

Hospitality Homes Helps Heal War Wounds

By Christine Godbout



Mariatu Sankoh (left) and Neneh Barrie

As she sits in the Hospitality Homes apartment at Reservoir Towers in Brighton, recovering from several major surgeries, Mariatu Sankoh appears content and at ease. One could never fathom the horrors she endured prior to her arrival in Boston for medical treatment at Brigham and Women's Hospital.

Seven years ago, when she was only thirteen, Mariatu was brutally raped and tortured multiple times during the long civil war in Sierra Leone. A member of the Temne tribe living in Makeni, Mariatu had been living as normal a life as possible with her family before the

incidents occurred. That same month, her father was killed. These events shocked her. Reflecting on her early childhood she remembers, "I was a happy girl. I never expected that such things would happen to me."

The brutality scarred Mariatu both physically and emotionally. Her bladder was ruined and repeated flashbacks haunted her. She remembers, "My condition was really bad and there was nothing I could do about it. I didn't want to tell anyone. I was so angry and discouraged." At a refugee camp, she met a kind amputee who suggested she go to Freetown, Sierra Leone's capital, to seek medical care. There, doctors performed three different surgeries, but nothing worked. One physician clearly told Mariatu that no doctor in Africa was qualified to perform the surgery she needed. "I felt so sad, I started crying," she recalls. "I thought, is this how I am going to live my whole life?"

The third failed surgery, however, marked a turning point. While in Freetown, Dr. Shanee Stepakoff, an American psychologist working at the UN, learned of her situation and committed herself to arranging care for Mariatu. Originally from the Boston area and familiar with local resources, Dr. Stepakoff contacted Brigham and Women's Hospital. Dr. Warren Becker and Dr. Michael Muto, both gynecologists, along with Dr. Kevin Loughlin, a urologist, and Dr. Mandeep Saund, a general surgeon, agreed to provide all medical treatment free of charge. The Ray Tye Medical Aid Foundation agreed to cover other costs during Mariatu's treatment.

The challenge of finding affordable accommodations in Boston for the required six-month stay remained unsolved. Through Brigham and Women's, Dr. Stepakoff learned about Hospitality Homes. The timing was right and the

Continued on page 2



Hospitality Homes

Hospitality Homes provides temporary housing in volunteer host homes and other donated accommodations for families and friends of patients seeking care at Boston-area medical centers. Since 1983, Hospitality Homes' unique, home-away-from-home lodging option has provided a caring response as well as relief from emotional and financial challenges for these individuals and families.

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**Guest Nights
 to Date**

3rd Annual Hospitality Homes Harvest Breakfast Thursday, November 15, 2007

Hotel Commonwealth

500 Commonwealth Avenue, Boston, MA
8:00-9:00 a.m., 7:15 a.m. Registration

Enjoy a complimentary continental breakfast while hearing firsthand the impact that Hospitality Homes has on the lives of patients, their families, and the volunteer hosts who welcome them into their homes.

For reservations: 617.482.4338 or email Christine Godbout at cgodbout@hosp.org.

Healing War Wounds—Continued from page 1

Hospitality Homes staff was able to arrange accommodations for Mariatu and Neneh Barrie, a Sierra Leonean psychosocial counselor who would serve as Mariatu's support person in Boston. The two women were placed in a high-rise apartment donated to Hospitality Homes in 2003 by the Schuster family, generous benefactors of Brigham and Women's. This apartment houses Hospitality Homes' guests and patients whose needs are inappropriate for a host home. The comfort and convenience of the space have worked well for Mariatu and Neneh. They have made friends with other Sierra Leoneans in the building and have begun to feel quite at home.

While in Boston, Mariatu and Neneh have formed a close bond. They enjoy spending time walking around the city, observing their new surroundings. At first, travel was difficult for Mariatu. She was afraid of the subway because the noise and crowds triggered flashbacks and she would close her eyes very tightly on the train. Neneh knew she needed to overcome this fear and told Mariatu, "You need to do things like that so you know that nothing will happen to you. This place is safe; it's not like Freetown. There's no war and the rebels are not here."

Neneh, who is from the Fula tribe in Kono, Sierra Leone, also witnessed intense brutality during the war. Forced to flee the country at age fourteen, she spent six years in refugee camps in Guinea. It was at this time that she began talking with victims, helping them overcome the psychological damage caused by such terrible experiences. She pursued counseling as a career and began working at the Center for Victims of Torture in Freetown. Neneh has provided great support for Mariatu, who wonders how her caregiver could tolerate living with and devoting so much time to her. Neneh acknowledges that all Mariatu endured could also have happened to her. Turning to Mariatu,

Board CORNER

Hospitality Homes is pleased to welcome three new members to its Board of Directors:

Janet Cooper is Chief Operating Officer for Deloitte Research in Boston. Janet comes to the board with a wide range of national and international business experience including sales, marketing, operations management, and strategic planning for businesses of all sizes. In addition to her professional endeavors, Janet has served on boards of several non-profit organizations, both in the U.S. and abroad.

Tara O'Donnell, Esq., is an attorney and lobbyist with Donoghue Barrett & Singal, P.C. in Boston and also serves as Managing Partner of the Capitol Consulting Group. She has worked as Deputy Director of Government Relations for the Massachusetts Water



Left to right: Tara O'Donnell, Janet Cooper, and Dennis Scott

Resources Authority and as State Manager for the Massachusetts Hospital Association. An active member of a number of professional associations, she also volunteers with a charity that serves homeless children.

Dennis S. Scott, Esq., practices healthcare law at P.V. Kent & Associates, P.C., in Danvers, MA. He has worked in both private practice and various government agencies and has experience with all aspects of healthcare including insurance, reimbursement, eligibility, and regulatory matters. Dennis is an active member of several professional and community organizations and his professional background makes him particularly aware of the needs of today's patients.

she says, "No one is happy with what happened to you. To support you through this is the least I can do."

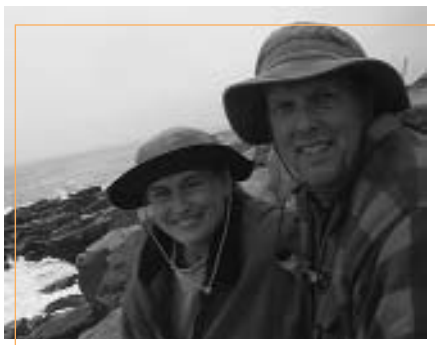
Mariatu is grateful for all the care she has received during her treatment and recovery. Still, it has been difficult at times. "When I had the first surgery, it brought back memories of what happened to me. I still have problems when I think of my past, but I know after this I'll be fine." Mariatu is deeply impressed with the quality of care she has received from the doctors, nurses and other staff members at Brigham and Women's. She notes their extra effort and comments, "The doctors here are very nice and the nurses are caring. They encourage you and try to make life easier for you."

When Mariatu completes her recovery, she plans to pursue an education. Emphatically she states, "I want to go to school." For the first time in seven years, Mariatu will have the opportunity to live a normal life. Tears well up in her eyes as she expresses her appreciation for Hospitality Homes. "This is one big thing you have done for me and I must say that I appreciate it so much."

Reflections ON HOSPITALITY

We actually contemplated sleeping in our vehicle in the parking garage! Then we discovered the Hospitality Homes brochure, and suddenly things looked brighter. Our hosts were fantastic people who made us feel very much at home, provided a safe and comfortable stay, and gave us the peace of mind and serenity we needed but never expected to find in Boston. We were blessed!

- Lynn and David, Maine



Lynn and David



James and Geraldine

Hospitality allowed me, as a patient, to rest easy knowing my wife was in the care of "good people" who were helping her navigate Boston traffic and providing a safe, secure place to rest her head after a couple of very stressful days.

- James L., Massachusetts

Former Guest Becomes Major Donor to Hospitality

Joan McAdam first learned of Hospitality Homes in 1997, when her husband, Walter, was referred to Brigham & Women's Dr. David Sugarbaker for treatment of his mesothelioma. Matched with host Angie Markert, Joan says, "We instantly bonded with Angie. Her husband had had cancer, too, so she seemed to know just what we needed." Throughout a series of visits to Boston during 1997 and 1998, Walter underwent evaluation, surgery, and follow-up treatment. Each time, the McAdams returned to the Markert home.

"Hospitality Homes made a terrible time in our lives a little easier. It provided a homey feeling for us that we couldn't have found in a hotel," says Joan. "It also gave me the freedom to care for my husband as I wanted to. I could cook for him, and make sure he followed his no-salt diet. I was in a neighborhood, so I could run down to the drug store to get the medication he needed. It helped me as much as it helped Walter, and I know he felt better because I could be a little more relaxed."

Joan, who still counts her host Angie as one of her closest friends, recently made a multi-year pledge of support to Hospitality Homes in memory of her husband, who died in 1999. "I am just so grateful that this program exists," she said. "It's truly a blessing for anyone who needs to use it. Hospitality Homes does excellent work and I know my money is used to do good for people who really need help."



Joan McAdam, right, with her host and close friend Angie Markert

We Want to Hear from You!

Send photos, essays, poems, and other thoughts to Hospitality Homes, P.O. Box 15265, Boston, MA 02215 or to Heather Davidson at hdauidson@hosp.org.



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Support Hospitality Homes through your company's United Way campaign. Simply enter charity code "M103393" or "U103393" under the heading "Restricted Contribution" on your paper pledge card.

For more ideas, visit www.hosp.org and click on "How You Can Help" or call 888.595.4678.

Home-like settings really make a big difference in trying times. - Andrea F., Inverness, FL