

HOPE ROAD: SYNOPSIS

A refugee from the Sudanese civil war, Zacharia (one of the 'Lost Boys' of Sudan) lives in Sydney with his wife and daughter. He desperately wants to do something for his former village, now in the newly created nation of South Sudan. His dream is to build a much-needed school, and he enlists the backing of numerous Australians who have raised sufficient funds to make a start on the project.

A year after Independence Zacharia returns to his village. Hundreds are out on the road waiting. A bull is slaughtered, women ululate and dance. Zac's overwhelmed. Promises are given and expectations raised.

Soon work starts on clearing the site and making the bricks. Plans are drawn up for the school. Yet almost immediately it all starts unravelling: the men want more money, the well is dry and needs fixing and there are arguments as the women push for the school that means so much to them. Eventually, by the time Zac returns to Australia, 6,000 bricks have been made, enough for the entire school.

Zac's trip has been supported by a group of Australian friends who have helped him raise the funds. One of them is Janet, his English-language teacher, who becomes his dedicated supporter. Fund raising now starts in earnest at countless small events across Sydney.

But any possibility of help from the Australian government is lost when aid to Africa is savagely cut. Zac's support committee comes up with an ambitious plan: a 40-day charity walk from Tweed Heads in northern NSW to Sydney. Zac was one of the 'Lost Boys' who walked out of Sudan, but can he do a walk like this again? All of 1,200 kilometres.

Zac and Janet hit the road. They take off down busy highways and forest tracks. What they lack in preparation they make up for in sheer passion and energy — calling into schools, Indigenous land councils, and Rotary clubs. It's a roller coaster ride and along the way there are some close encounters with back-road Australians. And then some home truths kick in. Will they reach their target? Have they been unrealistic?

Meanwhile, back in South Sudan, civil war starts again, and quickly escalates, while clan warfare breaks out in the village. The plans for the school and the 6,000 bricks they have made are imperilled. Even more unexpected is a tragic twist in Zacharia's personal life.