

Cuso International's magazine on global volunteering

CATALYST

FALL 2021

CELEBRATING
60 YEARS





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Photo: YouLead Project, Nigeria



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Catalyst is published
by Cuso International.

Cuso International is a Canadian charity committed to ending poverty and inequality. Cuso works with local partners around the world to improve economic opportunities for all, enhance women's and girls' empowerment, and advance gender equality. Through skills sharing, we are building sustainable futures. Each year, we amplify our impact by mobilizing hundreds of professionals who volunteer their time and provide their knowledge.

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Please send your comments, ideas and submissions to:
editor@cusointernational.org

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Catalyst is also
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Contents

- 2 Message from the Programming Team
- 3 A New Vision Sparks Hope
- 5 Successful Agricultural Program Comes to Life
- 7 Education Key to Ending Child Marriage
- 8 Perspective: Richard Schwalm
- 9 Flashback
- 10 Spotlight: #IamCuso
- 11 Education as a Means of Fighting FGM
- 14 60 Years and Counting
- 18 Fishing for Life
- 20 Alumnotes
- 24 Lives Lived

On the cover: Nadette, Porto Nuevo, Benin **Photographer:** Brian Atkinson

14



18



11





Above: Volunteers Kristi Denby and Carolina Freire in Tarapoto, San Martín, Peru.

From the Programming Team

In a year like no other, working with our partners to drive programming forward for their communities continues to inspire us. Together with our volunteers and legion of supporters, we are proud to continue to initiate and build programs that cultivate lasting change.

Inside these pages you'll read about our recent work in action, including our efforts to end child marriage in Cameroon, to fight female genital mutilation through education in Benin, to spark new hope for women entrepreneurs in Colombia, and to introduce women in Honduras to a traditionally male-dominated fishing industry.

And of course, Cuso is celebrating 60 years. In 1961, our pioneering founders began supporting change by sharing their skills in several communities around the world. Much has changed since then, however Cuso's drive and dedication remain the same. Every moment, and every program worked on, is important, and each iteration of Cuso over the past six decades has brought innovative strategies to tackle poverty and inequality in long-term, sustainable ways. Six decades on, Cuso International is still going strong.

The stories in this issue reflect how and why our efforts matter, now more than ever. We hope you connect with them as much as we do.



Tania Shephard
Head of Programs,
Latin America and the Caribbean



Anna Squier
Head of Programs,
Africa



Above: Clevis at her artisan vendor stand in Cali, Colombia. **Photographer:** Carlos Andrés Miranda

A New Vision Sparks Hope

in Cali, Colombia

In Colombia, the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted an economy already reeling from the Venezuelan refugee crisis, which has seen more than 5,000 people cross the border daily. Since March 2020, unemployment rates have soared to 14 per cent, with women 70 per cent more affected than men.

“The problems we had before COVID-19 are much greater now,” says Alejandro Matos, Cuso Country Director, Colombia.

In 2016, Cuso launched a program to help new immigrants who require training and vocational support, as well as those fleeing civil unrest and

gender-based violence. The program, known as SCOPE (Sustainable Colombian Opportunities for Peacebuilding and Employment), continues to provide practical solutions for women and men seeking employment, as well as providing consultancy for companies who wish to fill positions.

Growing up in a small coastal village that experienced armed conflict, Clevis Berrio wanted to escape its aftermath and erase the vivid memories of violence that were etched in her mind. She also needed to leave a partner who had taken up arms and threatened her life. She eventually found refuge in Cali, Colombia.



Above: Clevis showcasing her hand-crafted journals. **Photographer:** Carlos Andrés Miranda

It was here that she started to dream again. As a talented artisan, Clevis began imagining herself as an independent, successful business woman.

With the little money Clevis had saved, she was able to set up a small vendor stand in an established market close to her new home. With no training or business education, she was soon overwhelmed by her new venture. Struggling to manage her accounts, unsure of how to market her products and not comfortable networking with other business professionals, she was at a crossroads. With no close friends or family nearby, and dwindling savings, Clevis thought her only solution was to return to her home. The universe had other plans.

Fundacion Carvajal, one of Cuso's SCOPE partners, heard of Clevis's struggle, advising her she would be eligible for training and support. She quickly signed up. In a short time, with the help of a mentor, resources and access to retail information and tools, she improved her business knowledge and entrepreneurial know-how. The program also provided her with financial aid for transportation, food and other basic needs, as well as a computer and internet access.

"Supporting employment opportunities for vulnerable populations with technical-vocational training, and improving the business acumen of skilled workers, is the foundation of this program," says Alejandro.

Leaning on the training and resources she received, Clevis was able to create a business model that improved the sale of her handmade products, attracted more interested buyers and ultimately led to successfully formalizing her business. Today, Clevis is an independent entrepreneur who has traded in memories of violence for dreams of a promising future. She hopes to one day mentor other young entrepreneurs.

To date, this skills and training program has enabled 9,176 people like Clevis to access well-paying and productive jobs in the telecommunications, hospitality and service, food, manufacturing, construction and sales sectors. "Sixty-nine per cent of the people who come through the SCOPE program are women," says Alejandro. "These investments are showing dividends. They contribute to the livelihoods of individuals, but also to local communities, and are strengthening the country's peacebuilding process." ■

Successful Agricultural Program Comes to Life

It is not just crops that are growing in Tanzania's Morogoro and coastal regions. So, too, are optimism and new business opportunities for local women and youth.

To promote agriculture and agribusiness as an option for self-employment for youth and women in Tanzania, Cuso is working with the Sokoine University Graduate Entrepreneurs Cooperative (SUGECO), as well as local government, academic and private sector partners to deliver the Kizimba Business Model. Launched in early 2021, the model was created to boost employment in the agricultural sector and bolster agriculture as part of the country's national GDP. The innovative platform is also contributing to stable economic growth by using the country's raw materials and increasing Tanzanian farmers' connections to larger supply chains.

"Our partner has built an ecosystem where different actors play their specific roles," says Romanus Mtunge, Cuso International's Country Representative, Tanzania. "Up to 800 tenants can farm a tract of land, each supported by casual skilled labour."

To date, 1,000 hectares have been mapped out for women and youth agribusinesses to farm mango and soya beans. There is strong market demand for these crops, which may in turn create new employment opportunities as well as interest from investors.



Above: Sanavita addresses malnutrition in Tanzania through agribusiness engagements and by involving smallholder farmers.

“The support has been a catalyst of change in many areas for Tanzania.”

— Revocatus Kimario, SUGECO’s Executive Director

Mtunge predicts the program will help employ 5,000–6,400 youth per year, including entrepreneurs like 25-year-old Fatuma Mbaga. She is the founder of Get Aroma Spices—a small-sized producer and distributor of natural and dried food spices such as ginger, cardamom, cinnamon, black pepper, lemongrass and masala. Fatuma’s company buys raw materials from local farmers and then washes, sorts, dries, packs and distributes spices to wholesalers, retailers, supermarkets, hotels and other customers.

The initiative has provided Fatuma with valuable tips and tools for business management, record keeping, writing business proposals and developing marketing strategies. “My business has expanded and I’m now able to supply five regions around the country and I’ve attended more than 40 exhibitions,” says Fatuma. She now has her sights set on expanding her business across all of Tanzania, one day operating her own production facility and providing employment opportunities to other women.

Revocatus Kimario, SUGECO’s Executive Director, is thrilled with the project’s success to date, feeling it is making a tangible impact on efforts to close the country’s gender gap. Without Cuso’s support, “the gap would be higher than it is,” says Revocatus, who has seen firsthand the positive impact the program is having on women and girls.

“Many like Fatuma have benefited through the program,” adds Revocatus. “The support has been a catalyst of change in many areas for Tanzania, touching the lives of marginalized populations. Cuso is doing a great job in supporting our country’s development agenda.” ■



Top: Workshop led by the District Health Department and Tanzania Food and Nutrition Centre.

Bottom: Program participants

Education Key to Ending Child Marriage

When Sakinatou Bobo was 17, her mother and father were faced with a difficult decision. Approached by a much older man with an offer of marriage, Sakinatou's parents knew that agreeing to this proposal meant alleviating the ongoing financial burden associated with supporting their daughter.

In Cameroon, 30 per cent of girls between the ages of 15 and 18 are married. "When a girl is married at a young age, against her will, her chances of receiving an education are significantly reduced," says Ginette Sindeu, Project Manager, Cuso Cameroon. "Child marriage perpetuates inequality, gender-based violence and a cycle of oppression that keeps girls and women dependent on their husbands." Defined as a form of violence against women and girls, Child Early and Forced Marriage (CEFM) is a violation of human rights that Cuso International, in partnership with the advocacy groups Women in Alternative Action (WAA) and Queens for Peace, is committed to abolishing in Cameroon.

"Cuso is helping educate influential women (Queens) in Cameroon with

transformational knowledge and skills," says Francois Awounkeu, Cuso Country Representative, Cameroon. "We recognize that creating long-term impact happens at a local level, and WAA and Queens for Peace have the reach, respect and influence needed to put an end to this violation of women and young girls' rights."

To date, several members of Queens for Peace have successfully intervened to stop scheduled CEFM—leaders like Queen Moustafa in the village of Denssa, Northern Cameroon.

Hopeful that there may be an alternative solution to marrying her daughter off for financial stability, Sakinatou's mother Salamatou reached out to her local advocate, Queen Moustafa. "It is my privilege to educate women and girls about the many risks associated with CEFM. I am committed to acting as a guardian over my fellow women and village by informing them of these realities," says Queen Moustafa. "If we unite to abolish CEFM, we also fight to abolish gender-based violence and poverty."

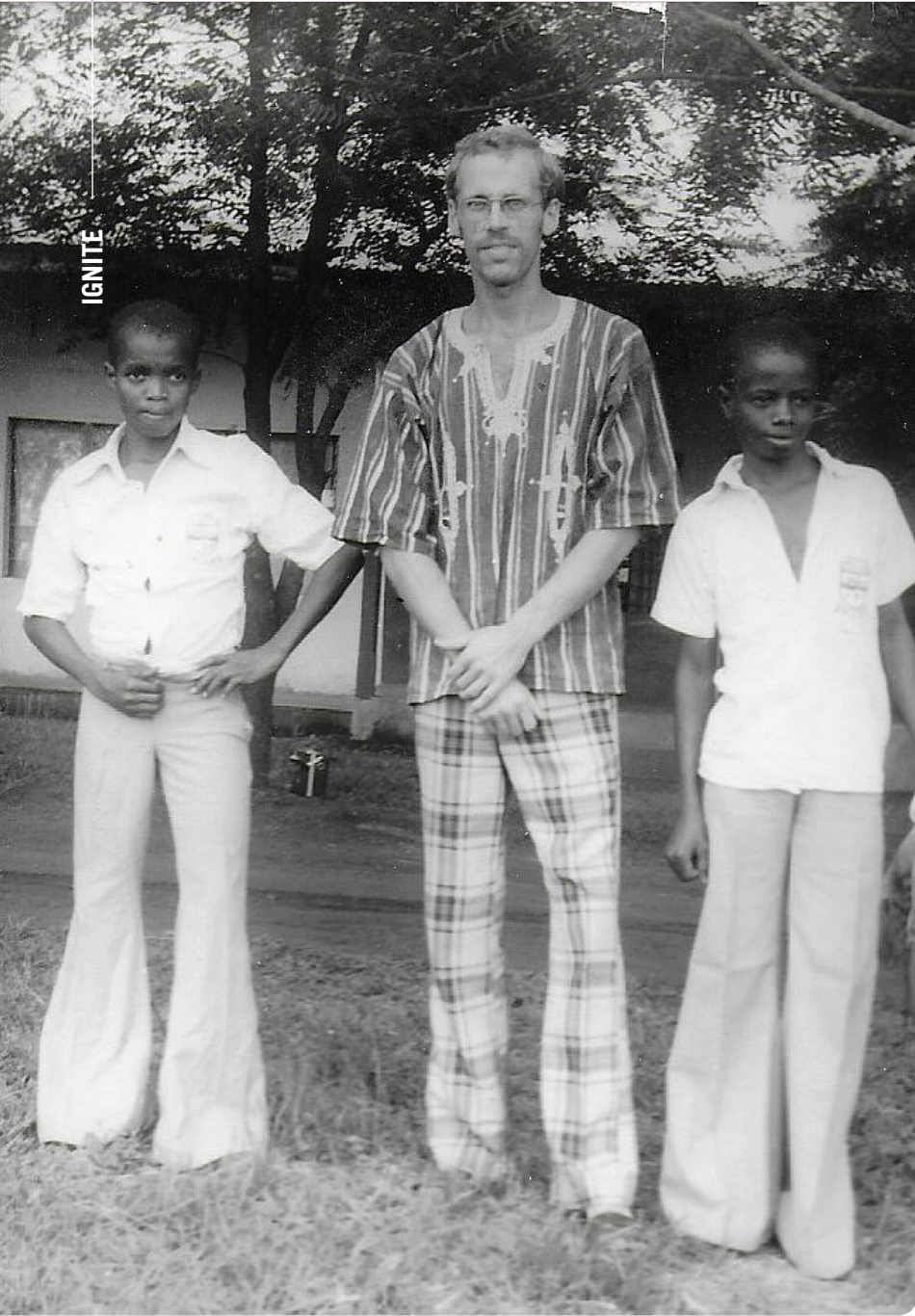
Taking time to sit with Sakinatou and Salamatou, Queen Moustafa



Above: 30 percent of Cameroonian girls between the ages of 15 and 18 are married.

was able to dissuade her from engaging her only daughter in a marriage she was not physically, emotionally or mentally prepared for. "The offer of a financial allowance to pay for Sakinatou's schooling removed financial concerns and allowed her to continue her studies," says Queen Moustafa. Now on track to complete her high school diploma, Sakinatou will be able to further her education, achieve her dreams and marry on her terms when she decides. Sakinatou will be one of 48 per cent of Cameroonian girls to complete her high school diploma.

"I believed I was honouring tradition and doing what was best for my daughter by marrying her off at a young age," says Salamatou. "I now know and appreciate that education is the only solution to ending a practice that puts young girls' lives and livelihoods at risk. I am grateful to Queen Moustafa for adjusting my crown and the crown of my daughter. I hope Sakinatou will grow to be a strong, influential woman like Queen Moustafa one day." ■



Perspective: The Road to Brotherhood

By Richard Schwalm

Through many shared adventures, Richard, Oliver and Philip have travelled a long road from friendship to brotherhood. Here is part of their story, as told from Richard's perspective.

Photo: Richard, standing with Oliver (left) and Philip (right), in Nigeria

As a Cuso International volunteer, my path started at the end of my final year at St. Patrick's College. Not sure what to do after graduation, I had a chance meeting with a social worker who invited me to a town hall meeting with Cuso International. I was recruited as a TOEFL (Teacher of English as a Foreign Language) volunteer for a two-year placement in Algeria, where I was posted to Batna in the fall of 1974 and then in Tiaret, in the fall of 1973. Following a summer vacation in Ottawa in 1974, I continued my volunteering with Cuso and was posted to Saint Brendan's Secondary School near a small village, Iyamayong, located in Cross River State, Nigeria.

Within a few months of my arrival at Saint Brendan's, I was introduced by the principal to Oliver Oji, a 12-year-old boy from Old Ekuri, who lived with his uncle in Ohana. In January 1975, I was asked to take in Philip Oyama, an 11-year-old boy from Iyamitet. Oliver had to trek 3 km from Ohona to the school (and back every day) after having done

morning chores for his uncle. Phillip had to trek 7.5 km from his home in Iyamitet and back daily. I took both young students as boarders and paid their tuition fees, as was the local custom for teachers to help those students who could not afford to use the boarding school.

Over the next two years, through many shared adventures, Oliver, Philip and I began what would be a long road through friendship to brotherhood. I am happy to say that I have continued to connect with Oliver and Philip over the years.

Oliver, as well as his wife Rebecca, have PhDs—Oliver in international development (biodiversity conservation and livelihoods) and Rebecca, in human resource management—and are currently tenured lecturers at the University of Calabar. They are involved in numerous ecological foundations dealing with climate change, reforestation and gender equality. Philip is the Deputy Director, Agricultural Extension in Cross River State, Nigeria. ■



FLASHBACK

Who do you recognize? Help us dust off this memory by sharing your stories or identifying those in the photo. Please email us at editor@cusointernational.org. Submissions will be shared via the next edition of *Catalyst* and online at cusointernational.org/stories.

Did you recognize anyone in this photo?

We asked our readers to send in their best guesses. Here's part of what we received.

“ This is the 1969–1971 Caribbean contingent, taken at St. Francis Xavier University in Antigonish, Nova Scotia, in late August 1969 after six weeks of teacher and cultural training. I am the second person from the right in the second row from the top. Lois Bateman is in the very centre of the front row. Also in the picture are Fr. Howie Gardiner, the Program Director and his assistant Diane.”

- Norm Biram, Trinidad and Tobago 1969–1972

Read more at cusointernational.org/stories.



SPOTLIGHT

#IamCuso

Sara Shuster

📍 Ghana 1983–1985

Volunteering in Ghana as a nurse in two different small, rural communities, in both a hospital setting and outpatient clinic, my responsibilities included direct nursing care, health education, health promotion and some administration.

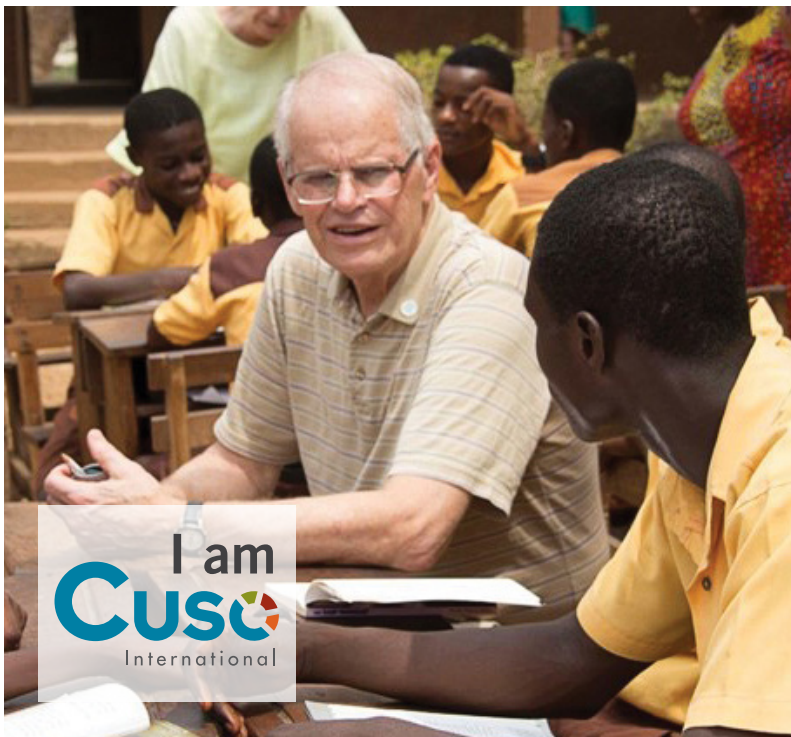


My favourite part of working with Cuso was the opportunity to travel and live in a country so very different from my own. I treasure the many conversations I had with local nurses, learning about their lives and sharing stories about our common experiences and challenges.

The biggest impact for me has been my own personal growth. It was a privilege to work with a variety of local staff and other Cuso volunteers, delivering basic

health care to members of the community. I gained important insight into the challenges that the local people face and also to the strengths and skills they have to offer. I learned so much from the experience and I continually make efforts to apply those lessons in my current life and work.

#IamCuso because I believe the organization strives to build capacity with individuals, communities and other groups in a way that is mutually beneficial.



Colin McNairn

📍 Tanzania 1963–1964

Volunteering in Tanzania as a tutor with first-year law students at the University College, Dar es Salaam, I am proud to say that several of the students I tutored went on to become senior officials and judges in their home countries of Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania.

My favourite part of volunteering was the opportunity to contribute to the development and evolution of a brand-new university, and witness the heady times associated with the first few years of Tanzania as an independent country.

#IamCuso because of an abiding commitment to international development. ■



Above: Agnès, left, and other village leaders have played a key role in the success of the project. **Photographer:** Brian Atkinson

Education as a Means of Fighting FGM

As the only girl in her village who has not undergone the practice of female genital mutilation (FGM), 15-year-old Rachidatou has felt isolated, displaced and different.

“My village practices FGM as an honourable and necessary exercise,” explains Rachidatou. “Even though I’m very afraid, it is something I have always believed I should do.”

Her attitude is common among girls in northern Benin, particularly in the regions of Borgou and Alibori, where FGM—a practice rooted in tradition and passed on from generation to generation—still persists.

By educating women and girls about sexual reproductive health rights, FGM and gender-based violence, Cuso is transforming women’s lives as well as



Above: Community leader Amidou Noura

“A lot has changed in this village since I took part in this project. The girls live without fear of being circumcised and many people have changed their minds about their plans to have their young daughters circumcised.”

— Amidou Noura, Community Leader, Benin

the overall health and well-being of communities across Benin. Cuso’s commitment to this work is aligned with the United Nations’ and World Health Organization’s commitment to abolish the practice, which is a violation of human rights.

Workshops train local female ambassadors to become agents of change in their communities. As

identified leaders, they take great pride in their roles and are committed to educating the next generation of girls like Rachidatou about the many risks associated with FGM.

Upon hearing about her daughter’s desire to undergo FGM, Rachidatou’s mother wisely directed her to Amidou Noura, a change agent. A mother of eight

and a respected community leader, Amidou chose to participate in a Cuso workshop where she learned about the reasons for not undergoing FGM, and why the practice has persisted for generations.

“Before attending the workshop, I thought the practice of FGM was necessary for a girl’s success,” says Amidou. “I learned that FGM is a dangerous practice that communities exercise in part because we know no different. Upon learning this, I knew I wanted to do more.”

Amidou clearly outlined the consequences to Rachidatou, using picture boards and resources so that she could truly understand the risks for her future if she underwent the procedure. Clearly recognizing the dangers, Rachidatou has since given up her plan to be circumcised.

What’s more, Amidou’s presence and influence have alleviated Rachidatou’s pressure to fit in with her peers. And the baton has been passed as Rachidatou now hopes to influence girls younger than herself and one day plans to become a community leader like Amidou.

“A lot has changed in this village since I took part in this project,” says Amidou. “The girls live without fear of being circumcised and many people have changed their minds about their plans to have their young daughters circumcised. Women approach me to explain their problems and together we find solutions.”

Despite a growing acceptance not to practice FGM, it sometimes continues underground. In many communities where the government has outlawed FGM, many perform it illegally, in secret and at times unsanitary conditions, which puts women and young girls at even greater risk.

Cuso’s efforts to end the practice of FGM also extend from communities to school and college classrooms, where young female students are taught about the negative impacts of this practice. With support from Benin’s Ministry of Education, Cuso has identified existing school clubs and supported the creation of new clubs with women’s health and well-being firmly on the agenda.

As a result, more than 150 school clubs in northern Benin now have messaging against gender-based

violence (GBV) and FGM. These clubs have developed action plans promoting the abandonment of FGM as well as teaching self-defence strategies.

“We plan to train teachers from these schools and school club supervisors in order to strengthen their knowledge of GBV and FGM and enable them to effectively fight against it from school,” says Landry Faton, Cuso’s Acting Country Representative in Benin.

With so many successful projects and efforts, young women in Benin like Rachidatou are pursuing brighter futures with less pressure, less violence and more opportunities. ■



Top: Young students are being taught the negative impacts of FGM.

Bottom: Efforts to end the practice of FGM extend from communities to school and college classrooms.



60 YEARS & COUNTING

TOGETHER, WE'VE BEEN CREATING BRIGHTER FUTURES SINCE 1961

In 1961, a small group of Canadian university students envisioned a more connected world—a world where everyone had the opportunity to reach their full potential, regardless of their circumstances.

They were inspired by a growing overseas volunteer movement that emerged the year before, spearheaded by university-based initiatives such as Canadian Overseas Volunteers and Canadian Voluntary Commonwealth Service.

Building on this momentum, Canadian University Services Overseas (CUSO) was officially established

June 6, 1961 at a meeting of the National Conference of Canadian Universities and Colleges at McGill University in Montreal.

Travelling to developing countries such as India, Sri Lanka, Malaysia and Tanzania, Cuso's first volunteers were bursting with enthusiasm, eager to fill skills gaps in fields such as education and health, while working alongside local community members.

By 1963, nearly 100 Cuso volunteers departed for placements in 15 countries. The following year, Canadian Overseas Volunteers and Canadian Voluntary



Previous Page: Nadette, Porto Nuevo, Benin **Top Left:** Christine, Inga, Tess and Mariba, Jamaica **Top Right:** Kate Martin, Tanzania
Bottom Left: Lan Dihn, Guyana, 2018-2019 **Bottom Right:** West Africa Orientation, 1969

Commonwealth Service were fully merged with Cuso.

Six decades later, that vision has remained the foundation, turning Cuso into one of Canada's longest-serving international development organizations, known for creating sustainable, long-term solutions to some of the world's more pressing concerns.

To date, it has placed more than 14,000 skilled volunteers—from nurses to business leaders—in more than 100 countries, leading the movement along with local partners to improve the well-being of millions of people around the world. This passion and dedication to pursue effective responses to development issues has enabled local communities across the globe to become the architects of their own development success.

“Our work continues to seed long-term, sustainable solutions to combat poverty and inequality,” says Patricia Perez-Coutts, Board Chair of Cuso International. “While Cuso’s programming and

geographic footprint have changed over the years, the commitment to a better world for all has never wavered.”

Cuso’s tools and strategies to advance gender equality and social inclusion, increase access to education, develop sustainable economic opportunities and enhance women and girls’ sexual and reproductive health rights continue to support equitable communities around the world. And, as always, they are delivered by dedicated staff and volunteers who possess the same energy and spirit as Cuso’s founders.

“Generations of people on four continents have benefited from Cuso programs,” says Patricia. “We are honoured to celebrate the lives of those who have contributed, the donors who have supported us, those who have benefitted and those who continue to passionately pursue creating a more inclusive world for all.”

A more in-depth look at Cuso's history reflects the organization's progress and reach.

- The 1970s marked the beginning of Cuso's involvement in the anti-apartheid movement of the African National Congress, among other movements in South Africa.
- The early 1980s saw a shift, with more women pursuing volunteer postings to promote local women's participation in improving the social and economic well-being of themselves and their families.
- In the 1990s, following Nelson Mandela's prison release and his historic presidential election win, Cuso's work in South Africa included organizing agricultural co-ops. These offered communities the ability to support themselves by growing local produce instead of relying on imported food aid.
- Further north, in 1996, Cuso was the only non-governmental organization in Sierra Leone during the civil war that focused on networking, and promoting sustainable development, gender equality and democratization.
- To mark the turn of the century, Cuso unveiled its Jubilee 2000 campaign for debt relief in some of the world's poorest countries.
- In 2015, Cuso launched its five-year Volunteer Cooperation Program focused on sustainable economic growth, access to health services, gender equality and social inclusion around the globe. This program positively impacted 2.5 million people in 17 countries.
- The following year, Cuso's Midwives Save Lives project was launched in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Tanzania, Benin and Ethiopia, improving the lives of 1.5 million pregnant women and their newborns.
- In 2017, Cuso launched its Canadian Program in partnership with Indigenous communities in Canada's north. A year later, Cuso introduced Women Engaged for Human Dignity in Northern Benin to address the harmful, illegal practice of female genital mutilation and to support young girls and survivors of gender-based violence.
- Earlier this year, Cuso introduced its Sharing Canadian Expertise for Inclusive Development and Gender Equality (SHARE) program. The new seven-year Volunteer Cooperation Program is operating in 10 countries.
- Today, Cuso International collaborates with communities around the world to help end poverty and inequality and build opportunity for vulnerable people across Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Canada's north. ■



Top to bottom: Genevieve Potvin, Nicaragua, 2017; Jessica Ortega (centre), Peru 2016; Richelle Matthews, Kenya 2008-2009



Celebrate with us!

Visit our dedicated webpage and explore more memorabilia, testimonials, videos, stories and podcasts from our archives, and special video greetings in celebration of Cuso's 60th anniversary.



[Click here to explore the webpage](#)

Top (left to right): Debra Son Martyn, Myanmar 2018-2019; Volunteers, Thailand 1969–1970

Second row (left to right): First group of Cuso volunteers, 1961; Alan Culham, Molepolole, Botswana, 1974-1977; Chelsey Berendse, Bolivia 2016-2019

Third row (left to right): Volunteers, Colombia; David Beer and friends



FISHING *for* LIFE

A group of Honduran women cast their nets to become more self-sufficient and to feed their families and communities.

Photo: Fisher Lucrecia Padilla (left) and Joise Gonzales, in Omoa, Honduras. **Photographer:** Kevin Peña

In early November 2020, Honduras was battered by Hurricane Eta, bringing widespread flooding and forcing hundreds of thousands of people from their homes. Just two weeks later, Hurricane Iota hit. Incessant rains, widespread floods and landslides caused damage to almost all areas of the country.

The pandemic and the impact of these natural disasters have made accessing healthy food even more challenging for many vulnerable populations in Honduras.

To offset these obstacles, Cuso's partner Centro de Estudios Marinos is teaching women how to fish while promoting sustainable and responsible fishing practices. Despite an ancestral connection to fishing, in the Honduran communities of Chivana, Muchilena, Las Flores, Estero Prieto and Omoa, fishing is primarily a male-dominated activity. In fact, only one local woman was experienced with building and repairing fishing nets. Determined to help her community, she set out to share her skills.

"I'm dedicated to fishing, I'm a fisher," declares Lourdes Salinas. "Fishing is too often seen as a male activity, but now we will be taken seriously," she adds. Alongside partner Centro de Estudios Marinos, Cuso

“ This project highlighted once again the importance of gender inclusion in sustainable development.”

— Karen Pavon, Cuso Country Representative, Honduras

organized a workshop under Salinas’ tutelage. Salinas taught 34 local women how to cast, use hooks and repair fishing nets. Under their mentor’s watchful eye, the women learned responsible and sustainable fishing methods, as well as the area’s fishing guidelines. They learned to accurately measure their catches and recognize smaller fish that should be returned to the sea.

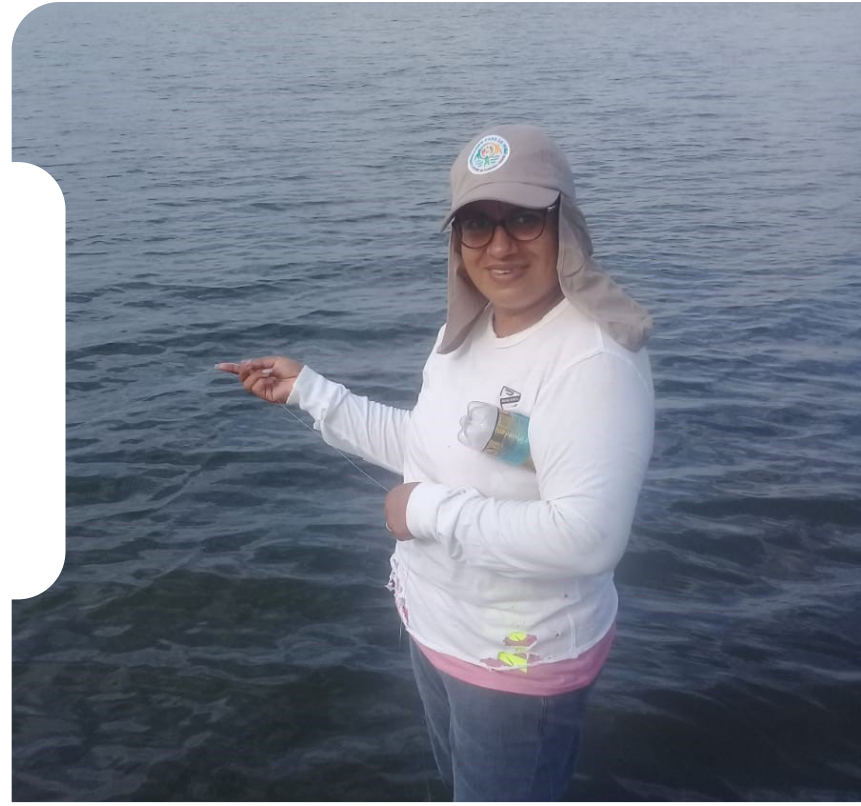
After the workshop, all of the women were given a kit of basic fishing supplies—essential tools that will enable them to better feed their families.

“Women can fish and can be part of bringing sustenance to our homes,” says Salinas, who hopes the skills these 34 women have gained will be passed down to future generations. Fishing for Life teaches us to be responsible now so we can have what we need in the future. I wish for a better life for our children and our families; this is a dream that every fisherwoman has,” says Salinas.

“This project highlighted once again the importance of gender inclusion in sustainable development,” says Karen Pavon, Country Representative for Cuso in Honduras. “If you give a woman a fish, you feed her for a day. If you teach a woman to fish, you feed her, her family and her community for a lifetime.” ■



[Click to watch the video](#)



Top: Fisher Dalia Gomez **Photographer:** Kevin Peña

Bottom: Migdeli Vargas Portillo, a fisher from Omoa, a municipality in Cortes, one of the most impacted regions hit by hurricanes Eta and Iota. **Photographer:** Kevin Peña

ALUMNOTES

SHARE + CONNECT

Editor's Note

Please note that your Winter issue of Catalyst will be published online only, and we want to make sure you receive your digital copy. Call 1-888-434-2876 x 295 or message us at alumni@cusointernational.org to update your contact information.

Kenneth T. MacKay (right)

📍 Ghana 1962–1964

I consider we were the first Cuso volunteers. Others will argue that U of T's-COV or UBC or the Caribbean CVCS were there first, as they were already in the field and then became part of Cuso. But our group in 1962 were the first Cuso volunteers recruited, trained and sent by Cuso. I had learned about the formation of Cuso in September 1961 during a Student Christian Movement (SCM) fall conference at Lake Muskoka. When I returned to the University of Manitoba, I, along with my friend Fred Harland, organized the U of M–Cuso committee. Then we applied and were selected, as we were both to graduate in April '62 (Fred took a few more years before he got overseas). I then attended the first Cuso Annual Meeting in June 1962 as one of the

U of M delegates. It was while standing in line in the cafeteria that Louis Perinbam asked me



if I would prefer Africa or Asia. My reply of “Africa” determined my future.

Then in July–August of 1962, 50 of us convened at Macdonald College in Ste. Anne de Bellevue for a month's orientation with the expectation that most of us would be going to Nigeria (as they had requested 50 teachers). It was not to be. At the end of orientation, just one person (John Adams) had a firm posting to Jos, Nigeria. Three of us—Roy Fisher (Nigeria '62–'64), Bill Godolphin (Nigeria '64–'66) and myself—picked up a drive-away car and drove to Calgary, advertising Cuso of course. When we stopped at my house in Winnipeg, there was a telegram advising that I had been accepted for a school in Ghana

(six weeks later, when in Ghana, I received an acceptance to teach at an agricultural college in Northern Nigeria). We continued to Banff, then I hitchhiked back to Winnipeg with a sign that slightly confused my potential rides—Africa.

Peter W. Ackhurst

📍 Tanzania 1969–1971

At long last, a 16 mm movie made in Malaysia about forestry there where I served as a Cuso volunteer after graduating from UBC has been put on YouTube featuring—you guessed it: ME! I am sharing it with you to prove to Mr. Fry that I really did do “bush” at one stage of my career in the tropical jungles of Malaysia. Malaysia from 1971 to 1974. Enjoy!!



Jacques Jobin

📍 Uganda 1969

I wish to inform you that my son Stéphane (pictured below), born a Cuso volunteer in Burundi in 1966, has been appointed as Canadian Ambassador to Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

“I have always been told I was a Cuso baby, having been born in Burundi when my parents were there in the '60s for SUCO/Cuso. We have a large and active development program at our Embassy here and I look forward to opportunities to collaborate with you,” says Stéphane Jobin, Ambassador Designate of Canada to Ethiopia and permanent representative designate to the African Union.

Ankur Mahajan

📍 Ghana 2012–2013

My name is Ankur Mahajan, and I'm a Canadian government employee based in Ottawa. I am also a former Cuso volunteer and was positioned in the region of Walewale, Ghana, as a Livelihoods

Development Advisor. Now I have authored a book relating to my experiences of West African countries. The book discusses the cultural observations, gender issues, religious and political context, corruption issues, security, climate change, dating/marriage culture, etc. It also looks at everyday challenges of the resident population due to ongoing conflicts. The book is globally launched and published. I hope it can provide value to understanding everyday life in Ghana from an international employee's perspective. I have opened all my personal and intimate experiences while living in Walewale, and ways to adapt to the country.

The book is titled *Life Beyond Bullets: Memoir of Life in rural Afghanistan and West Africa*. The book is now available at Chapters (Canada), Barnes & Noble (USA), Waterstones (UK) and other prominent stores around the world. It is also available globally on Amazon.

lifebeyondbullets.com

Greg Meehan & Sharon Hope

📍 Nigeria 1972–1975
& Nigeria 1972–1974

Interested in a West Africa 1972–1974 reunion? There are no settled plans for date and location yet, but Sharon Hope (Dambatta '72–'74) and Greg Meehan (Kano '72–'75) are trying to gauge interest in such a gathering, probably in late summer or early fall of 2022. By that time, it will likely be possible to travel and meet in groups again.

If you think you might be interested, check out the Facebook group [Cuso West Africa 1971–1975](#) or email Greg at gmeehan2@xplornet.ca. Looking forward to hearing from you.

Nancy Christine Edwards (below)

📍 Sierra Leone 1978–1981

My Memoir, *Not One, Not Even One*, is filled with community health stories of hardship, tension and heartache buffered by breakthroughs, resilience and humour. Readers will witness village encounters and meet local advocates for health improvements.

I share experiences of re-entry, recalibration, and a reboot as I return to Canada yearning for a career in global health and development. Readers will join me as I consider the roles of cultural insiders and outsiders, come to grips with my stance on female circumcision and grapple with how to respond during Sierra Leone's civil war.

Expected publication date: early 2022.





John Soehner (above)

📍 Malaysia 1972 - 1975

In April of 2019 I was “tracked down” on Facebook by Francis and Angie, two students I had taught in Malaysia back in 1974 and 1975! Francis had retired from IBM and took on a project to find his “Cegu” or Teacher, Mr. John here in Canada. Theresa, Francis’ wife, carried out a Facebook search, contacted my brother in Calgary to see if he had a brother that had taught in Sekolah Menengah Sulaiman back in the early- to mid-seventies. Bingo, my brother contacted me and I responded to Theresa’s inquiry. Within minutes Francis was emailing me!

Francis came to Canada and did his Grade 13 at Cosmopolitan College in Toronto, and then attended York University where he was in the Honours Economics Programme. On his return to Malaysia he worked for IBM and when a job

opportunity came up to work with IBM Canada in 1990 he and his wife returned to Canada. Angie attended the Malaysian National Science University in Penang, Malaysia, studying Honours Biology. She and her husband emigrated to Canada some time in the 1990s. Now I am none too certain if having a Canadian science teacher back in those Bentong days had anything to do with their choices for Canada, but...

We have spent time together since, for a beer in Bobcaygeon and at Farren Lake, north of Westport, for extended weekends to take in the fall colours.

Neill McKee

📍 Malaysia 1968–1970

Hello all. My new book, *Guns and Gods in My Genes: A 15,000-mile North American search through four centuries of history, to the Mayflower* is doing well.

Here is my first interview on the book, and how I wrote it to have universal appeal for those interested in tracing family history or with interest in the themes I chose in North American history—especially the comparisons between the US and Canada:

See a brief description and places to buy, as well as prepublication reviews [here](#).

Stan Combs (below)

📍 Vanuatu 1987–1989

Hi, I am in the final stages of publishing (via the British Friends of Vanuatu) a memoir of my and my wife’s (Holly Morgan) and our two young daughters’ (Heather and Laurel) 1987–1989 time as Cuso volunteers in Lakatoro, Malekula Island, Vanuatu. It covers the subjects of Vanuatu, the realities of international development where the rubber hits the road and, as I put it, “Little House on the Prairie meets South Pacific”. Frankly, it is more of a hobby project than a moneymaker. Nevertheless, I think it might be of interest to Cuso returned volunteers and prospective volunteers.





Merle E. Kindred (above)

📍 Jamaica 1978–1980
Guyana 2017–2018

Immersed in Guyana: A Senior Volunteer's Adventure shares the mundane and the magic of my two turbulent assignments in Guyana. Working on organizational improvement with a local NGO is filled with the human drama of life with 90 per cent of the country's population in Georgetown.

Guyana is resource-rich and a biodiversity hotspot. Later, readers ride with me on rivers to remote Indigenous territories where villagers want to fulfill their dreams of ecotourism. We share birdwatching and fibre arts interests that become tools for communication and empowerment.

Expected publication in 2022.

Umeeda Switlo

📍 Belize 2014–2015

While volunteering in Belize with Cuso International, Umeeda Switlo discovered a very special Allepey turmeric that had a very high curcuminoid content (7.6 per cent) compared to other turmeric roots around the world, which had a maximum of 4 per cent. This type of turmeric is more bioavailable and is delicious. The discovery has now turned into a blossoming business. “We work with over 300 small growers in Toledo, Belize, where no pesticides or herbicides are used, no watering, trees planted and more. We take pride in doing international development with a twist. We have a positive impact on the community and its environment.” They are now in over 1,500 retail stores and online through Amazon and Well.ca.

Hanna Karin

📍 Tanzania 2011–2012
Myanmar 2018–2020

Art for Freedom (photo right) tells the story of the first month of the military coup in Myanmar through the eyes of the Art for Freedom artists. It is not easy to fight a war with words and images, but that is exactly what the people of Myanmar attempted to do when their fragile democracy was

crushed by a military coup on February 1, 2021.

Artists joined forces and shared their imagery online for use on signs, posters, t-shirts—anything to bring attention to the human rights violations of the Tatmadaw, the name of the Myanmar military. The RCA Art for Freedom exhibit highlights the diversity of art styles and illustrates the creativity of the civilians in trying to peacefully regain democracy.

This exhibit is the creation of Hanna Karin, who returned from Myanmar in May 2020 after volunteering for two years in Dala with the social enterprise ChuChu.

The exhibit poster can be viewed online [here](#).

Art for Freedom can be viewed online [here](#). ■



LIVES LIVED

REMEMBERING OUR VOLUNTEERS



Ron Hornby (above)

📍 Trinidad and Tobago 1965–1967

It is with great sadness that the family of Ronald Alan Hornby announces his passing on January 6, 2021, at the age of 82. Ronald was born on April 29, 1938, in Chatham, Ontario. He went on to study at both the University of Toronto and University of Waterloo. From there, Ronald embarked on a journey that saw him volunteer with Cuso. Upon his return, Ronald ventured into the travel industry and then worked as a teacher. Among his greatest passions were travelling, visiting

foreign countries and experiencing some of the greatest wonders on earth, including an ascent of Machu Picchu in Peru. Ronald will be lovingly remembered by his children, Aaron and Kyle (Vashti), sister Marilyn and grandchildren Roderick, Raya and James. He will also be remembered by niece Melissa and nephews Michael and Mathew.

Michael G. Heptinstall

📍 Uganda 1995–1997 | Nepal 2000–2001

Michael George Heptinstall passed away from a heart attack August 4. Born in England in 1937, Mike emigrated to Canada at the age of 13, settling in Aurora. It was there he met his future wife, Jaqueline Wrixon. Married for 56 years, Mike and Jackie raised three children. He leaves behind his family both here and in the UK. Mike spent his career as a teacher and principal with the York District School Board but was a tireless volunteer with many causes. After retiring he and Jackie spent several years volunteering with Cuso overseas, first in Uganda and then Nepal. Upon returning home they moved to Bracebridge and became involved in the community there. He will be warmly remembered by many friends and all who came to know him.

Allen Karabonik (below)

📍 Zambia 1966–1968

Allen Harvey Karabonik was born in September of 1936 in Edmonton, Alberta, and passed away on July 12, 2020. He is survived by his sister, Elizabeth Riou, and numerous nieces and nephews. Allen is predeceased by his mother Eva Karabonik (nee Chrunik); father, Michael Karabonik; sister, Irene Kashuba; and brother, Harold. Allen was a brother, uncle and friend to many. After graduating from Calmar High School, he studied at the Provincial Institute of Arts and Technology (now SAIT) for two years. From 1966–1968, he was a volunteer with Cuso, where he helped build a new telephone communication system. He was employed at the National Research



Council of Canada in Ottawa from 1960 until he retired in 1995. He had many interests and hobbies, including swimming, photography, amateur radio, walking, travelling and videography.

John Mayne

📍 Thailand 1967–1969

John Mayne passed away peacefully on December 18, 2020. As a young man, John signed up for a two-year assignment in Thailand with Cuso. While there, he met Suree, his soon-to-be bride and lifelong partner. John loved Thailand and in his later years he and Suree split their time, living both there and in Canada. After receiving his PhD in operations research from Northwestern University in 1973, he joined the Canadian Public Service and worked in various central agencies, where he played a major role in the development of program evaluation in Canada. He retired from the public service as a senior advisor in the Office of the Auditor General of Canada. After retirement, John became a consultant and advisor in international development. He consulted to many international development organizations, including The World Bank, Asian Development Bank, Organization of American States, Gates Foundation, UN Secretariat and several other UN agencies. In 2006, he was named a Fellow of the Canadian Evaluation Society. His friends and colleagues around the world will miss him greatly.



Martin E. Horswill (above)

📍 Kenya 1966–1968

Martin E. Horswill passed away on November 6, 2020. He was a stalwart member of the music community in his local town. Horswill and singer Shannon Lythgoe were among the founders of the Amy Ferguson Institute, a local non-profit organization that supports, produces and promotes vocal arts in the West Kootenay and commissioned the opera. Much of Horswill's life was spent in community service, both in Nelson, British Columbia, and overseas.

Ronald S. Gentile

📍 Nigeria 1971

Ronald Gentile died January 26, 2012, in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, at age 79. Ron lived an extraordinary life, touching the lives of many people across the world. Ron and his sisters came to Toronto from Timmins, Ontario, for their

high-school education. After graduating from St. Michael's High School, Ron studied at Assumption University in Windsor. John worked in many different careers across many parts of the world. He worked to achieve social justice and basic human rights for all groups, particularly the poor. His enthusiasm for life and people, and his generosity and loyalty will be greatly missed. Ron leaves his sisters, Anne Beach of Naples, Florida, and Margaret Petrone of Elliot Lake, Ontario.

Donald W. Lehman

📍 Ghana 1990–1991

Donald W. Lehman passed away peacefully on January 14, 2018, in Lethbridge, Alberta, at the age of 79. Don is survived by his wife, Doreen, with whom he enjoyed 56 years of happy marriage. He is missed by his children, Greg, Lori (Randy) Whillans; grandchildren, Jessica, Holly and Bobbi; and great-grandchildren, Jadie and Jace.



Wojtek J. Winnicki (above)

📍 Thailand 1974

Wojtek Winnicki passed away in Montreal on May 2, 2018, at the age of 69. He is survived by his beloved children, Sophie, Mat (Ellie and Layla) and Alex (Karolane), his wife and many colleagues and friends. His children will remember him as an affectionate man, a gourmand, a great lover of music, an animal lover and someone with a good sense of humour. First and foremost an educator, Wojtek devoted his entire life to education. A tireless worker, he has dedicated himself to adult education, literacy, continuing education, entrepreneurship and international education. His contribution has been undeniable. An enigmatic man with a strong personality, a great intellectual, a visionary, a humanist, a leader, a motivator, a professional, a music lover, a polyglot, a traveller. Happy are those who will have known only one aspect of this complex and

passionate man. He left without expectation, in silence, having given everything. “Life and death are one, as the river and the sea are one.” – Khalil Gibran.

George R. Foster

📍 Papua New Guinea 1982

George Ronald Foster died on July 24, 2004, at Moncton City Hospital. He touched many people throughout his life with his laughter, his love and his hugs. George was employed with Fundy National Park for many years and had a love for politics, bowling, curling and volunteer work. He was born in Montreal, Quebec and was the son of the late Ernest and Annette Foster and husband of Jennifer Edwards. In addition to his wife, he is survived by six children, Erin Joyce, Kenneth, Neil, Nancy, Sheila and Lorraine, and several grandchildren.

Elizabeth Shears

📍 Ghana 1975

Elizabeth Shears passed away on October 24, 2020, at the age of 70 after a lengthy, courageous battle with illness. During her life, Elizabeth excelled on many educational journeys. Her professional attributes allowed her the opportunity to work for the British Embassy in Riyadh, teach at Mount Saint Vincent University and work as a nutritionist and public health advisor for the Nova Scotia Department of Health. Volunteering was also a huge part

of her life. Elizabeth had a love for travelling. She was fortunate to have seen many parts of the world, while embracing their cultures and contributing to their society. Together, she and her husband would continue their travels to Toronto, then Ghana, to work with Cuso. She was supportive, loving and, despite obstacles, she remained strong for her loved ones. She was charismatic, strong-willed and compassionate.

Ronald William Burrell (below)

📍 Malaysia 1971–1973

Ron Burrell passed away suddenly on October 24, 2020, of a heart attack. Ronald was born on February 2, 1947, in Harvey, New Brunswick. He grew up with his brothers in New Brunswick. Judith Elspeth (Eppie) Burrell (MacKnight) met Ron at the University of New Brunswick (UNB) in 1968. Ron was some glad he met Eppie because she helped him buckle down and study



to complete his degree in forestry. Ron loved the forest, nature and the wild, and he was able to have a long career in forestry, launching off that good education at UNB. Eppie married Ron on September 4, 1970, and they quickly started a life of experiences, heading on a grand adventure to Malaysia and other far-flung places with Cuso. He went on to have a successful career in the forestry industry. He was a leader, dedicated to the environment and to a life in public service, including his volunteerism in the Beaverlodge Trust, the Greenway Land Trust, Rotary and civic politics (with two mayors elected).

Orval Morningstar (below)

📍 Malaysia 1987–1989

Orval “Butch” Morningstar passed away on February 17, 2015. Butch was born in Port Colborne, Ontario, on July 15, 1954, and raised in Niagara Falls where he maintained lifelong friendships with his childhood buddies. He received a BSc from the University of Guelph,



and an MSc in geomorphology from Simon Fraser University before working with Cuso International in the villages of Borneo. Butch enjoyed spending time at the family cottage in Dunnville, Ontario, a good game of golf, Christmas, camping, his dogs, music and a fine glass of red wine. But, most of all, he was known for his love of family and friends. Butch believed in, and lived, the core values of life: honesty, integrity, respecting others' opinions and treating others as they wished to be treated.

William K. Pertch

📍 Tanzania 1964–1966 | Nigeria 1985

William Kurt Pertch died at home in Chatham on September 4, 2016, at the age of 90 years. Born in Gottingen, Germany, in 1926, son of the late Elizabeth (Gothe)

and Henry Pertch, William is a retired school teacher. He is survived by relatives in Germany and predeceased by a sister and brother.

Donna F. Borsos (above)

📍 Guatemala 1992–1994

Donna Frances Borsos passed away peacefully at Toronto Grace Hospital after a lengthy battle with ovarian cancer. Always a traveller, Donna left her Toronto birthplace while in her early twenties to find a life that mattered to her, and eventually found it. She chose to settle into life in Marcelin, Saskatchewan, and Ixtahuacan, Guatemala. Donna was an intelligent, independent person who cared deeply about the people of her community and family, and made many friends along her way.

Paul C. Paquette (below)

📍 St. Vincent 1964–1966

It is with deepest sadness that the family of Paul Paquette shares the news of his sudden passing at home on August 21, 2020. Born on September 25, 1939, in Woodstock, Ontario, Paul is survived by his beloved wife of 57 years, Anne (Kenney), his children Ellen (John) Reinhart, Greg (Faith), and Monique. Paul was the joyous grandfather of Jake, Will, Christian, Jessica, Job and Eric. Paul was an eldest brother, faithful friend, inspired teacher, photographer, philosopher, nature lover, art enthusiast, dog whisperer and life-long learner with a child-like joy for life, love and family.

**Robert Hiles**

📍 Nigeria 1981–1984

Robert Hiles, beloved husband of Carolyn Joy Hiles (nee Kennedy), passed away on January 3, 2021, at the age of 63. He passed away peacefully after battling a series of complications following open heart surgery. He graduated from Carleton University with a degree in genetics. He followed this by working in Nigeria with Cuso for three years as a teacher and eventually vice principal. Robert met his wife through Cuso. His love of travel led him to become a travel agent. Rob led a full, beautiful and colourful life. He remained a diligent member of Cuso. The world has lost a beautiful, kind and gentle soul. He will be forever loved, cherished and missed. Besides his loving wife, Carolyn, Robert is survived by his children, Charlie, Lara, Emily and Adam. Robert will be sorely missed by his sister, Cathy (Bob) and his brother, Doug; his brothers-in-law, David (Claude), Stephen (Karen) and Tim (Juanita); sister-in-law Gabi; his nieces, Shannon (Brent) and Katarina; and his nephews, James, Christopher and Zachary.

**Wendy Lee** (above)

📍 Jamaica 1996–1997, 2011–2012

Wendy Lee died on February 7, 2021, at the age of 71. Wendy was born in Abbotsford at MSA Hospital (then known as the Cottage Hospital) on January 3, 1950. She grew up in Abbotsford and went on to graduate from the University of British Columbia in 1972 with a Bachelor of Arts in political science. She eventually earned her Master's in business leadership. She married Brian Lee and they raised four daughters in Abbotsford, where she served as a city councillor. ■

LEAVING A LEGACY

It's hard to gauge just how many people around the world Murray Dickson and his late wife Gerri helped smile.

The couple, along with their two adopted sons who literally learned to walk and talk on Cuso placements, helped those in need in Nigeria (1973–1975), Papua New Guinea (1977–1979), and Mozambique (1981–1983), with Murray serving as a dentist and Gerri as a nurse.

In Nigeria, the couple was stationed in Makurdi on the south bank of the Benue River. “That’s where my son, Brennan, learned to walk, climb trees and swing on vines with other Nigerian kids.”

Murray and Gerri then took their skills to a remote hospital in Wapenamanda, Papua New Guinea, and their second adopted son, Michael, who was a toddler, joined the family. Stationed in Beira in Mozambique, Murray often packed his portable dental equipment in vans and headed to remote villages. Other times, he would travel by boat to reach those who could not reach him. “I was very much an outreach person, and I was happy to do that.”

Murray and Gerri remained in Mozambique after their Cuso International placement for a series of projects through the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) that are still underway, linking Mozambique’s Ministry of Health with the University of Saskatchewan.



Gerri served as the project director, working alongside deeply respected Mozambique colleague and friend Antonio Tanda, until Murray brought her home to Saskatoon in 2012. Gerri passed away in 2016 and her ashes are buried in a small Mozambique community.

“It was absolutely wonderful,” says Murray, looking back fondly at all three placements. “What mattered to us was the assistance we were providing, but even more so it was the learning that we were receiving and the opportunity to be in a challenging situation that tested us. We definitely grew as a result. Gerri and I were committed to making a difference, and the best legacy is leaving the world a better place. Cuso’s work will help honour that. Leaving a gift in my Will is something I’m proud to do.” ■

To learn more about how you too can continue to play an integral role in Cuso International’s mission by leaving a gift in your will, please contact Danielle Semple, Manager, Major Gifts and Legacy Giving.

Phone (toll free): +1.888.434.2876 x 205 Email: danielle.semple@cusointernational.org

Cuso
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BENIN



HONDURAS

GETTING SOCIAL

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COLOMBIA



PERU

