

April 2009 report from Harare – Life in the “new Zimbabwe”

Greetings to all you lovely people from sunny Zimbabwe! The rains have been good this year, but are almost over and the nights are getting a little cooler at last. Autumn, such as it is, is upon us, and the pool is only just swimmable-in. We will soon be putting its winter coat on, and will have to rely on long walks for our exercise for the next few months.

Many thanks to those of you who sent us Christmas cards – they started arriving in mid- January and one from UK posted in early December arrived last week – in time for Easter?!!!

You are no doubt wondering how we are coping here, and I'm happy to say that we are still very much alive, keeping well and working hard – at least, Loxley is. I am a lady of leisure most of the time, and have taken to doing quite a bit of cooking, something I've never been that keen on. But food is now so expensive that there is no alternative. We used to go out for lunch every Sunday, but now the quality has gone down and the prices gone up, so we wait for our trips out of the country and enjoy eating out then.

The political situation, as you probably know, is (dare I say?) improving slightly, and there certainly is a lot more hope around, which is half the battle. There are a lot of really awful things still happening, but it is going to take time, hard work and loads of donor money to sort things out, but at least a start has been made in some areas. It is good to see the supermarkets with their shelves full again, tho only those of us with sufficient forex can afford to buy. Prices are approximately twice what they are down south, but are slowly coming down. At least we no longer have to try and change our money into worthless Zim dollars, as everywhere is now legally able to charge in foreign currency. More than half the population still relies on food aid from NGO's, and some people never see that, or receive very little. Malnutrition is everywhere, and people continue to succumb to all sorts of diseases that they never should have contracted, like cholera. Apparently the incidence of new infections is decreasing at last, but over 4,000 have died since August. Water continues to gush from burst water mains, and in the high-density areas sewage still flows down many streets. But there has been a large injection of donor cash to sort out that dire situation in Harare, so we expect it to improve soon, and we are hoping that some of the roads will get the potholes filled before the next rainy season is upon us.

We had an adventure a couple of months ago, when we were driving to Mutare in my car and the engine suddenly seized up. Through a set of wonderful God-ordained coincidences we were able to tow it back to Harare (my first experience of towing while Loxley sat at the wheel of my car), a journey taking 4 hours! Then began the problem of dealing with the problem, and to cut an extremely long and frustrating story short, we have just returned from SA with a new (reconditioned) engine, which cost 2 arms and legs! Now we hope the mechanic will not take too long to get the car functional again, as Loxley's truck is also in for repair and we are presently sharing the ancient LifeLine Toyota truck.

In two weeks our friend Brian will be arriving from Oz, and will be travelling around the country as he always does, using the Toyota. He and Elizabeth were due to come later in the year, but the plans didn't work out, so they are making 2 shorter trips instead. Elizabeth is arriving in early May and will spend some time with us here, then later in the month we are all driving down south for a week's relaxation at Tshipise, the hot springs resort near the border where we always stay on our way home, then into the Kruger Park for 3 days' game-viewing. At that time of the year it may be more difficult to spot the game as the vegetation will still be quite high, but it will be cooler there than when we normally go, and there will be plenty of birds. We are really looking forward to it, as our trips to SA are nearly always quite hard-going.

Our maid, Mabel, who lives on the property with her husband – he has a job in the city – has just had her first baby. He came 10 days early, so she wasn't able to go to her sister's clinic in the rural areas. But, praise God, we were able to get her into the local maternity hospital, which we had understood to be closed. She and the baby were in for 6 days and received quite good treatment (this time it cost half an arm and leg!) and we were asked to name the baby for them as a special honour. So we called him Jonathan, meaning God's gracious gift, as she had a hard labour and the baby was quite poorly at first. Now Mabel has returned to work, and carries him

on her back as she washes the dishes and does the ironing. The gardener whom we were expecting to start work last time I wrote, turned up on Christmas Day – his English is not very good, and he'd misunderstood us! He is doing a pretty good job, but is not quite as bright as our previous guys, so needs a lot of supervision at present. Yesterday his wife and 3 children all pitched up from the rural areas, but at least he does have a home in the city they can go back to. It's a very different life here from the UK!

We have started attending one of the satellite churches that was planted out from the big Harare church just over a year ago, and are finding it very much to our taste. It is in a mall on the outskirts of the town, meeting in a disused shop underneath a disused cinema complex, and has already grown to over 750 people and has to have two Sunday morning services. Loxley has helped with the preaching and teaching, and I am involved with the music group, and it is a pleasure to be involved in a relatively new set-up again.

Loxley has been on his travels again recently. On one of his trips they crossed so many borders that he filled two pages of his passport with stamps – as well as another for the Mozambique visa. They have been in Mozambique and Malawi for the church and Zambia for Lifeline. We have had to transfer the literature work in Zambia to Emmanuel Press in South Africa from which it originated, via our Harare base, in 1982. Many thousands of Zambians are now Christians, and have been discipled, as a result of the literature distributed over those 27 years. Another adventure for Loxley was transferring the reusable literature from Lusaka to White River in S. Africa. He brought two truck loads thru from Zambia in December and February and we recently took one load to a friend in Joburg who will be able to take it to White River.

With our love to you all, Mavis and Loxley.