

## Reaching out – and a tear

There were 15 in our delegation to Zimbabwe. I was the only male. That simple fact started this story.

We arrived late at the church in Gweru (as we traveled I think we always arrived late!). We exited our combi (van) and walked into the church. I sat with the delegation on the left side of the church. Oops! That was the “women’s” side of the church. I made my apologies and moved to the right side of the church, sitting alone on a bench. Within a couple of minutes, I was no longer sitting alone. A young lady, not constrained by women’s and men’s sides, sat down next to me. Her name was Sibongile, using the nickname Sibbs.

Sibbs is a delightful young lady. She was a student at college, finishing her master’s degree. She only had one class, her thesis and examination to complete the degree. She was enthusiastically looking toward entering a PhD program, almost anywhere that would accept her, either in Zimbabwe or elsewhere, probably South Africa.

After returning home, I started an e-mail correspondence with Sibbs. The correspondence was good. Sibbs has a very strong faith. Back in Gweru, she was there because it was right, not there simply to greet a delegation from New Hampshire. Sibbs was a young lady that had so much potential for Zimbabwe. She successfully completed her master’s degree and started looking for PhD options.

As I corresponded with Sibbs, I lost contact with her for a couple of e-mails. Then I received the following communication (just as she wrote it):

I hope to find you and Rita well. I am sorry for the silence things have not been working well as to my expectations. It just wasn't my season. Beginning of the year I went to Harare which is the capital city of Zimbabwe, I was staying with my sister Senzeni and her husband Nelson and their daughter Zoe. I was looking for a job to fund my PhD and I was ready to take on anything to make my savings but alas in vain there were just empty promises and I never found a job that time and my brother in law Nelson (he is a Chartered accountant) lost his job as the company downsized yet he was the bread winner. So from then onwards my mother had to help us with the little pension she has and I could not make any savings for my PhD. So last month I got a temporary job to teach but unfortunately my sis and brother in law had to move back to Gweru and stay with my mother because they could not pay the mortgage for their house. So I got a room to rent and I am working but my salary equals my rental and living expenses making it impossible for me to save for my PhD. I just pray that God will help me to get a better job or a scholarship for my PhD I will not give up, so here I am now able to write you an email.

We are in spring and we are heading towards summer, for sure our seasons are opposite. You have beautiful grandchildren and their names reveal that their

parents know the Lord and thats a blessing. Am running for a lecture now it really feels good chatting with you guys once again. Thank you for not forgetting me.  
Take care

A tear in my eye. We face economic challenges here, but we need to realize that those same challenges, sometimes worse, are experienced elsewhere, especially with our sister partner, Zimbabwe. Pray with me that Sibbs is able to achieve her dream, that her family remains whole, that her faith stays strong, and that Zimbabwe is able to achieve its potential.

Robert Masters  
Tewksbury MA  
Traveled to Zimbabwe in 2010

(I accompanied the delegation from New Hampshire to Zimbabwe in the summer of 2010. It was my first time back in 59 years, since I was six. My father was the doctor at Mt. Selinda Hospital from 1948 to 1951. In 1951, my father died of polio. I also had a younger sister who died. My mother and younger brother were paralyzed from the middle of their trunks on down. My older brother and I were not sickened by polio.)