

January 3, 2004

Nhimbe New Year greetings from Zimbabwe!

Our gratitude for the support you extend in heart, thought and deed is abundant. We continue to be deeply moved by how we are all part of the intricate gears, which sustain our lives, bringing all things together to build bridges, and nurturing the well being that is nature. Our time here is reaffirming all that is good, all that is right, all that is uplifting. Your generosity provides oil, the essential component for smooth meshing, and for the blessing that makes this work possible. We, on this soil, as part of Nhimbe, come into this New Year appreciative, finding many wide and varied reasons to want to share with you, to watch for the guidance of the unfolding plan, and to seek the simple in everything we do.

As an added gesture of thanks I want to say how your ongoing commitment makes all the difference. The perpetual fundraising is of course a key to our movement towards progress, but it is that concern that you have integrated into your daily life that shows up on a regular basis and strengthens the network. There are focused pockets of you in Washington, Oregon, California, New Mexico, Colorado, Alaska, and North Carolina, who let me know throughout the year that you believe in us, that you want us to carry out your heart's desire, and that you are rallying for us during the long stretches. It gives us endurance. There are long nights, long days, and we have a long way to go, but this is a relay. And as you help us in your thoughts, actions, and prayers, we are taking turns with some of the hardest tasks, and there is relief. Thank you.

Right now for instance, without those to run Ancient Ways on US soil while I'm away, I couldn't be here. There is a network of people there organizing and carrying out the daily love of stateside Nhimbe for Progress, the Ancient Ways Music Program, sculpture repair, and house-chicken-and-dog sitting. How can I thank all of you? Your efforts to hold it all as your own child comforts me tremendously as I am away. It frees me, to be present here in a totality of the moment, to respond precisely, with clarity and guidance in the many situations that arise. And there are plenty that are outside of my normal comfortability, where I need to be here, now in all aspects of my being.

As we are blended into the mix here, it quickly becomes apparent what is needed to retain one's Self and what is superfluous. Circumstance, pretense and attachment to insulated living, are all in the melting pot. A nomadic non-electric camping lifestyle, going to and from the rural area, with unusual diet offerings (crickets, grubs, and the whole animal), as well as feeling emotionally rocked in the face of regular loss of life, contribute to a gradual shaving away of toughened exteriors. Shedding the excess is a sweet process, but not without questions. Lodi had his own awakening of this by simply losing his luggage. He began a new life without "the baggage". Of course when he returns he doesn't have any clothes to wear to work and so it has to start over there as well. Ah, the joy of being reborn.

In his case too, this is so appropriate as he is the *mukwasha*, or son-in-law, who has a new identity defined by Shona culture. As he becomes his nature within that context, the niche that is filled contributes to everyone, as it also is offering him the way within the culture. It is this strength and beauty of the family fabric that is holding everything together, even in the face of the economic collapse, the deplorable medical crisis, and extensive human suffering. Absolutely every person has a defined role to play in the family, which also extends into the community at large. This is Lodi's first trip to Zimbabwe since we were married here in 2000. We have found that the union is a living legend...people miles away say, "Oh, so you are the white *mukwasha* that was married in the traditional ceremony. "

This all makes more sense if you have been reading all the Field Reports over the last years. The family here adopted me after many experiences, touched by death, spirituality, and ultimately respect for one another's uniqueness. This brought us together rapidly in ways beyond the norm. Adoption really wasn't that far out of context for this particular family as there was another adoption that took place a few generations ago as well. It occurred during a tribal fight. A pregnant woman had her baby during the fighting and the baby was brought home to become part of this family. That person grew to be an important contributor to many people in the region, additionally as a recognized spirit helping even after passing on. Myself being dropped into their lives with precise timing was also no accident. I continue to see that the extensive implications of this weaving are only just being revealed.

Besides giving me the obvious of the love of more family, and me being able to contribute and absorb the traditional ways as a daughter, the fantastic understanding it has brought my Nhimbe work is so far beyond any expectations that I could ever have. How else could I have come to work so intimately with everyone in the villages? How else could I have learned of the cultural fabric from the inside out? How else could I bring your aid to these people in this way? Helping people is not an impersonal thing, particularly in a culture such as this. The intimacy needed to offer the hand in the appropriate context continues to be learned. Particularly after their struggle for independence from colonialism, there is always a niggling concern lingering in the background about the "how" of what we do, even more important than the "what".

Ancient Ways, which was founded in 1993 with a desire to preserve traditional ways of indigenous peoples everywhere, stepped forward into assisting these people in 1999. It is a fine line to walk since the nature of evolution will change those traditions. So how do we continue to know how to offer our help without imposing or infringing, or even knowing if we are offering inappropriate help because it seems right at the time? I can only trust that Spirit has a plan and that I am a steward. I need to thank you for all of your varied ways of being part of that plan, in whatever ways you carry out your heart felt connection. We all appreciate your dedication to these principles that uplift the spirit of the people.

HOLIDAYS

The holidays here are like many places around the world. Manufacturing ceases, while stores close and the focus is on the festive time of the year. The traditions here are quite different. Jivan was the most aware of the stimulus that was missing since we are so used to the commercial hype with lights, music and advertising shouting from almost Halloween. Being away from home truly brings the holiday spirit into the heart to allow the simplicity of other's ways to wash over us. We have thoroughly enjoyed spending time with the family.

Each of them takes the holidays in their own way. Generally they are working right up until Christmas day, and then soon after begin again with normal schedules, even though many business do shut their doors. The maids often return to their homes for a day or two to be with family. All of the people I have met are of Catholic or Apostolic faith. The Catholic faith is blended with their traditional religion in a beautiful way. There is no conflict between the belief systems. The Apostolic faith is a more fundamental approach and declares renunciation of traditional spiritual ways, although they seem quite accepting of others, maybe hoping to live the example they study. They all believe in the birth of Jesus Christ and that is why they set the Christmas day aside. Many also party hardy as a way of breaking the tension of yearlong work, and so play and eat much on Christmas and the day following, called "boxing day".

Nhimbe work has slowed to a snail's pace during the holidays. It is really good for me to be here without working the 24-7 but I started feeling anxious about the many things needing to get done. It's great self-discipline to just relax. This will be the first time in 6 visits that I have had some time to be a little lower key. I'm sure it will help with the recuperation process in February/March. It usually takes me a long time to find balance when I return. Part of it is that the hibernation that I would be doing in the Northern Hemisphere never gets done. I live out summer there and here and haven't figured out how to bed down for a long winter's nap. This holiday time may be just the ticket to bring some balance back into my routine.

MEDICAL & HEALTH

The daughter-in-law with tuberculosis continues to improve greatly. All fevers have gone and her appetite has returned entirely. We have done only two NMT treatments. Her son, around 4 years old, has begun showing small symptoms such as hers were in the beginning. They asked that I begin treating him as well. Many people have complaints of fevers, legs and feet hurting and on fire, backaches, and digestive problems. NMT has been getting incredible results. Fevers are leaving and people are walking without pain who were hurting; I only wish I had a colleague here to help.

The people here are very quick to respond to NMT when presenting what appear to be medically complicated issues, often things I've never heard of before. I believe this is because their traditions are based in spiritual and herbal treatments for medical problems, and so their innate belief system is in perfect alignment with intentional healing. This means that they are ready and receptive to have healing come about. They don't have all the scientific background, pragmatic and dogmatic thought that stands in the western mind's way to allowing well being to be a natural and intentional creation.

The difference I see also is that our high stress, fast pace, overly consumptive lifestyle in the states, contributes to creating internal confusion that these people do not have. Yes, their bodies have been given wrong tablets by ill trained doctors and highly exposed to improper medical sanitation, poisoned by modern production of agricultural and cleaning chemicals, as well as breathing vehicle exhaust prohibited elsewhere, so they have been assaulted physically. But emotionally and mentally the average person doesn't carry the western burden. They do carry troubles in their heart and mind, mainly survival problems. And spiritually they retain their simplicity.

PERMACULTURE

We continue to look for assistance to teach the basics of sustainable and integrated growing techniques. I would be very happy to connect with the permaculture association here, but so far have been unable. The Nhimbe Community Center groundskeeper surprised me this year by talking of using more manure, wood ashes and compost. I'm elated, as earth stewardship is one of my passions. She hasn't abandoned artificial methods as yet, but I haven't been able to provide her with sufficient training in alternatives either. I'm thrilled that she took in our conversations in the past and is considering them. Remember that fertilizers, pesticides and herbicides were introduced here many years ago and people here are

convinced just like in the states, that they are superior. Remember us in the late 50's and the 60's? That gives you a picture.

Through my exploration using essential oils in healing work I began working with Avraham Sands from Tiferet, based in Israel. He was generous enough to give me his essential oil distiller contact information in Johannesburg, whom I had emailed. They are producing oil from rural projects all over southern Africa. When I arrived at the airport, we took a few hours and went to the plant in the suburbs. There we met Mr. Teubes and began discussing our project and his work. Besides being a delightful man, he has an incredible business working with rural areas that produce the oils. He has a mobile processor as well as helps to build something on site.

Due to the economic situation with hyperinflation, he has just been waiting to work with Zimbabwe in any new ways, until the economy stabilizes. He said because we are there and able to manage operations, he could conceive of an investment with our project. He will be sending an expert from the University of Zimbabwe after the holidays to evaluate our area for the proper plants to grow. We may be able to try some small plots this year to see what really handles the soil and weather conditions. Since we have no real irrigation, it will need to be something simple. Our plan is to involve all the villages in whatever capacity we can, all being able to grow the herbs as a cash crop, hopefully providing more of a living than the present.

COMMUNITY CENTER

We were able to find some of the trees and seeds needed for the Community Center. We have delivered them and Chiedza has begun planting. She is excited. They didn't have the seeds marked at this particular store so I was curious what things were going to cost. Most packets were less than \$5,000 Zim and quite within our budget. Then I noticed the cucumbers were \$37,000. I don't know if there was a crop failure or what but they didn't have any cucumbers any cheaper. We managed tomatoes, carrots, peas, watermelon, and cantaloupe. Someone probably has dried their own cucumber seeds and will offer them. These will be sewn for the preschool snack time to have some fresh produce.

We managed to purchase some of the supplies needed for hanging the curtains. It will be so great to get that newspaper off the windows! I had really planned on doing it the traditional way, with cement screws and string, but realized that the cost is minimal and the effect so great, that we decided to get the wooden rods. Wood here is very expensive but it was still reasonable for the purpose. It's funny how curtains never occurred to me when we started. It's really like a child growing. You don't really know what exactly the child will need until they reach the age when they need it, and then it's so obvious.

Giving people a space to be, is a primary focus in my life. The need to offer this is my godmother's legacy, in that she gave me space to be, so this manifests both physically as well as in other ways. So when we create these community areas it is deep water that is flowing in my veins. The offering is providing a place for much learning, creativity and sharing and I'm pleased in the growth. When we first began, no one really understood what was coming about. Most people didn't know what a library was. The preschool that the children went to was often held under a tree or a condemned building. There was no where for the textile women to gather for large projects. And we still, have only just begun. I'm grateful that this is a gradual process. Its quite organic, growing slowly as we each mature, and then mature also as an organization, both here and in the states. Too much too fast is not a good thing. Slow and steady wins the race. We have come very far, proving the ground as we go, and that feels very satisfactory.

RELIEF FOOD

The rains have come and have been pretty consistent over the last 2 weeks. The maize has shot up and signs are good. At this point, I think we will not need to provide any relief staples as we did last year to the 12 and under children. CRS (Catholic Relief Services) is providing some staples. They give maize or bugler, oil, and beans. Not everyone qualifies, and the amounts seem to vary, not totally based on body count. This has been coming monthly and so we know there are some basics to supplement the fruits, vegetables, and meat they can raise.

EXCHANGES, PRICES & COMMUNICATION

During the holidays, there is much foreign currency and so we hear that the street rate drops. We heard that it was \$5,100 last week. They have ATMs here and are advertising to get people in town to use them. They are unable to get more than \$30,000 at once though and so it is a bit frustrating. With petrol at \$3,100 a liter that would be less than 10 liters you could buy, if you can afford it. That amount won't take you far.

Internet café is \$2,400 an hour and so it's a viable option for some people. They don't have printers there, so only limited research can be carried on. With the telephone system sometimes on strike as well as generally a poorly maintained wiring system, the phone lines are down a lot meaning internet cafes are painfully slow at times. Just getting time to go to a café is another problem, since they are located in town away from the townships where we stay.

The other day we were trying to use a cell phone to check on Lodi's suitcase and we literally spent hours trying to get connected. First the airport landline we were trying to contact was out, then the cell phone itself couldn't hook up. Lastly, we accidentally turned it off and the owner had a password on it so we couldn't get it started again, so had to borrow a neighbor's cell. We got every message imaginable, from the circuits being busy, to the line being unavailable. Obviously phone research is also severely limited. We do most everything simply by driving to the location, which takes petrol and time. Phone cards run about \$1,000 per minute and you can use up much time waiting while the person on the other end hands the phone over to the next 3 people in line. Talking to 4 people is an average before you get the one you want.

PRESCHOOL

School is still on holiday until the 15th, so we continue to make their curtains and organize for the next session. I want to thank all of you who sent information on the earth oven. I have printed the documents and turned them over to a smart young fellow, Denver, who stays with Cosmas who is going to research the idea and help me sort out how we should go about it. He is well educated, currently unemployed with a wife and young baby. He has been one of Jivan's pals as they can banter well. Creating a small oven for our preschool daily bread has potential for a bread business, as "homebread" is one of the favorites here and yet the stores have the white what-we-call balloon bread (I don't know where that came from – maybe the old Williams package). I'll be interested to see how this all pans out.

I hear from the Village Health worker that she weighs our preschool children regularly. She hooks them up in a strap she attaches to the big tree next to our stand. She says that all of the children are gaining weight and she is very happy about that!

TOILETS

Thanks too to those of you who wrote with composting toilet information. Since I have no Internet here I can't follow links to websites, but asked Denver to see if he can get more at an Internet café. He was quite resourceful buying a floppy, finding a café that allows them and pasting the pictures for viewing on our laptop. He is an interesting young man and has great potential himself – it is great that he can work with us now. He is researching the ideas and proposing solutions and alternatives for its development. Finding educated people in the rural area has been a stress and we are doing much to groom folks to a level that can handle more growth in the project. People are surfacing and it's really a matter of timing for more things to come together.

TREES

Denver explained that his mother lives in an area where sewage is used for fertilizing fields. We discussed the pros and cons of this pretty thoroughly. We agreed that the composting toilet project would couple well with the fuel-tree planting project, as the compost could be used to help those trees grow, but don't want to use it for food. Once the holidays are over, we hope to connect with people that can work with us for the trees.

STOVES

Again, due to the holidays, we haven't been able to move forward on purchasing metal for stovetops. But the women are going ahead and building anyway. They have tended to wait for the top, but the stove can be used without it, it's just not as tidy or useful. But it still works and helps, so they are going to proceed. Ivan Muungani, the man who was in charge of all building projects, passed on this last year. He hadn't been well since he was in a near fatal accident in 2002. I was heart broken to hear the news, as he was a dear friend as well as a great contributor and original members of Nhimbe. We have a young man, Tichaona Katena, who had helped with the stove project in the past, when Marian Grebanier was here in 2001. He also helped to plant the first batch of Community Center fruit trees and did a great job. He will be in charge of the stove project development and fuel-wood tree planting. I can't wait to get the wheels moving, as there is quite a list of interested families.

SUMMARY

This is probably a good place to stop. We have been working on the computer for hours over the last 2 days. We have been producing forms and control records for the Textile Coop to manage their business in an easier way. Today we spent working on the audit, closing the books for 2003 and opening for 2004. We aren't done but it's enough.

Thank you again for helping us to begin our New Year in such an intimate way. The people here are given hope at such a difficult time. They see progress and in turn desire to move the wheel. Your interest fuels their inspiration and we are all motivated to *nhimbe*. We are here to carry out your wishes as they match the original vision. The direction hasn't changed, and all of the difficulties have only refined it, blessed us all, and taught us about love, life, and Light.

Faithfully here on Zimbabwean soil,

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