

SSAAP Quarterly Newsletter: Edition XXI

Beltane (May Day), 2017

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This edition is dedicated to Ginny, my Sierra Leonean sister. Thanks for finding me when I needed you most.

Due to the length and content of the previous newsletter (Edition XX: 60+ pages!), Edition XXI will hopefully be less ‘wordy’ and more visual, with intention that you can enjoy looking at photos without any pressure to have to read too much! Please read only the sections that interest you or pertain to you. I apologize that I cannot seem to make the newsletters less than forty pages long. I have so much to report!

Thank you for your time and support of this project. And all that *you* do to beautify this world.

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“Take only memories, leave nothing but footprints.” – Chief Seattle



Paramount Chief Foday Gulama of Moyamba, Sierra Leone’s family: mother (left) and daughter Hawa (right).

“I have learnt through bitter experience the one supreme lesson to conserve my anger; and as heat conserved is transmuted into energy so our anger controlled can be transmuted into power which can move the world.” – Mahatma Gandhi

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Sierra Leone, West Africa



Sierra Leone is the epicenter of my world. It breaks my heart, gives me a better one, and heals it simultaneously. It's a place where anything is possible in the soil: every mineral, precious stone, and nearly any agricultural crop can be grown there. It is a highly fertile, rich place.

It is also probably one of the most abused, tortured, lawless and corrupt places on the planet – because of its endowment of natural resources, and the selfish nature of human beings and tendencies toward self-interest rather than respecting humans and their rights.

Every time I leave, I wonder if I will ever return. The deepest pain I have encountered on the planet has been handed to me on the soil of Sierra Leone. But then when I think about it more intensely, I realize I have to go back. Not just for SSAAP – but also for me. I cannot live without it. Sierra Leone is the bravest part of me.



As seems to be our usual pattern in exiting Sierra Leone, a whirlwind of events accompany our departure. In 2014, we left the country after a very productive stay with our project, then terrifying Ebola and witnessing dead bodies piled on the streets, as well as a personal tragedy in our lives when my daughter's father pretended he didn't know who she or I was in an effort to avoid paying child support for our child (in Sierra Leone, child support is approximately \$9/month). This year, in 2017, we left the country painfully once again after having reported a case of child abuse within the very home we were lodging. The abuse included daily beatings of two small children (ages 7 and 10), sometimes up to three or four times a day, humiliation, kicking, and slapping, punching, and neglect. My daughter also reported to me that at times the children were stoned (stones thrown at them) as punishment. As the two girls were my daughter's closest friends, and basically like sisters to her (when I cooked for her I would feed them as well), the abuse was also affecting Radiance psychologically. I noted a sad dissonance in her personality and knew that in keeping quiet, we were also being abused indirectly.





The abuse reached an intolerable point the last week we were in Moyamba. The older girl (pictured previously with shells in her hair) had been beaten throughout the day for dropping a spoon on the ground, and cried so hard that her eyes swelled to a point she could barely open them.

Later that night, the wife of the man who had beaten her entered the room and began to kick the little girl to wake her up, which made her cry more. We were in the room next to theirs and both Radiance and I could barely sleep that night, we were so disturbed. I even vomited. I stayed up all night packing so that we could leave the next day, fearing for the safety and well-being of my child as well as the toxic energy of staying in a place where children were being treated so brutally.

It got to the point that the abuse of these two little girls was no different than abuse of Radiance, or myself, and so just before we left our hometown of Moyamba in Sierra Leone, I reported the abuse of the little girl pictured on this page to her grandparents and parents in the village, and then to the father of the other little girl on the previous page. SSAAP sponsored both girls to go to school in the rural communities where they both are native for the next three years in an effort to remove them from the abusive home and provide educational opportunities simultaneously.



Sadly, two weeks after reporting the abuse to both sets of parents, neither girl was removed from the house and so I escalated the issue and consulted local authorities: Ministry of Social Welfare and Gender/Child Services in Moyamba, and the Family Support Unit (FSU) of the police division of Freetown, which reported it to senior officials in the small town of Moyamba. The FSU is the branch of the police that is linked with the Ministry of Social Welfare. Both groups took my report very seriously, and within a few days the police were knocking at the door of the house, telling them that there had been a report of child abuse in the house. The police told the husband and wife who were abusing the children that they would be sent to the police station for questioning, and that the children would be removed from the house.



They also told them *who* had made the report. And so after a series of horrible text messages that the man sent me threatening to destroy all my belongings I had at the house (Radi's and my bicycles, our bed, clothing, medications, kitchen items, etc.), I involved the Paramount Chief of Moyamba District.

Then I had a long talk with my daughter. I asked her if she had to choose between her things and her two best friends, what would she choose? She said she loved her friends more than her things. And then I asked her how she would feel after we left Sierra Leone, flew to Ethiopia, then back home to Zambia, knowing the little girls were being mistreated and physically abused, if we hadn't reported the abuse just to save our belongings. I told her that two human beings are worth more than anything we had left behind at that house, and that there was nothing we had in those suitcases that I couldn't replace, but that the two little girls are irreplaceable.

We are both still processing what happened and talk about different aspects of the whole situation on a daily basis, knowing that we did the right thing but how heartsick we felt for both girls, living in a nation where a justice system is almost invisible. As well, for those of you who have suffered either in conception of a child or to find a mate to bear a child with, as I have, then your heart will go out to the sad reality of how many neglected children there are in Africa that are abandoned by their parents, abused (usually in Africa the abuse is physical rather than sexual), treated as slaves by wealthier or more urbanized family members, or generally not appreciated. And it is very, very difficult to adopt or remove these children from their homelands, even if they are probably abused with scars on their bodies, malnourished, not learning at their respective schools, etc. Many of their parents would prefer they were taken to Westernized countries, as well, but the governments of the countries won't allow or make it extremely difficult to remove them. As I told my

mother, I would have given anything to have taken both little girls on the airplane back to Zambia with Radiance and I and raised them as my own.



I don't believe it is possible to work in Africa as an American without human rights issues barreling into whatever work you are doing, eventually – or when you start to go deeper there. After all, as Americans, the deepest essence of our root is human rights, and respect and dignity for all, and a sense of democracy that parallels spiritualism in its sensitivity to the well-being of each and every human's life.

I was sadly shocked by how many Sierra Leoneans either were unconcerned when I told them Radiance and I had been living in a house where two little girls were being physically abused daily, or were upset with me when I told them I had reported the abuse to the social welfare office and involved the police as well. Some of my Sierra Leonean friends were quite upset with me for taking this drastic measure.

Had I not reported it, I told them, it would be the same as me saying that the lives of those two girls were less than the life of my own child. In my culture, the husband and wife abusing those children would be facing prison time. We take child abuse very, very seriously in America. I would never allow anyone to hurt my child, so by not reporting abuses done to two other children, even though they are not my children, it would have been the same thing as saying my daughter's life is more important than the other two girls' lives – which it is not.

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“If I had my time over I would do the same again. So would any man who dares call himself a man.” – Nelson Mandela

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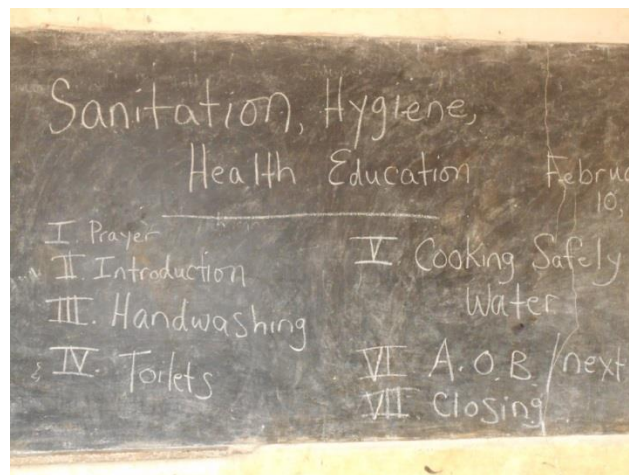
SSAAP Sanitation and Hygiene Workshops



Back by popular demand in the villages, post-Ebola, are the SSAAP Sanitation and Hygiene Workshops, which the people of Njagbahun Village requested.

I am a CNA, or Certified Nurse's Aide, in America. This is the lowest qualification of nursing in the U.S.A., and I was shocked/saddened to learn from some of my Sierra Leonean counterparts in the medical field that the American CNA is still higher than the highest nurses' rank of nursing in Sierra Leone. Hence, this is the reason why Ebola spread like wildfire through this nation of the world in 2014/2015.

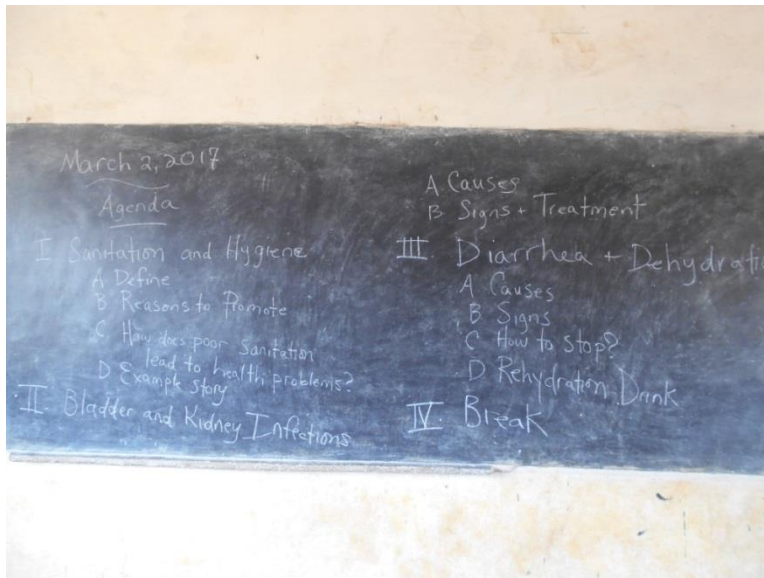
Nursing qualifications aside, I have always had a burning intrigue with tropical and infectious diseases, and *love* both teaching and learning from Africans, specifically in rural areas, about their traditional beliefs surrounding many of these illnesses – specifically malaria, HIV and AIDS, and STD/STI's.



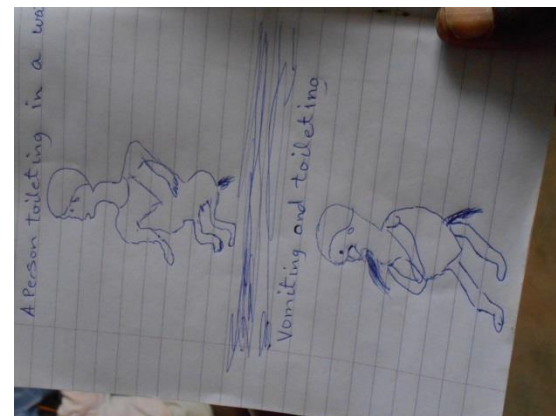


I teach the community simple skills I learned in my CNA training regarding hand-washing: cleaning the nailbeds on the center of the opposite palm, washing between fingers, washing the wrists and even up to the mid-elbow point with lathered soap. If soap is unavailable, then both ash from a fire (fire made with firewood, not charcoal) or dirt from the ground (not contaminated with animal/human feces) works somewhat as effectively.

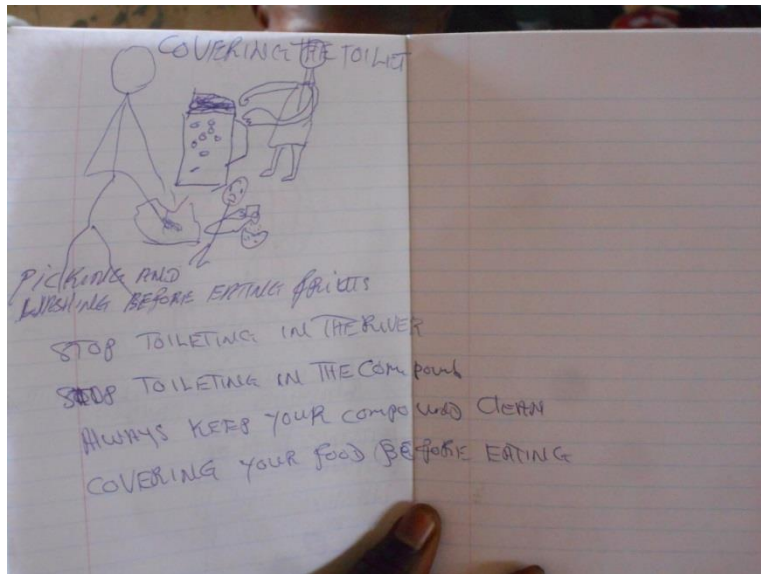




In another session, we discussed side-effects of poor sanitation and hygiene: diarrhea and infections.



We did a lot of group work, laughed a ton, and had a heap of fun.



SSAAP will be working with Njagbahun Community in the future to construct a toilet for the school, as per its sanitation and hygiene cleanliness mission.

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"I have decided to stick with love. Hate is too great a burden to bear." – Martin Luther King, Jr.

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Brief Clarification on Sierra Leone

It is difficult for me to describe the complexity of a nation like Sierra Leone. Every mineral in the world, or precious stone (save turquoise, I believe) is found there. It is the land of abundance. Rain, moisture, greenery, and untouched raw nature. In its own way, it is Paradise. On one hand, it has more to offer than perhaps anywhere else on the planet.

On the other hand, the people are eating one meal a day. There is so much anger and violence rampant in the everyday lives of the Sierra Leoneans, but in the end, can we blame them? “*A hungry man is an angry man,*” they always say. It is true. When you don’t eat – even for a day, you don’t feel well. Chronic hunger has serious psychological side-effects. So how can a nation of people who are starving be expected to remain in good spirits? The situation in Sierra Leone is tragic.

How many centuries does it take to dissolve the pain of human slavery from the earth’s soil? Or can it ever go away? Slavery is still thick in the hearts of Americans, some three hundred years post-slavery in our nation, its offspring the racial tensions that continue to divide Americans present day. Has slavery ever left Africa? Or perhaps the darkness of human slavery – which is just bondage of our own spirits – never really releases. The permanent stain that slavery has left on Africa is manifested as an inferiority complex that Westerners are somehow superior to them, and the inability to see that in the end, we all have different strengths and weaknesses (as individuals, nations, and cultures), and that ebb and flow creates a brilliant oneness that enriches the flow of the planet.



The civil war in Sierra Leone, which also served as an excuse for tribes to inflict genocide on rival tribes, an opportunity for many Western countries to capitalize on diamond sales, and venue for civilians to savagely destroy their neighbors, was one of the most brutal wars ever recorded in human history (1990-2001). Even the First Liberian civil war (1989-1996) or the Second Liberian civil war (1999-2003) doesn't have the same gruesome reputation as the Sierra Leonean civil war.

The child soldiers I worked with on my first assignment in Sierra Leone (2008-2009) had been injected with drugs against their consent, and were forced to kill family members, rape their own mothers, slice open the bellies of pregnant women, eat their enemies hands, pound infant babies in a mortar and use the butt of a gun as a pestle, and an endless list of horrific things I will spare you the details of. How many centuries does it take to eradicate the darkness and destruction from this type of terror?

The Ebola Outbreak of 2014/2015 was the straw that broke the camel's back for Sierra Leone, which is approximately the size of Illinois. The Outbreak shed bright light on the fact that the medical care in Sierra Leone is sub-par, a large number of the nurses having acquired their qualification through sleeping with their teachers or the doctors, and many of the doctors having obtained their status through bribery, corruption, or other lawless means. During the outbreak, strict curfew rules were enforced prohibiting farmers from farming on their fields, as nearly the whole country was quarantined to their homes, and agricultural endeavors were abolished. The end result: rampant starvation for the last three years in their nation. And importation of food products, such as the staple food rice, so costly that the average household can afford scarcely a meal a day.



This recent trip to Sierra Leone has been an awakening for me. I realized that no matter how difficult serving their nation is, I will never turn my back on them. I must have a sacred pact with the country, because I just could not abandon their nation, no matter how bad it is – and sometimes, it is just *bad*. Perhaps this is a genetic response to my daughter or my unconditional love of her father, but I believe it is something much deeper than this, still. It's an issue of social justice.

The Sierra Leoneans, many of them, have very little to no formal education. Yet they are some of the smartest people I have ever met – a testament to how many forms of intelligence exist on the planet. Most of the Sierra Leoneans have a base intelligence that keeps me very inspired – not to mention their work ethic. Of the places in the world I have been, they are undoubtedly the most hard-working people I have had the pleasure of working with.



No one should ever be hungry in this world; there should not exist an entire nation of people eating only one meal or less per day. These incredibly strong and resourceful people deserve more than to drink mud infested water with animal feces floating in it or filthy water with an ecosystem spawning within it. The problem will never be solved through simple means, either; it will involve genuine concern and compassion, not billion-dollar aid money thrown at a problem in hopes that it reaches the right target. Simple solutions to the largest eyesore the world faces: starvation and lack of clean water for millions (an estimated 795 million of the

world's 7.3 billion population suffers from chronic hunger, according to the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization's 2014-2016 study), will only worsen the problems.

SSAAP believes resources given to aid Africa must be given through relationships, education and non-selfish intention, otherwise the resources will be wasted.

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“Change will not come if we wait for some other person or some other time. We are the ones we've been waiting for. We are the change that we seek.” – Barack Obama

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Water

What if every village in Sierra Leone could be given a water well? I have been dreaming largely lately. I figure it can't hurt anything and one day when I die at least I will know I did everything I could with outrageous passion. Why wouldn't every aid organization working in Africa strive to put a water well in every village of the nation? Why wouldn't this be the first thing a government or a leader of a nation put in place for his people? That seems rather fundamental to me; that is what I am striving to do with SSAAP. If every time SSAAP travels to Sierra Leone to work (5-6 months out of every two years, on average) and we can fund the digging of five wells (\$1000 USD/well) per trip, plus give hundreds to thousands of people clean drinking water – not to mention employment opportunities to the local people digging the wells which in turn helps their families eat in a country where the unemployment rate exceeds 85% --then we have done something worth noting in our home in West Africa.



Water wells completed in 2017: Mokoyoh Village (left, above), Gibina Village (right, above), Ile Village (left and right, below),



Nyandehun-Nichol Village (left, below), and Gbokuma Village (center and right, below). Gbokuma Village was the only one of the five wells that was not complete when I left Sierra Leone in April 2017. In Gbokuma, we dug two holes, neither yielding water. The first hole we found a rock slab which was unable to be penetrated, the second hole filled with odious gases. Hole #3 was started in May 2017 and is expected to be complete by January 2018. More updates to come on this village's well. Gbokuma Village failed wells #2 (center) and #1 (right) have been filled back up with the dirt/gravel that was extracted from them.



SSAAP's local well contractor and friend in Moyamba District, Mr. Sam Amara. We are enjoying local palm wine ("poyo" in Krio) and finalizing our contract between his company and SSAAP.

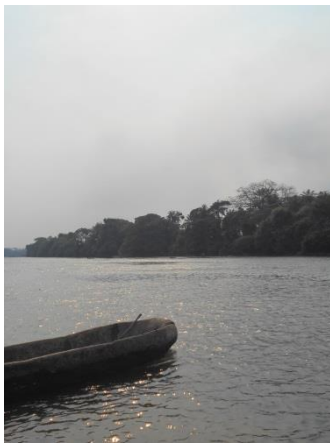
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“The sole meaning of life is to serve humanity.” – Tolstoy

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Future Water Wells in Sierra Leone

Mr. Sam and SSAAP have already assessed the well sites for Moyamba District for the future (whenever SSAAP travels back to Sierra Leone – date unknown). We currently have funding for five wells in Moyamba District (Southern Province) and hope for at least one or two in Port Loko District (Northern Province).



This site visit to Makoro Village, Port Loko District on March 28, 2017 was typical for a SSAAP water site in Sierra Leone: crossing a major river via dugout canoe (left), two run-ins with corrupt police officers followed by a motorbike breakdown (center), and, finally the destination: a wretched water source (right) in a remote village in the middle of virtually nowhere. Taylor Sorie Kamara, pictured in the blue shirt above, told me that no one in his right mind would ever want to work with him because he is so stubborn. It can also be said he is hellbent on eradicating starvation, and even if it is only in a small way – it will make a difference. To find an African who is concerned about the illiterate, marginalized poor of his own nation is very, very rare. I told Taylor we make a good team, as I have worked with very few Africans who can match me in their passion for rural development (or who could put up with me ☺). An agricultural development worker by profession, Taylor specializes in animal-rearing projects, which is why SSAAP currently has very successful poultry, duck, goat, and sheep-rearing projects, and hopefully in the future also a pig-rearing and a fishing project, all in Port Loko District. Yes, Taylor, you are incredible. None of this would ever be possible without *you*.

We love you Taylor!



What awaits us at the end of the arduous journey to reach the site is usually the same, each time: a kind-hearted and well-deserving large community.

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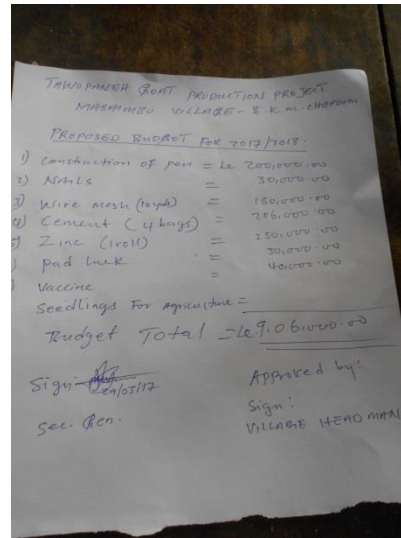
“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.” – Margaret Mead

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SSAAP’s Animal-Rearing Projects in Sierra Leone



SSAAP’s animal-rearing projects are extensive. Animal-rearing is beneficial in so many areas; they help to combat starvation, provide income-generation, teach livestock skills and medical care, and guarantee milk (cows, sheep, goats) used in a plethora of ways. The poultry farm in Makoba Village, rural Port Loko, partnering with local CBO (Community-Based Organization) Grace Children’s Foundation (GCF) has over 400 birds. We began the project in 2014 when SSAAP funded 50 birds. Despite the Ebola Outbreak, the project has flourished. A veterinary officer is also part of the program. In 2017, SSAAP funded part of the building of a new poultry house. The community will contribute for the rest of the shelter with their own resources, possibly through sale of some of the birds.



The Maisambo Village “Tawopaneh Project” came together for a meeting with SSAAP on 30 March 2017. The women, expressing their praise, thanked us. The community made a budget for a long-term goat house: the total is approximately \$120. SSAAP will most likely fund most or the entirety of this project when we return to Sierra Leone (date unknown).



Temporary goat shelter, above: left and right.

Four goats were purchased: three males and one female. One of the females is now pregnant. As goat theft is very common in the rural areas of Sierra Leone, Maisambo Community had the ingenious idea of creating a goat house (made from local bricks and mud) off the side of one of the stakeholder’s houses. Part of the wall of the house was removed, and the goat house was built as an extension to the already-existent house. The goats enter and exit the house just as the humans do (!), as there is no entry or exit point within the goat shelter. The goats graze during the day around the village, then at night sleep in this shelter. The community is asking for SSAAP to fund permanent building materials for this shelter such as iron sheets, cement, and iron rods (approx. \$120). The four goats cost less than \$100. In summary, for just over \$200 USD, an entire project will be created in a community of approximately 455 people, and all will benefit – either directly or indirectly. Talk about getting the best bang for your buck in rural Africa! Not to mention how happy and grateful these projects make the local people – that’s the best part 😊



Banthoron Village (means: ‘river coming from the east’ in Temne language, Port Loko District, Northern Province, Sierra Leone) has already begun their duck project. Duck-rearing needs a shelter, and the bricks and sticks (pictured above) have been created/collected for the shelter. They are estimating to buy approximately six ducks, a huge bag of duck feed, and told me to expect over fifty ducks whenever SSAAP returns to monitor their project. I told them I appreciate their enthusiasm and will look forward to meeting their duck farm when I return.

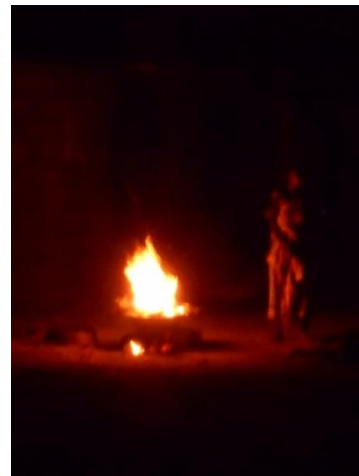
In-depth, detailed reports for all SSAAP’s Projects (water, animal-rearing, work with women, school sponsorships, herbal programs, sanitation and hygiene) available on SSAAP’s website: www.ssaap.org.

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“The best fighter is never angry.” – Lao Tzu

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Upcoming Projects in Sierra Leone



By the end of our visit to Port Loko, and SSAAP's last days in Sierra Leone, Taylor and I were working nearly all around the clock. We arrived for our community assessment trip to Gbantala Village well after nightfall (page 19, left and right) and talked with them about starting any project they would need in their community and having a program in their community. Taylor and I found this village accidentally in February: we got lost and the motorbike driver suggested we look for a village after we parked the bike, literally, in the middle of a jungle. The people were exceedingly kind and the village isn't accessible even by footpath, as there is a small river separating it from the other villages we work in. The community has never received donor aid in any form (UNICEF, USAID, UKAID, PLAN International, CARE, World Vision, etc.) and was enthusiastic to start a small animal project together (their choice) in the future, when SSAAP returns.



In the Moyamba District, proposals for a sewing training workshop in Njagbahun Village have already been submitted (left, center) by the two instructors interested in doing a vocational training course with the young adults attending the school. As well, a proposal for a school toilet has been submitted to SSAAP (right).



In Port Loko District, proposals to SSAAP have already been submitted for a fishing project with the vet officer (left), as well for a pig-rearing project (right).

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“Power is of two kinds. One is obtained by the fear of punishment, and the other is by the art of love. Power based on love is a thousand times more effective and permanent than the one derived from the fear of punishment.” – Mahatma Gandhi

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Culture in Sierra Leone



In rural Sierra Leone, you find lush jungle and intermittent streams – some of them a very clean resource for drinking.



Full moon at 4 a.m., Juma Village, Sierra Leone (left).Gpangbama River, southern Sierra Leone (right).



I have a difficult time expressing the heat of Sierra Leone – specifically in February/March/April prior to the first rains of the season. The heat exacerbates the already-challenging living conditions in the country and adds to the irritability and tension of the people. Always at a loss for words in describing the humid, sweltering heat of the tropics, I can explain that twenty minutes after bathing, one’s body is already drenched in sweat. I keep my head and neck covered with a damp shawl to keep me cooler – it works! At the end of each day, I soak our family’s clothes in soap; they smell horrible. Pictured is Radiance, sleeping. Ten minutes after falling asleep, the sheets beneath her body are wet from sweat. I have attempted to capture it in the photo.



Our SSAAP-GCF Port Loko Team.



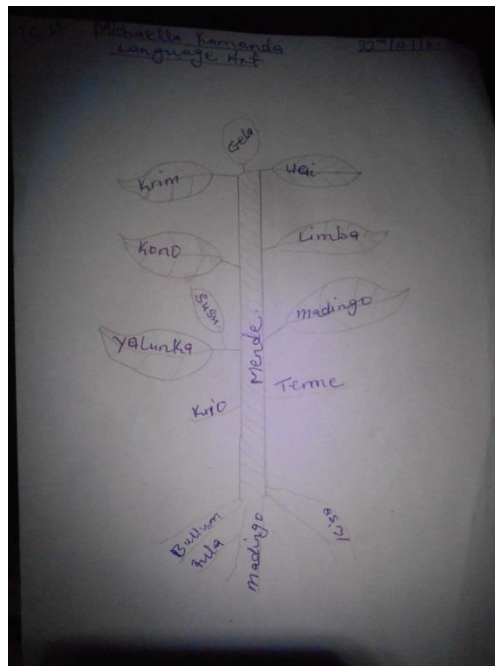
Old forms of currency used in Sierra Leone, as well as with the West African slave trade. (Courtesy of National Museum of Sierra Leone)



Kroobay Slums, Freetown, with its literal river of trash. Kroobay is one of the worst eyesores of Freetown, its residents some of the friendliest, kindest people you will ever meet. The current political party in Sierra Leone has hired one ‘inside job’ contractor to clean up the entirety of trash in all of Freetown. A job too overpowering for even fifty companies to effectively accomplish, the city has become a massive garbage dump.



Homeschool: the National Museum of Sierra Leone in Freetown. Bai Bureh, a warrior chief and one of the iconic symbols of strength in Sierra Leone, revolted against the British imposing a hut tax on poor villagers for their own land. One by one, each of the mighty chiefs fell slave to the British corrupt tax impositions, but Bai Bureh would not relent. He was later imprisoned by the British on the Gold Coast (Ghana) for six years, and died after his release from prison. He is quite possibly the most highly revered social figure in Sierra Leone. Bai Bureh is pictured on the 1,000 Leone currency note.



Tribalism – the root cause of every conflict in Africa – at its finest.

The diagram above was taught to students at a school in Moyamba town: *Mende* tribe as the supreme ‘stem’ or ‘trunk’ of the plant/tree, while other tribes (*Susu*, *Limba*, *Madingo*, *Krim*) as mere leaves off the *Mende* ‘stem’, and other tribes (*Krio*, *Fula*, *Temne*) as simple roots, again, from the main ‘*Mende*’ source. This diagram was taught at a reputable school in Moyamba town.

In my observation, tribalism is the main obstacle blocking development in Africa. And while every culture has its own form of provincialism/tribalism, Africa’s tribalism is the greatest detriment to its society, as Africa is

still mostly composed of tribes living in communities together. How can any society move forward whilst schools are teaching its pupils separation and hierarchy among its people? This is the *last* thing the world needs right now.



Cotton trees are one of the symbols of Sierra Leone. Ancient temples, many of them are hundreds of years old and carry the wisdom of all that has occurred here, passed through the soil. The tree roots, as pictured, show the centuries the trees have been breathing life back into the inhabitants of this soil. The more girth with which the roots clutch the ground, the older the tree.



Sierra Leonean country cloth (right) made with the colors of the Sierra Leonean flag. Green symbolizes the rich earth, blue the sea, and white for the breeze off the ocean (wind). Left, bird's view of the Sierra Leonean coastline as we flew over it. On the airplane, Radiance and I cried so hard the man seated beside us smiled and gave us a handkerchief. It's a country of so many mixed emotions, and in touching its soil, automatically I believe we become forced to deal with the parts of ourselves that are most tortured.

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*“Do the difficult things while they are easy and do the great things while they are small.” –
Lao Tzu*

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Ethiopia, East Africa (Horn of Africa)

Initial Assessment Trip



Rich in culture and tradition, poor in food security and potable water sustainability, Ethiopia is a country that has always appealed to SSAAP – primarily because we can travel to it for free (it is the connecting port between Zambia and Sierra Leone, and Ethiopian Airlines/Kenya Airways doesn't charge extra for a layover of up to 364 days!) and because it is a blend of both Zambia and Sierra Leone (the kindness of the Zambians with the work ethic of the Sierra Leoneans), Ethiopia might, in the future, provide a perfect climate for SSAAP activity to generate.

Expanding SSAAP to another nation is a difficult task, and one that takes time, as it is necessary not to diminish the resources for the other countries involved if expansion to another nation takes place. It took SSAAP from 2010-2014 to expand to Sierra Leone without depleting the resources of Zambia, as SSAAP is a small project and has limited resources. With Ethiopia, it will be the same situation. SSAAP will only be able to work in Ethiopia if resources from Zambia and Sierra Leone are still in tact, and new/future resources are provided to assist the Ethiopians.



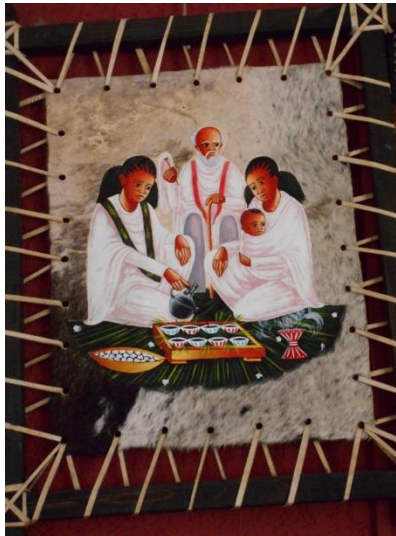
An argument for why SSAAP should (someday, resource-willing) serve Ethiopia is perhaps even more debatable than Sierra Leone or Zambia – based on one point alone: according to UN reports, ***between 6.6 million to 9 million will starve this year.*** In 2016, Ethiopia was rated by the UNDP as the seventh poorest country in the world. A nation with the second-highest population in Africa, second only to Nigeria, in April 2017 the population in Ethiopia was 103,755,204.

Ethiopia was never colonized, per se, but was briefly occupied by Italy in 1936, during WWII. As the only country in Africa never colonized (Liberia has been debatably colonized, and every other African nation has been indisputably colonized), the Ethiopians have somewhat of a different attitude toward foreigners than any other African nation I have experienced. They do not have the same polar “worship/despise” relationship with the Caucasian race that I have experienced with both Zambians and Sierra Leoneans. Historically, as a massive empire spanning across the Red Sea and into Yemen, Ethiopia was once a land of riches and, according to archaeologists, was the seat of human civilization. Today, it is within the top ten poorest countries of the world due to (same old story) a lack of shared resources. The rift between the privileged and the malnourished/undereducated/vulnerable members of society is vast, and the privileged members of the society occupy, sadly, less than 1% of the population.





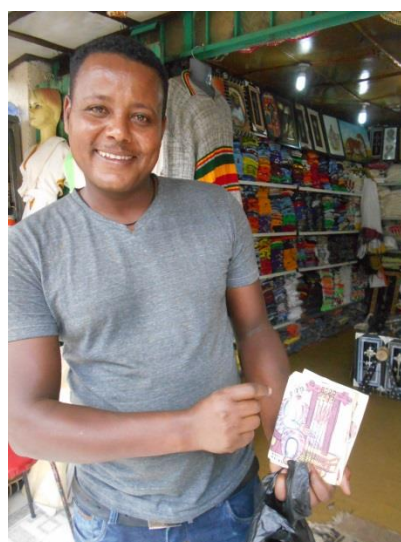
A group of vulnerable children and women in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia (left). A friend of SSAAP's works with these women and children in the capital city, as well as in Gondar, Ethiopia. SSAAP will travel to Gondar to do a site assessment trip in May 2017. The informality of Africa is continuous throughout the United States of America (right). On a Tuesday at 11 a.m. at the Ministry of Tourism and Culture, which Radiance and I visited to gain insight into our travel plans (Ethiopia is massive, the size of the entire southwest region of America), the Minister took a liking to Radiance, gave her a scarf, and offered her lunch. Like most Ethiopians I have met, they think Radiance is an Ethiopian and do not believe me when I explain to them that her father is a Krio man from West Africa and that I am her biological mother. Due to the large amount of Ethiopian children who are adopted by Westerners, most Ethiopians believe Radiance is my adopted Ethiopian child.



SSAAP will visit Ethiopia from 2 April to 15 June 2017, and will visit the following regions to assess whether or not, logistically, it would be feasible for SSAAP to begin a project here. The government has placed strict restrictions on NGO's (Non-Governmental Organizations) operating in its country, and due to corruption, will not allow any NGO to work directly with human rights issues. Indirectly, of course, every humanitarian aid organization works with issues surrounding human rights, but as SSAAP is primarily a water, food-resourcing, and educational program, we should not have a problem with government requirements here.

In its two-and-a-half month assessment trip to Ethiopia, SSAAP will visit the town of Gondar, working with a small charity organization based in Colorado, which had asked some time ago if we could do a water project for a group of people outside Gondar. We will also travel to a village called Adaammaa about ten kilometers from Durame town of Kembata Zone in Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Regional State. The third area we will visit is called DembiDollo, a remote town in west Ethiopia. One friend in Addis Ababa, the capital of Ethiopia, told the local authorities about our program and they were highly enthusiastic about SSAAP intervention. There are over 4,000 people from Harar, an area near the Somalian border, rehabilitated in the DembiDollo area to escape the drought that devastated the Somali and Hararghe regions. While in DembiDollo we will also visit the area of Gambella, home to a large ethnic group marginalized due to their significantly darker skin color than most of the other Ethiopians. Please note that each of the four regions mentioned above are in need of drinking water and food resources, I am told. As well, we have contact people and local places to stay in each place, so we won't be stranded.

After a meeting with an Ethiopian well contractor in Addis Ababa, I am told that a well in a remote area (drilled) would cost in the \$1000-\$1200 USD ballpark. I am told that a hand-dug well would be significantly cheaper. Extra pipes for irrigation and agricultural purposes could be added for a slightly higher price. These costs are affordable for SSAAP.



Ethiopian art: a myriad of styles, varying from traditional to modern. SSAAP intends to work with local artisans in remote areas to commission artisans to paint, carve, weave, and sew. The art aspect of SSAAP will be able to shine in Ethiopia, I am confident.

*

“Future people will wonder why we endured so many evils when we had the power to change.” – Ashleigh Brilliant

*

Site Visit in Amhara Region, Ethiopia



I am told that the need for SSAAP is desperate all over Ethiopia, specifically the more arid regions (Ethiopia is home to five different climates). SSAAP has been met with enthusiasm, heightened interest, and open invitation to many rural village regions of the vast country. When visiting the Amhara Region, I made friends with a man who took me to his village to meet the stakeholders of the village and to assess the need for clean drinking water, animal-rearing projects, sponsorship of children to school, income-generation activities. Above, many different kinds of honey are found in the Amhara Region of Ethiopia. Honey smells, tastes and looks different based on the flowers used by the bees to produce the honey, as well as the environment. Honey sales could potentially be a good source of income-generation and a worthwhile project for SSAAP.



SSAAP conducted a site assessment to Bugna Woreda Village on 23 April 2017. As seen from the photos, the region is incredibly dry.



The people attended the meeting in masses (center) and the village stakeholders (right) were so enthusiastic about SSAAP that they offered to build Radiance and I a house in their community – immediately! I explained to them that there were a lot of pieces that needed to come together before SSAAP could work in Ethiopia, but that a program here was on the horizon, resources permitting. Desperate for water, the people are currently drinking ground water which is almost dried. Their cattle and donkeys drink water once every 2-3 days.

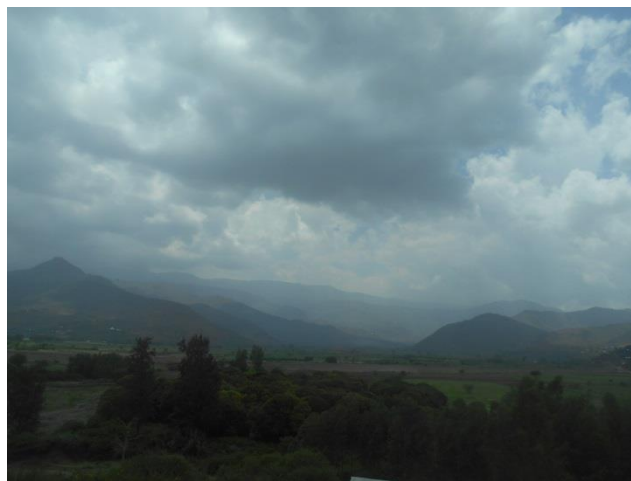
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“First they ignore you, then they laugh at you, then they fight you. And then you win.”

– Mahatma Gandhi

*

Culture in Ethiopia



The incredibly expansive nature, rich culture and preserved tradition of Ethiopia has been mentioned less than it ought to have been. Home to the Rift Valley, the Blue Nile and Tis Abay Falls (*Blue Nile Falls*), as well as Lake Tana and Awash National Park, there is endless, rather unknown beauty in this region of Africa.



In my humble opinion, Ethiopia is absolute eye-candy for most anyone who travels here: to an artist, a scientist, a historian, an architect, or an anthropologist. There is something here for everyone.



Africa is a homeschool parent's haven, featuring museums that cost little to nothing, wildlife, national game parks, and exposure to culture everywhere you go. Above: National Museum of Ethiopia, Addis Ababa. Above left: *Ardi*, 4.4 million years old – the oldest skeleton in the world, found in the Afar Region of Ethiopia, Middle Awash Valley. Above right: *Lucy*, the most famous skeleton in the world, 3.2 million years old.



Above: *Selam*, the earliest and most complete skeleton of a human child ancestor in the history of paleoanthropology. *Selam* died 3.3 million years ago (150,000 years before *Lucy*), and was sadly only 3 years of age when she died. *Ardi*, *Lucy*, and *Selam* are all females and were more prone to tree-climbing than walking. *Selam* is probably the most interesting as its skull has been preserved.



Above: Small, thin in stature, and incredibly charismatic Haile Selassie, the hero of Ethiopia is to Ethiopia as Mahatma Gandhi is to India, or as Nelson Mandela is to South Africa, or as Bai Bureh is to Sierra Leone. Some Rastafarians even go so far as to proclaim him as their savior.

*

“World peace must develop from inner peace. Peace is not just mere absence of violence. Peace is, I think, the manifestation of human compassion.” – Dalai Lama XIV

*

Zambia, Sub-Saharan Africa

No, SSAAP has not forgotten its base, its comfort origin and peaceful home – and we never will ☺ We will be back in June, and late July will welcome and await both groups of visitors: Mississippi State University's Engineers Without Borders (MSU-EWB), for their fifth year of assessment/drilling/monitoring and evaluation of water wells in the Simwatachela region, will come to our home in the village. Please see the attached article pertaining to MSU-EWB's work in Zambia with SSAAP.

As well, SSAAP's Secretary will spend two and a half months in Zambia (specifically in Simwatachela), surveying the project, assisting it in its weaknesses, conducting meetings with local beneficiaries, and working with local artisans in creation of new art, according to the market in America. She will also work with women in the village to sew and create items for our partnership with We'Moon in Oregon, U.S.A.

We welcome both sets of visitors with open hearts and open arms. If you are considering a visit to Africa and would like to be part of our project, please let me know. In some capacity, with whatever resource you have to offer (time, skill, knowledge) we would be more than happy to host you at our home in Zambia.

If your interest is in Sierra Leone or in Ethiopia, we will also make arrangements for that.



SSAAP has promised one village to repair their well upon our arrival back to Simwatachela late June, as well various other communities I have promised SSAAP will assess for future water wells, animal-rearing projects, or educational workshops. We also look forward to expanding our microloan program in Zambia, in hopes that it can reach more participants in Simwatachela, with the technical advice and support from one of our beloved and trusted economists in America.

*

“An educator is not merely a giver of information; he is one who points the way to wisdom, to truth. To create a new society, each one of us has to be a true teacher, which means that we have to be both the pupil and the master; we have to educate ourselves.” – J. Krishnamurti

*

Culture in Zambia



It is impossible to separate Zambia from Zimbabwe. Zimbabwean ‘Zim’ money before their economic crash of 2008. The literal translation of ‘Zimbabwe,’ from the word ‘*dzimbabwe*’ in the Shona language, ‘walled grave,’ referring to the Great Zimbabwe: stone ruins in one of the country’s fertile valleys, as pictured above on their currency notes (Oxford dictionaries). Zambia and Zimbabwe, although their histories differ dramatically, share many things in common: a border, various tribes, Victoria Falls, and the same pleasant demeanor of the individual people. I am told by a friend of mine who worked in one of the most expensive tourist hotels in the town of Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe that the twenty billion dollar note (shown above), or a month’s salary, could not even afford her a bottle of cooking oil and a bar of soap.

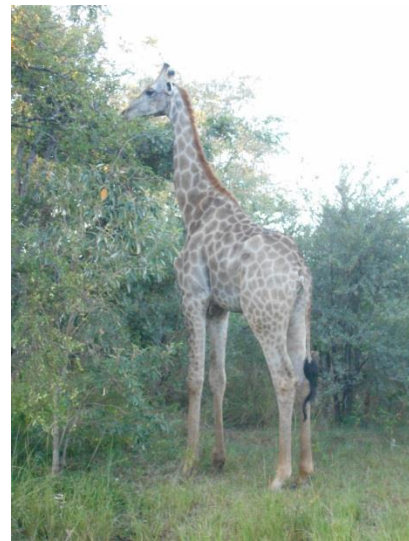
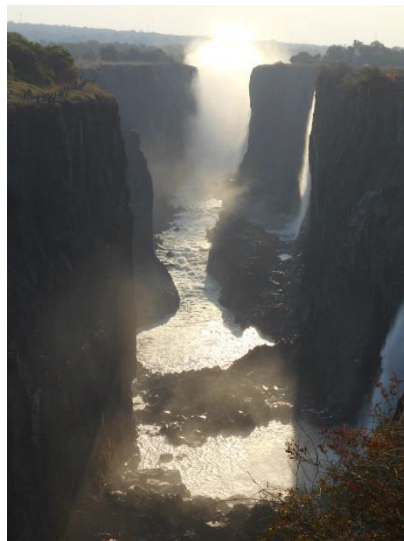


Livingstone, Zambia. It’s a place I would never, ever want to live without, and is most likely responsible for the success of the SSAAP-Zambia project. It provides refuge, healing, and inspiration when the village gets tough. In late August/early September, when most of the water on the Zambezi River (sources Victoria Falls)

has dried, these elephants come to feed in the late day and the Zambians know exactly where they are in the bush before they encroach upon areas where people rest on the rocks or wash their clothes.



Other forms of wildlife are not uncommon around Mosi-oa-Tunya Park, but are equally stunning.

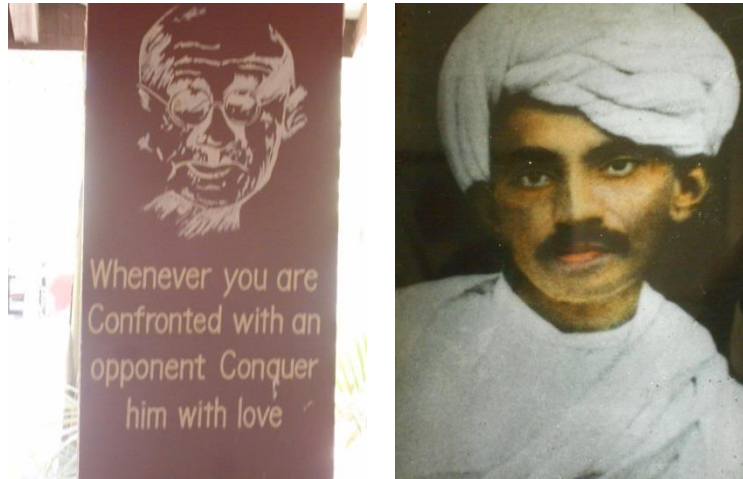


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“Security is mostly a superstition. It does not exist in nature, nor do the children of men as a whole experience it. Avoiding danger is no safer in the long run than outright exposure. Life is either a daring adventure, or nothing.” – Helen Keller

*

Where India and Africa Merge

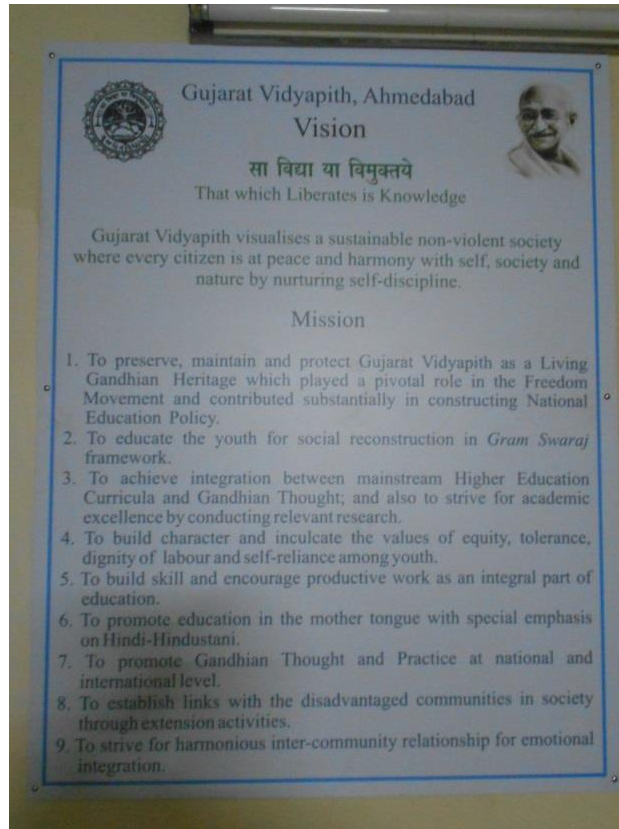


In 2016, using resources saved from my work as a CNA in America, I took my daughter on a homeschool trip to India. We went to a part of the country I had never visited before: Gujarat, or Western State. Gandhi is from this part of India, and we were fortunate enough to lodge in the University he started on 18 October 1920.



Above, this is Gandhi's University, or Gujarat Vidyapith, located in Ahmedabad, India. While we were staying at the University (in its guest house) the director of the university learned about my work in Africa. We were invited to a course for international students called: *Certificate Course for Foreign Students: Indian Culture, Gandhian Thought and Peace Studies*. It is a four-month course that runs every year from October to February (during the Indian winter) and is free for international students. The aim of the course is to spread Gandhian philosophy around the world, and to have as many students from as many different countries of the world as their capacity will hold.

The director asked me to invite as many Africans to the course as I could, as he realized the deep need for healing Africa has, as well as the need for teachings in nonviolent solutions to problems.



I have invited three Sierra Leoneans, one Ethiopian and two Zambians to the course for October 2017-February 2018.

Please let me know if you are also interested. The course is entirely free, save airfare to India. Room, board, books, and food are free, and the University also provides pocket money for additional expenses. They are looking for applicants.

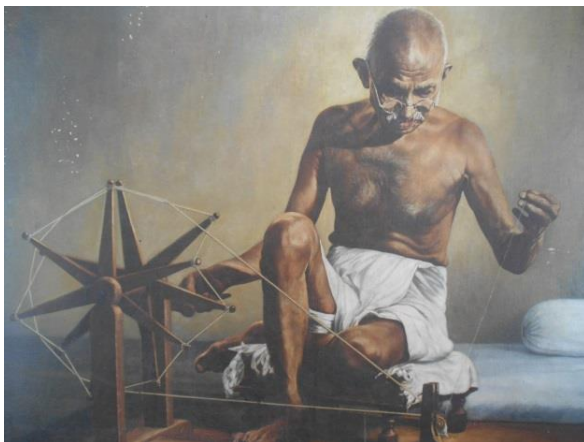
I applied and was accepted to the course; unfortunately, they accepted me for 2016/2017 when I had already committed SSAAP to digging five wells, sponsoring students, and spending time in Sierra Leone. I will reapply for the course this year, but as there is an age restriction (I am told that it can be waived, however) I may be too old to be accepted (I am 37). If you are interested, and have children (as I do), there is also a school program available for primary school-aged children, where the classes are taught in Gujarati and English.



The book store located within the library of Gujarat Vidyapith, above.

Again, please do let me know if you are interested in the course. Their website is completely in Gujarati which makes it difficult to navigate/apply. The professors are eager to welcome applicants from all over the world who believe in the principles of nonviolence and Love as solutions to every problem humans face on both a personal or a global level.

The course also includes Gandhi's teachings on non-violence, non-cooperation, *satyagraha* (uncompromising insistence on Truth), his spiritual philosophies and his writings (he wrote over fifty books while he was incarcerated over thirteen times, in both India and South Africa). As well, while he practiced law in South Africa, he wrote some incredible books on justice, Truth, and ethics.



Gandhi was a fierce believer in the potential of the village. He believed everyone, everywhere in the world should be able to grow his own food, create his own clothing, etc. The course teaches its students how to spin *khadi* cloth, make paper, blow glass, and create other forms of art.



Gandhi's first ashram was relocated due to the Bubonic Plague in 1896. This ashram is now a memorial, although visited by few. It is difficult even to find within Ahmedabad. Both the times my daughter and I went there, we were its only visitors.



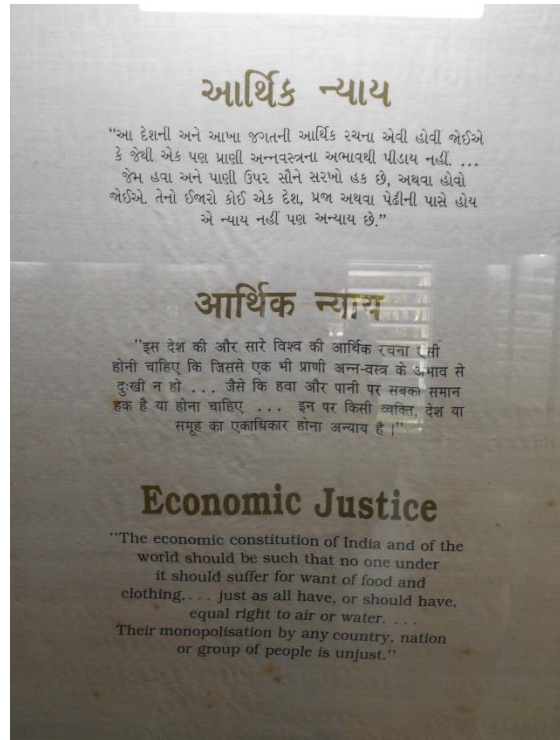
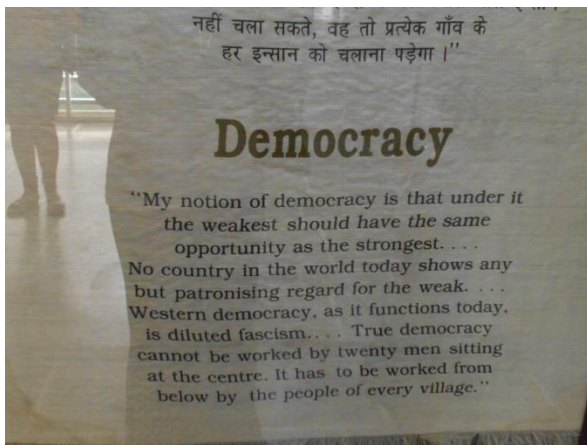
The memorial is charming: quiet and peaceful, and the staff even allowed Radiance to sit on Gandhi's bed.



Gandhi's ashram, after the Bubonic Plague infected his first ashram, was relocated to the banks of the Sabarmati River, also in Ahmedabad, India.



The ashram now serves as an extensive museum with many photos, Gandhi's writings, historical background on Gandhi's Salt March (*Dandi March*), as well as his imported textile-burning movement. Gandhi's specs and wooden sandals are also on display here.



For our research and homeschool trip to India we stayed modestly and made many local friends – on trains, at museums and holy places, and at Gandhi’s University. I am very much an advocate of traveling at a local level, meeting local people, eating local food, and studying culture, history, and art. I think you really see the level that people are living through this way, and in many aspects it is preferable, safety-wise, as the locals will keep you protected since they admire you for living with them at their level. It’s really fun, and we have learned so much from this method of travel.



My dream is to someday/somehow/someway incorporate the Indian yogic practices of infinite tranquility and harmonizing spiritual energy with Gandhi’s philosophies of non-violence, non-cooperation with corruption, and inner healing and share them with Africans – desperately in need of non-violent solutions to injustice in their nations. Africans simply don’t have access to the opportunities most of us in the West are given. They

don't have exposure to alternative ways of thought and action and resort to violence to 'solve' their problems. Violence makes everyone suffer, no one 'wins', and it crumbles the fabric of what we are in our Highest Selves when we resort to the base animal level of our beings to find solutions to problems.

I would love to initiate Gandhian Peace Studies courses/institutions in the African countries SSAAP works in (10-20 years from now – long-term goal ☺), intertwine SSAAP human rights initiatives and work with Indians and Africans to teach other Africans about the value in not lowering oneself to engage in the darkness of violence, using the platform of Gandhi's philosophies – respected globally. Specifically, the idea of nonviolence would benefit Sierra Leone greatly.



If accepted to the course at Gujarat Vidyapith for 2017/2018, I am also planning to work with the Gandhi Peace Foundation in Chennai, Tamilnadu, India. Some of my daughter's homeschool materials I found in India are published by this foundation, which promotes learning materials for children to engage in Gandhi's teachings and teaches Gandhi's philosophies of nonviolence at a level in which children can absorb them. Besides publishing fabulous learning materials, the Gandhi Peace Foundation also teaches courses and writes articles for local newspapers, as well accepts children to participate in the workshops they offer on peace education based on Gandhian values, which help to facilitate many of the ideas used in their children's materials.



Gandhi was not a religious figure nor was he a political icon; either interpretation of him would sell him short. Revered in his elderly age as a saint, Gandhi simply shook his head and frowned. This was never his aim.

He would have done exactly as he did even if no one had noticed him at all.

*

“If you want to come to my community, you must first study me. You must see how I stay, the bi-laws of my country, how I behave. Then you will understand me, and we will see how best we can work together. But our union together, must, at the base, involve respect on both sides. Otherwise our union is nothing more than lip service.”

– Gibrilla Kabba, friend to SSAAP in Moyamba, Sierra Leone

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SSAAP’s Philosophy of Sustainable Development

Living in Africa since 2004 conglomerated with bearing a child with an African man has taught me that life has to be about more than just survival. Then, how is ‘survival’ defined? And isn’t living with only the concern of self-interest not just another form of survival? Perhaps an advanced state of survival, but a fear-based state of survival nonetheless. Where did we get the idea that everything we do has to benefit ourselves? Why should our actions be only about personal gain? Why should there always be ‘something in it for me’? Is there not an invisible currency that exists in the Universe whereby the good feeling extracted through making someone else happy is the ‘payment’ we receive whenever we think of others not before ourselves, but *alongside* ourselves?



Love is the currency and joy is the payment. This brings abundance. *If I love you, I am also loving me.* There is no separation between us. *If I hurt you, I am also hurting me.* The logic flows in both directions.

The current state in which we are living is not effective any longer; as a collective humanity, we are not happy. We are all suffering from the universal pain of this planet. Furthermore, we have almost completely killed our greatest resource: Mother Earth. Our natural habitat, which has given us everything we need to be healthy and happy, we have nearly destroyed. This is the deepest tragedy of all. We are meant to learn a lesson that for whatever reason, we are too stubborn to learn: *Our selfishness will always bring us unhappiness.* This is the nature of selfishness – a parasite that feeds off of us but isn't really our Highest, Truest Selves. It's not really what we are at all. Selfishness is a gut response to pain. But it is not the essence of what we *are*.



As a collective humanity, the story seems to be the same, all over the world. It's the same old story. And it certainly is *old*. The thesis of the story is that we, as a collective humanity, can do much better than this. We can be better than existing at the animal, survival, base level of our beings that we all possess and from which none of us is exempt. But we have a choice. We can take a leap of faith and choose Love over fear. We can choose to smile at those who spit in our faces and laugh when we know we are being despised, or find compassion when we are misunderstood. It isn't necessary to always defend ourselves. Sometimes being wrong is the only right way forward. Sometimes being wrong is what humbles and beautifies us; this is wisdom.



What happens when sacrifice outweighs personal gain? And is there truly ever such a thing as ‘loss’? The revered scientist and spiritualist Albert Einstein did not think so. He believed that all things in the Universe were never really lost, their mere form was changed.

The world is in a crucible of crisis right now, and I don’t believe that can be disputed. Every individual country of the world is facing its own personal dilemma. The story for each country is the same, only the details differ. At what point are we going to awaken, as a humanity, to the awareness that getting ahead at the expense of harming others doesn’t add value to our lives, nor does it resonate with the Higher Heart that we all possess, only we choose to ignore due to pain?



Sustainable rural development: encouraging development of rural/village areas, discouraging marginalization/segregation/discrimination against villagers, which is so common in Africa. Like Mahatma Gandhi, we are working to uplift the marginalized poor in Africa. Gandhi did this in India and South Africa; through his model and inspiration, SSAAP strives to do similar work in Sierra Leone and Zambia.



SSAAP does not assist in areas just outside of town (less than 5 km from towns, typically) because SSAAP's mission isn't trying to urbanize semi-urbanized areas; we are focused on the remote, outlying areas, the hard-to-reach places that have little to no opportunities other than subsistence farming.

We are not aiming to aid in the urbanization of Africa (Westernization results in a direct loss of culture), but rather to encourage development in the rural, very promising, areas of Sierra Leone and Zambia and potentially (resources-willing) Ethiopia. Through the arts sect of SSAAP, we encourage local artisans through income-generation of traditional, tribal, and cultural art.

Either through theft of resources intended for the disadvantaged, or greed, or corruption, most of the large, Western government funding aid agencies have added to the problems on African soil, *not* alleviated them – specifically the rural poor, who suffer most from corruption, are highly vulnerable when humanitarian aid is ‘chewed’, as they say in Africa, in the capital cities of nations before it reaches the marginalized poor.



SSAAP is funded by local people; not through any government agencies. We want this project always to remain local, and personal, and relationship-based: both in Africa as well as from our home base in Colorado, U.S.A. Since our project’s commencement in 2007, SSAAP has been awarded one grant, for three years, which funded 1.5 Zambian wells: through Denver Rotary’s internationally-focused World Community Service. The rest of the project has been run entirely through private support.

So, thank you! All of you have truly made this possible.



SSAAP believes in doing as much as it can with whatever it has; we're not interested in changing the world politically but rather, peacefully, modestly and quietly through simple, basic needs and forging lifetime relationships with people from all corners of the world. We believe in the value and strength of stretching resources and how anything, no matter how small, can still make big changes in the lives of the people of this planet who live on less than 50 cents a day.

*

*“Take into account that great love and great achievements involve great risk.” – Dalai Lama
XIV*

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I Love Africa.

I have come to the conclusion that Africa is demanding physically, emotionally, and psychologically, and so one must approach it with the commitment and spirit of unconditional Love.

When you face life with unconditional Love, the possibilities are endless. And so will become your energy aquifer in doing whatever it is in your life that fuels your passion. For all of us, what that impetus is varies.

Simwatachela Sustainable Agricultural and Arts Program (SSAAP) is an organic, grassroots, village-based and relationship-oriented organization passionately dedicated to human rights, promoting clean water, food and education for all; we believe that through nonviolence and Love not only are all things possible, but that through service to others the Universe will open itself to a deeper realm of self-Love in which harming another becomes no different than injuring yourself.



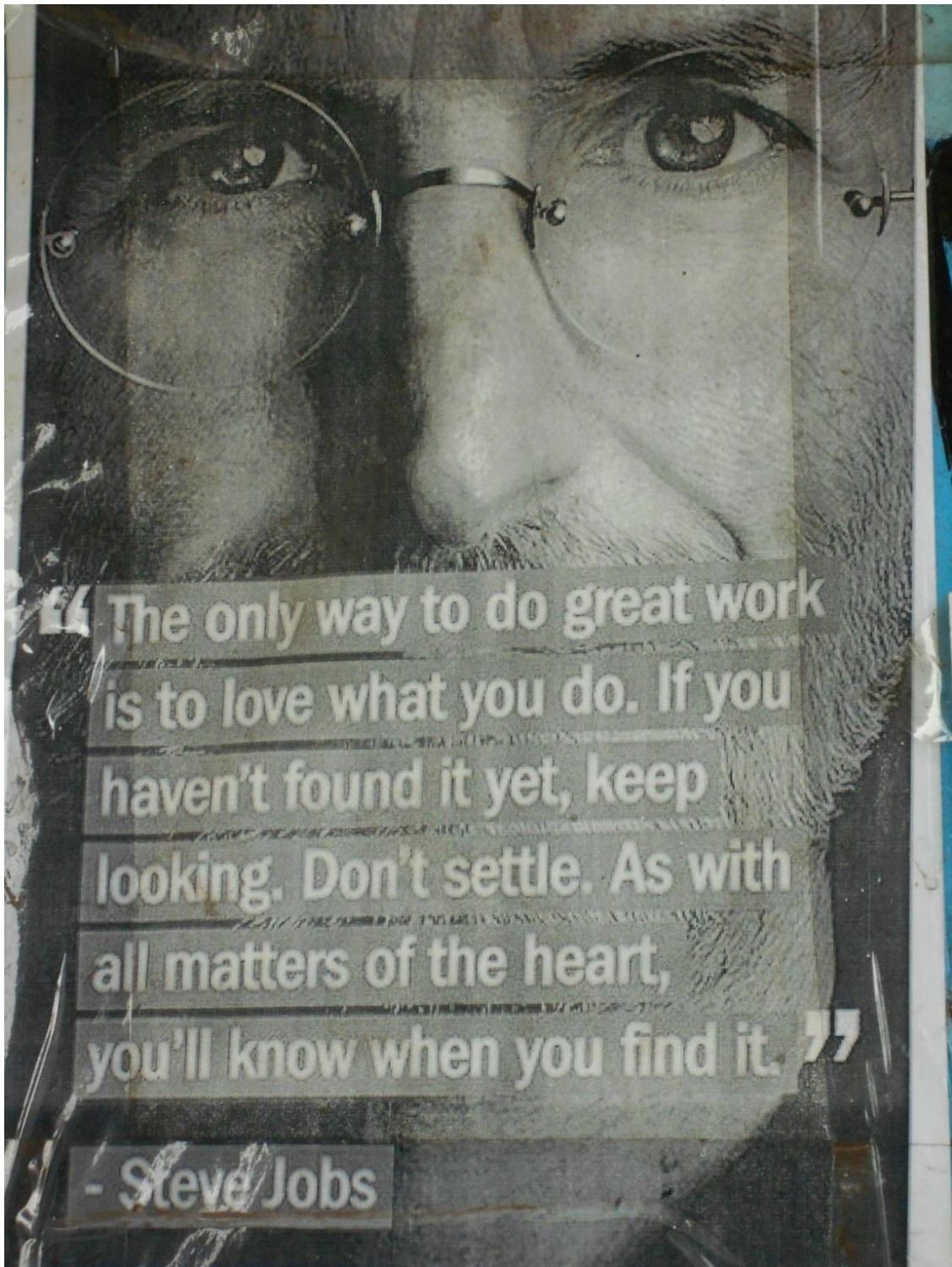
Thank you to SSAAP's loyal donors, supporters, allies, friends and Board members who have been with us for the long haul, who trust in SSAAP's mission, and who provide the fuel in which this fire *burns*...

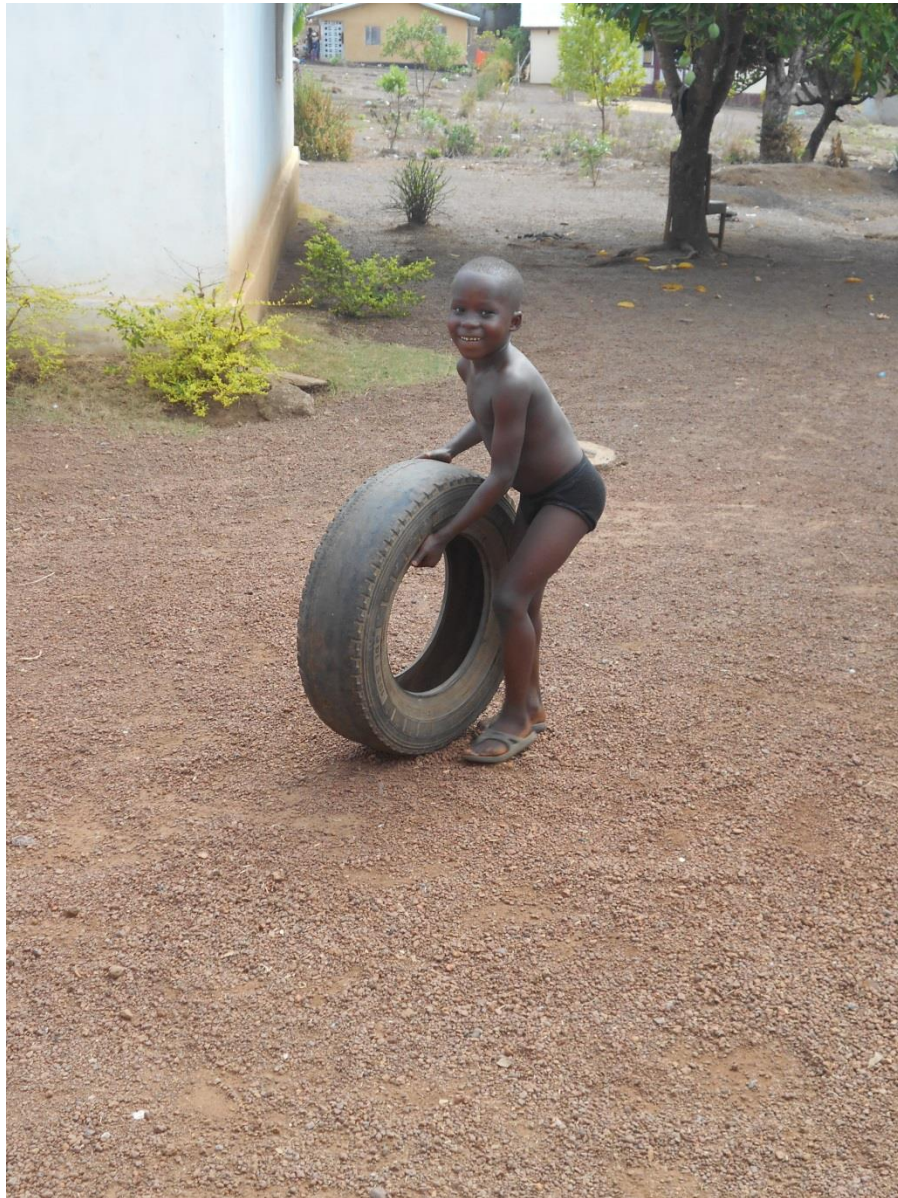
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*“This is my simple religion. There is no need for temples; no need for complicated philosophy. Our own brain, our own heart is our temple; the philosophy is kindness.” – Dalai Lama
XXIV*

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“If you think you are too small to make a difference, try sleeping with a mosquito.” – Dalai Lama XIV

All photos and verbiage by H. C. Cumming.

Thank you for reading! And for your time!