



The People of Zimbabwe

By: Abby Marr

Poverty, AIDS, starvation, malaria, droughts, extreme heat, corrupt government . . . All of these words accurately depict the current situation in Zimbabwe, Africa. What would make a person want to leave the comforts of their American suburban home and spend time in this country? I found the answer to this question during a two-and-a-half week mission trip in the summer of 2005.



Led by Bob Buchanon, a full time missionary evangelist, our group also consisted of my brother James and our cousin Sarah King. We traveled to South Africa, Zimbabwe, and Zambia, but spent about 90% of our time with the Christians in Zimbabwe. Bob had been to this country multiple times and had several contacts there, but it was the first time he took companions with him. This was also my second mission trip with Bob; I traveled with him to the Philippines Islands in 2002.

One of the biggest reasons I wanted to go on this trip was because I was more prepared for what to expect. One cannot comprehend the poverty of a third world country unless it is seen firsthand. Shortly after I arrived in the Philippines several years ago, I realized that I wasn't adequately prepared. However, traveling on a second trip to a nation with even more poverty than the Philippines, I could better utilize my ability to help the Christians. James and I packed our suitcases full of only things that could be left in Africa. Clothes and shoes would be worn once and then given away. Candy, snacks, and toys filled every crevice inside our bags. At the end of the trip we left with suitcases containing only souvenirs.



Poverty was the most obvious problem plaguing Zimbabwe. Most men have no job, which in turn means that there is no money to feed their family. It is very common for one to have only a few meals a week. Toys are almost unheard of, so the children make their own and play with what they have. I played a game with some children with one such homemade toy. We all stood in a circle, crumpled up a plastic grocery sack into a ball, and threw it to another child in the circle. The laughter that came from playing this game was as great as that from any expensive store-bought toy.

I also was able to prepare more for the Bible classes I was to teach. I prepared several children's classes and a ladies' class with plenty of handouts and visuals. It was important to provide the people with teaching aids that could make the classes more effective. Most Christians can't afford notebook paper, let alone Bible class materials. I was able to distribute handouts in excess to be used as continual references.

Several days of work took us out into the bush, or most primitive areas of land. It was rally like stepping back in time 200 years. There were no roads. Houses were built with sticks and mud. Dinner was a goat that was killed before my eyes, cooked in a big pot over a fire, and stirred with a wooden stick. Many of these people had never been to any higher level of civilization, so their children had never seen white people before. Children would take one look at our white faces and cry as if they were looking at a ghost.

Much of their poverty isn't only because the people have no money. Their country is being run by an evil, corrupt government, led by President Robert Mugabe. Mugabe kills and steals from his people only for his own gain. He takes their homes and farms without any notice. He withholds sugar from grocery stores and gas from the pumps for months upon months. He sets up road blocks so his soldiers can stop a vehicle to see if there is anything they want to take. The United Nations has sent semi-trucks full of food for the people, but they never see any of it. It is all stolen by Mugabe and his men.



Zimbabwe also has one of the highest rates of AIDS in the world. Thirty-five percent of all adults have the AIDS virus in Zimbabwe. With a

life expectancy of only 39 years, it was a rare occasion for me to be able to meet any elderly citizens.



Despite all the negative things about Zimbabwe, there is still a lot of good. I have traveled to several nations and continents around the world, and the friendliest of all the people I have met are the Zimbabweans. As we walked down dirt roads, we were constantly met with huge smiles and waves from strangers. Despite the conditions of their country, they are a happy people content with what God has given them. This is also obvious as they sing praises to God. It was the most beautiful, soulful singing I have ever heard. Most congregations have no song books, so they look ahead and sing loudly from the heart in their beautiful languages. The Christians' singing, along with the abundance of precious children, is what touched me the most.

So, how would I answer the question why someone would want to travel to Zimbabwe? It has nothing to do with the sights to see or the souvenirs to buy. It has to do with love between God's people. The Christians in Zimbabwe live completely different lives than I do, but I realized that they are still just like me in so many ways. They are just people trying to serve God in a society that

doesn't want them to, like so many of us. Despite the classes that I prepared for them, they taught me more than I could teach them. I learned about selflessness, contentment, and more about how to serve God from the heart.