

Alumni in the News

Relief stint brings rewards

Sheryl Gruber BS '92

Upon graduating from UW-Stout in 1992 with a B.S. in General Business Administration, I was fully prepared to begin a "respectable" career. I began a job with a large computer consulting firm in Milwaukee, and I was able to wear a suit and carry a briefcase. This was the life I had always planned! Well, after two years of sitting at a desk and looking at a computer screen, I began to feel a little pull to try something different. I contemplated what I truly wanted and realized that my desire lay in helping people in third world countries. I was not exactly sure how I would do this, but I quit my job and began pursuing options.

After much research, I found an organization called Food For the Hungry (FH). FH is a fairly small Christian relief and development organization with programs all over the world. I learned that being a relief and development organization means that they have shorter term relief projects, which are started because of some type of disaster that occurs in the world, as well as long-term, grass-roots development projects. I was drawn to the development side of the organization. I also found out that Food for the Hungry is a misnomer. They are no longer in the business of food distribution per se. Their current projects help people to help themselves provide food and necessities for their families through projects which focus on strengthening communities. They also help to provide life-sustaining spiritual "food." They call it the "two hungers" approach.

I attended an FH training in January 1995, and I was ready to make a commitment. The next

step was finding a project that matched my skill set and country preference. The process occurred over a span of a few months, and then the "perfect" position was located. I would be going to La Paz, Bolivia, to be the small business development coordinator. I was ready to begin my process of support raising (all FH development volunteers need to raise their own financial support), when I received a phone call from the FH relief coordinator.

"Would you like to spend the next six months working in Africa in the Rwandan refugee camps of Zaire before going to Bolivia?" he asked me. "Well, uh.....sure!!" was the reply that escaped from my mouth. The thought of doing a relief project had never even crossed my mind, but I heard myself saying that I would love the experience and that I could leave in two weeks!

What I saw when I arrived there was beyond description. Our team worked in Mugunga Camp, which is home to about 150,000 Rwandan refugees. The camp is about a mile and a half square in size. The refugees live in houses ("blindes," as they are called) made out of a large piece of plastic given to them by the United Nations and framed up with wooden poles. The poles are really just young trees that the refugees have chopped from near-by forests. The ground of the camp is basically all lava rock (*the area is volcanic, so much of the ground is either lava rock or lush grasses and trees*), and it is not uncommon to see people walking barefoot. Cooking is done over open fires, in a tin pot provided by the UN. The refugees are given a weekly ration of food which consists of corn-soy flour, rice, beans, oil and salt. Any fruits or

vegetables must be bought. This was the part of the camp that amazed me the most, the amount of commerce that was conducted. The refugees have been in the camps for two years, so Mugunga is basically a city. There were people lining the "roads" with food for sale, plus just about anything one could want, including hand-stitched Chicago Bulls jackets!

Our team carried out two main programs in the camp. I was responsible for the one titled Social Services. In our "zone" of 50,000 people, we provided assistance to the especially vulnerable refugees, handicapped, chronically sick, widows, and some children. We conducted classes for the children on hygiene, first-aid, writing, English and the Bible. For the adults, we taught different skills, such as how to make shoes from old tires and how to make cooking pots from used tins. Our building served as a type of community center where people could come and socialize and be in a positive environment for a few hours of the day.

The other program, called ChildWINS, served as a catalyst to bring children together with their families. During the war and the mass exodus of Rwandans from their homeland in 1994, many children became separated from their family members. There are four refugee camps just like Mugunga along the border, so it is possible that children could have ended up in a different place than their family. With the help of Rwandan staff, the FH program has helped to reunite more than 10,000 of these children with a family member.

The time I spent in Zaire was one of the most rewarding of my life. I learned the power of hope



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and the power of God — which are the only things that keep the refugees going. It is hard to predict what will happen in the future for these people. The most recent reports say that the camps are beginning to be shut down by the government of Zaire. If the Rwandans are able to peacefully return home, it would be a cause for true celebration. When talking with the refugees, their most common request was for our thoughts and our prayers, not a lot to ask from people who have been through so much.

As for me, I am still planning to pursue my original path. Being in a relief situation further strengthened my belief in development work as a means to possibly avoid such conflicts from occurring in the future. I believe that if communities are encouraged to work together and know one another, there is hope for a more peaceful future.

Landis dyes cotton for Donahue's rug

Wendy Merry Dunn County News

Lately when Tracy Lea Landis makes purchases at the local coffee shop, she'll say she's spending "Phil's money."

That Phil is none other than Phil Donahue, and Landis is dyeing cotton that will be woven into a rug for Donahue and his wife, Marlo Thomas.

Landis is working on Donahue's rug through one of her employers, designer Mary Ann Wise of Stockholm. Wise designed a similar rug 10 years ago for the Donahues.

There's a lot of pressure to get the exact colors for the rug. Before Landis was selected for the job, she sent in color samples to be approved by the interior decorator.

"Marlo's known to be particular about color," Landis said. "That makes it very stressful. And we all want to make Marlo and Phil happy."

Landis is dyeing 45 pounds of cotton in nine colors for the rug. The 100 percent cotton material is "recycled" hospital sheets.

Landis draws on almost 10 years of experience in dyeing, and she strives for absolute accuracy in her colors. If the color is too light, it can be dyed darker.

"If it's too dark, it can't be corrected," Landis continued, "and the material is then waste."

Landis has had a love for color since she was a little girl.

"I used to look at the colors that Mother Nature combined, and just look at it," she said. "I recently realized that I get a lot of satisfaction making those colors happen."



Landis has a bachelor's degree in clothing, textiles and design from UW-Stout, with minors in art and business.

"As a Stout graduate, I've studied a lot about industrial operations and apply that," Landis said. She's developed a series of systems to make sure a project is completed on time.

"The more systems I develop, the more room I have to be inspired and relaxed," Landis said. Landis started dyeing as an undergraduate when someone asked her to dye some clothing for them. Shortly after that project began, she noticed a stack of white berets at the Goodwill. Using a coloring process similar to tie-dyeing, Landis created the Zen Warrior hats.

She now orders the berets from the Czech Republic, and the dyed hats sell from Ohio to the West Coast. Locally the Zen Warrior hats are available at Dunn County Pottery in Downsville, Northern Outfitters in Menomonie and Truckers Union in Eau Claire.

"They are art to wear," Landis said, "This is my bread and butter project."

From there, Landis began dyeing other clothing items, and she continues to dye the hats. She's also dyed wool and silk for wall hangings.

"I grew to love it, and I got good at it," she said. "I enjoy color, and that keeps me going. I think that's probably pretty rare."

Woodbury University welcomes Nielsen as president

In July 1996, Kenneth R. Nielsen was appointed by the Board of Trustees as president of Woodbury University. Nielsen succeeds the outgoing president, Paul E. Sago, who announced his retirement earlier this year.

Nielsen, guidance and counseling MS'67, continues to add to his credit of 28 years of leadership experience in higher education. He considers his broad knowledge of education administration to be one of his greatest strengths.

"Universities need leaders who are visionaries, administrators and spokespersons, in addition to being academic scholars and successful fund-raisers," Nielsen said. "I am prepared to deal with the realities of our times.

Changes in funding sources, declining enrollments, fiscal constraints and other critical issues must be assessed in order to prepare for the future."

Nielsen's academic and professional training emphasizes psychology and administration. He earned a bachelor's degree from the University of Wisconsin, and a doctorate in counseling psychology and guidance from the University of Wyoming.

Prior to accepting the position at Woodbury, Nielsen served as president of the College of Saint Mary in Omaha, Neb., a Catholic teaching institution with an enrollment of approximately 1,200 students. Saint Mary's professionally oriented academic program is similar to Woodbury's emphasis on career-focused degree programs in business, design, and the arts and sciences. In addition, both institutions serve the non-traditional student population through evening and weekend degree programs.

Born in Racine, Wis., the 54-year-old president is married and has five children.

Woodbury University is one of the three oldest private institutions in Southern California. After more than 100 years in downtown Los Angeles, the university moved to a residential campus in Burbank. Woodbury is an accredited, non-profit, independent, non-sectarian university that offers bachelors' degrees from the schools of Architecture and Design, Business and Management, and Arts and Sciences. The master of business administration degree is also offered. The university's Weekend College and Evening College programs offer the full bachelor's degree in business, psychology and management, facility planning and management, and the M.B.A. on weekend and evening schedules for working adults.



Nielsen