

A New Beginning

The war in Central Africa has claimed millions of lives — more than any war since WWII. It's no surprise, then, that the 58 refugees (17 families) who came to Moncton this past year have all come from this part of the world.

The Multicultural Association of the Greater Moncton Area (better known as MAGMA) is the organization that helps these people make the adjustment to the Canadian way of life.

When MAGMA is notified a family is coming —

they are usually provided with a few weeks notice but sometimes it is less — they line up temporary accommodations for the family. Once the family has arrived they help them locate a home. Usually there are children, so having the family settle close to a school is a priority. Proximity to the grocery store, the bank, and the nearest bus stop can also be important factors. MAGMA also helps refugee families find a family doctor and may even accompany them to their first appointment. In addition, MAGMA refers families to com-

17 refugee families – all from Africa – came to Greater Moncton in 2004.

When I speak with them in October, it has been 10 weeks since the Nestor family arrived in Canada. Fozia has spent her morning working on her English language skills at MAGMA. She and Nduhira, her husband, arrived in Moncton from Ethiopia in August along with their 2-1/2 year-old daughter and nine-month-old son.

Nduhira was born in Rwanda and went to high school and college in the Congo. Civil war erupted in his homeland in 1994; his parents were killed and his brothers and sisters fled that country. Nduhira left the Congo and sought asylum in Ethiopia. It is there that he met and married Fozia; it is there that their two babies were born.

Nduhira tells me he has not heard from his siblings for the past decade but hopes they are well and looks forward to the day when he can make contact with them. Sometime in the future, when they are established here in Canada, they would also love to be able to visit Fozia's family in Ethiopia.

The Nestors are taking every opportunity to learn about Canada and the Canadian way of life. Nduhira is convinced he and his wife need more education; he speaks French, English (and five African languages), studied marketing at college, but knows that he needs Canadian credentials to land a job here. So education is definitely part of the future for the young cou-

ple, though Nduhira is not yet sure what field to pursue. He says that he needs to get a feel for his new land, to get an idea of what skills are valued here.

The family lives in an apartment where heat is included in the rent. They brought their warmest clothes from Ethiopia, but they are not yet totally outfitted for the Canadian winter. Looking ahead to Christmas, Nduhira tells me that this is a deeply spiritual time, a time for prayer and reflection. It is also a time for good food and fellowship with family and friends.

Fozia and Nduhira Nestor with their children – Katabana and Aziza.



In New Brunswick

munity resources and services that will be useful to them.

The organization also provides language training in English and in French. Of course, daily language training provides newcomers with social contacts as well as communication skills.

Volunteers play an important role in helping Greater Moncton's newcomers settle in. Most volunteers make a one year commitment and offer one to two hours of their time per week with the new family.

They may provide basic instruction in operating unfamiliar household appliances; perhaps they will take the family on a drive to show them the local sites.

MAGMA hosts two special events each year. The first is an evening of international cuisine and entertainment. This is open to the public and its goal is to promote cultural appreciation and understanding. And every December MAGMA hosts a holiday party for the children of refugees.

COI Editor, Jeanne Whitehead, talks to three of these families

The Goretto household is a lively one. Nine year old Annie, six year old Arnold and Ardon, age five, are brimming with energy. They tell me that in South Africa, where they lived last year at this time, there is no snow in winter. "There's no Halloween, either," they add. Halloween is but a week away when I drop into their home, and they are intrigued and somewhat excited by the prospect of this most unusual celebration.

The three children and their mother, Marielle, moved to Moncton in May. Arnold tells me that in Africa he played cricket and Annie adds that she sang in a choir. The children are students at Forest Glen School but have not yet joined any such groups here in Canada.

They do, however, have a plastic bat and ball and lately have been playing their games in the basement of their N.B. housing home. Their mother notes that children play outside in Africa. She has been told that the winter ahead will be cold, very cold, but she really has no reference point for "Canadian cold".

The children are delighted when I tell them I would like to take their picture; they promptly run to their bedrooms to change out of their Saturday morning pj's.

Annie, Arnold and Ardon's exuberance is in stark contrast to their mother's seriousness. She is originally from Burundi. As a refugee she and her children have moved frequently over the years. Annie was born in



Ardon, Annie and Arnold Goretto with their mother, Marielle.

Tanzania, Arnold in Zambia and Ardon in South Africa. Marielle will not speak of the past and is uncertain what the future holds. For now her life revolves around her children. She walks them to and from school every day, makes sure they are well fed, well dressed, well behaved.

I ask her about Christmas. She tells me that they celebrated Christmas in Africa, but it has been years since she has spent Christmas with other members of her family. It has been four years since she has seen her husband. A large photo of him sits atop the television set. She communicates with him via email ... and she wonders, aloud, when he will be able to join his family.

Although Heritier and Christian Masimengo are a year apart – Heritier is six and Christian is five – they are often mistaken for twins. The boys are adapting well to life in Moncton, and they are looking forward to the Canadian winter. They live with their parents, Elizabeth and Oscar Kambale Masimengo in a cosy basement apartment not far from the school that they attend, Beaverbrook Elementary.

“Of course Canada was on the list of countries where we would want to live,” says Oscar. “Canada offers us something that all Africans want – to raise our children without war. In Africa there is war, there is genocide ... and most of the wars are based on ethnicity. Both Elizabeth and I grew up in East Congo, but Elizabeth’s grandparents were from Rwanda. Because of that – because her parent’s parents were Rwandan – our entire family’s life was in danger when war broke out there.”

The family fled the Congo and took exile in Uganda in 1999. For a while they lived in a refugee camp. “In refugee camps you sleep outside. Sometimes there is food and sometimes there is no food. And often there is no medical attention.”

“Uganda is one of the few countries where you are allowed to leave the refugee camp,” adds Oscar. “In other countries you can be arrested if you leave the camp but in Uganda I was able to go into the city. I had been a teacher in the Congo and I was able to get a job as a teacher there as well.” The family shared a crowded apartment with others; the medical treatment their 13-year old son needed was unavailable and in 2002 the boy died of complications of aplastic anemia.

It was after their son’s death that Oscar and Elizabeth’s application for emigration was considered and in 2003 they learned they had been granted refugee status by Canada. They moved to Moncton in June 2004. Like their sons, the couple is looking forward to their first Canadian winter and their first Canadian Christmas. They are also looking forward to raising their children in a peaceful country, a country where education and medical care are considered basic human rights.

Oscar is not yet gainfully employed, but does volunteer work regularly at the Red Cross and at the Glad Tidings Pentecostal Church. He does not have the credentials to be a teacher in Canada, but he would like to continue his role as an educator. In addition to English and French, Oscar Masimengo speaks five African languages. He says that his ideal job would offering human rights education to African people.

The Masimengo family. Heritier would like to be a doctor when he grows up, Christian a pastor. The boys proudly donned their new Canadian flag fleece shirts for the photo.

