

A Charity Without Acknowledgement

TZEDAKAH

Making a Difference... Not Just a Living

Omer K. Reed, DDS... proud grad of LVI!



Omer in Africa in 1963.

Having married a wealthy woman and being inherently lazy we decided to capitalize on the situation and open a dental clinic in Africa. At that time our youngest of five children was ten months (that daughter is now my hygienist and is fifty three... time sure does fly), and all five of our children were eighteen months apart.

We secured an RN friend to live in with the kids, borrowed \$8,000 from our friendly banker and after a lengthy trip including UK, France, Spain, Italy, Jordan, Sudan... we arrived in what was then Tanganyika on the equator, then south to the twenty thousand plus foot Mount Kilimanjaro. In the Usambara mountain, just south of Kilimanjaro, our invitation by Dr. Verce Fugglestad included the fact that nine out of ten of those arriving at the hospital with a dental infection DIED.

We spent two months training two natives with some dental experience in Mombasa on the coast, and in catching up with the preventive and operative procedures of the team that staffed Bumbuli and also the two natives. They would be the dentists when we left! These boys were sharp, fast learners and unconditionally committed to the task. If the offending tooth refused to be removed, our objective was to break it off or cut it to establish drainage; only then would the efficacy of the antibiotic in the circulation be lifesaving! Amazing what one can do with an upper and lower cowhorn forceps, a universal bicuspid/anterior forceps and a few well selected elevators!

One day, an eighteen year old Masai warrior was sitting in my chair with a fractured lower molar... quite easy to repair but best to have a good mandibular block... so with my greatest care, skill and judgement I managed not to let him see the syringe and to not feel any discomfort.

*"If you think you're too small to make a difference,
you haven't spent a night with a mosquito."*

African Proverb

He slowly rubbed his mandible lower right and clearly said "Kilimanjaro!" Well, that puzzled me so I asked my assistant for a translation. I was told this young buck had been to the top of Mount Kilimanjaro where the cold snow is, and that is what his mandible felt like and he was smiling! So, I asked him "how he liked that?" My assistant translated and my new young friend "clouded over" and the translation came back... "what is it you have that you think I want?" Now even in English we misunderstand each other and I am reminded of my father's wisdom... he used to say when such a situation arose...

"I know you understand what you think I said but what you heard is not what I meant... I am responsible for what I say to you, not what you understand."

Oh, yes!!! That good old Midwestern philosophy is solid stuff!! And friend, Victor Frankl "you can choose what attitude you bring to any given situation"... in review... any value in getting upset here? Obviously not so I smiled and told my translator...

"I considered him my brother!" Apparently that was a clean easy message as he relaxed and a big smile enhanced his countenance. I find that same message terrifically powerful, even without the translator right here in Phoenix. My father came to mind as he once told me that "the older he got the fussier he was with what upset him." In this instance, I realized my Masai friend was not stupid, but rather he was very present and "in-charge."

We cared for fifty to seventy people a day. By week three, the death toll was ZERO. We have repeated this dental gig, over the years

(with sixty years at the chair there has been time and opportunity) in Mexico, Truk Lagoon, New Guinea, Kibbutz in Israel, Hadassah Hospital, General Hospital & South Phoenix for eighteen years.

John McCain broke our Tzedakak chain by listing our team in the congressional record for the three Catholic schools on the inner islands of Truk Lagoon. The kids had never seen a dentist and the Nuns took to the preventive part with a passion... and the scuba was terrific!

In this life, one discovers the measure you give is the measure you get back... packed down and running over!... being listed in the congressional record is, for us, a smashing reward... recognition!

So... time to return to phoenix... a long ride from the other side of the world!... on our way home we enjoyed stops in Bomba, Bangkok, Tokyo, Hawaii, for a week of rest with friends and relatives... now listen very carefully... This is the first year of many for us in dentistry where we netted more than we grossed!

Marci and I returned to Tanzania a couple of years ago and one of the two "students" was yet on the job, enjoying it with a passion, his helping relationship with his people ...glad to see us and thankful for the fifty five gallon barrels of supplies that do occasionally make it through to Tanzania... OUR LEGACY REMAINS STRONG & THE TRUTH IS WE GAINED SO MUCH MORE THAN WE GAVE.

*There is nothing like the reward of
helping others...*

Marci & Omer