Growing Up In Darfur

Sudanese Children Struggle to Survive

Sumaya’s life used to be just like other children’s lives. She went to school, played with friends, and did chores.

But in early 2003, everything changed. Armed fighters attacked her village in Darfur, a region of Sudan, killing everyone in sight. Sumaya and her family had to run for their lives.

"We ran and ran until I felt that I couldn't go on any longer," Sumaya recalled at the age of 15.

After walking about 100 miles, they arrived at Kalma Camp, a place for refugees in Darfur. Refugees are people who flee their homes because of war or a natural disaster.

The camp was home to more than 70,000 refugees. As of 2011, approximately 2.6 million people had abandoned their homes to escape the fierce fighting over Darfur's scarce farmland. Hundreds of thousands of those refugees were children, according to the United Nations.

The refugees arrived at places like Kalma Camp with little more than the clothes on their backs. Food and water were scarce, and the outlying violence often spilled into the camps. The situation was the "world's worst humanitarian crisis," U.N. officials said.

"Tens, even hundreds, of thousands of people...need water, medical care, and food," said Pauline Horrill of Doctors Without Borders, an aid group.

Everyday Struggle

Even a few years after Sumaya had arrived at Kalma Camp, conditions in the refugee camps were bleak. Tents and mud huts were clustered as far as the eye could see. The scorching sun beat down on the desert landscape, pushing the temperature as high as 122 degrees Fahrenheit.

Stephen Winter, a U.S. doctor, helped treat some of the sickest refugees at a makeshift clinic. "Many of the people ... have to sleep on the ground," he wrote in his journal. "They share the ground with biting insects and the occasional snake."

The refugees received food rations twice a month. Sumaya used the wheat, beans, oil, salt, and powdered food mixture that her family received to make a brown, watery soup for her younger brothers and sisters.

"The food here is not nutritious," she told a U.N. aid worker. "In our village, we used to eat lots of..."
vegetables and fruits, but we can't grow anything here."

Hope for the Future

One bright spot in Sumaya's life was school. She went to English classes in the camp. She also volunteered at a center where refugee children could play, draw pictures, and talk about what they'd been through.

The centers were important, explained Adolphe Mbaikouma, a UNICEF worker. "Sharing laughter helps release some bad memories," Mbaikouma said.

However, aid workers feared that more bad memories might be inevitable. Fighters had begun to attack refugee camps. The United Nations had cut the number of aid workers in the area because of the danger.

Still, Sumaya stayed positive by thinking about good things. She was thankful that her parents and brothers and sisters were alive. She daydreamed about her family's farm and the day she would be able to return home.
1. Sumaya's family left their farm because
   A. they wanted to help at the refugee camps.
   B. armed fighters asked them to leave.
   C. the farm was not producing food anymore.
   D. armed fighters attacked their village.

2. Refugee camps were set up to
   A. give medical attention to the victims.
   B. provide safety for the victims.
   C. give food and shelter to the victims of the attacks.
   D. all of the above.

3. The author wrote this passage
   A. to ask the armed fighters to stop fighting.
   B. to inform the reader about the situation in Darfur.
   C. to plead to the U.N. for aid.
   D. all of the above.

4. People in the refugee camps sleep on the ground because
   A. the ground is safer than the tents.
   B. they are immune to snake bites.
   C. the ground is cooler.
   D. there are not enough beds for everyone.

5. How is your life similar and different to Sumaya's? Explain.
1. According to the passage, approximately how many people in Darfur had abandoned their homes as of 2011?
   A. 26 million
   B. 70,000
   C. 2.6 billion
   D. 2.6 million

2. According to the passage, what caused the fighting to start in Darfur?
   A. not enough schools for children
   B. scarce number of houses
   C. diamonds and other valuable gems
   D. scarce farmland

3. Read this sentence: "The refugees arrived at places like Kalma Camp with little more than the clothes on their backs."

   Based on the passage, why did people most likely arrive at Kalma Camp with very little?
   A. They did not need to bring anything to the camps.
   B. They did not want to bring anything from the villages.
   C. They were not allowed by the camps to bring anything from the villages.
   D. They did not have time to take anything when the villages were attacked.

4. Read the following sentence and answer the question below: "Even a few years after Sumaya had arrived at Kalma Camp, conditions in the refugee camps were bleak."

   As used in this sentence, what does "bleak" mean?
   A. clean
   B. positive
   C. gloomy
   D. cheerful

5. What was likely the author's main reason for writing this passage?
   A. to tell the story of how Sumaya and her family escaped
   B. to show the conditions of refugee camps in Darfur
   C. to explain how people could have helped refugees in Darfur
   D. to show the kind of education children in Darfur received
6. According to the organization Doctors Without Borders, what do the refugees in Darfur need in 2011?

7. Based on the passage, why was it important for the refugee camps to help children cope with their experiences?

8. Choose the word that best completes the sentence.

   Sumaya stayed positive by thinking about good things even _________ conditions in the refugee camps had gotten worse.

   A. before  
   B. because  
   C. but  
   D. though

9. Which image shows an area scarce in vegetation?

10. What are some resources that were scarce in the refugee camps in Darfur?