

NYLSTROOM SCRAPBOOK

October 2007

Dear friends

Sunday, October 7th. Another hot, dry, dusty day has ended in Bulawayo – the 2nd largest city in Zimbabwe. It is a Sunday, and as the saints gathered this morning, the conversation revolved around who has got what to eat and how they got it. These are not people who live in grass huts, but people who live in houses just like yours and mine – and who used to have a life-style just like yours and mine. “My friend queued 3 hours for bread (small rolls, not a loaf) - and then the police came and took it all!” “I was SO lucky – I got to this shop just as a truck was unloading eggs. No one knew about it and there was no queue – and I got a whole dozen.” “There was this really sweet lady next to me in the bread queue. We were each allowed 8 rolls, but she only had money for 4, so she offered that if I gave her the money for the other 4, she would buy them for me – so I got twelve.” “You know what! The shop had both milk and bread – and there were two queues, but they were allowing the people in the milk queue to also buy bread! That was SO unfair and I complained to them!” “The SPAR’s manager’s relative told me that SPAR (a grocery chain) got loads of flour Down South (S Africa), and you know what? The police confiscated the LOT!” “My daughter and I were in the wholesalers the other day, pushing these huge carts – but there was nothing on the whole aisle except a few plastic containers and some baggies. I needed the baggies, so I put them in my empty cart. My daughter said to me, ‘Don’t look now, but those foreign tourists we passed awhile ago have just taken our picture!’” She laughed and continued, “I guess it was a picture of the two most optimistic women in Zimbabwe – pushing a huge cart in an empty store – like we were going to find something to buy!” One 59 year old lady gets up everyday, quickly carries a bucket over to her “wonderful” neighbor who has a borehole (well), and draws water for the day (IF there is electricity). Then she walks downtown (about 5 miles). “I like to get there by 10, because most deliveries take place about 9:30.” Hopefully one of the stores in the downtown area will have a delivery of flour – or milk – or eggs (forget meat). Depending on the size of the queue by the time she hears about it, she decides which queue to join. For example, as soon as flour is delivered, people already start queuing for bread. The queues can be blocks long.

“We have WATER today,” proudly announced a five-year-old in the Bible class. When we arrived in Bulawayo on Friday afternoon, we did not have water in our camper storage tank because the engine could not pull all the food we brought (nearly a ton) AND a full tank of water. We were hoping to take a few buckets from Jennie’s drums that she fills when they have water (a few hours twice a week). “And you know what?” Jennie told everyone, “We got WATER yesterday so they could fill their tank. We NEVER get water on Saturdays! Isn’t God so good?”

There is never water in some suburbs of Bulawayo. The government delivers it every week or so in “bowsers”(tankers). Margaret Kriel, writer for the Morning Mirror writes: “I do not think anyone can really understand the seriousness of Bulawayo’s water problems, until they see for themselves one of the queues at the water bowsers, like the one in Emakandeni on Saturday. We drove past an Ingwebu Bowser at 2 p.m. The queue snaked across the bare sandy soccer field, like a lazy boa constrictor. Women, men and children were walking towards the field from every which way. Hundreds of them, thousands of them. Each carrying as large a bucket as one could possibly carry. On our way back some three hours later, we saw the most incredible sight. The bowser had gone for re-filling, but there snaking across the dusty playing field, like a giant anaconda, was a bucket snake. A solemn queue of buckets, placed neatly in line, like tiny round colorful cars in a fuel queue. There must be honor amongst buckets as few of them were manned, over a kilometre of blue, yellow, red and green buckets, waiting patiently, neatly, thirstily for the Ingwebu Bowser.” The oh-so-sad sequel to this story is that in some areas the water was mixed with sewage – and now most of the people in those areas are sick. (They can’t boil the water because they have no electricity.)

Back to Sunday at 9:30 am. The children sang their little songs and then marched to Bible class to the tune of “I’m in the Lord’s army.” The lesson was Abraham offers Isaac, with the application, “The Lord will provide.” On the way to Bulawayo, a preacher’s wife had given me 2 quarts of milk. Jennie and I had decided to split the milk among the children in the class and explain to them how the love of God in the heart of this sister had caused her to give a gift – and now God is providing for them. Jennie had one of the boys lead a prayer of thanks, and then she passed out the milk. None of the children gulped it down, but each took tiny little sips, setting their cups down on the table in between sips. They were really SAVOURING the unexpected treat. “Mmm, this milk is so creamy,” said one child. “And it has so many vitamins,” said another. I want to tell you about two of the children in the class. The previous week, Jennie had come out of the shop with 4 pie-crust cookies in her hand. She had deliberated a long time before buying them because they were so expensive, but she finally decided she would give her husband a special treat. As she came out of the shop, Tristan (1st grade) and Amelia (5th grade) came up to her and greeted her. Tristan’s eyes went like a magnet to the cookies. “We are walking home from school – and we are hungry,” he announced. (They were hungry since their mother had no bread for sandwiches.) So of course, Jenny opened the packet and gave each a cookie. As she drove away, she looked in her rearview mirror – and she saw Amelia breaking off pieces of her cookie to give to her friends. That is how people survive in Zimbabwe – sharing, giving, helping.

After services we went out to the parking lot and unloaded the food we had brought. We had divided the food among 7 congregations – so there was really very little for each person – but believe me, EVERY person wanted his share. Even if they have good jobs, there is simply no food to buy in the shops – and no time for working people to go “hunter-gathering” as they call it. (The first settlers of southern Africa, the bushmen, were called “hunter-gatherers” because they walked around all over the place, gathering food as they went – just enough for each day.) Although the amount was small, it gave everyone a great boost – and we were so blessed by the Lord to even get it there. We deliberately kept the food as hidden as possible by not having any visible in the camper, since the police look through the windows. Usually they are so busy looking at the “moving house,” that they don’t seem to notice the trailer! Had they seen the food, they might have confiscated it. (They could have said we were going to sell it, which is not allowed.) One time we were stopped by a policeman who said he was very thirsty. Naive me offered him a drink of water. Street-wise Les told him that he was a preacher and did not have any beer! “OH, just go on!” he said. And so we traveled the 200 miles to Bulawayo with all our cargo intact!

YET, in spite of no water for days on end and electricity more off than on, on the surface, life seems absolutely normal. People smile and greet. Somehow some people find black market petrol and move around in their cars. Somehow most people find enough water to wash themselves – and they look clean and neat. (At one company with a borehole, each worker comes to work each day with 2 empty 2-litre Coke bottles. They fill them with water and take them home. One is for their own use – and one they sell.) As we stopped at congregations on our way to Bulawayo to deliver food, we were asked, “Did you hear about the gospel meeting at Saphila?” They are SO excited – and many are making plans to walk 50 and more kms to the meeting. “We are not sure how we are going to find the food for all these people, but we are trying very hard,” said one of the preachers who is helping to organize the meeting. And so these brethren carry on planning a meeting – with no outside help, because they need the fellowship of each other and the strength of God’s Word.

I hope these stories will motivate each of you to fervently pray for these people. Perhaps if we all pray, God will hear and heal their nation.

With love and thanks, especially to those who constantly prayed for us and to those who made our trip to the USA possible and wonderful, Linda Maydell

Below is a picture of George and Jennie’s front yard. As you can see, the lawn has had no water for a very long time! Yet, the trees, which have deep roots, can manage to even bloom in the times of drought. (The lavender flowers in the background are from the Jackaranda tree.) When I saw that, I took this picture because to me it was symbolic of the Zimbabwe Christians – deep-rooted faith in God which enables them to “bloom,” even in times of physical hardship.

Family Picture below:

Center, back: Jared, Joy and Nathan (21 months) Murrell. Jared is a mechanical engineer in Tampa, FL. Joy is a stay-at-home mom.
Right: Jeremy, Melody and Indi (1 week) Harbig. Jeremy writes computer programs for Moffat Cancer Research in Tampa, FL. Melody is a stay-at-home mom.
Left: Samuel, Gloria, Titus (18 months) and Levi (4 months) White. Sam is a preacher in the Birmingham, AL area. Gloria is a stay-at-home mom.
Joseph Maydell has a co-op job at Tampa Electric this semester. Then he plans to start his senior year at USF to be a mechanical engineer.

