

Fellow Rotarians,

I wanted to express my thanks to all of you for the excellent response to our call for assistance for the InterFaith Food Pantry. We filled Gerry and Linda Miller's car with all the canned goods and food products that were brought to our meeting this past Wednesday and it was delivered Thursday morning to a very appreciative organization. We also dropped off a check that was given by a member at the meeting. I received a message from a member who asked for the name and address of the organization so that they might provide financial assistance directly. The InterFaith Food Pantry is an IRS approved 501 c 3. You can visit their website at www.interfaithfoodpantry.com for further information on the Food Pantry.

- Send Monetary donations to
- InterFaith Food Pantry
- P.O.Box 7071
- Seminole, FL 33775
-
- Drop off Food donations at
- Aldersgate United Methodist Church
- Food Pantry located on the north side of church
- 9530 Starkey Road
- Seminole, FL 33775

Tim

Congratulations to Jerry Miller on his 7th year anniversary, this month in Rotary.



SEMINOLE SMOKE SIGNALS



ROTARY 2015-2016

Club Number 4289

August 12, 2015

PRAYER FOR TODAY

○ Lord, we know you ask us to be cheerful givers. May our gifts bring joy to others. Amen.

PROGRAM THIS WEEK: Vie Thompson, InterFaith Food Pantry

PROGRAM LAST WEEK: Joseph Rasor, Iraq and Afghanistan experiences as a U.S. Marine

PROGRAM NEXT WEEK: To Be Announced

Upcoming Events:

- Aug 30th Rotary Day at the Rays, See Lorie for details
- Oct 3rd: Beerfest
- Nov. 14th: Auction
- Dec. 4th: Holiday Christmas Party at the Club at Treasure Island

Rotary Club of Seminole Officers 2015-2016:

President	Tim Ingold	Sergeant at Arms	Jim Woodworth
President Elect	Bob Matthews	Bulletin Editor	Jeff Graves/Ruth Berry
Secretary	Lorie Whitney	Past President	Gerry Miller
Treasurer	Mike McQuilkin		
District 6950 Website - www.rotary6950.org			
Website - www.seminolerotary.org			
Rotary Club of Seminole P.O. Box 3313 • Seminole, FL 33775-3313			

The lost girls of South Sudan and the Rotarian who found them

The girls were alone. Their families were dead, or gone, or lost in the broken landscape of southern Sudan. They had nowhere to turn, and no one to turn to. Some lived in the market, others in the cemetery. When Cathy Groenendijk saw them, she couldn't help herself. She offered them tea, then some food, then a place to sleep in her guesthouse.

"In the morning, we would sit together and talk about what had happened the night before," Groenendijk remembers. "And what I heard I could not believe. I could not believe it."

One girl's father had died, and after the funeral, she never saw her mother again. She was living on the streets with some other kids when four men started chasing them. The other girls were faster. She fell behind and was caught and raped by all four men. Groenendijk knew a doctor who repaired the physical damage, saving her life.

Another three girls, ages eight, six, and one, lived with their mother, but they all slept in the open. Groenendijk helped them build a tarped shelter, but the hot sun ate it away. One night, a man snuck in and tried to assault one of the girls. After that, Groenendijk let them sleep on her veranda.

This was in 2006. A peace accord had been signed the year before, ending a 22-year civil war and paving the way for the independence of South Sudan. But the region was still broken in many ways. While the story of its "lost boys," who traveled hundreds of miles on foot to reach safety during the war, is well known, little has been written or said about the girls who stayed behind, and who were just as lost.

Groenendijk was born in eastern Uganda, where her father grew coffee and bananas on the family farm. She had three brothers and seven sisters, so when she was three years old, she was sent to the capital, Kampala, to live with an aunt. After secondary school, she went on to study nursing.

"When I was in Kampala," she says, "I used to take the food that was left from our kitchen in the training school and give it to the children who were without food. It was a very, very bad time under Idi Amin, and after."

It was a time of war, suspicion, and fighting. Between 1971 and 1979, about half a million people died under Amin's dictatorship. Another 300,000 died under Milton Obote before he was deposed in 1985.

When she finished nursing school, Groenendijk got a job at a hospital in the north of Uganda. "There were so many militias and armed groups, especially among the northern tribes," she says. "Even after the war, there were militias who were never fully disarmed. They were always fighting."

Not long after she arrived, she met a young Dutch missionary named Wim, who worked with a relief organization called ZOA that aids people trapped in conflict and disaster zones. The two fell in love, got married, and for 10 years remained in Uganda, mostly in Karamoja, the remote northeast corner of the country. In 1993, the couple went to the Netherlands. Shortly after they moved, the genocide in Rwanda began to unfold. An estimated 800,000 to 1 million people were killed in 100 days. When the violence subsided, a colleague at ZOA asked if Wim and Cathy would be willing to go to the country. Groenendijk would run a health program, and Wim would do agriculture and food security work in the town of Nyamata, south of Kigali. One of the most devastated areas, it's now the site of a genocide memorial, at a church where 10,000 people who had gathered for protection were murdered.

Five months after the killing stopped, the couple arrived in Nyamata. Seeing how many children had lost their parents, they took in two foster children – girls who had lost their families. The girls still visit, and one will graduate from college this fall.

"The organization had little money to plan something positive for the children, like a party, to share together, to bring kids together," Groenendijk says. "So I did a lot of children's programs, in addition to working."

In 1998, ZOA asked Groenendijk if she would help establish a health program in Sudan, which, on the map, was the largest country in Africa. In reality, though, it had never been much of a country at all. The south and the north were very different, and since 1955, animist and Christian groups in the south had been fighting for independence from the primarily Muslim north. During the first war, which lasted until 1972, more than half a million people died. The south gained some autonomy, but when oil was discovered there in the late 1970s, war broke out again. From 1983 until 2005, an estimated two million people were killed; four million more fled to other countries or to camps for internally displaced people. In a country of 12 million, no one was unaffected.

When Groenendijk and her husband arrived in 1999, the fighting was still intense. They lived in rebel territory, in a village



called Katigiri. "There were areas with no medical care at all," she remembers. "Many people were dying." They'd lived in conflict zones before, but this time was different. Planes bombed areas that had relief operations. "When we first arrived," Groenendijk says, "we were bombed as were driving. Every house had foxholes, and when you heard planes flying over, you got out of the house and into the foxholes. We also had one large bomb shelter for everybody, but if a bomb landed on that one, there would be many casualties. So we used several foxholes to spread the risk."

For nearly five years, she ran the ZOA health program in Katigiri. She made sure health workers were trained, medicines delivered, new health units opened, and transportation arranged for patients. All the while, the bombs kept coming as the war dragged on. When the danger and stress grew unbearable, the couple went back to Rwanda.

In 2005, a peace accord was signed and the fighting stopped. A date was set for a vote on independence. Groenendijk thought of the people she knew there, especially the children who'd lost so much. In 2006, she and Wim decided to return.

Now people were flooding into Juba. In the future capital of the world's newest country, everything had to be built from scratch, including Rotary clubs. Michael Elmquist had been a Rotarian in Kastrup, Denmark, for more than 20 years when he arrived in Juba in 2008 to work for the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He could see that the area could benefit from Rotary's work. The country had only 200 miles of paved road. Barely 2 percent of children completed primary school. Infant and child mortality rates were among the highest on every ranking. Everything needed to be restored: families, villages, lives.

"Once in Juba, I realized that the whole country of Sudan [before South Sudan became independent] had only one Rotary club, and that was in Khartoum, over 700 miles away," Elmquist recalls. "I felt I could not live for three years without access to a Rotary club."

He started to round up prospective candidates. But because few people in Juba knew much about Rotary, most of the initial recruits were expatriates. And because the streets didn't have names, people listed their addresses as "the big house with the yellow roof opposite Equatoria Hotel." Nonetheless, Elmquist soon found the required 20 people. The [Rotary Club of Juba](#) was chartered in 2010, bringing the number of Rotary clubs in a country almost twice the size of Alaska, to two.

After she and her husband moved to Juba, Groenendijk started working for an NGO called War Child, but grew frustrated with the slowness of a big organization. She needed to keep pace with the brothel owners who were recruiting girls. So she started her own organization, offering what she had. First, she gave the girls tea, then one meal. Friends would help out.

"For two years," she says, "I was providing tea and one meal, which was better than nothing. Some of the kids had never had a meal apart from scavenging and eating leftovers from restaurants. Once a week, I would buy a proper meal for all of them."

She started going door to door, asking for funding. Help started to trickle in. As volunteers and donors appeared, her organization started to take shape. She called it [Confident Children out of Conflict](#) (CCC).

Elmquist heard about her work and invited her to join the Rotary Club of Juba. She accepted. "When they saw what I was doing," Groenendijk says, "they used every opportunity to support us. A lot of credit goes to Michael. I went there and showed pictures of a girl who had been raped, to show what was happening in Juba. After that, a lot of people started paying attention to what we were doing."

"The job she's done looking after these children has just been amazing," Elmquist says. "You can't believe the difference in the young girls who come in. They don't talk, they don't know how to hold a knife or fork or anything. And she trains them and gets them to school. She gets them dressed. She saves them from prostitution, which would be their only source of income."

Soon Groenendijk started looking for a piece of land. Eventually, she bought some property and built a dormitory that could house about 40 girls. She hired a small staff.

The Juba club continued to support her work, along with other rebuilding projects in South Sudan – which became an independent nation in 2011. At one fundraising dinner, the club auctioned drawings done by the girls at Groenendijk's center and raised \$3,000 for CCC, as well as an orphanage in Juba.

Today, almost 40 girls and a few boys live at CCC, which also issues reports on child prostitution in Juba and the plight of the city's 3,000 street children. It is not an easy transition for those she takes in – some girls have run away, overwhelmed by structured life. But many more stay. After about a year, Groenendijk says, they get used to living in a house, sleeping in a bed. They learn how to settle disputes without fighting. With time and patience, she helps them adjust. Where the social fabric has been torn, she does her best to mend it. In addition to educating those living at the center, CCC pays school fees for about 600 children around Juba. A few have even gone to Uganda for further schooling. One, named Esther, is at one of the best schools in that country, with plans to become a doctor.