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The following is an excerpt from Jason's e-mail to friends

I've only been working at Catholic Charities for about a month, but I already feel as though I have many important stories that need to be told... We have a lot of refugees coming to Nashville from Burundi, which is a very small, poor country in Africa. Some of these refugees have been in refugee camps since 1972, when they fled Burundi during the first genocide in the Great Lakes region of Africa. One particular refugee, Jean, was born in Rwanda to refugee parents from Burundi, and most recently, lived in a refugee camp in Tanzania... While in Africa, Jean studied law and worked in a hospital as a medical assistant. Even though he is modest about his English skills, they are quite good. He has been a big help for me in helping his fellow Burundians to apply for jobs and go to interviews. Without him, a large portion of the thirty people that I've placed in jobs or secured interviews for would not have these jobs...

Jean has a wife and three young children, whom he clearly loves very much. He has a passion for helping others. Jean wants to succeed in America and help his fellow countrymen succeed. He made this very clear to me recently when he was helping me with translations when we were filling out job applications... What else is clear is that Jean already had his understanding of the American dream and was determined to live it out, that is, to work up that economic ladder to better the lives of his family, (and to another extent, better the lives of his bigger family of Burundian refugees). This concept of the American dream has existed since the first immigrants began coming to America. But how is one supposed to live that out today, in 2007, when the cost of living in the past ten years alone has increased greatly, and an entry level job pays no more than \$8 an hour?

As a non-profit organization, Catholic Charities Refugee Resettlement is supposed to assist refugees in becoming self-sufficient within six months. But I wonder if entry level jobs lead to self-sufficiency? The "economic boom" that has occurred in America has not trickled down to the very poor. The poverty line in America is just over \$19,000—less than what Jean would make at \$8 an hour. How long is his family supposed to survive on food stamps? What about those who make just above the poverty line, how are they going to survive with even less government assistance but still not enough to get by? Jean, like every other refugee, came to the United States with very little. Refugees start poor, and face a difficult climb in breaking out of the cycle of poverty, and few in society will give them a chance to succeed. In fact, many people that I have encountered here so far believe that refugees are some sort of illegal immigrant, who are trying to find work illegally. In fact, all refugees are allowed to be in the United States indefinitely, and are legally allowed to work. And Jean is one of the lucky ones. He has a college education and speaks English very well. What about those who don't? People like Jean and his family deserve better...

Luckily for me, I've realized that there is some hope. My roommates and I are not only assisting refugees, but also the homeless, troubled teens, single mothers, and ex-offenders. And there are others like us, all throughout the South, and all throughout the United States and the world who are doing all sorts of great things. Little by little we are making a difference. And with a little luck and some prayers, Jean will be able to rise out of the cycle of poverty that he and his family were trapped in the second they came to the United States. And with some more luck, and a lot more prayers, one day once we realize that we need to consume less, and care more, we will be able to say that not one person was left behind out in the cold, or without food, or without healthcare or without an education. One day, everyone will have the opportunity to be able to rise above the ordinary and seek out what motivates him or her.

For myself, at least for now, I've found what motivates me to rise above the ordinary.