

Dear Friends of Africa

April 2019

As we are experiencing the beginning of our rainy season the newspapers and TV report extensive flooding in the lowland areas. Many homes are washed away in the urban settlements as well especially where the people moved into the proximity of streams and rivers where the torrential flood waters carries everything in its path with its race down to the sea. However the villagers in the country sides like Lushoto are busy planting every arable acre on flatland and hill sides as well. It is quite a sight to see tiny figures high up on the mountain slopes turning over the brown earth with their heavy mattocks for the planting of their corn and beans. With the growing population year by year the search for food becomes crucial. Years ago the agricultural officers were adamant in encouraging the farmers to plant in furrows and terraces especially on the hillsides but the added effort discourages many to follow their sage advice. So soil erosion is a growing menace to the food welfare of our mountain communities.

Speaking of flooding I recall the big flood in 1946 in my home town of Elmira New York. I may have told this story before but it can be news to more recent readers. It had been a very rainy springtime and after a solid week of day and night rain our somber Chemung river going through the middle of town, which was rarely a fearsome waterway, surprised even the longtime residents with its might and vengeance leaving its banks up and down carrying away steel, and concrete bridges, houses and anything moveable and immoveable. There was another flood in 1972 but by that time I was already in Africa.

I remember the 1946 flood however very vividly and I was in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade of grammar school at the time. Our teacher was a religious Sister of Mercy, Felisitas, by name but her felicity toward us boys was to keep us after school hours to amend for faults or failures of commission or omission, intentional or unintentional but just being a boy was reasonable cause for detention. Most of us had a two to three mile walk to get home. So there we were with a steady downpour driving against the classroom windows. During a particularly frightening squall one of the boys went to check what was to be seen. With a face white with fright he shouted, "Sister the flood water is coming into the school playground." And Sister in her felicity simply said "There is nothing to worry about for we are here on the second floor and the water will never get up this high so don't get upset and carry on with your work." My work was for the most part to do drills in handwriting, practicing writing in the Palmer Method as it was known at the time. I might just add here that the exercise was in my case a total failure and to this day when I fail to read one of my own letters I have to call our school secretary Mama Halima and have her give me the translation of my own handwriting in English no less.

The family tells of the time on the 1972 flood when they came to evacuate my mother from her house which was almost a mile above the river bank. However Mother was adamant and would not budge from the house. She stood on the front porch of the house and pointed out to my anxious brothers and sisters that the danger had passed and told them all that the flood waters were ebbing. So they all waited for a couple of hours and truly the flood waters never entered my mother's house and were truly ebbing back serenely to their motherly bed in the sea. My mother was a very literate person and some in the family may not have been very aware of her "ebbing" description of the flood waters but I looked it up myself and she was dead on with her description of even tidewaters in changing direction by ebbing.

My mother's passion was for reading. Along with raising 14 children and being the faithful wife and widow of forty years she still found time to devour books. Every month one of us children would be delegated to make the trip to the local library and get mother's four week allotment of books. Upon retirement she was going through a book a day. Mind you it was not Einsteinium Physics but it was always good reading matter. I cannot recall to this day where she kept a TV in her house. Her diligence with her books put her in good stead to take the High School Equivalency Exam on the death of our father. She worked full time then to keep the family together while the young ones still at home finished schooling.

In 1964 Mother got word that I had been admitted to Ndanda Mission hospital with malaria. How she got this information I do not know to this day for there was no phone contact to our missions and a cable from the district Post office would be the only such connection. But somehow she got the news and within a matter of a few weeks she wrote that she and my sister Rose would be landing in Dar es Salaam. Rose had just completed studies for her nursing degree and was chosen as her most likely companion. When Rose inquired "Why Tanzania'. Mother simply said "Your brother is sick and we've got to go and get him." And they did come though it was weeks after my discharge from the hospital. But we had some delightful weeks together and mostly visited the villages surrounding the mission. Of course my mother was always the center of attraction. Little children were her special people. They would cling to her and try to rub off the whiteness of her skin to reveal some blackness that they were sure to find there underneath. During one of our conversations I asked my mother why she had come all the way to Africa. Her simple reply was, "I lost one son this year and I was not about to lose another one." She was referring to the death of my younger brother William who died in an auto accident in May of that year 1964. We are in great hopes of meeting our deadline in June to have the new dorm ready for habitation. We thank you all most sincerely for your loyal support in getting this most essential facility ready to be lived in. And may the Good Lord bless you all and please feel good all of you for this mission accomplished.



JUNE 2019 MOVING IN

Sincerely, Father Damian

