

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE – MAY 2010

In September 2009, I anxiously returned to Mchukuuni Village after more than a year in Canada undergoing cancer treatment. Needless to say, it was very emotional. Although the poverty and sickness were still overwhelming, so were the beautiful smiles of happiness. . I didn't have enough arms to hug them all!

During the first three weeks, my Tanzanian associate and I purchased, physically carried and distributed food and clothing to the villagers.

The logistics for a seemingly simple task were incredible. We bought the staples in Tanga Town and carried whatever we could manage in our backpacks. Then we took the local "bus" (old vans that comfortably sit 15 but are packed with at least 30 people). After disembarking in Mahawko, we walked with the weight to Mchukuuni Village and began distribution in the 35 degree heat.

Malaria is still the number one killer of children under five years old in Tanzania. Between the lack of food, medicine, clothing and decent housing, mosquito nets were not a priority amongst the villagers. However, we knew it would have to be a priority for Wipe Their Tears. When you see a beautiful child one day and hear they've died of malaria the next day, it leaves a hole in your heart. We knew we could not save them all, but we knew we would do everything we could to save as many as possible.

The first step was to physically go to each and every hut and record the names/number of children etc. We then purchased and personally delivered over 900 mosquito nets in Mchukuuni Village and Morongo. It took several days as we could only carry 40 nets at a time on bicycle.

There are no words to describe their gratitude. When villager after villager thanks you for helping to 'save their children', it really puts Life in perspective.

We also provided macute (thatch) for several worn/dilapidated roofs. Between the rains and the mosquitoes, this was also a preventative measure for malaria.

Our first aid supplies were, without a doubt, indispensable. We cleaned and dressed countless injuries and sores. When there was no electricity to heat water for soaking/cleaning, we gathered sticks and made outside fires. Every day there were people waiting for some kind of assistance.

We took countless villagers by local bus to Tanga Town to see a medical doctor. The fees and prescriptions were all covered by Wipe Their Tears.

Numerous meetings were held with the local villagers regarding wells. It was eventually decided that unless we had the proper equipment to dig several metres deep, it would be in vain. Historically, water has been found in the area, but it has always dried up at they were not able to dig deep enough. Although Wipe Their Tears did not have the finances or the resources at the time to pursue this further, it is one of our goals for the next trip.

Bagamoyo is a special town to me as it is the first place in Tanzania that I volunteered in 2004. We took the eight-hour bus ride via Dar es Salaam to help the children at the Imani, Upendo na Matumaini (orphan and vulnerable children's) centre. It is run by a minimum number of volunteers, but the number of children is increasing constantly. When we arrived, there were only enough staples for another three days. We supplied the centre with four months of basic food supplies and will supply chickens etc. on our next visit.

Christmas 2009 was a day we will never forget. We knew the area (east of Tanga) had not had rain for several weeks and many of the crops had withered and died. We took the seven-hour local bus to Magoma laden with staples, mosquito nets and gifts of clothing, material etc.

There were some very impacting moments for me. Three special people touched my heart – a very old woman, a young woman and a child.

The first was a very sweet, old woman named Maria whom I knew from a previous visit to the area. At that time, she had a medium-sized growth on her face, and I was astounded to see the increased size and rawness. People were avoiding her because they didn't know if it was contagious. I knew we had to help

her! We took her to the small local hospital; purchased sutures/antibiotics and paid to have it removed. She was so very thankful; she could now walk in her village without being shunned!

The second was a beautiful, young woman whom I noticed while being shown around the Magoma Hospital by the local doctor. She was sitting on a bed holding her baby, and the pain on her face was indescribable. The baby was in excruciating pain, and the doctor said she would surely die as he did not have the equipment to save here. And even if he did, the family had no money. They were planning to leave the next day to go back to their mountain home.

I knew instantly that this child needed a chance in life! We spoke to the doctor in-depth about what could be done immediately. Arrangements were made for the transportation, food, medical fees etc. for the mother, baby and grandfather to travel by local bus the next day to the Kilimanjaro Christian Medical Centre in Moshi for treatment.

When the family was told what Wipe Their Tears was doing, it was truly one of the most humbling experiences of my life. The gratitude - again - was indescribable.

(Several weeks later, we went back to Magoma. Word passed around quickly by bicycle that we had returned, and the whole family came down from the mountains to thank us. Again, beyond words!)

The third person was an eight-year old child named Elisa. While distributing clothes to the children, her sadness just caught my eye. I later found out that her father was dead; her mother works and lives in Dar es Salaam as there is no work in Magoma. Elisa lives with her grandmother in a one-room mud hut.

We gave her a dress and a couple small items. You would think it was a million dollars! She was so very happy and so polite. She did not ask for more; she was thrilled with what she received. Every day she came to see us, and cried uncontrollably when we left for Mchukuuni. Wipe Their Tears is paying for her scholastic expenses.

There were also two very special children in Mchukuuni Village whom we are still helping. One is a four year old named Chicki with a sight problem, and the other is a ten year old named Asha with physical deformities, including a large facial tumour.

We took both children and mothers by local bus to Dar es Salaam for testing/treatment and hospitalization. Chicki is presently wearing glasses that have made an improvement. When I return to Tanzania, we will bring Asha back for surgery on her tumour and Chicki for possible surgery.

While in the Village, two young boys almost in tears came to see us. They had been sent home from school because they each owed the equivalent of one dollar for school fees plus their heads weren't shaved. (This is compulsory for both boys and girls in elementary school.) They were so sad and didn't know what to do; their families had no money.

Needless to say, Wipe Their Tears paid the fees and took them for a straight-razor hair cut. We paid the equivalent of three dollars for the school fees and straight razor hair cuts.

The next day, one of the children brought his 'most prized possession' – his handmade soccer ball - as a thank you! It touched my heart deeply as I knew he had spent hours gathering bits of plastic etc. and hand tying. I did not want to accept it; however, I was told it would be very hurtful not to. (I have brought this ball back to Canada; and when I return to Tanzania, I will bring several soccer balls for the children.)

It doesn't matter if they are malnourished or dressed in rags, soccer is their passion, starting at a very early age. When I return, I hope to bring several soccer balls, jerseys etc. (If anyone can help in this regard, that would be great.)

In Tanga Town, two very different people came into our lives – a crippled street boy named Kassam and a cancer victim named Asha (another Asha).

After several days of logistics, Wipe Their Tears gave Kassam a new life - selling telephone certificates from his wheelchair. He went from living off the street with absolutely nothing begging for food to a beautiful, nicely dressed young boy with a chance for a future in his pouch!

And last but not least - the sweet lady named Asha ! Not only did she have a terrible limp because of one short leg, but she was also in excruciating pain. We brought her by local bus to Dar es Salaam where she was diagnosed with breast cancer. Wipe Their Tears is covering all medical costs for cancer treatment, and we're happy to say her prognosis is very good!

My plans are to return to Tanzania in January 2011 for several months. In the meantime, we will be fundraising for the purchase of additional mosquito nets, first aid supplies, clothing, food, chickens, fishing nets etc. as well as digging of wells and the construction of the learning centre.

The villagers love Canada! If we have accomplished one thing thus far, it has been their respect for our country. Their appreciation is beyond belief.

When you give so little for basic living – and it means so much – words cannot describe the feeling inside. These people deserve a chance.

The more we see, the more we want to do!

Their daily struggle for life is heartbreaking, and although we can't change the world, we **can** wipe one tear at a time!

Thank you.

Lorraine Paquette

Lorraine Paquette
President

***LIFE ISN'T ABOUT WAITING FOR THE STORM TO PASS...
IT'S ABOUT LEARNING HOW TO DANCE IN THE RAIN!!***