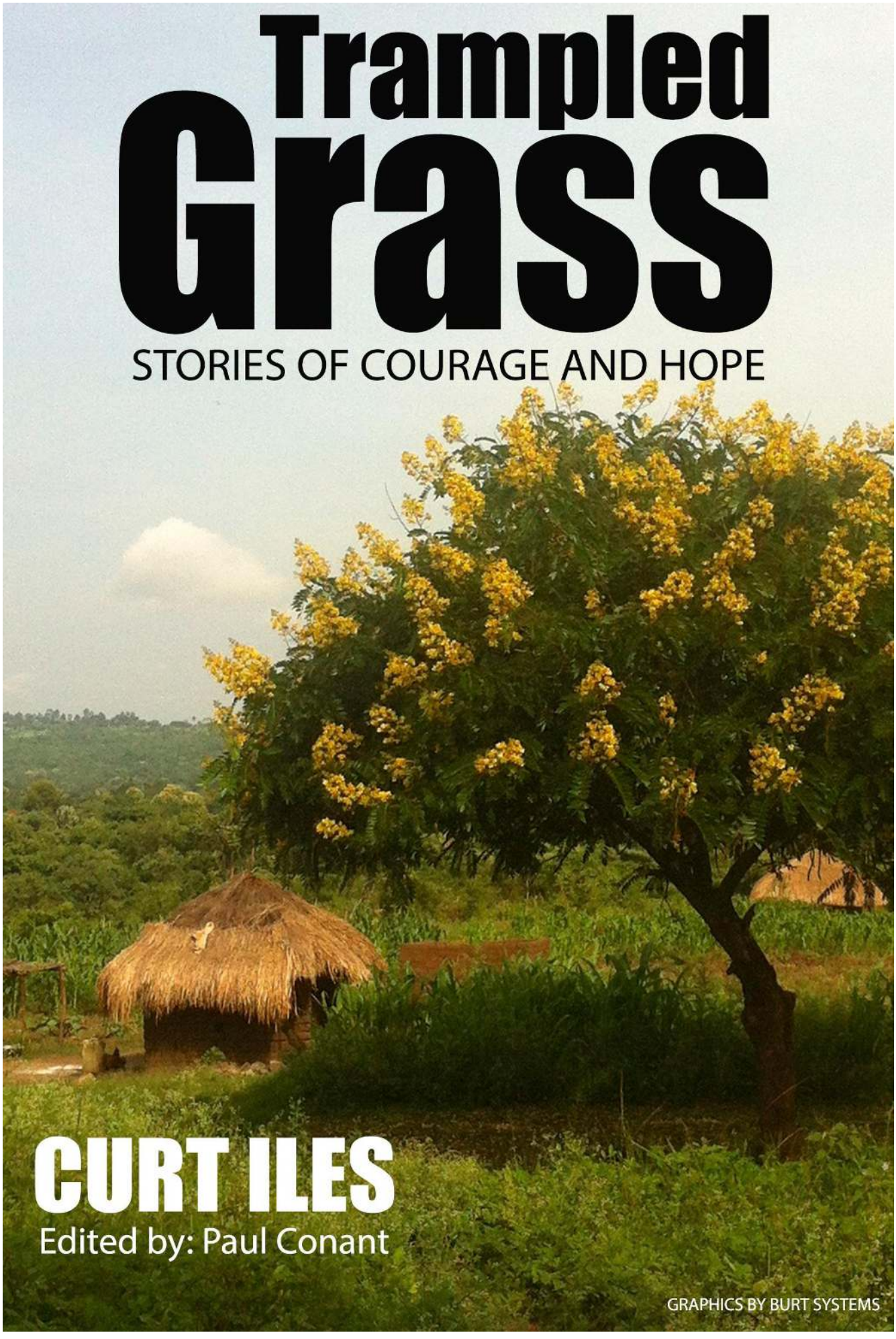
Trampled Grass

STORIES OF COURAGE AND HOPE



CURT ILES

Edited by: Paul Conant

GRAPHICS BY BURT SYSTEMS

Trampled Grass

Stories of Courage and Hope

S.C. Iles

Creekbank Stories LLC

www.creekbank.net

creekbank.stories@gmail.com

PO Box 332

Dry Creek, LA 70637

Other books by S.C. “Curt” Iles

A Spent Bullet

Christmas Jelly

Uncle Sam: A Horse’s Tale

Deep Roots

A Good Place

The Wayfaring Stranger

The Mockingbird’s Song

Hearts across the Water

Wind in the Pines

The Old House

Stories from the Creekbank

Learn more at http://www.creekbank.net

S.C. “Curt” Iles is represented by the MacGregor Literary Agency

In Appreciation

Trampled Grass is possible through the encouragement of our colleagues, Bob and Nancy Calvert, David and Renee Crane, and Tim and Charlotte Cearly.

Thanks to Kari Miller who coordinates our ministry from the U.S.

As always, we depend on the skill of Paul Conant with PWCEditing.

http://www.pwc-editing.com

Many of the touching photos are from the camera of our colleague Jo Ann Bradberry.

Anthony Mugisha and Agatha Muhaise of Uganda's BurtSystems have helped make *Trampled Grass* both attractive and easy to read.

I hope my love and admiration for my wife DeDe shows through the pages of this book. Our African journey has deepened my respect for my wife of thirty-five years. DeDe, you are an amazing woman.

Table of Contents

Beyond the rivers of Ethiopia, there is a land where the sound of wings is heard. A time is coming when the Lord Almighty will receive offerings from this land divided by rivers, this strong and powerful nation, this tall and smooth-skinned people, who are feared all over the world. They will come to Mount Zion, where the Lord Almighty is worshiped.

-Isaiah 18:1, 7 Good News Translations (GNT)

“Uganda is a fairy tale. The scenery is different, and most of all, the people are different from anywhere else in Africa.”

-Winston Churchill 1908

A Word from the Author

"The shortest distance between the truth and a human heart is a story."

Anthony DeMello

I'm a storyteller.

It's what I do. It's who I am.

Trampled Grass contains stories of the courageous heroes we've met in the two countries we've come to love, Uganda and South Sudan.

There are two types of heroes in these stories: The brave men and women who've fled the current fighting in the world's newest country, South Sudan. They are Isaiah's " . . . tall and smooth peoples . . . from the land divided by the rivers."

The second group is comprised of the northern Ugandans who've opened their land and hearts to the South Sudanese. Most have survived war and displacement themselves. They have taken their pain and used it to help others. Churchill's description of them as "different from anyone else in Africa" holds true.

I wrote *Trampled Grass* out of a promise as well as dream.

A *promise* made to dozens of refugees, as they begged, "Please don't forget us Tell our stories."

This short book is my attempt to fulfill their request.

It's also part of a *dream*.

I have a dream that peace will return to South Sudan and its borderlands.

A dream that readers like you—whether in America or elsewhere—will choose to become involved in this part of the world. *Trampled Grass* has numerous links and photos to help you explore the needs and opportunities.

My wife DeDe and I are lifetime Louisianans who now serve with the Southern Baptist Convention's International Mission Board in Africa. We serve on the Chadan Engagement Team. Our focus is the 118 unreached people groups of southern Chad, plus South Sudan and its borderlands.

Our task is linking American and African churches to these groups that are unreached for a reason: they live in difficult places and are often hostile to the

Gospel of Jesus Christ.

It's not a journey for the faint of heart but hopefully these stories will be a reminder that it's worth whatever it takes.

All proceeds from *Trampled Grass* will benefit our organization's funding offering, the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering. Nothing would make us happier than your investment in the nearly five thousand fellow missionaries serving throughout the world.

Your gifts can allow young families who are ready to come serve in areas like ours.

You can learn more and give at www.imb.org.

Curt Iles

Entebbe, Uganda

November 2014

www.creekbank.net

I STAND AMAZED 1

Pay Attention.

Be Astonished.

Tell Others.

–Mary Oliver

In the mirror: may we never lose the curiosity that defines a child.

That's basically what our two years in Africa have consisted of.

Paying attention to the people and places around us

This Continent never fails to astonish. We daily stand amazed.

We see beauty and hospitality beyond words to describe.

Karuma Falls on the Victoria Nile River is where Uganda's "Up Country" region begins.

We also have observed soul-astonishing pain and suffering.

"As they began shooting at us, I ran one way and my father the other . . . I've not seen him since. I don't know if he's alive or dead."

It'd be easier to ignore these astonishments. But we must tell others.

When you leave a refugee camp or small village, residents grab you by the arm, "Please don't forget us. Tell other Americans about us."

I'm trying to fulfill their request.

My job is to tell their stories. It's the purpose of this small book.

Don't worry that each chapter is sad and morbid.

You'll laugh at some of the forty stories.

Some will make you cry. That's the effect they had on me.

I pray you'll take all of these tales into your heart.

These are stories of courage and hope:

John, a courageous pastor, who returns to the middle of a war to "find his people."

A hero named Margaret who took her own refugee experience and used it to bring hope to an entire refugee camp.

Peter, a Dinka refugee on the run with his family, adopts a lonely boy from the Anuak tribe.

As we begin, a word of advice:

I love Africa but often have hankerings for things I miss from back home.

Right now, I've coveting a bag of Cheetos.

Not just any kind—but crunchy Cheetos. I hope someone will bring a bag (or two) over soon.

When those of us in self-exile get these delectable treats, we face a conundrum: do we devour the entire bag in one fell swoop or munch a handful of Cheetos each day?

We have friends over here who nearly needed marriage counseling after the wife scarfed down a whole care package of Reese's Peanut Butter Cups while the husband was away!

Trampled Grass is like that bag of Cheetos (or Reese's Cups); you can read through it quickly bypassing (for now) the links.

Or you can slowly savor each chapter with its portals, photos, songs, audio and video.

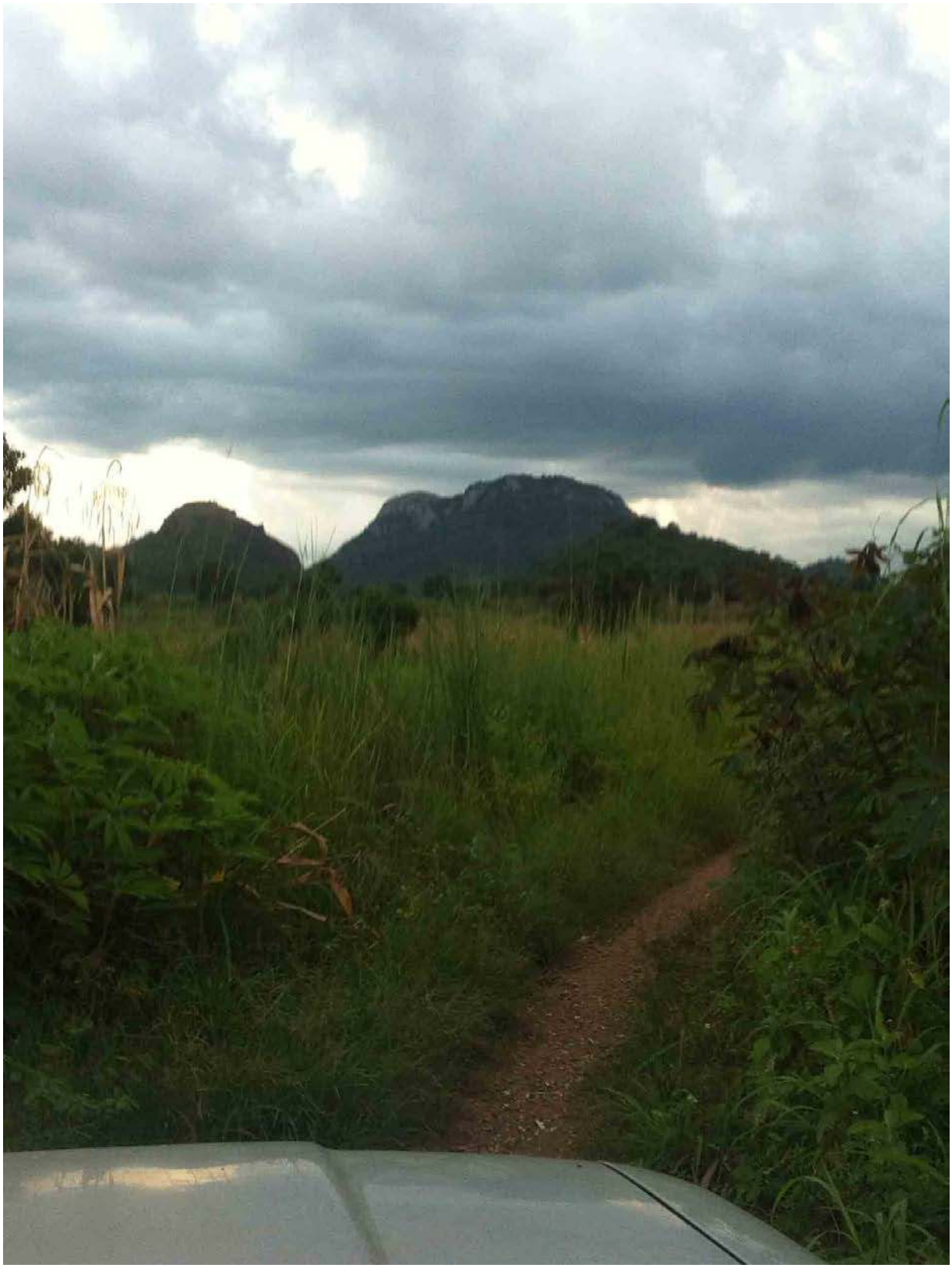
Snippet calls these links "discoverables." They allow you, the reader, to delve deeper into the stories.

Unlike those eaten Cheetos, these links will be present on your next visit. I've tried to capture it with my journal, camera, and soul. It’s now your book.

Enjoy. Be astonished. Pass it on.

S.C. Iles

Entebbe, Uganda



TRAMPLED GRASS 2

"When two elephants fight, it's the grass that gets trampled."

—African Proverb

This collection of stories is not about the two elephants that are destroying our adopted country of South Sudan. We'll leave that to the political experts. As we say back home, "I don't have a dog (or elephant) in that fight."

My concern, as well as stories, is about the trampled grass: the innocent everyday citizens of South Sudan.

"This war took away something we must have: our opportunity at education."
—Ulua Camp School Boys.

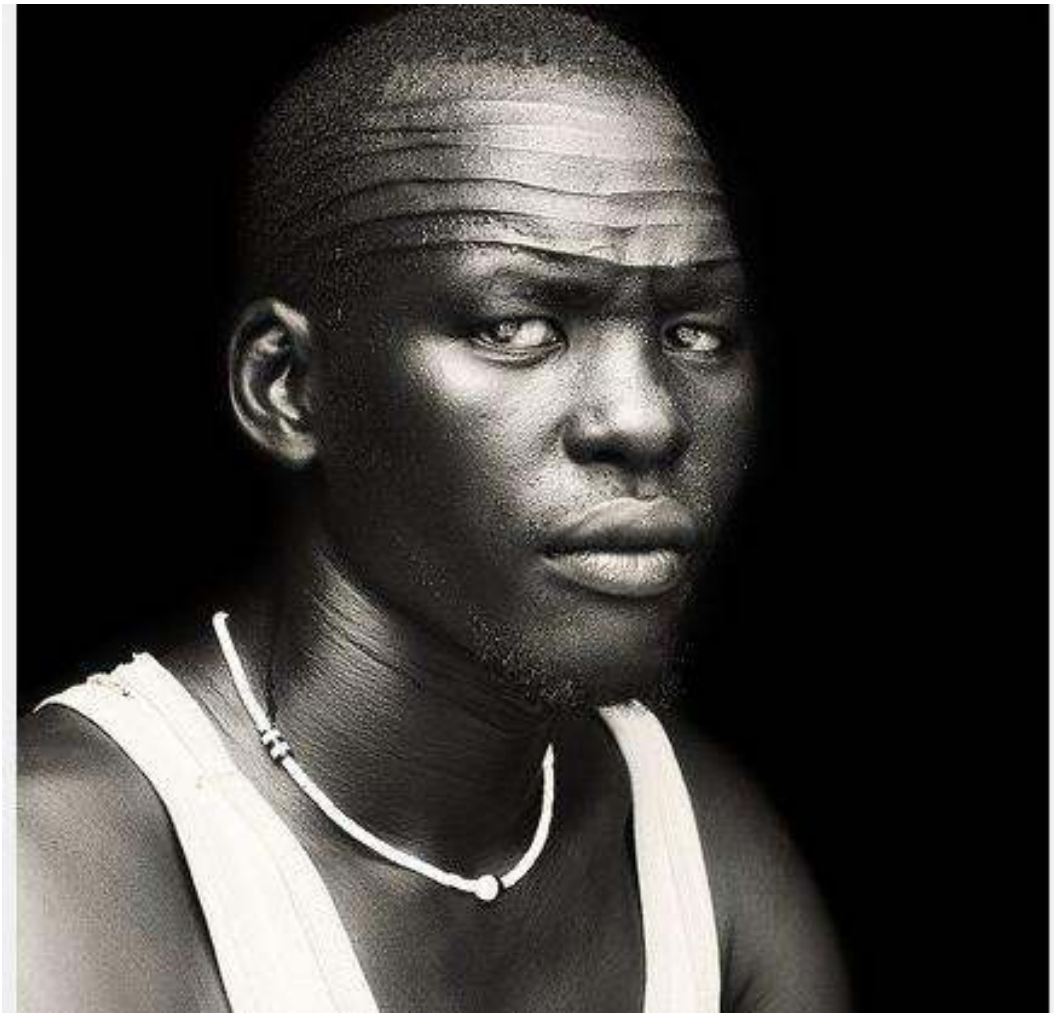
They are personally paying the price for the civil war that has gripped South Sudan since mid-December 2013.

We've met these brave people in the refugee camps and settlements along the border of South Sudan and its neighbor, Uganda. These are their stories.

The history and background of the current situation is complex and long. Here's how it's playing out presently:

A power struggle exists between the two strongest men in South Sudan, President Salva Kiir and former Vice President Riek Machar. Their sharing of power broke in July 2013 when President Kiir fired his entire cabinet, including Machar.

Kiir is from the Dinka tribe, South Sudan's largest tribe. Machar is from its second largest, the Nuer.



Nuer Tribal Scarification

Dinka facial markings

Learn more about the two tribes and how these facial markings have played a part in the violence.

The fighting is not all about ethnic allegiance, but the people you'll meet in the following stories—Nuer, Dinka, Shilluk, or Zande— were trampled by soldiers, rebels, even neighbors who viewed them as the enemy.

Many lost family members.

Map of South Sudan and its neighbors.

Many fled south to the Ugandan border. That's where we met them in the refugee camps and villages.

They are the trampled grass. These are their stories and of the heroes who've reached out to them. Enjoy!

Heroes: Once refugees, Joseph and Jessica Anyovi, have

used their past experiences to help others.

OH, MY SOUL! 3

Dedication. It's the right word for a couple who've spent twenty-four years of their lives in Africa.

Bob and Nancy Calvert are a unique couple. How else would you describe an Atlanta urbanite married to an Arkansas hillbilly who end up spending their lives in Africa?

Bob and Nancy Calvert have invested their lives in God's work in East Africa.

Bob has a saying for everything: "Oh, my soul," "Twist on the pig's tail" and a thousand more witticisms. Nancy, his wife of over thirty years, is one of the most insightful thinkers I've ever known.

- They have faithfully served in Africa since 1992.
- Raised four children on the Continent.

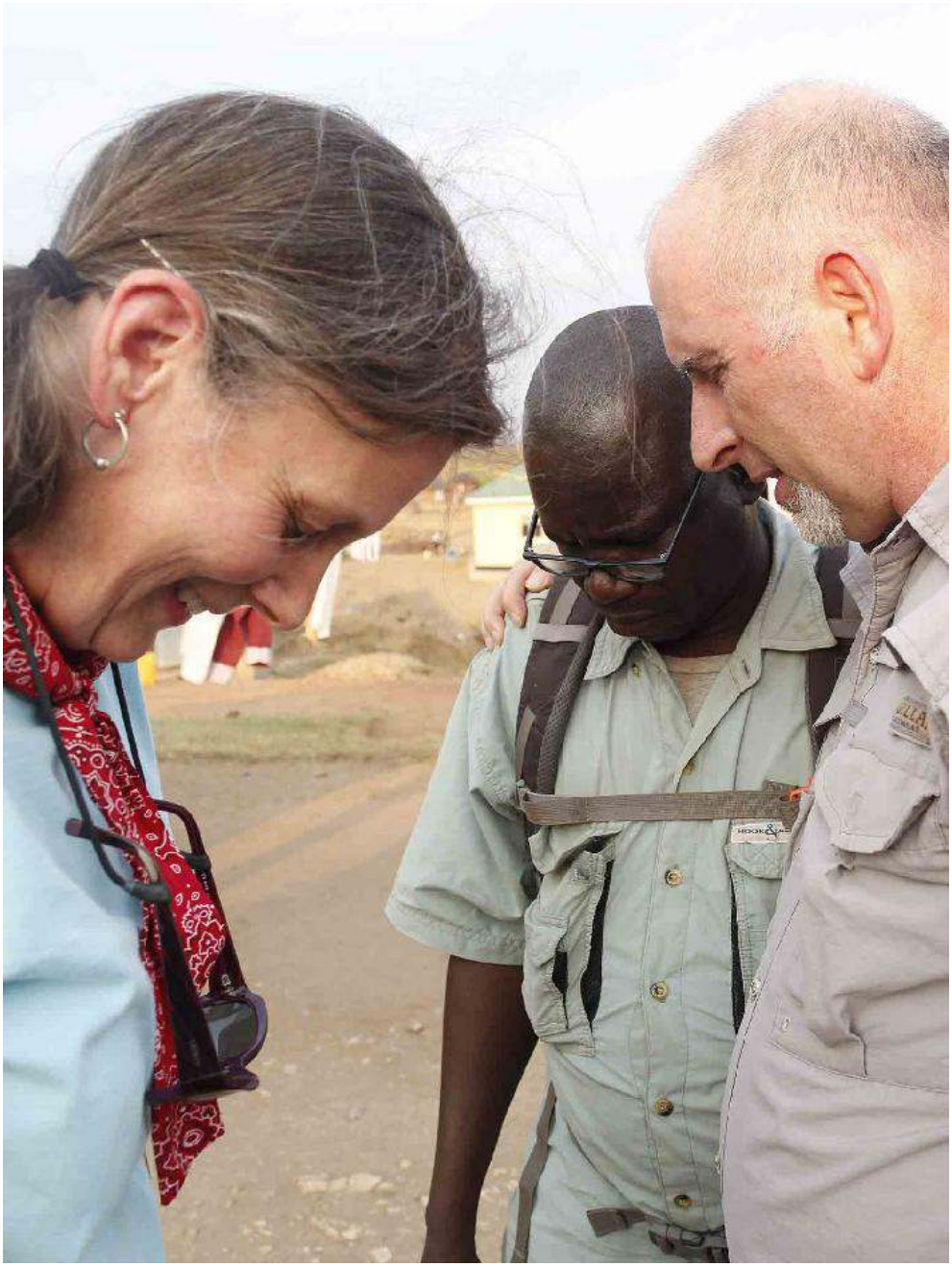
- Led thousands of Masai to Christ.
- - Mentored dozens of missionaries.
- Developed a story cloth that helps oral learners understand and share the Gospel.

James Metaloro shares from the story cloth in a Ugandan village.

When DeDe and I arrived in January 2013, the Calverts took us under their wing and became family to us.

Trampled Grass is dedicated to Bob and Nancy Calvert for their faithfulness and perseverance in following God's call. Thanks for showing us how it's done.

We encourage you to learn more about how you can use the Story Cloth right where you live.



Bob and Nancy Calvert pray with Pastor Tolbert at Faith Baptist in Nimule, South Sudan.


Up Country begins when you cross
Karuma Falls in western Uganda.

#UP COUNTRY 4

"I'm going up the country/Got to get away."

–Canned Heat in "Up the Country"

Most of the stories in Trampled Grass take place in the part of Uganda called "Up Country."

This rural and wild part of the country is often sneered at by residents in Kampala. It's considered backwards and unstable.

It's our favorite part of the country.

Uganda isn't a large country. Its size compares roughly to our state of Colorado.

Its neighbor to the north, South Sudan, is about the size of Texas with Oklahoma thrown in.

Comparison of Uganda and the United States

Up Country Uganda is rural. For better or worse, it's the real Africa.

You cannot understand Uganda without a geographical understanding of its relationship to the Nile River.

The Nile begins its long journey as it surges out of Lake Victoria at Jinja, Uganda. This is considered the source of the great river.

This section, commonly known as the Victoria Nile, flows north then turns west across central Uganda where much of it is actually a large swampy area called Lake Kyoga.

Uganda's main north-south highway crosses the Nile at one of the country's most beautiful spots, Karuma Falls. This is where Up Country begins.

Immediately, there is a different look and ambiance.

The trees thin as grasslands dotted with Palm Trees dominate the landscape.

The people are different also. The Up Country tribes are primarily Nilotic while those south of the Nile are Bantu. This creates a delineation between the two regions.

Until a decade ago, you crossed at Karuma Falls at the possible risk of your life. Northern Uganda was in the purview of the Lord's Resistance Army.

More on that misnamed group later.

Before turning north, the Nile passes through Murchison Falls National Park in and out of Lake Albert. This area is renowned for its animal life and beauty.

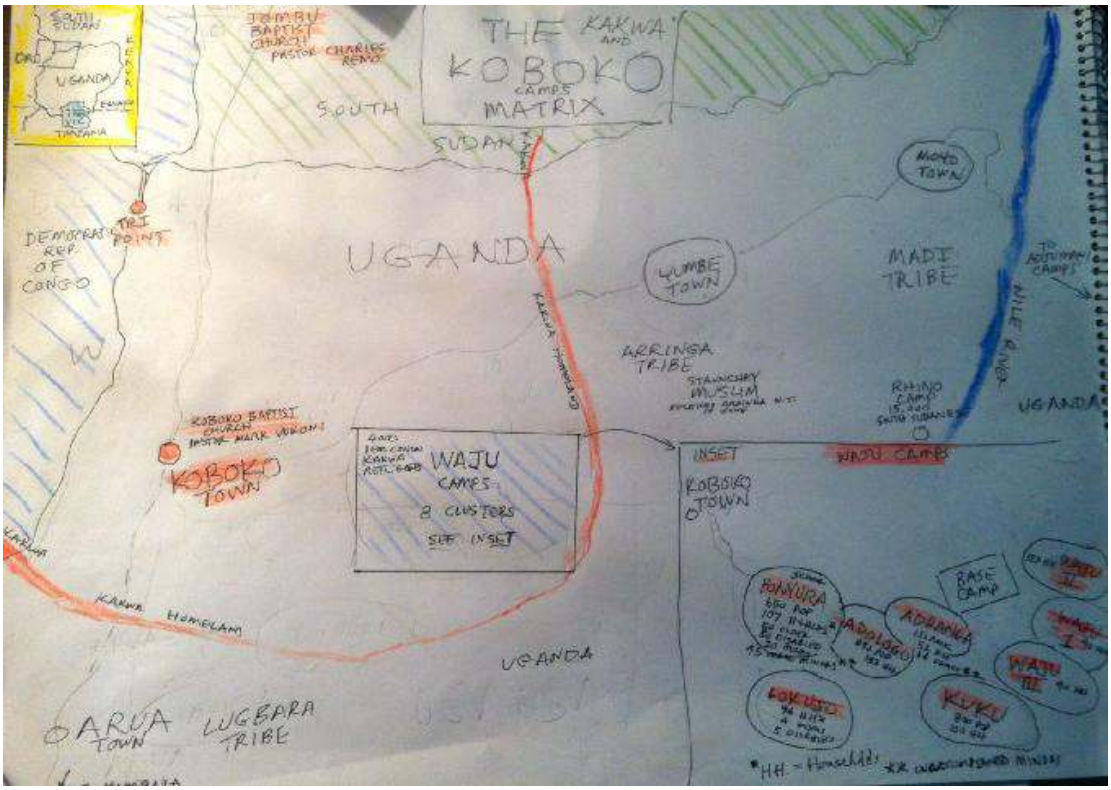
Yawning Lion at Murchison Falls National Park, Uganda

It's now called the Albert Nile and crisscrosses Up Country before entering South Sudan on its continued long journey to Egypt.

Most of the stories in this book take place along the Albert Nile. There are three major refugee camps along the River: Adjumani Camps, Rhino Camps, and Koboko Camps.

Adjumani, which is actually a dozen clusters covering a countywide area, is where Dinka refugees have settled.

Rhino Camp is primarily occupied by the Nuer tribe. Koboko Camp contains Kakwa refugees from neighboring Congo.



Matrix of Koboko Camp clusters

I feel much more comfortable in Up Country than on the urban shores along Lake Victoria.

It's probably because I'm from "the sticks in Louisiana." I'm Up Country. At least that's what the folks in Louisiana would call us.

That's all right, Jesus was Up Country as far as the Jerusalem Jews were concerned. He and his band of followers were considered "Country Bumpkins."

People from our largest city, New Orleans, sneer at our part of Louisiana as "backwards and ignorant."

That's similar to the reaction of citified Kampalans to Uganda's distant north.

So I understand about how Up Country folks feel. Many times they use the term "marginalized." They're underdogs.

And we Americans always love an underdog.

Up Country.

Like John "Karamajong" Bell, I prefer the wild part of Uganda.

John Bell preferred Up Country.

Bell, a British colonial administrator, so preferred northern Uganda that visitors to his Entebbe office were invariably told, "He's not in. He's gone to Karamajong." That's how he got his nickname.

On our trips to the wild North, we tweet with hashtag #UpCountry

In Trampled Grass, you'll learn about the people who live Up Country, a place where you're made to feel welcome.

A place where babies often burst out crying at the sight of a white man. A place where we are showered with rural hospitality and kindness.

It's where we are often startled, surprised, and delighted.

At other times, shocked, disgusted, and disappointed.

It's Up Country.


Africa
CHINA
MEXICO
WESTERN EUROPE
INDIA
EASTERN EUROPE
UNITED STATES
JAPAN

OUR EUROPE 5

This Dinka elder said, "It's my first time to set my feet in Uganda."

Elders are treated with great respect in Africa.

Keri Reception Center

South Sudan/Uganda border

January 2014

I sat quietly with the other Mzees. "Mzee" is an African term of respect for an elder. I've got the gray hair to be invited into the circle. It was a meeting of South Sudan refugees who'd crossed the border north of Koboko, Uganda. They were telling their stories as they waited to learn their fate and destination.

An elder cleared his throat and nodded north. "The ones who started this war—their children are not

here."

The grizzled man, a veteran of a generation of civil war to free his country, continued,

“Where are the children and grandchildren of our South Sudanese leaders?”

He shook his head. "They are not here. The children of our leaders are in Europe in fine schools.

Away from what we’re experiencing.

In fact, they will never know the bitterness our children have of losing so much. They are in Europe.”

Most of us will never know how it feels to
lose our homes, our way of life, and our security.

He took a long look around the bleak landscape that was now home for his family.

“I guess for us, this is our Europe.”

Everyone sat in silence.

The trampled grass had spoken.

No more words were spoken. The circle dispersed in a Biblical pattern of oldest to youngest.

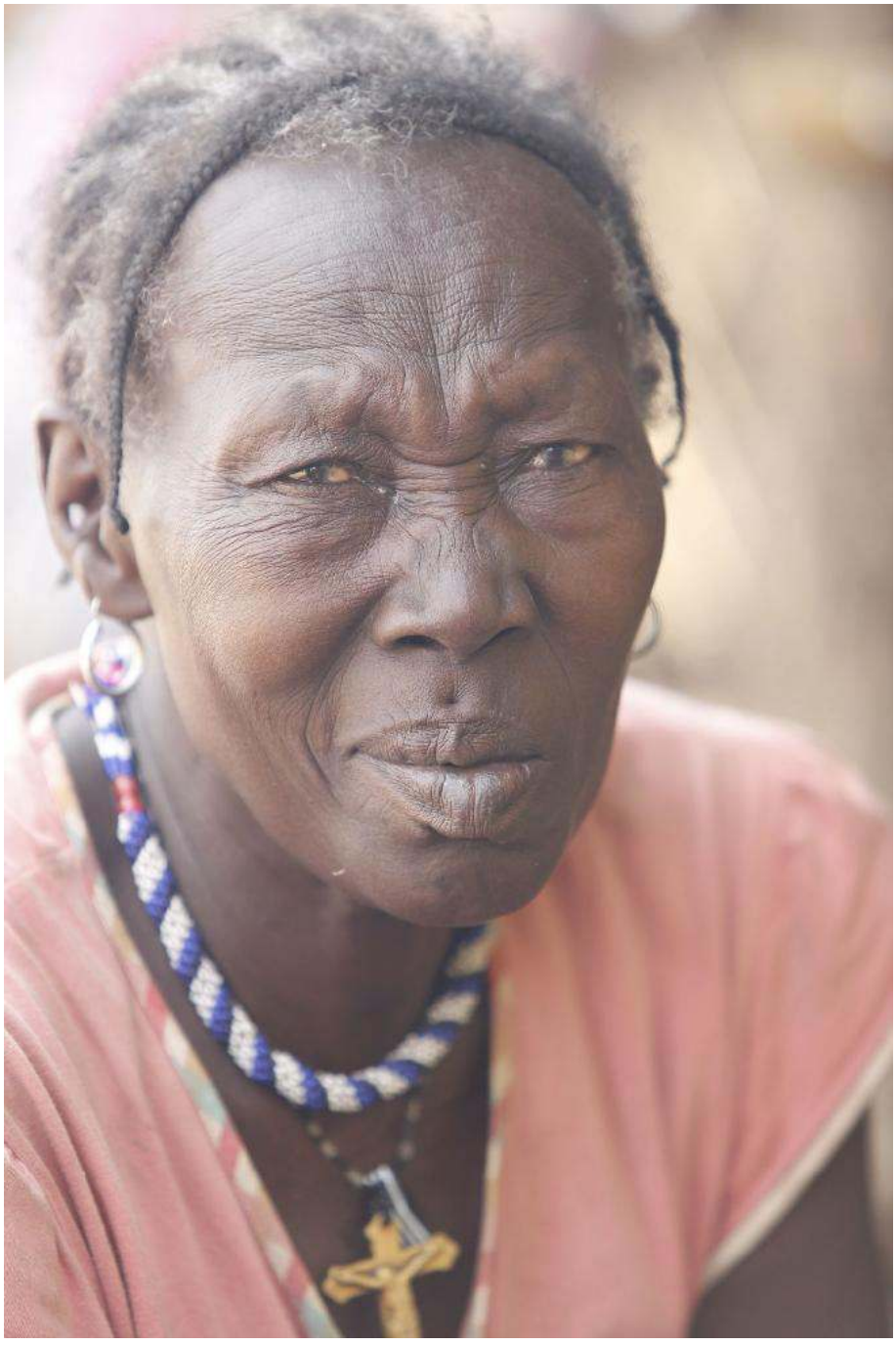
We sat there alone.

What could we do about this?

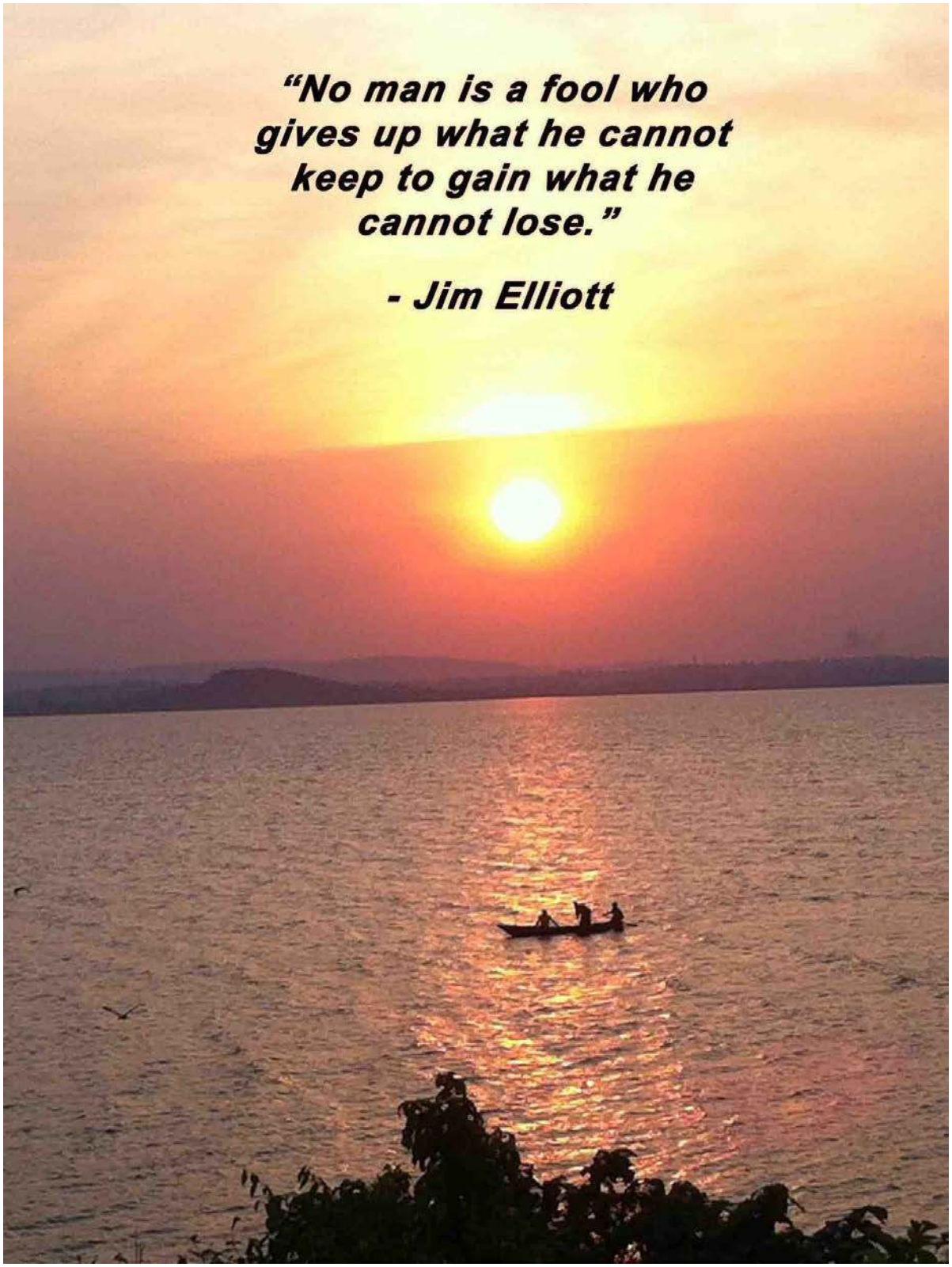
I did the only thing I know to do.

I wrote about it.

The stories of the trampled grass.



Many of the photos in 'Trampled Grass' surpass description, so we'll let them speak for themselves.


"No man is a fool who
gives up what he cannot
keep to gain what he
cannot lose."
- Jim Elliott

INDEPENDENCE 6

A New Nation. A New Baby

There is no love quite like
a mother for her child.

His name was Independence.

A new child born on the new country's first day.

The first child born at South Sudan's Juba Hospital shortly after midnight.

9 July 2011.

The happy birth of Baby Moses.

Full of hope and promise.

His parents gave him the full name of Moses Independence. The mother, Josephine, shared of her high hopes for both her new son and the new country.

In fact, many South Sudanese referred to their nation as New Sudan. New Sudan.

A fresh start.

A new beginning.

Baby Moses

Sadly, three years later, war has broken out in New Sudan. The future is uncertain. It's a tragic story of dashed hope. Baby Independence's story is even sadder.

He died before his first birthday. Details are sketchy.

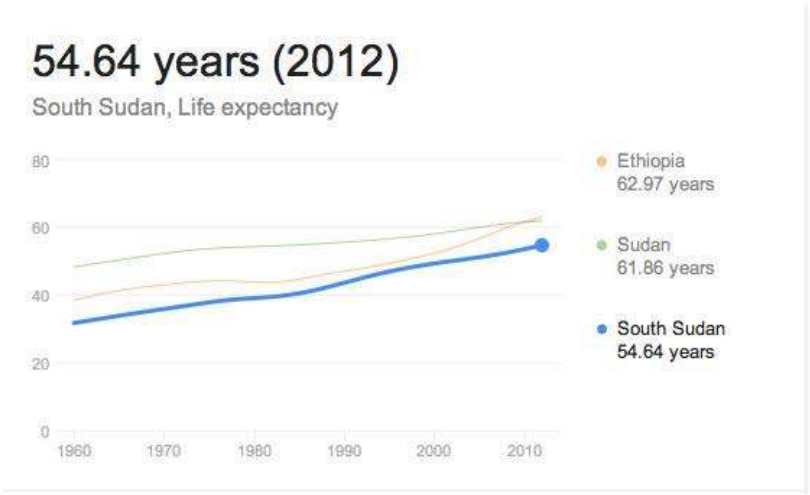
He became ill, got sicker, and the doctors and hospitals couldn't help him.

Baby Independence will never see his country grow into a true land of freedom and peace.

It shouldn't surprise us. Infant mortality is high.

The average life span of a man is slightly over fifty-four. That's what war, poverty, and famine do to the health of a nation.

South Sudan is still a place where women stoically realize that pregnancy may be a terminal condition. They may die giving birth to a new life.



The life span of a South Sudanese man is less than 57 years.

In Africa, the stats of those dying in war zones are not limited to mortars and machine guns. Many more die from malnutrition, opportunistic diseases, and famine.

Dead is dead. It doesn't have to be by a bullet.

Since the December (2013) fighting broke out between the rebels and government, many have written the obituary of New Sudan.

"If they can't get along for more than two years, what hope is there for this country?"

They fought the Arab north, where thousands died to bring this opportunity to become a new free nation, and now the selfishness of power-hungry leaders, has resulted in this ongoing war.

My home country, America, is known as the "Midwife of South Sudan." Our government and aid

organizations worked hard to broker the peace deal that created the world's newest nation.

The United States has poured millions of dollars into South Sudan. America the Midwife is now watching its baby on life support.

Probably like the midwives who delivered Baby Moses Independence felt as sickness sapped his young life.

Helpless.

Wondering what went wrong.

What could have been done differently?

South Sudan is on life support.

Her breathing is shallow.

But where there is breath, there's life.

David Deng, the son of a Dinka chief and American mother, said it well, "If you're not an optimist, you have no business being in South Sudan."

Things can change.

Things can get better.

Even if Africa seems cursed, things can turn around.

It won't happen overnight. It won't be easy.

Progress is seldom easy nor free.

I come from the Louisiana Piney Woods.

I come from Louisiana, the heart of rural United States South. It was probably the last part of America to move beyond the scourges that hold people back.

In the latter nineteenth century, malaria, yellow fever, measles, and smallpox still killed people.

Infant mortality was high. Once I stood in the oldest part of Dry Creek Cemetery with my mentor, Mr. Frank Miller. He pointed at the weathered headstones. "Look how every tall tombstone is surrounded by small ones."

He shook his head. "Most of the old timers buried at least one child. Some buried many."

Pointing at one grave, he said, "She died in childbirth. It was all too common back then."

The rural area that birthed me is much different now. I believe South Sudan can be also.

The new country has a long list of problems and challenges to overcome. The recent conflict has set this back. But there's still life.

And hope. There's a belief (held by those optimists like our Chadan team) that things can and will get better. I believe it's through changed hearts and minds that the nation can step beyond the present despair.

Without apology, I believe hearts and minds are only changed by the Spirit of God coming into a person. That's why we forge ahead with the Gospel.

It has the power to change lives.

And changed lives can produce a changed nation.

As another tough optimist/jailbird named Paul said, "Forgetting the past and striving for the future. . . ."

So, DeDe and I can honestly say that there's no part of the world we feel that we can make a difference more than in South Sudan.

It won't be easy. Good things seldom are.

South Sudan was just labeled the "World's Most Failed State."

That means there's only one way to go.

Forward.

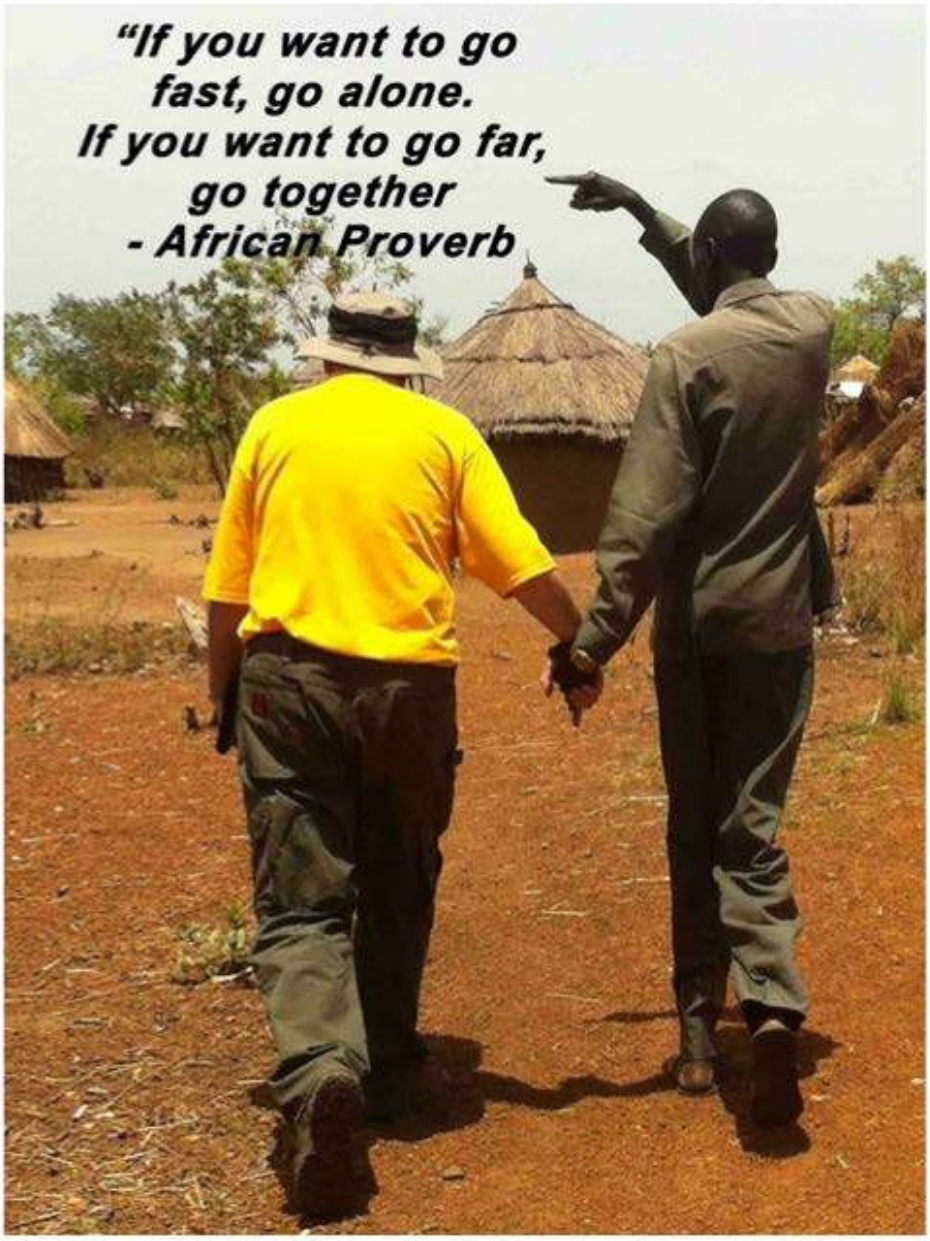
And with God's help, Better.

We cannot take our hands off the plow.

We will not look back.

Africa Stories recently featured another version of this story.

Please read and pass on.


"If you want to go
fast, go alone.
If you want to go far,
go together
- African Proverb

ALL TOGETHER 7

The African end of the log

If you don't read another word of Trampled Grass, please view this short powerful video. It's set to the song, "We're All in This Together" by the folk group "Old Crow Medicine Show."

This line from the song always touches me:

When you cry, I taste the salt in your tears.

It rips at my heart and soul.

We're all fellow travelers on this road called life.

The toll we pay is sharing the burdens of others.

We call it "helping lift the log."

I come from a family that's lived in the piney woods of southwestern Louisiana for nearly two centuries. Our culture still revolves around the Longleaf Pines and its grasslands.

19th Century log rafters on Louisiana's Calcasieu River

That's why the following story resonates with my heart:

In the pre-industrial days of lumbering, men lifted and loaded huge logs with manpower as well as oxen and mules.

The story is told of a lone traveler who happened upon a group of men lifting a log. There were nine men on one end of the log and only a solitary man on the other.

The traveler stopped. “Which end do y’all need help on?” The man on the lonely end of the log blurted out, "It's pretty obvious, ain't it?"

Here is how we feel this story applies to our work: People need the Good News about Jesus everywhere.

Most people “back home” in America have numerous chances to hear the Gospel. (I’ve always heard that the town of my birth, DeRidder, Louisiana has the highest churches per capita of any town or city in America.)

South Sudan, Chad, and northern Uganda are on the other end of the log.

People and countries are unreached for a reason: difficulty in geography, climate, and culture

The needs are great and the difficulties are challenging. Many people have never heard the Gospel.

Much of our work in South Sudan places us on the needy end of the log.

I think about the Lane and Jeremiadoss families. They've recently moved into South Sudan among the Dinka Rek people.

Robert Lane and Selvin Jeremiados. They and their families serve the Dinka Rek of South Sudan.

They serve on Chadan's Echelon Team. You can learn more on their team at Twitter #EchelonAfrica

These couples are excited to be among "their people" but face many challenges.

Will you help them lift their end of the log by praying for them as well as all of the work in South Sudan?

Ready to lift? 1 . . . 2 . . . 3 . . . Lift!

Because we're all in this together, and we cannot do it alone.

Here's the best way you can help lift.

We've come to learn that priority is a singular word. Here is our priority need:

1. **Prayer:** Prayer is like oxygen. We must have it to survive spiritually. We simply cannot make it without you lifting us up.

Pray for God's guidance, vision, and protection.

To learn more about how to pray for Chadan's Unreached Groups, our team's needs , and the International Mission Board's work, check out these links:

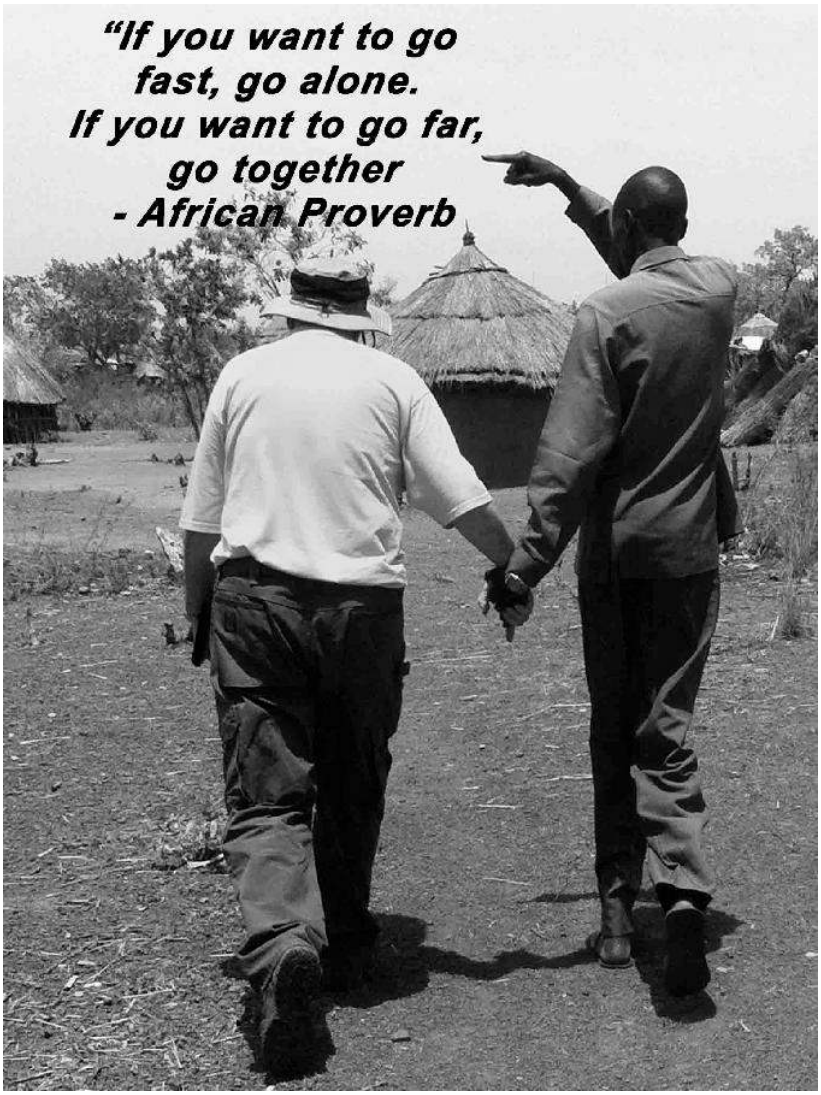
www.imb.org

www.creekbank.net

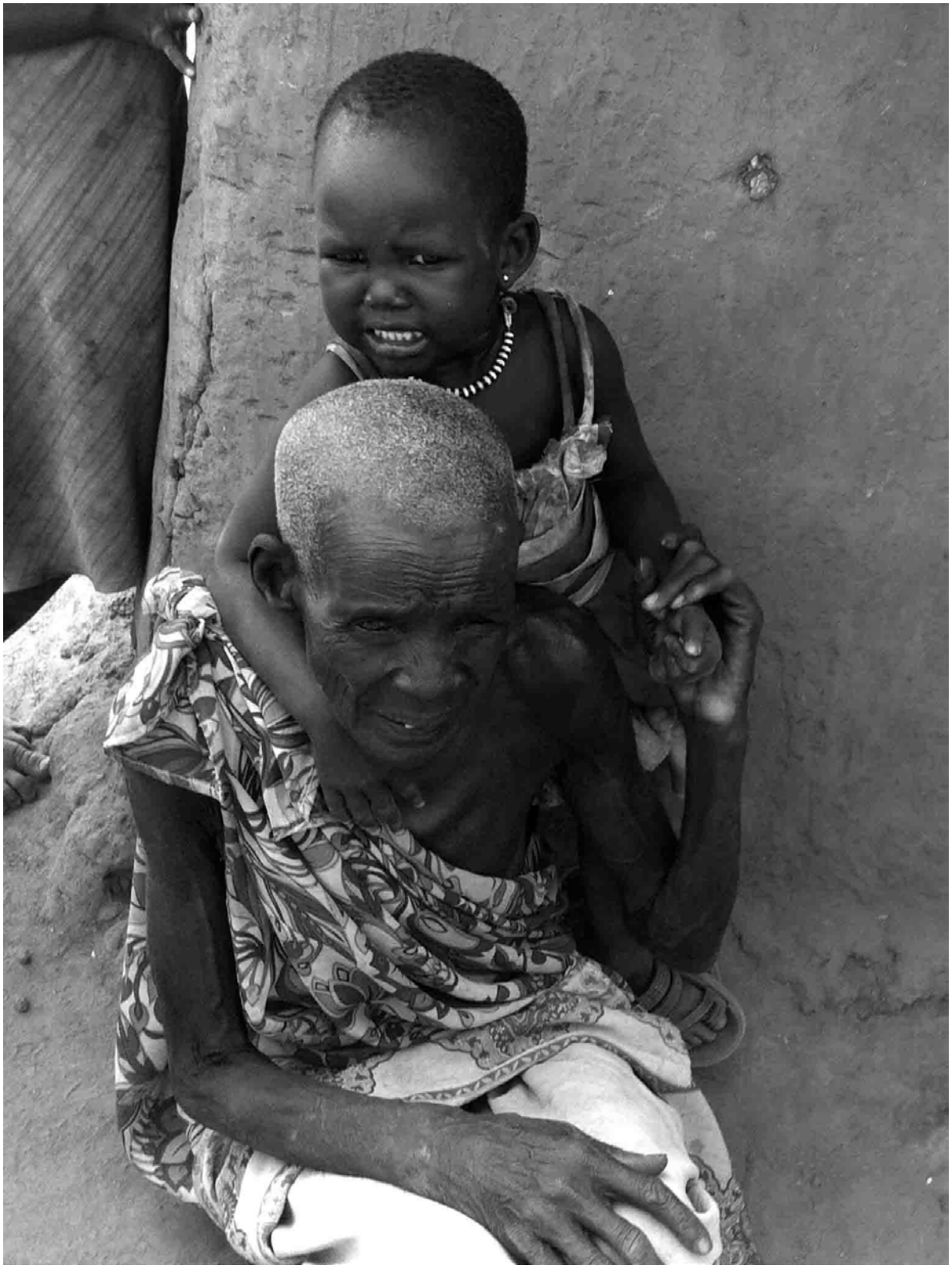
Africa Stories

Ethnologue.com

Pray often!



A photo and quote worth sharing. Coy Webb and Abrahim Kiir



VULNERABLE 8

It’s a word I've always had trouble pronouncing.

Vulnerable.

It means having no one to protect you. You’re on your own.

Not only that, but you have no advocate—no one who is stronger, older, or more powerful to defend you.

In fact, being vulnerable means you are at the mercy of all of the above. Nowhere is vulnerability more visible than in a refugee camp.

These are the most vulnerable, and this is how you can pray for them.

1. **Children and Teens**. All children face a difficult existence in a camp. None more so than the group called "unaccompanied minors."

It’s the term for children who arrived without a parent or even an adult. They may truly be orphans. Their parents may be dead.

Or they have been separated in the chaos and fighting surrounding their homes.

Anuak James with his "father" Peter. Also shown is Pastor Greg Crawford of First Baptist Rosepine LA

I think about James.

No one knew his story. Simply that he was alone.

Happily, he was “adopted” by fellow refugee Peter and his Dinka family.

We asked Peter, "Why did you take him in when you've got your own problems and large family? He's not even from your tribe."

He shrugged. "I found him out here sleeping on the ground. He had no one. We couldn't allow him to go on like that."

Anuak Region along South Sudan and Ethiopian border

I glanced from Peter the narrator to the young boy who was maybe ten or eleven.

Peter nodded.

"His name is James and he's the only Anuak in the entire refugee camp.

"We'd only met this Dinka man thirty minutes ago but already I'd formed an opinion.

He is a man of peace - a leader of the current refugees at the border camp.

Another hero.

I don't think it's too much to suspect he might really be an angel.

People who take in strangers in the midst of their own troubles certainly are angelic in my humble opinion. I grinned at the irony.

Everyone warns us, "Stay away from those Dinka. They're bad people.

"I've found that each tribe has angels. Sadly, the unraveling of South Sudan has shown how each tribe also has demons and agents of hate.

Angels take in the Jameses of the world to save them. The demons take them and turn them into child soldiers.

How to Pray: Pray for mercy, protection, and provision for all of the children without parents. Pray that families may be reunited. Pray that caring believers in the camps as well as local communities will take these children under their wings.

Pray for the child-headed households. These are usually siblings or cousins traveling together who are

led by an older sibling.

Pray for the teen boys. There are hundreds of young men in these refugee camps. Most were in school, speak reasonably good English, and want to move ahead. Their dreams have been shattered by the war. There are no schools in the camp and they face a bleak future.

Pray that Christian believers will step forward to disciple and mentor them. Many of our best, current South Sudanese pastors came to faith in Christ as refugees.

Idle Teen Boys "We want to be back in school."

2. **Elderly.** There are numerous older adults on whom the refugee journey has taken a horrible toll. Many do not have adequate shelter, bedding, and personal hygiene items. There are dozens of blind elderly due to cataracts.

Because of the vast numbers in the camps, the elderly easily can slip through the safety net.

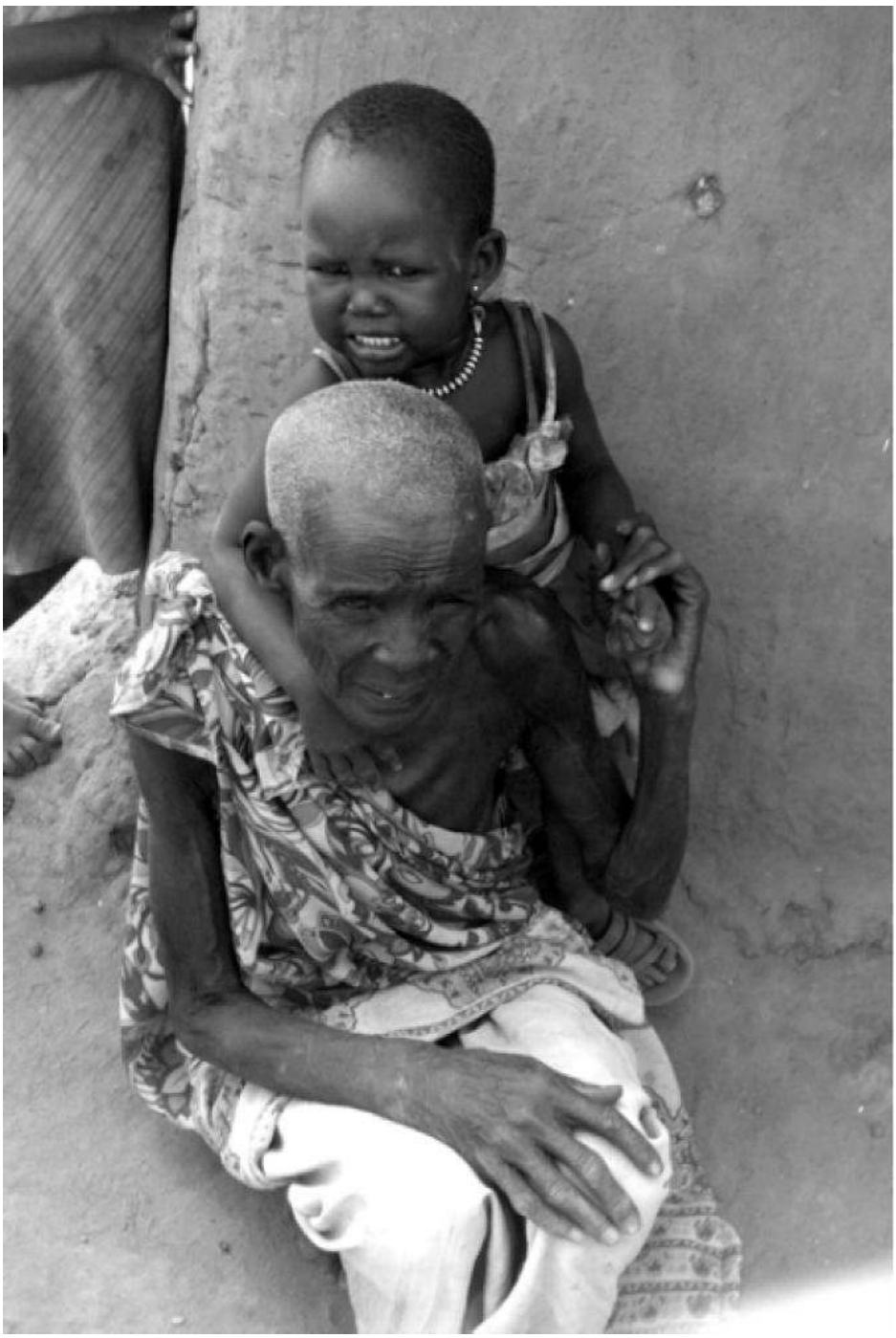
How to Pray: Pray for basic needs of the elderly to be met. Pray that many will see the love of Christ and receive the peace that passes all understanding.

3**. Pregnant Women.** There are over 1000 pregnant women in the camps of northern Uganda. Many will give birth in the camps in less than ideal conditions. In one Camp, we watched a woman, surrounded by other women, giving birth under a mango tree.

How to Pray: Pray that "Momma Kits" for pregnant women will be available as provided through local churches.

4.**The Traumatized.** So many people of all ages have seen horror and tragedy in the previous months.

Some have seen loved ones killed. Others have fled with only their lives. The camps are primarily comprised of women and children. The men have stayed behind or returned to salvage their homes or join the fighting. The families in camp live with daily uncertainty. Many are carrying deep emotional scars.



Mzee Momma showed her South Sudanese registration card listing her birth year as 1903. Her great-granddaughter was scared of white men.

HEART-GIFTS

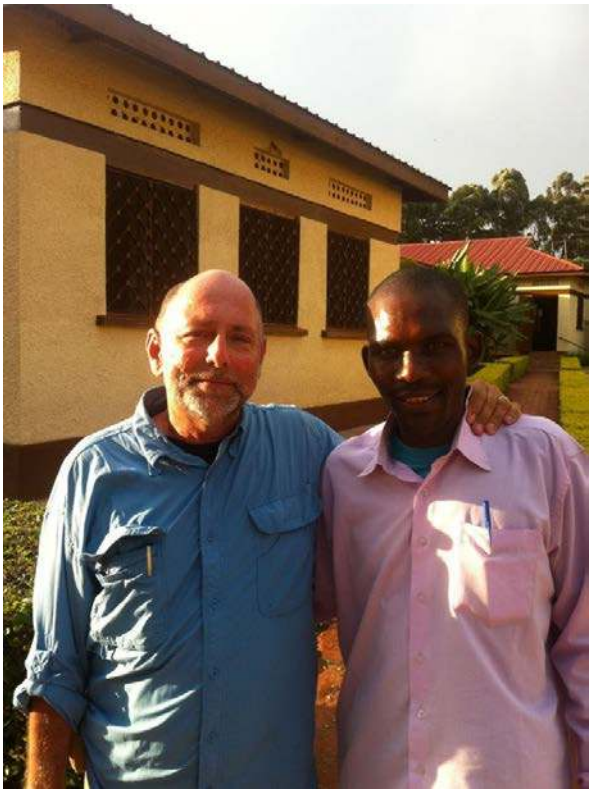
9

Imported Cheese and Rojo the Rooster

You never know what a day in Africa may bring. It often involves surprising and delightful gifts such as a surprise Birthday party replete with the African Squeal:

Last month featured two surprising gifts: Imported cheese.

And a rooster named Rojo.



Pascal and Mzee at Jinja, Uganda

I drove to Jinja, Uganda, last week for a seminary graduation.

My friend Pascal Ndihokubwimana had finished seminary.

Pascal is a brave pastor with a long last name. I'd like to have been there on the first day of seminary when Dr. Sivage called roll.

Pascal persevered to graduate.

Eleven long road trips over three years.

Making the bus journey through a war zone in eastern Congo,

through Rwanda and across Uganda.

Pascal and Juliet with his sister and her husband at Seminary graduation

His wife Juliet, whom I'd met in Congo, came to his graduation. She doesn't speak English and my French and Swahili are poor. She smiled as she handed me a plastic bag.

I peeked in at two perfect rounds of yellow cheese. "You made it?" Pascal answered, "She made it for you."

I cut a slice off. It was wonderful.

"Thank you . . . or merci beaucoup."

I proudly brought the cheese home to DeDe.

A recent volunteer team had left behind a can of Spam.

There’s not much I like better than fried spam. Go ahead and laugh and shake your finger.

I know it’s bad for you. And I don’t want to know what it’s really made of.

It's a comfort food for this redneck man.

DeDe made a toasted spam and cheese sandwich. She slathered on the mayo and mustard.

I sat down with a cold coke and a dripping spam sandwich. Not just any sandwich but one made with imported cheese and imported spam.

Cheese from the Democratic Republic of Congo.

And Spam brought with care from Frankfurt, Kentucky.

As that commercial used to say, “It doesn’t get any better than this."

Timekeeper Chicken roundabout in Adjumani, Ug

My second gift started out as a Coca-Cola.

Ethan Bossier (known in Dry Creek as Big E) and I were on our last day in the refugee camps of Adjumani, Uganda. Our friend Joseph said, “Before you leave, Mildred wants to see you.”

“Mildred?”

“Yes, you met her at church yesterday. She wants to give you a Coke.”

We drove to Mildred’s roadside market store. She greeted us with the warm African hospitality I’ve come to take for granted, sharing hot fried cassava hush puppies from a plastic bucket.

I’m not crazy about cassava. It’s a sweet potato-like tuber that’s neither bad nor good. It’s tasteless. But fried it’s not bad. (I come from a culture where a fried piece of leather shoe would be eaten with relish if you had a little Tabasco and Tony's.)

Mildred excused herself, presumably to retrieve my Coke.

I hoped it might be cold but knew better than to get my hopes up. Africa's the home of cold showers and hot cokes.

Mildred returned at a trot, with a big smile and a red rooster tucked under her arm.

I'm slow sometimes but it quickly dawned: she wasn't giving me a Coke. It was a cock.

She handed me the rooster and a small plastic bag of grain. Its legs were tied and it nestled in the crook of my arm.

Big E laughed so hard I believe he peed in his pants.

Big E with Rojo. (E's the one with the cap.)

I held back my laughter. I've been on the Continent long enough to know this was a serious sacrificial gift.

Africans seldom eat meat with a meal. The gift of a chicken is a sacrifice.

A sacrificial gift of love.

The plastic bag contained sim-sim, a sesame seed-like grain that makes great honey cakes. I handed the bag and rooster to Big E.

Mildred gave us instructions on how to keep the rooster well on our long journey across the Nile.

"A little water. A little sim-sim. Keep the windows rolled down."

It was as if she was sending one of her children off to boarding school.

We began our drive to the Laropi Ferry on the Nile. On our ferry crossing four days earlier, Big E and I had sat by a tied goat on the boat.

This time we had our own chicken. I named him Rojo after a nearly forgotten song of my childhood about a Mexican rooster of the same name.

Big E named him Kojak.

I had no problem with that. Everyone in Africa has multiple names spelled in multiple ways.

Rojo/Kojak was a fine-looking rooster.

A healthy Rhode Island Red.

Big E kind of wrested ownership of Rojo from me,

talking to it all the way along the bumpy road.

It sat contentedly on the floorboard pecking at sim-sim seed.

He (Rojo not Big E) was pretty docile on the entire three-hour ride to Koboko Town.

“What are we going to do with him, Bro. Curt?”

“I don’t know. We’ll decide when we get there.”

It was nearly dark when we reunited with our other team members.

I got Rojo out of the truck and took him behind the guesthouse where the chickens roost.

They were a sorry-looking lot and I knew my rooster could whip anyone in the yard.

Market Chickens on the Island Ferry.

I untied his legs and Rojo strutted through the yard, wings a-flapping.

Big E grimaced. “You don’t think anyone will steal him, do you?”

“Nah, he’ll be here in the morning.”

We were eating supper an hour later when a commotion began among the waitresses near the kitchen door. A fast-moving blur darted past them into the dining area.

It was Rojo. He ran straight to Big E.

“E, I believe he’s looking for you.”

We returned him to his roost and that’s where we found him the next morning.

We tied his legs and took him with us to Pastor Mark Vukoni’s house. Big E presented the rooster to Rose, Mark’s wife.

The Vukoni’s are both Madi and come from Adjumani town, Rojo's hometown.

At least we left our rooster with kinfolk.

Big E, who's a load of fun, whispered, “Do you think she’ll cook him for our dinner?”

“I sure hope not. I wouldn't want to eat a friend.”

Our American team and the local pastors sat in the dim light of the mud hut. It was a wonderful time of prayer and sharing.

About two hours into our meeting, Rose Vukoni entered with a serving tray

We eat lots of interesting African food UpCountry. This is beef-on-a-stick sold by roadside vendors

A month later, we were back in Koboko. I asked Rose, “What about the rooster?”

“It was sure good.” What more can I say?

It's Africa.

My Africa.

Such a land of juxtaposition.

Schoolchildren or strangers putting their hand out. "Give me money."

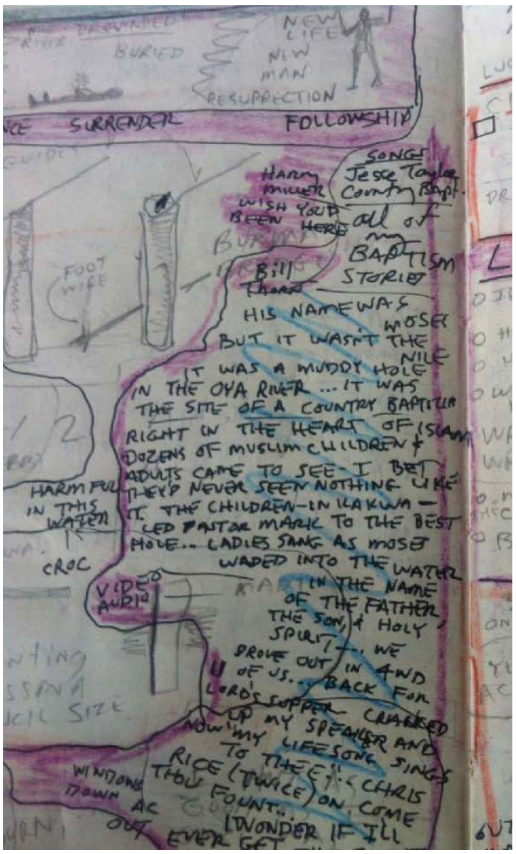
Good-hearted people giving you a precious chicken or carrying homemade cheese two hundred miles as a gift.

Africa. Our Africa.

The gifts of Africa. Given by Africans. Some tangible. Others priceless.

BAPTIZED IN MUDDY WATER 10

. . . wish you'd been there



Immediately after Moses' baptism, I jotted the outline of this story in Journal #73

His name was Moses.

And I witnessed his baptism. It wasn't in the River Nile.

But a muddy hole in the Oya River. It's not big enough to be a river where I come from.

It was a rural baptism.

In a real stream.

How rural was it? I drove in and out to the site in four-wheel drive with the hubs locked.

Moses' Ugandan baptism was similar to Jesus' baptism in the Jordan: outdoors.

In running water.

With a crowd of curious onlookers.

Even though the Holy Spirit didn't come down in the visible form of a dove, God's presence was very real.

A knot of folks gathered at water's edge for Moses' baptism. Eleven fellow refugees who'd crowded into our Land Cruiser. All part of a preaching point at Lokujo Camp.

A preaching point that is growing into a fledgling church.

The refugees were joined at the Oya River by dozens of local villagers. Curious children.

A few gawking adults.

This is the heart of Muslim country.

I'd like to know what these followers of Islam thought of the first baptism they'd seen. I told DeDe the onlookers wouldn't have been more surprised if a UFO landed and green men came down the steps.

Our church leaders explained, in Kakwa and English, what baptism is about.

They explained that baptism does not bring salvation.

It is a step (and a big one) on the road of obedience to follow Jesus.

It's symbolic—not salvation-imparting—symbolic of the born-again process.

The old man goes down into the water.

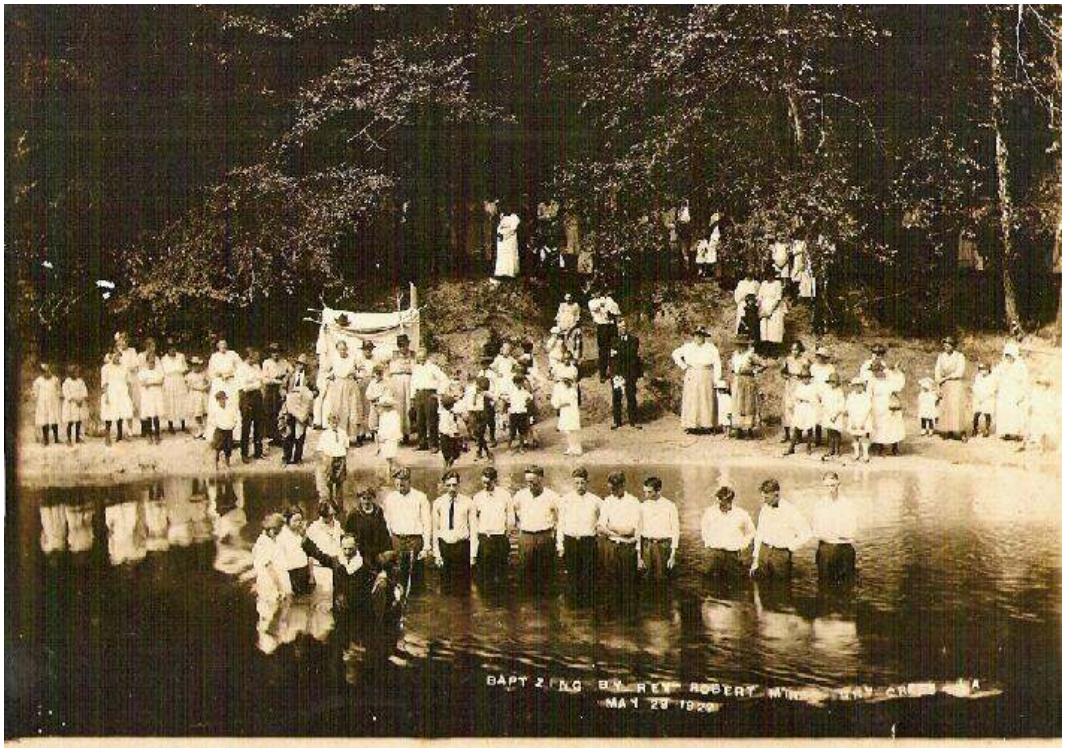
He's buried under the water.

I guess you could infer that it pictures the drowning of the old man.

A new man arises out of the water.

A new person in Christ.

On the riverbank, the women sing. Several scream the indescribable "African war whoop."



Another muddy water baptism: Bundick Creek Louisiana May 1922

Back home we would've sang "Shall We Gather at the River." Today's singing was, as it should be, all-African.

The local children are crowded at the water's edge. Pastor Mark shares about the born-again experience.

Moses, a young man about age thirty, is nervous but determined. Ironically, he's about the same age as Jesus was at his baptism.

My heart hears the faint words of a favorite song,

I have decided to follow Jesus.

No turning back.

No turning back.

I glance at Mercy, a young nurse who is also a new believer.

She has turned away from her family's Islam to follow Isa, whom she and I believe to be the Son of

God.

No turning back. I'll follow Him.

The baptism ends. Moses and Pastor Mark change clothes.

We all crowd into the truck and head back to Lokujo Church for the Lord's Supper.

It'll be the first communion for this baby church.

Plain, simple, and worshipful: Lokujo Preaching Point

Moses' first time to contemplate the bread and wine that symbolically represent the sacrifice of Jesus.

Blood and Body.

Juice and Bread.

Once again, a symbolism that means so much to the Believer. A strong symbolism that always humbles and touches my soul. This do in remembrance of me.

We roll the windows down. The AC is on the blink again.

A light rain falls as we slip and slide along the red dirt road.

I crank up the stereo. Casting Crowns with "My Life Song Sings to You."

The refugees, with their keen African ears, pick up the tune and hum or sing.

Next up, I play “Come Thou Fount" by Chris Rice. The wipers swing to the song’s rhythm.

My passengers know the tune and sing in Kakwa. I struggle along in English.

Jesus sought me when a stranger wandering from the fold of God, He to rescue me from danger interposed his precious blood.

I glance in the rear view mirror.

At Moses. And Mercy. And Pastor Mark. James, my son in the Lord, who is the Timothy for this refugee camp.

They ask me to play “Come Thou Fount” again.

“Play it again, Sam.” I happily oblige.

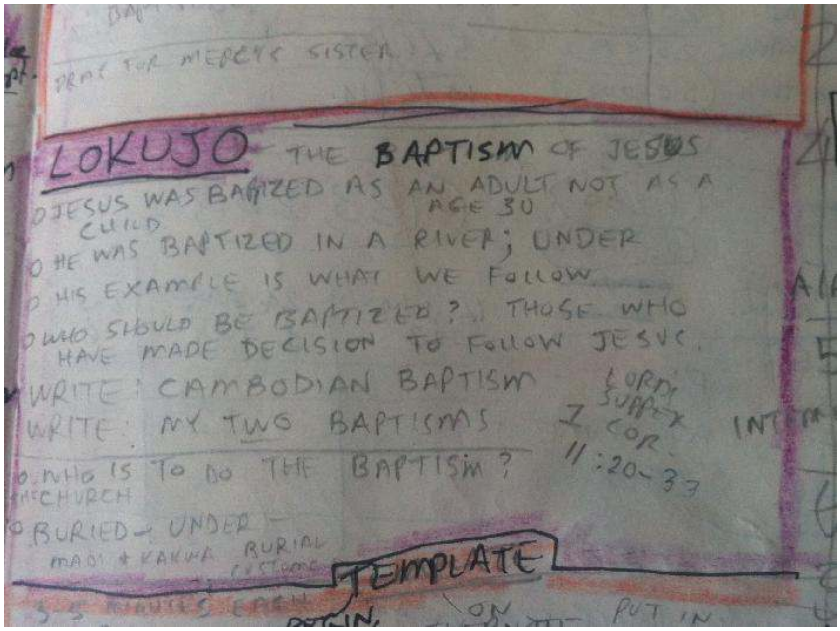
No one speaks as we manoeuver along the narrow path. It’s a holy moment.

The smells and sights of Africa catch in the breeze:

Wet Grass. Plowed Soil. Splashing mud. Sweaty bodies.

African laughter. Waving children. Scurrying goats. A cow, chewing its cud, refusing to give right of way.

I wonder if I’ll ever get today’s events out of my heart. I sure hope not.



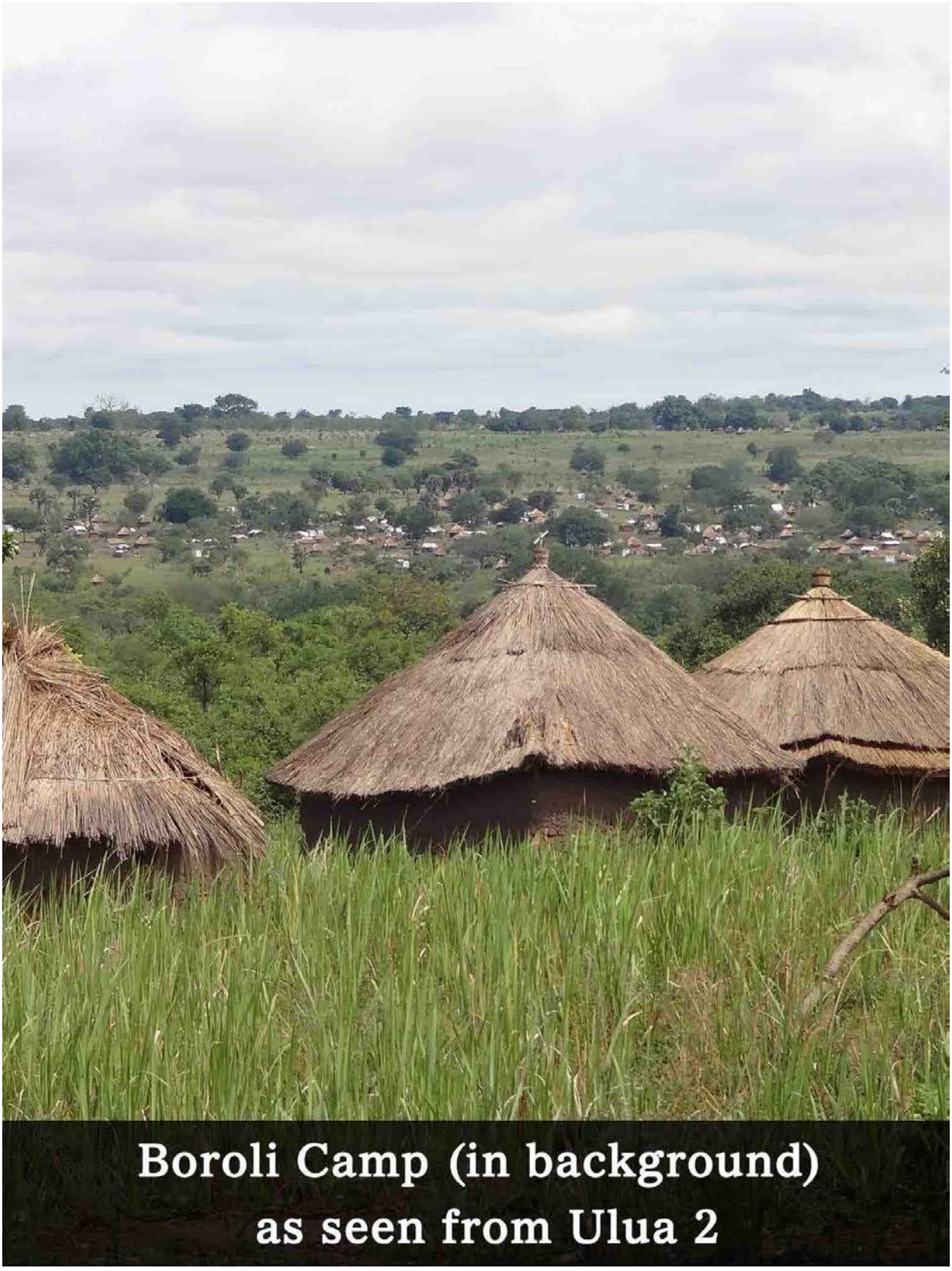
These are my journal notes from Pastor Mark's sermon before the baptism.

We need American and African believers who will adopt preaching points like Lokujo.

Are you ready?

Learn more

Moses' Baptism in the Oya River West Nile District, Uganda



Boroli Camp (in background)
as seen from Ulua 2

WOW!

11

Jovan and Jonah

We climbed out of the Land Cruiser as the red Ugandan dust rolled past. In the distance, about three kilometers away, was Boroli refugee camp.

I turned to Jovan, one of our young church leaders, “Jovan, that’s Boroli Camp. The Lord may send you to be pastor of that camp.”

He stared a while before cutting his eyes at me. “Wow!”

I wonder if that was Jonah’s response when God told him to go to Nineveh.

“Wow!”

As in “God, I can’t believe you want me to do that.”

Now Boroli Camp isn’t Nineveh but it stirred the same emotion of fear in Jovan.

“Wow!” Here’s why:

Boroli is the most unique of the clusters that make up what is called Adjumani Camp.

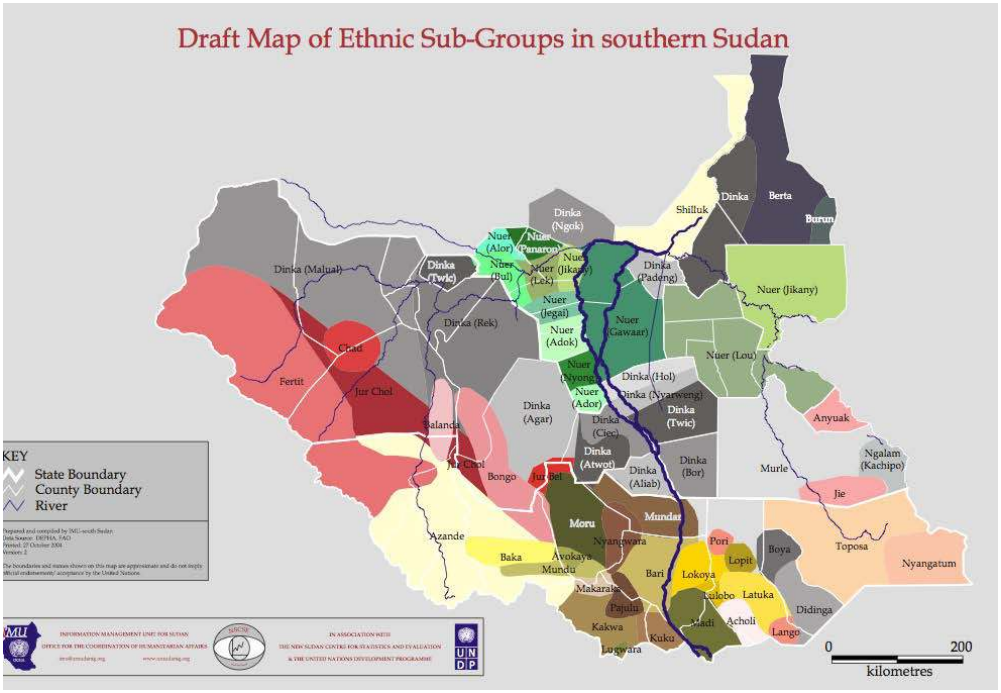
It consists of twelve tribes, with the Murle being in the majority.

All of the other camps are mainly Dinka.

The UN wisely knows to separate the Dinka from the others. They don’t play well together.

Their main tribal rivals, the Nuer, are across the Nile at Rhino Camp.

Refugee Camp experts understand that the world's greatest river is needed to separate the Dinka and Nuer.



Ethnic map of South Sudan. The Murle are located in South Sudan's Jonglei State

But there are no Dinka or Nuer at Boroli Camp. The Murle are capable of creating enough trouble on their own.

I love the Murle but they are South Sudan's most misunderstood and feared tribe. They have an unfair reputation as baby stealers and perceived as always ready for a fight.

This week had been a tragic one at Boroli Camp. Several Murle refugees and local Madi had been killed in clashes. It began over a football (soccer) game that went awry. You could sense the tension in the local community.

Boroli Camp was off limits during that time.

That's why my statement that God might send Jovan (a Madi) to a Murle camp elicited that one-word response that spoke volumes.

"Wow!" We are asking you to place Boroli on your prayer list:

1. Pray for peace in the camp.

2. Pray that Jovan will be faithful to however God leads his life. My statement was in jest but I'm serious in about how obedience to God may lead us anywhere. Need I say, "Dry Creek to South Sudan?"

I express it this way: Ready to Go/Content to Stay.

It's all about following Him.

Everything else is just geography . . . and a willing heart.

Mario, Augustin and other church leaders in Boroli Camp

3. Pray for Augustin and Mario who have started a Baptist preaching point in Boroli 1 and its sister camp, Boroli 2. These two young men are living in the Camp. On a recent visit, one of the Murle told us, "These men have come to live with us. They are drinking the same water we are."

"They are drinking the same water we are."

4. Pray for Juliet, a friend of DeDe's who is a person of peace in Boroli. Pray also for positive tribal leadership and inclusion in the Camp.

5. Pray for our Chadan Engagement Team that we'll wisely know when and if to work in Boroli.

6. Pray for Albert, a Madi who oversees the camp on behalf of the Ugandan government. He emotionally shared about that week's killing, "They killed one of my refugees." This Madi bureaucrat took it personally that a Murle under his watch care had died.

7. Pray for John K. a Murle church planter I've come to know. He's starting a new church in Juba, the capital of South Sudan. John is very concerned about his mother and family who are stranded in a refugee camp in Ethiopia.

You're invited to hear an inspiring message on Jonah by my Dry Creek pastor, Charlie Bailey.

All I can say is “Wow!” Pray daily.

Pray deeply.

Pray for Boroli Camp.

Learn more about prayer walking in Boroli Camp or contact us at creekbank.stories@gmail.com

E'S PHONE 12

Connecting across the Atlantic

Header above: Traditional Murle tukul (hut) at Boroli.

The crowd at Boroli Camp was growing and they weren't happy.

Ethan Bossier and I were the only whites within twenty kilometers and their initial hope at seeing us was cooled by our explanation that we had nothing to give.

The Camp Chairman explained, through a young interpreter, that Boroli Camp had several thousand residents from twelve tribes in South Sudan. Most of the refugees, including him, were Murle from Jonglei State.

As you learned in the previous chapter, the Murle have a unique reputation among the South Sudanese.

All of my dealings with Murle had been good up to this point. Up to this point.

But this crowd is suspicious.

There is an edge to this crowd.

Our appearance has been akin to a red cape flapped in front of a bull. The chairman's name is Daniel.

His interpreter, Ronald, is the camp youth chairman.

Mr. Chairman continues to inform us that the Murle feel marginalized. "The other majority tribes have been favored. They have more boreholes, larger food rations, and better shelter supplies."

Joseph, a local Madi pastor, is with us. I can tell he's getting nervous. When an African gets jumpy, it's time for the Mzungu to pay attention.

I slip out of the crowd and retreat to a nearby tree.

We need something to break the tension that is building.

I say a short Nehemiah-like “Flare Prayer” as in “Lord, help us.

I believe God answers in the form of a simple reminder.

Get out your satellite phone.

In the outlying camps as well as rural roads we travel, cell phone reception is poor or non-existent. I’m used to it: I come from the Bermuda Triangle of cell phone reception: Dry Creek, Louisiana.

We recently purchased a satellite phone for situations in the Bush where we need to make contact but have no cell service.

We used funds from a special friend who has chosen to support Open Hands Africa since we’ve been here.

That’s why I call our satellite phone “E’s Phone.”

E's real name is Elizabeth or Beth. She is a dear friend who shares a mutual love with me: a place called Dry Creek Baptist Camp.

Our satellite phone is a new model called a Sat Sleeve. I insert my iPhone into a slot on the larger phone and now I’ve connected to three satellites hovering over Africa. I can now call most of the world from the spot I'm standing.

Our Thuraya Sat Sleeve Satellite phone

I motion Ronald, the youth chair, out of the crowd. As I dial John's number, I tell him, "Ronald, I have a Murle friend on the line. I'd like you to talk with him."

I pray for John to answer.

John is a new friend who is a Murle church planter. He's started churches in Pibor, Bor, and Juba. Each time fighting has forced him to evacuate.

He is currently living between our town of Entebbe and Juba, the capital of South Sudan. John has a heart as big as Nairobi and a desire to see his people know Jesus Christ.

Murle John in Jonglei State, SS

"Hello. Who is this?"

I explain who I am, trying every alias and description I have: "This is Mzee Curt . . . Mzungu in Entebbe . . . met you at Calvary Chapel Church . . ."

Thankfully our game of charades ends with him connecting who I am. He's in Juba and we have a clear signal.

"John, I want . . . I need . . . you to talk to one of my Murle friends."

I hand Beth's Phone to him.

I can only hear one end and its in staccato Murle, but Ronald's smile tells me much. I glance back at the crowd and can easily hear the chairman's strident voice.

Ronald hands me the phone and I wade through the crowd to the Chairman. I hand him the phone. "My friend John, who is a Murle, is on the line."

The camp chairman takes the phone and within half a minute, I realize several things: He knows my friend John and he is smiling.

When the call ends, the chairman's entire attitude has changed.

We've been stood for. It's a common term in Africa.

It's nearly a legal or ethical statement. "I know this man or woman and will

stand good for them."

It's like a legal bail: I'm standing for him and will take responsibility for him.

Murle John has vouched for us.

And he has saved the day.

It has opened a relationship door for us with Boroli Camp.

A door that we strive to continue to walk through in wisdom and compassion.

And I'm convinced the door opener was Beth's phone.

We purchased it for our vehicle and long trips: breakdowns, getting hopelessly stuck, having two flats at once.

However, the first time it was used was a different type of emergency: a relationship builder in an atmosphere of muted hostility.

Thank you Lord for how you can use anything for your glory. Including a Thuraya Sat Sleeve Satellite Phone aka "E's Phone."

Thank you Lord that you choose to use simple folks like us.

Like DeDe and I.

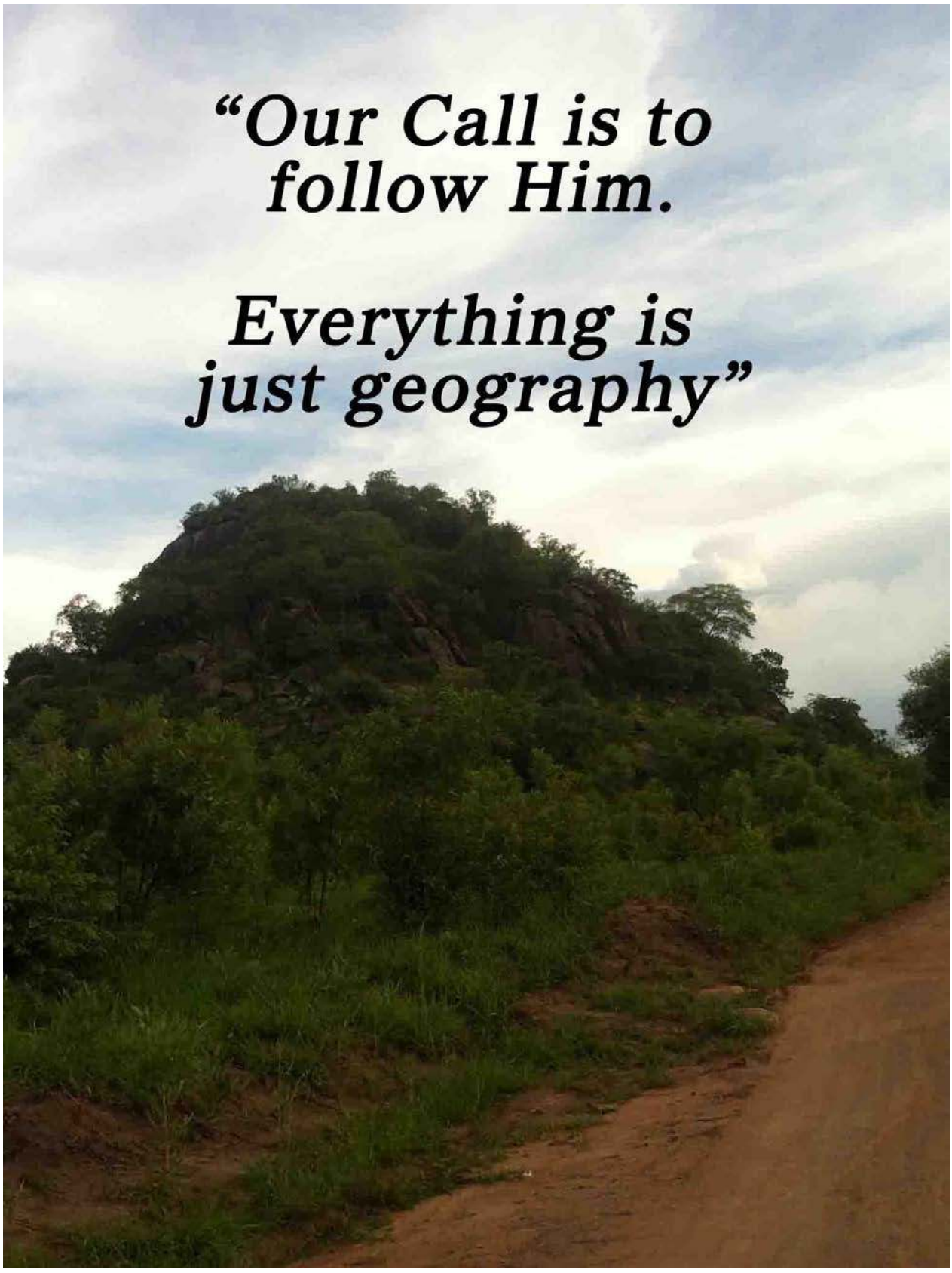
We are privileged to be on this journey at this season of our lives. And thank you Lord for praying friends like Beth

Who faithfully hold the rope back home.

Thank you Lord.

Amen.

When you support the work in Chadan, you're holding the rope for our team


"Our Call is to
follow Him.
Everything is
just geography"

LOST IN TRANSLATION 13

Anakula mbuzi ambako ni amefungwa (Swahili)

"The goat eats where it is tied."

Sudanese Proverb

Shelter from the storm: Goats in Nimule, South Sudan

I hopped in the back seat of the Land Cruiser as I told Joseph Anyovi, "You sit up front and ride shotgun."

He turned.

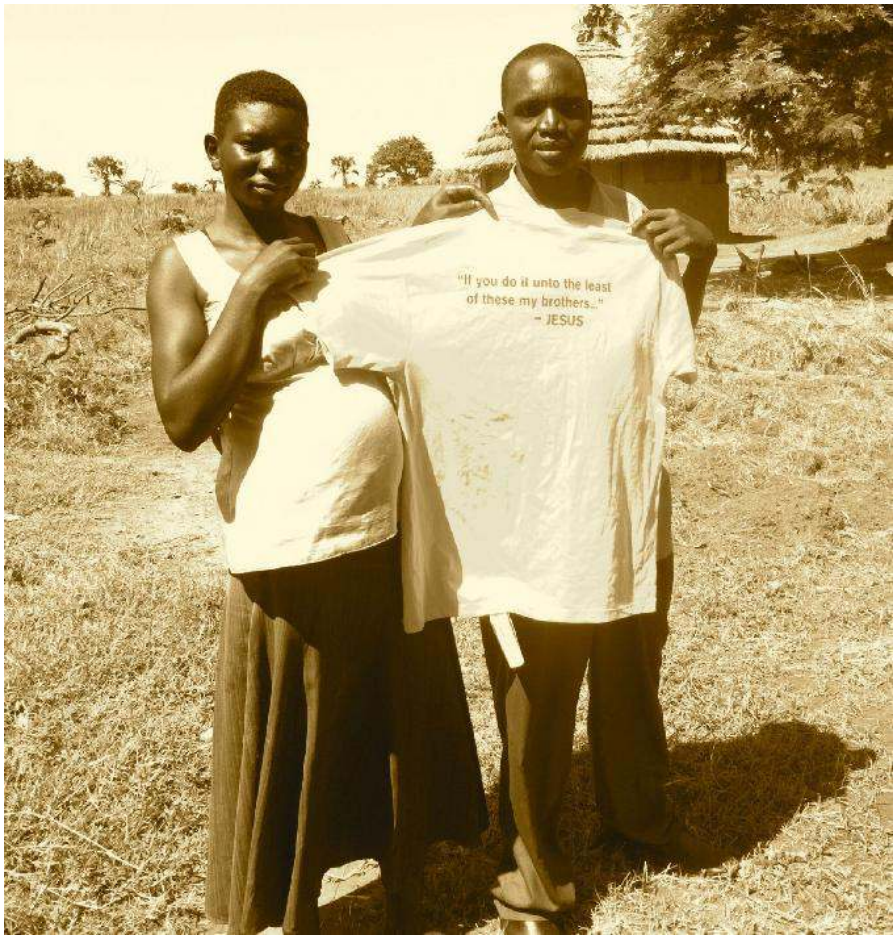
"Ride what?"

"Ride shotgun. It means to . . ."

Our driver, team leader Bob Calvert, shakes his head. "Don't even try to explain it. You'll never get it across."

Bob nodded at Joseph. "You sit up front beside me."

Once again, something I said was lost in translation.



Joseph and Jessica Anyovi on the day before the birth of their first child.

I learned early on: don't try to tell a joke to Africans.

It just doesn't translate well.

So I should've known better.

Known better than to play a Jerry Clower story in a car of Madi tribesmen.

One of my heroes, Jerry Clower

Three young African friends were riding with me after a full day in the Bush. As we headed back to town, a big goat bounded across the road.

That's when the plan was hatched.

I knew they'd enjoy Jerry Clower's "Big Red Goat."

It's one of Clower's shortest (2-minute) tales.

My colleague David Crane had nearly choked on a piece of chicken when I played it for him. It's a story that always draws a burst of laughter at the punch line.

That is if the listeners understand.

With little introduction, I played "Big Red Goat" for my African friends. They listened with polite attention.

A glance in the rearview mirror assured me they weren't getting much of Jerry's strong Southern accent.

They laughed at Clower's sound effects but the end of the story left them shrugging at each other.

I should've known they'd have difficulty. Africans have lots of trouble with American accents, especially the more Southern-fried varieties (like mine and Jerry's).

That's why most Americans over here acquire a fake-sounding British English accent. It's not showing off but an attempt to be understood.

I decided Jerry's story needed translating. "Guys, let me tell you the background of the story and then I'll play it again."

I pull off to the roadside.

"It's the story of two men who are deer hunting. They come upon a deep hole in the field. Not being able to see the bottom, they throw a stick in.

There's no sound, so they get a stump and chunk it in. Still no sound.

One of the men sees an eight foot section of railroad track nearby. 'Let's throw it in there and I bet we'll hear when it hits the bottom.'

The two men manhandle the heavy piece before sliding it in the hole. As they wait, a big red goat jumps into the hole.

One of them says, 'Did you see that?' 'Yep, it was a big red goat!'

Just then a man came walking out of the woods. He asks the hunters, 'Hey fellows, have you seen my big red goat?'

The hunters looked at each other and one answered, 'Yep, he just jumped into this hole.'

The man said, 'That's strange. I don't see how he could've done that when I had him tied to an eight-foot piece of railroad track.'"

I can hear y'all laughing all the way from Doodlefork to Deweyville.

My African friends also laughed. We've spent enough time together that they've deciphered and decoded my Dry Creek dialect.

I re-played Jerry's "Big Red Goat" and they seemed to really enjoy it.

I think they pieced together the story from Jerry and me. At least they were polite enough to laugh at the right spots.

If you're ready for a good laugh (and who isn't) you can hear Jerry's version of Big Red Goat.

Learn more about my hero Jerry Clower.

One Last Story on the perils of a Southern Accent in Africa:

Two days ago I went into a northern Ugandan duka(store) to buy a tub of butter. The dominant brand is called "Blue Band."

I asked the middle-aged clerk, "Dada (Sister), I'd like a container of Blue Band."

She dutifully returned with a blue ink pen. At least she understood part of my request.

“No. I mean Blue Band.” I used both hands to frame an imaginary butter tub. “Blue- Band-Butter.”

She twirled the pen in her hand.

"BlueBlandButter. I mean, BooBandButter."

An Ugandan standing beside me said, “He wants Blue Band.”

The clerk went straight to the shelf and returned with my butter.

Blue Band and a Blue Pen

The three of us had a good laugh.

My tongue had made us two more friends.

They have a saying in Africa:

Q. "Do you know what you call a Westerner who can't laugh at himself?"

A. "Gone"

Disclaimer: no animals were harmed in the making of this story.


WANTED:
Hairy-armed men with big hearts.
Dr. Tim Patrick at Koboko Camp

SHIRT ON MY BACK 14

There's plenty of sadness in the camps. Then again, if you look and listen, you can find treasures of love, laughter, and kindness.

There's also plenty of humor. It says a lot about the resilience of the human spirit how people have the ability to laugh in the midst of even terrible circumstances.

The older man came around a tukul (hut), scattering chickens in his midst. He was impossible to miss in his silk pajamas.

He had on silk pajamas.

I'm talking about a long-sleeved shirt, buttoned to the neck. Pajama bottoms dragging in the dirt with a knee in need of patching.

It was mid-afternoon. A long time since morning; a good while until dark.

He was dressed for either.

We stopped and gawked. One of the Americans in our group said, "I wonder how much those silk pajamas cost new?"

I have no idea. I'm not sure I've ever seen them in a store back home. At least not in places I shop: like WalMart, Target, or Academy.

Glen Hickey, a Kentucky volunteer, hit the nail on the head as we watched the pajama-clad refugee swish by. "Now, I know where Hugh Hefner sends his hand-me-downs."

We laughed until we cried.

It wasn't the first time we'd had tears this day. It was just the first time it included laughter.

The silk pajamas were probably all this man had. He looked pleased to have them. They did look comfortable.

I recalled the common expression, "We got out with just our shirt on our back."

You hear that after house fires, tornadoes, and hurricanes in America.

It's true also in war zones. Armed men burst into a village in the dead of night. Dead of night. For many it will be the night they die.

For some, especially women and children, it may be a fate seemingly worse than death.

People don't stop to gather possessions. The ones who survive run and never look back.

Often with just the shirt on their back.

Pencil sketch of the Pajama Man.

Africa is an environment that allows plenty of tears as well as smiles and laughter.

It seems you cannot have one without the others.

We greet strangers with smiles. It translates well in any language. We laugh with Africans.

We laugh at Africans.

They laugh a great deal at us. I seem to really entertain them with my twisted tongue, bald head, and hairy arms. As my friend Moses Yaka says, "You Mzungu's are unique!"

We smile.

We laugh and often weep without shame.

Dr. Tim Patrick and admirers at Waju Kakwa Camp West Nile, Uganda

MY PEOPLE 15

A leader leads. You cannot lead without followers.

And sometimes a leader must go find his people.

His followers.

His flock.

I want to broach that subject with two of my heroes.

You may have heard of one. His name is Fred Luter.

You won't be familiar with the second hero. I'll save him for later.

Fred Luter is pastor of Franklin Avenue Baptist Church in New Orleans. He has achieved fame as president of our Southern Baptist Convention.

I'm Southern Baptist. Don't get started. I know every caricature, joke, and stereotype about us. I can tell them and laugh harder than anyone.*

What makes Fred Luter unique is that he is black. And our Southern Baptist Convention broke away from other Baptists over the issue of black slavery.

I knew Fred Luter long before he became famous.

A generation ago, Fred was appointed as pastor of Franklin Avenue Baptist, a declining church in a changing neighborhood. That's a nice way of saying it was a once lily-white church, now surrounded by a black community. Pastor Fred was told, "Either revive this church or bury it."

God used Fred to build a strong church that reached out to its community. He's deeply loved among Louisiana Baptists for additional reasons. He's a great preacher. He loves people.

Fred is a caring pastor. He built a strong church in a tough part of New Orleans.

Then came Katrina.

Franklin Avenue Baptist was under ten feet of water. Fred's flock scattered all over the United States. His church, the building as well as the members, was gone.

He was a leader without followers. A shepherd without his flock.

So Fred Luter became proactive. He began searching for his people. Member by member, he tracked them down.

Pastor Fred Luter Franklin Avenue Baptist Church New Orleans, LA

He soon found large pockets of Franklin Avenue members in Houston and Atlanta. So he began gathering his members together in those cities.

This meant a great deal of travel and flexibility on Fred's part. It didn't matter. He'd found his people.

And he was doing what he was called to do. Pastor and preach to the Franklin Avenue congregation.

Over time, evacuees began trickling back into New Orleans. Many chose not to return, but others went back to rebuild their city. However, those from Franklin Avenue found their church and neighborhood destroyed.

So the reconvened church began using the facilities of a sister church, First Baptist New Orleans.

Eventually, a new and beautiful Franklin Avenue Baptist Church was built in the same neighborhood.

A strong church in a recovering community. Led by one of my heroes, a shepherd named Fred.

My second hero is Dinka, South Sudan's largest tribe.

His name is John Monchoyl.

He's also a pastor.

A church planter in Upper Nile State.

Pastor John Monchoyl Church Planter
Upper Nile State/South Sudan

He'd started five churches in and around Malakal, the largest city in the state. Malakal is inhabited by three tribes: Dinka, Nuer, and Shilluk.

John's an equal opportunity church planter. He planted churches for each tribal group as well as several mixed congregations.

When South Sudan descended into anarchy just before Christmas 2013, the areas with mixed tribal groups saw the worst violence.

Malakal was fought over by government forces and the rebels. It changed hands five times in a matter of months. The only safe place was in the local UN compound.

John and his family plus other dependents made their way to Juba, South Sudan's capital. They then began the long journey to West Nile District Uganda.

That's when we met him. He was moving his extended family of ten . They registered at a nearby

refugee settlement, Rhino Camp.

John told us point blank, "I'm leaving my family here where it's safe, but I'm going back to South Sudan."

His jaw tightened. "That's where my people are. They're hurting and suffering and I must be back among them."

I'd been following the BBC's reports on the fighting in Malakal and its description as a "ghost town."

The town had been razed. John had gotten word told all of the churches were burned and gutted.

I wondered what awaited Pastor John's back in Malakal. Were his church members who stayed still alive?

What he would find there?

It didn't matter to John. He was going to where his people were. To the place where they needed him most. If they were suffering, he would suffer with them.

He would give them the greatest gift of a leader: His presence in a time of trouble.

I've received texts from Pastor John in Malakal. He says things are safe and he is fine. It's hard to read between the lines of an SMS, so I'll take him at his word.

Will you join us in praying for John Monchoyl and the Malakal Baptist Churches?

A leader, who like my friend Pastor Fred, went to find his people.

Read more on John's Story

LONG MAY IT RUN 16

The road less traveled is never crowded and there's a good reason.

When the rainy season comes to Uganda and South Sudan, getting to the unreached is much more difficult. That's why having a good off-road vehicle is essential.

Our organization, The International Mission Board (http://www.imb.org), keeps us outfitted.

Vehicles, like our 1996 Toyota Land Cruiser, are supplied through the generosity of the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering. (http://www.imb.org/main/lottie-moon/default.asp) (LMCO).

Nowhere are good vehicles for bad roads more needed than in South Sudan. We encourage you to give until it helps.

And remember LMCO giving isn't limited to the Christmas season. It is open all year as it meets our needs in vehicles, housing, supplies, and projects.

Our vehicle, MaMa Pearl, "loaded for bear" at the Nile River ferry.

Our 1996 Toyota Land Cruiser is going strong at over a quarter million kilometers. Gifts to the Lottie Moon Offering allow folks like us to be outfitted for the difficult places.

We believe you'll enjoy the following story about a different type of machine for a wonderful couple serving with a sister organization:

Chances are I'm one of the few people who knows where both Nimule and Choupique are.

Bubba Hoezler does.

He's from Choupique, Louisiana.

And he has a new Polaris Ranger waiting for him in Nimule, South Sudan.

I know it's there. I saw it.

I first met Bubba and his wife, Cathy, in the Nairobi (Kenya) Airport five years ago. I was one of three Louisiana men enduring a seven-hour layover.

As we visited, Bubba came over. “Y’all sound like you’re from the South.”

“So do you.”

He smiled. “Where are you from?”

“Louisiana.”

“Well, so am I.”

“What part?”

“Near Lake Charles.”

“Really?”

"What about you?"

"Near DeRidder."

Bubba said, “Do you know where Sulphur is?”

“Sure.”

“I bet you’ve never heard of Choupique?”

I surprised him. “I know exactly where it’s at. I preached at Choupique Baptist a few months ago.”

He slapped my shoulder. “My Daddy leads the singing there.”

That was my introduction to Bubba and Cathy Hoezler. We enjoyed their company all the way to Houston Airport. They were returning home from five years in Sudan.

I remember Bubba’s comment as he bought an airport coffee. “I can’t remember the last time I handled paper money. Last week, I traded a bucket of nails for a jerry can of diesel.”

Strangely, I’ve not seen them since. But I keep up with them through the Internet and mutual friends.

They work for a wonderful sister organization. Cathy is a Physician's Assistant and operates a clinic in one of the large refugee camps on the Sudan/South Sudan border.

Bubba is an oil field hand who can work on anything. That comes in pretty handy in Africa.

Through the Internet, I've followed the difficulty Bubba and Cathy were having getting a new vehicle into South Sudan.

Not just any vehicle.

A new Polaris Ranger.

You may not be cultured enough to know about the class of vehicle known as “Off Road 4WD.”

There’s the John Deere Gator, The Kawasaki Mule,

And the Polaris. It’s a woods-running/deer-hunting/off-road rig. It’s made for getting in and out of tough places. You may not believe it but I know men that would trade their mother-in-law for one of those rigs.

The Polaris Ranger at Far Reach Ministries in Nimule, South Sudan

Back home, we use them for mudding. Yep, mudding's a verb as in "Me and the Old Lady are goin' mudding on Sunday after church."

I've seen bad logging roads and trails during the wet Louisiana winter but nothing like the mud of South Sudan.

The big difference here is that you're often driving on the main road in off- road conditions. The photo below is mute testimony of this.

"Main Road" connecting Uganda and South Sudan during rainy season"

With South Sudan's rainy season approaching, and knowing the narrow trails winding throughout refugee camps, I could just imagine their Polaris allowing Bubba and Cathy getting to inaccessible locations for their Jesus-work.

The problem was that Bubba and Cathy couldn't get their Polaris out of a really tough place: South Sudan customs at the Nimule border.

Vehicle importation is a headache in this part of Africa. Customs fees, import taxes, and open palms can jack the price up to nearly double the original price.

Customs at Nimule was demanding six thousand dollars to import the Polaris.

It sat for weeks at the border. I sent an email urging Bubba to link up with one of my friends with Far Reach Ministries. FRM trains chaplains for the South Sudanese Army or SPLA.

It's a great ministry operated by Americans Wes and Vicky Bentley since 1999.

Mid-December brought war to South Sudan and the mass displacement of hundreds of thousands, including Bubba and Cathy. They were forced to leave their refugee camp due to the instability. They landed in Nairobi and, like all of us, waited for the smoke to clear.

Recently, our team was in Nimule. As usual, we stayed at the Far Reach Ministries Guesthouse.

I saw it in the parking lot.

A new black Polaris.

I'll admit to breaking the Ten Commandments. I coveted it.

As my friend Gary used to say, "I wished it belonged to me and the owners had another one just like it."

Seriously, I knew who the owners were: Bubba and Cathy. It was waiting to make its trip up north to Dori Refugee Camp.

I was reminded of God's timing. If the Polaris had made the journey when planned, it probably would've been stolen in the chaos of the new year. Things not guarded have a habit of walking off here.

Bubba and Cathy are back near Dori Camp in unstable Upper Nile. That Polaris made its journey from Choupique to Sulphur to Mombasa to Nairobi to Kampala and Nimule.

And finally to Dori Camp. Ready for optimum use in Upper Nile, South Sudan.

I hope it's not a sin to pray for a vehicle. I'm not talking about praying to have a Polaris. I'm referring to praying for a vehicle as in,

"Lord, take this Polaris and use it in Upper Nile State.

Use it for your glory,

As Cathy practices her healing ministry.

Bless Bubba as he works on water wells and faulty carburetors.

Thanks for the folks back home who sacrificed to provide this 4WD.

Keep the Polaris safe.

Keep our friends healthy and protected.

Bring your peace to all of South Sudan.

May this rig be a vehicle of your love.

May it carry the Gospel to the white fertile fields of the Camps.

In Jesus' name.

Amen."

LOST BOYS REMIX 17

I've never seen you look like this without a reason,

Another promise fallen through, another season passes by you.

–Big Country"

They were called the Lost Boys and their story took place during the latter years of the 20th Century.

A generation of young men in South Sudan who walked across their country to freedom in the refugee camps of Kenya and Ethiopia.

Some had lost their families in the war. Others were one too many mouths to feed and were sent away. Lost Boys

The best book on the Lost Boys is God Grew Tired of Us by John Bul Dau.

The following stories come from the present. Stories of modern Lost Boys (and girls).

Best of all, it sheds light on the heroes who took them into their homes and hearts.

Lost boys who were found.

A house full of lost boys and girls I sat in the dimly lit apartment. My Murle friend John introduced his own four children, then his three nephews/nieces living with him. "We still don't know where their parents are."

Next he pointed out three more children, "These were the children of my best friend. When he and their mother were killed, we took them in."

Angels. Among the Murle, a tribe with a fearsome reputation among their neighbors.

An angel named Murle John

A Lost Boy in Kampala I sat at the Refugee Office for the Ugandan Government in Kampala, our nation's capital. I'm waiting to see an official who can open the door for continued work in the refugee camps across northern Uganda.

The packed room is full of mostly Somalians. From the crowd of brown skins, I pick out a young man from my country. He's South Sudanese.

I sit by him. "What part of South Sudan are you from?"

"Bor in Jonglei State."

I wonder how many Bor County residents are now in Uganda. I've met so many in the camps. Some are Dinka. Others are Nuer. All are hurting and homeless.

They call the Sudanese young man's name. I ask where he's going next. "I have no idea."

I look for hope in his eyes. A hope for the future.

A hope for South Sudan.

I see a glimmer.

I wave as he leaves.

Another Lost Boy from the land of divided rivers.

A land the prophet Isaiah called “smooth, dark, tall, and fearsome.”

“The Lost Boy” I met today didn’t walk to Kampala. He probably rode a bus or lorry (truck) to get here.

I still believe I saw that glint of strength. Two thoughts reverberate in my mind:

1. South Sudanese are resilient. They have been toughened by decades of civil war, oppression from their Arab neighbors to the north, and conditions of famine.

2. Secondly, the trouble in South Sudan is a spiritual battle. Only last night I read of rebels killing church workers—male and female—during one of the battles in Bor.

There is a battle between evil and good in that country. I do not think it’s overreaching to call the killing, raping, and chaos the work of Satan. Jesus called him “a thief who comes to kill, steal, and destroy.” He’s doing a pretty good job of that presently. Sadly, I’ve followed his footsteps in lots of places in Africa: Rwanda, Congo, Liberia, South Africa, and now South Sudan.

From listening to people who were present, there was plenty of evil on each side of the present conflict.

Additionally, stories abound of Christian kindness crossing across tribal lines.

It’s a battle for the soul of a nation.

We’ve even seen within our South Sudan team. Every difficulty and obstacle possible has been thrown in our paths. We’ve lost valuable team members during these past months. Every step forward is often followed by one or two back.

It's all a reminder that we’re in a spiritual battle. We wrestle not against flesh and blood.

I believe prayer– the prayers of Jesus-followers the world over– can make a difference in this battle.

I have to believe that good—my — win and I want to be on His side.

A Lost Boy in Ten Mile, Louisiana Don't be fooled: Lost Boys can be found in America. I recently spent two weeks with one.

I'm not sure what brought Tim Lee into the Foster Care system in Louisiana. I simply know that twenty years ago, he ended up in the home of two angels named R.L. and Margie "Cooter" Willis.

Yep, an angel can even be named Cooter. It's right up there with Clarence Oddbody ACS (Angel Second Class.)

The Willis family have raised over four hundred foster children including Tim, who is a pastor and advocate for foster care. A Louisiana lost boy who was rescued and given a new life.

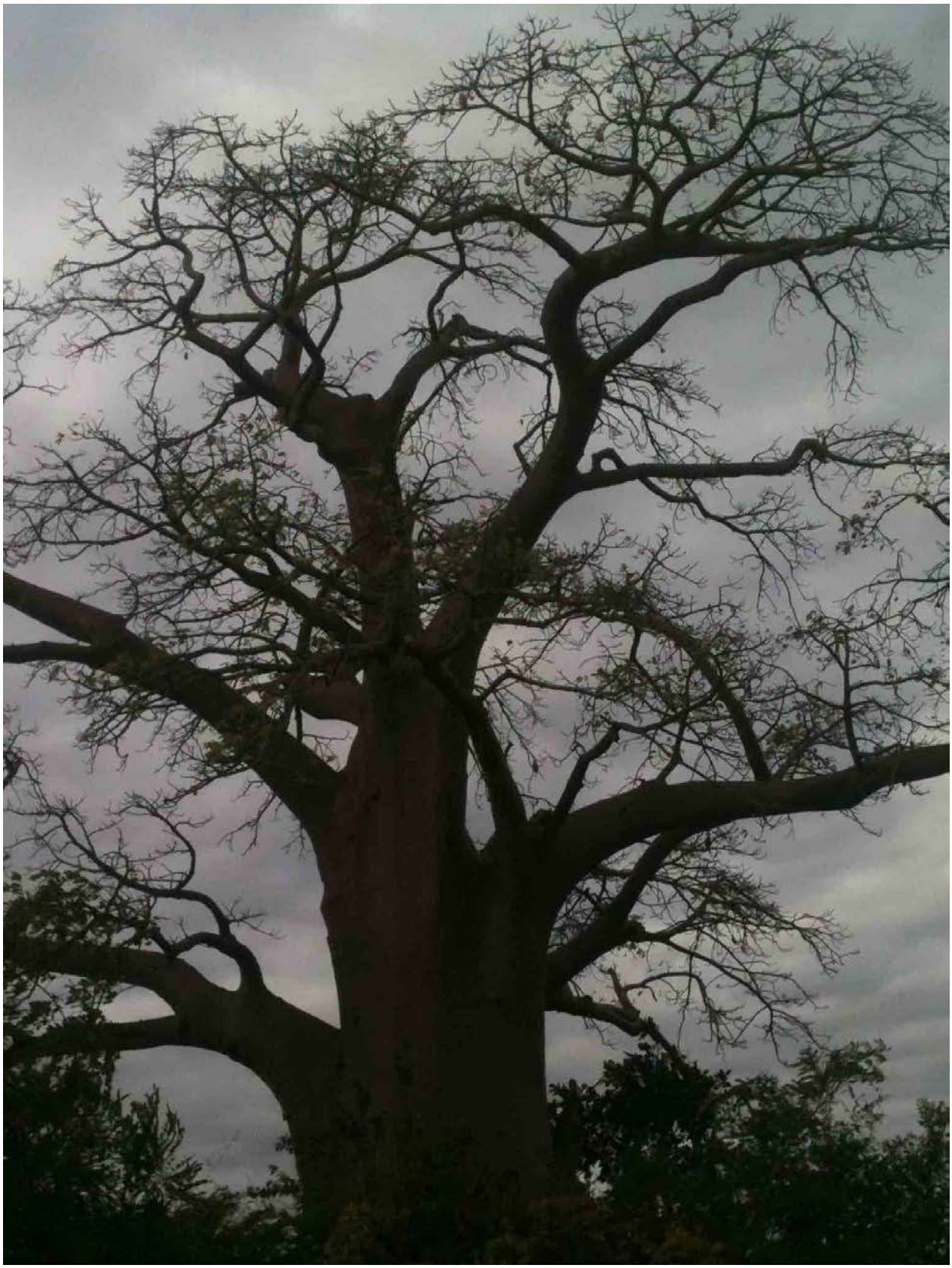
Yes, Lost Boys are found all around us. So are the angels who take them in.

Make their tribe increase.

Here's a very personal story on ways you can help in America.

We encourage you to explore the opportunities for foster child care in America. It's a way of being involved right where you are. Learn more

Dinka schoolboys Ulua Camp Uganda



RELOAD & REMOUNT

18

Driving up to a refugee camp is a daunting event.

You're greeted by thousands of people milling about.

Run out of their homes by war. They've arrived in a foreign country.

Been promised much but given little.

Often hungry.

Always worried.

Normally on edge.

Life is uncertain. They are understandably frustrated.

When they see a truckload of whites drive up, they get their hopes up.

Oftentimes, they also get their hackles up. They equate every white face with the UN, and if they're angry with the UN, they lash out at you.

We've experienced this repeatedly in the Adjumani refugee camps.

Each time it's worked out well, but several times we glanced back to where our truck was parked. I learned from Bob Calvert: always park your vehicle facing out. You never know when you may need to get out of Dodge fast.

After a harrowing visit, we drove to Aiylo Camp. It is a new arrival camp and has over 15,000 residents in it and its sister camp.

It was the usual jarring ride over five km of corduroy road.

As we rounded the corner and entered Aiylo Camp, a large group of waving women stormed towards our vehicles. They were singing and dancing to the accompaniment of a large drum circle.

Children were jumping up and down as we stepped out of our vehicle. I asked DeDe, “How did they know we were coming?”

Our Kentucky volunteers basked in the warm welcome. It was so nice after several of the previous camp scrapes.

Just then a police car sped into the camp followed by a nice bus. We stood watching as about a dozen nicely dressed dignitaries filed out of the bus. Armed policemen eyed us suspiciously.

The welcoming crowd tried to rekindle their enthusiasm but seemingly had “shot their wad" on us. They stood looking from us to the new arrivals, clearly confused. I think they realized the same thing we did: they’d welcomed the wrong visitors.

One of the visitors, a jewelry-bedecked woman, seemed to be in charge. She (nicely) informed our volunteers that this was a VIP group and it would be best if we excused ourselves pronto. They were a mixture of Members of Parliament and the Office of the Prime Minister.

We were just peons who'd crashed the party. We piled in and left unceremoniously. I stole one last look at the crowd. They were staring at us like a “calf at a new gate.” (* all idioms compliments of Bob Calvert and Kevin Willis.)

We now knew exactly what to do. We "got out of Dodge" as quickly as we could, laughing all the way to the next camp.

In fact, we’re still laughing. Our missionary friends, who know Africa so well, seem to enjoy it being recounted the most.

The Aiylo welcoming committee that welcomed the wrong visitors and couldn’t quite get reloaded and remounted* in time for the real welcome.

Our work in the refugee camps is an absurd mixture of deep sorrow, kindness, anger, relief, tears, and even laughter. When we share a humorous story (like the one above), it in no means lessens our concern and care over the suffering in the Camps.

It’s part of the coping method we’ve learned from our resilient friends in the Camps. And I’ve learned that Africans are the most resilient people in the world.

Jerry Clower told the story of a football game between Mississippi State and Texas Tech in Lubbock, Texas. Texas Tech is famous for its “Red Raider,” a masked rider who gallops down the sidelines when Tech scores a touchdown. This is done to the boom of a black powder cannon.

The Texas Tech "Red Raider"

Clower told of Texas Tech having the ball “first and goal” inside the Miss. State ten yard line. The Tech runner back ran off tackle inside the five. The referee (from the SEC) thought it was the goal line and signaled “Touchdown.”

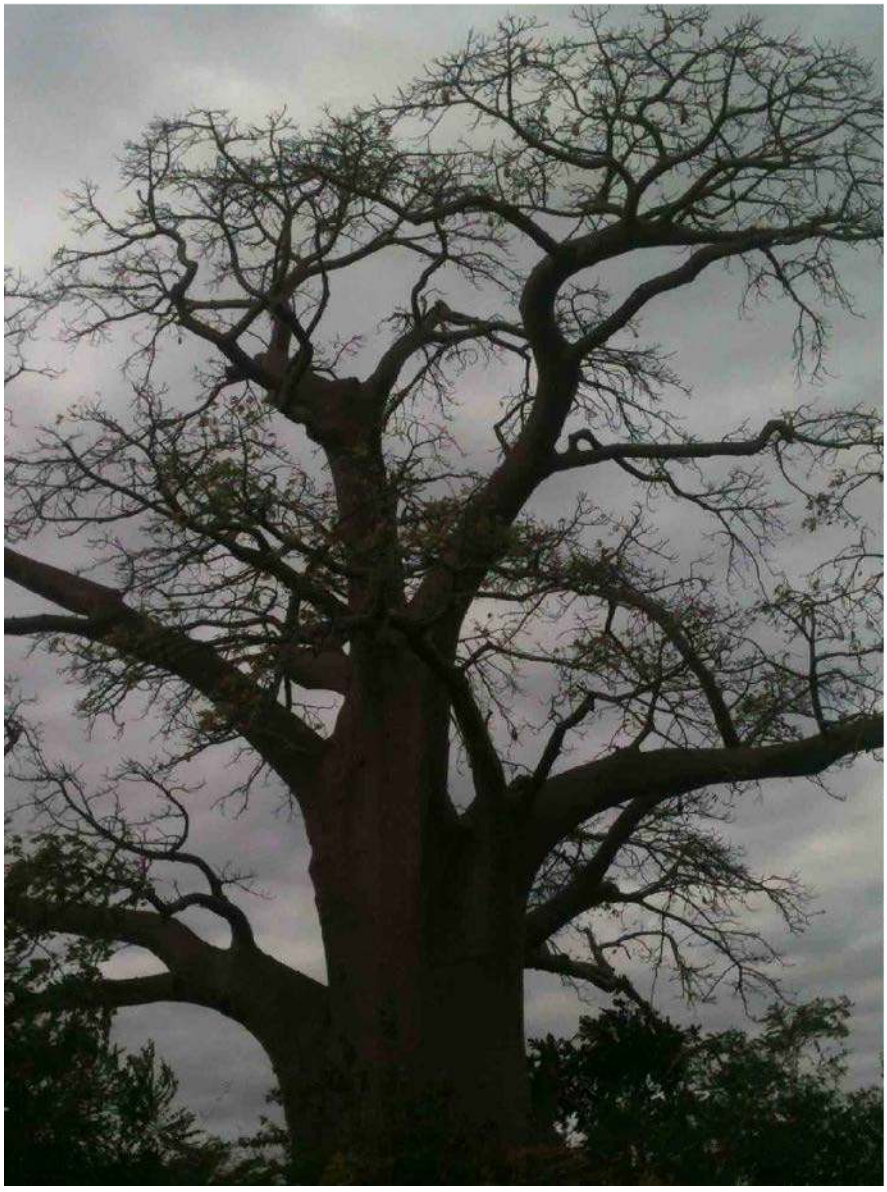
The cannon went off. The Red Raider galloped down the cheering sideline.

And then the ref realized his mistake. He sprinted to the Tech bench and put his arm around the coach. “Coach, I have messed up. Now, we ain’t done nothing to you. It's still second down and goal to go. I'll just stand here long enough to allow your people to reload and remount."

We saw it for real at Aiylo Camp.

They just couldn't get reloaded and remounted in time to give a rousing welcome to the real guests.

We just enjoyed our proverbial fifteen minutes of fame.



A Baobab tree, one of Africa's most distinctive trees. I took photo in Zambia during training.

THE O WORD 19

"She'll tell you she's an orphan after you meet her family."

–Chris Robinson in "She Talks to Angels"

African Orphans.

It's the O Word.

Orphan.

It's a controversial subject in both of our countries. Here in Uganda.

As well as the United States.

The word orphan.

Probably the most difficult part is defining an orphan.

Who is an orphan?

The simple answer is a child who has lost both parents. Mom and Dad are gone.

Many times through death. Death is very creative here: HIV/AIDS, war, diseases, domestic violence, and accidents. It can easily be any combination of the above.

Your chance of dying of old age are slim here.

Being an orphan: it can be desertion. I'm heartbroken by how many orphans do not know their father. They've never met him as in, "He left right after I was born."

Do we have any right to declare a child with one dead parent and an absentee one, "Not a real orphan?"

I think not.

I hope not.

Orphans. The simple answer is a child with no father and mother.

But simple answers seldom suffice in Africa.

This continent is the origin of "It takes a village to raise a child." It is part of the culture here, especially in the rural regions.

Family.

It's often a complicated situation.

When an African says, "He is my brother," we ask, "Same father/same mother?"

Because of polygamy, family trees often have many limbs.

Often when we peel away the layers, "She's my older sister" is really "she is the daughter of my father's brother."

"The Old House" pen and ink by Bill Iles

What we call a first cousin. But in Africa, a close cousin in the village is treated like a true sibling.

Extended family lives in small hamlets where the pot gets stirred together, both literally and figuratively. Openzi village, near Adjumani, is a good example. I've visited there dozens of times and am stilling discovering who's who.

Joseph and Julious aren't really brothers but cousins.

The two men Joseph refers to as "my father" are actually his father's brothers.

My Louisiana rural culture had customs like that. My dad, born in 1934, came home to The Old House, which was populated with his parents, paternal grandparents, an old maid aunt, and two great grandparents.

Over the next two decades, five siblings were added to that mix. All of the older generations are long gone, but the old log house is still standing and my father's generation is still intact like the logs placed there seven generations ago.

Family.

What a fine word.

He ain't heavy. He's my brother." Familial roles are often blurred in African culture

"He ain't heavy. He's my brother." Familial roles are often blurred in African culture Like the O Word, Family can be hard to define.

I'm not an expert on orphans, adoption, and the unique relationship between America and Africa on this subject.

I compare it to a sparkling diamond's many facets. Each one shows a different angle. These are some

of the facets we've observed:

There's Robert, an American pastor, who a decade ago, adopted a family of three orphan siblings.

Then he left them here in Uganda.

He and his wife chose to leave them in their native culture.

But they weren't left alone. Pastor Robert paid for their education, training, and given them a solid foundation for life in Africa. Through his assistance, they were able to rise out of the poverty that grips orphans in Kampala.

He was compelled to act and he did.

Outsiders (i.e., Westerners) can only address the tip of the orphan iceberg.

The best work is done by caring Nationals. Like the earlier story about our Dinka friend Peter taking in James, the lonely Anuak boy. Peter and his family saw a boy totally alone. They were compelled to act.

To get involved.

To put some skin in the game.

You'll never see a movie or read a book about this unknown heroes but they are the heart and soul of helping refugee "Unaccompanied Minors."

It's a term that breaks my heart. Unaccompanied minors .It travels with another sad term: Child-headed households.

Their stories begin with, "The rebels attacked in the night. I ran after my father in the darkness. When he stopped, I realized it wasn't my father. I still don't know if he's alive or dead."

Uganda is well-known in adoption circles due to two high profile Americans:

There's Katie Davis, author of Kisses from Katie.

A young American on a short term missions trip, Katie fell in love with the needy children in Jinja, Uganda.

She chose to give up her comfortable life and pour herself into building an orphanage. When we see her in Jinja, her van is packed with children.

Watching them unload at church is akin to the circus clowns pouring out of a small VW.

Katie Davis saw a need and was compelled to act. Sam Childers , best known for the movie loosely based on his life, "Machine Gun Preacher," is much more controversial.

Seeing the suffering of children ravaged by the Lord's Resistance Army along Uganda and South Sudan's border, Childers was compelled to act.

Compelled. There that word again. It means to be swept along by a force or idea. I've noticed it's a

word that aptly describes most difference makers in this world. "I saw this need and just couldn't refuse to try to make things better."

Then there's the story of Desire Grace.

We haven't adopted an African child but we've sure fallen in love with many. They easily tug at your heart.

I guess in a way I am Desire Grace's godfather.

Can a Baptist be a godfather?

Desire Grace's parents, Joseph and Jessica Anyovi, live and minister near Adjumani Refugee Camp.

Joseph has been a key to the local Madi helping the arriving Dinka refugees. He is an inspiration and hero to our Chadan team.

He and Jessica recently had their first child. I was across the Nile when he called, "We've got a baby girl. She and Jessica are both doing fine." "That's great. What'd y'all name her?"

"Her first name is Desire. Baba (Father), we want you to give her a second name."

I was honored but humbled.

What a privilege and responsibility.

I prayed and struggled for several days. When I returned to Adjumani, I had a peace. and a name:

"I'd like Desire's middle name to be Grace."

Desire Grace. It's a good name. I told DeDe it sounded like the title of a John Piper book.

Desire Grace with her parents, Joseph and Jessica Anyovi

The final adoption story is extremely personal. The trouble with Africa is that there's someone to fall in love with daily. My deepest love affair here (after my sweet wife DeDe) is named Daizy. That's her on the chapter cover photo in her Aunt Jemima outfit cooking up some matooke.

Daizy Mae Thomas and her mother, KB.

She and her adoptive mother, KB Thomas, lived with us for five weeks. As Daizy, a precocious 8-year-old, walked through the long Ugandan adoption process, we realized it's not for the faint of heart.

Nor for the thin of wallet.

It's a test of endurance. KB, who serves as student director at my alma mater, was compelled to finish this project.

Daizy and KB's story is one to tell: She is a member of the Alur tribe. KBmet her in an Up Country orphanage several years ago.

Her mother is dead. She's never seen her father who purportedly lives in the Lake Victoria Islands.

Daizy's grandmother, lovingly known as Jajja, takes care of ten grandchildren/dependents.

At some point Jajja, decided the orphanage was the best place for Daizy. Don't ask me why she chose Daizy and not one of the others.

I believe it was an act of love.

When KB began the adoption process, Jijja made the decision to allow Daizy to go to America.

It couldn't have been an easy choice. Some people might criticize Jijja for giving up the rights to a

granddaughter.

Once again, I choose to view it as sacrificial love in action.

I want the very best for you.

As the adoption process slowly meandered through embassies, government offices, and attorneys, KB and Daizy came to live with us. That's when I fell hopelessly in love with Daizy Mae Thomas.

Others might questions KB, a single mom, on her sanity in spending a king's ransom on being a single mom to an African girl.

It's just what compelled people do.

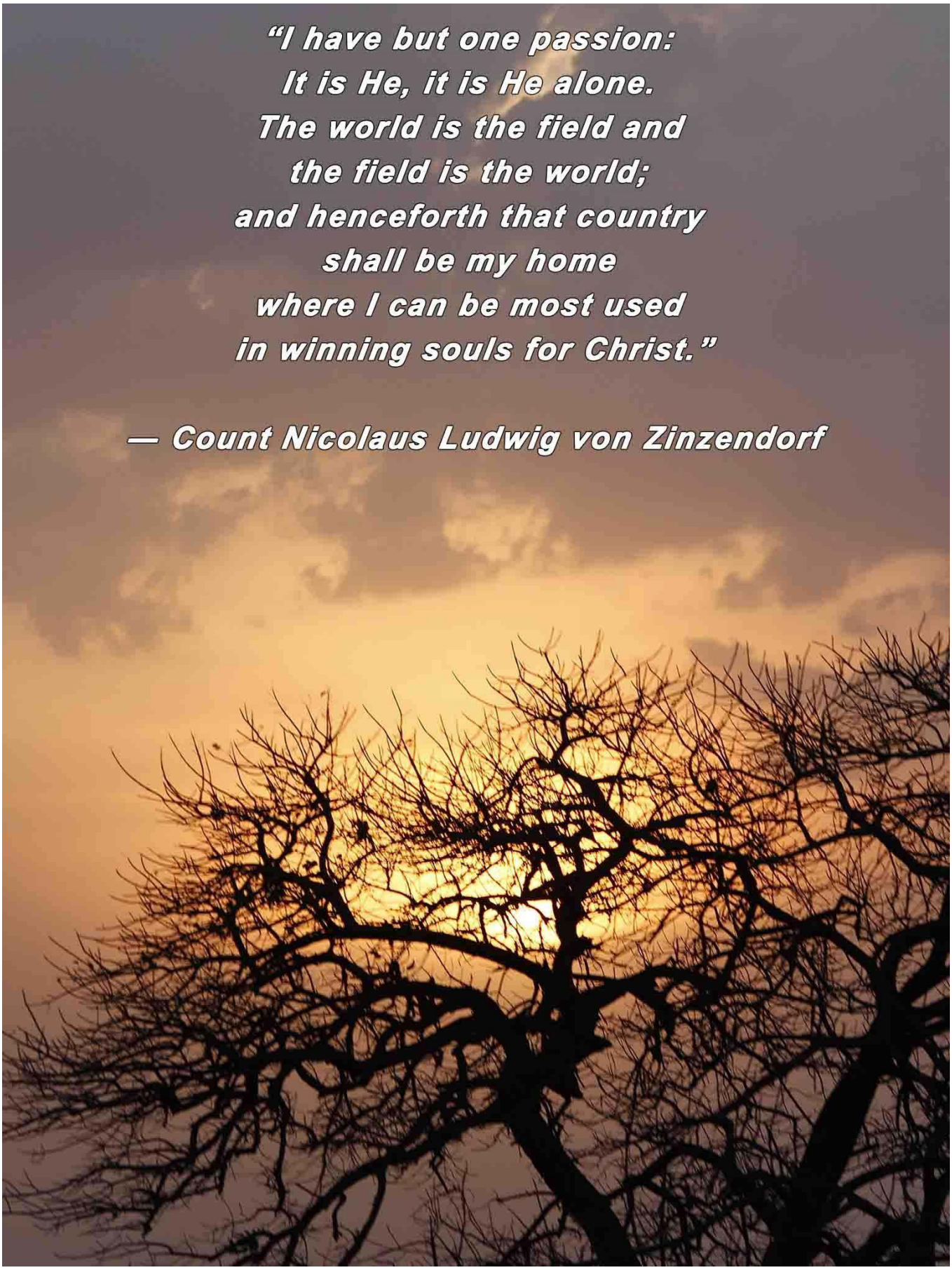
Daizy Mae Thomas and Emma Iles Arua, Uganda December 2013

There's an oft-told story of a boy walking along the beach. A high tide has deposited hundreds of starfish on the sand. The boy is picking up starfish and tossing them back into the ocean.

An older and wiser adult scans the vast beach covered in starfish. "Son, do you really think you can make a difference?"

The boy deftly frisbees another starfish into the ocean. With a satisfied smile, he says, "I sure made a difference for that one."

Here's to the difference makers.


"I have but one passion:
It is He, it is He alone.
The world is the field and
the field is the world;
and henceforth that country
shall be my home
where I can be most used
in winning souls for Christ."
— Count Nicolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf

BEEPED

20

The fine art of African cell phone Etiquette

Have you ever been beeped? It's a part of phone culture life in Africa.

I use a jail-broken I-phone over here. I like the way that sounds. Jail broken. I wonder if there's a warrant out there for me. Next thing you know, I'll be ripping the "Under penalty of law" tags off pillows.

There are no long-term phone contracts in our part of Africa. You purchase a SIM card from one of the providers (Airtel/MTN) and insert it into your phone.

Next you buy a pay-as-you-go airtime card.

They come in all sizes from 500 shillings up. (That's about twenty cents worth.) You scratch off the code and upload your amount.

Our SIM card box with phone cards for Kenya, South Sudan, and Uganda.

Africans live and die by their cell phones. I've not been remote enough where natives don't have a phone. They may or may not have service (need I say, "Dry Creek, Louisiana USA") but they've got a phone.

My friend Bob tells about being in rural Kenya with a Maasai cattle herder. A cell phone rang, the Maasai answered and had a conversation about the current price of cattle in Nairobi.

Another interesting thing about African phone culture is how they skipped the landline generation. Few Africans ever had a wired phone in their home or business.

One of the best visuals of how the developing world skips technology generations is taking place here in Uganda: All over the country, fiber optic cable is being laid. It's a big step in wiring the country together.

The trenches for the cable are being dug by hand. Long lines of shirtless young men swing pickaxes as the red dirt flies.

A good trencher could cut the time in half.

And put hundreds of men out of work.

Every advancement affects a way of life, sometimes good and sometimes not.

. . . Back to African cell phones and the act called "beeping."

Africans buy all things in small chunks. It's their economy and lifestyle. They'll send a child to the store after offering you tea or coffee. The errand girl will return with a few teabags and a small Ziploc bag of sugar. They know that to keep a pound of coffee or box of tea bags means the neighbors will borrow it all within a week.

This also goes with purchasing fuel. Many boda boda (motorcycle taxi) rides include a stop at the station for a half liter of fuel.

And that's how their phone airtime economy also works. Africans buy airtime by small amounts and guard it religiously.

And that's where beeping comes in: The caller pays for the call.

The receiving party talks for free.

That's why most of the calls I receive from Africans begin with, "Hey Bwana. This is Baki. Last night two unbelievers came to our Bible Study and"—CLICK.

I've been beeped.

Or rather flashed. It's a verb over here: "He flashed me." Or rather, I've been clicked: he's hung up.

And it's my turn to call back—on my nickel (or shilling).

My return call finds Baki relaxed and ready to talk all day. He knows the Mzungu has plenty of money because we buy airtime 20,000 shillings at a time.

That's about $7.63 at our current rate.

I usually laugh at beeping. We Wazungu expect it, and are seldom disappointed.

I especially tip my hat to the pros at beeping. Like my friend Baki who uses the hook so well.

In writing we are taught to use the hook. It's the beginning that hooks or captures the reader.

What are some of the best book hooks you've known?

My favorite is "It was the best of times and the worst of times" from Dickens' *Tale of Two Cities*.

One of my friends began his novel with, "For a hanging, it was a small crowd.

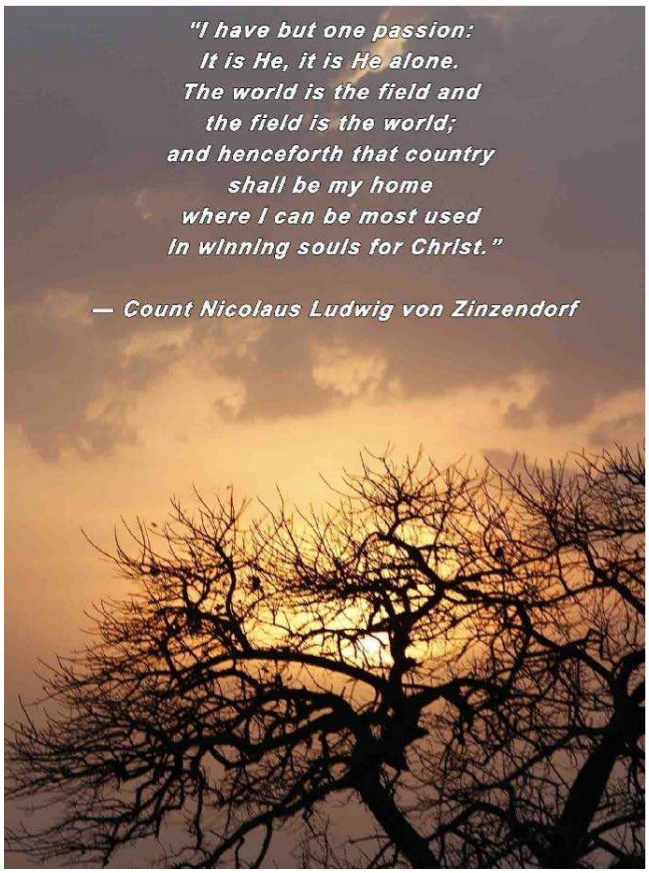
Especially for hanging a woman." That's a fine hook!

Good hooks, whether in a book, a headline, or phone beep, always make you want to know more.

My favorite African beep contains something like, "I have wonderful news . . ." —CLICK

It's part of the cell phone culture of Africa. Well, I'm nearly out of air time so I'll stop.

By the way, did I tell you about my first cousin who won the Texas lottery . . .CLICK.



One of our favorite quotes (and photos). You're welcome to share!

SOUTHERN GOSPEL 21

Header Above: A Southern woman from Dry Creek (LA), Eliza Iles, in Belgian Congo circa 1922. Aunt Eliza is second white hat from left.

Nothing connects with a person quite like truth in their heart language.

I'd never seen anything like it, and I've seen a lot. It was just like the Book of Acts.

We are ushered into the thatched roof-open sided church service.

The service is in full swing. If you've never been in an African church, you cannot fully understand full swing.

There's was a radiant joy in the singing and clapping. This is in spite of the fact that a sizable number of the worshippers are refugees. This is Faith Baptist Church in Nimule, South Sudan.

It's a Book of Acts church. More on that later.

The singing ends and a young pastor begins his sermon. I'm unsure of the language he's preaching in other than it's not English or Swahili.

After several sentences, he stops.

A lady to his right translates. I have no idea what language she's using.

As she finishes, a man on the far right speaks.

I don't have a clue. As another English speaker from the past said, "It's all Greek to me."

A fourth person, a young church leader, translates into something I understand: English.

This quadraphonic sermon continues.

We learn that the original speaker is preaching in Madi, the local language.

The woman on his right is translating into Arabic. Due to The Sudan (heavily Arab/Muslim north) and its occupation of the South during the war,

Arabic is widely used as the Lingua Franca or trade language.

The next man is speaking Murle, the language of most of the refugees present.

I'm not sure if the English is only for our benefit or others in the crowd.

South Sudan's official language is English.

Madi. Arabic. Murle. And English.

It's just like the Book of Acts. Chapter 2.

Listeners are hearing the Gospel in their heart languages.

Nothing connects with a person quite like truth in their heart language.

My monolingual frustration at only being able to converse in one heart language (English) rubs against my ribs.

The sermon in four languages goes on (and on). I always remind my American preacher friends, "Remember that using a translator doubles the length of your sermon."

In this case, it's times 4. 4x.

Madi, then Arabic, Murle, and finally English.

Spoken by four South Sudanese.

The Gospel in four languages.

A real Southern Gospel Quartet.

The best kind of all.

I wonder what these folks would think of our American Southern Gospel Quartet music.

I wonder what Southern Gospel Music lovers would think of the Full Swing African music I hear and experience each Sunday.

Read the amazing 1920 journey of Eliza Iles from New York City to the Belgian Congo

The Four Southern Gospel Translators at Nimule, South Sudan

GIMMEE SHELTER 22

The old man nodded at the dark clouds beyond the mountains.

“The rains are coming.”

We looked at the mass of South Sudanese refugees.

Hundreds of women, pots and dishes in hand, standing in line for their daily allotment of cooked food. A long line of yellow jerry cans stretching to faucets attached to a huge container.

Water is precious. Aiylo Camp Uganda

The rains are coming.

What will these people do?

They’ve erected shelters with tarps and plastic sheeting emblazoned with

UNHCR and USAID. And those are the lucky ones.

Others are standing under trees. It's their shelter from the coming storm.

What will they do when the rains come?

Equatorial Africa (the Uganda camps are about latitude 4 degrees north) has definite rainy seasons.

There are months (March/April) when it rains everyday.

There are other times (December/January) when it seldom rains. The savannahs become brown and brush fires fill the air with smoke.

When the rains return, they are welcome as they allow planting of crops and better access to water for livestock and humans.

The rains are welcome if you have shelter.

These refugees from South Sudan have little shelter.

Some have none.

What will they do when the rains come?

That night, a heavy rain breaks loose. Bob, being a good Southerner, calls it a “frog choker."

I’ve always loved rural expressions for rain. "Raining bull heifers and enough hay to feed them." "A real log floater."

"Gully Washer."

It rains most of the night.

Laying under our mosquito net at a cheap hotel, DeDe and I talk about the refugees who are seeking shelter from the same rains pelting our tin roof.

It doesn’t seem as big of a deal that we don’t have hot water, good electricity, or a fan.

We’ve got shelter.

However, thousands near us are laying on the bare ground, trying to stay dry under tattered tarps and stick shelters.

The needs are overwhelming and can easily flood us into paralysis. We can’t meet all of these massive needs.

But we can meet some.

The impossibility and magnitude of this man-made disaster is no excuse to shirk what we can do.

I think about a shelter being built at another location. A Madi tribe Baptist church in Nimule, South Sudan, has been hosting a large group of Murle refugees.

Through Baptist Global Resources (BGR) and the generous gift of a Dry Creek (LA) family, a brick

shelter is being erected to house the refugees. When they eventually return home, the building will become the worship center.

Let me rephrase that, it already is a worship center. As the words of Jesus echo, “I was sick ... in prison... hungry and you took me in". I’m reminded that true worship is always shown in caring for others.

I remind you that the rains are coming. We cannot do everything. But we can, and must, do something.

Storm moving in over Adjumani, Uganda

UNDERDOGS 23

A Lesson on Child-Friendly Spaces

I'm not sure I've ever seen anything that looked more out of place. As my grandpa said, "It was like a saddle on a pig."

A brand new shiny playground equipment in the midst of a ragtag barren refugee camp. I walked over to a swing set and pushed on it. It was cemented in the ground. Just as I thought: They're planning on these folks being around awhile.

The chains on the swings were looped out of reach of any youngsters. Why were they even there?

That is what's called "a toothy smile."

These refugees weren't from South Sudan. They were Kakwa people who'd fled nearby the Democratic Republic of Congo. Another alphabet soup-named rebel group was stirring things up, forcing these people across the border.

The playground equipment was donated by Save the Children. I have no fault with making the lives of these children easier, and a good swing can be therapeutic. Good for both the swinger and swingee.

I spent many good Louisiana afternoons swinging our three boys.

"Come on, Daddy, do an underdog." (An "Underdog" is when you swing someone high and run under/past before the swinger returns.)

It just seemed so odd, as the camp leaders spelled out a long list of needs: closer clean water, mats to sleep on, better nutrition for the children, and Bibles.

I glanced at the playground items and could only shake my head. They're sick from sleeping on the ground but have a new merry go round!

Go figure. T. I. A. This is Africa.

I've put that northern Uganda refugee camp on both my GPS and bucket list.

I'm going back one day with my grandchildren. I'm going to introduce them to some beautiful African children. And we may swing all afternoon under the brilliant African sun.

If I feel up to it, I might even try one more underdog.

Postscript 1

May 2014

On our first visit to this camp, we were with five local African church leaders.

Each had been a refugee at some earlier time in their lives. They've gone back and started preaching points in each of the eight cluster camps, including Adologo Camp.

Preach and heal.

Preach and heal.

It's what our leader Jesus did.

They're not building playgrounds but sharing the Good News.

They've coordinated drilling three boreholes in the Camps as they continue sharing about Jesus who called himself The Living Water.

God is working and often allows us to reach our hands in and take part.

When you come see us, I'll take you to Adologo. In the meantime, you might want to help the ministry our friends are starting there.

I'll take you there. And if you're agile enough, we'll let you try an Underdog!

Postscript 2

August 2014

It's eight months since my first trip to the lonely playground.

There's now a protective wooden fence around the area. A rough wood shelter has been built as well as latrines.

Dozens of children were running in the playground. Others sit in the shelter learning English and singing.

This is designated as a "Child-Friendly Space."

Only approved adults work within the area.

The children are temporarily free of the troubles and stress of refugee life.

It shows how wrong I was to pre-judge the worthiness of this project. Most of the camps now have a child-friendly play space.

Sometimes, it's good to be wrong and stand corrected. Let's play!

Save the Children's Child Friendly Space


I DON'T KNOW WHAT THE FUTURE HOLDS
T I KNOW WHO HOLDS THE
FUTURE

DISPLACED

. . . but not misplaced

24

I am a refugee torn from my land,

Cast off to travel this world to its end.

Never to see my proud mountains again.

But I still remember them.

"I am a Wanderer"

–Steve Earle

So often seemingly similar words have totally different meanings.

One word can soothe, while a similar word can irritate.

A word may unite. another word leads to division.

On my first trip to Asia, I quickly learned that there is a word you use carefully.

Refugee.

According to the United Nations, a refugee is someone who has crossed a national border to escape war, famine, or natural disaster.

A person who is still in their country but has moved due to the above factors is considered a displaced

person, not a refugee. They're called IDPs. Internally Displaced Persons. Government officials are very sensitive on this issue. They are displacees, not refugees.

Back in 2002 as I stood amidst a dusty, hastily built Displaced Camp in the floodplain north of Phnom Penh, Cambodia, our host, Mickey, kept reminding us not to call it a refugee camp.

Mekong River Displaced Persons Camp Cambodia

During our trip to the Indonesian tsunami areas we visited many Displaced Person Camps. Some were pretty nice while others were primitive and unsanitary.

Those who fled Katrina and then Rita were called evacuees, even though they were displaced persons. Don't ask me the difference. But they weren't and aren't refugees.

However, there is a point of clarification I wish to make. They've been displaced.

But they have not been misplaced.

The American Heritage dictionary defines misplaced as “put in a wrong place” or “place (something) where one cannot find it again."

It means you cannot find something and don't remember where you left it.

Recently, I couldn't find my truck keys. They were misplaced somewhere. Later on I found them—right where I'd misplaced them while preoccupied with this story.

However, displaced carries a completely different connotation.

It means moved but not forgotten or lost.

At some times in our lives, we all become displaced.

It doesn't take a hurricane, tsunami, or civil war. It can be a job change, a family tragedy, cancer, an illness, a financial setback, persecution from without or even from within.

All of a sudden we realize we are somewhere we did not expect to be. We've been displaced.

I'll never forget the morning of Tuesday August 30, 2005. Early that morning I sat with several hundred New Orleans evacuees from Hurricane Katrina. They were staying at Dry Creek Baptist Camp in my Louisiana hometown.

The news the day before had been spotty. Parts of greater New Orleans were underwater but one headline read, "New Orleans Dodges Bullet."

That headline crashed Tuesday morning as television videos showed most of the city being flooded. Several key levees had collapsed. As news anchors mentioned the breached canals at 17th Street, New London Avenue, and Industrial Canal, these displaced evacuees knew their homes were now under water.

They knew that their expected evacuation of several days was being washed away by the murky waters of Lake Ponchartrain.

They were displaced—no home to return to. At least for now . . .

And maybe forever.

Being displaced is bad.

It's tough.

But it is not the same as being misplaced. If I misplace you, I forget where I've "laid you down."

If I displace you, I've moved you but I know exactly where you are. Scripture is chock full of folks being displaced.

Father Abraham leaves home for a place God promises to show him.

Later his great-grandson Joseph is displaced to Egypt. This tragedy of betrayal, enslavement, and prison results in a tidal wave of forgiveness and reconciliation. We realize God allowed for Joseph's displacement to save the Jewish race.

His words to his brothers, "What you meant for evil, God meant for good" in Genesis 50:20 are a strong testimony to this displaced/but not misplaced juxtaposition.

Several centuries later, one of the greatest heroes of the Old Testament appears. His name is Daniel. He is an example of courage, coolness under pressure, and commitment to his own value system.

Daniel is displaced. That is the main story of this book in the Bible. As a young boy, his homeland of Israel is overrun by the Babylonians and Daniel is exiled to live in a foreign kingdom.

Except Daniel never forgets where he came from.

His belief in God and commitment to do what is right is shown in all he does. This leads him to advance to the inner circle of the Palace.

When the Persian King Darius overthrows the Babylonians, Daniel's character endears him to the new ruler.

In Chapter 6 of Daniel, he becomes the victim of an evil plot by jealous associates of King Darius.

Daniel breaks the King's edict that no one can pray to anyone but him. Daniel, committed to praying three times daily, is arrested and thrown into the den of lions.

Talk about displaced!

He was taken from his boyhood home, had his name changed to the beautiful tongue-twister of "Belteshazzar," gone from one kingdom to another, and now is thrown into the den of lions.

But he was only displaced. Not misplaced.

God allowed him to be displaced. Now don't ask me to explain all about the "permissive will" of God. I do not understand why God allows his people to be dumped right into the middle of terrible situations.

Displaced but never forgotten.

The next morning when Darius, who has fasted and prayed all night, comes running to the lion's den, Daniel is safe and whole.

Daniel succinctly replies, "My God sent his angel, who closed the mouths of the lions."

Yes, God knew right where Daniel was.

And as always He was faithfully there.

We could go on and on with these displaced heroes of the Bible. Isaiah. Jeremiah. Nehemiah. Even seafarer Jonah.

Best of all, our Savior Jesus spent time displaced: born away from home in Bethlehem. Carried to Egypt. His public ministry is one of constant displacement: "The Son of Man has no place to lay his head."

Many of our refugee friends have no idea when they'll return to their beloved land of South Sudan.

Some may never return.

None of us can reach into the future.

But we serve a God who can and does.

As one of our Ugandan friends repeats, "God's delay is not God's denial."

Can we be displaced?

You bet.

Misplaced?

Never in a million years.

Not only does God know right where you are, He is present with you. Jesus promised: I will never leave nor forsake you.

That's good enough for me.

With faith, it can be good enough for you.

Displaced?

Maybe.

Misplaced by God? No way.

Not in a million years.

"I know Who holds the future." Feel free to share this on Social Media

GRATITUDE 25

A Roof Over Our Heads

We've got a roof over our heads.

And the kids are all fed.

And the woman I love most of all

Lies close beside me in our bed.

Lord, give me the eyes to see

Exactly what's it's worth.

And I will be the richest man on earth."

–Paul Overstreet "Richest Man on Earth"

I've never really understood the term until recently:

A roof over our heads.

Not everyone has that in Africa.

Especially refugees.

Poppa Mzee had a roof. But that was about it.

The previous chapter page shows his home in Nyumazi Refugee Camp. A white UN tarp, which served as his roof, flapped in the breeze.

I wondered how wet he'd get in a blowing rain.

He lay on folded cardboard. Bare ground beneath him.

A small bag of possessions served as his pillow.

The worst part was how alone his spot looked. It was fifty yards to the next shelter.

I wondered about his story.

How did he get here?

Why was he so alone among 19,000 people?

One must be extremely careful distributing things in the Camps. You can easily cause a mob scene.

People can get hurt. So we discourage giving anything to a select few.

My sister Colleen once caused a near riot in a Liberian orphanage by giving candy to the children.

Projects and giving must be carefully planned.

I couldn't get Poppa Mzee off my mind as our group walked to a new water well.

We were met by the Camp Chairman, Wilson. He was a tall Dinka man in his forties. This position is filled by a vote of the refugees in the camp. It's a big position. A tough position.

Kind of like Moses in the wilderness. Listening to folks and their problems day after day.

Chairman Wilson walked with us back toward our vehicle. We passed Poppa Mzee, and I asked the Chairman, "We have a sleeping mat tied on our roof. May I give one to this man?"

"Sure."

He thought a moment. "Do you have two?"

"Yep. Straight from Ten Mile, Louisiana."

That went over his head but he lowered his voice, "I brought my old daddy with me from South Sudan. He'd love one."

"We'll give one mat to Mzee here and you can take the other to your father."

I won't describe how Poppa Mzee received his mat. You can see it in the photos. It was a highlight of the day.

Don't miss these two photos: Poppa Mzee gets his mat.

Poppa sighed as he settled onto his mat. My mind was a thousand miles away.

No, make that eight thousand. I envisioned the ladies at Freedom Baptist Church in Ten Mile, Louisiana, who'd made this mat. They sent a duffel bag of sleeping pads made from Wal-Mart bags.

I thought of Cooter, Dorothy, and all of the women who'd knitted these mats. I've been told it takes 700 Wal-Mart bags to make one mat. I wonder how long one mat takes?

I just know it made a difference in Poppa Mzee

Poppa's life.

As we left, he sat up on one elbow. "Cha lech."

I stopped. He repeated, "Cha lech."

Chairman Wilson said, "He's saying thank you in Dinka."

"Cha lech."

Miz Cooter, I'm just passing on this thanks.

Cha lech. Or as you'd say in Ten Mile, "Thank y'all."

"We can do no great things but we can do small things with great love."

–Mother Teresa

Warning: Please do not send mats over. It is much simpler and economical to buy mats here or better yet supply the materials for folks to make their own from local materials.

Postscript on Cooter Willis and her late husband, R.L., kept over 400 foster children in the space of three decades. They are rightfully famous in our area for a lifetime of good deeds and open hearts.


Sunday Best

Foster Parents of Year

Cooter Willis and her late husband, R.L.

We've got the plastic knitting needles they would need.

I wonder if Cooter Willis has her passport.

Here I am, Lord.

Send me.

Poppa Mzee on his bare cardboard mat Nyumazi 1 Camp Adjumani, Uganda

HEROES 26

Header: Margaret holds Maggie Iles

This book is filled with the term hero.

It's a medallion-like word reserved for angels and brave men and women.

he·ro [heer-oh] Show IPA

***noun, plural* he·roes; for 5 also he·ros.**

1. a man of distinguished courage or ability, admired for his brave deeds and noble qualities.
2. a person who, in the opinion of others, has heroic qualities or has performed a heroic act and is regarded as a model or ideal: *He was a local hero when he saved the drowning child.*
3. the principal male character in a story, play, film, etc.
4. *Classical Mythology* .
   a. a being of godlike prowess and beneficence who often came to be honored as a divinity.
   b. (in the Homeric period) a warrior-chieftain of special strength, courage, or ability.
   c. (in later antiquity) an immortal being; demigod.
5. hero sandwich.

EXPAND

How do you define a hero?

That's why Margaret is a hero.

Margaret lost both of her parents in South Sudan's war. A member of the Kuku Bari tribe, she became the guardian of her younger siblings. In UN jargon, she became leader of a child-headed household.

A brother lost his life and his children became hers. Others joined under the umbrella of her strength

and courage.

There are now eight dependents living with and around her at Alere Refugee Camp.

She takes care of all of them but it doesn't end there. She cooks simple meals and sells them at a low cost to the neighborhood children.

That's how Margaret came to know the girl with the bad limp. She related how she watched the girl struggle up the hill to school. The girl had a club foot and left earlier than the others to make it to school on time. In the afternoon, she limped past long after the others had sprinted down the hill.

Little did the girl know that Margaret would be the catalyst in a miracle that repaired her foot and changed her life.

The girl was named Adeit and her story is next.

Margaret at her tukul (hut) in Alere Camp near Adjumani, Uganda


UNO

UNO!

The Gospel according to Adeit

27

A Selfie: Adeit, Margaret, and Mzee

"My Father is always working, and so am I."

–Jesus in John 5:17

We stand amazed daily.

Really.

Amazed at the creative ways God is working all around us.

He can even use a deck of cards to draw a family to him.

We learned years ago that two things are good bridge builders across cultures and languages.

A deck of UNO cards and a box of dominoes.

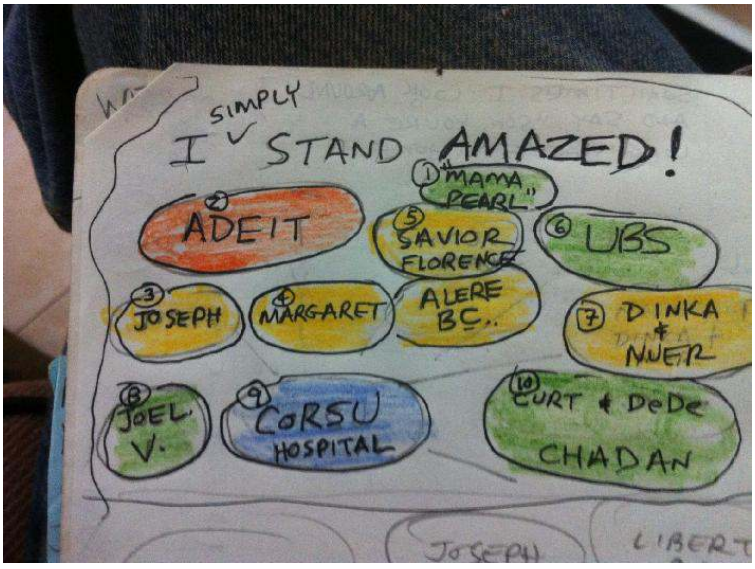
Dominoes. I've played Chicken Foot all over the world. I'll never forget playing dominoes among Sumatran tsunami survivors. "Kaki Ayam" (Chicken Foot in Acehnese) was a bridge builder and friend maker for our team.

Dominoes and UNO are great because you only need to recognize colors and numbers, and that is pretty universal.

Ed and Becky O'Neal sent a dozen decks of UNO over.

And one of those decks became the cement between a relationship that will stand the test of time.

I've been trying to notice and record all of these "coincidences"* and events. I tell DeDe that we're two old people stumbling and bumbling around Africa, and in the midst of our shortcomings, God keeps linking up us with the right people in the right places.



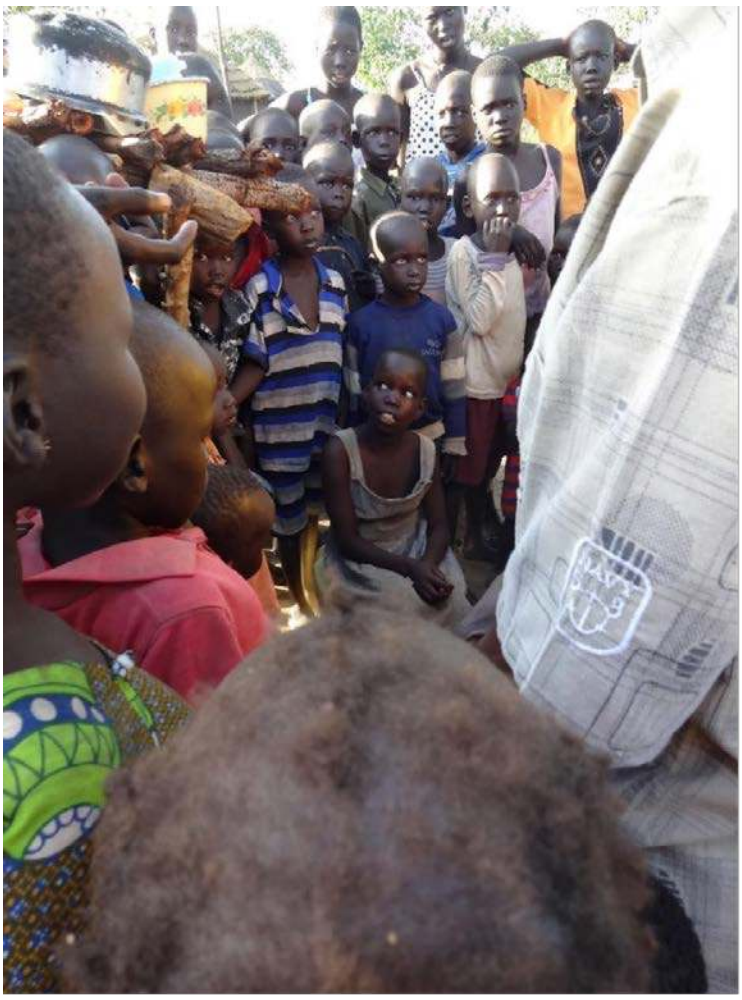
Coincidence is a cuss word in the Believer's vocabulary. This "Amazing Bubble" shows why.

The numbered bubbles above illustrate how God is always at work.

Bubble 1: Our 1996 Toyota Land Cruiser. It gets us to the difficult places where the unreached are. It was bought with gifts of love through folks like you through the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering. Thank you! Learn more at www.imb.org

Our Land Cruiser "loaded for bear" at the Nile River ferry crossing. Laropi, Uganda

Your giving through Baptist Global Response allowed a Kentucky Baptist Disaster Team to visit and assess the needs of the South Sudanese refugees in northern Uganda. You can give directly to BGR's South Sudan Projects.



Adeit with friends in Alere Camp, Uganda on the day of our original visit

Bubble 2: Adeit. The gifts (Lottie Moon and Baptist Global Response) led us to a young girl named Adeit. We met her at Alere Refugee Camp near the Nile River.

Coy Webb, director of Kentucky Baptist Disaster Relief, and I were visiting PSNs of the Adjumani refugee camps.

PSNs are the People with Special Needs. They are the vulnerable. The young child, the elderly women, the infirm, blind, the orphan.

Alere Camp was the last of the dozen we'd visited during a grueling week.

The last visit at the last camp. I nearly suggested that we not visit any more homes. We'd seen enough to break any heart. It'd been easy to skip this last visit. If we had, I'd have been a much poor man.

I'd have been a much poorer man if we'd turned back.

A refugee led us up a steep path to a ring of huts. "There's a young girl named Adeit with a bad foot."

The girl, who looked to be about eight or nine, was cutting onions. Her large Dinka smile made me

instantly like her.

Our guide pointed to her left foot that faced backwards. Adeit just shrugged and smiled.

I gave her a deck of Uno cards and took her photo.

We trudged back to our vehicle. I didn't really expect to see her again.

But Adeit took up residence in my heart.

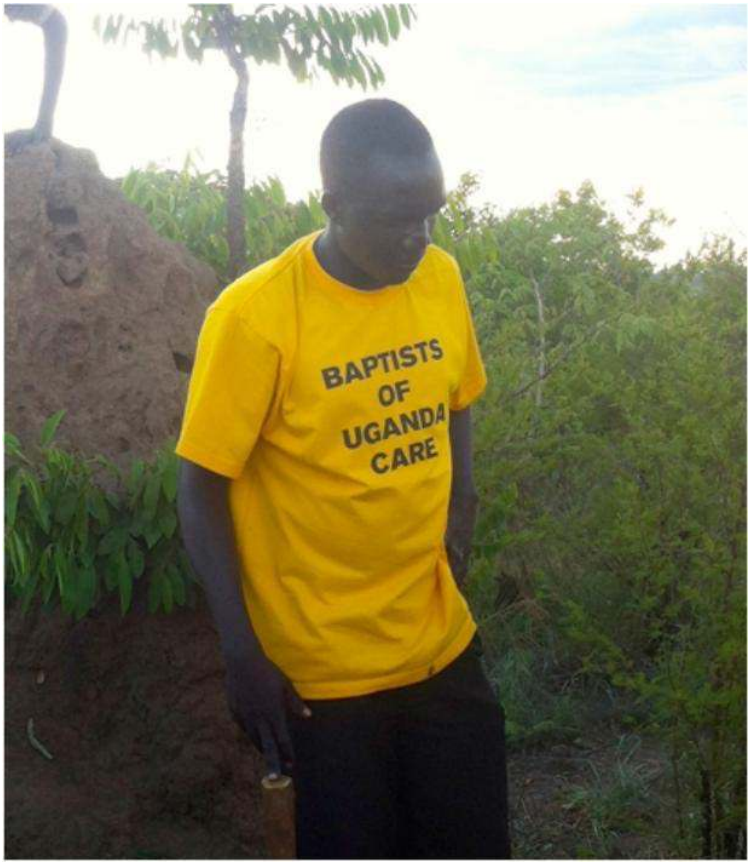
I found myself glancing at that photo daily.

Shortly afterwards is when God began moving.

Bubbles 3, 4, and 5; Local church leaders Joseph, Savior and Margaret began ministering to Adeit and her family.

We met with these leaders and shared about the opportunity to help Adeit. Margaret raised her hand. "I will go with her and the mother to the hospital in Entebbe."

They are sharing Jesus in word and deed as they built a bridge of friendship and concern for Adeit's handicap.



Pastor Joseph Anyovi, shown praying at a borehole site, has been a key in Adeit's story.

Bubble 6; Our Uganda Baptist Seminary is where Joseph, Savior, and hundreds of other national church leaders are being trained. Once again, your support of our organization makes this possible.

Uganda Baptist Seminary in Jinja,Uganda

Bubble 7. Alere Refugee Bapist Church, where Adeit and her family now attend, is a melting pot of Dinka (Adeit's family), Nuer, Madi, Kuku (Margaret) and more people groups.

Bubble 8, 9, and 10: Joel V is an American doctor with Samaritan's Purse. He's an alumnus of our organization's refugee camp work a decade ago. During a recent visit, he me told about CoRSU hospital near our home in Entebbe.

I asked, "What do they do there?"

"Rehab work on children."

"What kind?""Things like club foot and deformities."

"What does it cost?"

He explained that the cost was for transportation and lodging only and any surgery was free.

Dr. Joel Vanderford with Samaritan's Purse Kampala, Uganda

I couldn't get Adeit off my mind.

Every time I opened my computer, her smile seemed to pop up.

Because of the work of Pastors Joseph and Savior, a miracle began: Adeit, her mother Rebecca, and Guardian Angel Margaret (who served as translator) traveled by bus to the hospital.

Three surgeries later, Adeit's foot is facing forward.

I believe her Dinka resilience (and stubbornness) will serve her well during her long rehab.

We fully expect to see her running footraces.

We visited her Camp last week and were thrilled to see how her journey is touching the entire community for the Gospel.

Adeit, her mother Rebecca, and Margaret

All this is possible through our Chadan Team (Facebook @ANileApart)

We use Twitter Hashtag #UpCountry on our travels

whose focus is on the Unreached Peoples of South Sudan and southern Chad.

Due to the war in South Sudan, we're going to where thousands of South Sudanese have fled: the refugee camps along the country's borderlands.

Adeit's Dinka tribe is one of our priority groups.

We really do stand amazed at how God weaves things together to bring glory to his name as well as good in the life of a girl with a straight smile and crooked foot.

Her name is Adeit.

God is changing her life, the lives of her family (kin from South Sudan came down to see her "miracle foot") and even the spiritual temperature of Alere

Refugee Camp.

He's the one doing it.

We have the privilege of simply telling what we see.

And we stand amazed.

Lord, help us see how You are always at work around us.

In Jesus' name. Amen

Adeit on the road

Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said,

“Surely the LORD is in this place, and I did not know it.”

-Genesis 28:16

Earth's crammed with heaven,

And every common bush afire with God;

But only he who sees, takes off his shoes,

The rest sit round it and pluck blackberries.

-Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Adeit with her UNO cards from WalMart in DeRidder, LA. Thanks O'Neals!

GULU ON THE MOVE 28

Bouncing along on a northern Uganda road, it's hard to miss the colorful students.

Parades of brightly dressed children are walking home from school. We're north of Gulu in the heart of Acholi land.

Africa is a land of brightness. No mild colors here.

Pastels are passé here.

Every school has its uniform colors.

As the kilometers pass, we go from lavender to teal to bright red.

The children wave as we pass. They appear to have no worries or fears.

It wasn't always so.

Gulu was in the heart of the civil war between the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) and the Government.

You've heard the name of their leader: Joseph Kony.

The Lord's Resistance Army. Never has a group been more misnamed.

Don't associate the Lord with the vile and violent acts this militia carried out.

Sadly, this Acholi-populated army inflicted death and mutilation on its own people. The worst part of the LRA's atrocities was the kidnapping of child soldiers. Rebel squads would slip into villages at night and kill, rape, and plunder. Part of their plunder was the taking of children and teens. They were brainwashed and manipulated into cold-blooded killers.

Child soldiers. What a sad oxymoron! Two words that should never appear together.

Child Soldiers—their future and innocence taken away.

The best way to avoid being kidnapped in the LRA's nighttime raids was to leave home. During the height of the LRA mayhem, an estimated 25,000 children would pour into Gulu town nightly.

They were called Night Children. Seeking shelter wherever they could, they slept in doorways, on porches, and in homes and businesses that opened their doors.

That's why the colorfully dressed carefree schoolchildren of today are so touching.

They are the next generation after the Night Children.

The children of the children who lived in fear.

That prior generation was robbed. This generation is living in hope.

And a big part of their and their family's hope is built on education.

That's why there's such a long line of schoolchildren.

And that's why the statue stands in the midst of Gulu town. It's not exactly beautiful. Closer inspection reveals that it is made of rough sheet metal.

It stands in the middle of a Gulu roundabout next to a clock. The statue's base is plastered with ads and political signs. The median of the roundabout is unkempt.

In spite of its surroundings, the statue stands out. Two children stand behind a huge stacks of books. The books are large. We'd call them tomes or coffee-table books.

The book on top is open. The two children are reading. We can assume they are in school. They are not night children. They live in peace and freedom, and this allows them to get an education.

Education is not the answer to everything. I firmly believe spiritual matters take priority. But this doesn't allow us to throw the baby out with the bath water.

Education lifts up a culture. It provides opportunities.

It widens a worldview. It adds color to a person's world—transferring a black-and-white image into the vivid colors of Africa.

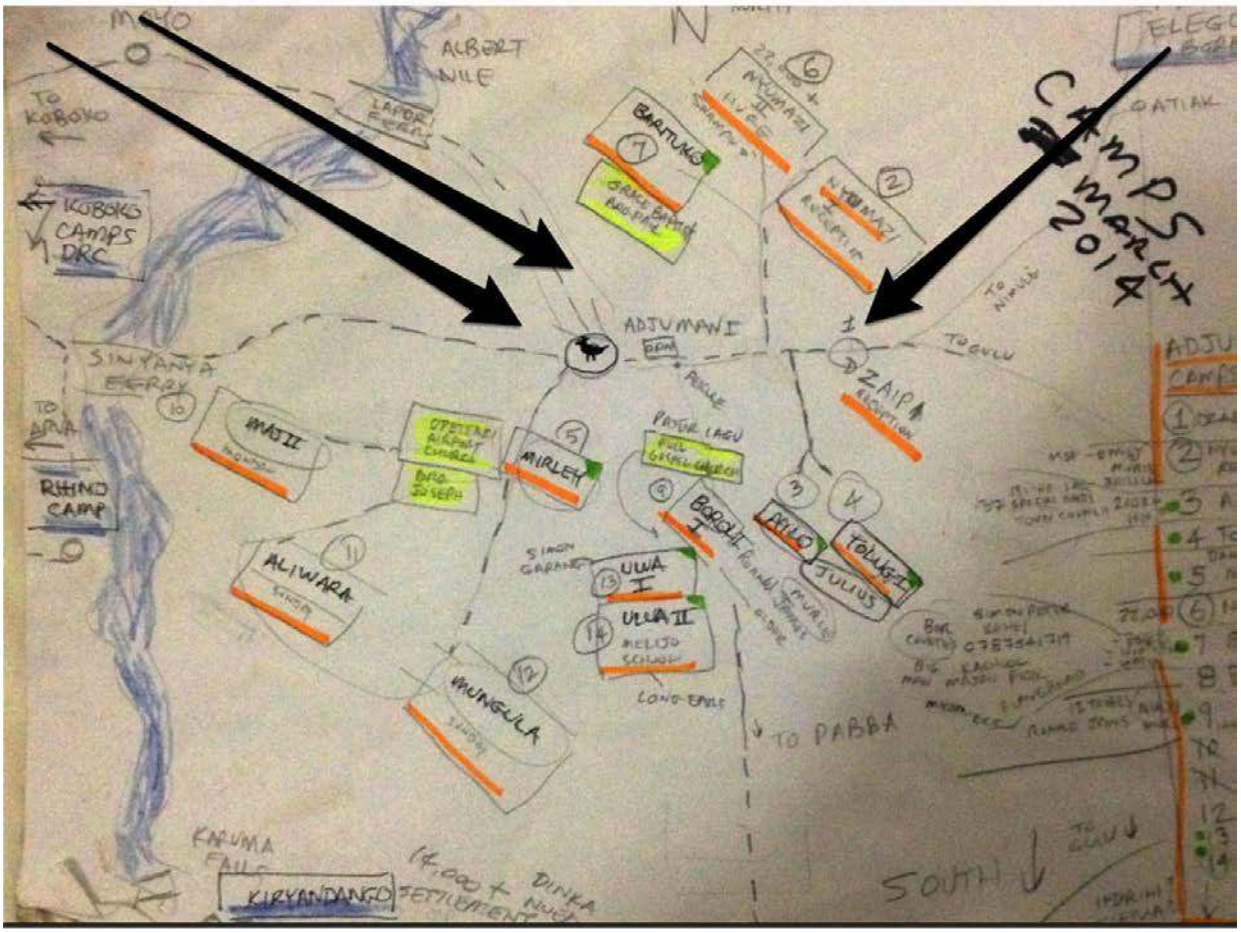
May it ever be so in Gulu Town, home of the Acholi.

Postscript

Joseph Kony and his LRA army wreaked havoc in Uganda, South Sudan, and Democratic Congo. The remainder of his forces are now hiding in the jungles of eastern Central African Republic (CAR).

Ugandan forces, with the aid of American soldiers, are tracking him down. Our hope is that evil leaders like him may become a thing of the past.

The Children and Book statue in Gulu is simple but fetching once you know the area's history.


ALBERT NILE
TO KOBOKO
KOBOKO CAMPS DRC
SINYANYA
TO ARUA
RHINO CAMP
ADJUMANI
BARTUKO
NYUMANZI II
NYUMANZI I
DZAIPA
TOGULU
MIRLEH
ALIWARA
UWA I
UWA II
MUNGULA
TOLLAGI
JULIUS
PABBA
TO PABBA
KARUMA FALLS
KIRYANDONGO
SOUTH
CAMPS MARCH 2014

GROUND-TRUTHING 29

Seeing is Believing

"You tell Mzungu to come up here (to Nebbi) so I can see him with my naked eye."

–Message from the father of our guard, Oscar.

Oscar's dad had heard about me but wished to see me face-to-face. That's what Ground-Truthing is.

This means seeing it first hand; not taking anyone else's word for it.

In the work of people-group research/anthropology, it's called "Ground Truthing"—putting your boots on the ground to see for yourself: where people live, how they live and what they believe.

Maps cannot replace that.

Wikipedia can't touch it.

Word of mouth is good.

But nothing is quite like going "barefoot."

Going there and putting your bare feet, or in our case, boots on the ground. Getting in among the people and seeing, feeling and tasting.

They've opened a new mall in our town of Entebbe. It's got a Nakamatt (Africa's version of Wal-Mart). They've posted a sign that they'll soon have a KFC.

Rumors have swirled that the mall will eventually feature a multi-screen cinema. That's a big deal. It's been over a year since I've seen a movie in a theater. Watching a movie on a Kindle Fire is different from the big screen.

I have tromped through the partially completed three-story mall looking for the cinema. I've gotten directions on its location:

It's about relationships. But isn't everything?

"It'll be on the ground floor."

"First floor for sure." (Warning: it is actually the second floor. Those Brits mess up everything over here.)

"Past the corridor on floor two."

No sign of any room that even remotely resembled a cinema.

"Oh, it'll open by the end of April."

"Summer at the latest."

I began to doubt the African grapevine.

There doesn't seem to be a cinema being built.

My hopes plummeted.

At least we have Amazon Prime.

Two days ago, I made another survey of the mall.

After two false leads, a third person said, "It's in the hall behind the Yogurt stand in the Food Court."

And there it was—two rooms with bare concrete, but clearly what will eventually be a cinema.

I believe I even smelled popcorn.

I now knew for sure. I'd seen it with my own naked eye. I didn't have to take anyone else's word for it.

"When will y'all be opening?"

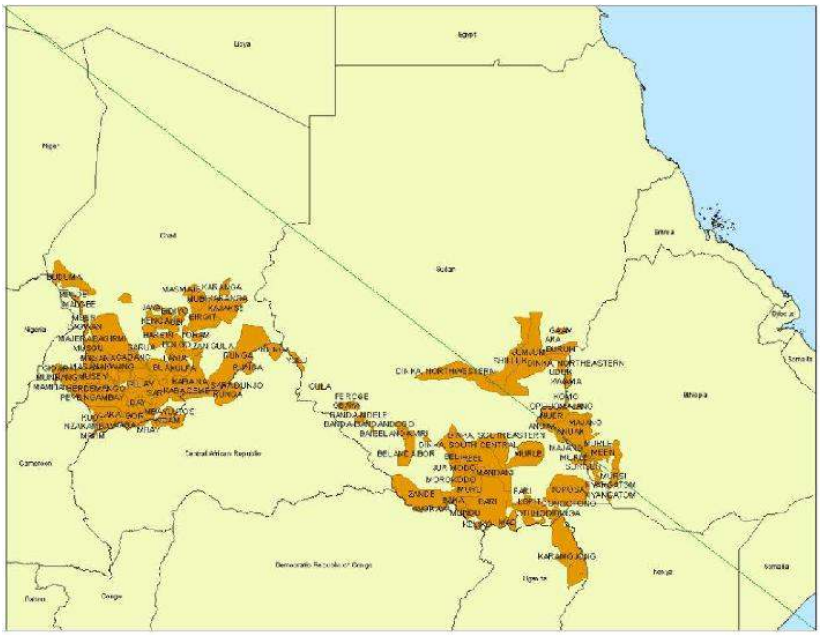
"Soon. Real soon."

Beware of these Africanisms: "Real soon" and "It's not far."

The small country of Uganda is in the heart of Africa. Its larger neighbor South Sudan is north.

That brings me back to our work.

Our job and calling is connecting or engaging unreached people groups with believers in both Africa and America.



Our Chadan Region: Hundreds of the least reached groups are located in South Sudan and southern Chad

Our area is called Chadan. It includes South Sudan and the southern half of Chad.

Both regions have difficult conditions as well as hundreds of thousands of unreached by the life-changing Gospel of Jesus.

Our focus has been on South Sudan, the world's newest country. During 2013 our team moved in and out of the country.

We were ground-truthing.

You could call it ground trotting.

Because many of our SS people groups live along the borders, we've also worked in northern Kenya and especially northern Uganda.

The end of 2013 brought an end to the fragile peace that was in South Sudan. Suddenly entering most of the country became impossible.

Most plans for 2014—going to places like Malakal, Bentui, and Juba—were shattered. The situation deteriorated in the first quarter of 2014. A ceasefire and peace all seem far-fetched.

Our team is currently seeking God's direction on focus and strategy. Here are our big questions:

1. How do we best do Engagement of the Unreached with the situation in South Sudan?

2. The two main parts of Engagement are Training (Discipling Leaders) and Research

(Ground-Truthing). How do we go about those in the current situation?

3. Thousands of "our people" (the unreached of South Sudan) have fled into neighboring countries. How do we Engage in the Refugee Camps of Uganda, Kenya, and Ethiopia?

4. Are the closed doors within South Sudan a call to work in southern Chad? Or the refugee camps?

5. As things slowly improve in South Sudan, when/how/where should we return?

6. As the predicted famine unfolds, how do we respond? These are all big questions that require God-sized answers

We implore you to pray for our Chadan leadership.

What do we need to see? Do?

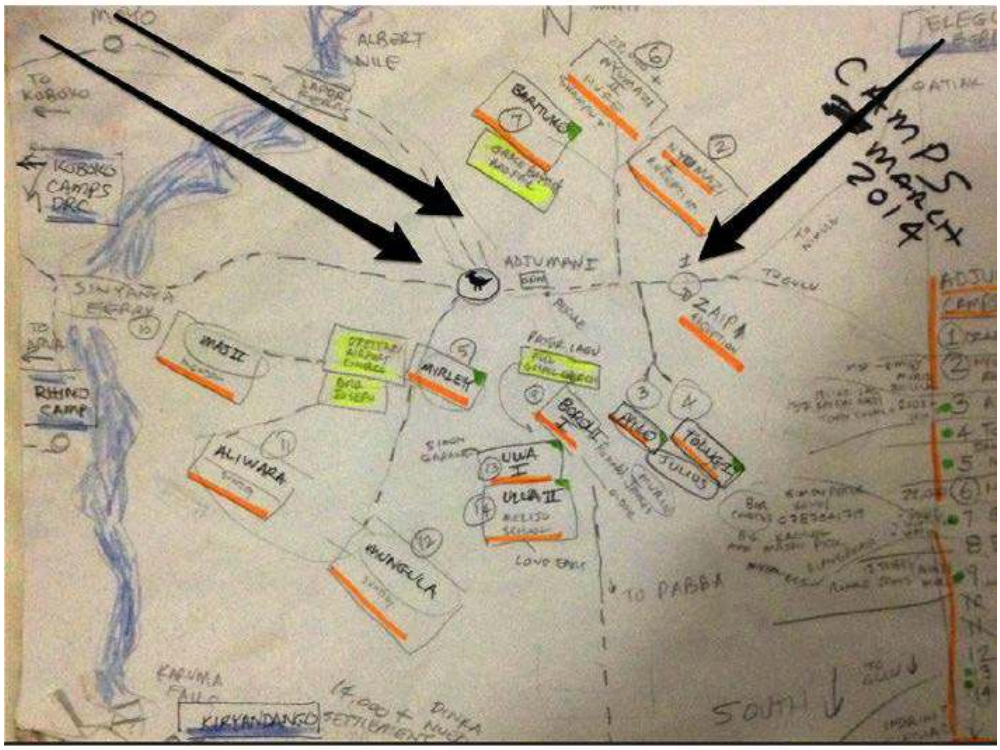
Where do we need to put our naked eyes?

Chadan Engagement Team exists to reach the least reached in South Sudan and southern Chad.

On one of my trips #Up Country, we stopped in Nebbi Town and met Oscar's father.

He later called his son, "Now I have seen your Mzungu with my naked eye and

I know he is real. I know he truly is your friend." That's ground-truthing at its best.



Sketch map of the Adjumani Refugee Camps

LOVE & WATER 30

"You can live without love but you can't live without water."

–Sudanese Proverb

Six foot six he stood on the ground

Weighed two hundred and sixty-five pounds.

But I saw that giant of man brought down

By a thing called love.

–"A Thing Called Love"

I've been wondering about those two forces that drive life where we now live.

Water.

Love.

Water and Love.

We live in the land divided by the rivers.

And all of those rivers flow into the Nile. It's the world's longest river.

It is arguably the world's greatest.

It's the source of myths, stories, and wars.

I'm from the land of the Mississippi.

They say in northern Minnesota, you can easily step across the source of the Mighty Mississip.

The Nile burst out of its source, Lake Victoria, as a full grown river full of rapids, depth, and width.

We live and work along the White Nile, the southern portion of the river. It joins the Blue Nile at Khartoum, Sudan, and continues its journey to the Mediterranean.

A river that flows, with no tributaries, through a thousand miles of the world's greatest desert, and comes out smiling.

The world's greatest river spits at the world's greatest desert, the Sahara, and says, "Bring it on."

It's not satisfied to be just another river. It chooses to do something few other world rivers have the gumption to do: it flows northward.

The Upper Nile (where we live) is south.

The lower Nile is in Egypt.

Go figure.

You cannot understand our part of Africa, especially the Sudans, if you don't know about the Nile. Everything here is about water.

Sudanese tribes have migrated for centuries, seeking water and grazing for their livestock. You don't live, work, farm, or raise cattle, without water.

"You can live without love, but you cannot live without water."

It's a true statement.

But maybe it's not.

I agree. You can't live without water. Our bodies, which are mainly water, must have it.

Without it, we'll die.

We'll die of thirst long before we starve.

But I'm not sure you can live without love. You can exist with the absence of love.

But I'm not so confident a person can thrive. Our bodies are made to need water.

Our soul is made to crave love.

I'm not referring just to romantic love, although it is a wonderful thing. I've been in love with the same woman for over thirty-five years. That kind of love is so sweet. I fear I take it (and her) for granted.

The human soul is made to love.

It can be a person.

Or in the case of parents (and grandparents) persons.

It can be a Godly love. "But the greatest of these is love."

I didn't make that up. The Apostle Paul (who was single) said it.

As Pascal, a mathematician, said, "We all have a God-shaped hole in our heart. And although we try, nothing else can fill it."

Not even water

Love. It's a word we toss around.

A powerful word. A strong emotion.

It can drive a person.

I believe it can even shape a nation.

As the song, "A Thing Called Love" shares,

"Can't hold it in your hand, see it with your eye,

But like the wind

it covers our land

Strong enough to rule the heart of any man.

It can lift you

It can put you down.

Take your world, turn it all around.

Ever since time, nothing's been found

That’s stronger than love.”

Amen.

May it be ever so.

Long live love.

In a dry land, every drop of water is precious

ACT OF FAITH 31

Faith is the confidence that what we hope for will actually happen; it gives us assurance about things we cannot see.

–Hebrews 11:1 NLT

"Water is invisible when it's underground.

God put it down there and it's our job to find it."

–Silva, Ugandan Hydrologist

Note boys in tree watching drilling.

Drilling a borehole is an true act of faith.

Boreholes. That's what they call water wells in Africa.

You're looking for something you can't see.

You believe it's down there.

The geologist says it's so.

But you can't see it.

Yet.

It's an act of faith to sink nine-meter length pipes and thousands of dollars into the red soil and rock underneath it.

A successful borehole

We were able to do this due to the generosity of our partners, Baptist Global Resource. BGR provided the funds and direction for us to drill wells in the Camps.

Why we drill: Ulua Refugee Camp preaching point in the shadow of a new borehole

I wish you could've have been there.

There's nothing quite like being among hundreds of refugees thrilled at

having clean accessible water. Many have been carrying 20 liter jerry cans for long distances.

That's over forty pounds of water, normally carried on the head.

There's nothing like watching a well come in. Water spews everywhere.

There is joy in the camp. We've been part of seven successful wells.

Then there's the disappointment of a dry hole. We know that feeling too.

Acts of faith sometimes require perseverance.

Not giving up.

Not giving in.

Believing and keeping on in spite of not yet seeing the result.

That's faith.

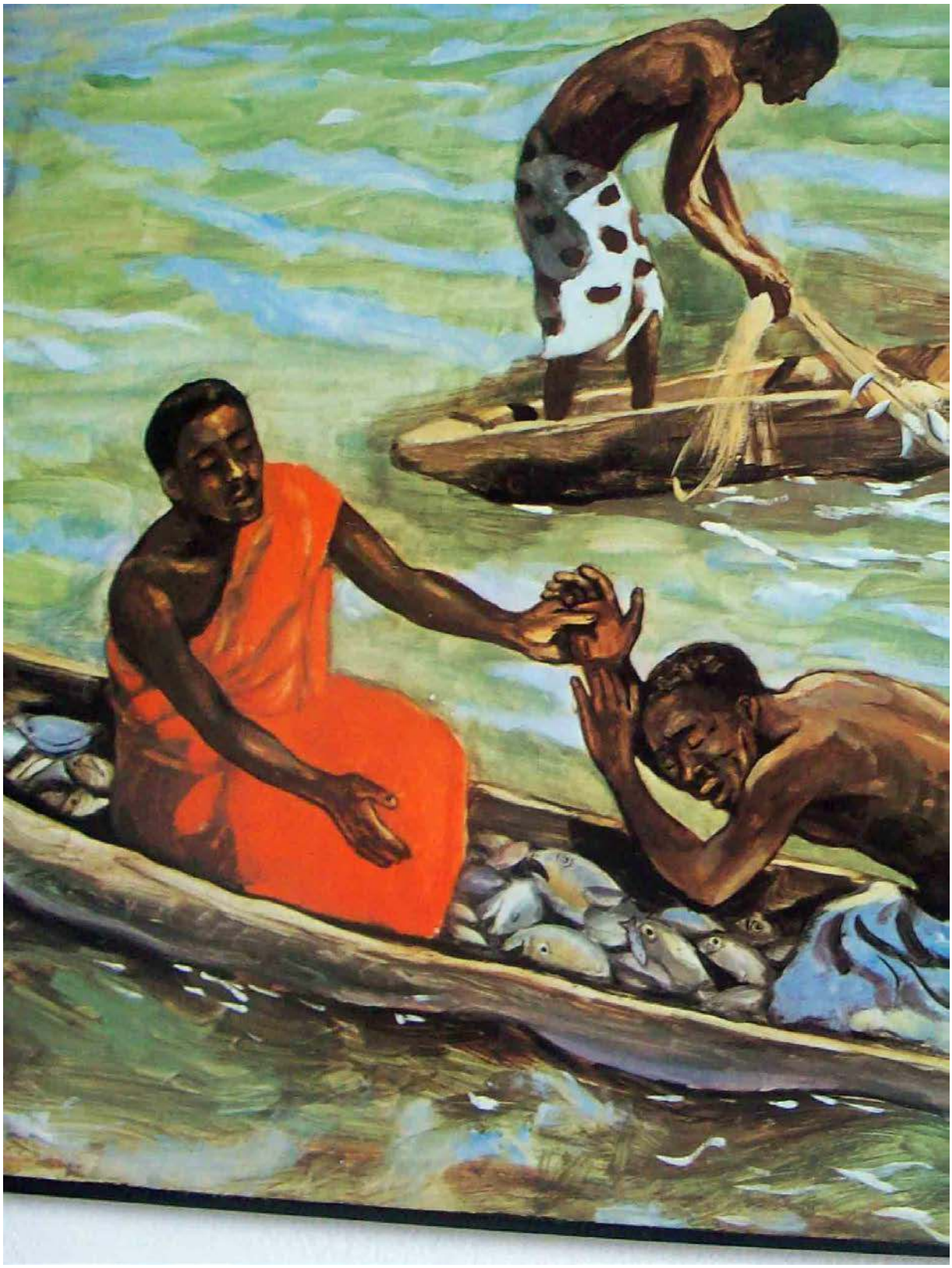
That's hope.

May we never lose either.

One of my favorite stories to share is 92 Dry Holes from Deep Roots.

It's the story of Texas oilman Amon Carter. Enjoy!

Borehole drilling at Ulua 2 Camp. Note tool pushers in tree.



BRICK BY BRICK 32

A Dinka named Batuk

Bricks can be used to build walls to keep others out or paths to bring them together.

I wonder where he's at.

I hope he's still alive.

I first met Batuk the Dinka at a lonely border checkpoint in South Sudan just north of the Tri-Corner of where South Sudan, Uganda, and DR Congo converge.

The Bazi checkpoint is deep in SS's Kakwa territory and it surprised us to see a Dinka there. He was easily identified as Dinka, the tallest people in the world. They are viewed by other tribes as arrogant and aggressive.

Batuk didn't make a good first impression. He was dressed in a running suit and approached our vehicle with a swagger that implied, "I'm in charge."

He was the Immigration Officer for this stretch of pot-holed road that can only charitably be called a highway.

Batuk began an interrogation of where we five "Mzungu" men were going and why.

As we informed him of our mission work, he scoffed. "Jesus is a white man's God."

He continued his monologue ending with, "If Jesus appeared right here, I wouldn't bow down to him."

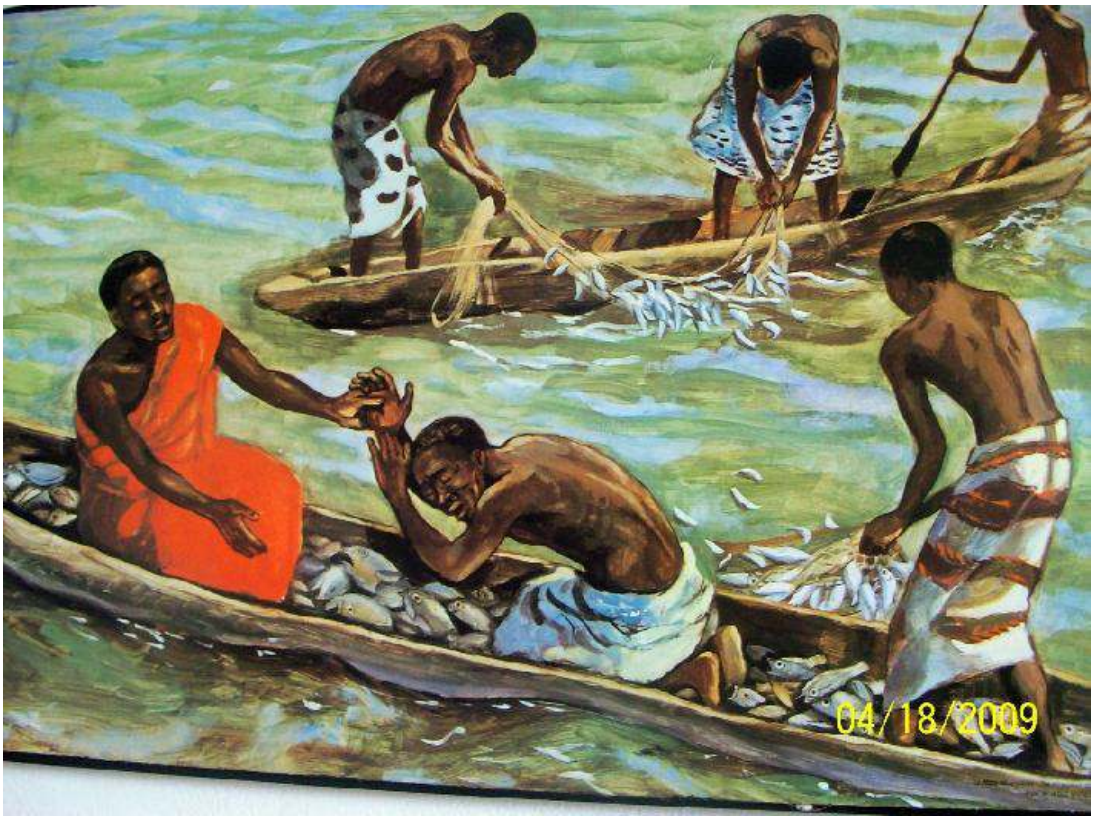
We were glad to leave his checkpoint and head north, but knew he'd be waiting on our return trip.

Four days later, there he was, still dressed in his running-suit uniform. However, we'd written down his name and so addressing him personally was the first brick to fall in the wall between us.

Several months later, DeDe, our son Clint, and I returned though Bazi. As we bounced north, we were ready for the checkpoint and Big Batuk.

First of all, I addressed him by name and alluded to our previous visit. A quizzical smile appeared on his face.

I handed him the photo shown below. "You said Jesus was a white man's God."



We shouldn't try to put Jesus in our little box.

This painting, one of my favorites, is from the Catholic Guesthouse in Goma, DR Congo.

He glanced up from the photo. “That’s just how some artist drew him as African.”

I shrugged. “Every culture makes Jesus look like their own.”

I put my white hand on his dark arm. “Besides, the real Jesus was probably closer to your skin tone than mine.”

He smiled.

Then I handed him our bribe. A loaf of DeDe’s famous banana bread. “We brought this for you.”

“For me?”

“Yep.”

It works like the Proverbial Charm: a bribe of bread, cookies, or bottle of water.

I even sometimes give a copy of one of my books. Anything but money.

He ushered us through the checkpoint, wishing good luck for our journey.

Three days later on our return, he greeted us effusively.

It must’ve been the banana bread.

He stood toe-to-toe with me. “I have one thing I want from you.”

I stiffened; ready for the infamous “African Ask” we face nearly daily.

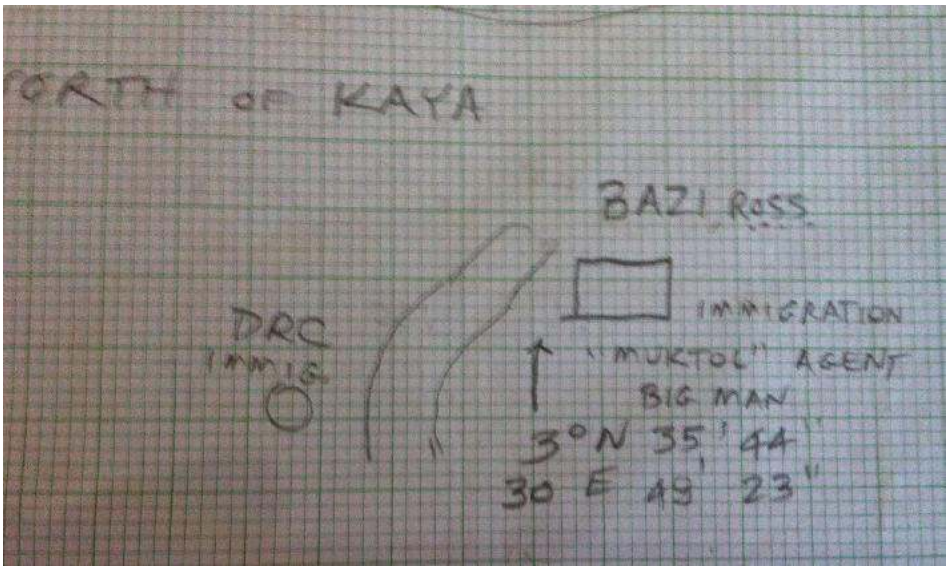
“I want two books.”

He had my attention.

“I want a book called 70 Great Christians and I want a Bible.”

I’d never heard of the book but promised I’d find it if possible and deliver it in January.

He walked us to our Land Cruiser. “God bless you on your way home.”



Bazi check point sketch. You can "go there" with Lat/Long on Google Map and pray for Batuk and Bazi

We waved and headed south. Over the next ten miles of potholes we talked of the change we'd seen in him.

It wasn't the banana bread. I firmly believe it was the kneading work of the Holy Spirit.

Back home in Uganda, I ordered 70 Great Christians from Amazon. Our son Terry brought it over.

It's a fine book covering historic Jesus-followers from "The 'Postle Paul" to Corrie Ten Boom.

I planned on presenting the book and Bible to Batuk as we passed through Bazi at the end of 2013.

But we weren't able to go.

War broke out.

Crossing the border into South Sudan sadly became out of the question.

As I think and pray about people in the war-torn country of South Sudan, I often think of Batuk.

How is he? Is he still at his border post deep among the Kakwa, whom we love deeply?

I pray for him.

Will you join me in praying for Batuk?

Lord willing, we are journeying through his checkpoint soon. I've got his care package ready. This man needs to know there is one white face that keeps a promise and was not put off by his initial demeanor and attitude.

As you pray, pray for Batuk's safety. Pray that Jesus, the Prince of Peace, will come to rule in his heart.

What is happening in our country of South Sudan is heart-breaking. But in spite of the chaos, God is working. Two of our team's couples recently saw 75 people baptized yesterday in a remote part of South Sudan.

God is working.

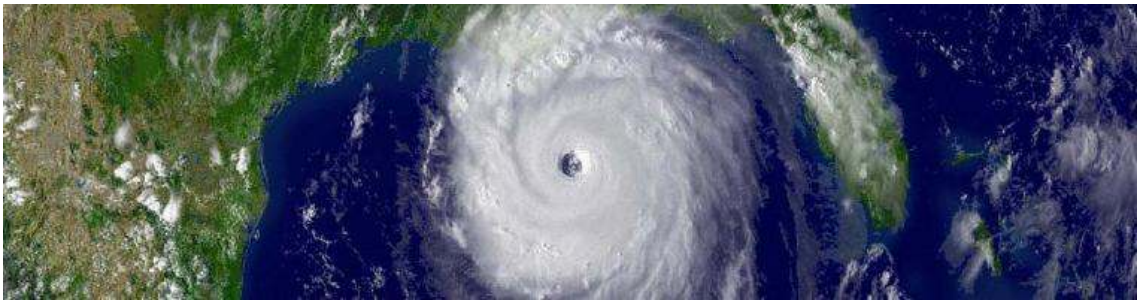
I also believe the work God started in Batuk's heart is ongoing.

Even though we're currently shut out of Bazi and South Sudan, we will continue to work. Even though you are a continent and an ocean away, you can be part of what God is doing. Pray! Pray for Batuk.

People are unreached for a reason. Often, they're in difficult places with difficult conditions. Many times the people are just difficult.

They try to drive us away.

Lord, help us see them as you do.



STORM FATIGUE 33

I'd suspected it when the tall Dinka woman was putting the finishing mud touches on a granary at Mirle Camp.

She was planning on being here a long time. She had storm fatigue.

I asked, "When will you go home?"

"I won't be going home."

She kicked at the red soil. "This is where I'll be."

Most of these refugees had been here before. They'd filtered home in the years after the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement.

They'd left camps like Mirle.

Or exile in Khartoum, northern Sudan's capital.

Shelters in Ethiopia and tukuls in the Kenya desert.

Even many of those who'd settled in Europe or North America returned to help build the New Sudan.

They came home full of optimism.

They finally had their own country, free of the Arab Islamic North.

Many of the younger ones had never been to South Sudan. All of their lives had been spent as refugees.

Now, with their new country only two-and-one-half years old, civil war had erupted.

Many of the refugees were back at places they'd never expected to see again.

Had hoped not to see again.

Their dreams shattered. Their hopes gone. I recall Poppa Pipe. That's what I call him. One look at the photos above tells you all you need to know about his name. He's Dinka from Upper Nile State—scene of the some of the worst of the fighting. Knowing the situation and his age, he'll probably never touch the soil of South Sudan again.

It's storm fatigue.

And it makes me think of Cameron Parish, Louisiana.

Cameron Parish lies in the extreme southwest of our state, about seventy-five miles south of my piney woods hometown. But it's a thousand miles away in culture and geography.

It's a beautiful, lonely place.

Much of the parish is marshland with the population living on natural ridges called cheniers.

It's a haven for waterfowl, seafood, and fish. The small population consists of hardy Cajuns who love their homeland dearly and cling to their independent lifestyle.

Cameronites are the kind of people that may be hard to get to know, but once you know them, easy to love.

Up until 2005, Cameron Parish residents divided life into "Before and After the Storm."

The Storm was Hurricane Audry.

The time was late June 1957.

Books have been written about the hurricane and what happened.

Over 600 people lost their lives when the storm swept in and the rising water trapped residents. Every family lost someone close.

It changed Cameron Parish.

Some folks moved north, never to return. Most returned and rebuilt their lives. Many, as insurance, bought homes in our upland inland area. A place to go when the storms came.

I recall the lines of a song about the Cajuns, "Acadian Driftwood":

Some stayed on to finish what they started.

They never parted, they're just built that way.

The next fifty years were mostly kind to Cameron Parish.

Most hurricanes veered to the east or west.

Several clipped the area but there was nothing like Audry. Life carried on as “before Audry”

and “after Audry.” Until Summer 2005.

Louisiana was dealt two blows on its eastern and western borders. You know all about Katrina and New Orleans.

Katrina didn't even bring rain to Cameron Parish.

But rain came three weeks later when Hurricane Rita hit SW Louisiana.

Cameron Parish was in the storm’s sights. Fortunately, there was no loss of human life. Older residents hadn't forgotten Audry and evacuated early.

After Rita, most returned to find their towns and villages were devastated.

Even the marshes were changed forever. Salt water now existed where it had never been.

They began rebuilding their churches, stores, schools, and homes. Everything was built according to new building codes, hopefully putting dwellings above the flood line.

Then in 2008,Hurricane Ike came ashore to the west of Cameron Parish, directly striking Galveston, Texas. Even though the SW Louisiana coast was spared the strongest winds of Ike, the flooding was worse than Rita.

Hundreds of newly constructed homes and businesses went under. This time Storm Fatigue set in.

Many people had had enough. They just didn’t go back.

That’s what we're seeing in the South Sudan camps. Storm fatigue. They’d had enough.

Observing the difficulty of refugee camp life, DeDe said it best, “For people to willingly live and stay here makes me wonder how horrible were the things they fled.”

There is one group that still plans to return. It’s the young people.

I’ve always loved teenagers and enjoyed being around them. Every refugee camp has a group of teen boys. They have a hard look when you first meet them. But as we sat among them and listened, one thing became apparent: their desperation to resume their education.

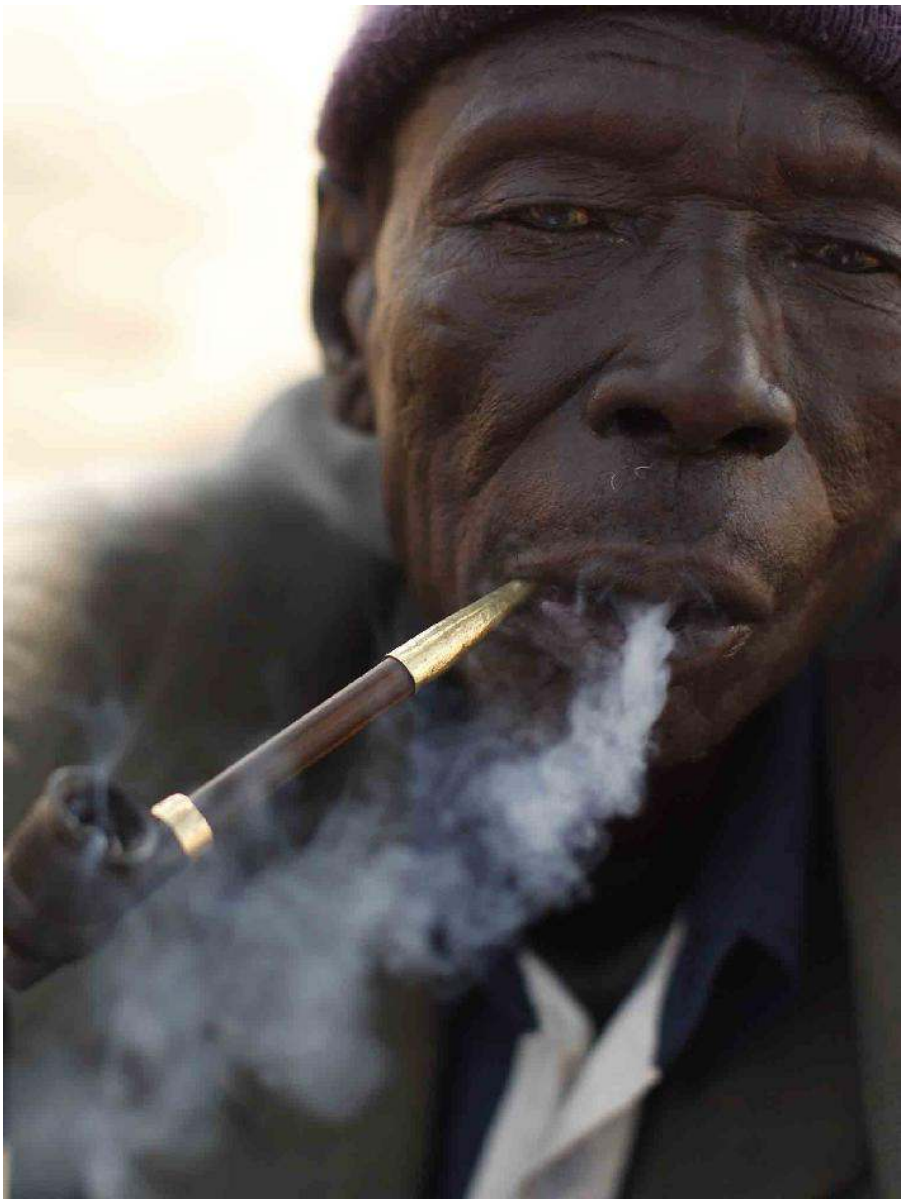
They know camp life has little future for them. They must get back in school. Somewhere. Soon.

I asked them the same question. “Will you go home?”

Every one of them, without exception, replied, “Oh, yes. Not now. But later when things get better, we will go home.”

They also glance northward. “South Sudan is our home. We will go home.”

They look to a future when the storm has passed and storm fatigue is only a memory.



This wonderful photo by our colleague, JoAnn Bradberry, is a favorite of all.

Well Drilling Truck and Young Maize (Corn)

I HATE AFRICA

34

. . . on some days . . .

Is it a sin to have a “I Hate Africa Day”?

I hope not.

Because from time to time I don’t love Africa.

There are some days when I long to be back at The Old House in Dry Creek.

Back among the familiar and family touchstones of my fifty-eight years.

I’ll admit it: There are times and days when I don't love Africa.

Recently I had an “I hate Africa Day.”

Here's a short recap: We were in northern Uganda.

It'd been a long emotional day in a huge refugee camp.

I’m not a picky eater but the supper that night featured a piece of chicken that was as tough as it was raw. I left hungry.

The better guesthouses in the town were filled by UN and Aid workers.

We stayed at a cheap guesthouse that was cheap for a reason.

The rain really broke loose just as we lugged our packs in.

My rain gear was in the bottom of a box in the back of the Land Cruiser.

By the time DeDe and I got to the porch, we were soaked.

The guesthouse wasn’t clean. In honor of the bathroom, I nicknamed it the “Sticky Floor Hotel.”

Bob swore it operated part-time as a brothel.

There was no hot water, but we hadn't expected it.

Electricity was spotty. Just like we expected.

It was stifling under the mosquito net.

Being hot or skeeter bit has no good options.

I was wet. Tired. Hungry. And Hot. Not a good combination.

I didn’t handle it well. The situation had gotten my goat.

My bucket was full.

And I was ready to dump it. I was unhappy and angry.

But most of all, I was ashamed.

Ashamed of my attitude. I was laying on the bed with the pattering rain on the tin roof.

I didn't have one ounce of gratitude or spiritual peace in me.

We’d just left thousands of South Sudanese who had no shelter from the storm. I had a roof over my head and a bed to lie on.

We’d watched a long line of pail-carrying women waiting for food.

An equally snaky channel of yellow jerry cans and tall thin Dinka ladies hoping for clean water.

Back at the Sticky Floor Hotel, I was being a bad sport.

My wife, who is an angel, gave me as much space as our cramped room had.

I’m not happy about it, but I was having an "I Hate Africa Day."

Or in this case, a Night.

As I tried to sleep,

I thought about Ol’ Paul and Silas in the Philippi jail. Singing at midnight.

Then Shipwrecked Paul. He was cold. Tired. Wet. And hungry.

Built a fire to dry out and got a snake bite.

That’s reason for a full- fledged" I-Hate-The-Mediterranean-Day" (or Month.)

Yet Paul used each occasion to share the Gospel and heal folks.

I was acting more like Elijah after the Mt. Carmel episode.

I was hunting a cave to hide in for a few days (or weeks.)

But the sun came up the next morning.

I went outside and made a pot of fresh coffee on our camping stove.

A group of children came through the parking lot picking up peanut-sized pods that had fallen from a large tree.

They reminded me of a flock of geese foraging over a rice field.

It's what's for breakfast! Collecting termite ants. They're a crunchy African treat!

The oldest child held up a bucket of the pods. He smiled and said in broken English, “Porridge for breakfast.”

As the coffee water boiled, I began humming an old song, “Picking up PawPaws, Putting them in your pocket.”

I was back in love with Africa.

5 Takeaways on a “I Hate Africa Day.”

1. Those days and moments will come.

2. Those times will pass.

3. We should expect them, but not wallow in them.

4. These times will hit us hardest when we are tired, wet, hungry, and hot/cold.

5. In times like these, we must go back to Our Call.

A young missionary so aptly told me, “In the end, our Call is to Him. Everything else is just geography."

It's one's Call that will keep you in the saddle when everything else screams to quit.

Amen and amen.

Bringing in water drilling trucks always causes conflict.

DIGNITY 35

Dignity: The artistry of a cleanly swept yard is part of African culture. It clearly says "Home."

I love words.

But a picture can be worth a thousand words.

Sometimes ten thousand.

These six photos say more than I could ever write.

Take your time and study them.

They represent the quiet dignity we find in northern Uganda.

Whether it's a weathered visage . . . smiling face . . .

The faces of Africa are unforgettable.

. . . or a new high rise chicken coop.

High-rise chicken house near Koboko, Uganda

The delight of a decorated refugee hut . . .

Decorated refugee hut Adologo Camp West Nile District Uganda

. . . or planted flowers.

Do you know the name of this beautiful flower?

It speaks of the dignity of the human soul.

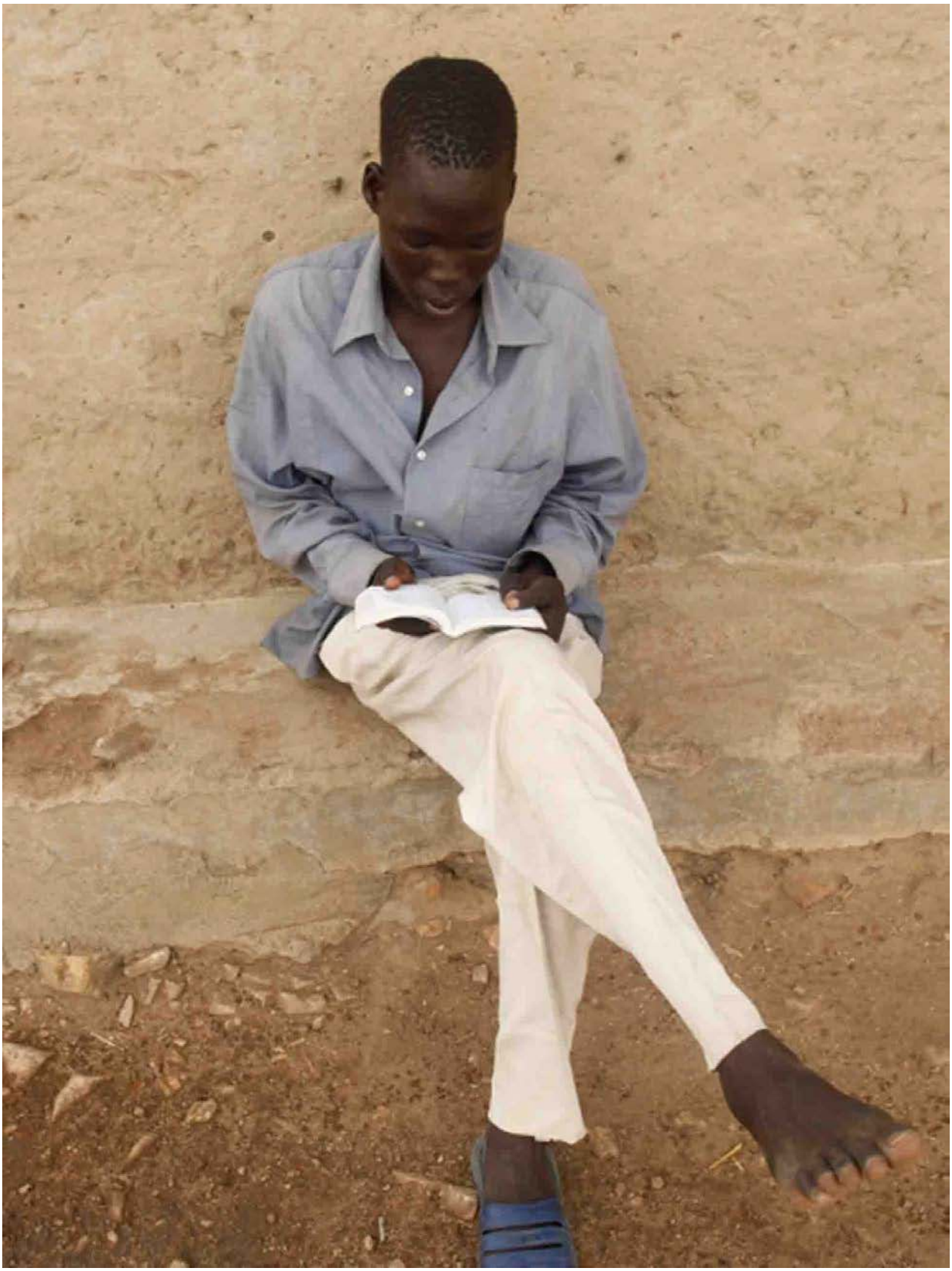
Every soul has a face.

A story.

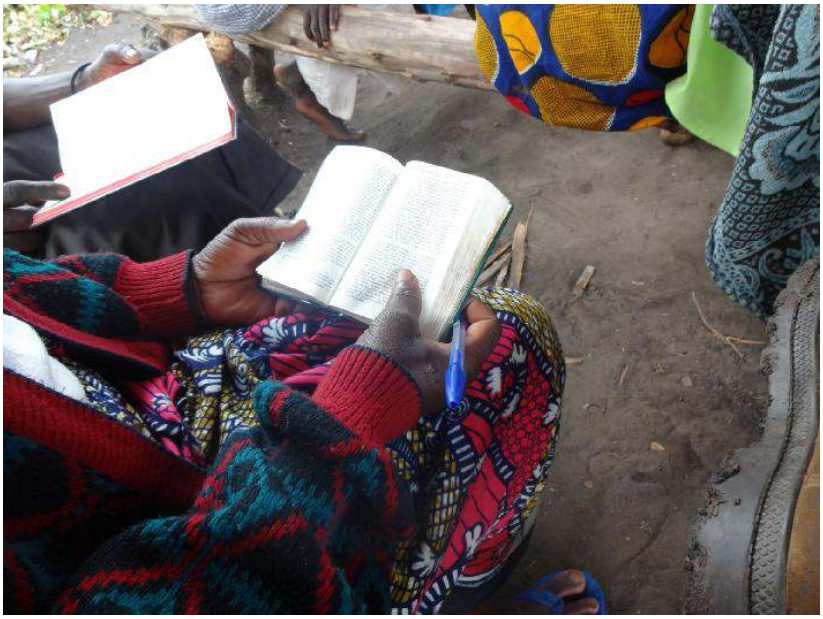
A story worth seeing

A story worth telling.

Yard Sign at testing to The Full Life near Waju II Camp, West Nile District, Uganda.



THE WORD 36



Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God.

Romans 10:17

The village leader met us at our vehicle. He gripped my hand. "I know you have good news for us."

He was right. We had the best news of all: the Gospel of Jesus Christ that brings hope and forgiveness.

Later, we were at an isolated refugee camp. The physical needs were obvious.

"What do you need most?"

The camp chairman looked around. "Lots of things, but most of all we need God's Word."

Then he added, "We need your people praying for us."

At another isolated camp, we were asked, "What do you have for us?"

I learned early on to be honest. "We don't have food or supplies. All we have to offer is prayer and God's word."

Two younger men snorted in disgust and stomped off. An older leader said, "Ignore them. We need plenty of prayer and Bibles."

Hearing the Gospel in one's heart language is captivating.

View Video of a Dinka Man hearing the Bible in his heart language.

People need shelter from the weather. Families cannot survive without food.

As we shared earlier, water is life. In conjunction with Baptist Global Resource, we've helped provide seven boreholes in the Camps.

However, to only provide these tangible things and neglect the needs of the soul is short-sighted.

People need hope.

A reason to get up and go on.

I'm proud of our mission to provide prayer, Bibles in all kinds of media, and the starting of preaching points.

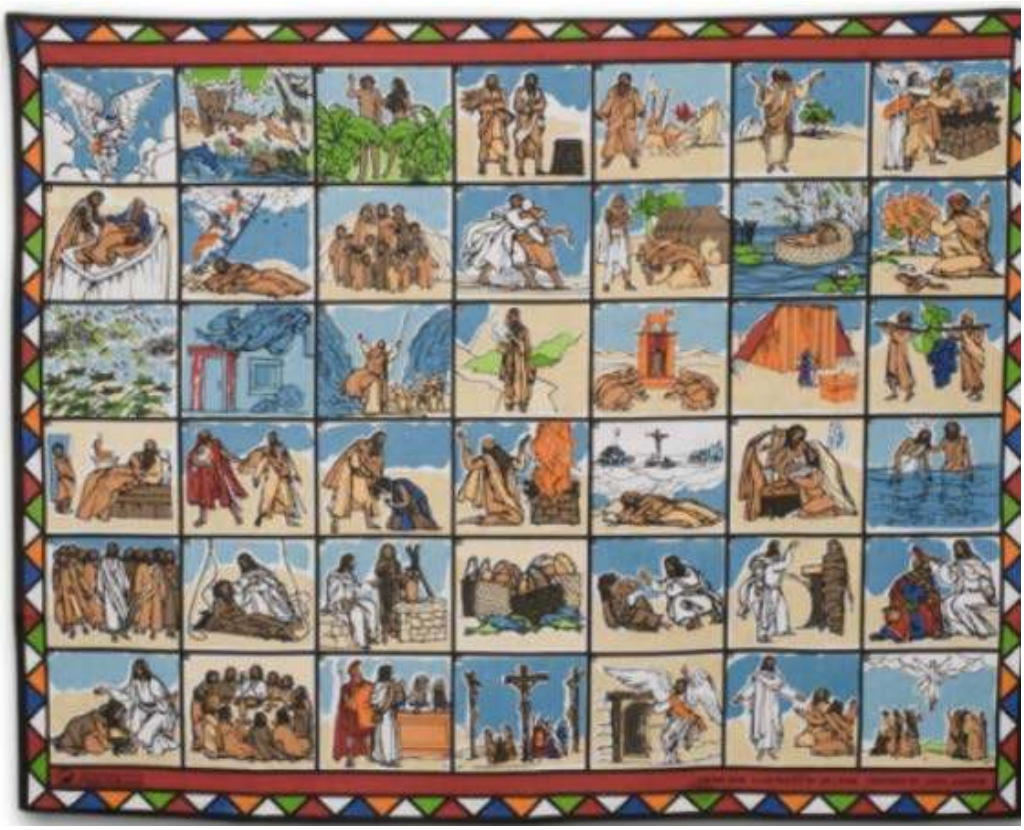
Preaching points that can grow into fledging churches.

Rough pews Chadan's reason for existence is to see churches planted among the least reached.

Churches that will follow these refugees when and if they return to South Sudan and Democratic Republic of Congo.

Here are ways you can be involved in getting God's word into the hands and hearts of the least reached.

The Bible Story Cloth has been an effective tool among oral learners.

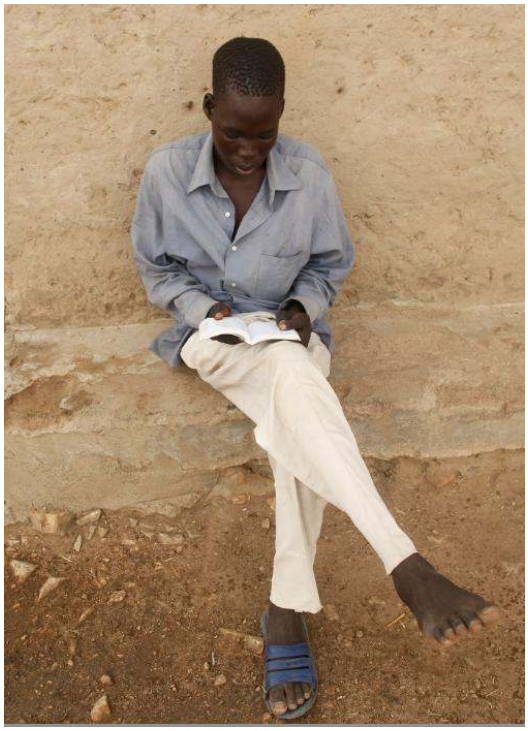


The Chronological Story Cloth was developed by Dr. Bob Calvert.

The Mega voice audio Story Teller.

We recently met Pastor Thomas, an UpCountry Langi pastor. He is a true man of God with a heart-rending story. Read his unforgettable story

Pastor Thomas with his Storyteller.



The Word of God has the power to change lives.

HOLDING THE ROPE

HOLD THE ROPE 37

You can help change lives

Header photo: Ulua Camp children "help" with hose during borehole drilling.

A true African church: Jombu Baptist Church

Eastern Equatoria State/South Sudan.

Jumbo Baptist Church is a truly African church.

And that's as it should be.

Pastor Charles Remo and his fellow Kakwa believers are making a mark for the Gospel in their part of South Sudan.

I'll never forget standing with Pastor Charles as he pointed toward a distant mountain range to the east. "We're going to start churches all the way to those mountains. The Kuku Tribe churches will

come from the other side and we'll meet.

They are planting churches and my Louisiana home church, Dry Creek Baptist Church, is holding the rope.

Dry Creek has committed to pray for the Kakwa.

They've made multiple trips to walk and work alongside believers.

This process is called Engagement. It's an American church adopting an unreached people group (such as the Bari Kakwa) and providing encouragement and boots on the ground to help.

Engagement is a big process but it can begin simply by choosing a people group or area to pray for.

Here are 5 Steps to Engaging an Unreached Unengaged People Group:

1. Begin praying about an Unreached People Group to pray for.

Our Engagement Team is happy to help you look at options. You can also consult these excellent resources at www.subsaharanafricanpeoples.imb.org

If God is leading your church toward focused prayer on one group, you'll move forward.

2. Prayerfully adopt a People Group/Region/Village to pray for.

Attend a Base Camp. Our South Sudan team will make sure "boots on the ground" research is done on your group. If we discover the group you're praying for is actually "reached," we'll praise God together and help select another group!

We hope churches will move beyond Step 2 but know that focused prayer by God's people will bear fruit.

3. Become an expert on your People Group

Internet research: Find your group in a nearby major city and begin ministry there. We will help organize a "virtual prayer walk" to guide your church's praying.

4. Make a Vision Trip to your People Group.

Your church will send 2–4 members on a two-week trip to your group. We encourage the pastor/or key staff member to be on that team. Our Engagement Team will assist your team leader in planning as well as guiding your trip.

Additionally, you can find your People Group in many large American cities. Our team will connect you.

5. Make a church decision to adopt an Unreached Group.

Your vision team will report to the church after which an official church decision to adopt a group can/will be made.

Key Engaging Church Terms

People Group—a group of individuals, families and clans who share a common language and ethnic identity.

UPG—Unreached People Group— a people group in which the number of evangelical Christians totals less than 2% of the population but evangelism is ongoing.

UUPG—Unengaged People Group— an unreached people group that no one is engaging or working among.

Engaging Church—a church taking on the missionary role of responsibility to ensure that a Gospel message is made available to their focus people group.

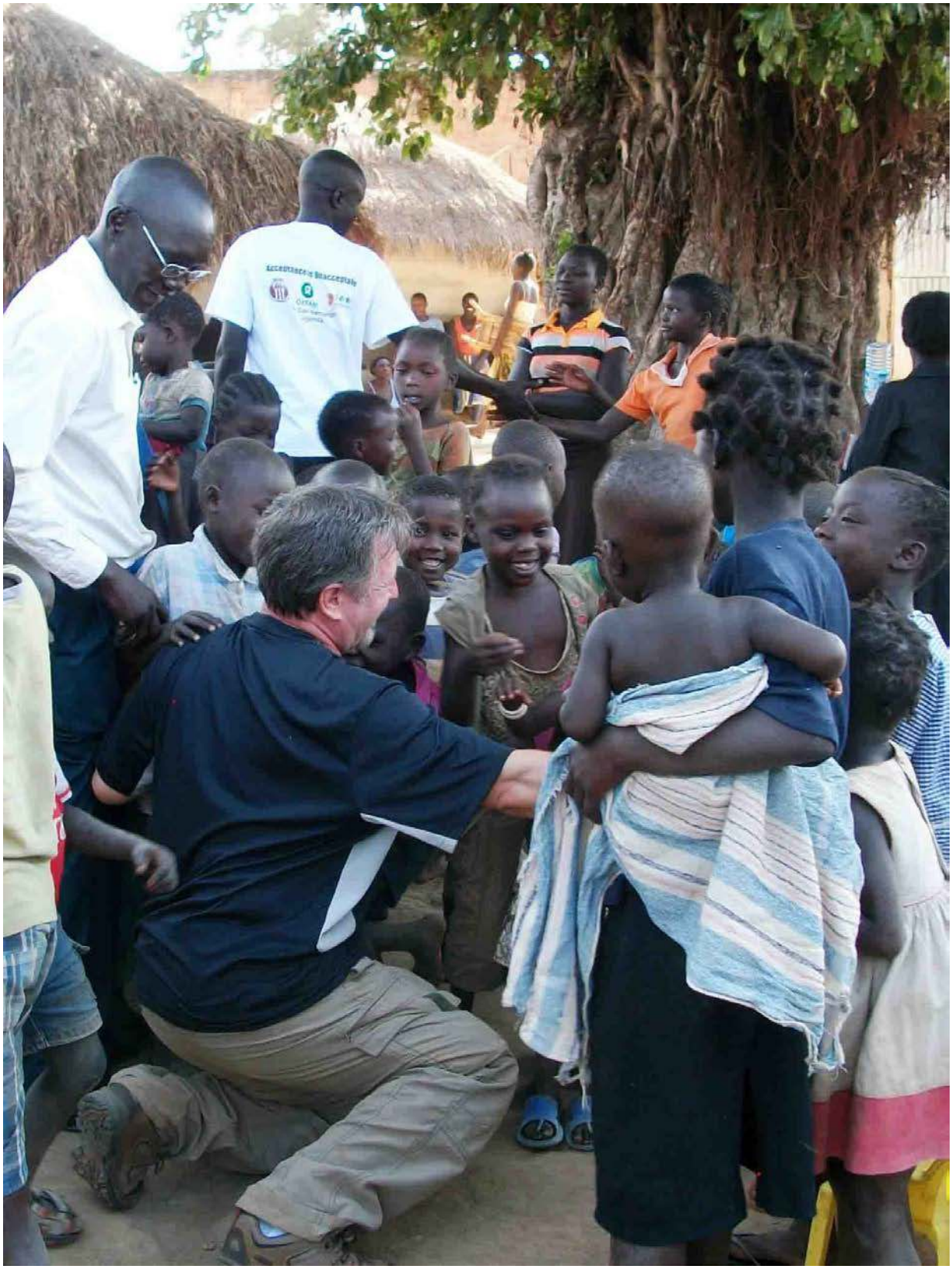
Want to learn more?

Here4theGospel Engagement web page

http://www.imb.org

African Stories

You "Hold the Rope" when you pray, give, send, and go



COME ON OVER 38

“We have heard the Macedonian call, 'Send the Light'."

–Southern Hymn, "Send the Light"

Boroli Camp church planters with Pastor Robert Franklin .

I've been thinking about the Macedonian man's vision to Paul in Acts 16. The Apostle had run into a series of closed doors in Asia Minor, today's Turkey.

This was followed by a strange vision of a man from Macedonia begging Paul to come help in what is now Europe.

If he was a Southerner, he'd said, "Y'all come over and help us."

The writer of Acts, Doctor Luke, states, "At once, we decided it was God's will for us to go."

It's always about following The Call.

The direction and focus we feel God leading in.

That's where we are.

We thank God that He has chosen to involve Dry Creek in the harvest fields of northern Uganda, South Sudan, and DR Congo.

We wanted to show you the faces and hearts of those who've crossed the Atlantic to help us.

Kentucky Baptist Disaster Relief team with new borehole.

Most are like us. They're lay people who love God and have chosen to care about the least reached and most vulnerable in the area we call Chadan.

They come from all walks of life. Teachers. Foresters. Camp Managers. Pastors. Housewives.

Most hale from small- to medium-sized churches.

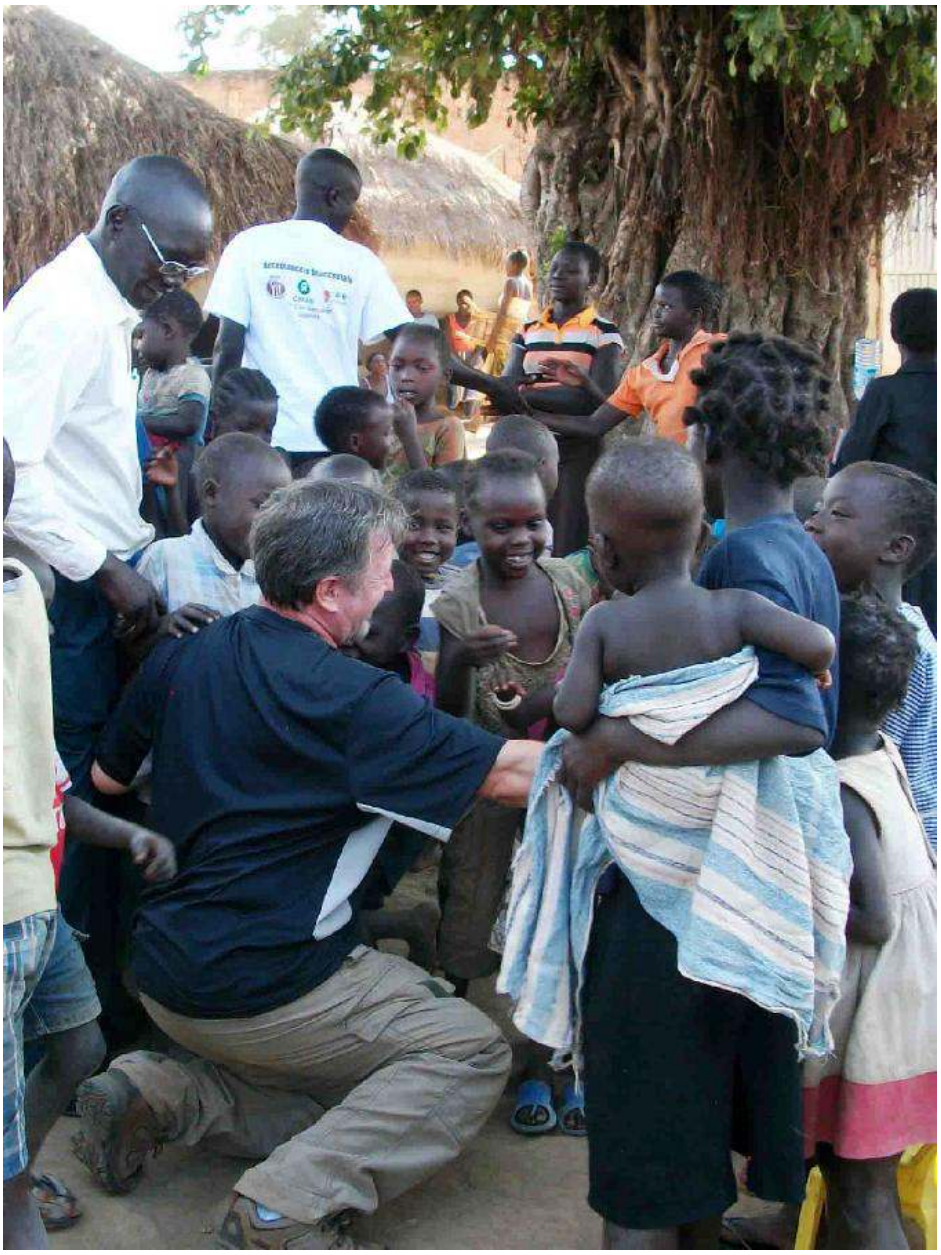
Gordy, Colleen and Brady Glaser with Adeit, Momma Rebecca, and Angel Margaret. Corsu Hospital.

They cover the spectrum of age, education, and geographical backgrounds.

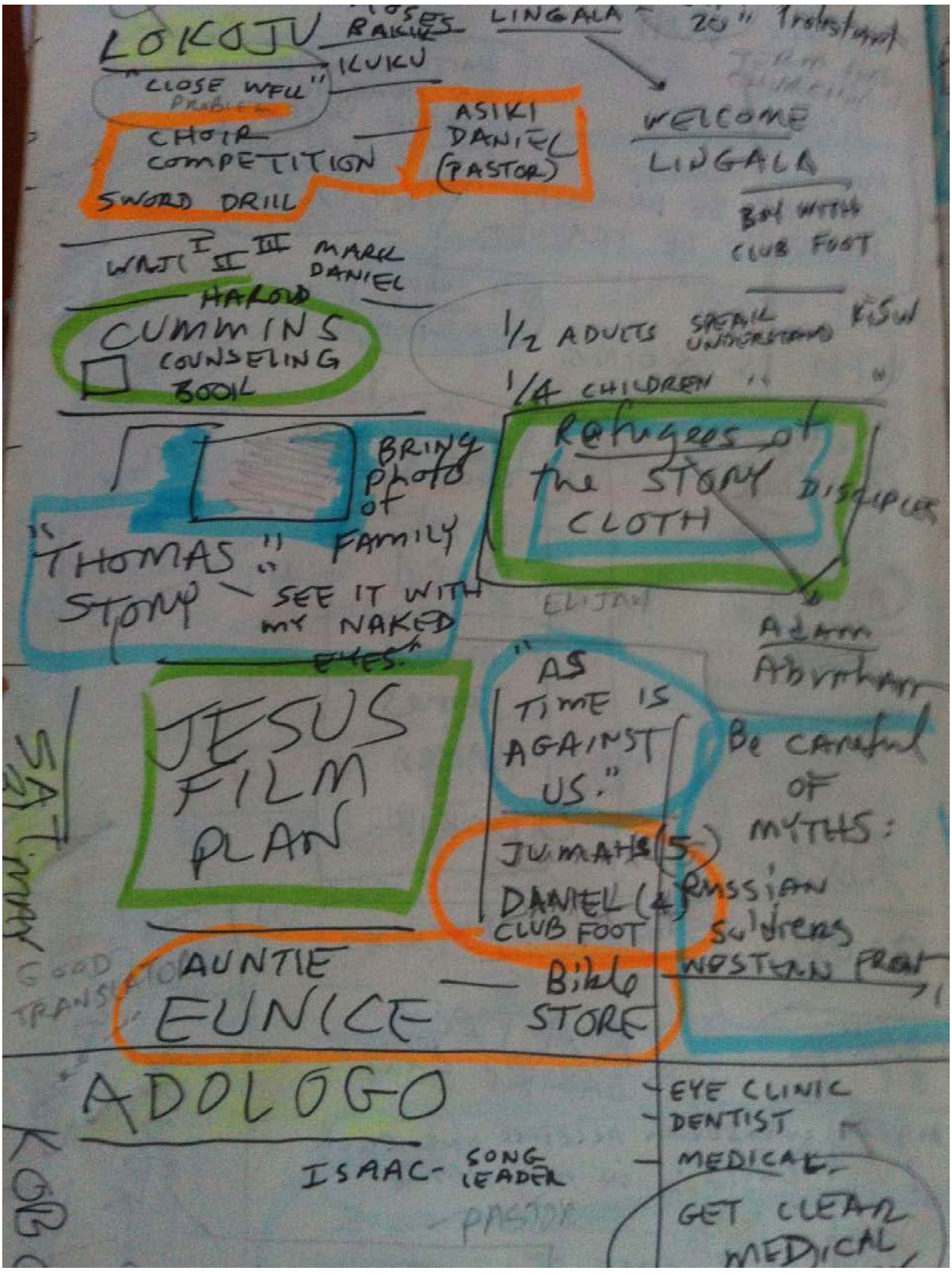
We present them to you as a reminder that anyone who heeds God's call can pray, give, and come.

Come on over. The fields are white unto harvest.

Beauregard Baptist Association Team at weekly Guard Bible Study



Brent Maxwell at Kakwa Camp. "It's about relationships, but isn't everything?"


LOKOJU
"CLOSE WELL"
IKUKU
CHOIR COMPETITION
SWORD DRILL
ASIKI DANIEL (PASTOR)
LINGALA
WELCOME LINGALA
BOY WITH CLUB FOOT
WAJI I II III
MARK DANIEL
HAROLD CUMMINS COUNSELING BOOK
1/2 ADULTS SPEAK UNDERSTAND KISW
1/4 CHILDREN
BRING photo of FAMILY
"THOMAS" STORY
SEE IT WITH MY NAKED EYES.
Refugees of the STORY CLOTH
DISCIPLES
ELIJAH
Adam
Abraham
JESUS FILM PLAN
"AS TIME IS AGAINST US."
JUMA (5)
DANIEL (4)
CLUB FOOT
Be careful OF MYTHS:
RUSSIAN soldiers WESTERN FRONT
AUNTIE EUNICE
Bible STORE
ADOLOGO
ISAAC- SONG LEADER
EYE CLINIC
DENTIST
MEDICAL
GET CLEAR MEDICAL

LAGNIAPPE 39

Something extra . . .

Lagniappe.

It's a French word denoting, "A little extra." It's a common expression in Louisiana's Cajun culture.

In the local Lugandan language along Lake Victoria's northern shore, the word is enyogeza.

A little extra at the market. Two small potatoes added to the dozen you purchased.

This story is lagniappe (or enyogeza.) A little extra for you to ponder from my personal journey in Africa.

Enjoy!

African markets are a source of fresh produce, new friends, and lots of stares.

“The shortest distance between the truth and a human heart is a story.”

-Anthony DeMello

5 Things Africa has taught me as a Writer:

My wife DeDe and I have lived in Africa for two years. Often I look around and am shocked at how far I am from my Louisiana piney woods roots.

It’s been an eventful time full of growth, frustration, change, disappointment, and joy.

Very similar to life back in the good ol’ U.S. of A.

Five lessons loom large in what this year has taught me as a writer and as a person:

1. It’s always a draft.

The year has been one of constant change:

Selling our home where we’d raised our family and lived thirty years.

Leaving the Southern rural culture for the red dirt of east Africa.

Learning Swahili to work in Democratic Congo, then being switched to South Sudan and Arabic. Hatuna matada for sure!

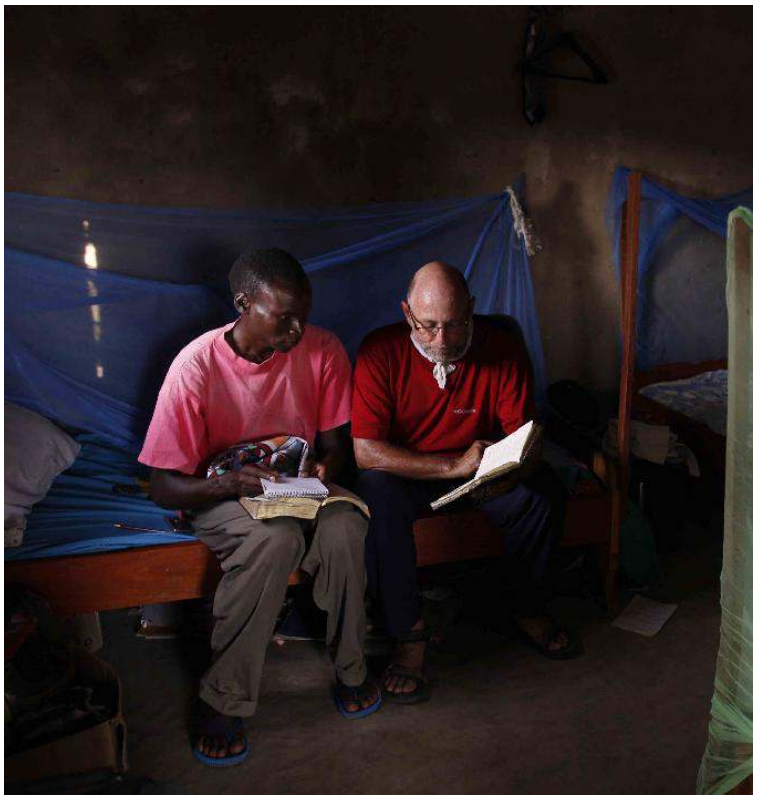
Our country, South Sudan, descending into chaos and anarchy as we watched our new friends suffer and doors close. The future is poised with more of the same. It seems change is the only constant.

Due to daily change, I've learned to live and journal in pencil. Life requires erasers. Our African journey has been similar to the process of writing a novel: sometimes our characters take over and send us in directions we didn’t choose.

But the end result is almost always a better novel as well as a richer life.

In spite of the change and uncertainty, I’ve never been more excited about life, our mission, or my writing than today.

I’m confident that God is still in control and still trustworthy.



It is a privilege to learn and share.

2. **It's always about the story.** Regardless of our genre, we're all storytellers. Our challenge is putting down words that attempt to accurately describe we first heard, saw, or imagined.

I've stepped from one storytelling culture into another. African culture is rich in gripping stories, proverbs, and history.

The best stories are always about the lives and struggles of people. Stories put a personal face on both tragedy and triumph.

Instead of statistics about the daily struggle Africans face, I share about a ferry ride with a young island boy returning to the mainland for a new school term. His mother holds a long stringer of fish in one hand and a plastic bag holding two live ducks. The boy grins. "That's how she's paying my school fees."

Numbers can be cold. "Over 1000 dead in South Sudan and 250,000 displaced."

But the story of one person's journey is better than dry statistics. I think about our Nuer friend Kun, trapped in the capital's UN compound for three weeks. He is paralyzed with fear that certain death by Dinka soldiers await him outside the gates. Our team listening to his frantic calls coupled with our inability to help.

It's always about people.

It's always about their stories.

Our job is simply the struggle to tell them well. As poet Mary Oliver aptly wrote, our job is to:

1. Pay attention.

2. Be astonished.

3. Tell others.

That's what I do. It's who I am.

"Pews" at Refugee Church Plant Adjumani, Uganda

3. Humility

Church pews

"Pews" at Refugee Church Plant Adjumani, Uganda

Writing and the subsequent attempt at being published is an extremely humbling experience. Sharing our thoughts and words with the public is akin to running down the street in your underwear. (Do other writers have that dream as often as I do?)

This public inspection and attending rejection is so deflating that many abandon the journey due to the disappointments that are part of the process. I know about rejection. I can proudly assert that my

rejection folder is as thick as anyone's.

However, Africa has humbled me like nothing else.

I speak the local language on about a three-year-old's level. The nationals laugh, correct me, yet still show me grace.

The taxi driver who delivers me to the market is fluent in five languages. I'm an American so you can easily guess how many I've mastered.

I'm greeted daily with cries of "Mzungu" and requests for money or assistance in "coming to America."

Each day gives me opportunity to look odd, stupid, and awkward and I seldom disappoint. It's part of the experience. It's all about humility.

I've always believed the humble writer is truly the best writer. Africa has allowed lots of practice.

I wouldn't trade it for all of the tea in Kenya or coffee in Rwanda.

Fish Story: "What a big one!" Dinka refugee and his Nile River mudfish.

4. It's all about being observant.

Africa rewards the curious soul.

During this past year, I've filled up numerous journals, taken hundreds of photos, and recorded dozens of voice memos.

I have frustrated myself and others with my obsession to capture every image, thought, and face or smile.

Our missionary term is nearly half completed. I have mixed emotions about that, but am more

determined to observe it all and capture it in my mind and heart.

5. I'm learning more about the Gratitude-filled life.

My African teachers are so grateful for everything. Oftentimes it seems they enjoy their little much more than our largess. Africans have so little compared to Westerners.

They understand “Give us this day our daily bread” and thank God for the bread when it appears.

I’m honing my degree of gratitude from this experience. Being thankful is simply a habit as are the twin sins of ingratitude and arrogance.

Storm over Jebel Kujur Mountain near Juba, South Sudan

We promised five lessons but in the spirit of lagniappe, here's an extra one:

6. Finally, I’ve been reminded of the real reasons I write.

It’s who I am.

It’s what I do.

Presently I’m not entering contests or seeking daily for that ever-elusive contract.

I’m simply writing. Last week, I started Journal #73 of my life journey. If I never published another word, I’d still write. It’s who I am.

A writer is someone who wrote today.

My job in Africa is researching the unreached people groups of South Sudan.

My assignment is to tell their stories in a way that will lead Americans to pray, give, and come over to help.

My calling is writing with influence and impact.

Influence is how far my message can go. It's the ripple effect of our writing. Impact is how deep our stories can dig into a person's heart.

I hope wanting to have influence and impact isn't sinful. If it is, I have sinned greatly.

The Internet Age opens so many doors for influence. I can tweet about a refugee camp in northern Uganda in real time as I share prayer needs and faces.

As I write for influence and impact, my reward isn't a glowing review, award, or publishing contract. It's a Facebook reply that states, "I feel as if I'm over there with you."

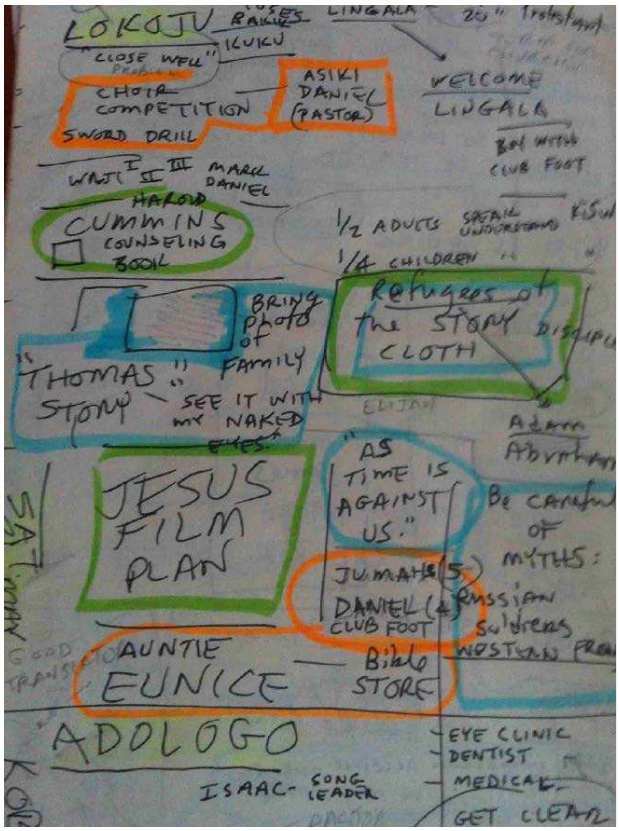
It's that volunteer, moved by a story, who comes to Africa and returns home with a fresh passion burning in her heart.

That's influence.

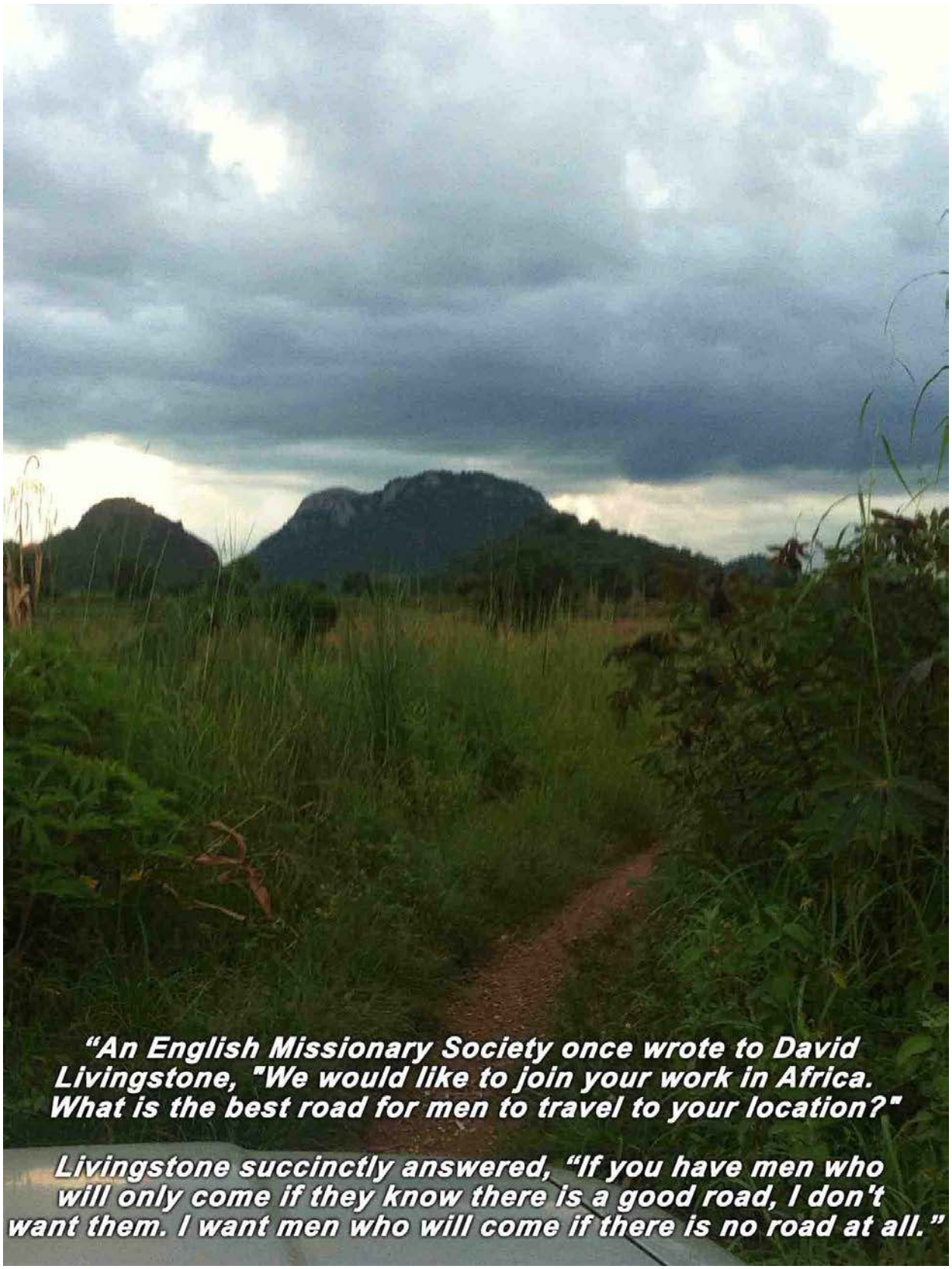
That's impact. That's why I write.

Curt Iles currently writes from Entebbe, Uganda, where he and his wife DeDe serve.

The author of eleven books, Curt is represented by the MacGregor Literary Agency Learn More at www.creekbank.net.



An African Journal Page.


“An English Missionary Society once wrote to David Livingstone, "We would like to join your work in Africa. What is the best road for men to travel to your location?"
Livingstone succinctly answered, “If you have men who will only come if they know there is a good road, I don't want them. I want men who will come if there is no road at all.”

EPILOGUE 40

African is full of hospitality. Michael Wambo leads me by the hand.

1. Be aware

2. Be Astonished

3. Tell Others

We started with poet Mary Oliver's three-strand cord anchoring the Amazing Life.

It's a good spot to end this journey.

I've been enjoying a rocking version of one of my favorite hymns.

I stand amazed in the presence of Jesus the Nazarene.

It's one of the themes for my life. The humble, itinerant, obscure Jewish teacher still amazes me. Even after following Him for over forty years.

One of my Madi friends told a group of refugees, "You know, Jesus was a refugee too. He knows how we feel." He added, "He was also homeless."

This friend took us through the stories:

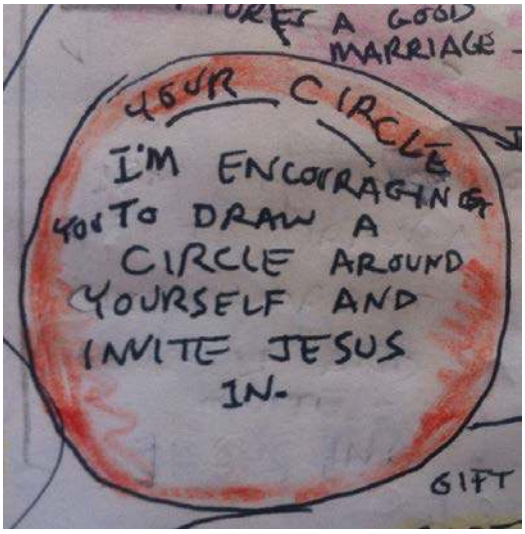
"He was born in Bethlehem while his parents were on the road. They soon fled to Egypt in the middle of the night.

During his adult life, Jesus stated, 'Foxes have holes and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.' If that's not homeless and humble?"

My friend was right. Jesus knows all about being on the move. He has a heart for the homeless.

He is still the friend of the friendless. A father to the fatherless. He is still amazing.

However, He is no longer the homeless teacher. He now sits in Heaven beside the Father. Your relationship with Jesus (or rather lack of it) will determine where you spend eternity.

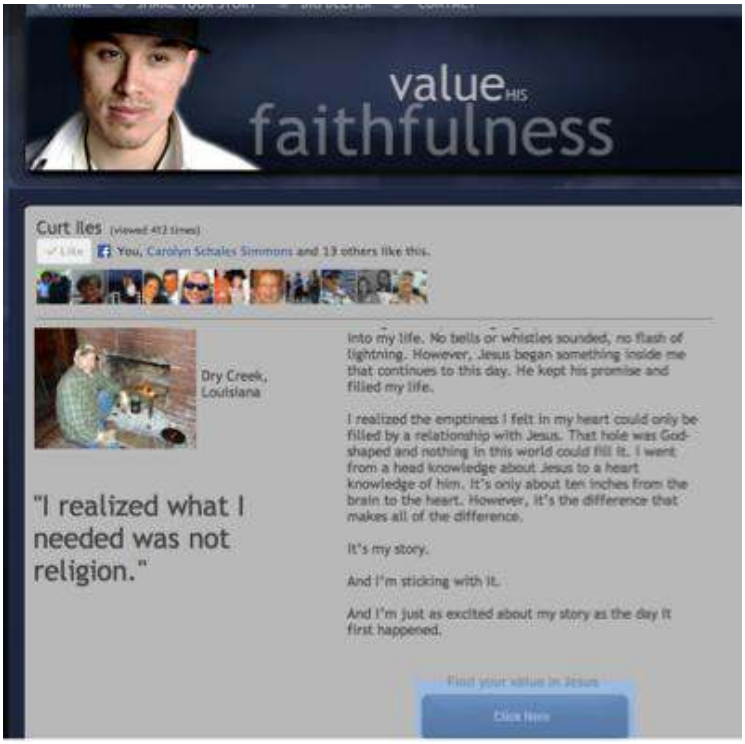


Draw a circle around your life .

It is only fair that I share my own story of how this Jesus, whom I attest to be the Son of God, changed my life.

Best of all, He is still changing me.

To read my story online: go to www.whativaluemost.com and type in “Curt Iles.” To upload your story: http://www.whativaluemost.com/Share.aspx



The "What I Value Most" website.

My Story

I make my living as a storyteller . . . Some stories are written, others I tell. Most of the stories I tell are true. Others, although fictional, are taken from real life.

As a novelist, I create characters and stories. However, what I want to share with you is a true story. How do I know? Because it is my story. It’s a story of what happened, and is still ongoing, inside of me. In my heart. In my soul.

I’m fortunate to have grown up in a rural area. Our lack of material things was offset by the richness of living in a place where my family had settled in the early 19th century. It gave me roots and a sense of belonging. A feeling of being part of something bigger than I am.

However, at age fourteen, I began the realization that something was missing in my life. There was a nagging emptiness, a longing for something more. I tried to fill this void with many things but to no avail. Being from a religious family, I turned toward church activities and a desire to live a good life. But, I quickly found this to be impossible and futile. The empty hole remained.

Then for the first time in my life, I became serious about reading the Bible. On my own, I began to explore the words and writings of Jesus.

Then I found my value in Jesus.

At this time, the first modern translations of the Bible were available and I found the words on these pages alive, fresh, and life-changing. Through careful study, I realized what I needed was not religion. What I needed was a relationship—a personal, intimate, deep relationship with Jesus Christ, the Son of God. I realized through what I read that I could have this relationship by simply asking in faith as I turned my life over to Jesus.

Sitting in a car, reading a gospel tract, I invited Jesus into my life.

No bells or whistles sounded, no flash of lightning. However, Jesus began something inside me that continues to this day. He kept his promise and filled my life.

I realized the emptiness I felt in my heart could only be filled by a relationship with Jesus. That hole was God-shaped and nothing in this world could fill it. I went from a head knowledge about Jesus to a heart knowledge of him. It's only about ten inches from the brain to the heart. However, it's the difference that makes all of the difference.

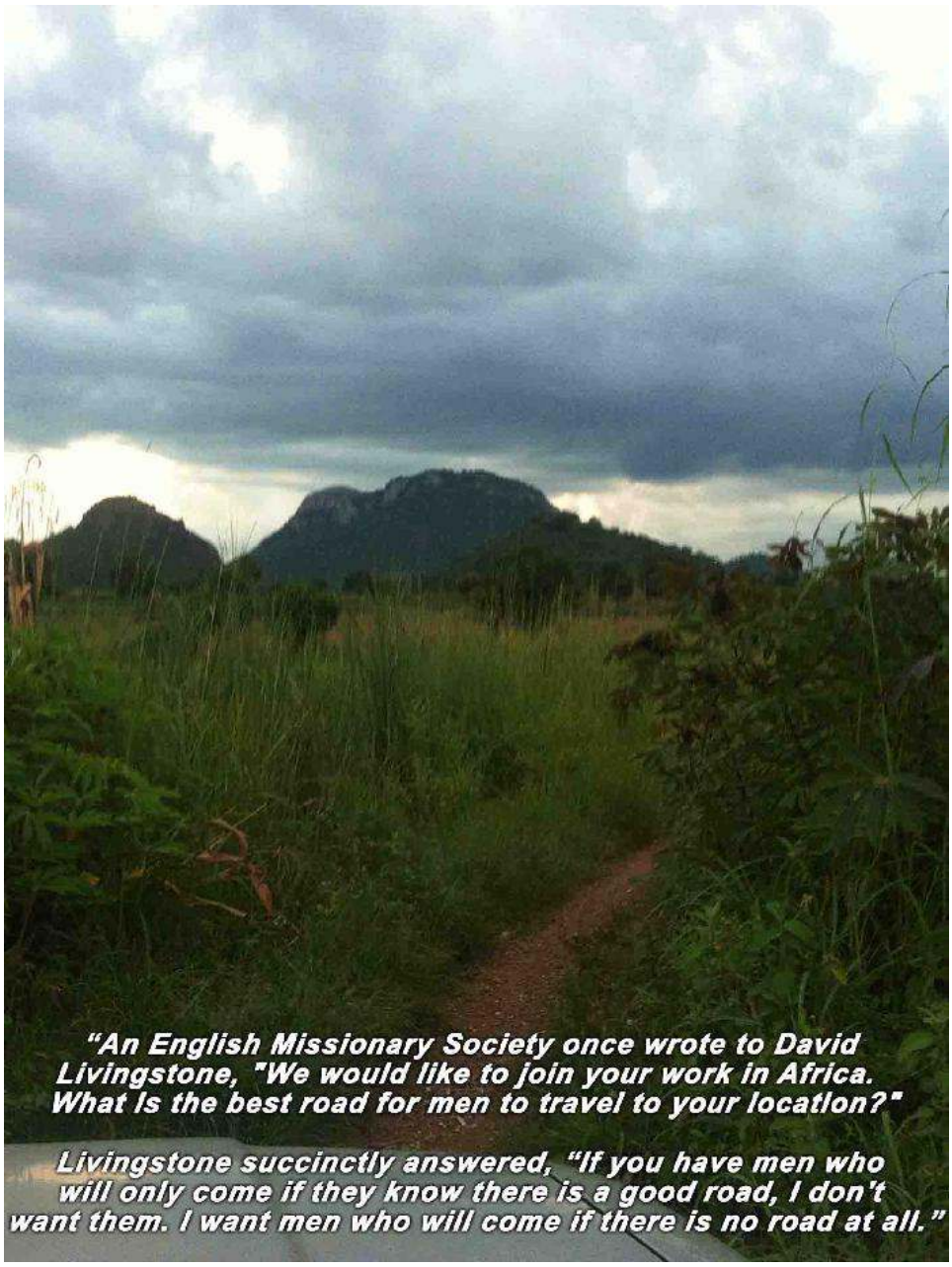
It's my story.

And I'm sticking with it.

And I'm just as excited about my story as the day it first happened. It can be your story.

S.C. "Curt" Iles

Learn more about Trampled Grass and other books by Curt Iles at www.creekbank.net



Thanks for traveling to "Trampled Grass Land" with us.

About the Author

Curt Iles and his wife DeDe live in Entebbe, Uganda where they serve with the International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention.

Prior to 2013, they lived in Louisiana, the setting and source of Curt's previous 12 books.

He and DeDe are the parents of three grown sons and nine grandchildren.

Curt's writing draws on his life experiences as a teacher, coach, principal, camp manager, speaker/writer, and missionary.

His life statement is "To be a man God can use and be respected by my family."

He blogs weekly at http://www.creekbank.net.

Other books by S.C. "Curt" Iles

A Spent Bullet

Christmas Jelly

Uncle Sam: A Horse's Tale

Deep Roots

A Good Place

The Wayfaring Stranger

The Mockingbird's Song

Hearts across the Water

Wind in the Pines

The Old House

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