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September 2006 News

Rwanda

Like bungie-jumping (reputedly – I wouldn't know, I never have nor would), there are life experiences that are scarcely FUN in the heat of battle, but one brags about *ad nauseam* for years. Hope:Rwanda was such.

Of course there were wonderful highlights, when our spirits soared, and we rejoiced with shouts of praise to our amazing Father. There were lowlights, when quintuple whammies of the great African 'No' battered even God-inspired perseverance.

Even the Kenyans agreed that the Rwandan character is complex. You greet with a stylized hug graded for familiarity. A biceps-grab for strangers, and full-bear with back-slapping for friends. This is followed by a courteous hand-shake, while the deferential will grasp their own right forearm with their left hand and even bow a little.

Many minutes are now employed asking how you are, how your family is, how your work is, how your busi-

Praying for the sick at UNITED concert in Butare.



Boy healed of damaged knee after this photo was taken!



Children under 12 did not experience the genocide.



Sorghum in June, a staple cereal in Africa.



Bron helps the team building Hope Village for widows.



More typical rural house.



Kigali billboard for the Closing at the National stadium.



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ness is, and again how your family is. Only then can business proceed. At this stage, arms may be folded, faces closed, and the conversation can become, as they would say, 'tough'. Their indecent history may be to blame.

One day we asked my PA when his birthday was. 'I don't know my real birthday', he replied. We were stunned. 'We don't celebrate birthdays...' he looked wistful. 'But my sister tells me that I was born the month before the sorghum turns red.'

Though familiar with last-minutitis, here it's an art-form. One Sunday night I was phoned to say we 'had a problem'. A certain provincial committee were refusing to work. Nothing new here, except that their event began on Tuesday. What preparations had been made? Almost nothing. We made the two hour drive into the forested hills on Monday morning. It was raining and cold. Greetings were exchanged, and arms folded. The issue, as so often, centred on money. Things were said that shouldn't have been. Fingernails were examined. And then after four long hours without warning the sun came out, smiles and heartfelt apologies were produced, and a plan of action made for the event to begin... the following morning. It did, and proved to be of God, and a wonderful success. I cannot believe

that the angels in heaven don't shake their heads in wonder.

The roller coaster

The events of Hope:Rwanda ran into each other like ants in a nest. Conferences, crusades, heart surgery, mosquito net distribution, education training, dentistry, village building, well drilling, church roofs, schools, football tournaments, gigs and concerts clustered for attention like street kids. Some proved immensely testing, others seemed to just happen around us.

Interestingly, by the Closing Ceremony, we were on a roll. All 'toughness' had dissolved in grace and organising became almost normal. Mark & Darlene Zschech, the visionaries and our bosses, flew in with many others of the Hillsong team. Thousands of pastors gathered for a wonderful conference, and on the closing night a symbolic flame was transferred to the local committee chairman who together with his team intend to lead Hope:Rwanda into the future. Even the government who so supported the initiative said that 15th July would be celebrated in future as a Day of Hope.

Would it be too grand a claim to say we had touched a nation? I don't know. But surely a seed has germinated, and it remains to be seen how great the tree will become.

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School of Healing

Administering and preaching are two different hats, and heads are designed for but one. Engrossed as I was in the minutiae of organisation, the change of gear was hard. So the School of Healing in Kigali suffered not through lack of enthusiasm or of God's blessing, but by me being rather too distracted. We started well with about 300 delegates. An elderly lady had wandered into the building for shelter or sustenance perhaps. In the event, she found both! Before long two of our delegates had led her to Christ, prayed with her, and seen her partial blindness and chronic back-pain totally healed! But we had forgotten that Saturday morning was the monthly 'community day' when the government requires everyone to clean the roadsides near their home, so without transport for our delegates the event missed its usual climax.

There is such a hunger and need for good teaching on healing, not just in Rwanda but throughout the worldwide church. Thank God for New Wine and other similar events, training the church to minister as we should.



Above: Maasai dancers at Teresia Wairemu's FEM annual conference

Below: Kenyan joy is infectious!



FEM Conference, Nairobi

Our return to UK was a whirlwind of frens'n'relations, trustee meetings, dentists, and a life-saving three day break in Snowdonia. I then returned to Africa to speak in the annual conference of Teresia Wairemu's church in Nairobi. One of the greats in the faith her testimony reads like a Bible story. It was a privilege to be a small part of what God is doing there. We saw many lives touched through the week, but these folk are full-on for God! What dedication and commitment! I went home having learned far more than I had been able to teach.

Now back at Maxted Road, the cree of the kites over the sunbird hills of Rwanda already fades into the warble of the Tuis in the cherry trees. Lambs bounce the green, green grass beneath the totaras. Church means pew and not platform.

What next? Only the Lord knows. We are willing to do what needs to be done. But two things are in my mind – another missions' trip, this time possibly to include Pakistan. And I need to write books, something I have talked about too long, and must now put finger to keyboard ('pen to paper' has more or a ring... ah...).

Will we return to Rwanda? Many of the thousands of participants in Hope:Rwanda shall. But there ARE two or three places that badly need a crusade. And a School of Healing. We made some good friends there, and ...the Lord will direct our paths.

Once again, our deepest thanks to you, our kind supporters and pray-ers.

Please note they have changed our address, again!