

However, the hardest part of the adjustment period was how new everything was to them and she had never been exposed to snow before. Also, talking to people was a challenge because of the way she was taught English while in the refugee camp where certain words were pronounced differently.

Despite the challenges, Dhital said that life has been good for her in the U.S.

“I felt like our life was almost gone in the refugee camp,” Dhital said. “The productive part of our life was basically passed so we came for our children’s future, and so they got to go to school and they are doing fine

so I’m happy overall. The reason I came was achieved.”

“Pingala now works at World Relief and is able to provide support for refugees and English Language Learners who are new to the community,” Shepard said. “Her service to our community is a mark of her commitment to justice and a testament to her resilience.”

At World Relief Spokane, Dhital is a job and employment counselor who provides assistance to refugees on how to get a job, how to keep it, the cultural differences at work and other vital aspects of the workplace.

Dhital said she is thankful for being given the opportunity to give new life to people, especially those

who had been in refugee camps, so they can find work and be independent.

“We’re not here on public assistance, most people come here and they work,” Dhital said. “We are not here to be burden, we are here to rebuild life and to be productive and to live as normal people.”

Dhital and Shepard will be doing a panel about the situation in Bhutan called, “The Land of the Thunder Dragon: The Light and Dark,” on April 3 during the 5th International Conference on Hate Studies at Gonzaga University.