GRAINS OF HOPE: REFUGEE EXPERIENCES IN WEST MICHIGAN

Research and writing led by Stephanie Sandberg in collaboration with students in CAS 395:
Sam Camp, Cathy Fazio, Lindsey Huizenga, Sam McConnell, Eden McCune, Philip Seomum

Brehane (light), from Ethiopia
Hahn-Ai (beloved, good girl), from Taiwan, a teenager who is telling her family story
Michael, one of the Lost Boys of the Sudan, now a Bible College student
Francene, from the Congo
Tashi (loyal and faithful), a Bhutanese man, in his late 30s
Farrah, an Iraqi woman
Khin (brave), a Burmese man
UNHCR
Jimmy, in his 20s, a young man who has volunteered with refugees
Becky, works with connecting refugees with volunteers and churches
Julie, works as a volunteer teaching ESL
Prof. Smith, a professor of Urban Geography
Kelley, a volunteer who helped a refugee family through a housing crisis
Jenn, works with helping refugees find employment
Karen, a nurse who assists refugee families when the arrive
Beth, a mental health professional
Cindi, a volunteer who has built a relationship with Hahn Ai and her family
Sophie, a teacher who works with newcomers
Audrey, an educator

PROLOGUE

In the darkness, we hear music and we hear walking, walking, and then singing. It is a foreign song, one never heard in America. It is like a dream. Then, a light and the singing stops.

Projection: Night, darkness. Something dark on the screens and isolated a figure in light who speaks:

Brehane: In my country, when I was very young and before the terror and hunger, my auntie told me about the malaika. These are good spirits, sent from God to us … These spirits, they love us and once, they came down, created from the light at the first creation, and they can do no evil, and they came down…came down (gestures) and they spread their light among my people, to help us to find land and home…to help us to find a peaceful place. Mostly they are invisible, but the night when we had to escape, when the terror came, I know I saw one because there was no way we would get out, my brothers, my son and me, without this man who came to help, who held out his hands to us and pulled us onto truck in the darkness...And then, we never saw him again. We do not know his name or where he is...this man who was our light in the darkness with his saving….glowing hands.

During this, we hear terror and truck and percussion. Then walking again. Song of Ethiopia.

STORIES OF HOME

Projection: Title of play on screens. Images of refugees walking. Freeze. some kind of a transition – walking, moving, projection into: projections of countries, continents, and pictures of the places.

Hahn-Ai: My family is from Vietnam. The Communists took over our country in 1975. My father, he says that they were oppressed, as in the communists took the people who weren't on their side to like concentration camps and like like abused them and like made them do labor and stuff. Not my family but many of our friends and acquaintances…people we knew. My parents didn't know each other yet…and my mom, she was trying to escape with her sisters.

So, there was no personal freedom...very oppressed...that's why people left the country. and um food was given out, you couldn't buy food yourself, there was a set amount of food you had to buy and that was all you got...the people who were in those camps and stuff, they were, I don't want to say malnourished, but they were not fed enough but they still had to work the same amount of time and even more. It was form of slavery.

My parents were looking for freedom…for more than 20 years.

Michael: We live in Kakuma in Kenya. In refugee camp there. Before this...in Ethiopia...before this in South Sudan. I am from Dinka tribe. Sudan, my country, used to be place of peace. Prosperity. I never know this. All I know is war and threat of the force of the SPLA (People's Liberation Army) and no thing that brings any peace. War is all that we know and the threat of this. We knew that they were coming to our village to force more boys to join. There we are so afraid. You know, I watch my parents die? Did you know this?

Francene: Hello. Hello. " I am Francene. I am from Congo." Those were the first words I learned to speak in English. At refugee camp in Mozambique…first words. They teach us those at the …class. Orientation class for refugee. I came first with my family, children and two of their children. Where I am from is nothing now. It is bad there then when I left and now when I am here. Congo, Democratic Republic of Congo. Is lost.

Tashi: Our family, they were farmers, so we grew crops, raised cattles. All these kinds of things we did. We are Nepali but living in Bhutan..historically it was-it was said that long time ago few Nepalis from Nepal were taken to Bhutan uh to develop the Southern region, and you know the Southern region became richer, and better and more fertile, and lot of cash crops, and other things. And it became so attractive that the Northern, you know Northern country wasn't so good. So then these were some of the reasons, and there are many other reasons which made the government ethnic cleanse us. So they just sent the lompaza all out of the country, and they gave us the deadline to leave.

Farrah: In my country, I only know war….whole time I am growing up in Iraq. Only war. Many bad things. My mother, she dead…died when I am just (counts in head) one and a half years old. One thing after another. Many bad things. This is why my heart sick now. Many bad things.

And I just get married one year. And we have so nice one year together. When I married him, the war was starting, but when I pregnant with Mohammed, it's more worse. When I go to bring Mohammed, the Iraqi police help us to get to the hospital. I get a high fever and nothing at the hospital can care of me because it's war and so bad. And my mother in law say, let me me take her to the home. And they told her, but that's dangerous. It's three o'clock in the morning and lots of American army, lots of Iraqi army, lots of things. Anything, they keep a gun on us, they put the gun at the window and they say, "We will kill us right now!"

And then we just turn the baby, we cannot speak English, can tell them what happened, and we just give them the baby, out the window, and they was so scared from the baby, they thought the baby is a bomb or something. It's a baby. Oh my goodness...it was Sooo bad!

And after...my husband working with the U.S. Army…and because this they try to kill him four times. We don't know who. Al Qaeda or who…we don't know who.

Khin: In Burma...there is just so much oppression...like people informing on each other, and danger and not really ever knowing if you were safe or anything. My father was in prison for six months and just because he's my father, they will put me in prison. They look for you, just because you're associated. In Burma the army is in control...everything is in their hand. They cut media..they don't want anything to be seen from other countries. They keep the whole communication under their control, the phone, the internet...they block everything. Now...it might seem like it looks a little better, but that's just the cover you know? Like the outside...how it looks. It's still the same.

Brehane: In my country…in my country is…hunger...we must escape because is poverty and starvation everywhere, and war too. We have to leave, my mother died and then we leave because there is nothing for us there any more.

ESCAPE

(images of refugees walking...images of flight). Stasis and then building intensity of movement. Walking into running.

Michael: We heard they were coming and still we did not move. My parents believe that we can stand up and that God will protect us. I don't know why they think this because it is not true. God was not with us there, only evil.

Francene: In Democratic Republic of Congo we…uh..we are just people. Just doing our lives. I had a..uh small business there, making, stitching, sewing things. Some dying too. In my…small village I just work and with my family. But one day, they take me.

Hahn-Ai: My father, he tried to escape..uh 11 times…and finally on the 11th time, he succeeded. This wasn't easy, because you are always followed. The 11th time, he made it, 1989.

Francene, Michael, Brehane, and Hahn-Ai chorally speak together: ONE NIGHT

Francene: (one night) They just come and take me. Army guys take me and they keep me prisoner. It is miracle that we survive because they keep us to just, for them. It's…they (*she is trying not to cry*) they…um they rape in public…they drag you out and rape…gang rape in public because…we don't know why. Why anyone do that? But for two years this happen to me. Or I don't know all the time. This is my son born there. And I do not know father…who can tell. So many.

Michael: One night the village was taken over by the army and they set fire to buildings, took women and girls away, and killed what they did not want or need. When my father tried to fight back and to escape, they shot him and chopped him in front of us. Only me and my brother survive this.

Hahn-Ai: And on this one night, ok so there was a big boat that was supposed to carry them but then the communists found out...and so he was like almost to the boat but he like there was no chance of them escaping on the big boat so he took like um....a fishing boat...like one you would take out just like, to sit to fish. That's the boat he took

Brehane: We leave in the night...we hear noises and someone called out a warning and we just gathered up whatever we could, hearing shooting and shouting getting closer and closer and then we grabbed each other's hands, me and my brothers, holding my

baby close and we we...we ran...that is when, on the road we saw truck and we didn't know is this good or bad? How could we know but it came up SO fast that we cannot hide and so then, this man he calls out "is ok, is ok" and then, that's when we take chance and he pull us into truck and lucky that it is ok. We go to Kenya...to border.

Farrah: my husband was working with the U.S. Army but...um...the worst was not starting with them. What happened here...um...the I don't know...Al Qaeda or some bad people...Four times they try kill him. They bombs his car...two times they bombs his car. the third time Mohammed, my baby was just 4 months old and they, when they bombs our house. Our house catch on fire.

Tashi: In Bhutan, they made a list of those people who should leave, and it was like, categories and if you were in that category, then you had to go. We decided to wait, but then they started shooting and killing some peoples, so we had to escape.

Michael: We are taken as prisoners to join army. For three days we receive barely any water. And no food. When we are very hungry, they offer us food for loyalty to army. We were in shock. Severe . Not in any condition to make decision . And we eat. They starve us again for more days this time ...And then brainwash us again. This time if we help to take prisoners , we get food. Four or five times they do this to us. Starve us, lock us up, give us food. When we help to take village. One day they give us guns . They thinking that we are now . Like them. My brother grab me and we run into the bush. This is when they are not looking ...In the night on a raid.

Hahn-Ai: So, it was all or nothing, so he went with them on that little small boat and then. Somebody didn't want to go all of a sudden and there was like a fight and they almost got caught because of that. At that moment it's just blank and you're just waiting to see what happens next basically....just emptiness. 2 million people tried to escape during that time. Just one million they make it…1 million people died at sea. My father, he made it.

Khin: I was supposed to be on the Burmese version of American Idol...Burmese Idol. I mean, I'm not a great singer, but I sing in my language. I had made it into the semi-final and then I had to leave to Malaysia. Because of my father...he does some politics and he supports Aung San Suu Kyi and so I had to run because of this. No time. Just had to leave fast. That night, that same night because the army had come to arrest my dad but he wasn't home and so he knew I had to leave...they would take me and force me to work like other Burmese boys, on the front lines, seeking out land-mines. Many boys, thousands and thousands, killed this way. So dangerous. And I had no choice but to run...

Michael: We run. We have nothing. Nothing. Nothing but the guns. No ammunition. No shoes, only small clothes. And we run. If they finds us we are dead. We walk and run for what seem like a year ...And now we know that it was nine months or so that we were walking. Crossing rivers that ...though we could not swim. Fighting for what little food or water we could find. So for nine months we walk and we join with others who are

walking too. Others just like us with no family . No home. How do you say? Rags. In rags. Ragtag.

Tashi: When they come, we fled, all of my family, into the jungle. Fleeing and it is miracle that we found one another again. In India at a small school there at the border. And then they said you are not allowed in India. Anyone who moves out of Bhutan should not use Indian soil, is what they told us. And then we had to further move out from India. It took us two days to walk out from India.

Michael: We walk and we walk. Until we cross border into Ethiopia. We live in Ethiopia for some years. I am seven when we flee from South Sudan . My brother is eight. From there we are forced to leave. To cross river where many more die because we cannot swim. My brother and me. We hold on to a branch and cross . But barely survive . We cough up what seems buckets of water . And we are not dead. Many things happen on this journey back to Sudan -- Wild animals, nearly drowning, starving and thirst y. Realize this is my wilderness. This is my walk through the valley of the shadow. This is my period of temptation. This is my crucifixion.

Francene: I escape by…they leave the keys..they drunk and leave the keys in lock and I just run. There is one soldier, one guy there slumped drunk and he try to grab me, but I smash his face with a..with a pot on stove and he can't see because he had the hot food on his head…my hands burn from picking up pot with bare hands, but I don't care. I run to where I think my family…my daughters is. I think, at first, about leaving the baby behind because he so hard to care for. But I grab him. And I am glad because he would be dead now. No longer.

Tashi: At border with India we um got a truck-the um they call tripper, where they load stones and take it to some other place and unload it like this. That's how we were brought by the mili-Indian military to the Nepal border. There was a border bridge, half India, half Nepal. They just unloaded like this. And then we are in Nepal.

Francene: So, we all run…there were eight of us and baby and we just find us..find all of us. That is miracle right there, that we all get away. My daughter she was cut and had been hurt and we took…we carried in turns and brought her with…to boat …to cross lake into Tanzania to get out. On a boat..small fishing boat that we take across. And then we are away..no not safe, but not in Congo.

Farrah: The fourth time...my husband was go to help people...he go with his best friend to get bottle of gas because there is none in Baghdad...and Al Qaeda or someone is following him and they cut the street on him and shooting at him...and my husband...his friend say "open the door and get out...maybe you can get safe." and friend keep driving...and my husband was so scared for his friend and he told his friend "you get out!" and he tell "I cannot because I driving...you get out you can be safe!" And then when he see his friend is killed driving...my husband just throws himself from the car and they keep shooting and shooting and the people..they saves him and for two hours he

stays there and I am CRAZY because he no call me...and then he finally call and come back to Baghdad and we has to leave right then. And we just move to Syria.

Khin: And I go...I go running to Thailand border...and when you get there you have to find an agent who will carry you across to Malaysia because refugee camps in Thailand no good...people just rot and die there from boredom and it's awful. So, you find an agent and he takes you across in the night...under darkness and you have to hope and pray that he doesn't sell you along the way or get caught and then you get sold into slavery on fishing boats...it's scary and I survive it.

Michael: And we survive . Now I am told that there are about twenty thousand of us lost children who survived and arrive there at Kakuma. If we are orphans, with no connections ...No ties to any parents then we are interviewed by UNHCR and resettled with families who sponsor us in U.S. I am a child when we begin this journey, when we escape but this journey is not more difficult than anything else.

CAMP

(images and maps of the camps and places spoken of)

Tashi: I had heard the word refugee when my teacher was teaching me in Bhutan, and he explained what a refugee was, and I didn't believe it. Now that I was that person, you know? I had a chance to believe it now.

Hahn-Ai: My parents meet in the camp…spending a lot of time together and then…(giggles) yeah. They lived with nothing…people traded cigarettes for food. They lived in this camp for seven years, in a camp near Kuala Lumpur. I was born there. April 16, 1995. I was born on Easter.

Tashi: From um India we-we walked to the border, and then uh-the Nepali border they stopped us. So we were taken uh-we went to a riverbank, 'cause people didn't welcome us in an open land. So we went to a riverbank, and we started settling there. That is when I saw you know hundreds of people dying every day.

Francene: We hear from a friend in Tanzania that Mozambique would be better place for us, so we travel there. Some on foot, some on truck…however we can. Shoes..two of us have no shoes, so we make shoes from other things we have, from cloth and some small pieces of plastic.

Khin: There are a lot of difficulties in Malaysia because you don't have an ID and you came illegally you know...and I stayed an illegal immigrant in Malaysia and they catch those people. They have a group of...they are not like soldiers not police but they have another group of people in yellow uniform they catch people they will go to illegal immigrants' houses at night and take them with them in a truck and put them in a jail and if you don't have any ID you stuck there and they sell you back to Thailand agent at the border ...you can get sold. It's really scary. They sell you back to the agents and they

will call whoever can send money and it you don't have money, those agents will sell you again to Thai fishing ship and you work there as a slave.

Tashi: And people from the village, the Nepali people come and attack you also on top of that. 'Cause uh there were girls in our camps, and the boys they used to come and gang-rape our girls, and people-Nepali people from Bhutan were very simple. They never fought back.

Brehane: Ah, I was in Nairobi city. But we had a hard time. Oh, the police, they are horrible. And I went to buy milk for him. Yeah, the police took police, found me and then asked me passport. I said, "I have but in my house. Can I go get it?" They said, "Nope." You have to go with us to jail." "I have uh, child home, how can I go?"... "You have to." "Please, can I go back? Carry my son, with me." They said, "Nope... you can have another son. You, you'll get another son. Why you worried for your son?" And then, they are very corrupted. My other brother added like um... twelve hundred shilling. They told me I gotta go home. After that we applied with UN to leave, to resettle. It took three…four years from 2000 to 2004

Khin: I was going to be robbed by 6 robbers, 2 each on motorcycles and then it was close to my house and they were pretending like they were police...and they don't look like police and they have knives. 2 guys just get out of the motorcycle and I just run and I turned into my apartment and they threw their helmets at my head so I ran upstairs and I wait a little bit and then I go and one guy come up. I look at him and he look at me and finally he go back. That day was uh, that was the day I fear the most. It is very hard in Malaysia...if they catch me, they will kill me. I was there for a year and 4 months.

Tashi: You were never-there was never a day when you could say that my stomach is full. Once they start giving water they have specific time that they will stop, and then by then if you do not get water you do not get water. Yeah so if you wanted to get water in the morning you had to get up one in the morning or two in the morning, and then go and line up your gallons in front of the water tap.

Francene: When UNHCR come, we register to leave, but it is NGO group..um Women's International group that help us too…to record our story and translate and help to get out. It take two years from 2007 to 2009 to go through the telling story and finding out all the truth. But they take all our story, and they tell us that we come to US.

Tashi: And then UNHCR came in and uh started organizing. they um...our teachers from Bhutan, they started uh informal schools under the tree. Like each tree was the classroom. So um I went and joined in the ninth grade, and a-after I passed the ninth grade they gave me a certificate. I passed the examination. And when I started teaching I the-the agency called Caritas Nepal, they gave a scholarship to some of the dedicated, committed teachers to go, and study, so I fell under that. I-I-I was opportuned to get that. I went to India, and then studied.

Farrah: we go to UN office in Syria...yes....and we tell them the truth and everything...and they looking on the computer and they found everything. We have a business here. We have a home. We have to do many things. They said, "You have just 15 days. If you want to fly in that 15 days or you cannot fly anymore." My dress...when I'm wedding....I don't have it. My baby's clothes...it's more important for Iraqi woman when they have the baby clothes. They don't want to give it up...they want to keep it until the baby's grown. Good luck. Bad luck to give away. And I don't have it.

Michael: In Kakuma, in refugee camp, many children arrive there like us with no family, no identity. The camp it stretch for miles...like a city. Kakuma it means "nowhwere." And that is where we are. Nowhere. No home. We get food and medical treatment and then, after some months there they tell us that we go to America. The only thing I knew about America was Mickey Mouse. I had a t-shirt when I was small boy. We were scared...really scared.

Tashi: Finally the government said that we were not genuine Bhutanese citizens, and that we were just immigrants, so uh even when we had all our documents with us the government did not accept us to be Bhutanese. So that is when we thought maybe they are not going to accept us back. So then most of us decided to go for third country resettlement.

Hahn-Ai: In 1996 they closed down the program for refugees, because they were trying to stop people from escaping…and that's when my father, by chance, got an interview with the U.S Embassy. Then, finally, after waiting for two years for all the papers, we came to Grand Rapids, to the U.S. in 1998.

UNHCR

(*images of UNHCR offices and officials and hopefully paperwork too*)

The UNHCR is played chorally by non-refugee members of the cast.

Tashi: Yeah-yeah once uh-once United States declared that they were going to resettle UN-UN-UNHCR, United Nations High Commission for Refugees is our parent organization.

UNHCR: the procedures followed with respect to the determination of refugee status.It is particularly important for the applicant to understand that the following questions must be established.

Tashi: Right from Bhutan, from our-from time of birth, a whole history they will create.

UNHCR: Why did you flee the country? Is the persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, or for reasons defined in the OAU Convention or Cartagena Declaration definition of a "refugee"?

Tashi: And then they will take a picture of us, and they will refer the case to United States Homeland Security. You know they are so welcoming, they smile at you, but when they are interviewing you every single place they are trying to find you whether you were involved in international activities, criminal activities, you know?

UNHCR: Why do you want to leave the country you're in now?

Tashi: Yeah and before UNHCR does the interview we go through the refugee status um identification process, and then UNHCR interviews us, and then we get referred to IOM, and IOM interview us twice, first they will take a picture, then they will call us back for the second interview, and then they will refer to DHS, Department of Homeland Security, which they are there in the camp also, and we will be called, we will be scheduled to call, and we will get the call.

UNHCR: Why can't you return to your country?

Tashi: We go over there, it is go-it's like a-an hour interview, speci-specifically it's an hour interview, but sometimes uh they could interview you for a day, a whole day also, and sometimes they tell you go out drink some water and come back again, you know if they do not get the answer they are looking for.

FLIGHT TO AMERICA

(projections of airports, airlines, IOM, and so on). Sound of airplanes.

Jimmy: I have gone as a volunteer to meet some people at the airport and that's been a good experience because when people get off of the plane, I think they are …well I think they might be a little scared and so to have this like normal American smiling guy like me there to greet them might be a good thing. I don't know..but I do know that the last time we went it was this Burmese family with like two little kids and parents and a grandmother I think…and it was great to just be there with welcoming arms and a sign that says welcome to the family and like…just smiling and …well that one gift we all have of hospitality.

Michael: The US government arrange to resettle many of us Lost Boys in US with sponsoring families. It was a scary experience. We would not eat on the airplane..I remember the plastic food..the plastic covered food and I wonder if I should or should not eat. But I don't. We are not sleeping for more than 24 hours and we are not eating for more than 48 hours. Greatest fear is, "what if no one is there to meet us?" "What if we are alone?"

Farrah: We get met at airport by caseworker. It is first Arabic I hear from her...it's so good. But...Oh yeah, then I missed my bag and they not send it. They never find. It was all of my new clothes, They not give me anything. I have nothing. And I know the clothes in America it's expensive.

Khin: I came like in the middle of the night and it was really cold and 2008 was the coldest until now you know in these 3, 4 years, that year was the coldest I think

Michael: Even though we are hungry and thirst and tired we just want to celebrate that we are safe.

Tashi: When I arrived of Grand Rapids Airport I-I was like totally lost. I came-I thought I came with little bit of English, but uh when I landed up over there my English was of no use.

Michael: When we reach the airport in Michigan we are met by our new family. We think that we are 17 and 16 years old now, but no way to be sure. No papers. We celebrate my birthday on December 12, the day we arrive here. It is new birth you know? We are born again. (he laughs – Ha ha!! And claps and laughs again).

Tashi: There was a big issue with third country resettlement. Like America was the first country to say that they were going to resettle 60,000 of us in the United States, but uh you know the history behind America, long time ago the slavery system, and all that, that hit back most of the people, and they thought maybe now it's our turn to be slaves in United States.

Francene: Oh…we very happy that we come to US. What we know..what we hear is that we will have hard but good life there. All we know is that Obama…that black man is president and this make us happy..have hope that we can live good there.

Tashi: Some thought we have to go, some thought no we shouldn't. But finally some of the educated people including me, you know? We decided let's go and discover.

Hahn-Ai: My father knew, over everything, because he had worked with the embassy, that you could trust Americans… so when he came over here, he knew that you could trust the people that helped us, like Church of the Servant and so like, we just just went with the flow.

Tashi: And we came, we found out America was one of the best countries to live, and then we started calling people and telling them "Come, this is the place you have to come to." That's how many many people came.

Michael: People in America walk with freedom. People talk with freedom. They look and hear and taste with freedom. There is no fear.

Francene: You know…we know about the uh..the statue..the liberty..the lady with the torch. Statue of Liberty. We know that and flag and idea of freedom. That is all we know. *(laughter)*

Farrah: I didn't know anything about America...I didn't know about people...I don't know English. I don't know anything, but something tell me in my heart it will be difficult for you. Then it is was difficult. It is.

Michael: We are not afraid. There is nothing to be afraid of in America except that sometimes there is too much. But you choose. You are free.

Tashi: When I enter the house, I saw the carpet, that was where I was sleeping, 'cause that look so luxurious to me. Uh 'cause last seventeen years of my life in the refugee camp I had always slept in dirt floor with a plastic roof, and walls made out of bamboos. So that looked to me very luxurious.

RESETTLEMENT AND CULTURE SHOCK

(images of some of the places and snow, etc.)

Becky.: So we (Bethany) are one of the resettlement agencies here. us and Lutheran Social Services. The US State department allocates refugee cases based on our ability to help the refugee...and we'll get an email from New York saying these are our cases and we evaluate them and if we take the cases, we assure them. Often there is a US tie that's already here. People go through alot when they get here. Culture shock and all kinds of things...

Francene: Oh…culture shock. Yes. We were told that we would, but it wasn't …we didn't know. And it comes from nowhere.

Tashi: There was always confusion, even in the day and the night situation. When it was daytime here in the United States everybody would feel sleepy, and when it was actually night, and we were supposed to be sleeping we were awake.

Francene: Cell phone here..you need it you know? People expect you to have it and it is so expensive…and at first too when you don't know where you are going. No help and no place to call.

Becky: What I say is that we get them on their feet. WE can't make their lives perfect but we just "catch and release" (laughs). I feel like they're falling out of the sky and unless we catch them. We get all the documents that they need, we help them um, the DHS services get their bridge card and you know, and get them enrolled on an employment program which is huge because once they're employed then of course success is more of a sure thing. They go to ESL classes at GRIF and job trainings and cultural classes. But the most important thing, and my job, is to connect them with

American friends because you can sit in a classroom and learn about, say, baking, but unless someone bakes with you, walks you through it, you're not going to know how.

Tashi: The food. Uh it took me at least six months to find the appropriate food that we uh our-you know we eat in our country, and in the refugee camp.

Francene: When we come, there is much difficulty with food...my stomach always the sick. Always. I need just rice and some African something, but first there was not this. They bring me brown rice in bag and it taste terrible to me and I have no way to say that this make me sick. And I remember how happy I was to finally get whole fish and white rice. It was my first sign of home.

Tashi: Chili in-in British English is peppers, so I was looking for chili in the stores, and I don't remember which store was that, they gave me a can of chili, and I opened it, and there was like meat in there, and there's no chili.

Francene: This cold here is not OK. I don't see how people can live in it and choose to live in it for so many years. Crazy. These Dutch people who live here for so long and choose it? They crazy.

Tashi: Um yeah the snow. I lived in a mountainous country, but I have never gotten the chance to see snow. Uh where I lived as a refugee, it was a very hot place.

Brehane: Yeah, um I never see snow. I think..."Something God sending, like white things I don't know."

Francene: So I start to walk, thinking at least I know I think where my home is. I am wearing probably two coats. But there is no phone…no place to call from and baby is crying and I am crying and walking. The end…at the end..I walk all the way to Meijer and there, when I come through the doors, the greeter, the man there. He see me covered in snow with my baby and he helped me to go up to the offices and to sit down and to…they gave me new clothes…they brought a lady, a black lady in to help me to call and to then to give me a ride home after I do shopping. That day was sad and good, because I realize that things are not so easy here, but people are good.

Becky: I think people assume if they (refugees) are coming then there is someone already that has already agreed to support them. They don't realize that they are coming due to our country's agreement to take in this percentage from these regions every October you know the president signs an order saying "we're allowing this many into our country this year and the percentage from these regions" and people are surprised about that. They didn't realize these people just come and it's up to us to help them or not you know what I mean? It's an awareness thing; once they are aware it seems like they are eager to help.

Tashi: We went to Lake Michigan. I had heard like when I was in the camp I had heard that people in America they just walk around with their underpant on. So I-it was difficult for me to believe these. I went to Lake Michigan, and that story came to be true to me, and you know we were in long pants and jackets in July. It was very shameful for me at that time because we were shy, and the people normally walking in front of you everywhere. Then they are kissing. They are like and they look so normal, and us, my wife we-we feel like laughing at them, but we cannot show them we are laughing, and our kids are giggling,and you know throwing out spit from their mouth trying to stop laughing, you know?

Francene: It is the no…lack..the…there is no community here. In Africa we have our doors open and we just go…you know to houses and we talk and we are together. There is this, but not here. I remember when we first arrive…my little girl…the smallest..she not really that small, but she don't know really where she is supposed to go to make friends and she goes out and just walks into the house over there across..she just walks in and she scares the..the boy and lady living there. So now my girl..she was just trying to make friend, but now she is scared of this.

Jimmy: I was at a worship time at church, …and sitting next to me were two guys, definitely not Americans. They didn't look or sound or smell American you know? And I am just totally …like my friends say I'm more American than G.I. Joe …and I'm not, but you know, that's the perception. So, when there's that time that you are s'posed to uh…you know shake hands, introduce and what not…well I just…yeah. I mean…they had just come here from…Burma, yeah… I was like where the heck's Burma? And we talked and they showed me. And that was the end of me being an ignorant American. Right there…that day. The end.

Becky: So once we get the arrival notice, we connect the family to the church and we hope a church is ready to accept...and to take leadership there. And so I call them and say "I know you've been considering this, praying about this. Can you meet this family at the airport when they come? can you help set up their apartment? Will you collect a welcome packet of things needed...and will you provide that team of people to help with English and transportation to appointments, and to learn to ride the bus? We want to have friendship for them.... they will not just provide these service, the church will make a new friends.

Jimmy: Oh my gosh…I had no idea what I was getting myself into…teaching these guys to drive. OK, so I am totally an American and it shows up in my driving more than anything, because I'll push a limit or two…or three or four…but when push comes to shove, I'm gonna obey those laws. Not these guys. My hair turned grey…look. They scared the bejesus out of me. No joke…no. Oh sheesh. Like Kyi, he told me, he said, in Burma, Thailand, Malaysia, no laws. Just drive. You get pulled over, you pay. And I said, "not here man, obey the laws." But it was like I swear to God stop signs didn't exist for him for the first month I was teaching him. And he said, "Jimmy....Jimmy…you gonna be ok I ran that stop sign? You gonna be OK?" And I had taught him "your mother" jokes and he'd say "your mother gonna be OK I ran that stop sign Jimmy?" And I would

be like green because we had just narrowly escaped a trip to Hades and he'd be like…"your mama gonna be OK?" Shoulda never taught him those jokes. (laughs)

Tashi: In-from where we came sky look very far away, and when we came to Michigan, you know? It was-it was it looked very near here. Yeah. I have no idea why, but it was right on top of our head when we first came, we felt are we going to touch that? I don't know why geographically if there is any reason behind that, but not only to me, my wife, other people also felt the same way. Now it's-it's pretty far. It feels normal.

ENGLISH

(*images of alphabet and also images of English language books and worksheets)*

Becky: The quicker they learn English, the quicker they're willing to learn…of course those who come with language abilities are going to be WAY ahead of the game, so language is huge even as far as employment…it's going to be hard to find a job if you don't have any English…there are fewer opportunities.

Jimmy: One thing I realized, like right away, was that tons of the volunteers, they take this work really seriously, you know? And that's cool, I can dig that, but I also…what I realized there is that it's got to be fun, and so I'm going to have a blast doing this..

Tashi: Um the other thing is the you know the new language here. Yeah, and the languages here in America. I mean it's the same English everywhere, but uh it's so beautiful with all its idioms and other things you know? Sounds fairly...

Jimmy: And no…I am fundamentally NOT ignoring the tragic experiences these people have had, but my friend Kyi and I have a great relationship now because we learned how to have fun together…to just hang out and like talk…And I'll be in his life for a long time, forever I think…and he'll be in mine. His favorite joke that I tell…and this is when I knew, totally knew that he was getting our culture, his favorite joke was a blonde joke (my girlfriend's a blonde and I like to poke fun at her a little). So the joke is "What do blondes and cowpies have in common? The older they get, the easier they are to pick up." (beats the table like a drum commentary) He laughed so darn hard…and you KNOW you're getting a language when you can understand a joke in the language. So, then I knew that he got it. And now he tells my girlfriend new blonde jokes constantly…and she puts up with it.

Francene: I came speaking maybe three words of English...my name is, how are you, what is your name, where is the toilet? These things. Learning the English is most important because without it, we are lost here. And there need to be more places to learn. GRIF and some of the other programs good..yes.

Jimmy: Well…um…so much you know? Like first thing I think is just to make sure that people are totally not afraid to ask for someone to talk slower and to…um…repeat

themselves. And then, you know, it is so important just to make sure that people know how to keep themselves safe, how to get to a hospital, how to ask for help and so I teach them that kind of stuff and it's vital. So..yeah..um..it's cool to be able to teach these guys some stuff that can make a difference in the long run…Not that I have a savior complex or anything, but just to help in those small ways.

Francene: There are many things I miss in the language....I know this. And I work very hard at getting it...at trying to get it. People keep ask me, "do you get it?" And I am saying, "get what?" what am I getting? That's a funny question, "Do you get it?

Jimmy: to see faces light up when they get something….like really get it you know. And we are such a…I think my cultural studies prof said this…we are such a task oriented culture…super like "tick off the stuff on the list" kind of people that I don't think you can teach English that way…from list…because it has to layer and build up over time in like…um…yeah like layers and layers of meaning. So, when you see some of those layers kick in…like grammar and vocab and idiom even…then you know that they are starting to figure it out.

Tashi: Um yeah "I bet." So "you bet" not "I bet." "You bet" was the first thing that really made me confused, 'cause whenever somebody thanked you, you know? Thank you, in our culture was always saying "you're welcome." In some places people say when I thank them they say "you bet," and that made me really confused, you know? I'm just thanking you. Why should I bet with you for that?

Khin: Its is like rude to say that you are fat because in our culture if someone says oh you are fat then you get better and its good (laughs) you are rich and prosperous you know so we just oh you become very fat and we are very happy (laughs) so some of those are very funny

Jimmy: Like, I think…even…if they can start to appreciate some of the beauty of expression in American English…like the thing I realize as I teach is that our language is just cool in this way I couldn't pinpoint…but it is so expressive and free in that sense. So, like I can give you an example, when this woman in my class, she was learning how to say "The grass is greener on the other side." She wanted to know what that meant. well..um…I told her. she said this…"The green grass is greenier when we see it from the weakness of our eyes." And I was like wow… and I told her that if she was a poet, she could use words like that.

Farrah: I love...ah..to learn the English. We knows nothing when we coming here. In airport, I don't know even how to ask time of flight, and I am so afraid...and so learning the English help me to just feel better...it give me something...some peoples to connect to and I feel like when I learn the new words that I can make these connections, you know?

Julie: So, we had ESL classes here and I was a teacher in Jenison public schools so I explored the possibility bringing my students here so that's actually what we did I talked to the contact person and I had like 60 sixth graders and our goal was to interview the refugees.

Tashi: Yeah, and the indirect we have American English like British English is more direct. If I want somebody to do something I'll say "Ok you do that," but an American way of saying is you know they don't tell you directly to do that. Instead they'll say "I would have done this." "I would do this." Or "I would do that." Indirect way of telling people which is really respectful, and honorable I think. Yes. Right, right. It just sounded more like a request than command, because British English is a commanding English, and American English is more, you know? It's requesting type of English.

Brehane: Oh, I had a hard time but, um, thank you for Church of the Servant... And the people who give me ride. Um, to know English... Especially Nita, Jill and her husband Rich. Uh, they have ESL class Tuesday and Thursday, stay five to eight. Um... they took me there like every week. Twice a week. I learned a lot of things from like the light, "Turn off the light." "Come. Go." [laughs, then exhales] It was hard, it wasn't easy. Yeah.

Julie: I don't think we can be everything to everybody. The biggest request from students is, Oh can I have my OWN tutor? Or Citizenship. a lot of people want citizenship and they don't realize they have to have a certain amount of English before they can pass that citizenship test but we can't be everything to everyone so that's y'know in terms of what refugees want, I'd consider that a gap for us. Gaps. I think *our* gap is sometimes when we have people who come in and want to tutor, but they don't realize that they don't have the skills to tutor. Y'know it takes a person who's very relational. That's number one. The smile on your face, the the fire the sparkle in your eye, the enthusiasm in your step, that's what they see and that's how they're relating to you.

Jimmy: So I did that…I just taught whoever wanted to learn, one on one, or however um…it was cool and I didn't know what I was doing at all, but I figured it out. I wish…honestly.. I wish that more people would just take a couple of hours a week of their time and just give it in some way…and it doesn't have to be with refugees, It could be with mentoring or whatever…but there are so many people who could just use a hand at this or that and I guess when I get the most upset is when I see like the total inequality, that at its base level is structural. It's racism at that structural level…and I just get angry about it because there are people with gifts you know?

Julie: but you know what, ESL plays another important role for them it's a social thing for them. it's a sense of "I belong here" "I have friends here" "I can come here, I'm safe". And I want them to step into our building, and to say it–within their heart, to know, that if I need help, people are here, and they will help me.

HOUSING AND HOSPITALITY

(images of houses in GR and apartments where refugees live)

Prof. Smith: So, this deserves a little history. Originally refugees came here solely under church sponsorship…and they all settled in usually the ah, near industrial areas. So the big area where you're going to settle is down, anywhere from Division and like Wealthy over to the river and then on the other side as well. If you drive down there now you'd go, "Well, it's a parking lot." Well a hundred or a hundred twenty five years ago it was nothing like that. Houses were clustered, very particularly together, for new immigrants. You would have African-Americans, you would have Italians, and you would have ah…you would call them Assyrians, Arabs, Assyrian Christians. They're showing up and they're all kinda jammed together. And shifting, shifting.

Francene: That first week, we receive so much. Food and clothes and like that. We were so happy because of this support. And we were started…starting to adapt to this place. Our house is…well..a source of struggle.

Kelley: So, the way I got into this is because this lady stood up in my church and said, you know, "can you walk alongside a refugee family?" And then someone called and I had to, the next morning, take a family to church…and I did it. That's how I got started. And once you're in, volunteering, you're in.

Prof. Smith: Initially, churches had to put people into transitional housing cause it was affordable. And still, this is what the resettlement agencies are dealing with…heck they're gonna deal with it forever because even with fair housing, there are firewalls blocking decent housing for refugees everywhere. It's not the same old game of overt racism it used to be…no it's buried. But it's there. Believe me. It's there.

Kelley: And so I met this family driving them to church. I fix houses, flip them. And I'm talking to this man in the car, from Congo, and he's a carpenter and I'm thinking, oh I could hire him to work with me. And I did. And then the crisis with his house happened. I mean. They just stuck him into this house with his large family without even really looking at it, without really seeing what the house was.

Prof. Smith: We got two major crises on our hands with housing for refugees. One. Big one. Is that we do not have enough housing for large families. So you get families coming in from Africa with say, 7 to 10 people…and you tell me, in Grand Rapids or the surrounding areas where you're going to find a four to five bedroom house for what they can afford on the cash assistance that's initially given?

Francene: This house is where we move to and people say to me, when I complain about water not working or soggy floor in the bathroom, or clogged sinks or peeling paint, smell of mold in bedrooms, "well isn't this better than Mozambique, than Congo?" And I think, why ask me that? That is not point.

Prof. Smith: You ever heard this one? "Well this isn't great but it's better than what they had." I love that one, that's my personal favorite. It's just like, "Oh, wow, so you've been shot at yesterday so if you only get shot at every third day it must be okay. It's better than where they were."

Kelley: And so they put them into this, you know, transitional area of town and the resettlement agency did a preliminary walk through because you can buy a house for ten thousand dollars like this house was bought for ten thousand dollars. And you can cosmetically fix it up, but it can still be very sick inside. I equate it with the human body

where someone can walk around a look really healthy, but they can have a terrible respiratory or circulatory system. I began to write a 4 page letter outlining all these problems and then I took photos and put together a 12 page powerpoint and then got online and look at the Grand Rapids interior housing codes and exterior housing codes and illuminated all of that.

Francene: We have needs. . . many needs. So. In our house. You can see. Our house falling apart. It's too hot in here all the time. Sometimes it feels like we are going to suffocate and air conditioner, no.

Kelley: But here's the thing that really tipped my boat is then you have a…a woman who's experienced 2 gang rapes and a father, and a husband, who's come home twice to find his wife bloodied and what is being done is that his 5 year old and 11 year old daughter are being put in a quote bedroom that has no window that the only way they can vent it is to prop open a storm door that has no lock on it so you can't just open the storm door, you have to open the big door. And it's so freaking hot that you either tell your little girls that "I'm closing your door and you can't, you're secure now, you're locked in here" "but daddy, daddy, we're so hot, we're, we're perspiring." "But you're safe."

Francene: Ventilation. No. Windows don't work right either. And no one to negotiate our rent for us. It keep going up. First from 800 to 900 then 900 to thousand now thousand to eleven…uh…one thousand one hundred.

Prof. Smith: Second big one. We have structural racism in housing shutting down potential access to apartments and houses in the white flight suburbs. There are some key areas where refugees are quote unquote allowed to live. But pshaw…these are not places where there's decent access to transportation and infrastructure. Are you kidding me? This is a huge problem. Once you get into the 60s…ah 70s…you start to have refugees resettled in Kentwood and then in Wyoming. And Kentwood has it's nickname right? Rentwood. You heard that?

Francene: What do we do? We have nothing. No power to stop this. And our cash assistance cut off when I get job, so now we have not enough money to pay rent and make the bills. And we call and say nothing works and they don't come.

Prof. Smith: They were, they have a lot of apartment complexes, they have a lot of duplexes. Well, who moves into apartments? I'll give you three guesses and the first two don't count. People you don't want there. Go to Ada, how many apartment complexes do they have in Ada? They've got none.

Kelley: They [the city] sent somebody over there and they wrote up 3 pages of violations on this house. And this was after basically the property management company saying there's no problem with it. The resettlement agency saying, "there's no problem with it." People can be very comfortable stating things that are not true, right?

Prof. Smith: We are resettling refugees on the fringes or some in the cheaper parts of the city. You see, the idea is that you don't want to have too many of these folks in one location. Tipping point theory. Lots of people believe in that and they don't want their community to be a tipping point statistic, so they find ways to limit access. They wanna scatter people everywhere instead of public housing complexes.

Francene: Eventually the son of the owner comes and he gets mad because my older son is living here and not supposed to be and he leaves without fixing, but where is my son supposed to go? So they don't fix and then they raise our rent because my son is here. And now we are stuck. WE have not enough money to move..not enough money to stay. Not enough.

Prof. Smith: Kentwood is fully racial-transitional right now. Five years and it will be minority majority. And so now you have the second wave of white flight. And I'm walking through Caledonia going, "I know where these people came from." And it's from Kentwood. And Caledonia is a cute little country town (smacks lips) welcome to suburbia! It's mostly white, it's expensive. And let's put it on the table, that's what they want. Homogeneity.

Francene: So...we keep live here. We hope for a better place, someplace where things get cared for. Where we don't feel like how you say, when people think you don't know what's going on, take advantage of? Yes, maybe someday buy our own home. That would be great! Maybe someday.

Prof. Smith: And then there's our delightful car culture. I mean these middle class families that flew out to 44th street and beyond, what did they have? CARS! And refugees don't. And some people think, ah well, that's a great way for them to get acculturated. The bus…gets them into the infrastructure right? Ha. And then you have cities threatening to not be part of the bus system like Wyoming, Grandville right? Why is that? Tell me, is it just taxes or is it something else? You know exactly what I mean. Who are you trying to keep out? You know, the bus is like a social disease.

Kelley: And so I took this upon myself, to find them a new home, and I found one. And we finally go through this whole thing of fighting with the resettlement agency, and finally getting them into a new home and then. Wow. I went over there the morning they moved in and there was like this much (shows with hands) water in the basement. Oohh my gosh! Are you kidding me? but the landlord, bless his, I mean, he, he then had to I mean rip up the basement floor, put in a new sewer line, run new electric, then the whole, because of the water and everything. He wanted them, kind of like everyone else who fell in love with this with this incredible family.

JOBS

(images of JBS, Michigan Turkey, Plastics plants, bakeries, etc)

Tashi: I had heard that the degree that you have overseas doesn't count in the United States. And if you do not have a job, you have nothing. So these type of little things you know, if my degree is not accepted it is sure that I won't be getting a job. And if there's no job, then I'll be in trouble. I am a BA ed. Bachelors in education. I am not using that now.

Jenn: I've been working with refugees for fifteen years. I just absolutely love it. I actually came in and started the program with uh, a really incredible team, and so we built up the program from scratch, which has been really really fun.

Jimmy: So Aung …another guy I was helping. One day I go over to their apartment…and he had asked if we could find him a guitar, so I have this friend and this dude, twenty four guitars and I went over and got him one that he wasn't using anymore and took it over to him, and he start to play like perfectly, this folk song from Burma and it was beautiful…and he's singing it and it just blew me away. And he's so great at playing and I am just thinking…why can't he do this for a living? Like why isn't anyone recognizing that this guy's got a ton of talent?

Jenn: We have people who have a huge range of skills, clients that are freshly here in the United States, and then we have clients who have been here for a much longer period of time. Um, and we've clients that have never had the opportunity to work, you know because of their situation as refugees, and we've clients that have never had the opportunity to go to school, and then we've clients with masters degrees and PhDs and who have a vast work history in the United States.

Tashi: So I got a call telling me to consider this job fair, so I came with one of my pastors over, and filled the application. That was my first day of filling an application in the United States. It was difficult for me. I did it.

Khin: It's hard, you know. I broke the contract that they had because I was on this match grant when they are taking care of for six months and they help you to get a job and you have to take whatever job they give you, and so I didn't agree with that. I sign it but the job that they first gave me was at a meatpacking plant and it was the really hard one and I said, "no, I can't". And I speak English so I can work somewhere else.

Brehane: I have job in hospital, but it was very hard for me to find a job here when I came. Especially with childcare for my son, and no knowing how to get around. Church is so helpful with all of this, with babysitting and with transportation. I think jobs could help with this too, with helping us to have places we can send our kids. That is something different in Africa, where everybody take care of everyone else. That is not here.. well it is, but it could be more widespread. My first job, before hospital, there was no understanding at all and I got yelled at for having to leave to pick up my son when he sick. What am I supposed to do? So I lost that job…and then I am on the "bad" list because…I don't know why, but it very hard for me after that…very difficult and not easy to find another job.

Jimmy: And I just really get upset talking about what happened to him, because you know a lot of these guys, they go work at meatpacking plants…like if you go down to JBS the meat packing plant in like Plainwell…this place is FULL of Burmese workers because they are really good at this kind of work, and they don't have to really speak English to push dead carcasses around you know?

Khin: And so then there was no one to help me, but my caseworker did it on the side still and I got my ID and social security and everything but then I barely have enough to pay for bills...and then I started working as an interpreter. But I was in danger. I just get 250 a month and rent is 500 and I was so upset at the time. I was depressed and I

wanted to move...and they didn't want me to move because the state will cut off their funding if they don't have enough clients. I was in danger...and I would eat at my girlfriend's house. I had nothing..just medicaid card and food stamp...that's all.

Jimmy: Like I said, it really does upset me to even talk about it, but he (Aung) gets a job at this meat packing plant, and it's cold in there, freezing, and his hands would be so crippled every day when he got home that he couldn't do the one thing that gave him pleasure..play that guitar. And when he would play it really hurt, and he developed arthritis in his hands so bad that he can't play anymore at all.

Khin: Because of the stress, I got sick a lot. I was in emergency like 3 times. I was ill...from the resettlement process and my journey to get here from Burma is already a stress too you know? It's hard (tears up) so she helped me sometime to go the hospital and she take me there and do translation for me and I have to be loyal to her. From my culture, if someone helps you, you have to be faithful to them. I married her because she helped me a lot when I have a lot of problems you know. At the time, no one else is helping me.

Jenn: We have so many clients that have low level English that we're not able to get hired. And so if we can somehow create jobs that allow people that are currently not hirable to be able to do work. So we're just trying to get as creative as we possibly can.

Francene: For me, I cannot find job at first, but I work hard to learn English. Still learning. It doesn't matter how tired the job make me. I work at plastics factory. When I first start at the job. I am so scared. But I go. There is sometimes carpool, sometimes bus. It take a long time to get there. And I am not sure if I can do the work. I am confused so much at first, but this lady at work, she come and she show me. She stop her work and she show me. Slow and she doesn't speak my language, any of my languages and, but something about her. She don't care if she get in trouble or anything for stopping her machine. She take the time to be my friend and show me how to run the machine better and do job.

Jimmy: And these guys…like I said, just so vulnerable because they don't get any opportunities and they are so dog dead tired when they finish an eight to ten hour shift that they just collapse and I would come to teach English or take them someplace and they just didn't want to go, and the work was making them lose the will to..uh..to have hope. It's like I saw it just draining away from him in that job and he came here with so much..hope I mean.

Khin: Right now someone that I know he is in hospital I think from working really hard and tired. He has heart problem. One side of his heart is bigger because in meat packing factory they use 75 types of chemical. So if you work for long term it won't be good for your health. Most people stop working after 1 or 2 years, some people keep working.

Brehane: I am out of the jobs service at…Lutheran. They don't help anymore. And I don't even know who to talk to. The communication about jobs needs to be better because we don't know…we don't know where to go. And American friends help, but what about those refugees who don't have American friends? What do they do?

Tashi: And they called me for the interview. I came, I was interviewed by Katie, then she called me for the second interview, then I came back again, there were two people who were going to interview me, then they called me for the third one.

Jenn: One of the choices that we're really excited about is Michigan Turkey. Now it is a meat packaging plant, but it's a completely different meat packaging plant than JBS. They're actually co-op and they run their business very different than JBS. They're not a union, they're proud of the fact that they're not a union, and they um, they treat their people differently, and they really want their people to move up. They are actually working with us on bringing English classes in.

Francene: They need to have English class at work. Like I hear about this, that in Norway…or in Sweden too that if you work there, they still teach you language at work. They make sure that for five years you have language help at work, all the time until you learn. And that's better.

Khin: And then, I get a job at Lutheran, with the employment program (ironic)...helping people find jobs. I didn't even know about all these resources...I didn't know they could help me find a better job. These agencies, they need to communicate better. They need to do better at referring you and helping you...more consistent...so people don't fall through the cracks.

Jenn: The job is everything, a major part of that process of healing. When they get a job, everything else seems to fall into place. They can pay their bills and then that anxiety is released, they can begin to dream.

Tashi: And they gave me a chance to improve my computer skills, 'cause I had no computer skills at all. So I started working with one of the volunteers in developing my computer skills, and I was called for the fourth interview and I was told to you know type and show them how-how much I can type, and different things, you know getting directions, and all those basic things.

Michael: We (my brother and I) we, both work. We work for Meijer in the grocery. I work in the bottle deposits and he work in the janitor clean up. This give us enough money to get our own place to live and to continue school. First we go to Kalamazoo community college and then my brother go to Western and I keep working to help him. He is now working for an engineering company, building small machines, like parts of robots in New Jersey. He has a wife and two children. He send me money now to go to Bible college. I want to be a pastor...to teach others and maybe even go back to Africa someday.

Jenn: We have these women go through this childcare program, this, microenterprise program, and they, literally women who are unemployable, and now they're getting jobs at these childcare centers and they're doing so well that the, um, directors of these centers are saying that our women are training their employees. Our brand new clients who a month ago were completely unemployable are training their staff on these childcare techniques. So amazing! So fun!

Francene: This lady, now my friend, probably my best friend here. She from Cuba. She help me. In lunch room we sit and try to understand each other. And we laugh together. It's funny…the English learning. Friendship helps the most. Job is hard, but friendship makes it better I think…yes I think.

Hahn-Ai: My father, he got a job in just two weeks…my dad, he walked in the snow a few miles to Meijers. In the line for the interview, this Vietnamese man was shopping and he saw my dad and he asked "Did you just come over here?' and then he offered help. And so he took my dad to his factory which is Behr, the paint company, and my dad worked there for a short period of time because he got allergic to the chemicals so he had to leave and find a new job....so it was just like. But then he got another job…at Key Plastics and he worked there for 10 years….now he works at Detroit Diesel with fuel injection and running robots.

Jenn: There's this new place called Michigan Fine Herbs and they literally pick herbs. And our clients, at least from 3 different parts of the world are thriving there, just completely thriving.

Tashi: I was taken to the supervisor, and she talked with me about benefits then. Then that gave me a picture that maybe I was getting this job. And I went home.

Hahn-Ai: We come here with nothing. So we have to save money for our family....for my children in the future. That's why we work hard and we earn some money....my parents do this for us.

Tashi: As soon as I reached home I got a call, and they offered me this job. From then on I am with Bethany, and everyone's very happy.

Khin: With jobs...we need more access to...well good jobs, more where we are doing things that we can do, that we are good at. Like me, you know, I am working now translating and things, but you know I wish someone had taught me, helped me about opening my own shop, which I now want to do...a grocery shop. It's a dream that I have. Just dreaming.

HEALTHCARE

(images of clinics, hospitals, etc.)

Farrah: I cannot stop getting sick. I don't what happened here. . . it is first that I have trouble with the eye …and this from war…from the sickness…and from the getting the bombs. And this is not so good for body. So, but I have the surgery and my body reject the transplant …I don't know. It just is.

Karen: Well, you're taking people who're totally, um, come from a place where Western medicine, Western values about medicine, ideas, um, therapies, are totally foreign to them.

Francene: The healthcare system here. It is very good but when I get job, I lose the healthcare …Medicaid. because no longer eligible. So now no insurance. . .

Karen: This is all new...you're placing them into a system that can be difficult for an American to navigate. And, uh, so that's the biggest thing is teaching them the difference between what is a primary care provider, when do you go to urgent care, when do you go to the emergency room.

Farrah: When I get from the emergency, when I get from the urgent care and they told me I have to go emergency, I broke everything here. . . I was so angry. . . And I cry and I cry and I cry until I feel my heart almost stop because I'm crying that loud, but it's all I can do. .. I am resilience.

Karen: . I mean, it's just an amazing thing, these are all new concepts for them.

Francene: We want to work. We want job and we work hard, but we also need some help and some benefit to keep working and do good job, you know? So health care and job…they like this (she demonstrates by weaving her hands together) They like this and need help both.

Karen: If we could get the Medicaid reimbursement up to where it should be, at the level where it should be, I really think that we would have much more success at getting, um, more offices to accept Medica- er, clients. Medicaid reimbursement is so low and, uh, um, physician's offices are also having to hire interpreters. And they have huge interpretation bills.

Farah: My health...my health you know...why my health get down? I don't talking about it. and I keeping everything inside...that will be not good for my eye. . . .And then it's my breast, they find a lump there. And they have to do the surgery…and it's not good..and they told me it's probably because of this same stress. But my breast doctor say "Farrah…you will be all right. You will be OK." And I don't believe them because of this thing now with my heart.

Francene: Another thing we do need. All of the people in my…in our family…they have bad things happen to us in past. Rape happen to all of the girls..uh female. We all held prisoner and go through many bad things.

Beth: At least 30% of refugees have PTSD. . .the importance of the work is that these people need to be heard, these people need to be,uh, helped in any way that we can. They have been through the most horrific circumstances that anyone could imagine...the foundation of this program is helping them emotionally to heal from… post-traumatic stress.

Francene: Nightmare and no sleep sometimes. And just I think with me and with one of my girls, just not good feelings every…ever. We uh…don't do so good with this.

Beth: They tell their story over time, so you piece together those pieces and create a narrative, a kind of a complete story. . . I had a woman here one time who. . . didn't say it, she just started to act it out. And she was on my floor, she was writhing under the table, she was. I mean, crying her eyes out, just couldn't find a comfortable place. She'd be on her knees, she'd be layin' down on the couch, she'd be in the corner, she was all over the room. . .It was awful to watch. . .she was a Rwandan survivor, of that, so.

Francene: Therapy I think…this would be good for all of us. We were taught to just...I think you say repress…to push it down. I think that some of what we go through is that we are not getting better because the stress…the feelings of stress from living here, just make worse you know? Do you see?

Beth: Other people will their story in kind of a nice story like succession, however, to me, that's rare. In my experience it's more like coming out a little bit at a time.

Farrah: I don't need to be bad person, to be sad people always. . . I don't like letting out anger. I went to therapy four times or something and I'm not feel so good to talk about myself. . .I just wanna keep in and that's maybe probably hurt my heart.

Beth: I had a . . . situation where I needed an immediate response from the Y, and I had to wait a week while someone was going home and being raped by her husband. And her children were being verbally abused and watching her, hearing all this and knowing that he threatened to kill her. Took a week and a half to get her on board with the Y. I called Muskegon, Holland, Battle Creek, Kalamazoo, Lansing, Grand rapids. It was all booked, there wasn't a safe house in the world I could find. . . it took a week and a half. We knew what was going on, we knew it wasn't safe and what she was going through, she was just. Ugh, the look on her face was enough to tell the story.

Francene: They call (Healing Center at Bethany)and we are refer there and..but now we cannot go because they call to say…to cancel appointment because they not open any more.

Beth: Every year we fight to keep our federal and state grants for the healing center, and every year we are in fear of shutting down. This year we did have to shut down, cancel appointments, and we lost positions. We're up and running again now...but who knows from year to year?

Francene: We have to go somewhere else I think now. We don't know. This is one of the …many…the many uh..things we need help to find.

EDUCATION

(images of schools, education centers, and so on)

Cindi: The Vuong family...they were a Vietnamese family sponsored by our church...Church of the Servant, and they came to church a few times, and they sat in the back row, and I don't know if they could understand anything. I don't think they could, but they came because of gratefulness to our church. And then they stopped coming, so I came and visited them, and I just said "I want to know how you are. Can you tell me how you are."

Hahn-Ai: Cindi's been a friend to us since we arrived here (giggles). And she's like my grandma because I don't have one here and she has helped us with so much. She is always there.

Cindi: We talked about their being here, and what it was like. And then I was about ready to go home, and um she stood up, and she hugged me, around the-around my hips 'cause she was so short, and she (Hahn-Ai's mom) said "You know...I need a mother. My mother died when I was nineteen. My father died when I was six in the war. Would you be my mother?" I don't know how she had the nerve or the courage to say that when she just met someone for the first time, you know? But she did, and I said "Of course I will be your mother." You know? And um so I went over every week to visit, and uh little Hahn-Ai was three, and she danced around the room every time I was there, and her mother made her all kinds of beautiful silk dance cloth-clothing, you know? And she just was our little princess. I watched Hahn-Ai grow up...just lovely, just lovely. She's such a beautiful person. She's good in every way. you know? She's done so well in school.

Hahn-Ai: I went to North Godwin elementary. If I went to a different elementary, I would still get the same experience. It's just a basic stuff...wherever. They put me in ESL for two weeks I was in kindergarten and I got out right away, I picked it up so quick. The first generation, like my Mom and Dad, they don't get the chance really to learn even though they're REALLY REALLY smart. The second generation, like me (giggles), we

learn everything, but we hold on to our family and our traditions. The third generation, they like, um, they move away, they lose some of the cultural like appreciation.

Sophie: It's amazing how quickly they start speaking and like: I've walked into classrooms, one in particular and they sing, they love to sing, and they were singing a Justin Bieber song (sings) "Oh Baby, baby!" And I looked was like: what?! Where did they learn that? And they said: computer, computer! So they're on the computer and they're using, they're accessing their music, they're accessing a lot of technology as well to help them make that transition and learn English.

Hahn-Ai: In Elementary school the teachers are like really nice because you're just little kids and they teach you in a way that keeps your innocence. and we are pretty innocent, my generation. And they were really good teachers. You know, though, your education is what you make of it. My dad taught me that. It's what you make it to be.

Sophie: We have a new curriculum that Kentwood has developed over the years. So um, my kindergartners are learning the letters and sounds and all the literacy skills right along with learning about how to walk down the hall and learning to use the bathroom, like we don't go to the bathroom outside, we go inside to use the bathroom.

Audrey: Our kids are coming in as teenagers and people don't realize that, that that's where the huge need for language help is and acculturation is, is with our teenagers and not necessarily with our little kids.

Sophie: I think it's extremely important that we are in tune to, um, more than just academic needs and this is my own personal views, but we have children who arrive here and we don't know their experiences in refugee camps. So, as we look at educating I think we as educators need to be more aware of, um, where they've come from, um, some of the political struggles they may have had in their countries.

Audrey: (sighs) What we need to look at is age, um, because our biggest concern is that they will age out of the system before we can graduate them. And, with Michigan's merit curriculum, it says every student has to go up to Algebra II. Which is a huge problem when we have refugees come in that don't know how to add and subtract. And if you're seventeen, there's no way we're getting you through Algebra II. It's just not possible. And so at that point we have to look at what's best for them, is it best to try and get as much English and math and information as we can? Is it best to send them to an adult basic education program?

Hahn-Ai: Since our school is an inner city school and since there's alot of struggles, the teachers and the counselors and the admin, sometimes they don't focus on the kids who want to achieve more. I am in that group that they neglect, so I have to make my own way. They cut all of our AP classes. And I took AP chemistry online...worst experience of my life...worst experience ever. But the thing was...we could not pass the AP exam to get college credit because we didn't have a teacher and last year our staff....they got

pinkslipped....120 of them...and alot of our great teachers, my favorite teacher who taught me everything....in history. He was one the best teachers I've ever had and he's gone now so I am really sad. We are at a disadvantage. I am because of where I am from, but I find a way.

Audrey: One of our challenges the last couple years because we have kids that went to school when they were little and haven't been to school in years. Because we want to give them credit for any high school coursework. Um, but we need proof. And so, when a kid comes with records, that's easy. If they come in and there's nothing, and with our refugees, they didn't grab their school records, you know. Um, so then we can try some competency testing, but then of course you struggle with "Is it native language, is it not? Is it culturally appropriate, is it not?"

Sophie: I think that the culture that we've created here as a building and as a staff is safe. It's a culture and an environment where teachers should be become more and more aware, and it's becoming second nature.

Hahn-Ai: I'm a senior now…and I'm going for valedictorian. I want to snatch it (laughs). I'm taking AP Art History, AP US History, AP Calc and AP lit, plus I take Spanish 102 at CC and extra curriculars too.

Cindi: Fortunately she's smart enough to do it.

Hahn-Ai: I wouldn't say there aren't any flaws in my school district, but I've learned to deal with them and when I got to high school I understand alot more, I understand why schools are the way they are. I'm an observer so I can. I can just stay in one place, and see different things, and I understand it right away because that's just how I am. I get to learn alot from different people.

Cindi: And being here, with this family, walking with them, being a cultural broker for them, to help them understand our system and just to be friends and community together, that is important. And I celebrate Hahn-Ai's success with her mom and dad!

Hahn-Ai: We stayed in this inner city school district and we made the best of it. What my father told me, what he has observed about life and taught me is that no matter where you go to school,it's up to you whether you want to learn or not, so even if you go to like a prestigious school...or if you go to an inner city school....it's up to YOU how and what you learn. And I think if I went to EK or one of those big schools, I would still have the same mindset as I do at Godwin, because I want to achieve no matter where. At some schools there are more opportunities for me to achieve but doesn't mean that I can't get what I want where I am. And I'm turning college applications in now. I want to be an architect.

Cindi: If her mom and dad had had the chance, they could've done very well in college. They're both very bright people. Hahn-Ai is her parents' dream come true…of education…of everything.

Hahn-Ai: Our priest gave an example of this architect...he came over here with an architecture degree from Vietnam, but when he got here, he couldn't keep his degree. So he got to this firm, and he was just an assistant drafter. He had talent, the boss recognized it and so he took the drafter's idea and replaced them with the head architect and the head complained about how he's just a drafter. And the boss said, "I see that his ideas are good and he is worthy." That's a lesson in life in general. If you work hard and even if under your circumstances, you can't get what you want, you find a way to get it. Refugee experience...our experience, teaches you this.

Cindi: Yes, they are so smart and so resilient and they teach us that this kind of hard work and resourcefulness is a good way to live.

Hahn-Ai: My mom, she is so happy for me, because what she wants, she cannot do, but I can. I can do them. I don't think that I am special, because this is the way I live because since they didn't have that chance, they value it and I value it too because they value it. It's just a lifestyle for me. It's the track I'm supposed to go on.

HOME

(images of sky and landscape of West Michigan)

Francene: Home, in French word for home is maison, in Swahili makazi. These words make me feel like…miss something. I am missing something. I have this place. Pillow. Place to lay down and be with family. I read the bible when I am not feeling this home. I sing songs from my homeland when I am not feeling this home. I hug my children and dance when I am not feeling this home. It is all I can do.

Hahn-Ai: Home is, what is it? It's where we have family and friends and freedom. Our community…our people. We need this community…we need friends here.

Tashi: Home is where we are happy. Here in Michigan we are all very happy, and people best people in Grand Rapids, Michigan, and are very helpful, friendly, like in my neighborhood right now I am the only person with this color, and they're all white people over there, but we are all very friendly, and you know?

Khin: To us, our home is here, together, me and my wife. We meet here and fall in love here and this is us. And the Burmese people here, we work with them, and they're our friends. Home is that sense of belonging.

Brehane: Home..yes. I came here, I'm here. I have three children here, and I'm in the same state. Yeah. Home for me is here…where people help me. And I work here, I knew people, he, I know people here. I have children here. That makes like, I feel like home.

Farrah: Home is something I don't have. (tears up) Everything here is different is different than my home. Not just the family. People here, I don't means the American, the Iraqi people here...they are so different than Iraqi in my country. I don't know what happen to people here.

Michael: Home for me, it is where I have this…THIS (referring to himself)…sense of belonging. That is all I have. That is home.
Francene: We are those who survive from all those millions killed in our home, Congo. So, we don't have home in the way we did.. my daughter...she tell me, she come home from work one day and she cries, and it's because she feels not a good sense of this home, of community yet. It is difficult. We need friends.

Jimmy: Well, for a lot of refugees…at least those I've worked with directly, they feel this void of community. We live individually. Alone a lot, or with just one or two other people, and that's a kind of living that people from say, Africa or Burma, they…well…they have this sense of a communal need, this is something you can't really replace with a Western church community or even with a friendship from a white guy like me…because it's a change in the fabric of life. That's huge you know?

Farrah: It is bad word. for me. refugee. for me I don't like it either. I am refugee, but I don't like it when they say, "refugee come from camp or refugee come from ...they don't have a home or they don't have food." Someone ask me "do you know banana...did you have a banana in your country...did you eat banana in your country?" you know, I laughed at him. I told him, "Did you think I came from a street...Did you think I came from where...from a forest? I came from a nice home and I came from everything nice in my country or when I was in Syria." But I came here and everything was bad to me here. Not when I was in my country. Just the bad things happen to my country.

Michael: There is so much love in the people that we meet who help us at school and at work and at home and at church..and even on the bus. It is confusing you know...the bus? I remember one day when we got on bus going wrong way and we end up out in probably Grandville and we do not know what to do, so we just sit there. And the bus driver, he pull over and come back to us and ask us where we are going and we just have a paper to show him the name of a community center we are going to for English classes. So, he called a special bus...one of those small buses to take us there and then the next day (he took our address and phone number), he came on his day off and taught us how to ride bus over the entire city. Then it was not confusing. But it is times like this, where we feel like we are loved. Oh..and he bought us our first hot dog and French fries and that soft ice cream. it was chocolate and vanilla and yes, I like. Maybe too much. Now I am getting to like to too much (he pats his belly)

Farrah: For me...I don't have any Arabic friend or any Iraqi people here. I know many people here it's just like "hi and bye." It's nothing. and that's you know it make me more depressed.

Hahn-Ai: In our Vietnamese community, the first generation, they struggle and they understand, the second like me they understand but they don't struggle, but third generation.... They understand Vietnamese, they understand the basics, but not the extensive, but not the literary. We can lose our community

Brehane: I am American citizen now, and I wanted this to go back, to see if I can visit my family. And I do. And I don't want to go back. This is my home. It's different there now…crowded and it feels like a different country…no food and hunger all the time there. When I came back I said, "I don't like it." I want to be here.

Becky: You have to see each of these people as God's creation and his image bearer and without that this would be difficult I think. I think it would be difficult to find the strength because it is a tiring job. You have to show…not tell, to celebrate faith through action, we're not here to proselytize. My dad (who recently passed away) lived and taught me to live by Proverbs 31:8: Stand up for those who have no voice…speak for those who are voiceless. My dad instilled that in us. And It's a huge blessing to work at a place where I can do that, to be able to help people who don't have a voice, that' the biggest thing…they simply don't have a voice unless someone goes to bat for them.

Jimmy: And there's one experience I think in particular that hits it…for me. Like this guy from Sudan that I became friends with. And after like a month of teaching him and helping and stuff, and he really wasn't trying…or at least it felt like he wasn't trying, and I swear I was about to give up because I just couldn't. I'm not very good at being quiet, maybe you picked up on that (laughs). And so there would just be times in the car or at his apartment or sitting in the lobby of health services or wherever and we'd just be sitting there in dead silence. So, one day, like a month into this, he just reaches over and takes my hand and says real quietly, "thank you." Even though I can't like do much…I can be there for him and that was it…but that's enough you know.

Francene: You know this story of Jacob? This story where he flees from his land and doesn't know where to go, his brother, his people want to kill him, so he makes a place, a rock for his pillow and sleeps? He has dream..the ladder dream. And then he sees the angels up and down? Going up and down? And God tells him that he is…that he will take care of him? This is my story. And God is here, in this place. And I am here in this place. This place is my home …if God is here, he will take care of us.

HOPE

(*images of freedom in the U.S.)*

Hahn-Ai: FREEDOM! freedom! Human life in Vietnam is very cheap because they're not needed...you're not important. You yourself. You're a human, you're nothing.. .even if you do NOTHING, say NOTHING, you'll still be oppressed.Here there's order, there's organization and the bill of rights, freedom of religion, freedom of the press, freedom to be....you can do anything you want.

Tashi: in my country Christianity is not allowed. And even if we wanted uh to become Christians we were not allowed to talk about it. when I came to the United States I got a

chance to proclaim that I was a Christian. I did that officially, and from then on I'm enjoying every single day. . .one thing that I find in the United States...I find that youths really take Christianity for granted.. . when I go to talk to youths in the school this is my request to them, uh you know to not take Christianity for granted, because people have to sacrifice their lives to become a Christian. They have to lose their family members to become a Christian. You know they are persecuted for trying to become a Christian, and here Americans are so blessed. You can become anything you want uh from day one.

Francene: You know how you say…that idea..they tell us this before we come that you can be anything you want to be in America. Not for all…not for my son. He makes me cry. But my girls..yes. For them yes. Not for me, but more for my girls, they will be the future. She wants to be nurse, and she is going to school for this. She, the other there..she wants to be teacher and she will. And they do good. They will work too, but doing what they is good at…doing what they ….hope to be.

Farrah: Well right now I don't have any future. Especially after this happen to my heart. I'm not thinking with any future. I'm just thinking about my children future. I just living for my children. I said, I don't have a good future. And I don't have anything past...you know (choked up). And all my life I don't have good things, but maybe my children will be good future for them because it's good school and good system here.

I hope my health getting better and that will be...that's a big problem...every time you follow a heart problem, eye problems...and many kind things.. . if it's everything going right for me, I would like to study here. I would like to be nurse or doctor, I would love them. I work so hard with my English. But I know it will not be easy to me to go to the college right now, but I would love to go to college. I working now with the GED, I start with the pre-GED and I hope it's can work.

Hahn-Ai: My goals in life....one of my biggest goals is...I'm just trying to get the highest possible GPA that I can. . . I really want a successful job because I want to provide, to give back. I want my parents to have a nicer house and yeah...family is very important. To give back to the people who helped my family come here....PARA, Cindi, your church, I want to give back a little...I mean alot. I want to visit my country where I was born in Malaysia. I want to be an architect and I want to see the skyscrapers there. So I am looking at pre-architecture programs, like U of M and Detroit Mercy because they have a really good internship and international branches, foreign exchange for college.

Michael: it is not home to me any more. Now America is home to me and I will always come back here, but I do want to help my people. Now in Sudan is very bad and there needs to be help there. Maybe you know this? But again there is genocide and just hate and hate and fear. Very little hope. In the Sudan, when I am boy, there was hope you know just to live and to grow and be grown. We are content. When the war and devastation come to us, there is not much...hope is destroyed but we keep hoping.We have...what do you call it... a small bit of wheat...we have. You know. At end of stalk? A grain...we have what you would call grains of hope. Because there we cannot see.

In...uh...slavery...when we are used in the army...when we are beaten and tortured...we are (he struggles and his eyes moisten)...not finding the strength to open the next day.When I face...when I am in darkness, even there when I am beaten and tortured every day, I hope. I do not stop. This is what keep me alive. But I really do not know meaning of this, what hope IS until I experience this place and the help of so many goodpeople, and the love that we feel. Here we have, what do you call it? A piece...no a grain....here we have grains of hope that we can see, and taste and touch and that help us to grow. We are so thankful to the people of Michigan for giving us this.

ADVICE AND CHANGE

(images of ????)

Francene: I would tell people who come to live here, that sometime we need to come together to talk about how this can be better. . . all newcomer together in one place and talk together about what should change… and how we can talk with people at Bethany and Lutheran to ask for things to be different... Like cellphone when we get here. Don't give us home phone…that doesn't help us. We need to be able to call each other and people for help... We need some help with houses and better help with people who own our houses..with landlords and with just clothes that fit and knowing where to find food that doesn't make us sick...We need to be able to talk to tell...Our voices are not heard, and our voices are here. We are here. You bring us. Now listen.

Khin: Something that needs to change is the communication between the agencies, and also making sure that we know about those opportunities in jobs and in other areas. The period of assistance has been shortened from six months to three months and this is scary, because it's not enough time. We need help from agency and we need to help each other too.

Hahn-Ai: the most important and the most necessary is when refugees come, have the same culture of refugees visit them often...same culture, same language because they've just left the place they've lived their whole entire life and to come here to a foreign place, it's very comforting to have someone from your home place come and help you out.

Michael: We suffer like Job or David or any of God's servants and it is through this suffering that we teach others how to live. We have, in my culture, Dinka culture many stories. My people used to gather at dusk to tell …to relate..these stories; especially I remember the stories of Col Muong. We raise cattle, the Dinka, this is our life and there is a story of Col Muong that I remember when he is so hungry that he eats an entire herd of cattle because he cannot stop himself and it make him so sick that he purges himself into the land, flooding it and destroying many things. The lesson this teaches us is that we should
only take, only eat, only consume that that we need. No more. What. . .refugees need to survive...is this…take and use only what you need because when you become very hungry you take too much, you consume too much and then you become sick. It is all right, and even better to live on very little.

Hahn-Ai: When ex-refugees help new refugees, those new refugees in return will help the newer ones and so on. this chain of help...we need this...it's a whole line....a whole system of turning to help. So....when you help somebody, you preserve your heritage and you preserve theirs and in turn they can help educate and preserve their community, even in this culture, and express themselves, so the world can know more about different cultures and different heritages and the world can come together and just...be people.

Brehane: we as refugees have a lot that we can teach…because we been through a lot..especially me with kids and escape and worry and just experiences. And we can help people. We can be the helping hands.

EPILOGUE

Michael: We are meant to be helpers to each other, angels to each other. And we are this for our brothers and sisters who come when we come and who come after us. There are many things that are difficult. It would be easy to just slip through the cracks, to end up homeless I think. Knowing English and knowing how to use it. Going to school. This can be for all refugee. This place make that possible... this is what we must do..once we have been helped we must help back. No one needs to fall through cracks.

Brehane: it has been years since I saw the malaika…that person or angel helping in the darkness. I know that I was saved that night by an angel. When the hands reached out to me in the darkness. I was saved for now, for what I am doing now and how I go on to make peace in the world. Now I am those hands. Now I am that light.

Michael: So, it is a word that means, refugee I mean, is a word that means we are in search of home...of a new home. We are a people of exile. All of us, are a people of exile. We all experience this in one way or another, through loss of family, through death or divorce or ...abandonment or even a self-exile. We experience this and we go on, in faith. We go on and we get up and move. You know the story of Elijah sleeping when God comes to him and tells him to get up and eat? That is story of refugee. We get up. We eat what we can find. We go on. Howis not the question I think...I think there is no question there, we just do. When you walka thousand miles with no shoes, you know what it means to just go on. But you know this too. You have not walked my journey, but you know what it is.

Hahn-Ai: When I listen to my family's story, I feel...I experience...there's just so much more to it than I think that there is. I don't think about it on a daily basis, so to just sit down and talk it out once in a while, it is a good reminder of why you're here and how you got here and how you want to go on from here. It's a good experience to tell your story...to tell my family's story....my mom and dad. Thank you for listening to my story.