

This time the AFADU Field trip to Zimbabwe was different, very different!

I met accountant, Jenny Winterton who was planning to stay in Zim until August at Sydney International Airport and we boarded for the 12-hour flight, minus our Board Chairman, Craig who didn't show up! After a distressed and exhausted sounding phone call, he had informed us that he had cancelled his booked cab to finish work commitments for a high profile client and his cat had made the decision easier, by peeing in his suitcase! With sincere promises to fly over next day we left without him.

Jenny and I met Fergal and fellow AFADU Board member Margaret Fleming at the Airport Hotel in Johannesburg. Fergal, a South African by birth had flown over early to visit relatives prior to heading up to Zimbabwe where they had planned to stay for 2 months. Marg, an RN from Darwin, was there to offer support at the hospital and get involved in the satellite health clinics and Fergal, his area of expertise community development, was hoping to write up and implement other health proposals similar to the ones they had both worked on in Uganda. Our meal that night in the Emperor's Palace Casino Complex was a great chance to catch up and talk about our AFADU goals but a far cry from the conditions we would be experiencing in the low veldt in Zimbabwe!

Next day, instead of picking up a hire 4X4 as usual, we flew directly into Bulawayo where Alison Lewin was waiting to pick us up in the newly purchased vehicle bought with funds donated by the Archer family.

Getting through customs in the tinned roof World War 2 hangar serving until airport renovations were complete, was a unique and hot experience and as I witnessed more and more people being charged duty for items, we found out soon enough, could easily be bought in the country, I looked skywards and prayed, as my case was jam-packed with medical supplies and presents for the children! After admitting to one small item and paying a hefty \$5 duty and then being waved out into the sunshine, I thanked my lucky stars that my line to heaven was still working!

Alison looked wonderful! It had been 18 months since our last AFADU Field Trip when she had decided to stay and help and not only had she trimmed down, she was brimming with good health. The new bright blue Isuzu vehicle looked fantastic and we piled our gear in knowing our hard earned volunteer money would no longer be going towards the profits of a South African Car Hire company and instead could be used for project work all year round. We drove back to the B&B along the wide tree-lined streets of Bulawayo and I marveled at shops full of goods to buy and the people going about their business looking as if they didn't have a care in the world. This was a vast cry from trips I'd made in 2005, 2006, 2008 and even 2010.



Alison



Jen



Fergal, Marg and Pam



Craig

At dinner that night we took bets on whether Craig would actually make it next day but next morning he called to say he would be at the airport at Bulawayo, as planned. After last minute provisioning, buying gifts for the children paid for by their Australian sponsors and a visit to the local markets we headed back to the airport to pick up our “lynch pin” and then headed for Chikombedzi.

The long trip was uneventful except for two things. At Gwanda we found out that the service stations were all out of diesel and so, almost, was the car! The second problem was the frequent stops at police roadblocks, which Alison told us, were revenue raisers. Police, throughout the country had full government approval, for 6 months, to keep all the paid fines to run their cash strapped local stations. As many vehicles on Zimbabwean roads were often not road worthy it was proving to be a real money- spinner!

Alison handled each “pulling over” with good manners, respect for the law and a huge smile and we were soon on our way. She also found a private entrepreneur willing to sell us enough fuel to get us to the next major town. She had not only become street wise she was now totally “country wise”.

This was the first year we had ventured to Zimbabwe in the wet season so instead of clear blue skies, dusty roads and dried up rivers and creek beds I was thrilled to see lush, green, grassy plains, running rivers and cloudy skies full of promise! After driving through the southern town of Beitbridge and then turning

off at Mwenezi onto the private, and beautifully kept road through the 100,000 hectare Nuanetsi Ranch Crocodile Farm, we finally turned off onto the Chikombedzi dirt and muddy road and then to Edenvale which was covered in waist high grass.



Edenvale Ranch

As our hosts Ezelle and Christo were at a wedding in South Africa, we were welcomed to Edenvale Ranch by other long time friends plus the three Jack Russell terriers who were elated to see that their choice of bedding had just increased dramatically. I introduced the team and then we made ourselves useful by unloading the stores, doing a quick tour of the farm's immediate buildings and the "flowing" river! It was any easy decision to light the braai and our first night, like so many others I have had at the ranch involved dear friends, eating a delicious BBQ, drinking very passable wine and catching up on all the news. Heaven!

My roommate Jenny slept well and next morning, to my relief she said that the rumour she had heard about my snoring wasn't half as bad as she had thought. As Jen, Marg and Fergal and Craig slowly got into the groove and settled into their surroundings Craig and I planned our two weeks of meetings and after catching up with Margreth Mutero, our very competent orphanage manager, we all headed for the Llrhanzo Children's Village so that the team could finally meet the children, see the LCV School and visit the water project and grinding mill.

The kids always blow me away with their bright, excited smiles and this being my 5th trip I was able to remember many of their names. Obviously, the children had grown in 18 months but they all looked so remarkably well and happy that I couldn't help catch their infectious joy. Even the two little souls that I knew were

suffering from HIV/Aids looked fantastic thanks to the regular ARV's they are now taking and the loving care of the guardian mothers who look after their day to day needs.



Pam and Zipporah



Craig and Brooklyn



Suordai



Vengai



Faniso



Takura and Gift

I watched the other field trippers and could see that the decisions they had made to fly from Australia to Africa, at their own expense, to support AFADU and the children had been a good one and they could finally see first hand what I had been raving about for years.

After Ezelle and Christo returned from South Africa, we had to have more welcoming celebrations, introductions AND wine then the next 2 weeks were taken up with daily meetings and working through the goals we had set ourselves to clarify AFADU's position in the area.

The Diary looked a bit like this:-

Day 1 – Meeting at LCV with guardian mothers. Field trippers visit the LCV school and the animal project. Discussed new children on program.



Day 2 – Meeting with Ezelle. Stinking hot! Wading pool set up beside the clothes-line to cool off which we all used! Thunderstorm that night and the river is constantly checked for flooding, as pumps need to be removed if it rises further.



Day 3 – Pancake Day! AFADU Field trippers drive to orphanage and cook pancakes, something the kids have never tasted before. Smothered with sticky jam the children give the thumbs up and Margeth decides to make it a monthly treat.



Day 4 - One of the children in town has been taken to Hospital with a scorpion bite. Sam the Jack Russell goes exploring in the river and is bitten on the head by a crocodile. Needs nursing care to his wounds. We kill a baby cobra that is hiding in tree where we have morning and afternoon tea! We are told there are others!!!!!!



Day 5 – Trip to Chikombedzi to visit the hospital and the Nursing School. Call in to BSG, the Sewing school, after visiting the older children at Margreth’s house. At Edenvale a large mamba seen slithering into the woodpile and killed by a workman on the farm. He nearly gets bitten in the process!



Day 6 – Rain stopped but stupidly took the short cut to the orphanage and got bogged in the Isuzu. For a team of mainly city dwellers, Bear Grylls would have been proud of our problem solving skills! Alison, who is helping a friend run a Valentines Day Party at his hotel over the border in Chicualacuala, Mozambique, will not be happy!



Etc. etc. etc. etc.

Each day I watched as Craig, working closely with the community, utilized his many skills to achieve our objectives and build relationships. Each day I watched as our team members found their niche and slotted in to the day to day running of the AFADU projects and community support network.

The end of our two weeks culminated in a huge party at the Farm with all the kids swimming in the river followed by their favorite chicken and rice dinner, doughnuts for desert and singing and dancing. So much fun, so much happiness and joy!



This trip as I said was very different. There appeared to be a really positive “shift” in the country and the powers that be seem to be sincerely working towards a saner Zimbabwe. Working with the entire community we achieved so much and left with clear and concise objectives for AFADU. We opened our own bank account, filled out the applications necessary to become an NGO and appointed Alison Lewin as the School of Nursing project Manager with the entire support of the Chikombedzi Hospital Board. Even before we had left the building had progressed.

AFADU is in the area to stay, however, we are nothing without our supporters, current sponsors and the people who have heard the stories about Ezelle and the kids at LCV and been touched!

After visiting a Danish orphanage near Bulawayo, whilst on our R&R, it was spelled out that not one Childrens home in Zimbabwe is run without International support. For AFADU to deliver the level of support at Lirhanzo Children’s village required we are asking for more sponsors to come forward to help and for those sponsors who are already looking after children to tell others of the work AFADU is doing.

Please remember we are all volunteers and unlike other charities all the monies raised through the sponsorship program go directly to the children and the running costs of Lirhanzo Children's Village. Sponsorship is \$450 year and can be paid annually or \$40 in monthly installments. Our transparency has appealed to the senior members of the Chikombedzi community and puts us in good stead.



If you can help, please contact David and Susie Utting the new sponsorship coordinators for a package or more information.

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