IN OUR OWN VOICE
by Bisrat Misgun, Marjorie Kovler Center participant

EVER SINCE I CAME TO THE MARJORIE KOVLER CENTER, I have felt a sense of tranquility and worthiness. This is mainly due to the assistance from the dedicated staff at the Marjorie Kovler Center as well as the fellow clients and participants who assist as support groups.

As one of the people who won an asylum case recently, I feel that I got peace of mind and closure. I was glad to see that my requests were heard and acknowledged. However, I would like to underline that some of the clinical and behavioral problems encountered do not disappear overnight along with winning an asylum case. Rather, they require constant follow up. With the support that I have been getting from the Marjorie Kovler Center, I believe that I am equipped to take care of my situation better and to be a positive force in the healing process.

LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

DEAR FRIENDS AND COLLEAGUES,
Greetings from “one of the directors.” I recently had the pleasure of changing positions within Heartland Alliance to become the senior director of the Marjorie Kovler Center and Refugee Health Programs. That has left Mary Fabri (who has traditionally written this column) and me in a quandary to describe our positions and responsibilities. One way we started was to say she was the heart and I was the guts of the Marjorie Kovler Center, but that left some people wondering, who was the brain? Another was to say she’s the director of torture treatment services internationally, but what did that mean for services at home? Another approach was to describe ourselves as the “director of the Marjorie Kovler Center,” but the ambiguity seemed to make some uncomfortable. The truth is, we know each other’s strengths and challenges and work to complement them. Perhaps most important, we are both totally committed to the mission and success of the Marjorie Kovler Center for the Treatment of Survivors of Torture. So, we will continue to clarify how we describe our roles and you will continue to hear from both of us in this letter from the director.

We wanted this newsletter to focus on themes of rebirth and new growth to synchronize with spring. Although I have seen my first robin, I haven’t seen many crocuses sprouting through the frozen ground, and I still see sheets of hard ice. Maybe that is the metaphor that is appropriate this spring. We search for renewal and hope in a time of many challenges, and await the day when the cold winter is over and we can be embraced by the warmth of a welcoming spring.

Mary Lynn Everson
Senior Director, Marjorie Kovler Center and Refugee Health Programs
IT STILL FEELS BIZARRE to introduce myself as a yoga teacher and energy worker! For most of my life, I had much more traditional careers: librarian, marketing communications manager. Even the time I spent making fine press books, setting lines of poetry letter by letter, tearing handmade papers, folding the printed sheets and sewing chapbooks, seems mainstream compared to my current life.

Serious illness jump started a major change process, and nowadays I practice yoga, meditation, and yoga nidra (deep relaxation) and teach these practices to others. The healing work I do—Phoenix Rising Yoga Therapy and cranio sacral therapy—is so much about spiritual practice, learning, and play that it’s difficult to consider it work. Sometimes people ask me “What do you do for fun?” and it makes me stop short. Although I participate in some of the “usual suspects” like hiking and seeing movies, it is playing with yoga techniques and shamanic transformation that make me feel most thoroughly alive.

In cranio sacral work, which is what I practice with Marjorie Kovler Center clients, we call the body-mind-spirit the dreambody. My first meetings with Kovler clients were quite daunting, as I was very conscious of their difficult lives. But once the work began, their dreambodies opened up and began to direct my work, and each in their own way began to take what they wanted from the sessions. In a certain sense, when I work I’m dancing with their spirits, and couldn’t ask for better partners!

SAVE THE DATE for the Midwest Light of Human Rights Awards 9th Annual Luncheon at the Palmer House Hilton Grand Ballroom in Chicago on June 10th, from 12:00 to 1:30pm. The event will feature a keynote address by Harold Koh, Dean of Yale Law School and former Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor.
FROM THE FIELD
by Mary Lynn Everson, Senior Director

I IMAGINE THERE ARE MANY OF US following the news reports and editorials on waterboarding (mock drowning and asphyxiation) and the related legislation. It seems however, that there are at least two viewpoints missing in this dialogue: the voice of people who work in the torture treatment field and the voice of survivors of torture.

Through the Marjorie Kovler Center’s clinical work and association with 34 member agencies in the National Consortium of Torture Treatment Programs, we are confident in our belief about waterboarding. Waterboarding is torture, torture is an ineffective interrogation tool, and torture is wrong.

President Bush’s March 8 veto of legislation limiting the CIA’s use of interrogation techniques, essentially prohibiting waterboarding and other techniques using physical force, is a huge step in the wrong direction. First, leaders of the U.S. Army suggest such techniques are not necessary. Additionally, there will be serious repercussions for thousands of innocent people whose governments can cite U.S. policy as justification of their own use of torture.

Anecdotally, we can cite survivor stories that support the horror as well as ineffectiveness of waterboarding and other forms of torture, where survivors report they will make up anything to end the nightmare. In a recent Torture Abolition and Survivors Support Coalition video entitled “Breaking the Silence: Torture Survivors Speak Out,” a survivor (physician) from South America painfully describes his torture from waterboarding.

In the end, we applaud the Congress, in spite of the veto and lack of votes for an override, for taking a stand against torture. The Marjorie Kovler Center has taken a stand in a recent legislative visit by asking Illinois Senator Richard Durbin for a hearing on torture. A survivor of torture from a country in Africa recently warned us to be careful. He said that our country is beginning to feel a lot like his. We can and should do better as a nation by condemning and prohibiting the use of these inhumane, horrifying interrogation techniques.

DON’T MISS OUR ANNUAL UNITED NATIONS EVENT in support of torture survivors. The event will be held on June 26th from 6 to 9pm at the Crown Center for the Humanities on Loyola University’s Rogers Park campus. Look for more information in the coming weeks.

CENTER NEWS

BEST WISHES TO FLUTRA AND CANDICE! Longtime Heartland Alliance employee, Flutra Sahatqija gave birth to a healthy baby boy, Ari, in February. Candice Sankarsingh-Hebbert, clinical PsyD student at Marjorie Kovler Center, also had a healthy baby girl, Soren, in January. Both moms are back at work and doing well!

THE MARJORIE KOVLER CENTER IS currently working with the Cambodian Association of Illinois (CAI) to assess the needs of elderly Cambodians affected by the Khmer Rouge. We expect the assessment to result in specialized collaborative programming.

THE RECENTLY RENAMED Marjorie Kovler Center Leadership Council of Heartland Alliance welcomes four new members: Irene Martinez, M.D., Kristen Welch, M.D., Judith Weinstein, M.P.H., Jennie Landfield, B.A. We sincerely thank departing council members Antonio Martinez, PhD, Jim Sanders, M.D., and Mary Pappas, LCPC.

WITH HELP FROM VIVIEN EISENBERG, the Marjorie Kovler hosted a talk by Jeff Spitz, Columbia film professor and documentarian, and Muntu Nxamo, member of the Robben Island Singers. The speakers discussed Jeff’s movie which tells the story of the Robben Island Singers and their lives since the end of apartheid. Muntu emphasized how torture has affected the lives of many South Africans and continues to post-apartheid.

THANKS TO JUDITH WEINSTEIN, the Marjorie Kovler Center was able to host a talk by Dr. Les Roberts, epidemiologist who co-designed and co-authored a key study on post-invasion mortality in Iraq. His study was published in the British Medical journal The Lancet and estimated deaths from violence 650,000.
RAWANDAN FRUIT SALAD

In Rwanda fresh fruit is sweet as candy, particularly delicious in a fruit salad. A fruit salad can be made from just three or four ingredients and makes a fine dessert with an African-style dinner.

Chop and mix any of the following: avocado, banana (or “baby” bananas), guava, mango, melon, orange, papaya, pear, pineapple, or passion fruit (can eat this right out of the fruit shell).
Add lemon juice or chopped fresh mint.
Add grated coconut or roasted peanuts for texture.
Sugar or honey can be added to taste.
Bon Appetit!

INGREDIENTS
Mixed fruit (avocados, bananas, guava, mango, melon, orange, papaya, pear, pineapple or passion fruit)
Lemon juice
Mint (chopped)
Coconut (grated)
Peanuts (roasted)
Sugar or honey (to taste)