

January 19, 2004

Greetings Nhimbe Friends and Supporters,

Again, this opportunity to write you is profoundly appreciated. Sharing our process here, with you who have made it possible, completes the circuit. We, you and ourselves, have dreamed this up. Your hope to touch another's life and using us as the vehicle fulfills our desire also, to help those who are less fortunate on this soil. The last weeks have been very busy tackling various problems and I need to let you know what is going on as it is unfolding.

REINFORCEMENTS

My husband and son left one week ago and are now home safe in Oregon's contrasting winter weather. Their time here was rich, with everyone growing immensely from the exchanges, benefiting from each other's company and influence. New heights of *ukama*, (the extended family commitment and dedication to relationship) have been realized by all concerned.

Our guests arrived the day following their departure. Molly Sirois came to assist with the details of the project's management, as we work fast and furious for many days on end to complete as much as possible in a short time. I am so very grateful for this help as there are only two ends to the candle and some trips I have even been looking for a third. She is also here to help with the video production.

Dana Vion, a video producer, also arrived one week ago. After coming to Zimbabwe and Zambia last year to produce a documentary, she was moved by Nhimbe's heart to come to participate this year. We received help from the region's chief to provide protection for her and her equipment coming into the country, in the form of a letter of support. She has been able to begin getting incredible footage, probably with more selections of film than she could ever use. We are enjoying the fantasy of a full-length feature film in the future, but that will have to wait.

She waited after her arrival for 3 days before beginning filming, as we wanted to clear our path with culturally appropriate prayers to have all the spiritual help possible to start the project. This was quite a challenging experience for her as a professional, holding back while feeling the clock ticking away. She is now grateful we approached it in this way, as everything is going very smoothly. We have heard many stories of film being taken in traditional setting here, where the film actually ended up blank or unusable. I personally have experienced this on more than one occasion, with video difficulties, so we wanted to take all precautions on this trip.

A note from Molly and Dana: This has been a journey of discovery, of extremes, of visual and sensory experiences that cannot be expressed in words. What we have experienced in the last 9 days is a collection of moments that have added up to a story that we could not have possibly written in our most inspired of moments! Beginning with multiple synchronicities validating our path here, and then reaching other tension extremes in walking in the township as the only white people within miles! The children laugh say and "Hihowayou!" and run away. The women stare and the men glare, and it's so hard to know what is behind those looks. After a couple of days in Harare we made the journey in the back of the truck to Mhondoro, an idyllic setting of 180 degree views, the horizon bisected by the triangular shapes of thatched roofs. It's just ineffable.

Molly and Dana also brought a relief package put together by the Ancient Ways staff that has made a huge dent in the need for certain items. This is the first time I've had that opportunity to receive things here in the midst of the workflow. It has made a tremendous difference. Thanks to all of you who helped put that together!

MEDICAL

Some of the items coming in the relief package were supplies for the Village Health Worker, Juliana Mukombegumi. Everywhere medical help is very expensive. It's also difficult to get the transport to a clinic in the rural area, so many people do without. We are only offering simple help that is within her training to provide. This includes Tiger Balm, Ibuprofen, and eye allergy medicine for example.

We have scheduled the Bilazia screening (for a parasite from stagnant water) for all villagers this next weekend. We had no problem locating the actual medicine as we are working with a wholesale pharmacy, but it took days and hours on the phone to try and locate the plastic urine specimen cups to no avail. We finally were at an open street market in one of the townships and found someone with a quantity of empty plastic water bottles, which we will cut in half and use. It's always so astounding to realize how much we take for granted in terms of medical care and availability of supplies. This example of specimen cups is minor, compared to previous year's challenges of obtaining blood for surgery or the saline drip during hospital stays.

For a brief report on my tuberculosis patient, I was just told that she is now cleaning the house and cooking, being able to return to her normal routine. This morning she walked a kilometer taking her husband halfway on his walk to our place. I

must say that I'm extremely pleased to say the least. The first day I saw her she couldn't sit up could barely breathe and had a fever and lack of appetite that wouldn't quit. She has had 2 NMT treatments, one essential oil treatment and just began a homeopathic. I realize that none of this "proves" anything, other than alternatives are certainly options and there are more reasons than I can list to be providing the alternatives here. The difficulties in implementing an allopathic program have been immense and I trust it is because it would not be appropriate.

The NMT treatments continue to be appreciated in the rural area as well. I've had my first opportunity to work with an AIDS patient. This happens to be a 3-year-old from our preschool whose mother passed away a month ago. The residents of the villages continue to be very grateful with people showing up every day asking for treatment. Since Baba's passing, it's quite a natural thing for them to find their way to our home, as he was a well-known healer. As my time is so limited, I am focusing primarily on family and the worst cases presented. There is so much need here for medical help. The NMT is so ideal because we are not in the role of dispensing medications or giving shots and are simply perceived as praying, which is in perfect alignment with their traditional healing system. Personally, I find working with NMT to renew my own energy, as I must relax completely to be useful. I only wish that there were a practitioner or two working at the Community Center. Is anyone hearing the call?

CEREMONIES

In the last two weeks, I've experienced more ceremonies than normal for an entire trip. The first was a special one for me since I was physically not here when my father was buried. There were special rituals and prayers required where my husband assisted, needing to set things right. This was quite a profound experience for us, as someone missing a funeral in America would not have a chance to reopen the family setting for that type of sharing. The second ceremony was this last Saturday. It was put together by all of the Nhimbe villagers for Cosmas and myself. Nhimbe has brought them such great things, more than they ever dreamed of, and they were moved to offer us a heart-felt thank you. This included hours and hours of music, a special ceremonial brew, and presentations of gifts. Nearly 300 residents of all ages attended and participated fully, including elders who had difficulty walking getting up to dance, many parents and children stirring up the dust with traditional dances.

One of the key points was a desire to acknowledge the ancestors of the land where we have our Community Center. This had never been done even though Baba had talked about doing it. In the states, this would be similar to recognizing the Native Americans. In this case, it was a particular lineage (the Chivero) that was involved. The ceremony addressed them, the Magaya ancestors, the other village ancestors, my ancestors, our donors' ancestors, and the Creator, as in keeping with traditional Shona practices. The intention was to offer gratitude for all of the assistance that has been received over the past 4 years.

There were special requests made by the community to clarify an official acceptance of myself as a daughter of the Magayas, by God and all of the ancestors. A private family recognition had been done in the past so this was for the community at large, to acknowledge my being "one of them". Additionally, there was awareness brought to the issue of drought, hunger, and the need for rain. Underlying everything is the constant reminder that food only comes with rainfall and so it is central to prayers, dances and singing. By the end of the ceremony, sprinkles began and by evening the rains had come continuing into the following day. The timing of the rain was perceived by the community as a great blessing of our Nhimbe work, my niche in the family, and support for the people surviving the day to day hardships. We were honored by the presence of the chief and villagers coming from far outside our own villages. The chief expressed much gratitude for all of the help to his region and only hopes the project can spread in all parts of Nherera.

TRANSPORT

Again this year, Cosmas is providing Nhimbe the use of his truck, a 1987 Nissan pickup, gratefully with a canopy on the back. This is an improvement over what he had when we started in 2000, as that car allowed you to only enter on one side and then exit on the other. So far this year the record capacity is 3 people in front, 3 feet of luggage and 13 people and one rabbit in back, with two short-distance hitchhikers on the bumper. Molly and Dana are getting their full share of the sardine pack. Through the discomfort, many stories are woven, Shona learned, and familiarity bred. There's nothing quite like this mode of transportation for getting to know your neighbor.

Cosmas receives mileage allowance for Nhimbe related trips, which helps with gas and maintenance. The continual problem is that the truck is so old that it is in the shop repeatedly. This year the truck has been in the shop every time we have returned to town, since I arrived in December. Half of our productivity has been affected as we wait for transport. Granted there are the commuter buses which are minivans also packed like sardines, but they are not practical for purchasing and carrying supplies, which is one of our main reasons for coming to town. It's obvious that Nhimbe needs a more reliable vehicle, but as with everything, other things take priority as funds are limited.

EXPORT and CRAFT ACTIVITIES

We've been able to send medical uniforms (scrubs) back to the states to get feedback about our quality. I feel the fabrics are great with an ethnic appeal. It's now a matter of verifying that our quality is high enough to be competitive and finding the openings in the market. Many of you are connected to the medical field in some way. If you have any suggestions, please e-mail them. My expectation is to have pictures of the scrubs being modeled so that appearance, fabrics and colors can be seen on our website (www.ancient-ways.org). But how do I let the nurses and medical professionals of the world know about our project, the opportunity for these women and our commitment to raising their standard of living?

We also have helped the seamstresses to organize the production of dresses, *javas* (traditional wraps), and other things from the scrap fabrics such as scrunchies, eyeglass cases and potholders. We had two new dress designs to work with, but both require a fabric that drapes nicely like rayon. I'm not interested in marketing polyester products and the rayon is almost non-existent, so that has affected their being able to make dresses. For those of you interested in traditional wraps, we are bringing some great local fabrics nicely hemmed, when we ship the sculpture.

With the South African essential oil connection and the daily need for soap here, we are researching the possibility of sponsoring a micro-loan to start a soap making business. I'm not yet sure whether we'll be able to make a separate laundry and body soap or if we'll start with just one, but in any case we want the women to be receiving their daily aroma therapy treatments as they do their work. There's a possibility of exporting a specialty line in the future if it all comes together well.

The next door neighbor's brother, where I stay in town, is the connection for training a village team in soap making. He worked for Palmolive and then began making soap with his wife when he became unemployed. We will hire him to get us setup for Nhimbe. The potential is great for creating soap that we could offer each family as part of an educational program around sanitation and hygiene, so that the initial customer could be Nhimbe itself to help get the business off the ground. We also purchase soap for the preschool daily use of hand and dish washing.

PRESCHOOL

The daily program is now in full swing as school started last week. So far we are only operating the half-day program. This year we are trying a new product for the *mahewu*. It is similarly made with maize, sugar and salt but with added soya flour for protein. This particular company is based in South Africa and has designed their product to contain the full compliment of vitamins and minerals (many chelated) for a daily allowance in a small serving. The focus of this company is to fight the nutritional dragon that underlies the progression of HIV into AIDS. They also have added a water purifier to the product so that it does not need to be boiled, losing more nutrients. As it comes in banana, strawberry, and vanilla flavors, the children will also have some variety.

This same family connection has a fishing fleet in Kariba and sells *matemba* (small dried fish eaten dry or cooked). We are looking into the cost so the children might have this as part of a snack a couple of days during the week. The alternate days would still remain with a serving of bread and *dovi* (peanut butter.) The opportunity for our preschool children is so profound. I don't know how many of you realize what an impact it is making on these children's growth, brain circuits, and general optimism towards life to have such offerings. We hear stories of the children insisting on their own school attendance due to the fine cuisine. Of course the educational part of the program is also exciting. They are learning many songs, games, numbers, letters, appropriate school behaviors, as well as the daily activity in Shona life.

SCHOOL UNIFORMS and REGISTRATION

Our school registrations are at 202 children this year. We decided to sponsor all of the children coming out of the Nhimbe Preschool, replacing the graduates from Form 4, increasing our numbers slightly. The uniform costs have doubled and we are hoping the women are able to sell the uniforms as prices rise daily and yet the ability for the rural person to make money does not change. Our plan is to go to schools this next Wednesday through Friday, taking pictures and getting the letter to their sponsor.

This year we plan to have all of the children come to the Community Center on Sunday where we will give them their letter or gift from America. Those of you who wrote your child are creating a doorway for them to potentially expand their horizons in ways that is otherwise not possible. Simply knowing that someone cares means so very much to them. Multiple volunteers in Oregon created special gifts for me to bring for those children who either did not receive anything from their donor or who are not sponsored. This way all children in the villages will receive a token from Nhimbe this year. At this particular meeting, we will also be officially introducing the Nhimbe tutor and making it clear that he is there to work with all of them.

CURRENCY

Prices remain the same or are higher. It's a continual shock to go to a store and find the prices changing so rapidly. Just last Monday, the government introduced an auction system modeled after the one used in Zambia. Foreign currency is being auctioned to bidders so that different players in the economy are expected to gradually shift the financial picture with a goal to

reduce shady bank dealings and lower the rate to the bank rate of \$824 ZIM to \$1 USD. We hear that realistically it may drop to \$3,000 ZIM but it cannot remain low, as there is no foreign currency coming into the country. Much of what was released for the auction had been on hold in the banks. We hear that the current rate is between \$3,500-\$3,900 ZIM to \$1 USD. For some historical perspective, I might mention that when we started the project in March of 2000, the bank rate was \$38 ZIM to \$1 USD and the black market rate was \$42. I thought that was a big deal, and now its 100 times that. We hear that it peaked at \$6000 just early December when we arrived.

During 2000, we found many NGOs (Non-Government Organizations) were leaving the country. The exodus has only continued resulting in less and less help particularly for the rural area. I believe there has been an increase in assistance for HIV/AIDS in the city and that is very welcome. As we've watched donors leaving the country that we might have partnered with to provide education, it has become apparent that the ball is in our court to develop our own programs. In the past 4 years, we've built a strong foundation, learning much as we are going along. I have to admit that this is a totally instinctual process. Thank God our board of directors gives me great freedom to roll with the punches, using my internal compass over conventional corporate strategies. Fortunately we've been highly successful, recognized here as a model program, deepening with every new undertaking and evolving as an organization here and in the states.

STOVES

Now that businesses are back open after the holidays, we've been able to locate proper steel for the fuel-efficient stove project. We are very excited to be stepping up production this year with new levels of organization. We began by redesigning the use of our steel to get the most out of it. We're now able to get 6 stoves for the price of 4, actually giving each woman more stove area, leaving no wasted steel.

Tichaona is taking the *mombe* by the horns to keep things moving, being the liaison between the women and the outer world. He's quite diplomatic, intelligent, and a hard worker. We need to pick up our repaired bicycles on this trip so he has some form of transport to get to the welding location to monitor their progress. The women are very grateful for his involvement, as it needs that link. Certainly the women and children are the greatest recipients of this help. They are the ones impacted the most by needing less firewood, reduced cooking time, reduced smoke thereby improving health of the whole family whom they nurture. The stove project is one of the greatest ways to empower the women without threatening any existing structures. I'm looking forward to seeing the progress.

MUSIC

On a final note, I need to share a paradox I've been living. Although it's through the music that Cosmas and I first met, we haven't spent time sharing music in my 6 trips, other than simply listening to CDs while we travel or generally sharing community experiences when mbira is played. Even though I teach some styles of Shona music in the states, and I brought him to my Ancient Ways students more than once, the music isn't our focus. We are usually discussing indigenous healing, traditions, and humanitarian issues. This may seem impossible to those of you in the music community, as we all know what voracious appetites Americans can have for the uplifting trance producing sounds of Shona music.

So this year, maybe after fulfilling some unknown commitment or milestone on my own path, I have spent some hours with my favorite instrument, the hoshu (a pair of maranka gourds filled with hota seeds making rattles and used along with any traditional and much contemporary music). I've played during multiple community ceremonies, moving from one extreme in my experience as being a businessperson to another as a musician. It may be having my husband and son both here together for the first time since our marriage in 2000, or having an excellent Executive Assistant that has freed me from my work focus or it may have to do with finding my primary path as a healer thereby freeing up my soul somehow. In any case, the dichotomy of this aspect of my life has shifted, but my concentration still remains on Nhimbe for Progress, a growing child cared for by many people's devotion, here and in the states.

CLOSING

We are gratefully and diligently working to carry out your intentful desire to offer practical help to the people here. They send profound gratitude your way!

Tatenda chaizvo (great thanks).

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