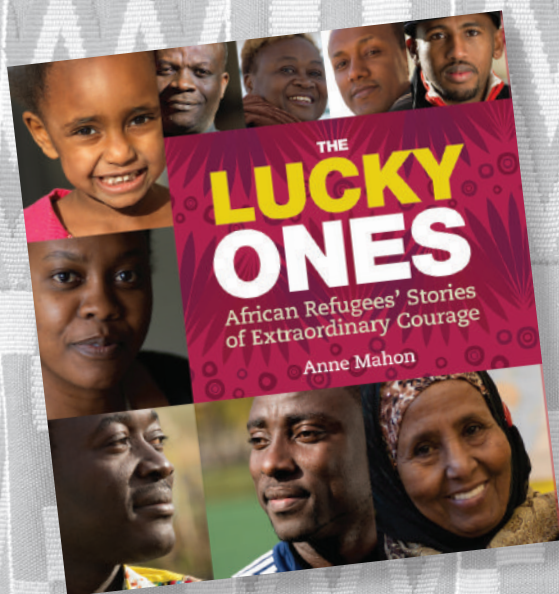




# READER'S GUIDE

READ THE SAME BOOK  
SHARE THE SAME STORY

## 2013/14 SELECTION



***The Lucky  
Ones: African  
Refugees' Stories  
of Extraordinary  
Courage***

by Anne Mahon



THE  
WINNIPEG  
FOUNDATION



Winnipeg Public  
LIBRARY

# ABOUT THE PROGRAM

Manitobans have selected *The Lucky Ones: African Refugees' Stories of Extraordinary Courage* by Anne Mahon, as this year's featured book for **On The Same Page**, a province-wide reading initiative that encourages all Manitobans to read and talk about the same book at the same time.

The program includes book giveaways, writer appearances, and special events inspired by the stories of the book's contributors. The shared experience of reading the same book and participating in events brings readers together to discuss and debate issues and themes identified in the book, creating opportunities for personal and creative expression.

"Winnipeg is a diverse, multi-cultural city and being a new Canadian is an experience that many of our citizens share," says Mayor Sam Katz. "It is my hope that the extraordinary collection of stories found in *The Lucky Ones* will inspire discussion, encourage an exchange of ideas, and promote understanding."

"**On The Same Page** encourages lifelong literacy, celebrates Manitoba arts and culture and helps build community through conversation and shared experience," says Rick Frost, CEO of The Winnipeg Foundation. "We're pleased to partner with Winnipeg Public Library on this important community initiative."

**On The Same Page** has featured the following titles in the program's first five years:

2009



*In Search of April Raintree*

2010



*Reading by Lightning*

2011



*Juliana and the Medicine Fish*

2012



*The Setting Lake Sun/  
Le soleil du lac qui se couche*

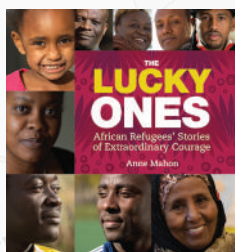
2013



*Manitowapow:  
Aboriginal Writings from the Land of Water*



## ABOUT THE BOOK



War, genocide, rape, looting, violence – the makings of nightmares is the daily reality for millions in contemporary Africa. To survive often means abandoning everything in a quick escape. If it were you, what would you do to survive? Could you flee? Could you leave behind belongings, memories, valuables, children, mothers, fathers?

In 2012, more than a thousand refugees to Manitoba, most from Africa, did just that. They are the lucky ones.

In this compelling collection, African refugees tell us, in their own words, how their lives were ripped apart and what they had to do to build new ones. They relate their stories with calm, matter-of-fact dignity that underplays the horrific challenges they have faced. In the pages of this book, we meet a wide assortment of men and women ranging in age from four to 73, representing a variety of African countries and backgrounds.

Their often untold stories span from experiences in their African birth countries through to their new homes in Manitoba. **The Lucky Ones** tells the story of the teenager who was kidnapped and then chained at an outdoor garage for 18 months. The woman who survived an encounter with a gun-toting rebel by knowing 30 generations of her family history. The young teen – all alone – who travelled across the continent from Burundi to South Africa in search of a home.

These accounts, as compiled by Anne Mahon, tell us much about the strength of the human spirit. These refugees show an openness to change and an unwavering gratitude that is an inspiring lesson for Canadians fortunate enough to already live here.

It seems we are all the lucky ones.

**Contact the On the Same Page coordinator at:**

Phone: (204) 986-2802

Email: [dpilon@winnipeg.ca](mailto:dpilon@winnipeg.ca)

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Anne Mahon** 's interest in telling the stories of African refugees grew out of her dedicated commitment to Canada's newcomers. She has been involved in a variety of community organizations and was nominated for the Lieutenant Governor's Make a Difference Community Award for her volunteer service. She lives in Winnipeg with her husband and their three children. This is her first book.



## ABOUT THE PHOTOGRAPHER



**Keith Levit** first picked up a second hand camera twenty-five years ago. The ensuing years have seen Keith creatively pursue his concept of merging photography and art, in both the black and white and colour mediums. Although based in Winnipeg, many of Keith's images have been created during his extensive travels throughout Africa, Asia, Europe, the Middle East, and North & South America.

*“Anne Mahon faithfully captures refugees’ voices with raw authenticity, imprinting their lives onto our collective memory. Their stories of love, loss, war, and grace capture the dogged human drive to metabolize pain into power for good.”* – Lisa Shannon, author of *A Thousand Sisters* and founder of Run for Congolese Women

*“Canada has thousands of untold stories of the immigrant and refugee experience. Here is a well-selected and well-told sampling – gripping accounts of what it’s like to overcome horrific obstacles and to live the dream.”* – Tom Denton, Director, Hospitality House Refugee Ministry

*“Reading this book will help us bridge the gap with the refugees – and will make us better Canadians as we appreciate our good fortune at the accident of birth. This is priority reading as we live in an increasingly complex Canadian society.”* – Art Defehr, former representative of the UNHCR to Somalia.

The author is donating all proceeds from the sale of this book back to the African community of Winnipeg through two local charities: micro-lending opportunities for business and community projects at SEED Winnipeg and entrance bursaries through the University of Winnipeg’s Opportunity Fund.

Visit [annemahon.ca](http://annemahon.ca) for more information.





# SYNOPSIS

A collection of distinct personal stories of Africans who have made Canada their home.

MUUXI, a young Somali man came to Canada at age 16 after being kidnapped and chained for 18 months. Escorted to Canada by an illegal handler, he was abandoned at the bus station where after hours of sitting scared with no English and no money, he was approached by a kind Somali man who would later become his father-mentor.

CHRIS tells his family's story of a violent death, fleeing Liberia for Ghana, seven years in a refugee camp, and extended efforts to bring the entire family to rural Manitoba, all the time honouring his deceased second father who he loved so much.

SEID is an idealistic journalist from Ethiopia who escaped after being tipped off he was being sought by the government for his outspoken views on a recent election.

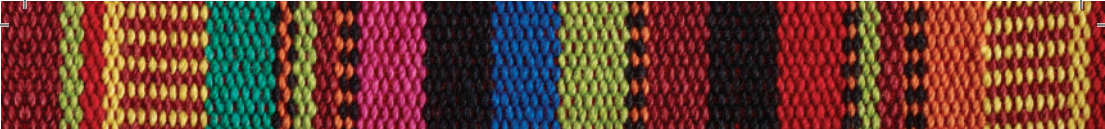
KIVI and GUILAINE are a couple from the DR of Congo who tell their anguished story of the separation of their family of six children and their extreme poverty as refugees. Their surprising faith and humour bring them great tenacity.

ANONYMOUS speaks out eloquently for the rights of mothers to protect their children from becoming child soldiers in the DR of Congo, and for dignity and rights of refugees in Canada.

SALLY was verbally abused first by family who raised her in Sierra Leone, and then by her husband. Sally's passion is to bring community together and empower women to change the world.

RAQIYA is an elderly Somali woman who says she was raised to be strong and independent. She reminisces about life there as a midwife before civil war and comments insightfully on tribal violence. Today, she is mother to the Somali community in Winnipeg.

ASUMANI is a man of tremendous independence and ingenuity. This Burundian lived the nomadic life that war creates, travelling alone some 5000 miles and through six countries, first as a ten-year-old boy looking for his mother and then as a teenager trying to find a better life for himself and his family.



NOMA is a young Zimbabwean woman who is the great-niece of the late senior Zimbabwean politician and activist Joshua Nkomo. And yet she is a self-proclaimed “all American girl” having lived almost all of her life in the United States until fleeing to Canada in the hope of finally settling her complex immigration story, which has brought her to question her identity.

AZARIAS is a well-educated Rwandan who lived in Kakuma refugee camp for ten years after the genocide in 1994. There he developed his unexpected gifts of leadership, first as a teacher, and then as the principal of the high school.

AKIM was a Sudanese prisoner of war who came to Canada after escaping jail in 1984. Once closely tied to the SPLM and SPLA, he speaks passionately about the oppression of the South Sudanese by the Arab-dominated North and his keen interest as he follows the latest developments of the recent election in South Sudan.

MARCELINE is a 67-year-old Burundian woman who brings her wisdom of 32 years in Canada raising five children alone, to share insights on the hot topic of parenting in a new culture. Especially important is her message of gratitude as she finds other parenting alternatives than “giving her kids a licking.”

EFREM is an Eritrean refugee who came to Canada via Europe in 1989. A well-educated man searching for a better life, Efrem has sponsored over 55 fellow refugees to come to Canada. His story of North American success through hard work brings hope to newcomers wondering about their future.

MARKO reminisces about Christmas as it was celebrated in his region of south Sudan and illustrates how much a refugee can miss a piece of their life, never able to duplicate it.

RAYMOND is a young man from Chad who tells of watching his father die in his presence and of a child’s life of war and poverty. His village received considerable assistance from UNICEF, which encouraged him to later commit earnestly to community development in Chad and now Canada.

ZARA, an Ethiopian child shares her adoption story, as imagined if she were telling it to a teacher one day. This story helps illuminate what the life of an orphaned African child could be like. (Mother was interviewed.)

DEBORAH immigrated to Canada from Nigeria to study theology and make a better life for herself. After 25 years in Canada, she speaks articulately on her deep love of Canada and the gifts newcomers have to share.

## AUTHOR'S NOTE

A number of things came together serendipitously to bring me to the writing of this book. In 1998, I moved with my family to another Canadian city after having lived my entire life in Winnipeg. During our three years there, I missed my hometown very much and struggled with the adjustments of living away from it.



Photo: Keith Levit

This event would prove to have even more of a deep and lasting effect on me than I could have predicted. A second factor in the creation of this book occurred one day in late 2006 when an African friend told my family and me some of his life story. His history — including twenty-five years of separation from his family and country, and the courage it took to rebuild his life in Canada — had a profound effect on me and became one of the main motivators that drew me to envision this project. His story reminded me how relatively easy my relocation and transition away from home had been compared to Africans who come to Canada. I could drive, I understood English, my family had financial stability and I knew the culture for the most part. Because of this realization, I became extremely curious about what refugees from another continent could be feeling. I felt compelled by my connection to him and the painful truths he shared that day. At that time, I was searching for something to immerse myself in that felt meaningful, and an idea unfolded.

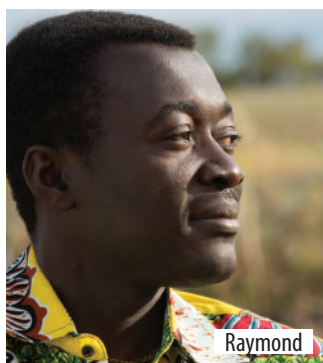


Photo: Keith Levit

I had a vision of writing a book with a mosaic of amazing stories much like the one I had heard. I imagined my proceeds from this book being donated to micro-lending opportunities and post-secondary bursaries for Africans in the Winnipeg area. So in 2007, I decided to interview Africans and record and write their personal life stories, but only after first researching how to best write the book.



I began to call people I had never met who were better acquainted with the African and refugee worlds in order to meet and question them. I did not realize it at the time, but during this research phase I was laying the groundwork for finding participants. I carefully considered how to interview, how to respect other cultures, and how to write so the reader would be captivated by these stories and the subjects would be properly honoured. But these concerns receded over time as my skills and conviction in the book grew.

All stories in this book are in the subjects' own words, carefully written as much as possible from what they said in their taped interviews. I feel privileged to be the messenger of these stories. It is a surprise — especially to me — that I am the vehicle for these shared stories since I am from outside the African community. Yet I am a volunteer, a supporter, and now a messenger. This book is a collaborative effort, similar to what Canada is at its heart ... people coming together from diverse backgrounds to share and build.

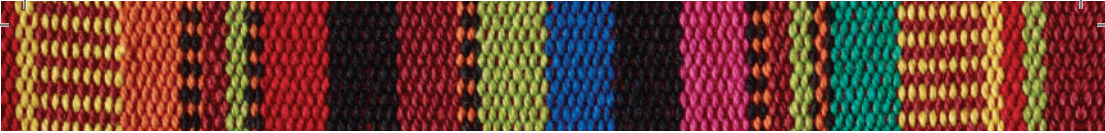
Africa is a continent of many distinct countries and certainly thousands of cultures with constantly changing political and social issues. It is not the goal of this book to present commentary on these topics, which are better addressed in the daily news and on the Internet, but instead to break open the human narrative that is their result. North Americans hear mostly about Africa's problems: civil war, violence against women and children, and poverty. This book chronicles the real-life realities of some of the challenges of living in Africa. But listen carefully to the stories and another description of Africa emerges; a continent of strong cultures and traditions that value family and community first, of people working together at a grass roots level to create triumphs of humanity and of people relying strongly on faith, whether Muslim or Christian.



Photo: Keith Levit



Photo: Keith Levit



In 2011, the Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to three women, two were African: Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, president of Liberia, and Leymah Gbowee, a peace activist. They represent just some of the many people and communities working passionately to create peace and positive change.

I've learned a tremendous amount working on this book, but there are two things I am especially mindful of. We all have a great deal in common, even if we have come from very different places and cultures. The universal truths of wanting to love and be loved, to work for fair pay and to raise our families in safety apply to us all. I also learned to believe that anything is possible. The resilience of the subjects in this book, as well as this book's creation, have taught me this: we should never limit our expectations to the boundaries of what we already know.



Zara and her sister

Photo: Keith Levit

## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. How familiar were you with refugees' stories prior to reading? Have these personal stories changed your perceptions of refugees?
2. Were there specific stories that challenged or surprised you? Which ones and why?
3. Which stories resonated with you the most and why?
4. Both Muuxi and Seid speak of having to "let go of their old lives" in order to integrate fully (page 25, 43). Do you think newcomers should have to give up their culture and adopt Canadian culture? Is it possible? What price is paid for this choice?
5. What coping strategies are used by participants in the book? What attributes helped them create resilience? For you in your life?
6. Deborah's story is one about immigration (pages 144-157). Why do you think the author included her story in this collection?
7. Have you ever moved away or been stripped of most/all of what you knew in your life? Do you know anyone who has? What does it take to start again?
8. How much do you think Canada's future relies on bringing in refugees and immigrants? What are the upsides and downsides of this?
9. In Anonymous' story he speaks of not just needing a bed to sleep on but of the things that will bring him the peace that he needs for a good night's sleep (page 163). What can established Canadians do to help newcomers "sleep better at night"?



10. Raqiya speaks of being raised an independent and strong woman (page 83). Does this surprise you? How do we perceive Muslim women today?
11. Do you consider Noma a refugee or an immigrant (page 107–119)? Why?
12. What role does faith play in these personal stories?
13. What is your opinion of the title? Are these participants lucky?
14. Why do you think the author chose to allow the participants to tell their stories in the first person?
15. Choose one of the stories from the book and compare and contrast this individual's experience to your own. How are you similar? How are you different? Try to question deeper than just gender, class, race, power, culture.
16. How do the stories of newcomers in this book compare to the experiences of First Nations People of Canada? Is there common ground? Differences?



Photo: Keith Levit

## 'The Lucky Ones' tells stories of refugees on the page



Anne Mahon and Muuxi Adams. (Photograph by Jordan Thompson)

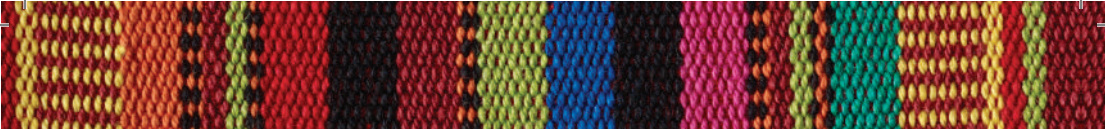
Anne Mahon is the lucky one — the On The Same Page initiative has chosen her collection of stories to be its featured book this year.

On The Same Page, a project by The Winnipeg Foundation and Winnipeg Public Library, is a widespread book club, encouraging Manitobans to read and talk about the same book at the same time.

Published by Great Plains Publications in Wolseley, Mahon's *The Lucky Ones* is comprised of 17 stories from African refugees who have moved to Winnipeg.

"It tells the stories of challenges in Africa and what it's like to come to Canada to start all over again," Mahon, a Tuxedo resident, explained. "It highlights some of the challenges and difficulties faced, but it also has a triumphant feel. There are stories of hope and of gratitude and a lot of perseverance."

*The Lucky Ones* was chosen by public vote. On The Same Page co-ordinator Danielle Pilon said each year, a list of four books is put together for Manitobans to vote on in order to select the featured book.



"I was so delighted that someone was going to bring the stories of these individual refugees to an audience," said Ingeborg Boyens, executive editor and one of the two owners of Great Plains Publications. "So often we never hear from people like that because they're busy trying to set their own lives and don't want to think about the past."

Although she has never travelled to Africa, Mahon was inspired to write this book based on her own personal experiences living away from her hometown, Winnipeg.

"I found it to be quite challenging," Mahon admitted. "When I heard the story of an African refugee friend who's in the book, I became intensely curious about what it would be like to leave everything behind and have to start with nothing."

From that point forward, Mahon worked her book for the next five years. Mahon wrote the stories herself, but she interviewed each subject, recording their conversations.

"Some of (the stories) were so horrific! I thought, 'Oh my God, how does someone live through this?'" Boyens said.

Mahon found her subjects by word of mouth — one person would introduce her to their friend, and so on. Mahon is also a volunteer at the Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization of Manitoba (IRCOM), so she met several of her interview subjects there. Regardless of the subject matter, Mahon found the interviewees easy to work with.

"They were very open-hearted and I was quite amazed by it. Overall, the subjects were very generous and very trusting. There were a few people who didn't participate but they are very much in the minority," Mahon said.

The title of the book describes those who were fortunate to leave the refugee experience in Africa, said Mahon.

"I think it's also a nod to those people who have done really well for themselves and settled well," Mahon added. "And I think, in a way, it's also a question mark. It's hard to come here as an immigrant or a refugee to Canada, so one might also ask, 'Are they lucky?'"

Cindy Chan/*The Metro*/October 9, 2013



### FICTION FOR ADULTS

Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi - **Americanah**

FICTION ADICHIE

Eggers, Dave - **What is the What?**

FICTION EGGERS

Gordimer, Nadine - **Jump and Other Stories**

FICTION GOR

Mohamed, Nadifa - **Black Mamba Boy**

FICTION MOHAMED

Mengestu, Dinaw - **The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears**

FICTION MENGESTU

Mengetu, Dinaw - **How to Read the Air**

FICTION MENGESTU

Osondu, E. C. - **Voice of America: Stories**

FICTION OSONDU

### NON-FICTION FOR ADULTS

Beah, Ishmael - **A Long Way Gone**

966.404092 BEAH 2007

Bul Dau, John - **God Grew Tired of Us**

B DAU 2007

Goodwin, Debi - **Citizens of Nowhere: From Refugee Camp to Canadian Campus**

305.896773 GOO 2010

Ilibagiza, Immaculée - **Left to Tell: Discovering God Amidst the Rwandan Holocaust**

B ILIBAGIZA 2006



Kidder, Tracy – **Strength in What Remains**

967.5720409 NIYIZONKIZA 2009

Leddy, Mary Jo – **At the Border Called Hope: Where Refugees are Neighbours**

362.8785 LED

Maskalyk, Dr. James – **Six Months in Sudan: A Young Doctor in a War-Torn Village**

610.92 MASKALYK 2009

Mawi Asgedom – **Of Beetles and Angels: a Boy's Remarkable Journey from Refugee Camp to Harvard**

B MAWI ASGEDOM

Moorehead, Caroline – **Human Cargo: A Journey Among Refugees**

305.906914 MOO

Nutt, Dr. Samantha – **Damned Nations: Greed, Guns, Armies and Aid**

303.66083 NUT 2011

Pipher, Mary – **The Middle of Everywhere: The World's Refugees Come to Our Town**

305.90691 PIP

Shannon, Lisa – **A Thousand Sisters**

305.90695 SHA 2010

Walzer, Craig – **Out of Exile: Narratives from the Abducted and Displaced People of Sudan**

962.4043 WAL

Zainab Salbi, Zainab – **The Other Side of War: Women's Stories of Survival and Hope**

362.87082 SAL 2006



## FOR YOUNG ADULTS

Naidoo, Beverley – **Out Of Bounds: Seven Stories Of Conflict And Hope**  
YA FICTION NAI

Nanji, Shenaaz G. – **Child of Dandelions**  
YA FICTION NANJI

Robert, Na'ima B. – **From Somalia with Love**  
YA FICTION ROBERT

Book Wish Foundation – **What You Wish For: stories and poems for Darfur**  
YA FICTION WHAT

Williams, Michael – **Now is the Time for Running**  
YA FICTION WILLIAMS

## FOR CHILDREN

Applegate, Katherine – **Home of the Brave**  
J FICTION APPLEGATE

Asare, Meshack – **Sosu's Call**  
J FICTION ASARE

Naidoo, Beverley – **The Other Side of Truth**  
J FICTION NAI

Berg, Lois Anne – **An Eritrean Family**  
J 305.8 BER

Wilkes, Sybella – **One Day We Had to Run!: Refugee Children Tell Their Stories in Words and Paintings**  
J 325.21 WIL

Williams, Mary – **Brothers in Hope: The Story of the Lost Boys of Sudan**  
E WILLIAMS





## RELATED WEBSITES

**[www.acomi.ca](http://www.acomi.ca)** – African Communities in Manitoba Inc.

**[www.cic.gc.ca](http://www.cic.gc.ca)** – Citizenship and Immigration Canada

**[www.ccrweb.ca](http://www.ccrweb.ca)** – Canadian Council for Refugees

**[www.humankindinternationalinc.org](http://www.humankindinternationalinc.org)** – Humankind International.  
A Winnipeg-based, nonprofit humanitarian organization committed to listening to and responding to the needs of the communities of Northern Kenya and Southern Somalia.

**[www.immigratemanitoba.ca](http://www.immigratemanitoba.ca)** – Government of Manitoba – Immigration

**[www.ircom.ca](http://www.ircom.ca)** – Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization of Manitoba

**[www.unhcr.ca](http://www.unhcr.ca)** – United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

**Watch for appearances by the author and other special events in January and February 2014.**

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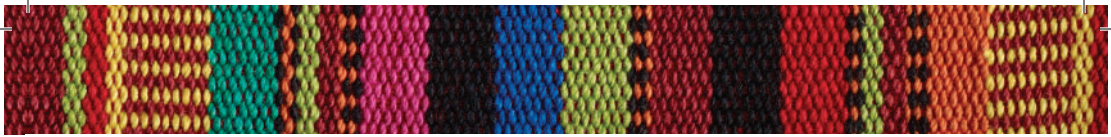
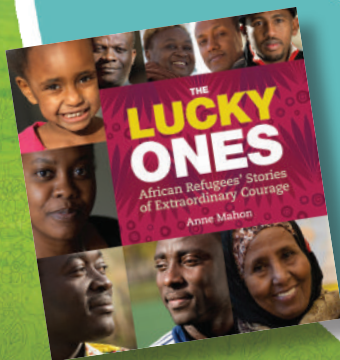


Photo: Keith Levit



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THE  
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