

Dear Friends,

This season of celebration reminds us of the need to live a life of thanksgiving. If we focus on the amazing miracle of each new day and all the gifts we enjoy, beginning with life itself rather than all the troubling things around us, our world will be different – more joyful, hopeful.

Bob Striler

We lost our beloved Bob Striler in late September. Bob has said all his goodbyes long ago and was ready to move on to his new life. Imagine all the people who were no doubt in his welcoming home party! We miss him.

Parkland Patients

Doug was a Parkland patient living in a nursing home when he was referred to us last year. He was very ill from the beginning of our time with him but always content in his circumstances. Bob Striler visited Doug in the beginning but as it turned out, Kevin Jacks became his friend and advocate. He died in February. When we spend so much time with a patient who has no family in their life, they become like family to us. I've never seen anyone die with more grace and gratitude than Doug.

Rajmonda

We update you from time to time about Rajmonda who came to us in 2002 from Kosovo. She was without a language because she was deaf. She received a cochlear implant the next year and has been in speech therapy since that time. Rajmonda began her third year in college at Lamar University in Beaumont, TX this year. They have a wonderful deaf education program. The plan is for Rajmonda to graduate with a Bachelor's degree which will allow her to teach sign language in public school.

Jordan

Four of us journeyed to Jordan in the spring. The purpose of our visit was to listen to the stories of the refugees and those who assist them in the hope of finding new ways to help. We visited clinics, organizations and churches. One woman who is doing so much to help is also dealing with her own crisis. Her husband has MS and needs a motorized wheelchair that they cannot afford. One teenager was hit by shrapnel and has been so traumatized that he is afraid to leave his home. There are so many stories filled with grief, sadness and in many cases hopelessness.

The container that we had shipped arrived while we were there but it would take another five months to get it released. These are the difficulties that test our commitment to care for our brothers and sisters in such great need. Throwing up our hands in exasperation is not an option.

Containers

In our last update, I talked about the effort to involve other organizations, groups and churches in the shipment of containers. The Albanian-American community will begin in January preparing a container for the The Trauma Center in Prishtina, the capitol of Kosovo. We will soon be meeting with the Sudanese community to help them begin gathering needed items for South Sudan. We have a container that will be ready for shipment to Jordan the first of the

year. I'm expecting by this time next year, we will have containers going out of six facilities. And there will be more.

Conclusion

The work of helping others when there is so much need challenges us on every level. Most days are pretty ordinary with an occasional moment of excitement. And then there are those rare times when in a moment you see the incredible result of an effort.

Thanksgiving night I went to a celebration sponsored by the Albanian American Heritage Center of Texas. My friend, Sofije Kusari, was receiving the Lifetime Achievement Award, primarily for her work with refugees beginning in 1999. I was asked to say a few words about my work with Sofije and introduce the plan to begin again the shipment of containers to Kosovo.

People began coming by, one by one saying, "I will never forget what you did for my family." My mind was flooded with memories of appointments for people who had escaped the fighting and were required to write their horror stories in preparation for hearings. Then there were the trips to Kosovo where patients came with their medical records hoping we could help them. We did bring several to the U.S. for treatment. Many had lost limbs and others escaped without physical harm but lost family members. In some cases children were so traumatized that they could no longer play as a normal child would.

And here we all were smiling and living our lives with new hope. This is the amazing power of the human spirit. No one was forgetting the suffering and loss during that war or the suffering of those left behind still struggling without enough money for basic necessities. But they were not allowing that to dominate their lives.

I walked out of that gathering overwhelmed with emotion. I was amazed, grateful and filled with pure joy. This is the story of doctors, hospitals, volunteers from all religions and all walks of life giving. And their giving brought healing. This giving is the call within every heart, in every sunrise and in every flower. "Rise out of the ashes of your loss and disappointments and walk into the light of your new life."

Thank you for all the ways you give.

In gratitude,

Rae England

Needs: Wheelchairs, walkers, first aid items, toothpaste, shampoo, bar soap, detergent, children's clothes, diapers, diaper wipes, coats and blankets.