

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE – 2011 June

In my last message, I said I would address the two questions that I am constantly asked - "How do you know where to help? How do you know who to help?"

First of all, it would be impossible to help everyone in need! We do not want the funding spread so thin that it does not make a sustainable difference. We must make the difficult decision of whom to help.

It doesn't matter where we go – we are told heartbreaking stories of destitute, starving children – many of whom have lost either one or both parents from disease (mainly AIDS) or who desperately want to attend school but the families have no monies for such luxuries.

Our priorities must be assisting small groups requiring help as well as individuals where our assistance will change their lives. We do not want to provide a bandaid solution. We want to provide a means to escape poverty.

Not every instance will be a success, but we must try.

Beautiful Bibi died last week. She fought a courageous battle, but the cancer had spread too quickly. She knew she was dying and asked me to bring her from the hospital in Dar es Salaam back to her village (four hours by local bus). She had to be carried off the bus; she couldn't even walk any more. In the end, even her morphine wasn't enough for her excruciating pain.

Because Wipe Their Tears helped Bibi so much, I was given the privilege of sitting beside her body for two hours. The hut was filled with wailing women, and there are no words to describe the sadness.

The men carried her body to the gravesite and Oredo helped her children lower Bibi to the ground. A very emotional day!!

On a happier note, we chose a small, dilapidated school to help. It's located in one of the poorer areas of Bagamoyo and the 'building' itself is a clay hut. The owner of the land has allowed the school to operate as it is the only opportunity for the children in that area to get any kind of education.

The room holds fifty children on a dry day! The reason is because there is no thatch at the centre of the roof and the rain pours in. There is no school on the rainy day. The floor has about 10 percent cement and the rest is dirt. The 'desks' and 'chairs' consist of six-foot long pieces of rough wood – 10 inches wide! Hard to imagine when you think of the beautiful schools and equipment we have in Canada!

We hired three local people to redo the roof. They made several trips by bicycle to transport the thatch etc. They climbed to the top – barefoot and no ladders – and worked in 40 degree heat. Just watching them was exhausting!

All of us (including me) gathered the old thatch to burn; even the little children who could barely walk picked handfuls and carried it to the fire.

This week we will knock out the remaining pieces of broken concrete and lay a new floor. Everyone is so excited!

The fee for the children who can afford to pay is approximately 50 cents a week. (Doesn't sound like much, but it is when you consider their average monthly earnings is anywhere between \$25-\$40.) These monies give them one cup of porridge in the morning. When they have not collected enough monies, the porridge is watered down accordingly.

Once the repairs have been finished, we will be making arrangements for a local woman to provide various food (cassava, fruit, bread, chai, etc.) on different days of the week. We want to ensure that the children have at least one good meal a day.

I'm humbled when they call me 'Mama Africa'. What I'm doing is very small in comparison to what large organizations are doing. However, I do feel in my heart that those we have chosen to help have been given a chance for a better life.

Our accommodations wherever we go are pretty rough to say the least. The first thing you do is check under the one sheet for cockroaches – then for frogs in the toilet! I have never seen cockroaches so large! And spiders! I still scream when I see a spider!

Living out of a backpack for the past three months has not been easy. However, as we've had to travel for the projects by local bus so many times (from Tanga to Dar to Bagamoyo etc.); it's most economical to take everything with us. (If I didn't have strong arms before, I sure have them now!)

I think what I miss the most is hot water! After walking in the rain with a 40-lb backpack, you just feel chilled. And having a cold shower doesn't really take away that chill. Can't really complain though; it's nothing in comparison to what the Tanzanians endure on a daily basis.

Now to 'education' – which has always been a priority to me. We have chosen four children to help. Two are in kindergarten and two are in secondary. They each have very heartwrenching stories.

Casey is sixteen years old and so bright. She lost her father several years ago and her mother this past Christmas. As she has no brothers or sisters, Casey had to go live with her uncle and his family. There were absolutely no extra monies to let her continue in secondary.

She is an absolutely beautiful girl (both inside and outside) with a real passion to learn. We knew we had to help her. We paid the fees for the rest of this year as well as a uniform, shoes, backpack, Muslim headdress, stationery etc. Casey is thrilled to be back in school, and whenever we see her around, she comes to thank us over and over.

Ocean is the second girl we are helping. She has no father and her mother works six days a week for \$40 a month. Her mother had been saving relentlessly for Ocean, but there still wasn't enough for school fees etc. Again, we knew we had to help her.

As with Casey, we paid for all the school expenses.

Next are Lucy and Omalie. Both are five years old and neither knows their fathers. The mothers work for pennies, and education is just not an option.

I knew the first time I met these children that I was going to do what I could to help. There was just something very special about each of them. (I'd love to help all of the impoverished children in Africa, but I know that's impossible!)

Lucy and Omalie's first day of school was a day to remember. They held my hand tight and wouldn't say a word for the longest time. Then, when they realized that this was really going to be 'their' school, the pure joy on their faces brought tears to my eyes.

It's hard to imagine that being able to go to school generates such happiness and pride. Even when their uniforms are tattered and shoes falling apart, the school children have a pride that is admirable.

Now for sadness again! Mwarami's sister-in-law died in childbirth. Her husband lost his mind and basically had a nervous breakdown. As psychological issues are not well understood in Tanzania (especially the smaller areas), he was taken to a hospital in Dar es Salaam. Three weeks later, he apparently contracted malaria and died. (I personally think he just died of a broken heart!)

Formula for the baby is approximately \$10 a can weekly. As the family cannot possibly buy it, Wipe Their Tears is covering the costs. Also, I went to the Monday local market and purchased several pieces of clothing for the baby. (The baby sleeps on a ragged cushion on the cement floor!)

They've named the baby "Faith", and they now call me "Mama Faith". (If I lived in Tanzania permanently, I would – without a doubt – raise this beautiful child. However, it's not feasible since I will be coming back to Canada. When I leave, I will arrange whatever I can to ensure Faith has a decent life. While I am here, I will take her as much as I can. This little child has touched my heart.

Now back to my dear, sweet Asha! We picked her up from the Muhimbili Hospital in Dar es Salaam. The child was in there for eight long weeks with no one to visit her except Oredo and me.

I met with the panel of doctors who meet weekly and make all decisions concerning facial surgeries. It was a unanimous decision that they do NOT have the expertise anywhere in Tanzania to perform another surgery. I didn't know I still had tears left in my body, but I did!

Explaining to Asha that after all this time, they can't do anything more was so difficult for me. The look on her face was the total opposite of the pure joy of Amalie and Lucy.

I am not giving up though! The head doctor wrote a letter summarizing Ash's medical condition and stating that Tanzania does not have the expertise. He suggests Asha be brought to either South Africa or India for surgery. (Of course, it is absolutely impossible for Wipe Their Tears to cover the exorbitant costs.)

Taking Asha back to the village was another day that I will never forget. It was heartbreaking! Her grandmother didn't even want to look at her. After 8 weeks in the hospital, she thought Asha would come back perfect. Asha was so sad; I am sure she wished she had never gone to Dar!

The other children actually laughed at her immediately. Although over half of the tumour was removed, her mouth is now on a 45 degree angle and her bottom lip protrudes much more than before.

I've been researching online to see if another organization can help with the financial costs. Thus far, no luck. If anyone has any ideas, information, please email me directly at: [sunshine8386@hotmail.com](mailto:sunshine8386@hotmail.com).

I promised Asha over two years ago that I would do everything I could to help her. I will not break that promise; I am not giving up! She gave me the biggest hug when I left, and the look in her eyes said "please come back and help me".

Now it's time for a success story!

There's a young mother named Tatu whom I've known for over three years. She works six days a week and earns approximately \$35 a month. One day I went to her workplace to say hi and noticed that she was extremely despondent. She told me that her 10-year old son could barely see and had to stop going to school. She had taken him to the local hospital, but they didn't know what to do.

I contacted CCBRT Hospital in Dar es Salaam and scheduled an appointment the following week for her son. Wipe Their Tears covered all costs (bus, food, accommodation, medical fees etc.) for Tatu and her son to go by bus from Tanga to Dar. I am thrilled to say that her son was treated successfully. The doctor said that had he not been treated now, it would have progressed and eventually become impossible to save his sight. (Perhaps yes – perhaps no.) This is Africa and they tend to say what they think you want to hear.)

In any event, he was given eye drops to be taken for several weeks and a much customized pair of glasses. He can see! He is back in school! We are all thrilled!

There are also two young men (21 and 24) whom we are going to help. Both need to go to CCBRT and both will require eye surgeries. We will keep you updated.

As you can tell, it has been an emotional rollercoaster living in Tanzania. However, even with all the heartaches and sadness, just knowing that we can make a difference – no matter how small – makes every minute worthwhile.

I am anxious to get back to Bagamoyo and hold Baby Faith!

Till later,

Peace and Love to you all,

*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!!***