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By Lyn Back

## OUT OF THE MIDDLE AND ON TO THE EDGE

*A Ministry of Witness in Yugoslavia*

When people learned I was quitting my job and going to Serbia, they responded with curiosity, and not a little skepticism. I shared their feeling—then, and now, several years later. In my less anxious moments I think that I'm on a continuing religious journey, a response to our human longing to be connected, to be at one with the power and mystery of the universe. We search all our lives for this connection. And if we think we have found it, if something touches our souls and calls us to be our own true selves, we can't ignore that calling. We are inspired, open to the deep urging of our souls, daring ourselves to move out of our comfortable routines, and make our lives stand for something.

Before going to Yugoslavia, I worked for the American Friends Service Committee, a Quaker organization that won the Nobel Peace Prize for relief and reconstruction work in Europe after World War II. I knew stories about people who had risked their lives to save others and I always wondered whether I would be able to do the same. The violence that was occurring in Bosnia stirred my childhood memories and called me to go to Yugoslavia as a witness, to search for truth on all sides of the conflict.

In 1997, I took a three-month sabbatical, traveling through Serbia, Kosovo, Bosnia and Croatia. During this journey of religious witness, which was supported by my Monthly Meeting and friends and

family, I experienced a bonding with the people of Yugoslavia and with the incredible tragedy that was going on there. I stayed with a family in Belgrade, Serbia, traveled to Kosovo with a Serbian relief organization and was one of the first Americans to cross the border into the newly formed Republika Srpska and then into the Bosnian Federation, which we know as Bosnia. I stayed with a Muslim family in Tuzla, with a Quaker woman in Sarajevo and with British Friends in Croatia, hearing stories and witnessing everywhere the physical destruction of the war and feeling the despair of the people.

When I returned to Philadelphia, it was as though

I had gotten off the train at the wrong station. My heart was still in Yugoslavia. Soon after my return, I had a dream. The message was short and dramatic and woke me, bolt upright, from a sound sleep. A voice said, "These are the people that you pray for in Croatia. There is a war and you are behind enemy lines. You call your boss and tell

him you have to go to Tuzla." When I told members of my Oversight Committee about this dream they agreed that I was being called.

In 1998 I quit my job at the American Friends Service Committee and accepted an assignment with the Balkan Peace Teams, working with local activists in Belgrade and Prishtina, seeking alternatives to violence. Although the war in Bosnia had subsided by that time, a low-intensity war was erupting



Balkan Peace Teams members Lyn Back and Adam Schmidtberger, (2nd and 3rd from left) relax with a Kosovar refugee family in Prishtina.

### Inside . . .

- Balkan Peace Teams...Page 1
- Colombia.....Page 3
- Rwanda.....Page 4
- Burundi.....Page 5
- Re-Entry.....Page 6
- Quaker Process.....Page 8

### ***The African Great Lakes Initiative announces a Workcamp in Burundi, July 6 to August 11, 2003***

In partnership with the Kibimba Peace Committee, AGLI will send international workcampers to rebuild homes for people from an internally displaced camp near Kibimba, Burundi. During the unrest in 1993, about 3,000 Tutsi internally displaced persons resided at the Kibimba Secondary School and church, and in 1998, these people moved to a camp on the main road to Gitega. Most of the people in the internally displaced camp are women, children, and the elderly. Some would like to return to their plots to live, but their homes have been destroyed and they do not have the material resources and human energy to rebuild their houses. The workcamp's objective is to rebuild some of these homes.

The Kibimba Peace Committee believes that the reconstruction will be a unifying and reconciling activity as well as the testimony of what both Hutu and Tutsi can do together. They will sensitize people, select the people who will work with the international team members, and make sure the bricks will be ready before the constructing events, since those who will build will need dried bricks. They will also meet with the returnees' neighbors to verify that they will be welcomed home. International and Burundian workcampers will participate in an Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP) workshop and other peacebuilding activities.

For details and application, contact David Zarembka at davidzarembka@juno.com



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See page 10 . . .

## Waiting for Spring

Here at Pendle Hill where I'm sojourning for the academic year, it's been a cold and snowy winter, and with concerns about if, and/or when the US is going to war with Iraq, it's been an uncertain time. But spring will come soon, I trust, and events will proceed. Even if we succeed in preventing further war on Iraq (after all, there's been a low-level one going on for 12 years) there are other wars and near-wars that call for all the peacemaking skills we can muster.

In this issue, we have two articles from experienced peace team volunteers, one from Lyn Back who worked with the Balkan Peace Teams and the other from Pablo Stanfield, who worked with Peace Brigades International. Lyn's account of her experience is not entirely positive: she suffered a lack of support in the field and especially after returning home. Pablo has sent us a long-awaited sequel to an article he wrote in 1999 about re-entry and ways to support returning peace team (and other) volunteers.

Friends Peace Teams (FPT) is entering its tenth year and we have been looking at the issue of support and re-entry very seriously. Our Re-Entry Project has begun phase one, developing a packet of exercises and other information for support committees. We hope to have the packets available by the end of the summer, when, with short-term teams going to two workcamps in Africa and an Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP) team in Colombia, we may have as many as 24 returned team members to add to the three longer-term members back from Burundi and others who have gone on AVP teams to Africa.

As FPT grows, our projects increase, and the invitations for new work are also coming in much faster than we can respond. Our limitations are the usual ones—time, human resources and money. I pray that we all will listen carefully to the leadings of the Spirit in these troubled times and discern if God calls for new or greater responses from us. FPT can use help with outreach to Yearly Meetings that are not yet involved in peace team work (and if your Meeting or Friends Church *is* involved in a project, please let us know!) We can use help with laying out Peace Teams News, (especially early in 2004) and other administrative tasks. Fund-raisers and financially minded Friends are especially needed as we expand. We need your prayers and your financial support. (Please see the coupon on page 11.)

FPT's Coordinating Committee will meet April 24th-27th in St. Louis, MO. If you'd like to sit in on one of our meeting sessions, or attend our public presentation about FPT, please contact me at 877-814-6972 for locations and times.

I have seen a different spirit at protests lately. People seem to be looking for more positive ways to say "YES!" as well as "NO!", and I think it is an opportunity to engage the attention and energy of many people who have not been deeply concerned about issues of peace and war.

I join the millions around the world with a prayer for US and other world leaders, for the people of Iraq and for our beautiful, fragile world.■

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*Thank you! Thank you! Thank you! Thank you! Thank you! Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!*

*Thanks to the generous donors who responded to our Fall fundraising letter. We appreciate your support, and apologize if there were delays in processing your checks. Some of our deposits were delayed when they were forwarded to me at Pendle Hill from Texas, and some were delayed by the holiday vacation taken by Baltimore Yearly Meeting, our fiscal sponsor. We continue to need your financial support, along with other donations of time and energy. Our wish list is below.*

*Wish List*

- *Computer equipment, especially laptop computers—It doesn't have to be new, but it does need to work.*
- *Cell phones*
- *Airline miles/tickets*

*Continued from page 10 . . .*

fear, hatred and desperation that spreads like a virus in the air. When a community became infected, it ravished the hearts of the people. Destructive energy erupted. People no longer thought rationally, the normal structures of moral and ethical behavior disintegrated and a whirlwind of brutality erupted. Once this evil gained momentum, it took control and there was little one could do to divert it or stop it. I have felt that presence just as palpable as the presence of love.

Living with that knowledge means living in a very uncomfortable place. And most uncomfortable

of all is the realization that the virus lies dormant in each of us. We can become sick with the virus until it consumes us. In fact, that may be happening right now as the country gears up for its "War on Terrorism". It is easier to project evil onto "the other" than to acknowledge it in our own hearts. But I am convinced that the challenge lies in not giving way to rumor, suspicion, and fear and that hope lies in our capacity to be brave and to listen carefully and skeptically to the deep urging of our souls. That is where I remain, outside the comfort zone, living life on the edge. ■

in Kosovo between the Serb military and the Kosovar Albanian Liberation Army. We spent the year of 1998-1999 shuttling between Prishtina, Kosovo and Belgrade, Serbia trying to strengthen the network of peace and human rights activists on both sides of the conflict. We left Serbia on the eve of the NATO bombing, but remained active in Macedonia and Hungary, working with refugees and trying to re-establish ties with our colleagues who had been displaced, expelled, imprisoned or worse.

I returned to Serbia in the summer of 1999, just after the cease-fire had been signed, and visited friends in Belgrade, who led me on a tour of the destruction left by the NATO bombs. In Novi Sad, just before returning to the United States, I sat on the banks of the Danube River, looking at the grotesque skeleton of a bombed bridge I had ridden over just the previous year. As I watched, little motorboats skidded across the water, ferrying people back and forth across the river, in lieu of the bridge, making do and carrying on as the people of Yugoslavia have done for centuries. Suddenly I was confounded by the brutality of our human race and at the same time uplifted by our unquenchable spirit.

My experience in Yugoslavia challenged my courage, my stamina and my faith. It raised difficult questions that were not answered by my Quaker beliefs, by my good intentions, or by my training in nonviolence. I've learned that there are limits to my endurance and now I have a better understanding of what those limits are. Most importantly, I have learned about faith. Faith is not only praying for the strength to meet the trial you are facing, it is also accepting despair, and of wandering alone in the night.

The work of the Balkan Peace Team was certainly well intentioned, but it was not supported or sustained adequately. Working with the young people, both my colleagues on the Balkan Peace Team and with the students in Belgrade and Prishtina, brought wonderful rich experiences, introducing me to intelligent, gifted, committed young people, who gave generously of themselves and whose spirits will continue to inspire me.

But as with many small organizations, there was

very little time or attention to orientation and training to prepare volunteers for the culturally sensitive and psychologically demanding work of building community in a country at war. Because of the constant rotation of volunteers, I worked alone for several months during the year. It was difficult to sustain a program by myself and to carry out the responsibilities that the work required.

Post-traumatic stress and culture shock were not addressed at the end of the volunteer's stint in the field, which is I think a major omission in planning, particularly with volunteers returning from war zones. Trauma in my case was often not first hand, but mainly secondary, working with and listening to the stories of survivors.

I am left wondering how much good we do as so called "helpers", whether as peacekeepers, or humanitarian aid workers in the war in Yugoslavia, or in any similar situation. I wonder how much that is done to help others is done, at least in part, to satisfy our own agendas, or to meet our sense of order and control. I know there is a definite temptation in the adrenaline rush that goes with living close to danger. And I wonder about whether humanitarian aid is a form of colonialism. Pouring millions of dollars into a war-torn economy leads to an unhealthy dependency, skyrockets the cost of living for the locals, and doesn't leave any sustainable economy once the dollars dry up.

My opinion is that there must be a strong will among the people themselves to end the violence and they must take the initiative themselves, once the cycle of violence has worn down. As outsiders, we can be supportive and encouraging, but our ability to understand the people, to listen to their stories, to solve their problems is limited.

Before going to Yugoslavia, the question of evil was for me an archaic notion. But my experience in Yugoslavia has dramatically changed that. As a white middle-class American. I had been cushioned and complacent. I thought that suffering humanity, poverty and violence were aberrations, which with the right combination of money and good management could be set right. But in Yugoslavia I saw and felt again and again the combination of

See page 11 . . .



## Join FPT's Peacebuilding in Colombia Team Summer 2003

Friends Peace Teams will send a 6-week **Peacebuilding Team to Colombia** in July and August 2003, at the invitation of *JustaPaz* (the Christian Center for Justice, Peace and Nonviolent Action), an agency of the Mennonite Church of Colombia.

Participants will work and worship with a number of Peace Churches, most of which are Evangelical in character. In 2002, FPT's team in Colombia offered Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP) workshops to: staff and members of the Mennonite Church, demilitarized former guerrillas; prisoners, staff and prison outreach volunteers; a group supporting political prisoners, and to members of a group of Conscientious Objectors to military recruitment. All were enthusiastic about further AVP training. The 2003 team will offer AVP workshops that will train Colombian facilitators and develop a local AVP organization. (To receive a copy of the Report by the 2002 team, contact Val Liveoak, below.) In addition, the 2003 team will explore other FPT projects in Colombia. All participants in the delegation must commit themselves to:

- a clearness and support committee process (non-Quakers should inquire about how to adapt the process to their situation);
- study and other preparation for the trip;
- fund-raising for the project;
- traveling in potentially dangerous circumstances;
- working on a written report and outreach after their return.

Spanish language capability is necessary. AVP, HIPP and CCRC facilitators and people with expertise in working in the fields of legal recognition of Conscientious Objection, trauma healing and human rights are encouraged to apply. Two people will visit Colombia June 8-26 to make preliminary arrangements for the team, and those with a strong interest in Colombia are encouraged to apply for this preliminary group as well. Deadline for applications is April 10, 2003. For more information and an application, contact Friends Peace Teams, c/o Val Liveoak, 338 Plush Mill Rd., Wallingford PA 19086 USA; Tel: 877-814-6972; e-mail: [fpt@quaker.org](mailto:fpt@quaker.org); Internet: [www.quaker.org/fpt](http://www.quaker.org/fpt)

## TRANSFORMING POWER IN RWANDA

*There is a proverb in Kinyarwanda (the language of Rwanda) which says, "God goes about the world doing good, but he sleeps in Rwanda."*

Upon seeing the spectacular beauty of Rwanda, you would think that this could be true. Carl Stauffer, a Mennonite nonviolence trainer in South Africa, held a trauma-healing workshop for survivors of the Rwandan genocide and one of the survivors changed this proverb slightly to say:

"God goes about the world doing good, but he fell asleep in Rwanda."

If you had lived through the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, you would no doubt wonder what happened to God during those terrible times. When I visited Rwanda in January 1999, this question was quite often asked. While people understood the mechanics of the genocide and how it had been planned and executed at the top by leaders wishing to consolidate their control of the country, they still did not comprehend the answer to the question, "How could we have done this to each other?" Christians realized that while the shadow of Christianity had made Rwanda one of the most Christian countries in the world, the substance of Christianity—"Love your neighbor as yourself"—had not been conveyed to those nominal Christians. Muslims were saying, "The genocide shows that Christianity doesn't work." Until Rwandans, including the Quakers, answered this spiritual question, they would be unable to move on to constructive healing processes.

In February 2000, when Friends Peace Teams' African Great Lakes Initiative (AGLI) organized an Alternatives to Violence Project training program in Uganda, three Rwandan Quakers were invited to participate in some of the workshops in order to see if they would want this introduced to Rwanda. They replied in the affirmative. In February/March 2001, AGLI sent a team of four facilitators from the United States and three from Uganda for five weeks to train the initial group of Rwandan facilitators in conducting AVP workshops. During the rest of 2001 and the first part of 2002, the newly trained Rwandan facilitators conducted their own Basic AVP workshops to gain experience.

The enthusiastic acceptance of AVP in Rwanda is due to the fact that it addresses the spiritual

question. The concept of Transforming Power gives hope that people in the future can and will choose nonviolent solutions over violent ones, regardless of what they have done in the past. Some of the exercises seem as if they were developed for the Rwandan situation (but of course they were not). In the "Dots Exercise" people are given various color dots and told to divide themselves into "dot groups" without talking. This is as arbitrary as dividing people who have the same culture, speak the same language, and frequently intermarry as Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa do. Rwandans understand this immediately. Likewise in the "Masks Exercise", where half the participants are given masks and made the ruling class while the other "serf" half must obey all their reasonable commands and then the roles are reversed and the former "serfs" lord it over their former "masters", Rwandans see the direct parallel with their national problem. I find it surprising that in this latter exercise which lasts forty-five minutes to an hour and which everyone knows is only a "game," Rwandan participants become exceedingly emotionally involved. It speaks to their condition, as the Quakers like to say.

In Rwanda after the genocide, 120,000 genocide suspects were put into extremely overcrowded prisons. But the justice system had been destroyed. Most of these people have been sitting in jail for the last seven or eight years. To deal with this problem the Rwandan Government launched the *Gacaca* courts (*ga-CHA-cha*). These were formerly community courts where people resolved minor disputes. So while the present system builds on the past, it is also a major extension of that tradition. There are 9,000 lower *Gacaca* courts in the country with 19 judges elected by the people (with governmental approval). Therefore each *Gacaca* court covers about 1,000 people and will determine the cases of about 15 genocide suspects. Leaders of the genocide are tried under the western style justice system in Rwanda or at the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda in Arusha, Tanzania.

Rwanda Yearly Meeting and AVP-Rwanda have decided that their part in restoring their country is to bring AVP to as many of the *Gacaca* judges and the prisoners who are being released back into society as they can reach. By January 2003, they had facilitated

See page 9 . . .

Continued from page 4 . . .

six workshops with the *Gacaca* judges and five with released prisoners.

David Bucura, Coordinator of AVP-Rwanda and General Secretary of Rwanda Yearly Meeting, in his report on the first nine workshops, writes:

*"The participants were interested by the workshops and the representatives of the Gacaca Commission asked to extend it in many provinces and to train as soon as possible many Gacaca Judges and newly released prisoners. They insist we continue with Gacaca Judges and newly released prisoners because the Gacaca Justice [process] is now going in all provinces. We chose to start at the grassroots where the majority of the Gacaca courts are. The participants were women and men, boys and girls, Hutu and Tutsi. We hope to have Twa for the next workshops. All participants were astonished by the AVP workshops especially the methodology used in it. Most of the participants changed, and they decided to use everywhere the TRANSFORMING POWER. They accepted to go and ask people for pardon and to forgive others. They gave us testimonies (Hutu and Tutsi). The newly released prisoners asked us to train their friends from prison because they are still angry and want revenge [on] those who accused them. All participants accept to take part in changing our country and to have a good participation in Gacaca process. They saw how Gacaca Justice is the Restorative Justice. They understand how Peace is needed in Rwanda. They accepted to abolish the Tree of Violence by not continuing the cycle of violence."*

In January/February 2003, an international AGLI team of Ray Boucher, George Walumoli, and Vickie Nakuti went to Rwanda to train additional AVP facilitators and more important, to teach six Rwandan how to conduct AVP's Advanced and Training for Facilitator workshops so that the Rwandans themselves can train more facilitators as they need them. AVP-Rwanda has also translated the Basic AVP manual into Kinyarwanda (the language of Rwanda) so that it is more accessible to the general population.

In neighboring Burundi, the AVP program is just beginning, with the initial training in April/May 2002. AVP-Burundi, with the support of Search for Common Ground, has done one Basic AVP workshop with the "peace keepers" and plans to do more as funds are available, including one in

March with the assistance of Carolann and Ray Boucher (Hartford Meeting). The "peace keepers" are civilians in a community, trained and armed by the Government to help keep the peace in the community. Since these people are accustomed to violent methods of resolving conflicts, introducing them to nonviolence through AVP workshops is a challenging, but important peacemaking effort.

Will these efforts at promoting nonviolent conflict resolution through AVP and its Transforming Power be successful? How will we know? In August 2003, AGLI plans on sending Peter Yeomans (Germantown Friends Meeting, PA), who was one of the team members to introduce AVP to both Rwanda and Burundi, to conduct an evaluation of the workshops done by that time. He plans on interviewing *Gacaca* judges, released prisoners, *Gacaca* commission and prison officials, AVP facilitators, and others involved in the AVP program to assess the impact that the program has had. His report will be available and a summary will be included in a future issue of Peace Team News. ■

Continued from page 7 . . .

shared a similar experience often don't "get it", this demands psychological training or perhaps very good Re-evaluation Co-counseling type skills on the listener's part. Concern is not enough; therapeutic catharsis is needed. Showing one's slides may provoke some interest, but it turns the experience into a kind of exotic tonic, rather than into a key part of one's life and social-change work.

Supporters of organizations and volunteers that go to foreign cultures should hold to this goal of helping the returned volunteer to come down into a loving community that will validate and accept the experience and its emotional load. However they provide that, through one-on-one partnerships, professional counseling assistance, small welcomes or a large program such as the Peace Corps event described above, if they gently press the returnee to adapt to new reality and at the same time appreciate and be appreciated for the work done overseas, they will have helped make a stressful transition easier. ■

## Quaker Practices and Processes for Peacemaking

At the Friends World Committee for Consultation Conference on the Peace Testimony, held in Greensboro NC in January 2003, Friends discussed Quaker practices and processes that can support peacemaking and peacemakers. A summary of that discussion to some degree recaps points that have been made by previous articles in this series, but are worth repeating. New insights are also expressed.

**Clearness, Support and Oversight Committees:** In addition to how they help the individual with discernment, they can connect the Meeting to the work. Peacemakers seeking Clearness about participating in a project may also ask the Clearness Committee to consider if the project is one that the Meeting will support. This would mean creating a Support (or Care) Committee and maybe an Oversight Committee. The difference between these committees is that the Support committee helps the peacemaker(s) with emotional, spiritual and other support including fund-raising, while the Oversight committee receives reports and may elder the peacemaker if needed. See <http://www.nyym.org/leadings/canada.html> for more information describing the different tasks of the committees.

**Spiritual or Traveling Companions (Elders):** These Friends help the peacemaker(s) in logistical, emotional, and spiritual ways while the peacemaker(s) do the work. The companion should hold the peacemaker(s) in the Light or in prayer throughout the project. This style of eldering is being revived by several liberal unprogrammed Friends Meetings and organizations, chiefly Friends General Conference. See <http://www.fgcquaker.org/traveling/bibliography.html> Other Friends traditions may have a different understanding of the way the role of Elder is carried out, but may be able to provide a spiritually grounded companion.

**Minutes of Support, Traveling Minutes or Certificates of Ministry:** In the 17th-19th centuries, these were used to avoid fraudulent claims of membership or to recognize a Friend's ministry when Friends traveled. These documents are less necessary in the modern world with advanced communication technology, but the process of writing one may be the

way a Meeting connects with the peacemaker(s) and/or the project. Undertaking this process can increase mutual responsibility of the Meeting and the Friend with a leading, and provides a written record. It is good for people with more expertise in peacemaking to be identified, even if the practice of the Meeting or Friends Church is not to record the peacemaker as a minister.

**Techniques rooted in Quaker Practice for confronting conflict within Meetings and Churches:** Quaker spirituality emphasizes listening and respect for all people, which are skills basic to peacemaking. Some Quaker groups easily and spontaneously drop into worship—generally silent worship, but sometimes oral prayer, and this connection with God (or the Spirit) grounds all parties in a unity that can help them find the way to resolution and reconciliation. Perhaps less deeply, it is also common for Friends to pause, leaving space for

reflection before seeking solutions to problems. At times a concern or problem isn't resolved as quickly as some parties may prefer, and patience is a necessary part of problem resolution when using Quaker process. Often, experienced Friends have learned to trust the process, which helps quiet impatience. Quaker dialogue, or, as it is commonly called, worship sharing, allows each member of the group to speak their mind without facing argument or discussion. This is similar to the first step in mediation models, where each party states their case before continuing to seek for a resolution. When worship sharing is combined with deep listening, it is very useful in conflict resolution.

Many Friends Churches and Friends Meetings actively conduct their Meetings for Worship with Attention to Business in a way that involves the use of many of these processes, but their practice varies widely, at least among the liberal unprogrammed Meetings with which I am familiar. It seems to me that these practices deserve close and regular consideration as ways to support and sustain peacemakers in the Friends community. ■

**Quaker practice emphasizes listening and respect for all people, which are basic to peacemaking.**

## LISTENING ROOM OPENS IN KIBIMBA, BURUNDI

Postponed last July because of insecurity, the opening of Kibimba Listening Room--called *Ibonaniro* in Kirundi--took place Saturday, December 7, 2002.

The right time, one can say. In fact, according to someone I spoke to in Kibimba, opening it during these previous months would have been like building a house during a rainy season where [adobe] bricks cannot dry. When I wanted to know more about it, he explained that the months of July, August, September, October and November have been terrible because of the fighting around Kibimba.

There has been no more fighting around Kibimba since the signing of the cease-fire and everybody is waiting impatiently for the full implementation of it to cease the decade of fighting and fleeing. Now that the cease-fire between the army and the rebels has been signed, everyone's heart is calming down and therefore they can talk about what happened in order to heal.

I went to Kibimba on Friday 6<sup>th</sup> to help organize things. When I arrived there, our four trainees were already on the ground. We debriefed first on what had been their work in order to introduce them during the Saturday ceremony. We left at around 5 PM with everyone excited by the event to happen.

It was shining very early on Saturday morning. The place which was going to be a shelter to our guests was well done and ready at 9 AM. A big number of people, including children, began coming in as soon as they heard Kibimba Secondary School students drumming and the Kibimba church choir singing.

The coordinator of the Trauma Healing and Reconciliation Services (THARS) and some other staff arrived at around 10:30 and the ceremonies started. We were privileged to welcome some local leaders, such as heads of sectors, as well as the population living around Kibimba. Also present were some Friends' pastors and other Friends who were meeting in preparation of the Friends' Yearly

Meeting scheduled at the end of December.

After the Friends hymn, the superintendent of the Kibimba Quarterly Meeting welcomed all the people who attended the ceremonies. Then, the coordinator of THARS addressed the audience. In his speech, he first of all elaborated on a number of projects that the Friends in Burundi have run since they started in 1934, including THARS. The Listening Room will be of great importance to the whole community and will work closely with other projects. The Friends hospital treats physical wounds while the Listening Room will use the approach of listening to treat psychological wounds. The hospital will refer patients to the Listening Room just as the Listening Room will refer some of its clients who need medicine to the hospital.

Another speech was given by Mathias, the president of the Kibimba Peace Comity. In his speech, he mentioned Friends support to the Peace Comity and thanked the Trauma Healing and Reconciliation Services for the Listening Room that was going to open its activities.

Rev. Audace Ntahondereye, one of the Kibimba trainees, then spoke, saying that he has been using the trauma-healing methods and found them helpful. He called on whoever will need the trauma-healing services to come to the Listening Room every Monday and Friday from 8 AM to 4 PM.

The ceremonies ended formal cutting of the ribbon by the coordinator of THARS and the president of the Kibimba Peace Committee. As is customary in Burundi, a lunch was offered to our guests at the Arthur Chilson Normal School. The ceremonies ended at 3 PM.

To conclude, our four trainees in Kibimba who will work at the Listening Room said they still need more training and supervision from THARS. But now there is hope. Looking at people's faces, there were smiles. ■



## Services for Returned Volunteers

*Editor's note: this article is a sequel to "Training Volunteers for Re-Entry", printed in PEACE TEAMS NEWS, Winter 1999, Vol. 4, No. 1, available on the Internet at <http://www.quaker.org/fpt/41reentry.html>*

Those who read my earlier article about the needs of the returning volunteer have urged me to share some specific recommendations on what to do for groups under their care. I will report on a gathering for a class of returned Peace Corps volunteers (RPCV) a number of years ago, as well as some recent activities with individual in situations more akin to what most Peace Team volunteers may face.

For Peace Corps and the Seattle-based Returned Peace Corps Volunteers group, RAVN, a team of us RPCVs developed a trial 4-6 hour gathering attended by about 30 people who had been home less than 18 months, hosted by a dozen returnees who had been back several years and a few foreign nationals from Peace Corps countries. The day's events were designed to provide several things:

- 1 – a sense of the value of their common activities: service abroad
- 2 – a sense of commonality in their Significant Overseas Living Experience (SOLE)
- 3 – a chance to express discomforts with any part of the experience, including return culture shock
- 4 – energy and group support for the process of re-integration into the USA

The primary activity for this group was an opportunity to get information about services that Peace Corps provided locally. We also included information the returnees had not received about the W-curve of culture shock and a chance to share concrete tips for coping with this transition stress. Almost everyone comes home expecting the transition to be easy, perhaps because we think of home as a refuge from the alienation found abroad. In fact, it is no easier than the transition to a foreign milieu for a large majority of people who make the trip. The chance to hear from volunteers who had already made the return trip was much appreciated and received the highest praise on evaluation forms.

Some of the events of the day included the usual introductory activities: an informal overview, housekeeping, expectations and goals for the day, agenda review and setting norms. By presenting these things in an open and enquiring manner, we offered participants the opportunity to question and then buy into the full agenda.

Our first big activity was story-telling in small groups, who listened as the newly returned volunteers talked about their hopes and successes in their volunteer work. We reminded everyone of good listening techniques and reflective listening that validates the speaker's experience. We asked long-time RPCVs to hold their desire to tell their own stories until all the newcomers had a chance and then to limit their stories to those that added to something a newcomer had said. We asked each mixed group to share an amusing anecdote with all the participants after regrouping and then did a short brainstorm on commonalities of experience, especially on the intangibility of definitions of success in this kind of work. We also heard stories from RPCVs who had thought their work was very ineffective but years later found that it sparked a significant improvement or change in the overseas site. Other forms of tribute and thanks were also added during the day.

After refreshments and a break, we reformed into slightly larger groups to talk about culture shock and disappointments of living or working abroad. This was a less structured dialog and produced a lot of raw material for a large group discussion on the experience of culture shock and adaptation, or lack thereof, to alien customs. In the smaller groups they also had a time to get longer-term perspective on what Significant Overseas Living Experience (SOLE) means to one's expectations in the USA, one's career choices and family values, as the RAVN members were invited to talk about how their perspective on service abroad had changed since they returned home.

We found that a sort of percolation and maturing of perspective is usual, although the way attitudes evolve varies individually and in some people requires many years to become integrated.

During the sessions we included some fun game-like activities. We showed a short video. We gave people a chance to gather according to where they lived, so they could network with neighbors from around the region. We had considered naming buddies for each new returnee but decided against it. I believe this technique could be useful if you're welcoming home people who do not have strong support systems in their hometowns – even an e-mail or a long-distance phone buddy might make the difference between a constructive experience and a trial.

Our last major activity was a small group activity of coming up with a list of "What's weird about the USA" in the eyes of expatriates returning or foreigners who are trying to live here. We introduced the session by reading a short humorous chapter from the *Book of the Nacirema*, which looks at Anglo North American norms with a dyspeptic Martian eye. Then several pre-selected long-term returned volunteers talked about their varied experiences getting through "reverse culture shock" after return. This is when the W-curve model was re-introduced and we talked about different needs that could be met by services on the resource list, which was then distributed. Particular steps that returnees found helpful came out in discussion.

Final activities included writing cards on which we wrote something we hoped to "bring home to the USA" that we appreciated from our tour abroad, posting them on the wall and reading them. A brainstorm of something good about the USA that we hoped we'd left with our hosts abroad became energetic and full of laughter. Oral evaluation of the day's activities was positive, as I recall, and we collected written evaluations too. I do not know if the Peace Corps ever replicated this model or tried to do similar things anywhere else. Yet a number of the RAVN members stated, "I wish I'd had this when I got home."

There are many ways a model such as this would need to be modified for most of our smaller, non-profit peace groups. The first problem to be faced is: Where do we find a large enough group of returned veterans of SOLE who can host and share with new returnees? Next: How can we centralize our volunteers' return so that we can welcome them in groups larger than two or three at a time? I suggest that almost any area of North America, or other developed countries of the world, has many more travelers than we are usually aware of. RPCVs, returned missionaries, returned business executives and international salespersons, serious trekking vacationers and many others have managed to have a significant experience of living in a distinct culture and can be found by skillful use of public media. Arranging all of our volunteers' travel on an individualistic basis may seem

simpler to minds stuck in the North American efficiency and individualist mindset, but getting people to travel together or to arrive at least near to the same place and time is not so hard if you make it an expectation or norm before you start.

In my experience, I have found that each of the many times I've returned from an important time in the less-developed world, I cannot let anyone force me to see television or go to a supermarket until I have been in the USA long enough not to be shocked by the exceeding excess of both those experiences. But the most difficult thing for me to find has been people who are willing to sit and listen actively about how the experience felt, why it was important, and frequently, the grief that living brings in stressful situations that threaten and kill people I have come to care about. Speaking tours can help give one a forum for expressing both facts and real experiences as well as sharing political deductions and passion for required changes. They do not take the place of a caring friend who can listen attentively every time one needs a shoulder for the emotions that are stimulated. Since those who have not

See page 9 . . .

