

Film charts refugees' plight

Free screening
at Moviehouse

By **Kathleen Wereszynski Murray**
Poughkeepsie Journal

"Rain in a Dry Land," a documentary film that will be screened this Sunday at the Moviehouse in Millerton, profiles two refugee families from the 1991 civil war in Somalia as they resettle in Springfield, Mass., and Atlanta.

Emmy-award winning filmmaker Anne Makepeace,

director of "Robert Capa in Love and War," "Baby It's You" and "Coming to Light," followed the Muslim families from a refugee camp in Kenya through their first 18 months living in post-9/11 America.

"It all started with a front-page article in The New York Times that I read in March 2003," said Makepeace, a resident of Lakeville, Conn.

The story, "Africa's Lost Tribe Discovers American Way," reported that 12,000 Somali Bantu, who were mostly illiterate and almost completely untouched by

modern life, were to be flown to the United States for resettlement.

"I thought, this is going to be like time travel," Makepeace said.

She decided she wanted to tell the story of how the Somali Bantu, who were enslaved until Somalia's civil war then sent to refugee camps, would adjust to life in the high-tech world of the United States.

"I started finding out what bureaucracies were dealing with these refugees," Makepeace said. "I started cold-

calling and contacting people."

Perseverance pays off

It took almost a year to get the go-ahead from the U.S. government and raise money to fund a trip for her five-person crew to Kenya, where she first met the subjects of her film.

Married couple Aden Kabir Edow and Madina Ali Yunye were headed to Springfield, while single mother Arbai Barre Abdi and her children were preparing for a life in Atlanta.

"I filmed them in their

(cultural orientation) classes in Kenya," Makepeace said. "They opened up very quickly to me. I was very moved by that and attributed that to a wonderful interpreter that I found whom they trusted."

She returned to Kenya in March 2004 with just a two-person crew: herself and a young cameraman.

"We went and filmed their goodbyes, their departure party and their journey to America," Makepeace said.

Please see **Film**, 3D



Bryan Meltz

Arbai dancing at Khadija's wedding from the film "Rain in a Dry Land."

Film: Director got close to subjects

Continued from 1D

She then filmed the families every four to six weeks in their new homes.

"Sometimes I would go for a special event, like a baby-naming ceremony," Makepeace said. "And sometimes I would just go and hang out with them."

Jewish Family Service of Western Massachusetts, which is affiliated with the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, is among three outreach groups that have helped Somali Bantu resettle in the region.

"It's part of our mission to help the stranger among us," said Executive Director Robert Marmor. "It is based in religious principles and teachings."

Jewish Family Service's efforts were met with resistance — some of it racist — in economically depressed Holyoke, Mass.

"It was very controversial," Marmor said. "It was right after 9/11."

Holyoke's City Council in 2003 voted against a proposal to relocate Bantus to the city, saying it did not have the resources to meet their needs.

Marmor himself said he received hate mail for his efforts.

But he was steadfast.

"I was never dissuaded from resettling refugees," Marmor said.

He contacted the City of Springfield, which "put out its hands" to the approximately 300 refugees.

The initial transition period is over, Marmor said. "The major issues now continue to be English language acquisition, working on employment for women and advocating for children in the schools."

Tutors needed

Springfield Public Schools will hire more tutors who speak both English and Somali and provide after-school programs to help high school students improve their English under a recent agreement reached with the federal Education Department.

"These families have escaped a war, a life of persecution, and they are so happy in their freedom,"

'These families have escaped a war, a life of persecution, and they are so happy in their freedom.'

Robert Marmor
executive director,
Jewish Family Service
of Western Massachusetts

If you go

What: Screening of "Rain in a Dry Land."

When: Sunday, 11:30 a.m. screening followed by a Q&A with documentary filmmaker Anne Makepeace.

Where: The Moviehouse, 48 Main St., Millerton.

Admission: Free.

Information: Call **1-518-789-3408** or visit www.the-moviehouse.net.

Marmor said. "They want a job, they want to buy a house and they want their kids to get a good education."

Marmor said he was approached by a number of filmmakers who were interested in working with the refugees.

"I chose to work with Anne because she had a compassionate, caring perspective," Marmor said.

He said Makepeace and her crew evolved into pseudo case managers.

"It went beyond the filmmaking, and I think that comes out in the film," Marmor said. "The level of intimacy that the film portrays ... It's clear, it's dynamic."

Makepeace said she was apprehensive about showing the film to her subjects.

"I really cared about the families and how they felt and I was really afraid," she said.

"Rain in a Dry Land" is a cinema verite, she said. "You have to show human frailty; their weak points as well as their strengths."

Jewish Family Services provided the setting for a screening of the film.

"They watched it and they were absolutely mesmerized," Makepeace said.

"Probably the most moving moment was when Madina, this beautiful, soulful woman and mother of eight, made a comment that was translated to me as 'well done.' Her husband, Aden, said, 'Thank you for telling our family's history.'"

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