

## History Comes Alive

First, a little bit about me: My father was the doctor at Mt. Selinda Hospital from 1948 to 1951. In 1951, he 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. I was six at the time.

Now we can go forward. 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. It was quite an experience for me, not only in Zimbabwe (I felt like I had come home), but back in the US discovering new connections. It was God letting the experience continue.

Next to the hospital at Mt. Selinda, there is a small village of mud huts. These huts house a community of mothers-to-be. The primary mode of transportation in rural Zimbabwe is walking. A mother-to-be certainly does not want to walk many miles to hospital at nine months. It is much easier to walk to the hospital at about seven months pregnant and live in this community until the birth process starts.

On the door of one of the huts was the name Dr. Stetson. I knew of Dr. Stetson, but had never met him. He was the replacement doctor for my father at the hospital at Mt. Selinda. He arrived in 1956 and stayed for 17 years. I mentioned to several of the delegation that I knew of Dr. Stetson. Janet Sanborn (North Hampton, NH) said, "I think I received a letter from him. I'll see what I can find." Janet sent me his address and phone number after we returned to the states.

I contacted Dr. Stetson and we had a couple of good phone conversations and agreed to communicate periodically. Dr. Stetson is 86 years old and is retired from medicine. I even mentioned the "Dr. Stetson" name on the hut door. He told me that the maternity building behind the hospital was originally named after him. When Zimbabwe gained its independence, things western were not as accepted. His name was removed from the maternity building and placed on the hut door. But relax, Dr. Stetson was not at all concerned about the change. That says something about Dr. Stetson.

This summer, Rita, my wife, and I vacationed for a week in Sedona, AZ. As it turns out, Sedona is about a half hour from Dr. Stetson's home town of Cottonwood. We had two delightful visits with Dr. Stetson (he prefers Kirk) and his wife Bunni. It was a special time for me. Dr. Stetson said that the 17 ½ years that the two of them spent at Mt. Selinda were the best years of their lives. That is exactly what my mother said about their 3 ½ years at the same place. Both the Stetsons and my parents were committed to being missionaries long before entering the mission field, though Dr. Stetson's path to becoming a doctor was a little more circuitous. Both couples were absolutely dedicated Christians who felt called to their home and life at Mt. Selinda.

Rita and I will be back to Cottonwood to continue our visit.

I could end the story here, but the experience continued. During our first visit with the Stetson's we met another couple, Jim and Sylvia Nissen. Sylvia's mother was a nurse who worked with Dr. Stetson at Mt. Selinda. They now live in South Africa. Sylvia mentioned that she thought that her sister, Marilyn, had played with my sister, Carolyn. Dr. Stetson gave me Marilyn's e-mail address and I sent her an e-mail. Below is some of that e-mail, I want Marilyn's narrative to be as she presented it. Carolyn was four years old when she passed away.

I remember your mother and father clearly, also Carolyn. Your Father was a tall handsome man with 'golden' hair and your Mother was beautiful, gentle and slender (they looked the perfect couple. Carolyn was about 5 (?) when I last played with her, which was about two days before she died. We had a lovely time together even though I was a few years older than her (there weren't any other little girls at Mt. Selinda for me to play with, so I was very good at climbing trees and playing with motor cars!). We went up a Chinese Guava tree and I persuaded her to taste one even though her Dad had told her not to, as the pips might give her appendicitis - you can imagine how guilty I felt (for YEARS!!!) when she passed away a few days later as I thought it might be the Chinese Guava I persuaded her to eat. We were all (about 6 boys and myself) put into one long room and keotherapy from everyone, in case we also caught Polio. Mum forced THE MOST REVOLTING MUTI (medicine) down our throats, with much wailing from all of us - we were too young to realise the seriousness of the situation ( I was born in May 1944, so must have been about 7 years old at the time), as in those days children weren't told very much.

Even small things that we do can have significant influence on someone else. I think that directly addresses being faithful. The first I knew of Marilyn is the e-mail partially presented above.

And Dr. Stetson is only one of several Zimbabwe-related people that I have met since returning.

There are so many experiences that make us who we are. The Ukama experience between UCC Zimbabwe and the NH UCC Conference is special. Make it work in simple terms. Let it enter your soul and be part of who you are. Ukama let my history come alive.

Robert Masters  
Tewksbury, MA  
Traveled to Zimbabwe in 2010