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Global Citizenship in

ACTION

Canadians reaching out to the world

*Celebrating the
International Year of Volunteers*



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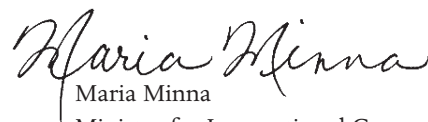
From the Minister

More than 130 years ago, a young woman named Marie Saint-André left on an adventure that was to change her life. She was on her way to India, a country that couldn't be more different from her home in Sillery, Quebec. Little did she know when she left that day that she would spend the rest of her life in service to some of the world's poorest people. A Catholic nun, she was one of Canada's first overseas volunteers, part of a growing wave of missionaries, teachers, and doctors who went abroad in the 1800s to serve the spiritual, physical, and intellectual needs of people thousands of miles away.

In the intervening years, tens of thousands of Canadians left their country to work in the developing world. Some, like Dr. Norman Bethune, Dr. Lucille Teasdale, and Cardinal Paul-Émile Léger, became household names. But most worked anonymously, known only to their colleagues, families, and friends. The legacy of these Canadians lives on, in the improved standard of living in the communities where they worked, and in the lasting bonds of friendship and trust that they and their partners built together.

CIDA was the first federal government agency to support volunteer organizations overseas. Today, we fund the work of more than 200 Canadian groups active throughout the world, including those featured in the following articles. In this International Year of Volunteers, *Global Citizenship in Action* celebrates these Canadian volunteers, following them to the Bolivian jungles, to the steppes of Kyrgyzstan, and to the safe houses for child soldiers in Sierra Leone.

These Canadians are true global citizens in action. I'm very proud of them, and of their legacy. I know that, after reading their stories, you will be proud of them too.


Maria Minna

Minister for International Cooperation

Global Citizenship in Action is produced periodically by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). You can visit CIDA's Web site at www.acdi-cida.gc.ca.

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June 2001

Printed and bound in Canada

ISSN 1492-4099

Publications Mail Agreement Number 1883151

Design: Aubut & Nadeau Design Communications



ACTION

Canadians reaching out to the world

The Canadian International Development Agency supports sustainable development in developing countries in order to reduce poverty and to contribute to a more secure, equitable, and prosperous world.

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Diana Frost

Manhole covers, safe water, and maple syrup

“When I first came to Chancay, I had no idea what to expect,” says Diana Frost, a chemical engineer from Sherbrooke, Quebec. “I didn’t know who I was going to work with, or what I was going to do, or even where I was going to live. It was exciting!”

It was the beginning of March 2001, and the former PhD student from the University of Ottawa was on her way to Chancay, a small ocean-side town of about 35,000 people just north of Lima, the capital of Peru.

Just three months before, she had responded to a call for volunteers from World University Services of Canada, or WUSC, that she had just happened to see while surfing the Internet.

“It was so close to my thesis that I couldn’t resist,” she says. “It’s what I always wanted to do—help poor communities get safe water and good sanitation.”

Today, Diana is well settled in, working with a team of young Peruvian engineers—two other women and a man—to evaluate the water and sewage systems in Chancay (pronounced Chong-kye).

“I’ve just spent the last three weeks lifting up manhole covers,” she laughs. “It’s not always easy—some haven’t been lifted for years, and they’re eroded to the point where I have to have a team of workmen to pry them open!”

It’s not always pleasant work. The system is badly in need of upgrading; it’s old, it leaks, it’s corroding, and it only serves perhaps half of the population. The water quality is poor and services are unreliable. Perhaps the worst problem Diana and her team have found is at the end of the pipe—where the sewage enters the ocean.

“At the port, you see everything that needs to be done in Chancay,” she says. “The plumes of sewage flowing into the water, the garbage, the chemical pollution from the fish processing plants... and people swim in that!”

The team of engineers has three months to evaluate the system and come up with recommendations for the municipality to consider. Chief among those recommendations will be building a sewage treatment plant. But while she’s measuring water flows, taking samples, charting the topography, and assessing the state of repair of the infrastructure, Diana is also taking time to have some fun.

“We’ve already gone disco dancing, and now we’re into karaoke,” she grins. “Last Saturday night, I was invited to a soccer game between two rival restaurants. Each made food for the teams and their fans. And this Saturday, I’m going to a wedding.”

She and her fellow engineers have become very close. They’ve introduced her to local customs and cuisine, including *pachamanca*, a feast of meats, usually pork, lamb, or goat, slow-cooked in a pit with native vegetables.

Her living quarters, donated by the local water company, are part of a small enclosed courtyard with whitewashed walls, red-tile roofs, and wrought-iron fences. It’s modest but cosy, and the cook in the little restaurant cooks her meals for her. She says it’s like living in the middle of an oasis.

“Here, they’re behind in some ways,” she reflects. “But they have some things that we don’t. People are a lot closer to each other. They stick together and they support each other.”

As for the future, Diana isn’t thinking about that right now. For her, this job as a volunteer for WUSC is a dream come true.

“I love Peru. I miss my folks and my friends, but I’m too busy to get depressed. And I’ve brought some maple syrup to remind me of home! I’m here for two years, and who knows? There’s all kinds of possibilities.” ■

CASPAR'S CORNER?

Just turn left at Nizhny Novgorod—you can't miss it!

Caspar Beuk can't stay out of the kitchen. It doesn't matter where the kitchen is. Russia, Lithuania, Bolivia, Sri Lanka...just about any kitchen will do.

Beuk was supposed to have retired 10 years ago from his work as an instructor and coordinator of the cook-training program at Malaspina University-College in Nanaimo, British Columbia. But he's still instructing and coordinating—only the students and the locales have changed.

Beuk put retirement behind him when he signed on as a volunteer advisor with the Canadian Executive Service Organization. CESO, as it is known, is a not-for-profit volunteer agency with a mandate to transfer Canadian technical and managerial expertise to developing countries and countries in transition. It draws on the knowledge, experience, and skills of some 3,800 women and men who have decided to pass on what they know to others.

"Caspar is one of our busiest and most effective volunteers," says John Gibson, a retired journalist who is now CESO's communications director.

Busy, in Chef Beuk's terms, translates into 18 assignments and a lot of miles over the past 10 years. Six of those assignments have been with Canadian Aboriginal groups, and 10 were in Russia.

In fact, if you visit the city of Dzerzhinsk and find yourself feeling a little peckish, you might want to check out the fare at Caspar's Corner. That's right, Caspar's. As in Caspar Beuk.

It all started in the kitchen of Tatiana Slizova's restaurant, called Shade.

Beuk was on assignment for CESO, working with Russian clients. He was there to introduce hotel and restaurant staff to North American and European cuisine, and to train cooks in modern kitchen techniques, menu planning, and service skills. That is how he met Slizova and, of course, quickly found his way into her kitchen and began working with her staff.

Within months, business doubled. Shade has become the most popular restaurant in town. And the food? Word is that the Dutch ambassador thinks it's the best he's ever had in Russia.

When Slizova recently decided Dzerzhinsk needed another good eating establishment, she got together with her mother and sister and opened a sports café/restaurant. They had no trouble coming up with a suitable name. "Caspar's Corner" seemed the only logical choice. It was their way of saying thanks to the retired instructor from Nanaimo.

"It's certainly an honour to have a restaurant named after me," says Beuk. "I'm flattered and pleased."

Who knows? There may soon be other restaurants bearing Caspar's name, as Beuk continues to pass along all that experience to the kitchens of the world.

The last we heard, he was off to Sri Lanka to teach, help with menu planning, and conduct seminars on the essentials of running a successful restaurant—understanding food technologies, food-service operations, and cost controls.

Can good food be far behind? ■



2001 is the International Year of Volunteers



The Canadian International Development Agency salutes Canada's international volunteers!

Throughout the year, the Canadian International Development Agency will honour those Canadians who dedicate their time—abroad or in Canada—to make this world of ours a better place.

Celebrate with us in recognizing their contribution and their achievements.

**Who are your volunteer heroes?
We would like to tell their story.**

Let us know by calling 819-953-6545 or 1-800-230-6349 and ask to speak with Pierre St-Cyr.

You can also send an e-mail to pierre_stcyr@acdi-cida.gc.ca.



Canada



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From drug counselling to child soldiers

by Lynn Martel, Reporter
Canmore Leader

CIDA photo: Clive Shirley

Keller aims to help rehabilitate youth in Sierra Leone

Canmore's loss is Sierra Leone's gain.

Jay Keller, former drug and alcohol worker for the Bow Valley, will embark tomorrow (April 4) on a 3½-month visit to the war-torn west African country to help implement a leadership training program for former child soldiers.

Keller will be working with Father Berton, an Italian missionary who founded St. Michael's Centre, a safe house where children recover from the traumatic effects of having not only witnessed, but participated in their country's civil war as child soldiers.

Berton visited Canmore last September with Isha Condeh and Tamba Jimmy, two 17-year-old former child soldiers who were participating in a ministerial level conference in Winnipeg that focused on children affected by war. While in Canmore, Condeh and Jimmy took part in a presentation called Peace Through Theatre, which Keller helped bring to Bow Valley school students.

"The Peace Through Theatre tour really touched my heart. It was really powerful," Keller said. "I began to realize more and more how we live in abundance here. And with abundance and knowledge comes a sense of responsibility."

During his visit, Father Berton asked the members of CAUSE (Christian Aid for Underassisted Societies Everywhere) Canada if they would partner with his Family Homes Movement (FHM) to create leadership programs.

Keller, who resigned his position as drug and alcohol worker to return to school next fall, was an obvious choice, said Sean Krausert, program director for CAUSE.

"Jay has incredible skills," Krausert said. "I think he'll fit in incredibly well there. I think the kids will really like him and I think they'll really respond to him."

Keller will work with small groups of children, aged 13 to 17, some whom are still at St. Michael's and others who might be in school or living with foster families and still receiving support from the FHM. Some will be children who have already returned to the community.

The FHM takes in children who have been orphaned or who had families who couldn't look after them because of the war. Mostly boys, they were abducted and forced to become child soldiers.



Photo: Lynn Martel, Canmore Leader



As the children have progressed through their rehabilitative process, Krausert said, Berton has noticed that some show leadership qualities as they grow and recover from their experiences.

"They'll really be targeting those kids who are leaders now and who are likely to be leaders tomorrow," Krausert said.

Through the program, Krausert said, it is hoped they can find the moral foundation that the kids grew up with before their abduction.

"We want these children to be making decisions based on honesty, integrity and cooperation as opposed to resorting to violence. This is really part of CAUSE's overall goal to help these kids to get back into their communities and for Sierra Leone to live in peace, to empower people to do things for themselves," Krausert said.

"This is not about imposing Western morals on these kids, it's about reviving strong Sierra Leone morals. It's about assisting these kids in finding morals that are already there."

Keller and Berton will try to help the children discover within themselves the right tools to make leadership decisions and take actions based on a good foundation, not the ones they learned in the bush.

Keller admits he knew little of the country before last fall and looks forward to collaborating with Berton and others who are working to help the children.

"Through the Peace Through Theatre tour I was trying to create a context before the ex-child soldiers came over to create a place where a current event could come to life for

the students. I guess it just ended up coming to life for me," Keller said. "A lot of work I've been doing in the Bow Valley has been trying to empower young people to make appropriate choices and walking with them through that."

Keller will fly first to Côte d'Ivoire, where he will stay with CAUSE Canada workers before going to Freetown, the Sierra Leone capital, a few days later.

Flights can still be interrupted without notice, Krausert said, even though the political situation is much more stable than it was a year ago.

Last fall CAUSE was able to move some of its activities up country a bit and outside of Freetown, Krausert said, which was previously the only safe spot. Rebel soldiers still hold territory, he added, but are now letting some relief workers in. The demobilization and surrendering of arms is going slowly with occasional skirmishes, but there is definitely hope that the situation will continue to improve, he said.

Keller won't be going anywhere near those places where violence is still a regular occurrence, Krausert said. ■

Reprinted courtesy of the *Canmore Leader* (April 3, 2001).

“My volunteer experiences have enriched my life”

Crissy George of Burnaby, B.C., was just the person the Belize Ministry of Human Development, Women and Youth was looking for. A social worker who, for most of the past eight years, has worked in the public health system with families of pre-school children, she was a perfect fit.

The government of this small country on the Caribbean Sea recognized that it had to resolve what had become a critical shortage of trained counsellors needed to work with young people placed in the care of Human Development, Women and Youth. The Ministry provides institutionalized care for children and adolescents who have been removed from abusive homes or who have committed a criminal offence.

“Crissy’s combination of professional skills and personal commitment to volunteering are an excellent match for her placement,” says Noelle Grosse, the Communications Officer for the Canadian arm of Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO) Canada.

In addition to training local staff in counselling techniques, George is providing direct counselling to the adolescents who have been remanded to the Belize City Youth Hostel. Although many of these young people have psychological problems and histories of abuse, until George’s arrival they did not have access to an on-site counsellor.

“I’m a firm believer in not going in as the expert,” says George. “I have to learn what is culturally appropriate—I need to hear from them.”

This philosophy has served George well, both in her foreign assignments and in the more familiar neighbourhoods of Burnaby. Her commitment to volunteering has taken her to the island of Fiji in the South Pacific and to Argentina in South America. Her most recent project involved refugee parents.

“I was not surprised by her decision to undertake this opportunity,” says her friend and former colleague Barbara Massiah.

“Her many years of working with children and adults from diverse cultures will be reflected in an obvious understanding and sensitivity to multicultural issues.”

Volunteering has always been part of George’s work ethic. She is a firm believer that her work in the volunteer community brings an added value to her professional development. She was among the recipients of an award for establishing a “neighbourhood house” in Burnaby. It provided a location for neighbourhood meetings, and it operated as a centre for older and less mobile members of the community where they could have easier access to the volunteer community. Her experience with three other Vancouver-area neighbourhood houses contributed to the success of the Burnaby project.

One of the challenges of the Belize assignment for George was to test out her skills and 20 years of experience in an area where resources are limited and where there is a different way of working. “I welcome the opportunity to share my skill.” ■



Crissy George



CIDR photo - Chris Brown

Lethbridge couple finds better lives for themselves and others

It was 20 years ago that Joan and Mark Wierzba gave up the hectic pace of New York City in search of “a better quality of life.” They found it in Lethbridge, Alberta.

Now, they’ve committed themselves to helping others create a better quality of life for their communities.

Joan and Mark are among the 3,800 volunteer advisors with the Canadian Executive Service Organization. CESO, for short, is a volunteer-based, not-for-profit development agency that operates in Aboriginal communities in Canada, and in some 40 communities around the world.

“Our first overseas assignment was in India,” recalls Joan, “and that was in 1994.”

Since then, the Wierzbas have served as volunteer advisors in Latvia, Jamaica, and Bolivia. Next month, Joan is off to Hungary to work with a rural-based organization that is setting up community social programs.

When she returns, Mark will pack his bags for a greenhouse project in Inner Mongolia, where the government wants to experiment with a variety of seeds that can be grown in a greenhouse environment.

“The latitude is the same as Lethbridge,” Mark points out, “and I have a good selection of seeds that I have worked with here.” One of the varieties they are most interested in, according to Mark, is watermelon.

Both these projects are a perfect fit for the Lethbridge couple. Joan, with her background in social work, is with the University of Lethbridge. Mark’s career was in computer-driven telephone systems. Now self-employed, he designs and develops energy self-sufficiency systems.

“I feel that I have 30 years of experience in social work, and that knowledge can be used,” says Joan. “I can help other people who don’t have that experience.”

It is education and a lifetime of experience in a variety of professional and industrial activities that CESO looks for when it recruits volunteers for national and overseas development-assistance assignments.

Working without pay, these volunteers draw on their personal experiences and skills to help people in developing countries. The objective is to help people help themselves—to pass on knowledge and skills so that communities can better



Joan Wierzba (left)

find solutions to social, health, and economic challenges.

“They are wonderful people,” says Cheri Langhofer, friend and neighbour of the Wierzbas. “It takes a very special person to do what they do.”

The Wierzbas take their work with CESO very seriously.

“It was a mutual decision to get involved with CESO,” states Joan, quite emphatically. “For years we were trying to find a development agency that suited our style and needs; a non-denominational agency that offered short-term assignments. CESO was the match we were looking for.”

Mark recalls one of the few assignments where they actually travelled together, to the remote Amazon jungle of Bolivia in South America. “Travelling to a distant location to carry out a needs assessment was one of the highlights of our volunteer experience,” recalls Mark.

While Joan was designing a proposal for a one-year pilot project on literacy, as well as workshops on native medicinal and nutritional plants and mother-child health care for indigenous women, Mark was teaching English classes and helping out at a senior’s centre.

For Joan, the Bolivian project brought a lot of personal satisfaction.

“You hope that what you do will have a lasting impact,” says Joan, after giving the matter some thought. “The pilot can now be adapted as a model for other indigenous communities.”

It’s funding from the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, as well as corporate and individual donors that enables CESO and volunteers like the Wierzbas to help stimulate local employment, foster trade, and improve economic viability.

“We believe that strong, viable private sectors are paramount to creating stable, healthy societies,” says Charles Beer, CESO President and CEO. And CESO is an effective investment. Beer says that for every dollar the organization receives in funding, CESO delivers more than two dollars in service. ■

Three years in Africa gave Kevin Thomson a whole new outlook on how business should work.

The Ottawa-based business manager served as a volunteer with the World University Service of Canada (WUSC) in Botswana from 1996 to 1999, helping to oversee the production and distribution of a remarkable new solar-rechargeable hearing aid.

“My experience in Africa really set me on a new path. My bottom line is not about money any more. It’s about whether a product is good for communities—both for the people who produce it, and the others who buy it.”

Developed specifically for the African market by local technicians at the Botswana Technology Centre in 1993, the body-worn hearing aid runs on a rechargeable solar cell the size of a credit card. Hearing-aid batteries are hard to find

and far too expensive for most people in many parts of the developing world. Sunlight, on the other hand, is usually abundant and free. The nickel cadmium battery in the SolarAid hearing aid can run for a week after four hours of exposure to direct sunlight.

The hearing aid has been manufactured since 1994 by Motse Wa Badiri Camphill, a Botswana non-governmental organization (NGO) that offers employment, vocational training, and accommodation to people with disabilities. In addition to the hearing aid, workers there also produce and sell sorghum flour, knitwear, and nursery plants.

“Not about money any more”

Ottawa volunteer helps distribute hearing aids across Africa

CIDA photo: Bruce Paton

During his placement with Motse Wa Badiri Camphill, Thomson supervised the production and design modifications, and developed a marketing system that now distributes the hearing aids in 15 countries across Africa. His partner, Laurie Rogers, also worked as a WUSC volunteer for Motse Wa Badiri Camphill during the same period, setting up Internet and electronic banking for the NGO.

“International volunteers are lucky in that they often work at the grass-roots level,” says Thomson. “You get a chance to work directly with small organizations where a small contribution can really make a difference and where the relationships you build, and what you learn from the people you meet, change you forever.”

About 1,000 solar-rechargeable hearing aids are now in use. NGOs have bought most of them to distribute to needy children and elderly people with hearing loss. The units cost \$60 a piece—about the equivalent of a month’s wage for the average Southern African worker.

In 1997, Kevin and three other designers from the hearing-aid team won a prestigious Design for Development Award from the South African Bureau of Standards. Through the assistance of another Canadian volunteer who is currently working on the project, Motse Wa Badiri Camphill is now fielding inquiries from Asian and Caribbean NGOs who are eager to distribute the hearing aid, as well as from companies who want to sell it commercially. Proceeds from these sales will support broader free distribution to hearing impaired people in need.

Now back in Ottawa, Thomson works as an owner-manager of the La Siembra Coop, a fair-trade organization that imports cocoa from several developing countries and distributes fair-trade products across Canada. ■



Photo: WUSC

Kevin Thomson (right)

Volunteer psychologist helps heal the “deepest scars”



January 26, 2001, is a date that Reine Lebel, a psychologist from Aylmer, Quebec, will not forget soon. That was the day a powerful earthquake devastated the Katch district of Gujarat province in India.

It was also the day Lebel travelled from Mumbai to Delhi, heading home to Canada. She had just completed a mission to Kashmir and Mumbai, where she provided training in counselling. She had been working with Médecins sans frontières (Doctors without Borders). The organization immediately assigned her to humanitarian relief in Gujarat.

The scene that awaited her was, in her words, “haunting.” While it may have been upsetting for newcomers, the victims were in a terrible state of shock. Lebel saw its effects as she toured the villages with mobile medical teams, identifying those in distress. In some cases, villagers had no choice but to tie highly agitated victims to trees to keep them and others safe.

How could these people be helped when the psychiatric hospital had been destroyed and staff members themselves were victims of the earthquake? Under the auspices of Médecins sans frontières, Lebel helped train local psychologists and social workers, who in turn set up teams in the villages.

Lebel notes that humanitarian assistance did not always include mental-health programs. For a long time, humanitarian assistance was basically synonymous with distributing shelter, food, blankets, clothing, and other items. Yet, in conflict situations, once the war is over, the deepest scars are often left in people’s minds and hearts.

Lebel saw this on her mission with CARE to Albania and Macedonia. When interviewed by Radio-Canada, she said over and over that people in Kosovo suffered such deep psychological scars that the most urgent task was to “listen to people.” Thanks to mobile clinics, teams trained to perform psychological evaluations did just that in villages where massacres had taken place.

Natural disasters, hostage-takings, relationship problems, problems reintegrating into society—the traumas Lebel has encountered in her career as a consultant have had a wide range of causes. Lebel has her own private practice in Canada, but she is ready to travel to developing countries whenever she is needed.

“Through her dedication, Reine has shown that she wholeheartedly endorses the organization’s principle of providing neutral and impartial humanitarian assistance,” says Annick Chalifour, Director of Human Resources for Médecins sans frontières.

This principle is integral to Lebel’s personality. While travelling as a tourist in Florida in August 1992, she found herself directing Red Cross teams when Hurricane Andrew struck. ■



Rx

Mr. Sunshine's prescription for success

When Joe Beelen retired as Director of Operations at the Glaxo-Wellcome pharmaceutical plant on the outskirts of Montréal, he did exactly what he had always planned to do—he went to work.

"I always was convinced that, after my retirement, I would want to do something positive and constructive," he says. And that is exactly what he did. Beelen joined nearly 4,000 other retirees and volunteered his knowledge, experience, and skills with CESO, the Canadian Executive Service Organization.

As a volunteer advisor, the retired pharmaceutical executive has travelled the world, teaching others what he knows, advising, and helping companies understand and resolve the problems that often stand in the way of success.

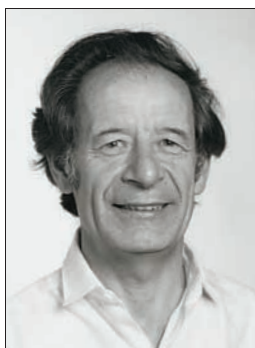
"I did acquire a lot of knowledge and experience during my career," says Beelen, "and I felt it would be a shame if nobody else could benefit from it."

As it turned out, his 50 years of pharmaceutical experience was exactly what a struggling firm in the Central Asian country of Kyrgyzstan was looking for. The company was facing huge financial losses as a result of major production problems. Beelen volunteered to do whatever he could to help.

"The client had a very serious problem with respect to its competence in the manufacturing of antibiotic capsules," Beelen recalls. "The company was facing a deadline to avoid significant losses."

Beelen had to call on every bit of his knowledge and experience to pull it off. With his technical knowledge, he was able to correct both the formulation and production processes. That allowed the company to use its existing stock before the expiry date.

Once that was done, he set up a basic training program for quality-control and production staff to develop the skills and expertise they needed to introduce new generic products that met international standards.



Joe Beelen

Photo: CESO

Sounds pretty straightforward. But it wasn't that easy.

It required a different approach than simply doing it the way it had been done for years at the Glaxo-Wellcome plant in Montréal. Beelen was always aware of the need to do things not just his way, but within the context of a culture and tradition.

Most CESO assignments are short-term, and many volunteer advisors never get to experience first-hand the results or long-term benefits of their work. But for Beelen, the satisfaction

was the smiles on the faces of the staff members, and the gratitude they expressed to him.

"The people in the laboratory went out of their way to express their gratitude," says Beelen. "They called me Mr. Sunshine." For a CESO volunteer, that makes it all worthwhile.

Maurice Servranckx has been a friend and associate of Beelen's for 47 years. "I am not a daredevil like Joe is," he states. "It is unbelievable what it takes to do that. The greater the adventure, the happier he is."

Although he is not about to follow his friend into the unknown, Servranckx has great admiration for Beelen's commitment to the needy. "He is a fantastic man with a profound knowledge of the industry, and he will not be satisfied until he achieves the desired result."

What's next for the 70-year-old Beelen? Thailand? Honduras? Haiti? Where will the challenge be? Where will he go to make a difference? He's not sure—but when the call comes, he'll be ready to go.

"It gives me the living evidence that, regardless of our age, we can remain and feel young and useful, and make definite contributions to speed up the progress in many developing countries." ■

Photo: MSF

On December 10, 1999, in Oslo, Norway, Danielle Robillard represented the Canadian chapter of Médecins sans frontières (Doctors without Borders) when the organization was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. As a nurse, Robillard has assumed numerous responsibilities within Médecins sans frontières. Among other things, she reopened a bombed-out hospital in Chechnya in 1996.



Danielle Robillard

Nursing with loving care

On Sunday, November 19, 2000, at the first International Conference of Francophone Nurses, Danielle Robillard received the Recognition Award on behalf of Médecins sans frontières (Doctors without Borders).

The award was personally presented by the co-chairpersons of the conference, Gyslaine Desrosiers, President of the Ordre des infirmiers et infirmières du Québec (Quebec Order of Nurses), and Catherine Dubois Fresnay, President of the Association nationale française des infirmières et infirmiers diplômés ou étudiants (French National Association of Graduate and Student Nurses).

Robillard carried out her first mission with Médecins sans frontières in Katalé, Democratic Republic of Congo (formerly Zaire), in 1994. In Katalé, she was responsible for the general hospital of a camp of 207,000 Rwandan refugees. She then travelled to Bosnia in 1995 to distribute medicine at a clinic. Finally, in 1996, she went to Chechnya to reopen a bombed-out hospital. Before she became involved in the field, she volunteered at the Quebec office of Médecins sans frontières for 18 months, where she was on duty two or three mornings a week.

Robillard also represented Canada when Médecins sans frontières received the Nobel Peace Prize in October 1999, in recognition of the organization's worldwide pioneering humanitarian work.

In September 2000, Robillard spent a week in the United States, helping to conduct a simulation of a full-scale refugee camp. This refugee camp will be set up in Montréal and other major Canadian cities in the fall of 2001.

Here in Canada, Robillard works as a nurse in the emergency ward at the Hôtel-Dieu Hospital in Montréal. Before that, she worked for two years as a nurse in the maternity ward of a hospital in Lausanne, Switzerland. ■



“Baptism by fire” for Canadian volunteer

It's no accident that Marie-Françoise Albern-Jean is a volunteer. That was the primary objective of her studies from the beginning. Tropical medicine, prevention of major epidemics, community health, nutrition — all of her specialties prepared her for involvement in the field.

When she settled in Uganda in 1991 with her husband and two little girls, she was ready. Her first mission with Médecins sans frontières (Doctors without Borders) proved to be a real “baptism by fire.” During this mission, along the border between Uganda and Zaire where a cholera epidemic raged, it took 36 hours to travel seven kilometres. On the mountain trails, the vehicle was attacked by soldiers who wanted to seize its cargo of medicine.

The value of medicine in the region became clear when the team responsible for evaluating the spread of the disease arrived at the hospital. Not a single tablet or solution could be found, and dozens of patients were becoming dehydrated. However, the team did find unpaid local staff whose dedication extended beyond the victims of the epidemic, since staff members asked to be trained, not only about cholera, but other subjects as well.

Albern-Jean says this thirst for knowledge under such conditions was one of the biggest surprises of her life. The next time she went on an observer mission, she made sure she did not leave without the books people were waiting for.

There has been a succession of missions since then. “Marie-Françoise showed great generosity in carrying out these missions, knowing full well the risks and dangers they involved,” says Annick Chalifour, Human Resources, Médecins sans frontières Canada.

Among other things, Albern-Jean worked as a medical examiner, dealing with several outbreaks of hemorrhagic fever caused by the Ebola virus, or with other epidemics of cholera or measles. She worked alternately with Médecins sans frontières and the European Union. With the European Union, she also participated from 1995 to 1998 in a project to rehabilitate Gabon’s national health-care system—not to mention her activities with refugees from southern Sudan in Uganda, and Somali refugees in Kenya.

Balancing such missions with her family life is an enormous challenge. Albern-Jean admits that, at times, she was stretched “to the limit.” But even in the beginning, under the most difficult circumstances, she was able to maintain radio contact with the outside world, thanks to the flawless logistics of Médecins sans frontières.

Albern-Jean continues to pursue her interests: last year, she went on a mission to Kosovo.

Albern-Jean currently lives in Montréal, where she uses her wealth of experience to give courses in managing humanitarian assistance. ■



Marie-Françoise Albern-Jean