



2018

Swazi Kids Newsletter

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A Place of Tears and Hope

I estimate I have travelled to Swaziland, now called eSwatini close to 30 times over the last 18 years, and I've gained some perspective. I am not an economist, I did not study global or women's studies at university, nor have I been a member of any UN agency. However, I am now 60 years old, I have seen a few things, visited many countries fully developed all the way down to dirt-dirt poor. So, from that disclaimed perspective, I'd like to share my observations about a tiny country that has been on the receiving end of many aid agencies, NGO's, IGO's, the International Monetary Fund, UNICEF, PEPFAR, USAID, World Vision, Save the Children, SOS Children's Village, Samaritans Purse, World Food Program and many more.

In the settled and urban or regions around the two urban centers, I would say the changes I have witnessed-indeed improvements-have been profound. There are shopping malls, nice ones, where there were corn fields in 1999. There are roundabouts for traffic, even street lights on one rural highway. Homes are sprouting up all-over in Mbabane, decent and well built with garages and granite counter tops. The US built a huge embassy two years ago, next to our favourite shopping area; it employs 300 people. Mozambique is planning to move theirs into this US's neighbourhood. Taiwan and Qatar embassies are already there. A massive (and I do mean massive) convention centre is halfway built, aiming for a 2020 opening for a Southern African summit. Across the road, going in are the new Swaziland Revenue Agency offices, 5 stories high. No one knows where the

Cultural Rights vs. Human Rights

funding is coming for these two structures. Downtown Mbabane has a spaceship shaped Hilton nearing completion. There is so much development that guesthouses are full and new accommodations are being built. There is even a great gym! Need I go on?

So, for us when we are here, we can live in relative comfort. For our senior students, those who have trades and degrees, this is a great time in Swaziland to be a young person with some skills. Our graduates all have jobs, even small business start-ups.

They are paying attention to other potential sources of income, such as visas at the border, road taxes, charging to park (25 cts) and even fining for cell phone use while driving. The border is tightening up. Police “seem” to be less corrupt. Although having said that, I was pulled over this afternoon for using my cell phone while driving, the \$6 I had to pay, literally went directly into his pocket as we spoke!

Even laws are changing. Women in some jurisdictions can actually own the land they have lived on, as opposed to it being in the name of husbands or eldest sons. They are attempting to pass a Sexual Offenses and Domestic Violence bill, just now, in order to make grade for a huge grant from the US. Included in this bill are increased penalties for things such as rape and killing your own wife.

In 2009, when a man killed his wife, he could get as little as 3-6 months for the crime, whereas, if he killed his neighbour’s wife, he’d get 2 years. Now if he killed a man, he’d be put away for much longer, as men are highly valued, women are seen as more of a possession. These are facts, and as a woman, I have trouble repeating them. It is my understanding that these sentences are going to change. They have not had any laws around incest or abduction, and this new bill, so far, has not addressed these. It is considered “part of their culture.” (are you speechless yet?)

There is an old tradition here called, Inhlanti, it allows a man at the time of his wedding, to pre-select a “back-up wife” should his chosen wife not produce children for him, or dies. This “junior bridesmaid” is usually related to the bride in some way and is a pre-teen at the time of this selection. If the groom wishes to make a claim on this “back-up bride” at a later date, he needs no one’s permission to do so. If that girl, reaches a marrying age, before being “claimed” she has to ask his permission from this man, in order to be released and carry-on with her own adult life. I think this is not practiced nearly as widely as it used to be, but nonetheless, when asked to relinquish this from their traditions and enter this into law as the “abduction” that it is, the men in the House of Parliament could not pass the change, citing it also as a “cultural right” for the men.

It’s a peaceful, exquisitely gorgeous, calm country. If a person is here with a good job or better still capital earned in the developed world, this place is continuously “on sale” as our dollars go much further on all services. I love it here and more each time we come.

So, here is what has NOT changed.

The Gogos (grandmothers) in the poorest regions are still living in the most depraved conditions that I have ever seen. They are mostly alone, as the solo adult, their children have either died or gone away. They are caring for their grandchildren, and even great grandchildren. I think people on the streets of Vancouver behind a dumpster may have nicer accommodations. Their homes are made of mud and sticks, with metal roofing held on by rocks. Rains pelt through the walls and around the rudimentary tin lids. They qualify for a senior’s monthly pension of \$40 CAD. They have to walk great distances to collect this allowance and with this they have to feed and clothe the 4 or 6 or 8 of them who live there, as the case may be. One woman we met is on ARV drugs for her HIV, she admitted eating cow dung,

A Thin Lifeline from Canada

as a patient needs food in the stomach in order to take the drugs and she had none.

There are still plenty of children in the rural areas who are living without adults at all. We support a few such family groupings. These kids fair less well, for obvious reasons, as they have no emotional support or guidance whatsoever. And teen girls still get pregnant.

HIV: Posted stats on HIV in this country have improved, however, there could be some number fudging in this. I can't be certain, but I have nurses who work in rural clinics and hospitals and they report that the HIV rate where they work, is over 80%. However, the implementation of the "mother-child-transmission" drug during pregnancy, as been a generation saver. This is well used here now and the rate of HIV transmission from pregnancy and the birth process has dropped to below 10%, which is amazing. There is also better management of the disease than 10 years ago. The women in particular understand the need to be on and use their ARV drugs exactly as the doctors tell them. The HIV virus is very tricky and strict adherence to even the timing of taking the drugs twice daily is mandatory for success. The men, however are another story and are still guilty of multiple partners, unprotected sex and spreading the virus, once their symptoms have improved from the ARV's.

There is also a very "positive" movement in the cities to be public with a positive HIV status, which is enlightened. You see young adults here with T-shirts advertising their positive-ness in an open way. This will go a long way to addressing the deeply entrenched stigma that an HIV positive person is somehow bad or sinful. You see no such equivalent in the rural areas, where the stigma and secrecy around these deaths is entrenched.

Men are fathering children and not parenting them, they leave their girlfriends or partners for anywhere with less responsibility. This is still a rampant cultural norm. When my travelers are

with me in the rural areas, after visiting the homesteads, they always ask "where are the men?" I'm not sure really, but they are not with their families, with very few exceptions.

And yet, in spite of some old cultural practices that really must change for the health of these people, I do remain hopeful. The young people whose lives Swazi Kids, have influenced and impacted are doing very well. They are much more mature, composed, and adult-like in their lives. They have jobs, decent paying jobs. They practice safe sex. A few have cars now. Some are parents and are parenting their kids, even some of the men. I admire and respect that these young adults have turned their lives around. To me, the small amount of money that they have received is just that, so small compared to what we have or even what each of us in the western world could spare or share, and yet they have turned this opportunity into gold. They have outgrown their beginnings and their circumstances, given just this thin lifeline from us in Canada.

So, I thank each of you for your financial part in this as this work all takes money.



Photo by Karin Olssen.

Manzini Region

Our renovation was completed last year with super success. We did the following: all new flooring, new plumbing in the 2 bathrooms, created 2 new showers, all new appliances including a wash-up room, washer and dryer, new kitchen cabinetry, paint throughout, new lighting, 24 new mattresses, complete new sets of bedding, curtains throughout, and new metal bunk beds for the children. Then we moved outside: a fantastic mural on the exterior walls, a bike path in concrete through the yard and new bicycles (now mostly broken, unfortunately.)

Sadly, as the conditions improved, the government has now added 12 new kids to the 24 there last year. It should hold about 10! But they are at least clean,



New mural at the Manzini Halfway House. Photo: P Carlson.

Emnotfweni High School



Construction of the new facilities at Emnotfweni High School. Photo: P. Carlson

We are now in phase 3 of the construction of an all-new school in a very challenged area of the low-veld in east-central Swaziland. The school is called “Emnotfweni” which loosely means “prosperous.” This year we put up a Consumer Sciences Building. It is mammoth and will house a cooking school, sewing rooms and a huge outside kitchen from which to cook for and feed the students. Twenty students from Brentwood College went to Swaziland to build the walls, working alongside the local community. Way to go Brentwood! They have also raised over \$13,000 towards the building materials.

Community Centre Number 7

This structure also went up this spring. We have done 6 such in the past. These buildings have become more elaborate as we re-design and improve on previous work. Now they have one large central meeting room, plus a library at one end and a preschool at the other, in separate but adjoining rooms. These are proving to be real centers for these otherwise quite scattered communities, rather like a city hall/rec center/library combo at home. Lots goes on here: training, learning, commerce, health services, at times even HIV testing.



Three local workers at the eDlangeni Community Centre. Photo: P. Carlson

Zethu Shabangu

This young woman is still simply amazing. She is in her 2nd year of a Business Degree on a full ride scholarship from Mastercard at Ashesi University in Accra, Ghana. She is cheerful, working hard, incredibly grateful and I simply cannot say enough about how proud we are of this girl's accomplishments and commitment to the task in front of her. Her program is 4 years long, and she does get to return home during summers. We now support her only with a monthly stipend for small purchases, toiletries, cell phone and internet use and when home the ability to travel within Swaziland to see family.





Women from the Gone Rural Collective at a community centre. Photo: P. Carlson



Construction of the new facilities at Emnotfweni High School. Photo: P. Carlson



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On the steps of a community centre. Photo: K Olsson.



Girls dancing outside a community centre. Photo: P. Carlson.



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A meeting inside a community centre. Photo: K Olsson (above); The Mbonane brothers. Photo P. Carlson (right).



The Mbonane Family

Some of you have helped us out with a child-led family of five kids over the past few years, here is their update. The oldest brother is Wandile, he is 18 and through some miracle of perseverance and genetics he is amazingly sitting in the top position or ranking in his grade 11 class. He is now the man of the household and will be handling your funds going forward. We are confident he is up to the task. He is also so strong a student that in 2019 we are going to bring him down from the hills to school in the city at a strong school, to increase his chances of going on to university. There is still no sign of either parent, so ongoing support is really needed. They are in dire need of new clothing and lighting. I am sourcing out solar lights for them. There are even lights that we can purchase here, with USB plugs in them, such that a cell phone can be charged. Enterprising rural people can generate a small bit of extra cash from these devices.



A little boy and his new shoes at the Manzini Halfway House. Photo P. Carlson.



Boys from the Matjana Elementary School. Photo P. Carlson.

Student Updates

Our kids seem a bit stronger this year than last year. We have had a positive change of leadership in our primary junior school and some not so positive changes at the higher levels at a few schools. We find that a change in the head of school has significant changes on the quality of the overall education and graduation statistics and thus the rate of gaining entry into any post-secondary institution. For 2018, we have 40 kids in elementary and secondary schools and 15 at post secondary.

August 2018 Canada Fundraiser

The plan is to bring three of our brightest stars to Canada to meet you!! We will be making stops at our cottage in Ontario, Toronto, Kelowna, Vancouver and Victoria. Small and casual events will be planned at each city in hopes of raising awareness as well as, paying you back with the treat of meeting them, after all these years of your support. On the docket to travel are 2 women and 1 man:

Phindile Matsebula is a nurse-midwife, who was sponsored by Susan and Richard Osler for years while in high school and then the Wheeler Family Foundation for all of her university education. Then there is Zethu Shabangu, the accountant to be, written about above, whom many of you either know or know-of. And then from the male side, is Ncamiso Nkambule, who was sponsored throughout his younger years by my brother and family, David and Michele Newton. Then as with Phindy, Wheelers have picked up his support costs for university.

Please set the date aside, pencil it in!

I am hopeful all interested sponsors can come. Here are some rough dates:

- **Stoney lake: Sunday August 12th at Carlson's cottage.**
- **Toronto: Tuesday August 14th, venue TBA.**
- **Kelowna: Carlson's home Sat August 18th.**
- **Victoria/Brentwood College: Tuesday August 21st (date estimated).**
- **Vancouver: Friday August 24th, venue West Van Yacht Club.**

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Reach Out

Our ongoing efforts to improve the lives of children in Swaziland require significant funds. If you wish to make a contribution, fill in this page and include with your cheque. Make cheques payable to: Swazi Kids Society.

- Any amount to use in Swazi Kids work = \$ _____
- Sponsor _____ elementary student(s) @ \$200 each = \$ _____
- Sponsor _____ secondary student(s) @ 500 each = \$ _____
- Provide uniform(s) for needy students \$100 each = \$ _____
- A child's bicycle \$150 each = \$ _____
- A pair of much needed school shoes \$80 each = \$ _____

Please make cheques payable to: Swazi Kids Society

Please post to: Swazi Kids, 4415 Swaziland Rd., Kelowna BC V1W 2X2 Canada

For further information either email Pam Carlson at swazikids@gmail.com or phone 250-309-2522.

Or: e-transfer to swazikids@gmail.com and use password: swazikids

Or: Direct donation at www.swazikids.org. MONTHLY DONATIONS AND AUTO-WITHDRAWAL OPTIONS NOW AVAILABLE. Tax receipts issued annually.