

# *In Their Own Words* Full Personal History Text

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## **Abdi—Somalia**

My name is Abdi. I'm from Somalia. I left my family when I was five years old—in my childhood, along with my sisters and my older brother. I have two sisters—we were four people together. When the war started, my two sisters, my brother and me, we ran together, and we missed the rest of the family. After that we moved to Kenya and we lived there for around ten or eleven years. Then we talked to the UN High Commission of Refugees about our problems, our missing family, and then they moved us to the Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya. We stayed there for around two years. That's when we were waiting to be processed to come to the United States. After that they brought us to America. That was the reason they brought us here—we were missing family.

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.

When I was living in the refugee camp I didn’t work. What I was doing is I was going to school. They were teaching us some math, english, science, and biology. We were also learning some Arabic. The classes were similar to here, but without the Arabic. The school was one of the things I was doing. The other one was I was taking some classes about our religion—what we call the Qur’an. I was doing that, and I was good at that too. I finished the whole thing around two times. That was the only thing I had to do—that was my job. I didn’t have anything else to waste my time.

The main sport we did over there in the camp was soccer. We were playing soccer everyday. There were actually a lot of families also from my country Somalia and everybody would go to play soccer after six o’clock. I was good at soccer and when I got here I played for two years at Winooski High School. That was really cool—that was interesting.

In the camp, there were a lot of soccer fields. When you walked out of the houses there were a lot of fields and every group have their own. It was really fun. We were playing each other at the beginning—group-to-group—we were playing other teams. Everyone would come to one big field and we would play the game. The groups were actually the blocks. The camp was setup in blocks. There were a lot of people actually—more than like one or two thousand. I don’t remember that much, but there were a lot of people.

Living in the camp it was pretty good, but there was no peace. If there is no peace you can’t live there no matter how good it is. That is the most important thing. It was dangerous. There were a lot of people—they would come to your house at night. We didn’t have numbers to call the police over there. Here you have “911” to call for emergencies. Over there they don’t have anything. The only time the police come is whenever they hear the sound of the bullets. That’s the only time when they come around. They don’t even check that much. They just come around the block and leave. The people with guns were just robbers. They didn’t want to be robbers, but they didn’t have enough food for themselves, so they tried to get some money from the people in the camp.

So eventually I came here to Vermont and started going to high school. I was sixteen. I was really excited to come to the United States. I was just wondering how the United States was going to look like. I didn’t know. I was thinking I’m not even going to see trees anymore. That’s what I was thinking—I was so curious about that. I didn’t think I was going to see sun anymore on the grass. I thought it was going to be big like New York City all over. That’s what I thought it was going to look like.

I also learned to speak English when I got here about four years ago. Actually, I wasn't that good at English when I got here. They put me in high school because I was sixteen when I got here. That's how they do it in Vermont. If you are older than fifteen, it doesn't matter about the language; they put you in high school. So they put me in high school and I started from ninth grade. It wasn't really that much fun because I was having trouble with the teachers. I wouldn't ask them to go to the bathroom; I was just walking out the door and they were wondering where I was going. I couldn't explain that I wanted to go to the bathroom.

I didn't even know how to say, "Hi." When a bunch of old people were talking to me I would just walk away. I didn't know what to say to them and I was feeling embarrassed if I talked back to them. I didn't know what they were saying, so whenever they started a conversation with me I started walking away. I was having a hard time when I got here with the language. I was taking some English classes—ESL [*English as a Second Language*] classes. They would teach us how to speak and also to write—a lot about spelling words. Actually, the most improvement I had with the language was hanging with my friends. We were the third Somali family to get here in the State of Vermont. So when I got here we didn't have many Somalis, so I started hanging with two guys—one of them was Bosnian and the other kid was from Albania. We were only using English for the language—in our native languages we couldn't understand each other. So I was talking to them everyday and I got used to it.

I was a little better when I had been here for five months. I was getting used to people—I was really scared of white people for some reason. The first one I saw was here when I got to Burlington the first night at the airport. I like it in Vermont. It's a really nice place—living and also learning—the education. If you live in another state and you are older than eighteen, they don't let you go to high school. But Vermont has a good law: until you are twenty-five you can still go to high school. I'll be in twelfth grade this year. I have one more year and then I will be done. I'm planning on going to college too if I can afford that.

When I got here—when I had stayed here for around five months—my mom called from Africa. I don't even know how she got the number. For some reason she called it and I was the first person that answered the phone. She said, "Who is this," and I said, "Abdi." Then I said, "Who is this," and she said, "Your Mama." I didn't believe it; I thought my mom had died a long time ago. I said, "My mom died a long time ago; my mom died when I was five—stop playing with me." She said, "No, trust me." But, then I hung up the phone. Then she called us back and I talked to her again and she said, "That's your name," and she gave me my last name. So I stopped talking to her and I gave the phone to my older sister and I said, "Mom is alive!" We were excited—wow! My sister started crying on the phone too and then we all started crying on the phone. We thought they were dead; we didn't even know they were alive anymore. They live in the camp we came from—Dadab. They were in Somalia during the time we were in the camp. Then when we moved from the camp—when we got to America—they got to that camp in Dadab. They were telling us that there was still a war in Somalia—there was not even peace. We told them to move to the camp because it's a little bit better. Now they live in

that camp. We help them whenever we can send them some money. It is a big family. My dad has three wives. He had with my mom ten kids—five boys and five girls. With the second one he had eight kids and with the third one he had around five. They are all living in the Dadub.

I was planning to visit once before I go to college. When I finish high school I was planning to go see them, but only if I get enough money and if it will work out. I am trying to get some jobs and save some money for that plane. I'm trying to—we'll see if it's going to work.

I would like to go back to visit my family next year, but I feel this is my new home. I don't feel I'm going back to Africa—I'm just going to visit them and see how they look. That will be interesting, they always tell me to come over there. They say, "We want to see you grow up." I am planning just to visit, but not to live there. It's really hard to live there especially when you are someone from America. You are like a God or something. Some people might kill you if they heard that you are from America. There would be no peace if I went back there. I would have to stay with the department of police. It's easy to die there. No one really cares about that. In the United States it's hard to kill a person, but over there it's not. It's just too easy—just like that—easy. And nobody will even care; no one will ask who killed them.

The refugees that are living here in Vermont, we're having a good time—not how it used to be. Life is getting better. What we have been through is a lot of things you know. People should really be very proud of the refugees. People in Vermont have helped the refugees a lot, too. Giving them food if they want food, also housing and the rent—helping them to pay. Really, people help refugees a lot in Vermont. I think they are doing the best thing. I think Vermont is doing the best they can for the refugees.

## **Admir and Sabina—Bosnia**

Admir: I married Sabina before the war. I think it was one year before the start of the war in 1990. Sabina live 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.*

*When we got to Tuzla, we didn't have any family to live with. We didn't have anybody. When we came over, there was a sports center and they let us sleep on the floor. There*

*were a lot of people. They gave us blankets and stuff to sleep with. After, I took Ismet and we went to live at a daycare. After the war settled down we went out and found a place to live permanently. We lived at the sports center for about a month.*

In Tuzla, we had just one road for going outside to Croatia or maybe Bulgaria. Around the city there was war. All of the cities were close together; all of the fighting was close. When they threw explosives—this happened in Tuzla. It was a little bit safer because a lot of people had come from Vlasenica or other cities. We had guns and we tried to push back the armies. There was fighting going on, but not as much as in Srebrenica and other places. Tuzla was a safe spot—kind of. Still, there were soldiers around.

*In 1993, a helicopter came down to Srebrenica and picked some people, including my father, and took them to a hospital—because he had heart problems and some other medical issues. They were people from the United States and other countries that tried to help people—an international organization. He was the only one from my family who was able to get out. Everybody else, my siblings and my mom, they stayed back. They brought my father to Tuzla, where we were living. That was the safe region. But my whole family was left behind. They couldn't get out.*

There was a law that was made: all Muslims in 1995 had to leave Srebrenica, had to find a different place, a safe place to live. That was an agreement between Serbs and Muslims. The Serbs wouldn't do anything; they would leave them alone; they wouldn't hurt them or anything. They made the agreement so the Muslims would just leave. That way the Serbs could have Srebrenica to themselves. That was the agreement, but you know always agreements don't work out. So it wasn't like that. The Serbs started dividing kids and mothers apart. They took the kids and wives and they were shipping them out to Tuzla. They were dividing teenage guys and older guys to one side and the kids and the wives to the other. They took the guys and put them in cages and jails—they killed them there. The soldiers were putting the civilians in jail. That all happened in three days. Every night they would take guys out of the jails and kill them, and they would take the women, and rape them.

*My mother and sisters, they went down to Tuzla, but my brothers stayed. They were in the woods trying to get out. They were shipping the women out to Tuzla, but the men they were keeping in those jails. My brothers escaped into the woods and they were trying to get to a safer place. That all happened in 1995. After everything settled, my family and me started looking for my brothers, but we didn't find them. They are all probably dead.*

*On May 25, 1995, a bombing occurred in Tuzla. Serbs from the hills or somewhere threw explosion bombs. It was in downtown—that's where it happened. They threw bombs and that's how people died in that place. That was just once. When that occurred almost 170 people died. My father was one of the people killed that day.*

We stayed in Tuzla for nine years before coming to Vermont. The war stopped in 1995, so for four years the war was going on around Tuzla. During the war everyday was the same. I was not the same as a soldier; I worked for the special police. I don't know how

to explain it in English. For example, in this one city soldiers from Serbia took the city, so some people tried to take back the city. Between Tuzla and Vlasenica there was a border, maybe 50 km from Tuzla. You know everybody was trying to save lives, you know your family. For example, I would go to the border and leave Tuzla. Everybody—anybody who knew how to take care of themselves, and knew kind of how to fight, they had to go on the line. Whoever can carry a gun.

*In 2000 or 2001, I had a sister already in the U.S. and she sent me papers to come live here. My sister sent us the papers, and we went through some stuff, and we got the papers to get accepted to live here. So that's how we came to the U.S.*

Yes, to bring us to the U.S., Sabina's sister sent papers to her, and then we went through a lot of things. We have to go to the embassy, and we had to do a test. That's how we got here. She sent the papers and I spent three years going from Tuzla to Croatia for the embassy. I had interviews with people from America. They asked where I lived before, where was my city, and how many people were in your family. I couldn't go back to Vlasenica, so they gave me the choice to come here.

Maybe it was hard for me. You know why, because I didn't have a car. Sometimes I needed to go from Tuzla to Croatia for the interview. One time I had some gold jewelry and I sold it to make money and used it to rent a car. Believe me sometimes it was very hard. Zagreb, Croatia is a big, big city. For example, I waited for two hours—two hours waiting for a parking spot. I didn't know Zagreb; I didn't know anything about it, and it was a very big city. I drove around and looked for two hours for one parking spot. When I came to the embassy, she told me, "Hey, you can't come in now and talk, you come next week." I spent a lot of money for five minutes, I was very angry. Sometimes I would say, "I can't go." It was very hard. There was one even bigger problem—because to go from Tuzla to Croatia, you cross the border, and the police can hold you—you can't leave Croatia. This happened all the time.

Before the war in my city—you see what I have here now—I have these things in my city before 1991. I had everything. My father made my house. I had a lot of money. I tell you before the war it was good. Now it's not. Believe me, I had a good life. Before the war I had a VCR. Believe me, not a lot of people had this. I tell you again, I had a good life before the war came. When the war started people lost everything. We're good now, now is good. I work here, make money; I send it back to Bosnia to make a house. It's not cheap, just cheaper than here.

Last year, I went back to visit Vlasenica. There is no war there now, but it's bad. For example, I know what happened there. I went to Vlasenica, but I don't want to go to where I lived before in Vlasenica. So I went to Tuzla and bought land to make a house. Now we are building a house in Tuzla. All the money from Rhino Foods—there is a lot of money I make—all the money I spend for this house because my mother is now living in my house.

*We have a bad story, a very bad story.*

## 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.

You have to study another culture before you accept it. Then after a long time, if you have anything to share, you don't need to keep it to yourself. You have to give it out to other people—to let them know about you yourself. You have to take in and give out. That's how the language is made easy for you and for others. Even if you are a small part of the community—how are those people going to judge you, how will they know you? You came to the community, you can be a stranger or when you get into the community you can say, "I'm a stranger; how can I make a friendship; how can I get the social life; how can I get integrated into the community?" The best way is to speak up. Otherwise, nobody will know what I have; nobody will know how much I knew; nobody will know what I need—what kind of help I need, or what can I give. Communicate to other people. When you speak up, those things get better and it makes it easier.

When our community have a gathering together, we share what we have and educate other people. We get together and we have workshops. We have a lot of activities that we do—cultural activities. We do singing, dancing, and storytelling sometimes. We do that a lot. Also, if there is another gathering we team up together with the local community here, people from the church and other people in the community who are friendly and want to get involved with the refugees—and we gather with them together. That's how we learned quick and easy how to be able to be in the community.

When I got here myself, the only difficulty was just the way I had to get around. When you get here, you don't have your own car and you have to use the public transportation. There are times, mostly late at night, when the last buses may end at 10:00 something—that's the end of the bus. If you work the night shift, and you come home at 11:00, there is no bus. And especially during the wintertime, it's not easy to wait at the bus stop or to catch the other buses. So there are a lot of variables right there. But, in other places where we came from, you can walk on foot. It's no problem. And you can see other

people in the street walking, so that will encourage you also to walk. If you are just on the road by yourself, you can't get anywhere because it is so far.

The thing that helped me mostly when I got here first—I worked with the refugee program, as the case manager's assistant. That is why I learned everything fast and quick. I copied everything to make it easier for me, because whenever you deal with something on a daily basis, you will be able to know what are the mistakes and what needs to be done, and how you handle all those cases.

The Vermont Refugee Resettlement Program supports you for eight months. After that they either get you employed or you are enrolled in a school. So you have to keep on moving in general life, you have to be stable and get what you need. The VRRP—they are busy. You are not the only one case that they are getting, so every week they will get new people. They have to receive the new people and start helping them, so you have to at least be active enough to get involved in whatever in the community is available.

Also, the other thing for refugees to be successful—you have to respect the rules and regulations. You have to avoid the law. Whatever needs to be done, that has to be the way it is. Sometimes people think something is easy and simple. For example, if you don't have a license, you shouldn't be driving a car without a license. If you have a permit, you have to have somebody with a license there with you to guide you on what you need to do. Sometimes if you create a crime it will affect your status—your refugee status. After a longtime, when you apply for citizenship, all of those things will come back to you.

Well, you see some people sometimes—it takes them a long time to get adjusted to the culture. Like in some places, in other countries, if somebody needs something from you, you may bribe them or give them money, and they will let you go. In some places that is normal. Here you give somebody money and it's against the law. Everybody here is very restricted on the law, but in other countries you can bribe and nobody cares. If the police pull you over and you give them something, you are good to go—but here you give them something and you go to jail.

That's why we have to sympathize with other people to know what are their cultural backgrounds. Sit together and discuss—find out the differences. That's what we did in the past with the police, the electric company, and the other social service providers. During our first two to three months, we have conferences and they came in to give some workshops to the communities. That's how people learn.

I feel good about the amount of identity that I am maintaining right now, but my worry is the little kids that are coming. There are some little kids, when they come to the United States, after a couple years they pickup English, and when they go home they have to go practice English with their parents. Their parents want to learn English too—from their kids—but how much time do the kids have to spend with their parents? They go to school at seven in the morning, until two o'clock, and they have after school programs. So maybe when they get home at five o'clock they have to get ready for dinner and by

seven or eight they have to go to bed. But what time did they practice their own native language with their parents? So the majority of the time they stray, and it is hard to bring them back to wherever you were before. When they start to be the age of teenagers, the more they are going away from their own cultures.

I was twenty-one when I came to live in Vermont—that was in 2001. Now I am twenty-seven. The process to come to the United States is long; it took me three or four years. You have to be qualified—you have to be in a refugee camp for more than 5 years. That is how you will be eligible to be resettled to a different country.

I am originally from the Bahr Al-Gharal region. I grew up in southern Sudan and I've been in many of the cities in southern Sudan. When I was young I traveled around a lot. When I was seven—that is when I was separated from my family. I was very young. I traveled from southern Sudan, all the way into Ethiopia, and then back through southern Sudan into Kenya, by my own. I was with other people, but not with my family. I was with a big group of people. Some of the young men who live here, some we left behind, and some other families. The majority were kids and the others were families. It was three months—three months walking, day and night.

We left from the town of Bor and walked to another town in southern Sudan, Pochalla. From there we crossed into Ethiopia to the Pinyudo refugee camp. While we were living in Ethiopia we moved between the Pinyudo camp and the Itang camp many times.

We were forced to leave Ethiopia because there was a war in Ethiopia in 1991. When they were overthrowing the government, the new government came and said they didn't want refugees to be on their land. They united together with the government of Sudan thinking that if they sent us back then there would be no resistance from the rebels to fight them. They were worried we would become a resistance and return to the Sudan to fight.

When we left the camp in Ethiopia, we had to cross the Gilo River to get back into southern Sudan. We lost a lot of people crossing that river—a lot of people died there. After the river we went again to Poshalla in southern Sudan. Then we walked through the towns of Narus and Locichoggio, to Kakuma—the refugee camp in Kenya.

They estimate that 85,000 people were living in the Kakuma camp, and I don't know how many I can say were Sudanese because it went down and up. It was congested. We didn't live randomly; they packed us into one spot where the refugee camp was. The refugees sit, they don't go anywhere beyond where they should be. So they control them. That's where they give them their shelter, that's where they get their food, their water, and their medication. You couldn't leave the area. If you wanted to leave the area you had to have a letter from the UN—why and where you are going—if it's for medical attention or if you got a scholarship for the school. I got my scholarship with the Joint Refugee Service. I was studying in the central province of Kenya, which is closer to the city of Nairobi, about a 45 minutes drive. I lived outside of the camp at that time, but I had to have a permit when I left for the semester.

Nine years in the refugee camp in Kenya, and three years in Ethiopia, and now six years in the United States. Yes, it was difficult to leave people behind in the camp. You never know what will happen after you leave—what will happen to them—because the local people would kill people at night. They would come into the camp with their guns and weapons. Normally, they would ask you to give whatever you had. If you tell them that you don't have anything, they may shoot you or something like that. These were just the local people in Kenya. They were lacking food, too. Whatever was given, they would say, "If you don't share that with us, then why are you here in our land? You cannot feed somebody while I am hungry, I am the one of the land." The UN was feeding the refugees, but the people outside the camp were starving. There was no way they could get any, so they had to use force.

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.

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

I was born in Uzbekistan in 1953. I lived all of my youth in Uzbekistan and I was married there. I was married when I was twenty-one years old. All four of my children were born in Uzbekistan. I graduated from school and went to college for a year and then I was working as a kindergarten teacher. Then I went back to school so that I could teach middle school. When I got married all of my plans got turned upside down because I couldn't work, I had to stay at home and take care of my children. So what I did was started working as a seamstress because I could do this job and be with the children. So when I finished my classes as a seamstress I found a job in a big factory where they made clothes. I completed a six-month course in order to get that job. Then I went and did a secretarial job working for the police department.

When my fourth child was born I got very sick and they almost wanted to take off my leg. So I quit my job and went to stay home and take care of myself. For two years I was a housewife. After two years I decided to go back to work when I felt better. So during the day I was taking care of the children and when my husband came home from work at 5 o'clock I would go to work.

In 1989, we moved from Uzbekistan to Russia. In the late eighties there was a political movement that started that didn't want us there because we were Turkish people and it was not truly territorial for Turkish people in Uzbekistan. So they tried to force us to leave.

The story started before I was born, I don't remember this, but my parents told me. What happened was that we used to be in a real Turkish territory. Then in 1917 and 1920, when the revolution happened, it became that our land belonged to Georgia—it became Georgian land. So our land ended up in different people's hands—Georgian people's hands. That is how we lost our Motherland.

The Georgian people had their own culture and their own religion and they didn't want to share because the land now belonged to them. After the revolution, we had no right to that land anymore. Stalin was a very strict man—he was a Georgian man.

So during the time from 1920 until 1944—when WWII happened—we still lived there, but we lived poorly because we didn't have rights, we didn't have anything. When the war started men and even teenagers went to war—fifteen-year-old boys went to war. So Stalin knew there were no men in the villages left because they were all in the war. So, he made a 24-hour notice that all Turkish people had to leave Georgia.

Stalin offered the Turkish people a train and they put everybody on this special train and told them that it would take them out of Georgia. Stalin's original plan was to put everybody on the train and then drown them in the sea. But somebody from Stalin's team—because they discussed this at a secret meeting—disagreed with the plan. He said, "You can't just do this, you can't just drown them. We need to try and find a way to find a land for them somewhere else."

There was a person who did not agree with Stalin's plans. He saved our people. They decided that they would send the Turkish people into Uzbekistan because Uzbekistan was a big place for growing cotton, and it's very intensive labor, so nobody wanted to work there. So they said, "Let's save their lives and send them there. They can be very cheap labor over there." So this was the main job for our families—they worked in the cotton fields—everybody. My father was eleven years old when he started working in the fields.

Many people died during the journey from Georgia to Uzbekistan—for two months they traveled on that train. The train would stop only once a week to check for the dead bodies—they would clean the train of the dead people. The people on the train didn't have any food, they didn't give them any food for the train travel. There were five to seven families stuck in one cart—girls, boys, women, and men. As for the bathroom—everything was right there. Some people were so hungry that they ate their own feces. Many, many, many people died. They couldn't even bury the dead people. They would just throw them to the side of the train. It was so sad.

When our parents arrived in Uzbekistan, nobody helped them build houses; they just put them in the barn. It was WWII time and people didn't have food and they didn't have money. Also, it was mostly women and children that were left, men that came back after the war were invalids. Only in the beginning did they provide them with a little bit of food. They gave them one cow and then they said, "It's up to you now to feed the cow, to get your milk, and to get started. Our parents had left all their belongings in Georgia because they couldn't bring anything with them. When they sent them over they told them, "Don't worry you will come back, so leave everything because you will come back later and get your stuff.

My parents had just built a new house in Georgia when they had to leave. They had a big farm and they had everything—and they had to leave it. In the cellar they even put some butter and honey which they had harvested the year before, because they had been told that they would come back.

In Uzbekistan they didn't have wooden or stone houses, they were made from clay. So my parents would work in the cotton field and little by little everybody tried to build their own houses. The local people helped them very much—they respected them. They didn't feel like they were enemies like Stalin and his people thought. Of course, they didn't speak their language when they first arrived. So it was totally different—new place, where they had nothing, and with language problems too. Stalin's team even warned the local people that these Turkish people eat people. They said, "Be careful with them. They are wild people—they can eat you." That's what they told the locals so they would stay away from them. But when people found out that it wasn't true they knew it was a government trick.

When my parents married, they didn't have any children for seven years. I was the first-born child and I got very sick when I was only a month old. The local Uzbekistani

people, who were great friends of the family, helped me to recover. This family that helped me when I was a small child—for me they were like second parents—we were so close. We are still in contact with those people, even though we left Uzbekistan.

So during that time in Uzbekistan we became as one country. We lived with the Uzbekistani people and we learned their language. We shared traditions—we took their religious stories and combined them with our religion. We became as one people.

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.

Before we left Uzbekistan we were in a quarantine status, meaning we couldn't go into a different area. If you wanted to go visit someone in a different area you had to go into the police department to check in with them and tell them where you were going. We didn't have any freedom at all.

My family was one of the first families that left Uzbekistan. When it started to get bad, I said we are living scared so we have to go—the sooner we leave the safer we will be. I was pregnant so I had to worry about my unborn child—and I already had two children. For a whole month we lived in fear. Every night we thought that we might be killed. It was a whole month of this situation. So we abandoned everything—we didn't want to do that, but we couldn't continue living this terrifying life. So we abandoned everything, and our neighbors took our animals and got our house.

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.

Turkish people are very hardworking people. In Russia, we grew vegetables and we provided a farm market with all of these goods. We started to make money and build houses and the Russians became jealous. They were upset because even though we came with nothing, we were starting to live better than them. Because we are such hardworking people and we tried to achieve some good—the Russian people got jealous. So people started accusing us of stealing their land again.

It started when some of the Russian people began to think about the Russian-Turkish war that happened years ago in 1876. So some people started to look way back and say, "Wait a second, these people used to be our enemy and now we have taken them into our land. In 1876 we had a war with them so why are we letting them live with us now?" Many people didn't even know about this war because they were not educated enough to know about it. But the people who did know brought it to their faces saying, "We can't live with these people—they are our enemies." The people who were mad about that war thought that they would get even now.

Eventually the Russians became afraid that as long as one family was settled down they would bring somebody else and then the Russian territory would again be occupied by Turkish people as it had been during the Russian-Turkish war. This problem was the worst in a place called, Krasnodar, where they were worried about the Turkish

occupation and they said, “We better do something and kick them out.” The governor of Krasnodar said, “Why us—why did you choose this place? Can’t you go somewhere else?” He was afraid that something bad would happen in his town, so he was trying to protect his reputation. Most of all he was trying to protect his image as a good governor; he didn’t want anything to happen. When they would ask us, “Why did you choose this territory?” We would tell them that it was because it was close to Georgia—just in case we could go back, it was going to be a short trip for us back to the Motherland.

In 1991, one thousand people from our community was sent to Moscow—to the President—to try and get a petition to see if he would do something to help us return to our Motherland. My husband went to Moscow and he and the others did a whole week of strike with no food in Red Square. But what happened was that in the course of those two weeks it was re-election of the President, when Gorbachev gave up and Yeltsin became president. So nobody wanted to take care of our problem, because they already had a problem to deal with. They just told the Turkish people to go home and leave them alone. We thought that since the government didn’t want to help we would send some people to walk from Krasnodar to Georgia and maybe make peace with the Georgian people without help from the government. But when the Georgian people heard about this they said, “No, you better not come—don’t come because we will kill you.” We were very peaceful, we wanted to come and talk hoping that maybe we could discuss something with those Georgian people. The Georgian people were very prepared. They had tanks—the military. They were all prepared just in case we decided to come. We had struggles so much already that we decided we didn’t want another war. We decided not to go and everyone returned to their homes in Russia.

Before, when we had moved from Uzbekistan, we never got the Russian documents. Since we never got passports in the Russian territory, we were illegal aliens. So, the Russians said we had to leave—but we said, “To where?” We couldn’t go back to our Motherland because it was occupied, we couldn’t go anywhere—where could we go? When people were complaining about us behind our backs, we would say, “What are you complaining about? We don’t commit crime, our children are well behaved—what is it that you don’t like about us?” They said, “We just don’t like you—there is no reason.” Again we were working on the farms because it doesn’t require any social skills to grow vegetables and we were unable to get good jobs—our kids were not able to go to college. When people reached an old age, they couldn’t collect a pension, because they were working there illegally. There was no financial help from the government because we were considered to be illegal.

So we decided to go to an international organization for immigration in Russian. That organization informed us that maybe they could send us to a different continent where nobody would know about Turkish people. They said they could send us to start a new life. Again it was a new situation, a new language, and we had to start all over again.

We are actually happy now because we have a future here. We don’t work as hard as we used to in the fields. Plus, we have papers so we are able to find a job and there is a future for our children. We even want to thank our government for giving us this

opportunity. Back then, we thought it was bad because we didn't know where we would go, but now we are thankful that they let us go to America. However, it's very difficult for us here. A good thing is that we can maybe find a job here and it's not a bad job, but we still had to work very hard to get where we are right now. Our dreams are about our children—that they will have a better life.

The language was the hardest thing when we first got here. The first month was hard to get used to a totally different area. My husband got very sick on the third day after we arrived—he was paralyzed. I didn't know where to go for help. When the refugee program in Vermont learned that we were coming they asked people if they wanted to volunteer to help. That is how we met Emily. Emily helped us—she helped us almost everyday. Emily could speak a little bit of Russian, so she was in a good position to help us. Emily is Jewish and we are Islamic, but she still helped us. She even brought us to the Synagogue one time—she would say that it doesn't matter that we have different religions because there is one God and he will look out for us.

A month ago, Georgia made a new rule. Now in Georgia, the Muslims said, “Now we want the Turkish people back because it's their land.” But many of the Turkish people are now in America. There is a big question in the Russian and Georgian parliament that they are discussing: whether the Turkish people are legal? If this movement happened while we were still living in Russia, we probably would have gone back to Georgia. But I don't think we will go back from America to Georgia. So we will have to just wait and see what happens to us in America.

## **Binh—Vietnam**

I had four children in 1974. Actually, I had six children and two died during the war, so I had only four left. I had four children and my husband died during the war. He passed away at that time. I was just alone, a single mom, and I raised up four children. That was really hard.

Before 1974, I worked in CamRanh because there were American soldiers there. I worked doing cleaning for the American army—laundry and cleaning. After that the American soldiers went back home. I think in 1972. I got married to a Vietnamese guy and I moved to Pleiku. I moved from one village to another village with my Vietnamese husband. Three of my children I left at home with my mom in NhaTrang, so when I was living with my husband in Pleiku I had just two: Loan and her brother. Her brother and her father died when we ran away during the war. So it was only me and Loan in the forest for two months. When I went back to my home village there were three more kids waiting there—that I left with my mom. In 1974, everything was gone and I had to go back to my village with my four children. I didn't have anything. I didn't have any money, but I lived with my mom.

Loan, my daughter, was just ten days old in 1974. She was born just ten days before the Communists came and I had to run away from Pleiku. I put Loan in front of me and used a cloth to tie her to my chest so I could run. I was actually running because they were coming and they would give you trouble. They might shot you and they were bombing the village. I couldn't bring anything. I wore only one pair of clothes and Loan wore only one—we took just what we were wearing.

Some people were walking; some people were driving cars, motorcycles, and bicycles. Anything they could get on to try and get out of the village. Because we heard the radio saying, "The Communists came and they will take this village, so you better get out from that village before the Communists come." That's how we found out they were coming.

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 communists. When I went into the forest I had only Loan. We had no water. I had to drink my own urine because in the forest there was 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 laid down Loan was usually on my breasts. Loan lay on my breasts and in the two months I was running away I never wore a bra. When Loan was crying and wanted to eat I could put my breast right there and start breastfeeding for Loan. Sometimes I would just lay there and open my breasts. I wasn't shy at all at that time. All I was thinking about was my daughter. Sometime I would have to like—I peed—my pants got wet. I saw the pants on the road and I took the pants from the dead body. I took those pants and I wore them. I took the wet ones and threw them away. I took the dry ones from the dead body and put them on me. I ran away and I was not shy. I was not shy at all because some people were walking with no clothes. Nobody paid attention.

I was so tired. My back was so straight I couldn't even sit. I was always in the situation, ready to go. I could not sit because I was walking for so long. I would usually choose to be near the men. If the men were sitting, I just laid down a little bit to sleep—but sleep in the situation like I was ready to go. If someone said, "Continue to move," I would follow them and I would ask the man right next to me, "Please, push me up or help pull me up." I could not stand up right away because Loan was on my breasts. I couldn't control myself to stand up right away. I was asking any man for help.

A lot of children died during that walk because there was no water. There was dung from the buffalo and people took the water from that for the kids that were three or four years old. They used the Tylenol—most people had Tylenol or Advil with them in Vietnam. They put the Tylenol in the bowel movement, so the water would come out. The dung became water and they took that water and gave it to the children. They died because they drink that. They got diarrhea for many days. When they died the parents threw them right on the side of the road and they moved on. You didn't have time to dig the graves—even the parents. If you didn't move, then you would die.

A pregnant lady was on the move when she had her baby. She was giving birth at that time. They just did it by themselves. They tied the cord and they used the branch of the tree to cut. Even after you give birth you had to go right away, so she walked about just 100 km and she died because the blood came out of her body. And also the baby died after.

Some people, if they had the cars, they were doing better than these people—the people who were walking. Usually the poor people were walking. The soldiers also had cars from the army, and poor people tried to climb in the cars or tried to climb on the top of the cars. But the people in the cars kicked them out and when they fell down on the road the other cars would come up and drive over them. Finally, that body—no blood came

out—there were so many cars. If you fell down people kept moving and they would step on you. Nobody took care of the dying people. It was so terrible.

If you could sit in the army car—if your child died and they knew your child died, you had to throw your child out to the field or to the side of the road. If you kept your child with you, they would throw both of you. People were very angry, very mean at that time.

When I first left the house in Pleiku I was on a wagon. Then when my husband and son died, I walked with the people and went to the jungle for two months. After that I came out of the jungle. At that time it was 1975 already so people had the microphones and they would announce, “Now peace has come to the country and there is no war at all so come out.” They called people to come out and register, so I had to come out and register with the Communist government. They told us what to do. You didn’t want to do something against the Communist government because you were afraid. You are so afraid of being killed—of them taking revenge on people.

The Communists drove me to PhuBon and from PhuBon they drove me back to Pleiku. There was no money, no nothing. People were stealing. The house was still there, but they took everything that they could sell—even the roof. They took off anything they could sell for money. They would go into your house and if they liked your pots or the bowls or the plates, they took all those things. The only thing that was left was the house. I looked up to see the sun because there was no roof.

I was a street vendor in Pleiku. I sold everything, used clothing, everything I could use to get money to raise Loan. That’s why I had such a really hard life in Vietnam. At that time I didn’t have any money left and I needed to eat. I was hungry. There were Vietnamese cakes made with the sticky rice and with the black beans. They made the big ones and they sold them for just one dollar—very, very cheap. But I didn’t have money to buy that. Other people, they took one bite and they didn’t like it, so they threw it away. So I took that one and I just took off the dirt on the top of the bite and I ate the rest. I lived that way for one year.

When I was in Pleiku I lived with my mother-in-law, not in my old house because the old house had nothing in it. I earned just enough money for a ride back to NhaTrang on the car with Loan. I didn’t have any luggage like you do. I just took half of a piece of cloth. I had two clothes, and Loan had two, and I put them on the cloth and tied it up. Then I tied Loan on my body, and I went back to NhaTrang.

When I went back to NhaTrang, first of all, the whole family was so happy to see me back. I had to work really hard because if you didn’t work hard you didn’t get anything to eat. All you think about is how you can get rice for you to eat. I had to work really hard from 1:00 AM until noontime. When I was done the work in the house, Loan could have the breastfeeding. I put Loan on the hammock from 1:00 AM until noontime. The whole family worked also. It was a farm. We were growing fruit.

I found anything that I could to make money. I would go to the river and find snails to sell at the market for people—for travelers because NhaTrang is a famous place with a beautiful beach. I sold snails and sweet potatoes and regular potatoes. I also had to go to the forest to get the dry firewood. I cut the trees and that was something to sell to people for their cooking. I would go get the wood and tie it up and sell it to people who needed it. Everyone needed it for cooking. We didn't have gas, we just used firewood all the time.

September and October it usually rained in my country in the forest, but I still had to cut the wood. When the forest got rain, the ground was so slippery. I would fall very often. I had to use a stick to walk all the time. I would get up on top of the hill and collect the wood and get it down. You have to make it so you can bring it to the road. The way I used to collect the firewood—I was very smart. I knew the shortest way to come back to my house and I used that place first. If I was looking for more wood, I would collect it and bring it back to that place. But you had to remember that place. After that I tied it up and put it on my back so I could carry it. Then I would go home.

So, I would walk to the forest from 1:00 AM to 6:00 AM. Then I would hike inside the forest until 10:00 AM. Then from 10:00 AM to 3:00 PM, I would collect all the firewood and put at the spot nearest my house. At 3:00 PM I got out of there, and from 3:00 PM I walked back to the house until 7:00 PM—everyday.

I wanted to die so many times during that time, but I cannot because I think about how my children will survive. So I cannot die, but I want to die. Too poor, too poor—so hard and too poor. Walking back home from the forest my whole body would almost fall apart. When I got home my son and the oldest daughter would be crying that they are hungry, and the younger son and Loan were crying too. Because I left the children at home, I went to the forest for long periods, so they didn't have anything to eat. So if you get home in a situation like that you want to die—so stressful. I would only sleep one or two hours—a couple hours a night.

When I got home I would have to sew because my clothes, when I went in the forest, would get torn. So I had to stay awake with the light from one candle. I would look through that and try to cover the hole. I had just one or two clothes and I could not buy another one, so I just tried to fix it. So I had to do the laundry and fix the clothing at nighttime also. I would sleep from 12:00 AM until 1:00 AM or 2:00 AM—then go back to the forest again.

When my son and my oldest daughter grew up they tried to help me to collect the wood. I couldn't walk up and down the bank, but they ran down and put the wood at the spot and went back to the place where I was putting the wood I found. That is why I love my children so much. They helped me.

Sometimes I got lost in the forest. If I walked through the forest at nighttime it was easy to get lost. When you get lost, you are just lost from this ridge to this mountain—you can't find the way to get home. Sometimes I would get lost—really lost—sometimes for

one or two days. But one time my son and my daughter got lost for one month. They walked from NhaTrang to the forest in Dalat. That's really like from Burlington to Boston. To get back they had to ask people. They came back one month later. Yes, they walked—can you image from Vermont to walk down to Boston?

Fourteen or fifteen years like that—very, very poor. It's really hard to raise up four children—Dung, Dang, Hien, and Loan—three boys and one girl. I had to feed all of them. That's why now when I came to the United States, I have been getting sick a lot. Sometimes I can't walk at all. I worked so hard during those years.

I was admitted to the Philippines in 1991, and then we came to the United States at the end of the year in 1991. I learned how America was like—everything in the Philippines for six months—and after that they brought me to Vermont.

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.

## **Dalabor—Bosnia**

There are three religions that live in Bosnia—there are Muslims, Orthodox, and Roman Catholics. It's kind of tricky explaining because there were three armies, and everybody was fighting between each other. There were three armies—two sides fighting at one side of the country, and the other two were fighting in another part of the country. Everybody was trying to take over the territory.

The war in Bosnia started—I believe it was the Spring of 1992. I was living in a place called, Zenica. It's about forty miles from the capital, Sarajevo. Yes—the war started in 1992, and after that we couldn't go out of the city. We just basically stayed there all the time—those four years from 1992 until the war finished in 1996.

In 1992—right in the beginning—the war didn't affect a lot of us. In my city we could still go somewhere else and come back. In 1993, the war started getting closer, and we couldn't go out and nobody could come in—except armies, armies could come and go in and out of the town. I mean we could probably walk somewhere, but it really wasn't safe to go out because you never really knew who was hiding behind the hill, or who was over there and who they were looking for.

When that started happening it was 1993, and there was less and less food. Prices started going up, and sometimes we would get to the point where there was no flour, no flour at all. I was living with my parents and my brother—who was five years younger—in town. I believe I was still going to high school at that point. When it started to get dangerous, they decided to close all the schools because it wasn't really safe to walk around inside the town. You never knew when they were going to send the missiles. They were always waiting for sunny nice weather when a lot of people would get out. Then they would end up killing five, ten, or twenty people at a time.

There was one mountain that when you go on the road was twenty-five miles from the town, but by airplane it was maybe fifteen or twenty miles. They were shooting from there. They were on the mountain. When they got there they shot all around. They were just shooting—they didn't care. They were just in a bad mood, so they shot.

In my town there wasn't really fighting inside, they were just bombing the city every once in a while. They were just waiting for nice weather—get some people out walking—then they hit the town. It wasn't that much. They would send maybe five or ten bombs a day. That would be all. You could still go out, it just wasn't really safe to walk. You never knew, it could be midnight or it could be ten o'clock when they send a couple bombs.

Through the war there wasn't really much going on, and I can say that sometimes I had a great time. I was just surviving for four years, just waiting for it to stop. Basically, you just had to make sure you got enough food, but I still had fun. We still played soccer—we still played, but you just never knew when a missile was going to hit, or maybe kill

us. It was scary for maybe the first few months, but you just get used to it. You just don't care. If they hit me, hit me—I'll just go.

A lot of stuff you just get used to it. No food—you eat less. You just get used to it. People didn't have cigarettes, so they just used leaves instead. They put them in newspaper, just something to have to smoke.

I was hoping to get a better childhood. I really had no chance for education because when the war started I was seventeen. I was just about in my third year of high school. When the war ended—when it finished, I was twenty-one or twenty-two. It just hit me at that period. I finished my school but the way we finished was that because of the war they said to everybody, "You guys are all done."

That was probably the big change for me because everything was supposed to go fine, everything was supposed to be good. Then suddenly a couple big heads decide to start a war and the fighting starts. It was the same for my brother too. He was twelve when it started.

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 19<sup>th</sup>, 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.

Later on my family decided to leave Bosnia. We had some family in Croatia. Then after that we came here to the United States. I think all around—in Serbia and Croatia—there were organizations helping people from Bosnia escape the war. There were two in Croatia and one in Serbia that was sending people to Canada, Australia, and the United States. It was definitely hard to leave because I had been there my whole life. But there is something that tells you that it's time to go. I can't tell you what it is, but you look at the situation around yourself and you don't see your future there. I say we can always do better—we are always looking for a better place to live. And that's basically pretty much why we decided to go.

And of course we always have that feeling that we wanted to be back someday. You talk to your friends that are still there—families there—I am happy because my parents are here, and my brother is here, and it makes it a little easier on me. A lot of people have parents still there—brothers, sisters—and they just go more often to visit. I have been back only once in 2001. I always have that feeling that I would like to visit for at least five or ten days just to see some faces I haven't seen for so long. But on the other side, both my kids were born here, and I see their future here. I want to be close to them, so probably I see myself pretty much staying here.

## David and Jean-Luc—Rwanda

David: Can you imagine if all the government—in one night—got killed and then in the morning you had to make another government?

*Jean-Luc: In 1994, things were starting to get worse. Then the President got killed and the genocide started. I was not in Kigali. David was there with my mom and sister, but I was at school at the time. I was supposed to go home Friday, but the President was killed Wednesday, so I was stuck at school with all my friends and classmates. They put all of us in the cafeteria and closed the door. These guys walked around the windows with machetes, talking at the door, “We want to come inside! You are hiding people!” The school director had asked everyone to put on their uniforms so we could not be identified. They were looking for Tutsis.*

In the capital, that was a very bad time. There were many things going wrong—you could not understand what was happening. Those people were there to kill. When the genocide started they went everywhere in the town and started to kill people. Today you can see the pictures—see the movies. People made documentaries about the people that were getting training. We did not know for what, but we saw the result when the President died and they started to kill people. People were getting trained to fight—trained to kill.

*I was at school for a month. After three weeks the director had to call the authorities. They sent three soldiers to keep the school safe. When those soldiers came—after three days—the director came and said, “All those kids who have military parents, there is a car coming by and I want those kids to leave.” So, I had to get in the car, but that was really scary because on the road I saw corpses—corpses all around on the road. By that time the genocide was pretty much done. That was something I never quite understood, being fourteen years old and seeing corpses. I couldn’t understand why, why people were doing that. I didn’t know that I was Hutu, or that my friends were Tutsi. I knew that we were just friends—we were Rwandese.*

I remember when the genocide began, when we moved out of Kigali. The genocide started on April 6<sup>th</sup>, and we went to my grandmother’s village on the 11<sup>th</sup>. Then we went to a military camp, because my father had been in the army and people knew him. We asked for protection. We got an apartment with two bedrooms, and Jean-Luc, he came to meet us. We spent a month in this military camp. There was a guy who had a passage to get out of Rwanda. He had a truck. At that time he was a priest in the army, he helped us get out of Rwanda to go into Bukavu, Zaire.

*We didn’t live in the refugee camp because my mom had friends in Bukavu. So, we stayed in their house for two years and a half. We had to move again because a war started in that region [First Congo War, aka. Kabila Rebellion]. The Tutsi soldiers, under the cover of the Kabila rebellion, were destroying the refugee camps and killing people. So we had to move—and move—and move—across the Congo by just walking for six months.*

When we left the town, I was with my mom and Jean-Luc. We had to put Mom in the back of a car to get her to the next camp, Kashusha. Jean-Luc and I, we had to walk thirty miles. We spent a night walking the thirty miles. Then we spent three weeks in the camp before the Kabila attacked. When they attacked the camp, it was Saturday in the morning. We just ran. I took my mom and my young sister. My mom had the baby on her back.

*There were a hundred thousand people walking. Some people were going that way—some people were going straight—some people were going back—so I didn't know exactly where to go. David and the others took the way in the forest, and I thought they couldn't have taken that way. So I took the road, and we got separated.*

My mom and I went through the forest and reached the road to Bunyokili. There was a guy there who had been tried by my father. The guy had been sent out of the army, and he went home. It wasn't my father who made the decision, but according to the stuff he had done, and what the other soldiers said, they made the decision to kick him out of the army. He recognized me, and he recognized my mother. And the guy decided just to kill me, just in the road in this town called, Bunyokili. When he saw me—he made a story—he says I am Tutsi, I'm from Rwanda, I come to get information and to bring back—and so those guys have to kill me. I was going to die, I was going to die because they had made everything—they dug for me. There was a pastor who saved my life. The pastor came and he heard the story and he asked me if that was real, because if it was not a real story then I had to show them that it was not real. I have to show something—show my card to show that I'm not Tutsi, that I'm not in the rebellion, and I didn't come to get information. He said, “Ask this guy for his ID and his mother's passport to check if he really is his son.” Because in the passport in Rwanda they put the name of the husband and the children, so my name was in her passport, and my ID was carrying my name. I showed them both documents and that was proof that I was the child of the Cornel, my father. [David and Jean-Luc's father was a prominent Hutu cornel for the army of the Rwandan government prior to the genocide.] So the guy didn't have a reason to kill me... I was not a Tutsi from the rebellion come to get information. That was my bad night. I'll never forget that. I saw the way they dug for me and I can remember that place. We had to move, and Jean-Luc met us after two months.

*When you move to a refugee camp, you have just to say, “Do you know this person, do you know this person, do you know this person”—and finally I found them. David and I caught cholera in that refugee camp. We spent four days in isolation. We survived, but many people died. In the big tents with twenty people, every five minutes somebody would die. They would just come take the body—take the body. After a couple weeks we had to walk again. The rebellion was coming to that refugee camp. Because at this stage the soldiers didn't have the option to bring people back to Rwanda, they wanted just to kill, “You didn't want to go back, now it's time to die.” So now they were just walking and killing people.*

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.

*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.

At this time, you are running after time. Time is the most important thing you got. If you want to survive, you have to run. You have to run—to run—and to run. The people behind you have cars—have food—have everything. You don't have food. You don't have a car. They know where they're going. You don't know where you are going. So you have to run, even if you run the wrong direction—just run! You have to be running because you have just one day before them. Just one day. So, we spent two weeks in the forest. The goal was to reach this town called, Opala. Our sister went with another group of people, and we were on our own—me, Jean-Luc, Mom, and Arnold (my young brother, nine months old). Jean-Luc, he would be on the front, Mom in the middle, and me on the back. That was our style to walk in the forest. Just walking—night, day, night, day, night. We went to Ikela. We found our uncle there. We spent just one night, all the next day, and then that same night we had to walk during the night because we had to escape the Congo soldiers. We had to walk at night to escape them—quiet, no light, nothing, just walking. After that, we walked all the way until we reached Boende. From there my uncle and the other guys decided to steal canoes so we could take the water because the river was going in the same direction that we wanted to go. We had three big boats and we started just to follow the river. This was my first time to paddle. We spent 11 days on the river, every night coming to a small village to find something to eat.

*Somewhere we met this guy who came with a big boat to take refugees. Somewhere close to Mbandaka, he came to take refugees. So we got on that boat. The boat couldn't go to the shore, so refugees had to come to the boat. We had to pay money to people from the village to bring us to the boat. Many people died trying to swim to the boat.*

*From Mbandaka we came to Inebu. It was a navy base where they were training navy soldiers. And from there my uncle had to pay people so we could cross the Congo River in the night. We went to a small island, and then from there we crossed to the other side, to Liranga—to the Congo Brazzaville.*

*On the other side of the Congo River, where we spent eight months, we built a small house. We went into the forest and cut the trees. We built the house with mud, and we put this plastic stuff on the top. So anytime it rained, David and me would go outside and hold the plastic because the wind would blow it away.*

We spent almost a year—anytime it rained—we were outside in the rain holding the plastic. We could hold the whole night. You know the good thing is the human body can adapt to any situation when you stand a long time. Take the Jews when they were in the concentration camps. At the end, everything became normal. Life, it's normal. It's normal to live in a concentration camp. It's normal to sleep this way. It's normal to wear these clothes. Everything becomes normal. We forgot that we had a life. We forget that we slept in a house. We forget that we had electricity. That was a dream. It was like one day we dreamt we have a good life. That was a dream. We forgot that we had been to school. We became like savages, like animals.

*We moved to the capital of Congo—Brazzaville. We spend two months in the refugee camp. We joined our younger sister, with the guy who took her by force. From there we*

*moved from the refugee camp to the city. My mom started to sell in the market, the public market, to get something to eat. We started to get back into life because we started to learn again to wear clothes, and to shave, and to put on cologne. To come through the high commission of refugees my Mom had to apply for asylum. She had to wait four years, interviewing everyday. She lost hope—she regained hope—and after four years they transferred our situation to Geneva. In Geneva they had to ask if there were any countries that wanted to take us. The United States accepted to take us. In November 2004, we moved to the United States.*

*And so among all those situations our life changed. We started to see things differently—we started to see life differently. We started to love without expecting something back—we started to give without expecting something back. We started to love—we started to share all we have. All these experiences became something good for us, because I'm not ashamed anymore to say that I'm from Rwanda. I'm not ashamed to share my story, because this story makes me strong, and proud to be who I am...*

*We lost a lot of friends in the genocide. On our mother's side, we lost our uncles, cousins, and nephews. Almost all of our childhood friends died in the genocide. You know things changed. When you grow up and you know you survived because you had a different name or because you were from another ethnic group—this is not fair. So my friend died because he was from another ethnic group, and I survived because I was from the other ethnic group? This is not fair, you know.*

We just learn from our experience. Our life is not static—it's dynamic—it's moving. If somebody needs your help, give your help because you don't know tomorrow if you're the one who's going to need the help.

*The thing we know is that we never change the world like this...[snapping his fingers]. We just contribute to what other people did, or are doing right now. The whole thing from this story is just that people have to understand that humans need more value. We are not materials. We are not something people use and just put in the garbage. We are humans, and in all our lives there are so many things connected. They are nature—they are our family. All society is connected to us, and people have to understand that respecting one person is respecting a society. I think that sharing our story is a way to show that even going through a hard time—losing family, friends—even after that people still have hope, and still try to do something to help humanity to be more human. So that's all.*

### **Faustine—Rwanda (Burundian)**

Every problem I had in my life came from my family background. I was born in Rwanda and all the ethnic issues about where my family was from—all my problems came from that.

My parents were refugees. They traveled from Burundi to Rwanda in 1972. At that time they were only about fourteen years old when they went to Rwanda. I was born in Rwanda in the refugee camp. So when I was born I found myself growing up in a refugee camp—living in a small house made of grass. When I was growing up in Rwanda I was playing with other Rwandese kids and they were saying, “Oh, these people are from Burundi,” calling us “Banyakarundi,” which was a surname for Burundian people. So I was asking my parents at the time, “Why do people call me a different name?”

Usually every night people would gather together, parents and kids, and the parents would tell them stories. We used to ask our parents why we are here, how come we found ourselves in this country? My parents said that we were refugees from Burundi and that our grandparents were killed by Tutsis with bamboo sticks. That was the reason why my parents left Burundi. But for me, I never believed that. I thought that it wasn’t possible that people were really killing each other, and instead I thought my parents moved because they were really poor and thought Rwanda would be a better place to live. Then my father told me that when I grew up one day I would understand what it means to be in a refugee camp—to be a refugee. He said, “You cannot understand right now, you are too young.”

On October 1, 1990, I was eleven years old—I was sleeping. That night, October 1, 1990, when the war started in Rwanda, I didn’t know anything about it so my parents woke me up and told me that the Rwandan Patriotic Force (RPF) from Uganda was attacking Rwanda. When the RPF came into Rwanda they came to the place where the refugee camp was—the refugee camp was in a place called, Mutara. It’s in northeast Rwanda in the province called, Byumba.

So I started running that night with my family. We started running, going away, and we spent the night in the banana fields. During the night 15,000 soldiers from the RPF came into Rwanda, so we could not go back to the refugee camp. We just kept going. That was a really hard time; we walked for four days until we got to a sports stadium in Byumba town. We slept in the stadium. We spent two days in the stadium with no food and no drinking. There were about 700 people in the stadium together. I told my father that I’m going to die because I needed food. As a kid, I didn’t care about what was going on. When I was hungry I was thinking about food. My father said, “My son, you know how we left our house; what can I tell you; I don’t have any food to give you; we have to stay here.” But the Rwandan government could not take care of us so they decided to send us back to the refugee camp.

We went back into the refugee camp that we had come from. We didn't have any choice so when the fighting broke out around us we had to move to a different part of the camp. If you didn't get killed, if you didn't get shot, when the fighting finished there you would just go back to your place.

We spent those four years in that place amid the killing. Sometimes the soldiers would have a hard time distinguishing between Burundese and Rwandese, so we spent those four years dealing with the soldiers both from the government and the RPF. What scared me was when the RPF came and started taking stuff from the people—stealing cars and destroying houses and killing people—that was really scary. So since then I just decided to give up going to school because the situation was so bad. Before that I was going to school. When I saw those situations, war and killing, I just stopped going to school. We didn't eat anymore—there was no more food.

So then I told my father that I was not going to just keep on running with him. I told him that if he ran again, he could take his way and I could take mine. I couldn't stay in that place. I wanted to go to Kigali, the capital of Rwanda, to find a life. By my father said, "You can't go my son. I don't want to let you go." At that time I was only fourteen years old and I was not eligible to have an ID. So when my father saw that I was really ready to leave that place, he was worried because I didn't have any identification. If I went without any kind of identification it was dangerous because at that time during the war if you had no identification they would kill you. My father went to the mayor and paid some money, because I was only fourteen years old. He paid some money to get an ID for me so that I could use it to go into Kigali.

So I left the refugee camp at three in the morning. I went on a truck that was owned by one of my father's friends. At three in the morning that guy didn't notice that I was on the top of the truck, so when we got to a town called Kabarore, close to Kigali, he noticed at eight in the morning that I was on top of his truck. He knew me so he stopped the truck and asked me where I was going. I told him my father sent me to Kigali. He understood, and he took me in his truck, and we went to Kigali.

That was my first time to be in Kigali. I had a hard time because it was a city and it was so much different from where I was from. I didn't want to show my father's friend that I didn't know where I was going, so I tried to pretend that I knew where I was going. So I just walked away—I said bye and just walked away. I spent two weeks just walking in the city. I didn't know where to go.

One of my brothers-in-law came to Kigali and he had a bag of clothes. He recognized me so he said he was going to leave me with this bag to give to somebody else. He left the bag and I sold it to get some money. The money I got from that bag—I stole from my brother-in-law, but that money was really, really good for me. It was a blessing. I was young so I bought some cloths, some jeans to look nice. And then I went to one of the hotels and bought a beer and started drinking it. There was another guy from Burundi who was a chauffeur for a guy from Belgium named, Etienne. I bought a beer for that guy and we became friends. The guy asked me, "What do you do? You seem to be having

money and a good life.” So I told him that I was a mechanic—sometimes I have work and sometimes I don’t—I was lying. And then the guy said his boss was looking for someone to fix his car, just one person. After four days, the Belgian guy came to pick me up and he brought me to his house. He took me around the house and he showed me where he kept his money. He said the only thing he didn’t want was someone who steals, so he took my ID and he made a photocopy.

His wife had been a Rwandese refugee living in Belgium and they had come back to Rwanda to live. When he found out his eldest son was about my age, and they knew that I came from a refugee camp—instead of being a worker at their home, I became like a child—one of their children. I spent a year with that family. I was having a great time like a member of the family. They were giving me money each month—20,000 Rwandese, which was a lot of money. More than someone who works for the government.

Then in 1994, in March, they gave me permission to go back and see my family and Burundian friends in Mutara. I left Kigali on March 26<sup>th</sup>. I went to the refugee camp and spent time with my family. On the day I was waiting for the bus to go back to Kigali—when the soldiers showed up and beat me up. They told me, “What are you doing in the middle of the road here? The president of Rwanda is dead and the president of Burundi is dead, and you are just hanging out in the middle of the road. Go back in the refugee camp.” They beat me up and told me to go back into the refugee camp.

I was really worried. I was regretting why this happened to me in the refugee camp when I should be in Kigali with the other family. So I was really confused and I didn’t know what to do. Since then everything started to become wrong. People started to kill each other, burning peoples’ houses. If you walk in the street and you are a Tutsi, they kill you. Everything got really bad.

From that refugee camp, the place called Murambi, we walked two weeks to get to the Tanzania border. It got so bad we decided to leave. I didn’t have time to find my family. Everyone took his own way. So I was alone. I was just running away with anybody.

As we were walking to the Tanzanian border sometimes there were people dying. We were walking through the corpses, people that just got killed from the genocide. Sometimes we walked and the people with guns would just shoot into a big group. One time a group of soldiers stopped us. They thought I was a Tutsi so they took me into the forest and they were going to kill me. Because I was tall they thought I must be a Tutsi. Some of the Burundian people I was traveling with explained that I was from Burundi. I got lucky that they didn’t kill me. One of the people in our group, they hit him in the head and I think he died. I got really scared.

When we got to the border, to cross the border there was a river with a bridge. There were so many people that they made a line. Just to move a foot would take an hour. I started trying to cross the bridge at eight in the morning and I didn’t get into Tanzania

until two in the afternoon. I was so happy when I crossed the bridge and they told me I was in Tanzania. I was so glad to be there that I ate the ground.

When I crossed the border over the bridge, the soldiers from Tanzania who were speaking Swahili, they told us that we better keep moving because the RPF may come to the border to kill people. So it was better for us to move. At the same time that they were saying that, the RPF showed up and they crossed the bridge and started killing people. Many people started jumping in the river. The river was called, Akagera. Many people died by shooting and just jumping in that river. So many people died that day.

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 can't go back into Rwanda because we were just refugees there.

I got lucky—God helped me—I got this chance to come live here. Sometimes I think of my parents and what happened to them. During the war, when I was traveling to Tanzania, my parents went to Kigali. What happened is when people started moving from the refugee camp in Rwanda, the idea was to go to Tanzania, but the way you take is important. My parents just missed the way to go to Tanzania. They took the wrong way, which took them to Kigali. They were in the group of people who missed the right way and went to Kigali. I know that when you are taking your way—sometimes even you know the way that you want to take—but because there are so many people moving sometimes you get lost, you make a small mistake and you find yourself in a different way than you want to go. That is what happened to my parents.

They crossed Rwanda to the other side, which was Zaire. They were walking across Rwanda for three months—three months to cross Rwanda to get to Goma in Zaire.

When my parents got to Goma, my brothers didn't survive. They were hungry so my mother went to buy some small cakes called, Begnee. My mother bought them the cakes, but those cakes were poisoned. Four of my brothers, they ate those cakes and died. Since my four brothers died, my parents lost their minds. They didn't know what to do so they just went back to Burundi. Even if they died, they already died—losing four children at the same time. So they decided to go back into Burundi, and when they got there they got divorced. My mother, for her, life was over—she lost her mind. My father is trying to find himself, but it's hard.

So I am just the only one, along with my sister, who are left of the family. I have a 31 year-old sister, but I haven't seen her in seventeen years. We were separated in 1990 when the war in Rwanda started. I heard she was alive, but we never saw each other again. My sister went back to study in Burundi and she is living there now.

I was in the refugee camp in Tanzania for 13 years before I came to the U.S. We have been in the U.S. for two months. Living here is hard—you have to work to make money and pay for an apartment. People tell me that if I don't pay my bills they are going to throw me out.

I am happy to be here because my son and daughter may have a future. In the refugee camp I was thinking that maybe my children would end up like other children, or like how I ended up. I am really happy, you know—I don't have much to leave for them, but I'm really glad to have them here.

## **James—Sudan**

My name is James Ajena. I'm from Sudan—southern Sudan. My life, my story, actually started in 1987. The people came to my area, and they set fire to the house and killed my dad at the same time. Then they took me with them—when I was nine years old.

I used to live in Low—that was my area. Low was our home; it was different from here. We had huts and gardens, and it was green. It was like in the mountains here. It was all green, but there was not a lot of open space where you could play futbol. We were among the trees. We had a river—we would swim in it, but not all of the year. In the summertime there was no water. The water would come to the river from season to season. I was young and I didn't have the chance to enjoy all of these things because the whole time—the militia they came. I didn't have a good life over there because we were safe for a little while, and then you would hear about some people getting killed nearby, and then they came the last time to my area. The Abiey area was burned—they set fire to the whole area. Abiey is located between northern and southern Sudan, so Abiey was finished first—the war started in Abiey—in my area. Even now Abiey has problems because the government in northern Sudan wants Abiey to be a part of the north, and the government in the south wants Abiey to be a part of the south.

Before the war, when there was no Sudanese Peoples Liberation Army and no government in southern Sudan, they just came to take our stuff—like if you had goats or cows—they would just come and take your cows. They wouldn't kill people. But when they heard that we were making a government for the south, they came and started to kill people and take the young people. They didn't want the young people to grow up and make problems for them—to make an army.

It was a militia, but I think the government of Sudan sent them to us. They sent them to us because that way if someone accused them then they could say it wasn't the government soldiers. But where did they find those guns and where did they find everything else? So, I think the government sent them to us.

When they came they burned houses down in the whole area at the same time. When they took me there were many children from five years to more than fifteen years old. When it happened I thought they would take me with my mom. Then I couldn't find her. They took the children one place and the women somewhere else. They separated us. I thought my mom was with me, but when I asked one of the guys if he could return me to my mom, he said my mom had run away. Because of the fire in the house, you could see somebody close, but far away you couldn't see them. My mom ran away to hide. She thought that my dad took me. She didn't know the militia had killed my dad.

So, they took me with lots of other kids. When they took us we had to walk for two days. Every time we came to a new area, some people would take five or ten kids—everyone would take somebody to go to work at their home. They didn't pay you—they didn't give you something to eat—something good. They didn't want you to die; they just wanted you to work hard.

The man who took me—he just came to the people who had guns. I think he was an important guy in that area. He had come to see who could come to do his work. So, he took me with some other people. When I went to his home, I was just by myself. I don't know what happened to the other people. He was a farmer and he had goats. I took care of his goats and cleaned the house. He wasn't nice to me. After that his brother came down and took me with him. I was ten or eleven when I left.

His brother was a businessman who traded wood between northern and southern Sudan. He was nicer—when he bought something for himself, he would give something to me. He didn't pay me to do the work, but he fed me. At that time, I worked with him on his farm. While I was working there I met a man from my tribe—the Dinka tribe. We spoke the same language and I told him about myself. I talked to him about my situation and he helped me to know how to save myself from this guy. I didn't talk to the man about leaving, I just left—I saved myself. I thought if I left him I could go back to my house—to southern Sudan. It was hard. I couldn't go back to the south—you could go, but it was dangerous.

Before I left the man I was in Omdromont, and when I left him I went to Khartoum—the capital city of Sudan. It's a big city. It wasn't safe in southern Sudan, but it wasn't safe in the north either. There were people that were working with the government. If they didn't like what you were doing, or if they thought you are doing something to help the people in southern Sudan, they could kill you without anybody knowing. And I think that is going on still now.

So after I saved myself, I went to live with my friend's uncle. I found a job to work in the house of some rich people. I would just work at the home and then go to church on Sunday—I was an alter boy. I did that for two years and then I got married to Adoul.

My first son, Deng, was born on September 7<sup>th</sup>, 1998. At that time we were living in Droshap with Adoul's family. When Deng was six months old he got very sick. I took Deng to the hospital with his Mom. They were there for more than three months. I was working at night and during the day I would go to see them, but it was far away. I took the bus for around one hour. I was living at home alone—everyday I would go to the hospital and then home.

The next part of my story starts when I was working with the Pepsi Company. When I was working there, my name came up on a list and they said I had to stay until January 2001 and then go to southern Sudan to fight. The list—I think it was for the Mujahadeen—I don't know how to explain them in English, but they are called, Mujahadeen. They aren't the army, they aren't the police—they don't wear the army clothes; they wear the normal clothes and they just have guns. They came looking for people and the Pepsi company just gave them some people who could go do that job—to go to southern Sudan. But that was my original territory; they wanted me to go there to shoot people. I said, “No, I can't do that.” When I said, “No,” they just said, “If you don't want to do this you can't work here anymore.”

So at that time I was thinking of leaving the Pepsi Company. I was just thinking of waiting until January 1<sup>st</sup> and then looking for a different job. That was my hope. I was thinking that if I didn't want to go with those people, then they couldn't do anything—the company couldn't do anything. When I decided not to go, I didn't tell the Mujahadeen, but I was telling the people around me—you know friends. I think someone talked to them and said, "This guy, he doesn't want to go do this. Maybe he thinks he will find another job or something." I think that is why they sent the men to my house.

When they came to the house I was there with my family. They came at night and knocked on the door. Then when I came to open the door, they asked me my name. When I told them my name is James, one of the guys hit me in the face. Then they threw me into a truck and they sat on my back. I couldn't move and I couldn't see their faces. They held me for three days and they were asking me lots of questions. They wanted me to go to southern Sudan. They said if you didn't want to go, then who was going to go kill those people in southern Sudan. That is what the boss—their boss—said to me. They hit me. That was for three days.

They wanted me to go take their training and then go to the south. They wouldn't let me leave, but then when I said to them, "Okay, I'm going to do this," they said, "Okay, if you're going to go do this, then we don't have a problem with you." "If you try to go somewhere, we know how to get you—how to take you back here." I decided to do the training because I just wanted to leave there—because I didn't know where I was. So, that's why I said I would go to the training. I thought when I came back I would find a different way to save myself and my family.

So I went to the training for two weeks. At the camp they taught me a lot of Islamic songs. We would sing and learn how to shoot the guns. I never went to training with the army; I don't think it was the same thing. They told us we would have to go to the south when we were finished. They were going to do something there called, Jihad. They were called the Mujahadeen, and they went to go do Jihad. I am Christian—they didn't care about that; they just wanted me to change my religion. Even if you didn't want to change your religion, you have to do it—you have to go to the south.

So for two weeks I had to go there for the training and then I would come back to my home on the weekend—which started on Friday. We came home on Thursday and went back on Saturday. When you left you had to go sign your name—they had an office somewhere called, Mossisa. It was a security office, a government security office. You just had to go to sign your name so that they knew you were going to go back the next day. During that time—the two weeks—my wife's father was making some papers for me—a passport and other things. That's why I needed to stay for a little bit. Then after the first two weeks, I left and went to hide in Jabeloliay. So I signed out and I didn't come back.

After I came back from the second week of training I sent Adoul to live with her mother, with Deng, and his sister, Aleik. It was hard to leave them, but I think it was safer because the people were looking for me, they weren't looking for my wife.

After that I went to Egypt and while I was there I found a UN refugee office. There were a lot of people who went there to get tickets. You stand in line to wait until your time to make an appointment six months later or a year. I went there and I just wrote down my name and made an appointment for one and a half years later. Then they told me I could come six months earlier—they changed so I only had to wait one year. When I went back, I filled out an application, did some paperwork, and then I got interviewed. They asked me about why I was there and what were my problems. I told them what had happened from my time in southern Sudan until now. After the interview they told me I could come on Thursday to see the list outside—there I would find my number and whether they had accepted me or reject me. When I went there, I saw the board and I found my number—I was accepted.

Life in Egypt was very bad because you could be walking in the street and somebody could take something and just hit you, because they know you are from Sudan. There were refugee people, like me, who died in Egypt. The police or the Egyptian government killed them. Those people had been in Egypt for a long time, and they were rejected from the UN Refugee program. That year the UN had said that they didn't have forms for Sudanese refugees because they said that Sudan had peace. So there were some people who had stayed there for five or six years and didn't get any help. Some of the people were from Darfur, where they didn't have peace. But the UN said that there was peace in Sudan, so they didn't want to take any Sudanese people.

I was accepted for resettlement in 2002 and I came here in 2006 with my family. It took a longtime 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.

## **John—Burundi**

I'm from Burundi—I fled in 1993. In 1993, there was a presidential assassination in Burundi. That's when we left Burundi and ended up in Tanzania. The first place we lived was a refugee camp in Tanzania called, Lulenge. I spent one year there. After that they sent me to another refugee camp in Tanzania called, Mukugwa. From 1994 until 2005 I lived in that refugee camp. In 2005, the OIM and the UN came and tried to resettle us to the U.S. I moved to Vermont in June 2005. Since then I've just been here. I don't have any problems here; I got a lot of help and the refugee program is still helping me to resettle.

I am thankful to the government for bringing me here and giving me the chance to have a new life. I try just to honor that privilege by respecting the law and doing what's right. I thank God because without him I would not be alive today. Thinking about what I went through in my country—my whole family was killed in 1993. After the assassination of the president, who was a Hutu, the Hutu population started killing the Tutsi population. I lived in the countryside and we didn't know anything about the problems with the president. After the presidential assassination, they started an ethnic war. At that time I started running around—trying to find a place to hide. I was lucky because an old woman hid me under her bed so I could escape. They killed twenty-six people in my family—everybody living on the same street. That old lady, she was a Hutu, but because we had a good neighborhood relationship she hid me. When the people came over to her house looking for me, she said there was nobody there.

What happened with that lady was she had a child with a Tutsi guy. So, I was a friend of her son's. I went to that woman's house in the morning around nine and I had to wait the whole day until eight when it became dark. What happened when it became dark was we were able to move because we didn't live far from Tanzania. The woman said, "I did what I could, you have to leave now," because they started burning houses so if people were hiding inside, they would get burned inside. We had to leave that night. We were able to walk in the night and we crossed the border—me and the son of that lady. When we went to Tanzania, the son of that lady was able to find his family and he went his own way. That's what happened—that's how I got to the refugee camp in Tanzania.

When I went to Tanzania I went to Lulenge where I was able to stay over with a Catholic organization that helps refugees. There were a lot of other refugees, but I got to explain my situation to the people down there. I told them what happened to my family and they decided I couldn't be sent to the Lukori refugee camp because it's more like everyone was sent there. Because of my situation I was fearing for my life, so they decided to send me to the Mukugwa camp. The people that lived there were having similar situations—harder situations. They were people who were fearing for their lives. So they sent them there.

In the refugee camps they used to have those kind of classes where they taught us how to forget what happened in the past and reconcile, meet together, etc. In my refugee camp, there were like 10 countries together—different ethnic groups. There was another

refugee camp that didn't want to socialize with the people in our refugee camp. There were also people who lost their minds remembering their family being killed in their country. So, the UN started teaching those kinds of courses.

After that, I didn't see anymore of the ethnic situation because I believed everybody was the same—had the same blood. I was trying to help anybody that I met out on the street, because I was trying to tell my Burundese fellows that we should forget what happened in 1993 and try to rebuild the country.

So as time went by people started to slow down, and we found peace in the refugee camp. Being in the refugee camp, I think we were sharing the same troubles. So when we met we would say, "What happened—happened. Let's just live together and try to have a life here." It's not only that Tutsi's were killed; Hutu's were killed too in that war, both sides.

There were other refugee camps, but if I tried to leave my refugee camp to go visit my friends at another refugee camp it was really dangerous because they didn't want to have people like me in that refugee camp. The other refugee camp was more Hutus and at my refugee camp we were more mixed—either the husband is Hutu and the wife is Tutsi—or the other way around.

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 was 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.

When I moved here there was a case manager at the Refugee Resettlement Program called, Wanza. He came to work with me and met me at the airport when I arrived. What he did—he contacted all of the African guys around and told them there was a new arrival—and that they should stop by and meet me. So after three days somebody stopped

by to say hi. That was a huge relief. Now when new people come I am able to drive them around and show them the town and share everything I know.

The more time that goes by—I am just learning another culture. I can't say I am losing all of my culture, but I am losing some of it. I'm not really worried about that because I am just trying to survive. If I can find a place to sleep and something to eat then that's enough. That's the most important thing. I consider this place my new home because I have found a place to sleep and something to eat. The only problem is having bills. There are a lot of bills and because we don't know the language we are getting jobs that don't pay enough money. At the end of the month, we are always under zero because we have to pay more than we make.

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.

## Malinga and Cléoplace —Congo

Malinga: I'm from the Congo—from Bukavu. I was married in 1995. My husband's name is Cléoplace. He's from the Congo, too. I have two kids—Bernadette and King. Bernadette was born in Zambia in 2003, and King was born here.

I was in Bukavu where Cléoplace was teaching. I was seeing Cléoplace and he asked me if I was interested—and I said yes.

*Cléoplace: You know in the Congo sometimes you have to support yourself. To buy papers for school, sometimes you teach even two or three times a week. You are not a fulltime teacher. That was what I was doing. I taught mathematics—and physics sometimes. You know so many people they fear mathematics, but because I did my studies in scientific B, which included chemistry, math, and physics, when I finished my high school and when I went to the college it was easy for me to teach physics and math. In math, Malinga was not a good student. I had to push—you know—to force that (laughing). She was not good in math.*

Cléoplace was a good teacher—yes.

I was born in Bukavu—that is the capital city of the South Kivu province. When I got married, I went to live with my husband's family in Uvira, a district about 120 km from Bukavu. Uvira is on the border—Uvira is near Burundi. I left Uvira and I went to Burundi for some business. You know in Africa sometimes there are no good jobs. So we do something that's not a big business—not a big deal. I would buy some pencils, books, and pens to do some business because I wanted to make some money. If I didn't have money, I couldn't eat. You know in Africa—the people—we are poor. So I went to Burundi to buy some things and the war started then. When I was in Burundi, I heard that Uvira was on fire. The war started in Uvira. So I found myself stuck in Burundi. When the war started, I stayed in Burundi because I couldn't go again in the Congo—because in the Congo there were people killing people. So that's why I stayed in Burundi.

*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.*

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 Cléoplace. 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 Cléophaçe, 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.*

*As we walked, we saw so many things—we saw horrible things. If you see somebody that is killed with a bullet, I think that's better than what we saw. Can you imagine that they slaughtered somebody by cutting off the head? And then they put it on a stick—people were walking with that. You can see the blood spreading onto his arm. You know some people, when they shot, the bullets would go astray and hit people. They would just fall down and die like that. And it's no help to go back and help them. You have to take your journey because you don't know if the second time it will be you.*

*So I had a tough time when I was walking. When we reached the shore and we got in the boat to take us to Zambia, it was one boat and it was not easy. Everybody wanted to get in the boat because if you took too much delay, rebels could come and attack you in that place. So we had, all of us, to get into the boat. We started the journey up to Zambia and it was almost inevitable to have an accident there because it was too heavy. The boat we used could carry maybe fifty, but we were almost seventy. A lot of us didn't have bags because when you are fleeing you only take the things that are close to you. We almost tipped over because it was heavy and there were waves on the water. Fortunately, we just reached the coast of the lake, and we got into Zambia.*

*I lived in Zambia from 1996 up to 2002 when I found that my wife was in Tanzania. If you make some calculations, it was almost seven years that I didn't see her. When I was in Zambia, I was going to the Red Cross to fill in some tracing forms to see if I could find her. After going to the Red Cross and filling out those forms, I didn't get any answer. So I decided then to use the Church's way. I ended up trying to write to churches because I knew that we are Catholic. I was targeting everywhere; it was not just Tanzania. I was targeting Tanzania, Malawi, and Burundi as well to find where she might be at that time. Eventually, I came to be informed that she was in Tanzania. The church in Kigoma, Tanzania, they responded to me and said they had a group of refugees and that kind of woman which I was looking for. So I started describing her—they had to make sure this was the same person I was looking for— and soon I came to find that she was the one.*

Because that family knew where they were going in Tanzania—when we reached Tanzania we stayed together. We were going to the church and doing everything together. When I was going to the church—it was the church which helped me because that is how I learned that my husband was looking for me. As a Catholic I was going frequently to the church. One day the Priest called me and showed me Cléoplace's letter. I saw the handwriting of my husband and I was really touched to learn that my husband was looking for me because it had been such a long time.

*After a few months, I had to organize transportation money. I sent it to her so she could join me in the Zambia. It was in March 2002. It took almost maybe six months because I was working, but the salaries in Africa are too low. So I had to take a few months to pay for her ticket and make sure it was in good hands. I sent it through the Catholics because I couldn't send it with just anybody. I knew that with the church it was in good hands and she would get the money.*

So after some time, they told me that when I was ready I could come and collect the money, so that I could go and return with my husband. I left Tanzania, but you cannot go to Zambia without crossing the lake. So I took a boat from Tanzania up to Zambia. Then from Zambia I boarded a bus up to the city—the capital city, which is Lusaka. I had the address already because Cléoplace sent me the address. So I went to that address and I waited for him. The place where I met my husband was commonly known. It was a place for refugees—it was the JRS, which stands for Jesuit Refugee Services. So when I got there, they went and told my husband. Cléoplace came and then we met.

*I was away from Malinga for seven years during the time I was living in Zambia. I didn't have any hope at all because seven years is too long. I just kept writing because I am a man and I had to find where she was located. But it was out of my mind—the thought that she could be alive—because I knew that Burundi was involved with the Congo war, and I knew that she's a Congolese, and she's on that side. I didn't expect to see her ever again. But some people kept on encouraging me, "You are a man, you just have to write." Just writing didn't cost me anything. I just wrote and posted the letters and hoped that maybe after ten years I might know that she died, or she's alive, or she is married—maybe something like that. It's better to know and learn about it than just sitting and concluding that she's dead. You know when she came and we could just look at each other and say, "Really—how?" Is that a ghost or a person over there—mixing feelings, you know, I cried and had some tears. It was a hard moment, but finally it was joy and we started our lives. It was at that time that I remember I went to the High Commission of Refugees. I wrote to the U.N. High Commission of Refugees and I was answered positively. I had the first interview, but I told them that I already found my wife. I knew what time she would be around and they said it was no problem. So when she came, I took her to the U.N. and we completed the program. It took four years to come here—it was a long process.*

We lived in Zambia from 2002 to 2005, and I came here in 2005. When we came here to the U.S., and during all that time in Africa, I didn't know where my family was. But when we got into Vermont there was an American by the name of Dick, and that American had a Congolese friend who was a priest. So that American said, "Okay, I am going to help you. I have a friend—a Congolese priest. I am going to ask him to find his way through the Catholic Church to see if we can get your family." So they used that line until they found my family. I spoke to my family in August of last summer—on the phone. I talked to my mother and I talked to my older sisters. I don't get to talk to them very often. When I can get a prepaid telephone card I talk to them, but if I don't then it's not regular. They may wish to come, but they cannot come here.

*One thing which I always say about the United States, and particularly Vermont, is that life is good. Why is it good—because there is peace. You never see someone coming into your house or finding you on the road and asking you if you can give your IDs. We don't have that here. Peace is the first thing which I always appreciate. Secondly, we have jobs. If you want to work and get a job, you can do that. One thing again that I have noticed here is people are not used to different color. You can see that if you get in the bus. You sit where there are two seats—people will pass. They have seen that place there and not sat down. So I think these people, they are not racist—no, simply they are not used to different color. That's what I think about Vermont—yeah, life is good.*

I miss my country, but there is nothing I can do. I hear everyday people are killed in Bukavu. I am worried about my family. My younger brother and younger sister want to come here, but it's difficult for me to get them here. I don't have any money. I don't think I will go back. When I heard my brother was killed—I was scared because they killed my brother before my mother's face. So I would be afraid that it could happen again to my younger one.

*We have been here for two years. Do I miss my home? Yes and no. Yes—because I was born in Africa, and even though I know that there is insecurity and there is poverty, but it's still where I was born. Sometimes I do miss all those small details. I want to see the river; I want to see my friends, stuff like that. But no—because I have had a bad experience. I have seen my mother laying down, killed simply because she was from another ethnicity. No—because I have seen myself born into a regime of a dictator for 32 years. You know the Congo is a rich country, a really rich country, but it's poor because of the leadership. So I think here is better because I know that my daughter and my son won't suffer like the way I did. That is why I say this is my home. Home is home—that is true, but you can make anywhere a home and it can be safer, too.*

*Basically that is our story. It's sad...it's sad, but to hear is better than experiencing. You know somebody can hear—can watch on TV, the way refugees are suffering. But if you experience that, I think it is the worst thing that a man can experience in his life.*

## **Nedžad and Nevzeta—Bosnia**

Nedžad: I was born in a small city in Bosnia-Herzegovina. My dad was working for a big company, he was the manager for bookkeeping. My mom was working in another company. Everything in my life was good. We were going every year somewhere outside the country on vacation or somewhere on the Adriatic Sea. When I finished high school in my city, I went to college in Sarajevo. After finishing college in three years in Sarajevo I went to live for two years in Banja Luka. After a while I return to my city and started working and saving money.

Around 1987, I started to work at a Post Office in Velika Kladusa. Working in the post office, first you need to understand how to do all the jobs in the company including answering phones, telegraphs, and being a cashier. After this you can move up to the position of manager in the post office. I became manager of a small post office, not in my village, but in one village around 60 km from my city, Bosanska Krupa. In this village, I was working for four years. After three years of working in this village the war started. We didn't have any work to do, so I eventually gave the post office to be a radio station. People used the post office for all communications, talking between cities with CB radios.

When the war started it was in the morning while I was working at the post office in this village. People called me and said, "Hey, what happened in your city?" I didn't know because I leave every day—I drive in the morning to go to work and come back in the afternoon. When people asked, I didn't know. I came that morning to work and everything was the same, but people said, "No, something has happened at the radio station in Velika Kladusa." I called my mom and she said everything was okay. After maybe two hours I called back and she said something was happening around the town. So, I got in the car and went down for about 35 minutes of driving. When I came inside the city I saw everybody staying in the streets—people everywhere. I asked some friends—I asked the police, I was good friends with the police—and they said they don't know, but people are talking about war with the Serbian delegation from the city. The Yugoslav army was inside talking about this.

I went home and took my hunting shotgun and my pistol, and I put in my backpack some first aid and alcohol. I put them inside and went out on the street, just walking around. In the afternoon around 5:30PM, the police stopped to say they found someone in a house hiding with an automatic rifle. We headed down to that quadrant of the city. We wanted to try and occupy the house, but someone inside the house start shooting at us. We had moved back to maybe around 30 yards when another person—I know this person because he worked in the post office and phone company—he shot at us from his window. We watched this and then we went inside. He jumped from the porch and ran away. When we went inside his house we found a radio station and one soldiers rifle.

I brought this radio station and rifle to the police. In the night after this, relatively everything started to be quiet. There were people with shotguns walking around the

streets—police and normal people. Everywhere was dark; everybody turned off their lights.

*Nevzeta: Lots of people had already left the city. I think 99% already left because we saw them when they were leaving. There were some men hiding in the houses, but the women, children, and older people, they already left. In one day most people just left, because they usually lived like that anyway. They had a house in the city and they usually had a house in the village. We were just thinking that this was still joke, you know. Nothing will happen, and actually in the night there was maybe a few shots or something, but it was quiet. But, we left the house because Nedžad wanted us to leave. We left the house and went over the river. We had some family and we stayed over the night—and I'm still thinking I will work and I'm waiting for Nedžad. The next day, April 23, they actually started the war. I think maybe five in the morning, or six in the morning.*

The day when I came back from work, I told Nevzeta if they started shooting, she must go into the village around 3km from the city. And the next day if they keep shooting she must go in the village where I had been working at the post office. So after the second day, my dad, mom, sister, her son and Nevzeta all went to Bosanska Krupa. That day, the fighting started around 2:00 PM or 3:00 PM. Serbian people started shooting with mortars and around 3:00 PM somebody said that soldiers from the outside lines around the city were coming with tanks. We had relatively nothing—seventy or eighty persons with hunting shotguns. At this time there was no army, it was just the people that lived in the city. After this too many people were moving over the bridges on the northern side of the river. When the Serbian soldiers saw how the people were leaving the city they started to shoot bombs at the bridge.

After this, maybe around 4:30 PM, our group of resistance went inside the sports recreation center. It is between two rivers—one triangle of land between two rivers. We went down in the corner and tried to find small boats to move to the other side—to cross the river. We would have been shot at by the soldiers if we went over the bridge. When we were going down in this corner the Serbian soldiers started moving. I told everyone to go outside, to move and stay quiet. People were taking the boats from the other side, coming and taking five or six people back and forth. Around 6:00 PM, Serbians came into the city and went on top of the hill that separated the city. They talked with the radio and they started to shoot down with mortar grenades on us. At this place I think we had seven people that died from the mortars. I think six or seven and five injured. Some people had crossed, but there were still people waiting and those were the people that got injured. The ones who were injured—I took from my backpack medication and put cloth around them. So in the night, around 10:00 PM, I went on the last boat to the other side of the river. We went into the city on the other side of the river and watched them start to burn houses.

*The soldiers didn't cross the river. They tried to find a way, but in the meantime the Bosnia army came to help. There was a bridge that they blew down. This was the bridge*

*in the city. They put trash and everything on the bridge so that the soldiers could not cross this bridge. They blew it there, otherwise the soldiers could cross.*

Our friend, he put his tractor-trailer truck on the bridge and then around ten days later he blew out the bridge. The truck stayed there the whole war.

After that I returned to Bosanska Krupa to meet my family. I went back to my workplace and started working again. Life was relatively normal. I think a few months after this I gave the post office to be used as a radio station. I don't know if it was in September, October, or January, when I went into the regular army. It was around half a year after the start of the war.

*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.*

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.

*There was no transportation—we had transportation, but they had no gas. Even if they had gas, all the soldiers were living in different directions. They couldn't go home-by-home and pickup everyone. You just had to find your way; you had to be on the line. Sometimes Nedzad left the house the day before—because I had a sister that lived in Bihac—and he slept overnight at her place before going on the line.*

The last day I was supposed to be on the line—when I was coming from the line to go home—war between two Muslim groups started. It was like a civil war that started between Muslims from different cities. So, I moved to Nevzeta's parents, around 10 km away, and stayed there. When the line came close I didn't go to fight on the line because the army I was in was now from the other side. I was now living on the wrong side of the line.

*The Muslim people—because they checked the houses everyday, we were actually surrounded everyday by people looking for Nedzad. You cannot go out and kill your own people and his army started fighting against people where he was living. So, he was on the wrong side. He went to hide with my parents because the people looking for him knew that they were older and that my brother was just sixteen. So, at night he left us and stayed there.*

When the line was coming close to her parents' house, I needed to move to the opposite side of the border between Croatia and Bosnia. I lived in a Croatian village—in a house. This part of the country is Bosnia, but in this village lived only Croatians. The Bosnian army didn't go in this area because this village was all Croatian and they didn't take Croatians into the army. So I lived all summer in this house. After, I started communication with the person who had started war between the Muslim people. Now that I was not in his army, or in his part of land, he could help open up the Serbian territory so that I could cross to Croatia. The bus started to move people to Croatia from Velika Kladusa to Zagreb. Sometime in August we paid around \$300 for a ticket—this is around \$200 US. We paid for tickets and moved over from this territory to Zagreb. Nevzeta, her family, and my family came with us.

*It's hard to know what it's like to lose everything. When we left our city with just the clothes on us—we just put on some old clothes—we were thinking we will just hide somewhere in the forest for a few days and we won't need these clothes, but actually it became spring and all we had was winter clothes. We didn't have anything for summer. I think that it was May. It was so hot and we still had long sleeves and sweaters. We didn't have shoes, just boots. That's all that we were left with.*

*It's hard. We were waiting just for Nedzad to come home from the line and you never know if he is safe because everyday somebody is killed. You never know. He would leave and if we saw him, we saw him. We listened to the radio—to the fighting. It was really hard. They sometimes would inform you where the fighting was really bad and you see the village or city ambulance is coming to the hospital everyday. You have somebody dead, somebody killed—usually the young soldiers. It's really hard. There's no explanation. You can watch Iraq now and say, "Poor people," but you have to be there to feel that. I can feel that, Nedzad can feel that—for these poor people you know.*

*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 1<sup>st</sup> 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.*

*The first few years were really rough here. It's hard for us—maybe for Nedzad it's not because his family is here, but my whole family is there. It's really hard, but the more we stay here, the more we become American. That means I am losing my friends there. I visit; I am going this summer, too. I like to see my family, but I think, I work here, I belong here, now more than ever. I think it's just the longer you stay, the longer you live—you become American. You get to know this life, you know this city, and you make new friends. Maybe when we are retired...maybe. Maybe we will return there...maybe.*

## **Victoria—Sudan**

My name is Victoria and I am a Sudanese girl. My family left Sudan to live in Uganda during the war. When I left I was with my parents, but then my uncle decided to have me come live with him. He decided to bring me to live with him because he wanted me to go to school. My uncle was not really too poor so he paid for some of his sister's children to live in his house with him and he paid for us to go to school.

So, I started school when I was living with my uncle in Uganda. It was a town—not a refugee camp. I lived there until I was in sixth grade and then my older sister, who was in Kenya, came there and brought me to a Kenyan refugee camp. I joined grade seven in Kenya and then I went to grades eight and nine. I didn't finish grade nine because that's when we came to America.

I am living here with my older sister. I have two sisters in the U.S. My oldest sister is married and she has five children. We used to live all together, both my sisters and me. Then we decided to move—me and my other sister who is also older than me by only one year. We live together now in Burlington and my oldest sister lives with her family.

When we moved to America we first went to Pittsburg, Pennsylvania. That's where we first lived. But there we didn't have a chance to go to the high school because if you were over 18-years-old you couldn't go to high school. You had to go study for your GED. So my sisters and I decided to leave that place, and we moved to Vermont. It was August 28, 2004—that's when I came here. I was working then and I didn't go to school until 2005. I registered to go to school at Burlington High School. It was September 1, 2005—the first day of school. At first I went to ninth grade because they thought I couldn't speak English. They told me they would study me for two weeks to see how I was progressing in the class. Then after that, they changed my grade and told me I was in tenth grade.

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 7:30 AM and I left at 2:00 PM. I didn't have time because I had to be to work by 2:30 PM. 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 ok. 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 3:00 and then she would stay until 8:00 PM 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 11:30 PM, 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.

When I was going to Burlington High School the teachers were really good. They understood how hard it was to work and go to school. I almost quit because it was so hard. Sometimes I got stuck. I wanted to do my homework and I was so stressed. The teachers always gave me courage and they are really, really, really good people. Not all of them, but some of them really know how hard I worked in school and how hard it was to do my homework. They always told me that, "Victoria, you are doing really great because some kids that don't work—they don't even get their homework done. You are really doing good in the class. You are fine." They told me not to quit, they told me to keep coming to school. I stayed home one time for a week and they kept calling me—the teachers kept calling me. I almost stopped because I was out of my mind it was so hard. If you become a senior it's a lot of work to do before you can graduate. In my career class, everything was on the computer. I didn't have a computer at home and I didn't have the time to use the computer at school. My classes were all day until when they

stopped and it was the time I had to leave and go to work. Susan Maureen—she helped me so much with my homework. I can't even explain how much I appreciate her. I told my friends at home that I have my Mom here, because my mom is named Susan, too. During my graduation she did a wonderful thing for me—she bought me a dress. She came for my graduation, and she told me, “Victoria, don't worry. Even though your mom is not here, look at me as if I was your mom.” She gave me so much courage for being in school. She was determined to help me until the end and she told me that one day I will be going back to see my family.

My brothers and sisters are in Uganda—they go to school there. My youngest sister is thirteen and I have a sister who is fifteen, a brother who is seventeen, and another brother who is nineteen. I also have my older sister; she is 24 years old. She has three children that are living with my parents in Uganda. My mom also takes care of three of her sister's children because she passed away. They are all in the house and I support them. I have three sisters, two brothers—five of them—plus my aunt's three children—so eight.

At the same time I am working and going to school, I help my family back home and I send my sisters and my two brothers to school. I have to pay for their school because I know that education is important and without my support to them they will never get an education. I want them to be in the same life that I will be. In Africa it is so hard to pay for yourself in school. You can go, but sometimes you get stuck and there is no money to keep you in school—so many girls decide to get married. Like my sisters, if I didn't pay to keep them in school, they would decide to get married because there is nothing else they can do. So I decided that no matter how hard it is, even though I go without anything, I will make sure that they are all fine and that they are all in school. I give them courage that school is important. They will see me working so hard in school—working so to provide them with some money—helping them so they can go to school. All my struggling is for them because I want to see them, everyone in my family, achieve something. I don't want them to decide to get married because of nothing. I look at it like that—I want them all to be well off.

So, I have two paychecks each month. The first one goes to my sisters and brothers, and the second one goes to my bills. Every month. If I get a check at the middle of the month, that's the check that I have to send back home because they have to buy food. There's nowhere they can get food for free. I have to send the money and my mom has to buy food and everything else with that money. Nothing is free. At the end of the month, when I get my check, I have to pay my bills. It's so hard because five of them are staying in the boarding—they stay on the campus at the school. I have to buy mattresses and all the materials needed at the school because otherwise when they go to school they will find nothing to sleep on. They have to buy their own stuff, bring it home, and then take it to the school. And I have to buy all of it—and I spend a lot of money. The other three of them—they stay home and walk from home to school.

If anything could happen I would want my parents—and my brothers and sisters—to come over to America. I talk to them every weekend on the phone, because if I send money, I have to call them. I am the fourth born in the family and they miss me. They

don't even know how I look. My uncle took me away from them when I was seven years old, so I haven't seen my parents for sixteen years. They don't know how I look, but they can remember me because I have a gap in my teeth. That is what they always told me, "We will not forget you because of the gap." I am the only one who has it in the family—nobody else has it. I'm the only one. I miss them—I don't even know how they look. After I am done my school I will be going back because I want to see my homeland. I will live here, but I need to go work in Sudan. I want to finish my school here and then I will get a job in Africa. Then I will go and help my country.

