

March 28, 2009

Greetings from Zimbabwean soil!

THE SHORT VERSION (Do come back later for in-depth reading!)

- Arrival – We are safely here. Odd weather. Water situation update.
- Family Health – Update on Matilda's condition with family and friends' continuing prayer vigil.
- Health Program – Immeasurable gratitude for the food deliveries in December and March. Medical loans for surgery, tests, and medicines. Proposal for HIV Clinical Study with NMT (see nmt.md).
- Youth Well Being Programs – Girl Guides (like scouts) and Boy Scouts growing, learning and excelling!
- Jangano – Girl and Boy Scout programs developing here too! Tailoring Club and Herbal Club are doing great.
- Education – Fees are very high. Parents here may need to contribute to stay within our budget. Paying older children's fees still on hold and currently out of reach – may be handling individually by contacting you.
- Economy – 25 zeroes removed over the last 18 months in devaluation. USD and rands on the streets – no foreign exchange madness. High prices everywhere due to no US coins for change.
- Summary – Much gratitude from this side for all of your support, interest and heart connection.

THE LONGER VERSION (Something to chew on...)

Arrival

We have been here in Zimbabwe for almost two weeks now. It was a real pleasure to see both of the region's Project Directors, Cosmas Magaya and Fradreck Mujuru, there at the airport to greet me, as well as our Senior Nurse Fred Muchiriri, and a young nephew. We took the afternoon to buy supplies (groceries, soap, candles, etc.) for the week in the bush, before returning for the 9:30 pm flight to pick up Rebekah McCormick, from Corvallis, Oregon, who is my assistant this trip. She was never so happy as to see us there! It was a very long 36-hour flight for this 22 year-old who had not flown internationally by herself before. She did great, and we both hit the ground running.

We, both being from Oregon, must have brought the rain as it had been regular sunny days before we arrived. We have seen our share of the moisture since arriving. But, as Bekah pointed out, it's different – it's warmer and not at all unpleasant. The nights have been colder than expected, so we are both happy to have some warmer clothes in which to wrap. The last few days have seen more normal sunny days and we are loving the sun.

When in town, we are staying at Cosmas' place in Glen Norah A, which is one of the townships on the west side of Harare, near Budiriro, where Fradreck lives. The cholera outbreak has gratefully skipped their family homes. Even though Budiriro was one of the areas hardest

hit, and we had heard about it in the BBC news, Fradreck's home was left untouched. Everyone thanks God. We initially purchased a few gallons of water in town and now are using our Red Cross quality purification system that we have always used in the village. We haul our water to town as well as carry a small back-up water purification when we travel.

Many people credit the cholera crisis with the political shift. After a few families lost five children in one night the MDC had their breakthrough in forming the joint government. The water is still bad but the government may be getting better. There is a great feeling of cool calm here with no hot spots.

Family Health

Although both Cosmas and Fradreck's families have been fortunate to miss the cholera epidemic, Cosmas' family has had their share of challenges recently. Alexio, one of the younger brothers, passed on this last year. Now Matilda, the mother of this clan, has suffered a serious set back in her health. She had lived through a surgery for a duodenal tumor last year. But within the last month the pain killers that were being used quit working. She began taking palliative-care quality medicine for pain (as for hospice, it runs about \$150 a month). Just before I left the states, she chose not to be admitted to the hospital, but to return home to stay instead, after losing a quantity of blood from not being able to keep anything down. It was looking bleak and the family began preparing for the worst, doing the preliminary research on the cost of coffins and consulting traditional healers for advice.

Many of you know that when I first came to Zimbabwe in March 2000, Cosmas' wife, Joyce, passed on within three days of my arrival. Through our previous friendship, and then the ensuing funeral, an unusually deep relationship developed resulting in my adoption into the family. These many years of working together, as well as marrying traditionally here to my Native American sweetie, has resulted in a great family bond (he paid the *lobola* and continues respectfully with the traditional family role of a *mukwasha* or son-in-law). Matilda is not just Cosmas' and 7 other siblings' (2 now deceased) mother, but mine as well. Over the years I have been blessed to have given many hours of healing work as well as sitting, lounging, and laughing together. This trip is no exception, although her frail condition has limited the types of exchanges.

Right away upon arriving I began alternative treatments and her response has been remarkable. It was like watching a flower without water come back to life. She began sitting up (more often and by herself), her eyes returned to her sparkling self, and she was able to ask for meeting times. This change all occurred after a couple of days of treatments. She refused her pain medicine as if to readjust to a new consciousness and then, after cleaning the cob webs out, returned to the pain medicine but with a new outlook. She is still in pain and is coming to terms with her process.

She called Cosmas and I in to discuss things. After Joshua, her husband, passed on a few years ago, she became the honorary head of Nhimbe, similar to my godfather John in the states as the father of Ancient Ways. She wanted Cosmas and I to consider how we might address the future without her - her ameliorating presence calms most any storm. Everyone seeks her counsel as she has great wisdom. She called another meeting with me to ask if I would buy her a special dress. We understood it was a dress in which to be buried and so should meet the criteria for traditional colors. I found something perfect.

We have been able to spend many hours just holding hands. Although we don't know each other's native language, we know the language of touch, and both find solace there. I realized how much touch has been part of our communication in these ten years together.

On Sunday, Cosmas saw a doctor who suggested she come to the hospital for tests and a blood transfusion. Although it didn't seem like a good idea, Cosmas felt he must try since people here do not really understand hospice. On Monday she was driven to St. Michael's, a rural hospital. They took a blood sample and gave it to Cosmas to taxi it to Harare, a 1 1/2 hour distance. There he got the blood tested and called the doctor, reading the results over the phone. As it turned out, her blood was fine for an 82-83 year old woman and she returned home the very next day with medicine to help her sleep and no blood transfusion. They provide very little services there. You bring your food and a relative to tend to your needs and cook for you. The hospital trip took its toll on her and she came home feeling very disappointed since she only went hoping beyond hope for some relief.

I saw the test results and don't really know what I was looking at other than it was clear that her body was fighting off something from seeing the blood counts. It's most likely the cancer since I would think she would have some fever if she had an infection. Again, I am not trained as a nurse. Should the need have arisen, Cosmas would have bought the new blood (\$115) and the drip solution needed to give her a bit of a lift. This whole procedure was only suggested because Cosmas comes to the states and has US dollars. Otherwise she would be left to die as most Zimbabweans are now facing. The doctor was not expecting a recovery, but wanting to assist in pain reduction.

Rebekah, being brought up Catholic, knew some of Matilda's desires as she is Roman Catholic also, and so we are doing what we can in a country with few priests left. With St. Michael's being a Catholic hospital we know a priest was there and was hopefully able to offer her communion and a blessing of the sick. A choral group from their local Catholic church sang their way to our home. Matilda enjoyed it a great deal. Many people are here at the family home. The daughters-in-law come at night and sleep here as a tradition. When they wake up at night they pray. Then the following day they return to their homes and daily life activities. Daughters and aunts and nieces are hovering, tending to her with ten or more women sleeping on the floor of the living room to be near her. She is being held delicately with many strong arms.

Health Program

The food deliveries in December and March (14 tons both times split between the two project regions reaching over 2,500 people) were very well received. Our efforts (yours and mine) were like a life-line to these people. The situation was really desperate with very little assistance from relief organizations. The larger organizations like CRS (Catholic Relief Services), one of the few active here, will cancel you on the list of recipients if you have any assets that you can sell, such as oxen. I can understand their wanting to have selection criteria to reduce their burden of feeding but the reality is that the weather here was bad for everyone and so there was no food available whether you had assets or not. Sell your oxen and you can't plow next year.

Thank you for your part of the food fundraising and delivery success. Both Project Directors have asked me to keep the money for the third shipment in the bank in case it will be needed at a later date as their gardens are now producing. This is great news!

We are providing two loans at this point for people within our villages. One is a small boy requiring a hernia repair for \$50. The child's school sponsor has gratefully offered to assist with this surgery. The father is one of the Nhimbe craftsmen and so can repay the loan that way, but we are also setting up a program to assist people in need of small amounts of cash by creating work exchange opportunities at the Center. The Preschool Head Teacher, Febby, will oversee the program and the people will work with our groundskeeper, Chiedza, and maintenance helper, Eunice, so they can assist in the garden, on the playground upkeep, or cleaning windows and polishing floors, for example. We are hopeful this program will work well with little input or effort from our staff.

The second loan is for a staff member, one of our Preschool teachers, who has been coughing. The required x-rays, tablets and CD-4 count will cost \$54 and we will be loaning her \$47 of that. As staff, she will repay the loan over the next months out of her wages, assuming she is able to return to work. If TB is positive she will be off work for several weeks (at least 6).

We would like to set up a clinical study for HIV for our residents using NMT (see nmt.md). To do so would require a financial investment that we are evaluating. The cost of a CD-4 count and viral load tests run around \$50. If you have 10 people in the study that is \$500 to get started, and then another \$500 each time you evaluate, in let's say three to six months. We are getting closer to proposing a budget and would very much like to hear from anyone who would be interested in sponsoring one or more of these residents, not just for a new life, but also to examine the outcome of NMT in these cases. It has proven to be an effective modality in the states for HIV positive conditions and is being researched. A dental clinical study was published in an alternative medical journal last year with amazing results. We have a very good opportunity here!

Fred, our Senior Nurse, and I are hoping to put together a workshop for the villagers to really explain NMT in a way that culturally makes sense. More to come as we design this!

Youth Well Being – It's Bho-o (Shona slang for "its awesome")

In June of 2007 our Youth Well Being Program really got its roots. We found that we had in our midst a terrifically talented women named Voice Muchada. I had previously known her as a mother whose children responded very well to NMT (a boy with rickets and a girl with pica). When the 3 Oklahoma teachers received a grant to do a cultural exchange, we saw Voice blossom. She shared songs, dances and games with the teachers who returned to Oklahoma and shared with their 4th and 5th graders. That was a very successful venture for us all.

In fact these Oklahoma students are now in the planning stages for bringing their families to Zimfest in June in Colorado! The children will be performing. I thoroughly enjoyed watching them during a recent in-residency at Oklahoma schools. Cindy Scarberry has seen to it that the Shona in the songs is so clear, I felt like I was in Zimbabwe.

So now to see the youth here so active is awe inspiring. Last trip we managed to design and print t-shirts for all of them. It was clear that there were many new participants as there

were many without shirts. They were performing traditional songs and dances with such ease and beauty, it was heart warming. They also played some games and showed us an herbal garden where they planted artemisia, basil, lemon grass, mint, and thyme. Voice had attended a workshop provided by the Jangano Herbal Club, along with other Nhimbe members, and so propagated that knowledge. My goal is to encourage them to research traditional herbs as well.

Under Voice's leadership the boys and girls are excelling. Her Girl Guide troops (including sunbeams, brownies and rangers, just like the Girl Scouts back home) are at the leading edge here as Nhimbe has been designated as a District center for Mhondoro Girl Guides. Since Tatenda, the boy's Machapro leader, moved to China to teach English, she has been covering both programs. We now have hired the marimba teacher Kenny Ndabambi to help her and to lead the boys. He has been doing superbly in leading the children in marimba songs and dances for several months and is excited to be officially the Scout leader.

Jangano

We have just returned from a two day trip to Dewedzo. When the Jangano staff had visited Nhimbe they saw what a wonderful program the Girl Guides was and so began a Youth Well Being Program themselves for girls and boys. We were moved to tears a few times as the children's singing and dancing permeated the air. Fradreck's wife, Mai Pasi, has been able to get involved and taught them some beautiful songs. We will be finding a way to transport Voice to Dewedzo to share more with their new children's club leaders.

We also were able to meet the Tailoring Club who started up to sew uniforms for children. This was a very innovative self-starting project that began over a year ago. Several women, and two men who maintain the hand crank sewing machines, make over 120 uniforms.

We attended a traditional ceremony giving thanks for all the help, particularly the recent food assistance. During this people were recalling various prophecies from 1972 which are now coming true. These included the land resettlement, the blacks living as neighbors in town with whites (politically correct way to refer here), and a white woman who would come and bring assistance to them during great difficulties. They felt that I was that woman. In 1972, I was just graduating high school from a small town in Oregon, and so find this all pretty amazing.

After the ceremony, Fungai, the Co-Director of Jangano, with Fradreck, had a significant dream that night about me. He said that one of the helping spirits which assists me in my life's work is described as a *gombwe*, which is a rain-making spirit. Its function assists everyone. He also taught me a song to put on marimba about a rain bird. Interestingly enough, water is an unusually powerful element in my life. I am very grateful for these new insights as it helps explain a few things. I am always pondering how my spirituality, which is core-principled Christian with the flavors of every path I have ever been blessed to share, fits, as I have always felt a bit like the square peg.

Education

The students love your letters! Many more of you wrote to them this year compared to previous trips. That was much appreciated by everyone, - parents, staff, the kids, and us (its tough to see children who don't receive anything since in our culture we obsess about equality)! Over half of the students received a letter from you! Previous years have averaged 20%. I

don't know what caused this change but your efforts do make a big difference! We also brought some letters from schools for a pen-pal exchange for those children not receiving anything and so will see how that works out.

The school fees in both Jangano and Nhimbe are quite high this year. We are hoping to keep all of our students in school. It depends whether the tuition will rise in the 2nd and 3rd terms. Currently the fees multiplied by 3 will be outside of our budget if we also buy fabric, send pictures, etc. It also means the money usually used to pay those in charge of managing the program (school records, taking the pictures, etc.) is going for the fees and so we have to re-evaluate and fundraise.

The fees for Form 5 and 6 (also called Special Needs) are very high right now and so that program is still on hold. I may contact you individually about your student if they are older. For instance, the daughter of Tawengwa Mujuru, the Jangano Project Manager (you may remember he had pneumonia/TB last year and continues treatments for TB), is in Form 6 now and they are asking \$300 per term plus a list of food supplies. This is around \$1,000 for the year. The first term was paid by Jangano and Fradreck himself from his family funds. Seeing our way clear to take on these older students is unlikely at this point. She does get good grades so if there is someone whose budget can handle this, please write.

Teachers here are paid by the government so these fees we pay are going to buy books, materials and supplies. Teachers were paid the equivalent of \$4-6 per month last year. Now with the government changes, they are to be paid \$100 per month, but with the use of a coupon which they exchange at the bank. Unfortunately, there are not enough bills in the bank and so teachers still remain unpaid. Some people are feeling deprived while others are hopeful that there is change happening. Last year, children actually attended only 27 days of school where the teachers were not on strike or on "go slow" which meant just hanging out. This "go slow" program was advised by the unions.

Economy

This trip is quite different compared to all others. There are no Zim\$! There are USD and rands (from South Africa). You pay for something and receive both of these currencies (even mixed together) as change. But, there are no coins for the US dollar so if your item is .60 they wait for you to go find 6 more oranges, for example, to make up the .40. Everything is over-priced as if there is no concept of the value of the dollar. This is causing us some budgeting challenges. It may be a tight situation this year to meet all of the needs, but things here will hopefully adjust to something more realistic.

Our accountant here was explaining that over the last 18 months (in 3 devaluing efforts) 25 zeroes have been removed from the zim dollar value! That is hyper-inflation at its worst. People with a bank account of 1 trillion zim\$ watched it turn into 1 USD the next day as the devaluation of the dollar swept through the banks. Many of the prices are now like our own: \$2-2.50 for 10 eggs, \$2.50 a liter of juice, \$1 large spool of thread, .50 practice tablet (used to be .17), .80 Coke, \$1 pint of beer, \$1 a 2-liter traditional beer, \$1.80 kg apples, \$250 motor starter for the family's 33 passenger bus (someone stole it the other day), \$1 to go to the cinema, \$2 per kg beef in the rural area (\$3-4 in town), \$1 pint of milk. We can only hope that things will settle down. At least we have no parallel market exchanges to do in back alleys – what a relief!

One of our family members (Angeline, Simon's wife) went to South Africa to make some money, selling her hand-made articles. It cost around \$30 1-way to go on the bus so it's a good investment for someone selling their wares. She got set up in a neighborhood housing situation and was going about her business. She was unaware of any problems and then suddenly one day, as she was selling wood and flowers by the road side, she saw people running and heard a great commotion. Feeling panicky she began asking what was going on. Some disgruntled residents, who felt their jobs were threatened by foreign presences, were attacking all of the visitors. This included Nigerians with full store fronts, Zimbabweans along the roads, and many other nationalities. As Angeline explained, the visitors will work for \$1 a day instead of \$10.

She saw people coming with hatchets and knives and even saw someone's head severed. She fled for her life. She even climbed a brick wall that was a foot taller than herself (she is a petite woman less than 5' tall), and tearing her clothes in the process, ran wildly and found a taxi. She had the taxi driver wait for the others right behind her who were also fleeing. She managed to find some police for protection. They were all taken and put in "the hole" – a long and narrow room – for 3 weeks!

At first the police had no supplies to care for these "prisoners". A group of twenty people shared one plate. There was no soap. There was light at the end of the room where the doors led outside, which was guarded by several officers. As time went on, various non-profit agencies brought in personal items to help alleviate the suffering. They brought a blanket so she didn't have to sleep directly on the cement. They brought soap and an item of clothing. Some people had lost their shoes and so received a pair. A little at a time, it became more bearable.

She would go to the guards to see about being released, saying that her family needed her at home, but of no avail. Angeline's children are mostly raised now but she has taken on another child of a deceased sibling. The police would help her to make phone calls to notify her husband and that was a great blessing. Eventually she explained that she had left her very ill brother-in-law at home and he was getting worse, so wouldn't they please let her go back to Zimbabwe? The guards did finally let her go – they delivered her to the border with a ticket home. She arrived back the very day that Alexio passed on.

After a short time she returned to South Africa to the place she had rented but none of her things were there. The shops had been burned, the homes ransacked and no foreigners remained. She went back to Zimbabwe empty handed.

Summary

With less than 9 days remaining Rebekah and I are scrambling to tie up loose ends. Much has been accomplished: many interpersonal learning exchanges, nailing down project details and adding brush strokes to an already beautifully developing community effort. We appreciate knowing that there are those of you who read this in depth and chew on it, making it a piece of your life. Thank you.

It is with great gratitude that we write to you. You contribute so much to these people's lives and to also to ours. You kindly remind me that the human heart is designed by its very nature to be humanitarian. Our society validates this perspective through the freedom of expressing our religion and spiritual exploration opportunities. But, our culture simultaneously

distracts us daily with an onslaught of negative news images, a tree or two in our mailbox carrying the latest promotions, and fast-life compromises deadening the still small voice inside.

I thank you deeply. We thank you - the residents in Mhondoro and also those in Dewedzo, and the team of countless committed volunteers around the US who are always carrying these projects inside of them. What an immeasurable gift! Until next week then!

Much love – faithfully yours from the soil here,

Jaiaen and Rebekah