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Beauty in a Scorched Land

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1

A Feast



2

A Pose



Thoughts From Kelvin



The stories I wrote are fiction.

My goal was to move the statistics from their status as cold numbers, to the living reality they reflect.

The journal entries and pictures by my sister, Charlene, are true. They are snapshots of her time working as a nurse in Zambia. As an editor, I have left her writing as intact as possible.

The idea of using parallel story lines was to contrast the state of the third world, with the richness of North America. Should this book be taken a reflection of whole continents?

Of course not.

The issues confronting Africa and North America are complex and diverse. This humble book cannot hope to cover them all. I would strongly encourage you to research the issues raised in this book for yourself.

Ultimately, our biggest goals for this project are to raise awareness, provoke thought, and most of all to prompt action. I hope we have achieved that in a small way.

Kelvin

P.S. Any resemblances between the authors and the monkeys are, of course, entirely coincidental.

4

At the Water's Edge



Arrival in Zambia

6



Sunrise

The morning sun was a burning eye of fire. Its gaze beat through the clouds and onto a head of short black hair.

Samuel straightened and then wiped a sheen of sweat from his forehead. Muscles rippled in his powerful arms. He believed that his strength was a gift of God.

A gift that needed to be used.

He could see the tips of pots bobbing along the trail to the south. A long line of water carrying women were on the way over.

His knees buckled as he bent and then filled another bucket of water from the river flowing past his feet. He struggled to steady himself against the undertow that threatened to pull him under.

He straightened. Success! Once again he had beat the river and the reptiles in it.

Samuel Kyanamina was young, handsome, and full of life. His sculptured body was bare, revealing the moisture glistening on his

ebony skin. All he wore was a pair of tattered brown shorts and a gleaming white smile.

He headed over to the long row of clay pots lined up on the shore.

Water gurgled and splashed as it flowed from his wooden bucket into a fat little pot near the end of the row.

Would today be the day? It could, but only if he kept working. He would need all the time he could get.

Samuel bent down again, careful to keep his eyes on the wide river.

Crocodiles were notorious in this area. They would swim just beneath the surface toward their unsuspecting victims. Still, if one kept their eyes open, they could usually be avoided.

As he continued to labor, the rising sun pierced the clouds and drew a beam of light across the surface of the river.

The crimson blood of yesterday's victim still stained the dull brown sand of the riverbank. A foolish tourist had wandered near the river and been attacked by a hippo.

Hippos were violent when disturbed.

Even more so than crocodiles.

Samuel paused in his work. His eyes squinted as he stared across the river. Just as he suspected, those were two elephants on the other side. There was no danger from them.

The joyful singing of the women grew nearer.

Samuel increased his pace.

Perhaps Lebo would have come with the women today.

Samuel had noticed her smile on their last visit. His heart had skipped a beat, then before he had been able to speak to her, she was gone again. Off on the long trek back to her village.

Would today be the day when he could finally spare a moment to approach her?

He was hopeful. The long row of pots on the sand had been filled. The effort of waking up early had been worth it. Samuel would have time to introduce himself to her. He felt the pace of his heartbeat picking up again as he rehearsed his opening lines.

AT THE WATER'S EDGE

The joyful singing was descending upon him.

Samuel turned to examine the crowd of women in colorful motion as they filed around the row of pots.

Where was Lebo?

The women began removing the empty pots from their heads and placing them on the sand.

Samuel's eyes continued to search the chattering mob.

Where was she?



“You know, you and Jolene would be a perfect couple.”

Rob stopped before the office water dispenser. He stuck his paper cup beneath the spout. His fingers twisted the release lever.

It stuck.

He applied more pressure.

“You gotta jiggle it a bit, then it works. Come on man! You gotta be

serious! Work it like you're doin the macarena! There ya go. Anyway, like I was saying about Jolene..."

Rob kept grumbling as he watched the water flowing into his paper cup. "You'd think they would have something better than this garbage in here. The company makes enough money after all."

"Yeah yeah...I get you...but you know how it is. Politics. The managers get all the perks while we get all the work. But, listen man, I'm trying to help your love life here...the least you can do is listen to me."

Allen was the resident computer tech. If you were the Sherlock Homes type you'd be able to figure this out by his pale, narrow face. If you were like the rest of the human race, you'd figure it out pretty quick when you saw the rest of his attire. The white shirt, casual black dress pants, and tacky red tie. As one might expect, the front pocket of his shirt was overflowing with pens.

Rob's square framed glasses bobbed as he nodded.

"Jolene... got ya. Now let's be clear. You want me to defy common sense and go on a blind date. The problem here is, I'm not blind and neither is she!"

"No, I'm just saying you should consider it. Seriously..."

"Seriously, huh?" Rob laughed and then down his water like it was a shot of liquor on Saturday night.

He had a head full of curly black hair. His face was unshaven, but just enough to be manly, not slovenly. He looked like he should be the leading man in a chick flick...Or perhaps the front man in a boy band. A smirk toyed around the edges of his dull red lips as he stared at his friend.

"And where do I find this maiden of untold beauty?"

Allen's slightly yellowed teeth were revealed as his face split into a grin. "Wait five minutes. She's the habitual type, she always comes over for a cup of water at ten thirty."

"Okay, then why haven't I seen her in here before?"

"You just started work today, remember?"

"Oh yeah, it already feels like a lifetime...sorry."

“A regular joker you are. Like I said, you’d be perfect for Jolene.”

Rob scratched his neck. His white cotton shirt and black dress pant uniform wasn’t very comfortable.

“Why would she come all the way up to floor eleven just for a cup of water? She seems a little crazy to me.”

Allen’s emerald green eyes widened. “Why not ask her yourself. She’s standing right behind you.” On that note Allen vanished into the maze of cubicles that populated this floor of the skyscraper.

Rob turned to face the most beautiful woman he had ever seen.

“I’m crazy am I? I’ve heard my share of pick up lines but that’s a new one. Now please get out of my way. I’m thirsty.”

Rob felt a rush of red foolishness spread across his face like a rash.

Why did he always say the wrong thing?

It was over before it had started.

Or was it?

As Jolene began filling her cup, Rob wracked his brain for a good comeback.

The ivory white of Lebo’s grin caught Samuel’s eye. He set down his wooden bucket and then began to walk toward her.

She was just as beautiful as he had remembered.

Lebo wore a blue dress adorned with a gold colored pattern of leaves. Her face was smooth. Her hands were calloused from years of hard work. She was perfectly formed in the hand of God. Samuel longed for the blessing of her attention.

The other women chattered like crows as they selected their pots from the row on the sand. When they found the object of their quest they placed it on their head for all to see.

Some of the younger women stared at Samuel’s masculine body as he walked by.

“Thank you Samuel!”

“Don’t be a stranger Samuel!”

“Beware of hippos!”

Samuel grinned as he returned their greetings. They were only jokes and he would treat them as such. The only woman he was interested in was Lebo.

He had to hurry.

She could never stay long. Her village was twenty miles away, she would need to start walking back soon if she planned return before dark.

“Good afternoon.” He said in a voice full of confidence.

Lebo bent down to place a pot of water on her head and then straightened. At first, the weight seemed to bring distress to her round, slightly chubby face and then this expression was replaced by a cautious happiness.

“Hello Samuel.” She mumbled, careful to avoid looking directly at him.

As Samuel stared at her, his heart began to pound out a tribal rhythm. Her face was round, but not too round. Her features were almost European, but a head full of small black curls betrayed her true nationality.

“Don’t be shy.” Samuel, stepped closer. “I know your family well. I’m sure you must have heard of my family. We...”

“Yes. Yes. My Father has told me all about you and your family. There’s no need to tell me anymore about them.”

Some of the older women tittered to each other as they watched the two lovebirds. Samuel ignored them as he pressed on.

“Did you have a safe journey?”

Lebo’s gold colored earrings swayed as she steadied the pot on her head.

“Yes, the rebels have moved south. The trail is safe...for now.”

“I’m glad to hear that. I...” Samuel lowered his head. “I have been praying for your safety as you travel.”

The pot of water on her head teetered as Lebo headed away from the river. “Thank you Samuel. I will pray that God will bless you for your kindness.” Lebo stopped to steady the pot again. All the while, the other women began regrouping and heading back toward the narrow path

they had come from. "I'm sorry, I must return to my home. The journey is long and one never knows when the rebels will return. "

Her body swayed as she walked to take her place in the line of women. Samuel felt an anxious tide rising within him.

He didn't want to lose her.

She was beautiful.

Elegant.

She had the bearing of a Queen.

Samuel's heart pounded in his head as he ran after her. "Ah, Lebo...a moment please."

Lebo kept walking, careful to keep her place in the line. "Yes...?"

"I..."

An expression of alarm crossed Lebo's face. Her finger trembled as it pointed at something behind him.

"Samuel, look behind you..."

He began to turn. "What is it?"

"Hippo!"



Rob sputtered, embarrassed at another failed attempt to communicate.

“Look. I’ll be honest with you Bob.”

Rob’s face wrinkled. “My name is Rob.”

Jolene’s thin lips twisted into a slight smile. “Rob. Check. I’ve got to get back to my office before my coffee break is over. Before I go, there’s one thing you should know. Like I said, I’m pretty sure I’ve heard every pickup line in the book.” Jolene’s soft face took on a sly expression. “But, if you can think of one that I haven’t heard yet...I might just accept an invitation for supper. The key word being, *might*.”

Rob stared at the vision before him.

She was perfect.

Simple minds might say she looked like Julia Roberts, but in Rob’s mind Julia had a long way to go to catch up with Jolene.

“So is it a deal?”

Rob's mouth felt dry. His heart twitched like a trampoline under the feet of rowdy children.

"So is it a deal?"

"Yeah, its a deal."

"Great!" Jolene reached into the pocket of her blue jeans and then pulled out a business card. She handed it to Rob as she spoke. "Whenever your mind clears up enough to think of something, email your pick up line to the address on the card."

"Can't we just go out...once maybe even..."

Jolene's inner joy bubbled out of her as she laughed. "We'll just see what happens when you send me that line...okay? Now I better get back to work before my Boss comes by and orders me back."

Jolene strode toward the door with the poise of woman who knew what she wanted, and got it. She wore a pink t-shirt and blue jeans. Who knew that there was an office in the building that had such a casual dress code?

The sweet scent of her perfume lingered. Was that a hint of lime?

Rob sniffed the air.

Hm. It was hard to tell.

Rob shrugged. Who cared. He tossed his paper cup into the trash can beside the water dispenser and then headed through the maze toward his cubicle.

He hadn't felt so dazed and confused since the last argument he'd had with his father.

"So, how did it go? All set for the weekend I see." The reedy voice of Allen drifted into Rob's consciousness.

"I don't know...I've gotta send her an email first."

"Well, I hope you don't need to do that anytime soon."

"Why?"

"The internet is down." Allen looked as if his best friend had died. In all likelihood, it had.

"What! Why?"

"Oh nothing much, it was just supposed to be a little upgrade.

Normally it wouldn't take long, but it seems there's been a little snag."

"Then why aren't you busy fixing it?"

Allen shrugged and then laughed without a hint of happiness. "I will. I was just checking in on you to see how things..."

"Well, feel free to check out again and fix that problem with the internet."

"Oh we've got plenty of problems around here. Even your smart phone won't work, trust me. However, on the plus side, you do have a lot to be thankful for." Allen altered his voice to imitate a used car salesperson. "An adequately designed desk in one corner, a computer that is certified virus free, and best of all, a date with the most desirable woman in the..."

Rob sat in his office chair. "Just so you know, I don't have a date yet and I won't have one either if you don't get out there and get that internet back online."

"Alright then. If you want it that way."

"I don't but that's all that Jolene offered."

"Okay, be the mysterious one, I'm going to work."

"Good!"

"But I'll expect a full report in triplicate on Monday morning." Alan smirked and then shuffled off toward his task as if he were headed toward Mount Doom.

Rob exhaled, struggling to calm himself.

Some people sure knew how to be annoying.

His hand moved the mouse. The bouncing screen saver gave way to a word processing program. Work waited, but there was only one thought on his mind.

What was a good pick up line?

"Grrrrr!"

As Samuel turned, the sound of growling burst into his ears. At first, only the, "Beware Hippos", sign filled his gaze. Then his eyes lowered. The sound of feminine laughter filled the air.

Samuel stared at the small boy before him. He was about ten years of age. He wore a red and grey shirt with tattered brown pants.

His mouth was twisted into the most horrible grimace a mischievous boy could imagine.

Lebo's laughter intensified. "This is my little brother Joshua. He likes tricks."

Samuel's deep voice boomed as he joined the laughter.

"Yes, he does like tricks. That is good...very good."

"Don't be afraid Samuel!"

"Be brave!"

The good-natured teasing of the women seemed to encourage Joshua. He scampered along the riverbank soaking up his moment of fame.

Lebo watched for a moment, and then smiled like a mother would. "I don't know how he can walk for twenty miles and still have that energy."

The rest of the women began to reform their line and head south. As Lebo watched them, an air of sadness seemed to wash over her.

"I'm sorry Samuel. I wish I could stay but I really must be going."

Samuel took a deep breath. "How is your family?"

"They are well." Lebo reclaimed her place in the line. "They send greetings."

"Send them greetings also..." Samuel hesitated, then plunged forward. "Tell me. Would your father agree, if..."

"Yes?"

"I mean, would you approve if I spoke to your father?"

"You wish to speak to my father about me?" Lebo's laughter sparkled. "I've been asking myself why you haven't done that already! Don't be afraid, Samuel Kyanamina...we are not Hippos!"

Samuel laughter boomed again. "Then I will see you soon. "

"Come on Joshua..." Lebo called to her brother as she continued to walk.

Concern tugged at Samuel's mind. "Watch out for that one. The rebels would like to catch a young man like him."

Fear flashed across Lebo's soft face. "The rebels are gone now. Joshua should be safe..."

"Only last week they kidnapped a group of children not very far from here."

Lebo's dark eyes widened.

Samuel thought for a moment and then made up his mind. "I know this won't help much...but, I will come with you."

"With us? But, you need to stay here and fill the empty pots for the next group."

Samuel grinned. "No. I'm done here for today. I can walk with you and your brother."

"I'd like that," Lebo said and then smiled a shy smile. "Speaking of Joshua, can you see where he's gone?"

"There he is!" Samuel pointed toward the prodigal lagging near the end of the line of colorfully dressed women.

Relief flooded Lebo's face. As they carried on their way, the two love birds came to enjoy the rare freedom of indulging in relaxed conversation.

Looking out at the plain from a distance it seemed as if a slender veil of sand hung in the sky, obscuring the sun. Powerful waves of heat shimmered up from the barren ground. Through all this, a line of black dots moved like army ants across the brown landscape. A joyful song marked their progress.

As day fell into night, the silhouette of a water tower could be seen in the distance. Easy water for those who could pay the price.

AT THE WATER'S EDGE



“Friday at six sounds perfect.”

Rob stared at the email message on the screen before him. It was only one line, but it made his heart pound with anticipation.

“Email working?” Allen’s head popped into the cubicle. He looked a lot more cheerful now, everything must have been fixed.

Rob spun his office chair to face his friend. “Yeah, thanks man. I appreciate it.”

Allen wriggled his eyebrows. “Success, my son?”

Rob grinned. “Success.”

Allen stepped into the cubicle and slapped Rob across the back. “There you see. What would you be without me?”

“Sane.”

Allen looked pained. “Now now. Is that anyway to talk to your best friend? The one who helped you stave off another weekend of loneliness?”

“I don’t know if I’d go that far.”

“You wouldn’t huh?” Allen grinned as a look of mischief filled his face. “Great pick up line by the way.”

“What! How did you...?”

Allen winked. “I told you, you wouldn’t be able to do anything without me. Anyway, good luck on Friday. I’ve gotta get back to hacking...I mean...work.”

Allen vanished as quickly as he had appeared.

Friday. What a day that would be. Rob licked his dry lips as he picked up a paper that needed his signature.

It was high time to earn some money.

AT THE WATER'S EDGE



Victoria Falls

BEAUTY IN A SCORCHED LAND



A Termite Hill

5

Ants in Our Pants



Charlene

August 19, 2006

Twitching.

Gesturing people.

Why?

We had started our day at 2:00 am in order to travel to our destination in time.

Our group was standing outside the retreat center with our baggage, waiting to load the bus. It was quite unexpected for a group rising at such an early hour to be so energetic...

Using my skills at detection I discovered that there had been an influx of ants overnight. Rebellious ants who did not appreciate our noble mission.

We managed to rid our persons of their tiny pincers, but the more cunning among them had managed to stowaway with our baggage.

The people sitting at the back of the bus received regular reminders of these extra passengers. A reason for dancing and celebration indeed!

It certainly gave me a better understanding of the saying, “ants in your pants,” (or skirts in my case).

-Charlene

6

A Splash of Beauty



7

I Said, No More Pictures!



War Stories



Two years later.

Bam!

A gunshot burst through the wall of silence.

Samuel grabbed Lebo as she attempted to run from their hut.

“Joshua, where’s Joshua?” Lebo was frantic, tearing at Samuel’s arms with her sharp fingernails.

Her red and brown dress crinkled and flexed as she writhed in her attempt to escape. Her face was a mask of terror.

Angry shouts began to echo throughout the village.

Bam! Bam! Bam!

Another flurry of gunshots crashed through the night.

Somewhere in the distance a shrill scream pierced the air like a hot needle.

Samuel’s powerful arms held the trembling form of his wife.

“You can’t go out there! They’ll catch you and then...then...” Samuel rubbed Lebo’s well rounded belly.” Then our child...what will they do to our child?”

Lebo’s tears poured down her plump cheeks. “I promised my father that I would protect Joshua...I promised...”

“I know...I know.” Samuel lowered his voice to hide his own fear. “But Joshua is old enough to take care of himself now. He’s a wise young man. Perhaps he escaped before the rebels entered the village.”

“I don’t know. I’m afraid. Afraid of what will happen if they catch him.” Lebo gripped her husband for support.

Samuel’s mind raced through possible options. They couldn’t stay here. The rebels only wanted children that could be kidnapped and enslaved.

All adults would die.

The bitter smell of burning grass began to tickle his nose.

Their round grass hut was the smallest in the village.

Perhaps the rebels would overlook them...perhaps...The chain saw chatter of machine gun fire chewed through any remaining illusion of

hope.

Boom! A muffled explosion sent a shock wave through the ground.

Samuel's flattened himself and then crawled across the dirt floor. Granules of earth rubbed like sand paper against his bare belly.

He stared at the opening yawning before him. He breathed out deliberately as fear gnawed at his courage.

It was the only way to escape.

He had to do it.

He had to look out there.

He forced his head through the open doorway.

The sight horrified him.

Samuel rose from the earth and then ran back to his wife.

"We must go...quickly! They're burning the village!"

"Joshua...what about Joshua?"

"He's old enough. He will find us." Samuel reached for the hand of his wife. "Come, we must escape while we can."

A look of determination crossed Lebo's face as she gathered the bottom of her dress and pulled it up. She needed to free her legs if she were to flee. A quick movement of her hands secured the dress in this position.

"Are you ready?"

Lebo could only nod, her face full of terror.

Samuel peeked outside again, then, satisfied that the coast was clear for the moment, he pulled his wife forward.

Overhead, the moon was white and watchful. To the south lay the flickering orange cones of a village in flames. To the north, a scattering of black silhouettes showed the multitude of grass huts that had yet to be destroyed.

The sound of gunfire was constant in the south.

A group of ragged looking soldiers charged into view prompting the young couple to flee for the shelter found behind a nearby hut.

The wang and whiz of machine gun bullets followed the couple to their hiding place.

Somewhere nearby harsh voice shouted out a blizzard of orders.

“Keep going!” Samuel whispered.

Sand beat against their bare feet as they charged north.

A familiar voice was shouting at them.

“Joshua!” Lebo stopped and turned south. She began to cough as her nostrils filled with the bitter smoke of destruction.

A young boy was running toward them.

Samuel felt a brief twinge of hope as he watched. Joshua had more energy than the entire village put together, if anyone could escape the rebels, he could.

For a brief moment, the boy was a silhouetted against the orange rage of war. Then his head exploded like a glass bottle as a bullet smashed into it. The now headless silhouette crumpled to the earth, still attempting to flee even as it collapsed.

Boom!

A grenade flashed as it exploded just to the left of them.

As the grass walls of a nearby home caught fire, smoke began dancing around the survivors like ghosts haunting the living.

The last thing Lebo saw of her brother before Samuel pulled her away was that of a uniformed child running toward the fallen body. The rifle held by the child soldier twisted, aiming down at it's fallen enemy.

“Joshua!”

Three rifle shots cracked in rapid succession as Samuel dragged his wife away from the evil sight.

“There’s a mission station four miles from here. Can you make it?”

“I can try.” Lebo wheezed, struggling for air.

“Then let’s go.” Samuel whispered.

They ran from the village faster than they had ever had before, still it seemed that the angry shouts of soldiers grew ever closer.

There was only one thing they could do. Run for their lives!

A dreamlike memory of Joshua running with the other children flooded Lebo’s mind even as she struggled to keep up with her husband.



“What a war they’ve got over there. I guess that’ll mean more refugees for us.” Rob popped another handful of popcorn into his mouth. “You know, instead of running over here and taking our jobs, why don’t all these people just stay where they are and fight?”

An awkward moment passed.

“I don’t know about that.” Jolene’s beautiful face was lined with puzzlement. “I mean, who would want their family to live in a warzone?”

“It’s their country isn’t it? They should fight for it just like we had to fight for ours.” Rob’s goatee covered jaw pulsed as he chewed another mouthful of salty corn.

“Well, I don’t know about that. I do know that I’m sick of watching all this.” Jolene lifted the remote and pressed a button. The violence and terror that filled the news faded to black.

“We have plenty of our own problems, we don’t need refugees

bringing more trouble over here.”

There was a moment of silence as the couple eyed each other.

Rob was dressed in black sweat pants and a plain white sweatshirt. It was a comfortable thinking suit. Another handful of cheese flavored goodness filled his mouth.

Jolene ran her hand through a head of black curls. “Speaking of problems. What about our future? Since we’re going to be parents we’re going to have to change some things.”

The gentle tick of a grandfather clock filled the kitchen.

A faint scent of wood swirled through the air. The log walls looked beautiful, but they had a distinctive scent. The faint perfume tantalized Rob’s nostrils.

He sneezed and then reached for another handful of popcorn.

Jolene was still as beautiful as the day he had met her. Heck! She was even wearing the same colors she had been on that first awkward day by the water cooler. A pair of faded blue jeans and a neon pink sweater.

Jolene leaned over the wooden table and grabbed the bowl of popcorn that sat before Rob. She dragged it across the table and out of his reach.

“Hey, what are you doing?”

“I’m trying to get your attention, that’s what!”

Her eyes bored into his. “It’s almost been nine months...we need to start getting serious about this situation.”

Rob stared at his very pregnant girlfriend. Why had he been so stupid? He couldn’t afford to be a father. Not to mention what his own father would say.

William was a preacher of the old school, he wouldn’t approve of this at all.

“Hello, is there anybody in there?” Jolene said in sarcastic tone as she rapped her fingers against Rob’s head.

Rob stared at the blinking blue numbers on the microwave oven behind Jolene’s pleading expression. That clock really needed to be set.

“Earth to planet Rob, come in please.”

“I’m sorry Jolene, I...I guess I just don’t feel ready for all this.”

“Really? Well, I’m not really ready to start thinking about being a mother either, but at this stage I don’t have that many options, do I?”

Silence fell over the yellow painted kitchen. The ceiling fan churned in slow motion. Yet, the summer night needed more than a few fan blades to ease its tension.

“There were other options you know, we didn’t have to let things get this far.”

“Well, if you haven’t figured it out already I’m not the kind of person to run off on my responsibilities. My mother always told me, ‘Jolene, if your gonna make the effort to bake the cake then you darn well better make the effort to take care of it.’ And since you helped bake this cake I think that...” Jolene gasped as she was pierced by a stab of pain.

“What’s wrong?”

Jolene stood as an air of urgency came over her. “We’ve got to get to the hospital!”

“Now?”

Jolene padded across the white tiles lining the floor. “Now! You’re driving.” She rummaged through the purse sitting by the doorway for a moment and then tossed a pair of keys in Rob’s direction.

Rob struggled to pull himself from the warm embrace of the couch. “But why?”

“Because you’re about to become a father, that’s why! Now let’s get going before you have to become a midwife as well.”

Samuel staggered as his foot plunged into a hole. As he straightened, a sharp pain shot through his bare chest.

Lebo stopped running and turned her attention to her husband.

“I’m sorry.” Samuel said, gasping for breath. “I must’ve hit a hole or something. But we can’t stop now...we must be almost there.”

The morning sun blazed down on the two refugees as they struggled to get into motion.

The barren path seemed to stretch onward into forever. Only a few

gnarled trees marred the brown emptiness under a clear blue sky.

“Are you going to be alright?” Lebo slowed as she noticed Samuel stumbling.

“Perhaps if I had some water.” Samuel’s voice rasped. Oh how his tongue longed for the cooling caress of water. If only, there was a river...a long river flowing with refreshment.

“I’m sure the mission will have some.” Lebo’s finger trembled as it pointed north. “There...look! Is that it?”

Samuel squinted as he gazed into the distance. “Yes, yes, that’s the radio tower.”

“Thank God. We’re almost there.”

“Help me. Please. We’re so close.” Samuel was in obvious pain as he forced himself to limp forward. Lebo moved beside him to steady him on his way.

They had only managed to travel about a hundred feet further before a faint buzzing sound caught their attention.

They turned south to see cloud of dust rising like smoke in the distance.

“Rebels. They’re sure moving fast.” Samuel rasped in the voice of one about to surrender to his fate. He gritted his teeth as he summoned up his last reserve of strength. “But, we must do what we can. Perhaps God will yet be merciful to us.”

Driven by this hope the couple kept hobbling toward the radio tower, the symbol of their salvation. As they walked, Samuel felt his parched lips forming the words he had long dreaded to say.

“Lebo...I must confess that I have hidden a secret from you...”

“Not now Samuel...we must save our strength...”

“No, I must tell you now. I have waited too long...far too long and only God knows how much life is left to us.”

A zebra stood beside the path, watching their progress, testifying to the fact that there was still life in the barren plain.

“Samuel, don’t speak such things, we must have faith.”

“Lebo, you are the only woman I have ever loved...but...I...I...” Samuel

hung his head as shame threatened to overwhelm him. The time for confession had arrived.

He must speak.



“So, our secret is out, a little boy.” Rob’s face was drenched in sweat, but the pride of being a father glowed from it.

“A very big boy.” Jolene smiled a weary smile as she lay on the white hospital bed. “What should we name him?”

“Why not Bill...after my Dad?”

“You know what will happen then...people will call him Billy.”

“I don’t know. There are worse names.”

“Yes...there is...Bill.”

Rob toyed with his square-rimmed glasses. Searching for a reply to the most stubborn he had ever known.

Meanwhile, in the hallway outside their room a metallic voice chat-

tered over an intercom.

Jolene's laugh was musical when it came. "Don't look like that! I was just teasing you. I think Bill is an excellent name."

"So do I." The deep voice of Reverend William P Revell thundered into the room through the door to the north. His well-fed body followed soon after.

Rob's face blanched as he turned to face the very person he wished he didn't have to see today, his father.

"I'm sorry Rob, I had to call him. To be truthful, I asked a nurse to call. "Jolene's voice was apologetic. "We have to be honest about this. It's never going to get easier."

An older man stood staring at them. His hair was a distinguished looking grey. His body was covered in an expensive black suit, and his face, although wrinkled, was made for television. He had groomed his image to be as close to Billy Graham as possible.

"Well, well, well, I must say, this is a surprise." William stepped closer to Rob. The florescent light beamed harsh white light over his head of black hair. "I know we haven't spoken in awhile, but that's no excuse. When were you planning to tell us about all these new developments in your life?"

Rob turned to stare at the small window on the south end of the room. A small glimpse of a city of skyscrapers filled his eyes. The exit door was to the north, blocked. Escape was impossible.

His Father's broad hand rested on his shoulder. "Turn to face me please son."

Rob felt his chin fall to his chest as he pivoted. "I was going to tell you but I...I..." His wavering voice sputtered to a halt.

William smiled as his eyes twinkled. "Don't worry son, I know we've had our differences over the years but I didn't come here today to talk about them." William's deep voice was bathed in compassion. "You and I have both done our share of sinning but the Bible says that forgiveness is a virtue." William's pale grey eyes stared at Rob as if he were a television camera.

“I...I know I’ve made some mistakes. I haven’t always treated you or mom like I should. I...I...” Rob lowered his head, trying to escape the piercing gaze. “I know I should’ve told you about all this sooner but I was scared. I...”

“Scared of me? I’m your father, what do you think I would do to you? Send you to Sibera? Or even worse, to Arkansas?”

“It’s silly I know. But we haven’t always seen eye to eye and...”

“And, you know the house rules, no matter what happens, we’re still family. We may not agree on everything but we’re still there for each other when it counts.”

Rob raised his head and took a breath. “Thank you.”

Reverend William patted his son on the shoulder. “I’m proud of you son. Today will be a new start. You’ll see. Having a family to feed changes a man.” William coughed into his hand. “You’ll be getting married of course?”

Rob opened his mouth and then closed it.

“If you keep moving your mouth like that you look like a fish!” Jolene’s expression was teasing. “Come on. Just spit it out. It can’t be that hard to say.”

Rob smiled and looked his father straight in the eye. “Of course, as soon as we get out of the hospital we’ll have a wedding.”

“Good.” William extended the hand of friendship toward his wayward offspring. “Let me be the first to offer my congratulations.”

Jolene leaned back on her bed and breathed a prayer of thanks toward the ceiling. Her blue hospital gown didn’t suit her, every muscle in her body seemed to ache but still, she had never felt happier.

“I’ve been waiting for this day for a long time. Perhaps you could share the story your struggle and redemption on one of my upcoming television shows.” William pulled a notepad from one of his front pockets. “Come to think of it. I should book you in while I’m still thinking about it. How about next week...”

Rob opened his mouth to protest, but was interrupted by his father.

“Anyway, we can talk about all those things later. Your mother is

waiting just down the hall. She'd be in here right now if she could but the nurses said there were only two visitors allowed in at a time." William chuckled. "They were quite firm about it too and you know how your mother would take that! Speaking of which, I better get out of here so she can get in here. I wouldn't want to get on her bad side right now, believe me."

A tangy scent of expensive perfume filled the spot where William had been.

Jolene smirked. "Is your Father always like that?"

William's loud voice echoed in from the hallway.

"Yes, he means well, but he always seems to act as if he's on camera. He's been preaching for so long he probably doesn't even think about it anymore. You'll know what I mean by the time the day is done."

"Alright. I guess I'll just go with the flow. By the way, thanks."

Rob started. "For what?"

"For sticking with me through all this."

Humbled, Rob could just nod his head as Jolene closed her eyes, thankful for a brief moment of rest.

Rob meditated on the red and wrinkled form of his tiny son.

Maybe being a father wouldn't be so bad after all.

What would little Billy become? It might be fun to stick around and find out.

"The good news is, your leg just has a sprain. That means it will heal in due course. However, I must also tell you that you have the beginning signs of tuberculosis. I strongly suspect that you also have HIV. We'll need to see the results of the blood test to be sure but given your symptoms and what you've told me I think I know what the answer will be. Does your wife know what you've just told me?"

Crack! Crack! Boom! There was a series of gunshots, then an explosion crashed in the distance. The rebels were on the advance again.

"Yes. I told her on the way over here."

The missionary Doctor stared at him as compassion filled his tired blue eyes. As he spoke his British accent became ever more pronounced. “It would be helpful to know who you might have got it from. I know this is difficult...but...”

“I don’t know her name. I was just a young foolish boy...and I...I...” Samuel shook his head. “I guess I should’ve paid attention to all those signs.”

The doctor nodded. “Yes, you should’ve. However, we can’t change the past. We can only plan for the future. Can you at least tell me the village she’s from?”

“That won’t help you, the rebels took over her village a few months ago. They killed everyone and burned everything that was left.”

Samuel sunk into the embrace of the hard wooden chair.

“They burned our village last night too. I doubt that any survived...” His voice began to break under the strain of emotion. “Women liked to see me filling water for them...they wanted to reward me...I resisted...but one day...I...”

The death rattle of a machine gun echoed somewhere to the south.

“Samuel, I know you’ve had a pretty rough time, why don’t we continue this discussion tomorrow?” The young Doctor’s voice turned soft. His hair was blonde and ruffled. His khaki shorts showed through the white lab coat that he wore. “We have quarters for you to stay in. I can show you the way if you like.”

“Don’t worry about that. I’ll find my way.” Samuel kept his eyes on his dirty bare feet as he summoned up the courage to ask the next question. “Um. If I have HIV how long can I expect to live?”

Somewhere outside the wooden room a small girl was crying. A constant, consistent, wail for help.

The doctor sighed as if the heaviness of the world weighed upon him. “Honestly, I don’t know. You may live for a few months, a few years, but it’s impossible to say. There are medicines that could help you...but...well...as you might suspect, they’re pretty hard to come by around here. We aren’t exactly the world’s top priority.” The Doctor’s

unshaven face was grim. “The rebels don’t help the situation either.”

Samuel’s mind trembled as he rose to his feet. The room was small and full of the stench of sickness. Flies buzzed around his head. He just wanted to leave this room.

The Doctor stepped back from his position before Samuel as he continued to speak. “We’ll have to test your wife for HIV and your newborn child as well, just to be sure.”

“Yes, thank you Doctor.” Samuel shuffled across the wooden floor.

The room had no windows. No air. It was almost impossible to breathe in here. Oh to escape...to sit beside a long cool river and absorb the warm gaze of the sun.

“Don’t give up hope yet. There’s a small chance that I’m wrong about the HIV AIDS...but...” The Doctor tapped on his clipboard. “Anyway, just send your family in as soon as you can. I know there’s a long line up out there but I’ll try to get them tested today.”

“Thank you.”

Samuel stepped out of the foul smelling little room.

A line of patients stretched back to the wall around the compound. A young woman in white who seemed to be a nurse stepped forward.

Her pale finger beckoned.

A large woman wrapped in all the proud colors of their country stepped out of the line and walked toward the room Samuel had just left.

Samuel limped toward the acacia tree growing in the middle of the compound.

The compound was a small one. On the west side there was a long wooden building that served as the hospital. On the east side was a square building that served as living quarters for the staff. The whole set up was surrounded by a wall, built with stone imported from Britain. A sturdy steel gate guarded the entrances on the north and south ends of the compound.

Government soldiers were everywhere, standing firm, watching for any signs of trouble.

Lebo was in the middle of it all, shaded by the branches of the acacia

tree. She cradled a newborn baby in her arms.

Samuel knelt in the sand beside her.

“I was right.” He mumbled.

Tears filled Lebo’s eyes as she gazed at him, searching for words.

Samuel crossed his legs as he settled into the dirt. “The Doctor said you must be tested...and our child. I’m so sorry...I was so foolish...I...”

Lebo placed her index finger over the mouth of her husband. “Shhh...If God himself will forgive a man when he asks for forgiveness, why shouldn’t I do the same?” Her voice became businesslike. “Now we must think of the future. God has graciously granted our boy a chance at life. What shall we name him?”

Samuel thought for a moment. After awhile his face broke into a smile tempered by inner tension.

“Meshach. God delivered Meshach from the furnace of fire...perhaps God will yet do the same for this little one.”

Lebo’s shoulders heaved as she coughed. “I will pray that he does.”

Samuel was silent as he diverted his gaze to the wrinkled form of Meshach cradled in the arms of his wife.

A flurry of machine gun fire exploded in the distance.

Soon the steady boom of bursting artillery rounds joined the symphony of war. It was a great day for civilization, the government forces had found the rebels at last.

Meshach’s powerful wail joined the weak cries of the baby girl somewhere in the line of waiting patients.

Samuel watched his son as numbness penetrated his body. Was his a cry of hope, or of sickness?

Samuel’s large hand reached out to caress his child.

“May God bless you my son...” He whispered under his breath.

What would the future hold?

Would Meshach be delivered from his furnace?

Samuel hoped that he would live long enough to find out.

WAR STORIES



Line Up at the Clinic

9

A Sign



10

Civilization



A Memorable Visit



August 9, 2006

Today we had a half-day clinic in a high school. I think we saw about 100 people. People were upset that we were leaving and I can't blame them. For many it was their only chance at seeing a doctor.

Lots of AIDS, TB, and Malaria today. We also saw a very sad case of Edematous Kwashiorkor's.

The baby girl's constant weak cry was heart rending.

The afternoon was spent with health teaching in Solwezi.

There were about 30 women participating. It went well. I felt that we were giving them something that they can use to empower themselves for prevention of common ailments and some practical treatments.

After teaching, we went to the Friends Committed to Caring radio station to record some health tips for future airing.

The people have such a great sense of community, patience, love, kindness, and tremendous respect.

One of the interpreters, Alfred, who is a very hard working children's worker, couldn't be with us today because his sister-in-law died of TB and he had to find transport to the cemetery.

She left behind four orphan children for Alfred & his family to care for when they are already struggling. He is malnourished and walks up to 60 km/day to help other children.

After recording we were able to play with the children- their version of duck duck goose. It was great!

We also visited the Solwezi graveyard. I can't very well describe it.

-Charlene

All's Well That Ends Well



Six years later.

Billy's blue eyes widened, watered, and then blinked.

"That's what I'm getting for Christmas tomorrow!" He muttered quietly as he jabbed his black mittens against the storefront window.

The video game system he lusted for was prominently displayed amid a tasteful display of color. There was a red and brown wreath leaning against the box. The green of the carpet beneath it. Yet, the most colorful of all were the twinkling red and blue of the lights running around the Christmas tree above it.

It was the prize every boy longed for this Christmas.

Billy's freckled face crinkled with a boyish grin of longing. His reflection revealed his blue knit cap, black sweatpants and thick red parka.

He felt a bit like Gollum in Lord of the Rings at that moment.

Billy chuckled to himself as his breath formed a vapor spot on the window. Gollum was silly and so was he for thinking like him.

Billy's face left the glass and swiveled upward to face his Mother.

"Can't you get it for me?"

"You'll have to ask your Father about that. Come on now...let's go..."

Billy turned back to the video game system. Inside the store, a yellow light flickered, and then winked out. Billy's eyes struggled to adjust to the gloom.

"Come on Billy, it's time to go." There was a brief pause. "You haven't been standing here all evening, have you?"

"None of your business!"

"Now don't give me that attitude. It's Christmas Eve! Smile!"

"No!"

Jolene giggled at Billy's sour expression. "You know what? You remind me of your father when you look like that."

"Rob Schmob!"

Jolene held out her hand. Her voice turned soft. "Billy, that's quite enough. We need to go to Grandma and Grandpa's. Everybody is there waiting for us. Don't you want to see your cousins?"

"Do you think Grandma and Grandpa might have bought that for me?"

A smile entered Jolene's voice. "Who knows? They might have...you'll find out tomorrow morning." She adjusted her knitted hat with her

free hand. “Now, let’s get going. Hey! I know what we can do. If you can tell me...hmm... something special that happened to you today...I’ll...” “Jolene’s voice turned to the tone of conspiracy. “Just maybe, I’ll tell you a secret about me and father. Something that Grandma and Grandpa don’t even know yet!”

Billy turned and held out his hand. Warmth slid over it as it melded with his Mother’s grasp. Billy grinned, revealing a gap in the middle of his line of teeth. “Okay! Guess what.”

“What?”

Billy grinned with mischief. “You hafta guess!”

“Oh let me see, I don’t know...”

Billy giggled as only a six-year-old can. “Nope! Try again!”

“I know...I know...It’s your tooth...you lost your tooth!”

Billy stared at the snow-covered street before him. Red and green lights flickered along the row of average sized houses.

Snowflakes danced gently across the bed of the night.

Somewhere in the city a choir was singing, “Joy to the World.”

“Was that right? You lost your tooth, didn’t you?”

“Yes...I did.” He turned his eyes to face his Mother. “Now what’s your secret?”

He felt moisture slide across his upturned face as cold snow collided with warm flesh.

“Well, what is it?” Billy repeated as he mother began to chuckle.

Sand swirled in violent gusts. It stung as it wriggled like tiny worms into Meshach Kyanamina’s tender skin. He drifted like a small black silhouette across a barren patch of brown.

In the east, behind a haze of sand, the setting sun was a brilliant blaze of crimson and yellow. Before him, a village of round grass huts huddled for comfort against the building sand storm.

His belly was numb. It always was. There had been no rain for many days. No rain meant no food. Even if rain did come, food would remain scarce for poor people like him.

Mother was sick. Far too sick to work and earn any money.

Water gurgled as it sloshed inside the dirty brown pot that Meshach carried. He slowed. It wouldn't do to spill the water after a twenty-mile walk.

Mother needed moisture to slake her constant thirst.

Meshach licked his chapped lips. Skin peeled off and fell to the ground unnoticed. If only he had enough strength to carry water for himself as well as his mother. As it was, he was too small. Too small and weak.

He was only six years old after all.

Meshach's eyes turned to the group of children playing happily in the sand. One child was dressed only in plain brown pants and a bare chest, just like Meshach.

The children stopped playing as Meshach approached.

They stared at Meshach.

"What's wrong?" He mumbled as fear lanced at his heart.

He knew what had happened to other mothers when they coughed. It was the reason why his village was now mostly populated by children.

What if his mother had fallen into the forever sleep?

Most of the adults, like his father Samuel, were already sleeping underground. Never again would they be hungry. Sometimes Meshach envied them.

"Surprise!" Shouted his friend, Reuben Mbasela.

"What is it?"

"Surprise tomorrow! Wait and see! You'll like it!" Reuben waved his colorful hoop for emphasis.

The children gathered around Meshach. White grins flickered from their dark complexions as they chattered.

"Why can't you tell me now?"

"Because it's a surprise!" The children laughed, releasing the joy they held inside.

Reuben continued speaking after the laughter subsided. "Tomorrow, after we carry the water from the river, you must come with us. Wear your best clothing."

Meschach was thoroughly confused now. “Where are we going?”

Reuben pointed a skeletal finger toward the north. “There!”

Meshach wrinkled his brow. “There? Where is there?” He asked, afraid of looking foolish. Reuben could be so confusing. Why couldn’t he just say what he meant?

Surely Reuben didn’t want to go to the farm of crazy Moses Banda!



“Surprise!”

Billy stared at the box resting in the middle of a mountain of torn wrapping paper. His heart began to pound like the little drummer boy. “It’s just what I wanted!” He gasped.

Billy still wore the black sweatpants and red Spiderman shirt that he had worn the day before. It was comfortable! It helped free his movement as he ran to the couch.

He hugged his Grandparents with barely restrained enthusiasm.

“Thank you, thank you!” He repeated as excitement possessed his tongue.

“Well, we thought we could fit one more thing onto the credit card.” Grandfather said, laughing in his deep voice. “I hope you enjoy yourself.”

Rob peered through his square framed glasses at Billy’s treasure.

Jolene smiled, the picture of a mother satisfied that her family was happy and at peace.

Billy returned his attention to the pile of presents beneath the tree. The big secret was that his mother and father were going to have another baby. Who cared about that? He had a great mountain of toys to play with!

He knelt beside the box that held his most precious possession. It was exactly what he had wanted. Beside it was a stack of other toys, but his eyes were fixed. The video games must be unleashed from their cage!

As Billy tackled the video game box, adult conversation swirled over his head.

The Christmas tree glittered with metallic tinsel. Blue lights flickered through and around the natural pine needles. The crown of the tree was a star that glowed red and white in alternating sequence.

In the south-west corner of the room, a fifty-two-inch screen silently played a heartwarming scene of lovers scampering about in the falling snow.

The new grey carpet was covered with wrapping paper and colorful arrays of gifts. The convention of relatives was scattered around the room. Everyone ate oranges, brown peanuts, or sucked red and white candy canes as they conversed.

The screen flashed to the news as the hour changed. The starvation ruined face of a small child filled the screen.

“I don’t understand why these people don’t just get jobs and help themselves for a change,” Rob proclaimed as he reached for another handful of peanuts. “Why bother us?”

“Rob would you turn that tv off,” Jolene’s voice rose above the clamor

of voices. “It’s Christmas, we don’t need any political discussions today.”

“Alright, alright,” Rob muttered as he reached for the remote that rested on the arm of the couch where he sat with his father.

The full-bodied scent of baking turkey wafted through the room.
The screen went dead.

Grandfather William stood from his seat on the couch and turned to face his family. “Well. Well. It sure smells like lunch, doesn’t it?” He paused for a moment to allow the room full of conversations to settle. “That means it’s time for the most important part of our tradition. Everybody gather around and I’ll...”

Billy opened the box, revealing the treasure of his dreams.

“Can someone hook this up please?” He said loudly, interrupting his Grandfather.

Grandfather wagged his finger. “Now Billy, pay attention. Grandfather is talking. You mustn’t interrupt.” Billy nodded, but his Grandfather had already turned his thoughts elsewhere. “Anyway, as I was saying, why doesn’t everybody gather around and I’ll read that old story about a child in a manger.”

Billy’s Grandmother cleared her throat with the womanly authority feared by husbands all over the world.

Grandfather grinned with natural handsomeness. “Oh, I’m sorry my dear. I forgot one important detail. First, we’ll sing a little song for Jesus and then we’ll read the manger story! After that we’ll tackle the turkey! How does that sound?”

The children in the room shouted their approval and began moving into position around Grandfather’s feet.

Meshach felt happier than he had in a long time. His belly was full. The sandstorm had stopped, and his head...

Meshach ran his fingers over his forehead. Yes, the sticker was still there. A red and white sticker that the nurse said was a Canadian flag. What a gift! Meshach vowed to himself that he would wear it until it fell

off.

The other children around him had agreed when he told them of his plan. They would all cherish the stickers they had received.

They would wear them forever if they could!

What a day. The people from Canada had set up a nurse's station only half a days walk away. It was close enough for everyone in the village to visit whenever they needed help.

How fortunate that Reuben had heard of the station opening. Reuben always knew things, perhaps it had to do with the fact that his father was still alive.

Perhaps if Samuel were still alive he would tell Meshach things as well.

Things like, why was there a farm along this barren trail? There was obviously nothing to farm, yet crazy Moses kept working his soil. Meshach had often giggled to himself as he surveyed the dried out farm yard. There was nothing here! Perhaps that is why crazy Moses saw cattle herd had dwindle every year...now he only had one left.

Why didn't Moses join his rich son in the city? That would be wiser than spending his days farming where there was no rain.

Everybody said it but crazy Moses refused to listen to anybody.

Meshach snuggled deeper into the hay where he lay and turned his thoughts to the nurse he had given him the sticker.

Darlene she had said her name was. What a strange name. But then, white people usually had strange names. It was their way. Darlene wasn't strange, she was pretty. She had taken a special moment from her work in the clinic to come out to him.

To Meshach!

She had even visited with him for a few minutes before handing each of the children a bowl of rice and a sticker.

It was fortunate that Meshach had listened to Reuben's advice to dress well for this occasion. He had worn his red and black checkered shorts with a grey shirt. A missionary had given them to his mother, now at last Meshach had put that fine gift to good use.

Moses's last remaining cow mooed with vague determination as she ambled into the darkened hut.

Meshach reached up to feel the prize sticker once again. Yes, it was still there.

Flies buzzed around him in an unpleasant swarm. Some tried to climb into Meshach's nose. He ignored them the best he could. What else could be done with flies?

The cow mooed again.

Meshach stared up at the large wet nose approaching him. The cow began tugging at the few strands of hay that formed the bed where he lay.

Crazy Moses had put his cow in a hut! Everybody had laughed about that too but Moses didn't listen to them. Yes, laughter only made Moses more determined.

Meshach shifted as the cow pulled his bedding out from under him. His rest was over. He needed to join Reuben and the other children and then return home.

The round hut smelled like manure and sweat. The walls were solidly reinforced with wood Moses had hauled in from the city. Tiny glints of light flickered like stars in the wooden door.

The manger bed where he had rested was soft...so soft. Much better than the hard floor at home. Meshach reveled in the comfort for a moment. Then, as the weight of responsibility descended on his thin body, he sat up.

The cow needed to eat and he needed to get going. Crazy Moses would not be pleased if he found a little boy resting inside his hut.

Reuben had dared him to rest here for a few minutes but it was time to escape before he got caught.

Meshach ran toward the door.

Mother would be waiting for him to prepare the evening meal. He must not be so lazy. He must go home.

A blast furnace of sweltering heat exploded against his skin as he scampered out into the semi-darkness of the descending darkness.

Black silhouettes of dead trees loomed before him. Reuben's colorful hoop lay beneath his feet. How wonderful! They could play some games on the way home.

Meshach felt his knees buckling toward the withered yellow grass. His face twisted into a grin as he fell. What a happy day it had been!

BEAUTY IN A SCORCHED LAND



The Forgotten Voice

Tinkling

*clamoring bells
preach from a distant steeple
while far below
I stand, forgotten
a black silhouette
in the pool of a streetlight
I begin shuffling, barely seeing
the streets of whispering
lights, laughing
at the shadows of the evening
the weary remains of a day
spent dodging the zombies
roaming the mall, hungry for deals
while so many in the city go hungry for food
and I can't help but wonder if a Merry Christmas
could be more than a living room full of cast off wrapping
and I can't help but wonder if a Merry Christmas
should be more than a pagent of programs and spending
to celebrate the birthday of a man who was homeless
a Christ who spent his days wandering
as a refugee*

BEAUTY IN A SCORCHED LAND

*a trouble-maker
rejected by his society
much like me*

14

Thoughts From Charlene



In August of 2006, I had the amazing opportunity to go work in Zambia for a couple of weeks as a nurse.

The people were beautiful, welcoming, and full of joy. It was most humbling as those who materially had next to nothing were so rich in faith, in love, in joy. I immediately felt at home there, especially amongst the body of believers.

It was highly emotional experiencing the poverty, sickness, child led families, etc. first hand. To know and to experience are two very different things.

To all those who have heard the call to accompany a missions trip, but have not gone due to fear, lack of finance, etc., do not underestimate God! With God, all things are possible. But the poor are everywhere.

If only we open our eyes and If only we open our eyes and hearts to do our part to obey God in an area of greatest importance to help the poor, the needy, orphans, & widows “in their distress”. It is one of the most discussed topics in the Bible.

The poor are only people just like us with stories to tell, hurts, joys, and gifts/talents to be shared-valuable. They are not some foreign species, another class far removed from our world where we can feel good about giving a few dollars to once in awhile.

“However, there should be no poor among you, for in the land the Lord your God is giving you to possess as your inheritance; he will richly bless you....” Deut. 15:4 (NIV)

We as richly blessed Christians have failed in many ways, especially in regards to the poor.

I have failed.

I need to change my lifestyle, be an advocate, manage my money wisely, give generously of my life, time, money, resources and be more careful about where and to whom I give.

To live like a glutton while others are dying from lack is sin.

To be self-righteous about those poor, “sinners,” who are dying from AIDS is WRONG. It's too easy to go along with popular opinion rather

than to find out for yourself.

When you are totally surrendered to God with an open mind & heart, making an effort- you will discover that “those people” are humans too, just like you.

Just like me.

I hope I will never be the same. That I will continue to be moved, to cry every day, and to live life differently- with a purpose-God’s purpose. The next time I feel thirsty, will I remember there are millions of people literally dying for a cup of clean water. “For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me....” “I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.” Matt.25:35, 36, 40.(NIV)

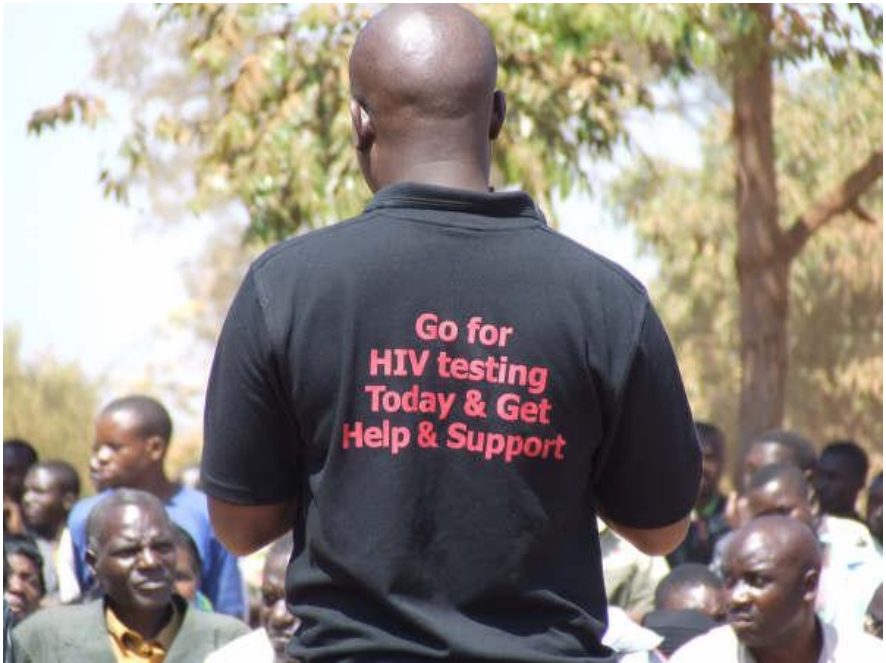
Today let’s cast off our preconceived prejudices, our business, our lack of faith, our fear, and do something for one of “the least of these”.

Tomorrow will be too late for many.

-Charlene

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Reuben's Story



How far would you walk for someone you loved?

Five miles?

Ten miles?

One hundred miles?

We encountered Reuben (not his real name) in August 2006. We were operating a clinic near Solwezi, Zambia.

It was a busy day, which wasn't unusual.

Obviously, I don't remember when he entered the compound. However, I will always remember his remarkable journey.

Reuben was desperate. He had already walked many miles through sun and sand, searching for the one bottle of antibiotic that the Doctors needed to cure his mother.

His mother was laying deathly sick in a mission hospital a couple hundred miles away.

Reuben had visited all the hospitals and pharmacies he knew of and each time was faced with a negative answer.

There were simply no antibiotics available.

With one last desperate attempt, Reuben came to us with his heart-wrenching story. At first, we thought we did not have that particular antibiotic either. However, we searched and found one bottle of the medication.

He could not express his gratefulness enough.

Soon, he had gone, anxious to return to his mother. We had to return to our other patients.

Then, after a few weeks, our team left Zambia and returned to Canada. Our term had been completed, but memories remained.

This memory is of the miracle of one.

REUBEN'S STORY



Poverty Factsheet



Did you know...in Canada...

- one in five households spend over 50 percent of their income on rent, which puts them at risk of homelessness?
- 42 percent of Canadians say they would be in financial difficulty if their pay was delayed one week?
- one in 10 Canadians can't afford to fill their medical prescriptions?
- as of 2015 there is no national plan to reduce poverty?
- as many as 1.3 million Canadians have experienced homelessness over the last five years?
- one in eight Canadian households struggle to put food on the table?
- child poverty in Canada is three to five times higher than countries that make it a priority to eliminate it?
- one in seven Canadian children live in poverty?
- minimum-wage increases do not reduce poverty. Most workers who benefit from a minimum wage hike are not members of a poor household?
- 200,000 people are homeless in a year, costing the Canadian economy \$7 billion annually?

-Source: The Salvation Army.

Did you know...in Africa...

1. **Seventy-five percent of the world's poorest countries are located in Africa**, including [Zimbabwe](#), [Liberia](#) and [Ethiopia](#). The [Central African Republic](#) ranked the poorest in the world with a GDP per capita of \$656 in 2016.
2. **According to Gallup World, in 2013, the 10 countries with the highest proportion of residents living in extreme poverty were all in sub-Saharan Africa.** Extreme poverty is defined as living on \$1.25 or less a day. In 2010, 414 million people were living in extreme poverty across sub-Saharan Africa. According to the World Bank, those living on \$1.25 a day accounted for 48.5 percent

of the population in that region in 2010.

3. **Approximately one in three people living in sub-Saharan Africa are undernourished.** The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations estimated that 239 million people (around 30 percent of the population) in sub-Saharan Africa were hungry in 2010. This is the highest percentage of any region in the world. In addition, the U.N. Millennium Project reported that over 40 percent of all Africans are unable to regularly obtain sufficient food.
4. **In sub-Saharan Africa, 589 million people live without electricity.** As a result, a staggering 80 percent of the population relies on biomass products such as wood, charcoal and dung in order to cook.
5. **Of the 738 million people globally who lack access to clean water, 37 percent are living in sub-Saharan Africa.** Poverty in Africa results in more than 500 million people suffering from waterborne diseases. According to the U.N. Millennium Project, more than 50 percent of Africans have a water-related illness like cholera.
6. **Every year, sub-Saharan Africa misses out on about \$30 billion as productivity is compromised by water and sanitation problems.** This amount accounts for approximately five percent of the region's gross domestic product (GDP), exceeding the total amount of foreign aid sent to sub-Saharan Africa in 2003.
7. **Due to continuing violence, conflict and widespread human rights abuses,** the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reports that 18 million people are of concern to the agency, including stateless people and returnees.
8. **Fewer than 20 percent of African women have access to education.** Uneducated African women are twice as likely to contract AIDS and 50 percent less likely to immunize their children. Meanwhile, the children of African women with at least five years of schooling have a 40 percent higher chance of survival.
9. **Women in sub-Saharan Africa are more than 230 times more**

likely to die during childbirth or pregnancy than women in North America. Approximately one in 16 women living in sub-Saharan Africa will die during childbirth or pregnancy; only one in 4,000 women in North America will.

10. **More than one million people, mostly children under the age of five, die every year from malaria.** Malaria deaths in Africa alone account for 90 percent of all malaria deaths worldwide. Eighty percent of these victims are African children. The U.N. Millennium Project has calculated that a child in Africa dies from malaria every 30 seconds, or about 3,000 each day.

– *Jordanna Packtor*

Sources: [Global Issues](#), World Hunger, [World Bank](#), World Population Review, The Richest, Johns Hopkins Malaria Research Institute, [UNHCR](#), [The Water Project](#), [Gallup](#), [Global Finance](#)

Thoughts From Janice



What has been done? Janice Bueckert, our younger sister, wrote this story in 2007.

Once upon a time, there lived a fair maiden, whose name was Geneveva. She was the fairest in all the land. In fact, when people

came to see her, they stood in awe. Her auburn hair glistened in the sun; her blue eyes seemed to sparkle with some unknown secret. Her gracefulness and dignity made everyone around her love her with selfless abandon.

Her father was a merchant in the slave trade and her mother was a cosmetician. Genoevea also had two brothers. One named John and one named Peter. Both were valiant and brave and had fought many battles.

Not all battles were fought on the field however. Peter struggled with selflessness, people admired and misunderstood him for it, but he didn't know how to say no and in turn, he was often burnt out and worn to frail pieces within his soul.

Genoevea never appeared to struggle outwardly but she wrestled inwardly immensely.

One day as she was out for a walk, she saw a rose. Not an ordinary red or white one but an orange rose. Curious, she stopped to sniff it. As she breathed in the fragrant blossom, she felt herself being taken to a faraway land.

A land where she'd never been but had often longed to go. What she saw was not what she'd expected, however. What she saw was her father's trade taking hundreds of slaves captive.

She saw the slaves harvesting and having it taken from them with hardly a penny in payment.

She saw hungry children dying from horrible diseases, sometimes without a hand to hold in those last crucial hours. Just as she thought she could bear no more, she saw something that brought her to her knees in tears and prayer.

She saw her own hands beating slaves, snatching babies from their mother's arms and waving food tantalizingly in front of their noses then snatching it away with cold-hearted cruelty.

She saw that behind her turned back many precious lives were being taken and she had never done anything about it. She saw that she could've done anything and it would've been better than doing nothing, but she had chosen not to for the simple reason that it was inconvenient

and uncomfortable for her to do what was right.

As Genoevea drifted back she straightened and started wiping away the tears but stopped. NO, she said; let them ask me what is wrong. Let them listen to what I have to say. Surely, we can change this horrible situation.

But as she told her story, over and over again, people looked at her blankly, patted her on the head, and walked away.

Then one evening as she wept by the fireplace she told her brothers what had all transpired. Peter lifted her chin, looked her in the eye and said, "Change begins with one person, Gen. Be the change you want to see." Then Genoevea realized what he was saying and nodded.

If change was going to occur, she couldn't just tell people about the problem, she had to do something about it herself. So from then on, she worked to free the slaves, and to restore equality among all people. It wasn't easy, but she knew that she had to do something or die.

Now, I'm sure you are wondering (or should be anyway) how the story ends. Well, frankly, that is entirely up to you. See, this is an allegorical sort of story. the slave merchant represents every one of us. the slaves are those in developing countries, trying to grow coffee, cacao, among others and are getting pennies for it-literally.

For example, one farmer, who used to grow coffee, hacked his coffee bean plants down and started growing khat, which is a drug that can induce manic behavior, hyperactivity, hallucinations, and affect the liver. It is also an effective anorectic.

The farmer didn't want to grow the drug, but he was forced to, because he couldn't afford to feed his family with what he was getting paid for the coffee. Therefore, we are all slave traders when we do not do anything to change the situation.

How, you may ask? Well, there are options, in some stores they sell fair trade coffee and hot chocolate. There are also many fair trade options on the internet. Small changes like buying fair trade coffee isn't much, but it's better than turning your back on people dying.

What fair trade does is it works to bring farmers in developing

BEAUTY IN A SCORCHED LAND

countries a fair price for their products. Which helps people start helping themselves.

It's a small start, but isn't doing something small better than doing nothing at all?

Consider this. You may not be able to change the world but you can change the world that one person lives in.

-*"Don't turn your back, do something."*- Janice Bueckert (AKA Janice Constant).



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Beauty in a Scorched Land



Isaiah 58:9-11 (NIV)

Then you will call and the Lord will answer; you will cry for help and

he will say: Here am I. If you do away with the yoke of oppression, with the pointing finger and malicious talk, and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become as the noonday. The Lord will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail.

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Heading Out

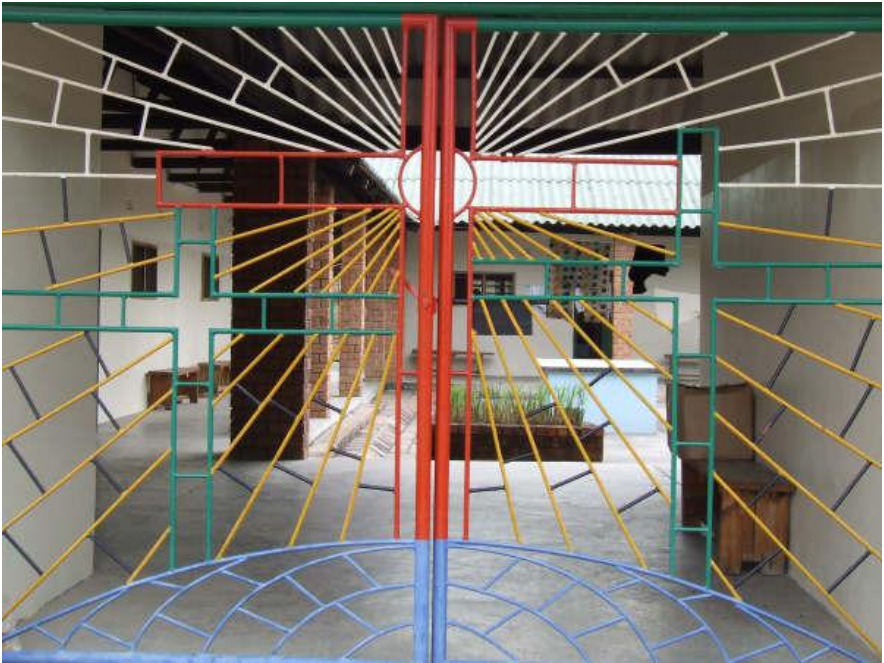


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Heading Home



Additional Thoughts



If you don't care about what the Bible says you may want to skip this section. However, if you're wondering if the Bible has anything more to say about this subject, it does! In fact there's about 2,000 verses in there that speak about issues relating to the poor. The list below is just a very basic starting point but it'll get you going. (Hopefully in more ways than one!)

What? No Bible? Type the verse references into google and read them there. Think about it, if you read the verses below you'll only have about

BEAUTY IN A SCORCHED LAND

1,979 verses to go to get the full overview!

Ezekiel 16:49-50.

Isaiah 10:1-3.

Proverbs 11: 24-28.

2 Corinthians 9:6-15.

James 2:14-17.

The Authors

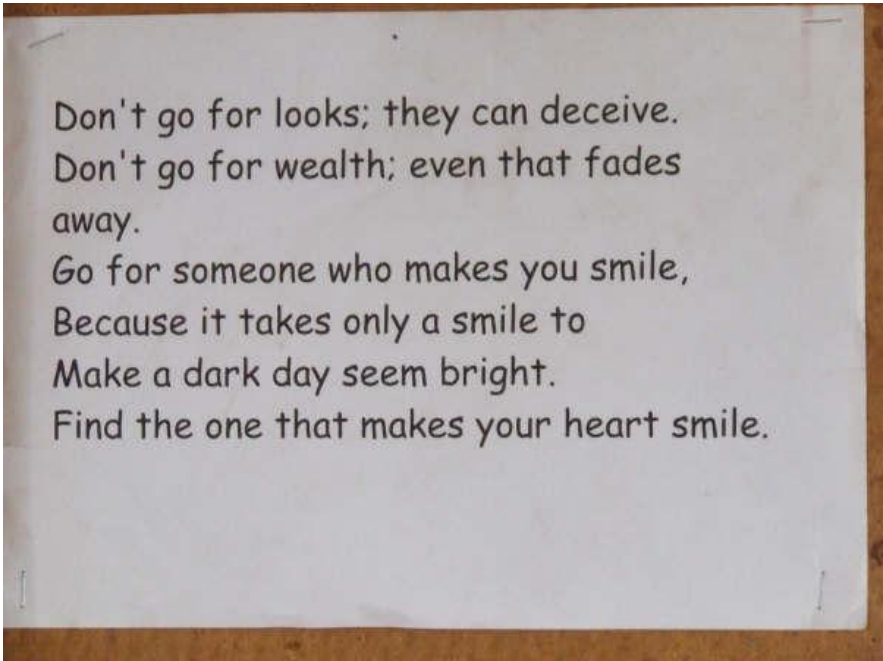


Kelvin, Janice and Charlene (in that order)

Janice is now a happy (on most days) homemaker. She and Charlene can also be heard performing on the Divine Signature album, Thank You, Jesus (itunes/amazon ect). Charlene continues to work as a nurse and is active in the various ministries of River Side Bible Church. (www.riversidebiblechurch.ca). Kelvin continues to write. Oddly enough, one of his most recent projects was a book by Marilyn Daniels titled, Marilyn's Meditations. Charlene met Marilyn on the trip described in this book

and later, introduced Marilyn to Kelvin. Who knew that relationship would lead to a book? On most days Kelvin can be found hiding at his website www.kelvinbueckert.com .

The Last Word



A quote that was hanging in one of the clinics...

