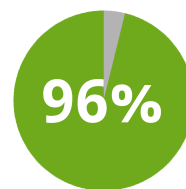


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Another Unbelievable Mitendi Story



JILL & MIKE LOWERY



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It was a long journey returning to the Congo from the U.S. After 9 months of almost constant travel, it felt so good to arrive back to our own little apartment and unpack our suitcases! We're happy to be settled, and as Michael said, "to be able to do the work instead of just talking about it for so long."

I didn't hear much from Mitendi Women's Center while we were stateside. The CBCO/Mitendi leaders tend to spare me the details when I'm away so I can have a break. Needless to say, I was anxious to get out to the center and see things for myself.

I was still jet-lagged, but made a surprise visit just days after we arrived back. I was flooded with relief as we pulled up to the gate and saw the Mitendi wall and everything intact. As I neared the building, I was bombarded with the happy sounds of the primary school classes in full swing. I had a wonderful welcome as staff members and many of the girls from our training program rushed out to greet me. They gave me a quick tour of the center and I was able to greet each of the classes. It was great to see the classrooms filled with all of those bright faces and the center's programs running smoothly.

As a few of the staff members were walking me back to my car, I had a chance to congratulate them on how good everyone and everything looked. My joke about how it must have been a year with no problems was met with awkward laughter and a lot of nervous glances between the staff members. Tata Bienvenu, the primary school director, finally said there had been some challenges, but except for one incident, nothing critical and God was faithful to see them through it all.

That one incident turned out to be another one of those "unbelievable Mitendi Stories":

Just after our departure, there was one last huge storm before the start of dry season in June. As a result, there was a major land slide across the road from the women's center that even took away half the road that runs in front of the Mitendi property, just a few yards from the wall. This is the main access road in and out of the capital city on the west side of town. In order to properly repair the road, they needed to divert the traffic. Our powerful "friends", who have long been trying to steal the Mitendi property, saw it as an opportunity. They approached the Chinese road crew and "gave them permission" to knock down two main sections of our wall so they could put a temporary road right down the middle of the property.

Tata Bienvenu found out about it early in the morning, just as the backhoe was poised, bucket in the air, ready to knock down the very portion of the wall that we had fought so hard to complete last December! Without hesitation, he sprinted to the spot and put himself between the backhoe and the wall. With his arms stretched out, he shouted, "Arrete! Arrete!" It was a moment of total panic, and utter confusion on the part of the backhoe operator - who thought he had been given permission. The folks who illegally gave the permission were there, too, shouting at Bienvenu and threatening him. Tata Bienvenu stood his ground and said, "I'll die before I see you knock down this wall!" The backhoe operator, egged on by the crowd, went so far as to push the bucket down on Tata Bienvenu's head saying he would crush him if he didn't move. Thankfully, at that point, several other Mitendi staff began arriving for work and stood alongside Bienvenu until they could convince the road crew that they did not, in fact, have permission from the proper authorities, and before they could touch that wall, they had to produce official paperwork to prove it.

All was quiet for a few days, and then a man showed up with an official letter from the government authorizing them to put a road right through the middle of Mitendi Center.

Work would begin in the morning. Bienvenu was devastated. The road would literally divide the property at the very place where the squatters want to claim rights to the center's land and would re-ignite the whole land battle. He said he went to bed sick that night asking God, "after all we went through to win this battle, how can you let this happen?" He said surprisingly, he slept, but awoke in the middle of the night with a realization. Though, at the time, it wasn't showing because it was dry season, during the rainy season (8 months out of the year), in the very spot where they wanted to put the road, that area is basically a swamp. Because of the landscape, the runoff from the heavy rains all pool in that one area and has no where to go. Bienvenu knew, without a huge investment in fill dirt and gutters to divert the water, as soon as the first heavy rain hit, their temporary road would be useless.

Early the next morning, when the road crew arrived, Tata Bienvenu was waiting for them. He approached the engineers and calmly said, before you start your work, I just want to show you one thing." While other Mitendi Staff members kept vigil near the wall, he took them to the site and explained about the water drainage problem. It was their first time inside the property. He said the engineers listened carefully, then walked around examining the powdery soil and conferring with one another in Chinese. After quite some time, they came back to him and said he was right, considering what it would cost to prepare the ground, it made no sense to put a temporary road through the Mitendi property. On top of that, once inside property, they discovered the school and the women's center and said they didn't want to endanger the children or disrupt the work going on there. Needless to say, our "friends" were not happy to hear the news. In a funny turn of events, the engineers became our advocates in defense of keeping our wall in tact and found a better place for their temporary road.

Hearing this story reminded me how privileged I am to work alongside people like Tata Bienvenu, Mama Jackie and the other Congolese Baptist Women. In a country where the majority of people are overwhelmed by the daily struggle for survival, these dear brothers and sisters willingly and at great cost to themselves, look beyond their own needs and live to serve the most vulnerable children and young at-risk women in their community.

Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and give His life – a ransom for many. ~ Matt 20:28

As Tata Bienvenu stood with his arms stretched out reenacting for me how he faced down the backhoe, I saw a perfect picture of Jesus before me. One who desperately wants to bring God's love, hope and new life into this broken world – and one who is willing to sacrifice himself to make it happen.

As we journey toward Easter, thinking about the sacrifice that Jesus made on our behalf, I hope you will also keep in prayer these dear servants of Christ who are striving to make a difference in their community in Congo.

Happy Easter! He is Risen!

Jill and Mike