

Reaching out in Africa

Making a Difference in a World of Great Need

by Jessica Klauber



I have never spent the night on the streets or been without food and water. I have never been abandoned, beaten, or without love. I have always had a place to call home, a loving family, and my needs have always been provided for.

For the past 24 years of my life, I have been extremely blessed. Four years ago, I became a Christian, and my outlook, attitude, priorities, wants, desires, goals, and life have completely changed. I feel that I am on the pathway to true life. It is this path that led me half way around the world to Africa. There were 13 of us that felt called to embark on this mission trip to reach out with our hands and hearts to the children and people of Swazi.

Our goal was to be a blessing to the communities. What we learned from these amazing people, I believe, blessed us far more than we could have ever blessed them. It opened our eyes to a hurting world. It broke our hearts with compassion and love.

The average lifespan in Swaziland is 33 years, and roughly 43 percent of the population has HIV/AIDS. All of them have a story to tell. All of them are precious and valuable.

I will never forget the moment I walked into the first community, Zombodze, and saw a hundred little smiling faces, running with all of their might to come meet us. Without any introductions, these little ones

began hugging us and lifting up their arms to be held. I wish I could describe what that felt like; it is probably one of the most memorable moments of my life. I had at least one child attached to each of my limbs and wrapped around my waist.

They knew that we were there to help them. They didn't need to know our names. All they cared about in that moment was being loved. These children were desperate for love. Their clothes were dirty and ripped, most didn't have shoes, many had signs of ringworm on their skin, but it didn't matter; to us, they were the most beautiful faces we had ever seen. Tears of sadness and joy welled up inside of me as my eyes took in the children and their living conditions.

We were set up with an organization called Children's Cup (www.childrenscup.org), and we worked to build community CarePoints. A CarePoint can be looked at as a school, a medical clinic, a cafeteria, or a meeting place. No matter what program is going on at a CarePoint, each is most definitely a safe haven for hundreds of orphans and vulnerable children that are in such desperate need of hope. Children's Cup's purpose is to take humanitarian and spiritual aid into the hard places where war, natural disasters, and disease epidemics have devastated societies.

With the support and prayers of our home church, Bayside Community Church (www.baysidecommunity.org), our team worked tirelessly for a week to make a difference in these children's and their communities lives. We looked for opportunities to serve the missionaries, teachers, and healthcare providers. We painted and helped construct CarePoints. We played games with the kids and sang songs. We gave them a piece of our hearts, and they gave us a piece of theirs. Language barriers seemed to be no obstacle in comparison to the love that was being poured out.

We visited a hospital and prayed for healing over children who were dying over malnutrition, aids, liver failure, and other diseases. I looked into the eyes of a child, probably no more than eight years old, who had been abandoned and was dying from liver failure. He was so weak that he couldn't sit up or speak. His eyes had lost any glimmer of hope. It's at moments like these that we can feel so helpless. All I could think was, "This didn't have to happen. This child didn't have to die..." I remember whispering, "You are loved and cherished" to him and singing as I gently rubbed his head.

Each of us left Africa having shared in a life-changing experience. We were all

touched in different ways and now carry with us the memories in our hearts. I have learned that there is more to this life than what meets the eye. There is more to this life than material wealth, achievements, and status. For me, having faith in something so much bigger than I could ever comprehend has opened my eyes to what can't be seen. I believe that we all have a plan and purpose on this earth, that all of us can make a difference, and that we can change the world by small deeds done with great acts of love!

As our plane departed from Africa, I was flooded with so many different emotions and was thankful for everything in my life.

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