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It was at the Mohawk Valley Refugee Center in Utica, NY, that I met refugees from both Chernobyl, Russia and Viet Nam. As students they were attentive and anxious to learn. Because they were new to the United States and had neither knowledge nor skill in the English language, a good deal of our initial attempts to communicate included gestures, dramatics and simple words. A young man, Vasily, arrived later in our language school year and he told me with gestures and awkward language that his wife could not attend classes because she was ill.



On Fridays of our sessions, I brought in food and/or clothing. My students were reluctant to take any clothing which they did not absolutely need. One Friday I brought my yellow cardigan sweater and a very lovely babushka, neither of which I needed, and I wanted to share them with the students. However, no one spoke up to take either. Instead they asked me to "Give to Vasily for woman (his wife)." Vasily finally accepted both and said, "Thank you, Teacher."

A number of days later, the class assembled looking very sad, and I motioned, "Why sad?" They told me "Vasily's wife die. Please go see." I did go to the funeral home and found it crowded with many Russians who came long distances to be there for the family. Walking to the casket, my eyes looked down to see this beautiful young mother of seven little children, wearing what had been my yellow cardigan sweater and beautiful babushka. After my knees stopped shaking, Vasily came up to me and with a strong hug, "tanked" me over and over. The clothing for which I had no use became the burial clothing for Vasily's dear young wife. That was the best she had. This picture will remain in my mind and in my heart's prayer forever. "How blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of God."

