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VICS

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VICS at 40

Bob Colburn CSSp, VICS Director

2011 is a momentous year as VICS celebrates 40 years of service in Canada and around the world. A small seed coming out of the life-giving documents of the Second Vatican Council, it took root in 1971. The excitement and energy of VICS was clearly there in its very first year as volunteers set out for various East African countries.

So much has happened since then. Nearly 800 volunteers have come and gone, directors and office staff have served both short and long terms of service and the grassroots work of development and development education, both here in Canada and 'over there', has gone on unabated.

VICS has served in nearly every profession from hospital doctor to maintenance worker, from high school teacher to university professor, from community development worker to architect.

We look back over the past years in amazement. So much has been accomplished — schools and churches built, lives

saved, health enhanced, children and adults educated, hope and laughter shared, clean drinking water savoured, crops improved, buildings repaired, accounts kept — but, most importantly, friends have been made and bridges between “here” and “over there” have been built and solidified.

Special Celebrations

This 40th year has seen returned volunteers from across Canada join in special celebrations in Vancouver, Edmonton, Ottawa, Toronto and Antigonish. We have welcomed back former VICS Directors Fathers Dermot Doran and Daniel Abba, as well as Sally Kerr, who ran the VICS Office for 28 years. And we have celebrated — great memories shared, lots of laughter, old photos and importantly the recognition of belonging to a family — the VICS family. At every event you could hear the words “VICS changed my life!” or “I think of my life as ‘before VICS’ and ‘after VICS!’”





Above: VICS Directors, Bob Colburn CSSp, Dermot Doran CSSp and Daniel Abba CSSp. Inset: VICS founder Desmond McGoldrick CSSp.

We have also paused this year to remember and pray for the repose of the soul of the founding father of VICS, Father Des McGoldrick and for Father Ted Colleton who worked with VICS as Director of Fundraising for nearly 10 years. We have remembered 17 former VICS Volunteers who have passed away. May they rest in abundant peace.

Ongoing Commitments

The VICS Resale Centre in Toronto continues to serve the community and to be staffed by generous and hard-working volunteers. Betty Moore and those who work with her make a generous donation to VICS each year — this year realizing \$20,000 from their Resale Centre. We are also immensely grateful to our benefactors who over the past forty years have given generously to VICS, endowing it for the future and ensuring that the day-to-day expenses are met so that volunteers can continue to serve overseas.

Who would have thought those forty years ago that a movement, a force for change and, importantly, a force for hope had been created? Today many of our returned volunteers are engaged in justice and peace and development issues both at home and overseas with a variety of international agencies. A number are priests and religious sisters and brothers; many have raised their children in the VICS tradition and yes, some of these children, now adults, have served with VICS or are planning to go out as volunteers. Not one of our returned volunteers has forgotten their experience overseas!

As we celebrate these past forty years, let us remember and celebrate our reason for being — the VICS volunteers from Canada and now our local in-country volunteers presently serving in Tonga, Nigeria, Cameroon, Nicaragua, Ghana, Tanzania and Ethiopia along with other VICS projects in South Africa and Sierra Leone. ■

During the past forty years VICS Volunteers have served in:

Africa

Togo
Gambia
Zambia
Malawi
South Africa
Kenya
Tanzania
Uganda
Angola
Cameroon
Ethiopia
Ghana
Ivory Coast
Somalia
Sudan
Lesotho
Mozambique
Liberia
Morocco
Egypt
Zaire
Niger
Rwanda
Sierra Leone
Zimbabwe

South Pacific and Asia

Nepal
Tonga
Papua New Guinea
Samoa
Fiji
Japan
Kiribati
Nauru
Pakistan
Philippines
Yemen Arab Republic

Central and South America

Nicaragua
Brazil
Honduras
Bolivia
Peru
Paraguay
Guatemala

Caribbean

Trinidad
Grenada
Bahamas
Haiti
Jamaica
St. Lucia
St. Vincent





V.I.C.S. RESALE CENTRE
699-6032

The million dollar store

Ellen Herie,
VICS store volunteer

When the Spiritans launched their foreign mission programme in 1971 under the direction of Fr. Desmond McGoldrick, it was to provide Canadian Christians with the opportunity of actively participating in the mission of the church in the developing world. Volunteers with much-needed skills — teachers, doctors, nurses, engineers — would be sent to various countries to share their expertise with the local people. The organization was known as Volunteer International Christian Service, or VICS.

Father Ted Colleton was very active in fund-raising on behalf of the mission enterprise, and a group of lay Catholics, loosely organized as the “friends of Father Colleton”, got together regularly in order to support the missions. Among the initial members of this group were May and ‘Podge’ Fitzpatrick, Clare Calabrese, Terry Bennett and Betty Powers.

I talked with May Fitzpatrick about the early efforts of the group to raise money. It was obvious that there was an abundance of enthusiasm and commitment among them. They spent evenings together rolling pennies, organizing dances, bake sales and rummage sales. New members joined their group and new initiatives were launched. The rummage sales held in church basements on a regular basis were particularly successful.

Thus, helped by the efforts of many donors, the first group of volunteers were able to leave for the missions in the fall of 1971.

Opening a resale centre

Rummage sales called for a location to store clothing and other articles and deliver them to and from the church

basements, so the suggestion was put forward to open a permanent location — a second-hand store.

In October 1980 Ray Sisk donated a small storefront office on Kingston Road near Main Street — the first VICS store. However, it soon became apparent that the space was far too small to effectively store and display all the donations that were pouring in, and shortly after, a new location near the Winchester Arms on Kingston Road at Victoria Park Avenue replaced Ray’s office. Betty and Charlie Moore had by this

They spent evenings together rolling pennies, organizing dances, bake sales and rummage sales.

time become very involved in fund-raising efforts for VICS. Betty worked at the Winchester Arms location, as well as subsequent locations, and is now manager of the present store.

Another store was opened at Queen and Broadview Avenue in 1982, run by Josie and Frank Whelan. It closed a year later.

Then in 1983, the group opened yet another store on Gerrard Street. It ran successfully for one and a half years under the direction of Clare Calabrese and Betty Moore.

It is interesting to read some of the store advertisements that appeared in local publications and flyers. A flyer announcing the opening of the first store “just West of Murphy’s ice cream store” reads, “A large variety of good second-hand clothing at

They call themselves helpers or coordinators, but after careful consideration it is obvious that Clara Calabrese and Betty Moore are experts at marketing, merchandising, and management, and the success of the VICS Resale Centre on Kingston Road in Toronto presents the evidence.

The store, which stocks men's, women's and children's clothing as well as books, knick-knacks and small appliances, is a model that many organizations could study and profit

from when it comes to volunteers meeting with great success. Betty is responsible for keeping the place clean, and she does this by ensuring that the windows and glass in the store sparkle, and the floors are washed often, and that the place 'has a good smell to it'.

Clara Calabrese helps with the coordination — arranging shifts for the 30 volunteers who staff the store six days a week from 10am to 5pm.

As well as selling to the public,

there is the mammoth job of sorting everything that comes in through the drop boxes at St. Joseph's Church, Highland Creek. Some of the pieces of clothing must be taken home and washed, ironed or 'de-fuzzed' as Betty explains, and then brought back in saleable condition. The present location at 872 Kingston Road is now operating with great success.

Barbara Klich
VICS Newsletter, 1989

the right prices — also, all kinds of other goods...". An ad that appeared in the *Scarborough Consumer* invited customers to "Visit VICS store today ... for attic treasures. Clothing may be second hand but it will look like new!"

For several years, used clothing and other articles were supplied to the store from a drop-box set up on the grounds of St. Joseph's Church in Highland Creek. At first, volunteers drove the donations to the store in their own vehicles — Podge Fitzpatrick and Ray Sisk among others. Eventually Charlie Moore arranged for a van to be purchased to transport the goods to the stores.

One location needed

It became evident that it would be necessary to consolidate the VICS stores at one location if any substantial amount of money was to be made for the missions, so the search was on for a suitable location.

On her way to St. John's Church one morning in the fall of 1984, Betty Moore noticed a 'For Rent' sign in the window of 872 Kingston Road. It seemed an ideal location for a new store. She encouraged Father Doran to enter into an agreement with the owner, and VICS opened the present store on



Shirley Reilly and Betty Moore at work in the store.

October 1, 1984 under the management of Clara Calabrese and Betty Moore. The other stores were closed.

The store at 872 Kingston Road is still operating successfully today, having become a well-known and well-loved fixture of the neighbourhood. The list of volunteers who have worked at the store and contributed to its success is too lengthy to include here, but God knows who you are!

Not only has the store contributed to the VICS mission an estimated \$1,000,000 through the years, it helps numerous seniors and our less well-to-do neighbours to purchase affordable clothing and household goods as well as providing an outlet for goods which might otherwise end up in the landfill. One further priceless benefit of the VICS store is the many friendships that have developed among the volunteers.

Hats off to the store ladies

Father Bob Colburn, Director of VICS since 2006, wrote in his 2011 Easter newsletter, "*And then there are our store ladies, those who under the direction of Betty Moore run a great VICS Resale Centre in Toronto, and whose annual gift to VICS makes a real difference to our financial bottom line. Hats off to the store ladies!!*"

In recounting some of the ups and downs of running the store over the years, Betty Moore confided to me once, "I truly believe God will keep the store going as long as he wants, so all we need to do is show up and keep working." The women who make up the list of volunteer workers at the store, along with Ann O'Brien who does the banking and takes care of the financial reporting, continue their hard work to ensure the success of VICS Resale Centre, and value the opportunity of being a part of the important work of the overseas volunteers.

We are forging ahead. Sales are good, donations are pouring in, and we thank God that he has blessed this enterprise which started so many years ago in a little storefront office and has become a successful business — no mean feat in the present economic environment. I am continually privileged to be part of such a wonderful, hard-working group of dedicated volunteers. Hats off to the store ladies indeed! ■

Journey of a lifetime

Kathy Murtha
Scarboro Mission
Centre Director



On a remarkable summer-like day in late October. In the early 1980's I boarded the Queen Street car in the west end of Toronto and headed east to the last streetcar stop. It was my 24th birthday and I wanted to do something really big to mark the occasion — something that might open up future horizons for a gal from the small town of Lindsay who had spent her life safely between the covers of books studying life, but not actually living or tasting it.

I had an appointment at the VICS office at 2475 Queen St. to explore the possibility of embarking on a two-year overseas volunteer assignment. Perhaps now I would be able to put a real face to some of the world's poor I had been studying and writing about in graduate school. A delightfully engaging blond Irish woman, Sally Kerr, greeted me at the door and proceeded to lead me up the stairs to the large front office. For the next two and half hours I was mesmerized by the story of VICS and the adventures and learnings of volunteers who had

set off for foreign lands. As the afternoon wore on and the room filled with the smoke of the cigarettes we shared, along with stories of our own lives that led us to this place, I knew I had found a home in this volunteer Christian community.

There to see me off

Fourteen months later on an unbelievably bitter, cold, icy, stormy January morning before dawn, my parents were navigating the treacherous 401 to get me on a plane to the Highlands of Papua New Guinea. No one in their right mind would venture out on such an inhospitable day. So you can imagine my great surprise when I got to the ticket counter and there was Sally and Dermot. They had come to see me off. The memory of those two indomitable leaders of VICS in the early hours of that cold January day never ceases to warm my heart.

I actually had no idea where Papua New Guinea was when Fr. Dermot Doran joyfully informed me that he had an ideal assignment for me. After 6 years of University I was embarrassed to admit my gross ignorance. I simply nodded with as much enthusiasm as I could. Upon returning home I ransacked my floor-to-ceiling bookcase for any mention of Papua New Guinea, before informing the crowds awaiting my news. No luck. Standing there baffled in the middle of my living room, Papua New Guinea had already begun to have an impact on my life.

Appreciating "The Other"

I began to realize the severe limitations of my perspective. Almost all my books were written by American/European white males working in a University setting. What would the world look like if I could turn it upside down and begin to try to see it from the perspective of, let's say, a young poor black



mother from another part of the world struggling to feed her children?

My journey of a lifetime had begun. A startling shift was taking place within me. During my VICS orientation in Trinidad one of the key facilitators spoke of the importance of undergoing a Copernican Revolution, where we remove ourselves and our culture from the centre of the world and see and appreciate “The Other.” This gave me the language and the understanding to begin to grasp what was happening to me. The process was accelerated during the orientation by the presentation of a real map of the world — which accurately depicts the true size of countries. Africa dominates the world stage with its massive presence, while England looks so much smaller than it has previously been portrayed.

I was heading for “the world down under.” Papua New Guinea, I was relieved to discover, is an island just north of Australia. So it was inevitable that my world would be turned upside down and given a good shaking. There are 750 different languages on the island of Papua New Guinea. I was being sent into the very centre of the island to the Huli people of the Southern Highlands, a stone-age tribal people who were first ‘discovered’ in 1956. Until that time we never knew they existed, nor did they know that we existed. I had no idea that there was a stone-age culture in the world, let alone that it might be possible that I could meet them and even catch a glimpse of the world through their eyes. This was a trip of a lifetime!

“Not in Kansas anymore, Dorothy”

Fr. Doran sent me off to the far reaches of the earth with a wonderful companion from Ottawa, Dorothy Wood. Dorothy was a rich fountain of wisdom and intelligence, not to mention reading material and music, both precious commodities in the outbacks of PNG. Together we ventured into the unknown. Upon arrival at Port Moresby, the capital, we were greeted by

the Capuchin Fathers and Franciscan Sisters we would be working with in the Southern Highlands. The only way into the centre of the country was by small plane. We had to wait for what promised to be a clear day, in order to avoid running into the face of the high mountains — one of the risks of getting in and out of middle of the country.

I don’t think I’ll ever forget the day we first sailed above the majestic mountains of the Southern Highlands and descended upon the small dirt airstrip of Tari. High above the clouds Dorothy and I shared our lofty hopes and dreams for the two years ahead. As the plane descended and the fluffy clouds disappeared, we gasped at the sight of countless bare-chested

I began to realize the severe limitations of my perspective ... A startling shift was taking place within me.

men dressed in leaves running down the mountainsides with bones in their noses carrying bows and arrows and spears. I turned to my companion and said, “I don’t think we are in Kansas anymore, Dorothy.” Whereupon she nudged me out of the plane first. Shortly after I discovered that one of the major sources of entertainment in Tari was greeting the arrival of any plane and seeing who was coming and going.

The middle of nowhere

After a rocky, dusty trip in the back of a pickup we arrived at St. Joseph’s Secondary School compound. It seemed like the middle of nowhere. It was totally deserted as everyone was on holidays. As darkness descended our entire little cottage



Kathy Murtha and Dorothy Wood in Papua New Guinea.

became completely covered with these large black shelled insects. I had never seen cockroaches before. I never thought they could be that big and could fly. The only place that wasn't completely covered by these black creatures was the kitchen table. At this point I was deeply grateful to Fr. Doran for sending me overseas with Dorothy who came prepared for any emergency. She just happened to have the making of a PNG equivalent of a hot toddy.

My job was to teach English and Drama to the first generation out of the stone-age. English was going to be the official language to bring the diverse cultural-language groups together. The boys wore leaves to school and the girls wore grass skirts. They had no last names as last names had not been developed yet, nor did they know how old they were according to our calendar. They started school whenever an elementary school came into their area. By the time I encountered these Huli students they had eight years of schooling in English and were proficient in three to four different languages. They were gifted story-tellers and had an amazing capacity for poetry. Stories, I discovered, were the foundation and glue that held the community together and gave it meaning.

“You are here and you have blood”

My students were my “way” out of the school compound into the villages where I might begin to see the world through the eyes of the Huli people. This wasn't easy. The doors didn't begin to open until after my Holy Thursday visit to the Tari hospital.

The hospital consisted of patients on dirt floors and an intensive care unit with iron beds decked out with stained sponge mattresses. As I greeted the spirited young doctor from Saskatchewan an unearthly wailing grew louder and louder as a massive group of distraught Huli people came down from the mountains to the doorstep of the Tari hospital. They were holding aloft a young man who had been shot with arrows.

He was bleeding profusely and his life was endangered. The Canadian doctor informed the mourners that the injured man needed blood immediately in order to survive. At this point the man was suddenly deposited at the hospital entrance and the crowds dispersed. It didn't make any sense. The doctor explained that the people believe that their blood is their life force and if you take away their blood you are taking away their life. But don't worry, he assured me. You are here and you have blood. Upon being tested, it was discovered that I am a universal donor.

Minutes later I woke up beside the injured Huli warrior and his bows and arrows on the sponge mattress. That's where the people placed me after I fainted. I never got to know the guy, but some ex-pats took pictures. When I finally returned to my classroom, the students gazed up at me with amazement. I had risen in their estimation. I had survived and my blood was now in their people's blood. Now the doors to their homes and lives began to open.

Two different worlds

Many times I had entered into “another world” somewhat like Alice in Wonderland. I grew up with the notion that black is black and white is white. That is a fact of life ... Not necessarily so. While in my culture white is the color of weddings and black is the color around funerals, in the Highlands of Papua New Guinea it is completely reversed. The bride and the groom cover themselves completely in this shiny black paint, while mourners spend months covered in white mud.

Europeans, as all outsiders were referred to, were constantly remarking that they found the Huli people rude at times. We are so accustomed to saying “Thank you” as a sign of respect. The people had no words for “Thank you” and were therefore not given to our practice. Meanwhile myself and other “expats” in our haste to get to our destinations were constantly stepping over the Huli people's legs and belongings as they were sitting on the ground. This was the supreme mark of disrespect in the Huli culture. God knows what all I did to those poor people.

Every so often the American Franciscan Sister who ran the school would manage to bring in some movie and we would eagerly set up the projector and screen in the barn-like cafeteria. The villagers with their entourage of pigs and chickens would join the students for these rare cinematic events.

Mary Poppins was a smashing hit in the outbacks of PNG. The people were keen to know what magic we used to make the animals dance. But most of all they wanted to know what trick lifted the umbrella and the person under it into the air. Sr. Lorraine, the Vice-Principal/Science teacher firmly informed them that due to the laws of gravity it was impossible for a person to rise from the ground. The film was simply make-believe. The people didn't seem wholly convinced. The next day at Mass we celebrated the Ascension of Our Lord into heaven — and they wanted to know if he had an umbrella.

The fire in the middle of the room

When I first met the Huli people I felt overwhelmingly sorry for them. They seemed so poor. They lived in small grass huts with dirt floors. Their few possessions consisted of a cut-off oil drum in the middle of the room which served as a fire place for warmth and cooking, a few blankets, a couple of pots and pans and some tiny plates, perhaps an umbrella or two. I thought my students would be enthralled by the comfort of our homemade couches with soft cushions, but they admitted that they were extremely uncomfortable. They kept looking for the fire in the middle of the room which we could all sit around.

During my second year in PNG I overcome my initial culture shock. I began to notice that these so-called “primitive-tribal” people had set up a society in which everyone had a home with land to grow their own food. Here in the Southern

I began to notice that these so-called “primitive-tribal” people had set up a society in which everyone had a home with land to grow their own food.

Highlands everyone had meaningful work, including the elderly who were constantly in the company of one young person or another. The place of the elder was at the centre at the fire. They were the ultimate story-tellers, educators, and spiritual advisors. Their presence and stories gave meaning and coherence to the community. I was once asked about the old people in my country. I remember informing them that we had special separate places where we put people when they got old. The villagers wrinkled their noses and shook their heads with pity.

Another thing I noted was that there was little division between rich and poor. People basically had access to the same resources. If you wanted to be recognized as a powerful leader in traditional Huli society you generously gave away of yourself, time and material goods.

In essence, I received from the people I went to help an alternative view of how a society might be set up. Here people came before profits and all had a rightful and dignified place with a roof over their head and food to eat. The experience continues to give me much to think about.

“Our church” and “my church”

The journey I took with VICS many years ago was a journey of a lifetime. These days I find myself reflecting on the powerful experience I had of the Catholic Church there. The missionaries to the Southern Highlands had facilitated a dynamic coming together of Christianity and Huli culture and spirituality. It was new, fresh and full of surprising energy. The Bishop wholly discouraged any efforts to bring in experts and foreign

building materials to replicate our Western European version of church. Their round churches were built by the people themselves with their own local material. People sat on the ground. The churches also incorporated many of the important symbols and rituals of the Huli people.

There were not enough priests for every parish, but this did not hinder the life and growth of the faith communities. The priest had many parishes under his direction and visited them every two to three months. In the meantime the laity were empowered to run their own communities. In this context their gifts flourished. You truly had a sense that the church belonged to the people, who quite naturally and rightfully spoke of “our church” or “my church.” To this day I continue to be struck on how we in Canada tend to say “the church” as if it is something outside of ourselves, something that is being done to us.

A few months before I was to return to Canada, my students came banging on the front door of my cottage in the early hours of the morning. “Miss Kathy, Miss Kathy, there is some terrible news about your country. It is on the front page of the National Papua New Guinea paper.” My heart sank. In the two years I had been in PNG I hardly had any contact with the outside world. We did not have access to phones or internet. A letter took 6 to 8 weeks to get to the Southern Highlands, if it ever arrived. So this must be really serious news to reach me there.

I rushed out onto the veranda and the students lifted up the front cover of the PNG National Paper and the headline read “Shortage of Priests in Canada” and there was a picture of a modern day white male with arms stretched out on a cross and the caption read “Dare to be a Priest.” With touching concern my students looked at me and said, “Miss Kathy, perhaps you need to go home, they need you there.” ■



Michael Doyle CSSp — the coming together of Christianity and Huli culture.