

## SSAAP Quarterly Newsletter, Spring Edition XXXVI, 2022; U.S.A.: Colorado and Ohio

To Gail. Mentor, Mother, friend, ally. Secretary, teacher, wordsmith, telepath. So now, here we are: our time together is ending, but this is only one era. There will be many more in this infinity. You have been with the project since its infancy: embryo, birth, toddler, teenager. You are part of its prime, and most certainly will be there in spirit as it sages into its deepest elder wisdom. Thank you for the years of your life you have spent helping to shape this incredible manifestation of something so divine, a profound dream you and I had. I will never stop; I will continue to pour the passion within me into this project, until my last breath. The project can never replace you, for you are irreplaceable.



Double-Radiances: In Africa, we often choose the names of our children based upon the people we stay with, or those who have touched our lives in memorable ways. Had she been born a boy, I was going to name my child Yajoh, the name of one of my favorite students when I initially worked with former child soldiers in Sierra Leone (2007). But as she was born a girl, I named my baby Radiance, after the woman pictured in the photo, above. She is Radiance, and my daughter's namesake. She has been a sister, a teacher, and a loyal ally to me since 2004. She is her name: Radiance, and has inspired not only the radiance in my own child, but also, within me.

## SSAAP Timeline

Dear Friends, Family, Friends who are Family (!), Family who are Friends (!!!), SSAAP Supporters, SSAAP Project Partners, SSAAP-Zambia Team, SSAAP-Sierra Leone Team, Teachers, Mentors, Shamans, SSAAP Volunteers, our Zambian Geologist water well driller: Likumbi, our Sierra Leonean water well contractors: Mr. Ndoko, Mr. Sam, Foday, Hassan & Musa, Sierra Leonean Field Leads Taylor S. Kamara and Musa T. Korpoi, Simwatachela Committee (Pumulo, Raphael, Felex, Bornwell, Regina, Mate, and Nelson), Artists, Painters, Musicians, Gardeners, Poets, Mermaids, and Dreamers:

It is with great Love that I write you this newsletter. With respect for U.S.A. culture – where SSAAP is currently based – I will write a short newsletter this edition. And because SSAAP is in U.S.A., we don't have any updated or current photos of Africa since we left Zambia; this newsletter will be primarily text-only. My long newsletters are typically written while SSAAP is in Africa, where I have thousands of photographs, and while I may not have electricity – I have plenty of time to write; it is what I do most!

If I can keep this newsletter below twenty pages, I will be impressed with myself! Brevity is not my stronghold, and so I will make a genuine effort to keep this newsletter succinct.

SSAAP's Timeline for 2022 – 2023 is as follows:

- January 2022 – April 2022: Colorado, U.S.A.
- May 2022 – June 2022: Ohio, U.S.A.
- July – August 2022: Colorado, U.S.A.
- September 2022 – February 2023: Sierra Leone, West Africa
- February 2023 – onward: Zambia, Southern Africa

Our time in the States is spent primarily reconnecting with SSAAP supporters, and enjoying our time re-entering their space, learning about their lives, discussing the project with them. We work to forge partnerships with new individuals and groups, as well to reconnect with former partnerships. SSAAP also engages in presentations, both virtual and in-person, and these presentations are available through our website in the “Media” section. We Love every part about being home – even the parts we don't like: hours on hold with customer service, struggling with RTD transport (!), getting rabies, typhoid, and Covid vaccines, scheduling medical appointments, a boat load of paperwork that I have neglected for the last 2 years and 9 months that we were in Africa. My mother always says: “It will all get done.” And it always does! So these kinds of details are just part of being back in the U.S.A. for us. We are so happy to be here, in every way. Everything difficult eventually becomes a lesson, and a lesson: eventually a healing.

The bounty of Nature is ever-present: the crisp white snow to follow a sparkling blue Colorado sky, and the smell of a cozy Colorado winter cannot be beat. The humid green of an Ohio summer. The desert heat of a Colorado summer. I can already taste the season before it has come; Radiance and I are profoundly happy to be home. Thank you for this opportunity!

If you are in the States and I haven't reached out to you to try to connect, kindly forgive me, and please contact me directly at 970-412-2136, or send me an email from the same email address you received this newsletter.

## SSAAP in the Media

As previously mentioned, SSAAP works with various partners to conduct meetings, workshops, and give presentations while in the States.

SSAAP Returned Peace Corps Volunteer (RPCV) Interview: Below is a link to a presentation through the Returned Peace Corps Volunteers (RPCV) Association; it is archived in the University of Kentucky's Oral History Library.

The volume and sound leave much to be desired, and so my apologies upfront about this. The Director of the Louie B. Nunn Center for Oral History, University of Kentucky Libraries and I discussed in-length about the possibility of redoing the interview, but we decided the content was worth tolerating the incessant audio disruptions, so we opted not to redo it, at least at this time.

What came out of this incredible interview with its lousy acoustics was the opportunity for SSAAP to work with the Director of the Louie B. Nunn Center for Oral History, University of Kentucky Libraries, in Ohio when SSAAP is there (May/June 2022) to do a three-fold interview with intention to delve more deeply into the issues that sculpt the project, controversies between the West's idea of how Africa should develop versus the organic approach that SSAAP uses which is an Afrocentric methodology that the project should develop only around the needs pronounced by the local people, rather than Western ideals, and our experiences in Africa. This three-fold interview will be available through the Wisdom Project, which the Oral History Library Director has also birthed. More details to follow regarding this project.

Here is the link to the public facing record for the Returned Peace Corps Volunteer (RPCV) interview:

<https://kentuckyoralhistory.org/ark:/16417/xt7p4r6gq717q>

\*

Neighbors Magazine, Centerville-Washington-Township, Ohio: This magazine is sent out monthly, to approximately 3,600 households throughout Centerville-Washington Township, Ohio (distribution from Spring Valley Road down to Social Row Road, and Clio Road to Yankee Road) features SSAAP in its March 2022 Edition. Please see the electronic version of this magazine, attached to this newsletter.

Please feel free to reach out to me regarding questions or comments you might have about either the magazine article or the RPCV interview. I gladly welcome all genres of feedback!

## *Water Wells in Sierra Leone – 2022*

We are pleased to announce that our first stop back to Africa in September 2022 will be to Sierra Leone!

We have not been to Sierra Leone since October 2019-March 2020, and Radiance and I miss it desperately; we flew out of Sierra Leone on March 19, 2020, and were the last flight out of Lungi International Airport before they closed the airport down for Coronavirus. SSAAP had contracted three different contractors to, respectively, dig 16 wells in 2019/2020 and 5 wells in 2017. One well from 2017 still remains unfinished, due to witchcraft beliefs in the particular community where the well was meant to be dug, thus in 2021 the well location was changed to Mowusu Village, Moyamba District, Sierra Leone. I expect that some of the 2019/2020 water wells are still not complete, thus will assess them when SSAAP revisits Sierra Leone in September 2022.

Before any new wells can be determined, we will have to confirm that all previous wells (5 wells in 2017; 16 wells in 2019/2020) are complete. Then, after their completion, SSAAP is pleased to announce that we have 50 new wells for 2022! This is more or less a dream come true for SSAAP, as its lifelong mission is to put a water well in every village in Sierra Leone (it is a small nation) before Heather dies at age 200 years old. 😊

The SSAAP-Sierra Leone 2022 water well schedule is as follows:

- 6 wells in Kambia District, 4 in Tonkolili District, 3 in Kailahun District and 8 in Port Loko District under the supervision of SSAAP Lead Field Worker-Port Loko District Taylor S. Kamara
- 19 wells in Moyamba District under the supervision of SSAAP Lead Field Worker-Moyamba District Musa T. Korpoi. Please see the attachment Mr. Korpoi sent me from the field since I have been in the States. I am very impressed with his initiative, although one community is repeated three times in the report, and some of the community's names/zones/districts are not listed. This will be a work-in-progress.
- 10 water wells – locations TBA

Kindly note as well that 2022 will be the first year that the SSAAP Lead Field Workers will be paid within the contracts for the water wells. Each SSAAP-Sierra Leone water well costs \$1000, and \$200-\$300/well (depending upon the Lead Field Worker's agreement with the Contractor, which will be between him and the contractor and signed via Contract with SSAAP) will be given to the Lead Field Worker. This will allow the Lead Field Worker to have access to the field, to work with the communities, and to have a deeper investment in each water well than previously whereby the beneficiary communities and the Contractors were not necessarily working together in harmony. The Lead Field Worker will serve as a glue that holds the beneficiary communities together, the water wells will be completed with more efficiency, and therefore the water wells will be completed in greater quantities and with more investment from both the recipient communities, the Lead Field Worker, and the Contractor. As well, each water well will benefit three parties: the beneficiary/recipient community, the Lead Field Worker and all of his dependents, and the Contractors and all of his dependents. The water wells are providing not only sustainable water to remote rural communities, but also a source of income to multiple parties.

SSAAP typically hires one contractor for every four wells (in 2019/2020, SSAAP hired four Contractors for its 16 water wells) so I suspect SSAAP will hire 10-12 Contractors in 2022 for this very extensive water well project.

\*

Our Thanksgiving abundance from the Universe this year is going to be our November 2022 volunteer visit to Sierra Leone – the first Sierra Leone SSAAP Volunteer that we have ever had! Please meet Mike Edwards, whose Biography is pasted below. Mike is committed to traveling to Sierra Leone in November 2022 to visit the project site, and to help SSAAP with the water wells. Mike, bring your camera! I am going to set you free into the field with either Taylor or Musa on the back of a motorbike and assess the progress of the water wells we will begin in September/October 2022. We work only in the most remote, ‘jungle’ villages of Sierra Leone, as I call them: you take a motorbike until the path becomes too treacherous, and you park the motorbike, and are then on your feet: a narrow-winding footpath that will eventually open up and land you in the middle of a huge village you couldn’t have even imagined in your wildest dreams was even there! This will be the journey of your lifetime! I hope you are up for the ride...!

Mike, thank you for volunteering to come to help our project in Sierra Leone. You will be the first, save my mother Gail, to ever have visited us in Sierra Leone. Sierra Leone is a tough sell, but you won’t regret it. I assure you that you will never be the same again, after having stayed, worked, sweat, cried, and Loved in such an abundant land. Don’t be fooled; Sierra Leone is a holy place.

\*

### *Mike Edwards – Short Bio*

**Mike resides in New Hampshire in the United States and has done field work in Liberia and Rwanda, including health and dental hygiene education, clean water practices and construction. “I’m humbled to be a part of SSAAP and to hold hands with the people of Sierra Leone as we walk this life journey together.”**



## *Water wells in Zambia – 2022*

Abedneco Likumbi, our Zimbabwean/Zambian Geologist/Hydrologist well-driller in Zambia continues to make me proud; while we are in Colorado, he has been in the field – securing documents for the land surveys at all three of SSAAP-Zambia’s sites (land donated to SSAAP by three chiefs in Southern Province, Zambia) which will eventually lead to Title Deeds under Zambia’s Ministry of Lands; Likumbi is continuing to work with the building of SSAAP’s Headquarters in the two new chiefdoms where we will continue working when we return to Zambia in February 2023, and setting up the water reticulation system in Cooma Chiefdom, which is one of the two new SSAAP project sites.

I literally thank the Universe every day for Likumbi; SSAAP couldn’t ask for a better project partner in Zambia. Likumbi, we Love you! Keep up the good work!

We are scheduled to drill 2-3 water wells for SSAAP-Zambia in 2022, despite SSAAP’s lack of presence in Zambia in 2022. More information to be announced on this endeavor as 2022 progresses.



***September 2021:*** Land surveying for one of two new SSAAP-Zambia Chiefdoms: Cooma Chiefdom. The chief has donated the land to the project, so we are in the process of surveying the land with a hired surveyor, Isaac (above); after the land surveying is completed, we will get a Title Deed for the SSAAP land through the Ministry of Lands.



If you empower Africans with clean water, it changes their lives permanently, sustainably, and infinitely. After doing this work for almost 18 years to-date, I have begun to see the difference between the communities that have a water well, and the ones that don't. One simply cannot compare a community without water, and their level of existence, to the level of development that is happening in communities that have access to a water well. Think of the effects of crystalline, pure water flowing into their beautiful bodies, versus murky opaque water which smells of cow feces. It is profound ~ the magnitude, the scale of water in our lives. Not only are we comprised of water, but it is the essence of our survival as human beings.







## *SSAAP as a Public Charity Organization*

After filling out the filing reports for 2019 to the IRS (SSAAP is not required to pay taxes, as it is a nonprofit organization, but must report to the IRS annually through the form 990EZ, Schedules A, B, G, and O; all SSAAP IRS reporting forms are available on our website, [www.ssaap.org](http://www.ssaap.org), since its origin in 2009), I am able to report that in 2021, 11.7% of SSAAP's funding went towards Administrative Expenses, and therefore 88.3% of SSAAP's funding went toward Project Expenses!

*The 2021 breakdown of SSAAP Expenses is as follows:*

- Infrastructure (*PayPal* fees, website fees): \$58
- Office expenses (postage, stationary, lamination, scanning, office supplies): \$340
- Living expenses in Zambia: January 1, 2021 – October 13, 2021 (food, transportation, phone, internet data bundles, postal box fee, toiletries, medications, miscellaneous for living such as charcoal and cement): \$1348
- Administrative support (Secretary of State Colorado filing fee, Heather and Radiance immigration documents which includes visas, work permits, and citizenship for Radiance in Sierra Leone and Heather in Zambia – we are both African citizens now!): \$1344
- International travel-related expenses (Emergency Evacuation medical insurance, COVID testing at border points, extra baggage to bring SSAAP art back to U.S.A., U.S.A. passport renewal for Heather and Radiance): \$479
- Project expenses (G-MAP Adult Literacy Program-Zambia, Micro-loan Program, Water wells in Zambia, Artisan Support Program, Radiant Street Beast Program, Plantation Program [Water Reticulation System – Irrigation], purchase of Africa art): \$30, 457.00

So, what this translates into is a total of \$3569 of our total funds going towards everything *except* Project Expenses, and \$30,457 of our total funds going into the projects themselves! Administrative expenses: 11.7%, Project expenses: 88.3%. These numbers are impressive, and I work very hard to keep our Administrative costs extremely low such that there is more funding available for the projects themselves. It is for this reason that I do not take a salary from SSAAP. My philosophy on this is that if I wanted a salary, I should just stay in the States and earn an income like everyone else here does. I shouldn't take funds away from impoverished people living at the lowest denominator of their societies, when simple things like one cow or a water well or sponsoring their children to school could change their lives drastically for the better and until forever. Therefore, my daughter and I live on a shoestring budget wherever we go: in the States, in Sierra Leone, in Zambia. Having local housing in Zambia and Sierra Leone, and avoiding the expense of guest houses and hotels, helps considerably.

On SSAAP's 990EZ for 2021, Schedule A, Section C, Line I4, we are asked to report our Public Support Percentage for 2021; SSAAP's Public Support Percentage for 2021 is 99.2%.

Thank you for your interest in these data statistics for SSAAP!

## *International Events*

SSAAP is so excited about its international opportunities and international partnerships in 2022/2023! A short summary of these events are bullet-pointed below:

- Working with Nonviolence Project Partner Lawson Gadri: Memorial Ceremony for Nonviolence Activism in Ghana
- Organizing a course on changing our judgment: the way we think about literacy and illiteracy, located in India (Department of Social Work, Stella Maris College, Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India), regarding rural Africa and valuing a skill set that people who never learn to read or write have, which those who are literate will most likely never acquire
- Cattle project in Uganda and Tanzania with SSAAP Project Partner Cows4Kids. SSAAP will be traveling to Cows4Kids project sites in Uganda and Tanzania to assist Cows4Kids in organizing sustainable sites for their mission. As well, Cows4Kids has sponsored SSAAP-Zambia's first sustainable cattle initiative, and in 2022/2023, we will be purchasing 10 female cows and 1 male cow through Cows4Kids sponsorship! I am \*extra\* excited about this partnership, as the woman running Cows4Kids is one of my best friends from childhood (in Africa, we would call her my sister); I have known her since I was fifteen years old, so the opportunity to work with her professionally now is surreal. Mary, thank you so much for your interest in working with SSAAP!
- Partnership with Potters for Peace (Wisconsin, U.S.A.) Women's Resource Center in Yumbe, Northern Uganda; SSAAP will help to organize the Women's Resource Center in Uganda with Potters for Peace (2022/2023), then Potters for Peace will help SSAAP organize a Women's Resource Center in Sierra Leone. Eventually, if success comes from the Potters for Peace/SSAAP partnership and the Women's Resource Centers, Potters for Peace/SSAAP will establish Women's Resource Centers in Potters for Peace sites in Kenya, Rwanda, and Tanzania, as well at SSAAP sites in Zambia.

\*

## *Domestic Events*

SSAAP is participating in Colorado Women's Day, in Golden, Colorado from March 10-11, 2022. SSAAP will be selling art, as well participate in a panel discussion regarding its philosophy on Women's Empowerment in Africa (which I have summarized in another section of this newsletter), and SSAAP will give a Guest Presentation on its project sites in both Zambia and Sierra Leone and how water affects women in Africa.

Here is the schedule for SSAAP within the framework of Colorado Women's Day:

*Day 1: Thursday, March 10, 2022*

- 8:30 Vendor table setup for SSAAP; Workshop; 12-1 pm SSAAP selling art, Vendor tables open

Day 2: Friday, March 11, 2022

- Vendor table open; Panel discussions, Heather speaks about women and water (10-30 minutes, focus on questions from audience): name of presentation: “Women are Water”; Award ceremonies; Event closes

Please see the flier, attached to this email, regarding details for Colorado Women’s Day in Golden, Colorado. Thank you so much for your interest, and please let me know if you have questions about SSAAP’s first fundraiser in 2022! And our first fundraiser since 2018!

\*

## *Literacy Resource Centers in Zambia and Sierra Leone: “Pages for the Planet”*

SSAAP is working in partnership with IX Power Foundation from Golden, Colorado; their mission: water and the treatment of women (and other disadvantaged peoples); they are at the intersection of the world's most pressing issues.

IX Power Foundation is sponsoring literacy libraries in both Zambia and Sierra Leone through SSAAP, in an effort to support literacy for women, men, children and elderly people in SSAAP’s remote locations in Africa. The Foundation is shipping literacy materials to Zambia and Sierra Leone, and sustainably fundraising for this ongoing venture. If you have used books that you would wish to donate to these libraries, please contact me and I will put you in touch with Deb, the wonder woman facilitating these libraries. Deb ~ you are a gift from the stars! Thank you! SSAAP is tremendously thankful to you!

The resource centers will not only involve the loaning of books, but also resources for cooking (pots, pans, dishes), clothing, and any other household materials donated to SSAAP and/or IX Power Foundation.

Additionally, IX Power Foundation is assisting with support of SSAAP’s Nonviolence Library, located in Port Loko, Sierra Leone. Through sending books about the essence of nonviolence, conflict resolution theory, and Gandhian principles overseas, you too can help to support this endeavor. Again, please do contact Heather if you have literary materials regarding nonviolence, and if you can get them to me, I can get them to Deb to ship to Africa. If you have household materials, clothing, or books of any nature that you are no longer using and looking to donate, please do contact me. SSAAP can write you an in-kind donation letter (we are a 501(c)3 not-for-profit organization) for your tax purposes.



The IX Power Foundation's online fundraiser for supporting the mission of Literacy Resource Centers through SSAAP in both Sierra Leone and in Zambia is called "Pages for the Planet". We are hoping for long-term success in this endeavor! Deb, thank you so much for all your ingenious ideas!

\*

## Women's Resource Centers

The philosophy surrounding the Women's Resource Centers, as created by Potters for Peace, is to create an environment in which women can dialogue with one another. A safe space to discuss social topics, and the needs of the women. The Center will serve as a space for service to women depending upon their needs – rather than what we, as Westerners, have determined they need.

Many of the women in Africa have social/tribal marriage contracts, rather than legal/official marriages, and they are bound to men either through economic poverty, or through their offspring. Culturally, because it is acceptable for the men to have as many wives/girlfriends as they wish, the women often do not have the opportunity to voice their issues to their husbands – but the Resource Centers could provide a platform in which they might discuss these sensitive topics with other women.

The Women's Centers will also involve craft-making, soap-making, menstrual pad-making, and washable baby diapers – all made from local materials.

Potters for Peace and SSAAP were discussing our mutual beliefs: that as Westerners, we are not there to preach; it is not our place to travel to Africa and tell the Africans what to do. The services we provide should be services that the people themselves have asked for, rather than services we have determined that they need: clean water; access to their voice; food, shelter, and means to create a livelihood for themselves.

When I was talking to the Executive Director of Potters for Peace, I was telling her: *Let's please not turn Africa into the West!*; I have an irreverent streak, and was telling her that I don't believe there are many parts of the globe that are as mentally and physically unhealthy as the West. Turning Africans into Westerners is hardly what SSAAP could call "development", and definitely not what we are striving to do in our work in the local communities we service. The West and Africa are part of two completely different contexts. Village schools often do not even have teachers, or teachers who can read and write themselves. Literacy does not have the same context as it does in the West, where it is mandatory that someone living in the Western world be able to read and write, but in Africa – whereby oral tradition is part of the culture, and most people speak five to ten languages but can read and write in none of them, and books are not part of everyday life – then who are we to tell Africans that it is imperative for them to learn to read and write? Of course SSAAP offers its Adult Literacy Program (G-MAP) for women in Simwatachela, Zambia, and Teenaged Mother Returning to School in Sierra Leone, as well as Sierra Leone primary school sponsorships ~ but those programs should be open to those who desire to learn to read and write, or who feel a void is there in their lives where reading and writing ought to be. These literacy programs are not for everyone; they are for anyone who desires them, but for those who do not, there should be options for them, too. There are plenty, *plenty*, of people living in the villages in Sierra Leone and Zambia that I have come across who cannot read or write, and who are instead putting all their energies and talents into their vocations.

The premise of the course in India: *The human brain is always active, if not overactive! If someone is illiterate, then the part of his/her brain that would have been used reading and writing and academic affairs, is used in another way: usually with his/her hands. Education, and learning, cannot just be in the mind and the intellect. If one is able to work with his hands, to learn through doing rather than through books and computer screens, then that is of just as much value as being able to read and write.*

*The history of literacy in the world begs the question that civilizations far older than that of the Western civilization, used different ways of communicating that had nothing to do with books. Languages, using pictures such as ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs, or characters as in the ancient Oriental languages, were profoundly effective means of communication. Reading, and writing: literacy, as we know it, might need to be rethought in the generations to come. Those who speak many languages, but cannot read and write in any of them, ought to be valued as deeply as the scholar who speaks only one but has an alphabet after his surname. Knowledge is the cumulative sum of what we have learned from this world, and in the end, books likely play a much smaller role in this than we would choose to admit. A man who knows how to live off the land and respect the earth but who cannot write his own name might, in the end, be farther ahead than a man who has been to school since he was three years old but does not know how to boil an egg on an electric stovetop.*

\*

## *Donation of Old, Used Mobile Phones*

SSAAP is eagerly accepting old, used phones for multi-purpose endeavors at its project sites in Africa. Each project for SSAAP (Cattle Project, Microloan Project, Water Well Project) would significantly improve if communication between SSAAP and its project sites in Africa did not dwindle every time I left the site in Zambia to travel to Sierra Leone, or when I leave Sierra Leone to go to Zambia, or when I leave Africa to come back to the States. In other words, if Project Leads could have access to an old, used mobile phone, they would be able to call me, or text me, wherever SSAAP is currently residing.

We have had approximately 12 phones donated to SSAAP in 2018/2019 and already about 4 in 2021/2022 ~ thank you to everyone who has donated an old phone they didn't need anymore! Truly, we appreciate it! And so does Gaia: Mother Earth. The planet doesn't need any more old phones thrown into landfills. The more we recycle items that we no longer need, the more we are helping Gaia to thrive.

As well, the project, like all things, runs so much more smoothly through sacred communication. It is wonderful to hear reports from the field, as well to hear the voices of the people we Love so dearly who are a continent away. And, it is a luxury to communicate back to the people of Africa that we intend to return! Each time we leave, they fear we will never return again. I don't think they will ever realize that without them, and without Africa, I couldn't survive. I have told this to them so many times; they believe I am just being polite. They don't understand that I would never lie to them.

# SSAAP's Philosophy on Women's Empowerment in Africa

*"Above all, do not forget your duty to love yourself." ~ M.K. Gandhi*

\*

To me, the deepest form of Love on the planet is forgiveness, and independence. As a humanity, we are all woven together as a collective, and all part of each other. Yet we are in separate bodies as individuals. But we must work towards the collective. Each of us has different circumstances.

I have tried ceaselessly to work with women in Africa, and I think many NGO/non-profit organizations including the UN have tried, but the attempts are perhaps unsuccessful, or minimal, for all the funding that has gone into these attempts. Things are indeed changing, but disappointingly slowly. I believe that this is because the work towards women's empowerment cannot be one-sided (one side helping the other); it must be a braid. A braid typically has three sections. The women must work for their own liberation; the NGO/non-profit organization/UN can assist them; the men must be part of this journey. The empowerment of women is also the empowerment of men, and of the collective whole!

Our project does not wish to engage with others in dependency. *Dependency = poverty*. We wish for self-reliance, self-empowerment, self-sufficiency. Sometimes the best way we can Love others is to let them learn on their own. Sometimes we can provide a helping hand, through such projects SSAAP offers (Adult Literacy for Women over 32 years of age from grades 1-7 in Zambia; Teenaged Mothers Returning to School After Giving Birth in Sierra Leone, as well through our Female Artisans Program), but in the end, the issue of women's freedom in Africa needs much more than any NGO/support/charity organization can provide. It must come from within. Sometimes I think it is just about Love. Love is an extremely potent, although invisible source, in the Universe. If you Love someone enough, it moves that person. If you set an example, then others can choose to follow (or not to). This is the power of Love; it is the most powerful force in the Universe, I do believe.

In many ways, I respectfully feel that the people who are in the best position to help are the people themselves who have the issue, who are enmeshed with it. True empowerment is enlightening ourselves, changing ourselves, from within. Only we have the power to change our deepest selves. No external change can happen without internal change first. People must decide that things cannot go on any longer the way they are going on, and then a change comes from within. It is not sustainable if the change is external without being internal first, at an individual level. From the individual level, the collective will automatically change.

The deep change for this taproot issue of women's empowerment in Africa will not come from a foreign privileged woman who is an African citizen through naturalization (me!); and despite this being the exact reason I am in the village: living with the local people to assist them, sometimes the help that we provide is not external so much as it is internal. It comes from within. Not an NGO/foreign body, but rather, the women themselves in the villages and towns in Africa suffering the discrimination: they are the true warriors. And the men! The men have to want the change, too! The men must see that the [former] system of repressing the women is also to their disadvantage.



With women's empowerment, the whole society is concerned. Women and men are two sides of the same coin. They work together, or nothing works at all. They are like day and night, or like rain and sunshine. The two things need to work together in mutual harmony in order not only just to survive, but also to thrive. This is a Law of Nature.

SSAAP does not have a complacent "do nothing" attitude towards both the enlightenment and empowerment of women. African women are powerful beyond measure. I am raising one! So I can attest to this; the last adjective I could ever use to describe my daughter would be "weak". And with my [new] Zambian citizenship, I now too am an African woman. Therefore, out of Love, I believe that in order for women's empowerment to be sustainable in Africa, and directly proportional to the strength of the African women themselves, then ultimately, their empowerment must be their daily work. The work that they are most proud of, the work that gives them their deepest strength. They have to decide that enough is enough. No one can do this for them but themselves. This realization alone will set them free, for it is their very path to freedom, their path to enlightenment and to release the shackles which repress them: economically-based partnerships, abusive romantic relationships, polygamy, not taking ownership over their own reproduction, and generally allowing men to lead their way.

As Executive Director of SSAAP, it is my duty to also recognize my position in the society I am living in within the African context. I am a privileged, educated American woman. Choosing to raise my child in the materially-poor setup of the African village, which is in-fact spiritually-rich, has been the sacred heart, the *ab*, of our lives. My daughter's life of privilege has not been material privilege, but rather has been her exposure. The women in our SSAAP communities are struggling just to eat, to survive. Things happen slowly, one step at a time. Offer them programs. If they wish to engage, they will. But the choice for change must happen within them, not through my force or my project's force. The programs to help them through SSAAP are most certainly there. The women have to choose to engage. I cannot and refuse to enmesh myself with their domestic issues of abusive marriages or their interpersonal issues; if they come to me for help, I am there for them for that - of course - and my project can help them, but it cannot change them. And that choice for deep-rooted cultural change must be theirs, not mine, and not mine because of what I believe due to my Western upbringing. I believe this is my respect of their culture, as I am a guest in their space. I do not wish to impose my Western value system upon them.

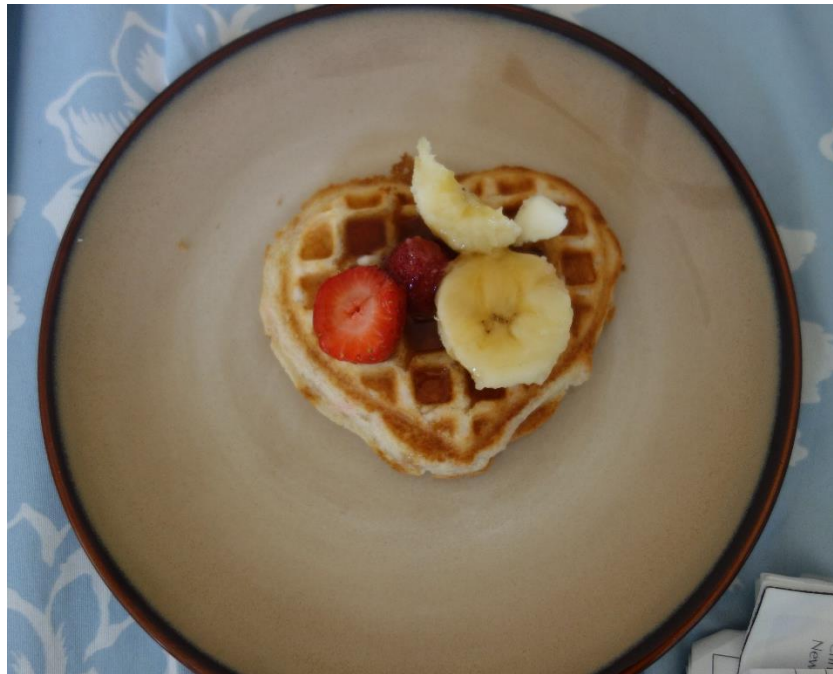
The best example I will ever have of this is regarding FGM (*Female Genital Mutilation*) in Sierra Leone. If, as of November 7, 2020, the most recent Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) reported a national prevalence of 89.6% of women in Sierra Leone are circumcised, and are telling me when I live with them there that the circumcision is their rite to womanhood in their society, and that they not only want the procedure done but are also looking forward to having it done, and that it defines their sexuality, then who am I to oppose it? My personal opinions about FGM are not relative. My Western ideas that the practice should be eliminated because it is dehumanizing, life-threatening and primitive, may or may not be a perspective shared by them, but should definitely not be imposed upon them. To impose upon them my beliefs based upon my Western upbringing would be a form of modern-day colonialism. They can talk to me, and ask me what I think, and I can respectfully offer my feedback - which comes from a Western perspective. But it doesn't have to be theirs. And I honor and respect that my ideas might be very different from theirs, and their culture's. Our differences in ideas have been the very essence of everything I have learned during my 18 years living in Africa, and my personal path to empowerment. The African people in the villages we work with, many of who are illiterate and have never gone to school, have been the profound Teachers in my life. I respect them more deeply than any other society on the planet. I have Loved them, and they have Loved me, and Love is always the supreme Teacher.

Incidentally, the work SSAAP is doing in Sierra Leone with the FGM issue is from a Female Reproductive Health standpoint, and most of the people working with us on this are men, who are few, but believe the practice to be abhorrent. I have found few people (women or men) in the society at-large who seem to think there is anything wrong with the practice at all. I have lived 18 years in the rural grassroots of Africa: Zambia, Sierra Leone, and Ethio-South Sudan. My experience has been that I am there to help them with whatever they tell me they want my assistance with. And not the other way around.

To me, respect is Love. Force is a form of violence; free choice is a form of Love. I do not wish to do any projects by force in Africa. SSAAP organizes the projects that the people want, and tries its best to serve their deepest needs in the most remote locations of their societies, where the people are most destitute. This has always been our objective. If the project is to run smoothly, with the most success, the people come first, and my ego: last.

\*

*“Find ecstasy within yourself. It is not out there. It is in your innermost flowering.” ~Osho*



*There can be nothing I miss as much when I am in Africa than U.S.A. food. Not having the kind of food I like available to me whenever I want it, and not having access to a hot bathtub or shower are the two things that I suffer from the most when we are in Africa. In the four months I have been home, I have gained 25 pounds and Radiance: 28 pounds. I predict that by the first month into living in Sierra Leone, it will be shaven back off our bodies as quickly as it came onto them. In 2008, Sierra Leone was determined by the UN's HDI (Human Development Index) to be the most unlivable country in the world at that time. Since then, conditions have improved, but in 2019 Sierra Leone was rated the 8<sup>th</sup> poorest country in the world by the HDI.*

## *Radiant Street Beast Program*



My daughter Radiance relates to everything through the lens of the Animal Kingdom before she relates to the Human Kingdom, much the same way that I do with the Plant Kingdom. Whether or not this translates into an animal-caretaking career, such as a veterinarian, or if working with animals is a meditative healing pastime for her that doesn't generate income for her, much like writing has been for me in my life, is completely up to the stars. Radiance is making strides towards action in her *Radiant Street Beasts Program*, which collects animals from off the streets in urbanized areas of Zambia and takes them home with us to the village, where we feed them, nurture them, Love on them (!), and give them rabies shots, vitamins, antibiotics if necessary, and de-worming medications every three months.

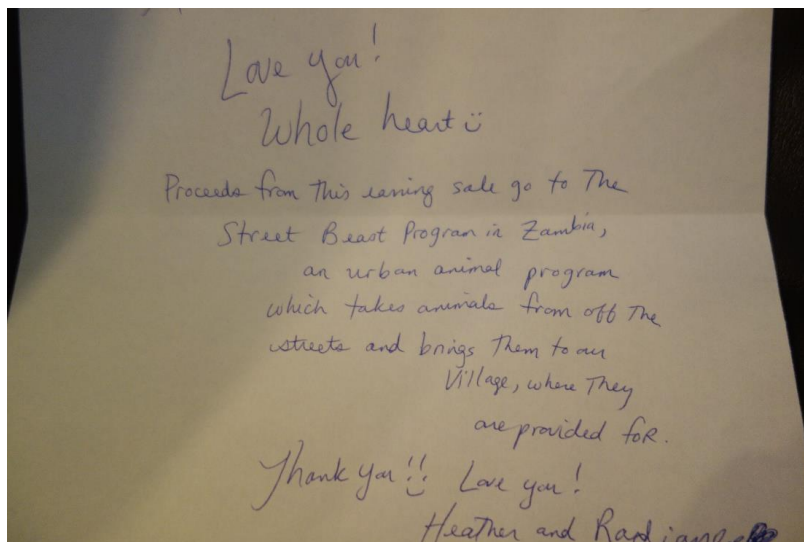


When we left Zambia in October 2021, there were 17 cats in our home. Three were kittens, which perished in January 2022; Radiance frequently calls the man named Shantiwell who is looking after our home, our garden, and our cats while we are not present in Zambia (his reward for his hard work when we return to Zambia: one cow!), to ask about the status of the animals. The three kittens, having been weaned by their mother, and Radiance not being there to take care of the kittens until they could fend for themselves, caused their death. So, there should be, at present, 14 cats in our home when we return.

Radiance has been making beaded/wire jewelry and selling the items here in the States to generate income for medications and food for the animals while at the village, as well the man SSAAP hires who lives in Livingstone, Zambia to catch the street cats to give to us. Here are some of her products:



These earrings cost \$10, and a note to the Buyer is below:





Part of Radiance's home-school in 2022 has been to organize this program. She must calculate the cost of her materials, then determine prices for each art item. Her original costs for each item indicated a loss, and so I had to work with her on the addition/subtraction alongside her sales receipts. She also has to budget how much the medications, food, and transportation of the animals from town up to our village. So far, in 2022, she has raised \$72.77 toward her street cat adoption initiative.

If you are interested in this program, or in purchase of the jewelry that supports it, please contact me. The prices are as follows:

- Beaded wire earrings (as seen on the previous page): \$10
- Small tree pennants (as seen above): \$10
- Medium tree pennants (as seen above): \$13
- Large tree pennants (as seen above): \$16.

Radiance also accepts commissioned art orders, so if you are interested, please do let me know.

I also wish to acknowledge in this newsletter, the powerful presence of Radiance's Colorado Homeschool Evaluator in our lives. She has managed to find donated curriculum for Radiance for grades 7-9, has helped us to secure a small tablet which Radi can use to look things up online for her schooling while we are in the States, and has just been overall the best support system we could have ever asked for both in the U.S.A. and in Africa. I don't have words to express how grateful I am to you, Kim. You have supported, guided, and inspired both Radiance and I on a multitude of layers of our lives. We are forever indebted to you.



One of the greatest appeals of homeschool for us has been the ability to adapt the curriculum to the child, and to let the school be child-led and parent-guided. We can tailor our homeschool, called *Love, Light, and Literacy Academy*, around Radiance's interests, and where she shines. Of course, we do also follow a traditional core curriculum in terms of formal academia, but our homeschool is largely informal as well. She has to learn fractions, absolute numbers, mean/median/mode/outliers, geometry and algebra just like every other 7<sup>th</sup> grader living in the U.S.A.! She is not exempt from the standards of wherever we live, while at the same time, we have incredible freedom to conduct our homeschool on an RTD bus, in a community swimming pool, on an airplane, at 11 pm at night, or in our cuddly bed. My only rule with her homeschool is that when it comes time for her to graduate, she attend a Western university: in Australia, U.S.A., U.K., New Zealand, or Canada. I want her foundation, her undergraduate degree, to come from a native English-speaking Western University. After that, she can get degrees from Nigeria, or Sierra Leone, or Ethiopia, Egypt, India, or wherever she wants – but her solid foundation, as mine was, must be at a Western university.

My best friend told me a few weeks ago that Harvard University has now eliminated admission acceptance based upon standardized test scores (ACT/SAT's). He read that they had recently stopped mandating standardized tests as a part of their admission process. This gave me great hope! Maybe more students have a chance at attending a university of their choice in the States, if the standardized test admission standards are lessened or eliminated altogether. My daughter's competency, like so many, cannot be measured through a standardized test. The things she has learned in her life, primarily, are not on those tests. They won't ask about street smarts, or how to convert U.S. dollars to Zambian Kwacha, or how to milk a goat, or how to relate to people without words since you do not speak a common language. She is tri-lingual, but the standardized test won't concern itself with anything about that. Standardized tests require one answer to a problem, and most of life's problems have many answers. Many things in life are both true and false. She is very sharp in science and mathematics, but the chances of her exceeding on a standardized test might not be as high as a student who has been in a public or private school grades 1-12, as so much of Radiance's education has not been formal.



## *Sustainable Love*

SSAAP is concerned, first and foremost, about the preservation and protection of the village: its value system, its humanity, its resourcefulness, its strength. Shed light upon the local people's inherent strengths, rather than focus upon what they are lacking, and the vision of the village is forevermore altered.



The *maya* of the two universes: Africa and U.S.A. – has taught me that they are not comparable; there are different strengths innate within both worlds. Africa is strong in community living, and living at a basic level; living even without basic needs, resources, etc.; U.S.A.'s strengths lie within its formal education, literacy, health care, resources and general opportunities.

I used to believe that as I aged, it would be easier to move between the two worlds; it has become harder. I am prepared to be as crushed to leave U.S.A. in September 2022 as I was to leave Africa in October 2021. It doesn't get easier to leave one world and re-enter the other; I was absolutely wrong about that. The pain of leaving one world and re-entering the other is excruciating. Each time I leave one world to travel to the other, a part of me dies that can never come back again ~ but is reborn in another form, I have noticed. I have watched my child. I think the transition is much more fluid, much more integrated for her than it is for me. She was born stronger than I am. Those who have Loved my child and I unconditionally on both sides of our landing portals have been the only thing that has saved us, enduring over and over again. I have come to learn that life's abundance is revealed through how far out of our comfort zones we are willing to traverse, how many times we are willing to [metaphorically and metaphysically] die within our life spans – which of course ends with a physical death – or I should say instead how many times the Universe asks of us to die for it.....



*SSAAP: assisting Africans in the most remote areas, with the most basic needs of food and water.*





*“Yes, I would like you to love yourself, because unless you love yourself, you cannot love anybody else.  
You don’t know what love is if you have not loved yourself.”*

*~ Osho*



*The photos and text for SSAAP Quarterly Newsletters are property of SSAAP ([www.ssaap.org](http://www.ssaap.org)) and cannot be used without permission. Thank you.*





*“In a deep moment of love, thinking stops. The moment is so intriguing, the moment is so tremendously powerful, the moment is so intensely alive, that thinking stops. You are simply in awe, a great wonder surrounds you.”*

*~ Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh*







*“Live as if you were to die tomorrow; learn as if you were to live forever.” ~ M.K. Gandhi*