

Fall 2005 #2 Field Report

October 20th 2005

Hello Nhimbe Friends,

Again, I write with appreciation for your interest in Zimbabwe. Your open ears to hear the story of what might be a point of view without witness, brings me much gratitude. Without you listening, I would probably not write, not share the perspective from the front lines here, nor feel any relief from expression.

Well into our 3rd week we have been working non-stop, literally. There is no time to waste. Every small effort injects momentum, builds relationships, and brings concentration to details that must be focused upon to carry out our mission. Fortunate for me, Helen is used to working many hours a day as a nurse on the continuous wheel of caring for people's needs. In our case, she has been spending much of her time supporting the Nhimbe work procuring supplies, keeping track of arrangements for all of the activities required to complete the jobs, and making detail accounting of our expenditures extending into the millions of dollars most days. We are all working together, the Nhimbe team from here on this soil, Helen, and I, giving it every ounce of our attention during these few days together. Everyone here is used to my visits and knows we must achieve much in a short time.

SCHOOLS

We have attended the schools this last week with a goal of collecting letters from the newly sponsored children, taking their pictures, and delivering your letters to your child, while also giving stickers to all the children. They marvel over the little symbols and pictures with at least one of them placing a sticker on their forehead. The ones receiving letters from you are very happy, even if they are too young to read them. Someone will read them to them and it will be an event to share. We heard that a couple of the children received a letter from the US through the regular mail which was quite exciting. Remember that anything you send through the postal system will go through many hands after opening and so sending simply a letter you will be assured that the child will get it, if the postal system gets it to the destination.

The schools each have their own personality, some are brighter and some dimmer, but all full of children in great need. These are the government schools who have not received much at all in the way of funds for many years. The paint is chipped, windows broken, and most things resigned in a deteriorating condition. Teachers make less than minimal wages, very few books reside in a classroom for all of the children to use, and little food is in each child's stomach. Parents can't afford to buy text books for their children so most all studies are

done at school with the limited resources there. We do encourage them to come and use our resources at the library and tutoring center. We also are funding a special needs program for the brightest and hardest working ones where we buy a set of books for their school year which can then be used next year by another student. The hope is to grow a revolving text book library for the situation as it won't change in the near future.

Compared to our country, there are not many finances directed at the children's education, so their inspiration must come from home. The setting is not plus-ki and everyone is doing what they can with what is available. The parents really must be the ones to prod them on towards learning which must be hard since many didn't finish their own education. We also, with our educational program, keep emphasizing how knowledge gives power of choice in one's life, the importance of focusing their effort, and too, the joy of learning. A hope still remains to be able to start our own school. Unfortunately there is a proposal to eliminate private schools which may be another thing to hold us back.

School fees have been ranging from the absolute ridiculous of 10,000 per term (the parents set the fees for their school) all the way up to 20 million for a term in an upper middle class private girls secondary school. They are continually raising their fees to keep up with inflation. 40% of children are not in school because they can't afford the fees.

Our "accountant" for Nhimbe here is married to a teacher in one of these private schools. She explains much about the situations there and the complexities of teenage years for all the girls, irregardless of their heritage. The most obvious issues are HIV/AIDS, living in both worlds of western influence and Zimbabwe's crisis, and the lack of prospect for the future. For the affluent children it means leaving the country and the poorer children there doesn't appear to be a future.

One of the highlights is that, due to her efforts (Thank you Margaret!) and our great documentary (Thank you Dana and Molly!), the girl's Interact club has adopted our project and raised over \$600,000 for us through showing a video, as well as sourced many books. Also, fellow teachers are donating books – the most obvious lack for our children is that the government schools do not teach world history, but only Zimbabwean history, from their point of view. This is an intense thought...all of these children are being taught in a vacuum.

FOOD

The prices of everything keep spiraling upward. The most significant impact of these changes is with food, because it is needed every day. The drought has limited the gardening and farming since water is not just turned on with a faucet and there are not hoses and sprinklers to run freely. People are very hungry, both in town and in the rural areas. These are some prices from the stores a

couple of weeks ago – remember that the average family will not be buying many of these things as they can only afford *sadza* and a few vegetables and maybe meat or fish:

12 eggs 230,000
Chicken whole fryer 157,000 in town
100,000 one live chicken in the rural area
5 pack tortillas 29,000
16 oz olive oil 469,000 (found in a special shop)
 $\frac{3}{4}$ liter mixed cooking oil 86,000
8 Tomatoes 25,000
1 Cabbage 25,000
1 small Butternut squash 10,000
Milk 16,000 to 25,000 for a pint
100% Juice 108,000 to 220,000 for a liter
1 Apple 20,000 each
1 Garlic cluster 3,000
1 Broccoli small head 7,000
1 Orange 5,000
1 Lemon 1,000
1 Cucumber 6,000
Bread white 23,000
Soda 23,000
Beer 25,000
Toilet paper roll 17,000
Load of Firewood 50,000
Salt is in low supply now

The economy is confused to say the least. The prices are rising sometimes daily, the street exchange rate is going higher, and the bank rate and wages are not moving at all. People in the rural area are being devastated by the increase in prices, as are people in town. At least when in town one can watch it going up whereas in the rural area it makes these incredible leaps as if they are living in a foreign country and it doesn't relate to anything that they can watch, see or have ever experienced.

I received word the other day that some villagers were told by CRS that they could not apply for help through their services because they are being helped by Nhimbe. Charles, our manager here, said he would need to talk to the chief about this because Nhimbe has only been providing preschool food and CRS has wrong information. It's ironic that they say this right before we have done the deed of actually trying to bring some food relief, as if they read my mind. It will be such a small amount that we end up providing, that they should not count this as sustenance!

TESTED MAIZE SEED

We are buying tested maize seed as another way of helping with the devastating lack of food. We didn't really receive much affirmation in the way of donations directly for this issue but feel that it is an obvious solution, assuming the rains comply with coming down. This seed would be provided as a micro loan, whereby they repay the amount from their harvest, at the cost of the tested seed at that time. The best farmers, maybe the top 3 producers, will be able to pay back their loan by bringing some maize to the preschool instead of the cash.

One problem for the rural farmer is being able to afford to buy tested seed – seed that has its germination quality verified. If you do not have good seed all of your farming efforts will result in nothing when the rains come. We are counting on the rains, and are planning on purchasing the tested seed for 100 families. That will be 10 kg per family which during a reasonable year will yield 1 ton of maize. This will be enough for their immediate family, and enough to share with their extended family that continues to grow, due to loss of life primarily from illness and disease, as well as people returning to their rural homes from the lack of shelter and livelihood in the city.

TSUNAMI CLEAN UP

We've seen the "clean up" residue. It stretches all over town in all of the townships all the way out to Mubaira past our villages. People here refer to it as Tsunami because of the devastation it has left. Where we are staying, there are 2 fellows staying in an outbuilding in the back. They lost their home from the bulldozing and needed a place to stay. They were the gardeners of our landlord's friend and were all of a sudden without residence. They are probably paying some small amount of rent. In the high density part of town, a room can go for 750,000 to 1 million. Many people, from the elderly to children died due to the complications of having no home in the cold winter months (last June to August) and the stress of losing their homes. Everyone knows someone who had to relocate.

We in Nhimbe have also received many people into our villages and are incorporating them in whatever way we can. They are showing up on the preschool rolls as well as looking for sponsorship to the government schools. The difficulty of course is that they have come without money, and no previous farming harvest to be eating, and so are needing help from families in the area, who are also having difficulty surviving these times.

HEALTH

We continue to make efforts towards helping people with their health problems. There is such an enormous need. Currently there seems to be flu of sorts going around with a lot of coughing and head colds. People of all ages are feeling the effects. This is just another layer on top of the chronic problems that people are

suffering with, for which they receive no help from the clinics. They are sometimes given pain killers if they go to the clinic but there are no antibiotics available.

The clinic is several kilometers away so one has to be feeling very poorly to go since most travel is on foot, and then one doesn't want to travel being you are that sick. We have seen only a couple of cars in the rural area during our entire stay and buses aren't running regularly due to fuel costs and lack of availability. What I would give to be able to provide them regular healing help! The alternative health care they receive from us is a drop in the proverbial bucket, and in this case, I wonder if it has a hole in it. Any alternative health practitioners interested in an adventure?

TRANSPORT

The only reason I'm actually finding time to write this Field Report is because the truck is in getting serviced, otherwise we would be out and about purchasing our supplies, such as the tested seed, cement for a toilet and a well, as well as fabric for the school uniforms. I'm hoping all goes well and we will be moving about shortly. This downtime is quite normal as we are borrowing Cosmas' truck - it is older and needs nurturing. Some trips we have been in town waiting for days for the truck's repair. The truck quit working on our way into town on Thursday, and we tried not to think about all of what that might mean as we sat by the side of the road.

The truck was full with all our gear, our driver, our manager, two hitchhikers who happened to be our preschool teacher and her husband who is a teacher also at one of the primary schools, and the two of us. We were thankfully in an area where the phone network would work off and on, which made us feel better although we never did get through. We pushed the vehicle off the road so that the big trucks would surely miss us, and watched as the sun got lower and lower in the sky. We joked about the fact that we actually had a mosquito net in the suitcase, plenty of water for all of us, and some oranges in case we needed breakfast.

Instinctively I felt that all would resolve itself and we would get home safe as we have had vehicle problems before, but these kinds of circumstances give pause for thought. We used the opportunity to begin discussing the problems of actually purchasing a truck for Ancient Ways. It is one of the many things that haven't been given any priority of funds (similar to paid staff and a cell phone). For truck usage Cosmas does receive mileage compensation at US rates which considerably helps him to maintain his truck. But the reality is that we have only a certain number of days to do our job and those are ticking away quickly. And the safety issues around breaking down in the bush bring concern. Generally, I have found the Shona people to be a very gentle and non-aggressive people

(maybe that is why it takes so long for things to get radical and change) but I also know how the stress of survival can change one's persona.

After sufficient blowing out of fuel jets and various other manipulations of points, condensers and anything else one might do to stimulate a car to work, we got it going. But by that time, we had used too much fuel by continually trying to restart it. Our driver Standrick, although not a mechanic, watches carefully all the time to learn the tricks of the trade and so managed to get us moving. As we entered the outer edges of Harare we were finally able to get through to someone on the phone network and it turned out to be Cosmas' brother. He came to meet us (some of you remember Simon) and he brought his daughter, and son-in-law who is a mechanic. The guys fiddled around some more under the hood until they were confident it would arrive home without stalling. Helen and I were taken to our place with the couple and their baby in the other truck. It meant that I got to ride in the back of an open air truck with the suitcases and the son-in-law, giving me a brand new appreciation for night life in Harare....quite a view.

COMMUNITY

Watching the family work together to get the car running and ferry us home gave me a very warm feeling. It reminds me of all the ways that people are coming together to help us make progress. The family is tremendously supportive....that is the bottom line in Africa – the family. Then too, not only are the Nhimbe village residents all working together on one team (which is rather untraditional) but also the non-Shona residents in Harare are also pitching in each in their own fashion. Our new found friends with origins in many countries around the world continue to amaze me with their assistance and interest. I'm sure that foreign currency being in demand creates more business relationships that would otherwise be the case, and that works for all of us. But the genuine concern for the people of all colors and walks of life is bright.

Another demonstration of help has been from the religious sector. Not only are the Moslems here very supportive but also the assorted sects of Christians both here and in the states. Everyone is going to the edge with impartial and non-discriminatory assistance. The human condition is the priority and not the background.

Just prior to leaving I found an organization out of Portland called Good Samaritan Ministries who has offered to support Ancient Ways in whatever way they can in this work (check out www.goodsamaritanministries.org) . This shouldn't come as a surprise since truly most all of the humanitarian work being done in the world is through the religious organizations, but because our focus was non-religious in nature, and actually has been the preservation and learning from traditional ways which includes their religion, I think I was assuming that

people in the religious arena would not support our efforts since it doesn't match their own agenda. But I have been pleasantly surprised. People continually demonstrate to me their desire to alleviate suffering as the priority, not other agendas. Our Moslem friend here is another example of someone living a life that is bridging surface dogmas and getting to the heart of the matter - humanity.

I had a dream one night in my hut where I was talking to God, and the nature of God inside of me was being revealed. It was explained that I must help all people, irregardless of their religion and that I am truly one with each person whether a Moslem, a Christian, or earth based religion for example. To dream this was curious since I have always felt so open towards all religious paths, and have studied many. But the timing was appropriate as it made me realize that I have been narrow in my thinking, unable to really reach out to all religions for help, and also assumed that people here who are in churches were not my concern. That sounds idiotic in a way, quite un-humanitarian, but because we have been so focused on just our little villages I have been very limited in my thoughts. The dream was quite revealing.

MATARUTSE

So within a day or so of this dream, I was asked by someone near our villages if we could help him finish the roof on their church. This person has requested help from me multiple times before over several years. I met him at Cosmas' wife funeral, and also at my wedding, as my husband was paying the *lobola* to seal the bond between the families. This man is related to us through marriage and lives a short distance away, in the Matarutse area (one of our primary schools). Always in the past, I would say that no, we have no funds available except for this one project. This time, I was able to talk to him with a new mind and heart. We (Helen and the Nhimbe core staff) talked at length of many things so that we could understand the true nature of his needs.

There was the psychological effect of the dream and then also two other things were put on my path, which are also directly related to this man's home area. One was that we met a woman in London on our way here who is from Zimbabwe, in fact born in one of our Nhimbe villages. We had emailed and then made the effort to meet. She was ironically also from the Mataruste area. She presented me with a very detailed project proposal she called Eagle Vision, that expressed her heart felt desire to return to Zimbabwe and develop a community project for the children in the area. She was primarily concerned that the young girls, but also young boys, have no help to develop into people that can contribute to their communities due to modern life in this economic chaos. She has a dream to help them.

We discussed her project, and typically I was wondering about her coming to our area, because as it turned out, one of the Nhimbe villages was her rural home, but her heart was to be working in the Matarutse area since she was now married, and traditionally that is where she would be spending her time. So I had left our meeting not quite sure what was to become of our working together, since I have always had that narrow focus of the Nhimbe villages.

The second thing that happened was that the preschool teacher that works at Matarutse primary school came to us, as we were paying the school fees for the older sponsored kids, and asked if we could help her with her preschool. They were holding the school under a tree and she explained that they have nothing much for the children to use. This was the same picture I saw 6 years ago before Karen Barton inspired building the Nhimbe preschool.

The combination of these 3 events (the church roof, introduction to Eagle Vision, and the preschoolers needs) timed with my dream was quite enough to push me through to a new level of understanding about my life. I have felt like a pawn in the game for a long time and this is just another level – kind of reminds me of those multi-dimensional games they play on Star Trek.

After looking into how the church was to be used (by all the local people no matter what religion – Anglicans, Methodists, Salvation Army, Roman Catholics, each with their own day and time) and how willing they were to also provide the space for the preschoolers, and the Eagle Vision community project once underway, it made complete sense to me to channel any funds that someone wants to donate to their cause to them, while assuring the funds get to the final destination for the requested goal. We can see that they are serious as they have a building that is almost finished, there is certainly the need for community space, and they are willingly working together!

To the people here there is no difference in how help comes and to whom, just so it comes. On our side of the world, it's more complicated because of the limitations of the Ancient Ways mission – the question I would have would whether helping finish a community services building is within the guidelines of preserving and learning from traditional ways. To the traditionalists this is a major concern and to others it isn't even a question. If its required, I may work through a different non-profit so that things are kept clearer – I'm not sure at this point but must follow the leads Spirit gives me. I'm assuming it would be people in churches who would be most supportive of roofing the building, even though I personally see the purpose as a community building serving many functions.

OMAY PROJECT

Some of you may remember that we are sharing an interest and providing an umbrella for the Nutrition Garden for Schools. Due to the petrol costs, and complete chaos that abounds, they are waiting for things to settle. I'm happy to say that I was able to bring them some funds from donations requested to help their project for when things get ready to move!

KUTAMBARARA

Those of you that know this song by Dumi, know that he was interested in the spreading of the music and hence named the song Kutambarara. The word is actually an infinitive meaning to spread. People also use it to refer to getting fatter, or spreading that way. I've always appreciated the subtle ideas expressed by the song since learning it from Claire Jones years ago. That seems to be the motto at the moment, being stimulated from all arenas, without bias.

It seems that the Great Spirit has intention for our efforts to spread in many ways. Another area requesting help is that of the Mujuru's rural home. Fradreck and Fungai spoke with me at Zimfest, along with one of their students, Rosalie from Portland. We discussed the possibility of raising funds for 3 villages in their area and concluded that I could facilitate that with their help, as long as we start simple and continue with that goal. Using the Nhimbe model, there are some easy tracks to follow and now with our incredible accountant here in Harare, rounding out the management team beyond my wildest dreams, it's as if we have been shifted into gear and are rolling.

Helen and I will be going with Fradreck to his home area this coming week for 2 days, meeting the village heads and representatives as well as the chief of their area. Our goal this time is to help communicate the vision in its simplicity and see if everything feels right from the soil up, identify the children needing sponsorship making it possible for you to sponsor one of these children in the next couple of months (!), as well as being unobtrusive in the area, simply coming and going quickly.

I will hopefully be able to write good news about our efforts next Field Report, as I have heard from Fradreck that everyone in the area is very hopeful and excited that some help could possibly come.

The most fascinating part of this expansion to me, is that God, in my opinion, doesn't care what religion or race a person is. That isn't a revelation exactly but I know that many of us haven't been willing to allow it to all reside in the same mouthful in terms of actually working. We have had our focus and they (whoever they are) have their focus, and we all do our own thing.

The biggest wakeup call is when I went to the preschool and they started singing bible songs. I was floored. In our country there is a division between church

and state and it's clear. It's gotten so clear that we can't let the school children pray in the face of danger, nor have Christmas ornaments on a school lawn during the holidays, nor refer to God, except in private schools. Things have become extreme in an effort to find balance. So, why would our Nhimbe preschool be singing songs about Jesus? Because, there is no division between church and state here. The bible is taught in all schools at all grades. Surprised? I was too the first time I saw the primary curriculum. It never occurred to me it was part and parcel of education in general and so the preschool too.

So is that a problem? Well, to those of you who feel differently it might be. If you have another religious bias it would seem imposing. I am a little concerned because I don't really understand all of the implications. I do know that my family here (Cosmas, his parents, etc.) are Roman Catholic and my mother demonstrates that belief by her apparel and songs, that our manager of all activities was raised by the mission school by the priests and is the most intelligent and deep thinking person I have ever met here, and that organized religion is the underlying foundation of more than one of the Nhimbe villages. So even though our efforts have been to not be promoting religion, because it is part of the nature of life here, and is not a separate thing, we end up in the mix. Personally, I have no issue unless someone doesn't allow another person their free will and the right-to-choose, then I have a big problem.

STATISTICS

Here are some approximate numbers to give perspective on the larger Zimbabwe picture. In this country it is not politically incorrect to refer to people as white and black, so I will use that reference here.

- Currently there are between 10-12,000 white people who are left residing in Zimbabwe, and in 1980 there were around 250,000. Most of these are multi-generation residents originally from various countries and so feel more African than not (much like me with great-grandparents from other countries – I'm an American not European, as with most of us).
- There were around 4,000,000 black people (this would include all tribes) who have left over the last 4 years. Half are those are living in South Africa and most are illegally there. They swim across a crocodile infested river to get there and sometimes are caught, being held under terrible conditions.
- Over 800,000 professionals have left over the last 5-10 years leaving all areas so now they are without the people who could really make a difference. Finding adequate replacements for teachers, doctors and other professionals is a real problem.

There is a malaise all over Zimbabwe in all sectors of the population – I struggle with seeing it in the rural school kids as I remember and hold dear the spontaneity and optimism of youth. I also recognize it as a heavy blanket over

every one of all ages, feeling beaten down beyond belief, and wondering when the nightmare will end.

SUMMARY

The first October shower just came and I felt like kissing the ground. It brought much hope to me that there might be a turn in weather, giving people a better chance of a future harvest. The milder October we started with, became a broiling hot one, and now the rain has softened that effect. The most important supply we packed for the trip was a couple of .99 cent spray bottles for use on the airplane to keep our moisture levels up. Daily we have used it to get some relief and feel funny sometimes spraying ourselves so much.

I hope that my reporting from the front lines here is not too grim. I always try to hold positive thought and know that the solving of the worlds' problems is not my job. My job is to behave myself, monitor my thought as that is the source of my own creations, and live my passion wildly no matter how it might be viewed by another to honor truly the Source of my soul. If one watches the drama of life from the spiritual realm much more consolation can come and that is the thing that sustains me. When the mild wind blows and the leaves are rustling about, it reminds me that Spirit is like the wind and I am comforted – you can't see either one but just their effects. The High Spirits are behind us, our ancestors want us to have faith, and we are all One in these efforts.

Thank you so very much for listening and caring about these people. It is all of your energy that you send us in the various forms that makes this all possible. We can't fix another's problems but we can make the load a bit lighter. Working as a team is the only solution and continues to amaze me, touch my heart deeply, and give me hope that there are ways to accomplish the seemingly impossible. Tatenda Chiezvo!

More to share next report...Blessings your way and to all of those you love,

Jaijen and Helen