

SSAAP Quarterly Newsletter, Summer Edition
XXXI; Sierra Leone-2023



This newsletter is dedicated to Dr. Adam, Kateri, Nalani, Charlie, Allen, and Linda. The support from your family in a myriad of ways has driven our initiative of education for all in rural Africa. Your generosity throughout the years has enabled so many young children, teenage mothers, and adult women to attend school, become literate, and fulfill dreams of a brighter tomorrow. Thank you for your support through SSAAP and for helping me to have healthy teeth! It seems like a small detail, but without the phenomenal health that both Radiance and I have, we could never spend years on end in these parts of the world, whereby healthcare is one of the many things to have fallen by the wayside. You are, to my exceptionally high standard, the best dentist in the world ~ forget the U.S.A. alone! Let's just enlarge our scope to the whole planet! And no one compares to you.

“People talk of the sacrifice I have made in spending so much of my life in Africa. It is emphatically no sacrifice. Say rather it is a privilege.”

~ David Livingstone: born 1813 in Blantyre, Scotland; died 1873 in Chitambo, Zambia



SSAAP-Sierra Leone to Zambia Timeline

Greetings from Equatorial Africa!

I write this to you with sweat dripping off my forehead, trying to avoid it hitting the computer keys. It is mid-April, and as we expect rain just after Sierra Leone's Independence Day (April 27th), the heat is the strongest in the weeks just before rainfall.

Today I have been sweating abundantly. It took me a long time to realize why: I washed my hair and put conditioner in it, and did not wash the conditioner out; the heaviness of the conditioner in my hair has caused my scalp to sweat profusely all day. I cannot imagine anywhere on Earth that is so hot, except the Afar Region in Ethiopia, and India in July (which is, incidentally, the least expensive time to visit!).

We were due to leave Sierra Leone on April 5, 2023 to fly back to Zambia, but after lengthy discussions with both our Northwest Field Coordinator and Southeast Field Coordinator, Radiance (my daughter) and I decided that it would not be possible to (a) construct our SSAAP-Sierra Leone Headquarters/house by April 5th, and (b) finish our 67 wells for SSAAP-Sierra Leone, 2023.

Our Southeast Field Coordinator paid the change fee on the air ticket, and he did so gladly and willingly and almost gleefully; his logic was that SSAAP would give him contracts for water wells, so he would benefit if I stayed, and moreover: the project would move along more quickly this way. He has also been invaluable in the building of our home; more about that in another section. This was the second time we had changed the air ticket to go back to Zambia, as the original-original ticket was for February 4, 2023. I was waiting on paperwork from the Zambia Immigration, granting Radiance and I leave from Zambia and when I got the documentation that we could be out of Zambia until October 15, 2023, we changed the ticket to April 5, 2023, until we decided that this still wasn't enough time in our beLoved West African nation, and so we extended the ticket again until August 2, 2023. When Radiance asked me why I booked the ticket for August 2nd, I told her: "Because the cold season in Zambia ends by the second week of August. I am trying to avoid the cold season in Zambia at all costs."

In Zambia, the cold season is very, very cold – specifically because we are in Kalomo District, and Kalomo is on a plateau; it gets very cold, cold enough to see your breath, cold enough to light a brazier and sleep with charcoal burning near the bed. As we bath outside, and the air is cold, there are very few things I abhor as much as Zambia in the cold season. I am someone who enjoys emersion in water, specifically bath tubs or hot tubs, though a pool is also appreciated – or a lake or an ocean or a river! – and asking me to bath out of a bucket of tepid water in the middle of the bone-chilling cold of Zambia's cold season (April-early August) sometimes just feels like it is asking too much of me. The silver lining is that cold season is a perfect time for visitors to come to Zambia, however; they don't know the difference in temperatures between the hot, dry season and the cold, dry season, and also because there is no malaria at that time: nothing to breed in, and too cold for the mosquitoes to survive!

SSAAP-Sierra Leone To-Date, an Analysis

Statistics on SSAAP-Sierra Leone Wells

- **35 wells to be completed by 15 July 2023 in Moyamba District**
- **21 wells to be completed by 1 November 2024: 7 in Port Loko District, 2 in Kambia District, 11 in Moyamba District, 1 in Tonkalili District**
- **7 wells to be completed by 1 August 2023: 5 in Port Loko District, 2 in Kambia District**
- **30 wells to be done by October 2025: 10 in Daru (Kailahun District), 10 in Kono District, 3 in Pujehun District, 2 in Bo District, 1 in Bombali District, 4 in Tonkalili District**
- **12 wells complete, contracted in 2019/2020 and finished by 1 August 2023: 7 in Port Loko District, 1 in Tonkalili District, 4 in Kambia District**
- **2 wells complete, contracted in 2019/2020 and finished in 2022: 2 in Kambia District**
- **5 wells complete, contracted in 2017 and finished in 2022: 5 in Moyamba District**
- **4 wells complete, contracted in February 2023 and finished in March 2023: 4 in Moyamba District**
- **Total SSAAP-Sierra Leone wells done from 2017-2025: 116 wells in 9 Districts: Moyamba, Port Loko, Kailahun, Pujehun, Tonkalili, Kambia, Kono, Bo, Bombali**



The Weight of Water

A friend of mine in Pueblo, Colorado, recently discovered that we don't have running water here in Sierra Leone. This was my response to him: *"If I ever get a house in U.S.A. (which I still hold out hope to have), I don't want running water. I will find a way to get a well drilled. Running water causes too many problems: flooding, ruining carpet, floorboards, etc. such expense and waste. Not having running water is something I prefer; you waste less water when you can feel its weight: fetching it from a well, or carrying it. Water is heavy! Running water makes us waste it more; I am guilty of that, in U.S.A. – I waste so much water when I take a shower or a huge bubble bath."*

The people of rural Africa will never have a chance, nor a change, without clean water: for drinking, agriculture, bathing, cooking, cleaning, washing their bodies and their babies. How far can we, as human beings composed 80+% of water, get without water? We cannot even survive a day! And for the excruciatingly large population of human beings in rural Africa who exist on a daily basis without access to clean drinking water: they will not be able to exist beyond a basic human survival level unless through a water well, and then life will change for them – drastically, dramatically, and yet also subtly – for the future generations.

There can be no change in Africa until local people, all over the great Continent, have clean water to drink. This is a fundamental human right, as well a part of our cosmic collective consciousness.

SSAAP-Sierra Leone Water Wells, 2023 (finished in 2023; more on their way before August 2023)



Nyagohun Village: Moyamba District



Mofelekpe Village: Moyamba District



Wonde-Fabiana Village: Moyamba District



Gbitima Village: Moyamba District

5 SSAAP-Sierra Leone Water Wells, 2014-2017 (finished in 2017-2022)

Monitored and Evaluated by Mike Edwards, SSAAP-Sierra Leone Lead Field Volunteer in November 2022



Mowusu Village: Moyamba District
(finished on November 9, 2022)



Mokoyo Village: Moyamba District
(finished in 2017)



Nyandehun-Nichol Village: Moyamba District
(finished in 2017)



Gibina Village: Moyamba District
(finished in 2017)



Ile Village, Moyamba District
(finished in 2017)

2 SSAAP-Sierra Leone Water Wells, 2019-2020 (finished in 2022)



Katha-Thenkel Village, Kambia District



Rochain-Thallah Village, Kambia District

12 SSAAP-Sierra Leone Water Wells, 2019-2020 (finished by August 2023)



Madina Village, Tonkalili District

In the next newsletter (Fall 2023), I will send an update on all water wells completed from today (May 27, 2023) until we fly back to Zambia on August 2, 2023. As well, in the next SSAAP Quarterly Newsletter, I will include both a report and photos of our finished SSAAP Headquarters house at the Robompe Land site.

Thank you!

*

Text from Heather to SE Field Coordinator in Moyamba District, Sierra Leone [with regards to the well sites] on May 17, 2023: Love you and thank you, hon. Please keep me informed on the house and Moyamba water wells. Make sure you locate them in the most remote, hard-to-reach SSAAP villages. I will come see them, check them, and do our usual Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) with the communities when I come back here in November 2024.

Response from SE Field Coordinator: Our wells are located in the most primitive areas where animals compete with human beings for water. Fear not; I have located the perfect villages for your water wells.

*

Photos of Progress, Water Wells, SSAAP-2023, Moyamba District

Below are our first eleven wells locations in Kowa Chiefdom, Moyamba District, Sierra Leone:



Mbawomahun Village



Kpendebu Village



Gbongeh Village



Sengbehun Village



Mondaa Village



Mokemie Village



Temedale Village



Gbangama Village



Gandohun Village



Ngeeyahun Village

The other half-finished, second set of eleven wells are in Mano Dasse Chiefdom, Moyamba District, Sierra Leone:



Nyagoihun Village



Morgbamu Village



Mongala Village



Bambobu Tommy Village



Moyombama Village



Bandana-Golahun Village



Nyadehun-Poogoima Village



Morsaybana Village



Torkpombu Village



Mbuwahun Village



Lungi Village

Photos of Progress for Other SSAAP Well Sites



Our SE Field Coordinator has sent me additional photos of water wells for villages (35 are due by July 15, 2023), but did not include the names of these villages! Stay tuned! I will indicate the village names for these community water wells for some of the remaining 11 water wells in the next SSAAP publication.













SSAAP's First Podcast

I (Heather Cumming) was invited to do a podcast, and I sent my Secretary Laura and my mother (SSAAP's former Secretary) the invitation to ask them if it was fraud! I have never done anything like this before, and just wanted to make sure it was legitimate.

It ended up being so much fun, and the woman who interviewed me was quite genuine and kind. I was coming down with Malaria and Typhoid fever during this podcast, however, so I wasn't my full 200% 😊, but I didn't want to reschedule the interview as internet/electricity/network connectivity is such a challenge here.

These are the two links to the podcast; two links, one interview:

<https://open.spotify.com/episode/744ZzEIlHVS9xJe9o1I7N9?si=MH-XheyNSMeKHP9HmjuUyg&nd=1>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3ljMeMFyfAs>



I was asked to send in a headshot, and I sent in the photo above, which they did not use in the interview. I didn't want a glamour shot of myself. Africa is not glamorous! I adore makeup and fashion and jewelry and costumes and beautifying myself, but I like to do that in parts of the world

where I do not stand out; here in Africa, I get too much attention as it is. I hate it. Naturally introverted and shy, some days I just hibernate inside my house all day, until the heat is too much and I have to go outdoors – and get harassed. Being Caucasian (“white”) in Sierra Leone is probably one of the greatest obstructions to progress and inner peace that one could have in this part of the world, and it seems to be a daily battle here to have my own sacred space whereby I am not stared at, whistled/gawked at, shouted at, harassed, and even on two occasions: assaulted (for reporting child abuse and domestic abuse). I absolutely abhor the unwanted attention I receive here. Sierra Leoneans have an odd reverence while at the same time a deep abhorrence of Europeans/Americans, and sometimes here I feel I am battling centuries, if not most of a millennia, of racial tension/hardship due to colonialization and slavery here. I call it: “*Post Traumatic Stress Disorder(PTSD) from over 600 years of raping the African continent.*” And, though the African people themselves had a large part to play in much of this, many of the local people today do not see it that way, and still hold a grudge against the Europeans who enslaved them and took them to be beneath animals and treated them accordingly as such. King Leopold II went so far as to bring the Congolese people back to Belgium and put them in cages to make human zoos. The Belgian people would pay an entrance fee, and throw peanuts at them the way children threw peanuts at elephants in American zoos in the 1950’s.



“Love is essentially self-communicative – those who do not have it catch it from those who have it. True love is unconquerable and irresistible, and it goes on gathering power and spreading itself until eventually it transforms everyone whom it touches.”

~ Meher Baba, from “The Law of Love” in Three Essays on Universal Law: The Laws of Karma, Will and Love by Michael Singer

Fields of Food

There is no need to purchase seeds in Africa – and when one of SSAAP’s supporters reminded me of this, it hit home. Seeds come from their parent ☺, and there is no need to purchase them. In November 2019, SSAAP purchased 20 bushels of rice seed for 10 communities (2 bushels/community). At that time, I did not understand that seeds should never be purchased, and come from their own [parent] food. Anyhow, the man entrusted to purchase the rice seed ran away with the money. Right now, I am dealing with taking him to the police, and he has paid back about three-quarters of what he stole, but the bottom line is that this was a blessing in disguise! Now he has to refund the money he stole, and we can use it elsewhere – no need to purchase seeds again! Tapping into indigenous, natural resources is a very important part of our work here.

As we are a small grassroots organization, serving remote communities in rural Zambia and Sierra Leone, keeping the project small, well-maintained, and its resources very well organized are the highest priorities to us here. We used to have another SSAAP project site in South Sudan (Ethiopian border), but we decided to close that site down during COVID due to safety/security issues that COVID shed light on for us there. Here in Sierra Leone, the largest part of our project involves digging water wells in remote villages that have a seasonal water source, which either dries up part of the year (during the non-rainy season), is filthy, contaminated with mosquitoes breeding, insects, or dead rats. I have even seen animal feces floating in the same water source. The water is unfit for human consumption, as well is a degradation to the people drinking it, their society, and humanity at-large. We owe each other better than this! SSAAP supports clean water ventures all over rural, remote, hard-to-reach villages in Zambia and Sierra Leone, and this is known as Phase I of our initiatives.

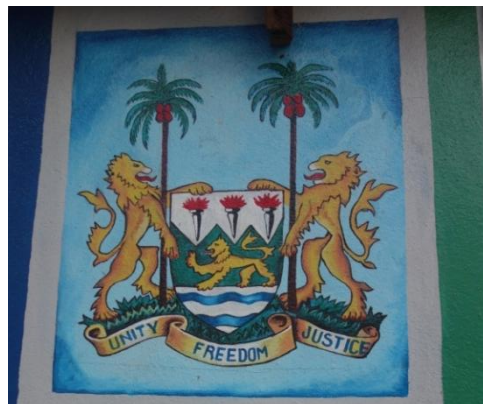
Phase II is agricultural: food, or as I always say: “Fields of Food”. I will know that SSAAP has succeeded, I tell the local people, when all I can see surrounding me are fields of food, as far as the eye can see: green fields full of food, and everyone with a full stomach and happy and functioning at their highest level because they are not suffering from starvation. This is my version of Utopia, as well as SSAAP’s success! We are beginning to get involved in both nations with agricultural ventures: in Zambia, simple irrigation systems (called ‘*Water Reticulation Systems*’), which provide subsistence farmers with year-round produce, a means of income-generation, as well as more nutrient variety. In Sierra Leone, our agricultural projects begin with digging an “*Irrigation Ditch*”, as I call them, to supply the land with year-round irrigation water. Our second SSAAP Land site, at Rosint Community, we have already dug our agricultural ditch. SSAAP tries to do its best, in every scenario and with every beneficiary, to support the local needs as stated by the local people.



We also work with arts by giving local artisans a market (we have various buyers in U.S.A.), with microloans (they call it: “*Village Banking*”), and school sponsorships for primary students and teenage mothers returning to school after giving birth in Sierra Leone, and in Zambia: Adult Literacy for women ages 35 and above. SSAAP is essentially a human and animal rights activism program, giving Love back to the planet. ☺

Above all, we are a Human Rights organization, striving towards Nonviolence, conflict resolution, and deeper inner awareness (consciousness). Human rights are not only in the name of standing up for ourselves and our family members/friends, but also strangers. In doing so, we are servicing the collective. In Sierra Leone, domestic abuse is all-too-common, specifically child abuse as all too many Sierra Leoneans believe that parenting is nothing more than constant abuse of their children. I have thus found myself advocating for children through the laws of the Sierra Leonean constitution. Sierra Leone was the third-poorest country on the globe, I believe, in 2022. It was rated the most unlivable country in the world in 2017.

My daughter also has an Animal Rights Project, called Radiant Street Beasts. She sells jewelry to support street animals which she takes from off the streets and brings them to our home to feed, vaccinate, de-worm, and Love on.



Slave Dungeon Project

The *Krio* tribe of Sierra Leone is one of the most fascinating tribes in Africa, in my opinion. They are one of the only tribes in the whole of Africa that is a mixture of both European and African descent.

The *Krios* are the people of Sierra Leone who were enslaved overseas, many of them intermarried with Europeans, and brought back to Sierra Leone – only to find that the language, climate, the way of life, and the general environment was very difficult for them.

The river port town where we live (and are building a house about 25 kilometers outside of, on the land that was gift deeded to the project and, more specifically, to my daughter by Paramount Chief Maforki), called Port Loko, was one of the main roots for transporting slaves to Bonds Island to be

taken to America. Most of the people taken to the U.S.A. were *Lokos*, of the *Loko* tribe, and once captured, were taken to Bonds Island where they waited to board the slave ships.

The original *Krios* were the offspring, the children that the four following groups of people gave birth to, and were a result of the intermarriage between these four groups:

1. ***Black Poor***: those who were captured in Sierra Leone, and taken to England. Slavery ended in England in 1807, due to the tireless efforts of a man who committed his entire life to the abolishment of such an abominable practice: William Wilberforce, who is incidentally one of my heroes. ☺ The slave trade came to a halt largely because of a particular case, between James Somerset (who was a slave) and Sir Starwet (who was his master). The case was taken to William Wilberforce, who was an MP (Member of Parliament), and turned over to Chief Justice Lord Mansfield, who was the presiding judge over the case. The resolution of the case as per Chief Justice Lord Mansfield was in the favor of Somerset, and in favor of the Africans.
2. ***Maroons***: those who were captured in Sierra Leonean, and taken to Jamaica/the Caribbean Islands, then returned after the slave trade was abolished
3. ***Nova Scotians***: those who were captured in Sierra Leonean, and taken to Canada, then returned after the slave trade was abolished
4. ***Recaptives***: those who were captured in Sierra Leone, held as prisoners while they awaited the slave ship to come to collect them to take them overseas, but when the slave trade ended were released. They were captured again by naval patrol boats from England, and then released again. Approximately 40% of the *Krios* were *Loko* people, who were captured due to their location (the *Loko* people lived along the sea and owned land near the port areas of Sierra Leone).

These four groups came back to Sierra Leone between the time frame of April 10, 1787 until 1807, and in the years after when slavery was abolished in England. When they came back to Sierra Leone, they found a deep language barrier, as they spoke broken dialects of French, Portuguese, and English; the adjustment to the environment too was harsh, as Sierra Leone is beastly hot year-round, and this tropical environment they were not used to. They suffered greatly, but were given a settlement of land by the *Loko* tribe, which is known as Freetown, and is today our capital city here in Sierra Leone. “Free Town” was, both originally and literally, a freed slave settlement, dotted with the Christian Maroon churches which are still quite active today. The *Krio* King of Freetown was called King Jimmy, and a whole area today is still named after him in the city. With the help of Governor Charles MacCarthy, who was also a *Krio*, the *Krio* tribe could re-establish themselves in their former homeland.





The oldest Maroon church in Freetown is downtown, near the historical Cotton Tree, on the corner of Liverpool Street and Siaka Stevens Street, built in 1808.



My daughter Radiance is proudly *Krio*; her father and his father and his grandfather are *Krios*, and his great-grandfather was a white Portuguese man. The *Krios* still live primarily in the Freetown area, and this is why Radiance and I always have so much fun when we go to Freetown: *the Krios*. The *Krios* tend to be well-organized and keep their promises; they are sharper than a tack, generally-speaking, and everything I have just written in this section of the newsletter was explained to me by a *Krio* man who just told me off the top of his head the dates and all the names I have documented here. The *Krios* never fail to impress me!



Radiance with her grandmother, Sarah (“Cici”) Jones, in Freetown: Friday, February 3, 2023. Radiance had not seen her grandmother since she was 4 ½ years old; now, at age 13, she decided it was high time to pay her a visit!



Radiance’s father, Nathaniel, is a graphic artist and a portrait artist. Above left, a portrait he did of his late father when Alex Ole Jones was in his late forties; above right, a portrait of his little sister Rosetta, who died at age 18 during the war. Rebels broke into their home, poured kerosene on Rosetta (who had been napping on the couch), and lit a match. She woke up to the smell of her own flesh burning. Nathaniel was the first person to come home and heard her crying out to help him; according to him, she had already “half-melted” and died shortly after.



Nathaniel’s business: a graphic design shop on Liverpool Street, which is right in the heart of the city.



Radiance has not seen her father since she was 4 ½ years old; almost a decade later, we have not talked to him or seen him since. His wedding calendar was on the wall of her grandmother Cici's house when we visited. Nathaniel married a lady who is half-Dutch, half-Sierra Leonean; she grew up in Freetown and to my knowledge has never met her own father in the Netherlands.

What I want to do, in honor of the courage born through the slave trade here in Sierra Leone, as well to celebrate the history of such a strong and resilient people, and in an effort to educate those both domestically and abroad: I am hiring a few local artisans to paint some walls of various slave dungeons (where slaves were kept after being purchased and before putting them on the boats) as well as two abandoned slave ships here in Port Loko (approximately 1 ½ hours away from Freetown).

My plan is for the artists to paint portraits of Nonviolence, Love-based leaders, Peace Heroes like Martin Luther King, Mohandas K. Gandhi, Nelson Mandela, HH Dalai Lama XXVI, William Wilberforce, Barack Obama, Abraham Lincoln. The walls should be designed with pastels, Nature scenes, and should be cheerful colors; these are places that have remained all these years but the local people aren't doing anything with. My original idea was to grow plants inside too and make them meditation zones, though this may be too "New Age" for Africa. So we will do whatever they want, not whatever I want! 😊



Radiance with her half-sister, Rosetta, who lives in Freetown. Rosetta is 17; she is four years older than Radiance and is in her final year of school; here, they SSII: Senior Secondary School II, and in the States we would call it 12th grade, or Senior Year of High School.

The Slave Dungeon work will have to be a future project (2024-onward). We want to bring Light back into places that have stagnant and dark, sad, lonely, frightened energy. This is the work of true art: to shed Light, even in the deepest darkness.

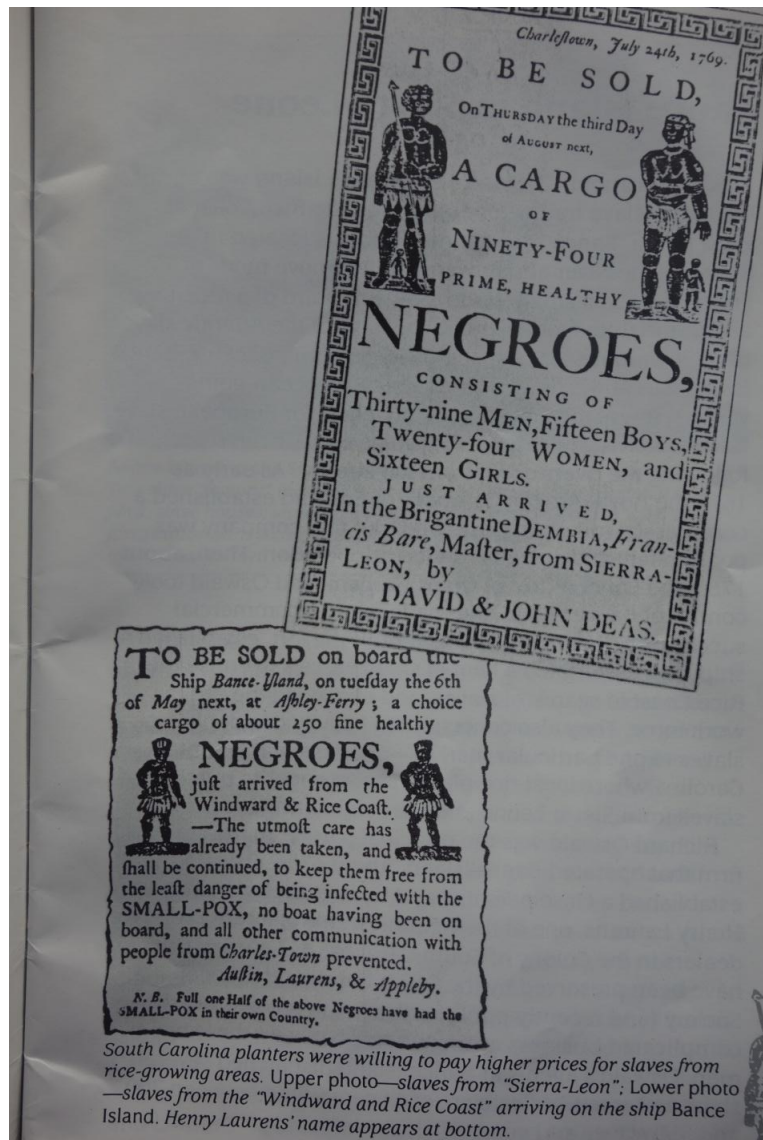


Photo courtesy of [The Gullah: Rice, Slavery, and the Sierra Leone-American Connection](#) by Joseph A. Opala

I am a deep believer that healing can occur at even the deepest and highest levels when we forgive ourselves. The first step in forgiving anyone else is through first, forgiving ourselves. Then, when we forgive ourselves, we can begin to forgive our own behavior as well as the behavior of others – most likely involving abuse of some kind (physical, emotional, psychological, sexual, spiritual, metaphysical). Once we begin to forgive others, we forgive our ancestors of the past. Forgiveness in the present-day can actually blend backwards into the past, and into the future, as we can probably all concur that the West African Slave Trade was one of the worst human atrocities known to mankind, historically. It is our duty, as a modern-day human collective, to heal the wounds of the

past, so that we can work together to forge a more enlightened future for all of us. We all suffer for the wrongdoings of our ancestors, and the only way to break the cycle of abuse is to forgive: ourselves as well our ancestors, and to move out of the cycle of abuse by refusing to allow old patterns of bad behavior to continue controlling us. In other words, we boycott the natural, inherent desire to blame.

This is what I have taught my daughter, and at the same time taught myself: *stop thinking of yourself as an entity, because all that does is grasp ego and we both know that the ego path is one of self-destruction, not self-Love. Stop thinking of yourself as an entity ~ and begin thinking of yourself as a conglomeration of representations. What do you represent? This is what you are, what you truly are. We are what we represent.*

When others don't Love you – and I speak from experience on this point!– as human beings, and as part of our human Nature, it is natural that we want to understand: *why? Why?* - because it hurts to the core when someone doesn't Love you. How could someone not Love you, when all you are – to the core – is Love? All of us, at the core, are simply Love. Human being is a burning ball of Love-Light-heat, much like the sun. So it hurts to the core when someone doesn't Love us, because all we are is Love.

So, if someone doesn't Love you, why? It's not because of you. It's because of what you *represent*.

My daughter is, as she calls herself, a hybrid: half-American/European, half-African/Sierra Leonean. We have been places in the world where she was unLoved because she is black; we have been places in the world where she was unLoved because she is white. As she is blood of both races, this has given her (and me, through her, as well as both her and I being racial minorities here in Africa) a uniquely objective perspective. It has activated our consciousness: if someone doesn't Love you, and wants nothing to do with you – especially if they don't know you – then *why?* First of all, this speaks volumes about the other person much more than it ever will of you. Second of all: *if people don't like you it's not because of you; it is because of what you represent.* Sometimes, children – regardless of where in the world we have been – have been cruel to Radiance because she is home-schooled, or because she is an only child, or because she is shy but direct, or simply because of her unique style of dress and culture.

Own it, girl! I tell her. *Be proud of what you are in this world; be proud of what you represent! It's worth it to be true to yourself, even if others dislike you or misunderstood you in the process, it all leads back to Love in the end.*

Over time, what you represent is what you are – more than anything else. And if what you represent means more to you than someone's favor, then their rejection of you becomes nothing more than a favor. If what you represent means more to you than the opinions of others, then their rejection of you doesn't hurt anymore, it disappears into thin air like a magician's whirlwind. Because that which you are representing stands by your side like a lantern in the dark of midnight, and you are the one who is awake to hear midnight's song.

It is never personal, in the end. F. Scott Fitzgerald wrote this in his famous novel The Great Gatsby, meaning that others judge us due to what we represent in this world, and that makes all the difference. It isn't personal, and in the end, it never was.

We are all, by default, Love; we are taken farther and further away from this natural state of balance the more we choose our ego selves: judgment, fear, control, and lovelessness. We take ourselves away from our true Nature when we devalue others because of what they represent, rather than value them for being brave enough to represent it.



I can't seem to get Radiance to smile for a photo no matter what I do! The first reason for this is because of me: I have taken too many photos of her, since her babyhood, and she is bone tired of the camera. The second reason: she thinks that the American/Western tradition of smiling for the camera is fake and phony, and she hates it – like most Africans. In a million photos of her father I must have taken when we were together (2007/2008-2009), I probably captured him smiling on film once. I adore this picture (above), as Radiance is standing beside her veterinary mentor, Alpha Conteh. Alpha always smiles for photos, and Radiance always laughs at him for doing so. It is an ongoing joke between them.

What we have learned in Radiance's homeschool is that the Gullah people of South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida are the former Black Seminoles: Gullahs who escaped from slavery: “*The Black Seminoles are an offshoot of the Gullah who escaped from the rice plantations in South Carolina and Georgia. They built their own settlements on the Florida frontier, fought a series of wars to preserve their freedom, and were scattered across North America. They have played a significant role in American history, but have never received the recognition they deserve. Some Gullah slaves managed to escape from coastal South Carolina and Georgia south into the Florida peninsula. In the 18th century, Florida was a vast tropical wilderness, covered with jungles and malaria-ridden swamps. The Spanish claimed Florida, but they used it only as a buffer between the British Colonies and their own settled territories farther south. They wanted to keep Florida as a dangerous wilderness frontier, so they offered a refuge to escaped slaves and renegades from neighboring South Carolina and Georgia. The Gullahs were establishing their own free settlements in the Florida wilderness by the late 1700's.*”

~ by Joseph A. Opala: The Gullah: Rice, Slavery, and the Sierra Leone-American Connection



To my nephew, James:

Your mother told me that you wanted to know more about our world here in Africa. I will say, and also speak for my daughter (your cousin, Radiance) in the process, that I Love this work more than I have words for. Providing water wells to destitute people in completely remote, off-the-beaten-path villages makes me happy; we help where people are drinking river water or ground water that dries up during the time(s) of year it rains less, and the water itself is filthy: shared with animals or mosquitoes and other insects contaminating it further. To me, this water is a slow, silent death sentence, and our project SSAAP (*Simwatachela Sustainable Agricultural and Arts Program*) works directly to elevate people from this low standard of living by teaching them that they deserve more; clean water is the first step. A water well in the village is a work of art and a function of science that, when fused, separates the local people from the very animals they are sharing the water source with. An animal can drink filthy water; a human being cannot. We are more sensitive in this way; the systems of our body are not as strong as an animal's. There is a level of Love and empowerment that is a fundamental part of this work: we Love the people of the village, and admire both their strength and their humility, and we want them to have better opportunities than this!

Love,

Aunt Heather

Sierra Leone Poets Society

For anyone who has ever received an email from me, or a Quarterly Newsletter – for that matter! - you know that I like to write! I am long-winded, not good at being succinct, and like to tell stories; I am someone who values the art of communication above most every other genus of art. My favorite genres of writing are poetry and prose; on Sierra Leone's Independence Day, April 27, I was lucky enough to make a new friend; incidentally, his 25th birthday was also on the same day I met him: April 27th. We went swimming together at one of the villages where SSAAP put a school toilet in 2019/2020, and while we were swimming, he told me about the Writers' Society/Poets' Society that he was part of and invited me to join!

He recently won a poetry competition and his poem highlights some of the obstacles that Sierra Leone faces. He is a graduate of Njala University, which is the most prestigious university here in Sierra Leone.



Title: "A Country Betrayed"; Poet: Amb. Ibrahim Denis Fofanah

Photo: courtesy of I. D. Fofanah

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Let me introduce you to my country
A place of beauty and diversity.
But look beneath the surface, and you'll see
A nation betrayed, by its own complicity.

Corruption, the bane of our existence
A cancer that eats away our persistence.
Our leaders, once trusted and revered
Now sell our future, to the highest bidder.

Ethnic division, a tool of the weak
Used by politicians, to play hide and seek.
Our people, once united and strong
Now divided, and their spirits wronged.

Drug abuse, a scourge on our land
A symptom of despair, that's out of hand.
Our youth, once full of dreams and hope
Now lost in a world, where they can't cope.

Unemployment, a problem that grows
A barrier that keeps us on our toes.
Our potential, once bright and clear
Now stunted, by a lack of care.

And yet, amidst the chaos and strife
There's a glimmer of hope, a chance at life.
Our youth, ready to make a stand
And rebuild our nation, with their own hand.

Let us unite, and fight for our rights
To break the chains, and take to the heights.
For a better future, for our children to see
A country that's strong, and proud and free.

Sierra Leone, our home and our pride
Let us work together, side by side.
To reclaim what was lost, and to rebuild anew
A nation that's great, and a people that's true.

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Village toilet, above: SSAAP has both a School Toilets and a Community Toilets Program, which we will usher back into our scope when we come back to Sierra Leone in November 2024, as the need for sanitation in the remote areas is high; many times, people don't even have toilets and defecate in the bush, or an isolated area of the village. I keep telling them: "You deserve more than this! A proper structure for something so important as human waste materials is paramount in your community."

I have wanted to give up on this country more times than I could even count. And because I abhor falsity and believe in Truth, no matter how brutal it may at times be, I refuse to romanticize the reality of Sierra Leone, or Africa as a whole – as a matter of fact. I have to tell this story as it is.

I am going to fight the good fight; I am a warrior. I know the people of Sierra Leone need help and Love more than any other group, collectively, I have come across on Planet Earth. They are the most collectively broken. It will take, and has taken, only Source energy not to break me, too. I knew when we started the brutal task of building our SSAAP-Sierra Leone house/Headquarters that no matter what, I was going to get that house done. And, when finished, I know it will be a masterpiece; it will have within its walls our hard-won Truth: blood, sweat, tears. Before I leave Sierra Leone in August 2023, we will have SSAAP's 12 wells done from 2019/2020 and the remaining wells 42 SSAAP has for 2023. This is my promise not only to the people of Sierra Leone as well as the people supporting this project through a plethora of resources: time, energy, finances, in-kind donations, and inspiration/support/friendship, but also: my promise to myself.

The progress of SSAAP, from its origins in 2007/2008 to present day: May 2023, is that SSAAP is active in regions with demonstrative success; we can bring people to the field, invite them to our humble village home(s), and show them the contribution that they have made to these societies. Our investment in this project is ourselves; my daughter has blood ties and is therefore a citizen Sierra Leone through her birthright, and I am in the process of getting my [naturalized] Zambian citizenship, as I wish to become a dual citizen of both Zambia and of U.S.A.

The advantage to living, breathing, feeling, absorbing, suffering, rejoicing, and being here for the long haul in the parts of Africa where we serve is that our empathy level becomes heightened about 200% more than if we were to face Africa behind the cold bauxite of a computer screen monitor. When in Africa, the wavelength of the African people's heartbeats synchronize with the wavelength of my own heart; synchronicity of the human heart drumbeat is the most powerful bond between human energies on the planet. The reliability of the project increases exponentially when Love introduced by the heart explodes into the mind.



Thank you so, so much for reminding me of how important it is not to give up, and to set my mind to something and stick to it.



I Love my impossible job, but will not pretend it is easy, nor will I excuse myself or the local people for our shortcomings. Here is the thing: when we open, it is to all things. When we are open, we cannot control what will come in. Opening ourselves means allowing ourselves to be vulnerable to failure, judgment, criticism. But this is a small price to pay for being true to our authentic selves, for freedom, and for fulfilling the dream of our lives.



SSAAP is a 501(c)3 charitable organization created by the local people and committed to serving the needs of the local people. We always say that if we are not in the middle of the jungle (in Sierra Leone) or in the bush (Zambia), where the water is the worst and the people are the hungriest, then we are not doing our job! Purely Love-based, this project would never be possible without Love: yours, ours, theirs. Love is the glue that holds us all together while we learn the lessons. Thank you wholeheartedly for helping our dreams to come true and alive, with every magical detail. ☺



“There will never be anything more human than a drum circle around a fire, bare feet on the earth normalizing our charges, being cold when it’s cold, being hot when it’s hot and wet when it’s wet...the birthplace of the resilient human spirit in alignment with Nature and the Divine. And I think the beautiful part of this is- IF we can be authentic in that manner in this human experience, but be connected and somehow do it globally rather than tribally...we could usher in unprecedented world peace. It’s probably not the path this world has for us, or we have for ourselves. We’ll probably binge on our own hubris and get reset back to Nature and drum circles again...because a wise woman once told me, heavily primitive is shockingly progressive.

After all: the 21st century human says – yes, it’s a great idea to defecate in 2 gallons of fresh water, we do it multiple times every day! Also yes, please – more drugs and dark prisons for animals that are our ‘food system’. Of course fresh air doesn’t matter to something living. ;) Nature? How does that work? And does it have power button?”

~ SSAAP Supporter, Friend, Writer, Activist and Philanthropist, 2023



“The purpose of all light, all enlightenment, is to know thyself...You must be able to see your whole self – your light and your dark. Can you do that without judgment? Can you look in the mirror of self-reflection and see your entire self, including your divinity and your humanity? Can you love yourself as you are? Can you harbor an expanded heart that is big enough to hold all of what you are? Can you bring all of who you are to the center of your heart? Can you accept yourself, and also know that this is everyone’s journey? This is the journey of every soul: ... to know thyself, and to love yourself unconditionally. Unless men and women can love themselves fully, they cannot love others fully either. Loving only certain aspects of themselves, they will only love certain aspects of others. This, now, is the beginning of unconditional love.”

~ Nicki Scully and Linda Star Wolf, from Shamanic Mysteries of Egypt: Awakening the Healing Power of the Heart



My heart is my Light and it guides me, a strong navigator in the fierce darkness; I listen to it, and it has led me all over the world, to different pockets and sacred places. It has never failed me. Here is how I have structured my life, planned and organized it: Love. It has been the guiding force in my life. Love keeps me in Africa. And Love always brings me back home again. No matter what – no matter how frustrated, annoyed, dumbfounded, flabbergasted, irritated I become at the people in both Sierra Leone and Zambia, I cannot help but Love them oceanically. I just Love them so much, and it is this Love-state that propels me and drives me, inspires me and generates my passion not only for my work, but for the continent Herself. Above: Rochain Village Chief, a community we have helped in the past with both Primary School Sponsorships and a School Toilet. I always want to help him; he is so Loveable. Love is contagious, and because I Love him, I want to help his village, his people. The web of life is the collective consciousness we have when our energy threads through the needle's eye of our hearts, sewing us together in weaving a tapestry of Love.

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“As we dance in the meadow, flowers wreathed around our heads, drumbeats in our ears, we sense the trembling web, many fine threads entwined with yours and mind. We send our love to the threatened biodiversity of our beloved earth, the waning butterflies, and the amphibians warming us through thin skins to change our ways. Now is not the time for apathy or regret, not the time for keening in sorrow. It is time for swift feet and gentle fingers. Time for cracked open hearts and wild tears. Time for delight and determination to twine back together, eyes open to where we are and what can still be done.

We begin – like the crow daring to peck away at what confines us, cracking out of the shell, persistent in our knowing. We begin like the snake, feeling the tightness that no longer suits us, stretching beyond our edges until we shed our shape and become reborn. We begin with a smile, with tears, with blood and possibilities, we begin by listening to the whispers of our inherent capacity to rise.”

~ Molly Remer, “Beltane”; Mother Tongue Ink, 2022



“Organising our lives around the seasons and cycles and honouring the Holy Days is not a luxury extra, it is a radical necessity. The Earth urgently needs all of humanity to slow down and come back into intimate affiliation and rhythm with her. The global climate crisis cannot be solved by external fixes, three day working weeks, artificial intelligence or new technologies. Solutions need to be led by the Earth on her own terms.”



The holy days are our soul's watering holes where we ritually recalibrate ourselves, express our full palette of colours, our innate wholeness, delight and reverence through self-styled ceremonies and celebrations. They infuse our energy with joy and sublime gratitude, make our chosen actions more potent. They are how we open the weave, bring in all the tender ways of the sacred, give unbroken ancestral connection back to ourselves.



Half of the Earth's quest for regenerative healing takes place in dormancy and darkness. She needs our fallow time with the land and trees as much as she needs our activism. Dark holy days are where we restore our depth, 'see' the most far-reaching solutions especially during our bodies' times of heightened consciousness which include menstrual bleeding, giving birth, menopause, elder age and dying.

On the holy days themselves we leave our homes as if on paws, on the wing for a feast of noticing what herbs want our attention, what Goddess, what advice the ancestors want to give us through which bird, animal, stone, tree. Inside each holy day and at the hub of the mandala they form, is the temple of the ineffable feminine. Here in the fecund unknown we scan the WorldSoul for something to help the burning world – a personification of source consciousness that only heals because it is rooted real in our most ancient provenance when hearth, art and religion were one, homes temples and temples homes – shining in the very fabric of the magical dark – Black Terra Mother.”

~ Debra Hall (Garroch Glen, Scotland): “Introduction to the Holy Days”, Mother Tongue Ink, 2021



**I am happy, and feel
joy...**



tremendous daily

**...not because my
life is easy or**

**comfortable (it is neither of those things), but because I
followed my heart, and it led me here. I am happy that
I trusted my heart. It has never failed me.**