

## Lifeline Zimbabwe Updates April-May 2010 trip

Some of this is trivial, some humorous, and some (we hope) is inspiring!

### 13/4/10 to 30/4/10 update from Zimbabwe

Leaving Melbourne for the non-stop flight to Joburg on Virgin was a real shock! I walked straight up to the counter with no one in the queue ahead of me! After queuing with Qantas for years at their undermanned Sydney counters, this was almost too much.... A very pleasant staff member asked me to lighten my overweight hold luggage (I already had a heavy backpack, computer / printer bag and large bumbag to take on board), but one look at the letter from our church re taking some relief resources through to Zimbabwe, and he not only passed it all through, but gave me a priority express card which enabled me to walk around the very long customs queue and go through an express lane what had only one person in it. All this was almost too much again! Melbourne! I love it!

The near-new Boeing 777 was a delight to fly in. More leg room, wider aisles, fine food, very up-to-date entertainment channels. But it was full. And instead of being 13 hours, it took over 15 hours non-stop – even though it is one hour closer than Sydney on the Great Circle Route. Why? Because two-engined planes cannot fly anywhere more than three hours away from the nearest airport. So we flew way north of the shortest route over the Antarctic ice-shelf to near Perth and on to Joburg. Off the plane and into the airport terminal reinvented for the World Soccer Cup– to get lost in all the changes! After finally locating SAA's new departures area, I lobbed into their Frequent Flyers' Lounge – attained by using Star Alliance last year when Elizabeth and I came home via the Northern Hemisphere. Good heavens! After flying to Africa 17 times as a peasant, is this what I have been missing? Topped up with freebie food and coffee, sitting in a comfortable armchair, I was feeling like a Zimbabwean even before I arrived in Harare....

A smooth exit out of customs in Harare with no delay in luggage transfer or theft in Joburg. I was very conscious of the effective prayers of so many on yet another 23-hour travel. Thank you!

I had one day's rest and preparation before Loxley Ford and I set out for the 500k drive to central Mozambique. We could not believe the number of semi-trailers queued both sides of the border – we counted 90 on the Zimbabwean side, and 67 on the Mozambican side – and 90% were fuel tankers! The road was totally blocked at one point and we squeezed through only after much manoeuvring.... 200km later we arrived at Sparrows' Nest Orphanage. After inspecting the nearly-finished girls' dormitory (they now have a separate shower and toilet off each room – which is very unusual in this part of the world), and meeting some of the helpers who assist Domingos and Alice with the 60 children onsite, we took the Caetanos with us 40kms back up the highway and stopped overnight in the only half-decent motel in the district – a mere 230km drive from where we were heading early the next morning to start three days of teaching and ministry.

**ODD SPOT:** The main highway from Zimbabwe to Beira has broken apart in several areas after the rains. Roadworks are piecemeal and the surface must be negotiated with great care. But the greater danger awaited us on the main north-south highway to the capital (Maputo 1000k south) – it is an excellent road (finished by a foreign company only 4 years ago) with few bumps and potholes. We were doing 100kph when we approached a bridge at the foot of a long hill. Suddenly we could see an enormous pothole in the middle of the road, with a sheer wall about 50cm deep. We narrowly missed it, and then noticed a small modern car totally wrecked about 150m further down the road; it had end-over-ended after tearing out its front right-wheel suspension. It was an awful sight. There were police present, but no one had bothered to put a warning up at the pothole. Apparently the car flipped the night before. Two days later, as I write this, we have passed that spot five times, and still no warning. It's the resigned sense of fatalism here that gets to you. Some other driver will probably hit it too – so preventable - but with a shrug of the shoulders, people (including officials) just do nothing. The lack of initiative makes you want to jump out and take over at such a scene! Regularly!

There had been a program change (what else is new in this part of the world? There is little Internet here and phone conversations take place in two languages!), so after booking in at a motel in Muxungue (pronounced Mushungway)- a town that has electricity since we stayed there 8 months ago, we headed 55k back up the highway and 20k north on a dirt road to Matarara, where we had such an effective time of ministry last year (when Jeremy came with us), So we ended up spending three days with the people (Alice has been a real blessing with the women and children), the leaders and pastors from several churches, and some community leaders. In fact, the district paramount chief attended all day for 2 days. This apparently was a real fillip for what Lifeline is doing in this area. We taught and then prayed for many. We finish up tomorrow (Sunday) with a large combined churches gathering.

**QUESTION:** How do you teach people to study God's Word, and build a daily devotional life when most of them cannot read?!?!? And there are so few bibles in the entire district??? No wonder Jesus taught so many deep truths using parables – things rural people can readily identify with and remember. Some laughed when they recalled my story last visit of how my father taught me not to steal money from home by making me drop my pants and undies, and belting me on my raw bum. They had got the point (he loved me enough to dish out real preventative punishment) and hadn't forgotten!

It's now Sunday night, and Loxley and I have dropped Domingos and Alice at the Inchope crossroads bus stop (for their 35km trip home) while we continued 60k north to see if our old Lifeline interpreter, Joao Madeira, was home in Gorongosa. It turned out he was in Germany for 6 weeks on a food-from-plants development program with Feed the Hungry (FHI) – a NGO which has a global reach; he has worked for them for many years and has been promoted to area manager at Gorongosa. His wife welcomed us and we had a very enjoyable time catching up on their family news. It

was worth the 110km extra to show we cared enough to call. He has asked us to do a daylong seminar for the pastors of this remote area next time we come to central Mozambique.

The morning at Matarara was a wonderful time, with much ministry among these hungry-for-God people. Several churches amalgamated their morning service to hear the Word of God – some 150 people sat under the shade of some very large mango trees (it was blazing hot), mostly on reed mats. Dogs stalked around the perimeter (they aren't aggressive though), babies were being breastfed all over the place, and the senior pastor was in bare feet on the wet earth. Praise God (it's been very dry here and some food shortages are already being felt) after we left yesterday, heavy rain fell – just on their area and nowhere else. They were all very happy with this, even though it meant much of their earth was boggy around us.

The Matarara churches are only the second ever I have come across in Africa who asked for nothing. What's more, they covered all the cost of whatever catering they laid on – not just for us four visitors and the chiefs, but everybody was fed something. We were blown away by their generosity – and yet they are so poor. We prayed long and hard for God to bless them, their crops, their Christian relationships, and their spiritual life after we left. What amazing people!

After five days in Mozambique, Loxley and I are tired of eating chicken!

We slept well at the motel (air-con on all night – you don't care about the cost!... which was only \$US36 anyway), left Inhope just after 6am and arrived at the border two hours later, and had the quickest, quietest transit through both sides ever! Amazing difference from when we came in. And only a handful of semitrailers too. So, after a tasty breakfast at Wimpy's in Mutare (despite no power again), we were on our way in the very hot late morning and back in Harare by 1pm. 1700kms and not one hitch! A big thank you to everyone who has followed our itinerary and prayed over our travel arrangements. Elizabeth mentioned the degree of intense prayer at home on the phone today, and I could not help but be truly grateful – prayer does make a difference!

It was a very profitable trip and helped us see more clearly where Lifeline can continue to be useful and relevant in the changing spiritual climate of central Mozambique. And we are so glad that our dear friend and brother, Domingos, and his wife (Alice) are going so well. Both widowed, and now (re)married for just on 18 months, they are developing in their "mature years" as a means of blessing and ministry to so many. Loxley and I so appreciated them; without their aid, we would be lost in the Mozambiquan bush churches.

#### **CULTURAL ODD SPOTS:**

**1] Culture triumphed!** Several years ago, Lifeline was very involved in the minimum tillage program in Zimbabwe. This approach to farming minimised the disruption of the soil in a hot, dry climate. The results were in some places a 600% increase in the yield of maize (the staple diet). Did their neighbours seek to learn from their improved methods? When some farmers reaped this increase, it was not uncommon for their neighbours to accuse them of using witchcraft, and burn their crops! Corporate bondage to the old ways overruled common sense and progress!

**2] Food Fellowship Frowned On In Mozambique,** on a stinking hot day, we four visitors were ushered into an airless mud hut for a hot lunch. I asked if we could eat outside where the other pastors were – in the cooler air under the mango trees. As our hosts carried the small table, chairs, and food outside, one by one the pastors quietly seemed to disappear... When I asked where they had gone, no one would directly answer me. So I asked was it customary for the local men (who don't eat with the women and children at a communal function) not to eat with (esteemed) visitors either. Yes, it's a sign of "respect"... And these are Christian leaders.... Quite ignorant of Paul's admonition to the Corinthians of his day – to come together and celebrate the joining into one heart and spirit people from all kinds of backgrounds by eating together. It's called "table fellowship". We have a long way to go....

It's now Thursday (22/4), and tomorrow Loxley and I drive up to Chinhoyi where we are staying with Simon and Linda Smith (yet again! They are terrific hosts). We are meeting up with several people who are fellow travellers with Lifeline – Peter and Stella Banda, Bob Haywood (who pastors the Banket Christian Fellowship nowadays – while managing an expropriated farm for the new owner), and Corky and Jo Sheppard are coming down from Karoi to see us too.

Yesterday, I walked the 4km into the city to visit Lamiel Phiri at the national office of Central African Presbyterian Church. Lamiel attended our seminar in Beitbridge three years ago, and has just completed his PhD in the USA – his dissertation? "Servant Leadership"! He is going to forward me a copy of it. While there he introduced me to the incoming National Synod Moderator of CAPC – David Ponchisi. Lo and behold, he too had attended our seminar in Hwange (where he lives – a long way from Harare!) two years ago; we caught up on his on responsibilities and some of the dear brothers and sisters who labour for Christ in Hwange. It's a small world.... And he asked if we can fit in a further seminar and ministry back in his home town later this year....

Today, I met with Alan and Dorothy Graham and was given a guided tour of Jabulani (= Rejoice) Orphanage – where they have taken in a small number of abandoned babies and given them a wonderful environment to grow in. The layout of the 1 hectare site is amazing; 12 children accommodated in one renovated and two brand new houses. The opposite end of the spectrum from Sparrows' Nest in Mozambique – which is overrun by the 60 children in much less favoured circumstances economically – yet both are doing what they have been commissioned to do.

Thanks for the continued prayers that Elizabeth emphasised were being maintained when I spoke with her yesterday. My health is excellent (for a change!). The weather here is perfect, and I have been taking the opportunity to study hard (the phone doesn't ring for me and email is very limited), rework lots of material for the journey ahead (when the bulk of this trip's ministry will occur) and for home responsibilities too. I feel very fresh, and **THAT** is unusual here – to say the least.

## **1/5/10 to 3/5/10 from Gweru**

Loxley and I were struck down in Chinhoyi by a mild dose of gastro lurgy from something served to us (we think) in the township. It remaineth somewhat active in our systems but has not been uncontrollable. And it is almost gone (a week later).

Sam's luggage disappeared en route to Harare and he has had no clothes, etc, at all. We heard yesterday (three days later) from Mavis that his suitcase has now turned up at Harare airport – which is of little use here in Gweru! So apart from the clothes he arrived in, he is wearing my spare underpants, shirt, and Loxley's sweater! We will all survive.... In fact I wondered when I unpacked on arrival in Harare why I had brought additional clothes to normal.... And Gweru is being, well, Gweru! Warm in the day, windy and a bit chilly as the sun goes down. And Sam feels the cold.

Our time here in Gweru has already been interesting, effective, and timely. Yesterday, our first full day here, we met with pastors at Henry's for three hours. Then dropped the medical stuff off at the Mennonites to distribute (without backdoor corruption), Sam and I shared three hours of lectures at Artwell's Bible College (this year he has 12 students including several pastors – including Nicolas Mugabe! – and we were both impressed at what he is doing. Loxley and I went out to Mkoba and caught up with the Ncubes. Betty was at her market stall, Addmore at home, the boys came in later. Then Loxley and I visited Vashandiri Centre where we made the booking for the September Indaba – including better accommodation arrangements than last time!

The director of the Gweru Bible College, Artwell Chiangwa, is about to open our Lifeline Ministry Resource Library on a regular basis. This is shaping (finally!) as a valuable resource to the growing number of serious students in ministry and theology development. I have just arrived back at the Jackson farm 8k out of town where we are staying. The generator is on (as usual – power is off most days 6am till 9pm) and I am trying to finish off at least this simple update to thank everyone for the continued prayer support.

Today, we went out to Mkoba and had an intense 3-hour time with people from three churches that met in Addmore's lounge-converted-to-meeting-room. You can put 40 in it. Loxley has had it painted afresh, and it is now an impressive room for ministry. Sam spoke very, very well, and got "re-Africanised"! He really connected to the people, so I have swapped pulpits with him tomorrow. He is going to Lifespring, Loxley to Pastor Diamond's church, and I will now speak at the combined Gweru church service.

Loxley and Sam spent the afternoon back at the farm, while I spent time in town connecting with people for the seminar planning – catering, etc. I have the lunch tickets already printed to keep the "nyama Christians" at arm's length again (those who turn up not long before lunch and leave soon afterwards)!

We are being looked after really well (as ever); I also caught up with Roy and Melodie Wilson. Roy is now managing a BP service station 200m from home, and is very happy with that. I also visited Melodie's 81 y/o mother, Charmian. She is as warm as ever.

A big thank you to all those who especially prayed for the 3-day Gweru seminar – there were the usual mess-ups and misunderstandings, and as usual (with the help of concentrated prayer from home) we have been able to sort out most of the mess in time. Sam has really got going now-now; the ministry relevant and effective, and the practical side (catering especially) flowed really well in the very capable hands of Cheryl Albasini (Pieter's wife) is a tremendously supportive and competent sister in this area.

It won't be long before I am home again, and I will be very happy about that. In 4 weeks, we will have had 13 bed-moves! Enough packing and unpacking to last me a whole year...

**Monday night** - We are now out at Antelope Park and some of the 78 lions nearby (as in only 100 metres away!!) have been roaring on and off at night to us! We came out to the ministry cottage for two nights after we finished the Sunday ministry in three different churches. Sam is doing really well in connecting with the local people. Mr Andy Connolly has again kindly made a cottage available for us. And Sam is slowly getting over his fear of roaring lions! I took them for a brief game drive after we got here at 5pm. Saw 6 giraffe, a herd of wildebeest, some impala, and a great big flock of vultures.... Tonight (a day later to when I wrote this) we saw zebra as well. Sam is happy - we finally caught up with Maximus – their biggest breeding lion - all 240kg of him! While we were on foot (but outside his wire of course)....

The night before we arrived, David Coultart's 8 y/o daughter was mauled by a lioness when she stuck her hand in the lion's cage to pat it.... The owner had to shoot it to free the girl's arm. So sad as she had three cubs near birth. Coultart is the MDC minister for education and a Christian - a careless one it seems as the girl was left temporarily to wander around the lion enclosures on her own!

Things are still proceeding in Midlands and looking positive for a long-term future ministry resource centre there - if not one operated by Lifeline, certainly in conjunction with others who have started one out at the Weavery (a quite modern former large shop) near Antelope Park – with accommodation facilities to bring in rural pastors for training.

We started the three-day seminar this morning. It was not as well attended as the previous three years, but much more interactive. Quite a number of fulltime pastors and leaders attended, and the discussion was greatly helped by Sam's presence, gifting, and contribution. The Baptist pastors, Pieter and Cheryl Albasini, have opened the main (Baptist) church facility to us and it is really, really good! So grateful for all their help. Later feedback indicated this was viewed as the best seminar we have put on in the Midlands in the past 7 years since we started doing them. Very encouraging!

Sam has proven to be an excellent seminar speaker – he is gifted in stimulating interaction on the topics that drew animated discussion – such as the marks of true and false apostles, and releasing charismatic activity in a Local Church (our main topic this trip).

Loxley caught the bus the 300k home to Harare on Wednesday to oversee the building alterations for the new family he expects will to move in later this year, as he prepares to transition over the rôle he has played in Lifeline for the past 17 years. None of us are getting any younger, and several us are now well past 60!....

## 7/5/10 from Bulawayo

It's Friday night and Sam and I have just got back to Mick's after two very successful days in Bulawayo.

Yesterday we drove down early from Gweru, then visited David Beevers at his home, went on to call on the Sibanda's and admire the beautiful little boy (Theodore) born after a 36 hours labour by vacuum, after Chele's strength failed. He is fine now, and she is too. They are all so happy. We passed on from our church the princely sum of \$US275, which paid all the hospital maternity and delivery fees - from the part of our overseas aid for Lifeline people - . She went to a public hospital and got very good quality care there (same care in the private hospital would have cost them over \$US2000 - unaffordable).

Sam has been a pleasure to travel and minister with. He is an easy person to get along with, and fits in everywhere so well. Today we are ministering in the morning at Breakthrough's MTP, and then to the church this afternoon.

We also called to sort out arrangements at the Christian Leadership Resource Centre for Friday's seminar. They were expecting about 40 pastors to come to their small premises. But on the day 55 turned up, the seminar room was absolutely jammed, and we had an excellent day from 9 to 4 with them. After lunch (very nice cost-effective catering, paid for by New Life), Sam and I split up the group into two discussion groups, and they seemed to really enjoy it. The level of interest was shown by the large number who stayed on all the way through to the 4pm dismissal. At the end, we had a moving time of praying for one another too.

Then all day Saturday, we were with a packed church at Breakthrough church with George Moyo and his energetic worshippers (including the ever-reliable Chamu as choir leader). We taught about 150 people from 10am to noon, then the service began in earnest at 1 till 5pm. They were jammed into every part of the building!

The praise was powerful; the dancing got frenetic for a while with some *vanyawi* showing off, and then Sam preached a powerful word. Everywhere we have been in these two brief weeks together, people are requesting him to return! And he says he plans to as the Lord undertakes.

## 12/5/10 Final Update from Harare

I am ready to depart (unlike Paul - not this life - but from Zimbabwe) after dropping Sam at the airport this morning. I leave tomorrow at 12.30, and it is a 18hr trip home. Sam was a great blessing to me personally, and a wonderful blessing in ministry wherever we went. He plans to come again.

We need quality teachers of the Word (and some with an administrative gifting too) here as the doors open left, right and centre. We have FIVE requests to help in Midlands with teaching, training, etc, of leaders, students, and then another opening in Masvingo through Artwell's movement - and they are offering all food and accomm (which is unusual here - normally we are expected to cover all costs). They want quality instructors to train leaders and ministers at all levels in their 12 churches there!

My heart abounds with joy when I see the vision God planted in me some years ago starting to really gather momentum here. We could set up a Base in the foreseeable future in Midlands - the ministry needs and opportunities are there and growing, but we would need MUCH more logistical support (personnel, finance, resources, quality itinerant teaching ministry, etc) before it becomes a reality.

Just today, after dropping Sam off, I picked a hitchhiker at the airport and brought him back to town - he is 29; graduated on Lifeline correspondence bible courses as a teenager, is now the youth pastor in a Methodist church of 2000 people, and was thrilled when I told him he was travelling in a Lifeline vehicle! I even told Loxley I had picked up a Lifeline hitch hiker. I burned the CD I have developed for him on request, and forwarded my NIV Study Bible to him (they are like gold here).

The two donated laptops that Gavin organised were very gratefully received. Pastor Diamond (Addmore's Ministry Training Program working friend) nearly kissed me! He told me he has been praying for one for two years, with no hope of saving enough money to buy one. I passed on the best one (and it is by far the best one ever our church has sent on) to Artwell, for the Lifeline Library he has now offered to coordinate and for his Bible Colleges he is overseeing. Well placed!

A safe trip home; no breakages, and a clear trip through customs completed what turned out to be a very significant month in the unfolding of the Lifeline Vision. Loxley said to me as I left, "I know you didn't really want to come (this is the busiest time of the year at home in Sydney and it was very hard to make time to go), but God has been in your visit, and we have seen significant things emerge for the future". I say AMEN to that!

A very sincere and big **TINOTENDA** (thank you) from Sam Abalo and myself to everyone who consistently prayed for us. Yes, we were very conscious at times that we were being carried along on eagles' wings... Prayer is such an enabling power. And our next return trip will be (DV) for the bi-annual Indaba in September.