

# F.O.M. NEWSLETTER

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Volume 15, No. 1

Winter 2004

## F.O.M. PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

### **SERVICE OPPORTUNITIES with IMMIGRANTS**

Dear Friends,

In the midst of all the regular business of keeping FOM running (processing grants, maintaining the books, getting out the newsletter), the Board has been working on long-range planning. The planning can perhaps best be described in terms that many of us learned to live by in Malawi: *pang'ono pong'ono* ("little by little," for you Tumbuka and Yao speakers). Progress is being made. Our interim goals, which the Board established when I joined a year ago, have been met. The newsletter, thanks in no small measure to the Herculean efforts of Beth Evans and Fides Ushe, is now being published on a bi-annual schedule. Small grants are being reviewed and 3 were awarded totaling \$1175, since the previous newsletter was published last fall, with an additional \$2,000 sent to FINCA. And with the addition of Matt and Katrina Grantz to the Grants Team, we have a Board of 11 members. Obviously, it was time to set new goals!

The Board, after careful discussion, has assembled a new list of goals that I would like to share with you. Over the next year we will be working to:

- \*Maintain contact with our members through both the newsletter and a re-designed web page;
- \*Get more and higher quality small grants proposals by re-establishing a link with Peace Corps staff – both in Washington, DC and in-country;
- \*Review our membership policy and create a budget for the organization, and
- \*Expand our service component beyond the small grants program.

This leads me to the title at the top of this letter. In an effort to expand service opportunities for FOM, I attended a conference last November about African immigrants and refugees in the Washington, DC area. The workshop was organized to bring together various non-profit and government organizations dealing with refugee issues. Representatives were there from a Maryland education program (short-term mentoring for at-risk students), the local county law enforcement, World Bank, another Friends group, etc. But the information presented was much more geared at explaining the ways that a refugee's experience of America is different than at mobilizing the various groups to act as advocates, provide financial or instructional assistance, or any other form of service—which was, of course, what I had hoped to get from the conference. But what cannot be found one way often can be found another, and sometimes Fate, in the guise of a happy coincidence, lends a hand.

The coincidence: the most recent NPCA newsletter included an appeal for volunteers from Monique Dupre of the Somali Bantu Project. Monique works with Somali Bantu refugees who are being resettled in the United States. The Somali Bantu are being placed in several cities throughout the United States, and the project is looking for volunteers to help them acclimate to their new homes. I believe that RPCV's, with their experience navigating between cultures, and specifically FOM members with their knowledge of Bantu culture, are uniquely suited to the task. I spoke with Monique about the project, and about what FOM members could contribute. Please read the article on the Somali Bantu, and the Somali Bantu Project inside this edition of the newsletter. This is an opportunity to repay some of the wonderful hospitality that was shown to us when we ventured into a world far away from our homes—consider volunteering your time to make a stranger feel welcome, and let us know about your experience!

Sincerely, Dawn Citrin, 98-00, President F.O.M.



## **PERSPECTIVES ON MALAWI**

This column will try to provide a mix of perspectives on Malawi from past and current PCVs, Malawians, and NGO studies. Our goal is to provide a balanced mix of reflections, facts and figures, experiences, etc., to enhance our understanding of what is and is not working to improve the lives of all Malawians. Ideas for issues you would like to hear more about, as well as article submissions are encouraged. Views do not necessarily represent the board of FOM. We hope you enjoy this column.

### **MALAWI and AIDS By Max Reid**

Over the last two years I have traveled to Malawi twice while working on a documentary on the effect of AIDS on Malawi. I met and interviewed dozens of people over the two months that I was there. Though the great character of the Malawian people is still very much alive, the country is very different from the one I served in as a Peace Corps Volunteer in the late 60's.

Malawi today has a population somewhere around 10-11 million. Half of the population, or about 5 million, are under the age of 15. The number of people who are HIV positive is an estimate and can be influenced by politics. Most agree that a quarter to a third of the adult population is infected.

In the 80's and early 90's, AIDS spread because of a lack of information. People talked about it, but there were no serious warnings. It was thought of as a disease that was happening somewhere else, not in Malawi. Because of Malawi's political situation, no one in the government wanted to raise the specter of a possible epidemic spread by sexual contact. Kamuzu Banda, wrapped in a cloak of Victorian values, would not tolerate the discussion of sexually transmitted diseases.

In today's Malawi, people don't want to admit they might be HIV positive out of fear of stigma and social alienation. AIDS is associated with being promiscuous, something most Malawians would not want to admit. Few in Malawi get tested to try to contain the disease by behaving responsibly.

I spent a lot of time with a young man who was educated at the Poly Tech. He was quite a womanizer. He said that he never used condoms. He ate all of the time, and was proud that he was rather fat. He told me that being fat was a sign that he was not infected. He refused to be tested for HIV because, if positive, he would not have access to drugs and he saw nothing to gain. To him, testing positive for HIV was only a death sentence.

One of the factors in the spread of AIDS, particularly in young people, is economic. Needing school fees or food for themselves and others in their family, women often find it difficult to say no to a sexual advance that may include a reward. Tradition also encourages women to be passive when it comes to sex. Though this is changing, a woman's ability to say "no" is still very difficult.

On the village level, AIDS is devastating families. Experts believe there are as many as a million children in Malawi who have lost one or both parents. Grandparents often bear the burden of caring for many grandchildren. Although innovative orphanages like Malawi Children's Village are being organized throughout the country, the number of orphans continues to grow.

With family members sometimes ill with AIDS related diseases like tuberculosis (Tb), the ability to plant and harvest crops is severely impaired. The unpredictability of rainfall at the right time, adds to the problem of generating enough food. With the addition of starvation, diminished immune systems have an extra burden.

AIDS also effects the professions. It is decimating the ranks of medical workers, teachers, police, government administrators and workers in private enterprise. Many have died and there are few skilled workers to replace them. For example, Malawi is losing as many as 300 teachers a month to AIDS....far more than can be replaced.

Crime and corruption are on the rise. Most of Malawi's income is from foreign aid. However, much of the aid has been withdrawn because of alleged corruption at all levels of government. As faith in institutions declines, the resulting political and social stability could lead to chaos.

But, there is hope. Many small bootstrap organizations have been formed to help those with AIDS. They are dependent on donations, but they are very efficient. Every Kwacha is carefully spent for maximum return. Pilot programs have shown that antiretroviral drugs are very effective in keeping people well and increasing their lifespan. It is hoped that low cost generic drugs will reach Malawi in enough quantity to preserve the infrastructure and improve the health of Malawi's families.

Malawi needs help to combat AIDS. Unfortunately, half of the world's foreign aid dollars are going to Iraq, so there is little money for Africa. President Bush's new AIDS initiative has yet to get full funding and Malawi is not on the list of nations destined to receive aid.

Support is needed. Groups like Malawi Children's Village and many others benefit greatly from the small donations we make. Perhaps we can band together. Maybe Friends of Malawi can exert some influence on our government to help Malawi receive a larger share of the help so desperately needed.

If you have questions or comments, or if you would be interested in showing "Dying in Silence" my film about Malawi to your school or friends, please contact me. (Info at [www.dyinginsilence.com](http://www.dyinginsilence.com)) or at [max@4r.net](mailto:max@4r.net).

## ANOTHER POLITICAL POINT OF VIEW

The following has been excerpted from a newsletter of the Scottish Malawi Network. It has presented the following view of the political situation in Malawi largely from the point of view of CCAP missionaries who have returned to Scotland.

\*It appears that there are 31 political parties competing for power and most seem to be formed on personality-based politics. While the defeat of Maluzi's attempt at a third term, and a perceived return to a one-party state, may be a victory for democracy, this democracy is in fact so fragmented that it may not bode well for the future of a healthy democracy in Malawi.

\*There is almost no new blood. Many parties consist of UDF defectors who have money. Aleke Banda and Justin Malewezi lead the PPM; Mpinganjira the NDA; Tembo the MCP; Chakuamba the Republican Party; and Ntaba in New Congress for Democracy.

\*In order to be effective, some of the smaller parties will need to form a coalition or align with another stronger party.

\*It is possible that the outcome of the elections will lead to even greater economic, political and social problems than now exist.

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## BITS & PIECES

**MARK YOUR CALENDAR!** August 5-8, 2004, will see nearly 2,000 RPCVs from around the country descend on Chicago for the National Peace Corps Association Conference. Confirmed speakers include:

- \*Wisconsin Governor Jim Doyle and First Lady Jessica Doyle (both RPCVs Tunisia)
  - \*Afghanistan Vice President Amin Arsala (spouse of RPCV)
  - \*Former Thailand Foreign Minister Surin Pitsuwan
  - \*Alderman Ed Smith (RPCV India)
  - \*Tribune Correspondent Steve Franklin (RPCV Turkey)
  - \*Ambassador Ronald Godard (RPCV Ecuador)
  - \*NPCA President Kevin Quigley (RPCV Thailand)
  - \*Muntu African Dance
  - \*Natya Dance Theater
  - \*Latin Rhythms
- And more!

Registration fees range from \$95 to \$220.

For information about the program, country of service events, speakers, hotel information and registration, visit [www.rpcv2004.org](http://www.rpcv2004.org). Let's have some FOM members attend!

## "Bittersweet Return" Cont. from p2

Finally, in the fall of 2003, "A Bittersweet Return to the Warm Heart of Africa" was ready to share. It had its premier at an event sponsored by the Los Angeles Peace Corps Office and my local PC group in Santa Barbara and I have continued to share it with community groups. I have found that it lends itself to fundraising efforts that I have been doing on behalf of the Malawi Children's Village.

Because the making of "Bittersweet Return" was done as a school project and I had no intention of ever selling the documentary, I did not go through the complicated process of obtaining copyright releases for the music and photographs used in it. Therefore, I am not at liberty to sell it. However, if anyone would like to see "Bittersweet Return" there are two options:

- 1) I'd be happy to make you a copy and mail it at my own expense if you are willing to make at least a \$25 contribution to Malawi Children's Village. Just send me a check made out to Malawi Children's Village and I will send you the video and forward the check to MCV. My address is Barbara Hodgdon, 306 Northridge Road, Santa Barbara, CA 93105
- 2) I'd also be happy to circulate a copy of the video if you would be willing to mail it on to others. Just send me an e-mail ([b-hodgdon@cox.net](mailto:b-hodgdon@cox.net)) with your contact information.

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## BOOKS

*Justified by Faith: An Irish missionary experience in Malawi.* By Angela Hanley. Available from St. Patrick's Missionary Society, Kiltegan Co. Wicklow, Ireland. It is the background story of 'The Bishop's Letter' that set off open defiance to the Banda dictatorship and led to his overthrow. Many photos.

*The Spirit Dimension in African Christianity: A Pastoral Study Among the Tumbuka People of Northern Malawi.* By Silas S. Ncozana. Deals mainly with forms of Vimbuza, Vyanusi and Virombo and a history of the Livingstonia mission.

## OPPORTUNITY TO HELP

Dear Fellow Malawian RPCV's,

I'll be forthright. . . This letter is a solicitation! But, I hope you will read on because I think that you will be interested in the cause.

My name is Barbara Hodgdon and I was a PCV in Malawi 1962-64. Recently I participated in a Peace Corps sponsored community event in my hometown of Santa Barbara, California, where a young Malawian student was part of a panel discussion about Malawi. The student, Kent Kafatia, made an enormously positive impression on the audience. Afterwards, several people called me to ask if there were some ways they could help this struggling student. We decided to form a committee to explore ways that we might help. But, more later. . . let me first tell you about Kent.

Kent was 19 when he came to the United States two years ago to pursue his dream of becoming a chemical engineer. But his road to achieving this dream has had a number of obstacles. First, the 9/11 disaster made the visa process much more challenging and Kent ended up on the West Coast instead of New York where he had planned to go to school. Then, the devaluation of the kwacha dramatically eroded the help his father (who is a chemical engineer for the Central Region Water Board in Malawi) is able to provide. So, without government support and with the diminished resources his family can provide, Kent is really stretched to achieve his dream.

Kent has completed his first two years of university work at Santa Barbara City College by working four different jobs, two of which are all-nighters (a security guard at SBCC and bookkeeper for a motel). He typically sleeps only 2-3 hours a night at the Salvation Army Center that has been his "temporary" home ever since he arrived. But despite this rigorous schedule, his academic performance has been outstanding and his determination to pursue his dream of returning to Malawi with skill that can make a difference is still strong.

However, the financial challenges now increase as he moves to a university setting (probably either Berkeley or the University of California at Santa Barbara). Tuition will be substantially higher than at the community college and with California's financial problems, university tuition is expected to increase.

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After sitting down with Kent to review how we might help him achieve his goal, the new Friends of Kent Committee decided to focus on two goals: Finding a more suitable housing situation than the Salvation Army Center and raising funds to help with tuition costs. The first goal was achieved several weeks ago when Kent moved into the home of the former wife of Doug Burk (Malawi PC Director 1972-72). In pursuit of the second goal, we have set up a special bank account and are beginning to tell Kent's amazing story in hopes of raising funds to help with his future tuition and textbook costs. If you would like to contribute to this cause, you can send a check to: Friends of Kent 192416582  
Montecito Bank & Trust  
c/o Lauri Leighty  
P. O. Box 2460  
Santa Barbara CA 93120-2460

You can be sure that any contribution you make will be well invested. Kent is determined to return to Malawi with skill that will help the country that he loves so much. If you have questions or would like to know more about Kent or this effort to assist him, please feel free to call me at 805-687-8408 or e-mail me at [b-hodgdon@cox.net](mailto:b-hodgdon@cox.net). The Friends of Kent Committee has launched a website where you can learn more about Kent and get feedback on our fundraising efforts on his behalf. Go to: [www.friendsof Kent.org](http://www.friendsof Kent.org).  
Sincerely, Barbara Wilder Hodgdon ('62-'64)

Kent Kafatis was born and raised in Blantyre, Malawi. He is the second of four children. He attended Malamulo Primary School, Southend Secondary Day School, and St. Partick Secondary Boarding School. Currently, Kent is pursuing a degree in Chemical Engineering in the U. S.

**FOM GRANTS UPDATE**

Moni Nonse!

The FOM family would like to welcome the newest members of our grants team, Katrina and Matt Grantz! Katrina ('97-'00) and Matt ('98-'00) were education volunteers and their experience as teachers in two different regions will serve as an invaluable asset to our team. Matt and Katrina currently are based in Colorado while Matt attends medical school and Katrina finishes her Ph. D. in hydrology.

While Terry Liercke is off on a USAID assignment for a few months, I have been holding down the fort and am very excited to offer a very warm welcome to Katrina and Matt. As they say in Malawi, *“Takulandirani ndi manja awiri!”*

We have received many exciting grant proposals from the field, thanks to all the hard working PCV's. Please keep sending your requests! Since the last newsletter, we have awarded three new grants.

First is a grant for \$500 to Fides Ushe of Springfield, MA. Fides is planning a trip this summer to visit her family in the northern region of Malawi. FOM is assisting the local community-founded rural medical clinic with benches, stethoscopes, blood pressure cuffs, cots and a medicine supply cabinet with a lock. This small clinic will service the very community that built the structure with hand-made bricks. This same village also built a school, so we are very eager to hear reports when Fides returns.

Our second grant, of \$300 was made to PCV Hollee Pattison. Members of Hollee's village will be attending a two-day workshop on soap making. A portion of the profits from the soap will assist with feeding and basic care at a local orphan care program in Chinguluwe village.

Our third grant was awarded in the amount of \$375 to Dedza District PCV Mary Ann Camp. Mary Ann has been working with her village to build a permanent indoor nursery school because the children have been forced to move classrooms over five times. With a SPA grant (small project assistance-a grant fund for PCV's funded by the US Embassy) in 2003, Mary Ann and her community built the structure and staffed the nursery school. Due to sudden inflation, the cost of labor exceeded the original SPA grant proposal budget. Mary Ann's village requested some assistance to cover the remaining costs for her project, as well as for a small

*Cont. next column*

slide, two tricycles, five door locks and three blackboards. FOM does have a general policy of awarding funds for small-scale projects that can be completed within the limits of the program (such as a SPA grant). However, we awarded this grant after careful deliberation and with the following explanation: the project's situation was unusual (rapid Kwacha inflation coupled with cutbacks in the amount of SPA funding awarded in fiscal year 2003); the level of community involvement for the project was very high; and Mary Ann's track record with SPA grants was excellent.

The nursery school project is aimed at reaching children prior to primary education, and teaching them the fundamentals of being a good student. The teachers at the local primary school have noticed a big difference in attention span and level of basic knowledge when the children have attended the nursery school.

I would like to extend a very sincere "Thank You" to each and every member of FOM for your generous support. Because of your help, the grants team is able to award these grants to support the hard work of communities across Malawi. Also, we would like to commend the efforts of the PCV's. We are very proud of your hard work and dedication to the people and communities of Malawi.

Sincerely,

Kate Reidy for the FOM Grants Team

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To facilitate prompt communication, the grants team will use one e-mail address for all grant submissions from now on. Please direct any grant-related correspondence to: [FOMgrants@yahoo.com](mailto:FOMgrants@yahoo.com).

Please note that Terry Liercke, for so long the primary contact for FOM grants, now is serving in a consultant role to the grants team. Please help us through this transition by directing correspondence to the shared address above.

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## THE SOMALI BANTU & THE SOMALI BANTU PROJECT

The Somali Bantu Project is an effort to resettle Somali Bantu refugees in the United States and to make the transition as smooth as possible. They are being settled in 50 cities throughout the country. In each city, a local agency has been designated to lead the resettlement project. Monique Dupre has asked for RPCV assistance and urges would-be volunteers to contact her at [moniquedupre@hotmail.com](mailto:moniquedupre@hotmail.com), or to contact the local agency for their city. Ms. Dupre is putting together a community garden project with the Somali Bantu in her community which will provide the refugees a place to gather, an opportunity to learn more about their new community in a setting familiar to them, and basic 'city smarts' (how to take a bus, how to meet their neighbors, etc.). Opportunities for acculturation projects are numerous, but many local agencies are overwhelmed with providing housing and access to social services. ***That is where our help really can make a difference!***

Here is a bit of helpful information taken from *The Somali Bantu: Their History and Culture* by Dan Van Lehman and Omar Eno. The full text can be found at [www.culturalorientation.net/bantu/](http://www.culturalorientation.net/bantu/). The Somali Bantu can be divided into distinct groups: those indigenous to Somalia, those who were brought to Somalia as slaves from Bantu-speaking tribes but integrated into Somali society, and those who were brought to Somalia as slaves but maintained, to varying degrees, their ancestral culture, Bantu languages, and sense of southeast African identity. It is this last group of Bantu refugees that has suffered particular persecution and that is in need of protection through resettlement. Although they have lived in Somalia for approximately two centuries, in many ways they were viewed and treated as foreigners. These Bantu sought resettlement to Tanzania in 1993-94, and to Mozambique in 1997-98, before they were considered for resettlement in the United States in 1999.

Many Bantu refugees can trace their origins back to ancestors in southeast African tribes who were enslaved in the 18<sup>th</sup> century by agents of the Sultanate of Zanzibar. Among others, these ancestral tribes include the Makua and Yao of southern Tanzania and northern Mozambique; the Ngindo and Nyasa of Tanzania, Mozambique and northern Malawi.

The following briefly discusses areas of need and what service providers might need to address:

**Health Care** – The concept of family planning does not exist. An estimated 60% of the Bantu are under the age of 17, and 31% are under 6. Resettlement professionals should be prepared to deal with significant health

*Cont. next column.*

care, sanitation, and social support issues relating to small children and mothers. Having been used to pit latrines, they are unfamiliar with typical American bathroom facilities, diapers and feminine care products. They practice rural traditional beliefs. This extends to medical care in which local healing techniques are used. Some apply a heated nail or metal object to an infant's head in the belief that burns will reduce swelling of the head in cases where it is unusually large. They also burn small holes in the skin to cure ailments like stomachaches and migraine headaches and the use of herbs is common. Prayer and ritual ceremonies are used to cast off illness and evil spells. Like other Somali groups, the Bantu circumcise both males and females. Health and legal concerns around this should be addressed. It should be noted that Islam does not mandate female circumcision although it is a tradition that may have accompanied Islam.

**Mental Health** – Bantu refugees with a lineage of slavery have a long history of marginalization. This has adversely affected their sense of equality and self-esteem. During the recent civil war many witnessed their relatives being killed. The prevalence of violence and the constant threat of attack in the refugee camps have further eroded a sense of security and well-being. Trauma-related feelings of hopelessness and depression are seen. It is important to recognize that Bantu children who will attend American public schools probably are traumatized as well and will need special services in this area.

**Learning English** – Learning a new language in a foreign country poses many challenges.

**Special Needs of Women** – Circumcision, rape, lack of education, second-class status in Somali society, high birth rates, single parent status, and trauma from past experiences all are conditions that Bantu women have had to endure in Africa. In the United States, Bantu women will be challenged further if they cannot draw upon extended family and kinship networks to assist them with child rearing and moral support.

**Relations Between Bantu and Other Somalis** – Although the Somali population in the United States may not openly be hostile to the Bantu, and in some cases, genuinely be willing to assist them, service providers should not assume that there will be immediate trust and respect between them. Resettlement professionals should use the same caution and sensitivity in case management with the Bantu and Somalis that they use with other ethnic groups who have a history of contentious relations.

## F.O.M. Newsletter

C/o E. Evans or F. Ushe –  
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### EDITORS' NOTE

The first attempt at reviving the Friends Of Malawi Newsletter has been received well. Several have contacted us with encouragement. Remember, we are doing this as volunteers and will need the help of many readers in order to be able to print with any regularity. Thanks to Max Reid and Barbara Hodgdon for their submissions to this issue. If readers have an interest in submitting items, they may be mailed to: Dr. Beth Evans, Judd Gymnasia, Springfield College, 263 Alden Street, Springfield MA 01109.

Fides Ushe, John Herbst and Beth Evans are planning another trip back to Malawi this coming June. They have received a FOM grant to help equip the rural clinic for which the villagers are making bricks in anticipation of the medicine they will be bringing.

Because of the knowledge that a prior attempt by PCV nurses at making a "bicycle ambulance" was not very successful, students at the Lemelson Center

for Assistive Technology at Hampshire College (Amherst, MA) were challenged to design one that could be reproduced in Malawi. It is so exciting that they have accepted the challenge! If successful, it will mean that a person too sick to walk to Embangweni Mission Hospital will not have to hire an ox cart for transportation. This column will keep you updated on all of the projects that also include scholarships for girls to attend secondary school and the start of a cottage industry for the women at Mzoma.

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***Please send information and articles for inclusion in the next issue to:***  
***[Elizabeth\\_Evans@spfldcol.edu](mailto:Elizabeth_Evans@spfldcol.edu) or Fax to (413) 748-3537.***

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