

May 12, 2006

Again, Greetings from Africa!

Leaving Zimbabwe always give me cause to think deeply. I wonder about how these efforts to uplift these people have bubbled up out of my life, how new insights about the human condition continue to be revealed providing tasty morsels for my hungry consciousness, and how a powerful force outside of myself persists to pull me forward one step after another towards the light-path, even during the darkest of times.

The road is sometimes too murky. Not a place for a human to thrive, no fragrant flowers, just a dank hole that doesn't have enough air. There is a great sadness in Zimbabwe like something is broken - the losses of family fabric from gradual disintegration, personal integrity being set aside as survival stresses increase with no food, no job, no money, and losing hope because one has no vision for their purpose in life - these are all contributors. My brother-in-law told me that now three people recently have jumped from some height plummeting to their death as daily life becomes unbearable...this is something new. Maybe you have read about the many babies being abandoned along the road - I think the paper I read said 20 a week. A recent article said its not just women who were abandoning babies. This is not Shona culture - this is a travesty. These are signs of desperation with no relief, very weary war torn souls without comfort, and lost spirit. Please keep these people in your prayers. All it takes is a glimpse of Light during those moments for a person to make a different decision.

I read a Swahili proverb that "One needs something to do, to love, and to hope for. It made me think about how a community essence such as we are developing in Mhondoro with the Nhimbe vision is creating the substance behind that proverb, even in the face of adversity, economic chaos, and extreme poverty. The growth of the relationships among the people, the activities they participate in, and the future plans are all pieces of a wholeness which is touching many people's lives even many outside of the seven villages. There are requests regularly to expand and include more people.

One day I was walking with a man and woman down one of the many interweaving grass paths back to my hut, and a local police officer attended to walking me part way home. His focus however was to get me to buy him a beer. I usually reply something like "oh, I don't want any thing" as if I think he wants me to participate (this is a common problem in Zimbabwe today - many people will ask for alcohol of various sorts but this isn't traditional Shona manners). I managed to side step his requests as if it went right over my head and just kept talking like the "dumb blonde" does. Since translation can sometimes be challenging I blew through the whole thing as if our English was having difficulty. Trouble with communication is a routine enough situation.

He finally receded into the background as I found my original friends. They immediately remarked that I shouldn't listen to him, that it wasn't right for him to do that, particularly since he had misrepresented himself as the Chief of Police. They both chimed in with the same exact words at the same moment saying in stereo from each side of me "you aren't here for pleasures, but for the future"! Both carried that message in their hearts that the money I bring isn't to be misused to indulge people but for their children's schooling, the community development, healing, and whatever we are doing to improve the sub-standard living

conditions. This conversation really stuck in my mind the way they said it together with the timing of a rehearsed duet – I almost expected someone to start counting quickly like we used to as kids with that made-up spontaneous game....coke 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8...

After leaving Zimbabwe I continued to Kenya this trip to explore the relationship between Nhimbe for Progress in Zimbabwe, and Good Samaritan Ministries (GSM), based in Beaverton Oregon with Centers throughout the world. GSM helps people organize themselves to be a "good Samaritan" and assist their neighbor regardless of religion, race, or gender. They have put a new face on people working together from many Christian faiths by pointing out that the common ground they all have is that of compassion-at-work. In Kenya is the Continental Training Center for all the African nations to attend, to study this concept. It starts as a concept, but then easily becomes a path - once assisted the person wants to help their neighbor as a way of giving back.

### GIVING BACK and TRADITIONAL WAYS

That same concept is why so many marimba and mbira players say they want to help Zimbabwe, as a way of giving back. Interesting how compassionate action is stimulated by the quiet pressing of one's heart. Like in the movie "Paying It Forward" (I didn't particularly like the ending of this film but enjoyed the overall message), offering help to another person because the one who offered you the helping hand may not be present at the moment. Beautiful thought.

And that is some of what originally brought me to Africa I believe. My godmother Jaenai, (we found each other when I was near 20), gave me so much love through her teaching and guidance when I was in my early twenties, that when she passed on when I was 27, I found that I was charged with her legacy, and I must do whatever I could in gratitude for the Great Spirit that worked through her. So now, to find an organization like Good Samaritan Ministries, who are teaching some fundamentals of what my godmother taught, I am finding a sweet familiar resonance and am wanting to understand how this all fits together with the great needs in Zimbabwe.

The intriguing piece of all of this to me is that Ancient Ways is an educational organization, with a mission to preserve traditional ways of indigenous people providing appropriate assistance where the need exists, so what is the connecting point with Christianity, is it just helping our fellow human? Obviously, as an organization, we discriminate in those traditions that we support and those that we don't. Polygamy is common in Zimbabwe, or female circumcisions which are more common in some other parts of Africa, for examples, are traditions which do not uplift the people and so, by their very nature, are left behind. This doesn't mean that we don't help those polygamists in our villages for instance. Discriminating against people or not encouraging a tradition are different subjects in my opinion. I know many polygamists personally. I don't really understand all of how their mind works but some are fine responsible people. (I'm continually joking with a few of my sons and male friends there about reversing the roles, imagining the woman being the polygamist and checking in on their feelings about that idea...I love radical thinking when it pops every bubble you think is valid.) My goal in bringing assistance to everyone is greatly an effort in bringing education and empowerment to the women in these situations, which I wouldn't have access to otherwise.

Another traditional Shona custom is that a parent does not speak to their child about sex or romance but instead the aunt and uncle do this job. This tradition is no longer a valid custom in today's society with such a high HIV rate, with families not always staying together, and so many parents are opting out of that one. Also, traditionally, women kneel under certain circumstances when addressing a man, but some mothers are not teaching their daughters this as they feel it is not a needed piece to family values or showing respect. It's a slow and tentative evolution. Changing a deeply rooted tradition is an awakening experience and doesn't happen overnight. What we know from history is that a people that can't change will not survive so what is the essence of what must be retained? We have our focus to help people remember their identity and preserve their culture, because modern, isolated, and high-tech life is stripping individuals of their roots, poisoning their beings. At the same time, if they are a Christian and are interested in working together for the benefit of bringing aid to their neighbor, we will be developing ways for them to do so. I think these two things can work together, particularly since so very many people are Christian and want support in those beliefs.

In the past, we have publicly made it clear that we are neither a political organization nor religious, and all people are free to participate no matter what their opinions and beliefs. We are working together with many villages with different points of view, all in the spirit of compassion. I believe that the Good Samaritan concepts and training will bring a new level of personal help to people as they are trained in basic counseling technique, for instance, how to listen and really hear another's problem, as well as the idea that none of us have a right to judge another, only to help those in need.

So our Project Manager/Counselor, Charles Muungani, and our Educational Program Manager, Takesure Musarurwa, (both seen in the DVD) will be attending the GSM Continental Training in Kenya in August through October, assuming that the passport and visas go through. This will be their first time out of Zimbabwe, which will be very empowering. It will also give them quite a boost to find that there are others with a similar calling, that of helping the poor, finding ways to assist with the needs of the local people and bringing people together in a loving and kind spirit to use their minds and hearts to make good choices.

Religion all over Africa was taught in "word" but little in "spirit" or "deed", so that the Living Love, as Jaenai used to call it, was left out. There are so many people in our Nhimbe villages that are part of various segregated religious groups with many rules to live by but underlying that, their basic beliefs also teach the compassion – it sometimes just gets buried in the dogma.

The Samaritan in that biblical story was considered someone without religion, possibly an infidel or heathen, but his actions were truly of the one God. I identify with that guy as I have never figured out how to fit into the religion-box but carry a heavy burden to help others and fulfill some "ministry" (as some would call it) as an educator for personal empowerment. I'm looking forward to seeing how this all shakes out. I feel confident that Charles and Takesure will benefit tremendously from this training and bring back a new level of vision to their work.

Another unique thing about GSM is that they do not charge for their work. People who need counseling, help with their bills, addiction recovery or whatever service, are all given this free of charge. GSM also sends 100% of the money that is given to them for a country to the country! The way they are able to do this is that they do separate fundraising for their offices in the states and various programs. For instance, they fundraise for the Continental Training Center,

so that all of those needing the training receive it free of charge. I've been very impressed by their work on both sides of the planet. (See [www.goodsamaritanministries.org](http://www.goodsamaritanministries.org)).

## KENYA CENTER

The Kenya Center has three functions: 1) The Continental Training Center runs trainings for all of Africa and this location is the base for that; 2) The local Uranga people are the recipients of the outreach program of counseling, help with the ramifications of poverty, and school sponsorships (helping with some staffing for a local primary school, as well as running a preschool, and a developing secondary school); and 3) The 20 or so outreach Centers around Kenya (10 fully established and 10 developing) are also managed out of this location. The people running all of these programs are each and every one such an inspiration. There are many volunteers that make it all work, all of which are people who came to GSM for help and then found volunteering a good way to participate in creating a better life on the planet. These people are full of integrity, communication from the heart, and an obvious sincere desire to answer a personal calling to genuinely help another, rather than just impose religiosity.

They are raising money for many deserving projects primarily those dealing with education as that is the primary problem for Kenyans. They have a preschool with over 50 children attending daily, and much like our preschool, they feed them a meal. They have started a Secondary school with a great vision in mind and are building it one grade at a time. They are up to Form 3 now with close to 100 pupils. Each year they are adding the next grade's building and teachers. They haven't yet achieved a potential goal of one book per child, teachers paid a comparable wage, or completed classrooms but they do have a commitment to excellence.

Their model is a good example of how something can come together on a shoe string budget. It helped me to remember how Nhimbe started in the beginning and wanting to find that confidence again to begin a primary school, if Spirit is inclined. In the GSM case, the students who had been sponsored by GSM in the past graduated and came back with this vision. It was these previous students who birthed this Secondary school and are part of overseeing it. Pretty potent next generation!

The primary school buildings were funded in 1995 by GSM as there were no classrooms only mud buildings. They are boarding boys, and unofficially a few girls, as well as having a mixed day school. They feed all the children a lunch to keep consistency for the boarders and day school. The boarders are mostly orphans. Just like where I stayed in the home of Papa James and Mama Theresa Opiyo, the International Director for Africa and his incredible wife, there are also many orphans living there. (The rural orphan population seems to be higher here than in Zimbabwe but that maybe just an impression through discussions as I didn't see statistics.) The primary school is lucky enough to have solar powered rooms so that the children, even the day scholars, return in the evening to study. They have taken 4<sup>th</sup> in the district for a national test this last year and are very pleased, wanting to work harder to achieve 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, or 3<sup>rd</sup>. There was only one D listed in the grades with everyone else as A's B's and C's. This is a huge difference compared to our rural primary schools. Besides the extra studies, there is the extra desire. I hope when we manage to develop our primary school we can compete with this effort.

## URANGA

Uranga, where the Center is located, is about 100 kilometers south of Uganda's border. From Nairobi, I flew into Kisumu which is the 3<sup>rd</sup> largest city in Kenya, bordering on Lake Victoria, the world's largest fresh water lake; it includes Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda. Kisumu is about 100 km from Uranga and a 3 hour drive some of which is on rough dirt road with many ruts. The climate here and the roads are much like the Peruvian Amazon, and not much at all like Zimbabwe. There are forested mountains surrounding this interior jungle which is very lush and green. This time of year was off-and-on rainy, cool, warm-to-hot and humid, just depending on the time of day. It was a lovely time to visit a rainforest. Uranga has about 20,000 adults with children at least doubling that, residing in 90 villages with 10 sub-chiefs and 3 main chiefs. The population seems to be higher density here than in Mhondoro as near as I can tell.

The traditions here are of course one of my interests particularly after the family immersion in Zimbabwe, being saturated with Shona lifestyle for the last 7 years. The similarities and differences are fascinating. After spending 3 days with my hosts I felt like I have known them for years and was coming home for a visit. The common spirit of genuine compassion brought me into a simple exchange and focus with them. Having much experience living in a hut without electricity and water made my stay a natural and very easy transition, as they had a generator for special-visitor lighting as part of some newly built 4-cornered buildings and a wonderful mosquito netted bed. My stay was so short but it stretched out into weeks in experiences. I have learned much about myself and my new friends in this part of Kenya.

#### KENYAN ECONOMY

The exchange for the Shilling here is 68-70 or so, to 1 USD. Taking the bus from downtown Kisumu to Uranga, cost about 200 shillings. Petrol to drive an older used car roundtrip is about 4,000 shillings. (We were blessed by a widow who loaned them a car to help with the local transport while I was visiting.) Taking a taxi from downtown to the airport would be 400 shillings. Petrol is 75 per liter, a little higher than in Zimbabwe. A liter of drinking water costs 50 shillings. Tuition at their Secondary school is around 12,500 shillings per year although other local Secondary schools are 15-17,000. They are keeping the fee low to make sure the school gets off the ground. Some of the local children pay the tuition and some of them are gratefully sponsored by GSM.

Kenya has many struggles similar to Zimbabwe. They have had droughts so that people are very hungry. There are no jobs and so what can one do to find food to eat? This coming June should relieve some stress in that regard as a new crop will be on, for which there was plenty of rain this year. The one huge difference is that the economy is somewhat stable compared to Zimbabwe. The Kenyans also have the same problem with having to leave the deceased without a proper burial and piling up in the mortuaries due to the high fees of transport and funeral services. There are many children who do not attend a secondary school at all because the fees are too great. That is why the Secondary school GSM has started is so important to the area, keeping the fees low.

#### SUMMARY

Charles, our Nhimbe Project Manager, is always full of philosophic thinking to stretch one's mind and heart. He is from the old school and commonly pointing out the problems with the ways people have come to think, to expect too much, always waiting for something outside of them to change their lives. His background is as a teacher and engineer and so he is an educator to the core, helping everyone to think outside of the box. His comment one day as I was leaving

said a lot..."Nhimbe is sowing seeds of development and people shouldn't take that gift the same as a passerby getting a government issued tin of maize." He continued to express his feelings about what we must do to diligently keep our special offerings from being taken for granted.

Our American welfare system carries many lessons, so Cosmas and I continually think about how to help the people without encouraging dependency, and Charles is right in there pitching too, so that we do not add any more fuel to the fire. The extreme male-dominated Shona culture and colonialism has made a unique mix with which we are always dealing. How can one offer charity without supporting a mind-set of more child-like neediness?

Thank God for Charles' addition to the project as he has only been on board as Project Manager for the last year. We have made such great strides in that time. Alan our book keeper has also been working in his capacity as well for one year and truly, it has been such a Godsend. I don't know how I thought I could do it without them (I guess I only did due to finances) -- I'm actually feeling like my graying hair could grow back blonde as they all are working to take more of the load and let me work on the US side," on the tin cup trail" without the stress of worrying about so many of the details there. I think Cosmas' health is also better due to this last year's intervention. What a blessing!

Its easy to get pulled back into thinking about the past and the all the difficulties of raising this child up, but I feel like we are on a new page, loudly proudly all singing the same song, and headed down a superb path, pregnant with ambition, direction and continuity. There is a Nigerian proverb scripted in the wall at the Harare airport: "One should keep one's eye on one's destination, not where one's stumbled." With that great advice, I'm looking forward to the continued unfolding chapters for Nhimbe for Progress and up-and-coming Jangano with great anticipation.

The US team holding down my home front, the Ancient Ways office (thank you Veralyn for dropping into our lives!), and the many of you volunteers that make such a difference, are continually in my thoughts of gratitude – we couldn't do it without you! You being on the mark in all you are doing contributes in immense ways. Thank you all for your heart, hope and creative energy for these people. Everyone, please feel free to call me 541-258-8710 (email is not as good) with your ideas for a primary school, or any other tugging thought that is nuzzling you, been sparked within, or moved your heart and mind. I'm back on US soil and happy to be home.

Tatenda Chaizvo!

Jaiyen