



Some Find Laughter in Hyperinflation

JIM BELSHAW Of the Journal

When presented with a single piece of monetary currency with a face value of \$50 billion, there's not much to do but laugh.

It's legitimate, or at least it was until recently when the Zimbabwean government removed 10 zeroes on its currency so it no longer comes in billion dollar units.

The one in my hands had printed on it: "Pay the bearer on demand Fifty Billion Dollars."

In Zimbabwe, it would have bought you an egg. Or it would have a couple of weeks ago.

Laughter comes easier when Patrick Makokoro, director of The Goromonzi Project, an NGO (Non-Government Organization) working with orphans, laughs at it, too.

"That egg will probably cost you about \$200 billion now," he joked as we spoke on the deck of Janet Shaw's Placitas home, which also happens to be the headquarters of The Goromonzi Project. Janet, 55, was born in England and moved to Zimbabwe when she was six weeks old. She began the project in 2005.

Patrick, hired to coordinate the work in Zimbabwe a year ago, is in New Mexico to raise money and introduce New Mexicans to the project in a series of three meetings:

2 p.m. Sunday at the offices of Bill Druc, 1300 Luisa Street, #23, Santa Fe. (470-0797; bill@druceng.com)

7 p.m. Thursday at Friends Meeting House, Fifth and Bellamah NW, Albuquerque. (350-3959; janet@goromonziproject.org)

2 p.m. Aug. 17, the home of Cynthia and Stevan Schoen, 2 Hillside Drive, Placitas. (867-2884; schoenlaw@comcast.net)

As a child growing up in what was then called Southern Rhodesia, Janet Shaw came under the care of a Zimbabwean woman she looked upon as a second mother.

"She taught me so much," she said. "And now I have lived a wonderful life, and I thought it's time to pay back a debt. It's time for me to pay back to the greatgrandchildren of my nanny in Zimbabwe."

Janet and her Australian husband, whom she met while living in South Africa, traveled the world, one of those places being New Mexico. When it came time choose a place to settle and raise a family, they came to Placitas. She often returns to Zimbabwe to visit family and in 2005, while visiting her sister, noticed large numbers of children roaming the streets.

Her sister said, "Oh, those are the orphans."

Janet asked questions. How much would it cost to educate a kid for a year? About \$100. How much for food? About \$200. How much for health care? About \$350.

"There were 16 children living with an old man," she said. "Well, I thought, I have 16 friends in Placitas, and I'll ask each for a dollar a day, \$365. I mean, that's nothing for us. Well, it turned out that

I have more friends than I had orphans. So I asked my sister if she could find more."

Shortly thereafter, they were up to 60 kids. Today, it's 151, and Janet needed to hire someone to oversee the project. She chose Patrick Makokoro, a 24-year-old who had been working with similar organizations since he was 18. He knew how the system worked — when it was allowed to work.

The dictator, Robert Mugabe, ordered a ban on all such groups in early June. Patrick was not allowed to visit the rural area where the project's orphans lived. So he came to New Mexico for the series of meetings and to give himself time away from Zimbabwe, where recent elections were marked with violence and, in some cases, killings.

"It is a difficult country today," he said. "You can't get basic commodities — bread and milk. It's difficult to get a hold of money because there is such a shortage of notes. You can't find gas, so you must use the black market. In daily life, it is difficult for ordinary people to make ends meet. For the orphans, it is even more difficult."

When asked why she went to the bother of it all — or why anyone in faraway New Mexico should go to the bother — Janet Shaw said, "People ask me that all the time. I tell them because it's there, because at this time of my life, it is there, and that's why I bother."

Then she adds what she says is one of the core components of Zimbabwe character.

"An insane optimism. Things are going to get better! Things are going to get better!" she said. "My husband says he doesn't know how I can talk like that after all this time, but I think it's something innate in all Zimbabweans. We have an insane optimism."

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