

Our Trip to Uganda

The last time I had traveled on a mission trip with my son (Gregg) had been eighteen years earlier in the Philippines. He was only eight years old when I took him with me to So. Leyte. We passed through the road blocks and by the army base that had long since been abandoned due to the problem of the communist insurgents known as the NPA or New Peoples Army. Gregg embraced the entire experience as an adventure and fear was not a part of his perception. Gregg had been taking young people on mission trips for over six years. This was my first opportunity to travel with him. I had been busy as a pastor, a business man and as a student completing seminary.

Each summer Gregg selects a group of young people to travel with him as interns. These young persons are put through a rigorous program of training. I had served in the U.S. Marine Corp and saw in my son the tenacity and drive of a drill instructor. I realized that these young people were being trained like soldiers, only they were soldiers for Christ. The summer began with two weeks of intensive Bible study and challenging lectures on the cost of living the Christian life. Next was a week long conference held in Nashville. The conference involved times of worship with our ministries own band; Unnamed Servant. In the mornings and afternoons were Bible classes, one of which I taught on the book of Job. Next was a week in Mexico, then a week in Jamaica. After that we went on to Kenya to hold seminars at the Bible Training Center, and to minister in some of the churches in remote areas.

My young son was already a veteran of numerous mission trips and had established the Bible Training Center in Kenya. Now, after three weeks in Kenya we loaded into a bus with our Kenyan students, Elias Rukonya, with his wife and his son Nicholas. With our interns and students we numbered twenty five persons. We were on our way to Uganda. We did not know where we were going to in Uganda, only that Gregg believed God had spoken to him about making contact with people in Uganda and opening a training center there also.

By this time the interns have slept on concrete floors, ate food unlike any they had ever ate before, experienced thirst due to a lack of boiled water, gone days without showering, gone without sleep, and traveled endless hours, and lost weight. The interns have also opened up as people, experienced God in prayer, and found themselves carrying a love for the unreached and suffering peoples of the world.

The bus ride was to be an all night trip, along the way we saw zebras, giraffes, wart hogs, and baboons. The countryside was beautiful, filled with a look like only Africa can offer. Trees dotted the countryside, while at other times the dense forests were truly jungles. Our backpacks were stored on the top of the bus and covered with a tarp. Unfortunately the tarp

did not keep out the powerful rains that we encountered, leaving many of us with wet packs, clothes and sleeping bags. We arrived at the border to Uganda in the early morning hours and attempted to sleep in the crowded and cramped bus until the border opened.

I knew very little about Uganda, I did remember Uganda to be the home of the dictator and murderer Idi Amin, and the home of the Entebbe airport, where Israel had accomplished a daring hostage rescue.

We were on our way to the capital city of Kampala. Gregg had told me that God would tell him where we were to go and would be our guide. Gregg also told me that God had told him that something was about to happen and that he was not to worry. A few minutes later we pulled in for gas, the driver was a muslim from Tanzania. He was backing up the bus when he hit something. The sound and impact were such that I thought he had knocked over the gas pump. Gregg said, "This is it Dad, remember God said don't worry." Gregg never turned around to see what we hit. I on the other hand had to look, it was only a rack full of oil cans.

We arrived in Kampala not knowing a single person. We were to pick up two of our Kenyan students that were unable to depart with us and had taken alternate transportation. We were to drive to a bus depot, but no one knew where the bus depot was. Gregg asked the bus driver to stop and let him out of the bus, he said, "I'll go to the person the Lord leads me to and that person will guide us to the bus depot." Within a minute Gregg was re-entering the bus with a man. The man sat up front and directed our driver straight to the bus depot, the man was happy to be taken to the same location and left us with a smile.

After picking up the two students Metembe and Conjogo we looked for a place to park. Operating on a limited budget Gregg was insistent that we find a place to park for free and in the middle of the city. Gregg directed the bus driver to pull over at a gas station. The station had one area where a bus could park and allowed us to park there without charge. On a side note, at this particular time a group that we had taken to Mexico was withholding a \$24,000 dollar payment to the ministry. Also the ministry had already paid in advance the trip that the group had went with us on. The young ministry was in jeopardy of bankruptcy. Gregg would have no monies to pay his employees or himself. Gregg believed that if he would Take care of today, and what God wanted of him today, then God would take care of tomorrow, with this in mind he laid aside the weight of the problem and focused on the day.

We parked in Kampala to exchange money and find a place to eat. That afternoon we took off down the road asking God to guide us to someone with whom we could stay and work. The day was quickly passing as we traveled northward into Uganda. We discussed the possibility of sleeping on the side of the road and decided if we did we should arm ourselves with some Ponga knives (machetes) to ward off any curious animals. Gregg told our driver to pull into a gas station and he and Nicholas took off to purchase some Pongas.

The presence of a bus full of white people in Uganda attracts a lot of attention. There was a muslim man there by the name of Abacard. He and Gregg spoke and he invited us to stay at his farm. Abacard was a tax collector and would not be off of work for an hour, so we drove up the road for a half hour before returning to meet Abacard. When we met Abacard he felt unsafe giving us a place to stay because of his muslim friends. Abacard directed us to a pastor that was located in a town some miles off the main road.

In the midst of our travels and negotiations the local police authority became aware of our presence and wanted to know what a bus full of Americans were doing in the middle of Uganda.

We would spend many hours waiting and praying in the bus while Gregg was in the police station with the O.C. (officer in command). Unlike America, the police in Uganda are armed with automatic weapons. The O.C. wanted to see all of our passports and visas. Gregg was threatened with overnight incarceration, we were praying.

The pastor's name is Tom. Tom had a small church in the little town of Bombo. We had resigned ourselves to sleeping in a field out in front of the church. A field where the Ugandan ranchers herded their horned cattle, the field was spotted with the ever present 'cow patty'. If Jesus wanted us to sleep outside, (we had no tents, and our packs and bags were wet) we were prepared to do so. Once we all resigned ourselves to the will of the Lord, Gregg and Pastor Tom were released from questioning and we were able to go to the church and stay there.

Our youngest intern (ever) was a young girl named Brin. Brin never complained or showed any signs of worry as she submitted herself to the will of Jesus to direct our journey, and any suffering would be for him. The next ten days and nights we spent sleeping on the concrete floor in the wood post, bamboo and mud structure from which the church was built. During our stay we loved, shared, and prayed, and taught the people of Bombo. Pastor Tom received us with great love, he and his family and church prepared food for us and washed our clothing. Through God's direction and providence we had been brought to a group of people that had been praying for someone to come and teach them the Bible.

The O.C. visited us daily and our uncomfortable beginning turned into a blessing. His presence at the church on a daily basis helped secure our safety. Our encounter and cooperation also developed trust and relationship with the police so that we might return and be welcomed.

One evening a man entered the service, he was obviously tormented and was suffering. Gregg wanted the church emptied, the man was demonized. He had elephantitis on both legs, from the feet up to the knees his legs were swollen, his skin like inflamed leprosy was grey with open splits and sores. The smell was difficult to bear. The man did not speak English, so we had Pastor Tom to interpret for us. As we prayed for the man to be free of

the demonic oppression (devolution) that sought to kill him and had thrust him into living in filth, he placed his hands on his ears, then out of his mouth came the words 'be quiet'. The voice was deeper and different than his, I looked at my son and said, "Did you hear that?" Gregg replied, "Yeah it wasn't him." Gregg quickly pulled his hands from his ears and I responded with, "We will not be quiet". We prayed for the man until he was in his right mind, we gave him fresh clothes and heated water for him to shower with and bought him some dinner. On Sunday he came to church looking better, much of the swelling in his legs was gone and he had gotten a haircut and was smiling, he also testified about Jesus during the service.

We made several excursions into remote areas of Uganda where churches associated with pastor Tom's group were located. During one such excursion our muslim tax collector friend Abacard flagged us down and requested to go with us. I knew that Jesus was calling Abacard to himself. Abacard sat next to me on the bus. He asked me questions and I shared with him about the person of Jesus for a couple of hours. Abacard requested that we pray with him as he asked Jesus to be Lord of his life. We still pray for Abacard as he faces a great deal of persecution for his choice.

After ten short days of wonderful ministry in Bombo and other areas we departed for Kenya. We were all a little closer to one another than we had been before. We were not people on a manicured tourist mission trip we were pioneers, we were apostles, and prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers all on a mission for Jesus. The bonding of us Americans with our Kenyan friends was greatly enhanced by the trip into Uganda. During our time in Uganda the Kenyans ate food they had never seen. They found themselves in a place where their native tongue was unknown, so they were forced to speak English. When we got through the border some of them wanted to kiss the ground of their native country. Now they knew how it felt to be a missionary, now they knew that being a missionary is about more than having enough money to go, it is first about being called to go and then being obedient to that call.

We wanted the Kenyan Bible Students to learn that they did not have to have the budget of an American missionary to be called or to go. The students did learn that they could travel and go and live like they live and be a Kenyan missionary. We achieved several goals; first, we made contact with believers in Uganda so that we could build a training center, second we gave our Kenyan students an experience that changed their world view and equipped them with the knowledge that they could be missionaries on a Kenyan budget and finally we taught our American interns that God still directs the lives of his people that are called to serve him. The interns left us for home, some moved to Nashville to attend our newly founded school and plan to join the ministry. Our time together cannot be erased by time or people because God was with us on our journey.

It is now 2007 and we continue to return to Bombo town each year. Our school has grown and we are preparing young people to go and live and work in Bombo town and around the world.