

March 20th, 2010

Dear Friends of Zimbabwe;

Greetings from the soil here! We landed very late on the 11th after an uneventful but very long flight across the Atlantic. We, is Kristen Magis, my assistant this trip, and I. We went right to work upon arriving and have adjusted with a normal bit of fog the first day or so. All is well with the weather in this beautiful country, and our first trip to the rural areas has been very pleasant and highly productive. We are now back in town to get supplies.

Kristen has her doctorate in Public Policy with a focus on Sustainability and Social Justice. She is the owner director of the Leadership Institute, located in Silverton, Oregon, since 1995. She has been consulting with non-profits for 20 years and is now turning her attention to those involved with humanitarian aid overseas. She found out about Ancient Ways through someone who has been helping us for several years. Kristen is here to help in whatever way is needed, and is gracing us with her highly sought after talents in the area of organizational growth and development. She worked with our Board of Directors this last winter to help us refine our Vision and Values, and now is here working with the real meal deal in Zimbabwe.

She is donating all of her time and we are eternally grateful. I'm sure this is fascinating to see things from both sides of the coin – for example, most all of her experience has been with non-profits working in the US, and now she is here on the ground in Zimbabwe, working with our international organization which is another kettle of fish. She too is having a great opportunity to build the bridges from the world of academia as a scholar and to put into practice all of the theory. Additionally, she is here consulting, teaching me how to navigate the organizational terrain, while at the same time making us snacks, helping to balance the books, and do other gopher tasks. What a diversity of contrasts!

BEING IN TOWN

Even though coming to town has the advantage of more accessibility to things such as a wider variety of food, internet café, and hardware supplies, there are huge challenges in the city scape. I'm a country gal and so have to step up my resilience to handle the scene for any duration. The water works without electricity, but for unknown reasons has been shut off regularly without notice and so there are water buckets filled waiting on standby for using the toilet, bathing, and cooking. The water is highly polluted and

so we bathe with it, but shouldn't really drink it. The electricity is not a convenience one can count on as it goes off and on randomly. Several hours to multiple days go by without lights and stoves (you hope you have your meal fixed for the evening when the lights go out). The (landline) telephone only works if the electricity is on and so cell phones have become a must. And, where does one take the trash? To the corner to burn our pile with the neighbors'. It would be okay except modern plastics are everywhere on store shelves. Toxic smoke from the garbage burns, the older EPA-less vehicles and diesel buses, as well as stacks of burning tires that will result in a pile of wires to be coveted, fills the sky above the asbestos covered roofs. Some parts of Harare where the wealthy live have better water, but everyone struggles with the electrical outages (no phone) and air quality issues.

Why come to town with the extra stress? Camping in my hut is much easier...the well is a stone's throw away, the fresh country air is invigorating, and one is naturally geared to candles and flashlights. But, the project supplies are found in city stores, our accountant is in the suburbs, and the only communication with the states is at the internet café, so we are like nomads when here, moving back and forth between the stark distinctions in lifestyles.

THE ECONOMY

Our first day here we went to the city supermarkets and township shops to get our start up supplies. Thankfully, we are no longer counting Zim dollars with zeroes lined up around the corner. Instead we are using USD and then South African rand for the change (5 rand is 50 cents US). This shift has reduced the stress for not only us but everyone who lives here in many ways. Many people have an 8th grade education for math and working with billions just wasn't working ...even the government here complained of errors in their work force.

When the US Dollarization occurred one dollar was equal to 50 billion Zim. The challenge was that one dollar was brought in as the basis of the transactions. There was no coin available and so the dollar became the primary unit of exchange instead of a smaller unit, like a dime. If you bought a loaf at .80 you would have to pay a dollar because there was no coin. So school fees are very high with each school setting their own prices. Food prices too are sufficiently high so that everyone eats only what they can grow or barter, making a loaf of bread last much longer. For example, from our grocery list this trip for the month:

- 6 medium onions \$1.49
- 7 lemons .75

- 4 garlic clusters .88 (the cheaper small ones as the nice large ones were 4 times that)
- Apples \$2.40 per kg (so about \$1.10 a pound)
- 2 small butternut squash .71
- 2 kg self rising flour at \$1.80 (.82 per pound)
- 3 dz small eggs \$4.50 (buying in bulk was the cheapest – I tend to go vegetarian when here)
- .65 small yogurt
- .88 pasta

Many items in the supermarket are brought from other parts of Zimbabwe and South Africa or Botswana, so when in the rural areas, you would only eat what your neighbor and you grow, with each neighbor being ¼ mile away. Hence, we come to town for the nurturing of our diet, as well as supplies for our programs and services and the internet. We don't do a lot for ourselves while here, except eat as normally as possible, since we put in long hours and aren't here as tourists.

NHIMBE INTAKE

Our second day we headed out to Mhondoro after getting our basic supplies. Just like a doctor or nurse taking in a new patient, I really needed to get my finger on the pulse of the energy of our core group who offer Nhimbe to the community, so we were able to sit with each member, (18 in all) for 20 minutes or more and get a feel for how things have been since I saw them last. This initial "intake" has been standard protocol for several years as the potential for tragedies and trauma here in 1 year is standard fare. Much had changed, just like with every trip.

Mostly the same faces were present, but with new stories of difficulties, or *zvakaoma*, and how that was impacting their lives. All people are trying to cope up with radical financial challenges. Their wages at Nhimbe for Progress were always funded on a shoestring and now with the US dollarization (using USD with very high prices at the store and at school but without any raise) the staff has been facing a very demanding situation. Prices in town have always been higher than the rural area, but now it seems that many things are cheaper in town. Disillusioned, frustrated and feeling hopeless, the average employee was wondering how they could make it. They couldn't get their brain around the incredible service they are offering the community without adequate compensation. It wasn't making any sense. I knew that things were hard, but like using a thermometer gives you a more accurate reading than a hand on the forehead, coming here always gives me the genuine article first hand.

We also found many people losing their loved ones, acquiring new extended family members to care for, as well as the birthing of new babies to welcome. Specifically we shared about the loss this last May of Achiera Matilda Magaya, the elder of the clan here and my adopted mother, and the loss in November of Papa John, the elder in our clan in the US and my godfather. People were moved by both of these passings. John had been able to visit in 2007 to see the great work that had been accomplished due to his generosity and in the process made many friends here and has a baby named after him, as he offered much wisdom from his 88-year-young life.

The *zvakaoma* was explored in a listening state, then I followed with descriptions of some of the background that many had never heard, or understood, to help balance the picture. We came out of our initial meetings rich with information but with no certain answers.

CORE GROUP MEETINGS

We have spent 3 blocks of time working creatively with the staff and management to uncover the diamonds in the dust. Unfortunately, Cosmas is missing all of this great exploration and discovery as he is in the states with in-residencies and other teaching and performing commitments. It's quite a process to turn a dark room into one filled with light. It's much like when a depressed person has no idea how to get out of their dilemma and then someone suggests that there must be a way forward, "so let's talk".

We began by first making sure everyone felt heard by me giving them feedback about all of the critical consensus issues. Then using many metaphors we began exploring the idea that our staff here are like the aunts and uncles of the organization which is the child, instead of them feeling like the child, looking to the parent (me or management) to solve it all. Since Cosmas and I began Nhimbe we both had our elders as partners of support in the undertaking. Now all 3 have passed on, and the extended family really needs to step up to the plate.

Next, we took time to use a guided journey to remember ancient history of the Shona people and how powerful and resourceful they are, and how to remember hope in today's circumstances. We released the focus on the *zvakaoma* with the knowledge that like aunts and uncles, counseling their children, they can't even begin to consider a solution until they are free of bad feelings.

Our next step was to celebrate our strengths and successes. That meeting was joyful, music filled, and a powerful shift of consciousness. Our next meeting hopefully on Saturday will now dig into the *zvakaoma* looking for the way forward.

There was only one of the issues that was raised that I immediately felt compelled to solve. That was of an outstanding debt from a few years ago. The staff has been paid on this notorious shoestring budget since the beginning, so I had offered to buy them either a *mombe* (cow) or a *mbudzi* (goat) depending upon their role and length of service, as a way to deal with the situation. It's much easier to come up with a bonus rather than a continual amount each month. We bought the *mbudzi* and that deal was done, but we couldn't find *mombe* anywhere, even traveling quite a distance. There was a famine and it was affecting everything. When I left, the money was left behind for them to buy the *mombe*, but they still couldn't find any. The funds were finally used for normal expenses, and then the idea was forgotten, until this trip.

Everyone wanted to know what happened to the *mombe*? It was clear that we needed to take care of that right away and so everyone went to their neighbors and returned the next day with a note confirming the deal. They were given funds to buy the *mombe* and were asked for a commitment to care for it to bear calves (i.e. not to sell it), to use the manure instead of fertilizer (to support our permaculture commitment), and to team up with others (the Nhimbe motto) to use the *mombe* for plowing. Everyone was elated!

Mombe besides representing fertility, have a critical role in Shona culture. The law for stealing a *mombe* is the same as it is for killing a person! You can see why this was manna from heaven and was an important first step to working through the *zvakaoma*.

Kristen and I have been thoroughly enjoying this co-creative process with the Nhimbe staff and management. Because international work is unique in application, she is getting her feet wet and we are not proceeding strictly by the book. I love our team work as we each have unique gifts to offer the approach. We are blending our talents. I have several years of being here as a family member and leader, all of which is colored by my primary passion as a healer. Kristen's focus is the healing of the organization, bringing to bear every individual's involvement in the growth and transformation. So we are each working as healers from two prisms, and it is an incredible unfolding.

Kristen is getting a great deal of first hand information intellectually, spiritually and through the heart. I think she will go home understanding more about something I mentioned before coming – that is that the Board has always given me room to navigate intuitively. They have been extremely supportive in allowing us to figure things out as we go along. We would have had to leave the country many years ago if we were running Ancient Ways like normal US companies try to do. The intuitive guidance aspect of our business has granted us the ability to respond in the moment to

the current chaos or crisis that we face. That element is one huge part of our success here.

SCHOOLING

One area of difficulty is that parents are dealing with unprecedented circumstances for each of their child's education. The school fees are still the requirement to attend school, and so when Ancient Ways can't pay the fees the child is literally chased away. We witnessed this event several times with children showing up at the Center in the middle of the day. With the dollarization, the tuition was raised to figures outside of the rural farmers' normal budget. Then the teachers declared a strike at the beginning of the year and weren't there to teach until a couple of weeks ago. The government had given them an increase to get things moving, but they felt it wasn't sufficient. They only returned to school because the government required parents to pay weekly incentives to the teachers. The incentive can be money or food, but in all cases, it's far more than can be afforded. Particularly if you have multiple children and you are paying for each child each week, some money, beans, maize or peanuts. Even with the incentives the teachers are carrying on a form of strike called go-slow.

We have stayed with our plans to hold firm on enrollments so that the only children we are taking on are those who are sponsored and who are showing progress and attention to learning. We are still getting in last minute donations that change the picture as I write this. We will be nailing this down in a very short time.

Older children particularly are hard to turn away. They have managed to make it through the system and are ready for the higher education, and often family funds are lacking. One boy approached me this morning only needing \$20 to be able to pick up his exams from last year. He had put himself through the last 2 years of schooling, as his parents were not well, and he was now graduating Form 6 (advanced level like our Community College), ready to go to the University. We won't know if he is a good risk until he gets his exams, but we have no donor so far that has been able to take on that next step of higher education costs. University fees are running around \$400 or more per semester and so that is \$800-1000 a year commitment.

We also have a girl who is ready to go to the University but has no means to pay the tuition. She passed 12 out of 15 points in Form 6 which is considered to be very good. She has been a Jangano student for several years now and she is a success story, but we are having a huge challenge to fund her schooling. Usually we offer the tuition help, but not the transport, food, lodging, books, etc. that is needed to go to school. We leave those other things to the family. Unfortunately her family is very poor, and her father just passed on, leaving her mother, her, and siblings. Her father was

Tawengwa Mujuru, our Project Manager for Jangano. He was an extremely dedicated and enthusiastic man who was of great integrity. If you know anyone who might assist this young girl please let us know right away as school is beginning.

IN SUMMARY

It is with much gratitude that I write to you. Those of you who have read to this point, bless us and our work here by your interest and concern. I would ask that you focus prayers our direction as we are facing some very difficult times with many road blocks and seemingly insurmountable obstacles. I can only operate optimistically, and so we are working from that core belief.

We can make a difference in the lives of many families extending all across Zimbabwe and elsewhere, thanks to you. Each person here who is benefitting from a service that Nhimbe provides, in turn offers that abundance to their extended family no matter where they live, because that is the roots of Africa – the family. No matter what else we are doing we are reaching a multitude of people with relief, and hope and sometimes a new belief that things can change.

Next time we come to town (the 24th-26th) we will be going straight to the Dambatsoko area, where the Jangano project resides in the Dewedzo mountains (check out the 5 minute Jangano intro film on Youtube...Jangano began in 2005 using the Nhimbe prototype.)

Tatenda Chaizvo!

Jaiaen (and Kristen)