

**October 14<sup>th</sup> 2005**

**Greetings from sunny Zimbabwe!**

**We, Helen Six and I, arrived safely and have been working for a little over a week. October is the hottest month here, although this year it has been slightly milder, so we are fortunate. October is humorously referred to it as suicide month due to the heat. Unrelenting African sun after many months of dry weather just before the hopeful summer rains takes its toll on everyone and everything. It feels like a humid desert experience to us but with more vegetation than our deserts. Our normal body temperature regulation doesn't seem to be figuring out this quantity of heat and so we get waves of heat coming and going all day long without equivalent perspiration kicking in – our bodies are confused by the weather, but our minds are remaining adaptive to the variety of experiences.**

**We also feel very fortunate for the assistance you have provided to Ancient Ways to be able to continue working on this soil. It is a complex world here and beyond one's comprehension at times. The Nhimbe for Progress team on this side of the planet is organized and working hard with the resources we have provided them. We are seeing the fruits of our dreams in motion and thank you for your part in that.**

### **SUPPLIES**

**We began purchasing supplies the first day we arrived and went to Mhondoro on our third day here, hitting the ground running, and have now returned to the city to purchase more things for the project. The list is quite long and involved in every sector of activity - simple things such as raincoats for the Community Center guards who are preparing for the upcoming summer rains, seeds for our preschool garden, and Shona books for the library tutoring program. We want to purchase one term of food items for the preschool and have been researching the best way to do that considering the lack of food staples here at this time.**

**A new found contact has allowed us to experiment with turning over the locating and delivery of some larger sized or bulk purchases so that we can focus our time on the rest of the list. We'll see how this goes and if we can afford to approach things this way. At this point it's a real relief to cut down on the detail hustling around that we do to satisfy all the departments. We have spent 2 full days going everywhere to find things and if we hadn't turned over the list, we**

would be in town for another 2. Our purchases take us to many parts of town and into many kinds of stores because so many places don't have stock on hand. There aren't department stores like we have on every corner in the states. And the shelves are empty of many items, although there seems to be an abundance of poisons and pesticides available. Many a store clerk has laughed at us trying to locate some simple office supplies to make our record keeping manageable, or some item for the preschool teachers to do their job better. Keeping the store shelves stocked is a real problem.

## **FOOD**

You may remember that the source of our special food supplement for the preschool dried up during '04. We have now found a replacement and are very excited about it! It is a relief to know the kids will have better nutrition. The particular product is a corn-soy blend with added vitamins and sugar (CSB). We have tasted it and found it quite preferable; it's not overly sweetened nor does it taste heavily of soy. Over the past year there were some small amounts of porridge given to the preschools (by government or NGO I'm not sure), but the last 3 batches have been unfit for human consumption and they have had to feed it to animals.

The situation on the ground here is severe. Our supplier of CSB has told us of mills closing due to lack of grain, with pretty grim predications for the people's food supply here. There is literally becoming no grain available. He explained that the abundance of food here in the past had come from irrigated fields, which are now almost non-existent. That is how the country had survived previous droughts of even worse proportions – there were irrigated farms in operation. Now the lack of rain has stalled the average rural farmer who can not raise enough for the family, as well as made the commercial farms an empty breadbasket.

Another block to acquiring food is that there are laws here requiring that extra grain that is raised must be sold to the grain marketing board. That means that if I as a rural farmer have more grain than my family needs, I am not supposed to sell it to my neighbor. It also means that any grain that may be brought to a mill must be processed by the mill and not resold. If a mill transports the grain in an unprocessed state there is a possibility of it being confiscated. So for us to purchase grain, even though we may have the funds, is an impossibility as the supplies are dwindling.

**We are told that there are supplies coming into the country but specifically not in any way that attracts attention, and also not anytime soon in a major way. Maybe by year end, things will be so absolutely devastating that alternatives will be developed. As we drive the rural roads we see hundreds of people gathered at various locations. They have been told to wait for Catholic Relief Services (CRS) to bring some food, as they did in the past. But about 8 months ago, they discontinued operation and were told to stop delivery of food. Their warehouses sat full and the people's bellies were left empty. It's confusing to the people and teaches a lie, as there is little food coming, but they still must wait as hope is better than nothing.**

**Along the roadside we saw children picking small things up off the ground. My first thought was that it was something shiny like a pretty rock, but we were told that they were picking up the grain that had blown off of a passing truck. Any way to source something to eat...**

**The first personal report from each of the Nhimbe staff has been a comment about being hungry, starving due to no crop from last season's draught, and difficulty dealing with the continuing increase in prices. Their bodies are looking so very lean. It is heartbreaking as I have known these people for a while now, as this is our 6<sup>th</sup> year, and they are my friends and family. I never dreamed that I would be faced with such desperation.**

**I am at a loss as what to do as our fundraising efforts were never intended to feed over 1,200 people. Our goal has always been to provide the fishing pole not the fish, but I can not be here with this lack, without addressing it in some capacity. After hearing that children are being turned away from school because they don't have a writing tablet, and the parent can't purchase one because it costs too much (around 8 cents USD), something inside of me snapped. I have heard stories before but saw it close up this time.**

**So we decided to purchase a small amount of CSB for each family. We will dedicate \$1 USD per person per month for the next 3 months. We don't have the latest survey results and so don't know how many people have moved to the country because of the tsunami "clean up", (the governments destruction of homes which weren't built within regulations), but know that the numbers have increased.**

**This is a lot of money for Ancient Ways to dedicate in this way. But I can't watch this without doing something. In the past I have consoled myself that the preschool children are being cared for, when I was**

being fraught with concerns for the people, but that isn't enough now to lift this burden of seeing people without the basics to eat. This \$1 per month only purchases a small amount (nearly 7 adult servings or 14 child size portions) to spread out over one month, but when there is nothing else available, literally, it will make a difference. The extra protein from soy and extra vitamins adds another type of value as well. Normally we would try to locate bulk grain straight from harvest, but are finding that this option isn't available. If anyone knows an organization or individual who could match these funds to increase this effort please let them know about our project as we are quite successful here.

On one level I feel that I would do make this decision in any case, but am reminded that the fundraising efforts of people back home are the winds beneath our wings, and I don't need to be afraid of the commitments my heart calls me to. Loren Mach's work with family and friends through Rhythmwalk last year came through as a donation right before we left October 1. Knowing that those funds are there comforts me greatly - that will make a big difference, as we sort things out over the next few months. Also, Byron and Dana Moffet from Whidbey Island, with their many comrades, also raised a significant sum for which we are so very grateful too. These kinds of fundraising efforts, which required nothing of me, keep me from going mad in the face of this kind of crisis. I can only pray that their inspiration will touch others to consider how our efforts at home do make a difference on the other side of the globe!

#### **CURRENCY**

The bank auction rate is near 27,000 per 1 USD, with the bank rate at 24. We hear rumors of the parallel market having reached over 100, settling around 80,000 to 85 this week and being 70,000 when we arrived. When I was here in April and May, we heard that the rate was 16,000 to 20. The prices in the stores are keeping up with this street rate but the people's wages are not. In the rural area where they live close to the land, keeping up with hyperinflation is an impossibility and they can only stare in disbelief.

#### **PETROL**

Petrol queues are long, requiring a line up at 5 a.m. So far we have avoided the queues by purchasing the petrol with a coupon system at an equivalent of \$1 USD per liter. Also, I hear that some people charge \$100,000 per liter on the street. There are fewer cars on the roads, so that is pleasant - less pollution, less driving intensity - but the reality of it is that people can't move around from one place to another. Even

**the buses are stalled out at the bus depot not able to get diesel with very few actually transporting people. One has to have forex (foreign exchange) to be in the fuel market.**

**We have enough petrol to leave town today (Saturday) and go out to Mhondoro where we will be visiting all 5 schools. We are sponsoring additional children and so need to take their pictures and retrieve their letters to their potential sponsors. This is a huge leap for us as we were increasing only 20 children per year and this year we had already increased the sponsorships. The preschool children have increased by several also, with registration closer to 80 now, as the new families have come from town to their rural homes to find refuge from the debris of the clean up.**

## **HEALTH**

**Helen accompanied me this time to assist with the enormous task of recordkeeping and helping me stay organized. She has been a genuine help in this regard, reinforcing the needed details on paper and contributing to the overall planning discussions. Besides being a great traveling companion with a good sense of humor, her desire to help others shines at every turn. Her background as a registered nurse and her studies using alternative modalities for healing are giving her perspective to review our Health Station.**

**So far we have been able to offer a few healing treatments to staff members. I have been working with NMT here (see [www.nmt.md](http://www.nmt.md)) for a number of years now and have found that alternative modalities are the most succinct approaches under these circumstances. They require no outside tools to do the job, the use of intention in healing matches much of indigenous medicine ways, and they are well received by the people. And the bottom line is that the success rate has been high.**

**We ran into more concerns this trip regarding poisons and the storing of grain. Does anyone out there have an interest in finding out how we keep grain in our mills or warehouses there in the states? There are the two markets, mainstream and organic, and both would have the issues of deterring rodents and insects of various sorts. There is a product here that is used by the rural family farmer (I have no idea how the commercial mills here deal with this issue) who needs to store grain for the year. It is called Shumba Super. I am interested in whether this is truly safe as they mix the powder with the grain and feel free to use it after a month. It never occurred to me that we are eating this stuff. Here is what the label says:**

## **Shumba Super**

### **Ingredients**

**Fenitrothion 1%**

**Deltamethrin .13%**

**Inert 98.87**

**Chemical group Organophosphate Synthetic Pyrethroid**

### **Directions**

**Mix with grain. Add 25 gr of SS to 1 bag 50 kg of maize. It says it is safe to use after a minimum of 45 days and is for control of stored grain weevils, moths, larger/lesser grain borers.**

**Directions say to mix into grain with a shovel and sprinkle around the room. Directions do not say to use gloves or breathing protection. At the bottom of the label it does say it is poisonous to swallow, inhale or skin contact. Every person I've ever asked has never known not to touch or breathe the product. I know that chrysanthemum flowers are the source for the organic pyrethrum that is used but it is still considered a poison even though its organic.**

**I am unable to do any internet research here but am wondering if anyone of you has a hankering to know more. I am very concerned for the health of Zimbabweans and feel that the poisons that are misused and overused are one of the threats to health as the immune system can only handle so much. In my mind this is bigger than HIV because with adequate lifestyle changes many people are living with HIV, but without knowledge that poisons are meant to kill life and we are living creatures, many people are continuing to harm themselves.**

### **THANKS**

**Please know the incredible gratitude that we all have for your involvement and concern for the Nhimbe villagers. There is suffering all over Zimbabwe, and in fact all over the world. So to be able to have a hands-on way of introducing stimulus towards betterment of life, well being, and hope, is a wonderful thing and we thank you for all that you do, whether as a volunteer, in a financial way, or your words of encouragement, positive thoughts and prayers. Our goal is to find ways of helping more people and refining the ways we extend our hands to do the most effective and efficient job possible.**

**We'll be in touch next week when we return over the weekend. Keep us in your heart...your intention to do good here is being made manifest and we hold your interest as our focus.**

**Blessings,**

**Jaiaen and Helen**