

SSAAP Quarterly Newsletter, Edition XXIX;
Summer 2020: South Sudan (via Ethiopia)



This Edition is dedicated to all the guys, my brothers from Ohio: musicians, trouble-makers, philanthropists, artists, hippies, poets and warriors.

Franko and Kristi; Mark R. and Melissa; Dan and Erica; John and Molly; Brian and Cara; Adam and Leslie; Aaron; Mark M. and Natalie K.; Ryan and Rena; Bry and Hoppe; Poodle and Kristin; Dave and Marika; Felix; Mary and Drako.

Thank you for being my spine. It has helped me greatly to stand up.





Back-track: Follow-up on Sierra Leone



We left Sierra Leone on March 20, 2020 to fly to Addis Ababa, Ethiopia for our South Sudanese border project there.

When I did the accounting for the Living Expenses for 2 ½ months for Radiance (called 'Amara' in Sierra Leone) and I, from January 1, 2020 to March 20, 2020, I discovered we had spent less than \$250 USD (kindly note we used the exchange rate of \$1 USD = 10,000 Leones):

LIVING EXPENSES: SIERRA LEONE: January 1, 2020 to March 20, 2020	Amount in USD
Salone: Food: 1,160,500 Le	117
Salone: Transportation: 234,000 Le	23
Salone: Phone: 608,000 Le	61
Salone: Toiletries: 61,000 Le	6
Salone: Medications/Laboratory fees: 10,000 Le	1
Salone: Homeschool outings, books, materials: 2,000 Le	1
Salone: Lodging	0
Salone: Miscellaneous for living: 217,500 Le	22
Sub-Total	231

This is a sincere selling point for the project. If we are able to keep the Living Expenses and Administration costs lower, it means we have more funds for the actual projects themselves. We have come here to help the local people, not for ourselves, and although we extract more from this project than ever I could put into words (!!!), the mission of the project is the local people: not us. We do not support buying fancy houses, vehicles, motorbikes, electronics, or other material goods. SSAAP's funding is for the local people who need it the most ~ and Radiance and I will survive off as little as possible. We are most happy this way.



In five of the six communities SSAAP is working in in Kambia District, they are constructing a home for SSAAP so that we don't have to travel long distances (from town to the village) to service them, so we will be living in the more remote areas than in town in 2021.

As well, two of the fourteen communities SSAAP is working with in Port Loko District are constructing a house for SSAAP, as well as a SSAAP Agricultural Center whereby we will have a few community gardens as well a pineapple plantation that we can use for funding the Nonviolence Library. This is an ashram set-up of sorts whereby the various income-generation

activities are occurring on the same land site as the projects that they are funding. SSAAP has funded only the cement for the SSAAP Agricultural Headquarters; otherwise the contribution is 100% from the community.

We hope that with all these houses in beautiful spaces around Sierra Leone you will feel welcome to visit our SSAAP-Sierra Leone Headquarters just as many of you have come to visit our SSAAP-Zambia Headquarters!



The paralyzing, tantalizing and harmonizing beauty of Africa awaits you ;)

SSAAP and Coronavirus

Perhaps easier, I will include cut-and-pastes from correspondences I have written friends, family and supporters of SSAAP in regards to how SSAAP departed from Sierra Leone and entered Ethiopia on March 20/21, 2020. I apologize to those of you who have already read these; sorry for the redundancy!

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26 March 2020

Hi All,

I can't imagine how it has been for you all in U.S.A. It makes me so sad that we are one of the 'infected countries'. For us here in Africa it has been nothing but the ripple effects of the tsunami, but I imagine economically with the stock market crashing it is going to destroy what was left of the developing world. People were already hanging on by a thread; now it seems they will be hanging on only by the sheer will of the Universe. It is a little bit overwhelming to think of the catastrophic effects of everything shutting down, worldwide: schools, offices, restaurants, markets, gathering places. Not to mention sad. You will have to tell me all about it; I probably know very little about it in the end: what is happening in U.S.A. The more you teach me the less ignorant I will be.

I can't determine from here, either, if Coronavirus in the States has sped life up (as now you have more on your plate than before, with kids at home, homeschool, working from home, etc.) or slowed it down (like a lot of snow days put together). So you will have to tell me.

So ----> you want to hear what Coronavirus has done in Africa?! Well... I didn't really realize any change until the day before our flight from Zambia to Ethiopia via Accra (Ghana) and Nairobi (Kenya) when I called the postal worker in Freetown, Sierra Leone to find out if he had any letters or parcels for me before I departed. I told him I was flying out and he said: "You are lucky. On Saturday (21st) they are closing down the airport. Yours will be the last flight out of Freetown on Friday."

That really made Radiance nervous. She was worried we wouldn't leave Sierra Leone and she is itching to get back to Zambia just because she misses the kids who stay on our compound, and she misses being able to cook all the Western food I cook for her that I buy at *Shoprite*: South African superstore, our version of *Walmart* only that the food is all organic! This is Africa: no preservatives, everything rots in a day without the fridge. So we get to the airport on Friday 20th (airport is located on a peninsula, called *Lungi Island*) and luckily we were 6 hours early. I am always early for flights, boats, trains and buses as I am always late in every other part of my life. Thank goodness we were early; go through the first passport check and the man checking people's documents at the first check point looks at my passport, says: "Where are you flying?"

so I say: "Nairobi." Then he says: "Is that your final destination?" and I say: "No; Addis Ababa is." He shakes his head. "Ethiopia has just been closed to all foreigners. Are you a resident or a citizen?" I say: "No, but I have a 2-year tourist visa in my passport." So he goes to check on it. Is gone for about 30 minutes. Comes back; says they still don't know. So I wait. While I am waiting, I start thinking that we have this 2-month layover in Ethiopia for our South Sudan project and then we fly from Addis Ababa, Ethiopia to Lusaka, Zambia. So the man comes back again (meanwhile can you imagine the line behind me?!) and I tell him: "I have an idea. If we can't get in to Ethiopia, I bet we can get into Zambia. We are permit-holders; we have work permits. I just applied for our residency and have receipts as I have already paid for both Amara's and my residency permits." So he smiles and says: "This might work! Let me check." Then the Kenya Airways boss comes to the station and says: "So you are thinking to go to Zambia?" And I say: "Yes. We can just bypass Ethiopia and go straight on to Zambia," to which he says, sadly, "There are no flights going to Lusaka as of two days ago. Zambia sealed its land and air borders on Wednesday."

I literally stood at the station and started sobbing. I don't know why. It's like the only place on the planet I am always welcome, Zambia!, sweet Zambia, probably because I have our little village house there - but it is Home - and now we can't get back there. So I look at Radi and say: "Looks like we're stuck in *Salone* (Sierra Leone), baby."

Then we find out that Ethiopia *has* kept its borders opened even to non-residents and non-citizens, and so we can go get ticketed for the flight. This takes about 3.5 hours to check in. Why? Because everyone is so stressed trying to check this or look at that or deal with this other thing that they cannot do a simple thing like check a passenger into a flight. Sierra Leone is high-drama. Anyhow, after all this, we have to pass through Immigration. This is another catastrophe. Radiance entered Sierra Leone on her U.S. passport but needs an exit stamp not only in her U.S. passport but also in her [new] Sierra Leone passport she got in December. So we have to get the Immigration Officer who issued us the passport on the line. It's just... a mess. We fly to Nairobi.

We get stuck there 10 hours but at least the airline gave us 2 free meals each so that was fun. We met in the airport 150 Cameroonians who had been living in the airport for 5 days. Hadn't bathed, but the Kenyan government was paying for their 3 meals/day. Apparently the Cameroonian government canceled all flights going into and out of Yaoundé (capital of Cameroon) prior to Kenya Airways flying its passengers to Cameroon, but because they didn't want to have to refund all the passengers their \$\$\$, they decided to send the flight out. It circled around and around Yaoundé for an hour, until the Cameroon government said they had to turn back, so Kenya Airways brought all 150 Cameroonians back to the airport and now the Kenyan government has to sponsor their feeding. Someone was also telling me the same thing happened in Burkina Faso, that even the citizens couldn't enter their country so there was a large group of them stuck in the airport. The man at the Kenya Airways Information Desk, Peter, and I must have had a psychic connection. It was like he could read my mind. I told him

all about my situation and he looked up on the computer that Zambia had not been updated on the portal, and that he didn't want to fly us to Zambia (we are supposed to go there on May 15th) if he didn't know if we could even get into the country. He said a lot of Zambians were also in the same boat, and that if Zambia sent the aircraft back, then we might miss the window of time to get into a country, so that we should go to Ethiopia. So he made the decision for us, even though in the end, both Radi and I just wanted to go to Zambia, but we honored our commitment to come to do our South Sudan (Ethio-border project). This is what project is: commitment, or as the Rotarians say: 'Service above Self.'

It will be good to hear your optimism. My optimism is also shining through. This is Humanity's Great Test. Will we rise to the occasion? Or shrink away in fear? As in Ethiopia the illiteracy rate is very high, literally people are calling me: "Coronavirus". They think that since I have white skin, and I am a Westerner, I am automatically infected and contaminated. That is my new name. And in Sierra Leone, my name is "Opotu" (Temne for 'white man'). People on the streets shouting 'Opotu!' to me I just say: "Yes, my parents named me this. It's written in my passport: 'Opotu Cumming'." People end up just laughing at their own ideology when you confront them in this way. Walking to this internet office this morning, some Ethiopian guy hollered at me: "Coronavirus!" I stopped on the street, walked backwards to where he stood, and said: "I'm sorry! Did you say you are infected with Coronavirus, Sir?" He just gave me a dumbfounded look.

When you combine people on their Smartphones but not using the phones for a worldwide library or for educational purposes, rather for social media/drama/gossip, and no one has medical facts plus then compounded by and accompanied by fear, what do you get? You get Africa! People don't know the facts: the virus needs a cold climate to survive, people are screened 5 times at the Ethiopian airport, Radiance and I have been living in a 0% infection/0 contamination country (Sierra Leone) for 6 months, we haven't been in the States for over a year now, and where we have been is a contamination-free zone. I had a long talk with a girl about this last night. I told her that even if someone is infected, alienating/stigmatizing s/he isn't the way to combat the virus, but that we should be more Loving and care for that person, work to treat the virus and not treat the person inhumanly. I firmly believe that this is the time we should be extra-Loving, extra-sympathetic towards one another. The girl was really receptive to it. I am trying to be forgiving and compassionate despite the emotional pain we are experiencing being stigmatized here *because we have white skin*. Most people here don't speak English. If they do, it is their third or fourth language. I wish with my whole heart we had made it to Zambia: people speak English, and we speak Tonga. But this is a true test of our strength: do we surrender to the anger/fear/hatred manifesting around the globe right now, or do we choose Love?

I have made my choice ;)

And am just laughing that my new name is: *Coronavirus Cumming*. My new Ethiopian name. I will always remember this time of our lives; I know Radiance will as well. People discriminating against us here, when Ethiopia has a contamination rate (as of April 10, 2020: 51 cases out of 2000 tested) higher than where we have been staying: Sierra Leone (contamination rate 0%; infection rate 0% as of April 10, 2020), but they would prefer to judge a book by its cover rather than to read the book itself. This is a true test for Amara and I for the lifelong lesson of *forgiveness*.

Leaving Sierra Leone is always painful; it's one of those countries you Love but you don't know you Love it because on a daily basis life is so difficult: getting clean water, eating, finding edible food that hasn't rotted from the intense sunlight, fighting with vendors who change the prices of things overnight or because they perceive you as being wealthy. There are so many things that make everyday living such a difficult task, and the Sierra Leonean people are typically smart, clever, creative but hot-headed – probably due to the climate! In this, I realize I have also just described my daughter. So whenever we leave Sierra Leone we go through withdrawal: *our drug is a country*. The transition to Ethiopia/South Sudan has an added culture shock for us, which is represented through the language barrier: the Nuer people we work with speak English as a 3rd or 4th language; in Sierra Leone, English is basically their first language as it is so close to Krio. Krio is their national language and connects all the different tribes living there, as well it is Amara's tribe and she does speak Krio fluently. So this has been especially hard for her. As for me, my Krio is horrible so I talk to Sierra Leoneans like I talk to Americans: they understand slang, and English curse words (!!!) and are well-versed in English. Part of my connection to them might also be that I can speak English to them and they understand it: not as a subject they learned in school, but as a source of communication. Many people all around the world learn English in school, but it is a subject in school for them: not a communicative tool. Radiance cannot get the Sierra Leonean *Krio* off her tongue, either; she, with Krio still thick on her tongue, keeps talking to people here in Krio and I think it comes from habit, and they give us a strange look. So it's hard to transition from being able to talk to people [in Sierra Leone] to basically being tongue-tied here, and not being able to freely converse with anyone except my daughter and for Radiance: her mother.

We are going to the village today and I hope to start our project and get it moving (mango tree and banana tree plantation, maybe a few water wells?, two fishing projects at *Baro River* which separates Ethiopia and South Sudan, goats, bee-keeping [I hope], chicken-rearing, latrines). I think it will be different when we get to the village than in the urbanized places we have been. I think we will be embraced with a lot more Love and kindness as the people in the village know why we are here: we have come here for them.

I just wanted to share. The ride to the village is here now so let me send and go. Thank you for listening! Heather



Here are photos from our last day in Sierra Leone. We had a double-party: picnic at the river, then a night party. I swear I work with the Sierra Leonean Gandhi; Taylor (left) looks just like Gandhi. Then we have another friend, Fanta, in Ethiopia who looks just like Obama.



Radiance and I adore this guy, Abubakarr. We call him ABK. He is rough and honest: my favorite kinds of people are this way. He rides his motorbike rough, smokes strawberry cigarettes, and is just *rough*. He's adorable. As Radi and I always say: *He is grit. Just raw himself.* His son is 6 and has dreadlocks. He is our spokesperson for Rochain, Mabureh and Madee Villages and is very serious on the one hand, on the other hand he is always sneaking little sips of gin or whiskey from these cheap 500 Leone (approx. 5-cents) plastic sacks they sell on the streets.



They made us a picnic at the water near Rochain Village the day before we left Sierra Leone. Here is Radiance with Taylor's two daughters: Tennehawa and Mamiseka.



The water is warm and bubbly and feels like a hot tub. Absolute heaven.



This is our large Going Away Party later that night. Above left: this random unicorn/goat/sheep creature was presented to us by the Counselor of the region, along with a stick...!?, honoring us for all the work SSAAP did in Sierra Leone. Above right: me at my goodbye party with my eyes shut ☺



This party lasted until 3 a.m. Talk about celebration for a grand project: the SSAAP-Sierra Leone is mighty, and I am so proud of it. Thank you to all who participated ;)





The ride to the airport. Tennehawa literally cried most of the 2-hour drive from Port Loko to Lungi Airport.



Making it onto this flight was a little victory for us ;) We were told it was the last flight departing from Lungi International Airport, Sierra Leone for 3 months. Sierra Leone is taking the Coronavirus with extreme seriousness as they do not want to repeat the Ebola-2014/2015 Outbreak episode again. Radiance and I were discussing how this has, most-likely, revealed and re-opened some unhealed wounds with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) from the Ebola Outbreak. This will help them greatly if they remain with 0% infection and 0% contamination of Coronavirus; it will help them regain their inner-fortitude. I am so proud of the way they have been handling the virus: with courage, grace, and strength. And that is a nutshell for how I see the Sierra Leonean people ☺



Sierra Leone from the sky is literally



just one large water country.



We got a free food voucher. It was so nice to eat fancy airport food, Western food!; we have been wanting this type of food for ages now. I am non-formally studying food and nutrition, and hunger; there is a spiritual component to food that I believe is a part of nutrition: enjoyment that is the highest cleansing of the palate. If we eat food that is scientifically unhealthy, but it gives us pleasure, is that not a part of nutrition? The converse to this is eating healthy food that tastes badly to the palate – which I believe is also another aspect of nutrition. Our childhood food that we have grown up on, our ‘comfort food’, can sometimes be the ‘healthiest’ food in the world for our bodies, despite what scientific nutrients it holds or does not hold.

Food has an emotional/mental/psychological/spiritual component that scientists do not study. I have heard many Indians speak of the spiritual value of food; they are also a country that practices fasting, which is a deep sacrifice as well opening experience: what it is like to live without food for days on end or to survive on as little food as necessary.



Gorgeous Ann from Kenya who served us our food at the restaurant in Nairobi for our voucher on March 21st. She got both of her degrees in TX and we were talking all about everything, about U.S.A. and Africa; she was refreshing; very beautiful on the inside and out.



Hair to an African is an art form.



Our counterpart on South Sudanese border, Moses, met us at the airport. He took a 2-day bus journey from the border just to meet us at the airport. If that isn't commitment I don't know what is. Here we are; we made it to Addis Ababa, Ethiopia!



We stayed with Moses's extended family in the city (Radi is literally falling asleep in this photo) and then with Moses took the 2-day journey to the southwest area of Ethiopia, the former South Sudan, Gambella Region. If you look at the map, you can see how the Gambella Region of Ethiopia juts out into the South Sudan.

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Heather's observation on Coronavirus in Africa (and this is just from me, my observations and experiences – not from anything anyone has said or anything I have read – I have no way to access the outside world from here!): Most of the African nations have taken drastic precautions. And while necessary precautions are good, extreme precautions may do more damage than good. For economies barely hanging on to the corporate world by a thread, shutting down airports, transportation industries, airlines, commerce and trade for over a

month will have devastating effects that might indirectly cause more illness, death and destruction than directly the Coronavirus would have. In other words, the indirect effects of shutting down a nation for one, two, three, etc. months in Africa is most likely more shattering to the nation than the virus would have been: causing starvation and suffering, as well loss of work/income for the breadwinners of these families, which will indirectly cause death and injure the local people more than the virus would have.

However, the rural [village] areas seem to be more protected from the virus than the larger urban cities where many people are packed together; the villages are protecting their people through the natural isolation and the villagers' lack of movement to other areas of the country and/or the planet.

Africa simply cannot mimic and follow suit on policy and procedure of the Western world for Coronavirus. They must find their own creative way to handle the crisis, which will not be the same way the West handles it. The infrastructure we have in the West simply isn't available here, as well the ability to resiliently bounce back after economic crisis the way we can in the West. Most of us in Africa do not have refrigerators or freezers to store food for more than a few days, and as the food is all entirely organic here, it rots quickly. There are a plethora of resources available to us in the West that are not available, in any way, in Africa. Thus an economic depression in the West will cause Africa to have decade-long, wide-ranging effects here, which would have been more preventable had they not reacted to the virus crisis the way the West did.

These are simply my observations, not backed by any studies or research other than my own, informal studies from living here. My source for all of this is just myself.



Step #1 to SSAAP's Site: 18-hour bus from Addis Ababa to Gambella Town

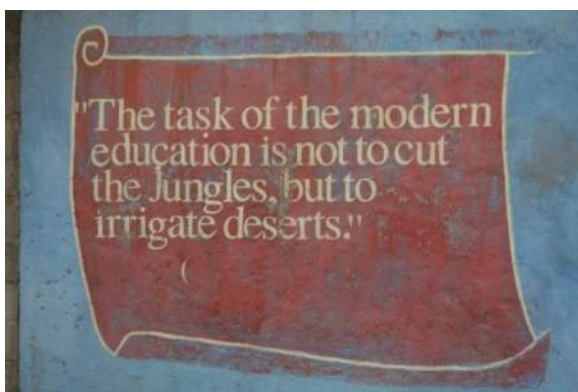


A long bus ride indeed, but the splendor of the Ethiopian Highlands stares at you through the bus window ☺ And the plane from Addis Ababa to Gambella is approximately \$1200 USD for Radiance and I (tourist price different than local price) so we prefer to take the bus to save project money: \$17.50 each one-way, so \$35 for the two of us to reach Gambella town, one-way.



Step #2: Gambella Town, Southwest Ethiopia

I wish to explain thoroughly SSAAP's project site in Ethiopia. The site is about 20 minutes in one direction, and an hour and a half in a different direction (Baro River-side) from South Sudan. If you look at your atlas, you will see a section of Ethiopia that seems to jut out into South Sudan. I have heard that this region, called the Gambella Region of Ethiopia, actually used to belong to South Sudan, but due to border changes, ownership and land boundaries when Djibouti was formed, then Eritrea, Ethiopia had to give up a section of its land and so it was compensated back to them through this chunk of South Sudan. I always call it the 'Ethio-South Sudan' project simply because the area we are working technically resides in Ethiopia, but the people we work with are one of the major South Sudanese tribes: *Nuer people*. There are Nuer people found in Egypt, Uganda, Kenya and Ethiopia – around their respective shared borders with South Sudan (excepting Egypt) due to the civil war in South Sudan in 2013. Thus, SSAAP works with the Nuer people in Ethiopia. Many of them are Ethiopian citizens, some of them are South Sudanese citizens, and some of them are former refugees.



Around Gambella, we enjoyed seeing some of the same things as the last time we were here (February to April, 2019). Above left, my favorite painting on the side of a decaying building in Gambella. Above right, the UN Refugee Headquarters. There are many refugee camps some kilometers outside of Gambella town, and most of the NGO's in Gambella are located in this proximity to aid the refugee camps.



Just as SSAAP works with a CBO (*Community-Based Organization*) in Sierra Leone (called GCF, or Grace Children’s Foundation), in Ethio/South Sudan we also work with a CBO, called Gambella Children and Community Development Organization.



We had a long meeting the day that we left Gambella for the village, on Saturday, 28 March. Executive Director Nhial Jeing Pal, wearing white, is extremely passionate, while Moses is more laid-back and patient, a good silent listener. Nhial has many good ideas and is very focused on SSAAP’s work in *Nyinenyang Village*.





Before leaving for the village, Radi and I like to stock up on fresh vegetables which can be difficult to find in the rural setting of the village. The artist in me feels such a pleasing, mouth-watering aesthetic to the way vegetables are laid out to be sold in the developing world: usually upon maize sacks, on the side of the road. Living in Africa has taught me so much about nutrition and how vitamins and minerals all must work in harmony so our body bears the divine balance it needs to function at its fullest. I ought to have studied nutrition, become a doctor, a chef - something with food! I Love to cook and I Love to eat.

My life is too short for all the things I should have been or done ;)



Our lodging in Gambella town is this little locally-made Nuer house.



Again, it saves the project so much money if we stay with local people rather than rent hotels.



Moses's grandmother, pictured above, owns this compound, and so we always stay with her. She is shaking days-old milk to curdle it into a cheese-consistency in the traditional seed container she holds in the photo. Additionally, we have learned so much about Nuer culture and the South Sudan Civil War in 2013, and about the plight of all the refugees living in Gambella (there are many) from all the English-speakers on this compound.





No bathing shelter, but Radi and I have learned to make-do with the bucket of water and the little mat ;)



You find all these little creatures in this part of Africa, such as the lizard below, with orange, blue and white coloring - just beautiful, climbing up the wall while we bathed ☺





Some photos around Gambella town. Nhial's mother is pictured above – strong as an ox. Below left, there are so many homes like this in Gambella: partially-built, and part of the structure dilapidated. Below right, this photo was taken for Radiance's *Animal Rights Project* (currently in both Sierra Leone and South Sudan). This donkey, not fit to live in town and deserving of a rural setting, is eating garbage festering in the 105-degree heat on the side of a road.





The long, hot, 4-hour drive from Gambella town to *Nyinenyang Village* awaits us.



Step #3: Gambella Town to Nyinenyang Village



There are many Nuer villages along this horrible, bumpy road from the town to the village – which is essentially the South Sudanese border, as we are only about 20 minutes from the border (the last time we were here I was told it was an hour and a half, but that is another border point).



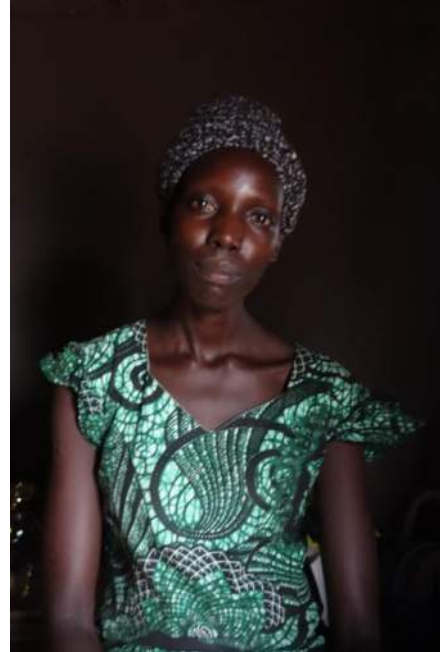
It is so dry and dusty that you can see in the background a wind storm.



Typical Nuer village enroute to our Nuer village.



Step #4: Nyinenyang Village: SSAAP Site



Moses's family was impatiently awaiting Radiance and I ☺ His sister (above left), his wife Nywal (above right), and his mother (below).



SSAAP's Home in Nyinenyang Village



A tour of our home: We Love the way the Nuer people construct their traditional homes and the inside is clean. This is the house built and maintained for SSAAP in the village.



The entryway to our home, at night (left); the matron of the family we are living with on the compound; she has many grandchildren but is only 7 years older than I am; in African culture, I am old enough to be a grandmother [I am 40 years old] (right). I have met a few African grandmothers who are in their 30's.



Our bed and the mosquito net over it (above left); our washing basin and water supply (above, right). There is no electricity, internet, or running water in our village.



Our charcoal bundles (above left); Radi blows on our fire (above right), and our pan: a metal dish that we cover, as there is no such thing as a 'frying pan' in this part of the world ;)



We are managing to make delicious meals despite the setbacks and difficulties in doing so. Above left, the one table in our room is our food shared with toiletry products. Above right, beans, rice and cabbage.



Our kitchen, below left; bathing shelter, below right. When it is too muddy we just bath outside.



This life of simplicity we have been forced into, due to the nature of our work and the way we wish to implement it, has taught me that *things* have a profound effect in our lives. We have more things than any of the Nuer people we stay with. But things alone cannot make us – or anyone – happy. But some things are necessary to maintain life or health and therefore happiness. There is a healthy balance, and we are learning to find it. I have a monthly migraine that cycles around the moon and take pills from *Walgreens* for this, so I need the pills. Radi needs her comb for her hair. We need a knife to cut our vegetables. Then, after the need becomes the desire: Radiance has paints and a paintbrush because she enjoys making art; I carry Egyptian Oracle cards and books on mysticism all over the world with me and don't mind their weight due to the quality they add to my life.

I think it is the relationship to things that I have come to respect: what the things mean to us in our life. Some of the things we own, in all due respect, such as our water filters, are life-savers.



Our toilet, above left. We urinate in this sliced water bottle (called a 'Suba Cup' for the ciTonga verb to urinate: *kusuba*) and defecate in plastic bags that line the inside of this metal bowl. We wash and sanitize both the Suba Cup and the metal bowl, and then throw the defecation (still in the plastic bag) into the community compound toilet, above right. This toilet is so filthy and smells worse than I have words for, so to enter inside I only did to take this photo. And of course the photograph cannot do justice to the smell, but believe me when I say I do believe squatting over this pit would cause more disease (and there are flies all over it) than our choice to defecate in the plastic bags.



Photos around our compound.





After the first heavy rains of the year fell, so did our bathing shelter.





This photo encapsulates SSAAP's mission in South Sudan/Ethiopian border:

- Little boy, age 3, is eating dirt
- Little boy will not eat until 8 p.m. at night and this will be his only meal of the day
 - Little boy is completely naked
 - Little boy is filthy from playing in the dirt
- Little boy has sores on his genitals and is always itching them (as shown in the photo)
 - Little boy's stomach is enlarged due to malnutrition
- Little boy lives with us on our compound so that we may see him every day, as a *daily reminder* of why we are here

How do we justify the mismanagement and lack of distribution of the world's resources, again?!

1. "There will always be hungry people in the world."
2. "There will always be poverty in the world."
3. "It's not my problem."
4. "I'm too busy."

When we choose not to care, to turn a blind eye, and participate only in the health and well-being of our personal families and limited communities we most relate to, we are participating in tribalism. We are indirectly saying that the people we Love are more important than the people we don't know or might never meet. Why can't we open our hearts and Love humanity at-large? Is it not time for us to make those kinds of changes that will ensure humanity's longevity on the planet: when we learn to treat each other better, we will be a stronger species.



I have struggled deeply many internal battles since we arrived here at the end of March 2020: if not with the Coronavirus, then with the lifestyle and situation of this area. I will never lie to the people who believe in SSAAP the most: those of you reading this newsletter right now. I have struggled with this issue: *Do I feed this boy every day?* Where do Love and dependency and responsibility overlap (as in a Venn Diagram) or do they overlap at all? Here is my Truth: I struggle to feed Radiance every day here. Whether it be due to inedible food, food that rots at 105-degree Fahrenheit heat after 2-3 hours, food that neither of us can digest, or cooking with bad charcoal made of trees that don't produce heat, I am struggling for my child and me here. The Nuer people look at me and shake their heads; they are so pleased we are here but they feel our pain: there are no other Westerners for hours, many kilometers from here. They tell me that even for them, in their native habitat, this is one of the hardest places for a human being to live: the heat, the lack of food, the lack of food variety and availability, the lack of water. Am I being selfish that I feed this boy only what food we have leftover? And what is my responsibility to this little boy?

This is the age-old question: *How much can we give of ourselves without completely depleting ourselves so that we have nothing to give to anyone at all, much less for ourselves?*

What I believe is that for everyone it is different, and the ways that people serve others are infinite. As human beings, we can help – and do! – in so many ways. Any help we can aid anyone with, as human, is a service. Whether it is a day of giving someone a few bites of food or some water, or whatever one can afford to share, that is a service. Teaching someone about nutrition and food variety, that is a service. I have never felt SSAAP to be a failure if I think of it in these terms. When I think of who we have helped and with what, I feel joy in our accomplishments; when I think of how many people still need help and how deeply, I feel overwhelmed and retreat to a cave: my home wherever I am, and remain silent and alone. I will always be an introvert and in being so, I ponder the great tribulations of this Universe. I don't think there is any one solution, and definitely there isn't any one person or organization or NGO or mission that can clean up the burden of poverty in Africa, but it is the small things we do that make the biggest differences in other people's lives. People remember small acts of kindness the most. The foundation of this is Love and the more we Love the easier it is to give and the more we give the easier it is to Love.



Healthcare in Nyinenyang Village



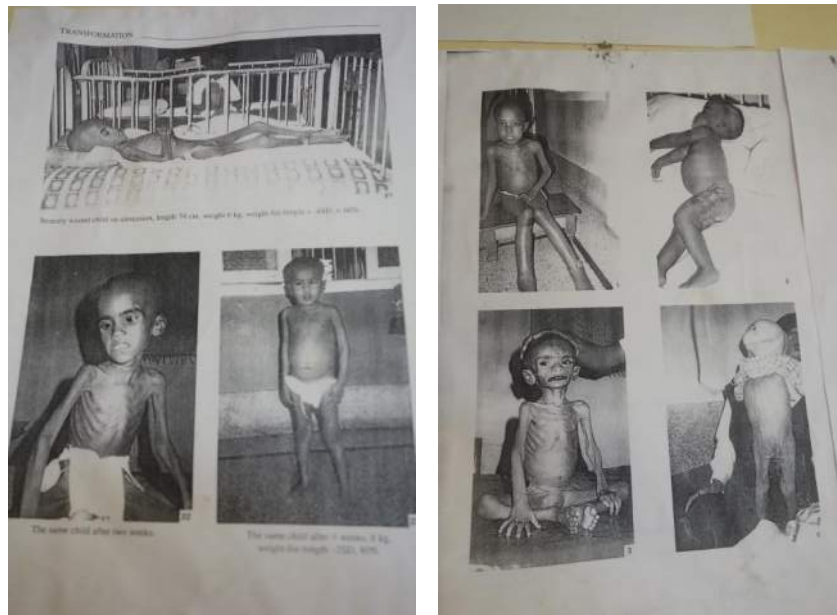
Welcome to *Nyinenyang Melese Zenawi Memorial Primary Hospital*, located about 5 minutes from our compound in the small village-town of *Nyinenyang*. This hospital services approximately 10,000 people in the Zone in which we are located – and that represents the population of people who have the means of visiting the hospital: either by foot or by hiring transportation. So many can never reach the hospital due to absurdly long distances while sick, or don't believe in allopathic (scientific/Western) medicine.



The day we visited the hospital, while we were waiting to speak to the doctor outside his door, he told us to come into the room: Radiance said. I thought he wanted us to remain outside his door. Anyhow, after waiting for a long time, we decided to enter the room. A little boy, probably about age 6, was dead. He had drowned in a river approximately 3 hours from the clinic, and no one knew where the little boy was. After searching for him for hours, they found him at the bottom of the river.

The little boy looked so peaceful, so much that it was difficult to discern whether he was sound asleep or dead. Radiance just looked at me, and in her eyes I could hear her question: *Is he dead?* I put my hand against his face, and his skin was still hot from the sun: the 3-hour transportation ride, I assume. Stoically, his relatives wrapped him in the blanket they brought him to the clinic

in, and wordlessly carried him back to the little vehicle they had hired to bring him to the clinic. My eyes met his mother's. *I am so sorry; I am so sorry*, I said to her; tears were literally squirting out of my eyes although their eyes were dry – such is their custom. Africans do not cry. After helping the little boy, the doctor turned to me: “So there are some *Vivax* malarial parasites in your blood. Not many! But I want you to take medication anyhow, okay? But nothing to worry on, right?” As I walked to the pharmacy to collect the Malaria medication, I was shaking with tears – even more intense because I was supposed to hold them in. Radiance hugged me and said: “It is so strange to think that just this morning, he was alive and playing in the river. Just some hours later, his life is over. It happens in a second, doesn't it, Mommy?”



Posters of malnourished children hang on the walls. I have noticed among the people here a general lack of knowledge of nutrition. For example, they scarcely eat proteins: eggs, nuts, beans. They do eat some lentils, but commonly I have seen them double-up carbohydrates: eat Irish potatoes with bread, or rice with *njera* (staple food of Ethiopia), or *kop* (staple food of South Sudanese people/Nuer tribe) by itself. They seem to have little knowledge of how to blend foods, or to eat a carbohydrate alongside a protein or a vegetable.

Radiance and I were discussing how in India, every meal is complete, natural, healthy: *daal bahd terkeri* (sorry for the English translation of Hindi words ☺): lentils, rice and a vegetable, then some kind of spiced pickle on the side, water to drink, then milk tea (*chai*) after the meal. Incredible. The Indian people seem to naturally understand health and how to blend spices, colors, and vitamins to get a well-rounded (and delicious!) meal. There doesn't seem to be that intuition here; people don't inherently interpret how vitamins, minerals, and nutrition go together, thus resulting in the extreme malnourishment you see in the above photos.



We simply cannot compare the African medical facilities to those of the West, so in this vein it is good to be respectful of Coronavirus and the limitations African healthcare workers would have in controlling and combating it.



There was a refugee camp located in our village some years ago, but they relocated it near to Gambella town for safety reasons. Our village, *Nyinenyang Village*, is approximately 4 hours from Gambella town, and Gambella town is approximately 18 hours from Addis Ababa, the capital of Ethiopia.



Working extensively with the health center in Nyinenyang Village has taught us so much.

I am told that polygamy is very common among the Nuer people, as it is with our Tonga people in Zambia, and that the average man has six wives. Here is the killer (literally and metaphorically): it is the women who protest the use of a male condom. The women believe that if they ask a man to use a condom, or if the men attempt to have intercourse with them with a condom on, they will refuse, thinking that the man is indirectly saying she is a prostitute. So the *women* are responsible as well for the spread of STI/STD's/HIV as the men, and the HIV rate in the Gambella region is the highest in Ethiopia: shared with Addis Ababa, Ethiopia's capital city.

There is so much lacking (again, this is only Heather's observations) in the way aid is distributed in Africa, even through UNICEF and the UN and other large government aid agencies such as USAID and UKAID, in that not enough research is done before the aid is dumped onto a cause. Notice I say 'onto' and not 'into'. More and more I begin to understand the statistics of why, since the early '90s with the onset of HIV and AIDS in Africa, the large funding thrown at Africa caused the poverty rates to grow exponentially here. I understand it because the large organizations and funders do not do ample research – or any research – about their causes. Men in Africa cannot be blamed for its problems; most of the large funders, specifically any funds related to the UN, always favor women and blame the men for being the abusers, the polygamists, and the cause of the problems while holding the women as victims. I do not believe this at all. I believe empowerment of women is simply this word: *power*. And with power comes responsibility. If the women would own their own power, and take responsibility for the polygamy as much as the men: as they are also engaging in it, then Africa will have a new face in the future.



There are two ways of looking at Africa: traditional, old world and modernism way-forward. The traditional, old world model says women do not have a say, and are forced to sleep with men they know have multiple partners, and they don't have a say in the matter if they want their children to eat. The modern model says women can refuse the traditional system that is enslaving and imprisoning them and that *it is time for that change now*. All the money in the world cannot change Africa while their tribal practices are leaving them in poverty because they refuse to be the change. The women must take responsibility to change the culture that is oppressing them.

They can, like women in the West have taught their daughters to do: *Stand up and say, loud and clear: 'No'. This has gone on too long. No more.*

That is also their choice. And their responsibility. And we can Love women enough to give them that responsibility – not allow their fate to be determined by ancient traditional tribal practices, and Love them hard enough to respect that the way things are they must be content with: otherwise they would be the change. They are strong enough; it is up to them. SSAAP is here to help them, but as we are a non-dependency organization (we wish for no one to be dependent upon us) we can partner with them – not be the change for them.

We can also look at Sierra Leone. What I have noticed in my 16 years spent in Africa (with intermittent visits to India and U.S.A.) is that men are specifically blamed in Africa as the perpetrators of violence by the NGO's, the UN, UNICEF (all the large funding agencies). SSAAP has a different take on it: mostly the women are perpetrators of violence in communities in Sierra Leone. Why? They are the sole custodians of their children who many times have more children than what they can afford (both energetically as well monetarily) to take care of, and are the ones who hit their children out of frustration, who have access to their children 24/7, sometimes beating them on a daily basis, which in-turn causes the children to grow up broken, confused, and dis-abled emotionally ~ increasing the cycle of violence as they will eventually have children themselves and beat them the same way unless the ancestral cycle of violence breaks. I have never seen a man ever beat a child in Africa; every beating I have ever seen has been from the women: the mother, the schoolteacher, the grandmother, even the nurse at the clinic.

A large percentage of the Sierra Leonean women have a calloused, uncivilized, even very dark outlook on the world. The women, quite largely, are disgruntled and disengaged, and it took me so long to realize why: they are missing a vital part of their bodies, which makes them feel not whole at their essence, perhaps deeply in their unconscious minds. How does the UN wish to achieve its goal of Women's Empowerment in Sierra Leone if one of the most empowering parts of their bodies has been removed from them?

Furthermore, it is the mothers who send their daughters (approximately ages 9, 10, 11, 12 or 13 years) to the secret society for young women called the Bondo Bush which is where the cutting of the clitoris (FGM) and oftentimes the labia takes place as part of their initiation. This, too, was founded by a woman: Madame Yoko, who believed the women had the responsibility to their husbands to be “good wives,” and that the removal of their clitoris would help them to be more loyal to their husbands. Yoko, incidentally, was the first female Paramount Chief in Sierra Leone, and brought the idea of the Bondo Bush from Mali, although **she herself was not circumcised**. As the tradition is woven through time, it is the mothers these days, the women, choosing for their daughters to be mutilated – not the fathers (the men). There could be a debate as to whether the women are choosing to be mutilated to please the males in the society – as a girl who has not been “cut,” as they say, is usually passed over, not eligible to be married – so the men are not exempt from this discussion either. As time passes, it has become more and more difficult to separate blame, and in the end males and females are so intimately connected that it would perhaps benefit us as a society not to look at men and women as two separate **teams** competing, but rather as a wholeness and a totality that Nature cannot survive without: two energies within all of us regardless of our external gender or sexual orientation that co-exist in harmony, rather than battle with one another.



The bottom line is that women’s empowerment starts with women not depending upon men for their survival. I don’t believe this is a “luxury” limited to Western women; I believe in African women as deeply as I believe in Western women, so I know it is possible for African women too to have the same equalities we have in the West, but the women in Africa have to be ready to make that change. Only they themselves can do it. I believe it the default of an evolved humanity which respects, honors and praises all its members: children, elderly, women and men. Women and men can share friendship, ideas, and work together with dignity and respect if their relationship is not solely sexually-based, as well if it is not survival-based.

Radiance's Home-school



We just carry her curriculum (books from India, Ethiopia, Zambia, Sierra Leone, Egypt, U.S.A. and England) around the world and work on her lessons wherever we are, learn as we go, and learn every day through all the experiences we encounter. That is our school.



She wishes to be a Veterinarian when she grows up, but for large animals such as cattle, goats, sheep, camels, and even wants to work with some of the wildlife we have in Zambia: lion cubs, cheetahs. I am trying to organize this for her when she is 15/16 years old. She just turned 10 in December 2020.



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Open Defecation Project



I am so thoroughly disgusted with the cultural practice of open defecation here. Literally, people stand on the streets and defecate, or throw their defecations in public streets and public communal areas.



This random stool was found on a pipe outside the Agricultural Office where Radiance and I work with the Agricultural Officers in Nyinenyang. Attracting flies and polluting the air with its fowl stench, I just wondered why the person wouldn't take the extra step of throwing the stool in a latrine, just 500 meters from where the stool was deposited. This really angers me, and spreads diseases that local people have no way of measuring nor controlling.

SSAAP will work with the *Nyinenyang Melese Zenawi Memorial Primary Hospital*, likely a 2021/2022 project as the time SSAAP will be in the village is short on this trip, to build local latrines in the villages as well to educate citizens (primarily adults) about the diseases that fecal matter can spread, as well to educate their own children about the hazards to their health that this kind of behavior causes.

One locally-made latrine can be built for approximately 1,500 Birr (~ \$45 USD) which is the cost only for the trees for the structure of the latrine (long, tall trees do not grow here due to the lack of water, and so they must be imported) as well as the plastic sheets which will be used between layers of mud for the floor.

I want to cement the floors of the toilets, as we do in Sierra Leone and as our SSAAP-Zambian Headquarters has done for our personal toilet (which has held up now for 14 years with a cement floor, and with the daily morning task of dumping ash from our fire inside the latrine it doesn't smell badly at all!; the ash acts as a de-smelling agent), so I am looking into the cost of a few bags of cement for each toilet.

To me, this is #1 Health Issue that the Nuer people face: their habit of open defecation. It is dehumanizing to them and I simply cannot relate to why they do this.

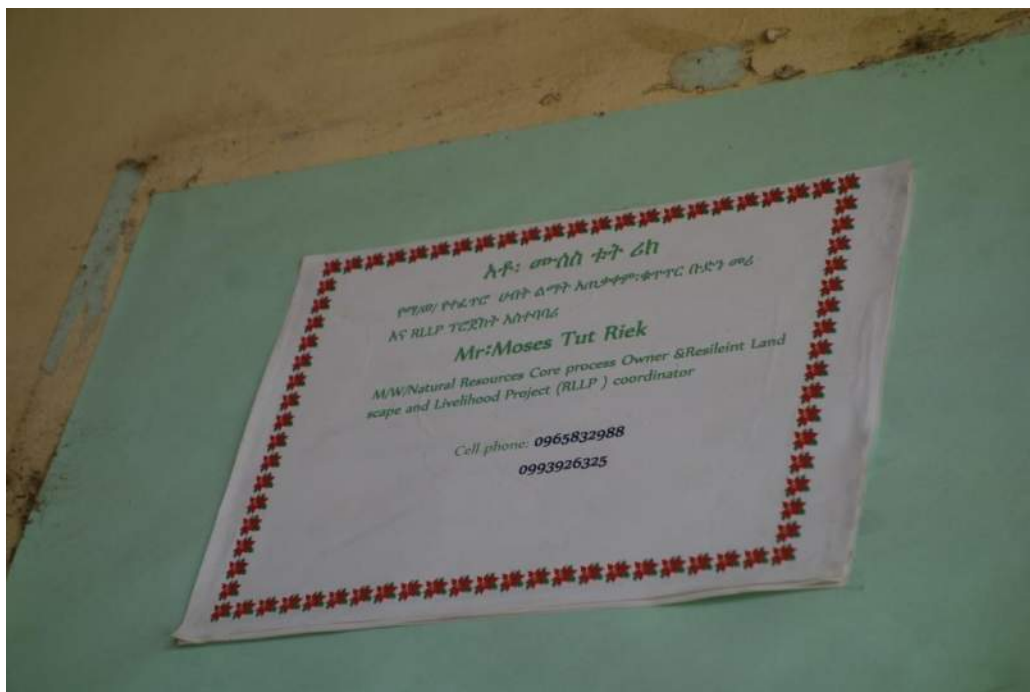
The toilet on our compound, the one with the horrible smell!, was built to be shared by a bar and a restaurant (in the loosest senses of both words ;) thus it is made of concrete and permanent, but is still unhygienic.

SSAAP's Work with Agricultural Sect



SSAAP works directly with the Agricultural Ministry in Nyinenyang Village, as most of our projects are agriculturally-based.

Moses, our lead counterpart, is the Natural Resources Land and Livelihood Project Coordinator.





Here is our working space at the office with Moses at the Agricultural building. The electricity runs off the power from Gambella town, nearly 4 hours away, so is *usually* not working. We take our work seriously, and as for Radiance: well, I wish I could get her to take it more seriously ;)



When there is no electricity at the Agricultural Office, we use the outside plug at the clinic, which is run on solar power, rather than on electricity. I wish all of Africa could use solar power. So much more efficient and absolutely harmless to the environment – utilize this burning, intense firey African sun, I say!



Nuer Culture



Tattooes: The markings you see on the gentleman above, across his forehead, are common for a Nuer man, and small dots for a Nuer woman, as seen below, as a rite of passage into maturity/adulthood/reproductive season of one's life.





The only real complaint I have about being here is shown above: biting ants! They are attracted to our floor, and I believe they are nocturnal as they come out at night only. They are small, and sting. After a few minutes, they give these welts on the body. Shown above, my elbow. I think I have more of an allergic reaction than Radiance does. The swelling goes away after about 45 minutes.

Nuer Floor: Locally-brewed alcohol is mixed with dirt to make the mud floors of the Nuer homes.



Here is the mud laid out on the maize sack (above) and the woman we stay with (below), in the roasting midday African sun, plastering the dirt floor with this 'topping' which is darker than the dirt itself. The women work unusually hard here, and the balance that we have observed in Zambia and Sierra Leone of the women and men sharing duties does not seem to be found here.

We have been impressed by the attitude and hard-working nature of the women and are still waiting to be captivated by the men – who so far have fascinated us with their laziness, their excessive talk-without-action, their controlling natures and just wonder in the end if we have come here for the women who seem far more open-minded and creative.



Coronavirus Heroes

'Corona': halo, crown, aura, radiance, circle of light

These are the people who held up, as the saying says, even in boiling water: showed their true spirit of commitment to the project during the crux of humanity's hardship – the widespread viral outbreak:

- **Kenya with T-Mobile Phone Company:** A stranger we shall never meet came to my mother's aid after Gail had bought a \$58 calling card and still could not get through to me in Ethiopia. When Gail called T-Mobile to ask why she couldn't get through to me with the calling card, Kenya refunded her the \$58. Gail explained that she was trying to help her daughter and granddaughter get from Ethiopia back to Zambia (SSAAP's African home and official headquarters) and she was so touched by Gail's gesture that she granted Gail *free, unlimited calling from Colorado to Ethiopia* until we left Ethiopia on 15 May 2020. Gail was so relieved, and the tension from the dam within her broke, such that she started sobbing out of gratitude over the telephone to Kenya. Ironic too that she is named after an African country herself ;)
- **Jim Clark:** Loyal SSAAP supporter since 2012, Jim has faithfully kept in touch with both Gail and Heather throughout SSAAP's stent in Ethiopia, helping us with everything from small details, research, and logistics to emotional support for the project. He intends to visit Zambia whenever the travel ban ceases, and we warmly welcome him. We Love you, Jim; thank you from the bottom of our hearts for all you have done for us.
- **Kristi Franko:** My lifelong best friend's wife, Kristi, has been through so much to stay in touch with us while we have been moving all around Africa, and she doesn't miss a beat. Her communication skills are exceptional, and she makes a point of sending us her support and Love no matter where we are or what we are doing. Love you, girl. Don't know what we would do without you and don't want to think about it, either!
- **Mom:** Well, we are eternally connected as all parents are to their children, but you have gone the extra mile for Radiance and I now just as you did during the Ebola Outbreak in 2014, trying to help us out of Sierra Leone and back to Zambia just as during this time, you have been persistent to help us get out of Ethiopia and back to Zambia. You have lost countless hours of sleep and energy over trying to help us; you have traveled from one side of the rainbow's edge to the other end of the bow on our behalf. The only way I can pay you back: being as good of a mother to my own daughter as you have been to me. This is the barter system of Love. With you always, and thank you for being relentless. Now I know where my determination comes from!
- **Mr. Abiy:** This angel literally appeared out of the woodwork two days before the Ethiopian [Orthodox] Easter, Sunday 19 March. He was in awe of our lifestyle, the commitment we have made to serving the most destitute citizens we could reach in the nations where we work, and told us anything we asked of him he would do. The owner of a large construction company in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, he has over 600 employees

all over the nation. He assured me he would help me get on the airplane to take us back to Zambia: Heather's #1 Target: getting back home to our Zambian village while the Coronavirus gets worse, until it gets better.

When Heather talked to her mother on Ethiopian Easter Sunday, she was told her flight on 15 May to Lusaka, Zambia with Kenya Airways was cancelled and her mother had booked her on another flight leaving Addis Ababa, Ethiopia for Lusaka, Zambia on 29 April instead. On Easter Sunday, Heather called Mr. Abiy. In the midst of his family Easter celebration, he was able to organize for Heather and her 10-year old daughter Radiance a vehicle from Nyinenyang Village to Gambella town then all the way to Addis Ababa the following day.

I don't need a cent, a single Ethiopian Birr from you, said Mr. Abiy. I am doing this to honor you and what you do for others, and because I am wealthy and I can afford to do it. I know you don't have very much money for your project, and I have seen the little mud house you are living in. Most of us, local Ethiopian people, could never ever even live this way. I respect you! I also see how you have been treated since you have come here. You have been dehumanized and degraded because you are a foreigner and my people of Ethiopia do not understand that anyone can carry Coronavirus; not just a foreigner. I want to give a better name to Ethiopia to the international world. I want foreigners to hear this story and give a good name back to Ethiopia. I helped a man from Spain once, in this same way. He was a missionary and had vehicles for his project. The very people he trusted and hired stole his vehicles and everything he owned. I took him in, took care of him for a few days and helped him with his air ticket back to Barcelona. I will help you in whatever ways you need help. And I can take you directly from the village to the city and even take you to the airport for your flight out. You can stay at our home in Addis Ababa. We have a large home and so you will be comfortable there with us. My wife is already looking forward to meeting you, and my four children will have great fun with your one beautiful daughter.

Sometimes our lucky stars turn lemons not only into lemonade, but rather into lemon pie ;), and so not only did Radiance and I arrive safely and soundly to Addis Ababa a week prior to our flight, but we had great fun along the way. The journey from the village to the capital city took us three days/two nights, and on the second night we were spoiled in an expensive (Ethiopian standards) hotel with hot water – my first hot shower since I left Zambia in September 2019!





Traditional Ethiopian coffee ceremony, above.





Radiance and I with Mr. Haptamu, assigned to chaperone us for the 3-day journey (left) and Getu, the driver of the vehicle (left and right).



The expensive hotel (!!!) with the hot shower, and a balcony. They gave us the best room the hotel had.



*



A friend of ours in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, was sharing with me how heavily the Chinese residents of Ethiopia have been discriminated against during this time. They are called ‘Coronavirus’ on the streets, and sometimes things are thrown at them. Yet they haven’t traveled to China for even years at a time.

Discrimination requires ignorance in order to breed, I have told my daughter. Without ignorance, you cannot have alienation, stigmatization and discrimination. What I understand is that during a time of worldwide trauma, as the Coronavirus epidemic has been, the more we do in acts of Love, generosity and kindness, the more we are going to aid this virus in leaving the planet forever and never returning. The trying times are the times in which we *see* with all three of our eyes; I have a friend working with the Ministry of Tourism in Ethiopia and I explained to him that this attitude towards foreigners, in Ethiopia, will have long-lasting effects. The virus will go away – whether it is one month or one year from now – and then what will happen to Ethiopia’s tourism industry? The Chinese man who hasn’t left Ethiopia in five years is going to tell everyone he knows; so will his wife. How many people do they know? How fast does word of mouth spread? And I tend to always speak out against injustice myself, don’t mince words ☺

I told my friend that international tourists, in the future, if they hear these kinds of stories about the Coronavirus times, will go see the Blue Nile from Khartoum rather than in Bihār Dar, Ethiopia. They will see exotic animals on safari in Kenya or Tanzania or Uganda, other East

African nations, rather than here. No one deserves to be treated as a disease, *even if he is infected*, as this is a time to Love, cherish, and help one another more than ever before. If a nation, such as Ethiopia, is behaving this way today towards its non-citizens, this will affect them tomorrow. Such is the Law of the Universe.

In Gambella town, in the end of March 2020, *before the virus even had really come to Ethiopia* Radiance and I were served in a restaurant. We bought breakfast: eggs, bread, coffee, milk, tea. We were treated kindly and paid our bill according to the amount of money we owed. After we paid, we were ignored by the server when we asked for more water, and some other customers tried to spit on us, calling us 'Coronavirus' and told to "Get away! Get away from us!" This was, of course, *after* we had paid our bill.

So the bottom line is: our actions today affect us tomorrow. I was taught this even as a child. Deeds are an energy that have a trajectory out into the great vastness of space. I always try to bear this in mind, as no one is above the Laws of the Universe. Ignorance breeds poverty. It is best to honor one another, and the more dire the situation, the more simple acts of kindness stretch farther.

Due to widespread panic and discrimination, we decided while travelling internally through Ethiopia, from the southwest border point of Gambella and back to the capital city of Addis Ababa to fly back to Zambia, to use our African documents versus our U.S. documents. Radiance is a dual citizen, holding both a Sierra Leonean passport as well a U.S. passport, and I have a Work Permit and official receipts that I have paid for our Residency in Zambia from the Republic of Zambia. I assume it will be easier and safer for us to travel through the interior of Ethiopia with documents showing our longevity in Africa rather than our American citizenship.

And so, in an attempt to balance all things, I tell you now about the hardships we have faced here simultaneously with what Mr. Abiy, a complete stranger, did for my daughter and I. All of these experiences are priceless in our lives: good, bad, hateful, Loving – we learn from all things that happen to us.

So Radiance's homeschool the last week before flying to Zambia was fractions (she hates them) and learning how to evacuate a foreign country where English is barely spoken amidst widespread panic while maintaining inner calm and peace – focusing on keeping healthy also.



SSAAP Projects in Nyinenyang Village

SSAAP School Sponsorship Program 2020



Let's get these kids out of the dirt and into the school ☺



This is the rural village school in Nyinenyang Village.



Approximately 513 students attend this Primary school.

School fees are free in Ethiopia (just like in Sierra Leone!) so it is a matter only of the uniform. SSAAP was given a gift in 2018 to sponsor some students to school. Here is the breakdown of the uniform costs.

- Primary Student uniform ~ 250 Birr = \$7.69
- Secondary School uniform ~ 400 Birr = \$12.31

We will sponsor 6 Secondary Students and 10 Primary Students to school in 2020.



The Secondary school is on the left and the Primary school, on the right.

The biggest issue is that schools are closed; the photo shows how vacant it is. SSAAP is trying to work with the Headmaster of both the Primary and the Headmaster of the Secondary schools to organize for a sponsorship for the 16 students for when school reopens, hopefully still in 2020. However, if the school will not open for a long period of time, I do not want to hand the school money (Africans are not good at planning ahead with money, generally-speaking) too prematurely.

I will leave the village in 3-4 weeks and if the sponsorship fund is not used here, perhaps we can use it in Zambia instead. I will be there from May 15, 2020 indefinitely, but well into 2021 – so hopefully schools will be open by then.

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Mango and Banana Tree Plantation Projects



This is the project site allocated for the Mango Tree Project, in Batokdol Village, where they have already begun to cultivate the land for the project.



They have already begun with a Moringa Tree project, and want to add to it with the Mango Tree project sponsored by SSAAP, partnering with SSAAP.



In Batokdol Village, they have already begun digging the land out this way, as shown below.



You can see they have already begun to cultivate a large section of land, but much more still remains.





The little trenches in the ground help the water saturate the roots so that the plants may be cultivated more effectively. I don't know much about this type of farming so am learning more about it from the experts here!





Here is the site that is being cultivated for the Banana Tree Project.

This site is in Gerguer Village.









Project = Investment

Our project, a service, invests in the local people through Project. Project – if managed proficiently and effectively, becomes a local business or an IGA: *Income Generation Activity*, for local people, food for their families, and surplus as profit for them. The project is our investment in the people, or in humanity itself.

Here is an excerpt from a correspondence I wrote to a friend of mine I studied with in Norwich, England in 2002:



Tuesday; March 31, 2020

My friend,

I am writing you back from your letter I received in Sierra Leone but from our South Sudan project site: in Ethiopia, approximately 20 minutes from the Ethiopian border with South Sudan.

I waited until we were here to write you back – because here, we have time ☺ In Sierra Leone, the pace of life is so much faster, and we had more access to internet and to electricity than either here or in Zambia. I want to hear all about how the Coronavirus has affected you, your work, your lifestyle, etc. It has barely touched Africa, yet I predict it will affect us in major ways due to *economy*. The stock market crashing in the States affects the whole world, most especially the marginalized, destitute parts of the world barely surviving ~ this will take a heavy toll. My prediction is that Coronavirus *cannot* affect Africa as it has in the West, as Africa is home to the daily threat of deadening diseases: Ebola, Malaria, Typhoid, Giardia, Cholera, HIV, Syphilis. The Africa people have suffered with these diseases for so long and with such resilience and triumphant immune systems that I do not **believe** Coronavirus will have the life-threatening impacts here that they have had in the West ~ but probably more severe economic ones. The countries where SSAAP works were already experiencing inflation; just to give you an idea most of my Peace Corps Service, rate was 5 Kwacha = \$1 USD (2004-2006). I believe around the time of your visit, during Mwanawasa's reign, it was even 3.5 Kwacha = \$1 USD. Now the exchange rate is 15 Kwacha = \$1 USD! Sierra Leone: in 2012-2017, around 4,500 Leones = \$1 USD. Now, in 2020: 10,000 Leones = \$1 USD. The numbers have gone haywire. African economies were already struggling fiercely beneath a system *designed to defeat and oppress them* and this Coronavirus will impact, crush and devastate them even further.

I think Africa failed because it didn't trust itself and believe in itself – age-old story, eh?! ;) They never should have left their own bartering system, and abandoned their own systems which served them. The Western way **kind-of** works in the West, but as I said, it's a system invented for the West that is intended for the West, and not necessarily for the whole world. An African hut made of

earthen materials: mud, clay, dried grass, sticks, local bricks works *here* where there is no snow, excessive heat, and it regulates temperature. An African hut cannot survive in North America in January, just as Capitalism cannot survive in African context. It doesn't work here. The sun just set over this little South Sudanese (Nuer) village. Children are wailing in symphony: *starvation*. They are hungry. There are at least four children wailing outside our door. Radi asked me why the mother – age 15 – doesn't breastfeed the baby. *Probably no milk*, I say. *She's probably so hungry herself there isn't any milk in her breasts*. Some of the mothers even go so far as to hit the children when they cry out of hunger. It's excessively painful to be in the culture of this and know that *most* of the world is not living like these people. This is excessive poverty, which is why Coronavirus is pretty much the last thing on these people's minds. They are stressed because they haven't eaten in 2 days, the heat is above 105-degrees Fahrenheit, and it is dry. Dry, dry, dry. They are so relieved, to see me here. Can I take away their suffering? Not I – only the Divine! Can I give them long-term, sustainable project that is Love-based, Nonviolence-founded, and an investment in a better future? SSAAP is here to try! And this we will try with: mango tree plantation, banana tree plantation, fishing endeavors at the border (2021/2022 – not now), school sponsorships, goat, chicken, bee-keeping, latrine project as open defecation is an issue here. I just believe these projects are the only way forward. They are empowering without dependency (SSAAP wants 0% dependency). They are hands-on and not hands-out (SSAAP will never give hand-outs). They are Love-based for livelihood and address the raw, real issues here: no food, no water. The brown water that comes to us we have filters for drinking, but the local people do not, and this wretched water is unbiased ~ it doesn't discriminate, slowly killing all whom imbibe it. I figure my life isn't worth very much if there is a portion of humanity 'surviving' this way, and what a good use of this lifetime: try to help these people who need it the most, and even if I fail ~ I will spend a lifetime trying. That is my commitment to humanity. I am not just doing it for the Africans, however; I am doing it for all the people who sincerely want to help but cannot come here to do it themselves: health issues or because of their lifestyle or occupation or responsibilities to their families they cannot be here hands-on, as I am ~ so let me be here on their behalf, representing the West that cares. My Love for Africans and Africa is equal to and parallel to my Love for Americans and America. I Love them equally and unconditionally. My project is intended to serve all of humanity in this way: by sharing the resources of the world, with purity and with Love. That is the goal, the mission, the Path, and its destination.

Aaaahhh ~ nothing could get as deeply into my heart as Africa.

I Love you to Pleiades, past the moon and Sirius, Heather



