

# HUGH'S NEWS

VOL. 47 No.1

News from Africa

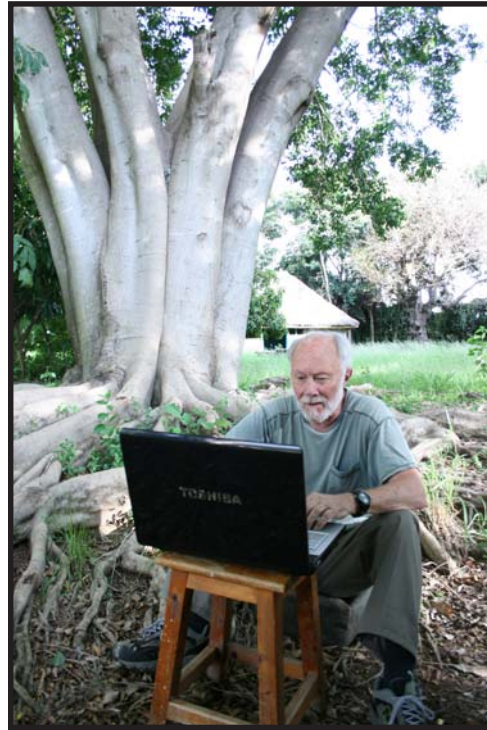
Published every once-in-a-while

## JUST BACK FROM AFRICA

I'm writing from home now (my home in Colorado). You see, I've been at my 'other home' in Africa for some time. It was indeed good to be there, meeting old friends and witnessing first hand the wonderful work which you have been responsible for.

And do I have some stories to share with you – the visit to the 'witch-doctor', my personal meeting with Barack Obama (really), encountering a hippopotamus up close and personal (way too close), but most of all, the daily encounters with widows and orphans who are alive and well today because of your compassion for a people you have never met.

Time and space will allow me to write some bits of my visit, but some stories must wait until the next edition of your favorite newsletter.



*Now, here's a photo of high-tech/low-tech working together. Yes, that's me sitting on a log under a huge tree sending an email (very slowly!) from our clinic site in Kenya. It's called the "eagle tree" because a pair of African fish eagles reside there and are raising their young above me. Oops, that was close! You have to be aware of what the eagles are doing up there.*

## A DREAM COME TRUE

My younger life was a preparatory experience. My parents, my teachers, the years at St. Thomas Seminary in Denver – they taught me the fundamentals of Christianity. Now, I am able to practice what I've learned. To heal the sick, provide shelter to the homeless, food to the hungry, and to care for widows and orphans in their distress. This is where the "rubber meets the road." This is where I apply Christianity in my every day life.

I trust that you would not consider my reflections an affront to your own beliefs, but rather another reason for us to rejoice in this important work that our God has entrusted to all of us.

Marty and I feel blessed – and thankful beyond words for this wonderful work. Which brings me to this point. It is obviously impossible for this small group of us –

Carrole, Marty, Kim, David, Candy, Mary Alice, Dorothy, Rob, Pat, Suzanne and others involved in the day-to-day operations of Lalmba – without **you!**

By myself, I'm pretty insignificant when it comes to solving the world's difficult issues. But together, we make a **big** difference. Just talk to some of the thousands of orphans who are alive today because of you, or feel the gratitude of a mother whose only child has survived a deadly disease because of you, or the woman who operates a profitable business because of a small loan which she got from you.

I'm sure that you already know this, but it's good to remind you how important you really are! Speaking for the people who we serve in Africa – **thank you!**

# Bringing Hope to the Hopeless

Hugh and I love to tell stories about people whose lives Lalmba saved, orphans we've cared for, illnesses our immunization and public health programs helped prevent. Every once in a while, a single person comes along who needs nearly all of the services Lalmba provides. Let me share one of those stories...

It was a normal clinic day in Chiri, Ethiopia, with dozens of people waiting for treatment. An Isuzu truck pulled up to our gate to drop off an emergency patient they had transported in the open bed of the truck. The badly burned boy was rushed into our 14-bed inpatient ward. About 12 years old, Beregwa was from an isolated tribe that's quite a long distance away. Fortunately, we have two employees who speak his language so that our medical staff was able to communicate with him.

As is all too common in these remote parts of Africa, he had fallen into the cook fire during an epileptic seizure. His left arm was horrifically burned. I won't go into the gory details, but he lost his hand almost immediately, and it was obvious that his arm needed to be amputated. This type of surgery is beyond the capability of our clinic. This boy needed to go for an

extended stay at the University Hospital in Jimma, a 3 1/2 hour drive away.

Although that may sound simple, in Africa this kind of thing can be rather complex. Beregwa spoke only his tribal tongue, so it would be impossible for anyone to communicate with him in Jimma. Beregwa also had extreme behavior issues. He was so troublesome that some of our staff asked us to "release" him from our hospital. Beregwa had never been to school, and didn't even know how to count. He didn't understand modern medical treatment, and so was terrified of what might happen in Jimma. Most people in our area have never, ever been in a car. We have to teach them how to open the door. So Beregwa was even frightened of the car. The first time we attempted to drive him to Jimma, he panicked and became so violent in the car they were forced to turn back after only a couple of miles. He refused to come near the car after that. With no family around, it was up to us to get him to change.

Beregwa stayed in our inpatient unit for several months as we treated his burns and epilepsy, and prepared him to go to Jimma. The orphans in our Children's Home became key to his behavior change.

---

With gentleness and  
compassion, our orphans  
surrounded him in his grief.

---

Not long after Beregwa came to us, the Isuzu drivers returned with terrible news – his mother had died. He was now an orphan. Our kids and I were all right there when this news was delivered. Needless to say, Beregwa was overwhelmed. As I watched, my heart was doubly broken. It was apparent from the looks on our children's faces that they remembered all too well this horrifying moment in their own lives. Who better can understand the shock and terror of a child who has just lost their only parent? With gentleness and compassion, our orphans surrounded him in his grief. It was truly a terrible time, but out of this tragedy a new friendship was born between Beregwa and our kids.

Over the next months, Beregwa spent time playing with our kids. He began to learn the local language, began to accept the idea of using a latrine (instead of the closest bush), and became more compliant with the medical

staff. The kids even conspired with us to get him into the car! First, it was just a trip down to Chiri's market area — a mile away. It took them about 15 minutes to get him into the car, but their enthusiasm about the "joyride" finally lured him in. Next came a trip to Bonga for sodas, a 45 minute drive. Finally, Beregwa was able to go to Jimma.

Of course, the story doesn't end there. Beregwa returned to Chiri after spending several months in Jimma for the amputation and burn treatment. Even though he wasn't from Chiri originally, he had nowhere else to go. Ethiopia is truly a hopeless place for anyone with a physical disability, much less a one-armed, teenage orphan boy from a minority tribe.

Beregwa was too old for our orphanage, and his behavior and language issues prevented him from attending school, a key requirement for orphans to be in our Reaching Children at Risk guardianship program.

We faced quite a challenge, knowing that this child had no future without us, but recognizing that this could end up becoming a lifelong commitment. So I asked Aselefich, our Children's Director, to place him with one of our staff who spoke his language, and to provide him with two meals a day if he agreed to work diligently on his language and behavior. Some people believed Beregwa would never be able to attend school, but I wasn't willing to give up on him yet. And so began a long year of change.

Last November, I ran into Beregwa on my first day back in Chiri. I hadn't seen him for six months, and I could hardly believe the changes. Before me stood a very polite and poised young man. At about 14 years of age, Beregwa had begun first grade. Even if he hadn't been able to tell me in English how very happy he was to be in school, the huge smile said it all.

Although we usually bring much younger children into our orphan programs, we made an exception for Beregwa. With only one arm, Beregwa would never be able to support himself by doing manual labor. His only hope for any future is education. I am very pleased to tell you that Beregwa is now formally part of our Reaching Children at Risk program, which provides nearly every need he will have while he attends school.



*Beregwa just after starting school*

I consider this a pretty good investment, for less than \$300 a year!

Without Lalmba, Beregwa would have died from his burn wounds or epilepsy. Without Lalmba, there would never have been a chance for him to go to school. Beregwa would tell you that without Lalmba, without you, there was no hope. But that's what Lalmba is all about, isn't it? Bringing hope to the hopeless.

CHECK OUT OUR NEW WEBSITE:   
LALMBA.ORG

# Meeting Barack Obama (really)

You may recall that the father of Barack Obama lived in the part of Kenya where we operate three medical clinics. His ancestral home is not close to us, but in the same Western Lake region.

Well, I had heard that he was around these days and had hoped to meet him while I was there. It was late in the day on March 10<sup>th</sup> when he came with some family members. Yes! It was indeed Barack Obama.

You see, after Barack Obama (the other one) was elected our president, lots of couples began naming their babies . . . yep, Barack Obama.

If you want the real truth, then I must admit that just a few days before that, Michelle Obama had come to our clinic for medical treatment. What a gracious person she is (at age two).



*That's me with Barack Obama. He was having a really bad day (so would I if I had poopy pants).*

# And . . . while I was in Ethiopia

While I was in Ethiopia in early February, I was able to see the remarkable work that a handful of dedicated Americans are making happen. The Chiri Health Center sees over 100 outpatients every day. And when I was there, the inpatient wards were almost always full.



*In Ethiopia with Carrole, I caught her having some totally outrageous fun with these girls at the Chiri children's home. Later I learned that she does this on a daily basis (possibly for her mental health?).*

Dear friends . . . I am able to testify to the wonderful work which you so generously support in Africa. Lalmba is the conduit for your kindness and concern for your fellow man (and woman).

I hope to share some of my other stories and photos with you soon. God Bless you!

**Lalmba Association  
7685 Quartz Street  
Arvada, CO 80007**