

Stories of Hope



Advancing human rights for 75 years



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Introduction

Dear friends,

It's one of the most precious gifts we can offer anyone caught in the most dire of circumstances:

Hope.

Hope is a promise to the future. And thanks to generations of caring supporters like you, UUSC has been delivering on that promise, all around the world, for 75 years.

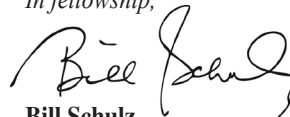
As part of this year's Guest at Your Table tradition, we're highlighting stories about UUSC's enduring commitment to helping refugees and other displaced people. That's why our special 75th anniversary Stories of Hope begins when UUSC's story begins — during the dark days of World War II, when Martha and Rev. Waitstill Sharp helped refugees, including two you'll meet in the following pages, escape war-torn Europe.

This year's Stories of Hope also includes examples of how we're bringing a brighter future to displaced families in today's world. I hope you'll be inspired by these stories, which span UUSC's entire history, and join our global partnership of dedicated people who work, learn, and grow together.

I invite you to become a member of UUSC, if you aren't already — or renew your membership. Be part of our community of inspired and passionate human rights activists!

Please support our work by making a donation online at uusc.org/givetoguest or by using the reply form at the back of this booklet. Stay informed by subscribing to our e-mail list at uusc.org/email. Together, we are successfully challenging injustice and advancing human rights. Join us today!

In fellowship,



Bill Schulz
President and CEO

Visit uusc.org to learn more.



Story 1

Catherine Chvany and Alexander Strasser

We see them sometimes, trapped in grainy, black and white film documentaries. They were the most poignant of victims — young children caught in the maelstrom sweeping across Europe in the early days of World War II. Even today we wish, impossibly, that we could save them from their hopeless fate.

At UUSC's 75th Anniversary Gala in April, we were honored to be joined by some of the children who *were* saved: Catherine Chvany and Alexander Strasser. They are living testimonials to UUSC's founding mission and the enduring values that carried Rev. Waitstill and Martha Sharp to Europe 75 years ago.

Even before reaching the United States, the story of Alex and his family featured a near-miraculous escape. His father, a prominent physician in Vienna, was interned at two concentration camps — Dachau and then Buchenwald — and freed

only after Alex's mother sold some of her jewelry to bribe a guard at Buchenwald.

The family escaped to France, where they were interned by the Vichy government. Their future looked even darker when cancer took the life of Alex's mother.

But then their fortunes shifted: Alex's father met Martha Sharp. Working in unoccupied France, Martha was finally nearing success on two extraordinarily difficult tasks: getting the Vichy government to issue exit visas for 29 children — and convincing the U.S. State Department, riddled with anti-Semitism, to let the children into this country.

Alex's father arranged with Martha to include six-year-old Alex and his older brother Joe among that fortunate group. And in December 1940 they joined hundreds of other refugees in setting sail from Lisbon on a ship that had been stripped of almost all furnishings so it could pack as many passengers as possible. Today, Alex has little memory of the crossing — except, he adds with a laugh, that fellow passengers labeled him and as his brother “the two tigers.”

That ship also carried to safety 13-year-old Catherine Vakar (now Chvany) and her younger sister, Anna. The two girls had been born in Paris to émigré Russians but were spending the early months of the war in the Pau region of the French Pyrenees. That's where Martha Sharp was arranging for shipments of desperately needed milk for thousands of hungry children — in fact, it had been the repeated pleas of parents in Pau that first motivated Martha to find a way to help children escape the continent.

Cathy and Anna were late additions to the emigrating group. Their father had met Martha Sharp's secretary, a fellow Russian national, just a few days before departure and pleaded with her to take his daughters — a request made possible only later by the late withdrawal of two other passengers.

After reaching the United States, Cathy stayed in touch with the Sharps, babysitting the couple's young son and establishing a lifelong friendship with their daughter. And she has never forgotten her good fortune in escaping Europe during those dark days. "What I owe Martha is my life in America. Perhaps my life itself."

If hope is a promise to the future, Catherine Chvany and Alexander Strasser devoted the rest of their lives to making the most of that promise. Catherine studied at Harvard, married, raised a family, and became a distinguished professor of Russian at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Alexander earned his medical degree, married, and raised his family in Rochester, N.Y., where he still practices medicine.

Go deeper and take action:

- Learn more about UUSC's history at uusc.org/history.
- Make a donation to UUSC at uusc.org/givetoguest.



Story 2

Lilian Castillo

"My son lost his childhood in that center."

While listening to her long and appalling description of conditions at the Karnes County Residential Center, an immigration detention facility near San Antonio, you quickly understand what a strong woman Lilian Castillo is. But when the subject turns to her only child, Lilian finally begins to lose her composure.

And why not? After all, it was to save her eight-year-old son, Jose, from the brutal violence plaguing their home in Honduras that she'd undertaken the long and risky journey to reach the United States. She was determined to offer him something better than an early death at the hands of the criminal gangs that control so much of Honduran society, giving it one of the highest murder rates in the world.

Who among us would harshly judge a mother for trying to deliver a brighter future for her child? Inexcusably, our own

Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) did.

For ten months, ICE locked Lilian and Jose in the Karnes detention center — for all practical purposes a prison camp, surrounded by razor wire fencing, and a grossly inappropriate environment for any child.

Ten months of inadequate medical care and malnutrition. Ten months of abuse and the ever-present threat of solitary confinement in the “cold room.” Ten months of living with the fear of sexual assault by the guards. Ten months of treatment so unconscionable it provoked at least one suicide attempt by a fellow prisoner and drove Lilian and other women to go on a hunger strike. Ten months of wondering whether she’d lost all hope for her son’s future.

Lilian and Jose came to this country in search of sanctuary — but were met instead with cruelty and abuse at the hands of our own government.

And then UUSC entered the picture. We’ve partnered with the Refugee and Immigration Center for Education and Legal Services (RAICES), a grassroots organization, to provide legal and casework assistance to thousands of mothers like Lilian caught in the immoral machinery of the broken U.S. immigration system.

RAICES helps these refugees assert their rights and navigate ICE’s complex legal and bureaucratic rules. Once women and children are released, the organization also connects them with local families for

temporary housing and support before they are, typically, reunited with relatives elsewhere in the United States.

The lawyer RAICES provided helped Lilian convince a judge, finally, to release her and Jose — and, as Lilian puts it, “gave me hope that I had a chance here in the United States.”

Today, Lilian and her boy are living in New York with her sister. And what of Jose’s future?

“I see the happiness in my son’s eyes, and I don’t think I’ve ever seen that happiness before. I want to keep moving forward. I know everything will fall into place.”

Go deeper and take action:

- Learn more about what UUSC is doing to fix the broken immigration system at uusc.org/immigration.
- Follow us on Facebook (facebook.com/uusc4all) and Twitter ([@uusc](https://twitter.com/uusc)) to learn more about breaking events in our work for immigration reform and other campaigns.
- Make a donation to UUSC at uusc.org/givetoguest.



Story 3

Irish Grace M. Ramirez

With years of experience as a public health nurse in some of the most impoverished communities in the central Philippine islands of Cebu and Bohol, Irish Grace M. Ramirez thought she was prepared for anything.

But that was before November 8, 2013.

Before Typhoon Haiyan, the most powerful storm to make landfall in recorded history, cut a devastating swath through the island nation, killing 7,000 people, leveling entire villages, and displacing 6 million people.

Before she understood how profoundly traumatizing it is to lose everything — one's home, crops, livelihood, entire community. And before she realized how her years of medical training and experience were insufficient to relieve the debilitating trauma afflicting so many of her people.

But UUSC has long understood that healing those hidden wounds is one of the most

important and difficult challenges in responding to any large-scale humanitarian disaster. In the Philippines, in partnership with the nonprofit Trauma Resource Institute (TRI), we are deploying a successful new approach to this longstanding and difficult challenge.

We first brought TRI to the Philippines in January of 2014 to conduct a series of train-the-trainer workshops in what is called the Community Resiliency Model (CRM), which gives first responders and other caregivers the tools they need to help displaced communities recover from the profound emotional trauma that accompanies disaster.

Irish Grace was one of the first participants — and she immediately not only understood but personally experienced CRM's effectiveness. Although she had not lost her home or any loved ones, Irish Grace had been deeply affected by the typhoon, especially by the emotional difficulty of giving care to so many devastated survivors. Today she credits CRM with giving her the strength to maintain her own resiliency in the face of so much suffering.

That personal experience, combined with her training in public health, made her the ideal coordinator to bring CRM to psychologically shattered communities: "Because of my own trauma, I was able to empathize with them."

Irish Grace put together a team that, over six months from late 2014 through early 2015, trained more than 100 community

health workers throughout her region in the Philippines. Part of what makes CRM so effective is that it focuses on the connection between individuals and their communities, and the skills it develops are easily passed throughout those communities. That means the healing process that she and her team delivered is “going viral”!

As the secretary of the Philippine Association of Community Resiliency Model Trainers, Irish Grace today works with other organizations interested in this novel approach. And the more she learns, the more grateful she is that UUSC brought this novel approach to her country: “I saw in the communities how thankful they were with the CRM trainings. It gave them a new hope.”

Go deeper and take action:

- Learn more about all of UUSC’s work in the Philippines at uusc.org/philippines.
- Learn more about the trauma resiliency training Irish Grace took at uusc.org/philtraining.
- Make a donation to UUSC at uusc.org/givetoguest.



Please join UUSC in our work with these partners — make a contribution to support our efforts.

Your donation of \$40 or more earns you annual UUSC membership benefits. In addition, all unrestricted contributions of \$125 or more are eligible to be matched dollar for dollar by the UU Congregation at Shelter Rock in Manhasset, N.Y. — doubling the impact of your gift!

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As a member of UUSC, you join a community of over 40,000 supporters who share your principles and passion for justice. You also stay up to date on pressing human rights issues through periodic mailings, action alerts, and our semiannual newsletter, *Rights Now*. And most importantly, you join a coalition of others who put their hands to the arc of the universe and help it bend toward justice.

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