

NYLSTROOM SCRAPBOOK

March 2006

Dear friends,

A typical Zimbabwe hut is dimly lit by sunshine streaming in at the doorway. The windows, if any, are very small.

A lot of times I feel just like that hut. When I am among the women of Zimbabwe I get glimpses into their lives, but for the most part my knowledge of them is dim. Yet I so need that knowledge to be an effective teacher. On this trip I was blessed to have an "open window" – Nancy Chabaya also known as Mrs. Dube. (Traditionally Ndebele women keep their maiden names after marrying. However, the government has now changed their records, recording all married women with the husband's last name only.)

Nancy, a widow, is the headmistress of Tongwe Primary School and is now on "long leave" of 6 months. She requested that she accompany us on one of our trips around Zimbabwe. I knew she would be a wonderful translator, but I was a little hesitant. Nancy reminds me of a ship in full sail – placid yet majestic. She is a strong natural leader, in the very nicest most helpful way – but I was not sure I wanted to be taken under her "sails"! Nancy later confided that she had her own fears. "When I heard we were going to Matabeleland North! –many people advised me not to go. There are so many diseases there. I was wondering how many vaccinations and inoculations I would need. So I spoke to a doctor and he told me that the same diseases that are there are here as well. I must not worry – I must just go." I had to smile – we ALL fear the unknown!

As we spent time together, I could see that Nancy was having a great time and I soon realized that she was not interested in taking over but simply in helping. "Mrs Maydell," (she would privately say to me in her most professional, formal manner) "These women have a problem with the witch doctor. He is wanting everyone to attend a meeting where they jump over a rope to see which of them are witches." "And if he decides they are, what happens?" "He puts marks (cuts) on their faces." (They told her the problem, but I doubt they would have told me.)

"Mrs. Maydell," said Nancy. "I do not think you should use the example of the man taking too much mielie meal for himself (as an example of selfish behavior) since that is very rare in our culture. Rather use the example of the husband giving all the money to his mother instead of to his wife." (An Ndebele mother-in-law feels that the daughter-in-law must be subject to HER and often insists that her son put her desires above his wife's needs.) This is exactly the type of feed-back I have been seeking – a glimpse into what really happens in the day-to-day lives of these women and the problems they face. However, ironically, the very next day Nancy came to me to relate that after the service had ended (and Les and I had left), a woman came with an accusation that the preacher who had accompanied us had not distributed the drought relief (mielie meal) fairly – she did not receive her share. After a long discussion, investigation revealed that the sister was absent the Sunday the mielie meal was distributed. Her husband had received the meal, had hidden it, and had eaten it secretly. (Nancy and I were both curious as to how he had managed to cook it secretly, but our curiosity remained unsatisfied!) You can see in the picture below the traditional way of cooking. That is a bit hard to hide, even if you do it inside a hut!

It is truly sad that people are hungry enough to steal food – and that is why it is so wonderful to us when we see all the small children going around with half-eaten mielie cobs and pieces of sweet reed (like sugar-cane) in their mouths.

Les even found some food he could eat if he first washes off the salt – capintas. These are tiny raw, dried fish that come from Kariba Dam on the northern border and Les munches them like potato chips. To me they smell repulsive, and as one white sister put it – "those eyeballs staring at me...." However, the Africans are not worried by eyeballs. They even enjoy these "cute" caterpillars called mopane worms (because they eat the leaves of mopane trees). Fortunately for me, Les cannot have dried mopane worms (they smell even worse than the fish) because they are first boiled. Seriously, for the Africans they are an excellent source of free protein, and the mopane tree grows in semi-arid conditions. The mopane worms in the picture are still "too weak." In two weeks, when they are "bigger and fatter," they will be ready to harvest. Notice their cute little "paws."

We are still wading through mountains of clothing that so many of you have generously sent. We unpack 10 boxes at a time and then re-pack, trying to put a good mixture of adult and children's clothing in each box. We give a box/boxes to the congregation while all are present so that things will be done honorably in the sight of both God and men. Each congregation, exercising its autonomy, distributes the clothing in a different way – not always how we would do it. At this church another "Nancy" whisked the clothes out of the box and spread them on a mat in the dirt in front of the congregation which meets under a tree.

The men sat on one side on chairs on the "man's side" and observed this sister distributing the clothing to the sisters who were sitting on the ground on the "woman's side." She would hold up an item, look around the audience for a gleaming eye or outstretched hand, and present it to them.

When she got to the elaborate hair clip, she first looked a bit puzzled. Then she whisked off her traditional head covering and stuck the hair clip on the back of her head. There were a few giggles, soon suppressed as the serious business of each sister making sure she got her share continued. We have encouraged the brethren to write thank-you notes and give them to us to pass along to you – also for the Bibles and songbooks.

Notice the mielies growing in the background. Such a beautiful sight! We thank God for the blessing of rain and also for the blessing of your beautiful friendship and prayers. We also thank Him for the continued good health of our family, including the new grandsons. May He also bless you richly.

Linda (& Les)



distributing clothing



Wondola ladies' class



mopane worms



mielies growing in field