



## FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS

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Amazing Zimbabwe

Dearest Supporters,

I do apologize for the length of time that has elapsed between email updates. Three weeks ago when I was in Bulawayo the internet for the whole country was down. The story that went around was that some gifted vandal was assuming the main fiber optic cable for the country was just regular copper wire and cut through it as he was stealing the wire for resale. You can imagine what a mess that was to repair. Last week when I was in town the electricity was off for the whole city. Think about what that means. No traffic lights, no cash registers, no computers, no lighting (the elevators don't work anyway). This was in the downtown area of a city of 500,000 (?) people. The smaller shops that do not have huge electricity demands carry their portable petrol generators out to the sidewalk and they can sort of resume business as usual. If you can find a way to heat water to make coffee, it makes for a relaxing time, since you can't get anything else done. Getting frustrated doesn't solve anything.

I am beginning to understand how a rat that spends endless days in a maze must feel. Over the past two weeks, I have made trips to two parts of Zimbabwe that I have never visited before. The purpose has been to collect maize that was donated for the use of EBI. The response of these little rural churches has been both magnificent and humbling. More than 25 years ago, the late Linda Stern counseled Chris and I (as we were coming to Zimbabwe for the first time as a family) to invest our time and energies in the lives of others rather than becoming fixated with projects which will only fall apart with the passage of time. It was wise counsel. On these journeys I got to enjoy the kind of interaction with our church people that is precious beyond price.

The Toyota takes a hammering over all the dirt roads we traveled. One shock absorber bracket was broken for the fourth time. The first trip to the most southwestern part of the Mtshabezi District took us almost as far as the Botswana border and about eight hours of time. Norman Dladla (another lecturer here at EBI) was my companion and guide. Dladla had been to a Baptism-Communion weekend to this area the week before and made arrangements for us to meet the deacon for the area and go around. Financially, it may not make sense when comparing the expense of collecting maize with a value to \$20/bag against the cost of collection. My conclusion is that it is a necessity regardless of the cost analysis. EBI asked these churches for support, and this is what they were able to give. It would be rude and insulting to despise their efforts at responding. Besides, there is no way that I would relinquish the opportunity to experience hospitality to visitors which is the hallmark of Ndebele life. Last week, a very aged rooster made the ultimate sacrifice so that we could enjoy sadza with vegetables and meat. I have no idea where this remote village came up with three cokes for their distinguished visitors. And every place that we stopped also gladly made an additional contribution for our benefit. I have more unshelled peanuts than we will ever use.

The second trip was to the far western stretches of the Matopo District. This time Alexious Nkomo (another lecturer) was my guide, since he had started his church work as an evangelist for Matopo District almost 20 years ago. Again we were traveling north, south, east, and west over what would only be called "dirt roads" by the loosest application of the definition. I thought that I had already appreciated the magnificence of the Matopo Hills, but we saw scenery that absolutely requires a halt and examination. What a world our God has created!

First tea (according to hobbit lifestyle) was in a smoke-filled cooking hut and was complemented with uncooked corn meal made into balls and cooked in boiling water. These are called “African muffins” and are about as bland and tasteless as anyone can imagine. My eyes were watering from the smoke as the wife of the home knelt by the fire and roasted some shelled peanuts for us to take along. The pastor of Lushumbe church requested to walk to EBI this coming Monday to root through some old bicycle parts that have been stored here to determine if there were enough pieces to make one bicycle. Since I have no idea where we were I also have no idea how far he will be walking.

The next memorable encounter was at a village where we stopped to ask for directions. In African culture there is no such thing as a brief encounter. Etiquette requires an introduction, explanation of purpose, enquiries about the health of everyone in the village, discussion of possible common relatives, when the rains are coming, and finally where are we? This particular village was memorable for two reasons. First, Mrs. Mpofo is the mother of two daughters. Their names are Joy and Hope. So, of course, I had to open my wallet and pass around my favorite picture of my daughters, Joy and Hope. Second, firmly grounded was a vintage Massey Ferguson tractor such as I grew up driving. Discussion with the brother-in-law produced the information that the engine had been overhauled about five years ago and that the tractor had been allowed to sit since it was now surplus to the family farming operation needs. I left my card as EBI Principal and said that we would be in touch. It only needs tires, battery, distributor, voltage regulator, carburetor and a few other nonessential parts. An offer could be in the making. Second tea was at the home of Nkomo’s “sister” (actually aunt) and this time included some deep fat fried flour balls that I thoroughly enjoyed. After collecting maize from the remaining churches, we started the long trek home. Nkomo has this bizarre idea that ostrich farming would be a good project for EBI to generate some income. We stopped at a village that had about 100 ostriches and talked with the farmer. I’m not convinced but perhaps the idea does have some merit. We’re still talking and investigating.

I want to close with some amusing anecdotes for Bob Barber, who so enjoyed the local newspaper affectionately called the Bulawayo “Comical” (in actuality, Chronicle). The page three story was about the fact that the Japanese government donated some fire tenders (firetrucks), one of which was allocated to the town of Hwange. “However, the Town Board has no firemen to do the fire fighting,” reports the paper. Page eleven has an advertisement that Andy’s Haven Hardware is having a special opening on “Bugler (Burglar) Bars.” I wonder if they play the Zimbabwe National Anthem or “Taps”? The “Baccosi” Express offers a natural adult habitat for your drinking pleasure. “Why drink on the street when you can have the comfort of our facilities?” Sorry, Bob, but I can’t locate the article that mentioned that a certain prize for quality African leadership was not awarded for 2009 because there were no nominations. Life goes on. As always we appreciate all of your prayers and support.

Make it count,  
Steve and Chris

We serve under the auspices of Brethren in Christ World Missions. Contributions towards our ministry may be sent to Brethren in Christ world Missions, PO Box 390, Grantham PA 17027-0390 or in Canada, 2700 Bristol Circle, Oakville, ON L6H 6E1.