



REFUGEE JOURNAL

Telling the Story of UCC Refugee Ministries

Featuring
stories
from
regions in
Africa
and
Eastern
Europe



*Edited and
Compiled by*

Refugee Ministries, Global Sharing of Resources

Wider Church Ministries of The United Church of Christ



**UNITED CHURCH
OF CHRIST**



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Your gifts to Our Church’s Wider Mission basic and One Great Hour of Sharing make possible the work of UCC Refugee Ministries.

The cover art is an original watercolor called “Afghanistan: Attack” inspired by the events of 9/11. The artist is Rev. Linda Carleton, Assistant Minister of Refugee Programs for the First Congregational Church UCC, Guilford, Connecticut. She is also the Sponsorship Developer for CWS Affiliate, Interfaith Refugee Ministry, New Haven, Connecticut. This artwork has been used with the permission of Rev. Linda Carleton.

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Who Will Tell the Story of UCC Refugee Resettlement?

For more than fifty years, thousands of refugees from all over the world have been resettled by hundreds of UCC churches in dozens of cities across the country. Churches have been reaching out to people seeking refuge and helping families and individuals start anew by resettling them in their local church communities. What a powerful testimony of a compassionate response to the plight of refugees! As we pondered the significance of this vital ministry, we wondered aloud, “Who will tell the story of UCC Refugee Resettlement?”

Who

Who will tell the stories of the amazing courage and resiliency of refugees, the stories of faithful and self-sacrificing church folks, the stories of transformation of both sponsor and refugee, the stories of faith in humanity being restored and faith in God being deepened? Who will tell the story of hospitality extended, self-sufficiency nurtured, faith put into action, and fear overcome? Who will tell our story? How will the legacy of faithful action be preserved? We must tell the story. We must pass the baton that others might run this race with diligence and faithfulness.

will

tell our

story?

This publication is an attempt to preserve the history—the stories—of the United Church of Christ living out its faithfulness to Christ’s call to “welcome the stranger” as we participate in the ministry of refugee resettlement. We cannot tell all the stories shared over coffee tables or reported in church newsletters, local newspapers, or highlighted in letters to our office. We wish that we could, but we have chosen only a few stories that capture the marvel of this vibrant ministry. We hope you enjoy this window into the world of the ministry of refugee resettlement and sponsorship.

In faithful service,

Mary Kuenning Gross
Executive for Refugee Ministries

Naima Quarles-Burnley
Refugee Sponsorship Developer

Luvette Hickey Irvin
Secretary

Catriona Grant
Program Intern



Who Is a Refugee?

According to Article 1, the 1951 UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, though lacking inclusive language, defines a refugee as a person who:

... owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it. ¹

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was established on December 14, 1950. The UNHCR is mandated to protect refugees and seek durable solutions to their problems through voluntary repatriation, local integration, or resettlement. The majority of refugees eventually return home, but the period of exile is long. In Africa and Asia, the average period of displacement for refugees is eleven years.² Less than one percent of refugees are resettled to a third country such as the United States.

To be resettled in the United States, a person must meet the definition of a refugee found in Section 101(a)(42) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA), which closely follows the definition in the 1951 UN Convention and 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees. The INA also defines a refugee, under specific situations identified by the U.S. president, certain persons who are within their country of nationality and those refugees of special humanitarian concern to the United States.³

The Bureau for Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) of the Department of State administers the U.S. refugee resettlement program in conjunction with the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) of the Department of Justice and the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) of the Department of Health and Human Services.⁴ As of March 1, 2003, a new page was turned as the functions of the INS were reorganized under the direction of the Department of Homeland Security.

UNHCR/R. LeMoigne



Sylvia Thome



Hegge Opseth NCA/ACT International



We are a church of the Stranger—the Church of Jesus Christ the Stranger—Statement on Uprooted People, WCC

The Church World Service Immigration and Refugee Program (CWS/IRP) enters into a cooperative agreement with the Department of State each year for the resettlement of refugees. Nine Protestant denominations, including the United Church of Christ, participate in resettling refugees around the country through a network of 41 CWS affiliates, which provide pre-arrival training for sponsoring churches and resettlement services to refugees. Since 1946, CWS has resettled over 450,000 refugees in the United States.⁵

The World Council of Churches (WCC) challenges churches to broaden their understanding of “who is a refugee?” In 1997, WCC released the Statement on Uprooted People, “A Moment to Choose: Risking to Be with Uprooted People,” which states:



Mary Kuening Gross



Jennifer Riggs



Bill Sage

People leave their communities for many reasons and are called by many names—refugees, internally displaced, asylum-seekers, and economic migrants. As churches, we lift up all those who are compelled by severe political, economic and social conditions to leave their land and their culture regardless of the labels they are given by others. Uprooted people are those who are forcibly displaced because of environmental devastation and those who are compelled to seek sustenance in a city or abroad because they cannot survive at home.⁶

Alarmed by the negative portrayals and harsh treatment of the displaced, the WCC issued the following challenge to the international church community:

We challenge the churches worldwide to rediscover their identity, their integrity and their vocation as the church of the stranger. Service to uprooted people has always been recognized as diaconia—although it has been peripheral to the life of many churches. But we affirm that it is also an ecclesial matter. We are a church of the Stranger—the Church of Jesus Christ the Stranger (Matthew 25: 31–46).⁷



The Beginning of UCC Involvement in Refugee Ministries

Following World War II, American churches of the Protestant tradition came together in 1946 to form Church World Service (CWS) to address the needs of war torn Europe. CWS has its origin in responding to the plight of refugees and displaced persons. The Evangelical and Reformed Commission on World Service and the Congregational Christian Service Committee were active in responding to the refugee crises of that time and are the forerunners of the present day refugee work of Wider Church Ministries, a Covenanted Ministry of the United Church of Christ. The denominations that came together formed the Church World Service Immigration and Refugee Program (CWS/IRP) as a joint structure to facilitate their work with the U.S. government's resettlement program.

Through the Displaced Persons Act of 1948, under Public Law 774, thousands of homeless men, women, and children who survived the Nazi concentration camps and slave labor battalions were eligible for resettlement to the United States. Millions of workers had been transferred forcibly to the Reich to build up a labor reservoir depleted by war losses and army conscription. Included were families and individuals from the Baltic States, who fled their homelands before the advancing Soviet armies at the end of the war. Also included were those who fled their homelands in the aftermath of the war because of persecution due to

their race, religion or political belief.⁸ The displaced persons included Poles, Estonians, Latvians, Lithuanians, White Russians, Ukrainians, Yugoslavs, and Hungarians.⁹

One of the first UCC churches involved in refugee resettlement on the West Coast was Eden Congregational Church of Hayward, California. The Reverend Dr. Richard Norberg was the pastor in 1949 when they sponsored Mr. and Mrs. Emil Lillak and their three children from Estonia. Norberg shared his story at the fortieth anniversary luncheon of CWS in



UNHCR/157/1951



*“Thanks for helping to resettle our people.
We will take care of all those who are left.”*

Hollywood, California, in 1987. Just two years after the Lillak family arrived, he received a telex from CWS in New York, asking that he help coordinate the arrival of three thousand refugees from Russia. In disbelief he thought it to be an incorrect number. It was correct. Three thousand Soviet refugees arrived in San Francisco onboard the Liberty Ships, each carrying one thousand persons. They were placed in hotels, and eventually churches sponsored all but five hundred people, who were elderly or unable to provide for themselves. Finally a group of Russian people came to Norberg and said, “Thanks for helping to resettle our people. We will take care of all those who are left.” With that news he cried for joy for the rest of the day.¹⁰

Another of the earliest church sponsors was the Fauntleroy Community Church in Seattle, Washington. Fauntleroy began its work with refugees in June 1950, with a family from Yugoslavia, Josif and Persida Filipovich. Josif fought in the Yugoslav army and was captured and sent to a POW camp in Germany. Persida, at age eighteen, was sent without warning to a work camp in Germany. They met and married in a displaced persons’ camp before coming to the United States, sponsored by Fauntleroy Church. Fauntleroy UCC has continued in ministry to refugees in every decade since the 1950s, having reached out to refugees from Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, and Cuba. From 1981 they worked with two other UCC churches in Seattle, Admiral Congregational and Alki Congregational, to resettle refugees from Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Haiti, and most recently Afghanistan.¹¹



Courtesy of the National Archives



What Is Refugee Sponsorship?

welcome
the
stranger

Refugee Sponsorship is a ministry. It is a direct response to Christ's call to "welcome the stranger." As Christians, our basis for response is God's deep love for the stranger. The Bible has many accounts of people fleeing their homes and being welcomed as strangers in strange lands. As the church, we are responding with compassion to those who are seeking refuge from war, persecution, and oppression. Having fled their homes, refugees have left behind all they have known for an uncertain future. Sponsorship helps refugees begin a new life in another country, such as the United States. The success of a refugee family depends greatly on the welcome they receive when they arrive in their new country. Refugee sponsorship means reaching out to a family and helping guide them on the journey to becoming self-sufficient.

Refugee sponsorship is a ministry of hospitality. Through the ministry of refugee resettlement, sponsoring congregations live out the biblical call to welcome the stranger by creating hospitable communities for refugees. Refugee sponsorship can be a symbol of hope and faith, as well as an act of love and a way to encounter Christ in others. We open our homes and our hearts.



Sue Robert

A church helps provide the initial basic needs of a refugee family. After welcoming their family at the airport, a sponsoring church generally provides a family with housing, furnishings, food, clothing, and transportation for three months to get them started. Churches often assist with orientation to community life and finding employment opportunities. Refugee families also need our prayers and friendship.

Refugee sponsorship is an opportunity to participate in a life-transforming ministry. Both the individual church members and the refugees are transformed. The efforts of a sponsoring congregation can make a significant difference in the lives of refugees. As sponsors, we also receive blessings as we reach out to be a blessing. Our faith is deepened. We learn about other countries and cultures. We understand more about how God works in the world. Transformation surrounds and ministry abounds.



How to Become a Refugee Sponsor



Mel Lehman

You can contact the UCC Refugee Ministries office to inquire about the potential of refugee resettlement in your area. UCC Refugee Ministries works through a network of regional, national,

and international contacts to match refugees with congregations. U.S. officials interview eligible refugees referred by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) living in camps run by the host government. Church World Service Immigration Refugee Program (CWS/IRP) then relays information about refugees to its network of forty-one affiliate offices around the United States and its partner denominations, including the United Church of Christ. CWS/IRP has affiliate offices in twenty-three states. Refugees can be resettled within fifty miles of each affiliate office. The United Church of Christ works in cooperation with CWS/IRP affiliates to invite local churches to sponsor refugees and provide orientation to churches preparing for refugees' arrival. In some cases churches assist with family reunions to help relatives fulfill their role as sponsors. Congregations outside of the geographical range of an affiliate office are encouraged to participate in Refugee Ministries through advocacy opportunities.

Contact

Refugee Ministries
Wider Church Ministries
United Church of Christ

for more information at:
700 Prospect Ave E
Cleveland OH 44115-1100

Phone: 216.736.3213

Fax: 216.736.2294

E-mail: burnleyn@ucc.org

Web site:

www.ucc.org/ministries/refugees



Sam Hong

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"How Long Will You Cry?"

Peter Malual from the Sudan and First Congregational Church UCC, Madison, Connecticut



Peter Malual from the Sudan

"All my life is full of dangers but I always pray that there is [a] way," Peter Malual reflected as he described the attack on his village in Sudan in 1987. Peter's father was killed, and in fleeing, family members were separated. Following a grueling three-month trek, Peter spent fifteen years of his life in refugee camps in Ethiopia and Kenya.

Peter recalls that during his early time as a refugee, he often cried. He became aware that his spirit asked him a question. "For how long are you going to cry?" Peter says today, "It is my question, and that question is important because it reflects me back to what I believe." Peter answered his question years ago and answers it today: "It is me now who will make things to be in my future, the way that I will get my parents and the way that I will help others who are suffering. . . . if I continue to cry, maybe I will make nothing. So I decide to go ahead." Peter's courage and faith have carried him a long way.

In 2001, through Interfaith Refugee Ministry, a Connecticut affiliate of the Church World Service Immigration and Refugee Program working with UCC Refugee Ministries, Peter came to the United States with some of the young men who had become family to each other in the refugee camps. Peter had walked thousands of miles through wilderness with shoes made from leaves, in an environment where muddy holes served as the only water source. He attended school in refugee camps, learning without the aid of paper and pencil. Yet, Peter had never been on a bus, or a plane, had never seen a toilet, or used a knife and fork. This was the beginning of a difficult acculturation.

The flight of the Sudanese youth has been described as an exodus of biblical proportions. Starting in 1987, more than 17,000 young boys from southern Sudan traveled close to one thousand miles to find sanctuary from a bloody civil war. The northern Sudanese government forces and Arab militias leveled the villages with bombs and left most of these boys orphaned. They first trekked to Ethiopia, surviving military assaults, marauding bandits, starvation, and attacks by wild animals. Tragically their safety was short-lived. Following a military coup in 1991, Ethiopia evicted the Sudanese youth from the refugee camps where they had been living. Already malnourished from the hardship of their refugee flight, these young men were forced to flee again across flooded rivers and make their way into Kenya. Many of them did not make it, but some reached a massive refugee camp in northern Kenya called Kakuma.

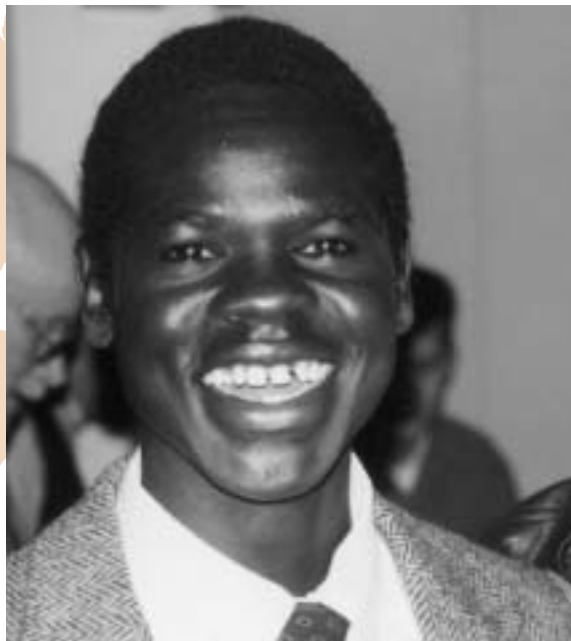
Once these young men reached Kakuma, they found that the other members of their tribe no longer accepted them, since they had no family ties and had never undergone the tribal rites of passage for manhood, according to Dinka or Nuer societies. They had become outcasts even among their own people. The United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees (UNHCR) recommended that a select group of the Sudanese Youth of Kakuma be considered as candidates for permanent resettlement. The U.S. government offered to bring about 3,800 to this country. United Church of Christ churches in association with the CWS affiliates in four states have welcomed forty-three Sudanese youth of Kakuma as of April 2003.



Sitting on a plane beside a Laotian man who had come to the United States as a refugee, Carol Brown was fascinated to learn the details of his resettlement and the vast degree of acculturation required. “What made the difference in your life?” she asked. “A church family,” he replied.

Days later Carol providentially attended a meeting to discuss whether her church, First Congregational UCC, Madison, Connecticut, could co-sponsor the resettlement of a group of Sudanese youth. Carol and her church family committed. Later that same week they met Peter Malual and his “brothers.” Carol has embraced refugee resettlement as a calling to ministry. She says that we are all called to ministry but often do not hear the call in the usual, busy activity of life. She and the young Sudanese men have become family to one another. They affectionately call her “Mama Carol.”

In the refugee camps tribal elders had told the young men, “Because your parents are dead and cannot teach you the ways of the world, education is now your mother and your father.” They treasured these words in their hearts through the years. Although once in the United States the young men, preoccupied with establishing themselves, were unable to give the elders’ wisdom due attention.



Mary Kuennig Gross

Peter Malual

Carol explored ways that their education might be furthered. She discovered a high school diploma correspondence program and gathered a group of twenty local UCC volunteer tutors. She raised more than \$20,000 for tuition, some of which came from the One Great Hour of Sharing offering. Fifteen Sudanese youth graduated from the high school diploma program in 2002. Currently Carol is raising funds for the young men to attend college. She says, “I have learned far more than I have taught, and gained more than I have given. . . . My cup just runneth over.”

Peter now studies at Gateway Community College. He shares an apartment with some of his “brothers” and works at the Yale branch of Barnes and Noble. His dream? To become a lawyer.

Materials presented by Peter Malual and Carol Brown at the UCC Wider Church Ministries Board Meeting, One Great Hour of Sharing Plenary, Cleveland, OH, November 7, 2002. Carol Brown, chair, Resettlement Committee, First Congregational UCC, Madison, Connecticut, now works for Interfaith Refugee Ministry, New Haven, Connecticut.

Strangers Become Neighbors . . .

The Maaloos from Nigeria and First-Plymouth Congregational Church UCC, Lincoln, Nebraska

The Maaloos from Nigeria



Nigeria

Ogoni tribe members had made their home in eastern Nigeria for over five hundred years. Rich sources of oil were discovered beneath their land. This marked the beginning of tremendous environmental, social, and economic injustices towards the Ogonis. Clashes with security forces uprooted thirty thousand Ogoni people in 1996, and tensions have continued. Among those displaced were Precious and Nale Maaloo, with their five children aged three to fourteen, who were resettled in the United States in 1999, sponsored by First-Plymouth Congregational Church UCC, Lincoln, Nebraska, and the local affiliate, Heartland Refugee Resettlement, working with UCC Refugee Ministries.

Rae Hunter-Pirtle's life has been enriched by her relationship with the Maaloos, initially as a member of the Refugee Resettlement Committee and subsequently as neighbor and friend. Rae has a love of children and has especially appreciated fun times with the Maaloo children, Meelubari, Zorte, Badum, Sorle, and Nubari. Coming from a village with no electricity, plumbing, or cars, this family found themselves in a very different environment. Rae fondly remembers the children's preoccupation with doors opening automatically and drinking fountains. They displayed the curiosity characteristic of kids, which often gives adults a fresh look at the world.

In Rae's family, the game Mancala (which originated in Africa) has been a favorite. The Maaloo children were also familiar with this game, so it was natural that Rae and the children would play together. Yet the ways they played the game were far from similar. The Nigerian children played at lightning speed, whereas Rae was accustomed to slowly pondering every move. She was clearly no match for her young opponents, but one of the boys took pity on her and pointed out the moves she could make to stay in the game.

The world of Rae's children has also been expanded through their participation in the Maaloos' resettle-



Neighbors Become Friends



sewing machine. Five years earlier, the Deumics had been sponsored by First-Plymouth Congregational UCC in their resettlement from Bosnia.

Rae is full of admiration and gratitude for the Maaloos: “In two years this African family, which arrived in our country with three duffel bags containing all their belongings, studied English, learned about a vastly different culture, took difficult jobs, learned to drive, bought cars and their first house! The process comes full circle as the children now attend the same schools as my children and they have become true peers, not ‘sponsors’ and ‘refugees.’”

Sponsors open the doors of their communities and the doors of their hearts. Refugees, having already shown unbelievable courage and hope, show new courage and hope in unfamiliar surroundings with unfamiliar people. Strangers become neighbors, and neighbors become friends. Everybody participating is given fresh experiences and fresh ways of looking at the world. All have their faith in humanity renewed. All are bonded in community. Transformation abounds and surrounds.

ment. Rae notes that the experience in helping prepare the apartment was significant: “The process was wonderful for our children who could help personally in providing special care for some of God’s people whom we did not yet know.”

A few months into the Maaloos’ resettlement, Mrs. Maaloo expressed a desire to sew. Emsud and Samka Deumic, who are tailors, heard of her wish and gave her a



Pictures and material submitted by Rae Hunter-Pirtle, Refugee Resettlement Committee, First-Plymouth Congregational UCC, Lincoln, Nebraska. Background information from the World Refugee Survey 2000, U.S. Committee for Refugees.

Loved Back to Life

The Krasniqis from Kosovo and East Congregational UCC, Grand Rapids, Michigan



“*B*ear one another’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ,” Paul wrote to the Galatians (6:2). After her husband and father passed away, Sue Robert says members of East Congregational UCC in Grand Rapids, Michigan, shared her sorrow. Likewise she wanted to lighten someone else’s burden. Sue was moved by the plight of Kosovar refugees and suggested sponsorship to the church council. In May 1999, with ten committed people and \$2,000 seed money, the church agreed to sponsor a Kosovar refugee family.

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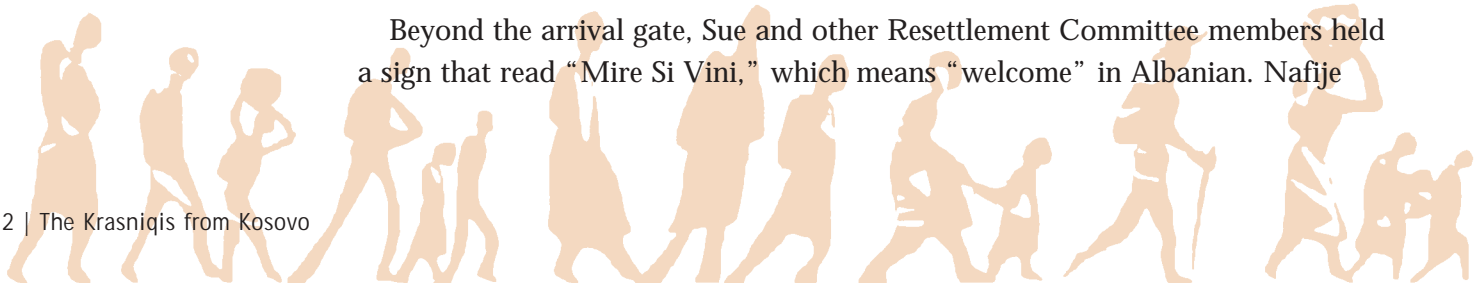


In 1998 Nafije Krasniqi, a young woman in her twenties, was uprooted from her home in Kosovo in the trauma and terror of civil war and ethnic cleansing. She was forced to flee into the mountains with her siblings and cousins, not knowing if her parents were alive. The group made their way to a refugee camp in Macedonia and was accepted for resettlement in the United States.

Sue and other members of East Congregational UCC were given a mere eight hours notice of the Krasniqis’ arrival by the CWS local affiliate, PARA (Programs Assisting Refugee Acculturation), working in cooperation with Refugee Ministries of the Wider Church Ministries in the UCC. Sue was concerned about many things: The Krasniqis’ apartment was not ready. How would she prepare dinner? How would they communicate? Then Sue had an awareness of God speaking to her: “Wait a minute Sue. Remember what this is all about.” She felt God’s presence and told herself that God would provide; the most important thing was to be there for the Krasniqis with open arms and an open heart.

Nafije Krasniqi and her relatives departed the refugee camp in Macedonia, and on July 14, 1999, entered the United States to begin the journey of their resettlement. The six young adults had one small carry-on bag between them and many emotions.

Beyond the arrival gate, Sue and other Resettlement Committee members held a sign that read “Mire Si Vini,” which means “welcome” in Albanian. Nafije



caught sight of the placard and later wrote, “At that moment the miracle in my life that I couldn’t possibly have dared to hope for, began to unfold. The first indication was a welcome sign in my language with my name on it. . . . We were met with arms that encircled us in love.”

Empowering the Krasniqis in their resettlement has brought forth many gifts from the congregation and the surrounding community. Apartments have been beautifully furnished and decorated; English lessons given; much paperwork dealt with; bicycles procured; shopping expeditions made; taxi services provided, and provisions for extensive dental and medical care. Nafije’s cousin Qamile required hip-replacement surgery as a result of being thrown out of a window by Serbian police while coming to the defense of her brother.

In sharing time and food around the table, joys and sorrows, sunsets and swims, lives have been transformed. The cultural exchange has been enlightening, fun, and spirit-filled. Members of the congregation have learned about intricate crochet, Albanian dancing, and Islam. Nafije joined a study group at the church on comparative religion.

Three years into their resettlement, the Krasniqis speak English, have jobs, can navigate Grand Rapids, and have drivers’ licenses and cars. They are essentially independent, the goal of refugee resettlement. Nafije is studying at a nearby community college.

On Easter Sunday, during the church’s sponsorship of her family’s resettlement, Nafije addressed the congregation. “I am being loved back to life by those who care so much for me and my family. They have rekindled my hope. . . . My new friends have reached out with empathy to encourage me and show me the way to a new life.”

Sue calls the Krasniqis’ resettlement one of the most rewarding experiences of her life. “There is no way I could do justice to the experience or put into words what has happened to my life because of this precious family. . . . These loving friends have enriched me in a way that is indescribable . . . they will always be like family to me.”



Pictures and material submitted by Sue Robert, coordinator for sponsorship of the Krasniqi family from Kosovo, East Congregational UCC, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Real Life Loss

The Bicics from Bosnia and North Stonington Congregational UCC, Connecticut

The Bicics from Bosnia

“



f all the terrible things we see on television of civil wars in various countries, they have never been truly real in my mind,” said Dana Cross, a member of the Mission Committee of North Stonington Congregational UCC, Connecticut. All this changed after the church council agreed that refugee sponsorship was a vital mission, and Dana became chair of the newly formed Resettlement Committee. In November 2000, taking a leap of faith in the midst of hiring an interim minister, they began to raise support. Letters were sent to church members requesting household furnishings, financial assistance, and commitment of time for transportation and English lessons. The church collected cans and bottles for recycling and baked pies to sell. By May 2001, the three-hundred-member congregation had met its goals. Almost immediately, they were given the opportunity to sponsor a family of four from Bosnia by Interfaith Refugee Ministry, New Haven, Connecticut, a CWS/IRP affiliate working with the UCC Refugee Ministries. They readily accepted responsibility.

Suljo and Saliha Bicic, with their teenage children, Samra and Samel, landed in the United States on June 15, 2001. Ten years earlier they had lost their home and had been on the list for resettlement for two years. Upon arrival, they were temporarily hosted in a local home; then on August 29, 2001, the Bicic family had their own home once again.

Dana described one occasion while visiting the Bicics, “They showed me a picture of their home in Bosnia after it had been bombed. It was a framed photograph in their living room. When I saw it I began crying and the Bicics joined me in a very long crying session. It was then that their situation became real to me. A couple of months later in very broken English, and with Samra’s help, Saliha [Mrs. Bicic] told me how Suljo [her husband] had been beaten almost to death in front of her and her children. She tried hiding the children (ages eight and ten at that time) behind her so they would not have to witness their father being nearly killed. She told me how his hands were beaten so



Real Life Sharing

badly they were the size of watermelons and he screamed with pain. All she had was a washcloth and water to nurse him. He had no medical attention until arriving in the United States ten years later.”

The Bicics attended English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) classes and had daily English tutoring by volunteers from the congregation. Mrs. Bicic and Samra quickly found jobs working at a pharmaceutical company. Samel attended school. After several months in physical therapy, Mr. Bicic also found a job as a driver for Connecticut Rehab Services.

Six months into their resettlement, the Bicics were financially self-sufficient. A service of celebration for the family was held during Sunday worship. In June 2002, one year after their arrival, the Bicics hosted a lamb-roast picnic to thank the committee, tutors, and transportation volunteers for their efforts. Dana says, “All of our prayers for this wonderful family have been answered. . . . This has been a truly awesome experience for all of us. . . . I have been personally changed because of the contact I have had with this family. . . . This family of Muslims . . . will always be part of our church family.”



Pictures and material submitted by Dana Cross, chair, Resettlement Committee, North Stonington Congregational UCC, Connecticut.



Bicic Family



Bicic Family

Remains of the Bicics' home in Bosnia after it had been bombed.



Notes

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3. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). July 1997. Country Chapter USA: "The United States of America by the Government of the United States of America." P.USA/1 in *UNHCR Resettlement Handbook*. Geneva: Division of International Protection.
4. Ibid.
5. Gerhardt Hennes, historian on the Displaced Persons Act of 1948 and Church World Service, telephone conversation with Mary Kuenning Gross, April 15, 2003.
6. World Council of Churches, "A Moment to Choose: Risking to be with Uprooted People," Statement on Uprooted People (Geneva: Refugee and Migration Service, 1995). 1.
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