

February 20, 2004

Greetings Nhimbe Friends,

Sitting here at my desk, feeling Oregon's cloudy wet winter is a stark contrast to living out a hot, humid and rainy summer in Zimbabwe. Here now on this US soil, I am gratefully indulging in long hot showers, familiar sensual experiences and satisfying social exchanges, as well as feeling reverence for the deep underlying reliability of nature. Nature is like an underground stream that is clear, steady, and strong. The intricate beauty and inherent power of the natural world, the human condition's instinctual nature continually seeking well-being, as well as the insightful non-ordinary reality of the world of Spirit, all bring me great comfort, no matter what the location. They provide a source of consistently accurate information for my mind, a quality of soundness for my heart, and bottomless breath for my being.

Your prayers, encouraging words and intentful action bless my life and have given me a continuing appreciation for this path. My godfather's financial support, making it possible for me to freely offer my time, is only matched by your generosity, making it feasible for us to continue the work in our Nhimbe villages. Some of you carried disbelief, envy, even disapproval, when we started Nhimbe, and have come back to say congratulations – thank you for that. Others of you have fed me encouragement like a baby, helping me hold the vision born out of my godmother's legacy. Those of you, who have been around since the beginning, nurturing me through all of the difficult times, are held in high esteem here. You have made it possible for me to be super human in my vulnerability knowing that you have only blessings for my personal journey, holding me dear in your heart, and seeking to see me as I truly am. These openings, which further my becoming, deeply touch not only me, but obviously many people, and I want to thank you. And I am only telling half of the story, as Cosmas tells the other half. I can say *Tatenda Chiezvo* from both of us...your dedication helps us confidently follow through with destiny's calling.

#### VIDEO FOLLOWUP

We heard that Dana and Molly returned home and had a safe and easy trip back to the US. We received word that the Smart Media card that had an error has been recovered! This is another good sign for the project. It took purchasing some recovery software and then voila, the digital card was back to normal. *Maita Basa!* (Good job!)

#### HEALTH

Last week marks the beginning of the new educational process for health and well being in our villages. The Centre's outreach program is now implementing in Mhondoro beginning with the elder training in survival skills, HIV/AIDS counsel, and eliciting communication amongst the residents. There is so much enthusiasm for this help. Everyone is so very grateful for this new found opportunity.

Cosmas just wrote to say that the three day workshop went very well and the response was overwhelming. Although the workshop was meant for 40 participants we ended up with 63 people, but payment was restricted to 43 people. In order to meet the budget he had to reduce the participants allowance from Z\$5,000 to Z\$3,000. This is an amount given to recognize that the participants can't be working in the field or selling their products and is the industry standard there. The workshop leader thought it was wrong to turn away people who had made an effort

to attend the workshop, and they all agreed as most of them were elderly people, walking some distance.

Everyone wants to live. Even those who are stubborn about their lifestyle, they too want to live. This education can help to create a social norm that stands out in a positive way, calling people to excel and carry truth as a breastplate and choice as a sword. Being unafraid to face one's life is a powerful antidote to fear. And with daily funerals as the norm, a new kind of courage, sensitivity and endurance is being required of these people.

The Nhimbe Health Program calls out for aid more than just about any other. We have been slow to manifest any major effect in this aspect of Nhimbe, and yet everything is tied to it. The Centre's education program is a start, as is soap making, and providing a few pain killers, tape, and gauze, but there is so much more help needed.

- The building of toilets and wells are directly connected to health, as less than 10% of the residents have neither. The sanitation piece is an obvious link to everyone's overall well being. These are the more costly projects, each one costing 6 times that of children's education, explaining why we have done little. It's so hard to imagine but put yourself somewhere in the wilderness, without tools and similar resources and you can see that day to day survival would take precedence, and when your finances did increase, besides buying food for winter, no part of your children's education is free, so saving for a cement toilet or cased and covered well, wouldn't be the priority.
- This year's research into composting toilets has potential of being less costly to implement, but also needs some grounded advice for anyone experienced in the field – please write if you have any leads for help in this area!
- Finding someone living in Mhondoro to train, for example, in NMT (please see [neuromodulationtechnique.com](http://neuromodulationtechnique.com)) is another search. I suggest this particular medical specialty because it dovetails perfectly with the indigenous medicine and it is light years ahead of other alternatives. Who has the basic medical education plus the understanding of intentional healing (such a natural to these people) that would be desirous of dedicating themselves to our area? And then can we get a visa? Those of you who are involved in bringing Zimbabwean musicians to the states know how complicated that can be.
- What about visiting practitioners from the states? During these complex times, where life is so very stressful, is there anyone interested in helping for the short term, providing some relief? I'm very happy that the few medical treatments I was able to offer changed those people's lives – that they had new opportunities to make choices in their daily routines, to enjoy life more, no longer suffering.
- But they need a regular clinic with something more than expired medicines, under trained staff and deplorable sanitation. It pains me that they have no options but to go to places that are supposed to be helping and then often return home worse off and hopeless or discouraged. I mustn't go on.
- What about the serious consequences of using potentially hazardous man made materials? It would take a lot of research to introduce alternatives, but I believe that this carries more power to stop killing people than many other things. It is only matched in improved diet, stopping malnutrition and starvation, in my mind. You are wondering what I am talking about. Everyone uses man made things all the time, what's the problem?
  1. Do you take handfuls of insecticide (like for ants around the foundation or the corn borer) out of the container without using gloves or a mask?
  2. Do you know once you have done that to wash your hands?

3. Do you know not to apply it in the kitchen around the food and utensils?
  4. Do you apply chemical fertilizer to your crops with your hands also?
  5. Do you breathe the fertilizer dust?
  6. Do you use chemical cleaners and polishes daily, because you highly value cleanliness, without gloves?
  7. Do you eat from metal plates covered by a broken painted surface, eating the chips at each and every meal because you can't afford to buy new plates?
  8. Is your highly-inexpensive regular recreational beverage (resembling a traditional ceremonial brew but sold at all stores) made in a vat without appropriate sanitation so that you wonder why you have a headache, sore throat or running stomach?
  9. Do you burn plastic because it starts a nice fire, breathing the fumes as you blow on the flames?
- I could go on...but consider why this is happening. These people have lived close to nature for centuries and then quickly modern technology provides us all with new options. If they are not told, why would they know that these things might be harmful even fatal? I have found no education in Zimbabwe that touches this. Permaculture education might help some, but it doesn't touch on safeguards, if people do choose to use the chemicals. We can't force change.
  - I was appalled when I first came in 2000. I realized this trip, as Molly and Dana were horrified, that I had been worn down, just like the heel on an old shoe. It was like a distant memory that I too was once outraged and indignant at the irresponsibility of introducing products that carry such lethal potential. So I've been reminded, painfully so. But am still at a loss as to how to change anything. I just feel like crying. We, as Nhimbe, need to develop our own program to educate and provide options. Can we afford to buy one pair of gloves and a bandana for each adult as part of this educational process? The power to change is in the education though, not the item. That takes a far more dedicated plan than purchasing a product. Thanks for listening – it doesn't hurt as much when I share.

## EDUCATION

Our work with the school children has impacted much in their lives. They have a glimpse that someone somewhere else cares about them. The parents of course are relieved by the lack of financial burden, but receive much reinforced encouragement to make education a priority – particularly for the girls. Through the importance we place on education, through the fee payment as well as having the library and tutor, each parent is being educated as well. And then they get to receive tutoring too with our new Adult Basic Ed program!

In 2001 we began the preschool. At first it was just getting the building up, then finding the teachers, organizing food, and eventually registering children. Having the morning meal has made an incredible difference, as has having a space dedicated to their learning. We continue to learn how to operate this effectively - how to provide supplies and opportunity that is based in their native daily way. They come to the 1<sup>st</sup> grade so well prepared and far beyond their schoolmates.

Cosmas and I have a hope for the eventual development of an alternative school because of our experience with sponsoring children at government schools and the running of our preschool. The amount of money going into the government school program is plenty. We wonder if we might not be able to provide more actual education on our own, particularly seeing these bright children coming from the preschool ready for learning but going into a dulled environment. This

has been in our hearts since the beginning and now, a few people are surfacing that might be key players.

The tutor who is helping all of our Nhimbe kids with their studies has years of experience as a teacher both in primary and secondary levels. He has the potential of being an excellent headmaster as he continues to take the role of counselor to the people and is always thinking outside of the box. A relative came this year to see what we are up to, and she is a primary teacher (grades 1-3). She is highly educated, outspoken about principles, and friendly. If we started an alternative school with first grade, just one grade at a time, she would be a likely candidate.

And of course, Golden Munyaka, a friend from OSU, has been a great advisor. He came to the states on a US program after many years working in the Zimbabwean educational system in every capacity and will be returning home eventually since he has finished his doctorate. He has studied education inside and out, as well as community projects and so has the potential of being a great help. He continues to encourage us in creating everything we do on an indigenous knowledge foundation, as his research shows the highly successful nature of that orientation. That fits perfectly with Ancient Ways mission; I'm sure that is why Spirit brought him into our lives.

Another person surfaced this year as we socialized after a traditional wedding. I met someone who works for Save the Children, as a Program Administrator, with many years experience with other NGOs in Zimbabwe. It was very inspiring to know that people are in the woodwork, and when things are ready to shift and go to the next level, there are people waiting in the wings to come aboard. That was exciting and a real relief, since finding qualified people has been one of our main concerns. We have a "model project" in many ways, even with our shortcomings, and everyone there is very interested.

So why start our own school? Is it just that we think we could do better? There are many major problems, which we want to address:

- The current curriculum is geared towards higher academia and there is no path for the average rural child who financially has no chance to proceed to the University. There needs to be options so that every child can learn to read, write and do basic math so as to have tools for daily life, irregardless of their life's plan, particularly in learning English since Zimbabwe is a bilingual country and there is much power in having the dual language at your fingertips.
- All tests given are in English, and yet the children do not learn English easily, but just struggle to get by. Most of their parents did not learn English due to the war and poverty, and at home Shona is spoken. The teachers talk to them daily primarily in Shona, but English is required, so the children fail the tests even when they might know the material. Without passing tests they look like failures when they may be quite capable children with great futures.
- Finding well qualified teachers in the rural area is a challenge as the compensation, accommodations and lifestyle is limited. It takes someone with roots there who is also educated, experienced and desirable. We want to raise the standard of the teacher's qualifications as they hold one of the keys to our children's future. Excellence needs to be modeled.

- The resources are severely limited so that there are very few books in the classroom for the many children. Our library is helping but it is only a drop in the proverbial government school bucket...and the bucket has a hole.

Time will allow us to know whether an alternative school is an option. Education is close to Cosmas' heart as he is someone who went through both the rural school and then on to the University, encouraged greatly by his parents, but also by experiences that Spirit brought to him at a young age. My godmother's focus was in teaching someone to "learn how to learn", because then they can do anything they are big enough to do. That is deep in my heart. There are obvious reasons for dreaming when putting all of these worlds together.

Most private schools in Zimbabwe have been started by churches. I'm assuming our help would need to come from some other sector. Not that a church might not be interested in helping, but usually there are many agenda's attached, and here in America, there are so many different ideals it seems a complicated idea. Just as a matter of interest, the government curriculum carries the Bible, which version I don't know, as one of the subjects on the daily educational program. I have not looked into what that means in terms of tests and grading, but it's an interesting point.

## STOVES

We learned much this year about moving the stove project forward. We found and corrected many problems with the process. I don't mean problems with the stoves themselves, as there are little in the way of difficulties. Of course there can always be improvements, but the real issue has been in helping to move the project out of the mud. Sometimes it feels like we have sunk to our knees but can't figure out why.

So with the various issues addressed, we are holding the stoves as a priority. Our goal is to put stoves in every possible kitchen hut that is interested. The cost of accomplishing that is higher with the prices of the metal top increasing, but the time to build a stove is down to 45 minutes, so they really have it figured out. The *tsofso* stoves are the easiest way to allow Nhimbe to spread to other villages without the overhead required as in the Health or Education programs. Both of those require much in the way of administration there, and here. The stove project is the quickest way to impact the women and girl's lives, the children and family health in general, as well as the need to buy a depleting supply of firewood, all with the lowest overhead.

The region's chief came to us this year, publicly calling us to help his entire region in all areas. I'm not sure how many villages he has in his area, but our helping makes a tremendous difference to his burden. He has asked us to spread into all the villages bringing Light. He says this is the first Light he has seen and is very grateful. The stove project would be one of the first I would recommend to spread beyond the limits of our 7 villages due to the ease of implementation, individual and family effect and the environmental impact.

## IN SUMMARY

Here I am almost on page 6 already. How does this happen? Sometimes the faucet has an endless flow wanting to write volumes. Thank you so very much for listening, or skimming (whatever the case may be). Knowing that you care and will hear my heart, has taken me through the last 3 months, rocking me to sleep at night and pushing me out the door the next morning.

Cosmas and I have much to share with you over the next year, so it's important that we've stayed in touch during this trip. He appreciates your interest in Nhimbe when you see him during his trip to the states. It helps him to know that you appreciate and find important the same things he holds dear. These are his people, his family, and his life, outside of his celebrity and teacher status. It is meaningful to share your whole being with people. It too, is significant to be able to share your prosperity with your neighbor, someone you tended cattle with as a child, or someone you don't even know who can't buy shoes for their teenager, particularly when you are struggling in your own way to achieve for your own children.

Thank you all for your words of kindness, your financial support, and your individual inspirations of what you might do to assist. When you call or email with an idea of how you might help Nhimbe for Progress, it truly is like adding an engine to the track and the mountainous terrain seems not so arduous. The various ways you help, make the demands of the work less strenuous, as well as pique our own interest, and inspire our commitment with hopeful feelings.

We, the Mhondoro residents, Cosmas and I, gratefully acknowledge your part!

Tatenda!

Jaiaien

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Ancient Ways is a non-profit (501(c)3) organization dedicated to learning from and preserving traditional ways of indigenous peoples.

Nhimbe for Progress is a community project working with rural Zimbabweans to: 1) improve sub-standard living conditions such as re-building collapsed huts that were destroyed by the floods, building wells, toilets and fuel efficient stoves, providing medical assistance; 2) offer business opportunity to poor rural Zimbabweans, and 3) sponsor children who are unable to attend school because they cannot afford the necessary fees (\$35/yr.), provide teaching materials to schools, establish a pre-school program, 4) create a community fund to help with the special needs of the elderly, infants, and orphans.