



## **L.A. woman heads to South Africa to make a difference**

By Cynthia E. Griffin  
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Friday, April 20 2007

While many 24-year-olds are just figuring out who they are and what they want to do with their lives, Ivory Rose Parnell is just three short months away from fulfilling what the U.C. Riverside ethnic studies graduate sees as her destiny.

In August, the Los Angeles resident will start a one-year sojourn working in a South African refugee camp, and naive or not, the middle child of three daughters says she is not nervous or even scared about this major change in her life.

"I studied abroad in South Africa in 2004. I worked with a Non-Government Organization (NGO) called The Valley Trust, based in Kwazulu Province (near Durban). They are primarily an HIV/AIDS and sustainable development organization, and that experience solidified what I needed to do with my life," said Parnell, whose certainty about her direction is evident in the confident and calm way she speaks.

"My goal has been to get back to South Africa," added the former Watts Labor Community Action Committee worker, who spoke of her first experience there as making her feel more comfortable than she had ever felt in her life. "I felt like I was home."

While that first trip allowed her to live in a university dorm, during this one-year stint Parnell will live and work in the Kala refugee camp of 20,000 people. She will be part of a team sent in by the organization FORGE (Facilitating Opportunities for Refugee Growth and Empowerment) to prepare residents to return to the Democratic Republic of the Congo at the end of the year.

"There are three components of the project," explained Parnell about what she is doing. "The first is to disseminate information on what tools and supplies the United Nations Refugee Agency will supply; the transportation plan and to give them information on people who have already gone

back. That's my part."

Parnell said the second part involves giving camp residents basic construction and agricultural skills and helping link those to opportunities to make money.

The third aspect of the project, which is also Parnell's responsibility, is to address empowerment. "That is emotional and mental health issues like self-confidence building, nonviolent communication and interpersonal skills," added the young project manager.

Parnell is well aware of the magnitude of the task she is tackling but feels personally compelled to get involved.

"If you have the knowledge and don't do anything to improve the situation, it's irresponsible and in some ways almost criminal.

"If I'm not actively involved in the uplift of African people . . . I need to make good on the dreams and visions of my ancestors . . . and to a certain degree fulfill the purpose God has for me."

While Parnell is a FORGE staff member, the organization is primarily a volunteer effort and consequently she must raise \$7,500 to help pay for her housing, food and other necessities. She has already raised \$2,300 and is in the process of planning other fundraising activities to secure the balance.

As she talks about her August departure date, Parnell's excitement is palpable, but she is also well aware of her family's bittersweet emotions. "They understand, but they want me to be here with them."

To support Parnell, contact her at (323) 273-4974 or via e-mail at [irparn@hotmail.com](mailto:irparn@hotmail.com).