

To Whom It May Concern

Edited by Emma Judge



Extracts from the book:

Sarah Westcott was IVS's Field Officer in Lesotho between 1977 and 1982. Sarah was also Chair of the Board of Trustees for eight years.

IVS volunteers in Lesotho found themselves in an interesting mix – the advantages of living next to a successful capitalist economy included access to the full range of western material goods, while they lived among people who were victims of the apartheid system in one way or another: desperately poor and dysfunctional Basotho families, South African refugees and agents of the apartheid regime. In urban Maseru, this mix was heady for idealistic and sometimes naïve volunteers. In the rural areas, life was more traditional but the effects of the migrant labour system were still intensely felt in each homestead. Men went away for 13-month contracts to work in the mines of South Africa and returned, strangers, to their wives and children. Domestic violence was common.

The refugee community

I became a friend of Phyllis Naidoo, a South African lawyer, of Indian origin, who came to Lesotho as a refugee. She was a member of the SACP and ANC and worked for the families of prisoners on Robben Island. She was then, and still is, a remarkable woman. When her life was threatened, she fled from South Africa. Her house in Maseru was a constant stream of refugees, going to see her to exchange news and information, and receive moral and political support, and apparently endless meals. Phyllis worked as a lawyer in the Justice Department in Lesotho, so she was out most of the day. I once asked her how there was always food to eat in her kitchen and she told me that she got up at five every day to cook before going to work. Her commitment to the cause was tremendous and she was an inspiration to all those who passed through her house. Her huge talent was to make everyone feel special and appreciated... For many of us volunteers, Phyllis embodied the spirit of resistance to the apartheid regime and the conviction that one day it would be overturned.

As Chair of Skillshare International, I returned to South Africa on a couple of occasions for regional meetings. These were held in Johannesburg, but in hotels in Sandton, a place I would never have gone in the old days. This was quite an eye-opener because I had never frequented rich white suburbs and it was a real shock to me to see the wealth in the local shopping centre – every second shop a gold and diamond jewellers. This was made especially stark to me as I was working for another charity and visiting a township nearby, which was extremely poor. It made me realise what an enormous gap there still is between the rich and poor, white and black, and what a long way there is to go to put all the injustices right.

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This book has been produced as part of the celebrations of the 10th anniversary of free elections and democracy in South Africa, coordinated by Network South Africa 2004.

It consists of accounts from a range of people associated with Skillshare International over more than thirty years, focusing mostly on those working or volunteering on programmes in the Southern Africa region. The people concerned were caught up in the struggles for independence in the region, some through choice, and some simply by being there. The diversity of contributions from people working in different countries and different sectors reflect the cost of the struggle against apartheid to those countries in the region that vehemently opposed the South African regime. Most of the stories are told here for the first time. Solidarity and comradeship with people across a physical and cultural divide, united in their desire for a just society, runs throughout these contributions.

In the post apartheid era, the issues have changed. HIV/AIDS appears central in the contributions as does the need for skills development and capacity

building. A new generation of international volunteers has become involved in the challenge of rebuilding and supporting the reconstruction and development contributing to a movement towards sustainable development of governments and civil society organizations throughout many parts of the region with local staff in support of partner organisations. Their stories, as they address the vital need for skills development and organizational growth as well as the impact of HIV/AIDS and poverty in general, reflect the challenges facing present day southern African societies and their governments.

The title, "To Whom it may concern", is taken from an extract from a short piece by Trevor Huddleston, who was until his death in 1998, President of Skillshare International, and represents a message that is as true now as it was then, when Trevor spent four decades attempting to bring the world's attention to the oppression that was happening in South Africa and its neighbours. But in this moment his words were "directed at all who understand the urgent need for deeper concern over the future of southern Africa."

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Mount Meru International Marathon Race Report

Sarah Lee is a health trainer at KCMC in Moshi in Tanzania

On Sunday, 1st August, 2004, a group of 28 people competed in the Mount Meru International Marathon in Arusha in Tanzania to promote Occupational Therapy.

The runners and walkers included students from Occupational Therapy (OT) and other disciplines, the coordinator of the OT school, local and international occupational therapists, doctors, physiotherapists and other workers from the KCMC hospital in Moshi in Tanzania. We also had some people working outside KCMC, both Tanzanians and foreigners, who joined us. Our team consisted of people from Tanzania, Kenya, Germany, Australia, France and England. Tanzanians made up half the team.

Occupational Therapy is still a relatively new profession in Tanzania with the School of Occupational Therapy only starting its training programme in 1998. At the moment there are only 18 Tanzanian trained occupational therapists. Therefore, a lot of people seem to have little knowledge of the profession and most importantly, of an occupational therapists ability to improve the independence and quality of life of people after disability.

This run was an ideal opportunity to spread the message of Occupational Therapy through the streets of Arusha for 42.2km.

Every day in Tanzania you hear the words "pole" or "pole sana" – as people express their sympathies with "sorry" and "very sorry". These words are said to someone carrying a heavy load while travelling or working, and to people involved in a multitude of other activities. People who are unwell or who have permanent disabilities hear these words every day.

On the day of the marathon all 28 of us, wore t-shirts saying: "Pole sana haitoshi. Wape walemavu nafasi." "Sorry isn't enough. Give people with disabilities an opportunity."

We started the race under a huge banner with the same words. It was incredible to run along the streets and see people in dallas stick their heads from the bus to read the shirts. To have local children run alongside us through the outskirts of Arusha, laughing as they realised that the wazungu (foreigners), were wearing shirts with a meaningful Kiswahili message. I don't think that I will forget the way Tanzanians read the message from the shirts out loud as we passed, and talked about it amongst themselves as we ran on.

The marathon was a great way to show the community that as health trainers we are actively making efforts to increase opportunities for people with disabilities. For occupational therapy, it was a fantastic way to make our profession visible. People contacted us from outside KCMC to enquire about OT because of the race publicity. And many workers within KCMC can now put the faces of the girls on the marathon poster to the profession of OT.

The race was a fantastic opportunity to build team spirit amongst workers and students at KCMC. Our team had three people complete the full marathon, two people ran thirty kilometres (one being Sarah), ten ran the half marathon, and other competitors ran and walked various distances. Two months ago I could never have imagined that we would have such an impressive team for this race. Then it was mainly Alexandra Groene (also an occupational therapist) and I, who were the only team members.

KCMC and Tuimaini University were integral to the success of the marathon, providing us with transport to the event and the opportunity to promote the event throughout the facility.

Thanks must also go to all those who have pledged money or already given donations. We sought sponsors for the race to raise money for Occupational Therapy, and this is now being collected.

If you would like to make a donation please email Sarah Lee on serrilymerrily@hotmail.com advising the amount you wish to donate and whether you require a receipt.

Special Study Module on Health and Development 2004, supporters and medical students.

Skillshare International and the University of Leicester Medical School completed successfully the 3rd year of the Special Study Module on Health and Development (SSM 2003). This year more supporters (Returned Development Workers and Health Trainers) contributed in the SSM as guest speakers, along with other external experts in the area.

SSM evaluations show that students' understanding of development, the role of NGOs and its implications of health issues in developing countries has expanded. The following contribution comes from a medical student that attended the first year of the SSM in 2002. It shows how the SSM has helped her to expand her professional experiences and has influenced the choice of her medical electives a year after finishing the SSM.

SSM student from 2002:

"Two years ago I was a 3rd year medical student studying health and development, a course set up with the help of Skillshare to give medical students who were interested an idea of the issues and problems surrounding healthcare in the developing world. Six months ago I got the opportunity to see for myself what it was like in the field. I spent 6 weeks in Botswana working in the paediatric department of the main hospital of the country. While I had studied the module I had been amazed that with HIV so prevalent so little was being done at a national level by so many of the governments. Botswana is an exception to the rule and was one of the reasons that I decided on it for my elective destination. However even though HIV treatment is available to all, and prevention of mother to child transmission (PMTCT) is a government policy there was still a huge difference in the standard of care compared to the UK. Children were sleeping on mattresses on the floor, and there was a shortage of some basic medicines that should have been available but were not. What shocked me the most was that even with free medical treatment and the option for mothers to prevent passing HIV to their children many still refused to be tested, and did not want to know if their child had had HIV when they died in childhood. Even with national advertising campaigns through all media routes people are still becoming infected, and around the city there are many orphanages, and children living alone and caring for each other as all their family has been killed by this epidemic. Hope is still there though, women are starting to join the PMTCT programme, and it was a joyful occasion seeing HIV positive women who had been on the programme coming for the test results and finding out that they had a negative child, one who can live free from the disease and hopefully grow up realising that they have been saved from a terrible fate. Hopefully in this way the next generation of Botswana will not become infected in their adult lives".

If you want to more about this exciting project, please contact Dr. Raúl Pardiñaz-Solis at Skillshare office in Leicester 0116 257 6629 or e-mail raul.pardiaz-solis@skillshare.org

Stop Aids Campaign Update

At the end of October the campaign's paper 'Access to Treatment and Care' was launched, providing the background to the call for a target for universal care and treatment being set at next year's G8 summit. To download a copy of the report please visit www.stopaidscampaign.org.uk/downloads/SAC_paper.pdf

Visit the Stop AIDS Campaign website too, to see how well Tony Blair is doing in the fight against AIDS.

www.stopaidscampaign.org.uk/Blairometer.asp

Skillshare International continues to be an active and involved member of the Stop AIDS Campaign, the campaigning arm of the UK Consortium on AIDS and International Development.

A Day in the Life of...

A Skillshare Health Trainer

A pachyderm tale
Dr Bharat Gadhvi is a health trainer with ASHWINI in Tamil Nadu, India

It's early evening and the sky is beginning its transformation to an orange and pink hue. The only sounds in the air are the characteristic distant call of a peacock and the trampling of leaves underfoot. We are returning from Glenrock, a Kattunayackan tribal village deep in the forest, where 10 families live, not cut-off, but distant from so called "civilised society". Our team of animators, health animators and a doctor have been to the village to discuss being part of the Adivasi Munnetra Sangam (AMS), a tribal people's collective, consisting of, and working for the 20,000 strong adivasi population of the Gudalur valley, in the beautiful Nilgiris district of Tamil Nadu in South India.

For over 15 years, along with its associated institutions, ACCORD, ASHWINI and VIDYODAYA TRUST, the AMS has been addressing politico-legal, socio-economic, cultural, health and education issues affecting the five different adivasi groups living in the area.

Today was a successful village visit. We were able to talk to many key members of the village. We also managed to see Janaki, a young Kattunayackan mother now on treatment for tuberculosis. Janaki's is a remarkable story of a young woman seriously ill with TB, whose

deep-rooted fear of the health system prevented her from accessing treatment until it was almost too late. Unexpectedly, we also saw another old friend of the Gudalur Adivasi Hospital, Ippi Vellutha. I will never forget bringing him back from his equally remote village of Yellamalai around a year ago (again with TB), nor the sweet taste of his wild honey, which he sold to our staff, as payment for his hospital bill.

As our jeep chugged its way up through the coffee and tea plantations, I saw a large grey rock a couple of hundred feet above. Next to it were several others of varying shapes and sizes. Within this distant grey mass, I suddenly saw two ears flapping. It took a few seconds to dawn on me, but once it did it brought with it a feeling of excitement, fear and awe, all rolled into one. One, two, three...seven wild elephants were grazing on the path above us. Life was never this exciting working in the UK NHS! As they heard the noise of the engine, they began to scatter. As we climbed further up the road we saw two adult elephants and two calves heading off into the trees. But where were the other three?

Radhakrishnan, a Paniya animator working with ACCORD since 1987, stepped out of the jeep to locate the whereabouts of the other three elephants. I could not resist the temptation, and followed him. As we tip-toed up the mud road, around blind corners, Radhakrishnan signalling to the jeep driver to follow behind us slowly, there they were. Less than 50 feet away, mother, baby and the biggest tusker of a father I have ever had the fortune, or misfortune, depending on how you look at it, of seeing. As the male turned to watch us jumping back into the jeep to drive off to safety, I felt a tingle down my spine. The sight of this magnificent pachyderm looking down on us, with a look of utter disdain: if looks could kill, I'd be well into my next life by now. It was an incredibly humbling yet, at the same time awe-inspiring experience. An experience that comes along but once in one's life.

Later that evening, as I was recounting the tale to my wife and daughter, I felt an overwhelming sense of privilege because as Skillshare health trainers with ASHWINI, my wife Deepa and I are

able to go to villages as remote and as beautiful as Glenrock regularly, to work with and learn about the adivasis of South India, and to mould young fresh minds to become future nurses and health animators, future leaders of their community.

Our work is all about building relationships. Indeed, the effectiveness of any NGO working at the grassroots level, will depend largely upon the strength of the relationships built up, both within the organisation and with the community that they work amongst.

So what does a typical day as a health trainer involve? Everything takes much longer here in India than in the UK. Everything. "Running hot water" sometimes involves fetching and heating it yourself. Breakfast doesn't come from a Kellogg's box, nor milk from a carton. At 7.45 a.m. there's a class to do for the future ASHWINI health animators and hospital nurses. That too in a language that was totally foreign to me, and just a little less foreign to Deepa, when we first came. A lot has changed in the three years that we have been here. Most of all the pre-conceived idea we had that we, as "trainers" have to do all the teaching. Often it's more about learning. And adapting one's methods and one's own "mental clock" to just slow down, absorb, not to expect so much.

For our now five year old daughter, Ambika, it's hard to know what she makes of all this. Or whether she will even remember this experience in years to come. I would like to believe that it'll help her to think a little differently, to not necessarily follow the "mainstream". Our family thought that we were crazy to put aside a potentially lucrative medical career in the UK to come and work in India. Twenty five years earlier they had moved in the opposite direction, from poor India to the relative riches of England. But wealth is about more than pounds, dollars or rupees. Our exposure to the tribal culture and value system has indelibly enriched our lives and our way of thinking. During the Skillshare Orientation and Pre-departure Training, I recall being told that health trainers and development workers often need counselling and considerable support when they return to the UK. I can see now how life is going to be quite difficult when we eventually return, at least initially. Our family initially felt that, in coming to India, it was something that we had to "get out of our system". "It", whatever it is, has in fact got very deeply ingrained "in our system". We don't see this experience here as a one-off. On the contrary, it has fostered a very strong interest in development work and the voluntary sector. Whether life in the UK will allow us to keep up this interest, only time will tell.

It hasn't always been plain-sailing though. All relationships take time to develop, some can go wrong through small misunderstandings, as we ourselves have experienced. We have seriously thought about leaving on a few occasions, but something has kept us here for nearly three years now. A major factor has been the support from Skillshare, especially from the India Office, and from the partner organisation here in Gudalur. It's more rewarding if you learn the local language, as we have done. It's also much easier when you come as a family, as we have also done. You have someone to share the experiences of a good day, as well as the frustrations of a bad one. Thankfully, good days, like this one, far outnumber the bad.



Skillshare International Ireland

Skillshare International Ireland has been successful in obtaining funds for the recruitment of two development worker/health trainer posts from the Development Cooperation Ireland. The posts are for a communications specialist and an advocacy specialist for an HIV/AIDS project and they will be recruited in the near future. The posts will be based in southern Africa.

Launching Skillshare International Ireland

Wednesday 7th July 2004 marked a special occasion for Skillshare International Ireland as the organisation was launched in something of an unusual way.

In fact a multi-purpose get together was organised with a number of key identified stakeholders – both individuals and organisations – to launch the organisation but also to engage in a consultation to facilitate us to set out our vision. The meeting also presented us with the opportunity to gather information that will be used to feed into the Corporate Strategy Development process.

The range of people invited included former Skillshare International development workers and health trainers, and more recent returnees from countries where we work. Here we acknowledge the support of Comhlámh (the Irish returned development worker organisation). We also invited the Irish development umbrella organisation as well as a number of development networks, campaigning and educational, the development section of the Irish trade union umbrella body and the Development Cooperation Ireland.

The evening was facilitated by the members of the Ireland board and was workshop based, enabling us to maximise on the event as a consultative tool.

We are very pleased with the evening and are satisfied that we achieved all that we set out to. For a report of the proceedings please email Fran Flood at fran.flood@skillshare.org

Make Poverty History in 2005

Next year something amazing is going to happen and we are going to be part of it! An unprecedented number of UK based organisations and groups have come together to form a powerful coalition to MAKEPOVERTYHISTORY. Focusing on the themes of aid, debt and trade, the MAKEPOVERTYHISTORY coalition aims to put pressure on the UK government to make a commitment to end poverty, and also to use the opportunities presented to them in 2005 – their hosting of the G8 summit at Gleneagles, Scotland and holding of the EU presidency from July onwards – to influence other key players to make lasting change, once and for all.

You'll be hearing much more about this in the media over the coming months. The campaign is launched to the public on January 1st 2005, and will be highlighted in the New Years Day screening of The Vicar of Dibley on BBC One. We'll tell you more about how Skillshare International is getting involved in the next copy of News. In the meantime, please visit www.makepovertyhistory.com/ to find out more, and keep an eye on our website, www.skillshare.org for regular updates.

Key points from the MAKE POVERTY HISTORY manifesto

Key points from the MAKEPOVERTYHISTORY manifesto

MAKEPOVERTYHISTORY urges the government and international decision makers to rise to the challenge of 2005. We are calling for urgent and meaningful policy change on three critical and inextricably linked areas: trade, debt and aid.

1. Trade Justice

Fight for rules that ensure governments, particularly in poor countries, can choose the best solutions to end poverty and protect the environment. These will not always be free trade policies.

End export subsidies that damage the livelihoods of poor rural communities around the world.

Make laws that stop big business profiting at the expense of people and the environment.

2. Drop the debt

The unpayable debts of the world's poorest countries should be cancelled in full, by fair and transparent means.

3. More and better aid

Donors must now deliver at least \$50 billion more in aid and set a binding timetable for spending 0.7% of national income on aid. Aid must also be made to work more effectively for poor people.

(Taken from <http://www.makepovertyhistory.com/docs/manifesto.pdf>)

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