

## THE CIRCLE OF FAMILY

by Denise Roy

The problem with the world  
is that we draw the circle of our family  
too small.

—MOTHER TERESA

Our family is about to get bigger.

Next Wednesday, we will become foster parents to a 17-year-old refugee girl from Iran. She will be a part of our family, learning English, attending school, and being a big sister to our very excited 10-year-old daughter.

This all started with a newspaper article I read last year. It began:

**WANTED:** Flexible, big-hearted and internationally-minded families to help young refugees achieve self-sufficiency.

**REWARD:** A chance to help a child build a new life.

It went on to describe the Unaccompanied Refugee Minors Program, which finds foster families for teenage refugees who are orphaned or separated from family due to war or famine or other circumstances.

As I read the article, I was deeply moved. This seemed like a chance to do something concrete, to move out of a feeling of powerlessness in the face of so much war and suffering, to take in one member of the human family.

So my husband Paul and I attended the informational meeting. When we arrived, there was a room full of people who were also interested: single women, couples with small children or with teenagers, retired people, working people, former refugees as well as people born in the U.S.

That night we learned there are over nineteen million refugees and internally displaced people, most of these women and children. Hundreds of thousands of children in refugee camps have been orphaned or separated from their parents, and are at higher risk for abuse and exploitation.

Particularly since September 11, 2001, there is such a long application process that most of these children will never get out, living all of their childhood years in these camps.

After that meeting, Paul and I decided to become foster parents. During this last year we went through the required training and certification, and we met the kids who began to come through the program.

We've met teenagers from Honduras, Liberia, Sudan, Afghanistan, and Somalia. The stories of what they have been through are heart-wrenching: Losing moms and dads and entire families and villages in the genocide in Sudan; journeying on foot through entire countries in search of safety; experiencing cruel oppression based on gender or race.

The world gets a whole lot smaller when you let others into your life in such real and tangible ways.

These kids have helped me to understand that even though there is so much suffering, there is so much love. I am in awe of their courage and their appreciation of so many things that we take for granted. It has been such a gift to be with them and also with the people who provide so many services to refugees. I know that I am in the presence of unsung heroes and humble saints.

Through this experience, the circle of my family is growing larger.

All children are our own. They are our family, and need to be cared for. There are so many ways to do this: through political influence, through financial contributions, through education on the issues, through prayer. In whatever ways we can, let's continue to expand the circle of our family.

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