

One day I want to go back to Africa

By Liang Jing, April team 2002



I knew I wanted to do something different when I was a senior student in university. And one day I found a piece of information on 21st century newspaper, “making a difference for yourself and for people in need!” I knew this was the kind of experience that I wanted. During the 6 months in the school, Yunnan Institute of Development, we were doing different and new things all the time, and we learnt to handle new situations in this way, which turned out to be an important part of the Africa

preparation. To expect the unexpected. We also had some tough experiences in working/living together in a team, which is not always easy. Later we realized that this was also useful preparation before going to Africa.

I have the most amazing time of my life in this short period. I mean it is very different going to Africa and be a part of a poor community for six months, than hearing about this in the news at home.

I was working with DAPP, (Development Aid from People to People), under the program Child Aid and Environment in southern province of Zambia. I lived and worked in Kanchele, a rural community and a real African bush. It still amazes me setting off at four o'clock in the morning with stars and moon, and driving back from town - 2 long hours of driving along a dirt road...and coming upon Kanchele- a place so deep in nature yet so full of life! I think about it and I get the biggest smile on my face. I wish you could all come here because you would be able to see for your own eyes- it's awesome!

Zambians are the friendliest people I've ever met. When you pass by strangers in the market, they always greet you with a smile. And they always tell us how important to the project we are. “How are you?” This is the most common word we got from the kids, but when we get back to them, they just laugh and run away. They pay much attention on greetings. Just hello can't show all your passion, we have to say good morning, good afternoon and good evening in Tonga language at different times in a day. That makes us always very happy when we greet each other. In a word I've never felt so appreciated in my life. I'm so happy to be working and helping such great people.

The generosity of people here still amazes me. They can have nothing yet will still find something to offer you, a cup of milk, an orange, Nshima(thick maize porridge) The word selfish has yet to exist here. I was bitten by our neighbor's three dogs the day after my birthday, and nearly 20 people that week asked me how I was feeling! I felt as if they were my family.

I have officially become one of the Tonga tribe in the first week in Zambia. I have been given a Zambian name. Mutinta it means “a beloved daughter”. It was given to me by a friend here that I have grown to love and cherish and I love it so much. I am beginning to get really accustomed to this place, really comfortable. And in order to have an African style look, I found someone patient enough to braid my hair with extensions before I back to China. My dream as an African girl. It took 12 hours' work to make it. So my sister didn't want to go with me to the street and and get lots of attention when I returned to China.

I can't really go further without telling you more about my work and organization, simply because it is what gives me so much energy and motivation day after day... It is through my work that I get to have a real contact with the community, the people, the Zambian culture and their values.

Our main work usually turns around giving training workshops and monitoring our activities in the villages. In detail, I focus on women clubs and preschools and also some other work like orphan program, micro-loans and youth clubs.

Training preschool teachers bring me lots of fun. They are some of the most fantastic persons I met in Zambia. Very active, open minded, acceptable and corporative. The training workshop normally lasts two or four days. We gave them the examples of how to give a good course, discussing about how to be a good teacher, how to tell an interesting story, the early child development, games, sketches ... Both parties learning something new and different.

Every meeting I have, the women all sing and make me dance in front of them. Me...little Asian girl dancing in front of a bunch of African ladies that know how to dance about 20 times better than me. They always get a big kick out of it and we always seem to have a good time. They always have lots of questions for me during the meeting as well. Why their home bread can't be sold? How to start up a business? How to let their members become more active? How to keep healthy like me.J (Because I am a little bit fat and they think fat is beautiful) How are the women clubs doing in China...

There are youth clubs for out-of-school youth between the ages of 18 and 25, married or not married. After training the youth club leader, we distributed two balls for each youth club. They were all pretty excited about it and some of them met to have a program (meeting, discussing, learning and playing) almost everyday.

Working in the field also an amazing thing for me. We need to bike one or two hours to a nearby school or village. Enjoy the view of the huge grassland, the blazing sunlight, beautiful wild birds in the trees and lovely children race out from their home yelling and screaming hello to make sure we didn't miss waving at them.

Before I came to Zambia I thought it is a tropic country no winter at all. But winter is coming down in the South Hemisphere in June and July, and let me tell you that the nights in Kanchele are not only cold, but freezing!! I use my sleeping bag and a blanket to keep myself warm. You can imagine how much fun it is to jump into our red basin, and pour some (already cold) water for bathing with the wind come through our elephant grass made bath circle (I mean there is no roof at all, just a circle). That makes every single drop of water twice as cold... there were some regulations we made from experience: no bath before 11:00 am and after 1:00 pm!



Three of us Chinese girls went for our study tour and vacation weeks at the end of May. We visited other DAPP projects and ended up at Victoria Falls and a national park for some wild camping. The time with the other projects was an unforgettable experience. We talked with those people who are HIV positive, taught them how to do keep themselves healthy, we made a back-to-school campaign for orphans, we meet the street children... I can't forget those lovely children we meet in Children's Town. They came to our house everyday and begged to learn Chinese Kongfu and followed us and called us Jacky Chan.

Victoria Falls are gigantic. Totally amazing, you can't even see the end! And we got totally wet even with the rain-coat. We also greeted some baboons, wild giraffes, zebras, antelopes, rhinos in a National park. Can you imagine three lions passing slowly by your open car? Elephants just stand in front of your car and threatening to chase you? That's all we meet in the national park. But we came safely back to our village and back to China.

Chinese restaurant are always one of the places we definitely would visit when we went to some big town. But let me tell you that the Chinese food in Livingstone is incomparable! It is so delicious! I think the reason is because that time was our first time to have proper Chinese food since we came to Zambia. We met a group from a Chinese medical team in that restaurant. They took care of us just like parents to their children. We really felt like we were staying in China.

The kids are a never-ending source of enjoyment and they continuously have new things to teach us. They always show their big grins on their dirty little faces. Our little friends in the village visited us the first morning after we arrived to Kanchele. They must have heard the vehicle's sounds last night. They helped us to set up fire when we were struggling to cook our first meal in the village. So we shared our food together with them. They visit us almost every day. If we are busy with our work they will just stand outside our window and look at us through the window. I was getting used to it after some days, and though I love the awed attention and giggles I get from children, I find it quite interesting how I don't notice that my skin is a different colour until I remember why people are staring at me.

African people like singing and dancing very much. And their dance is amazing good. They taught me so many times but I still can't catch it. So I have to say it has come by nature. All the boys and girls like to play balls in our yard. They make the ball by themselves. They find some plastic and roll it together and tie them with lots of thread. Some time we are playing together. They are very happy when I join them and they take much care of me.

It is two months ago since I came back from Africa. Those most friendly people asked me to bring their warmly greetings to all the people in the People's Republic of China.

It can show how those fantastic people they are! How can I greet 1.3 billion people?! But I'd like to pass their greetings to everyone here. And hope they are all happy and healthy like us as well. One day I want to go back to Africa! To meet again those wonderful people, watch the enormous blue sky, walk in the tall grass, enjoy the sight of the animals and the oddest shaped trees that always stand alone...

