

March 29 2018

Dear Friends of Zimbabwe,

Arriving at the Harare airport always feels somewhat like swimming underwater. The altitude and humidity creates a palpable texture to the experience. Nothing quite like it. No matter which airline you take, it is quite a long journey, but we actually got some pretty decent seating. Jess figured out after a couple of legs, that exit row seating was the solution as she is a tall, long-legged gal. Leaving home on Wednesday around 2:30 p.m. and getting into Harare Friday 12:30 p.m. sounds like 46 hours but due to time zones it was really only 37.

Here is the short version:

- ❖ OUR FIRST TWO DAYS – ADJUSTING TO NATURE
- ❖ SUNDAY – ALL ABOUT FABRICS
- ❖ MONDAY AND MMC EXPANSION...WOW
- ❖ TUESDAY AT THE PRESCHOOL
- ❖ WEDNESDAY AND PAYDAY
- ❖ *TATENDA CHAIZVO!*

OUR FIRST TWO DAYS – ADJUSTING TO NATURE

We – Jess, my helper this trip, and I – were blessed with an uneventful flight and all bags arriving safely. We quickly found the welcoming faces of Cosmas Magaya, our Project Director and his wife, Patricia, who is also our key coordinator for the *Mhandara* Monthly Care program (MMC). Within a few hours after landing, we had stopped for supplies, dropped by the family home in the townships, left some donated flannel in town for getting a batch of the reusable washable pads underway, and headed out to Mhondoro, the rural home. We arrived after sundown on the 23rd. *Tasvika!* Sorting quickly through the trunks to find bedding by flashlight left us well spent and ready for our first night's sleep at the village homestead.

Although we each had night-time mice visitors, we managed to overcome our first hurdle, as we are both hardy campers. Jess, an OSU student, my assistant and friend on this trip, woke up to two little eyes within inches of her own, but luckily outside of her mosquito net. The mouse in my hut was rustling about in a drawer, so I tossed the entire cane unit outside to be dealt with later. In the a.m. I was able to empty the drawer in the grass, assuming the noisy creature had gone during the night, but no. The thing was huge... I thought it was a rat... and it dashed right back into my hut!

Finally later in the day, three of the women came armed with broken tree branches to help me roust it out. Unfortunately, it had a nest of three babies inside the bottom of my bed and so it was not going to just be chased out. With their sticks they promptly dispatched them all and I finally was able to sleep.

I felt badly, I just don't like killing, but I reminded myself that it was probably just the first of many hard things, where not all involved are happy with the results. This can be a common situation as people think "us Americans" can solve everything with money and I often have to find ways of saying no, just like to the mice... Just can't host those guests.

Jess said her mouse was rather small and crawled under the door that second night for a quick peek at her, but then left. She has since stuffed the hole with a plastic bag.

We have been on the run since arriving. Saturday was spent unpacking and barely settling, visiting our Chief Nherera who helps us help them, and getting the kitchen organized for the 3 week stay. We have hired Lillian, a very bright and talented 27 year-old with excellent English, a large capacity for endurance and hard work, and a superb cook. She is helping us with all the domestic necessities, translation help, as well as data entry. And, wow... we are eating great! Saturday was also spent successfully meeting with the marimba and mbira teachers to check on several things that will be unfolding during the trip.

SUNDAY – ALL ABOUT FABRICS

Sunday was a big day, meeting with our craftswomen who are embroidering the blocks that we began importing long ago. We will again have a few of these blocks at Zimfest, as well as filling an order for a quilting venture. These women are so grateful for the work and the money to help pay school fees. Not enough can be said about supporting their art projects and its effect on their morale as well as the food on their table.

We also had many meters of flannel fabric in our suitcases that were donated to the MMC program from three main sources. So Sunday we spent some time measuring and cataloging for Nhimbe inventory purposes. Everyone is so grateful for the help, and the flannel quality from Canada and the US is far better than what we have been buying here in the shops.

Sunday was our first big day of filming, and Jess was found behind the camera at every turn. She has a natural affinity for camera use as well as has found the women delightful and the culture fascinating. She is so very personable that she quickly found a place in their hearts. Filming the embroidery stitching and flannel inventory kept us busy for hours.

MONDAY AND MMC

Monday came quickly and our plan was to drive to 5 local schools in one day, 2 of which were already part of our Nhimbe community, having participated in Girl Guides for several years. Our goal was to reach out to more girls and see what kind of natural expansion was possible. We were met with great interest in all locations. Basically we gave a short spiel on our program to stir interest.

But then, it started occurring to us, since we were talking to hundreds of girls, that if even ten percent show up at our camp next week, we had better think about logistics. First is to see how many girls

come to this coming Friday's meeting. It's a normal weekly meeting where they either sew or sing and talk. This time we will talk about the MMC system and our protocol for participating. We will also talk about my favorite subject, boys. Predation is a serious problem as it is anywhere in the world. Our goal is to arm these girls with knowledge, awareness, and permission to be unashamed to talk with our leaders. The program is called Hurukuro Na Tete, meaning "Discussions with Auntie." Everyone loves that name! Hopefully we will help reduce teen pregnancy, HIV, and improve overall happiness for females, although I'm not sure that we can influence child marriage.

The 3 new schools (actually each consist of secondary and grade 7 from the primary as well) are all quite a distance to walk, so teachers have offered to accompany the girls. That was the first logistic to solve. Hopefully it's worth the hike! Maybe the teachers will become as passionate about it as we are and can begin their own satellite programs out from our Nhimbe community center, with training from our leaders. This would mean the girls can stay closer to home. I'm sure that getting all of the adults together will benefit everyone, as our leaders are also very eager to learn. They really appreciate my blunt and to the point nature, particularly when talking about shy topics. I lost my shy somewhere along the way.

Another concern about the camp, scheduled for the 6th through the 8th, is that the solar battery is now unusable. It had a long good life, installed around 2006. To get a new marine deep-cycle is easily \$300 and the tech to install and check the system another \$100. Since we don't have that extra in the budget we are trying to find alternatives. There are some little systems for \$165 that we might be able to install. The small system will charge phones too. The large system from '06 will charge cameras and laptops, so is the better long term solution.

In any case, with 75-80 girls normally at camp, and if we mushroom to include the new girls, with over 100 plus some, we really need to have some lights at the community center. I'm particularly concerned for the new girls since they are totally unfamiliar with the grounds. If you are in a position to help with this situation please go online to www.ancient-ways.org or send a check, indicating that you want to help with the solar repair! Please let me know at windgatherer@ancient-ways.org that you are contributing to this so I can make a corresponding decision. Thank you so much! And the girls thank you too!

The filming and driving to each of the schools took all day Monday and we were all whipped by the end. Zimbabweans have a lot of endurance and even they were tired. A storm had started moving in on Sunday, stirring up dust, mold and grass seed in the hut roofs, and Jessie and I began sniffing and sneezing about the same time. We both have needed to increase our vitamin vigilance and try to fend off being immune compromised from fatigue.

TUESDAY AT THE PRESCHOOL

Tuesday gave us the last day of the first term to pack in all possible filming of the preschool. Again by the end of the day we were bushed.

We made it through the day with scampering children everywhere, and are still recouping from the intensive, purposeful activities and weather changes. Hopefully a break to town to get supplies will be an easy diversion. I tend to like to stay rural, and avoid cities, much like back in the states, but do look forward to solving some communication challenges that can only be dealt with in a network area. We, in the states, take much for granted in city life.

WEDNESDAY AND PAYDAY

Normally today, Wednesday, would have been payday due to the upcoming Easter holiday weekend, but even though we had hundreds of dollars between us, we didn't have any small bills to pay people. That means another reason to go to Harare, since the rural area has little money. So instead of payday, we had a nice staff meeting where Cosmas and I were able to explain more about the world economy, and how much we appreciate their hard and committed efforts. We all enjoyed the conversation and could have simply adjourned, but gratefully I was in a position to offer them a slight increase in compensation due to your generosity this year. When I calculated it, the actual percentage of increase was around 10%, but we had kept a tight lid on any raises, since their dollarization of '09 and our housing collapse of '08, and just not being sure of how the economies were going. So it felt great to be able to shift after having to hold such a hard line, and everyone was very happy! We paid them just the increase, and will go to town to get change for the remainder.

We've taken a risk here and I'm hoping it was well founded. We are able to continue this work because of you and your generosity, and also because they are a super team, carrying out the mission and executing our agreements with great cooperation.

TATENDA CHAIZVO!

Thank you again for your prayers and encouraging words. Jessie and I are blessed to be here and thank you for your continued interest and support of these people in their efforts towards progress. From the infants to the elders, they are all benefitting. The work is reaching far more than the 6 villages, due to the nature of the preschool and the MMC and how both of these programs can welcome anyone in need.

Thank you for hearing me... I am typing this in the dark of my hut, listening to the Zimbabwean bugs, maybe crickets, talking quietly just outside, and thinking that tomorrow is going to come very early as we will head out for the 1.5 hour drive to the capital city after breakfast.

All the best,

Jaiaen and Jess