

## **Testimony of My Journey to Africa**

**By Heidi Lum**

The journey started when I went to see Hotel Rwanda with my sister. I was so affected that I couldn't leave the theater for nearly a half an hour. I just wept and wept. Dan Chun had mentioned that he wanted to get involved in Africa, and now I was anxious to see that happen.

Then Bruce Wilkinson came and invited people to go help the hungry in Africa. I knew I was being called to go. My heart was racing, but I couldn't make the decision to go without talking to my husband. But I felt the Lord saying to me that I had to trust Him, with the finances of it, and with my husband. So I went forward. Later, my husband gave his blessing, and I was able to raise the all of the funds needed to go. It was an exercise in faith, in which I had to trust God every step of the way.

I learned to trust God for His leading, and that He would provide for my needs if I followed Him. My team in Swaziland prayed a lot in the van on the way up to work every morning. And every day, God answered in miraculous ways. It was really amazing. We saw so many miracles of faith and trust. I began to know that if I heard God tell me to do something, and we prayed and did it, amazing things would happen.

While we were in Swaziland, I had a dream that I was back in Swaziland, with my family, arranging sponsorships for children. Behind the Swazi people, the word "Compassion" rose up like the moon rising in the night sky. I wanted confirmation that I really understood what God was saying.

That night, I heard Janine Maxwell talk about the numbers of children orphaned by AIDS, and what happens to them. I was devastated. Not only are there 14 million orphans in Africa, but also their futures are very bleak. Without parents, the children lack funds to go to school, to eat enough and get proper nourishment, and to have decent clothing and shelter. The really desperate kids end up prostituting themselves just so they can survive. Of course, this makes the problems of AIDS and poverty worse. Many children, who have lost one parent to AIDS, must watch the surviving parent die as well. In the meantime, there is no adult in the family who is able to earn a living. So even though children may have one parent alive, many may not be better off than those with no parents. I took Janine's talk of confirmation of what God was telling me earlier that day in the dream.

Two days later I had a vision as I was waking in the morning. God was taking my heart and planting it in the soil of Africa, just like he had done with Bruce Wilkinson. It was quite a vivid picture. Another confirmation of what God was calling me to do.

So I got back home and told my poor unsuspecting husband that we had to move to Africa! Bless him, he didn't say "No!" outright, but he didn't jump up and say, "Yes!" either.

My first evening back at Night Life I was praising and worshipping God with all my heart. I had my eyes closed, and I began to see a line of Swazi people in front of their distinctive homesteads, looking to me for help. I kept seeing this every time I closed my eyes. Toward the end of the worship time, I began to see God's arms stretched behind them in an embrace, and I heard, "Feed my sheep!" Now I really knew, without a doubt, that God was calling me to Africa.

I began to work on a proposal to Compassion International, to see if they would partner with us to start a new sponsorship program in Swaziland. The short part of the story is that it would take them probably 10 years to get there. I KNEW that the orphaned children couldn't wait that long, and I knew God didn't want me to wait that long, either. So then I started looking into ways that we could go and build orphanages and sponsor children in underserved rural areas, partnering with the local church, using Compassion as our example and guide.

In Africa, God gave a woman a vision about her son. In the vision, the son received a letter from a white woman in America. He was to do what the woman asked him to do in the letter. She told her son about the vision. When her son heard that I was looking for a pastor to work with in Swaziland, he contacted me. Through much e-mail we worked on a proposal together to bring Compassion International to Swaziland. Neither of us knew of meeting the other at the time, but we both felt a kinship in the Spirit, and that this was God's leading.

I called this pastor after several months of correspondence and sending my photo, and he told me then that he had met me once before, when I was in Swaziland last year. He worked with my team on our last day there, and had noticed my leadership. He said the thought had come to him that one day he would be in my house. He of course thought this was preposterous, and immediately dismissed it.

Back in Hawaii, I began approaching many other well-established Christian organizations to see if they would be willing to partner with our church to build orphanages in rural Africa. I kept getting turned down. Every organization has its own way of doing things, or they just weren't ready to undertake such a big project. I was told that it wasn't going to be possible from several people, including pastor Dan.

Well, I became discouraged, but I KNEW God was leading. So I called my friend Robin, and we prayed on the phone together. While we were praying, God's still, small voice said, "You can't pour new wine into old wineskins. You need to make new wineskins for new wine." Immediately I knew what to do. I had to start a non-profit organization to do what I knew God was calling me to do. I really didn't want the headache of starting a new organization, but it was clear that that is what God was leading me to do. The next day I started getting the legal paperwork going to incorporate. I also opened a bank account that first week, and the first donations came in. This was on February 3<sup>rd</sup> of this year.

Then I went before the missions committee at First Prez and asked for the moon. Really! I gave a presentation about the needs in Swaziland, Africa, and what I felt God was calling me to do. I asked that First Prez sponsor the trip to build an orphanage. I asked that our new organization become recipients of the Easter offering this year, to provide the funds for the first orphanage. I asked that they consider bringing over the pastor I had been working with to the HIM Conference this year, so that we could nail down details for the mission trip this summer and so that he would be nourished at the HIM Conference. All these things were approved!! Impossible!! But it happened!!

So David Thulani Simelane, my Swazi pastor friend and partner in ministry came to the HIM conference. We came to agreement on the scope and limitations of the project, and a solid commitment to the vision God had given us. As soon as Pastor David walked into my house, God reminded him of what He had said to him that day last year when he first met me, that he would be in my house. Amazing!

When Easter came, I fasted and prayed. I knew God would provide. It took a couple of weeks to get the figures back. We needed just over \$11,000 for all of the materials for the orphanage. I met with Dan, and his estimate was that we would receive around \$5,000. Jordan thought it might be around \$7,000. In the back of my mind, I had this assurance, somehow, that it would be just what we needed. I just smiled and nodded, but didn't say anything. When the figures were finally confirmed, Jordan couldn't believe it, and wouldn't let me tell anyone until he re-confirmed the figures. Well, he re-confirmed, and we received just over \$11,000. Exactly what we needed to purchase all of the materials for the first orphanage! Another miracle!!

God again provided for all of my financial needs in getting to Swaziland. He also gave me an inter-denominational team of 14 to go to Swaziland to build the orphanage, many of who also had to raise funds. All the funds were raised. Every person was provided for. Just in the nick of time.

Though the trip was not easy, and there were seemingly endless hurdles to get through, God was faithful. We had enough funds to cover everything we needed. We completed the shell of the orphanage before we left, and we were able to pay for a local Swazi builder to finish it.

I was asked to preach while in Swaziland, and God gave me the message the night before both times. And somehow, they were exactly what the people needed to hear. After the second sermon, it was evident to those who were there that the Spirit of the Lord was present in a powerful way. So Pastor David invited all who wanted to receive prayer to come to the front. David and I began praying for the people. Then Andy and Justin joined in. About 10 people came to know the Lord that day, and several were healed instantly of various illnesses, including AIDS and debilitating arthritis. Praise God!

Though I was greatly tested, and in many ways discouraged during and after the mission trip, when I look back, it is so obvious that God's hand was in it all the way through. So I take courage in that. As I spoke in the last sermon in Swaziland, God is strong even when

we are weak. God uses weak people to do the impossible. It's not easy, and sometimes it's not very fun, but He uses us to do amazing things, IF we are willing to follow and trust Him to provide what we need to follow Him.