

Extravagant Welcome – Leading up to our journey to Zimbabwe, I was a mess of emotions. I was excited about seeing this new part of the world and getting to know its people. And I nervous about being so very far from home and family. The unknown is always scary and it was with this apprehension that I cried goodbye to my family, boarded the first plane in our trip, and the second plane, and finally the third plane. While the first two flights had the most airtime (6 hours followed by 11), it was the final leg of our journey from Johannesburg, South Africa to Harare, Zimbabwe (a mere 2 hours) that was the most uncomfortable. There was a rather unappetizing meal served followed by much turbulence upon our descent into Harare. My seat companion, Charen from the Newport church, remembers me, at the end, clenching my teeth, shutting my eyes, and pleading, “can we just land already?!” And we did. When I opened my eyes, getting my first glimpse of Zimbabwe, I saw dry grassland, minimal trees, a hazy fog at the horizon. And upon the first building, the first human-made structure I was to see in Zimbabwe were the letters – A.G.S. My name is Alyssa Glenys Sands. AGS is what my NH license plate reads and it’s what my dad has always marked on my birthday, Valentines, and graduation cards. I discovered my own personal welcome to Zimbabwe, courtesy of “Air Ground Support” The message was, “be at ease here, you are home” and in my nearly three weeks in Zimbabwe, I was to discover just how true that was. What an extravagant welcome.

Extravagant Welcome – During the introductions to our host families on that first night in Mt. Selinda, Reverend Mugidheya went around the room noting the presence of various members of the community. And at the last table he proclaimed to Mt. Selinda’s “Golden Couple” – Albert and Bessie Hliziyo: “We have brought you a granddaughter in Alyssa.” And after arriving at their home later that night, I followed Go-go (grandmother) down the candlelit hallway to the bedroom in which I would sleep. There I found a single bed, lovingly made with pink sheets and a warm thick blanket, much as I have found many times in my Nammy’s home in Keene. Go-go said, “Sleep well Alyssa, you are free. We will see you tomorrow.” What an extravagant welcome.

Extravagant Welcome – It has been a long but wonderful day at Mt. Selinda. The morning was spent at the Daisy Dube Children’s Home, visiting with the kids, singing songs, and showing pictures. In the afternoon we toured the hospital and were fortunate enough to see a newborn and his mother, a product of the maternity ward. The sun was shining as we traced the walking paths through the community gardens, our feet gaining a red-ish tint from the rich earth. It is nearing dinner time and a group of blue uniformed high school girls walk toward their dining hall. I am with Go-go now, heading home, past the beautiful brick church, the high school buildings, and the Mt. Selinda playing fields. As we near the Hliziyo home, I hear “Alyssa!” and out comes my little mukoma (brother) – a 3 year old boy named Gift. He is running with three neighbor girls who greet me in warm hugs. When I say “Manheru,” they giggle at my accent and reply “Good evening.” The oldest, Munashe, takes my hand and we all walk towards the house. An extravagant welcome.

Alyssa Sands

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Zimbabwe  
Traveled to Zimbabwe in 2010