

Chapter 16

Mission Report in Willow Creek 3rd Ward - Nov. 24, 2013 by Sister Stokoe

We are Tom & Diane Stokoe, both retired educators. For those of you who are new to the ward, I'll begin by saying a little about us. We have lived in Willow Creek for 35 years. We raised a family of six sons here. My husband taught history, speech and drama at Skyline High School for 31 years and was the voice of Skyline football and announced all the home games for 13 years. After retiring early from Granite District, he taught at Mountain Ridge Jr. High School in Alpine until 2010. I taught at Skyline and at Kennedy Junior High and served as librarian at Granite and later at Olympus High School. I served as president of the Granite Library Media Association from 2001 to 2004. I was elected president of the Utah Library Media Association.

We were released from our mission in South Africa on 15 October, 2013 and spent the next eighteen days touring sites in Turkey, Greece, Jordan and Israel as we followed in the footsteps of Paul. We visited the cave on the Isle of Patmos where John the Revelator had the vision recorded in the Book of Revelation and then we flew to the Holy Land and walked in the footsteps of our Lord and Savior. We saw people from different denominations being baptized in the River Jordan and contemplated the many baptisms we witnessed in South Africa as we served in Grahamstown and Motherwell Branches in Port Elizabeth.

When we came home we went to the Draper temple where we performed baptisms for the dead. We are the only church on the face of the earth that performs baptisms for the dead. But we know they were performed in Christ's time for Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "Else why are they baptized for the dead if the dead rise not at all?" (1st Corinthians 15:29).

I testify that John the Baptist delivered the keys to baptism and the authority to Joseph Smith. We belong to the same church that Christ organized when he was here upon the earth. It was restored in these the Latter days in all its purity and power.



Baptism of the Mdlele Family from Motherwell including the missionaries and President Zitzu on far right.

Our primary assignment in South Africa was to work with the Church Educational System as CES specialists and to assist with the Perpetual Education Fund. We spent our first eight months presenting PEF firesides and sponsoring “Planning for Success” classes in the wards and branches from Port Elizabeth to East London; but did not have very much success generating loans. If we’d worked for a bank we would have been fired. I found it hard to reconcile being a loan officer with my patriarchal blessing which states, “You will take the gospel to those who know not God nor the purpose for which they have come to earth.”

My first few weeks on the mission were very hard. I was not happy with our tiny flat. It needed painting and repair. I blew up a couple of appliances by plugging them into the wrong outlets. Our washer did not work and the Internet went down every time it rained.

For me everything changed the night before Mother’s Day. Four young elders knocked at our door and brought me a cake and wish me happy mother’s day. These young men will probably never know what a blessing they were to me. They invited us everywhere. We went with them

to teach investigators. We visited in-actives with them. Elders Acton & Pack were particularly attentive. This dynamic duo signed their area book "Action Packed" and they were. I fell in love with the young missionaries.



At District Conference in East London

In December President Wood got approval from our area leaders for us to do member service work in Grahamstown. President and Sister Nye were leaving for home and the new couple that had been assigned to that branch had visa problems and were sent to the Phillipines.

We moved into the flat in Grahamstown. Elder Stokoe assisted the leadership in the branch until the end of January and then something historic happened. A new all black branch presidency was called and Elder Stokoe served as executive secretary. I sent their picture to the local newspaper and wrote an article explaining that the Mormon Church in Grahamstown is now led by local leaders.



Khaya Ketani, 1st Counselor, President Budaza, 2nd Counselor
Nathan Johnson with Elder Stokoe & Mission President Wood

I taught Institute and helped with the activities. We organized a Valentines dance in an effort to promote romance in this branch of mostly single young adults who were attending college but had not much more success than we did in generating PEF loans.

Grahamstown is a college town with student boarding. It is the same distance from Port Elizabeth as Logan is from Salt Lake. I know this because we maintained two flats during this time and drove back and forth between them a couple of times a week. Thank you for keeping us in your prayers. Many of you know that Elder Stokoe loves to drive fast. I just closed my eyes and tried to sleep while he whizzed past construction sites and dodged the cows, sheep, goats, baboons and monkeys that wandered into the highway.

Grahamstown is also home of the National Arts Festival so we got to enjoy some plays, musical productions and art exhibits. Elder Stokoe loved watching the native African dancers. But often I got tired of stomping Africans so went off to enjoy the award winning films.



In the projection room at Settler's Monument with Isaac Cupido, who chose films for the festival.

This mid-winter festival happened while you were all celebrating the 4th of July.

Each Sunday evening we invited our four young missionaries to dinner along with Alan Bamford, who is a widower and the only white man in the branch. We went with the elders to do service at the Thomas' 600 acre farm. Sister Thomas was the only white woman in the branch. Her husband is an Afrikaner and a non-member who owned a farm outside Grahamstown so she could only attend every other Sunday.

On March 3rd the branch had a "finding the lost sheep" activity and we divided up into groups and went to the township looking for members-of-record who were not attending. The biggest problem was distance. Many Black members had to walk 45 minutes to get to and from church every Sunday and 45 minutes home. Few Blacks own cars. Most must walk everywhere. It takes a lot of commitment and stamina to be a good Latter-day Saint in Africa.

We moved back to Port Elizabeth and continued our work with the PEF program. By then it had merged with Employment Services under Self Reliance. The new program was just being introduced so we had down time. We sponsored a service project at the Lorraine Frail Care Center. Tom bought the seeds for a vegetable garden.



The young missionaries dug the ground to plant seeds. Elder Stokoe decided that we should have a talent show for the patients there. Twice he put together excellent forty minute shows with our very talented young missionaries. They loved it! Also, the elders enjoyed performing. We always ended each show by singing the mission theme song. I would have liked to have had some of our young missionaries come and sing it for you today but it's holiday season and it did not work out.



President Neku center with his two counselors Vosqit & Parker

Stake President Neku called us April to go and assist Elder Zitsu in a township called Motherwell. There were six members there. It was too far for them to walk to the ward building in KwanoMaxi. So they decided to organize a group in Motherwell. The stake rented a vacant classroom in Elufefeni elementary school. Group leader Elder Zitsu was a one man show. He prepared the sacrament, conducted the meeting and taught lessons. As more people began to attend the stake rented four classrooms total. There were so many investigators that President Wood sent out two missionaries. Members were making appointments for them. They were so busy that brother Zitsu asked us to help give the missionary follow up lessons. This we really enjoyed. We got to visit with members in their homes in the township.



With Elder Zitsu in Motherwell

The four class rooms were painted, broken glass windows replaced and new copper wiring strung to replace that which was stolen. Now we had electricity with rooms for the relief society, primary, and young adults. President Zitsu told them, "Now you won't have to meet with the old people. You will have your own room and Sister Stokoe will be your teacher." I taught the young women's class and the 12-17 year old Sunday School class.

We helped some of the members in specific causes. It took five months to get Buzelwa Norongo's national identification number and a birth certificate. Until then she was a non-person in South Africa. I

thank my friends whose prayed for her and put her name in the temple. It took all our efforts to establish her citizenship. Now Buzelwa can get a job and be legally married. This is huge. Many people were not issued birth certificates when they were born so they are locked out of the system.



Going to Home Affairs so Buzelwa's aunt could testify.
It took two visits and mountains of paper work.

We helped Zim Mdlele get back into college and assisted Paul, a 26 year-old, register in classes so he could qualify for a job as a security guard.

Every Sunday we had the best of both worlds. At 8:00 a.m. we attended Sacrament Meeting in Port Elizabeth Ward which is an old established white Afrikaans ward with a few Blacks. After that meeting we drove to Motherwell and attended the block and served.

On Wednesday nights I taught Institute to young adults in Port Elizabeth. Those youth were so committed and dedicated. They were such an example to us. I had two engineering students from Nelson Mandela University. Puti invited Deng, a classmate from South Sudan, to attend. He was baptized. I worried about Deng because he is returning to South Sedan after graduation in January. I worried that he would be the only member of the church there until I learned that there is a small branch in Juba.



My Institute students in Port Elizabeth: Nicole & Neil Fourie, Deng Gatluak, Phuti Rukia with Erin Palmer seated



We drove Moxoli (right) from Grahamstown to East London to be set apart for his mission. He flew out the next morning with two of these Elders for the Johannesburg MTC.

I want to share Sifundiso Beja's story. It demonstrates what is going on all over the world. Generally, Africans do not learn to swim but enjoy going to the beach and being in the water. Sifundiso went to the beach with his soccer club when a huge wave came in and swept some of them out to sea. Seven drowned. Sifundiso survived. A little after that his English teacher introduced him to the gospel. Grahamstown has only 135 members but they have five missionaries in the field. We took Elder Maxoli (far right) to leave for his mission.



Sifundiso (*shown with his English teacher*) was baptized on May 4th. He spent many hours helping the missionaries which is typical for many devout young Africans who are baptized into the church. Often they are the only member of their family to join. Some are teased, persecuted or shunned by their peers. But they remain faithful.

We took Sifundiso to get his patriarchal blessing and discovered that he was fore ordained to serve in many important callings in Africa. When Motherwell became a branch in September this nineteen-year-old high school senior was called to serve as the 2nd counselor in the branch presidency. We served with Doctor Scott, a senior missionary who had been on five previous missions and he told us about teaching five young Muslims. "How can we know that what you are teaching us is true," they wondered. "Pray about it. Just ask God," he told them. Today every one of those young men are serving missions.



Sister Frieda Palmer, Sifundiso, Patriarch Palmer, President Neku and Paul

Thank you for your faith and prayers in our behalf. I testify that the Lord keeps his promises. My patriarchal blessing was fulfilled as we were called to serve in Grahamstown and Motherwell. During the first few weeks of my mission I wondered if the brethren had made a mistake. What I felt prepared to do, and what my experience and training had taught me to do, was not what I had been assigned to do.

I was not successful as a loan officer, but because of our being assigned to Grahams town and Motherwell, we had wonderful teaching and service opportunities that never would have been possible without these assignments. Senior missionaries are told that they are to be "the guide on the side not the sage on the stage." Often they are not given teaching responsibilities. But Elder Stokoe and I had lots of opportunities to speak, to share, to lift as we participated in those branches."



Motherwell Branch Presidency
Elder Mdlele, President Zitsu and Sifundiso Beja

Will a senior mission be easy? My answer is "no." But it will be worthwhile. Will it be what you expected? "Probably not." Think of a senior mission as boot camp for eternity. Tom and I had separate careers which took us in different directions. We were busy working and raising our family and did not have time to work out some of our relationship problems. Companionship training in Zone Conference and being together 24 hours a day changed that. Things got a lot better when Elder Stokoe figured out who the senior companion was.

Marriage is not easy. Patriarch & Sister Palmer spoke at a P.E. fireside for the young marrieds. "I deserve a medal" Elder Palmer said. Sister Frieda Palmer responded with: "I deserve a monument." I love my husband more and we are more compatible having had a mission experience. I am happy to have had a willing, worthy, healthy husband to take me on a mission. It was a privilege to wear the mission badge. It reminded us that we are all disciples of Jesus Christ.

President Wood told us about going out to the Cape of Good Hope in his missionary gear--white shirt, tie and suit. Everyone else was in sports clothes. He wore his badge. As he walked past a tourist he heard the tourist say to his friend: "Did you see that man? That was Jesus Christ." It

was a great blessing as missionaries to serve and represent him in South Africa.

The church is truth. This work is real. Joseph Smith was a prophet. We belong to the church that was established by Jesus Christ in ancient times. Serving a senior mission blesses us and our family. My kids are an independent lot and they get along well on their own. But each could see the hand of God in their life as we served in South Africa. I love our Heavenly Father and say this in the name of our beloved Savior, even Jesus Christ, Amen



We loved working with President Mark and Sister Kathleen Wood, Elder Mark and Sister Lavern Sherbert (Seminaries & Institutes) on our left, and with Elder Leon and Mariam Van Sickle (Provident Living.)

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