

# A Crack in the Rock

VRRP's Volunteer Newsletter

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VRRP is a field office of the U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants

## Inside This Issue

Out of a Crack <i>By Judy Scott</i>	1
What's In It For Me? <i>By Lauren Berrizbeitia</i>	2
Notes on the Jungle and Our Long Walk <i>By Aline Kwizera</i>	2
To Give is Better Than to Receive <i>By Molly Godin</i>	3
A Long Journey: From Bhutan to Burlington <i>By Deirdre Smith</i>	3
Fire Razes Refugee Camp in Nepal	4
Relationship Enrichment Program <i>By Wendy Reid</i>	4
HELP Help HELP! <i>By Marcia Stone</i>	6
Community Buzz!	9

## VRRP'S MISSION

The Vermont Refugee Resettlement Program brings hope and opportunity to the lives of refugees and immigrants. We act to defend human rights, promote self-sufficiency and education, and forge community partnerships through a full range of services and programs.



Photo: Rose McNulty

Our world often seems to be a hard, rocky place. Manmade and natural disasters strip people of what they need to survive. But Vermont is a crack in the rock, widened by the smiles, persistent efforts, and adventurous spirit of its people. Thanks to 234 volunteers, we are offering a new life to people who have endured the harshest conditions in hopes of a new opportunity.

## Out of a Crack

By Judy Scott

When your problems are so tough that they totally engross your awareness, survival skills seem to bypass your consciousness. They just slip into your life. If soldiers with guns are chasing you, you don't think about how to run. Your body figures out how to run its fastest without you thinking about it.

Even in less compelling circumstances, we tend to develop survival skills without being aware of it. To an extent, you can raise your pain threshold by getting used to pain. You learn how to tune out that annoying co-worker who complains all the time. As long as survival skills have a beneficial effect, it's safe to leave them on the subconscious level.

Since survival skills can sometimes become negative, it's not a bad idea to examine them consciously from time to time. When I first started volunteering with VRRP, I was connected with a refugee family that had several other volunteers. The family asked me for help filling out their application for subsidized housing. We sat down together to work on it and I was surprised at how dif-

ficult it was. Because I'd never filled anything like that out before, I had a hard time figuring out how to do it. There were questions I had to skip because I couldn't answer them. As we were working on it, one of the other volunteers stopped by. She saw what we were doing and said, "Oh, I helped them with that last week. It took me forever! And there was some of it I couldn't do at all so I called their case manager for help. It turned out that she'd already finished it and turned it in."

I just looked at her in dismay. We were both thinking the same thing: then why are we wasting our time doing this? I was upset enough that I called the case manager (that was in the days when there was no volunteer coordinator to contact!) With her interpreting, we learned that the family was very concerned about the high cost of rent in this country. They realized that the only way they could survive was to get into subsidized housing. They assumed that if more people filled out applications for them, they'd get a subsidized apartment sooner. This was one of the first lessons in my continu-

ing education of how much easier life is when you already understand the system.

We explained to this family that that housing authority would be irritated by additional applications and would just throw them out. They looked unconvinced. In the months that followed, it happened more than once that the family asked several different people for the same thing. Often several different people put great effort into doing that thing, only to find out that someone else had already done it. Finally we all sat down together to discuss it. We described how we felt and explained that we just couldn't understand why they would ask more than one person to do the same thing. The father looked at us with as little comprehension as we had of him. He explained, "In the camp, if I only asked one time for what we needed, we would have died. If you ask one person, maybe they will do it, maybe they won't. You have to ask every person you can. As long as you're alive, you have to keep asking."

The thought went through me with the speed of an arrow that

Continued on page 8

## What's In It For Me?

By Lauren Berrizbeitia

A few months ago, I was talking with someone who has known me throughout my three-and-a-half years of volunteering with VRRP. She has watched how the early, all-consuming work with refugees has changed and become an integral and rich part of my life, and she knows how much I enjoy my relationships with my Somali Bantu friends. In this conversation she was questioning me on my motivation for continuing to seek out, collect, and deliver donations of children's clothing to families. "Isn't this just a big ego trip?" she asked. "You show up with a bunch of clothes for the kids and everybody loves you. You're like Santa Claus." I didn't have to think long to answer. Of course doing this makes me feel great! I put in long hours getting clothes donated, sorting them by size and gender, and delivering them to families who need them. I put together a bag of newborn clothes and blankets for each new baby that is born. Delivering the clothes is really fun and very satisfying. The kids look great in the new clothes, the parents are relieved and happy, and I feel useful. I get to visit new parents and hold newborn babies. Do I enjoy having people feel glad to see me? Absolutely. And I don't see what can be wrong with this.

The clothing distribution part of my volunteer activity began three and a half years ago when my first Somali Bantu family arrived from Kakuma Refugee Camp in Kenya. I collected donations of clothing for the family of eight, but so much came in that I had a lot left over. So I began distributing it to others who arrived with very little. I enjoyed it. I got to meet the new families as they arrived, and bringing them something they really needed bridged our initial shy awkwardness. Of course at first people were glad to see me because of what I brought, but before long I got to know the people and they began to know me. We enjoyed our contact. We pantomimed through our first communications, used the few words we knew in each other's languages, and got others to interpret whenever possible. Kids tried on clothing, I drew



outlines of their feet to try to get them shoes that fit and I made lists of children's ages and sizes. We laughed a lot together, and before long friendships bloomed.

From the very first I felt motivated to volunteer for what were in part selfish motives. I wanted friends from other cultures. I felt deprived because I had never had the opportunity to know African people, and I was deeply disturbed by what was happening to people in Darfur, Somalia, Rwanda and many other places torn up by wars and internal conflicts. I thought I would feel better if I

*Continued on page 7*

## Notes on the Jungle and our Long Walk

By Aline Kwizera

Composed with Jeanette Ruffle

We had to leave Bukavu when I was eleven years old. We walked for many months and covered 6,000 kilometers. I lost my shoes because I was running. I saw my shoes on another woman. I asked her, "Can I have my shoes?" She said, "No." When the sun came out, the road became hot and I had to walk on the grass. The road was too hot. Then my mother had an idea. She made little grass shoes. She wove the grass on the bottom and tied them on my feet with long strands of grass. It was a comedy. Every hour we had to make new shoes. After that we found shoes in the road. Then I could wear one shoe and my mother could wear one too.

We stopped in one camp named Tingitingi. Here there was no food and there was disease like dysentery and cholera from bad water. I got sick the first day in Tingitingi. Everyone got malaria, but that was the first time I got that disease. I could not eat and drink. So many

people died. Older people and children both died. There was also the disease with itching and open sores. For food we ate corn flour and peas, both green and yellow. Here some program came to give assistance, but it was not enough. Children had fat faces and big tummies because there was no food. I remember counting eighty people on their way to the cemetery in two hours. The people were covered in white blankets.

It was here in Tingitingi that I cut my finger on the baobab tree. I went to the hospital where they sewed it without an antiseptic. After two days it became infected and had to walk with my hand above my head at all times. My finger became swollen and sore. One night when I was sleeping the abscess broke, and that day I could not move my fingers. They were stuck together. After that my finger healed.

The war continued and we had to leave that camp. Everyone became very small. Young women came to look just like grandmas. They lost hair. Their breast became like socks. We were tired and sick. During this time there was no food and there was disease. We ate fruit that was red and hard to open and was good with sugar. In the jungle, people were shouting "Where is the way?" We didn't ask. We just followed.

When we came to fallen trees, we had to pass my baby brother down from one person to the next. We were always climbing trees and walking in water. After the jungle, we came out in the open. We saw so many oranges. I didn't know if this was by God or what, but we found figs and sugarcane, and we had food. There were houses, but no one was there. We caught many, many chickens, goats, pigs and ducks. Everybody shared. We got rice, which

*Continued on page 7*

## To Give is Better Than to Receive

By Molly Godin

According to The Campaign for National & Community Service the average Vermont volunteer spends about 45 hours per year volunteering ([http://www.national-service.org/pdf/VIA/VIA\\_summaryreport.pdf](http://www.national-service.org/pdf/VIA/VIA_summaryreport.pdf)). For most VRRP volunteers, 45 hours comes and goes quickly between grocery shopping, bill paying, English lessons, and homework sessions.

I'd like to share a few outstanding moments from my volunteering career:

1. Being welcomed by six smiling kids when I open the door to visit a family.
2. Teaching a mother how to cook homemade macaroni and cheese.
3. Watching a refugee child who struggles so much in school be the leader on the soccer field.
4. Seeing a mother smile for the first time in three months.
5. Explaining to a father for an hour what the difference between gas and electricity is, and why he really needs to pay both bills.
6. Explaining to the same father for an hour, a month later, what the difference

between gas and electricity is, and why he really needs to pay both bills.

7. Explaining to the same father, for a third time, what the difference between gas and electricity is, and why he really needs to pay both bills.

Outstanding—because I remember them as clearly as the day they occurred. As a three year volunteer with VRRP, I have been inspired, amazed, and motivated through most of my giving. But I'd like to take the opportunity to acknowledge that giving is not always inspiring, amazing, and motivating. Sometimes giving can be frustrating, testing, and tiring. And sometimes receiving is better than giving.

Although it was contrary to the advice my mother always gave me, I figured out after five months of volunteering that in order to have a lasting career as a VRRP volunteer I needed to find something to take. Visiting families and explaining the same things over and over again, no matter how important, wasn't the rewarding work I was looking for. Coincidentally, it was around this time that I also began to spend larger chunks of time with my family. I found myself visiting at times when I had not just eaten so I would be able to share a meal with them. I also found myself taking the small



offerings that the family gave me: flip flops, half gallons of OJ or Milk, and an African dress. It was becoming easier to do volunteer work. I wanted to stay involved. As I adjusted my volunteer times and interactions, it seemed like there was a fine line developing between volunteer and friend. My giving which to outsiders may have seemed so unselfish was turning into a beautiful relationship based on the most basic needs. I was able to help my family survive Vermont and America, and they were able to teach me about what really matters in life: friends, family, and keeping an open mind.

## A Long Journey: From Bhutan to Burlington

By Deirdre Smith

The country of Bhutan is a remote, landlocked nation nestled in the Himalayas between India and China. About the size of Switzerland, this small, secluded country has only recently opened its doors to tourism regulated by the government; a government that held its first democratic elections just last month as part of the transition from an absolute monarchy to a constitutional monarchy. Some people may have heard references to the country as "The Last Shangri-la," or allusions towards the government's measure of "Gross National Happiness," based on sustainable development, environmental protection, cultural preservation, and good governance, but an even greater number of people have heard very little about this country, if anything at all. Recently though, VRRP has started to resettle refugees from Bhutan who have been living in camps in Nepal since the early 1990s. When a country has been noted for its "Gross National Happiness," one may begin to wonder why approximately 103,000 people have been forced to flee their land and have not been able to return for eighteen years.

The Lhotshampas, who live in southern Bhutan, the Ngalongs who live predominately in the west, and the Sarchops who live mainly in the east, are the three main ethnic groups in Bhutan, although there are several other smaller groups. Together, the Ngalongs and the Sarchops are known as the Drukpas. The Drukpas are predominately Buddhist and speak similar languages, but Dzongkha, the language of the Ngalong, is the national language of Bhutan. Bhutanese Lhotshampas, or "southerners," are people of Nepali

origin who were invited to migrate to Bhutan in the late 1800s by Bhutanese government contractors, in order to develop the uninhabited land in the southern part of the country for cultivation. The southern area soon became the main supplier of food for the country, but there was little interaction between the Lhotshampas and the northern populations. The Lhotshampas retained much of their cultural heritage, continued to speak Nepali and predominately practiced Hinduism.

Little attention was given to the southern portion of the country until the 1950s when the King began to open Bhutan to the rest of the world and initiated development projects throughout the country. In 1958, Bhutan passed its very first citizenship test, which established a secure place for ethnic Nepalis as part of the Bhutanese population. The Lhotshampas were granted citizenship, their customs, festivals, and language were recognized, they were represented in the National Assembly, and they were allowed to take part in the army, police force, judiciary and the cabinet. However, in the 1980s, as the Lhotshampas began to establish themselves in society, and their population grew in size, social and political tensions began to develop.

In 1985, the Bhutanese government passed a new citizenship act that required proof of residence in Bhutan in the year, 1958; not the year before, not the year after. Qualifications to become a citizen also became more stringent, based on knowledge of the Dzongkha

Continued on page 5

## Fire razes refugee camp in Nepal; aid rushed to the homeless

UN World News Center  
March 3, 2008

GOLDHAP CAMP, Nepal, March 3 (UNHCR) – A devastating fire swept through the Goldhap camp in eastern Nepal at the weekend leaving thousands of refugees from Bhutan homeless and around 100 slightly injured.

The government, which is coordinating relief efforts at Goldhap with the help of UNHCR, began on Sunday afternoon distributing plastic sheeting for shelter and food packs to the estimated 8,000 people left homeless by Saturday's fire, which destroyed almost 90 percent of the camp buildings.

The UN refugee agency distributed 150 plastic sheets on Sunday as well as bamboo for building new huts, while the World Food Programme (WFP) provided an initial two-day mixed ration of rice and wheat-soya blend for the refugees. The Nepalese army has constructed some 200 emergency shelters in the camp.

UN aid agencies and non-governmental organizations [NGO] were rushing more aid Monday to Goldhap, one of seven

camp in eastern Nepal housing some 108,000 refugees who left Bhutan in the early 1990s. The government has started giving financial assistance of about 500 rupees (US\$8) per family.

"This is a disaster and an absolutely traumatic event for the refugees," UN High Commissioner for Refugees António Guterres said of the fire. "We are urgently mobilizing all resources, with a lot of help from the government, to get them shelter, food and comfort."

The cause of the blaze, which swept quickly through the camp's closely packed bamboo huts, is under investigation. Initial reports suggest it was an accident.

Camp residents said they only had time to save themselves. "I was inside my hut, cooking food. Suddenly, I heard people shouting and screaming. When I went out, I saw huge flames approaching my hut," said Lok Nath Mishra, who lost everything in the fire. "I fled with my family members and children."

"I did not have time to take anything. My family was the most important. We lost everything, including all our official documents," added Mishra as he sifted through the remains of his hut. Personal documents are very important to the refugees because they prove their identity.

When the blaze broke out on Saturday night, refugees and fire brigades battled for three hours to bring the fire under control. The homeless refugees found shelter under trees, with locals or in the few buildings left unscathed, including the camp school, the clinic, an emergency communal shelter and some huts.

Despite the extensive material damage, there were no serious casualties. "As of Monday, some 100 refugees have received medical treatment in the camp health facilities and eight at the local hospital," said Nirmal Rimal of the Association of Medical Doctors of Asia-Nepal, a UNHCR implementing partner. Refugees and UNHCR welcomed the fast response to the disaster. "I am grate-

*Continued on page 6*

### Relationship Enrichment Program *By Wendy Reid*

In 2007, the Vermont Refugee Resettlement Program (VRRP) initiated and designed a workshop to provide communication skills to our different refugee communities. Refugee groups that participated found the workshop useful to them.

Workshop I focused on four communication skills:

1. Showing Understanding Skill – Learn to put yourself in the other person's place and listen with strong interest
2. Expression Skill – Learn to communicate more clearly what you think and feel and need in a respectful way.
3. Discussion Skill – Learn how to hold calm and productive conversation.
4. Problem Solving Skill – Learn how to find solutions that are good for both you and the other person.

This year, based on needs expressed by refugees themselves, VRRP has developed two additional workshops. They are:

- Workshop II, Managing Financial Decisions as a family.  
Topics include Importance of Budgeting, Saving Strategies, and Using Credit Cards Wisely.
- Workshop III, Stress and Conflict Management.

Workshops I & II are being offered at VRRP on:

- Tuesday and Thursday evenings, 5 pm – 8 pm
- Wednesday and Saturday mornings, 10 am – 1 pm

Workshop III will be offered at a later date.

Any refugees who would be interested in participating should call Wendy Reid at 802-338-4628 or leave a message and she will get back to you.

## New Farms for New Americans Project

This summer you may see Africans at your local farmer's market, not just buying food, but also in business. The Association of Africans Living in Vermont has launched its New Farms for New Americans Project and plans to have 20 community members involved in growing and marketing produce. Participants will be cultivating their own plots of land at the Winooski Valley Park District and selling food collectively at the Old North End Farmer's Market, Winooski Farmer's Market, and wholesale to the Intervale Food Hub, Burlington School District and other area businesses. Please look for opportunities to buy New Farms for New Americans produce. For more information, please contact Josie Weldon. (802) 985-3106. Josieweldon.aalv@yahoo.com

## Remembering Rwanda

On April 10th, at 7:00, Senator Romeo Dallaire, the Commander of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR) from 1993-1999, will speak about his experiences in Rwanda and his current humanitarian work. The event will be held at the Ira Allen Chapel at 26 University Place, and will consist of a lecture, followed by a question and answer session.

Hosted by: UVM STAND (Student's Taking Action Now: Darfur)

### Bhutan

*Continued from page 3*

language and culture of Bhutan, marriage to a foreigner, and whether your parents were both Bhutanese or not. Furthermore, in 1988, the government began to conduct a census only in the southern part of the country, grouping residents into seven different categories from genuine citizens to non-nationals. During this census there were many reports of harassment, irregularities, and confiscations of legal papers. Continuing along these lines, in 1989, the King issued a decree requiring all citizens to abide by driglam namzha, the traditional code of values, dress and etiquette of the northern Bhutanese. Everyone was required to wear the traditional dress of the north, clothing that had never been worn by the southern Bhutanese and which was not suitable for the subtropical climate of Southern Bhutan. The Nepali language was also removed from school curriculums in the south, where it had existed alongside English and Dzongkha.

As a result of all of the new limitations on the lives of the Southern Bhutanese, public demonstrations spread through the south in the 1990s. The government responded by labeling anyone who participated in the demonstrations an "anti-national" and began to conduct raids on houses, leading to the imprisonment of thousands of Southern Bhutanese. Many of those who were imprisoned were tortured, although most people were never formally charged or brought to trial. Upon release, many returned home to find their lands and homes demolished and their relatives living in exile. Southern Bhutanese who were

not imprisoned were denied public sector jobs, suffered from forced evictions and intimidation from local officials, and were denied public services, such as education, since the schools in the south were all closed following the demonstrations. The Bhutanese government then issued an edict, stating that anyone who could not prove they were residents of the country before 1958 had to leave the country.

From 1990 to 1993, an estimated 100,000 Southern Bhutanese were forced to flee their homes to neighboring India and onwards into Nepal. As they were expelled, the Bhutanese government forced people to sign "voluntary migration certificates" which stated that they would not return to Bhutan and that they were leaving of their own free will. Since then, the Bhutanese have been confined to seven refugee camps in southeastern Nepal, while the governments of Nepal and Bhutan have debated their fates for eighteen years, over fifteen rounds of talks.

The government of Nepal has opposed local integration of the refugees, while the



government of Bhutan has opposed repatriation. Many of the Bhutanese in the camps have wanted to go home to Bhutan, although the situation there is still tenuous for family members that did not flee the country. Additionally, Bhutan has encouraged people to populate the south and to take the land of people who have fled to Nepal. As a third-party solution, the US government has decided to resettle 60,000 Bhutanese, with an additional 10,000 going to each of the following countries: Australia, Canada, the Netherlands, Norway, and Denmark.

After living in Nepal in camps, on land that was not their own, in houses that could easily be burned to ash, and with no opportunity to work, resettlement is a chance to start all over. We look forward to welcoming each new arrival as they step off the plane and we encourage new volunteers to join us in the process!

## HELP Help HELP!!

By Marcia Stone

Since our last newsletter was published, we have been blessed with some wonderful new refugee arrivals! However, our warehouse is now looking very empty and we need to replenish it as soon as possible for new arrivals who are on the way! We need your help, please! Do you work at an organization that wants to do a drive for toiletries, kitchen cleaning items, and other items in our Welcome Kits? Do you have neighbors engaging in SpringCleaning who suddenly have an extra couch, kitchen table, chairs, or even pots, mixing bowls, and serving utensils? We are even doing a donation drive on **April 12th**, when Chris Tiplady, a wonderful VRRP volunteer, will drive around to pick up larger items that need transportation. It would be most helpful if any of you could coordinate with your neighbors and then arrange with **Deirdre** for drop off at our warehouse. Call Deirdre at 338-4632 or email her at [dsmith@uscrvt.org](mailto:dsmith@uscrvt.org).

We are currently in need of volunteers to do **donation pick ups!** Do you have a truck or van? Are you willing to volunteer once a month for a couple of hours? We could really use your help! This is a great family project if you only have one day to offer your services this month. Call Deirdre at 338-4632 or email her at [dsmith@uscrvt.org](mailto:dsmith@uscrvt.org) to discuss this.

**VRRP Benefit Dinner in June.** A few of our volunteers have already come forward to help super volunteer, Supriya Serchan, put this on. Many more people are needed to make this the same success that the last one, 'A Taste of Nepal,' was. Tickets sold out before they were even dry! This will be a wonderful opportunity to assist and support this benefit. People are needed for all stages, from advertising to clean up. Please email Marcia Stone if you can help us with this! [mstone@uscrvt.org](mailto:mstone@uscrvt.org).

**World Refugee Day Celebration** is scheduled for **June 21st** at the Unitarian Church at the top of Church Street. Please help us in honoring and celebrating our wonderful new Vermonters! This also has many opportunities for volunteer service. Talk it up at your local community meetings and at your schools and create teams of helpers. A real team effort is needed to make this the best celebration ever! Watch for more information in newsletters to come.

Anyone have a desire to be a star? We are getting many requests for **speaking engagements** which, due to such a small staff, we sometimes have to refuse. If you have a passion for your work as a volunteer at VRRP or have expertise on our various refugee communities and would like to share your experiences, either by speaking or writing an article for local press, please give me a call or send me an email: Marcia Stone 338-4627, [mstone@uscrvt.org](mailto:mstone@uscrvt.org).

We have a large direct mailing planned in the near future. Want to put your pen to paper? Perhaps we will have a big writing party and do it all in one day/evening or perhaps you would like to do this in the comfort of your home. Let's talk. If interested please contact Hannah at [volunteer@uscrvt.org](mailto:volunteer@uscrvt.org) or call her at 338-4633.

### Fire Razes Refugee Camp *Continued from page 4*

ful to everyone for their support to us in this very difficult situation. I received food and financial assistance of 500 rupees from the government," said Kamala Pokherel, sitting with her two children under a temporary shelter.

"The emergency response by the Nepalese government, UN agencies, NGOs and the local population has been remarkable and we are extremely grateful for their strong support," added Daisy Dell, UNHCR's representative in Nepal.

Aside from the financial and material help from the government and UN agencies, humanitarian organizations – some with UNHCR financial assistance – have started to distribute hygiene kits, cooking utensils, tarpaulins and clothes for children. Local residents living near the camp have also been very supportive, providing emergency shelter and food.



Meanwhile, the UN refugee agency will provide cash grants to refugees to help them cover their basic needs, while WFP will replenish food stocks lost in the fire and hopes to resume a two-week ration distribution.

A major resettlement operation to third countries is on the verge of getting under way for some of the refugees from Bhutan in eastern Nepal, including people in Goldhap.

### What's In It For Me?

*Continued from page 2*

could participate in some of those people's experiences of beginning new lives in Vermont, and I thought maybe having an American friend might help them make the transition. I did really want to help, but I assumed I would get a great deal out of the experience for myself, and that has been true beyond my imagination.

It's interesting to think about what makes volunteering sustainable over the long haul. New refugees need a lot of help. Their needs can feel overwhelming to volunteers, and there are so many challenges to our usual ways of thinking and functioning that it can get uncomfortable. Some of us may not find it easy to say no, to set limits, and to feel OK about taking care of ourselves sometimes instead of prioritizing refugee needs. All these issues are important and have to be worked out. But I think a big part of sustaining volunteer activities over time is finding things to do that we enjoy, that are fun for us, and that make us feel good. The happier we are in what we do, the more likely others will enjoy us and the greater the chances of making real and lasting friendships. I enjoy children a lot, and so getting to spend time with, know and love a bunch of them has been really satisfying for me. And they love me back, and that is touching and nourishing for me.

I have beautiful Somali Bantu style dresses that were made especially for me. My living room is brightened by an embroidered ceiling hanging made for me by a Somali Bantu friend. I have loosened up (something my family and friends never thought would happen) about time, about staying up late when I have to get up early the next day and about being flexible about surprising changes to what I thought was going to happen. Being with people seems more important now than staying on a schedule. My feeling of being in community is bigger and warmer than ever before. After recent surgery I had a steady stream of former refugee visitors who stopped by to see me, expecting nothing from me, but just showing up to care and keep me company. My awareness of how many Americans really want to help the newcomers has grown immeasurably and is reassuring and encouraging to me. I feel touched by how much people are willing to give when they know what's needed.

Many issues that seemed black and white to me before volunteering seem complex and multi-layered to me now, and it is easier for me to recognize how imbedded I am in my own culture and to remember to try to see things from another perspective. As a white, middle-class liberal I always knew intellectually that racism in Vermont existed, but I didn't see it myself in my daily life. How

### Volunteer needed to help with Monthly Newsletter!

Familiarity with Quark is helpful, but willingness to learn and a strong editing eye are just as good!

Please contact Deirdre at [dsmith@uscrvt.org](mailto:dsmith@uscrvt.org) or 338-4632.

would I, as a white woman with almost no black friends? But now, as a friend to black African people and an honorary grandmother to 10 Somali Bantu kids (with one more on the way soon), I am exposed to it regularly (though thankfully not frequently) and my understanding has become personal and visceral. This, while painful, is something I needed.

When my families made the decision to resettle in a country far from their own and when I made the choice to become a volunteer with VRRP, we had no idea how our lives would change. The ongoing pleasure I get from my developing relationships, and, yes, from being able to help with this enormous undertaking, has sustained me for over four years, and will, I believe, for a long time to come.

### Notes on the Jungle

*Continued from page 2*

we winnowed. We were lucky because we were in the front and got some of this food.

#### Notes on Many, Many People Escaping

I lost my family. We were so many people side by side, you could sleep while walking. And when I left, I was just about one kilometer away, when I was lost. I stood on the corner and cried. I called "Salome", "David's Mom", "Jean Luc's Mom", "Arnold's Mom" and for anyone who came from my mom's village. "I AM HERE! Your daughter Aline." People were shoving and pushing me and passing me by. Everyone was calling out for family.

I heard a voice crying, "I am John, your cousin. Come here!" He was in the ditch by the side of the road. We found each other. My heart returned from my throat. My cousin had two tins of biscuits, each one had 9 biscuits. He gave me one tin and kept one for himself. We didn't sleep that night, just continued walking and walking all night and into the morning. We arrived in a small place with five or six huts and just sat a little there because we were so tired. And we started to walk again and I lost him. We were walking and when I turned, I couldn't see him anymore. Now I had only a tin with nine biscuits, and nobody.

Here some people were stopped because in front was a bridge and too many people wanted to cross at the same time. There was a stampede. People were dying. Mothers turned to look at the babies on their backs and they were dead. It was hard to breath. I turned around and went to the side and I continued to walk and I found someone who said, "I saw your mom with your baby brother. They just passed by one hour before." Without shoes or anything, I began to run and run.

Soon I arrived in a village, Lubutu. Here I met someone who saw my mom somewhere. He saw my mom sitting in front of a house; she had lost David and John and me. She just had Arnold, the baby. And I started to go looking for her.

At the first house, I saw no one. At the second house, I didn't find her. I started crying and crying. I was still searching. The third house, I was thinking, "Okay. I have lost everyone. How do I get out of here?" I looked like someone who lost her mind. And then, I just heard and felt someone embrace me shouting, "My baby, my baby." She scared me. It was my mother! And now my heart just went down, down, thump. I had found my mom.

Out of a Crack

*Continued from page 1*

of course he was right. In keeping with the life he'd been leading for the previous 13 years, his practice was the right one. Given what I'd been used to, mine was the right one.

That exchange gave us both a chance to re-evaluate survival skills we'd developed. He began to see that volunteers might be very irritated if asked to duplicate tasks. I began to see that, based on past experience, two people could have very different, but equally valid, assumptions.

I'm trying to devote some conscious effort to examining my own survival skills so that I can let go of any that are no longer serving me well. This effort has given me a chance to discover some beneficial survival skills that I didn't even realize I'd developed. Just the other day I was asked how I stay so calm when there are so many new arrivals and so little advance notice. That's true of all our staff and it got me thinking: how do we manage that? What are the survival skills that we've developed?

In response, recent events poured into my mind. Yesterday, a case manager and I went to visit an elderly client who is consumed with anxiety about the family she's left behind, about being a burden on the people she's living with, and about how to

cope when she speaks no English. When I entered her apartment, I could see her immediate anxiety in the lines in her face. When her case manager followed me in, she rose and held out her arms. He enveloped her frail body in a hug and I could see her anxiety fade as she felt his strength and his caring.

I'd like to say we solved her problems in the 90 minutes we spent with her but we didn't. We got some ideas – asking assistance from USCRI, our national office, and filling out an application in a different way that might produce better results. Her volunteer offered to make a doctor's appointment for her to work on a health issue. As we were about to leave, she said she had one more thing to say. Her case manager interpreted as she expressed her appreciation for her volunteer who makes sure she can get to her doctor's appointments, who visits her

even though they can't talk to each other, and who cares about how she is every single day.

Hearing that made me feel full of joy. I've realized that a survival skill for me is learning how to be nourished by the life-affirming connections I witness. A connection may be the understanding that has developed between a refugee and a volunteer who have no spoken language in common. Or it may be the confidence that a refugee has in her case manager. Or it may be the thrill I see on the face of a new arrival when he learns that, even though he's 26, he can still complete his university degree as well as work full-time.

There are many challenges endemic in refugee resettlement for staff, for volunteers, and, most of all, for newcomers. How we survive those challenges reveals a great deal about who we are as human beings.

Whether you are a volunteer or a community member involved with refugees in some other way, I hope you will join me in giving some thought to how you find nourishment in spite of the inevitable difficulties – and let me know your perspectives on it. It's an intriguing topic, and one that will provide fertile ground for further discussion in this newsletter if we make the effort to share with each other. I'll be hoping to hear from you....

**We would like to thank Olga Foss, Case Manager and Employment Counselor, for all of the hard work and dedication she showed during her time at VRRP. Good luck with your new position!**



## VRRP STAFF PHONE DIRECTORY

Deirdre Smith	AmeriCorps*VISTA Volunteer Office	802-338-4632
Emily Cochrane	AmeriCorps*VISTA ELT Office	802-655-2656
Fatuma Bulle	Staff Interpreter	802-654-1706
Jacqueline Rose	Coordinator of Interpreting Services	802-654-1706
Judy Scott	Director	802-654-1700
Loan Nguyen	Financial Support Specialist	802-654-1701
Marcia Stone	Coordinator of Volunteer Services	802-338-4627
Marija Valencak	Deputy Director	802-654-1705
Matt Thompson	Employment Counselor	802-338-4625
Megan Cannella	ELT Coordinator	802-654-1704
Mukiza Noel	Case Manager	802-338-4617
Nada Popovac	Front Office Manager	802-655-1963
Rashid Hussein	Senior Case Manager	802-654-1707
Tam Truong	Accountant	802-654-1733
Volunteers and Interns	Volunteer Office	802-338-4633
Wendy Reid	Relationship Enrichment Coordinator	802-338-1860

*e-mail addresses follow this pattern: Marcia Stone = mstone@uscrrt.org  
(Exception: Volunteer Office = volunteer@uscrrt.org)*

# community buzz

## April Issue

Each month, we pride ourselves on the fact that our newsletter includes articles by volunteers, former refugees, and staff members. Input from such a wide range of people involved in the resettlement process enables us to offer many different perspectives on the experience to our readers.

We would love to include an article about **your** experience, which will help us keep volunteers and community members abreast of challenges, successes, and questions that volunteers face. If you have a story to share but don't have the time to put it into words, one of our volunteers is a professional writer and has offered to work with other volunteers to capture their stories.

If you'd like to discuss an idea for an article, please contact Marcia at 338-4627 or mstone@uscrvt.org.

Articles for our May newsletter are due April 20th.

## Donation Pick-up Day!

Have you wanted to donate that mattress set, dresser, kitchen table, or other large item and just have not had a way to get it to our warehouse??

On Saturday April 12th, Chris Tiplady will drive around to pick up large items, so spread the word!

If you need a pick up, please call Deirdre at 338-4632 to make arrangements.

## NEEDED: Volunteers with Trucks!

Do you want to volunteer once a month for just 2-3 hours each time? Do you have a truck? If so, then VRRP needs **YOU!**

We frequently receive more offers of donations like beds and couches than we can pick up. So, we often have to turn away items that we truly need. By volunteering to pick up donations ONCE a month around the community, you will make an enormous difference!

Please contact Deirdre at 338-4632 or dsmith@uscrvt.org for more information. We are happy to accommodate all schedules.

## Volunteer Open Houses

Open Houses provide a wonderful opportunity to learn more about our organization, Volunteer Program, and volunteer opportunities. Marcia and Deirdre will be present to discuss our programs and answer your questions, and we hope that experienced volunteers will stop by during the second hour to share their stories or concerns. While attendance at one Open House is **mandatory** before beginning service, they are also a great time for new and veteran volunteers to check in and chat with VRRP staff.

In **April**, Open Houses are held every **Monday** from **11:30 - 1:00**.

If evening meeting times are better for you, then you're welcome to come to one of our **May** Open Houses, which will be held every **Monday** from **5:30- 7:30**, except for Memorial Day, May 26th.

We look forward to seeing you there!

## Save the Date!!! World Refugee Day Celebration!

**June 21st from 11:00 - 4:00 at the  
Unitarian Universalist Church  
152 Pearl St., Burlington**

**More Details to Follow**

Vermont Refugee Resettlement Program  
462 Hegeman Ave, Ste 101, Colchester, VT 05446  
Phone: 802-655-1963 Fax: 802-655-4020  
E-mail: volunteer@uscrvt.org  
Volunteer Office Phone: 802-338-4633

## Directions to VRRP

**Coming from downtown Winooski**, follow Route 15 east past St. Michael's College. Continue past Camp Johnson Military Facility. Take a left at the next light and turn into Ethan Allen Complex.

**Coming from Essex**, follow Route 15 west past Susie Wilson Road. Turn right at the next stop light to turn into Ethan Allen Complex.

Hegeman Avenue is the third road on the right. VRRP is at 462 Hegeman Avenue (the third building on your left — a brick building with a green on white sign out front.)