

SSAAP Quarterly Newsletter

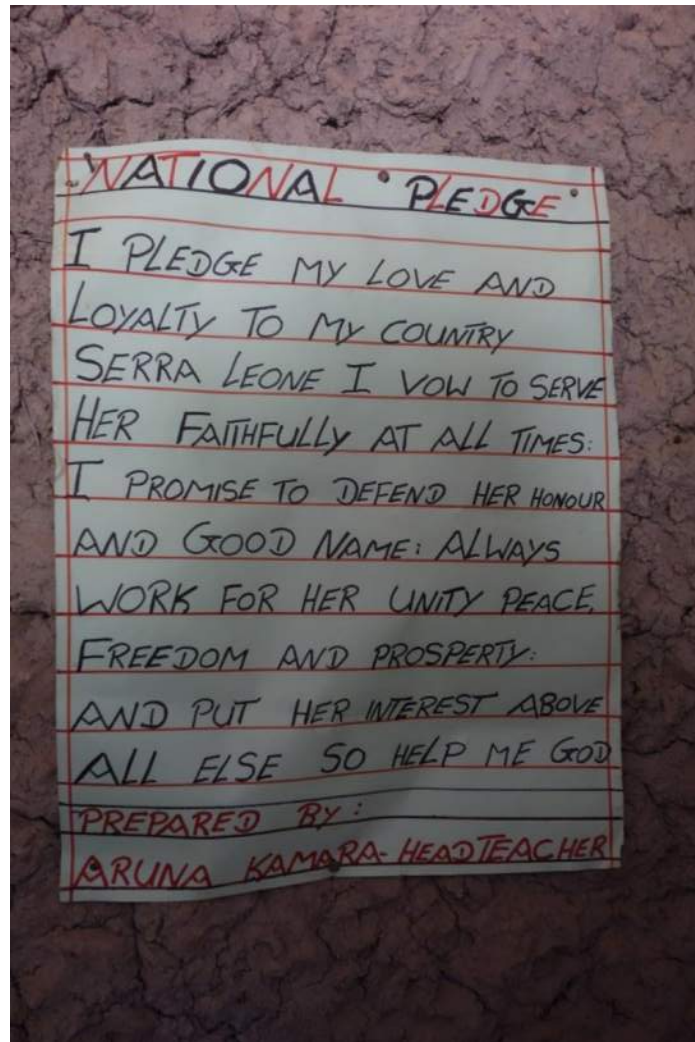
Spring Special Edition XXVIII; Sierra Leone, 2020



To my siblings, or as we say in Africa: 'same-mother-same-father' – Val, Jennie and Ian. We are each the quarters of an unfathomable whole, infinite and interwoven pieces of each other.









“There are no rules. Just follow your heart.” ~ Robin Williams











Greetings SSAAP Supporters, Board Members, Friends, Allies, and Newcomers to SSAAP:

I want to share the beauty of Africa with you, and as it is vast, my newsletter is absurdly lengthy this quarter. A lot of photos, a lot of project work, a lot of Love.

I will candidly inform you that this newsletter is one of the longest I have ever sent out. It surely overdrafts the typical 40-50 page newsletters I typically send. I am fueled by a passion so intense for this country and, quite specifically: the project we are doing in this country, that I believe this is what ran me into the 100+ pages of this 'Super Edition' Newsletter. SSAAP-Sierra Leone is the largest of all our SSAAP countries, servicing over 28 communities in 4 districts in Sierra Leone. SSAAP-Sierra Leone is the largest of our three projects for multiple reasons: perhaps one being because things here are the least-expensive, so we can dig many water wells, or sponsor a large number of children to school, or buy 10 villages vegetable seeds that will feed their whole communities for just above \$300 USD; things like this make our project grow quickly in Sierra Leone. Another aspect of SSAAP-Sierra Leone's success has been with our primary partners, *Grace Children's Foundation* (GCF) which we work with in Port Loko, Tonkalili and Kambia Districts, as well with our partner organization, *Health Education Agriculture Development Sustainability* (HEADS) in Moyamba District. Without these loyal, dedicated partners, SSAAP could not even begin to achieve its mission. Our last factor in SSAAP's success in Sierra Leone is due to the hard-working nature of the people themselves; they are the very source of fuel for my fire ☺

So, my apologies for the length of this newsletter. Treat it as a book rather than a newsletter; feel free to read only the sections which interest you, or just look at photos of all the interesting tidbits this newsletter contains. Thank you for reading, thank you for your loyalty to our work in Africa, and above all things, thank you for your Love: the source of all things in this project.



Water Wells

Previously-Dug Water Wells: Water wells are the centerpiece and focal point of SSAAP. Just as important to us as digging new wells is maintenance and upkeep of previously-drilled wells. In the pages to follow is a sampling of 2/5th of the wells SSAAP provided in Moyamba District in 2017, via photobook sent to the donors for these wells, so that you can familiarize yourself with how SSAAP monitors its wells.

*

Monitoring and Evaluation of SSAAP wells from 2017 in Moyamba, Sierra Leone

We monitored all SSAAP wells in Sierra Leone, two years later, as they were dug in 2017, just to see the outcome and make sure the water wells were still providing an adequate source of clean water for the communities. SSAAP provided five wells in five different communities in 2017.



We assembled our Team of partners on Thursday, January 23, 2020: well contractor Mr. Sam Amara, and partner CBO in Moyamba District: *Community-Based Organization* called HEADS-Sierra Leone: *Health Education Agriculture Development Sustainability*. On the right, you can see an example of a bridge that we passed on the road on the way to the five well sites. The roads are poor and the villages, remote.

Site #1: Gibina Village



The engraving plaque was taken off (see darker area where Radiance is sitting) as these wells were dedicated to SSAAP's donor, but they misspelled the name so I told them to correct it.

It will need to be fixed before I return in 2021.

Two and a half years later, and our well is still strong! – providing ample water to the community. This is a success story!



This is what I call 'Aid Dump'. Just across the narrow 'highway' ;) (you can see the footpath), UK AID, UNICEF and Living Water International provided a very fancy hand-pump borehole in 2019, after our SSAAP well was dug in 2017. The hand-pump well, they told me, hasn't yielded a *single drop of water* for the community, despite its flashy appearance and expense.



I made a joke (as you can always count on me for my horrid sense of humor) that our ugly – but functional! – SSAAP well is the one providing the water, and had UK AID, UNICEF, and Living Water International done research in this village, they would have seen the people already had an adequate water source so that they could have taken their fancy borehole/handpump well elsewhere in an attempt to spread the resources wider – providing access to clean water for those who sincerely do not have water, versus giving one community two wells.

For year-round water to provide for an entire community, I have observed in Sierra Leone that the hand-dug well with a bucket and pulley far surpasses the well with the metal hand-pump.

The reason for this is that after digging the well, if a series of pipes are put into the ground, and then a hand-pump is affixed at ground level, the pipes limit the flow of water out of the hand-pump and into the people's buckets. A SSAAP-well with the bucket and pulley seems to work better as the cement is put at ground level, then approximately 1-1 ½ feet down into the well, so that the water can drain from the soil, providing people with naturally filtrated-water.

Typically people complain about the hand-pump wells that large-scale government-aided projects have provided to them, and request SSAAP's help to fix them. I tell them that the well was not dug by SSAAP and is not our responsibility, but that I would be happy to write the organization that provided the hand-pump well to explain that it is defective and that the organization should be monitoring its work. I have written multiple letters of this fashion since I arrived in Sierra Leone in October 2019!

The problem with large-scale groups like UNICEF, Red Cross, USAID, UK AID, etc. is that they seldom re-visit communities after the ‘aid drop’ therefore the sustainability piece of their work is significantly lacking. As SSAAP is small-scale, we always have time for monitoring and evaluation. There are overt as well subtle benefits to working with smaller, local, more intimate organizations.



Community meeting and discussion, pictured above. SSAAP well is providing water year-round, and they have an abundance of water. They are so thankful to SSAAP, as had they relied on the UK AID/UNICEF/Living Water International well, they said, they would be disappointed without water during this current dry season (January-April of each year is the dry season in Sierra Leone).



Here is Mr. Sam, our well contractor from 2017 in Moyamba District. The wells he constructed for SSAAP are *perfect*; his craftsmanship was lovely, and the wells are everything I dreamed they would be.



The cement descends approximately 1 foot of depth into the hole, and the water is found, they said, at about 6 meters down. The well, fully dug, is approximately 8-10 meters deep. We have a lot of trouble with feet/meter conversions as the Sierra Leoneans use feet, and due to the failure I was in middle school (!!!) I forget the Customary System. Everything I know I learned in Zambia, and there we use the Metric System, and Military Time.

Quite fortunate, this well is built above a rock. Spring water is coming up, filtered from the rock, they explained. The water is 100% clean for drinking (we tested it) and the SSAAP well is their sole source of water in Gibina, despite the fancy hand-pump well across the 'highway' ;)



The cement slab is mounted upon a series of bricks, and the mouth of the well (I just made that term up but I like it!) is here!



No evidence of bacteria (primarily fecal matter we test for) in Gibina's well!

The *Mississippi State University-Engineers Without Borders* (MSU-EWB) Team taught me to always perform water-quality testing. The lead professor, who was also my mentor and Head of the Civil Engineering Department, told me if there is any evidence of fecal matter

in the water, then you don't have a 'Success Well'. It is incredible how the voices of our Teachers are always in our heads ;)



Sadia Bagbadi, above, signs a document with her fingerprint indicating that Gibina Village commits to helping with a 25% Community Contribution. There are two kinds of Community Contribution with SSAAP: (1.) taking care of the resource SSAAP has gifted to the community, (2.) assisting SSAAP and giving back to SSAAP so that SSAAP can stay in Sierra Leone. We are building a local home in Sierra Leone, made of coconut palm trees, thatched grass roof, and SSAAP will provide the cement for this house. It will be a Headquarters for SSAAP-Sierra Leone as well a home for Radiance and I, a local kitchen, local toilet, local bathing shelter, and meeting place so that we can begin holding Office Hours here in SSAAP-Sierra Leone as we do in SSAAP-Zambia.

Gibina Village has a Well Committee and with its Treasury works to maintain the bucket, rope, and the well itself.

They are asking SSAAP to help them in the future with agriculture ventures: groundnuts, sweet potatoes, and corn. These are primarily Cash Crops. They also want Staple Crops: rice, cassava, and yams.

I told them we could plan for that in 2021, when SSAAP returns ;)



These community meetings are one of the most important Monitoring and Evaluation techniques SSAAP conducts in its communities, which is one of our ‘staples’. Other large-scale projects do not have this kind of intimacy with their communities, but for SSAAP, it is vital in terms of sustainability and security of our work here. Relationship *is* our work.



Here is the expensive well (left) that doesn't work, juxtaposed with their simple SSAAP-well (right) that does!

*

Site #2: Nyandehun-Nichol Village



On our journey, we passed other communities with poor water sources (see above) also asking SSAAP to assist them with a well. We jotted down their names and gave them a CAT (*Community Assessment Tool*) to fill out.



Our well sites are specifically isolated communities whereby even the motorbike cannot get through on the foot-paths so eventually they have to walk their motorbikes into the village. I call them 'Jungle Sites' and always tell the Teams SSAAP partners with that they are meant only for us; large NGO's cannot move into these 'secret villages' with their large vehicles, nor do they aim to. SSAAP has the luxury of working solely in places we deem vulnerable and valuable.



Incidentally, these areas are also incredible. You find yourself tracking through the jungle, then the narrow pathway opens up and you find civilization: a village! These are the remote areas we do target, and are honored to do so.



Nyandehun-Nichol Community has taken initiative to construct a bamboo fence around their well (left); (right) although coarse, their dedication on the well still remains!



Our 'M&E' instrument we use in the field is also available on our website, under the 'Forms used in the Field' link.



We do have an issue with this well. Kindly note the well cover 'door' broke and fell inside of the well. They are using a circular plate over the hole, but I told them this will never, ever be a sustainable solution to the issue come the rainy season. It basically monsoons here!



The highest yield of all the 2017-SSAAP wells, Nyandehun-Nichol is a 9-meter well, with the water coming in at this time (dry season): January, at 1.5 meters down. The people have ample water year-round and are abundantly grateful for that.

We had a community meeting, and the women fed Radiance – which is so important to me. When we move around all day in the villages, from sunrise to sunset, she is such a trooper but she gets so hungry. I hate moving around with her hungry – it feels defeating to the purpose of our work ☹️ (left); (right) The Chief of the community eagerly signs our form that is community wants to help with the SSAAP-Headquarters.



This community has a Water Management Committee. The women are responsible for the sanitation and hygiene of the well, and the men are responsible for the construction and protection of the well. I love how in Africa, these tasks are very pointedly distributed!

After March, the water level will lower, and at that time, they want Mr. Sam, our Contractor, to come to their community to help them remove the well cover from the water, and repair it. They will provide him food, lodging and a small stipend to do so.



Water quality test kits indicate a well clean and clear of fecal matter, although the slight stains on the left test do show traces of the well cover contaminating the water: slight bacteria. I am not worried about it, just will re-test it again in 2021 after the well cover is removed from the bowels of the well (left); (right) The community gifted SSAAP with two chickens and a bag of rice due to their thankfulness.

Assessments for Currently-Dug Water Wells: We are always in the process of ascertaining which communities qualify for a water well from SSAAP (must be isolated, not near to town or urbanized area, not near to paved road ('tarmac'), and a large enough settlement to merit a water well (>100 people).

In 2019/2020, SSAAP has been busy assessing well sites as well signing contracts with three contractors. These wells are due to be completed in 2020 before the rains come around Sierra Leonean Independence Day (27 April). We have a total of 14 wells for 2019/2020: 8 in Port Loko District (*Rosint, Rochain, Mabale, Mabureh, Madee, Rochain, Mokoro Village,*

and the last Village to be announced), 6 in Kambia District (Katha-Kera, Rothamneh, Bakey-Lhimray [2 wells in this huge community], Rotain-Thallah, Konta-Thenkel Village) and 1 in Tonkalili District (Madina Village).

SSAAP already has 8 wells planned upon its arrival back in Sierra Leone in 2021!

Please read about our initial site visit to Rosint Village. SSAAP makes a photo album (via PDF file) for each donor with each project, but I specifically wanted to cut-and-paste Rosint's water well as, my daughter points out, *they were the most grateful of all the water-well recipient communities* ☺

*

Rosint Water Well; Port Loko District, Sierra Leone; 2020



This is the chief of Rosint Village, in a green shirt. Rosint is located in Bakeh-Loko Chiefdom, Port Loko District, Northwest Province of Sierra Leone, West Africa.



We had a large meeting with Rosint Community on Saturday, January 11, 2020. We wanted to learn as much as we could about their community.



Our aim is always to know each and every community as intimately as possible – as this is always the goal: *sustainable relationship*. And the deeper we know them, the more we can assist them in their most pressing needs.



We assembled in their meeting shelter and discussed the issues in their community. They have approximately 533 inhabitants of their village. No government aid has ever come to assist them, nor any aid organizations: foreign or domestic. SSAAP will be the first to assist them! The only development project they have ever had is a small cement bridge, funded by the chief's brother.

They engage in farming – specifically swamp rice farming (rice is the staple food of Sierra Leone), as well they grow ground nuts pepper. They are hungry and have not enough food; there is not enough rice seed for them to sustain their whole community year-round. They are highly interested to work with SSAAP on both rice seed and cashew nut farming, as SSAAP has a 2019/2020 program assisting communities with rice seed and cashew nut seeds. Our sole (Soul!) interest is water and food for these precious people.



Issa, pictured above in red/navy/white stripes, is our contact for this village. I met him in the city (Freetown: the capital of Sierra Leone) and he assisted me to fix and update my computer – not even asking for a single coin for his hard work. I asked him if we could trade, and since he helped SSAAP, SSAAP can help him if his home village (everyone in Africa has a root in a village) in any way the people needed.

The day after our meeting: 12 January 2020, he wrote me this text message:

Good morning Heather, thank you so much again for bringing life to my community yesterday. My people were very much happy not only for the opportunities SSAAP will bring them, but the non-violence campaign (to love one another and have equal rights for all). But you know what? I am the happiest as you made my people considered me their “chief”. From time in memorial, SSAAP is the first NGO to give my people the opportunity to cry out their community problems and challenges and ready to help them. Long live Heather. Long live SSAAP Home and Abroad.



The chief signs an Agreement with SSAAP through his thumbprint, below, as he is unable to read nor write. Issa is assisting him after SSAAP debriefs the people regarding our expectation for 25% Community Contribution from them, which includes their participation in building a local structure (Headquarters) for SSAAP in Sierra Leone. Every community working with and benefiting from SSAAP projects must contribute in the construction of

SSAAP's local headquarters in every country where we serve. As well I explained to them SSAAP's Nonviolence Policy: *any form of violence against humans or animals we will not tolerate, as we have a 0% tolerance for violence* (Sierra Leone is a very violent country, given their history of slavery, civil war, and disease epidemic). SSAAP believes that the only way to sustain true development is through Nonviolence, which is a channel of Love as well Truth, simultaneously.



Then we hiked down to their water source. The people of Rosint Village told us that they have no well, and depend upon the swamp for their water (cooking, cleaning, washing, drinking water).

This is their water source: the swamp. But the swamp dries up in March/April (until the rains come again at the end of April every year), and so then they are left to filter this swamp water through a strainer made of fishing net. Can you imagine?! You want to drink a cup of water and have to fetch the fishing net to get the mud out first?!

If nothing else, this bears testament not only to the absolute strength of these people but also the violence of poverty. I am *offended* by the poverty I have seen in Sierra Leone, and use that word very specifically!



This is their swamp water source. The photos reveal that the power of one water well has both vast direct and indirect ‘ripple effects’ in the rural communities of Sierra Leone.

This water well is going to change these people’s lives – permanently!



This swamp water source is surrounded by mud (left, below) and has small black tadpoles living in it as well (below, right).





In all my years of Africa, this was surely one of the worst water sources I had ever seen. I walked away feeling horrified, but so happy that there was something SSAAP could do to help.

We went back to the village meeting area and finished our meeting.



I told the people of Rosint Community about the water well they could expect for 2020. They screamed and cheered and a few of the women even stood up with applause!





This is the reaction you receive when you give people who are drinking essentially mud water – specifically mothers who want their children to live – a fresh water source: *water well*.







We also promised, before we had to leave as it was growing dark, rice and cashew nut seeds, as well as agricultural tools (5 cutlasses, 5 pick axes, 5 shovels) to serve them with higher food production in 2020.

They are in the process of building a school, so we assured them that at its completion, and once it became organised, SSAAP would assist them with school sponsorships and a School Toilet in 2021 when SSAAP returns to Sierra Leone again.

*



This is the way we sign thousand-dollar contracts in Sierra Leone: drinking coconut milk, informally. Above, our Kambia District well contractors.



Signing our contract with Mr. Foday. Just saw that I have dirt all over my face. Oh, well, it is a messy job – as Taylor always says (with a British accent): “This is a bloody job we are doing!” Traditionally, I always pay the contractors for the wells in USD (U.S. Dollars) as the water wells are the largest part of our project – as well its centerpiece – and I want them to take it as seriously as SSAAP does. SSAAP has hired three contracting companies for its 14 wells in 2019/2020, and already we have 8 more wells lined up for 2021!



These happy men, just given employment, in a country where unemployment > 80%, are overjoyed.

*

School Sponsorships

School Sponsorships: We have sponsored 546 primary school children, class (grade) 1-6, in 2 districts in Sierra Leone (Port Loko and Tonkalili), at the following schools: *Rochain Community School, Mokoro-Subdivision Community School, Gbery-Thonkara Community School, Mabale Community School, Madina Community School.*

Additionally, SSAAP has sponsored two students to finish their grade 12 education: one little boy and one little girl, both in class 3 for a special sponsorship program for 9 years, so up to class 12 for both of them; this is

the rest of their primary and secondary school education. They have been sponsored at *Rotifunk Community Primary School*, Port Loko District. The only two conditions of this 9-year sponsorship are as follows:

- To take the sponsorship seriously. SSAAP alongside its partner organization, GCF, will be checking with the school through report cards and attendance records to ensure both pupils are taking the sponsorship seriously.
- Avoid pregnancy: both the boy by impregnating a girl, and the girl being impregnated. Teenage pregnancy interrupts learning. In Sierra Leone, only the females pay the price for teenage pregnancy, and the males who impregnate the females finish school regardless of the teenage pregnancy. SSAAP, a gender-equality based organization, will have the same policy for both the male and the female student: *wait to start your family until you finish school!*



Here is the 9-year sponsored male student #1: Saidu B. Kamara.



Here Saidu is with his family: his older brothers, and his adopted mother. His father and mother have passed away.

2/3-11/12 Rotifunk: ♂
9 years

SSAAP-SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM: Grades 1-7 APPLICATION

SSAAP is a water, food, nutrition sustainability and educational empowerment program designed to help those in Simwatachela, Southern Province, Zambia as well as in Sierra Leone – both rural and urban Freetown.

1. I am applying on behalf of Saidu B. Kamara (name of student).
2. I am applying for s/he to attend 11 (grade), term 11, year 2020.
3. I live in Rotifunk (village), Port Loko (Province or District), Sierra Leone (country: Zambia or Sierra Leone).
4. Is this child an orphan? Yes (yes or no)
5. Single or double orphan? Double
6. A vulnerable child? Yes (yes or no). Why?
He has lost both the father and mother
7. Why is this child's parent or guardian unable to afford school fees?
They have died
8. If this student is accepted for a scholarship, how will money be collected to pay the school?
Through the contact person
9. What school does this child attend? D.E.C. Primary
10. Why does this student want to go to school?
To acquire knowledge in order to be a good and responsible citizen in future.
11. Who is the contact for this application? Yusuf Cole (Name), 080-26-52-14 (Phone) Rotifunk (Address)

Please note that completion of this scholarship program does not guarantee or promise payment of school fees or uniform. Applications will be collected, then mailed to U.S.A. where SSAAP's Executive Board will decide which students merit sponsorship. If Director Heather Cumming is in U.S.A., not in Africa, it will be your responsibility to mail her the form in U.S.A. Her address is below. Please also note that a flat rate of \$20 USD (approx. 5.40 ZMW in Zambia; 4,317 SLL in Sierra Leone) will be granted to accepted students for school fees per year as well as uniform. The \$20 USD will be the cost to cover both the fees and the uniform.

I have read, understood and agreed to the conditions of this application.
Kamara (Signature), Saidu G. Kamara (Name), 20/2/20 (Date)

SSAAP Address in U.S.A.:
Heather Cumming, c/o SSAAP; 3076 W. 112th Court, Unit A; Westminster, CO 80031; U.S.A.

OFFICIAL SSAAP STAMP:

This is an old application form we have reused; our SSAAP-U.S.A. address has changed, as well we do not work in Freetown: only in rural areas of Sierra Leone (Port Loko, Moyamba, Tonkalili and Kambia Districts). This form was drafted in 2009 when I was living in the city in Sierra Leone with Radiance's father!



Here is the sponsored female pupil #2: Yeabu Sesay.

2/3-11/12 Rotifunk: 9
9 years

SSAAP-SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM: PRIMARY
Grades 1-7 APPLICATION (Zambia)/Grades 1-6 (Sierra Leone)

SSAAP is a water, food, nutrition sustainability and educational empowerment program designed to help those in Simwatachela, Southern Province, Zambia as well as in Sierra Leone – rural Port Loko and Moyamba.

- I am applying on behalf of Yeabu Sesay (name of student).
- I am applying for s/he to attend 111 (grade), term 11, year 2020.
- I live in Rotifunk (village), Port-Loko (Province or District), Sierra Leone (Country: Zambia or Sierra Leone).
- Is this child an orphan? Yes (yes or no)
- Single or double orphan? Single
- A vulnerable child? Yes (yes or no). Why?
She has an old aged mother who cannot afford fees.
- Why is this child's parent or guardian unable to afford school fees?
Because her mother is poor.
- If this student is accepted for a scholarship, how will money be collected to pay the school?
Through the contact person
- What school does this child attend? D.E.C. Primary, Rotifunk
- Why does this student want to go to school?
To acquire knowledge for her to live in a better condition in the future.
- Who is the contact for this application? Yusuf Cole (Name), 080-26-52-14 (Phone) Rotifunk (Address)

*Please note that completion of this scholarship program does not guarantee or promise payment of school fees or uniform. Applications will be collected, then mailed to U.S.A. where SSAAP's Executive Board will decide which students merit sponsorship. If Director Heather Cumming is in U.S.A., not in Africa, it will be your responsibility to mail her the form in U.S.A.. Please also note that a flat rate of \$10-20 USD in Zambia/\$8-\$16 in Sierra Leone will be granted to accepted students for school fees per year as well as uniform. The money will be the cost to cover both the fees and the uniform in Zambia and Sierra Leone.

I have read, understood and agreed to the conditions of this application.
[Signature] (Signature), Sadio G. Konde (Name), 20/2/20 (Date)

OFFICIAL SSAAP STAMP:



Here she is with her family and extended family: her adoptive mother (in grey, beside her), her auntie (in yellow, with red head wrap), and her brothers. The lady in magenta is her late father's aunt, so I don't know what that relation would be to her – but in Africa, everyone is family! Her mother is elderly and unable to walk – so not pictured here, and her father has passed away some time back.

*

SSAAP has sponsored 96 secondary school mothers to return to school after giving birth in 2 districts in Sierra Leone: Port Loko and Moyamba, at the following schools: *Njagbahun Secondary School* (Moyamba District) and *Rotifunk Community Secondary School* (Port Loko District). Our only condition on the secondary school mothers is that they take the sponsorship seriously – with most of them this goes without saying – and not to cheat SSAAP's sponsorship program by falsely pretending to have multiple children. You will see an example of this in the pages to come; one young mother, age 15, pretended to have two children in an effort to secure 'double sponsorship'. She was caught – by my daughter Radiance! – and banned from the 2020 sponsorship program as such. She can reapply in 2021, but for this year she will not be considered for the program.

The pages to follow are an excerpt from a photobook to a SSAAP- School Sponsorship donor:

Students Sponsored in 2020: Rotifunk Community Secondary School

called: 'Bai Bureh Memorial Junior Secondary School'



Adamsay S. Bangura, from Mafory Village (this school supports multiple neighbouring villages): J2: Junior Secondary School Class 2, so 7th grade in U.S.A., pictured here with her son.

I told her while I was taking her photo that she made her hair to match her uniform. A lot of these West African girls go nuts with their hair – my daughter, the Sierra Leonean, included. :)



Ramatu A. Sesay: Rogbithon Village: J3 (8th grade) – again, note the hair!; here she is with her little boy.



From left to right: Emma Bangura: Maforay Village, J3; Fatmata S. Kamara: Rotifunk Village, J3 [her son has an elongated belly button. This condition is very common in Africa with unqualified nurses cutting the umbilical cord incorrectly. As the baby matures the belly button grows this way. I have seen adults with this condition and it is really painful for them, they have confessed to me. Infant mortality rate is high here due largely-in-part through umbilical cords being severed incorrectly and massive blood loss.]; Fatmata Kamara: Tasso Village, J3 [not a typo! Many of the people in Sierra Leone have the same name as both surnames and first names are common here.]; Fatmata, pictured on the right, will need a uniform.



Mabinty Bangury: Tasso Village, J2; Kadiatu Bangura: Tasso Village, J1; Satamatu Bangura: Tasso Village, J2 [Satamatu was age 10 when she gave birth. She is either 11½ or 12 now.]





Emma Kargbo: Tasso Village, J2; Fatmata Kamara, Rotifunk Village, J1 [Fatmata is another very young mother. She is age 12 now, and gave birth when she was 11.]; Mabinty

M. Karbgo: Rotifunk Village, J2 [Mabinty will need a uniform. I told her she is very courageous: she is age 25, the mother of 3 children, and wants to go back to school. This is an usual case as most women her age settle into motherhood and abandon the idea of school for good, but it was translated to me that she told me to thank her sponsor and she will not disappoint you!]



Isatu Kamara: Makera Village, J1 [Isatu is another young mother; she was 13 when she gave birth and is either 13 or 14 now.]; Isatu Kamara: Rotifunk Village, J2; Hwanatu Bangura: Rotifunk Village, J1 [Hawa will also need a uniform. Her child wouldn't look at me for the photo as she was scared of me ~ her first time to ever lay eyes on a white person!]



Gifts presented to the sponsor of this program from the Headmaster, and two stakeholders (above).



This is Fatmata A. Bangura, Maforay Village, J3. You can see she has the same child as Emma Bangura, Maforay Village, J3, on page 31. As the child was dishonestly ‘used twice’ and belongs to Emma Bangura, Fatmata Bangura will not be participating in the SSAAP Sponsorship Program at Rotifunk Community Secondary School for 2020. The Headmaster will find another young mother to replace her. She will be given another chance to participate in 2021 if she can show signs of more honesty/character change. SSAAP cannot afford to work with people who don’t mind taking advantage of our project.



This is Fatmata’s ‘honest’ child, but as she was trying to pretend to have two children to receive a double sponsorship, both the Headmaster and my workmate Taylor S. Kamara decided to ban her from the 2020 program. At age 15 she was trying to pretend to have two children – and look at the size of her daughter! The whole issue was really sad.

*

Site Visit: Gbery-Thonkara Village, Maforki Chiefdom, Port Loko District



This school is notably huge but well-supported by the community. On our first visit, 16 January 2020, they told us that only 9 students were coming to school without uniforms. I told them we had 10 sponsorships for them, and they were elated! We visited them again on January 20, 2020.



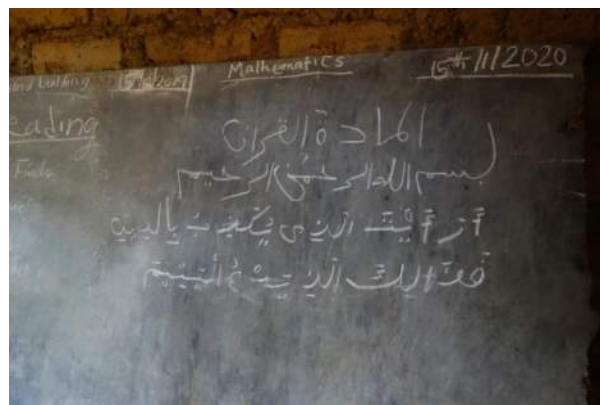
Here is the Headmaster of the school (left): *Mohamed Conteh*. I am going to use the word ‘refreshing’ to describe him; he is in this job for the children, and he is sincere. He isn’t looking for personal gain and is actually quite educated himself: rare to find such a person in these remote villages we work in. At right, we have the three school teachers. They are enthusiastic and range in age, as you will see: a young man in the middle, an older man to his right, then to his left a man about my age.

This looks like an incredible team. What Taylor and I want to do is work with them through the school, then depending upon their level of performance and general attitude, we would like to work with them on agriculture, as well at the general meeting we had with them on 16 January they were enthusiastic to begin a Microloan Project in the village. I told them about our Microloan Project in Zambia and they were jealous – wanted it here in their community. I was thinking maybe the future-future (2021-2022) for this, as Microloan Project needs connective relationship (which I don't have yet with this community) and good monitoring – which I cannot do now as I am leaving Sierra Leone in March 2020.

But I promised we could put it in the books to review it in 2021 when I return. I also told them I would help get them some first aid kits (many communities are in need of this and so I am going to contact some companies in U.S. to see if any could be donated to SSAAP).



The school is crude but they are doing their best, and the sponsorship will help immensely.



Gbery-Thonkera Village is a Muslim community, so they are doing their best to teach their children Arabic.

The daunting statistics of illiteracy in Africa, like most statistics in Africa, are given to us with little context nor background on the situation as to how the data research team arrived at their numbers. Sierra Leonean illiteracy rate is 60%. This does not mean, however, that 60% of the population cannot read and write; rather, it means that 60% of

the population does not have a single language they can read, write, listen and speak in. The children in Gbery-Thonkera have the following stressors placed upon them: their textbooks are written in English, as academically most African countries (even the Francophone nations) stress that their children learn the international language, English (although it is British English, not American or Australian English so the spellings are a bit different than ours) so the children can read and write in English but they cannot speak or understand English if it is spoken to them. They can speak and understand if someone is talking to them in their native language, *Temne*, but they cannot read it or write it. *Krio* is more-or-less the national language in Sierra Leone, uniting all the tribes in Sierra Leone (*Krio* is Radiance's tribe; her father is a Krio man) and most everyone can speak and hear in Krio, but very few can read Krio or write in Krio (Radi is learning to do both, as it is her father's tribe and African bloodline). Now, Gbery-Thonkera Village is throwing Arabic into the mix: teaching them to read and write in Arabic, so that eventually they can read the Quran, but they cannot speak it (I have met only 2 Sierra Leoneans who can speak Arabic; it isn't at all common to speak it here). So, just to site all these examples: children in Africa have a language-identity crisis and from them I have learned the only way around it is to stress that there is one language that a child can read, write, speak, and listen to/understand: their primary language, so that any other language the child will be able to build upon the primary language.

So the high illiteracy rate in Africa just means there aren't commonly many people who can read, write, speak and listen in one language, as they can do some of these things in multiple languages: typically most people speak 3-5 languages, I have observed.



Their teacher explained to them that SSAAP had come here to help with sponsorships; they are all clapping and eager and overjoyed ;)



This is their Staff Room and where they store the books for the school. This is better than most of the schools I have visited in the remote areas, and that is why I can attest for the fact that they are trying their level-best.



I went ahead and distributed the funds for the primary school children, knowing that *Grace Children's Foundation*, our partner organisation, would do a follow-up in a few days after I had left for Moyamba (southern area of the country) and send me photos. I have a great Team here in Sierra Leone.

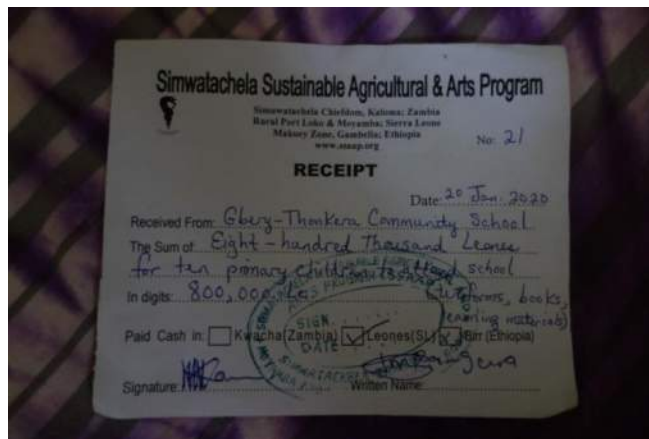


I counted the money once, then passed it to Radi to cross-check by counting twice, before handing it to the Headmaster. I want to familiarize her with counting money and being in a position of empowerment in the project, learning how to work through conflict, address

issues with money, distribute and document funds, etc. so that if ever she wants to run her own project one day, she will have those tools in her toolbox from her childhood. Part of her home-school is teaching her personal responsibility. The more she can function on her own in a healthy, happy, and promising fashion the more successful our home-school, called *Love, Light and Literacy Academy*, will have proven to be. She is only 10, but she is such an asset to SSAAP in a multitude of ways.



And, just for total transparency's sake, as well so the community knows how seriously we all take this project, I had the Headmaster sign the receipt in the presence of the village elders, Chief, and community stakeholders – as well the three school teachers.



So, just to understand this receipt, each primary school student is \$8, and we sponsored 10 students, so \$80 total. In Leones, this is 800,000 Le as \$1 ~ 10,000 Le. And, just to understand how poorly our economy is here in Sierra Leone, when I first came here in 2008, the exchange rate was 3,500 Le ~ \$1. When I was pregnant for Radiance, it was 4,500 Le ~ \$1. Now it is 10,000 Le ~ \$1.

Here are SSAAP's sponsored students from Gbery-Thonkera Primary School, to follow, in uniform:



Alie Tonkara, Class IV



Mariatu Koroma, Class



Momoh Kanu, Class IV



Adamasay Kanu, Class IV



Abdula Kanu, Class IV



Sallamatu Bangura, Class IV



Joseph Alie Conteh, Class I



Joil Manal, Class I



Abdul Kanu, Class III



Kadiatu Sesay, Class I

*

**Site Visit: Njagbahun Secondary School, Moyamba District,
Sierra Leone**



'JSS' stands for '*Junior Secondary School*' which is essentially middle school. There is JSS 1 (grade 6), JSS 2 (grade 7), and JSS 3 (grade 8). We visited Njagbahun Secondary School on Tuesday 28 January 2020.





They call this woven cotton: “Country Cloth”.

SSAAP has been working with Njagbahun Primary and Secondary School since 2014, as they have a Skills Training Center (*Gbomuma Skills Training Center*) which trains students to do carpentry, tailoring and weaving. The Skills Center is vital in keeping the school afloat, as they use sales from the Skills Center to fund the teachers’ salaries, upkeep of the school, etc.

SSAAP is going to support Gbomuma Skills Training Center in 2021 through purchase of another weaving loom and a few sewing machines, as in this culture, where even those who have been formally-educated are still far behind those formally-educated in other parts of the world as here the standard of education is so low need a way to make a living. Giving people skills is essential here, and so SSAAP is thrilled to support them in the future with their Skills Center.

As well, SSAAP supports the Secondary School Mothers Returning to School through our arts initiative with our partners in Wolf Creek, Oregon, U.S.A.; We’Moon purchases artworks woven by the young ladies which supports their education and their skills endeavors!

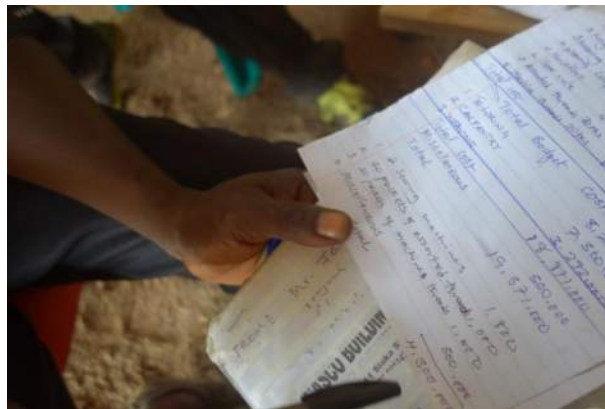


This is the Head of the Skills Training Center, in orange above. He is passionate, stubborn thus very challenging to work with, fun-loving, and a typical Sierra Leonean. ;) On the right, the man in the green shirt with the cap is the Head tailor, and the man in green without the cap is the Secretary of Njagbahun Primary and Secondary Schools.



We had a meeting to discuss SSAAP working together with the school in 2021 on agriculture ventures (growing groundnuts and rice), support of the Skills Training Center, as well Adult Education courses on Sanitation and Hygiene (in 2014 and 2017 I gave them a course and a certification for the training) as well on Nonviolence and Peaceful Conflict Resolution.

Then we discussed the SSAAP sponsorship. They were flabbergasted: the largest sponsorship ever offered to them 😊



He handed me a budget for the Skills Center for 19.37 million Leones ~ \$2,000 USD, and I explained to the whole group, gently but firmly as I try always to do, that we are supporting over 28 villages in 4 districts of Sierra Leone (*Port Loko, Tonkalili, Kambia, Moyamba*), as well 3 nations of Africa, and our funding is very limited as we work only with private/ personal donors as ours is a public charity organization ~ we are not funded by large-scale government agencies or corporations. I told him to slash that budget!!!, and get it down to the \$300-\$350 range, then we could support the Skills Training Center in 2021.

He diligently did so, although he was laughing. Like I said, many of the Sierra Leonean people are very challenging to work with; they are not simple like the Zambians or straightforward like the South Sudanese. They are complex, highly-intelligent people I have the pleasure of working with and learning from. The complexity: perhaps a result of slavery, tropical disease, and the darkness of humanity as it tries to get its hands on natural resources without wanting to give anything back for them. *That* is my nutshell of a

typical Sierra Leonean. They have great sense of humors, so I always try to use humor as a way to work with them – better than fighting!



This beautiful lady, center, is a SSAAP-success story. We have sponsored her since 2014 to school, every year from when she was in primary school. Now she is in secondary school, and has a child, so she was sponsored under SSAAP again in 2020!



Njagbahun Secondary School (left) and the Gbomuma Skills Training Center (right).



Njagbahun Primary School (left) and the schoolyard (right). SSAAP had sponsored many children in previous years (2014-2018) at Njagbahun Primary School but decided this year to do the primary sponsorships in Tonkalili and Port Loko Districts instead, to spread the help.

As Njagbahun Secondary School serves multiple villages (it is a center-point for about 10 communities) most of the teenage mothers have to walk long distances to school, so did not

bring their children along for the photos. Only a few did, as you will see, and then later that day we traveled to another community, *Manjendu*, where we want to work with agriculture in 2021, and were able to capture photos of three of our students with their children in the village.



Kadiatu Lebbie, JSS II (Njagbahun Village); Zainab Conteh, JSS II (Kpangbama Village); Josephine Kamara, JSS III (Manjendu Village);



Sallamatu Tarawallie, JSS III (Kpangbama Village); Abibatu Sesay, JSS II (Manjendu Village); Abie Finoh, JSS III (Njagbahun Village);



Martha 'Mattia' Kenday, JSS III (Kpangbama Village); Nancy Makondoh, JSS III (Njagbahun Village); Jeneba Komeh, JSS III (Mojobobo Village);



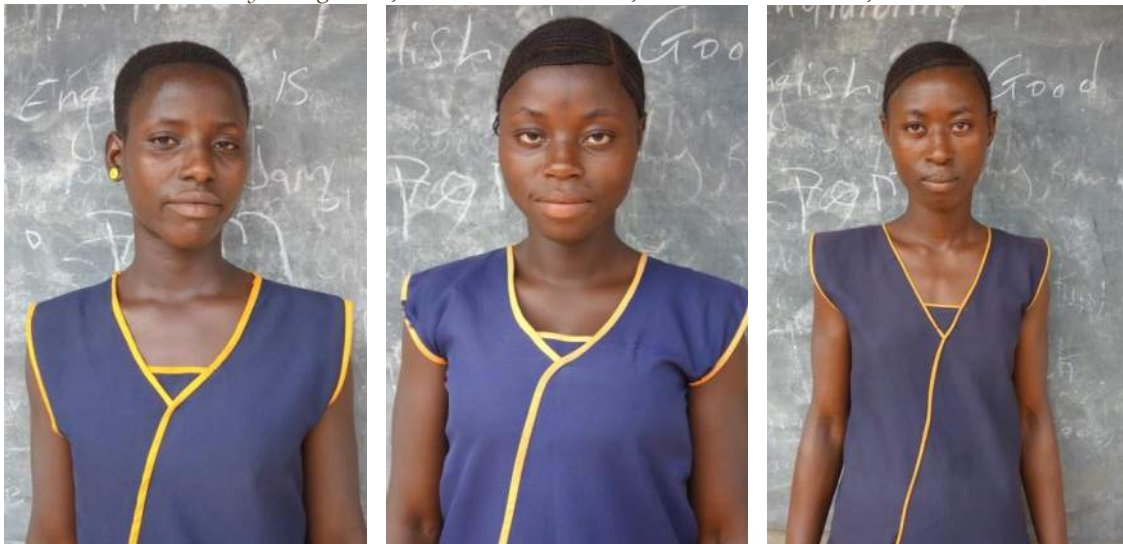
Fatmata Dukuray, JSS III (Kpangbama Village); Kadiatu Makondoh, JSS I; Fatmata Turay, JSS I;



Abibatu Gberie, JSS I; Josephine Moseray, JSS II; Fatmata Kabia, JSS II;



Gladys Korgbotu, JSS II; Bintu Faunah, JSS II; Isatu Kamara, JSS II;



Mabinty M. Kamara, JSS I; Mamie Y. Kamanda, JSS III; Nenneh Tommy, JSS III



Josephine Sevalie, JSS III; Alima Koroma, JSS III; Makallay Sheriff, JSS III;



Janet Baona, JSS I; Adama Kamara, JSS III; Mamusu Kabia, JSS I;



Aminata M. Koroma, JSS II; Doris A. Mbayoh, JSS III; Mattu Bondeva, JSS I;



Nancy Fofanah, JSS I; Kadiatu Turay, JSS I; Mamie Kallon, JSS I;



Ramatu Kargbo, JSS I; Umu Lebbie, JSS I; Margeret F. Kleller, JSS I.

They wrote the donor ‘Thank-you’ letters (you know how I feel about thank-you letters, it’s my upbringing! = my mother), and official receipts from the school.



The new president of Sierra Leone boasts free quality school education for all, but what this poster isn’t stating is that the school fees are free only. The uniform, shoes, school materials are not included in this, *nor* are teachers’ salaries. Approximately one out of every 7-8 teachers are given a salary from the government; the rest of the teachers are teaching as volunteers, receiving nothing for their services. I *suspect* that the aid organisations that are helping to support the free quality school education: UNICEF, EU, UK AID, and Irish Aid have not looked into the innards of the school programmes enough to see that the majority of the teachers are not being paid, which doesn’t exactly make for ‘quality education’. For this reason, the SSAAP sponsorships are intended to help with school uniforms, but if the student already has a uniform I tell the Headmaster that the funds

should be used for school materials such as text books, pencils, erasers, books to write in ('exercise books') and to provide something for the teachers, as the teachers volunteering their services doesn't seem sustainable in the face of such deep poverty as we have in Sierra Leone.



Given such a large amount of money, I counted it once, passed it to Radiance who counted it again, then to the Headmaster of the Secondary School to count it a third time.



Faces of happy, sponsored students just given an opportunity of a lifetime to ☺



We visited Manjendu Village later in the day for an agricultural project we just began there, and some of our students who reside in Manjendu Village that hadn't brought their children to school requested I photograph them in the village (without uniform) but so that you could see them in their home community with their children.



Abibatu Sesay, JSS II; Josephine Kamara, JSS III; Fatmata Kabia, JSS II

*

School Toilets

School Toilets: SSAAP has organized for 8 school toilets in 2019/2020 and will provide another 8 in 2021 upon our return to Sierra Leone.

In 2019/2020, the following School Toilets were provided to: *Thawiiya Community School, Mabale Community School, Makin Primary Community School, Mokoro Subdivision Community School, Madina Community School, Rochain Community School, and Madee Community School*, and *Rosint Community School*. All of these communities lie in Port Loko District, Sierra Leone.

For the School Toilets Program in 2021, we have 8 toilets and have already selected some of the locations for our 5 School Toilets in Kambia District (*Rothamneh and Katha-Kera Villages* to start) and 3 in Port Loko District (*Mabureh and Ropolon Villages*) thus far.

The following is an excerpt from a donor photo album and report:

School Toilet: Makin Village, Makonteh Chiefdom; Port Loko District



This is Makin Village's current school toilet.

Approximately 240 people share this toilet. Now you can see why my standards are so low when I am in the U.S.A., right!?! ☺

We had a meeting on 24 November 2019 and SSAAP distributed the funds for the toilet.



We had two meetings at Makin Village: the night we arrived (11/23/19) and then after we slept there, again the following morning.



The women in this community are very active. I think it will also be a good place to work with the *FGM* (Female Genital Mutilation) and with Nonviolence concepts.

SSAAP wishes to aid in unlocking the ancestral cycle of violence in Sierra Leone through its Nonviolence Initiatives, and wishes to honor the inherent beauty in women in doing so through addressing the FGM issue delicately. The society, and the women, deserve so much better than the situation they are in presently.



In the midst of such chaos, it means we have to remain pure and objective. We have to be centered.

So it means we have to find our own light.

The way forward is light, and the way forward is Love. I have found that in every scenario. The only thing that resolves conflict is Love. The only thing that dissolves pain is Love. It's the medicine of humanity – should we choose to infuse ourselves with it, intravenously I recommend ☺



So we had another meeting the following day and discussed working together on a Nonviolence Program, a Fowl Project (chicken-rearing), on a Pen Friend Exchange Program (working with a school in the U.S.A. to exchange handwritten letters), and on the toilet for

the community – located near the school. The women were so happy they hugged me. I told them it would give me great inspiration to work with them as friends and talk with them about Nonviolence, as well the *FGM* practice. I told them I wanted to learn from them – probably more than they would ever learn from me ;)



Here I am handing the head stakeholder the funds for the toilet, and the Women’s Representative as well.



Two stacks of \$50 USD, essentially. Their money is so heavy and hard to cart around as the highest note (10,000 Leones, above) ~ \$1 USD.

The village stakeholder, Mohamed Ali, on the following page, signing off on the receipt, as well expressing his gratitude for this gift to the community. Development in a community begins with a water well, agriculture, and a school (education).



I tell him to thank you (the donor for the toilet) – not SSAAP! – and therefore they are making a gift and writing you a thank you note. They are incredibly grateful, and so am I, for this.

*

Community Fishing Project

Sierra Leone, the wettest country in all of West Africa, boasts rivers in nearly every community SSAAP works in, and about an hour from the sea no matter where you go in the country.

In 2014, I was fortunate enough to work with Francis Kabba, pictured below in orange with his children, on a veterinary issue. He vaccinated some fowls for our fowl project in Makoba Village, Sierra Leone. He was paid 200,000 Le for his work, which at that time was approximately \$27. At that time he told me his lifelong dream was to start a community fishing project. He is a Vet Officer employed by the Ministry of Agriculture, and a fisherman on the side. Six years later, his dream came true for him.



Boat Launching Ceremony: 15 January 2020



The community that will benefit from the boat was all gathered around for the launching of this boat: a monumental experience in their lifetimes.



A fairly large crowd had assembled and we waited while Francis made all the finishing touches on his Launching Party. Note the woman sleeping on the ground, above right!



I was impressed by the lettering for the boat's name: "The Irish Roisin", but think the lettering for SSAAP/GCF (our partner/locally-based organization called *Grace Children's Foundation*) is a bit small, so maybe in the future they can enlarge it.



And on the stem of the boat, very subtle, in Krio: "God Gee" which means in English: "God Gives". An interesting note: both Radiance and I are very close to Francis. He is working with her on her veterinary work (she wants to grow up to be a vet, so he takes her to the field to draw blood and inject goats, sheep and cattle) and he and I resonate on many levels. Radiance plays at his house with his *pikins* ('children' in Krio) two days a week: Fridays and Sundays. Francis is an incredible human being; I enjoy working with him immensely.



The crowd/community that this boat will serve just keeps growing...



... and Francis presents the little cakes he made for the celebration, topped with *kola nut*: a tradition in West Africa for ceremonies or celebrations.



He went to so much work to make this ceremony perfect; the whole idea of what this means to him is touching, to me, on so many levels.



We started the ceremony off with an Islamic prayer (left) followed by a Christian prayer (right) as Sierra Leone is approximately a 70% Muslim / 30% Christian nation.



Francis gave a speech (left) followed by Taylor, in sunglasses (right) who represents our partner organization GCF.



There will be four fishermen working on the boat, besides Francis. Two are pictured above: in green and in red. You could pick them out of a crowd. They are muscular, strong, and fearless – exactly what one needs on the sea, right?!

Two weeks following this Boat Launching Ceremony, the fisherman in red, above, lost his four-year old child to a random bout of Malaria. The following week, his wife died, randomly. I believe he is my age (40) or perhaps a year or two younger.



Then we all shared the ceremonial cake...



...and sprinkled the traditional rice all over the boat to bless it.



Francis's mother, pictured above, sprinkling rice on the boat.



Then it was my turn to give a speech.



My speech was short, as the sun was setting, Radiance had a headache, and we wanted to get the boat into the water in the wharf before the sun set; the gist of my speech was asking for safety on the sea. I explained that as all of us are parents of small children, we are needed by our children more than anyone else. I asked them to be safe at sea.



And then it was time to saw the [symbolic] piece of wood connecting the boat to land, before they pushed it into the sea via swamp marsh.



One of the fisherman donated oars (left) and the net we purchased through the project (right).



Everyone – women included – getting ready to push the boat from dry land through the swamp and into the wharf. One woman is yelling at me (right) as I said I wanted to help push the boat; she was telling me it was their work to haul this boat – not mine!



The boat was profoundly heavy ~ which gave me a new respect for the quality in the materials that had been used to construct it, as well as the craft. Needless to say, about two seconds into pushing it I was pushed *away*, not able to keep up with the brute physical strength of these noble people.



The two strong fishermen at the stem of the boat as the rest move it into the swamp.



It took a village to get this boat into the sea!



The West African [hu]man: every muscle developed, chiseled. Muscles that lie dormant on most of our bodies are strong on theirs. When I first came to Sierra Leone in 2008, working with a friend on her project with orphans and former child soldiers from the war here (1990-2001), I worked with boys ages 16-22 who had been child soldiers in the war (they call them ‘child combats’ here in Sierra Leone), had been drugged and forced to do horrific things such as kill their family members, fellow tribesmen, even their parents. The boys, not much younger than me, used to tell me all of their stories and they are still my friends to this day; had Radiance been a boy, I was going to name her after one of the boys. My

friend's project (this was before SSAAP started in Sierra Leone in 2012) had hired professional artisans from the city, Freetown, to work with them on many of the psychological issues they faced through art: dancing, drumming, painting, singing. I remember looking at these young men dancing in the burning African sun, sweat streaming off of them and marveling at the pronunciation of their upper body muscles, even at that young age. I have noticed similar parallels in Radiance's body, especially the expression of muscles on her back, so I think this is genetic; it certainly does not come from me ;)



The boat got stuck as it entered the marsh...



... but these people are tenacious and not about to let a small detail stop them!

Sure to succeed, they pushed it into the swamp marsh,



which eventually bleeds out into the sea. They pushed the boat into the swamp, and continued to push it into the wharf via swamp.



They wouldn't allow Radiance and I to go through the swamp (we don't have boots, only sandals, and they didn't want our feet getting attacked by black flies), so instead we ate the food Francis cooked for us.



This is the way we eat in Africa – everyone crowded around a large centerpiece plate of rice, the staple food here. I adore rice but have gotten to a point where I realize that for me, a large part of nutrition is food variety and joy in the food I eat; I cannot just eat food I don't enjoy to fill my stomach. I think this has been a contributing factor to my extreme weight loss here, which is unfortunate as I wish to remain healthy. Luckily, Radiance enjoys the food here so she is well-nourished.



Referencing this abstract idea of culture shock, as people always ask me if I experience this when I go to the U.S.A. after spending years in Africa, or going back to Africa after being in the U.S.A., and I always tell them that yes, Radiance and I have culture shock but can never explain what it is to us so find it easier to use examples. I will state an example now: *It is difficult for both Radi and I to eat without sharing a plate with each other or with others.* We find the food tastes better if it is shared communally. It is difficult to eat having our own plates. Coming back to the States, this is very strange to people; it is one of our ‘Africanisms’ – one of the traditions we have adapted without even intentionally trying to.



After we ate, Francis got word that the community fishing boat had made it from the swamp and into the wharf, and he rejoiced.



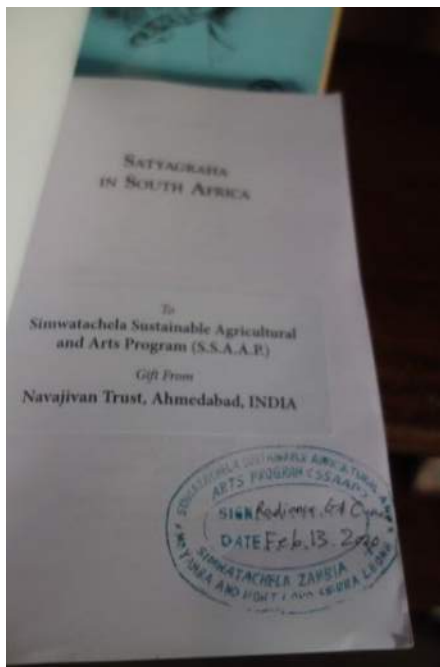
And here she is: *The Irish Roisin* in the wharf, with the fisherman-in-charge seated in it. Boat to a fisherman is his bed and his home.

Nonviolence Library Launching



This project, in-the-making since 2017 when I took the course on Nonviolence in India, involved partnerships from Gandhi's printing press in Ahmedabad, India: *Navajivan Press*, as well with the University in Ahmedabad where both Taylor and I studied: *Gujarat Vidyapith*. More books are being shipped to Africa for the library, and for this, we are phenomenally thankful.

Taylor organized the books, I printed the labels, and Radiance teaches the Head Librarian as well the Chief Educational Officer how to affix the labels onto the books and how to stamp inside of each library book the day before the Library Launching. As part of her homeschool, I try to give her responsibilities to empower her to the best of my abilities.





Our Head Librarian, Sheka (above, left) with our Head Educational Operations Manager, Marco (above, right). Taylor's and my goal is to empower Sheka through the library, as he was unable to finish his university course due to restrictions on funds and other financial limitations.



The invitation letter that GCF, our partner organization, sent out to various people in the town: stakeholders such as the District Council, radio stations, activists, educational leaders.



The launching was a huge success; people from all over the community attended, and we discussed with them some of the fundamental aspects of Nonviolence. We decided to have the Library Launching on Valentine's Day, as this is a day of Love, and Nonviolence is Love.

Nonviolence is not for everyone. Nonviolence is for those who are ready to take responsibility, stop blaming others, and empower oneself through self-realization. It is a daily commitment and a daily effort, and as human beings, difficult for each one of us.

What I explained to the group is that Nonviolence is the platform for all of SSAAP's projects. A water well is not sustainable if the group maintaining it is violent. Sponsoring a child to school is in vain if the child goes to school and comes home bleeding from being flogged for wrong answers on her test. All of our projects are unsustainable if there is a platform of violence beneath them; on the contrary, all projects with the platform of Nonviolence are sustainable, as Nonviolence is Love and Love is the only real sustainability factor in SSAAP: Love-based relationships, long-term, for life and for long after our lifetimes.

Nonviolence is not simply the absence of violence; it is rather the presence of Truth and Love; in the language of Nonviolence, the words 'Love' and 'Truth' are interchangeable with 'Nonviolence'. Nonviolence is also non-judgment, as judgment, in its essence, is violent; Nonviolence is non-judgment of others as well ourselves, because each of us is the worst judge of ourselves. Additionally, we all have violent tendencies within us because we all have anger within us; I am convinced it is a part of the human condition, and universal.

Abuse: repeatedly telling someone s/he doesn't matter or isn't worth anything. This is the most common form of child abuse in Sierra Leone, and I believe it comes from parents having more children than they can afford both energetically and financially. The parents become drained when they have too many children for what they can support, 7+ children, and frustrated, and take their aggression and grievances out on all of their children simply because they have more children than they can handle.

Violence and development do not go together, which is why I am assuming Sierra Leone is ranked 181 out of 189 countries of the world for 2019 with the UN's HDI: Human Development Index. Out of 189 countries in the world, we are the 8th lowest in human development, worldwide:

<http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/2019-human-development-index-ranking>

*

Satyagraha: movement led by *Satyagrahis* who use their Soul, rather than their fists, to fight injustice

Satyagrahi: warrior; *"You can take everything from me – strip me of all that I have – but you cannot touch my Soul"*

Conflict, these days for me, inspires me. It heats my internal fire, the Bunsen burner within me, for sacred internal alchemy to take place. Sierra Leone has taught me that I am guilty of being hot-headed, sometimes; I realize it is the symmetry of also being a passionate person, which I am. *Passion has two faces*, I always tell my daughter Radiance who here in Sierra Leone is called 'Amara' (which is her middle name and her Sierra Leonean name): *Every emotion has two faces. Had Gandhi not been so stubborn, it is doubtful that an entire sub-continent could have nonviolently gotten independence from the most powerful empire in the world.*

Conflict has been the fire I have used for deep healing: starting with myself.

The schools in Sierra Leone are breeding zones of violence: students are whipped, beaten, flogged with a stick or a cane, slapped, punched. You get flogged if you are late; you get flogged if you talk; you get flogged if you get an answer wrong. Radiance's closest friend in Sierra Leone, Francis (Francis Kabba, the Vet and the Fisherman's, daughter) told her that the school girls adopt the habit of wearing six skirts to school every day, in this beastly heat. When Radiance came home after playing with her and told me this, astonished, I asked her: "Why on earth would they do that?"

"Francis said it hurts less when they flog you if you have more skirts on. She said it hurts so badly when the teacher hits them with a stick that the more skirts they wear to school the less they feel it."

SSAAP's co-worker and faithful partner who has done everything alongside SSAAP in the project, Taylor, age 43, has a distinct memory of being a school boy, just after his father died. He said they were forced to relocate after the death of his father and the new location of his home was 3 miles, in one direction, from the school. He and his brother arrived late to school one day that the teacher flogged him (hit him with a stick) 18 times. He was hurt so badly he could not walk, his brother as well. He has carried that memory all the way into his adulthood.

I know you are so deeply immersed in this culture that you don't have the objective-outsider perspective that I do, I said to Taylor, but this is not healthy human behaviour. It is dysfunctional. Healthy human doesn't want to hurt another human being. It is only due to dysfunction within someone that he could choose to cause pain – and would even want to do so – to another. Why should these teachers beat the students if they are late or get an answer wrong; what does it matter to the teacher in any way? They are simply taking their own anger and frustrations out on the innocent school children.

For this reason, SSAAP has drafted a *School Sponsorship Nonviolence Agreement Form* that any school as a beneficiary of SSAAP's sponsorships in all three of our nations: Sierra Leone, South Sudan/Ethio border, and Zambia, must mandatorily sign in order to participate in our program. This Agreement will serve as a new SSAAP policy and strictly enforced, as SSAAP – and I am assuming its donors for the school sponsorship programs as well – will not wish to support institutions which engage in violence towards innocent children. All schools working with SSAAP must also work under our Nonviolence Platform, which means that any school receiving SSAAP sponsorships must not allow flogging, beating, hitting, slapping, punching, etc. at its school or from the teachers towards the students. Violence prevents true learning in schools, and SSAAP does not work with violence in any way: we do not tolerate it, we do not live with it or work with it or engage in it.

As it is a human right, it is also a Constitutional Right: children, even through the Sierra Leonean law, have more rights than their parents; children are our investment in the future and are the better part of ourselves. Abusing them is in fact crushing the deepest parts of ourselves. I tell the Sierra Leoneans: “If you want an under-developed country, centuries behind the rest of the world and behind even in terms of African standards, broken and torn – then continue beating your children. They *are* the future, so if you break them you are breaking the future of your nation.”

SSAAP's School Sponsorship Program and SSAAP's donors involved in School Sponsorship will have access to the form and can even edit it/alter it, and I will discuss this with them personally, but SSAAP does not feel comfortable supporting institutions that promote violence. Half-jokingly, half-seriously I always tell the Sierra Leoneans that this nation is the '*Child Abuse Capital of the World*'. It is rampant here, as the Africans generally take children as their *property* rather than their *responsibility* and do not empower the youngsters to have their own minds, fostering personal thoughts, beliefs, and identity. And while the schools in Sierra Leone permeate the essence of violence within their core, SSAAP does not feel it beneficial to work together with them unless they agree to our policy on Nonviolence. Interestingly enough, when speaking to the schools about this policy of SSAAP's, they are *relieved*. They feel it is a grand idea, and that pleases us greatly as we feel it would be hypocritical of SSAAP to work with schools promoting school sponsorships with the knowledge that violence goes on at the school, without actively trying to

discourage the violence while still support the essence of learning and the opportunities that sponsorships provide vulnerable children and teenage mothers.

At the end of our discussion at the Library Lanuching, I suggested we form a *Satyagraha Group*: meeting one designated night a week, by candlelight, and discussing issues of violence and nonviolence. The mission of such a group: strip away layers and layers of oneself, strip down to the core and then go deeper still, because in this state lies the medicine for true healing. As expected, I explained to them, many people will end up leaving the group, as some humans do not wish to be honest with themselves. It is no problem even if the group dwindles down to two or three people: then you have a core group as you go to your core, dedicated and committed to Truth, which is where one finds his/her inner light. It is there, in the center, of us all.



To sustainably fund the Nonviolence Library, we are going to have a SSAAP/GCF pineapple plantation as well a garden, as Gandhi did at all 3 of his ashrams as well is the 'Ashram Landscape' in most of India: self-sustainability within the organization. In mimicing this model, the plantation and garden will provide food for the Head Librarian and the Education Officer, as well they will provide labor for both initiatives. They will benefit from and work for a simultaneous cause, and this will be executed under the principle of *Anubandh*: Sanskrit term acknowledging the necessity that people look no further than 100 miles of their village for their every need. The tea bags that I am drinking in my tea in Sierra Leone imported here from the Netherlands or the peanut butter coming here from Oman is hardly sustainable; fuel from the incessant aircrafts used to deliver and import/export these products is polluting our planet exponentially, and 100+ years ago when the princple of *Anubandh* was first expressed the Indians had similar concerns to those we are facing now.



Taylor looked at me, smiled, and breathed a sigh of relief when the Library Launch was over. Having worked on this, in different ways, over the course of 3 years (since 2017), we had met our goal: we had opened a Nonviolence Library: the first in West Africa.

SSAAP-Sierra Leone Headquarters

On this trip to Sierra Leone, I had the realization that Sierra Leone is the only one of our SSAAP-nations that we don't have an office, our own home, or our own dwelling space: comfort zone, sacred space. Every time I have been to Sierra Leone, I have lived with a family: from 2008-2012, off-and-on I lived with my [ex]-husband and his family (Radiance's father and his family); in 2014 I lived with a 90-year old woman 'Granny' and her grandson Saidu: now one of my best friends, her other grandson an RTD bus driver in the greater Denver area who invited me to stay with his family in Sierra Leone. In 2017 we stayed with our Moyamba-SSAAP partner (*HEADS-Salone*) and now in 2019/2020, we are staying with our Port Loko-SSAAP partner (*GCF*). Although we have had countless experiences varying from horrific to Soul-satisfying staying with other people and their families, at age 40 and with my own family, we deserve the freedom of having our own space to thrive, rather than having a room in someone else's home. Additionally, Radiance and I have been spoiled by the village in both Zambia and South Sudan and its clean air; urban Africa is an overrated, far cry from the village. With no regulations on quality air control, you find people burning plastic and other contaminants in residential areas daily. As well, people lack knowledge of how this is an urgent threat to their lungs. I wake up every morning with a sore throat and the smells of burning plastic in my nostrils and just think to myself: *take me back to the village! I am a villager, and that is where I best belong!*

For these reasons, all of the communities we have helped (with a water well, school sponsorship, agriculture project, etc.) we are now calling on to give back to SSAAP. Without

this, I explain to the communities, my daughter and I don't have our freedom here, and it isn't home for us the way Zambia is whereby we have our own compound: house (*n'ganda*), cooking shelter (*cikuta*), bathing shelter (*cisambelo*), toilet (*cimbuzi*), guest house (*n'ganda a beenzu*). Our preference will always be for Zambia if we do not have our own headquarters here in Sierra Leone as well.

Our 25% Community Contribution policy is two-fold: (1.) the community gives back to the resource SSAAP has provided it. As it is a gift to them, they must maintain it and take responsibility for it, whether it be a school toilet, school sponsorship, water well, crafting project – they must maintain it and take responsibility for it or the project will never have the human touch of their own blood, sweat and tears: their ownership of it. (2.) The community must give back to SSAAP/GCF or SSAAP/HEADS by providing a local structure: local labor, local materials, local resources, made by local people. We are interested in a strong structure, built to last for some 20-50 years. We plan to use coconut palm trees for the poles of the house, thatched roof made with local grasses (just as we have in South Sudan and Zambia); the whole structure will be simple and local, save cement for the plastering of the walls and the floor (helps to keep termites and other pests out), which SSAAP will provide. We don't wish for the communities to spend cash on our home, but rather, in-kind: labor, materials, energy.



Late night site visit at *Rotain-Thallah Village*, one of our Kambia well sites, I snapped this photo of the village chief signing with his thumbprint our SSAAP/Community Agreement regarding community contribution, building a SSAAP structure, and as I stood back taking this photo, a voice deep inside of me whispered: "This was your dream come true." I stood for a minute in the darkness, entirely unobserved by the people in the village, standing inside my own Truth and realized that this *is* my dream come true. No electricity, shoddy internet, tiring of the staple foods and diet, mice, cockroaches, people's tempers in this hot-headed nation, obscene poverty: children dressed in rags, people drinking filth water and

eating once every two days – I take it all: the darkness and the light. I will take whatever the Universe dishes out to me; this is my commitment to Africa. The Path isn't anything more than a *flow*: letting life flow through you and surrendering to all which we cannot control, which I believe is 95% of everything, all the time. That's the thing about Africa: the illusion that we control anything in our lives is entirely stripped away here. Africa is a methodology in surrender, being within Nature, and being a vessel. This is my Africa; there isn't another person on the planet who will see it as I do. It's my dream come true to be here and, more specifically, to be doing the work I am doing: going to the villages and outright asking: "*What are your dreams? What do you need? What can SSAAP do to help you?*"

There is an adrenaline rush that comes from being in the right place at the right time. It's not about being saintly or being a savior or a healer – as each of us is *all* of those things – it's about the *magic* inherently existing in all of our lives, should we choose to recognize it, and doing the most with the gifts that were given to us.

I tell our communities that what SSAAP wants is: "*... a little compound for a little project. I will take what you give me; we are not queens who need rich palaces but rather Africans just hoping to live in houses made from the earth, just as you do.*"

We need to work with communities and their stakeholders/leaders who assist SSAAP with 25% of Community Contribution. We have already dismissed four communities from our project that were unwilling to contribute anything, much less 25%, back to our efforts, that hosted an attitude of: *We are helpless so it is your responsibility to serve us.*

Taylor, SSAAP's lead counterpart in Sierra Leone, always chuckles, responding with: "But we do not help helpless people. There is no help for the helpless."

As well, I tend to follow Universal Law before I follow human law. And there is nothing like this in the Universe: one party gives and gives and gives and another party takes and takes and takes. This is not a sustainable model, rather an existential model, honoring neither party.

The way forward with SSAAP-Sierra Leone is as follows: 25% Community Contribution for SSAAP: helping us build our headquarters, locally. Local structure made by local people, excepting cement floors, cement plastering on the walls, floor of toilet is cement, floor of cooking shelter is cement and floor of bathing shelter is cement. SSAAP will purchase cement. Everything else is left up to those we are supporting to now support us.

We are *highly* selective of the communities we work with. Why? This is a serious business we are doing – and if we don't take it seriously, then the communities we work with won't, either. It is an investment in others, and their investment in us; an investment in human relationship is the most sustainable force on the planet, as it is Love-based, if both parties honor it. I always tell our communities that we need their help (building the SSAAP Headquarters, or with Nonviolence in their communities, or with F&F: *Food and Fuel* when we visit their communities: fuel for the motorbicycles and food while we are in the village; Radiance gets hungry easily) and that we want to help them so they must also help us and

the two things *have* to go together or we don't have a partnership, and we don't have a relationship, and we don't have a project. It has to be a give-and-take, or it is nothing at all. SSAAP is *very* unique in this fashion, by asking its communities to give back to SSAAP rather than most projects which consider Community Contribution to be the community's contribution back to itself (bringing materials for projects that their communities benefit from) versus SSAAP asking them to give back to SSAAP, so that it doesn't collapse, and so that SSAAP is sustainable.



Simwatachela Sustainable Agricultural and Arts Program (SSAAP)

A food, nutrition and water sustainability organization created by the people and committed to serving the needs of the people.

In the U.S.A.:

*6913 McClellan Road
Wellington, CO 80549
U.S.A.
Phone: 1-303-408-5775*

In Zambia, Sub-Saharan Africa:

*P.O. Box 620097
Kalomo, Zambia
Southern Africa
+260-978058678*

In Sierra Leone, West Africa:

*P.O. Box 3
Moyamba, Sierra Leone
West Africa
+232-80115386*

www.ssaap.org

ssaapafrika@gmail.com

SSAAP-Sierra Leone Headquarters Agreement: between SSAAP/GCF and Beneficiary Communities

SSAAP-Sierra Leone Headquarters should entail the following:

- Locally-made structure donated entirely by the communities SSAAP-GCF is serving through wells (primary communities to assist with structure), agricultural endeavors, school toilets, animal-rearing, school sponsorships, art, Adult Education ventures.
- Headquarters should include, but is not limited to: house, cooking shelter, toilet and bathing shelter (connected), land area outside the house.
- Headquarters should be 5-10 miles from Port Loko town. SSAAP does not wish to have its Headquarters built in town due to many of the [negative] attitudes of towns' people, as well the loud noise blasting at various hours of the day and night. We prefer to live in and work in peace and enjoy the beauty and silence of Nature.
- Headquarters should be comprised of locally-made structure should use strong materials built to last 20-50 years, i.e. palm tree poles versus local poles, thatched grass, moulded brick.
- SSAAP will provide and purchase cement for the floor of the house and to plaster the walls of the house, for the floor of the toilet and cooking shelter, for the floor of the

bathing shelter. SSAAP will also provide insecticide and a sprayer for spraying the locally-made house.

- All other aspects of the Headquarters, including the land itself, should be donated by local communities invested in SSAAP-GCF and that have directly benefitted by SSAAP-GCF
- Structure should be completed before SSAAP's arrival back to Sierra Leone in 2021 (date TBA)
- It would be a benefit to the project if there was another area within Port Loko town that SSAAP could lodge when using internet for days on end: such as a room adjacent to the GCF office or the Nonviolence Library.
- Communities that have benefitted from SSAAP-GCF projects are directly responsible for this structure as their 25% Community Contribution back to SSAAP. Failure to comply will result in SSAAP's dismissal of this community from all future projects and endeavors.
- SSAAP will be responsible for monthly spraying of insects/termites from the house, as well the cost of the insecticide and the sprayer, but the annual upkeep of local materials and labour, such as for re-thatching the house, will be enforced by the community. The community will bring the grass and also provide the labour for upkeep and maintenance on the Headquarters.

We have read and fully understand this SSAAP Headquarters/Housing Agreement and will do our best to provide this in the future.

Signed:

SSAAP REPRESENTATIVE

DATE

GCF REPRESENTATIVE

DATE

GCF REPRESENTATIVE

DATE

GCF REPRESENTATIVE

DATE

COMMUNITY REPRESENTATIVE

Community

DATE

COMMUNITY REPRESENTATIVE

Community

DATE

COMMUNITY REPRESENTATIVE

Community

DATE

Our form has been signed by over 20 communities to-date!

*

In addition to our Community Contribution policy, we have SSAAP's Policy with Violence:

- We have 0% tolerance for violence
- Don't work with it
- Don't live with it
- If we see it we won't work with the community no matter what we have begun or promised to them

Violence perpetuated in Sierra Leone is probably the #1 reason for this nation's under-development, its deep poverty, and its suffering. None of our SSAAP programs will succeed if there is underlying violence at their base. I tell Sierra Leoneans that SSAAP could dig a thousand water wells in this country but if the people are still beating each other, torturing, humiliating, and breaking each other into little pieces, then a water well isn't going to do them much good in the end.

But here are the secrets, and it took me this long (I first came to Sierra Leone in 2008, when I was 27; I just turned 40) to realize this: Sierra Leoneans are so used to violence that they don't know otherwise. It is knitted into the fabric of their daily lives. The first secret is that they truly do not know that their behavior: beating their children, punching each other, screaming in each other's faces, is violent. I hosted a Nonviolence Adult Education Training in Thawiiya Village, one of SSAAP's Port Loko School Toilet sites, and was humbled by the fact that the chief expressed his sorrow for all of this. He told me he was so sorry that they don't know that their violence is a bad thing for them, and injuring their society in a plethora of ways.

The second secret is forgiveness. I believe forgiveness is the highest form of Love. And it is not intellectually achieved simply because we want to forgive. Forgiveness tugs at the marrow of our bones while we are sleeping at night or begs to be acknowledged when the knot in our throat tightens. Forgiveness is sub- and un-conscious; when conscious, it isn't forgiveness but rather an intellectualization of an idea. And what has been tugging at the marrow of my bones these nights is to forgive the Sierra Leoneans, because they truly are unaware that their violence is hurting them. They candidly admit to being very violent

people, and that violence exists 200% in their society, but they sincerely and humbly regret that they didn't know it was wrong – or that there was another way.

I don't think forgiveness is anything we think about; I believe it is involuntary. You can't ask yourself to forgive someone they way you cannot ask your heart to beat: it does it on its own. I have never consciously tried to forgive anyone; sometimes I think it is more therapeutic to be honest with ourselves and to feel every emotion we feel, even the ones we hate brewing inside of us, then when the time comes the feelings that no longer serve us release on their own, the same way the body cleanses us of toxins that are polluting it on its own; forgiveness is a natural byproduct of inner, raw Truth. We, as human beings, hold on to pain as long as we need to, because it is ultimately serving us should we use it as a tool for growth rather than as a platform to punish others upon. When it no longer serves us, we let it go, release it. Thus one day you realize you just Love someone despite whatever s/he did, and that your Love is more powerful than your grievance. A human is separate from his/her actions, and the more we can separate a human from his/her deeds the more we can work with the philosophy of Nonviolence.

Everything I am sharing in this newsletter I have also shared in my meetings with our communities. Many Africans believe that Westerners do not know what suffering is. I tell them about Radiance's father. My story of Radi's father confirms to them that many of the disappointments African women face with their men abandoning their families I too have faced; men and women alike are grateful for this raw honesty. It encourages them to be honest with themselves. Therefore, this new ideology of Nonviolence has truly inspired both themselves and myself! They want another way! And even though this change will be gradual, even light-years and surely not in my lifetime, I wish to plant the seeds for it *now*.

I want to create essential elements for the society to blossom.



Thawiiya Village Chief, center, listens intently while I discuss Nonviolence philosophies. He is approximately my age (in his 40's) and is beautiful, as you can see: inside and out.



He signs SSAAP's Community Contribution Agreement as well as orally agrees to the Nonviolence Policy between SSAAP and his community.

*

SSAAP on the Radio



Taylor has been actively working on a presence for our work on the radio.



During our these radio sessions, we discuss our work in the field: water-based, agricultural-based projects, primarily; all firmly rest upon a manifesto of Nonviolence. We discuss how our work differs from other aid organizations in the sense that we are all volunteers; no one among us receives salary. Additionally, we require the community to actively participate not only in aiding itself, but also in aiding SSAAP/GCF so that we can sustainably work in Sierra Leone for as long as our services are required here. Callers call in to ask us questions and we answer their questions, concerns, or requests for our services as best as we can.

Post-Ebola Aftermath



The aftermath of the Ebola Outbreak in Sierra Leone, 2014-2015, still lingers around – throughout the country.



This sign is located in Kambia District (above, left), as well there is an Ebola Cemetery in Moyamba District (above, right).



As well there are numerous grave sites in the Kebbi Town Memorial Cemetery, Moyamba District, Sierra Leone.



The graves are all unmarked.



*

The Role of Allopathic versus Traditional Medicine in Sierra Leone

This is a continent slowly awakening to science and medicine, although centuries behind the West. People teeter between working with the African medical doctors (“Medicine Men”) or herbalists who use plants and trees for healing, and seeking healthcare and advice from the closest government medical facility or medical health post. There are also some very good health facilities in Africa headed by Italians, or Indians, or Chinese or U.S.A., as well *Medecins Sans Frontiers* (Doctors Without Borders) but by-and-large, these facilities are under-staffed, under-funded, and the demand is so great on them that they cannot keep up with the demand of the local people. One would be considered fortunate to receive their services.

Many of the local government healthcare facilities are overrun by those who are untrained, or newcomers to surgical practices, and a loss of many lives have been caused by this.



Botched surgery job for a woman with a stomach ulcer. Signs of infection are layered around the incision site.



Leprosy (also called ‘*Hansen’s Disease*’) is so common in Sierra Leone that there is a Leprosy Center located in the country. I haven’t researched it enough to know how it is funded or how someone is eligible to be a patient there, but will look into it as the Chief of Madee Village, one of our 2020 Port Loko well sites, has lost some of his fingers and toes due to the disease. His hands and feet are pictured here. Kindly note all of the people documented in this newsletter not only have given me permission to print their photos in this newsletter, but have requested I do so to share with the rest of the world the lack of medical care we have here.



In *Madee Village*, one of SSAAP’s 2019/2020 Port Loko well sites, there is access to a thick river, peaceful and calm and perfect for swimming; one of the best places to swim, as the

current is not so heavy. Fishing is the main agricultural activity for residents of Madee Village.



At our most recent site visit to Madee Village, my daughter Radiance pointed out to me while we were swimming that there were black flies around the riverbed. Black flies cause the dreaded disease called *Onchocerciasis*, commonly known as *River Blindness*, also extremely common in this country due to the high volume of water content here, as well due to prolonged exposure to water bodies where the flies are present, over decades of one's life.

Radiance and I take an assortment of medications, carefully researched, every six months to prevent diseases such as *Schistosomiasis*, *Malaria*, *Trachoma*, as well to clean our systems of worms and other parasites. *Ivermectin* ('Mectizan') used to prevent River Blindness, although not approved by the USDA, is approved in the U.K. and the Sierra Leonean government passes it out for free during the rainy seasons when the threat of the disease is highest, so as to prevent its citizens from suffering profusely, then eventually going blind.



Citizens of *Madee Village* suffer from River Blindness (*Onchocerciasis*) more than any other community we have ever worked with, due to their close proximity to the river and its contamination with black flies. The man on the left was a fisherman his whole life and lived on the water, but the woman on the right did not participate in any fishing herself. Madee

Village is approximately a kilometer from the river, but the infestation of black flies at the river also hangs over the village.

There is an eye clinic, and again I must research it, that services people's eyes, and I am hoping that both this man as well this woman could have sight restored to their eyes. The man's eye has been sealed shut for just over a year, and the woman's eye is not quite sealed shut. Both complain of a horrible itching sensation, followed by a 'dewy' sight over the eye, as though the eye is constantly filled with water.

I promised both of these River Blindness patients as well the Leprosy patient I would research both clinics, and urged their family members – as all three of these patients are elderly – to raise transportation funds to get them to these specialty clinics, as the clinics themselves are free; only the cost of transportation would be funded by the patients or their families.



I have been abundantly impressed by the services of this African Medicine Man, Mr. Sinnah. After a 3-day labor, followed by 5 hours of fruitless pushing, my daughter's head crowned but her body couldn't make it out of my womb alone and I had a C-section. Since her birth, I have suffered from hemorrhoids which tend to flare up worst when I am in Sierra Leone, so I think it is environmental as well as psychological. As well, we have in our genetics a grandmother and an uncle who had this condition so severely they were forced to have surgery, so this problem also runs in my DNA. My co-workers, seeing the pain I was in for days: couldn't ride a motorbike, could barely sit down and could hardly sleep, called Mr. Sinnah to my rescue.

Mr. Sinnah's remedy would put the companies making *Preparation H* cream and anal suppositories under in the U.S.A. ;) Completely natural, he found some leaves from a cotton plant growing in his backyard, and ground them up, added water, and told my daughter to pour the green liquid all over my backside. Literally, within minutes, the hemorrhoids began to shrink. He also gave me a liquid to drink, made of boiled leaves of the cotton plant as well, three times a day for only one day. His treatment was magical. I had relief within

hours of his visit to our house. The cost for the treatment? I traded the medication he gave me for a sack of rice and a yam I gave him.



My #2 chronic health condition, which I call: “African Woman’s Back Pain”, he cured too. We all have this: all of us African women! From cooking, sweeping, lifting heavy containers of water, bending over to wash our clothing on a daily basis. Our lower backs just begin to ache. I told Mr. Sinnah about this and he found me *Yemani* leaves, again, from his backyard. He told me to have them pounded, then heated in water (see previous page) and then to put the wet, soaked leaves in a plastic bag, then cover the plastic bag with a cloth and use it as a heat compress: position it on my lower back then lie on it. It miraculously worked! I am free of lower back pain! His mother, he said, also suffers the same ailment, so he gave her this remedy as well.

His mother is age 110 and his maternal grandfather lived to be 130 years old. The secret? He said they both worked on a farm, with Nature, growing their own food with their hands dirty in the rich, warm soil. *Every food my mother eats is medicinal*, he said.

*

Spending all these years in Africa, since I first arrived as a Peace Corps Volunteer in 2004, has made me appreciate so many things I never would have appreciated so deeply previously: medical care being #1. People here die of diarrhea, fever over prolonged periods of time, simply-cured things in the U.S. which here go untreated and cause death. I have also learned how to appreciate *food* in ways I never used to ~ how balanced diet, nutrition, food from the earth elevates our consciousness and makes us stronger and healthier, versus when we don’t eat or eat only enough to survive it really takes a toll on human emotion, psychology and temperament. Here in Africa, they always say: “*A hungry man is an angry man.*” So true ~ try not eating for days or eating one meal every two days and see the psychological, physical and emotional state you find yourself in. Hunger is so deeply crippling to the human spirit.

Hence, many of the African wars are fought over injustice from the government or food shortage or simply-stated: lack of proper distribution of resources. SSAAP’s work in a simple statement is: re-distribution of resources and teaching people to rely on themselves rather than on governments or large-scale NGO’s/aid organizations such as UNICEF, UN,

UKAID, USAID, Red Cross, etc. which tend to be highly-political organizations and in the end rarely touch the hard-to-reach-locations where people are suffering the most intensely without adequate food source and potable water. These are the locations SSAAP works in: where the issues of malnutrition, hunger, dirty drinking water (resembling mud), no clinic, no healthcare, no school exist. These remote, rural village areas are the places where the need is the greatest – *and* – human generosity and gratefulness the deepest. I am constantly in awe of the brilliant spirits and attitudes of those suffering the most – which makes my desire to help them amplify. I feel grateful *on a daily basis* by the opportunity of this work and the inherent capacity it holds for true, deep, significant and sustained change at the root level of the society which causes poverty in our world: poverty affects all of us either directly or indirectly, as we share a collective consciousness as a whole, collective Humanity. Once people regain connection with their inherent brilliance and power, they will rely on themselves rather than blaming their government for not aiding them; in the end, if they can aid themselves, this is true empowerment.

*

SSAAP Sites and Commitment to Agriculture

Agricultural project: feed hungry people. Sustainably and immediately.

I always dreamed to do a project feeding hungry people: rice and cashew nut seed distribution in Sierra Leone has been one of our staple projects in 2019/2020; better than relief food is sustainable food: *agriculture*.



We figure why go to all this trouble if our efforts are not worth it ☺ Better to go to these extremes because here, the deepest needs rest in its extremes.



SSAAP's villages are off-the-beaten-track, then off-the-beaten-track! The town winds out into African bush on paved road, and from paved road, there is usually a 'main' dirt road, as pictured below. This is still not isolated enough for us.

We strive to help villages with less access to tarred road, or no access at all.



We go deeper and deeper still, hoping to service the most isolated, hard-to-reach areas that, guaranteed, no NGO or government aid will have reached, as their vehicles couldn't withstand the hardship of the narrow footpaths that lead to SSAAP communities. SSAAP finds the hidden areas no previous funding agencies have gone and no one is going, and serve them to the best of our capabilities.



My beloved friend told me she said she felt people were being brought to me that could help fulfill our mission. SSAAP works with an incredible Team here. In Port Loko, we have Taylor Sorie Kamara, above, who studied in India on the Nonviolence course a year after Radiance and I studied at the same university; Gibril and Kolleh with the Kambia District Team (Kolleh pictured above in motorbike helmet); Alpha with the Tonkalili District Team; Musa Korpoi and James Ndoko with the Moyamba District Team, below.



*



We are Night Owls and have been known to work long into the night, if it is the only time the people are available and/or we are! The last few site visits have landed us home at 01:00 a.m. with one of the motorcycles running out of fuel, and one visit one of the bike riders lost the key to his ignition and we were stranded on a deserted road, in the middle of the African bush, for three hours. Moments like these remind me to appreciate the resilience of my child as well as our project, and I am forever thankful to Taylor for being so patient despite countless obstacles we have all faced together.

Most of the communities we are working with have requested for agricultural seeds and tools. SSAAP provides for communities the following: rice seeds, cashew nut seeds, 5 cutlasses, 5 shovels, 5 pick axes. For a few of the communities receiving agricultural seeds, we have provided them with additional agricultural gear: 3 rain jackets, 3 pairs of rain boots, and three pairs of gloves.

Our desire, with SSAAP, is to strengthen permanent crops in our remote communities, then work with cash crops such as maize, groundnut, cucumber, melon, and pepper.

We are serving nine villages in 2019/2020 with agricultural services: *Madina, Rochain, Mokoro, Ropolon, Thawiiya, Mabureh, Rosint, Mayepoh, and Rogbalan-Thallah Villages.*

*

Policy on Theft



SSAAP's Policy on Theft: Pay it back in-cash or in-kind. SSAAP is the only project I am aware of that gives this kind of responsibility to its communities. If funds are squandered, then the community must pay the balance back. This has caused a lot of uproar for SSAAP, specifically in Sierra Leone where multiple projects I have caught theivery inside of. SSAAP has 0% tolerance for such behavior; I see it as no different than if someone goes inside a shop and steals an article of clothing or a bottle of lotion. In fact, it is worse, because these funds are not SSAAP's. They are donor funds, given with the pure heart and pure intention of helping those most vulnerable, and when the kindness of SSAAP's donors is taken in vain and abused, as I said, SSAAP has 0% tolerance. I have landed numerous instances of theft within the project in police offices, chief's palaces, etc. This is part of our 'dirty work' but it is necessary work, as I never want to come home to the States and look any of SSAAP's donors in the eyes and lie to them about how their gift to SSAAP was used and have to tell them that the funds were squandered.

Most projects in Africa, after the funds are stolen, the project either retreats from the country or shuts down entirely; I never want a few bad apples to spoil SSAAP and its donors' pure intentions, thus if funds are misused/pocketed, abused within the project, the individual or community guilty of such an action will be cut-off from SSAAP in the future, but is responsible to pay back the debt in-cash or in-kind, such as giving animals or seeds back to the project. It becomes a police case if the community won't accept responsibility for the theft. This has happened not many times, but enough that SSAAP needs a policy for it.

I learned a lot from these situations, however, and they set an example to me of how I want SSAAP's donors to be treated, respected, and cherished. I always tell Africans that as SSAAP is a small project with small funding, and I am a small person with small needs, we do not have any extra funds to waste as we are serving three African nations, and what is stolen in one of our projects equates to another project being robbed. I see it in a very

analytical way, almost like a mathematical equation. SSAAP has a very large job in protection of donor funds and we don't squander them, even on ourselves (Radiance and I). It is unethical that I would put ourselves in a situation to be living *amongst the poorest people on the planet* and do anything here besides try to assist them, especially when our precious donors have provided the resources to do so. It means everything to protect our donors and I care about them and Love them equally as I care about and Love the people of Africa. SSAAP does cherish and honor both worlds as a harmonious balance, when in harmony. Thank goodness that as more and more people in Africa begin to work with SSAAP, and they are aware of our policies, they have the choice not to work with us if they cannot adhere to our strict rules on theft of SSAAP funds. I hate to be so harsh but unfortunately all these years in Africa have forced me to be: well-seasoned, I hope to be :)

Holding Africans responsible for their actions is one of the highest forms of Love we can impose upon them, as this is also *empowerment*. This term is thrown around much in Africa, especially in regards to women – but like all things, there is a personal responsibility in this. If one wants to be served and thus empowered, s/he must take responsibility for her/his actions. Imparting such an idea within the culture of Africa has not been an uphill battle; it has been kayaking upstream against a rapid ☺ As you can see, in many of the African nations where corruption is at such a high scale, the behavior at the highest levels of the government trickles down to the citizens at the deepest roots of grassroots society. So I always tell communities, prior to working with them at the first assessment meeting: SSAAP's Nonviolence Policy, SSAAP's policies on theft and stealing resources from donors in U.S.A. (although we have a few donors too in Ireland, India, and one in Sudan), as well our policy on 25% Community Contribution of the community back to SSAAP. I tell them upfront that this is the texture of SSAAP: its elemental fibers, and if they cannot work with our philosophy it is best that we don't even begin a project together.

I am met most times with wild applause, the communities exclaiming they Love these new ideas ☺



SSAAP's Philosophy

SSAAP is a non-political, human-, animal-, and Nature-rights based organization which believes in honouring the spirit of existence. Poverty and abuse are forms of humiliation that as a collective whole we have the power to conquer: through our creativity, focus and vision – and through Love, which goes without saying.

SSAAP strives to connect Africa with the West through integrity, purity, longevity, and knowledge. It is important to have a balance between the two polar opposites we have been fed since childhood about Africa: abject poverty – the 1980's commercials with Sally Struthers and the children batting flies out of the corners of their eyes alongside the early 80's *National Geographic* photograph of the vulture swooping down to collect the half-dead child in eastern Ethiopia/Somalian plane; versus the romanticized vision of Africa with the animals and the sunset safari and the *Acacia* trees swaying in the breeze.

And while both of these extremes exist in Africa, SSAAP does its best to balance the extremes by providing a tangible reality through stories, photos, reports, and crafts which are available through SSAAP fundraisers in U.S.A. Through African art, we can see the hand-work, the local materials, possibly even breathe the scent of Africa.

What I have learned is that when I put myself in a position of lowering myself, even being vulnerable, the Universe does not fail me; it rewards me.

In order to do the job, says Taylor, one has to create a vision greater than himself.

*

I wish to be a little person who does little things that when piled together turn big. When I die I would prefer that there was no record that I was even ever here: nothing marked, nothing buried – just turned to dust, gone with the wind. I don't like attention and am inherently an introvert and shy: like my father, and like Radiance's father. My closest ally is the time I spend alone, processing. Reading, writing, and pouring my heart out as constantly as possible to the people I Love and trust the most has saved me during inner battles with my darkest demons. Sacred alone time has served me most as a mother, with SSAAP, and with all of my relationships: friendships and romantic relationships, especially. Whatever time I spend with human beings I must double or triple into alone-time: with Nature as an added bonus-recharge. The time I spend with only myself grows the joy I spend with other people exponentially: my relationships are more healthy, balanced and centered because I am not depending on anyone else for my inner peace. The less dependency I have on human beings for my personal happiness the more my relationships with human beings have reached new heights: Americans, Africans, Indians, Europeans. I can do anything and everything so long as I have inner peace.



I am always trying to remove myself from my own equation. Things seem to just flow better that way.

The more selfishness that exists within us, the more layers away from our inner Truth are we; this is a Law of the Universe. We cannot reach our core selves which is the space where we radiate true light and true Love, where we find inner peace, and where we give birth to our selves.

I have the best job on the planet; I remind myself of this when I am hungry because I cannot find food that tastes good, when the phone doesn't work and I can't find internet service and just miss connection to my friends and family, or when it is so dewy and humid here that every task is a challenge and even bathing three times a day can't make the sweat go away. *I have the best job on the planet:* I get to go to people and light up their day, their month, their year!, and promise them things they have wanted their entire lives and have never had: more abundant agricultural seeds, water wells, animals, school toilets, education for their children; I get to be the Santa Claus of Africa, and – best yet – I get to see their faces light up, or observe some people even cry with joy as I explain the process of how SSAAP is going to assist them.

I have spent a lifetime in study many ancient traditions, belief systems, philosophies. The wise words of my heroines, heroes and ancestors echo in my head. I spend my time with books and my writing; we have 5 bookshelves now crowded into our little house in Zambia. The wisdom of others I find within these books, and this is a form of medicine for me. But in the end, the wisdom of another is not my own; so I therefore search for my own Truth – and within that space is pure freedom – and in the end, I don't follow anyone else; I follow me.

Culture: Heartbeat of a Society



Banana tree bucket bath: I have learned that if it is hot enough outside, all one needs for a bath is a bar of soap, toothpaste/toothbrush, and a bucket of cold water. Radiance always opts to bath beneath a banana tree; the leaves are soft and warm and she likes their essence; she says they make her feel safe. I was told later, coincidentally, that during the civil war, many people hid from the rebels in the banana trees for the same reason: safety and a feeling of security.

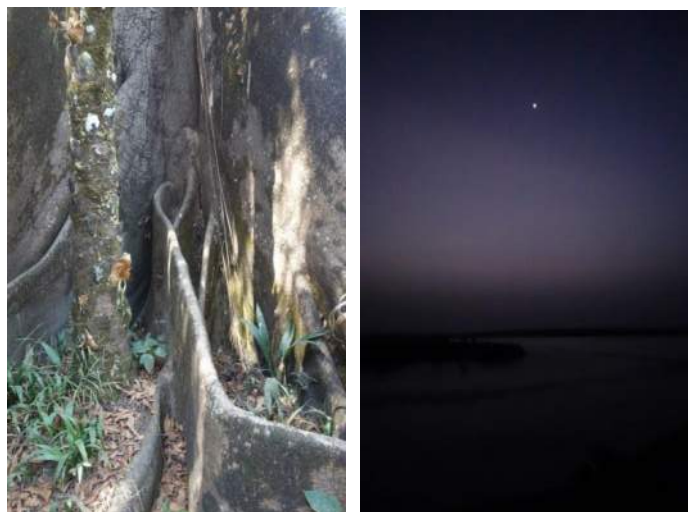


Laundering Clothes: Most girls, by the age of 12, have learned to do the family's laundry. In Sierra Leone, they beat the wet clothing against a stone to help to release the dirt from the fabric.



We refuse to stay in Africa without a cat: Cats may have kept us alive this long in Africa. Our cat, *Nazu*, sleeps in the hammock of our gently-hanging mosquito net. Besides being good company, cats kill mice, rats and snakes; they possess immunity against the toxins of the snake and kill and eat them. Radiance tends to fall asleep reading, with her headlamp. Most nights I stare at her, mesmerized, while she is sleeping. I am sure this is a bi-product of having only one child, that I may extravagantly afford the time to sit, enchantingly, and stare at her no differently than I did when I first brought her home from the hospital just days after giving birth to her. Of all things in this life, she is my most-cherished. I am more honored to be a mother to this little girl than any other role in my life.

Sweet Sweet Salone: I need Nature like a sick man needs medicine. We are going to have a Tree House built for the project.



They are going to build our home between the spines of this tree, which is alongside the sea, in one of our Kambia District communities called *Bakeh-Lhimray Village*.



No matter the challenges, I have to accept all of Africa if I am to Love it unconditionally, even the parts of it I don't like. U.S.A. is deeply romanticized here in Africa, and so I tell the Africans if they want U.S.A. then they must be prepared to do the same: accept even the parts they do not like, as this is the only way to truly be with anything.



Africa Overload: These are bags of charcoal, piled high, atop the roof of this small van, and coming out the back as well!



Kola Nut: This is one of the most supreme gifts offered in Sierra Leone, honoring a guest in the village, showing thanks and praises as well as intentions of abundance for the visitor.



Bush Meal: This animal, part of the reptile family, was found in the bush near the house we are currently residing in: Port Loko town. When the people, pictured below, who killed it explained to me they were going to eat it the same day, I screamed and they began to laugh. I was hoping they were joking; they were not.





Krio Signboard: 'Peace dae na we han': “Peace is in our hands.” Krio, which is approximately 85% broken English and 15% French and Portuguese, originated from the slavery trade days. It is more or less the language that unites all the tribes in Sierra Leone, as well as is used in Liberia, Nigeria, Cameroon, and Ghana – although called ‘Pidgin’ in those nations of Africa. My daughter is a Krio; most of the Krio tribe lives throughout Freetown, as they were ancestrally many of the freed slaves from the U.K. who returned to Sierra Leone after slavery was abolished. Our capital, *Freetown*, is thus named for this reason. Radiance, my daughter, speaks Krio and she is learning how to read and write in Krio as well – important to us both as this is her tribal root. As a native English speaker, I find learning Krio, oddly, more challenging than learning *ciTonga* (our *Zambian* language) as Krio is like backwards-English and literally goes against my natural tongue to speak it.













West African seaside village. The curse of Africa, for me, has always been that no matter where I go in the world, I always leave my heart behind here. Africa haunts me.





Living on the edge of a sword does not necessarily mean getting cut or living in danger; it means one learns how to sharpen the skills of one's mind's eye: telepathy, vision, wisdom, compassion, humanity and divinity.









I feel a profound sense of joy I never before had known – and not because of any kind of perfection in my life, but rather due to an internal peace. Life is innately a profound gift, but due to all the traumas we experience, sometimes even daily, our vision of this becomes clouded.

My aim is to have clear vision: white glowing light, shining through every part of our life: guiding us every step of the way.





