

Visit to Zambia

Catriona Valenta
June 26, 2013



Catriona Valenta, a Glasgow, Scotland native currently living in Giessen, Germany, traveled to Zambia from June 13 -26, 2013 to join an interfaith tour.

The following is a personal report by Catriona Valenta from Giessen Germany, and a native of Glasgow, Scotland, who visited Zambia from June 13 to June 26, 2013.

The country was called Northern Rhodesia when I was a schoolgirl, its first president, as an independent nation, was Kenneth Kaunda, and Unification missionaries had established a very successful sausage-making factory there in the 1970s [first missionaries came in 1975].



Pupils of the Barlastone Park give their greetings to the visiting guests.

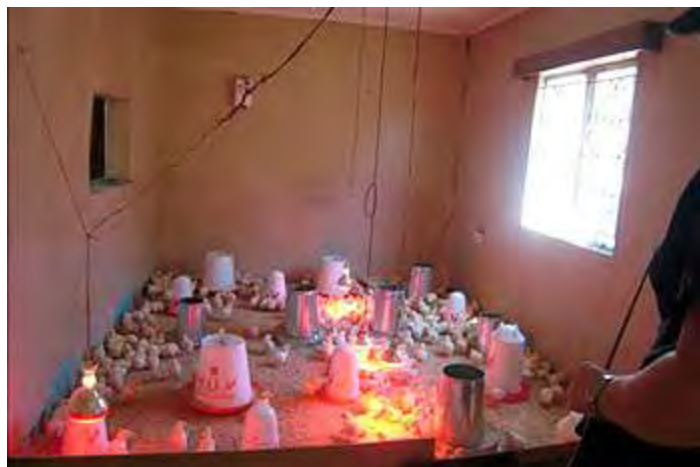
That was about the extent of my knowledge of the landlocked African country of Zambia until earlier this year when the decision to join an interfaith tour in June inspired me to update my knowledge.



Valenta (right) met up with Eunice (left), who runs a small makeshift clinic in her home.

Robert Williamson, a fellow Scot who was born in Zambia and spent 17 years there as a missionary, has been organizing and leading tours in cooperation with International Relief Friendship Foundation (IRFF)

and Universal Peace Federation (UPF) for the past four years. The trips have a healthy balance of purpose: to distribute donations and funds whilst gaining first-hand feedback on how these donations are (to be) used, to visit institutions founded and funded by other organizations to see how they operate, and of course, to see and experience this wonderful country which boasts the largest waterfall in the world, the Victoria Falls, “discovered” by the missionary David Livingstone.



Eunice purchased 100 chickens to develop an income-generating business to support her makeshift clinic in her home.

This year marks the 200th anniversary of Livingstone’s birth in Blantyre, Scotland, and it was especially meaningful for me, born and raised in Glasgow and, like Livingstone, a graduate of Glasgow University medical school, to visit the land where he pioneered, worked and died.



On behalf of the US-based charity “Eyes of Africa,” Valenta and her party were able to distribute almost 200 pairs of reading glasses to the local people who had been gathered by Eunice.

We were a small group of six ranging in ages from 24 to 61; four of us from a Christian/Unificationist background, and two Muslims. And our gracious van driver and ‘local’ guide was Rudolf, who was sent by Father Moon as a missionary to Zambia from Germany in 1975, later to be joined by his Austrian wife with whom he has raised four daughters. It was Rudolf who had learned the basics of sausage-making from his father in a Bavarian “pub”, and who together with Robert and a Japanese missionary pioneered and developed a successful business, which was able to support many other projects. One of the projects, Barlastone Park School, started by the Unification Church missionaries in 1984, provides education to university-entrance level for more than 300 pupils. The school charges fees, but is dependent on donations and sponsorship for maintenance and expansion. Previous donations of microscopes and computers have been put to good use, and there are plans to build chemistry and physics laboratories. After handing over further donated laptops and school supplies, we were welcomed in the assembly room by the enthusiastic students who entertained us with lively songs and dancing.

Zambian charities founded by Unificationist missionaries

At one time, there was a well developed medical clinic supported by IRFF, which for complicated reasons, could regrettably not be maintained. However, Eunice, one of the original nursing staff, provides medical care for locals in a small, makeshift clinic in her home. (When we visited her, she was treating a lady with gastroenteritis with IV fluids.) Her vision is to have official recognition and to expand her services, but the path towards that goal is fraught with challenges. Nevertheless, she is a determined lady, and we were encouraged to see that she made immediate use of a modest donation by buying 100 chickens from which she can develop an income-generating business to support the clinic.

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School children from the Mackenzie school, a project founded by the IRFF, entertain the visitors.

In the north of Zambia, in Ndola, is the Mackenzie School, a further project established by IRFF. Young people from Switzerland have regularly visited and volunteered their services, and make monthly donations to help pay teachers' salaries. Another charity, "Doors of Hope," has also become involved, and we saw a building in which they plan to house a new medical clinic. Children the world over appreciate similar treats, and certainly the "goodies" we distributed -a drink, chocolate, fruit and crisps [British English for potato chips]-were all eagerly received and consumed on the spot. In addition, we donated school materials, largely funded by donations from members of the Muslim community in Scotland. The song and dance performance of the children certainly had us clapping and tapping our feet.



Valenta visited the monument in northern Zambia which marks the spot where David Livingstone, traveler and medical missionary, died on May 1, 1873.

Although the resources of IRFF are limited, the organization is always open to help where needed, and is eager to learn how other organizations operate, and so Robert had arranged for us to visit two new (to IRFF) projects-the Chikumbuso project in Lusaka and the Namumu orphanage near Lake Kariba. Robert and Ashley also visited a third project in Livingstone, the Heartspring orphanage.



A visit to the massive cascade, Victoria Falls, the world's largest waterfall, is a must when visiting Zambia.

The Chikumbuso premises are humble but well organized, and self-sufficiency is encouraged. Here women and orphans are housed, and there is opportunity for schooling and to learn a trade. The small

shop had an enticing assortment of items on sale, including laptop covers made out of recycled plastic bags. The impression left was very positive.



When taking in the spectacular sight, double-layer raingear helps to keep dry when “soaking in” the experience.

But in contrast, the visit to the “Namumu Orphanage Centre” is indelible in my memory because of the extreme squalor in which the children are living. The roofs of the sleeping quarters are infested with bats, and their smell, which persists even for years after they have been eliminated, is as nauseating and irritating as anything my nostrils have ever been assailed with. And these kids have to sleep in such an environment. I felt uneasy in my comfortable hotel bed that night. Those in charge of Namumu are good and motivated people, but perhaps the difference lies to a large extent less on the size of the donations, but rather on how well these funds are used and whether or not they are channeled into productive activities which can generate a certain amount of self sufficiency. Simply providing aid without good guidance and support can encourage unhealthy stagnation and dependency.

One of the most important aspects of this tour was follow up on the use of donations, because, sadly, mismanagement and even corruption and misuse are not uncommon. On our schedule was an orphanage which had been visited and supported last year. Shortly before our arranged visit, we received a call informing us that the orphanage had been closed because of rent arrears, and that the children were being cared for in the homes of the staff. We were to meet in the office premises and to tour a new building in which the children were to be re-housed. The whole situation seemed suspicious and the accounts given by the representatives who received us were contradictory and implausible. However, a decision was made to give benefit of the doubt by making a small donation and tasking our on-the-spot representative, Rudolf, to make a visit later to inspect the promised new orphanage. But how painful it is to realize that one is possibly being deceived and lied to! This experience reminded me just how important it is to “trust, but verify.”



Valenta took an evening cruise on the Zambezi River and spotted two hippos.

Paying respect to early pioneers

Zambia also has much to offer the tourist, and this aspect of our trip was not neglected. Luckily the roads in Zambia, although not four-lane highways, allow for reasonably unproblematic travelling, and we were able to cover the several hundred kilometers from the Copperbelt in northern Zambia to Lake Victoria in the south in Rudolf’s van with minimal discomfort.

But it is humbling to remember that it was under conditions of much more than minimal discomfort that the early pioneers such as David Livingstone made this journey. We visited the monument in northern Zambia which marks the spot where he died, kneeling in prayer, at the age of sixty-one in 1873. His

faithful, native companions removed his heart, which they buried at the site of his death, and had his body transported to London where he is interred in Westminster Abbey. It was very moving for me as the seven of us, joined by two local boys, stood in a circle in prayer and reflection. Although “the white man” in many ways has left a bloody and disgraceful legacy in Africa, many, such as Livingstone, came with noble intent and accomplished much good.



A trip to Africa is not complete without a visit to a game reserve.

And a most interesting and fitting conclusion to this visit was our reception with Chief Chitambo IV, a descendant of the local chief who knew and worked with Livingstone. There is undoubtedly always protocol involved in an audience with dignitaries, and this was no exception. A full bow, removal of headgear, a prescribed method of clapping in response to his first questions - we more or less managed the ritual to the satisfaction of the chief and his attendant. Details of the audience will not be divulged, but before leaving, one of our group was offered a piece of land and at least one wife as an enticement to settle there!



Valenta and her party shop for ingredients at the marketplace to make curry.

The Victoria Falls in southern Zambia is another crossing point between the two countries. This massive cascade is the world’s largest waterfall, and is especially spectacular just after the end of the rainy season, in April/May. The native name is “Mosi-on-Tunya”- the smoke that thunders - and indeed this is a fitting description as the spray can be seen from a distance of several miles. The better known name was given by Livingstone in honor of the British monarch, Queen Victoria, who was on the throne in the year that he discovered the falls, 1855.



A white rhinoceros basks in the sun.

What a spectacular sight! Decked in double-layer raingear we viewed the falls from different angles, “soaking in” the experience. And then that evening we took a cruise on the Zambezi river, keeping a keen eye open for the native river inhabitants, and having the luck to see quite a few hippos and one or two well-camouflaged crocodiles before we marveled at the early sub-tropical sunset.

And what trip to Africa would be complete without a visit to a game reserve? In even a short afternoon visit we were able to see giraffes, elephants, monkeys, zebras and even the rare white rhinoceros. A close up view of the rhinoceros was made possible thanks to a relationship that Robert had cultivated on a previous trip with the park rangers who provided an armed accompaniment for us on a short bush walk to see this unusual and somewhat grotesque animal grazing.

Was it really only a two week visit? We had so many experiences! The UPF meeting at the Peace Embassy, the audience with Egyptian Ambassador- who had an “Ambassador for Peace” certificate dated 2003 New York displayed on his wall, the visit to the Moslem mosque, teaching hotel cook Godfree how to make curry when we took over his kitchen in the Mkushi Forest Lodge hotel, the tour of Twikatane Farm sausage factory--all these experiences contributed to a rich and eventful visit.

But as always, the most precious and lasting memories are of the people we met and with whom we shared testimonies, impressions, hopes and dreams.