

September 22, 2007

Dear Zimbabwean Friends,

Greetings from the sunny soil here! We arrived a little over a week ago and are getting into our groove, adjusting to the nomadic norm of moving back and forth from the rural area to town. Like usual, we are remembering to carry familiar food when we move from place to place, thinking about the availability of our water sources, and planning each time period carefully. The theme here is often “hurry up and wait” leaving us in a “huaw” state often. Our main focus is following many threads of the needs here, looking for possible solutions, as we settle into a work mode.

We, includes my husband Lodi, who hasn't been here since 2003 and as the mukwasha (becoming the son-in-law after my adoption and our subsequent traditional marriage here in 2000) he needed to check in after too long of being away, and also Conni Moore, a volunteer from Albany, Oregon who recently surfaced through a GSM (Good Samaritan Ministries) referral. Lodi will leave this coming Tuesday, after a very short 2 week stay, and Conni will remain for the entire 6 weeks, primarily to help with the student sponsorship program, although her companionship and innovative ideas are a wonderful asset. Laura Gillette, a nurse from Salem, Oregon, will be coming to help with the Health Center, as well as creative export endeavors. We will be back in town by the 1st to pick her up at the airport.

For those of you who want the quick version:

THE CITY AND ECONOMY – reduced transport options, minimal electricity, air and water deteriorating, little food, street rate from 280,000 up to 360,000 zim over the last week.

MATILDA'S HEALTH – she is recovering nicely, much gratitude for all of the help from the states, we are really seeing great improvements!

JANGANO TAILORING CLUB – new club to make uniforms is turning out to be a great idea!

JANGANO PRESCHOOL – need for a preschool is being met by resident donations and volunteers with a little help from us...it's a way to get started – any preschool interested in partnership?

JANGANO HERB WORKSHOP & BOOK – great new 2-day course will teach herb lore to both Jangano and Nhimbe residents. Herbal booklet will be created to raise funds for continuation of the program.

NHIMBE DONHODZO HEALTH CENTER – It is a source of incredible help in the rural area where drugs are unavailable – needs another nurse due to the number of people coming...any fundraising ideas?

PROBLEMS SHARED ARE PROBLEMS SOLVED

We keep working together to find solutions that will really work on the ground here. Thank you for all you are doing to assist this process!

The longer version for when you can make time:

THE CITY AND ECONOMY

Coming into the city of Harare has been much like each visit, although the many aspects that are always troubling are magnified. The transport options are even more limited, making movement

from place to place a real challenge. The lack of electricity has added to the infrastructure breakdown which was already tipping. The pollution in the air and water continues to worsen working against the natural human animal's stamina. The food availability is causing unbelievable stress on the average person. The city continues to feel like a science fiction movie, particularly late in the afternoon, as dusk quickly takes the day – there are many people trying to return to their homes, walking through eerie dimly lit smog-filled streets, buying some dinner vegetables which, thank God, are still available at road side stands.

Granted I'm not a city gal, and don't warm up to the concentration of consciousness that makes up life in town, but this is beyond a personal opinion about choices of living locations. This has moved to another level. Experiencing an economic collapse such as this just reinforces my deeply rooted beliefs about self-sufficiency, being an advocate for less consumerism, and my own American lifestyle needing a complete re-evaluation. Hopefully this is giving me the jump-start I need to clear the clutter, rethink what is important, and make some of those changes towards simplicity that I've craved.

There is less petrol available and so the vehicles on the road are few, comparatively. Some people have purchased driver's licenses instead of taking any test, and so it feels much safer with less traffic, but of course, some of them don't know how to drive. Petrol is costing more than \$1 USD. This means that the average person whose salary is very low, can't afford to go to work. Many people have literally quit their jobs due to this problem and have started some sort of home business, often one of buying and selling. One can find something in one area and then move with it, trying to sell it elsewhere, and make a buck. Just about anything can and will be sold if someone can move about.

The power outages are serious. One expects no electricity in the rural area, but counts on this convenience in town. This impacts daily life like cooking and refrigeration for instance, and also normal business in any way, like using the computer, cash register, or a sewing machine. People will be inside shops buying things and just remain to buy in the dark, trying to see with the little light coming through the windows, or the shop will close because of no till. All of the power cuts are coming at peak periods so that there is a tremendous disruption of normal activities. What this means is that people may be getting up at 4 a.m. for instance to do ironing, cooking, and other daily tasks, while then disrupting their sleeping patterns. The long term consequences for mental health are a cause of great concern, as well as the short term wearing away on the psyche.

Our accountant, who lives in the low density area, had electricity for 5 hours yesterday and this has been the pattern. Belvedere, where we are staying in the middle density area, has had 7 power cuts in a week lasting from 4 to 7 hours. Cosmas, our Nhimbe for Progress Project Director here who stays in the high density area, has had no electricity for 2 weeks and so whatever meat might have been put by in the freezer is now of no value. Two blocks away at our sister's Winifilda's home, there has been electricity off and on maybe 25% of the time, enough to keep some things refrigerated.

Many people in these high density neighborhoods are cooking on open fires in their small yards, bringing fuel wood into a premium in the local parking lots. Most people can't afford paraffin

stoves and gas is unavailable. The deforestation in the city is now to be a huge concern just like what we are facing in the rural areas. The smoke from these yard kitchens is adding to the already poor air quality from the older vehicles without EPA controls, the diesel buses' exhaust, the bonfires of tires so they can sell the inside wires for fencing, and the burning of rubbish along the sides of roads coming from plastics and trash that remain as residue from modern life in a city without a recycling program. All of this is burdening immune systems which are already compromised from stress, malnutrition, and HIV among other various illnesses.

Water borne disease is common as the city water and sewer systems are failing. Not only is their raw sewage in the water supply as the city's conventional treatment system has been compromised, but also, there are invasive plants in the natural water sources which when poisoned, are resulting in chemicals in the water, and resulting rotting fish. Water products, such as bottled water, beer, and sodas are available in a limited way in the store but are all produced here with this water, leaving a less desirable product. Many people bring water in plastic containers from the rural areas where they or a family member have their rural roots. Some are fortunate to have a bore hole and so have their own clean water source in town. The sewage pipes in many areas have been broken and so the raw sewage is pouring into the street where the children have been told to avoid. Jumping the puddles though is not always possible.

The food store shelves are stark. Some stores have nothing. Some have a few items plentifully. The next store may have totally different things available. The difficulty is finding what you may need or to what you have become accustomed. Pasta continues to be on the shelves, but bread is not found easily. Those with connections in the rural areas where people have had a successful farming season, have enough maize for sadza. They grow kovo, which is like spinach, and are set for their daily meal, but without much of a protein source.

We purchased some beef for Lodi's last night with the family in town, and heard that they hadn't eaten any for several weeks. Some chicken is available as they can be slaughtered and eaten without a need for refrigeration, and some eggs are available from street vendors but not in the stores. Fish being caught at the reservoir is also here and there. In general, finances make it quite impossible for the average person to find food, and then no electricity makes it very difficult to store anything with any consistency, resulting in continual losses of food that has been put by.

Last week we heard that the street exchange was \$280,000 zim to 1 USD. At that time we purchased supplies for ourselves, plus Robin Truesdale and her friend Kessy who are here working with our Youth Well-being program. Some of these items will last many weeks and others, that won't keep, will be held in our cooler with ice during our days in the village settings. We also will give some of our supplies to our various hosts in thanks for their incredible generosity – keeping us safe, comfortable, and supporting our intense work-mode.

- 1 cabbage 80,000
- Large bunch of carrots 250,000
- Apples 100,000 each
- Small broccoli head 150,000 each
- 4 green peppers 150,000

- Cucumber 60,000 each
- Large bag (25 pounds?) potatoes 2,400,000
- Large bag (25 pounds?) butternut squash 1,800,000
- 30 eggs 900,000

Milk in the stores is virtually unheard of. Sometimes people can source it from local farmers. Yogurt is also not available, but there is some cheese. It ran 180,000 for a small 3"x 3"x 1" block at a special uptown store which caters to a unique slice of the population.

So I never quite understood why the government bank rate would stay at \$250 zim to 1 USD. How does it make any sense when the street rate is over \$350,000 to 1? Why would anyone go to the bank? Someone explained that there is a process whereby anyone can apply to buy foreign currency at the bank rate. So let's say I want to buy 100 US dollars. *If* my application is approved then I could buy \$100 from the bank for 25,000 zim. Then I could go to the parallel market which is what most everyone is using to survive, turn the \$100 usd into 36 million zim. Hmm...never occurred to me...guess I'm slow. Obviously, not just anyone will get approved to buy the "forex" but the special.

MATILDA'S HEALTH

As some of you may know, Cosmas' mom had undergone surgery a couple of months ago. He had needed to leave for the states for teaching and performing before knowing the full outcome. I am happy to report that she is indeed doing well. She has been recovering gradually as she is staying at Winifilda's and cared for with much attention to detail. Although the immediate results after the surgery were not obvious, she is now improving. When we came she was able to sit up by herself and was able to hold down more food. Winifilda and the other sisters are doing a marvelous job. She has many visitors every day as she is well known and loved by many.

We were able to bring additional powdered Ensure as her doctor was recommending this and it wasn't easily available in the stores. My son, now in the army in Afghanistan, bought her 2 cases of Ensure, some funds for food, and a happy-baby food grinder to ease the eating situation. I've been able to offer some alternative healing treatments that she enjoys and is saying is also helping. She is now able to move around on the bed on her own a bit more, each day is getting up to walk down the hall, and even went outside yesterday where she watched the children playing in the road, and then came inside and watched a little TV before going back for a rest. She is also encouraged I'm sure because my husband, the legendary white mukwasha, is re-thatching her kitchen hut and repairing the fences. All in all, I am feeling very happy and hopeful about her continuing recovery and want to thank all of you for your prayers, good energy and healing thoughts that you are sending her way!

Those of you, who sent donations to make her surgery literally a reality within the better medical clinic here, are in her and our daily thoughts. A requirement for that amount of money would have left the family in dire straits and potentially left here to the common medical outcome here, which is not positive. I am so grateful for her continued health. Besides being a delightful, hard-working and beautiful woman, she is very well-respected and an honored part of the Nhimbe project hierarchy. Everyone in the villages is also very hopeful about her regaining her health.

JANGANO

We took a trip to the Dambatsoko area where the Jangano project was started in late 2005 with Co-Directors Fradreck Mujuru and Zhange “Fungai” Mujuru. The main focus has been the sponsorship of children to attend school as well as the initial building of two toilets, a hut and a school well project. Fradreck had never been to see the Nhimbe Community Center, so he came and picked us up there, marveling at all that we have accomplished. He was very inspired in seeing the reality of the Nhimbe stories he had heard. Nhimbe is a research and development model and provides such a wealth of information to reach out to all of Zimbabwe. After a brief tour we headed out to the Dewedzo community.

JANGANO TAILORING CLUB

Fradreck’s main man is Tawengwa, a very action oriented young man who is very good with the books and record keeping as well as congenial and good with people. He lights a fire under me that takes me by surprise since I’m usually the one with the torch. I am very grateful that Fradreck chose him.

Tawengwa has organized 15 women who wanted to participate in sewing the children’s uniforms. As with the Nhimbe model, we provide the fabric to the families and then they get the uniforms made. In this case, all of the women come together and those that have machines sew and those who want to help cutting, ironing, etc. are hired on a day basis. They sew the uniforms, have a great social time, and save the project a great deal of money. They have been using a spare room at the St Bedes primary school. This has been a super success this last year and they are looking forward to the next season of sewing.

JANGANO PRESCHOOL

The local preschoolers need a program (this is a government mandate for Grade 0 and also the residents concern for their children) and so the Jangano project has been approached by the parents and school to see if they might sponsor a preschool. It looks like this will develop in a slightly different way compared to Nhimbe. In Nhimbe we sponsor our preschoolers like any other age child, and then pay teachers and cooks, buy food and uniforms, as well as maintain a play area, pay a health worker and do inventory control of supplies, on behalf of the preschool. We have been blessed by the partnership of Sundborn Children’s House in Albany Oregon, a Montessori preschool there and the vision and kindling of Karen Barton, who sparked the fundraising for the Nhimbe preschool.

In Jangano, the parents are donating approximately .30 US cents per student and the volunteer teachers are interested in working for that so that the 40 or so children can get started with a program. The parents are also donating food so that the children will be able to eat something. They have a temporary shelter to use. We will help initially by sponsoring two of their children, thereby raising a little money to buy some supplies and maybe uniform fabric.

Ideally we could sponsor this preschool at another level someday, actually paying the teachers a living wage, supplement the diet with fruits, vegetables and protein sources, and create a school setting for them. Anyone know of a Montessori or other preschool that would be interested in helping with this worthy project? The people in the area are already organized with a fire under them!

JANGANO HERB WORKSHOP & BOOK

In the Jangano area there are some great resources of herbal knowledge. One of the local women is Benita Chirisa's (my Executive Assistant) mother. She has been studying and helping others with herbs for many years. We all sat together and discussed the idea of providing a workshop to local people. After laying out a 2-day course, and coming up with a budget to include breakfast for people who will have to walk 2 to 3 hours to arrive by 9 a.m., and lunch, we decided that there would be room for 15 participants from Jangano, starting with the Tailoring Club, and then 4 from Mhondoro who we would bus to Dewedzo. Besides Benita, we will send our two groundskeepers to be able to plant herbs at the Nhimbe Community Center and hopefully pass on the knowledge there. We will also send Hilda, my sister who cooks for us, as she has dreams about herbs, as in a traditional way a healer would. They are organizing now for this to begin at the end of September.

Part of designing the course is laying out the information about the 8 most important herbs, which will include both traditional as well as European herbs which are part of their culture now. The participants will receive all levels of information about growing, propagating, harvesting and using these herbs as well as receive samples, and 3 plants. The budget is around \$8.50 per person and if each person received all 8 plants it would have been \$13. We have an additional \$20 total to transport our 4 Nhimbe residents round trip. We are hopeful that everyone will utilize the information for healing and pass it on to their communities. We will fund this from general donations because it is such important health information coming at a critical time.

Following the workshop, another local herbalist and Benita's mother will put their heads together, and prepare an herbal booklet that we will re-print in the US to make money for the promotion and scholarship of this health workshop. This will be a great resource to not only the local communities but also anyone in the US interested in herbs. We are hoping to ask Kuda, Winifilda's son who is being sponsored at art school, to draw some pictures for the book as well.

NHIMBE DONHODZO HEALTH CLINIC

When we arrived at the Community Center our first day in the Mhondoro area, we found a queue of people waiting to see our nurse. People are coming to our area from all other clinics and hospitals as we have been able to source some basic supplies. These supplies are only including pain killers and hygienic bandaging as we are not officially a registered clinic yet. Once we gain the Clinic status we can also get other drugs, if available. Actually, as of late, the wholesale pharmacy we usually buy from is completely out of betadine (iodine) and ibuprofen for instance, so much of what will eventually be offered is healing suggestions, alternative health treatments, preventative advice, and possibly herbs.

Fred is happy to be running this Health Center, although he really needs another set of hands. We need to find a way to sponsor another nurse to assist with the administering of any drugs etc. as he is unable to manage the Center, provide nursing, and provide the alternative medical treatments that are also really helping. We would need to raise another \$1200 a year or more to hire another nurse, on an on-going basis. Any ideas?

As Fred explains it, the current economic crisis in Zimbabwe, is actually the perfect soil to begin working with alternative approaches, since there are no drugs available. He is focusing on workshops with people to explain conditions, natural approaches to health, and also learning to do group NMT (see www.nmt.md) treatments. This trip I hope to work with him and our masseuse who is in training, to learn about Healing Touch, Therapeutic Touch and Reiki. My goal is also to explore a counseling technique called Focusing to see how that could be shared in a grassroots way here.

PROBLEMS SHARED ARE PROBLEMS SOLVED

Fradreck shared this wonderful idea. He said it is a bit of the wisdom from the elders. Traditionally that is how things are done here. You share your problem and a solution is found. It feels like a good motto as that reflects much of what we are doing here. We bring another perspective from outside the confines of the system. We bring an independent, somewhat rebellious thinking (considering our ancestors), and much resourcefulness to imagine ways through the jungle. In exchange we are allowed to expand our own horizons to include the richness of another culture, the all pervasive gentleness of the Shona people, and much inspiration about resilience in the face of adversity. The hardships here are bringing people together in ways they would not have dreamt. Within the white community as well, people are working together and taking care of each other both within and outside of their circles, so that only good prevails.

Thank you for all you are doing on that side to support our efforts here. There are no words to express the immense gratitude we have and all of the village residents have for your significant donations of time, money and healing energy of Love sent this way.

Until next time, warmest regards from all of us here,

Jaijaen, Lodi and Conni