

“Monthly” Newsletter from Tasmin in Kenya
May 2009

Dear Friends,

Well, so much for the monthly newsletter that I had every intention of writing...it's been awhile since i've sent out an update, and much has happened in that time. Somehow, I just couldn't get down to writing before, because even though circumstances pointed to closure, I always had a sense of unfinished business that needed to be resolved. Each time I had prayed about our situations, through different passages in the Bible, God made it very clear that He was on our side, but for a good while there, we didn't see any victory.

I believe that when I wrote the last letter, I was struggling with the chiefs...what a nightmare, what a fiasco, what an eye opener!!

After spending at least 12 hours all together (at various intervals) in the Principal Chief's office, asking for permission to distribute food to Manda's hungry, I got frustrated. They knew that I had a container of goods on the way, and they wanted a stake in it. We would begin with the issue of food, and end up being told that ALL donations, no matter what they were, needed to go through their office. While Manda people were gently starving towards death, the chiefs were playing games, using the people of Manda and our desire to help them, as their leverage. After being patient far too long, I took legal counsel and was told that I could donate the food to a local church, and have them distribute it...So, since I am affiliated with the Catholic church here, we took the food to the Catholic church grounds on Manda, and distributed it on their behalf (with the permission of the Priest, of course!) For awhile there, the noise quieted down from the chiefs.

Between November and February, between distributions which were continuously being thwarted by the chiefs, we distributed over 10,000kgs of food. The Chiefs even went and had meetings in the different areas of Manda, and told the (starving) people, not to accept food from me because I may be poisoning it, because they didn't know where I was really from and had multiple nationalities...and other such foolishness. The people were even threatened with imprisonment if they accepted food from me!!! But, they were hungry, and the chief had offered them nothing better in exchange, so they came and collected their rations each time, and thanked God and our donors for them.

The biggest issue with the Chiefs, was that I had made it more than clear that I was not putting ANYTHING into their hands. (They have salaries, and with regards to distributions, they have shown themselves to be corrupt).

When the contents of the container came in, interest was piqued all around.in my village, people who haven't addressed a word to me in months, suddenly began talking to me, and wanting to help me...Our bicycles were the focus. Everyone, including little children, kept asking me for a bike! I made it very clear that the bikes were for those who helped us service the tanks on Manda. Besides, this village is rather well off in comparison to others in this area, and just about everyone can afford to buy their own bikes! I became rather unpopular amongst the youth, yet again...

Just after our last load of goods came in mixed with my own furniture, I had a surprise visit from the OCS (Officer Commanding Station), which is a branch of the police here. Someone had tipped them off that I was selling motorbikes, and that I had drugs!!

They asked to see the bikes and whatever else I had, and when they saw the clothes and the wheelchairs and crutches etc, all destined for the poor, they understood quite quickly that it was a set up. The narcotics officer also happens to be a Christian, and saw very clearly that I was one too, and that illicit behaviour wasn't on my agenda.

In that period of time, I has also been called into the National Security Intelligence Service office, as it had been reported that I was taking pictures and gps readings on Manda. The man in charge recognised that it was in the interest of remaining accountable in our work that I had done so, and was not a threat to the country! He encouraged us to keep going!

Immigration also called me in, questioned me on my activity, and said that all was good with them with regards to my papers, but that I should try to get things sorted out quickly.

Finally, the most ridiculous event of all took place... I was summoned to attend a barazza, which is a village get together where information is diffused and issues are discussed. I had been told that the District Commissioner would be present, and so I went.

After many struggles to get boats to Manda, I rode furiously to the schoolgrounds where the meeting was already in progress. I saw a small fraction of Manda represented, no DC, and the chiefs, ALL of them, including one from another area who had been the head honcho in trying to get me to give them things from the container. In one of our meetings in fact, this same chief had 'allowed' me to distribute food (even though I didn't ask for nor need his approval), and had started asking about his area again. I got so fed up with him asking for stuff, I told him to STOP asking for his area, that our aid was designated for Manda! He got angry back, and in front of at least 10 Manda residents who had come to support me, screamed, "The people of Manda can die, I'll stop you from working!!" I couldn't believe he said that in front of Manda people!!

Anyway, all the chiefs were dressed in their army uniforms, got up one by one, and in Kiswahili, lied openly and accused me to the people. My Kiswahili is not remarkable, but I was able to understand a fair bit of what they were saying, and my coworkers confirmed later, that they were bending the truth well out of shape!! I was not given time to speak, and at the end, I was served with a letter which had been signed by the District Commissioner, saying that all our donations were to cease! That I was to go through the channels prescribed (he had sent me to the chiefs, but hadn't been told about the number of hours i'd spent trying to get permission to work! I was told in that letter, to contact the District Steering Group (??) if I wanted to proceed. So that was the termination of monkey court...

I later contacted a friend from the water department, who told me that the DSG consisted of the heads of all departments, that they met once a month, and that I could ask to be put on the agenda. I was assured that the chiefs had nothing to say or do with this meeting, so I decided to give it a shot. On the chosen day, I went to the packed meeting, and found myself sitting two chairs away from the Principal Chief!! What a drag!! I got up when it was my turn, very quickly told the people what we were doing, and asked for the permission to move ahead. The district water officer asked me to explain why I was having problems on Manda, that it had something to do with the fact that we take tanks away from people...I then explained, that in the Western world, Africa is considered to be a bottomless hole, and people were getting wary of giving money to projects. That so often, projects were mismanaged when in the hands of locals, and that more than often, 5 years after the start of the project, nothing remained of the work...I told them that Africans seem to presume that white money is cheap, and that it isn't. That the money given reflects a lot of hard work and much sacrifice to help the needy. The reason we allow ourselves to take tanks back, is that if people don't show themselves to be responsible and make a good stand and take care of the tank, we had

the right to take them back, and give them to people who would be responsible. The vast majority of the people understood and agreed with our reasoning.

Then, Principal chief Jamal got up, and said that I was undermining the offices, that I was not following protocol, and essentially, that I should be stopped from working. That I was creating disension on Manda, which was otherwise a peaceful community. He 'forgot' to mention to them that I had spent 12 hours in his office, and also that he had never referred me to any other departments...Well, the shyness left me at that point, and I stood up to defend myself. (I must say, I am in awe of Jesus, Who didn't speak a word in His own defence when He was being accused in front of Pilate...It takes a lot more than I seem to have, to stay quiet in a situation like that)! Anyway, I am so sure that God inspired me, as I clearly stated the truth, that I had been in their office, that they were more than slightly interested in our goods, that they hadn't informed me to go to other departments, but had said that everything needed to go through their hands. That with regards to food distributions, more than once, I had heard that the chiefs were pilfering food from the government allocation to the poor via the Red Cross, and were either reselling it or keeping it for themselves or friends... I have people whom I trust fully, who live on Manda, and we did our distributions ourselves. We ended up being designated to a sub committee, and were summoned to meet a few days later.

At the subcommittee meeting, only the District Water Officer, the District officer and myself were present, and we spoke freely and extensively. I told them what i'd gone through in the months prior, and they too saw the chiefs corruption quite clearly. I was told at the end of that meeting, that our work was good, that we were to continue, but we were to liase with the different departments which were relevant. I agreed to their request, but stipulated that in order for us to proceed, we were demanding the return of two tanks which had essentially been stolen, one by the brother of Chief Aweso, and the other by Peter, who had formerly worked with us, and who'd always worked out of chief Aweso's pocket. They were leaning on their relationship to chief Aweso, and were refusing to return extra tanks which they had taken, one from a dead relative, the other from his sister's farm. We had exhausted every means of getting the tanks back (in our last effort, I had gone with David and Charles, my coworkers, and we had taken the dead man's tank back. Peter and Aweso's brother followed us some hours later, and with machete's, took the tank back forcefully, accusing us of being thieves!!) A complaint of theft to the OCS seemed to fall on deaf ears, as I believe Peter may have greased the palm of the chief inspector when he was called in for questioning...The chief inspector seems a bit uncomfortable in my presence when we meet in town since then...I so hate the corruption in this country.

More and more meetings, with the District Officer and once with Aweso and his corrupt sidekick Muhamed Yusuf, who both openly lied during a meeting, saying that all the people of Manda wanted to give their tanks back, that the people were fed up of me and wanted me out because I was creating problems...Aweso said to me in that meeting, that he had told me before to work with local people...but he himself had given me Peter to work with, and Peter is a kikuyu...(David and Charles are also Kikuyu's, but the only difference is that they understand the heart of the work, and want to serve God and their fellow Manda residents). At that meeting, I stated clearly yet again, that I absolutely wanted those two tanks back before we would do any more work. I knew by then, that the District Officer valued our work on Manda, and wanted us to continue. I also alsked for a full island barazza (meeting), wher we could hear what the majority of the people truly say. Chief volunteered all the tanks of his family, to which I replied that I wasn't asking for them. I only wanted the two in question, with Peter and Shee.

More days passed, and I could see the rains approaching fast. I decided (after prayer, obviously), that if the local government wasn't going to show us the minimal amount of protection for our work which I was asking for, that I would no longer work in the area. We would take our investment elsewhere. It seemed clear to me, that if I let this issue pass as many were encouraging me to do, that later we'd have many problems even greater than

what we were facing. I was reminded of Israel going into the promised land. They were told to drive out the inhabitants of the lands, to purge it as such, of iniquity. Some of those people were not driven out, and they forever remained a thorn and a snare to Israel.

I encouraged the people of Manda to come together as one, and to demand the release of those tanks, as they were the ones who were going to lose their blessings. They did so, but seemed to be thwarted. The next day, I sent a message to my co workers and to the district officer, thanking them for all their help – that from now on our work would be undertaken elsewhere. About half an hour later, the D.O. Called me and urged me not to do that. I told him that all the District Commissioner had to do was to send a couple of police, and demand the release of the tanks. If he wasn't willing or able to do that, then lawlessness would have control and we were not willing to invest any more money into such an area! He said he'd contact me in a half hour. I didn't hear a word back that night, nor the next day.

The next morning, I got a message from David, that the four tanks had been released, that we were free to collect them at Peter's farm! Within a few hours, the four tanks became twelve – chief had forced his whole family to return their tanks!! The work was suddenly purged of all iniquity, and we were now free to continue!! Praise God!!!!

We immediately did a distribution of 20 tanks the first week, plus the 12 which were returned. The people were so, so happy to see us back, and were so happy to get their tanks! Many said, "If they don't want them, we do"!! During the same week, I learned that people on Manda had begun to eat their seed for sowing, which I know is poison treated to keep the beasties from attacking them. They were rinsing off the food and eating it from sheer hunger! We decided to do an emergency feeding that Saturday, and served about 600 people with approximately 1500kgs of food. We now have the last 10 tanks to distribute of the 20 we ordered again. The rains have begun, so we await a sunny gap to be able to fit the taps on them, paint Yesu Anakupenda (Jesus loves you), and hand them out. Another food distribution may be in the works, I am not sure.

We also have a collaboration in the works, between Manda Primary School and Wings of Grace International. We will be giving on a permanent loan basis, 4 excellent manual sewing machines which will be used to teach the children a life skill, 16 bicycles of varied childrens sizes, to be used in the recreation area, and most importantly, a feeding programme, which will provide them with a meal each morning with all the nutrients necessary to properly develop their minds and bodies, even in a poverty stricken environment. I am currently awaiting the signature of the District Education Officer on the terms of Collaboration (after all the issues we've had, i'm learning how to protect our investment!!). Also hoping to receive a positive response from a local air service provider, to bring the food up from Nairobi.

Next step is to form the Manda Farmers Cooperative, to give them a voice, to help them sell their fruit and veggies, in order to become self sufficient...we've got lots of work ahead!!

So, that's the update of all that's been going on in the past months. Thank you for your prayers, words of encouragement, your financial support and friendship...It's been a brutal time, but we've made a big step forward!!