

And she prayed for me by Jackie McMakin and Jean Adams

Jackie McMakin:

Good morning. Jean and I would like to share ways our contact with the Bokamoso students and teachers has touched us. Jean will do this by sharing some images of Winterveldt, South Africa, where they live and a story about one student, and I will share three ways I have been touched by God through contact with the students and teachers. Jean and I see this sermon as a windup up for their last visit and a kickoff to their next one that will be next January.

To get started, let me invite you into a meditative state. Imagine you live in Winterveldt. A new little child, a boy, is born. You are the parent of this child. You are delighted with your healthy adorable baby. However, in a few months you begin to worry. This baby is not thriving and you know why. You do not have enough food to give him. You and he manage the best you can. He grows and goes to school but languishes a bit. In high school, he takes matters into his own hands and begins to steal for money to buy food. You need the food but you are worried sick about this way of getting it. You know it is wrong. One day someone knocks at the door. It is Solly Malangu. He says, "I have noticed your child is not doing well. Why not let him come to us at Bokamoso. He can take our Adolescent Development Program. Maybe that will help him."

He does come. With a generous meal every noontime, a half hour of singing every day, learning about South Africa and the spirit of ubuntu or connectedness, and learning about his own gifts and strengths, he turns around and begins to thrive. One day everyone is excited at Bokamoso. The American students from Roy Barber's school in Potomac, Maryland are coming. Jean will tell you about what it was like to be on one of those

visits.

The exchange visits sponsored by Seekers and St. Andrew's Episcopal High School have gone on for several years. I remember hearing about the first one. Frankly, I was opposed to it. Having lived in Winterveldt myself as a volunteer with Dave, I knew how little these folks have. To expose them to our abundance seemed like a cruel joke. However, when Sallie Holmes, desperate for help, called and asked if could do something, anything, with the kids, I agreed and ended up doing a workshop on vocational direction – what they were going to do with their lives.

What turned me around and opened me up was the attitude of the students, Solly and Rosinah their teachers. They were so thrilled to have help in thinking about their future. Their energy, openheartedness and eagerness seemed like total gifts from God. Out of nothing, so little hope and opportunity, came these eager beavers, as energetic as new puppies. Their spirit is like a touch of God in my soul.

The next year I volunteered to do a workshop and Jean joined me as a partner. We were inspired by Thomas Friedman's book *The World is Flat*. He says that if every young person in the world had a context in which to define his dream and learned steps on the path to create that dream, the world would be an immensely better place. Young people would be preoccupied with taking their next step and have little time or appetite for making trouble or blowing people up. This was an "a ha" for me, and I named our workshop *A Dream and a Path*. In it, we help students flesh out their dream and write it in the form of a resume and then we focus on seven additional steps they can take to help that happen. In addition to the two-day workshop, this year we arranged workplace visits so students could learn from folks working in fields that interested them. Jean will tell us about one of these workplace visits.

Jean, your story highlights the two other ways that I have

been touched by God in this experience. The generosity of workplace hosts has been astounding. Betty was thrilled to spend the workday with Jeannine and her office mates learning computer graphics at the computer. Sam, accompanied by Dave, got a rousing introduction to civil engineering at the Rinker Engineering Firm in Manassas. It turns out that John Rinker loves mentoring young people who are interested in engineering. Tlapelo spent excellent time learning the art of recording music with John Morris and Katie Fisher.

The third way that I have been touched by God is the incredible dedication and can-do-ism of our own Seekers community. Twenty-one Seekers were involved in making this last visit the best ever. Those of you who are here, please stand. You got up at ungodly hours to drive kids to their appointments, you helped students create resumes, you donated and brought snacks for the workshops, helped with kitchen tasks, sold crafts at the George Washington University performance. Moreover, of course, you, Roy and Elese, were and are the backbone of this whole effort inspiring the kids to do their very best, perform well and learn all they can. You all are a very inspiring group with which to be involved.

What difference our work makes in these folks' lives? We know that Emmanuel has become an accomplished singer and performer, that Lucky has started his carpentry business, that Phineas went away inspired to do more fix-it projects as preparation for his IT career. However, let me say this. As much as we ask for reports on how the kids are doing, we never hear as much as we would like to hear. This question of results reminds me of an experience I had. Over 50 years ago, the Presbyterian Church in the USA selected 100 students and flew them to McCormick Seminary in Chicago to spend a week with their premier theologian, Robert McAfee Brown. I was part of this group and had a super time interacting with these students and with Dr. Brown. As far as I remember, I never sent a letter of thanks to the Presbyterian Youth Department that had arranged this.

Moreover, I know that the folks in the Department never asked us how this experience went for us. Yet this is true. I have spent the last 54 years arranging experiences for people to interact and grow in faith in settings very much like that one in Chicago. Those folks in the New York office simply said, "Let's invest in these students." That was that.

Once again, we will have a chance to invest in our Bokamoso students. They will be here next January and at Seekers on Jan. 13.

The Scriptures for today are all about second chances. As we supply nourishment, stimulation and connections to these young people, we are relying on the fact that this will help them bear fruit as the fig tree did and help them be, as Isaiah says, "Leaders of nations." From the bottom of our hearts, Jean and I both thank Seekers for this grand chance to be with folks who need a second chance and to share what we can to help that happen.

Jean Adams:

Winterveldt. What is it like? I could not get a sense of it before I accompanied Roy and a group of St. Andrew's students there a few years ago.

It was autumn. The flat land had high grasses, small homes made from a variety of materials, dirt roads, small trees. And space. Lots of space. It was like an American Indian reservation that I had seen.

I remember three images so clearly. They happen to involve the high grasses, but perhaps they will serve to give you a glimpse of Winterveldt.

First image: We are on a hired bus, about to enter Winterveldt. We turn off the wide, paved highway onto a dry dirt road. The driver, an Afrikaner, begins to mutter to himself. We roll along the road until he spots a washout

ahead. Slowing to a stop, he stands and announces almost joyfully, that this is as far as he can take us. We should get our baggage, and would have to walk the rest of the way. As he set the bags out onto the road, we heard yelping sounds. We looked towards them and saw six or seven Bokamoso young men leaping through the high grasses towards us. They had seen the cloud of dust that announced our arrival. They warmly greeted us, and they swooped up the suitcases and walked with us to the Guest House.

Second image: It is almost evening and a couple of us would like to walk a bit beyond the Guest House in the twilight. Two or three Bokamoso youths accompanied us. Three children emerge from...where? They see I have a camera and want me to take a picture of them. I agree. They step up onto the cement base of the place where the water spigot is located, a place the community uses to get its water. Before I can adjust the camera, a bevy of youngsters, waving and yelling join them. The grasses were high, I had not seen them coming. When the photo was developed, I counted twenty-four kids!

Third image: I had arranged to stay for another day in Winterveldt, while the St. Andrews' students went on to Johannesburg. Solly drove me to see the Hospice, the Haven – a preschool for AIDS orphans, the Rehabilitation Center, for physically disabled people, an experimental hydroponic "Farm", and Lerato la Bana, the women's income generating embroidery project, which Kathy Tobias helped with business and marketing skills in 2000.

The next morning I was to meet Steve Carpenter, who was driving into the city to attend worship service at his Catholic church, and from there I would be driven to join the St. Andrews' group at the airport.

I rose early, hoping to take a little walk. When I stepped out into the early morning air, up ahead on the dirt road, I saw a woman, bent over at the waist, sweeping the road with long

grasses. This made a lovely pattern of scallops, which I decided I would not disturb, so I turned back into the Guest House.

Stephina wants to become a nurse, and then a doctor. I set up an appointment with Dr. Doreen Mar, an Emergency Room physician at Arlington Hospital, who was currently on vacation.

We were to go to the Emergency Room and announce our arrival to the nurse in the booth by the entrance. We did this, and she warmly greeted us. She spoke of what a fine physician Dr. Mar was, and how much she herself enjoyed being a nurse, knowing every day that she had been of service to people.

When Dr. Mar arrived, she took us to a comfortable area to sit and talk. Giving a bit of her own background, Dr. Mar described her own hopes to become a doctor, and what she had to give up when she was in med. school, for example, going out with friends, and doing slot of the activities she enjoyed. However, she knew that one day she would be able to do these things again. She urged Stephina "to study thoroughly and not to quit until ..." (here she picked up a magazine) "you know the material from this side and this side, and this side, and this side." It was a dramatic illustration.

Dr. Mar had always wanted to be a medical missionary. Being an emergency room doctor, rather than having a practice, allowed her to follow her call. She belongs to a group of physicians that go our several times a year for two or three weeks at a time to countries where the need for doctors is great. Actually, she said, she would have been in one of those countries now, but the visas had not come through in time.

A committed Christian, she was speaking about her call. At the conclusion of our meeting, she asked, "May I pray for you?" Taking Stephina's hand, she asked God's blessings on Stephina's path and on a lifetime of doing God's good work.

Stephina took a few notes before we left to visit Christ House, and talk with Mary Jordan, the head nurse. Mary told of testing out what she felt was a call to be a nurse by first becoming a nurses' helper. It became quite clear that this was what she did well and what she wanted to do, so then she went to nursing school. In particular, she feels called to work with the formerly homeless and addicted.

After lunch at the Potters House, we picked up another student, through with her visiting. On the way back to St. Andrews' I took them to the National Cathedral. We saw the nave, then looked over the city from the observation area, walked through the Gift Shop where they saw some items from South Africa, heard a choir rehearsing for evensong. Thus ended a full day.

At the workshop three days later, I was Stephina's mentor. We worked on her resume, and at the conclusion, I asked her how she felt about her visits to Dr. Mar and Mary Jordan. She had been pleased with both visits. "Dr. Mar was so motivating," she said. "Her heart is in her work!" Then she paused, and added "And she prayed for me."

These words stuck in my mind. It seemed to me they came from an open heart.

I believe this openness of heart was a characteristic of these young people.