

SCI Blue Visits Zimbabwe

By Sam Monarch

An American cannot visit Africa without being shocked at the extent and depth of the poverty faced by vast numbers of people. Alice and I have made several trips to Africa and the conditions under which so many children are reared is virtually impossible for one American to describe to another as we have no basis for comparison. It will suffice to say that our very poorest are wealthy by comparison.

When Alice and I became aware of the SCI Blue Bag Project, we decided that from then forward, our unused baggage allowance would carry presents to children who have so little. In April of 2011, our grandchildren, Tom and Clay Monarch, with our help and the help of our Kentuckiana SCI Chapter, put together a three bag Blue Bag Project for the 33 children who lived on the farm where we hunted. Tom's and Clay's Blue Bag Project was an unbelievably heart-warming and much appreciated success.

When Alice and I began to plan an early Fall 2011 trip to Zimbabwe, our thoughts turned to how can we stretch the airline baggage allowance so we could take more clothing, shoes, school supplies, etc. to the desperately poor children in Zimbabwe. When we shared our plans with our Kentuckiana SCI Chapter, the response was that it would again like to co-sponsor the Blue Bag Project and the shopping for soccer balls, t-shirts, flip-flops, toothbrushes, crayons, coloring books, pencils, etc. began.

Our outfitters, Arnold Payne and Ticky Drummond of Impala Safaris, were very excited about the idea and promised to locate a school with children who needed help. Our baggage allowance was 4 bags. Typically, Alice took one bag, I took one, and the rifle made 3, but that only left one bag for the children. We discussed the fact that Impala Safaris would do our laundry daily and decided that we really did not need as much as we usually packed such that we ended up with 2 duffel bags for the children.

After we reached safari camp in the Hwange National Park near Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe, Ticky and Albert (our PH) began the process of deciding which children in the area were in the greatest need of help. Unfortunately, it was like deciding who on the Titanic needed a life raft the most. The most affluent children in the area lived in one room duplexes with an outside "kitchen" and communal water/toilet facilities while other children lived in round huts with no windows, no electricity, no bathrooms, and only an outside fire pit to cook over.

Ticky and Albert, with help from our local trackers, soon located the Jabulani Secondary and Primary Schools which were started by Mrs. Sefiwe Ndhlovu, a teacher of over 30 years. Ms Ndhlovu, who greeted us warmly, advised that she had an enrollment of approximately 350 children and all 350 of them were needy.

When we arrived at the school, it was lunch time, but no lunch was being served as the school could not afford food, let alone a

lunchroom. The children could bring lunch from home if there was any food for them to bring; however, we saw very few children with anything to eat. Our trackers pointed out one group of children who were not eating that we had seen (miles away) walking to school before seven most mornings and walking home again after five.

Through the use of her personal funds and donations, Ms. Ndhlovu's had built one thatch roofed three-room primary school and one adobe block two-room high school and both were overcrowded. She was most proud of the new toilet/bath house which was under construction. The government had agreed to give the school "water" and for the first time the children would have flush toilets and showers. Children who had no bath facilities at home could now take showers at school.

Ms. Ndhlovu took us on a tour of the school and I was surprised to see that there were no desks and only a couple dozen or so chairs for the 350 children to sit in to work. Virtually all of the children sat on the floor and learned from the teacher's lectures and use of the chalk board. The only books were a few paperback books which had been donated by UNICEF.

The head mistress was very cheerful and very upbeat. She was proud that these children were being offered an education. She advised



Junior High School



High School



Lions In The Mist
Near Children's Path



Elephants Near The Children's Path



Inside a Classroom



Mrs. Ndhlovu, Alice and Sam
With A Few Of The Children
With Blue Bag Presents



Children Walking To School



Cape Buffalo On Children's Path



Primary Students



Elementary School



Primary Classroom



Children's Current
Restrooms Facilities

that her greatest problem was one of attendance as only about 1/2 of the children show up at school on any given day as the parents/caregivers see little need to educate the children. Further, the children must walk miles to and from school past vast herds of cape buffalo, elephants, and lions as there is no free public transportation and their parents have no cars. Even if they had had cars, there would be no money for gas.

Even though our arrival and unloading of the SCI Blue Bags with presents had made the children's eyes sparkle and had peaked their curiosity, all of the children remained respectful and attentive to Ms. Ndhlovu and their teachers. Before our tour began, we discussed the contents of the two SCI Blue Bags with the head mistress and she was excited with First State Bank's donation of 10 pounds of peppermint candy and Sheriff Todd Pate's donation of 2 dozen color-changing drinking cups, not because of their "magical" powers, but because the children had to drink water out of their cupped hands from an outside spout.

Ms. Ndhlovu was delighted to have rulers, flash cards, pencils, coloring books with printing in them, crayons, jump ropes, new soccer balls and a pump (they had a couple of old flat balls but could not afford a pump), and other school supplies, but I wondered, with so many who

needed so much, how would the 90 t-shirts and 25 pairs of flip-flops, 50 toothbrushes, 2 dozen bandanas, and other personal items be distributed. Ms. Ndhlovu sensed my concern and said, "I will give the personal items to the orphan children first, then to those who have lost their mothers, and then to those who have lost their fathers."

I agreed that giving to the orphans first sounded like a very good idea and inquired as to how many orphans there were. She responded that 1/2 of the children were orphans - having no living parent and many, many more had only one parent. Children were being reared by grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, or neighbors. I had known that HIV was devastating to the black population of Zimbabwe, but Ms. Ndhlovu's comments to the effect that AIDS was killing a whole generation and that nothing of significance was being done to prevent its spread was shocking.

As we moved through the primary classrooms, Ms. Ndhlovu warmly introduced us to each group of children and told them that we were hunters from America and that we had brought gifts to them.

At the conclusion of the tour, Ms. Ndhlovu assembled the children to show them the gifts and explain who we were. I held my breath as she began to explain that the children would see us, and people like us, riding in the back of safari trucks and that we were hunters and that we came to shoot their animals.

Then I was impressed at how well and how simply she explained that the hunters paid for the animals that they shot, but the hunters then gave all of the meat, all the edible parts, to the their families, and the hunter kept only the non-edible horns and hides for themselves. She went on to explain to the children

that they needed to protect the wild animals and to take care of those animals because if the animals were gone, the hunters would not come back to spend their money and people would lose their jobs and there would be no gifts. She concluded by saying that hunters were good for them. I thought to myself, "How could anyone possibly explain wildlife management in more practical terms!"

The children were wonderful and very well behaved! Mrs. Ndhlovu was fantastic! She gets very little (almost no) support from the government and is struggling to keep her school open and our SCI Blue Bag gifts were very much needed and appreciated. She and her staff were great with the children who were exceptionally respectful to them and to us.

Jabulani School is located across the road from the Victoria Falls Airport and is very easy to find. If you know of anyone heading in that direction or anyone who wants a really good cause to donate to, these children desperately need help as this school may be their only link to a brighter future.