



The Gweimen Centre Newsletter

A Self Sufficiency Center for Widows and Orphans of HIV/AIDS

Spring 2011

Experiencing Gweimen

by Mary Sytsma

There's a commercial for car insurance on television that involves a man who drives around in a pink car causing accidents. In the commercial he's called "Mayhem." I thought of that when I was watching the Gweimen children play during my visit this past January. Some of the little boys are so full of energy and mischief; they just cruise around, bumping into the other children, disturbing the girls' games, creating Mayhem. They act like normal kids.

Isn't that great? As I watched them, I thought to myself that only healthy children act like this. Only children who get enough to eat and who are not afraid act like this. It was easy to forget as I watched them that they are HIV positive. Their small bodies carry a potentially deadly disease, but they are healthy and well fed because of the work of the Gweimen Centre. Thank God.

Gweimen means comfort, hospitality, welcome in Hausa, the language of most of the people who live near the Gweimen centre. In spite of the mayhem, I always experience these things when I visit the centre. Let me give you an example.

One afternoon two of the smaller children who don't speak English yet and who are usually very afraid of me came close to me while the others were playing. In fact, little Jop, who is about four years old, climbed into my lap. As I rubbed his back, he started to suck his thumb and he fell asleep. In the past, some of the older boys have tried to make Jop sit by me, and they would laugh when he would cry. But today he came to me to rest.

While he slept, one of our brand new children, Gift, came close and sat pressed up against my side. She is also about four, and she didn't speak a word, but occasionally she would peer up at me through a curtain of little braids which dangled around her face. We didn't communicate with words, but we were communicating. As we sat there, the three of us, Jop, Gift, and I, we all experienced Gweimen.

What a privilege to be the one who can represent the arms of Jesus to these little ones, to be gweimen to them, in Jesus' name. And what a gift they give me in

return, the trust and love of small children who don't need words to understand that we are family to each other.

Why Is There Violence in Jos, Nigeria?

by Vern Geurkink

If you approach Nigeria from the north, you are probably coming from a semi-desert region into grassland that offers good grazing for herders' cattle. As you progress things gradually change from beige to green, from dry to humid, from grassland to savanna, and if you go far enough you fall from bush country into swamp and jungle.

For most of 13 centuries this has been the experience of traders and herders, mostly Muslims, traveling south with their cattle, horses and camels. When they arrived in the swamp they hit what Eliza Griswold (*The Tenth Parallel*, p. 8) calls "the tsetse fly belt." So many of their animals died of sleeping sickness that it ended their migration at the 10th parallel, 700 miles north of the Equator.

Across much of Africa this latitude marked the southern reach of migrating Muslim populations. The rest of the continent south of this line has for millennia been the home of the black nations whose culture included the practice of their ancient indigenous religion.

Then 100 years ago Christianity began to spread rapidly in Nigeria, growing from an estimated 176,000 Nigerian Christians to 50 million by the end of the century, nearly equaling the number of Muslims. The faithful of these two religions tended to encounter each other all along the 10th parallel that crosses the country in the middle. The Nigerian city of Jos, which sits on the 10th parallel, is one of the places where the adherents of Muhammad and the followers of Christ have been rubbing elbows for decades, mostly living together civilly.

Upheavals in the last ten years, however, began to stir suspicion and hostility between Christians and Muslims, leading to outbreaks of violence. Events such as the 9/11 attacks in the U.S., leading to the invasion of Afghanistan, the inflammatory journalism hyping the Miss World competition that was to be held in Nigeria, and scandalous cartoon depictions of Muhammad in the Danish press, all triggered violence that killed and maimed many people. Local tensions also stirred conflict. One estimate is "that in the last decade, over 150,000 lives have been lost to such conflicts in Nigeria."

In such an atmosphere it is not long before non-religious factors incite to violence. People find themselves in competition for fresh drinking water, firewood, or regular access to electricity. Conflicts that have nothing to do with religion break out between competing residential populations that happen also to be religious communities. If your community loses its electricity when your local “Christian” politician is beaten in a rigged election, whom do you blame? Griswold concludes, “the violence is at its worst along the line where Christianity and Islam meet.” Unhappily, the Christians and Muslims of Jos live along that line.

Kwoi, the village where Gweimen Centre is located, is only about 2½ hours east of Jos, and almost as close to the 10th parallel. We might conclude that the folks in Kwoi are torn along religious lines as they are in Jos. What a joy to report that Gweimen Centre is favored with a more peaceful environment. The Centre serves orphans from both Muslim and Christian communities. Perhaps even more satisfying is that we gladly report that adults also live in peace, so that widows from both religious communities can participate in our programs. It is a very special joy for us to report that the impact of your support for our programs is not undermined by erupting religious hostilities or communities in conflict.

The Heart of Giving

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Blessed are the merciful, for will be shown mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

The first time I read those words of Jesus in the gospel of Matthew, I must admit I was more than a little befuddled. Those who are poor in spirit, those who mourn, those who are meek.....these are the people who will inherit the earth and the kingdom of heaven? I even wondered about the merciful, the peacemakers and the persecuted so richly deserving of such a monumental reward.

James 3:13-4:3, 7-8a, discusses two different wisdoms: a God-given wisdom and a wisdom born of the earthly cravings. *Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. Such wisdom does not come down from heaven, but it is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil.*

A wisdom born and fed through worldly desires never satisfies, as we continuously place ourselves and our wants first. It is an “unwise” wisdom that breeds chaos, discontent and spiritual emptiness. In contrast, God-given wisdom *is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.*

Generous giving is the fruit of God-given wisdom. It seems scary and counter-intuitive to forego our own desires and needs when it comes to money. However, God promises us that if we trust His wisdom, we will be blessed – with comfort, mercy, peace, joy and spiritual freedom.

Let’s dare to take the challenge to trust God’s wisdom with our finances. Let’s test him and see if our lives are not greatly blessed! *Linda Palmer, Treasurer Gweimen USA*

6th Graders at Timothy Christian School Make & Sell Coasters to Support the Gweimen Centre

For the past several years, students in each grade at Timothy Christian have lived out the schools mission “to transform the world” through some type of restoration project. The 6th grade has built a relationship with the [Gweimen Centre](#).

For this year's service project, teacher Ms. Carrie Boogaart came up with the idea to have the students make and sell coasters. The students enthusiastically embraced this idea and took orders for over 200 sets of coasters! This translates into a \$2,300 check that will go directly to the Gweimen Centre.

On Thursday, March 10, the 6th grade students, along with assistance from parent helpers, created approximately 1,500 coasters. They cut and glued backings on each tile, used Modge Podge to adhere the design and make them water-resistant and once they were dry, bundled and sorted their orders.

http://www.timothychristian.com/News_1011_6thGrade_MakesCoasters.php to see photos of the process.

If you would like to join us in supporting the Gweimen Centre and purchase a set of these beautiful hand-crafted coasters for only \$8, please contact Ms. Carrie Boogart at boogaart@timothychristian.com.

President's Message

During the past few weeks we all have had an occasional glimpse of spring that tantalizes our thoughts of being able to get outside and enjoy the newness of the year. Thoughts come to growing things and working the soil for all who love to garden. The Gweimen Board of Directors and many friends of Gweimen have been diligently working behind the scenes selling and promoting our Gweimen Vegetable and Herb Plant Sale. This project has become our major fund raising effort and we look forward to providing the many varieties of vegetable and herb plants to our supporters. To find more information or view an order form go to our website at www.gweimencentre.org Pick up day is scheduled for Saturday, May 14th from 9am to 1pm in either Wheaton or Geneva, IL. Additionally, Gweimen will have a tented booth setup in Geneva on the very same day (May 14th, 10am – 4pm) during Geneva's annual "Gardenology Festival Day". We will be located on the front courtyard of [Graham's 318 Coffee](#) and pastry shop along charming 3rd Street. Gweimen Board members will be present selling our vegetable, herb and summer flowering plants as well. The festival is well attended and tremendous fun with many gardening specialists and all types of gardening products to view and purchase. Even if you are not in the market to purchase plants, please stop by our Gweimen tent and meet some of our Directors. We would love to meet you and have the privilege to personally shake hands with supporters and friends of Gweimen. I prayerfully hope each of you are enjoying the Gweimen newsletters. The Board of Directors enjoy sharing their stories and news of Gweimen with so many wonderful and encouraging happenings surrounding the important and essential efforts at the center in Kwoi. Thank you all for supporting and caring about a small but vital work in God's earthly kingdom.

Mike Richardson, President of Gweimen, U.S.A.

The Little Red Car

by Rick Johnson

One Sunday as my family and I were sitting down for service at Crossroads Community Church in Downers

Grove, IL, we could not help but notice these three beautiful black women wearing their bright traditional clothing. They were Beatrice Kadang and her daughter, Debra and Dorcas. We introduced ourselves and learned that they were from Nigeria, and Beatrice was here attending Loyola to obtain her doctorate in education.

At that time I was involved with the youth groups at our church. One Sunday morning the youth pastor asked if I could pick up Debra and Dorcas for Sunday School since, to my surprise, we lived only a couple blocks from each other. It was a wonderful opportunity for us to really get acquainted and learn about Beatrice's work in Nigeria.

I learned about Beatrice's work back in Nigeria, how she taught at the seminary, and was seeking to start a free boarding school for the children of the national missionaries. She also worked with women suffering from breast cancer, contacting breast cancer groups in the USA to acquire education materials and prostheses to send back to Nigeria. all the while working on her own doctoral program and raising her two daughters.

The other thing that I learned is how difficult it is for international students to live day to day in America. Neither Beatrice nor her daughters could work here while she was in school. She had to rely solely on the support that she was receiving from home and friends. It was not much and often they had to go without.

At that time I was driving a little red GEO Prizm that I had inherited from my father in law. It had 100,000 miles or more on it, but it was a great little car and I was happy to have it. One day Beatrice called asking if she could use my car as hers was in the shop, again. As time went on, and Beatrice's car became more and more unreliable, the "Little Red Car" began spending more and more time with Beatrice. As my wife and I both work at home this really wasn't a hardship and I began to see how much of a blessing it was to her.

That was really the beginning of our friendship, and an amazing time of spiritual growth for me. As we traded the "Little Red Car" back and forth, I looked forward to chatting with Beatrice; "What about the message today in church?" "Did you hear on the news today...." "How are things back home in Nigeria?" What was remarkable was the spiritual insight she brought to our talks. An insight not just because of her daily devotion to God's Word, but her absolute trust in God's daily provision of her needs. Faced with challenges that would have absolutely broken me, again and again Beatrice voiced words of praise as to how God had provided. Indeed, being with her was to witness miracles happening!

Here in America we have endless abundance, everyone has a car, hospitals are everywhere, grocery stores are over stocked to the point that some food is thrown away.

I was amused when she explained how people in Nigeria would lay hands on and pray over a car, if it was even available. And I was heartbroken when she told me how she had to quit working at the cafeteria at Wheaton College because she was having a nervous breakdown watching them throw out food when she knew that people back home were going to bed hungry.

As I watched God use Beatrice, I felt Him calling me to get involved. At our church we decided to have a collection of items for the missionary children at the boarding school in Jos. Beatrice was returning to Nigeria to visit, so we collected school supplies and clothes, stuffing them into two giant suitcases for her to take.

While she was there, she met with some people who were trying to help the widows and orphans of AIDS back in her home village. Beatrice was so moved by their plight that she gave some of the things that she had brought over to them as well. And that became the seed for the Gweimen Centre.

When Beatrice returned to the states and showed me the pictures of these children, I was so humbled and blessed that the small act of donating some school supplies and clothing could mean so much to these children. It was life changing for me.

As for the "Little Red Car", well once when Beatrice was using it, it died leaving her stranded in Indiana. She was taken in by pastor there who was also blessed with her story. When I went to pick her up I wasn't sure that they were going to give her back! I guess even "Little Red Cars" are part of God's plan in bringing us together to further His amazing work.

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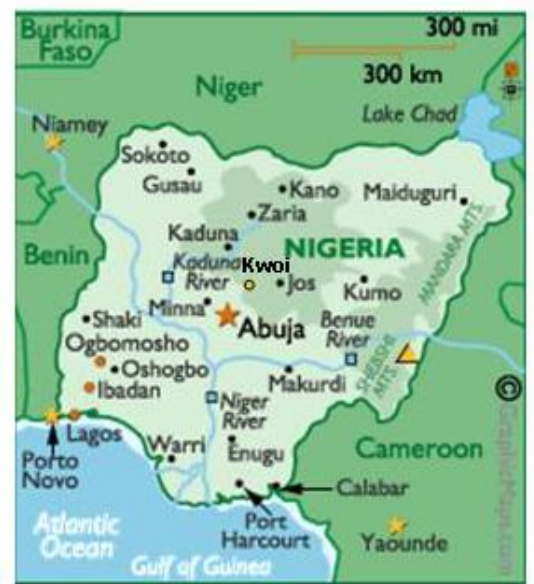
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