

# *In Their Own Words* Exhibition Excerpt Text

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## Contents

Abdi	2
Admir and Sabina	4
Alex	6
Aziza	8
Binh	10
Dalabor	12
David and Jean-Luc	14
Faustine	16
James	18
John	20
Malinga and Cléophaçe	22
Nedzad and Nevzeta	24
Victoria	26

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## **Adbi Somalia**

I came here with my two sisters and one of my older brothers—we were four people. My brother doesn't live with us. He's old enough and he lives alone. My sisters and I lived together, but one of my sisters got married last year. She lives in Maine right now. She has two kids already. I live here with my older sister, Maryan. She is around twenty-six, and she has seven kids. She was the oldest one, you know. She was like my mom—she was the one who raised me. She means a lot to me. My parents, I never see them. I was five years old the last time I saw them. I don't even remember them that much.

I don't remember much from living in Somalia. I was little then. All I know is there was a war, and a lot of people were getting killed, and a lot of people were raping women. We walked from Somalia to Kenya. It took just forever to get there. We didn't have any food to eat. All we had was only the trees where we were getting apples. We were drinking the dirty water because we didn't have anything else to drink. When the war started, everybody just started running away immediately. We didn't even have enough time to wait for my parents and to find out where they were. My family—they thought we were dead—the four of us. They thought we were dead and we were thinking they were dead, too.

When we got to the first refugee camp, we didn't have any houses. They gave us tents—they gave out one to each family. So that was our home until we started building a house. We built our own. What we did was go in the forest and cut a lot of trees. Our house was not that big—we couldn't afford to have a big house because we had to build it. We put a lot of trees together to make a circle, and at the end we put some wood and some grasses to make a little cover. We had a lot of long grass over there, so we put it on top to make a roof. That's all we had to use and that's how most of the houses were made. It wasn't really that good of a house to live in, but it was better than the tent.

We were actually getting some help from the UN High Commission of Refugees. We would get some food from them. It was once a month, so if you ate it all before that, you wouldn't have any other food to eat. The food was actually not enough for the month. We were staying hungry for like two days. Then we would try and work and get a little more food. Everybody knew they were going to die because of hunger, so no one was even eating that much. We were eating just once a day—just a little bit for the whole day, and then the next day just a little bit more. We knew if we ran out there was going to be no way to find food, so we forced ourselves to eat a really small amount all month—to not run out of food.

That was a really big change—when we got here, we had food all the time. All you have to do is go to the grocery store and get whatever you want. That’s a really good thing about food: when you get enough, everybody gets full.

*Abdi (Left)*

*The Qur’ān, Sūrata’l-Baqarah, Ayah 255 (Middle)*

*Abdi’s sister, Maryan (Right)*

## **Admir and Sabina Bosnia**

Admir: I married Sabina before the war. I think it was one year before the start of the war in 1991. Sabina lived before in Srebrenica. I went and took her and she came to live with me in my house maybe 55 km away, in Vlasenica. Our families were close to one another. Our life was normal; we lived like normal people. We had a house; I worked, and Sabina stayed home. I worked just like I work here. If you work more, you would have more; if you worked less, you would have less.

The war started in 1991. Sabina's family was in Srebrenica, like always, and she was with me and my family in Vlasenica. They just started messing with the Muslim people, treating them really badly. They took people for no reason to jail. Some people came back home, some people didn't. They just started treating people badly everyday. So we decided that we couldn't do anything about it. We knew that a lot of people had died, so we just decided to go to Tuzla. So my dad stayed in Vlasenica with my grandmother. Sabina's mom, dad and her brothers stayed in Srebrenica because they couldn't come to Tuzla. In Srebrenica, no one could move, no one could go anywhere.

Nobody wanted to lose their head; there were a lot of problems. Every night we were listening to some soldiers walking around the house. Not just my house, a lot of peoples' houses. Everyday we didn't have food; we didn't eat. You know you don't have too much food because it's war—it's a problem. Nobody worked and the stores were closed. Some people had enough of what they needed for the house, but they didn't share. After one month, I could see this was no good. I didn't want to lose my family: me, my wife, and Ismet—ten months old. I say, "Okay, Sabina's cousin is coming; we are going to Tuzla because in Tuzla it's safe." The war wasn't close to Tuzla, maybe around 100 miles. Tuzla and Vlasenica are like 100 miles away. It was definitely safer. So, Sabina's cousin drove us to Tuzla in his truck. There were maybe a hundred people in the truck. Not just my family, but a lot of families.

*Sabina: It was a pretty big truck, and there were over 100 people in the truck. It was one of those trucks with the covers, not made out of metal. Some of the men were changing into females' clothes and dressing up as females so that the soldiers wouldn't take them off of the truck. The soldiers stopped the truck. They were looking for certain people. But, there were more buses, so they told us we could go. In our truck, the soldiers didn't touch anybody. They just went into it and looked through who was there, and then they just let us go. They didn't touch us.*

*I didn't feel good of course. I left my family; I left my house; I left everything. I thought we were going to get killed, and Ismet was going to get killed because he was small. I was never sure what was going to happen from Vlasenica to Tuzla. I never knew, because anything could happen. I didn't even know I was going to leave that day. We just got everything together and left.*

*Admir (Left)*

*Their son, Ismet (Middle)*

*Sabina (Right)*

## Alex Sudan

First of all, what I would like to talk about is the life of a refugee. The most important thing, even if you are a refugee or if you are just in a different country—what you need to have is your identity. You don't need to forget your culture. Whatever culture you came from, or whatever background you came from, you should not be ashamed. You have to keep your originality. Physically somebody can change, but mentally you still remember home and where you came from.

Here in the United States you have the opportunity to practice your own culture or own background of where you lived. They aren't taking that away from you, so you have that freedom. As soon as you become a refugee, you don't have to say, "I am a refugee; I am in a foreign land; I have to behave like the others—how they behave." You have to respect other people and their culture. If there is any conflict of interest between them, you have to figure out which one is really better for you, instead of jumping to something you didn't know about, and at the end you come to regret it. Identity is important. You have to keep yourself and your confidence for what you are doing or what you are getting into.

[...]

So when people come here they are really stressed. What you went through—for how many years before you come here—it is no surprise. Sometimes you see some people who are not able to talk in front of you because they don't know exactly what is going on—are they talking to the right person; can they help them or not? There is a lot of debate in your own mind just to learn when you should be worried or not.

The thing here is—why people are struggling with each other—it's just a matter of understanding and fear. How can we break those pieces? When you break the ice into pieces, that's the only way you have to have an approach. Don't get scared of someone, talk—talk more. The more you speak out, the more somebody will hear you and you'll get what you need. I think that will help us. A human being is a human being. We are the same—what differs for us is only the culture. Our mentality, our intelligence, is the same.

For instance, when you have somebody new into your community, you don't know that person. The first thing you can do is bring that person closer to you. For example, if somebody knocks at your door, you don't ignore it, you go and open it and see what that person wants. Maybe they need help; maybe they came to the wrong address or

something like that. You have to get some information on what they need. So that's the same thing with the refugees. They don't know anybody here; they are just knocking at the door of everybody in Vermont—they are knocking at their doors. Then if you open your door, it means that you open for them. But, when you open the door it means you have to go see what they need. Maybe somebody needs help; maybe they don't need help—they will let you know. Then from there, that is how the friendship starts. For example, if you want to learn about me—how will you learn? You have to come closer. At least there has to be something—a goal to bring us together, to motivate us to.

*Alex (Left)*

*Board member, volunteer, co-founder (Middle)*

*Serving food at the AALV picnic (Right)*

## **Aziza Uzbekistan (Ahiska Turkish)**

Then in 1989, the politicians again started to spread around this old movement about how there were people from a different culture in their territory. So it started all over again, from the place we had moved once, now it came back again. It was the government of Uzbekistan. Even though the President of Uzbekistan was very friendly to the Turkish people, there was a majority working against him. So he was forced to follow the majority and they voted to make the foreign people leave—it didn't apply just to the Turkish people, there were Russian people and they wanted them out too. They wanted only to preserve just the Uzbekistani people.

The Uzbekistani people reacted differently to this—some people did not agree with this decision—some people loved us. They were like family—they were our friends. But some people decided that we had to go. So what they started to burn our houses and damage our farms. They tried to make our lives miserable, thinking that we would go find somewhere else to live. In some cases, the local Uzbekistani people would hide Turkish people in their houses, because they could even be killed. I was pregnant when all of this was happening.

In all of the newspapers—and all of the conversations—we were hearing that the Turkish people had to go. We couldn't live in a community where nobody wanted us. Unlike before when my parents left Georgia, this time they let us choose where to go. They just wanted us to choose our own place to go—and go. So again we closed our house, leaving everything but the luggage, and we left.

[...]

Early in the morning—I remember we left early in the morning. I didn't even say goodbye to my parents. I just took my children, my husband, and we left. I couldn't say goodbye to them because of the quarantine. I couldn't leave my house and travel to another village because the police were in control. That is why I didn't say goodbye to anyone. They would let us go to Russia, but we couldn't go to the next village. But, as long as it was a different country, you could go. They even gave us tickets for the airplane if we agreed to go to Russia.

All I took with me was one change of clothes—whatever we had on and maybe one dress for myself and one for each of the children. I also took one cup, and one spoon for each child and for each family member, one fork. I had money in the bank, but I didn't even

collect the money. Only after two years, when things had settled down, I came back and I was able to get the money.

So again we were in a foreign land—Russian land—where we didn't speak the language. After two months of living in Russia, the people from Uzbekistan looked for us and said, "Come back to us. We don't wish you bad, it was just the government." The reason why the Uzbekistani people came and looked for us after we left was because no one wanted to go work in the cotton fields. They missed us then because they needed a working class. Even the government admitted that it had been a bad idea, but the Turkish people were mad at them and we decided that we were not coming back.

We have a general rule—we say, "Never look back, only look forward." So since this happened we decide to make the best of the situation. In general, we are very friendly people no matter what happens to us, but at that time we still didn't have our Motherland. We were moving one place to another, and deep down we all missed it. Our hearts are in our Motherland.

*Aziza (Left)*

*Turkish wedding tradition (Middle)*

*Family photos (Right)*

## **Binh Vietnam**

When we started to run we left from the house. I was lucky. My husband went back to find some water for our son. That's why my husband and my son got killed. At that time the two groups of people, the Communists and the Republic of Vietnam, they were fighting together, and they started bombing. But my husband went back. If he had just followed me, he wouldn't have died, but he wanted to get some water for our son.

I ran to the forest to hide from the bombing. When I went into the forest I had only Loan. We had no water. I was two months in the forest just with Loan. A lot of people died in the forest because they didn't have enough water. We had the banana tree, so we could take the water from the banana. Also, there was one kind of snail in the forest. I took the snail and put it in the soldier's helmet. I used the rocks to make a fire pit, and of course in the forest you can find dry tree branches. So I cooked—I boiled the snail and water came out from the snail. I drank that water. That was one of the only ways to get water—and the banana—and also there was a special kind of leaf on a tree. That one has a sour taste. So, I took all kinds of these and just tried to eat them to take the water from the leaves. Water came out from the leaves.

At nighttime, I would sleep with the dead bodies. There was bombing. People just died on the road or everywhere, but nobody was digging the graves. No people were doing that.

[...]

When I came here my life was easier. So I am always thankful to America because my life changed. Life here is easier than in Vietnam—compare the money I make. If you go to work at the factory, or anywhere, you earn the same money like everyone. But in my country it's different; it's really different. If you find the firewood and you sell it, it's up to you, you are the street vendor. You do it by yourself and no one is saying, "This has to be this price." But here everything has a law and has a price. So everyone is making money—putting it down for the rent. Then we still have money left to save in the bank and also I can send some back to Vietnam to help my relatives.

The hardest thing about moving to Vermont was the language barrier. I don't know how to read and write. When I went to work, I didn't know anything and they spoke English with me. It was really hard. At first I worked at Lake Champlain Chocolates and then my second job was at Gordini. I worked at Lake Champlain Chocolates for three years and then Gordini for ten years. I can't work now because of my legs. I cannot walk

sometimes. I can't get out from my bed. The doctor just recommend for me not to work, so I get SSI benefits. I became a U.S. citizen in July of 2007. I felt so happy, so proud. I did not sleep very well because I was worried. I didn't sleep well for two months before the interview.

Four of my children came with me to the United States and all of them are doing successfully. The son who helped me collect the wood is now the owner of a nail salon and they are doing a very good business. All that time I was in Vietnam and then the United States—I never thought to get married. I thought only of taking care of my family. Now that I am here living with my children and grand children, I think this is the greatest pleasure of my life.

*Binh (Left)*

*Binh and Loan in Vietnam (Middle)*

*Binh with Loan and her two grandchildren (Right)*

## **Dalabor Bosnia**

I remember I was selling vegetables. I would buy them and then resell them. I was just working for myself on the street, just selling certain things to make some money. I'm not going to call it the "black market," but stuff like that. That was just for a little while. But my normal day was just—you know we didn't have a lot of activities because we would really try and minimize being out of the house. Around my place we would just hang around and I was playing soccer like three times a week. We had one place where we would play inside. Sometimes we would have to stop that because the missiles would start coming again. We'd stop, go home, and then come back maybe two days later.

Sometimes I was outside when the missiles would come down. We could hear when the bombs were coming because we would hear a "POP," and we knew it was coming in twenty seconds. When I was walking on the street I would crouch down and cover my head with my hands. Sometimes it would hit a mile from me or maybe a half-mile. One time a bomb hit right in front of my window. I was living on the first floor of a building, and it hit right beside the building. It damaged all my windows, and the pieces went into the house and onto the furniture. I was sitting in front of the building at that point. There were a few stairs and I was sitting on them. I heard when they sent the bomb, and I walked into my house and laid down on the floor between two couches. When it hit it crashed all the windows. If I had decided not to go inside—if I said, "Ah I don't care, it won't hit here"—well it hit there. It was all smoke, I couldn't see for a couple minutes. I was lucky then.

It was not a nice feeling, and every time I heard the sound there was something in the pit of my stomach. Some people would lie down in the street. I would just crouch down, and then I'd hear the big explosion. Sometimes it would land really close to me—one, two, three hundred yards. We just got used to it. In Vermont if there was snow for twenty or thirty days you'd just get used to it—you don't care. It's the same feeling with the bombing.

Sometimes I feel that we really appreciate being here more than native Vermonters do because you don't have that feeling. You were born here and probably your grandfather was living this way, and your father and you will do it with your kids. You guys don't know what is the opposite way. That's why when I hear some people complaining about something—I'm good, compared to what I've been through ten or fifteen years ago. I just remember that, and it makes me feel good.

One time something happened—it was April 1993. We didn't have malls. We had a big building, and when you walked in there were two or three floors with stores all around. It's not like the mall where you walk in and everything is on one level. I was working in front of that store, and I had a little table. We had a lot of tables—they let us do that. There were a lot of people selling candies and stuff. You didn't have to have a store to do that. It was just to let people make some money. That was a really popular place. There were a lot of bars and cafes around—and bakeries and fast food. And one day, it was April 19th, I decided not to go that day to sell stuff. I didn't feel—I just said, "I'm going to take the day off today; I just don't want to go." That day nineteen people were killed in front of that store. It was a bomb, a missile. They sent it out and nineteen people died. It was a nice Spring day—short sleeves—everybody went out. That's what they were waiting for. That day if I had been there I would have been killed. That day—I don't know, something told me not to go. And what is bad about it is all three religions got killed. You know what I'm saying, all three religions. The bomb doesn't ask you, "What is your name?" It doesn't tell us what we are on our foreheads.

*Dalabor (Left)*

*Certificate of Organization for A Taste of Europe (Middle)*

*Baking the day's bread at 6:30 AM (Right)*

## David and Jean-Luc Rwanda

David: To get across the Congo River everything began in Mubutu, when we got to a bridge. That was a very small bridge. You can't image—you've got the bridge, you've got like a million people fighting to get to the bridge, and nobody can see the bridge. No, you can't see it. In your mind the bridge is full of people, but when you get close you see that nobody is walking on the bridge.

*Jean-Luc: At the entrance to the bridge there were soldiers with sticks, just hitting people. They said, "You have to have organization! Make small groups!" Because the bridge was so small, if everybody went onto the bridge it was going to collapse.*

When I saw the bridge I went back. I was worried—I didn't know where Jean-Luc and Mom were. I was just crying you know. I went back into the people and when I got in the middle there was too much pressure. There was a guy carrying a baby that was newborn—the same day. And I saw the baby was starting to die, and there was too much pressure on me too. So I see the baby start to die—the baby was dying! I just took the guy, and I started to move, "Get out of the way, the baby's going to die." I pushed the guy—I pushed the guy and people started to make room to give us the way. And we moved—we moved—we moved. I pushed the guy—pushed the guy, and we just—we went and we got out.

*The thing is, I had to make my way through those people, so I made myself like a security guy. I took a stick and said, "Move! Move! Move!" I had to move through the people. You say, "People, move!" But they can't move because there were so many people—carrying stuff on their heads, everybody standing, people making noise. So you have to start going through peoples' legs. We were getting scared because we could hear bombs.*

I saw a guy, a friend of my uncle's who was in the army. He was carrying his family, trying to get his family over the bridge. When we went together to the bridge, a guy came to protect us. When we got in the middle of the bridge, I saw Jean-Luc in the front of the people, and I told the guy, "Hey, Jean-Luc is over there." He got him and Jean-Luc crossed the bridge. After we crossed the bridge, we spent five to ten minutes getting some rest, and then we said, "Ok, we hope Mom and the other people we came with crossed the bridge." We took a walk to the top of a hill, trying to find if anyone had crossed the bridge. When we got to the top, we heard people start to shoot—BANG! BANG! BANG!—around us they were shooting. So we started to run. We ran, ran, ran. At that time when you heard people shooting, the best thing was to run, and think about stuff later. So we ran, and I saw a guy, a guy I knew. I asked him, "Did you see my

mom.” He said, “Yeah I don’t know, somebody started to shoot on the bridge, and we didn’t know why, but I think your mom is dead.” He said that, and we started to cry—Jean-Luc and me. We cried—ran and cried. We spent three days walking, walking away. We walked like 100 miles from Mubutu to a small town located at 100 kilometers from Kisanghi. We needed to stop to sleep—we hadn’t slept those three days. When we got there—the day after—Mom came with our sister and the baby. They said they reached the bridge when the shooting started. My mom held my sister and they jumped in the river.

*David and Jean-Luc (Left)*

*A path through the forest (Middle)*

*Young brothers in Kigali (Right)*

## **Faustine Rwanda (Burundian)**

When I got into Tanzania, life was really hard. I went to a refugee camp and we were together with Burundians and Rwandese in that refugee camp. Then there came a time when the government decided to separate Rwandese and Burundians. They wanted to take all the Rwandese back to Rwanda. One day they sent the tanks and soldiers into the refugee camp to get all the Rwandese out of the camp. So the only thing you had to do was show your ID. If you were from Burundi, you were lucky. If you didn't have an ID and you were from Burundi, they were just going to take you back to Rwanda. When they came into the refugee camp and they were asking for that identification, sometimes they would go inside your small house, and if they found nice pants or nice shoes, they would take them. Finally, I started to think that life in Rwanda was better than in Tanzania. That was in 1995 until 1996. Once all of the Rwandese were back in Rwanda, they brought all of us Burundians to another refugee camp. The other refugee camp was filled with Burundian refugees that had come directly from Burundi, not from Rwanda.

When we got to that camp, we were speaking different versions of Kirundi—the Burundian language. For us, we were raised in Rwanda, so our Kirundi was more like Kinyarwanda—the language in Rwanda. The rest of them were speaking a really strong Kirundi because they had just arrived a few years ago in 1993. They were really true Burundians. So things got really tough for us living there because that group of Burundians considered us to be from Rwanda. They said, “You are not Burundian; you are just Rwandese because you don't speak Kirundi.” Those people denied that we were Burundian, even when we told them where we were from—the town, the street. They said, “No, you are not Burundian, so we don't want you going back in Burundi. You have to go back into Rwanda where you are from.” It was confusing because people started to argue about the land they owned in Burundi, or the land their parents owned, the houses, etc. They tried to tell us that we didn't have a right to these things—but anyway, both groups were in the refugee camp and nobody could even go back to Burundi. We were arguing about who owned the things in Burundi, but we were all in a refugee camp and nobody was about to go back into Burundi.

So when we first got into that refugee camp, we found out that the other group of Burundians were involved in the fighting in Burundi—and the politics. For us, since we were not welcomed into that refugee camp, we decided just to get involved in businesses and that stuff—having a life. We kept away from those political things and owned businesses and took care of ourselves instead of getting involved in the fighting.

When those guys went back into Burundi and got the power, they started sending letters back to us saying we didn't help them get the power and that we were only seeking money in our businesses. They told us if we chose to go back into Burundi, we better know where we are going. They didn't really want us back, so they told us to just stay where we were in Tanzania or go back into Rwanda. We were really upset because we couldn't go back into Burundi, which was our country, and we couldn't go back into Rwanda because we were just refugees there.

*Faustine (Left)*

*Separated from his sister in 1990 (Middle)*

*Emanwell and Fransina (Right)*

## **James Sudan**

I was accepted for resettlement in 2002 and I came here in 2006 with my family. It took a long time to get here—they just took a long time. For me I think it was better for my family, but I wasn't happy because I left my country. If I was by myself—it's not a problem—I could have stayed. With my family I thought it was safer to go. I wanted to see this place to save my family.

When I first came here, when I first came to Vermont, I called southern Sudan and I talked to someone I knew from before I came here. He had passes so that he could go to southern Sudan. He was a business man. He said that I had to buy his ticket and he would go look for my family. When I first came here I got some money from the refugee office. I took half of that money and used it to buy the tickets. I thought that it was better to sleep outside here in Vermont than to have some doubt in my mind. I think it was important to do that—not important to feed myself or sleep in a good house. I had to do that because the man said if I sent the money for the tickets, he could go to help find my parents. They have many people over there who don't know where their children are, and they are asking people like that guy who goes into southern Sudan and then comes back. So I just told him my name and my parents' name, and he came back and told me that he found my mother and my mother's relative.

When I heard about my mom I was thinking I would go back—but I have to wait because I want to take the training to become an electrical technician. I want to take that class this September and after I finish I want to go back in the Sudan. I just want to see what's going on in southern Sudan. I want to see my mom. I want to go for one month and then come back. My mother said that she is not sure that James is still alive. She told the man that if he talked to me—tell me that she wants me to come see her before she dies.

It's a hard way because I am worried about the government over there. It's not safe because they haven't forgotten me. They know where I am now. My plan I think I'm going to southern Sudan. It will be difficult, but I will try. I'm going to another country that's close to the south and then I can walk there or find something to get me there. It will be hard to go there, but I have to go there. You know you cannot be happy if you have no parents and no relatives.

I don't know why, but I have to go to see those people. And I don't know what is going to happen after that. Right now, in the war, they say there is peace, but I don't think that we have peace—not yet.

*James (Left)*

*Deng with his school artwork (Middle)*

*James and his youngest son, Atier (Right)*

## **John Burundi**

I was 20 years old when I first came to that refugee camp. I was in the refugee camp for 11 years. I was chosen to be a security guard because of my good behavior. I would talk with the guys from Tanzania to secure the camp. I was chosen by the guys from Tanzania because they thought I had good behavior and could help them secure the camp.

I was also teaching kids and coaching soccer. Some guys came down from Canada to teach us how to play the sports and how to coach all the children—basketball, soccer, and other sports. I got a certificate to be a coach, so I would coach the kids. I got a certificate to teach also. I was a kindergarten teacher. There were different schools in the camp because it was such a big refugee camp. In my school there were 500 kids. There were 1,800 people in the camp total. The majority were children.

I met my wife and we got married in the refugee camp. We didn't know each other in Burundi—we used to live in different regions. We just met in the refugee camp.

When I moved to Vermont, I spent three days in the house. When I was watching through the window, I would see only white people, and I was wondering if one day I would be able to see another black person. I didn't know what I was going to do. I didn't know how I was going to go to the marketplace, and I didn't know if I was ever going to find someone to talk to—because I didn't know the language.

[...]

In the refugee camp, I didn't make a lot of money, but I didn't have any bills to pay, so I could live with that money. Here I make more compared to the refugee camp, but I still have a lot of bills to pay. There were also the friendships that I had in the camps. In the refugee camp we used to spend the whole evening sitting around and talking. Here I just spend my time at home. I can't go to visit friends because of the language and also because everyone is working. Now that there are Burundian people coming that speak the same language—I am less lonely.

I have five kids, seven people in my family in total. My oldest son is eleven, the second one is nine, the third one is six, the fourth is three, and the last one is six months. We are

having a really good life because we are getting food—the government is helping us. The kids are going to school—my three year old is starting this year.

My message to the Vermont community would be first to thank them for welcoming us with a heart of serving and welcoming refugees. The second thing I would say is that the refugee concept is something that is a hard thing really to understand because being a refugee means suffering and broken hearted. There are a lot of things going on in a refugee's mind based on what that person went through. If somebody comes to you with a question or is asking for service—even if you don't speak the language, take the time just to listen to him. Even if you don't understand a single word, try just to imagine what he is trying to tell you, because that person really needs help.

*John (Left)*

*A teacher, a security guard and a coach (Middle)*

*John, his wife, and their four children (Right)*

## **Malinga and Cléophace Congo**

Cléophace: It was October 25, 1996 when the war broke out. It was in the eastern part of the Congo. People started fleeing—some went to Tanzania, some went to Zambia, some took their way to Burundi, and some took their way in Kenya. My wife at that time was in Burundi doing some kind of business. She went there, so when the war broke out she found herself on that side. It was difficult for her to cross again back to the Congo. So myself, I wasn't prepared for that, we were trapped in that situation, and we had to flee.

*Malinga: When I was in Burundi there was a family I was staying with—that is where I was living every time I went to Burundi. So I found myself caught in that situation, and I went to that family, and I stayed there. The husband of that family knew Cléophace. That family was a family of Congolese, and they had been settled there for a longtime. But they also had their own problems of security, so they decided to leave Burundi to go to Tanzania for security reasons.*

*We snuck—we left at five in the morning while all the people were asleep. They said that they could not leave me behind since I was living with them. They said we should all go together, so we went up to Tanzania together. Because there was a lake, if you wanted to go to Tanzania, you had to take a boat. We took the boat and went to Tanzania. The boat ride was long—like four days. There were other people on the boat, too. There was not enough food, so I didn't eat for three days.*

*I was in Tanzania for seven years. It was hard for me—life was so bad in Tanzania. I was by myself and it was hard for me. I couldn't imagine when I was going to see my family and my husband. After I arrived I went to the church, and I saw the priest, and I said, "I'm from Congo, and I'm looking for my husband." They said, "Yes, we can help you. We can give you someone who can help you." I had some hope in Christ that maybe I would see Cléophace, and I believed that because I prayed.*

I want to describe my story, but sometimes I find myself thinking about what happened and it's hard. I do remember before even we left Uvira—my mother was killed. Someone informed me. Somebody came and said, "You know your mother died and we saw the body on the way to the market." So when I went it was not easy.

She was killed, and it was a confusing month—the month of September. It started even in July and August. They were abducting people—kidnapping people. When the war actually started, we just got up in the morning and found everybody on the same road. They were going, making one line because there was only one road. On one side there were big mountains, and on the other side was Lake Tanganyika, so we just had one way

to go. If you didn't go that way, you had to go to Burundi, and you can't go to Burundi because Burundi was involved in the war. The border was closed. So we had to follow the long line for a distance of 250 km until we took a boat at Lake Tanganyika.

I do remember I took some things with me when I left. Just about two trousers, if not three, and some shirts which I sold along the way. You know I needed that money. If you found somebody who wanted to give you the value of one or two dollars—you just get it to buy dinner, or whatever. Also I took some books, important books. I had a small bag because at that time I was in the college. So I just used that bag to carry some books and other things, and I just went like that. They were special books for the language Esperanto, because I was learning this international language. I even have that book still along with another copybook. I still have them here.

*Malinga (Left)*

*Cléoplace with his workbooks (Middle)*

*Cléoplace, Malinga, Bernadette, and King (Right)*

## **Nedzad and Nevzeta Bosnia**

Nevzeta: It was summer when they drafted Nedzad. We were still thinking that they were going to stop. It's just a joke, you know. We had some army, but it was not enough because a lot of people didn't want to go to war. You have some that had already volunteered, or police that must go, but they didn't have enough people to support the army. Some old people didn't want to go because they are scared, but if they draft you, you must—if you 18 and older—you must go.

*Nedzad: After this I went on the line in Bihac, another city that is relatively in the middle part of Bosnia—for nine months. I didn't see any action in these nine months. I started to learn how to play with cards. Usually, when I was on the line everything was quiet. Before that, and after that, a lot of people were shooting with the grenades.*

Many times the Serbians stopped—the UN tried to send us food—but they stopped it. Many times they stopped it or they took what they needed to take. We had one liter of vegetable oil, 5 kg of sugar, and I don't know how many kilograms of flour. They give you some cans, but it's not a lot of food. Some stores still had food, but it's a lot of people and after maybe a few months we were out of food. Then the only place to get food was from the UN. People tried to make gardens and tried to prepare some food. You know in summer it's always easy. You have apples, you have everything, but when it's winter, winter is long like in Vermont, and you can't get food.

Life was social until we didn't have food anymore and after that everybody keep apart. You're hungry you know, it's hard. Everybody had somebody they know on the line. It's not easy to wait. We would have no communication, Nedzad would just leave.

*Two days on the line—four days home. It needed to be two days on the line, two days at home, and two days to make me ready for the line. I would just leave and spend around 90% of the time walking, 50km. I would go in the morning and come home in the night.*

[...]

The night that I give birth to my son there was bombing near the hospital. There was bombing the whole night. All night it was just the sirens. There was no electricity. They stopped the electricity because they didn't want them to see us. It was dark, and they gave me my baby, and we went into the hallway and just lay down. We spent the night in the hallway. There were beds, but because of the bombing they thought we would be safer in the hallway. We didn't have medication—no hot water. If there was hot water,

they used it for the soldiers. Many soldiers were operated on without anesthesia, and you could hear the screams the whole night.

*When I came in from the line and went home—the next day somebody called and said, “You are having a son.” It was April 1st and I thought it was a joke because in my country it’s the day for joking. So I said, “Okay,” smiling. But then my mom called and said, “You’re having a son!” The next day I went to the hospital and was watching him sleep.*

Actually the radio station, each morning if somebody is born, they called, “Vlatny Llain—Golden Lily.” I don’t know how to explain it, but they would say, “Oh, today is born another Vlatny Llian,” and whoever is the father on the line, they say the name of the wife who gives birth. It’s just such happiness that we have boys—especially boys because we lost everyday a lot of soldiers. They say there are nine women for each man in my country, because a lot of them were killed in the war.

*Nedzad (Left)*

*Nedzad’s parents’ house (Middle)*

*Nevzeta (Right)*

## **Victoria Sudan**

It was hard to go to school full-time and to work full-time—and to do my homework. When I first started I didn't have time to do my homework and I couldn't get help because I went to school at 7:30AM and I left at 2:00PM. I didn't have time because I had to be to work by 2:30PM. So for the first year, I didn't have time to get help at school and I didn't have time to do my homework.

I work as a custodian. I have been working there now for three years. I work in Colchester, Mallets Bay, at the elementary school. I would go to Burlington High School and then when I was done school there in the afternoon, I would go to Colchester to work. I work there because my boss really cares about my school so much. And not everybody cares—few people care you know. He told me, “Victoria, I'm really proud of you being in school, and you really work so hard, and I know that you are so determined to be in school, and that's really great.” But, it was so hard to work without a car. I would take the bus to Burlington High School, but I did not have transportation from Burlington High School to Colchester. Every day I had to figure out how to get to work. When I was in school I would always have to ask myself, “How am I going to get to work—I don't have a ride and I don't have anybody to pick me up?” Sometimes my friends would give me a ride, and sometimes I would have to take a Yellow Cab—it was \$11.00 everyday from there to Colchester. So, that's how I got there—until now, I got my own car. I got my license and now I can drive myself.

When I was a senior, one of the teachers—she worked at the elementary school in Colchester—she asked me if I needed some help with my homework. Since I was having a hard time doing math, she asked me if she could help me at work during my break time. So, I talked to my boss—he is a really good person. He cares about refugees getting a good education because he knows that if you don't go to school you will have a hard time reading. I asked him and he said, “Yeah, it's okay. You can do your homework when you find someone to help you.” The teacher who helped me was named, Susan. She helped me from 2006 until I graduated. She would get done with the elementary school at 3:00PM and then she would stay until 8:00PM waiting for me so she could help me do my homework.

Yeah, it was so hard to do my homework when I needed to work and I had to sleep. I would usually only get like 3-4 hours everyday until the school was over. I couldn't get enough sleep because I got out of work at 11:30PM, and then I had to come home, and I had stuff to do, and I had to finish the rest of my homework. I couldn't do all the

homework together with Susan. We would do some, and then I would do some by myself when I got home.

I found out that it is important to go to school because most people here are educated. And we who are Africans, like the refugees, most of us are not in school. Most of us are not educated. Some of us—they can't even speak English. It's hard for someone to understand when you need help—or when you call someone, they don't understand when you can't speak English. I know it's hard to do both work and school, but there's no help—you have to do it. If you say you only have to work, you are not going to get an education. If you say you only have to go to school, you cannot survive because you can't afford to pay your rent. So, I decided to do both and I graduated this year. It was June 15, 2007. I am happy that I made it through and now I will be going to college.

*Victoria (Left)*

*A diploma earned (Middle)*

*Working full-time at the elementary school (Right)*