

January 2016



The White Rose Group

FINAL UPDATE

Aspiration and Achievement The Buledi Family

It's a new year and time for another update on the Buledi family. This will be the last newsletter as Quesney, Lauraine, and Didier now have been in Canada over 18 months.

What a difference a year can make in a life! There is much to tell. Here are the highlights:

Quesney began working part-time at The Westhaven (a 55+ independent living residence) and soon became a member of the full time staff. He quickly recognized that life as a senior is much different here in Canada than in his homeland, the D.R. of Congo. He has received accolades for his hard work, and now a promotion to a management position. He feels valued by staff at The Westhaven and is clearly adored by many of the residents.

Quesney always intended to further his education. He was accepted at the University of Paris to complete his Master's Degree in Law. His studies began in November 2015 through that University's distance learning program. This allows him to continue living and working in Canada. Ultimately he will be required to travel to France to take final oral and written exams. He is working towards meeting qualifications in Canada.

This remarkable man is also determined to share his life journey and that of his children through the

written word. His first book, nearing completion, recounts the extraordinary and difficult circumstances his daughter Lauraine faced as a very little girl until she was smuggled into Thailand and reunited with the father she hadn't seen for several years. Quesney will seek a publisher soon and then begin writing a second book.

Didier's first year of school in Canada was a triumph. At the closing ceremonies in June he placed within the top five students at the school, receiving three athletic awards and an Honours Certificate. He played soccer, ranking best on the team, and excelled in track and field. A pulled hamstring had him on crutches

with a brace for several weeks.

Now in his final year of high school, Didier is researching post-secondary options and scholarship opportunities for September. He knows it will not be easy to obtain the financial support needed but he is determined to continue his education.

Lauraine, officially a teenager at 13, is an excellent student and achieves high marks in all her courses. She has received special recognition for her contributions in class and



Top and left: At the beach with Carla and John Rempel, good friends from church.

Below: Sharing personal stories of forgiveness with Kim Phuc, the (then) nine-year-old girl in the hauntingly famous 1972 Vietnam war photo.



The Buledi Family: Designing their own futures

for helping other students. Lauraine is well liked by teachers, staff, and her classmates. While it will be another year before she enters high school, she has already begun to consider her options for the future.

Last summer the family toured parts of Manitoba and enjoyed learning more about their home province. They became members at the local YMCA and throughout the summer were there every evening taking part in the activities offered.

Didier and Quesney sing in the church choir and Lauraine attends Sunday school. Their second Christmas with *Winterpeg* snow was as much a delight as the first one. The family has made many close friends through their church, and they enjoy outings and sharing meals with them whenever their busy schedules allow.

This family's circumstances have evolved from life-threatening danger and struggle in Congo, to stability and happiness here in Canada. These newsletters have reflected their joys of discovery and achievement. However, every rosy picture has its hidden thorns and this is certainly true for the Buledis. Last summer their world was shaken to its core with the news of a dear friend's sudden passing—a person who had been instrumental in saving their lives. Muriel Lauvige Fung met Quesney shortly after he arrived in Bangkok seeking

asylum. She and her husband Vincent became close friends with Quesney and were instrumental in paving the way by which he and his children would see their future in Canada.

Tragically, this remarkable young woman who had done so much to protect and enrich the lives of so many others was unable to prevail in her battle with post-partum depression. Following is a tribute to Muriel and her family in Quesney's own words.

As we continue through 2016 we look forward to a bright future for the Buledis—their strength of character and sound family values have carried them through turmoil most of us cannot even comprehend. It is gratifying to know they aspire to greater achievements, are prepared to accept the challenges of their new life, and are eager to contribute to their new community and enhance the lives of others.

We thank you for your caring interest and for your contributions to this family's extraordinary journey. With the plight of so many refugee's constantly in the news we can only pray others will find a peaceful home here or elsewhere and experience, as the Buledis have, the grace of a compassionate community.

As always,
Love,
Phyllis and Ron
phyllisreader@gmail.com

Phyllis and Ron Reader founded The White Rose Group in 2006 with the support of Phyllis' sisters Gail Stafford and Judy Wolfe, and Judy's husband Jim. The Buledi's are the second family The White Rose Group has sponsored to Canada.



Enjoying the English Garden with Carla Rempel, Gladys and Barry Hammond, friends from church.



*From top:
Ready for Canada Day;*

Lauraine and Didier with Phyllis Reader and her sister Gail Stafford;

Lauraine's School awards ceremony with Ron and Phyllis;

Bottom photos: Awards galore! Reaping the results of dedicated efforts.





Muriel Lauvige Fung

Born in Marseilles, France in 1978, a passion for teaching French drew her to Britain, Jamaica and Fiji where Muriel became concerned with the plight of women and children in disadvantaged areas. In order to effectively improve the most destitute lives she returned to school in London and obtained a Masters in Education and International Development. Muriel worked at a refugee centre in Thailand where she met and married Vincent Fung. The couple worked in East Timor before joining the United Nations in New York and later Geneva where their daughter Thea was born. Between UN postings Muriel continued teaching French. While in Bangkok she helped many families obtain the papers needed to live with dignity despite extreme obstacles. She changed the lives of many with her humour, generosity, patience, tolerance, and dedication.

It's very difficult to believe that someone so special, so kind and almost perfect is no longer here to start that chat on the web or to send that text message.

I came to know Muriel soon after I arrived in Bangkok in February 2008. I arrived with nothing but a few clothes. I was destroyed – I had suffered unspeakable abuses and had no hope I could reconstitute my life. I was in the country illegally, without a passport or a visa. Like other asylum seekers, I had no rights and under the constant threat of arrest. What little money I had was gone in two days. With nowhere to sleep I sought shelter in a mosque.

I found my way from one agency to another until I met Ms Ali Collier at the Bangkok Refugee Centre (BRC). Ali realised I spoke French and introduced me to Muriel. Her smile met mine and we started to talk as if we knew each other for ages. Muriel quickly restored my lost hope. Finally, after more than four years of darkness there was a light! Someone cared and would help me. Through Muriel I met many others at Asylum Access Thailand who have remained good friends. Muriel helped me find a safe place to stay, even paying for my first rent. However, my status made it difficult to find work. Finally Muriel was successful in securing a volunteer teaching position for me and over the course of the next six years I helped many refugee children and adults maintain and improve their educational skills.

Muriel introduced me to her then fiancé Vincent Fung and he and I became very good friends. I had two people that cared for me and I considered them my new family. They introduced me to the modern world, made sure I had a safe place to stay, food to eat and activities to do. This kept my morale high. They took me to cinemas, to evening "get-togethers", shopping malls and bought me new clothes.

They introduced me to new people who would be friends. I could never have dreamed these

people would open the doors to freedom for my children and me. I now had people around me with whom I could share my pains and sorrows, people who vigorously fought for my happiness and my freedom.

When Muriel and Vincent left Thailand they ensured I was living in a secure area and that all my basic needs were met. I cannot forget that night. Vincent handed me an envelope with enough money to cover all my needs for months. I could hardly comprehend their kindness. It was difficult to say good bye but we kept in touch through e-mail and on-line chats. She always wanted to know that I was well and safe. She sent books for me to read, she suggested movies to watch, music to listen to, she asked her friends in Bangkok to take me out, she sent others from abroad with gifts. Whenever Muriel and Vincent came back to visit Bangkok, I was always first to greet them.

Muriel helped me focus on my future rather than my past and present. It was impossible for me to study in Thailand without my papers and she knew I wanted to go back to school. To my astonishment, she paid my tuition for law school. I completed the 3-year program and became a lawyer all because of Muriel. What an angel she was!

I had been separated from my children for more than six years and could not even expect they were still alive. When they were located in 2010 and we were reunited in Bangkok, Muriel and Vincent came to welcome them. They encouraged the children and helped them to focus on the future by providing them with so many new experiences. Muriel's confidence that we would all have a bright future never wavered.

In 2012, security became a concern throughout the refugee community in Bangkok and many people were arrested. Once again it was Muriel who took action to ensure we escaped arrest. With the help of her friend we moved to a house in a middle class neighbourhood. She reasoned that the authorities would overlook us if we weren't living like refugees. Muriel and Vincent paid for the house until we were resettled to Canada.



Quesney and Vincent spent many happy hours together exploring Bangkok.



Muriel and Vincent came to see us again in Bangkok in November 2013. We had wonderful time together and when it came time to say goodbye Didier, Lauraine and I could not stop the tears from flowing. Muriel hugged us and cried. We could not know it would be our very last time together.

Muriel always wanted us to be free. Today, through the efforts of Muriel, Vincent and other friends I came to know through them, we are free. When I look back over the past eight years, I can't imagine what my life would have been if I hadn't met Muriel. Thanks to her, I am a resident of Canada, I am working, and furthering my studies. My children are free and happy; they are going to school and see a bright future. I feel so blessed.

In our last video call, Muriel and I went through the events of past and present. She said: "I am so happy you have your life back. I am so proud of you my brother."

Muriel and I had many dreams and it is sad she won't be here to see them realized. We dreamed of starting schools that would educate girls in Africa, we had my books to publish, a movie of my life story to be shared with the rest of the world...

She wanted her daughter Thea to be a happy girl and wished that Didier and Lauraine could be Thea's godparents. Muriel and Vincent had planned to visit us in Canada, introduce Thea to us, and celebrate our freedom. Mother Nature decided otherwise.

I miss Muriel very much. I will do everything I can to ensure Thea understands the great woman her mother was.

The **Muriel Lauvige Foundation** will be created in her memory. This non-profit organization will pursue Muriel's vision of educating vulnerable women and girls. I trust Muriel is happy that we will carry on her dream.

Quesney Buledi



From top: Quesney and Muriel in 2009;
Reading Muriel's French book for beginners which she wrote and illustrated;
An introduction to the wonders of Sea Life Ocean World, Bangkok, 2010;
The farewell dinner with Muriel, Vincent (far right) and friend Philippe Schneider (left) in Bangkok, 2013.