

Zimbabwe Journal

June 21- June 30, 2006

Hello Family & Friends...

Greetings from Zimbabwe! Some of you know from my travels in Kenya last summer that I like to journal back to you all in the States while everything is still fresh in my mind. People from last summer seemed to enjoy reading my travelogue, so I am doing it again. I hope you enjoy it and find it interesting! We have been without internet access for several days due to power cuts, and much has happened, so there's lots to tell and I have written a book.

We arrived safe in Zimbabwe on Friday...our travels were totally and completely smooth. We flew Virgin Atlantic to London. From London, we took Zimbabwe Air to Harare. Given all the jokes we had heard about the airline, we were pleasantly surprised that the aircraft did not rattle or break down over Libya or the Sudan :-). We were worried about getting through immigration/customs, but we breezed through everything. We had been praying for all these things going smoothly and God definitely delivered.



The Croudace Family



Rachel & Al

It was joy to finally meet Allistair and Shelly Croudace, the couple that run the camp, who we have been communicating with for months prior getting ready for the trip. They are AWESOME!!! My impression of Zimbabwe so far, is completely different than I imagined. I figured it would be more like Nairobi which has a rather massive issue with garbage. Harare is well-kept and the infrastructure in the country is actually quite good...unlike all the potholes and necessary off-roading in Nairobi. I actually feel a lot safer. The Zimbabweans we have met so far are very polite, but seem far less fascinated with us white folks than the Kenyans. I look forward to getting to know more of them soon.

From the airport, Shelley and Al had to run some errands. At our first stop, we saw a whole bunch of monkeys on the roof of the house playing. I think they were showing off for us. Some of the team has had a rather surreal feeling about the trip that they weren't going to Africa, but rather shopping at TARGET. Seeing the monkeys gave everyone the distinct impression that we were not in Kansas anymore. The team split up to finish off the errands and Al wanted to take us to his favorite pizza place (yes, pizza in Zimbabwe). Pizza here costs over a million dollars seriously, Al had to fork over a whole stack of money. Of course, a million Zim dollars equates to about \$3-4 U.S. (\$365,000 Zim to \$1 U.S.).

One can't help to be charmed by Al right away...he is the Crocodile Hunter or Crocodile Dundee - the real-deal Zimbabwe version. My favorite Al quote so far is "You must be smoking your underpants, better switch to your socks" or "if you're not living on the edge, you're wasting space." Shelley, who is from Thousand Oaks, CA, is the perfect hostess. She is so kind, sweet and has great sense of humor.

We took the two-hour drive out to camp and got to see the countryside. I couldn't help but have the distinct feeling of coming home. There is just something about Africa that feels so comforting and familiar...even though it has been a year it feels like I never left. I think some of the team thought we would be roughing it. Not so, our accommodations are quite nice and were eating better than we do at home. Their house is lovely, large and comfortable - it has a pool, a trampoline, the outside is very lush and next to a very beautiful river...although, the river has tiger fish in it (same fish family as piranha, but 4 times the size) and sometimes crocodiles.



Lisa & Bombazonkey

I am huge animal lover...so I am hog heaven with their three dogs, donkey, horse, peacock, salamander, parrot and their cat,

Whoopsidaisy, who has already become my cuddle buddy...not to mention their three totally loveable kids that are so full of personality (Micaela -11, Rachel-8 and Caleb-5). Caleb is a self-professed bush boy, a mini-version of the Crocodile Hunter (i.e. Al)...who is in his element when he is hunting spiders, snakes and anything else that moves in the bush, and yet, he likes to use words like lovely when he prays. I was napping on the couch the other night and Caleb came and jumped on me. The power had gone out for a few hours, so we had candles everywhere. Caleb became entranced by the candle and he says look at the candle, I am making the flame get bigger... I said "are you doing that with your special powers?"...he said nah, "I don't have powers, I am doing it with my eye magic." My other favorite Caleb quote was when we found three large spiders in the bathroom (and by large, I mean Africa large)...he looked at it and says "you can touch it, I don't think it's very poisonous."



Whoopsidaisy & Rachel

Rachel also loves adventure and loves hanging out with her dad and mom. Micaela is the typical pre-teen, but very polite and also adventurous. Saturday she found a rather poisonous lesser baboon spider (slightly smaller than tarantula and hairy to boot!) and she proceeded to put it on box and come out and show me. I was taking pictures of it, when the thing jumped out right at me...needlesstosay, I screamed pretty loud. Don't worry, mom, it's poisonous, but not deadly and not an aggressive spider.

Later when I was looking at their wedding album, there was another lesser baboon spider in there. I didn't see it until Al moved my hand (which was unknowingly cupped over the spider) and said mind the spider, to which I screamed, jumped up, spilled my water and threw their whole wedding album on the floor. Al was razzing me about screaming over the spider and asked what I was going to do when I was chased by a elephant.



Lesser Baboon Spider



Lasting Impressions Camp

Al took us on a tour of the area where they have the camps. It's on the same property as their house, but a little farther away - they are on 400 acres. The camp is pretty rad (to quote the 80s)! It's got a ropes course and all these fun team/leadership building activities and a volleyball court. The camp housing is situated on a hill that on one side overlooks a lake and on the other side looks over the river. We will be staying in these cool safari-style tents with the kids. The dining area (which is still under construction) is the best place to view the sunset from. The scenery is absolutely stunning and while we were touring the camp we saw several baboons. Also, Al showed us the bones of black mamba that electrified itself on the wires of the camp last December.

On Sunday, we led worship at Al & Shelley's church. Its cool because Tricia plays guitar and little did we know that Brian plays drums quite well...so between the team singing with the guitar and Brian on the djembe (jimbay) drum, Al said we rocked that church more than he's ever seen it. After church on Sunday, we went to lake (they call it a dam) and went boating...yeah, life is ROUGH in Zim! Al was trying to convince us to go inner-tubing, but we politely declined being bait for the crocodiles. Although, we didn't see any crocs, we did see a fish eagle (looks just like a bald eagle) and also a water monitor (a large lizzard). I kinda felt like I was back at Bass Lake but Africa-style.



Tricia Leading Worship

We are running the Lasting Impressions camp from Wednesday until Saturday this week. We spent all day Monday and Tuesday planning the camp. It was a challenge planning a 4-day camp in two days, but I think we came up with some good stuff. Our focus of the camp is unity and friendship. After planning the camp on Monday, we went back up to the hill to watch the sunset, a test run before the kids arrive. The guys jammed on the African drums as the sun set over river...it was magical!!!



Drumming in the Sunset

We are now in our third day of the camp, which is going so well. It's been awesome serving with the Lasting Impressions camp staff: Tammy, Carla, Tafadzwa & Admire (whos 3-yr. daughter Natasha is adorable and my new friend). The kids are absolutely amazing, polite and incredibly responsive to all the stuff we are doing. We have done tons of activities with them, including repelling, canoeing, archery, crafts as well as games, singing and we have led Bible studies around our theme. One highlight so far was a game of camouflage, whereby the kids and counselors go down to the swamp and have a mud fight and get totally covered in mud, then 1/2 of them stick brush to themselves and go hide in the bush. The other 1/2 have to go try and find them and it's amazing how well they blend in. Lisa Marie surprised us all and jumped right into the swamp and the mud fight, I would have too, but I don't have enough clothes here :.

One of my favorite things we instituted (Melissa's brilliant idea) is we have a post office box and all day long the kids can write encouraging notes to each other and their counselors. The kids have totally and completely embraced this and the post box was full last night. I am the postmaster, so I had to read through all the notes and make sure each kid had at least one (which they all did). Some of the notes made my cry. My favorite so far was from Elsa (13) to her sister Heidi (6). She said "You are a wonderful sister, I prayed for you to be in my life." You are a princess. Another one was from a little girl names Danielle (11) to me, she said "I can tell from the way you react to people that you have a great spirit and are a child of God." Danielle has a smile that could light up the world.



Lisa Marie in the Mudfight



More Mudfight Pics

Last night, we set up the DVD player up at the outdoor dining hall and played "The Chronicles of Narnia" for the kids. Then this morning we led a Bible study around Narnia themes. Remember watching movies outside at camp? Now picture this, sitting on a hill in Africa, overlooking a river on one side and a lake/dam on the other...you finish watching an amazing sunset, countless bright and shining stars come out to fill the unpolluted night sky, you can see the upside down moon over the makeshift screen (a white sheet), you cuddle up in your sleeping bags with a bunch of kids (plus a couple Pitbull mixes and a Great Dane our camp protection) and watch a movie beamed onto a white sheet...drive-ins just wont seem the same anymore.

This camp is a wild camp that has elephants, lions, leopards that walk right through the camp. Apparently, the lions sometimes sleep on the camps food tables at night, but not to worry, well be safe. We will also be camping near the Mana Pools, which is a world heritage site, where we will be both working with the kids, but also getting some good game viewing in. Work/fun, it's all the same...and we just hope we will make a difference.

A few anecdotes...we found yet another huge lesser baboon spider in OUR ROOM the other day! Our local bush boy (6 yr. Caleb) took it outside for us, then promptly left a real-looking plastic salamander on my bed for me...his idea of a little joke. The other night one of the



The Farty Pitbull

Croudace's Staffordshire Terriers (a Pitbull mix), was cuddling in bed with Tricia when she (the dog) started letting pretty rank farts and Natisha said "ah, see, you came all the way to Africa to sleep with a farty pitbull." Also, Al told us he will play Snake the Baboon with us, a game he and his daughter Micaela came up with, whereby, you put some food and a piece of rope on the end of fishing line. When the baboons come up to the food, you pull it, making the rope move they think its a snake and immediately faint...after a while they peak out to see if the snake is gone. Sometimes the baboons fake it, but most of the time, they actually do faint...its a defense mechanism, because snakes don't usually strike anything that isn't a threat to them. Last anecdote, one of our favorite things so far is tea time where we all gather and chat and relive our day so far. We have tea time twice a day...man, its awesome...we Americans need to slow down (especially me!).



Carla & Matt - L.I. Counselors

Hope everything is great back in the states! Miss you all! God bless!

Much love,
Marci

Zimbabwe Journal

July 1- July 9, 2006

Hello Family & Friends...



Caleb

Greetings once again from Zimbabwe! A lot of wonderful things have happened since my last travelogue. Our team has truly been blessed and we are having the adventure of a lifetime. Who knew mission work could be such fun, and yet I truly feel are doing a lot of good here.

The Lasting Impressions camp ended last Saturday. It was so awesome! Little Caleb was asking around if the kids could go home, get more clothes, and continue with camp for another week. Caleb continues to entertain us...as does Micaela and Rachel. Lisa Marie was hanging out with Caleb when they found some Kadu dung and Lisa Marie asked what he was going to do with it...he just furrowed his brow, shrugged his shoulders and put it in his pocket. I can't imagine the things that Shelley finds in his pockets...because he is never without some bug, stick or rock in his hands.

The last morning of camp, we had some girl and guy bonding time. We girls made necklaces and beaded bracelets and also washed our dirty feet and painted toe nails...yes, we are girly even in Africa! The guys searched for snakes and ran off into the woods. On the last day, we had the kids continue with the post office box and write notes to their parents and each other. It was so sweet! The parents arrived in



Window at Camp

the afternoon and we had a Braai - a South African word for BBQ. We rigged up our makeshift screen (the white sheet) and made a Power Point presentation to music with all the photos from the 4 days of camp. Its amazing how many memories you can make in only 4 days. I hope we helped to create memories that will last a lifetime for the kids. I think we did!

Immediately after camp was officially over we had to start preparing for the second camp in Rifa. We were exhausted, but we all took on the preparations and stayed up late packing stuff. Rifa was an absolutely amazing experience for us! Rifa is an educational camp for school kids in Zambezi River Valley. The Zambezi River Valley is unique, because the

Zambezi River used to flood every year onto what they call the Zambezi flood plane. Several years ago they built Kariba dam and dammed up the Zambezi to create electricity for the country. Now the river rarely floods and there is a very large flat area near the river where the animals are abundant. Rifa, which means "our heritage" in Shona, is built on a ledge directly overlooking the flood plane about 1/4 mile from the river. Our lodging were what they called kennels that were right on the edge of the flood plane. The kennels are named that, because that's basically what they are...they are concrete and wood open air stalls, with two small beds and mosquitoes nets, enclosed by a chain link fence. At night, the animals walk freely around the camp...so imagine us behind the chain link fences, with animals surrounding us. I couldn't help but get the impression that the tables had turned and now we humans were on display in the zoo. All night long we could hear the cry of the hyenas, elephants, hippos, lions, all kinds of birds and other animals. In the morning, we would wake-up to the baboons making a raucous - they were everywhere throughout the camp.



Melissa in the Kennel

We went to Rifa to help with a camp for a 6th grade class. These kids were just as amazing as the kids at Lasting Impressions. They are so polite, smart and so full of love. They certainly taught us more than we taught them. This camp is soooooo different than American camps! This one was actually more like an outdoor classroom. Monday morning my team of kids - the cheetahs - was taken out hunting for 4-5 hours. For each class that comes through the camp, they attempt to hunt and shoot and impala...then they dissect it for the class. Yep, things are little different here! Imagine in your 9th grade biology class...you not only dissected a pig, you had to go hunt down a wild boar. Hunting with 8 kids, the Bel Air team of 8, and 2 hunters, was quite interesting. I was absolutely amazed at how well-behaved and quiet these kids were while walking through the bush for 4-5 hours. We all learned about being down wind...tracking...looking for "spor" (i.e. animal prints). Fortunately, we did not bag an impala...I think that might have been a bit upsetting, to me at least. Although, our guys I think got to live out a fantasy of sorts - hunt-

ing in the bush in Africa! Who knew that's what we would be doing when we signed up for this mission? We didn't really see any animals on this jaunt into the bush. As we discovered later, all the animals were on the flood plane right in front of the camp and we were about 10 kilometers away....ah, such is life. They never were able to catch an impala, but our little Melissa was all ready to don her surgical gloves and lead the dissection of the impala. Its actually quite educational for the kids, just like we all did dissections in school going up...its just Africa-style.



Rifa Kids on the Zambezi River

Each morning Al or Brian Peters (not Brian from our team) would lead an education walk to various places around the camp. Brian is an interesting chap! He is a prominent business man and yet he has a passion for the bush- he is the perfect gentleman, tall, lanky, very upper crust English-looking and yet I would definitely trust him with his rifle and my life. During these walks we would learn all about the trees, the birds, the ecology of the flood plane...and I now know more than I ever wanted to know about animal dung. During these walks we would also learn about the different animals track shapes as well as dodge the occasional elephant or baboon.

Our second afternoon at Rifa, we took the kids fishing for tiger fish (same family as piranha, but huge). Here we were on the banks of the crocodile filled waters of the Zambezi River, surrounding by several pods of hippos, with 6th grade kids having target practice with live ammo rifles behind us as we were fishing for piranha...but don't worry mom, were not in any danger!



"Unity" - Our Camp Theme



Rifa Kids



Fishing on the Zambezi River



First Time Shooting Gun

Truth is, we really weren't in any danger...we had our trusty park ranger, Derrison, protecting us with an AK47 from the various wildlife. They take many precautions for the safety of the kids...of course, living in Africa, one is always living on the edge. It will probably seem odd to you folks at home that they have target practice with the kids...but here in Africa the kids really do need to know how to shoot a gun for various reasons. It's really for their own good and also is part of their culture. And I will confess, I shot my first gun...two bulls-eyes and one just off center. Again, who knew we would be experiencing all these things on a mission trip? Although, it's all part of helping out with the kids...and part of their education as well as ours.

These kids are truly resilient, they all seem like happy go-lucky kids...but it doesn't take much delving under the surface to find out that almost all of these kids have some heart-breaking story. Two of the kids have HIV/AIDS, one girl lost her father to cancer just 2 weeks before the camp and her cousin lost her mother not long before. Each of these kids has experienced a lot of sorrow in their young age. As we got to know them better, they would confide in us and allow us to pray for them. Many of their families are struggling to survive and most of them have already lost a parent or someone else close to them. At night, we would sing worship

with them around the campfire and hope that our goofing around with them, talking with them, and sharing our stories somehow help to lift their spirits.

We try to encourage them to dream big, because there is a lot of possibility here...as well as try to encourage them to be leaders in their communities and stay strong in their faith, despite the hardships they are going through. Getting to hang out with these amazing kids was definitely the highlight of this camp!



Rifa Kids



Sunset on the Zambezi River

elephants. Each night at the camp, the camp leaders would leave some raw meat out on the flood plane where we could see it...and then we would wait to see which animals would come for the bait. Our first night, we saw a leopard...and then saw the leopard spar with a very large porcupine (the porcupine won!). Leopards are very elusive creatures and are very rarely seen...so it was definitely a treat! Another highlight was Brian being chased by a baboon. He got a little too close and a large male baboon rushed at him. Brian just took off running at top speed. Everyone at the camp was yelling "don't run," because you're supposed to stand still and puff out your chest. Eventually, Shelley had to run out of the kitchen and chase the baboon away.

Here are a few other highlights...

The girls stayed in the kennels but the guys were in a tent...our first night there, the girls woke up to some loud stomping outside and looked out to see that the guy's tent was surrounded by



Elephant



Fishing for Tiger Fish

We went on a night drive and saw a pride of lions, which were around the camp throughout our time there. We heard them, but only saw them once. Also, we were driving out on the plane and came across an unsuspecting elephant who mock charged us. He stomped his feet, flapped his ears and then trumpeted very loud at us. Another time on one of our walks we came across several elephants. The largest bull elephants, jumped and balanced entirely on his back legs, front feet off the ground, to reach a branch he was feeding on. Apparently, the Zambezi River Valley is one of the only places in the world that elephants do this naturally in the wild and it's very rare to see. Lastly, one of the biggest highlights was one afternoon, Al took us out fishing for tiger fish and I caught the largest fish an 11 lb. Tiger fish...and man, those things fight...it took a long time to reel in the monster. One our last night at Rifa, I awoke to large crunching sounds outside to find several hippos about

20 ft. outside the kennel, feeding on grass down on the flood plane...all in all, it was pretty darn cool!

The kids were definitely the most memorable thing about Rifa, but getting this rare opportunity to commune with the animals definitely gave me a much better appreciation for God's handiwork and his creation. Looking out onto the flood plane is a surreal experience! It's very "Land of the Lost"...one half expects to see a Tyrannosaurus Rex to walk by.



Our Shadows on the Savannah

Our team and the Croudaces had to stay at Rifa an extra day longer to deal with a broken down vehicle. It was hard to say bye to the kids, but it was good to have some necessary downtime and in such a beautiful place. We walked down to the river and enjoyed an amazing sunset over the river looking over at Zambia (on the other side). Then we invaded the camp kitchen and the team made a really nice candlelight dinner for the Croudaces. We came back from Rifa yesterday and today we led worship again at Al & Shelley's church. Tonight, we lead worship at another church and will get a chance to revisit with some our kids from the Lasting Impressions camp. Tomorrow, we are visiting a small local hospital run by American doctors. Hopefully, we will be able to lift the spirits of the patients there. Tuesday we may go into the slums if we can arrange it or we may possibly help out with a preschool. Wednesday we leave for Antelope Park, which is one of the only places in the world where you can play with baby lions.



Our Team in a Tree



Sunset on the Zambezi

We are having an amazing and very unique experience! We continue in prayer for those we have come in contact with and those we have yet to meet. We have been getting some amazing feedback from people that having us here is really raising their spirits...I hope and pray we will continue to do so. We are looking for more ways to minister to the people here.

I hope everything is great at home. We are following the North Korea news on the T.V. about the missile test, which is a bit disturbing. We hope everyone is doing well at home! If you are a person who prays, please continue to keep us in your prayers. Please pray for our continued safety, for team unity, for more opportunities to help with people here and for smooth travels as we leave Africa next Sunday.

God bless,
Marci

Zimbabwe Journal

July 10- July 15, 2006

Hello Family & Friends...

Greetings once again from Zimbabwe! Many more incredible things have happened to us over the last few days that I thought I would share with you in my travelogue volume #3. I think you will find this email particularly interesting.



Sanyati Mission Hospital

Last Sunday night we went and led worship at a Pentecostal church...and man, do they know how to worship! And I must admit that our guys rocked on the bongo and djembe drums. It was really fun for us and we got to see some of our kids from our first and second camp at that church. They were so excited to see us, and likewise we were excited to see them again!

Last Monday, we had the privilege of visiting Sanyati Baptist Hospital, a mission hospital located in a very rural area of Zimbabwe. This was an incredibly moving experience for us! From the looks of it, Sanyati used to be a more lively and functioning place than it is at the moment. Around the hospital there are many nice houses built by Americans about 30 years ago for the doctors that used to live there. Now there are only two doctors left to run the whole hospital and the rest of the houses are now inhabited by workers or locals. One of the doctors has 5 young children. He could be making a bundle of money in the states, and yet he has chosen to give up almost all of his worldly possessions and move his family here in the middle of "Podunk" Zimbabwe in order to try and make a difference in the lives of these people. While the hospital is small by American standards, it's quite unbelievable what they are doing here. These two doctors manage a large number of patients and do many surgeries with very little equipment and supplies, not to mention dealing with the regular power cuts. I kept trying to imagine what this place might have been like in its heyday with the many doctors that used to be there and when their facilities were in their prime. It's so sad to me that every time I visit a place like this, it is in a state of decay instead of flourishing. I wish more folks would take an interest in places like this! Only a little money could do so much. We were told that only \$20 could cover two to four operations.



Rifa Staffer's Kids



Sanyati Patient



Sanyati Patient

responding. At first we were quite stunned and just stood there in shock watching. In the maternity room, only moments before, we had been singing "Blessed Be Your Name" the final words of which are "You give and take away, you give and take away, but my heart will choose to say, blessed be your name." Many of us began to cry as we felt certain that we were going to witness the death of this newborn baby - so we had to leave the room. Those of us who could find words through our tears stood outside the room praying for the baby. Fortunately, we found out later that the baby did survive, but it took them about 7 minutes to revive it. It was a rather scary introduction to the hospital as we had only been there about 15 minutes when this happened.

Alistair had told us to prepare ourselves emotionally and spiritually for what we might encounter there. However, it's always difficult to know what to expect in these situations. We were taken on a tour of the hospital and the first ward we were taken to was the maternity ward. One mother was holding her newborn girl and then pulled back the sheet on her bed to reveal that she had just given birth to twins. While they did not speak English, it was wonderful to be with these new mothers and sing with them and pray with them. Next we were taken to the labor and delivery room...this isn't like hospitals in the U.S., we were basically allowed all access to the hospital. We were visiting with the nurses, when they brought in a brand newborn baby that had just been delivered via C-section. We were only a few feet from the baby when it became clear that they were trying to revive the baby and the newborn was not



Tricia at Sanyati



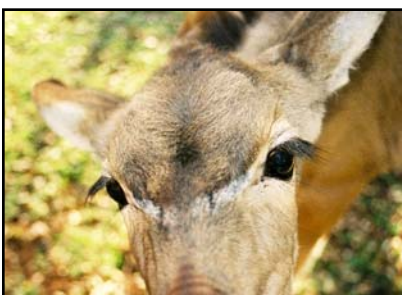
Me at Sanyati

Next we visited the various wards of the hospital, singing to the patients and delivering gifts as well as candies for the nurses and staff. Each of these people had a story to tell, even if they only spoke Shona, there was story in each of their eyes. And even as they were in pain and feeling sick, they were incredibly appreciative of the songs and very receptive to us. One woman patient insisted on singing to us, even though she could barely sit up in bed. I felt of all the places we have played songs on this trip, we sounded the best at this hospital...especially when we got the whole outpatient waiting room singing the only Shona song we knew. Their faces just lit up when they sang.

We visited patients that were being treated for malaria, recent amputees, AIDS patients, people with severe herpes, and a myriad of other illnesses I can't even imagine. African witch doctors that practice a sort of voodoo are well-known in the area. One man we visited had been poisoned by his mother-in-law, who was a witch doctor. The doctors are not sure what she poisoned him with because the hospital does not have a proper lab to run blood work, which has made it difficult to treat him. Dr. Perkle told us a few hair-raising stories, including one about two men that had been cursed by witch doctors and had come in because they had slit their own throats, claiming that they had demons chasing them. There is a strong belief in the occult and spiritualism here, and some of us have palpably felt the effects of that.



Sanyati Kids



Oora, the Kudu

After the experience at the hospital, and the back to back camps, we were ready for some R & R. Tuesday morning we spent a few hours with a local preschool and then headed to Chengata, which is a game preserve not far from Kadoma. At Chengata, we were greeted by Oora, a very friendly baby Kudu that was feeding on the grass near the parking lot. Also, just off the parking lot were Kiera and Simba, two adorable 6 mos. old lion cubs, who became my buds for the next two days. You can walk right into the enclosure of the cubs and interact and play with them. Chengata has a lion breeding program, so in addition to their little cubs they have several large and beautiful lions there as well as a hyena all in enclosures. At night, the hyenas and lions would get into roaring contests. A lion roar sounds a lot different than you would probably imagine...it shakes the ground and you can hear it for miles...and the various sounds that hyenas make don't seem like they should come from any living creature.

The accommodations were very nice! Although like many safari lodges, there are no enclosed windows in the rooms, there is only a screen, and it was quite cold while we were there. Our first night there, I saw something under the covers at the bottom of my bed and just as my roomie, Natisha, was trying to warn me about it, I reached out to touch it. It was warm and jiggled...I screamed thinking that it was some sort of creature that had crawled in



The Hyena



The Cubs

The next morning we arranged for half our team ride horses and the other half ride elephants into the game reserve. The less dangerous animals all walk freely in the park. They have herds of wildebeest, zebra, impala, sable, kudu and about 200 giraffes. I rode a horse first, then we all met up in the middle of the savannah surrounded by wildebeest and zebras herds and we switched our rides. I rode Ben, a 23 year old African elephant with a quirky personality. When he is in a good mood, he will actually give you hugs. As I was riding him, he was breaking off hand fulls of grass and sticks and handing it to us with his trunk, leaving it on his head for us...apparently he was sharing. The elephants were massive and there was something mythic about riding them through the wide open savannahs of Africa. I felt like I was in the final film of "Lord of the Rings." It was RAD!



Me & Ben, the Elephant



The Lions

To top off our morning safari excursions, in the afternoon, we went and did a lion walk with 4 almost fully-grown lions. Despite their larger size, they are actually gentler than the lion cubs and they were absolutely beautiful to watch. We could pet them and interact with them, but mainly they stayed close to their trainer. We were able to get some really good up close pics of them as their trainer had them climbing trees and doing a few tricks. All and all our time at Chengeta was amazing and we had some good down-time.

Friday we went to Eiffel Flats school and participated in the assembly presented by the kids that we were at Rifa with. It was fun! Now were just hanging out and getting ready to leave and we may do the ropes course at Lasting Impressions today. Which brings me back to the Lasting Impressions ministry that we came here to support...it's truly an awesome ministry that has the capacity to reach a large number of people. It's extremely difficult, though, because while life here is simpler, nothing is easy! Getting supplies can be difficult and prices are constantly fluctuating...most of the time the Croudace's have to travel several hours to Botswana to get their supplies. The rocky dirt roads are very hard on cars. We've had several breakdowns while we've been here and they don't have AAA, so Al has had to make repairs out in the bush a few times. Getting fuel here is a difficult task, because often the gas stations don't have any fuel and it costs about \$4-\$5 gallon. The extreme inflation in the country makes it nearly impossible to budget anything. To give you an example, when this country was Rhodesia their dollar was more valuable than the U.S. dollar and now the exchange rate is from \$200,000 to \$400,000 Zim dollars to \$1 U.S. dollar (which is why pizza costs over a million dollars). We've all been millionaires while we were here with the amount of money we exchanged.



Picture from Lion Walk



Eiffel Flats Skits

All this said, though, the foundations that are here in Lasting Impressions are quite incredible given the circumstances. One could think that places like Sanyati Hospital need all of our support...and places like that are important, but in order to truly create change, ministries like Lasting Impressions are imperative. Sanyati basically treats the symptoms of the issues in the country and keeps people healthy, and of course that is an incredible cause. But Lasting Impressions is focusing on creating the leaders of the future that will have moral values and a Christian faith that will help to guide them. Training leaders is important for the future of this country and is very much needed if there is to be any positive change here. I truly think the camp has the ability to affect a lot of people in a profound way.

Well, that's all I have for the time being...geez, I wrote a book. We are heading out on Sunday. Our originally scheduled flight was cancelled, so we have to head out a little earlier and will have an extra



Camp Entrance



Flying over Mt. Kilimanjaro

night in London. Then seven of the eight of us will be in Bellagio, Lake Como, Italy for 4 days and will be returning next Friday. We're gonna miss Brian! It'll be weird without him as well as have all grown together during this trip.

Please pray for our continued safety and that all of our travel logistics will go smoothly. Please pray for Al and Shelley and the Lasting Impressions ministry here. Also, please pray for their family Micaela, Rachel, Caleb and Nans, Pops and Irma (Al and Shelley's parents who live here)...as well as the camp counselors Matt, Tammy, Carla, Admire and Tafadzwa. We feel as if we have all become an extended family living together over the last 3 weeks and all these wonderful people have become very important to us.

I hope everything is going really well at home. I am feeling the first pangs of homesickness and I miss you all very much. I can't wait to see many of you within the next week!

God bless,
Marci