

Bessie Veramu is my pen pal. We had only written to one another a few times before our trip to Zimbabwe. She is a married mother of 4 and I guess I chose her because she had all daughters like me.

I had a wonderful time with Bessie and her family during our visit to Gwenzi. She is a real character with a terrific sense of humor.

Bessie's husband Charles is a farmer and the couple own approx. 12 acres of absolutely beautiful land where they grow a variety of crops. They live in a traditional thatched roof hut with 3 of their delightful daughters. We very briefly visited their home one afternoon so we could see where they lived, but the location of their property was too remote for me to stay there with them, so I stayed with Bessie at her oldest daughter's home which was more centrally located.

I liked Bessie immediately when we met and we continued to develop an easy and comfortable rapport over the few days that we were together.

I was really humbled by Bessie's hospitality. It was so sincere and so basic that I will just never forget it. It was obvious that they had gone to some lengths to make it nice for me, and I think that Bessie was a little nervous that it wouldn't be comfortable enough.

Accommodations were lean. We slept on mats on the floor in the bedroom. I had my own mat and Bessie and her 2 daughters shared one. But each night was like a pajama party with close friends that I had known for ages. We laughed and talked and shared stories about our families. Bessie and I connected as wives, as mothers, as women of faith and as it turned out, as social workers. We share many of the same basic concerns.... our family's health, good educations for our children, family finances, providing a safe and loving home, and being the best mothers that we can be.

In addition to farming, Bessie works as a village outreach worker for the village of Munasi, which is about $\frac{3}{4}$ miles from her home. From there, all of her outreach work is done on foot. She works hand in hand with Gwenzi clinic, one of the busiest health clinics in the area. She is clearly loved and well respected by the people in the village

The whole experience for me was just amazing. I know that I never would have understood or been sensitive to the day to day struggles that our partners experience without seeing it first hand. I have changed as a result and I am very grateful for having had the opportunity.

Martha McDonough
Pilgrim United Church of Christ Brentwood-Kingston - paired with Gwenzi UCCZ,
Gwenzi, Zimbabwe
Traveled to Zimbabwe in 2007