

# NYLSTROOM SCRAPBOOK - JUNE 2008

June 21, 2008

“The veneer of democracy is so thin in Africa,” said a friend the other day, as we spoke about Zimbabwe. In just a few weeks, the peaceful country we knew has been turned into a churning pot of misery and violence. What is so very frightening to me is the way the youth have been used as a tool to inflict sadistic torture – beating people and pouring herbicide into the wounds so that they will slowly die, lacing people with petrol and setting them alight, chopping off body parts and gouging out eyes. It is as though they have no consciences. And what will become of these men in later life? I think of Mugabe – he was once such a young man, using the same tactics. And so when he came to power it was nothing to him to murder 20 000 Matebele to ensure his leadership. I now realize that the intervening years have been peaceful in Zimbabwe, NOT because Mugabe and the leaders of his party were truly interested in peace or democracy, but because they did not perceive any threats to themselves. Now they have taught a new generation the way to power through violence. What will stop this cycle?

Last week on Freedom Day, the youth leader of the ANC (SA’s ruling party) stated that the youth were willing to “kill for Zuma” so that he can be the next president. (Zuma has been elected ANC president and is destined to be the next president of SA if he survives the criminal charges he is soon to face in court.) In other words, only as long as democratic law serves the ANC youth, will they be law-abiding. The veneer of democracy is so thin...

During the past ten years of Zimbabwe’s economic melt-down, about one-third of its population came to live in South Africa, mainly illegally. As long as Zimbabweans were not seen as a threat, “ubuntu” (traditional African sympathy for fellow Africans) flourished. But when S. Africans began to perceive that Zimbabweans were taking away their jobs and free government housing, a wave of xenophobic violence erupted that killed nearly as many Zimbabweans in South Africa as were killed in Zimbabwe. The veneer of civilized behaviour is so thin....

Thinking about all of this, I also thought about myself – do I control my anger as long as things go pretty well, but not when I am feeling unwell or when particularly provoked? Do I treat others with respect only as long as they treat me with respect? Is my Christianity just a thin veneer?

I suppose that all of us have areas where our faith is a bit threadbare, and I count myself blessed by God to often be meeting sisters who encourage me to do better. On our last trip to the OFS, I got to know this sister at Kroonstad - I am embarrassed to tell you that I have forgotten her name. About 10 years ago, her husband divorced her, took her children from her, and married another woman. About 3 years ago, the new wife left him, so he asked her to forgive him and come back to him. This she did, for the sake of the children. He became terminally ill with AIDS and was an extremely difficult patient, but she nursed him to the end. About 3 months before he died, she heard the gospel and obeyed it. When her husband died a few weeks ago, his government pension died with him, so she is penniless because she is not yet old enough to be eligible for the retirement pension. (Notice her bath towel doubles as a coat.) She survives by doing someone’s ironing 2 mornings a week – and the Christians also help her. Despite her difficulties, she is so very happy because her children, who are now in their late teens, have had the opportunity to come to love her and value her.

Nobody who worships here (in Brandfort, OFS) can survive with just a veneered Christianity. We are so proud of these brethren who, despite deep poverty, have managed to erect a place of worship, albeit they must dodge the leaks when it rains!

Here is a picture I could not resist taking, even though it was during a song service. Five-year-old Annan of Donkerhoek, Namibia, clearly sees his father Sheya as a role model! (He climbed up on a chair with the back missing in order to experience leading the singing.)

Leon, one of the other men at Donkerhoek, said that he met some Canadian social workers through his customer service work at a cell phone company. He asked them why there is so much AIDS in Africa. Their reply? Because the youth have no positive role models. May God bless each one of us to be a good role model to our physical children and grandchildren, to our peers, and to our spiritual children. It is an awesome responsibility!

Thank you, as always, for your encouraging words, support, and especially for your prayers. With love, Linda Maydell





**the pulpit**



**the auditorium**



**five-year-old Annan**

