



# **my heart it is delicious: Setting the Course for Cross-Cultural Health Care; the story of the CENTER FOR INTERNATIONAL HEALTH**

*Biloine Whiting Young*

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MY HEART IT IS DELICIOUS is the amazing and inspiring story of how a baker's dozen of Minnesota volunteers responded to an international health crisis half a world away and helped transform refugee medical care across the globe.

When the American Refugee Committee of Minneapolis sent a small medical team to tend the sick and starving refugees on the war-torn Thai-Cambodian border in 1979, the fledgling nonprofit had no idea its work would last into the twenty-first century. Neither did many of ARC's volunteer nurses and physicians, who realized when they returned to Minnesota that they and western medicine needed to change if non-English-speaking refugees had any hope of better health care upon their arrival in America.

One of those volunteer physicians, Dr. Neal Holtan, founded St. Paul's Center for International Health in 1980. His goal: to serve the unique medical needs of Minnesota's newest immigrants, who were arriving by the thousands not only from Southeast Asia but later from Russia, Somalia, and other countries in upheaval. Little by little, the center's staff learned that knowledge of their patients' diseases, sensitivity to their beliefs, and integration of their customs are essential ingredients in treating persons of various cultures. A quarter of a century later, the Center for International Health is renowned for its practice of culturally competent care, thanks in large part to its director, Dr. Patricia Walker, herself a world leader in the global response to the health needs of uprooted and displaced persons.

MY HEART IT IS DELICIOUS tells many stories of the American Refugee Committee, the Minneapolis Center for Victims of Torture, the Center for International Health, as well as of patients and practitioners like Dr. Walker, a tropical medicine specialist who grew up in Thailand as the daughter of an American pilot, trained at the Mayo Clinic, and opened her own home to several refugees. Together, they drew inspiration from an international health crisis and each other to change how the medical world heals victims of violence and warfare, mind and spirit, body and soul.

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