

Refugee Transitions' "World of Difference Benefit Luncheon"
San Francisco City Club
November 12, 2009
Volunteer Speech: Rachel Freeman

Hello! My name is Rachel Freeman. I have had such a wonderful time getting to know Praseela and her family during the past few months and am so impressed by how fast Praseela is learning English and how much she cares about doing well in school.

I first heard about Refugee Transitions from a friend of mine who was tutoring a family from Liberia. I wanted to tutor a Bhutanese family in particular because I had learned about Bhutanese history and culture at The Folklife Festival in Washington DC. I attended a Refugee Transitions orientation session and a training for new tutors, which were extremely helpful in preparing me to work with Praseela. One of RT's staff members went with me to the Rai's house for the first time and introduced me to their family. This was the beginning of a lasting friendship.

At first, Praseela had trouble telling me about what she had done that week because she didn't know how to express this in English. But now when I go to see her, she is so chatty and can't stop talking!

One of the things I have enjoyed doing with Praseela is teaching her how to ride a bike. Once she gets on her bike, she starts telling me all sorts of wonderful stories about her life and interesting ideas she has about the world. Praseela has also taught me some Nepali. I love the phrase for "this is delicious" – "yo mito cha"-- because they are always making wonderful food for me.

I am deeply moved by the Rai family's resilience and resourcefulness in creating a new life for themselves here. Many of their friends would love to have a tutor of their own one day. I am excited to think that new volunteers from Refugee Transitions may begin to work with some of these families in the future.

I am very thankful to Refugee Transitions for introducing me to such a wonderful family. My experiences with the Bhutanese refugee community have inspired me to pursue a career working with refugees and to build a strong community amongst my *own* family. Dhanyavad!
Thank you!

