

March 8th 2016

Dear Friends,

It has been another full week, following through holding the many threads that make this tapestry. We, those living afar, and they, here on this soil, together make a warp and weft that weaves the future. We are all working together, co-creating opportunities for the children while enhancing the lives of the parents. Those of you who promptly replied to our plea certainly brought tears to my eyes, and we all thank you. Because of this initial response we are able to begin to work on our list! I am thrilled and they also are so very grateful. If there are those of you who didn't have a chance to reply, please feel free to do so. We continue with quite a job at hand.

Access to the internet, phone, WhatsApp etc., has been limited this trip. I could see that some of you wrote me with wonderful replies sharing blessings of encouragement, new ideas, financial donations, and the like, but I have not been able to reply. It is complicated to describe how one can have some internet but not enough network or battery to respond. This is particularly true in the rural area where I have spent most all of my time. I'm sorry to not be able to dive right into conversation with you, as that is my nature, but it has to wait until the door opens. Thank you so much for your interest and concern for these people. There is much suffering in the world and I appreciate your partnership in making your difference show here!

THE QUICK VERSION:

- Weather report – praises for thunderstorms!
- Empowerment from you to purchase some supplies is done with tremendous gratitude.
- Re-thatching is on the radar but a challenge to see easily on the horizon.
- Permaculture and our preschool are a good match...love that produce.
- Monthly care and underwear – we are making great progress and are hopeful for the future.
- Health concerns are continual...we have much to do.

WEATHER REPORT

All of a sudden we have had several serious downpours. There is nothing like the clapping of thunder and a light show in rural Zimbabwe. This rain will certainly help with some of the ripening but far too many crops are too far gone. It's odd to be rejoicing when one is caught with the heavens opening their floodgates, since coming from Oregon we have web feet and are often found looking for the sun.

EMPOWERMENT TO MOVE FORWARD

On the 8th when we go to town (and I send this report), Patricia, Cosmas' wife and our Project Director in his absence, is now empowered to buy those cast iron pots, get window glass, as well as the plates, cups and spoons for the preschool. We did some scouting last week and got some fabric sample pictures so she'll also be able to buy the cloth for those long-needed curtains easily.

Wow... this will really lift the spirits here, of both the staff who understand the need for basic tools, as well as the children whose eyes will pop when they walk into the rooms. What a difference little things make (for the small sum of \$89). It reminds me of having a potatoes peeler or can opener that is just plain worn out but I keep

using it for years and years, as if it would be a big expense... it must be my depression-era roots. Unfortunately they were counting on us to squeeze out that \$89, so thank you for helping.

Many people live with the constraints of the ghetto and so however we can help them imagine, creatively visualize and dream up possibilities, it will improve their lives in the long haul. Wayne Dyer said "change the way you look at things, and things change", and I'm a believer. Give me a glimpse of something hopeful and it transforms my heart, which is where our magic resides.

Patricia will also be taking those women who work with the children to make the health checkup and police reports soon. First, she must make an appointment with the doctors who only come from Harare once in a while to the St. Michael's hospital, 20 or so kilometers away. The primary donor who founded this hospital passed on 3 yrs ago, and so regular operations are badly influenced. She also founded a part of the hospital that served infants and children only, and that is going smoothly since the Roman Catholics are now sponsoring that part.

This group of women will include the officially hired preschool teacher. Our new teacher Gabriella, is easy to work with and will benefit from the extra income as the library is only part-time, once a week on Saturday. Everyone is delighted, herself and her family, the other staff, and those of us stretching the dollar to meet the needs.

RE-THATCHING JOB

We got the quote on re-thatching the two huts and our jaws are on the ground. The quote is over \$2,600. It's a hard pill to swallow, particularly when the labor is only \$750 and the rest is materials. The real expense is the roofing itself, which is the special long grass that can be used to thatch. At least we know that this grass cost also shows up on the dinner tables of local residents (the sculptor's neighborhood to be exact)...it's not like it's imported from China. Interestingly enough, that original roof has lasted 15 years from when we first built the preschool so it's actually quite a good investment. I think we may have repaired it once in that time. Not bad for a bunch of grass, sticks, a few nails and twine.

Clearly, replacing the roofs are those maintenance needs of real life. There are two rooms to re-thatch, one larger than the other. Again we must be prioritizing what is essential and when. I remember when we first came in 2000, and I walked through the condemned building that was one of the local preschools. It was dark and dank and I could feel tuberculosis in the air. There were no supplies, let alone food. I was also shown the big tree where the preschool was held at another local school, children gathering there for lessons. It was some of these impressions that imposed upon my mind.

I am so very grateful to all of you who have helped us over the years to make a difference. Life here is hard and an adequate early childhood development opportunity will always be treasured, by both the students and their parents. You know, our Nhimbe school has been recognized as a model. We don't do anything lavish but cater to core educational and nurturing needs. Thank you for however you can continue to help as we continue to remain dedicated to the task at hand.

ORCHARD, GARDEN & PERMACULTURE

We spent \$27 and got some seeds for the groundskeeper to plant. We managed to get a variety of them including peas, carrots, tomatoes, rape (like spinach), watermelon, and cucumbers. I see the rape is already sprouting! My plan is to come with video in hand on Monday when we'll have a community meeting, and be able to get some footage of her planting the peas and sharing her corner of the Nhimbe world with us.

The orchard is looking tremendous... maybe some of you also remember when we first planted them and had bug challenges. They have done great with their care. They also have continued following the permaculture lessons provided on composting so I'm deeply pleased about that. There really are so many commercially generated inputs here – its mind blowing. Everything from the chemicals for fertilizing, to insecticides and herbicides. What my brain can't get around is the predominance of these things and their use, over natural methods. This is such critical awareness, particularly as it affects the food for these young tikes. Okay, I'll get off my soap box... everyone knows that I teach organic at a moment's notice, so have to control myself. In any case they have taken this to heart for which I am grateful.

We were having a talk last night as dusk was coming. Since I raise hens for selling eggs too, I was asking when they will be letting the little chicks out to begin scratching about. They were planning on waiting until 8 weeks old but I was encouraging it sooner as long as they can keep track of them. It's plenty warm here so they could be getting bugs out of the yard, which is lots of protein. Come to find out, they have sprayed the yard seriously with chemicals so there are no bugs! This was to inhibit insects from infesting the flock. But we use wood ashes at home for that, putting them in a dusting box, the chickens take care of spreading them around. Then too the ashes get mixed with the dried grass bedding and is great for the compost pile. Fortunately they have a continual supply of ash here from the daily fires.

This is the kind of knowledge that has been lost as the stores, academia, and media promotes "modern" ways to progress. This is happening all over the world, and then someday we'll wake up to find no birds in the morning ... have you read the novel, *Silent Spring*, Rachel Carson was it? I did say I would take off my professor hat, didn't I?

MONTHLY CARE & UNDERWEAR

One of the biggest blessings this trip is being able to implement the Monthly Care program. We envisioned this more than 5 years ago, and together with the Underwear for Over There program, we have slowly been making progress. We, Rachel Six and I, applied for a grant and although it was very well written, it was through a religious organization that gives preference to those within their group. So we must look for more grant opportunities. If you are at all interested in helping research grants please let me know!

This trip has seen some major inroads to bringing the Monthly Care pieces together. About 50% of you are intimately familiar with this topic and I hope your heart is as touched as mine is in sharing with you. The guys out there could skip the next few paragraphs if you like, but you all have sisters, wives, and daughters, so the more you understand the easier all around.

We began by buying the reusable sanitary supplies so each girls received her own packet. We had a great time talking and sharing. A most interesting part was when I had the realization that the girls needed a demo to know how to use them, so I fairly discreetly went in the other room and removed my underpants so we could show them how to use the snaps. I had been saying to not be shy or timid about this topic, but to feel free to share, so did my part holding my underwear in the air. By the time the demo was over we had some serious gender bonding and it was a perfect way to get all of this information openly discussed. We answered all kinds of questions, like will this snap feature keep everything in place when they play sports, and of course the answer was yes, but a second pair of underwear would work for added security if they are concerned since they only wear dresses. We have a great leader for the girls, Febby, the lead preschool teacher, assisted by Fortunate, and they keep communications flowing, and model great leadership skills every week with these young girls.

We have 27 girls currently enrolled with more coming. The goal is to buy a small pail for them for soaking, as well as a slice of soap each month. A bar of laundry soap is about 14 inches long and they felt that each bar could be split up with 8 girls monthly. Most girls have a pair of underwear but maybe if we can afford to do it, a second pair would be very useful. I am hearing much appreciation from the girls that someone is talking openly with them. You know it's a tough topic for some parents....doesn't matter which country you are in.

There are cultural norms here which are ancient and are being forced to go through evolution as the face of the Shona traditions are changing to adapt to modern realities. One of these deeply affects these girls. Traditionally, the mother and father give their children room to be themselves and do not get involved with their sexual or romantic education. That special nurturing comes from the aunts and uncles. In a traditional society, one can imagine how that could work very well. But, now, the aunties for these young girls often do not live nearby since so many people have been displaced looking for work or in the land redistribution, and also, there are thousands of people who have died in this middle generation. There still remain some elders, and the very young, but so many have passed on who would have been the auntie. So, some mothers are beginning to talk more openly with their daughters as it's a survival necessity.

Our Monthly Care program is serving a huge function to bridge the gap. Our goal is to evaluate the economic feasibility of helping them to begin to sew these reusable pads here in the rural area, to most importantly be able to provide them each year as new girls come into the program, but then potentially sell to the local village women too, or wholesale to the city. With the economic situation here, and the draught being what it is, meaning lack of nourishment, it is hard to know, as coming up with solid numbers on costs is difficult when prices keep rising, and marketability really does depend upon whether one has food on the table.

This function of providing the aunt's counseling can't be underestimated. Child marriage, although not approved of, has been on the rise, as has teen pregnancy, and the same myriad of problems that we face in the US with STDs and HIV. We were joking about the program being called "*tete talk*" as *tete* means aunt. So they found a great Shona equivalent "*hurukuro na tete*" which means discussions with *tete*. It has a nice ring to it as it rolls off of their tongue. It's kind of tricky to get all the vowels right for us non-Shona speakers, but it's fun to say once you can get it up to speed.

Another big kickoff to the program was to answer the question of where do they put these reusable pads? It's not like they have lots of options with purses and backpacks, as often a girl is seen with a small plastic bag that might have *sadza* for lunch in it, and an arm load of books. Elle Garrison, a good friend and excellent seamstress (who happens to be my sister), put together kits for each girl so that as soon as I arrived they began a sewing project to make a small personal bag. The kit included a Ziploc, fabric and some pins. I was amazed at how quickly they were able to sew these up (seriously from grade 6/7 through form 4, only 1 girl had a hard time). They received their pads when they completed their sewing.

Elle also made up another project that was a patchwork tote, which had come from the various fabrics from her years and years of quilting. The girls will be able to carry books, lunch and their personal monthly care bag. I am so grateful for this added bonus of such a special gift. The girls are absolutely delighted! If we can afford to do at least the personal bag next year for the new incoming girls, it would be superb as they not only learn more about sewing, and get a very practical help for their monthly cycle, but they can see if sewing is one of their talents as they are growing up.

HEALING WORK, LIFE, DEATH & LANGUAGE

Luckily, we have managed to make a small amount of time for healing work this trip. Some of you are familiar with Reiki which is an energetic medicine, and now commonly used as a complementary alternative in hospitals all over the US. Another practical approach in the alternative world is called Neuro Modulation Technique (see NMT.MD). This is "information" medicine and is grounded in standard biology and science but also new physics. I've been a practitioner since 2002 and have found the Shona people to be amazingly receptive. One of my colleagues Satya Khalsa has offered to help with remotely treating some folks here. So I've sent a few profiles with pictures and am looking forward to hearing how that works, from my taking notes and then emailing her. All 3 people are HIV+ to include a 10 yr old boy, a fairly healthy woman 62, and a very malnourished 38 year old woman, who is very close to me.

When there is a lull, I have been able to offer a few treatments in between other things. The most interesting was the other night when a 49 or so year-old down-syndrome adult was all of a sudden half-unconscious, unable to speak and passing out. It was worrisome since communicating can be challenging anyway. I followed the standard NMT protocol and wow, she recovered rapidly. I am so grateful for Dr. Les Feinberg's passion to have developed this leading edge technique. It definitely is part of the paradigm shift in medicine and healing all over the world, and seeing its application here in the bush in Zimbabwe gives me hope for people everywhere... but more practitioners are needed (contact Les and tell him Jaiaen sent you), both in terms of recognizing the vital need for integrative medicine the world over, but also those willing to reach out to the planet at large, maybe going that extra mile to travel abroad (feel free to talk to me about my next trip).

The death toll here has continued to be an incredible hardship on these people. I've been here about 10 days, and in that time 5 people have died, ranging from 30 yrs to 103, 4 of whom live within 2 km. The 5th person was a chief who lived about 10 kms away. Of course everyone is going to funerals, and in some way many people are related, if not by blood, then by totem, so there is a great demand for time and money to follow proper rituals and ceremony.

That points to another serious problem for the community. The elders who know the correct way to bury the dead are expiring and the job is left to only a few. The young people know that they gather, provide food, make music, etc., but beyond that know nothing. Who is receiving the knowledge of the elders? This is a problem around the world in many cultures where social and spiritual norms are not intact, and the ancient ways are being lost with the passing of another elder.

Some of you may say this is fine, and that they can replace their procedures with religion, eastern, western, or what you like, but the problem is much larger than that point. Language, which is the essence of the untold stories of a people as well as the living legacy, is also vanishing. It's mind-expanding to be trying to translate and interpret what is being discussed, only to find out there are no words for this or that in English, or in Shona. It can go both ways. The beautiful richness and diversity of a culture and peoples is found in the language, as well as how they view the spiritual world. We are not the same but we share so much common ground.

So for example, our preschool encourages bilingualism because that is the country's standard, yet so many rural residents are not empowered to speak English. In the same way, I ask for translation help and they think there might very well be a word but we have to seek out an educated elder to do the interpretation. There is also street slang that has come to be an extension of Shona, not really offering the great depth and character that language can offer, but it serves as a bonding ritual, just like in the states.

COMMUNITY MEETING UPDATE

As always, the community meeting was delightful. The girls and boys were released early from the secondary school to be able to come and share their singing and dancing. They have such powerful voices. What a reminder that song and dance is an incredible personal language from our souls. (And in the US, if you don't want to sing or dance, you can play marimba or mbira...we Americans are sometimes shy.) Quite a lovely day with the following highlights:

- They shared such gratitude for your generosity!
- We were able to deliver 3 boxes of library books... thank you so much Karen, Beth, Debby, Anne, Alan and Vickie.
- Thank you to Colette and the Lacombe Oregon girl scout troupe...they love the soccer balls. Three went to the preschool and the teens cheered to hear they got one too.
- The residents suggested that they donate thatching grass but knowing the reality of the coming famine we suggested that when the rains come enough to have grass, that we buy it from them and they can keep the price down to help make it happen.
- Saw that the tomatoes were sprouting already.
- Girl Guides (like scouts) were sharing how much the camps mean to them and want to help contribute towards the food costs by bringing a bit of food from home... they love the expansion it brings!
- Thunderstorms sent us packing...

THANK YOU FOR LISTENING...

It means so much to be able to write you and share what is going on. It's as if you are sitting with me here in the dark, hearing the various crickets and other night sounds in the background, while I'm typing away on this tablet, hoping to get my thoughts on the screen before the battery runs low. I feel you here in my hut, those of you who are caring about this with me, and am very grateful. I know that there is so much going on in life, that to take time to sit and read may need to be a planned event.

Watch for more to come in the next week or two, and in the meantime, tell someone you know that you love them.

Mindfully yours,

Jaiaen