Relief stint brings rewards

Sheyla Grober B.S. '92

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

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

I attended an FH training in January 1995, and I was ready to make a commitment. The next step was finding a project that matched my skill set and country preference. The process occurred over a span of a few months, and then the “perfect” position was located. I applied for a job to La Paz, Bolivia, to be the small business development coordinator. I was ready to begin my process of support raising (all FH development volunteers need to raise their own financial support), when I received a phone call from the FH relief coordinator.

"Would you like to spend the next six months working in Africa in the Rwandan refugee camps of Zaire before going to Bolivia?" he asked me. "Well, uh...sure!!" was the reply that escaped me from my mouth. The thought of doing a relief project had never even crossed my mind, but I heard myself saying that I would love the experience and that I could leave in two weeks! What I saw when I arrived there was beyond my expectations. The grounds of the camp is basically all lava rock (the area is volcanic, so much of the ground is either lava rock or lush grasses and trees), and it is not uncommon to see people walking barefoot. Cooking is done over open fires, in a tin pot provided by the UN. The refugees are given a weekly ration of food which consists of corn-sow flour, rice, beans, oil and salt. Any fruits or vegetables must be bought. This was the part of the camp that amazed me the most, the amount of commerce that was conducted. The refugees have brought in the camps for two reasons, so Mugunga is basically a city. There were people lining the “roads” with food for sale, plus just about anything one could want, including hand-stitched Chicago Bulls jackets!

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

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

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

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

Landis dyes cotton for Donahue’s rug

Wendy Meury Dunn County News

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

"That Phil is none other than Phil Donahue, and Landis is dyeing cotton that will be woven into a rug for Donahue's rug Woodbury University welcomes Nielsen as president

In July 1996, Kenneth R. Nielsen was appointed by the Board of Trustees as president of Woodbury University.

Nielsen succeeds the outgoing president, Paul E. Sago, who announced his retirement earlier this year.

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

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

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

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