

1 February 2018

"He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives..." - from Isaiah 61:1

Almost Arrested

It started as a normal morning, but it turned out to be a day we'll never forget.

South Sudan

It dawned as normal as a morning can be for Americans visiting Juba, South Sudan.

But it turned out to be a day we'll never forget.

ITMI's [Kent Reisenauer](#) and I waited in our hotel's small restaurant. [Vicky Waraka](#), our long-time South Sudanese partner, was late for our breakfast meeting.

Vicky's lateness was of little concern. Vicky does not have her own means of transportation. She would travel in a "taxi," which in Africa is a 9-10 passenger vehicle inhabited by closer to fifteen passengers and making just as many stops. Passengers of these stifling "clown cars" envy the luxurious space sardines enjoy. The air in their tins might move and smell better, too.

In Africa, your meetings start when everyone can get there.

Vicky arrived, apologizing for that which she cannot control. Taxi service in the capitol of the youngest country on earth was interrupted by one thing or another that morning. Undeterred, Vicky found and hitched a ride. Kent and I welcomed her and made sure she ordered a full breakfast. She chose a hot cup of tea, two eggs and fruit.

Vicky probably doesn't eat many breakfasts. She cares for so many

widows and orphans as a leader in her local church. Judging from her appearance, she goes without for their sake quite often.

Vicky was born in South Sudan. She has experienced the decades of conflict up close and personal her entire life. Somehow, she has maintained an unwavering gentle nature through the hardships.

As we discussed Vicky's ministry and life, she grew serious. In the 14 years I have known Vicky, she has only spoken of others with grace and warmth. With great care and intentionally chosen words, Vicky shared that she had moved out of her mother's small shack where she previously lived with her mother, brother and sister-in-law.

Over the last year, Vicky's sister-in-law connected with a fringe African religion, who convinced her she is a modern-day prophet called to prophesy...for money. Her constant attacks on Vicky's biblical beliefs and practices had Vicky caught in daily spiritual battles. With meager personal resources and nowhere else to go, Vicky strove to bring peace to the home. It was not to be.



As the spiritual conflict intensified, Vicky's continued petitions to the Lord seeking what He wanted her to do yielded a small miracle. God gave Vicky a small plot of land and she erected a two-room mud house with a shiny tin roof. For her, that rough, mud-walled building is exceptional – dirt floor and all - because it is hers.

Vicky keeps a demanding 7-days-a-week schedule counseling deeply traumatized women and families. South Sudan's long-standing culture of survival, anger, abuse and intense rejection has traumatized everyone to some degree. Those two rooms shared with 5 orphaned teenage girls is a necessary safe-haven.

Later that day, we would witness the vitality of Vicky's ministry to the wounded and abused firsthand.

(continued from p.1)

Our discussions concluded, and our driver gave us a ride to Vicky's home. We rattled and jarred along as our driver worked his way down tiny dirt pathways considered roads, jostling our way out of the main part of the city.

Vicky's "neighborhood" is also an area where many soldiers live, at the ready 24/7 to defend the city. Days earlier, they fortified in a heated battle against advancing rebels attempting once again to gain a foothold just west of Vicky's home. Understandably, tensions were high and nerves raw as conflicts of the past, haunt and fuel present fears.

The afternoon sun was starting to cast long shadows as the huge cloud of dust created by our vehicle loomed through the unmarked maze. We stopped in front of a bamboo and straw fence with a tin gate. The five girls Vicky has unofficially adopted, aged 16-18, clamored to open the gate and greet us with ear to ear smiles.

We planned to finish the day with a home cooked dinner of beans, rice and red tea made from hibiscus flowers, all heated over a hand-formed mud stove. The orphaned teenage girls Vicky cares for would prepare this South Sudanese fare.

Vicky gave Kent and I a quick tour. Only parts of the bamboo fence were completed with "privacy straw," meaning any outsiders can look in through the cracks on the six female residents. This was especially disturbing later when we saw the bathroom and bathing area.

The small, two-room house is Vicky's palace. It is about fifty percent finished. Sections of the mud walls have not yet been reinforced by the homemade plaster mixture of mud, cement and used motor oil in hopes that the rainy season won't melt the walls. The floor inside the house was akin to a field of dirt clods. Turning an ankle on the plum-sized dirt balls seemed unavoidable. Yet Vicky's bed and dresser in this room was expertly made and ready for inspection.

The girls' room was space enough for 3 single beds and no more. We were surprised to learn two of the single beds slept two adult girls each. They, however, exulted in sleeping off the ground.

After a quick tour of the "long drop" (or outhouse) and "bathing area," Kent and I realized that these ladies *didn't even have privacy to use these facilities*. There wasn't enough plastic to cover all four sides of both stalls. One side of each stall remained open. Anyone could "observe" them bathing or relieving themselves through the incomplete outer fence. This is even more dangerous at night, when the darkened neighborhood is crawling with unsafe activity. Using the bathroom requires a light, alerting the neighborhood someone is out. They need a four-sided mud building around these facilities, if not for modesty reasons, then for safety.

Later I sat across from Vicky, my camera on its tripod pointed at her to record stories from her ministry in her own words. After about twenty minutes, there was a knock at the tin gate. From directly behind me, the visitors entered the yard and made a bee-line toward us. Their initial demeanor was cool, but that didn't last long.

One asked me what I was doing. Vicky's body tensed up as I answered, "Interviewing a long-term partner..."

"Not touch camera!" one said with force, as I moved to stop recording.

After Vicky spoke to them in Arabic, she relayed, "these men are from the security force and they are unhappy."

They asked again what I was doing. I gave the same answer. "Who gave you permission?"

Vicky reminded them that this was her property and we only recorded what was hers. This didn't seem to matter.

They planned to confiscate the camera equipment, and we'd be forced to "come with them."

Five-foot two Vicky respectfully but firmly bought us some time. She told them we wouldn't be walking. They need to call a vehicle to transport us wherever they planned to take us.

I later found out the inebriated and belligerent one told Vicky "If you don't do as I tell you, I will just shoot you all." In this country, these are not idle threats. Other than her resistance to "walk with them", there was only one thing this woman could do to placate two agitated officials.

(continued on p.4)



From the Director

Dear Team: 125 Women Overjoyed With God's Word

Our trip to South Sudan and Uganda was filled with drama and suspense. It was also filled with wonderful ministry and experiencing firsthand the lives changed and futures now hope-filled.

Unless you've stood in a rock-strewn dirt floored church in front of 125 South Sudanese women whose faces and body language carry the emotional scars that have come from living in South Sudan, you can't know the pressure to attempt to meet their expectations to relieve their poverty, pain and emptiness.

You also can't know the joy that comes from locked in eyes, heads nodding in agreement and even smiles as God's Word and His Spirit touch both their heads and their hearts with truth that will free them from part of their daily prison. One elderly lady had Lazarus call me over during a break in the teaching. With deep determination, she looked me straight in the eyes, "Where have you been?"

"Excuse me?"

"Where have you been?" she repeated. She explained that since the inception of this young country there has been a constant stream of organizations coming to South Sudan to "train" and "teach" the needy people business principles and practices, "...but none of them are even close to as helpful as the teaching you have given us here today." SALT principles for life and, in this case, specifically for Financial Freedom really is the truth that will lift these people and their society out of their unbiblical cultural practices.

[Piotr Zaremba](#) will be in the States for most of the month of February. If you want to know what God is doing since he finished and published the first evangelical translation of the Bible in Polish, please call the office and see if he is available for your home group, Sunday School class or even a personal meeting with you. If you haven't met Piotr, you have really missed a treat. Piotr is one of the main reasons I became involved with ITMI, over 19 years ago. It was meeting him in his home in Poland with my father and Bill Bathman that God used to show me how special our brothers and sisters who were born and raised in the Communist countries really are. I invite you to see for yourself how special Piotr is.

Our [Timothy Keller](#) has really fallen into a great problem in Zambia. You see, there is a huge and well known credibility issue with police and military in most of Africa. Too little pay drives them to use their badges and positions to take what they want from those that have little to no ability to push back. For the last year, Tim has been opening God's Word and teaching police from all levels biblical truths and world view. Now he has been asked by a high ranking official in the Zambian police department to provide this training for those higher up. To say that God opened a door that had previously been sealed shut is an understatement. The Zambian church has, for the most part, ignored the police mission field, due to the deep hurt and mistrust between all parties. Now, Tim's use of God's Word has brought tears to the eyes of many a police person when they finally realize the damage of their ways and the spiritual needs that they carry.

I have been in all of our partners' homes and communities. I have seen first hand the myriad of needs created by generations of living apart from God. I couldn't go without you. Tim and Piotr could not serve without you. ITMI could not send the message without you. Thank you, all, for just going with us to South Sudan. Thank you, all, for being with Piotr and Tim and all the ITMI partners...we are in this together and we will see new faces and smiles when we all get to Glory!

In His Service,



(continued from p.2)

Vicky stopped and out loud, asked her Lord to intervene and break down any evil at work.

Miraculously, ITMI's **Jahim Buli** was responding immediately as the Holy Spirit nudged him "go find Steve and Kent, right now!"

How Jahim found us is another miracle. Our phones were muted during the interview. Yet, by God's grace, Jahim found his way through the dirt maze to Vicky's house – where he'd never been before. As soon as the vehicle stopped in front of Vicky's gate, he realized why the Spirit led him there.

Jahim greeted the two men and exchanged Arabic words with them. Jahim's gender, height, wisdom and words - given to him by God - caused the situation to stop escalating.

Jahim strode across the yard, briskly covering the distance between us. "I have to get you out of here... *NOW!*"

He knew he needed to avert a disaster. I didn't know where they agreed to take us, but I trusted Jahim and Vicky.

By now, an additional security official had arrived. He and Vicky climbed into the third row of Jahim's small van. Kent, another official and I squeezed in the middle row. Jahim drove and the most agitated security official claimed the passenger seat. Before we reached the main road, the third official spoke up in Arabic from the back row. He wanted to get out. He didn't want his name involved with this. Jahim stopped the vehicle and the official took his leave.

This caused the other two officials to converse with Jahim again. Then, just like that, they abandoned their crusade and Jahim's van, allowing the four of us to go free.

Most South Sudanese's response to this story? "This is what we live with every day."

Americans, accustomed to the right and privilege of due process, struggle to understand how something like this could happen. Yet, in cultures where the majority have suffered repeated trauma and abuse, it happens every day. You really can't blame the government officials for their suspicion, fear and

control. They were raised in it and formed by it. It's all they've ever known.

Uncontrollable fear left over from years of injustice and pain compels many to squash what they don't understand, almost as if they are enslaved to their own reactions.

This is why ITMI goes where we go. Because people – people created by God and for God, in His own Image - are deep in prisons of cultural fear, anger and revenge, even as they go about their daily business. The conviction that they can - and hope that all might - flourish under Christ's freedom, is what drives us as we gladly serve and empower Vicky, Jahim and Lazarus.

Kent and I are eternally grateful for your prayers offered on our behalf. Each was clearly needed and definitely felt. Will you help us help Vicky, Jahim and Lazarus as they willingly put themselves in these situations?

-Steve Evers, Summer Kelley

Check our website for more photos, stories and videos from our trip.

For Praise

1. Gospel Joy - Poland - Gospel Joy Choir is preparing for an upcoming tour around Poland.
2. Casa Dorca - Romania - Two new children finding the home safe and warm as their fears of their father are allayed.
3. Eugene Kalunga - Zambia - Construction of the new village school progresses.
4. David Kumar - India - Ability to provide face masks for slum women working with dangerous chemicals.
5. Gerhard le Roux - South Africa - We were available to respond to the local police's request for a Christmas outreach.
6. Charl van Wyk - South Africa - Upcoming discipleship opportunities co-hosting Salt and Light radio show.
7. Adi Ban - Romania - Traveling early this month to Poroshkovo, Ukraine with the gift of clean, safe water!
8. Steve Evers, Kent Reisenauer - US - safe return from Uganda and South Sudan!

For Prayer

1. Piotr Zaremba - Poland - Travel mercies and divine appointments during his time in the US this month.
2. Jahim, Vicky and Lazarus - South Sudan - Protection and provision in the midst of instability.
3. New Life Center - Poland - New team members as they transition into new roles, serving those in need.
4. Vicky Waraka - South Sudan - Provision for the completion of the walls and bathroom of her home.



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