

October 12, 1993

Dear LulaBelle and Angus:

I awakened early this morning and spent an hour or two thinking about your project and how it related the project we started in Zimbabwe. It made me want to go on another mission. There is so much good that can be done in the world. The biggest danger, however, and I'm sure you are both aware of it, is having the ones you are trying to help become dependant instead of independant.

I don't know if the program at the MTC is the same now as it was when we went on our mission. They took all the missionaries to S.L. where we could get instruction from the general authorities. The R.S. was waiting for us. One of the board had just returned from a tour of the missions in Africa. Their instructions: teach the women in Africa to quilt. I was a little dismayed. I quilt. But not enthusiastically, and am not an expert. I also knew from experience that even getting the women in the Utah R.S. interested in quilting was not easy. I asked if batts could be obtained in Africa, and she said that she would see that we got batts.

When we got to Zimbabwe, therefore, we were primed to start teaching both the black and the white R.S.'s to quilt. We started by getting the basic quilt frames together so that we would have the equipment. Good materials were available there as Zimbabwe, like South Africa had embargos placed against them, and since they could not import what they needed and wanted they had become quite self sufficient. That is why they had such nice textiles. They had built their own factories. Batts, however were non existant, but the R.S. had them on the way (long boat) (or sent by courier). After about a month, the first of the batts arrived from S.L. via new missionaries, and the mission President brought them up to us on his first visit.

The white branch had never had a set of quilting frames. So Tracy drew up plans for them and had one of the members of the Branch Presidency who had a wood working shop build them for us. They couldn't even follow directions--the uprights were so heavy you could hardly lift them, and so were the boards. If they don't use them for anything else, they could be used to hold up the stage. And they cost us an arm and a leg. I wonder if that set of frames are still around. We left them at the local chapel for the white branch.

But frames, or not, I couldn't stir up much interest in quilting among the whites. The members of the white branch were so involved with trying to decide whether to stay in Zimbabwe now that that there was black rule or, if they moved, where to move to, and how would they get jobs. That they were not interested in much else. One the President's first visit he assigned us to work with the black branch and made Tracy Branch President. His job--to train the few competent black priesthood men to lead. We also soon became involved with a translation of the basic church pamphlets and teaching manuals into Shona, the native black language.

Poor as they were, the black members of the branch were smart and were probably better off than your average Phillipine member of the church. The same story--more women than men and the black men seemed to father children and skip. And the biggest problem was to find enough money to buy books and school uniforms so their children could attend the otherwise free schools. But those women came every week with their children and we soon fell in love with them.

In Zimbabwe everything of wood soon falls prey to termites, so all their houses etc are built of brick or concrete or stone. So even the little houses in the townships built by the government were sturdy and not about to be blown away by the storms. But they were cold in the winter and had various degrees of running water. Most of the people cooked outside over fires (for which kindling was a real problem), as the forests of Africa have all been burned up and it was against the law to cut trees for firewood. **THERE WAS A REAL NEED FOR WARM BEDDING.** But I couldn't get the women interested. They were very practical--the cost of the materials and the batting was beyond their meager means to buy.

But I soon found out that there was a market for quilts. I made a couple of tied baby quilts with some of the batting the R.S. sent and went to the baby stores. They would take all the baby quilts that we could make.

I had started holding home-making meetings. Sometimes at the R.S. President's little home and sometimes at the chapel in the city and sometimes at our rented home. (the owner would have died if she had known). At one of these at Sis Chaya's home, the members were all busy crocheting. One of the kind white members kept sister Chaya busy crocheting bedspreads for all the beds in her house. (even if she didn't need them.) I had taken the baby quilts with me. I asked them how long it took them to make an item, and how much they could earn when they were through. A long time and practically nothing. I said: "How would you like to learn how to make baby quilts. You can make a quilt in one or two days if you keep at it. It will cost you seven or eight dollars to make, and you can sell it for \$20. They were definitely interested.

The thing we wanted to do most was to make them independent. Although most of them knew how to crochet, some of them had never held a needle in their fingers, but they learned fast. Tracy, realizing that the most difficult thing about making the quilts was getting the quilt ^{square} on the frame, made light uprights that could be stored without too much problem in their little homes. And he made the frame in one piece so that all the ladies had to do was tack it on the frame and the baby sized quilts could be quilted all in one piece.

Our first frame was a great success but the local wood was so hard you couldn't put tacks into it, so Tracy had to do a lot of shopping but was finally able to find a soft enough wood to do the job. We told the ladies that the first quilts that they made would pay for their frames and the materials, and then they would start making a profit.

I started teaching them in the local Chapel. Tracy and I would go out to the township and bring the ladies in. We showed them how to put the quilts on the frame and what materials to use, and where to buy materials. We started with the simplest form--the tied quilt. Since they do not have the western concept of sanitation, their homes were quite dirty. In addition, there were the cooking smells. A commercial product has to be clean. We had to teach them to keep their supplies in a plastic bag away from the children; to wash their hands, and to keep the quilts themselves tightly tied in large plastic bags until they were finished. Only one or two quilts had to be rejected because they were too dirty to sell.

While they were all learning, I realized that we needed a sewing machine. So Tracy and I went out and bought a small electric sewing machine. At the time we bought it we hoped that it would stay in the Black branch and that they would have a branch building to put it in in the not too distant future. (They still do not have one) We ended up teaching one of the daughters of the Chayas how to use the machine and let her make enough quilts to pay for it. The Chayas did have electricity in their township home. The biggest

temptation is to give it to them. Even then, they got thinking we would take care of everything for them. Just what we didn't want to happen. By letting their daughter earn the machine, it then belonged to her, and there could not be any feelings because we had showed favoritism by giving it to any one individual. We hoped she would help by doing some of the machine sewing for the quilts.

Meanwhile, while they were learning, Tracy was making the frames for each of them, and I was trying to teach them some basic economics. First: Pay 10% tithing. Second: Buy enough material to make at least one more quilt from your profits. Preferably, if you could, put ALL your first profits into more materials. But at least enough for one more quilt. We showed them where to buy the materials and took them to the shops where the market for the finished quilts were.

Then a local Indian merchant saw us carrying the quilts to market and asked about them. He asked if we would make him seven single bed size quilts for his family. I said I doubted if we could get the batts, but Tracy intervened and said that we would be glad to take on the project.

Someone had told Tracy that the only place in Zimbabwe where they had batts was a factory which made sleeping bags for the Zimbabwe army. The batts were imported and not for sale to the public, but the long scraps cut off the ends of the sleeping bags were for sale and were very cheap. They sold them by the pound, but in large plastic bags. We had been experimenting with them, hoping they could be used to make stuffed toys or bedding for the local members.

Tracy had the idea to lay them out on paper on the outside cement by our garage, and spray them with MMM spray glue, lay another layer the opposite way and use these batts for the Indian project. I objected that that was not honest, but Tracy assured me that the batts thus constructed would hold up even in washing and do the job. We demonstrated this by making a full bed size quilt for ourselves (the bedding in Zimbabwe was terrible) and we are still using it on our bed at home. The pieces did not come apart, and there was no smell. They have survived numerous washings.

Since they were not the size to use on the baby quilt frames, Tracy built another set of larger frames to make the quilts, and we were in business. We left these frames with Sister Chaya to use in the black branch. The project paid for all the ladies' baby quilt frames and they all worked together tying the quilts and finishing the ends with a blind stitch. When the project was completed, the Indian merchant was delighted.

I soon taught the ladies to turn the edges under and baste the edge and one of our black members who owned her own sewing machine and earned her living by dress making would sew around the edges of the quilt, making them more serviceable.

The project netted us enough to pay for all the frames and get enough materials for a quilt for each of the ladies to start with. More Batts were coming from the R.S. and the mission President was (jokingly) getting tired of delivering them.

We also experimented with using rubber foam which was cheap and available in Zimbabwe in the place of the batts, but they were not very satisfactory. The batt ends were the solution, and I tried to get the ladies to pool their resources and buy the ends by bulk, but they just couldn't seem to think in "bulk" terms. They wanted to go to the factory and buy fifteen cents worth. Since the factory did not want to fuss with that, it was a problem.

At this stage I wondered if I should try to tap the same market in Bulawayo, some 50 miles to the south of Harare, and so I wrote a letter addressed to the buyer of a large department store there. She visited us in Harare (her folks lived there) and ordered four white, four blue, four yellow, and four pink of a new baby quilt I had made which had a gathered edge.

By this time I had taught the ladies how to tie the quilts using the stitch which resembles a bird track but which doesn't have the loose tie ends which the local baby shops didn't like. They would pay us \$20. each. The store then turned around and sold the quilts for \$40 each. Can you believe it? This would really help the ladies, because they would realize at least \$12. profit on each. That was a lot of money for those ladies. We learned something on this project, too, that is: that moving away from the home base, eventually would involve shipping, billing, and delivery and increase our expenses. The Bulawayo buyer (she was a very nice lady) told us at the end of the project, that although she liked our product, the hassle of ordering and picking the quilts up was not worth it to her. We were also getting into a phase of the project that could not be handled locally by the members of the group.

Another problem we ran into was that of our own Transfer. The mission at that time was having the Sr. missionaries buy their own cars, and then we drove them up to Zimbabwe. The catch was that we had to take the car out of the country no later than six months or a huge tax had to be paid on the car. We had delivered the quilts and were waiting for the check to come from Bulawayo. We were scheduled to leave for South Africa at the end of the week. The buyer in Bulawayo said the check was on its way and we would have plenty of time to distribute the earnings out to the ladies and convert our own expenses (about \$600 U.S.) into dollars.

I had contacted a local white member of the church and asked her if she could pilot the project until the blacks were able to handle it themselves. Everytime Tracy went to the bank to see if the check had come, they said it hadn't. The last night before we left he went to the bank just before it closed and found a white bank teller. He investigated and said the check had been there for a week. We did not have time to change our own investment to US dollars, so we had the check changed so we could pay the ladies their earnings, and left the rest of the Zimbabwe funds with a member of the bishopric and told him to use it for the branch.

The local white members told us the project would fall apart when we weren't there to help with it. And it did. For a while after we came home we were able to help a couple of the ladies by trading quilt tops and batts from America for crocheted goods which they could get in Zimbabwe. The project diluted to just the black member who was the dressmaker, and who went to South Africa often enough that she could buy the batts. She soon stopped doing quilts because she could make more money selling crocheted goods which she bought in Zimbabwe and then peddled in South Africa.

Another problem had to do with human nature. After the Indian project, one of the ladies came to me and said: "Sister Hall, I need to ask you for a special favor." And I said: "You need me to loan you enough money to buy material for another quilt." "What did I teach you?" She thought she was going to get rich and had gone in debt to buy a radio. Her father was the director of a youth home for wayward youth, and I knew he could afford to loan her the money, and I also knew she would have to pay him back and maybe the experience would teach her a lesson. I told her to borrow the money from her father. The last thing we wanted for these people was to have them go into debt, thinking they were going to make all this money.

Another problem we ran into. I overheard Bro Chaya say to another member. "This quilt project is wonderful. We'll convert the whole township--but they can't get in on the project until they join the church." I had to give him a little lecture about why a person should join the church. Certainly not for gain. In fact, just before we left zimbabwe, I had started teaching quilting in the local chapel cultural hall as a possible means of meeting people who might be taught by the missionaries, and who did not even know about our quilt project, but were just interested in learning the skill. We only had one lesson before we were called back to South Africa.

I found when we got to South Africa that batts were available there, and could be taken into Zimbabwe by one or two without duty, but there was only one of our black members who could do this even if the other ladies could be frugal enough to pay for a queen size batt which would make four baby quilts, there was no way we could keep them supplied with batts, and the MMM glue idea didn't take hold.

Oh, well. They learned a skill. I wonder if the quilt frames and uprights were burned for firewood?

It is a wonderful idea to teach the Philippine members to sew. And if they can develop a cottage industry that will bring them enough money to clothe their families and keep the children in school, what a blessing it would be for them. Especially if there can be a place where the equipment can be kept locally for the use of the members and used for their mutual benefit. Is there a place close enough to the branch where material can be purchased? We found our biggest problem was getting the project on its own feet before we had to leave and finding local talent capable of keeping the project going when we were gone. If we could have stayed our whole mission in Zimbabwe it might have survived. Now the problem of getting a car out of Zimbabwe within the six month time frame has been solved by the couples using mission cars, which should always have been the case.

Best of luck to you. It would be such a blessing to those people. Rae collected enough to get the machine, I have taken enough over to Sam to give you a start on the materials. The one thing we have left from our project is the love of the people we tried to serve. That was worth it all.

Love,

Ida-Rose