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NYLSTROOM SCRAPBOOK - June 2007 by Linda Maydell

Dear friends,

A small part of the Victoria Falls, which are 1 ½ times as long as Niagara Falls. Trails wind through the rain forest at the top of the cliff on the right where there are various lookout points. At some places there are brush "guard rails." In some places no guard rails at all.



Victoria Falls

It's 9 am. Two hours ago we left Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe, just after a mid-winter sunrise. A beautiful fluffy column of cloud, visible for several miles, hovered over the falls and shimmered creamy, white and pink in the early morning sun. Baboons huddled together in the road to the Botswana border, trying to soak up the warming rays. Ground hornbills, an endangered species, pecked in the short grass along the roadside. We disturbed grazing kudu, roan antelope, and even the rare sable antelope. They sprang across the road, but the elephants continued to munch the trees, totally unbothered by vehicles hurtling to and fro. After several kilometres, we crested a rise, and there below stretched the green forested valley of the majestic Zambezi. This is Africa at its best – one of the reasons why we so *enjoy* living here.

Life expectancy for men in Zimbabwe is 34. For women it is 32. This is Africa at its worst – one of the reasons why we feel we *need* to be staying here. So, a few days ago, after a bone-jarring, car-destroying, driver-patience-testing 45 miles off the main road at an average speed of 16 MPH, we arrived at Siadindi Church of Christ, about 150 miles SE of Victoria Falls. On this trip we had already broken one special heavy-duty spring, punctured one tyre, and ripped the water pipe out of our water storage tank, so Les was driving particularly carefully.

The church, which is only about 5 years old, meets in the old, broken-down huts of the brother of one of the Christians named George. George's brother had got "ill" and died in his 30's. George lives about 1/4 mile away in an impeccably neat *kyaya* ("kigh-yah").

The *khaya* is the family living area, consisting of several separate mud huts with grass roofs – living/dining rooms, bedrooms and a special kitchen with walls only half-way up to let out the smoke from the cooking fires. It also consists of a chicken coop, an open storage bin on stilts to hold corn, sorghum and millet before it is shucked or ground, an enclosed small hut with various “rooms” for beans and ground grain, and various useful trees such as papaya, banana or mango. The entire area is enclosed by a hedge or fence of thorns. There is not one blade of grass, and the dirt is swept daily. Just outside the *khaya* is the *kraal* (“crawl”), a small circular fence made of tree posts planted right up against one another, where oxen or goats, etc are kept at night for protection. Surrounding all this are a few acres of fields, also enclosed by thorn fences, particularly to keep goats and other animals from eating the crops. (Some brethren in another place lost all their crops due to a herd of 50 elephants breaking down their fences and eating everything. This happens during times of drought when the elephants do not find enough to eat in the bush.) About 50 brethren walked from other villages about 20 miles away to attend the meeting, and George invited all of them to sleep at his *khaya*.



George's khaya

The kitchen is on the left. The dishes are washed on the stand in the center. Note the “stamper” turned on its side. They use that to pound maize to meal.

The Christians did an incredible job of inviting their non-Christian neighbours to the meeting. I had at least 20 of these women in my class, and they participated amazingly

well. What all women want to study most is marriage. This is not easy to teach because their culture is so complex and it is so difficult to ascertain exactly when their culture conflicts with the word of God. These women have a LOT to overcome. Sex education for girls is supposedly done (very ineffectually) by an aunt or grandmother who is unlikely to be a Christian. What normally happens is that a young man takes his pleasure how he pleases until one day he gets someone’s daughter pregnant. The mother, who has “taught” her daughter to be pure by saying, “Don’t get pregnant,” angrily demands to know, “Where did you get this child?” It grieves me that even mothers who have been Christians for years then order their daughter to go live in fornication with the father of the child, regardless of the type of man he is. All that seems to interest them is the “fine” and the “lobola” (bride-price) that the young man’s family must pay. The negotiation of the lobola is a long process done via relatives who act as mediators. The parents of the girl are not even allowed to *meet* their future son-in-law until the negotiations have begun – and then it is culturally taboo to back out! (An aunt or uncle is supposed to surreptitiously investigate the young man and his family before negotiating.) Because the young man seldom has enough cows (about 8) plus various other gifts for family members, he negotiates a settlement, gives a “down payment,” and then is “allowed” by the young woman’s parents to do what has been happening for months already – sleep with their daughter. However, the parents do NOT allow their daughter to legally marry before all the lobola has been

paid. Some call this down-payment arrangement “marriage,” but so far as I can tell by asking many questions, it is not considered to be proper marriage according to the law of God, the law of their country, or even according to their own culture. (This arrangement was not allowed in years past, but has evolved since parents are demanding more and more lobola.) Sometimes women will tell me they are married “sort of” or they are “not sure” if they are married. One Venda chief (not a Christian) told Les straight out that he is *not* married, but he does “have” a woman he is busy “paying off.” In Ndebele/Zulu culture, the woman does not belong to the man until he has paid *all* the lobola. Should she die, he is not allowed to bury her according to his own wishes. Any children born to them before the lobola is fully paid belong to the parents of the girl. He has to pay extra lobola if he wants his own children! God says a man must “leave father and mother,” but what often happens is that the parents of the young man help him with their own cows for the down payment. Then, the girl comes to live with the young man in his parents’ *khaya* and is treated virtually as a slave by her “parents-in-law” since they “bought” her. If the young man should die before all the lobola is paid, and with AIDS this is happening a lot, the property of the man belongs to his parents and the “wife” and children are often sent back empty-handed to her parents’ house – and there is no provision culturally for things such as school fees for the children. On the other hand, if the full lobola has been paid, then the wife and children are the responsibility of the husband’s entire extended family – to care for them, pay their school fees, etc. Saddest of all, because the man is forced to “marry” the girl he impregnated, he never makes a commitment to “cleave,” breaking God’s second law of marriage. It is not long before he is sleeping with other women, infecting both himself and his “wife” with HIV.

At Siyadindi I taught about 8 hours on sexual purity and marriage. I tried, as always, very hard to find out about their culture (Tonga) and to ask THEM if such-and-such a practice is right according to such-and-such a verse in the Bible.

Finally I asked the class, “If a young man comes to negotiate to marry your daughter, and he is hard-working, a good Christian and has never slept with another woman – and he offers to pay you the normal down payment, but asks your permission to legally marry your daughter before sleeping with her, what would you say?” “NO.” They were *adamant*: “Then he won’t pay the rest of the lobola.” “But do these other men pay the rest of *their* lobola?” “Well....no.....” “And if he were a good Christian, don’t you think he would be more likely to honor his agreement, and be less likely to infect your daughters and grandchildren with HIV?” “Well, hmmmm.....” They clearly had not ever considered such a thing before! I hope and pray they will consider it now! Through similar questions, I tried to get them to see that their attitudes are in a big way responsible for their daughters’ sexual impurity. I so much want for them the blessings that the gospel can give them. I really thank God for men such as Peter Mudenda who do more than just teach – he actually has made provision for a marriage officer to come and help them.

I asked the women at Siyadindi if there were *any* present who had followed God’s law or who had a daughter who had followed God’s law: leaving father and mother, cleaving (commitment plus obeying the government laws) and *then* becoming one flesh. There was

one! A young woman named Sipiwa who had married a fellow-Christian. After marriage they left their home village and the congregation where they were converted and moved to a village where the young husband started his own *khaya* and another congregation. During the winter months, when the young husband is not farming, he goes from village to village – preaching to the lost. Even during the summer he sometimes does this because the other Christians come and plow or weed his fields for him. Sipiwa then prepares a goat for them in appreciation. What power in the gospel! What lights in the darkness! May others be motivated to follow their good example and may God be glorified!

We take great comfort in knowing that you are praying for us and for the other Christians – thank you so much. As you can see, we are certainly in need of much wisdom. With love, Linda Maydell

P.S. We also wish to thank those who sent clothing.

Below: Representatives from 19 congregations (including a congregation made up only of 5 women), choose the clothing that is best suited for those needy among them.



Donated clothing

