

April 10, 2009

Zimbabwean greetings from American soil!

THE SHORT VERSION (if you are pressed for time – do come back later)

Arrival Home – The trip was short and sweet. We are back in our beds here, with running water and electricity...and deep appreciation for life. Thank you for the air miles – we appreciate the donations! Great teamwork in Zimbabwe!

Update From the Rural Home – Matilda continued to get better. Lots of frank discussions about dying.

Unity in Diversity – Protestants, Catholics, and Traditional religion all coming together with respect for each other.

Preschool – Jangano preschool is growing out of our Nhimbe experiences. Nhimbe children are thriving. Medical exams required for all personnel – unexpected item added to the budget.

Medical Update – Fred purchased many medical supplies as well as happily received our suitcase offerings.

Education and Paying School Fees – The school fees are out of sight but we are able to manage many of them. Parents will need to get involved some also. Next term will tell us more. I will be contacting you individually about “Special needs children” in town due to various rates. Beauler Dyoko orphan update.

Economy – The value of the dollar is not understood and so prices are bizarre.

Infrastructure – Roads, electricity, water and phones are all compromised. Update on our solar unit. Potential for self-sufficiency just around the corner with electricity at Nhimbe.

Exports – We brought home sculpture and textiles! Can you help take some to Zimfest? Any stores you know interested in purchasing? Thanks!

Other Fund Raising Ideas - The new CD project is coming along well and it won't be long and you can have this hot number in your own home!

In Summary – As always, with the deepest of gratitude, we thank you for your support of our ongoing efforts to uplift the Zimbabwean people.

THE LONGER VERSION (When you have time to take in more.)

Arrival Home

We arrived safely back in the states this week and are finding our bearings. It was a whirlwind trip that accomplished so very much. Thanks to the many of you who donated air miles - our expenses were far less! What a great gift...please feel free to contact the office again with extra miles you don't need – they do make a big difference!

Bekah was a great assistant and helped in so many ways. Besides contributing skills and abilities that were very supportive to getting the job done, we also spent many hours talking about life, heart expansion, and creating new visions for our lives. She is a bright young woman eager to find her way. Each trip I spend quite a bit of time contemplating how to integrate the ways that the people, their lives, and their culture touch me so that I continue to grow and evolve. It usually takes weeks to assimilate - there is more culture shock returning than there ever is going.

Their culture and ours do not mesh easily. They have little in material things and we have over-excess. They have much in real life daily traditions and we have vague recollections of great-grandparents coming to the Americas from other continents. They have the wide open right-brain doors of dreams, experiencing life, and channeling music, and we have the left-brain doors requiring columns of figures to add up, making sense of life by ordering things alphabetically etc., and organizing practically everything to conform to a standard. Our extremes have a beautiful way of coming together to accomplish lofty but attainable goals as is evidenced in our projects. But, integrating all that I learn from the moment-to-moment experience of camping in rural Zimbabwe as part of a family unit, and relating to the community with language, smiles and touch, takes some penetrating effort to get behind the veils of my life stateside. I just thank God each time I am able to dip into their cup and let the memories wash over me to re-evaluate and understand what life really is and who I am in the process.

I must applaud the efforts of our team members in Zimbabwe. They have only gotten stronger during this last year and are working together with great ease. When Takesure Musarurwa, passed on last year, at least 4 different people began assuming his roles. His work has been shouldered in various ways by many of the team members. Cosmas, being in the States last year for several months, also pulled the team into a new level of independence, and it gives me great hope for the future of our project's success. We will continue to overcome.

Update From the Rural Home

Matilda continued to get better each day. As I was leaving she was looking great as if nothing had ever been wrong. She had that same beautiful strong look that raised so many children and children's children. She had begun eating meals again. She woke up singing one morning and turned herself over, by herself with no help. (She had not been walking for quite some time but with help was able to move in bed.) She explained that she recovered so that I could go in peace knowing that she was fine. She didn't want me to worry about her. Cosmas suggested that her love for me was creating a recovery. I have to say that after 55 years of feeling not particularly wanted or valued on this planet, this thought comes with much healing for my heart and its childhood traumas. Bekah also gave her a great deal of comfort with Catholic prayers and concern, as Matilda had always held closely to her Catholic upbringing.

She also asked that I return for the funeral so I could be present when she is buried. She wanted to put on her new dress purchased for the funeral so I could take photos. We talked about the afterlife and the many different views on the subject with all of the ideas focusing on embracing and returning to the Light (my own background is broad, studying spirituality as it is manifested in organized world religions, earth-based approaches, as well as simply human nature being a spiritual experience just like the trees and grass and flowers seeking the Light). These were some pretty heavy discussions particularly because, like many Shona traditions, dealing with illness and dying normally requires being indirect.

The tradition is to not talk frankly about most things (as is the case in many aspects of the culture). Most people would talk about how her body is going to get better, using as many euphemisms as possible, and avoid the hard subject of passing from this realm. Because our culture is often more to the point, it's hard to understand fully the traditional ways, but it feels like a way of cushioning the experience. The tradition masks a denial or helplessness that we feel during these times.

Achiera Matilda Magaya is an amazingly strong woman, who is on her way. It didn't really hit me hard that I would not see her again until I was on the plane.

Unity in Diversity

One of the themes this trip was the unification of the religious aspects of people's lives. There is traditional religion; there are Protestants of every assortment, and Catholics. There are no or very few Jewish or Moslem people in our villages although they are part of the Zimbabwean culture. Interestingly enough, there was this theme of unification in both regions.

In Nhimbe, the people have been working together for 10 years in so many ways that there is a real acceptance and respect of their various life styles amongst the residents. They actually now look forward to seeing each other as they are gathering with their new circle of friends. When we started the project some of the most conservative people didn't really associate much with anyone else, and many from churches kept their distance from traditional religion. Much growth has happened in 10 years.

Since we were here last, they worked for several months preparing a "show" featuring each religious group with 2 songs plus an entrance and exit song. There was singing, dancing and demonstrations. It was lively and well organized, taking over 3 hours to complete. There were so many groups of the traditional religion, as well as Catholic and Christians that it was like downtown USA with the variety of approaches we have. I loved the diversity. I videotaped the entire thing out of respect for all of their work, and by the end of the day was bushed. Of course, it was all in Shona and so we didn't understand anything much, but could see that their spiritual nature was strong, passionate, and it had found many homes in the various methodologies. We could recognize the word Baba meaning Father but that was about it.

At Jangano the same theme was up but from another angle. There the project is fairly new, starting only in late 2005. There is a consistent sponsorship program but are no community center buildings. They have rallied at the schools with their programs, such as the herb club or tailoring club, but, only recently has Jangano really touched all 1,250 plus residents personally, due to the food deliveries.

When we brought the 7 tons of food in December and again in March, the elders were consulted for prayers prior to distribution. There was quite a discussion about giving food to some of the people who had been very prejudice towards the traditional religion lifestyles. These particular elders had suffered at the hands of some "Christians" and were still feeling the effects of this. Fradreck stepped in to explain that the food is for everyone without bias. He also clarified how we can't punish someone because of their religious prejudice because then we become just like them.

In the thanksgiving ceremony and also at the school gathering of parents, children, and teachers, Fradreck and I went over the same theme, trying to make it clear that Jangano efforts are humanitarian.

I explained that all of the children are mine – I look at them and don't know which family they come from, what church they go to, or if they don't go to church. It doesn't matter to me because they are all my children. That is why our motto is "A child's life is the path". I also used the examples of race and gender. They all have experience with bias based on race, and it felt like a perfect opportunity to highlight the idea of lifting up our girl children and helping them to be everything of which they are capable. By the end of our talks and sharing, the foundation was clearer and it will now be easier for growth to happen, although, as we all know, forgiveness can be a process and take time.

Also, recently in the Jangano area, the local Catholic church building was being used by everyone as a non-denominational gathering place. Many were meeting there daily as a source of inspiration. It was great to see how difficulties can pull people together who otherwise might not be able to see the importance of connecting with others who appear different. The morning prayers had been opened up to other religions during lent. The priest was hoping to be able to continue this practice.

Ironically, as I kept pondering how to reach out to everyone during this last year of incredible hardship without food, I was thinking about what can help besides sending something to eat? I began thinking about a hut where everyone could share a spiritual focus. It could be a place that anyone who was suffering the loss of loved ones, or troubled by trying times, could go and just be, plugging into the juice that can found in a dedicated space. It could be a sacred area (no shoes, no cell phones, no food) that was not only non-denominational but would also be shared by those who favor traditional religion too. So when I arrived and found that this was what was going on with our people, I was amazed at how we are so seriously linked across the oceans, in heart and mind.

Preschool

The Jangano residents are very motivated to support a preschool at St. Bedes primary. We have discussed the forward-moving steps for them to have a preschool of their own. If there is opportunity to expand school sponsorships we could begin with the Jangano registered preschool children (currently Ancient Ways supports about 50 to 75 children between both projects who do not have a sponsor – please contact us at zimbabwe@ancient-ways.org or call 1-877-TATENDA, if you have \$35 per year and room in your heart for a child). We now have a waiting list of these 3 to 6 year olds that we will consider adding in once we are able to sponsor the remaining children for which we pay school fees.

Mai Pasi, Fradreck's wife Ignophipha, has visited the Nhimbe project more than once and has been studying how they do everything, from inventory control of the foods, to the curriculum and focus on everyday life. She is ready to make it happen! Her youngest child is now in a boarding school in Form 1 and so she has much more time available. She has many leadership skills just waiting to be put to use.

The Nhimbe preschool continues to be the shining star of the Nhimbe project. So much focus is given to assuring its success. These kids are given an opportunity to feel full, both in belly and in stimulus, as well as a focus on positive thought. The effect on their lives is immeasurable during these times when their lives at home are often depressed. Thank you so much for making this a reality!

We have been notified by the authorities that all adults who come into contact with the preschool children must have medical exams. We don't know how much this will cost, but it may easily be as much as \$100 per person and there are at least 12-15 people. Fred, our Senior Nurse, is looking into

the exact requirements. We are in “good books” with the head doctor at St. Michael’s rural hospital just up the road, having gained much respect for what we are accomplishing with very little in the way of resources, so Fred feels he can get a clear picture and some good advice there. This is another unexpected item to add to the budget.

Medical Update

Fred was able to go to town last week and obtain plenty of medicine for bilharzia (Schistosomiasis – a parasite from standing water) since many children as well as adults face this health problem. Theresa Stephens spent several days prior to my departure researching this online and by phone across the globe. She found that the drug can be purchased cheaply in the Netherlands but we would need to partner with other larger NGOs to purchase the quantities needed, and then figure out the way to get it into the country. We are grateful she also printed him a guide booklet about bilharzia to be able to provide more educational forums with the villagers. Fred also bought more betadine and other supplies thanks to her helping us with last minute donations.

Medical aid is a huge problem – our cousin-brother Chief Chiketa was also requesting help for his region which is a next door neighbor. He explained that the biggest problem was that there are very few medicines in the country even if we do have money. Due to carrying suitcases, we were able to take a few basic supplies in, including homeopathy and other over the counter drugs. We are always grateful for any donations along these lines. Fred is getting more familiar with homeopathy and is loving it.

Education and Paying School Fees

The first term of 2009 just recently began, although normally the start date would have been close to Jan 15. Now the children are on break for a month. Next term begins in May. Early in the year we rallied around organizing the children to study regardless of the school system’s failure. So Charles has been working with 4 tutors with more coming every day – he feels he could have as many as 10 volunteers to help very soon.

Each person is taking on a group of children of certain ages. They have been meeting since the beginning of the year and are only getting stronger. In our library we have all the school books so they know on what to focus. We are doing more to support these children’s education than if they were just attending school, since the teachers are in such a state of apathy after not being paid for so very long. It would make so much sense to just start our own school, but the wheels of progress have their own path to follow and it’s a co-created journey amongst us all.

The school tuition for the first term was long overdue, but because the children had only attended 3 weeks of the term, everyone was in conflict with the amount. The schools were asking for a great deal of money from these rural people and most people had no way of paying it. These fees were set by the parent’s group, the PTC, and then renegotiated multiple times.

By the time we left, much had been resolved with the exception of the Tendai’s 3 schools (our sculptors). We are not sure what is going to happen with those but we are waiting to see if the local

people are going to be able to pay them. Recall that the teachers are being paid by the government (or are supposed to be – they still haven't received any wages), and so the money the school asks for is supposed to buy books, put in floors, and build toilets, etc.

The general requirements of the Nhimbe schools were negotiated to a reasonable rate that the local people can afford. We stayed out of the discussions and let the local people decide what they could do. In Jangano the fees were much higher than normal and so, by the time we added up the cost of the these fees, and the small amount that goes to the Jangano folks to administer things, \$5 for the letter/picture exchange, the exam fees for the secondary children (9 subjects each with an exam fee of \$15 per child so over \$135 a piece) and the uniform fabric, we were so far over budget that we had to modify the way we are participating.

We proposed a budget so that we are not paying the full fees, but the parents will get involved and help. Out of this budget there was no money left for Audrey in our office here, who spends hours working with them in keeping records. Who knows what next term will bring, but long term something has to give.

This belt tightening has helped everyone to get keen on being more results oriented. Jangano cut 8 children who were not performing, feeling that we should be sponsoring children who really want to be there. Nhimbe is going to follow suit suggesting more of a scholarship idea rather than a sponsorship. In the states we call it tough love. Lavishing benefits without any requirements doesn't present a realistic picture of life anywhere on the planet.

The biggest challenge is the "special needs" children in town. I will be writing to each of you individually and we will have to take this on a term by term basis. There were fees as high as \$300 per term for an inexpensive secondary boarding school, \$100 per term for secondary, \$50 per term for primary, and \$500 for form 5 and 6. All of these are so far out of our current budget that we either cut all of the city services, or we talk to you individually. If anyone has room in their budget for a child going to school in town, please write, as currently they are being chased away. Our accountant's wife works in a well-off school where they are paying \$1,600 per term for a day school – these are often politician's children.

In the last couple of years, we began to include Ambuya Beauler Dyoko's children as part of Nhimbe since she has worked with us so much over the years and Cosmas gave her a place in his village (although she remains in town). We found her unable to feed the orphans she cares for and found ourselves unable to cover the children's school fees. She lives in Chitungwiza where the price for a \$1 phone card was \$1.50! I gave her \$5 per child out of the sponsor money as some step towards sanity but am waiting for the solutions to reveal themselves as the USD hopefully finds some balance.

Beauler actually *is* caring for orphans. Most of the time you hear about orphans in Zimbabwe, they are not children without both parents. They are missing one parent. So I always feel that the term "AIDS orphan" is really being misused and misrepresents to Americans what is really going on. I find it offensive that donors are being misled.

In Ambuya's case, these are actually orphans without both parents. Very recently her niece killed herself by taking poison, and so Beauler incurred expenses for the funeral as well as inheriting 2 more children for which to care. Additionally, when she returned from her last trip from the US she sent her eldest son (a grown man with his own family) to exchange 250 British pounds (\$500 or so USD) and he was

robbed. It was a scam with two men, one robbing and the other acting like a policeman running after the thief. He was left without anything. She was previously able to make some money with her band there, but her amplifiers and speakers are burned out. Life in Zimbabwe has some very harsh edges.

If you know Beauler and want to assist with sponsoring her children please write. We are looking for answers to many of these questions across the board, with Nhimbe and Jangano. Because some of you know her personally it might be something you can consider due to having spent time with her. Thank you.

Economy

The USD is definitely the currency at the banks and on the streets, with some rand mixed in, but because their most recent relationship to money was zim\$ in the trillions they feel like a one dollar bill USD can't be very much and so are just making up prices with no relationship to the reality of goods behind anything. Something will hopefully shift on this because it is making for some very difficult financial decisions. Not only are the school fees higher, but the supplies for the preschool are also more. Every where we look the costs are out of sight. Our staff members (over 20 people) do at least have jobs, but we can't increase their wages all of a sudden because the economy is crazed. This is calling for some real creative thinking.

We have implemented a new program called the CVP or Charity Volunteer Program that I described in my last Field Report in March. This allows someone to work at the Community Center for a couple of hours and earn writing tablets, pens, pencils, and soap, for example, for their families, as well as pay back a loan (most often for medical help). We spent much time discussing and formatting the management aspects of this program (for instance, if they are volunteering at the Center, we don't want them working in the garden because they will likely graze on the children's future meals) and so now it's a matter of implementation. Hopefully it will work with little in the way of input from us with a good return and involvement of the community.

Infrastructure

Since 1980, when the country officially gained its independence, very little money has been put into roads, phones, electricity and water, so everywhere you look these systems are failing. Each time I've visited in an election year, I've seen token amounts of patching of the roads, but in general, the pot-holes have only gotten larger. The recent collision causing the new Prime Minister's wife's death was attributed to these road conditions. (Although with his 2 year old grandson also meeting his death by drowning last week, there is sideline speculation about possible wrong doing). Anytime we drove to town we travelled this very same road. Some repairs have begun there although driving was a tenuous situation.

Pot holes on a gravel road like the driveway that leads to my home in Oregon is one level of a problem, but these holes in the asphalt on the rural roads are like craters on the moon. Driving normally is not possible – much attention must be given to navigating, or the car and its contents are seriously jolted when it hits the abyss. There has been a marked deterioration since our October 07 trip.

The phone systems are still compromised although they have added more cell networks and so it's a bit easier to get through. During this last year, Cosmas has managed to get a landline at the home in Glen Norah that was owned by Baba Joshua. Cosmas inherited this place (where sister Winifilda lives). I remember when we first started Nhimbe in 2000 we applied for a phone there. They showed us an application that was already on file, which was applied for in 1993. It took 15 years to get this phone installed! And we in the US complain about delays in how long something takes – waiting for the internet to come back up for example!

In the rural area there is very little electricity hooked up but, in town, everything is wired to expect it. They have a plan called load-shedding whereby they have rolling blackouts. Some areas are hit worse than others but in general, every day, your home is without electricity for several hours. Wealthier neighborhoods have generators. Poorer neighborhoods have no options. Everyone has candles. We used to go to town to charge equipment (cameras, videos, computers, etc.) but now really count on the Nhimbe solar unit.

We had some trouble getting the solar unit upgrade (from 07) working properly – the technicians didn't really know what they were doing. Cosmas tracked down a good solar technician and he made repairs costing \$400, including new parts. Now the system should hopefully be working again. We have both the multi-wave oscillator that many people love as well as computer laptops requiring the juice on an ongoing basis.

Eventually Nhimbe would like to get on the electric grid so that they could manage some small businesses like carpentry, welding, a women's salon, tailoring, etc. This would not take too much to bring in electricity from the road and would have the potential of giving the project some opportunity for self-sufficiency. A few people would get employment, while many get services. The youth can get training to help give them direction in life. The proceeds get invested back into Nhimbe.

Exports

Since 2000 we have been bringing back the hand made crafts of the villagers. Their efforts to feed their children match our commitment to keep the projects going and so we sell their work. Not only does it help tell the story but it gives you something concrete to take home or give away instead of the simply donating. Although most of our "business" is donations, the income from sales is an important part of what we do. There are people in Colorado, Santa Cruz, Spokane, Oklahoma, and Albuquerque who have our inventory to use at fundraisers. This support is amazing and a critical component. Since I hadn't been to Zimbabwe since October 2007, our inventory was getting so very low. This trip we remedied this. We brought home some sculpture and textiles as well as some new jewelry.

Bekah suggested they make rosaries out of the same seeds and nuts as the necklaces and bracelets, and so we have a small number of them, as well as protestant versions, for all of you who appreciate the beauty of native jewelry and want to bring those elements into your spiritual practice. If this is well received, next time there is always potential for a mala as well. It was an interesting project because it brought together the Roman Catholics, as the beaders, as well as the Apostolics (a conservative charismatic Christian group), as the serpentine carvers, to create a jointly made piece that reflects the nature of rural Zimbabwe.

One of the ways that we sell these exports is through Oregon stores. Greenbaum's fabrics, in Salem, are working with us using the embroidered blocks which the women have been creating in animal designs. This particular store focuses on those with a passion for quilting. They placed an order so that we can promote the project and get these embroidered beauties into the hands of more people. We also sell sculpture in Ashland at Sound Peace as well as the Wood Gallery in Newport. If anyone has any suggestions on stores who are interested in "gifts that keep on living" please contact us. We are always interested in those places that are really "get" the overall picture and appreciate the unique opportunity of working in partnership with us.

We normally take our products to Zimfest annually. If you live in Oregon and are going to Zimfest in Colorado this year, please let us know if you can carry something in your suitcase. It is likely worth it to us to pay your bag fee for a 2nd bag since otherwise we won't be able to sell there. Also, if you have any ideas for well-attended shows where we should be selling the products and sharing our story, please write. Thanks!

Other Fund Raising Ideas

We are always open to any and all ideas you have for raising funds. My husband came up with a great idea for a CD that could be made from various bands contributions of tracks. That process has been coming right along. Before I left, the deadline for the bands submissions came and went and so I was able to get a copy of the songs to listen to in my hut and on our trips to town. Our Zimbabwean friends enjoyed listening and could easily identify the Zimbabwean and American singers when I couldn't. They thoroughly enjoyed singing along with the songs as we drove to town and back.

It was a great and deeply moving experience – I just can't quite get over the support from people I don't know. They must know about the project. I am so very grateful. You know, its one thing if someone you have grown up with over the last 20 years supports you in your efforts, but it's another thing to see that someone I have never met is offering to help. It melts me.

The song tracks have been in the jury process for the last month and I believe that process is now over. I'm not on the jury as such but have been privy to the songs submitted and I think we have some great ones! There are some tracks from Zimbabwean artists and some from North Americans. The CD cover design has come from Gilbert Stirling Lee in the UK making this a 3 continent collaboration. Guy Tauscher from Hood River is overseeing this entire project and I can't thank him enough! We will most likely produce a marimba CD as well as an mbira/guitar/electric CD. I am hoping that many of you will be interested in adding it to your collection of Zimbabwean music, and if you haven't yet started a collection, this will be a great first for you!

In Summary

Thank you for your ear. Your listening helps me through this process. By being able to write to you I can come to terms with my life, the loss of life I have seen too much, and the suffering of the people there. I have never been one to think in terms of fate or destiny, but now I am wondering about it. I usually think in terms of how everything has evolved to this point since finding the sweet music from

Zimbabwe, but apparently it has been a life long journey that has just become more apparent and visible the last 20 years. What prompted me to begin this work? What keeps me going when everything seems like it is too much? What is the core principle behind it all? My path of healing (myself and others) was the spark, being part of the music is the fuel, and compassion is the fire. I'm sure some of you can relate.

Your support of our work is so valuable – we are a small non-profit and yet are able to accomplish so much with your assistance. We appreciate your help in this – we do it because of you. Sure, I have my own impelled, propelled and compelled nature to be there and to get down to business, but also, your desire to give to these people, is another reason I do this work. You are dreaming me up to help them.

Thank you for working together with us all, the residents there – the children of the soil, and the residents here – those whose lives have been turned inside out with a love for the music, and all the rest of the volunteers who have come forward to change the future. Your financial donations make a difference - as do your prayers, your encouragement, and your time. You make hope a reality for these people. Instead of just seeing something on the news that disturbs your sensibilities you – you are doing something! Thank you!

Blessings to all of you,

Jaiaen