

A Crack in the Rock

VRRP's Volunteer Newsletter

Summer 2009
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VRRP is a field office of the U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants

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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 233 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

We celebrated World Refugee Day on June 21st on the beautiful grounds of the Unitarian Universalist Church, donated for our use by a generous congregation. We celebrated the peace and opportunity that Vermont offers newcomers as the newest element in our country's long history of giving immigrants a chance and, in return, receiving the benefit of their hard work, diverse personal resources, and gratitude.

We remembered the 8.5 million refugees who have been living in human warehouses for more than a decade, denied freedom of movement, denied even the chance to work to support themselves. Very few of those people will ever have a chance to again live a life where there is hope for the future. But here in Vermont we do what we can. Every year we give between 200 and 300 refugees an opportunity in which their efforts can bring them a real future, one in which hard work is compensated by developing security for their families. What our community receives in return are new

members who share with us their strength, determination, and ingenuity. These qualities sometimes come in forms so different from what we're used to that it takes some time for us to recognize them for what they are.

We celebrated six individuals who arrived four or five years ago and have been working for the same employer all that time. They have proven themselves as employees, breadwinners, and taxpayers. They are recognized leaders in their communities who assist others who are in need. This was our chance to honor them for their strength and consistency in giving the companies who employ them the benefit of a strong work ethic and a dexterous intelligence that finds solutions that most of us miss. They also demonstrate a quality with which we in this country have little experience. Or maybe it's more that, through their life experience, it has grown into a form that is not what we expect. I'll start by calling this quality patience, but it has very little of the acceptance that we associate with patience. The patience they live by is characterized not at all by acceptance. Instead its hallmark is more of an understanding that you can't waste energy by your life not happening as expected, by disappointments, by fear. You can't allow fear to decimate your potential.

You'll find two articles in this newsletter about people who exemplify this quality. One is a Burmese refugee who resettled in Vermont about a year ago (see page 2). The other is a Burmese woman, Aung San Suu Kyi,

who is still in her native country, imprisoned there (see page 8). She was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for her tenacious advocacy of human rights and democracy through years of government house arrest, oppression, and imprisonment. Her magnificent fortitude has strengthened all her followers. Her focus on the goal of government by agreement of the governed has lit the path towards democracy for the Burmese people who have never experienced it. Her patience in the face of 19 years of constant new obstructions has served as a chilling and timely reminder to those of us who take our government for granted.

Think about what you were doing in 1990. Imagine if everything you really wanted to do in the years since then had been thwarted by your government. I've been complaining this summer because there's been so much rain. Now I'm trying to imagine what my life would have been if I'd been imprisoned year after year – not allowed to go outside in the sun or feel it on my skin. If I'm irritated because it's been a rainy summer, how could I be patient with that? I'm trying to imagine my life if I'd been separated from my family all those years. What if, in times of trouble, I hadn't had my mother's wise words to give me the long view? What if, in times of doubt, I hadn't had a chance to build a firmer foundation with my husband's confidence in me? What if, in times when I felt hopeless about the state of the world,

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Burmese Matriarch

By Karin Johnson

Women are often the backbone of the family, providing not only care, but continuing guidance and support through the trials and tribulations that life can bring. For Ah Chan, a former refugee who is now a Colchester resident, being the backbone of her family has required extraordinary strength and fortitude in the face of adversity. She is a widow and the great-grandmother of a large family of 26 members who now live in the Burlington area. Her first great-grandchild was born just a few months ago. Ah Chan is not only the backbone for her family but also a strong support for many members of the Burmese community.

Last month I sat down with Ah Chan and our Burmese staff interpreter Htun Sein on the afternoon of the one year anniversary of Ah Chan's family's arrival in the United States. We sat in her living room, her granddaughter sleeping on the couch and a Burmese movie playing on tv, while she told me about her family and their journey to the United States.

Ah Chan grew up and raised her family in a small village in Burma (whose government now calls the country Myanmar), working as a merchant and selling items to the local village. When the government's military regime started to attack villages, soldiers arrived in her village to force some people into slave labor. Others fled. The soldiers stole medical supplies and eventually took over the land of the villagers. It was then that Ah Chan fled with her eleven children, trekking for many days across the Burmese jungle to Thailand.

In Thailand they had no alternative but to live in refugee camps. Life in the camps she describes as difficult. In the first camp where they hoped to find safety, soldiers continued to enter and raid the camp. Though they were outside of Burma, their personal safety was still threatened. They fled to another camp further from the border where they lived for nine years. They survived on food rations. The education the children received was minimal.



photo by Karin Johnson

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Greetings from Laurie Stavrand, Coordinator of Volunteer Services

Hello to everyone in the VRRP community,

You all have been doing great work collaborating with VRRP, some for years, some for months, and some just beginning this adventure. I am excited to be your new VRRP Volunteer Coordinator. This opportunity is especially meaningful for me because from an early age I learned from my family to think about the world at large and not to take my American citizenship and the quality of my life in the United States for granted.

I have always been inspired by my grandparents who arrived by boat at Ellis Island just before the crash of 1929, but still succeeded at starting a new life in New York City for their

young family while managing to provide substantial assistance to many newer immigrants during the depression. After World War II my grandfather, Bestefar, worked closely with the first UN Secretary General, Trygve Lie, to provide humanitarian relief for war-devastated Norway. He had good reason to become involved as his relatives had been displaced from their homes during the German occupation of Norway.

I've lived in Vermont since 1989 and in New York City for ten years before that. I have been a practicing architect for over twenty five years, working on projects large and small, here and abroad. I've traveled in Europe (Norway of course), North and West Africa, Central America and Indonesia. I have two adult children, a son who is a musician

living in Vermont and a daughter who is a writer in New York City.

I would especially like to hear from volunteers and refugees about your experiences. Please share your stories with me, including your successes and struggles - I would love to be able to use that information to further develop the volunteer program. My email address is lstavrand@uscrvt.org and my telephone number is (802) 338-4627.

I look forward to meeting you all.

Laurie Stavrand

P.S. We are in search of volunteers who want to become family friends and English tutors. Please be a talent scout for us!

Spotlight on Employment: Shelburne Farms

by Kristen McCaskey, Employment Counselor

For a newcomer to Vermont, landing the first job is not easy – especially given the current economic situation. Newly arrived refugees must overcome significant barriers, including mastering a new public transportation system and language. This spring, several refugees were given a chance to contribute to their new community through employment at Shelburne Farms.

Shelburne Farms is a membership-supported, nonprofit environmental education center and National Historic Landmark on the shores of Lake Champlain in Shelburne, Vermont, whose mission is to cultivate a conservation ethic. Once Shelburne Farms is open for the season, guests can enjoy the nature trails, learn about cheese making and tour the property. Shelburne Farms is also host to various educational programs, from elementary school field trips to professional development workshops for educators.

As the snow washes away and buds appear on trees, the hospitality sector gears up for the busy summer season in which tourists come to take advantage of the natural beauty of the Green

Mountains. At the Inn at Shelburne Farms, the housekeeping staff (which includes five members of the refugee community) starts by restoring the rooms and antique furniture to resemble the way the building looked in the 1860s when Dr. William Seward and Lila Vanderbilt Webb built the property.

Upendra Bista, a refugee from Bhutan who lives in Burlington with his wife and children and recently started working as a housekeeper, said that Shelburne Farms is “a nice place. I like working there – the environment is beautiful and the people are friendly.” He also said that he enjoyed the opportunity to learn about the organization’s rich history, cheese production and see the animals. Prior to coming to the US, Bista worked as a tailor in Nepal, and in fact turned down a tailoring position in South Burlington because he wanted to stay at Shelburne Farms.

Other new Americans are contributing to the Inn’s restaurant as servers and dishwashers. The restaurant serves breakfast, dinner and Sunday brunch and features seasonally-based menus and locally grown food.

Vermonters enjoy living here and tourists are drawn here because of the many opportunities to appreciate nature (such as hiking, biking and maple sugaring) and the Green Mountain State’s commitment to protecting the environment. All too often, refugees do not have the opportunity to explore or fully understand Vermont’s nature-based culture. Shelburne Farms is an ideal work environment for newcomers because it provides them with the opportunity to learn about Vermont’s historically preserved buildings and natural beauty and spend their days in a respectful and beautiful place. This exposure to nature helps those who may feel nostalgic for the orange groves or farms they remember from childhood and to those who are adjusting to life in a new city.

Thanks to Shelburne Farms’ willingness to collaborate with VRRP, several refugees have the opportunity to gain work experience, contribute to the local economy, learn about Vermont’s rich natural history and help Shelburne Farms continue the tradition of promoting education and sustainable farming.

Winooski Culture Hop

O’Brien Community Center
in Winooski on Mallett’s Bay
Avenue

August 13, 2009
4 to 6 p.m.

Come for a community BBQ for the
Winooski and Burlington communities.
There will be exhibits and art at the center.

Contact Sister Pat for more
information or to volunteer at the event at
Pat.McKittrick@vtmednet.org.



photo by Karin Johnson

Vermont's Immigrant History

by Vincent Feeney

We welcome Vincent Feeney, author of *Vermont: An Illustrated History*, as a guest columnist for "A Crack in the Rock." His new book *Finnigans, Slaters and Stonepeppers: A History of the Irish in Vermont* will come out this fall. Feeney's future articles will explore the experiences of successive waves of immigrants who contributed to making the Green Mountain State what it is today.

Because Vermont is a sparsely populated agricultural state it does not readily come to mind when one thinks of the immigrant experience in America. The popular picture of the immigrant story in the United States is of New York streets teeming with newcomers at the turn of the twentieth century or of Victorian San Francisco's business and commercial districts populated by new arrivals from China and Japan and other lands across the Pacific. The recent immigrant who finds him or herself in Vermont may well wonder if they are the first "greenhorns" to find themselves in the Green Mountain State. They may wonder if they will ever fit in — will they ever become Vermonters? Well, the simple answer is yes, they will fit in, and they will become Vermonters.

History says so. People from all over the world have been coming to Vermont for the past two hundred years. The history books are only now beginning to wake up to the fact that Vermont has been welcoming people to its borders for a long time. In fact, any Vermonter whose ancestry is not Native American had forefathers who came from distant lands. Vermonters are, as Eleanor Roosevelt once famously said of the United States, a nation of immigrants. Immigration to Vermont began even before there was a Vermont. In 1772 when Ira Allen, a native of Connecticut and youngest brother of our state's almost mythical hero, Ethan Allen, first explored the northernmost reaches of the Green Mountains, he found a Dutch couple living in the Champlain islands and a grizzly old Frenchman named Mallet living a hermit-like existence on the shores of the bay that would be named for him. And just before Ira's arrival there had been a couple of Germans living on what today is Shelburne Point, although they seem to have perished at the hands of some robbers from Quebec. Across the lake just south of present day Plattsburg an

Irishman named William Gilliland who had served in the British army during the French and Indian War (1756-1763) established a colony of Irish Protestants and acquired additional lands in the Champlain islands. In the 1770s a group of Irish settlers from Scots-Presbyterian backgrounds established the town of Londonderry in south central Vermont. This influx of new people from different lands continued through the period when Vermont was an independent republic, 1777 to 1791. In an attempt to encourage settlement Vermont's government went so far as to encourage a group of Scots to leave their native land and settle in Ryegate, on the northeastern side of the state. Thus even in its earliest days Vermont had its immigrants and they were ethnically diverse, although it was a diversity that was all white and almost exclusively European in its origins. And unlike later immigrants who came to the United States and faced an often hostile, entrenched, old Yankee society,

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Staff News

Join us in welcoming our new interns to VRRP for the summer.

Volunteer Department:

Andrea Luxenberg
from Bucknell University

Aileen Ozay
from University of Vermont

Employment:

Vivian Baird-Zars
from Smith College

VRRP STAFF PHONE DIRECTORY

| | | |
|------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------|
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| Htun Sein | Staff Interpreter | 802-654-1728 |
| Jacqueline Rose | Coordinator of Interpreting Services | 802-654-1706 |
| Jenelle Eli | Employment Counselor | 802-654-1717 |
| Judy Scott | Director | 802-654-1700 |
| Karin Johnson | AmeriCorps*VISTA Volunteer Office | 802-338-4632 |
| Kristen McCaskey | Employment Counsellor | 802-338-4625 |
| Laurie Stavrand | Coordinator of Volunteer Services | 802-338-4627 |
| Loan Nguyen | Financial Support Specialist | 802-654-1701 |
| Matt Thompson | Coordinator of Programs | 802-654-1705 |
| Melissa Lang | ELT Coordinator | 802-654-1704 |
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| Shawna Wakeham | AmeriCorps*VISTA ELT Office | 802-655-2656 |
| Supriya Serchan | Case Manager | 802-654-1716 |
| Tam Truong | Accountant | 802-654-1733 |
| Volunteers and Interns | Volunteer Office | 802-338-4633 |
| Wendy Reid | Relationship Enrichment Coordinator | 802-338-4628 |

*e-mail addresses follow this pattern: Laurie Stavrand = lstavrand@uscrvt.org
(Exception: Volunteer Office = volunteer@uscrvt.org)*

Bike Recycle Vermont

by Emily Eschner

Since August of 2008, I've been the AmeriCorps VISTA serving at Bike



R e c y c l e
V e r m o n t
(BRV), a small non-profit in Burlington's Old North End. BRV was found-

ed almost five years ago by long-time Burlington resident Ron Manganiello, as he began fixing up bikes to provide transportation for Somali Bantu refugees. What started as a small operation in Manganiello's yard quickly grew and connected with two other existing greater Burlington non-profits, Local Motion and Good News Garage. Local Motion - a pedestrian and bicycle advocacy organization - adopted BRV as one of its main programs while Good News Garage - which provides low-income families with vehicles - donated a perfect shop facility for BRV in its basement.

BRV's core mission is to provide affordable, reliable, and sustainable transportation to Vermonters with limited financial resources via refurbished bicycles. For \$20, we provide a bike, helmet, lock, and blinking light to our clients, who must receive or qualify for public benefits recognized by the federal government, such as Food Stamps, Reach Up or Section 8 Housing.

Our two other key areas of focus are education and waste reduction. Vermonters who have bikes that they no longer want or need donate them to us to be refurbished. Each bike that comes through our doors is used to its fullest potential. If the frame of the bike itself isn't useful, we strip any salvageable parts to use on other projects. Any rubber, plastic, or metal beyond use is recycled through Chittenden Solid Waste District.

BRV staff trains both youth and adult volunteers to help us throughout the repairing and recycling process. Individuals and groups of volunteers

come to us from the greater Burlington area and from established partnerships with several schools and social service organizations. Many of the youth we work with don't perform their best in "traditional" academic settings but find that they have an affinity for doing physical and mechanical work with their bodies and hands.

We also offer a program called Earn-A-Bike, in which youth ages eight to 18 can exchange a minimum of ten hours of their time and service for a bike. We are currently restructuring this program to include more of a curriculum from which kids can learn and take away basic bike repair and maintenance skills.

Since its establishment, BRV has worked closely with VRRP. A large percentage of our customers - about a third - are resettled refugees living in Burlington and Winooski. As a VRRP family friend volunteer with a Bhutanese family, I have

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Tanzania gives Burundian refugees more time to return home *from UNHCR*

UNHCR, June 30, 2009 - This is a summary of what was said by UNHCR spokesperson William Spindler - to whom quoted text may be attributed - at the press briefing, on 30 June 2009, at the Palais des Nations in Geneva.

UNHCR has welcomed a decision by the Tanzanian government to give more time for the voluntary repatriation of some 36,000 Burundian camp-based refugees.

The Mtabila refugee camp in Kasulu district in north-western Tanzania, the last remaining camp hosting Burundian refugees in the country, was scheduled for closure today, 30 June, when all its residents were expected to voluntarily repatriate home.

However, on June 20 - World Refugee Day - the Tanzanian Minister of Home Affairs, Hon. Lawrence Masha, announced that more time will be given to the Burundians, who have been

refugees in the country since 1990s, to go back to Burundi.

The refugees will now have the chance to plan their return home during the traditional high season for repatriation which runs to the end of September.

The Minister also reiterated that no refugee will be forcibly returned and reaffirmed his government's commitment to uphold international laws and standards relating to the protection of refugees.

The Burundian peace process has paved the way for the return of one of Africa's longest staying refugee populations. Since 2002, UNHCR has assisted the voluntary repatriation of over 485,000 Burundian refugees from the neighbouring countries of Tanzania, DRC and Rwanda.

Over the last 37 years, Burundi's conflict has triggered waves of displacement,

making the central African nation one of the biggest refugee producing countries in the world.

The remaining 36,000 refugees in Mtabila camp fled to Tanzania to escape the ethnic violence in Burundi in the last 16 years.

In addition, there are the "1972" Burundian refugees in three 'old settlements' in Rukwa and Tabora regions in western Tanzania. In a landmark decision in 2008, the Tanzanian government gave a choice to these refugees to return home or apply for Tanzanian citizenship.

Some 165,000 of them decided to stay and applied for naturalisation, while another 55,000 opted to return to Burundi. Of these, some 40,000 have returned home with the help of UNHCR and the remaining 15,000 are registered to repatriate to their homeland before the end of year.

Burmese Matriarch
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While in the camps, Ah Chan worked as a midwife. She received training while in the camp in order to assist expectant mothers. Limited resources made it difficult to provide adequate care to mothers during labor but, in spite of this, she helped many women to give birth to a new generation in the camp.

Ah Chan contemplated her family's future. Returning to Burma was not an option. Her family's land had been occupied by soldiers for a long time, and the situation in Thailand was not improving. When she was offered the option to resettle in a third country, she knew that it was the best decision for her family.

Ah Chan arrived in Burlington with one of her daughters. They were the first of her family to come to the United States. Upon arrival, she knew that she had everything to learn about this new place and she determined to do her best to provide opportunity to her children and grandchildren.

Ah Chan shared that, after one year of life in the United States, the top priority for her family is to continue to support themselves and for the children to receive a good education. With the help of VRRP and the Vermont community, Ah Chan's family has been provided opportunities that were not possible in the camps in Thailand. Her sons now work at local farms and businesses to support their families. Her grandchildren go to school and are rapidly learning English.

Ah Chan commented that, before coming to the United States, she was scared about what it was going to be like here but, with the help and guidance of the VRRP staff, her family has what they need. She's very



satisfied and happy with her family's success in the United States.

Though Ah Chan has limited English ability, I have found that she has connected with staff, volunteers, and the community in a special way. She greets people warmly with genuine hugs and laughs and is delighted to see each one. She is a respected member of our community. Knowing such an extraordinary individual benefits each of us lucky enough to come into contact with her.

VRRP says Goodbye to Marcia Stone

by Karin Johnson

To work at VRRP, you have to have a good sense of humor and creative ways to manage the stress that can sometimes come with this line of work. Marcia's great laugh and a sarcasm that can lighten anyone's somber mood, touched staff, community members and countless members of our refugee community. We will truly miss her.

Marcia always greeted clients with a big smile, how are you and often a little joke. She gave big hugs, sometimes to clients who I never thought would allow it, but it was Marcia! Why wouldn't they?

My time here working at VRRP would truly not be the same without Marcia. She has guided me through my journey as an AmeriCorps VISTA here at VRRP and I will always know her as one of my great mentors.

Marcia is truly loved here and we will miss her dearly. Marcia will not be a stranger, however. She will continue her work with refugees and we hope to see her often!

World Refugee Day Thank You

We would like to thank all those who shared our World Refugee Day celebration for making the day a great success.

Great thanks go to our many contributors:

- | | |
|--------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|
| American Flatbread | Rhino Foods |
| City Market | Samosaman |
| Champlain Orchard | Shaw's |
| Costco | Shelburne Orchards |
| Euro Market | South Burlington H.S. |
| The Fiddleheads | Sweet Clover Market |
| Green Mountain Coffee Roasters | Unitarian Universalist Church |
| Hannaford's | Vermont Teddy Bear Co. |
| Healthy Living | Wal-Mart |
| Jeh Kulu | Zachary's Pizza |
| Klinger's Bread | |
| Leonardo's Pizza | and the many, many families who cooked the donated food! |
| Magnolia Bistro | |
| McDonald's | |
| NPC Processing | |

Bike Recycle Vermont
Continued from page 5

had the opportunity to get to know many Bhutanese, as well as Burmese and Somalis, by face, name, or both. As I write this article, I have two Bhutanese youth on their way to earning a bike of their own. I have witnessed firsthand the difference a bike can make in the life of a new American - opening doors for employment, errands, community exploration, and recreation. Bikes are some of the first tools of independence in a new country!

BRV is open Tuesday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. for volunteers and donors and from 1 to 5 p.m. for customers. If you are interested in donating a bike, volunteering, or helping someone you know get a bike, contact us at 264-9687. You can also visit us online at bikerecyclevermont.com.



by Karin Johnson

Family, friends, and VRRP staff gathered late one night with case manager Mukiza Noel to greet his wife at the Burlington airport. After being separated for nearly two years, they were finally reunited when she arrived from Tanzania. We are all very grateful to Susan Sussman, of Senator Patrick Leahy's office, for her assistance in bringing the refugee community a much needed Kirundi, Swahili, and French interpreter and in bringing Mukiza his wife.

Vermont's Immigrant History
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the early newcomers to Vermont faced little opposition. The Native Americans, primarily Abenaki Indians, who might have resisted the encroachments of European immigrants on their land, had been so decimated by disease and incessant warfare between France and England prior to 1770, that their numbers had been reduced to a fraction of their former strength. They could offer little resistance. A frontier land, there was no established society in Vermont to resist growing waves of newcomers, whether they were immigrants coming directly from Europe, or internal immigrants from other New England states.

Ethnic diversity is at the heart of being American. In the 1780s, a transplanted Frenchman living in New York, John Hector St. John de Crevecoeur, wrote a book titled Letters From an American Farmer in which he asked the question, "What is an American?" Americans, he answered, were a people of many religious faiths and diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds. As it is with America, so it is with Vermont.

In future articles we will look at Vermont's experience with immigrants and immigrants' experience with Vermont.



photo by Karin Johnson

Out of a Crack

Continued from page 1

I hadn't had my children's achievements to give me heart?

How can Aung San Suu Kyi be patient with unremitting obstacles being placed in her path in the most diabolically Sisyphian manner while I get impatient in the face of rainy weather or reduced economic security or events not going according to my plan? I think that the answer is that she has developed a different form of patience that I, and most of us in this country, have yet to learn. Our current difficult times demand that we learn that form of patience. Those of us who do learn it are the ones who will lead our country out of the tough times we're in. That form of patience can teach us how to find strength and purpose in spite of the anxiety and insecurity in our communities.

There are many former refugees here, in our own community, who have learned this form of patience. There is a Somali Bantu man who, after a lifetime of oppression by a system that treated his people as second class citizens, is now working as a liaison in the public schools to open up equal opportunity for families who, were they all still living in Somalia, would follow the old discriminatory ways. It is this form of patience that carries newcomers

through the adjustments that new growth requires.

There is the other Burmese woman I mentioned above, who has settled here as a refugee. Her losses have been enormous. When the army descended on her village to impose a lifetime of forced labor and sexual slavery on her children, she gathered them and ran with the rest of the villagers while soldiers were shooting at them. They didn't all escape. Those who surrendered were captured and worked to death. Those who were wounded were left to die. The others had never been so far into the jungle and knew only the direction, but not the way, to get to Thailand. She followed a stream so they'd have water even when they couldn't find food. When they woke up one morning to find that the fish in the stream were dead, she realized that the soldiers had poisoned the stream and had to prevent her desperately thirsty children from drinking. These experiences taught her a form of patience that she uses now to help others through the enormous adjustments they must make to become a part of their new community.

Over 400 people joined us for the World Refugee Day celebration. The great majority were people who came to the U.S. as refugees over the course of the last ten years. They brought food and music to share. Others were service

providers and VRRP staff and volunteers whose lives have become intertwined with the lives of the "newcomers." It was great to talk with so many different kinds of people: a young man who's learned so much from volunteering with refugees that he's committed to a career in social service, a young woman who was in a refugee camp five years ago but has now graduated from high school with two scholarships to help her go to college, a middle-aged woman who's been working in environmental services (cleaning) at Fletcher-Allen for the past three years and has only one semester left before she receives her nursing degree, an older woman holding hands with a toddler who said that this has been the best, most surprising and rewarding, hardest volunteer job she's ever had, a single mom who told me about all her current struggles and then pulled out her brand new first driver's license and laughed to see how thrilled I was.

Talking with people, I saw opportunities being opened. I saw people learning from each other though no one was trying to teach. I saw the dynamic of people coming up against something new and giving birth to better ways of doing things. I saw what was for me a new form of patience: a determination in the face of adversity. Learning that quality is just what our country needs.

Burmese Leader Aung Saan Suu Kyi

By Judy Scott

You may have heard about her because she was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1991 when Francis Sejested, then Chairman of the Nobel Peace Prize Committee, described her as, "an outstanding example of the power of the powerless." You may have read one of her books, [Freedom from Fear and Other Writings](#) or [Voices of Hope: Conversations](#). Or you may have heard about her in the news. In 1990, her political party won 82% of the vote but the military regime in Burma refused to allow her to take the office of the Presidency.

Her father, General Aung San, fought for Burma's independence and was assassinated six months before independence was won. Though she grew up fatherless, she was inspired by his dream of a democratic future for their country. She went to

Oxford University in 1964, where she studied philosophy, politics, and economics. There she met and married her husband, a professor. They raised two sons and it appeared that she would live out her life there.

She returned to Burma in 1988 to care for her mother who was seriously ill. At that time, the country was in the midst of turmoil. Monks, students, and office workers by the thousands were calling for reforms that would lead to democracy.

"I could not, as my father's daughter, remain indifferent to all that was going on," she said that year in a speech in Rangoon. She was propelled to become the leader of the non-violent pro-democracy movement in Burma, inspired by her studies of Martin Luther King Jr. and Mahatma Gandhi. The government responded by sentencing her to prison and house arrest by turns. For 11 of the past 19 years, this regime has forced her

into some sort of imprisonment or detention. When her husband died of prostate cancer, they had not been permitted to see each other for more than three years.

Through those years, she has been the soul of patience, advocating non-violent resistance to one of the most brutal military regimes in history. Though she has been forced to remain physically apart from her people, her religious leaders, and her family, she is revered as the elemental mother of all Burmese people, no matter what their ethnicity, language, or religion.

For more information about her, go to <http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/em/fr/-/2/hi/asia-pacific/1950505.stm>

http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/1991/press.html

<http://www.thefamouspeople.com/profiles/aung-san-suu-kyi-11.php>

community buzz

Volunteers: What Are You Learning? Share a few words with others!

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 Karin at 338-4632 or kjohnson@uscrvt.org.

Thank you to Emily Eschner for her contribution this month.

Urgent Donation Needs at VRRP

We are in need of certain items to help provide for our new families:

**twin and full beds, dressers,
kitchen tables and chairs, couches,
kitchen items** (glasses, plates, knives, pots, pans),
linens (towels, twin and full sheets, blankets)

Please call the Volunteer Office with any donations at 338-4633.

Volunteer Orientation

Volunteer Orientations provide a wonderful opportunity to learn more about our organization, our volunteer program, and volunteer opportunities. Laurie and Karin 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 orientation is mandatory before beginning service, they are also a great time for new and veteran volunteers to check in with VRRP staff.

Upcoming Orientations:

Thursday July 23 from 5:30 to 7 p.m

We look forward to seeing you there!
If you have any questions contact Karin at 338-4632
or kjohnson@uscrvt.org

New Speaker Series

Let us know which topics are of most interest to you for workshops beginning in the fall. A few thoughts:

1. DCF- Department of Children and Families
2. WIC - Women, Infants and Children Program
3. Lead Poisoning Housing Issues

email Laurie Stavrand with suggestions and comments at lstavrand@uscrvt.org

Fuel Assistance Applications

Applications for fuel assistance are being distributed now. Those who received fuel assistance last year will receive applications in the mail.

For new arrivals, applications must be obtained. Please contact Karin at kjohnson@uscrvt.org to request an application.

Applications due by August 31 to be eligible to receive the full benefit.

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.)