

NON SIBI NOW

By Scott Campbell '82

(Editor's note: This article is adapted from remarks made by Scott Campbell '82 in his acceptance of the 2008 John Phillips Award last fall.)

I would imagine that human rights violations and investigations and working with local activists in Africa might seem to be worlds away from this Assembly Hall. But in many ways, they're not, especially in terms of how we react to the world around us. I see many connections to the work I have done and what many of you are now doing.

To explain, allow me to tell you a story about a friend of mine, Jay Nash. When Jay was in first grade in the 1950s, he had a classmate who had crutches and wore leg braces. The student had been paralyzed by polio, a disease that has since been eradicated in the United States thanks to vaccination campaigns. When Jay and the boy were in school, however, anyone could catch the polio virus, which left many victims paralyzed from the waist down for life.

Their classroom was on the third floor, and the school custodian had to carry the boy up and down the stairs at the beginning and end of each day, and for recess. One day, the boy's braces got "stuck"—there was no way for him to move one of his legs. The custodian had to fix the braces, right then and there, in the classroom. He did it with a hammer.

Jay didn't give polio much more thought until some 15 years later when he was a Peace Corps volunteer in the Democratic Republic of Congo. There, for the first time, he encountered many people crawling on the ground or limping on legs paralyzed by polio. These people made his classmate look lucky since few had braces or crutches.

Vaccination came late to Africa, and the disease has not yet been eradicated. There are still many young people living with paralysis, and Jay found it difficult to turn away from those in need of treatment.

On the bright side, paralysis from polio is often, to some degree, "fixable," with either simple equipment or one-time surgery (or both). Often, victims are able to walk, or experience a dramatic improvement in walking.

For many years, Jay only dabbled in assisting Africa's polio victims, helping a few kids that he encountered in his travels. In 1998, while living in the Congolese town of Lubumbashi, he set up a small brace-making workshop in his garage and, with the help of a few friends, began making braces for a few people each month.

The next year, things changed dramatically. The political situation in Congo had become unstable. On a visit to the university in Lubumbashi, where he was doing humanitarian work for the U.S. government, Jay was attacked by a violent, anti-American mob. The ordeal lasted some nine hours and it looked like Jay would not survive.

A few students took pity on him and hid Jay in a building, where he could hear the mob trying to break in. Reflecting on his life in what he thought were his final hours, Jay had an epiphany. He realized that he had felt the most satisfaction in life working with the disabled polio victims.

As he listened to the angry mob outside, what bothered Jay the most was that he still had a dozen kids on a waiting list to get orthopedic equipment.

Fortunately, Jay escaped, fleeing as the late-night remnants of the angry mob chased behind. When he got out of the hospital, he made sure the kids on the waiting list got the equipment they needed.

From that time on, it became hard for Jay to put people on waiting lists. Jay's brace-making facility grew and began providing more braces and operations for young polio victims. He cashed in his entire retirement savings and rented a house where kids could stay while they were undergoing therapy. When that was full, he let them stay in his apartment.

The organization, known as StandProud, is now a network of workshops and rehabilitation centers all over the Congo. It is run almost entirely by young Congolese, many who received treatment from StandProud. (www.StandProud.org)

Why am I telling you this story? In short, because if Jay were here, he would be working with many of you who volunteer with ESSO, or Amnesty International, or Big Sib Little Sib. Jay would be in the Best Buddies program, providing company to an older person, or assisting at the Exeter Hospital. He

(continued on page 111)



Scott Campbell '82

(continued from page 112)

would be doing something, something *non sibi*, in the here and now.

I don't think Jay would view the service to community here in Exeter any differently than making braces for polio victims in his garage. And I don't think John Phillips, or his present-day award committee, would either.

Over the past years, I have had the privilege to live in places like the Congo and support people like Jay. I have been fortunate to see the pride and happiness on the faces of kids who are walking for the first time. In the evenings, as the temperature in Congo drops, these kids organize a game of pick-up soccer in the small lot beside Jay's house. There's nothing on TV that can match the exhilaration of scoring a goal. I imagine that many of you working with ESSO and other organizations know what I'm talking about. You have similar stories.

I have had the opportunity to hear from victims about human rights violations, in Africa and elsewhere. And I've been able to tell these stories, through organizations, like Human Rights Watch, to the media and governments around the world. I was also fortunate enough, through the organization Global Rights, to have worked alongside courageous human rights activists from the Congo and elsewhere as they responded to local problems.

The people who have impressed me the most, whether in a refugee camp or in downtown Exeter, are those who have simply done what they can. Those who take a hammer—right then and there—and fix a first-grader's stuck braces. Like Uwe Brandes '84, who puts the environment and people—particularly those who are marginalized—at the center of his efforts to improve the design of U.S. cities. Or the Exeter faculty who serve on town commissions to protect Exeter's streams and rivers from pollution. Or the ESSO volunteer who didn't ace his calculus test because he stayed too long at the hospice.

The details of these examples are, of course, very different. Exeter is not the Congo, but the point is the same: I am inspired by those of you who have taken the time and made the commitment to volunteer locally. Your work makes me feel much closer to Exeter today than to the Exeter I attended some 25 years ago. I am prouder than ever to be an Exeter graduate, largely because of what you are doing, and because of Academy initiatives that include making the environment a priority, working toward achieving need-blind admission, and emphasizing community service.

Local activism doesn't usually get the attention it deserves, but that's where the action is. A few weeks ago, I was in Darfur, Sudan, a place that continues to experience very grave human rights violations. I met Sudanese who had fled their villages after being attacked by militia supported by their own government. As they spoke to me, we received more reports of bombings in villages just some 10 miles away.

As I listened to them, I regretted that I couldn't do more locally. As Africa coordinator with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, I make sure that the U.N. is doing its utmost in fulfilling its core function of protecting human rights. My battles are on questions of policy and management and operations to ensure the U.N. has the best people deployed in places like Darfur.

While I am rarely on the "front lines" these days, the stories of those displaced from their villages remind and compel me to do my utmost, from where I am in Geneva, to protect human rights.

In the end, let me repeat a simple point: find out what's important to you. Figure out your role, in the here and now. Our world is full of an increasing number of people in need, some in Congo, some not far from this Academy Building. Investigating mass graves in Africa may not be your thing, nor may be providing assistance to polio victims. That's OK. In the meantime, try Exeter Hospital or an elementary school where a student may need help with math.

I think when John Phillips had *non sibi* in mind it was also "*non sibi now*" —not next week, next year, or once you've graduated. I also think, when talking about serving community and humanity, he didn't have in mind such distant problems as polio in Africa or the displaced in Darfur. He meant things like volunteering with ESSO, and volunteering today, this week.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak with you this morning, and for this award. I dedicate it to Jay and all those who have taught me and impressed me by making "*non sibi now*" part of their everyday lives. ●

The people who have impressed me the most, whether in a refugee camp or in downtown Exeter, are those who have simply done what they can.

Scott Campbell '82, recipient of the 2008 John Phillips Award, is the Africa coordinator for the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. Learn more about his accomplishments in this issue's "Around the Table" on page 5, and about StandProud at www.StandProud.org.