

KAY REID

A neighbor and a storyteller

BY JON ROSS ■ CONTRIBUTING WRITER

“**S**tories From Our Village” reads the banner on the front of the 43-page booklet. Inside, speakers named Pacheco and Gazai, Chavez and McIntosh, Ananouko, Prokhorov, and Mitchell tell first-person stories from the diverse North Portland community that is New Columbia.

Some tell of coming from the other side of the world:

I was expecting life in the United States would be much easier. I was shocked when I saw a lot of extremely poor people, without a house, without money, on the street. In Russia we did not have people on the street.

Others tell of losing everything:

After the strokes, before coming to Columbia Villa, I reached a point when I had to decide: feed my family or pay rent. I chose to feed my family, and we got an eviction notice.

Of fighting for a future:

In Tillamook, at 14, I was taken out of my home and placed in foster care and juvenile lockups. I was probably the only 16

year old that ever faked her ID so she could get a job.

And witnessing history:

Because of the political situation in Sudan, my husband was working in the United Arab Emirates, and from there we came to the States and applied for asylum. We were in New York September 11 and saw the towers fall. After that, we had to go to Michigan by train. We boarded, but five officers ordered us off, took our passports, and brought a big dog that sniffed our luggage. They held us six hours and we missed the train.

These are the voices of a handful of the 2,500 residents of New Columbia, a mixed-income housing development in North Portland. The person who brought these voices together, in person and on the page, is Kay Reid, though on the phone, she’s quick to correct me —

“OK, the idea — and it was *the* idea, it wasn’t just *my* idea — was that we should engage some kids, some teenagers, to teach them how to interview.”

I’d been warned Kay would take every opportunity to share or shift credit for her good works — and indeed, it is her desire

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PHOTO: WWW.NEWCOLUMBIAAPTS.COM

Top: Columbia Villa was a barracks-style housing project originally constructed for Kaiser shipyard workers during World War II. Above: New Columbia was built on the site between 2003 and 2005 with emphasis on access to common space and community.

NOTHING
makes me **MORE**
HOPEFUL
than discovering
another human being to admire.

— ALICE WALKER —

The **NOTHING MORE HOPEFUL** series originates from a workshop taught by Martha Gies. “Last fall, as I tired of hearing the ISIL Hour, interrupted only occasionally by a warning about Ebola’s imminent arrival in Europe or the U.S., it occurred to me that the media was deaf to good news,” Gies says. “I remembered my friend Sr. Rosarii Metzgar once telling me she believed all the terrible news with which we are daily battered must surely be offset by small and unseen acts of good.” Gies resolved to enlist some writers who would hunt down and write those stories.