



Reflections from Africa **by Evertt W. Huffard**

Many, if not most, of the roads we traveled in Africa were long, rough, and dusty—but not without time for reflection and imagination. The acacia trees (like the one in this picture from the Serengeti) became one of my favorite scenes in Africa. When I saw them scattered out, standing alone in the distance, I imagined the earth lifting its hands to honor the Creator. The intensity of the sun on the equator, the incredible array of wild life, the power of Victoria Falls, and influence of the Nile River reflected a Creator worth praising. But it was the people of the land and the people of the kingdom that impressed me even more.

Seven weeks in Africa with the Harding in Zambia (HIZ) group was the longest of my six trips to sub-Saharan Africa and the richest. As it comes to an end, I wanted to summarize some of my reflections for those of you who might possibly ask me “how was Africa?” Chances are I will be so busy when I get back that I would not have time to answer the question nor would you want to hear the long answer. If you did not plan to ask that question, then read no further than the next paragraph. I will not be offended.

I want everyone to know the deep gratitude I have for being able to participate in this unique experience. I am grateful for a wonderful wife who encouraged me to go. This is the longest time Ileene and I have been apart in 41 years so it could not have been a unilateral decision. I am also grateful for Harding University for inviting me to teach in the HIZ program. I am grateful for Brenda, Steve, Larry, Matt, and all the staff at HST who were willing to double up in September and to fill in some gaps since then for me to be gone this long. It was also a special blessing to be with Jeremy and Katie Daggett and Janice Bingham. Jeremy directed the HIZ program extremely well and taught Missionary Anthropology, Katie taught conditioning, Janice taught Health Care Missions and Culture of Poverty (Katie and Janice also spent three days a week training students in the clinic) and I taught Strategy of Missions.

The following represents some reflections on various aspects of the trip to Africa.

- ❖ Six weeks with twenty-six 19 yr olds: Since our youngest child is ten years older than the sophomores in this Harding University group, it was a blessing to step into the world of a younger generation. I was three times their age but had no problem keeping up with them. Admittedly I did not recognize most



of the movies or songs they were talking about! Their enthusiasm, openness, energy, respect, and giftedness blessed me and everyone they met. I really enjoyed my time with them (photo: the group on the rim of the Ngorongoro crater).

They could sing Tonga songs so well that it amazed everyone and blessed everyone who heard them sing. If you would like to be blessed by the rich reflections and insights of Africa from these students, go to their blog at hizambia.tumblr.com.

- ❖ Visiting missionaries: The earliest missionaries of the churches of Christ from the USA went to Sinde, Kabanga, and Namwianga. The first families like the Brittells, Merritts, Shewmakers and Browns arrived in the 1920s. Roy Merritt still lives in Namwianga and grew up in Kabanga. Other than the four years he attended Harding University in the 1960s, he has lived in Zambia all his life. He was gracious enough to take me to Sinde and Kabanga telling stories all the way there and back. The trip to Kabanga took several hours on a really rough road to a village that still has no electricity (photo: Roy at Sinde). We worshipped there one Sunday, Roy spoke at the Lord's Supper and I preached. We also had Meryl with us, the great grand-daughter of the Browns, who began Kabanga and then went on to start Newe Mission. The HIZ group enjoyed every Friday evening singing at the Merritts home. Kathy, Roy's wife, has a passion for children that drives the mission of "The Haven" where three houses now care for about 80 babies. Meagan Hawley also works with the Haven, see their blog for more information on the Haven (zambianhavenonearth.blogspot.com).



I also enjoyed my time with:

- Sam and Ellie Rodriguez who, in retirement, committed to serve for five years in Mumena, in northern Zambia.
- Rick and Karen Love, and children, in Mumena blessed the group with discussions of being a family in another culture and assessing short-term missions. Karen is the daughter of Arlen Hendrix, missionary in Lyon, France who I have known for many years.
- Rod and Sue Calder, and son, South Africans who are serving at George Benson Christian College of Education at Namwianga. Rod

took me to “the farm” to see all the land originally owned by Dow Merritt that Rod had managed for several years.

- Ellie Hamby, an incredible lady who after serving in Namwianga with her husband did not slow down after his death. She is over there several times a year. Most of the postcards of Zambia you can buy at the airport or tourist spots were produced by her. She serves on the board of the Namwianga Mission and helps coordinate a medical mission trip to Zambia every year involving 100 Americans and 100 Zambians. She organized all the food and lodging for our 9-day trip to Mumena.
- Klaus Muller, possibly the only missionary from the churches of Christ in Germany, manages Twin Fountains Agriculture Training Institute and farm—just two farms over from Namwianga. I really enjoyed the day I had with Klaus, whose only experience in the USA was attending LCU and Texas Tech in Lubbock, Texas. I also returned one afternoon to teach a class on Islam for the students in the school. He is teaching Zambians to farm, to raise cattle and chickens, and to serve the Lord. His parents moved there in retirement and developed a Basic School with a incredibly well equipped carpentry shop for vocational training.
- Kevin and Charity Linderman and their children blessed us with good food and coordinated our 7-day visit to Mwanza, Tanzania. Half the group stayed in Mwanza for four days and the other half went to Geita where they were hosted by Brett Harrison and the team.
- Erin and Merissa Bailey and their children were the first host of our sub-group that stayed in Mwanza, the “Pythons.” We engaged them in conversation about home schooling, short-term missions and church development. We also enjoyed the climb up the mountain behind their house with a great view of the area and massive rocks protruding into the sky.
- Jason and Emily Miller and their family also hosted us in their home. Jason took our group to the Nyabusngswa church on Sunday—two hours one-way out in the bush requiring four-wheel drive in places.
- Bobby and Candice Garner in Jinja, Uganda hosted the whole group for 8 days with challenging conversation on development and field experiences in many villages to observe projects for water source, water rehab, womens empowerment, and tree planting. The Source, operated by the Kibo Group, became our base of operations in town. As an internet café on main street, it also serves the church in town and the Basoga Bible School.

❖ Teaching missions and visiting mission points:

- I have never had a better context to teach a course on mission theology and principles than at HIZ where I can provide classroom instruction then we can observe multiple mission points, missionaries, village churches and development projects. The

students learned ten key verses to shape their theology of missions, wrote a mission statement for their life, and witnessed the cultural challenge of moving from an individualistic world to an African group oriented world with the Gospel. The points of tension that emerged in class and in our travel focused on how short-term missions could be done well and the preparation necessary for long-term missions.

- My own observations of the various mission points reminded me of the continuing challenge to balance mission methods between the fear of paternalism and the power of syncretism. The ideal of self-sustaining growth of churches and ministries constantly faces the realities of outside funding creating more problems than spiritual growth.

❖ Village churches:

- The first weekend I was in Namwianga we all went to the Sinazongwe district, a couple of hours drive away. We arrived on Saturday evening. After a traditional meal of nshima we experienced singing and preaching—all outside on very short wooden benches



in total darkness until after midnight. The speakers used the light of a cell phone to read the text. The men slept on the ground around a big tree and the women slept on the floor within the walls of a church building with no roof. The next morning the group went three directions to different churches. I preached for the church at Mugonko that had several elders and had recently planted another church.

- We visited churches in Zambia, Tanzania, and Uganda. Zambian churches have a rich tradition of singing groups and no matter what size they were they had their own chorus. They also have a tradition of shaking everyone's hand as they leave the worship service, which creates a "receiving" line the length of the number of attendees (photo: greeting line at Kasibi Church of Christ our last Sunday in Zambia).

❖ Memorable sites:

- Right in the middle of the previous photo, at the back of the receiving line, you can see a group of children in the light blue shirts. They were boarding students from the Basic School at Namwianga who walked two hours to this church that day, singing all the way!
- I seemed to take a lot of pictures each time I witnessed the sunrise and sunset in Africa. They were beautiful. I know, along with the

bright stars at night, these vistas of creation can be seen elsewhere in the world, but our travel seemed to expose us to them more sleeping out on the ground in villages or camping through the Serengeti.

- Groups of Africans singing at church or on many other occasions reflecting the joy and praise of people who can teach us how to be grateful with less.
 - A line of yellow water containers at bore holes at almost any village waiting their turn to pump water.
 - One day we went with two brothers who work with Kibo repairing water wells. Two were successfully fixed, one had been out of order for two weeks, the other for two months. This meant the women and children had to go an additional mile or two, at least twice a day to get water. The men did not know how long the second well was out but the women did! There was a little party when we had the water flowing again.
- ❖ Spiritual leaders: Everywhere we visited the need for more emerging leaders and stronger leaders convinced me that developing leaders should never be disconnected from proclaiming the Gospel. I deeply respect the spiritual influence of all the missionaries. However, as I reflect on spiritual leaders I met in Africa, one from Zambia and one from Uganda come to mind.
- Nelson Simafuta (photo: Nelson with some of us en route to a church) teaches Bible at the Basic School at Namwianga. He was the one who led the students on the two-hour walk to church. He taught the HIZ group to sing Tonga songs. Two Wednesday evenings he asked me to show pictures from biblical sites in Israel to the students there. The Spirit of God clearly works in powerful ways through his life and ministry.
 - Ronald Bwona, in Jinja, Uganda, works for Kibo responding to requests for water wells. He goes to villages several times to bring about transformation in the village, not just provide a new water well. In the process he teaches hygiene, brings the community together, and works through the church in the village. This was one of the best examples of a holistic approach to transforming community. Ronald approaches this “water source project” with passion, energy and love for the community.



It could not have been a better trip. Thanks for your prayers—they were all answered!

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