

Helping people in Africa with a sense of adventure

In 1999, Carol Campbell, a mother of three and co-owner of a multi-media company in London, Ont., heard fellow Londoners Glen Pearson and Jane Roy were planning a trip to Southern Sudan to free slaves by buying their freedom with the \$60,000 they had raised from across Canada. Slaves? She was shocked.

"It was just so bizarre to think slavery was still going on in this day and age," Ms. Campbell says. But in fact, chattel slavery was not just going on in Sudan, it was widespread, with militias from northern Sudan raiding southern Sudan villages as part of the decades-old war. The militias would burn the villages, killing the men and taking the women and children captive and sell them in the north as chattel for \$50 to \$75 each.

Ms. Campbell joined the team led by Ms. Roy and Mr. Pearson on their trip to Sudan. She planned to produce a documentary to raise awareness. "We freed about 1,100 slaves on that trip," she says. "Communities would come looking to see if their relatives, some who had been missing for 10 or 12 years, were among the freed slaves. They had been repeatedly raped and beaten. There was genital mutilation. Many of the young women had children fathered by their masters. The boys were sent to camps and indoctrinated. They became child soldiers in the north."

That trip changed her life. "I've been going back for 10 years," says Ms. Campbell, who is on the board of the Canadian Aid to Southern Sudan, the organization founded by Mr. Pearson and Ms. Roy. "I was blown away. I had to do something," she says, "It just gets under your skin and you just know you have to keep going."

By 2001, the group had freed 14,000 people and the slave trade slowed following peace negotiations between the North and South. At that point, the group changed focus to helping free the communities from the slavery of poverty, especially those that had taken in the freed slaves, many of whom were originally from communities that were destroyed by the militias.

"These people are so hospitable and they take so many people in and help them rebuild their lives, but they're in the process of rebuilding their lives, too. Most of the households are headed by women, so they do everything: the cooking, collecting wood for fire, walking up to 10 kilometres a day to get water. They have to earn a living; quite often, they're in the marketplace with tea houses, trying to scrape a living together. The women have a very difficult life," says Ms. Campbell, who took five years to finish her documentary. Called *A World of Difference*, instead of simply documenting the horror of slavery, it tells of the journey from slavery to rehabilitation.

The group has numerous ongoing projects, which include a safe-water program and one that provides a male and female pair of goats to each family in need so they can raise their own herds and provide for themselves. They also work on literacy programs for the women, help refugees from Darfur, built two public schools and are collaborating with another NGO to build a secondary school.

"Some of the child soldiers when they came back were 15 and 16, and they would start off in grade one to three," says Ms. Campbell. "These are teenagers who recognize what an education can do for them and are willing to sit in a class with seven, eight- and nine-year-olds. They're just so resilient and inspiring. It has been really heartwarming to see some of the small things that have been done have made a huge difference in these people's lives."

In 2007 Ms. Campbell, whose children are in their twenties, sold her share in her business to her partner. She now only works on special video projects, particularly for charities.

"I've become more and more involved with Sudan. It speaks to me more now than it did in 1999 because I've come to know the people, and particularly the children, and see the small difference that I can make," says Ms. Campbell, who credits her parents for demonstrating the importance of giving back.

"Work is important but volunteerism is important, too. And it doesn't have to be something like going to Africa. When my kids were young, there was no way I could have done that. But you can take an hour in a day [for] Meals on Wheels. You can talk on the phone to a shut-in. There are so many, many ways that we can give back. Making a difference in one person's life is enough," she says.

"And helping people in Africa sounds wonderful and it is, but not everybody can do that," she says.

"I've always had a sense of adventure and in a way it fulfills that as well, so it's not just giving, it fulfills a lot of needs and passions in my life."