



GRANT TOWNSHIP LIONS CLUB
629 W, Bayou Court Fox Lake, IL 60020



WE GIVE OUR HEART TO THOSE WE SERVE

Swazi Fathers Front & Center - Policeman, Baggage Handler, Translator, Professor

June 21st, 2009

In honor of our fathers in America, meet some admirable Swazi men.

A police captain, DAVID befriended Lions Harry and Echo and the whole Luke Commission team three years ago. His homestead, 2.5 hours southeast of the mission house, is one of the poorest, remotest regions in the country.

"You have helped my people much. We thank you, thank you," David graciously exclaims on numerous occasions.

This May was The Luke Commission's third visit to David's home area. "My people are hungry and sick." One year the TLC team took the people drinking water on the clinic day. This year a prominent Swazi farmer donated 200 kilograms of frozen chickens.

Personally, David is more difficult to know. David's wife works for the government, so she and David live together in a Manzini apartment. Like most Swazi men, he talks little about his immediate family.

David protects the VanderWals with advice and action. During parliamentary elections last autumn, David told the VanderWals not to stop at any road blockades at night, even if the detainers wore uniforms. People were disappearing and their body parts used to attract the favor of "winning" spirits.

Not long after, The Luke Commission was returning to Manzini at 3:30 a.m. (fulfilling the promise that "Everyone will be treated before we leave..."), when Lion Harry was chased for 45 minutes after driving through a roadblock. Lion Echo repeatedly called David on her cell phone. When she finally reached him, David assured her "I will handle this."

Minutes later the pursuit ended suddenly, as the chase cars abruptly turned around and sped away as stealthy as they had begun the hunt.

Now meet CLEMENT. God pairs us with people and purposes in our everyday lives, but divine appointments appear more pronounced here.

One day Lion Echo was at the nearby Matsapha airport trying to track down missing luggage for American volunteers. Lion Echo knows many employees at the tiny airport.

"I spend a lot of time locating bags that don't arrive with our people," she laughed. "A friend asked me to talk to his friend..."

Clement is a widower. His wife died four years ago, and tears still pool in his eyes when he speaks of her.

"Occasionally, one conversation seems more valuable than a whole clinic. This was one of those times," Lion Echo noted.

A baggage handler for Swazi Air, Clement probably has medical problems Lion Echo could have addressed, but that day he needed a spiritual uplift more.

Though he attends a Zionist church, Clement wanted to hear about Jesus. "My pastor is not learned," he said. As a nation, Swazis are religious, but most of their beliefs are based on traditions of ancestors.

Fellow Swazis are pushing Clement to remarry. "I worry another woman would not treat my children good," he told Lion Echo. Of his five children, two are still young.

A Swazi widower is supposed to remarry within six months of his wife's death. A Swazi woman, on the other hand, usually cannot remove her black mourning clothes for two years. Often her possessions and home revert back to her husband's family.

"It was shocking how he shared with me," Lion Echo said.

One of the hardest barriers for the VanderWals to breach is the "secrecy of relationships between men and women," Lion Echo said. "It's so strange to us." Husbands and wives seldom interact at clinics. Fathers seldom accompany their children.

"I still love my wife," Clement explained. "It is difficult to resist my culture's ways."

SIPHO is a young father and a Luke Commission translator since 2006. We call him "Small Sipho" because another translator is a taller, huskier Sipho we call, predictably, "Big Sipho."

A year ago at age 28, Sipho married the mother of his two children, ages 4 and 1. She lives on Small Sipho's family homestead with his mother and several brothers and sisters, while Sipho rents a room in town so he can work for The Luke Commission during the week and at a candy factory on weekends.

The young couple's marriage is an exception in Swazi society. Most men must buy 15 to 17 cows for the bride's family before the wedding. One cow costs from 1,800 to 3,000 Emalangenis, said Sipho, easily a month's wages for a Swazi with a good job. Multiply that by 15, and \$3,375 to \$5,625 is required by a father for his daughter. No wonder young Swazis delay marriage.

Small Sipho purchased only one cow. "I owe her father," he admitted. "I must pay."

Small Sipho's father had six wives and died in 2001. His youngest wife was Sipho's mother who bore 11 children. Small Sipho is the 5th child. He also has 9 half brothers and sisters.

During his childhood years, Small Sipho lived with his father, unlike many Swazi boys. When asked about his step-mothers, Small Sipho answered, "He sometimes goes to the others."

Does Small Sipho intend to take many wives? "No," he smiled. "One is enough. It is easier to maintain only one."

He met his wife when they were both in 9th grade. He still goes to his mother's church... when he is not working.

MUSA died unexpectedly a couple of weeks ago, so his Father's Day tribute is especially appropriate.

Although a prominent retired university professor, Musa remained a humble servant of "the least of these." He was an active Luke Commission supporter,

working tirelessly to transport patients who need extended care to Lions Harry and Echo.

"Musa handled the unfinished business that could be left undone when we treat so many people," said Lion Echo. "It's easy to help on the day of a clinic and be a community hero, but Musa did so much more."

Musa loved working with The Luke Commission, his wife said publicly at his funeral attended by more than 1,000 Swazis. An all-night vigil at the gravesite honoring the deceased ended in a Sunday sunrise burial, a common Swazi custom.

At this service, Musa's wife whispered to Lion Echo, "My husband was honest," meaning true to her as his only wife. Before his death, Musa excused her from donning widow's clothing. To show respect, she will stay in her home for a month and then participate in a TLC mobile clinic, July 13, in her husband's place.

"Musa had the heart of the people. He had the same passion as The Luke Commission," Lion Echo noted.

Musa also coordinated Operation Christmas Child shoebox distribution at five schools last year. At one bush location, 19 students remained empty-handed. Next day Musa made the one hour trip to Manzini to pick up 20 boxes at the VanderWals' mission house. When he returned, 21 children waited expectantly, so Musa was still short one gift.

Back to Manzini drove Musa. He could have said, "We've already given 700 shoeboxes to that school, so I'm done," but he thought one child was worth his effort.

Both Lions Harry and Echo are saddened by Musa's passing from a failed heart. He was 63.

"With people our ages dying all around us, it surprises me how affected I have been about an older person dying," Lion Echo said. "I miss him. He was a tremendous encouragement."

To dads everywhere, those we'll see this week and those we remember as if they were here yesterday, please know that a family is not a family without you.