

A JOURNEY TO SOUTH AFRICA

Sister Rebekah



Sister Rebekah resides in the Sixth Avenue squatters' camp that we primarily worked in while in South Africa. Squatters' camps come as a result of the 45-year Apartheid that ended only 12 short years ago. Racism and segregation are still extremely rampant, even in the churches. When the Apartheid was in its prime, white people from all over S. Africa pushed colored and black people out of their homes. After the Apartheid ended, the Government now had to deal with the problem of where to put all of these displaced people. The solution was to send them to small plots of land where they'd live in crudely

assembled shacks pressed together. The Sixth Avenue camp consists of about 75 families shoved into the size of half a city block. The largest camp/township, called Khayelitsha (Xhosa for *Our New Home*) in Cape Town alone has just fewer than one million people in it. We were appalled at the shacks that went on for miles as we drove past Khayelitsha one day.

Sister Rebekah, though she grew up in a home, now lives in a small shack at the edge of the Sixth Avenue camp with no electricity or indoor plumbing. She lives with her two sons, her granddaughter, whom she raises and another boy, Reggie. She "adopted" him after his mother died of AIDS. Her husband, like almost every other man in the camp, is an alcoholic who we rarely saw out of bed during the day.

Sister Rebekah has an air of authority about her that makes you think twice about messing with or contradicting her. She is the religious leader of the camp, a title that she would never give to herself, but is understood by all who come to her in their greatest times of need.

One morning, Mary Jean, Alicia and I joined together with other Christian women in the camp for prayer. Sister Rebekah sat, wearing a yellow t-shirt with a small circle torn at the top near her heart. I was scheduled to bring a message of encouragement from the Word to the ladies and then we would all pray. However, as we began, Alicia, the American missionary we stayed with while in S.A., asked Sister Rebekah if she missed her eldest son that day. Sister Rebekah said that she did and began to tell us that the yellow shirt was one that her oldest son had been wearing when he was murdered by a bullet-wound to the chest a year prior. Amazingly, she was able to get all of the blood stains out and wears it on days when she misses him in a particularly intense way.

That morning, she could have railed against the Lord for all of her troubles...being forced to live in a rundown shack, having to figure out how to feed her family, having to deal with a husband who was drunk and in bed most of the time, having to cope with the death of a child. She could have unleashed anger against the Lord, but she didn't. Instead she sat and proceeded to tell of God's faithfulness in her life. She told of how He had provided food on a day where they knew they would go hungry again. She told of how her husband had apologized for the first time after verbally abusing her. She told how the Lord provided food for a child who was very sick and had come to sit with her because his parents weren't taking care of him. She talked for close to 45 minutes before completely breaking down and weeping. She was discouraged that day. She didn't come to us and ask *us* to encourage her, she encouraged herself. She sat and *chose* to remember the faithfulness of the Lord instead of the troubles that plague her life.

When I told her how encouraged I was by her and her faith in the Lord, she beamed like a child praised by a beloved parent. I was so humbled by the weight that my compliment carried with her. To think that she would put me in such a high position simply because I was a "rich white American." How could she know that I endeavor to have faith like hers? That I look *up* to her and not *down* at her? I pray in time she can see the authority and wisdom that the Lord has blessed her with and never believe for a second that the location where she resides, determines her worth. If nothing else, I pray that my love and respect would show her that.

Sister Rebekah with her granddaughter





South Africa Highlights

- Placing my hands on the dry, rough and cracked skin of a seven-year-old, at her request, with a bad case of eczema and praying that the Lord would heal her.
- Taking Reggie, from the Sixth Avenue camp, to a shopping mall to buy new clothes and shoes because he was quickly shredding and outgrowing the few clothes that he had. His face and attitude expressed a wonder at the things he saw and did that I will never forget. **You can hear more about this story on the home page of my website: www.tredessa.com.**
- Ministering to destitute people at a homeless shelter and singing Christmas carols for the first time this past Christmas season.
- Being with Ben and Alicia Eakins, whose home we stayed in, and offering encouragement and support to this young couple who have forsaken family, friends and everything that's familiar in the U.S. to love those who are deemed unlovable in South Africa.
- Learning new hand-clapping games from every child who could push another out of the way in order to gain your attention. I will be taking these games to Venezuela with me to teach to the kids there.
- Shoving 20-some people into Sister Rebekah's very small shack and studying the Word by candlelight with other believers, some illiterate and some drunk.
- Seeing the most beautiful country I've ever been to. We had the privilege of visiting several different towns as we drove down the coast and each place was unique, different and beautiful in its own way.
- Going to an elephant park on Thanksgiving and driving around for hours, watching hundreds of elephants, zebras, ostriches, warthogs, hartebeests and meerkats leap across the road in front of our car.
- Watching a family of baboons overtake a shut-down visitor's center and use it as their personal playground while ignoring a bright green car full of Americans sitting right in the midst of them, watching in fascination.



COMING UP...

A month's time will bring about my fifth trip to the Home of Refuge orphanage in Venezuela. Mary Jean Powers and I will again be taking a team to do construction around the facility and to teach the kids English, computer and art. With 15 people going, this is our largest team yet. Mary Jean and I agree that the Lord has big plans for this trip and we're excited to see what they are. As with South Africa, I cannot go to the nations without you. This trip will cost \$1,600. Would you consider sending me?

Please visit the Home of Refuge website and read some of the stories of the children who have been rescued: www.homeofrefuge.org.

If you'd like to partner with me in going to Venezuela, make checks out to "Get the Word Out". Send them to: **Get the Word Out ♦ Attn: Tredessa ♦ PMB #321 1610 Pace St. Unit 900 ♦ Longmont, CO 80501.**

Please **do not** write my name on the check, just attention the envelope to me. All donations are tax-deductible.

Thank you for your prayers and finances to help me go to South Africa. The Lord continues to give me a deeper love and compassion for the poor and needy...those so close to His heart. May your new year bring about more opportunities to reach the lost for Him!

God bless,

Tredessa Rhoades

Be sure to check out my website for more pictures and stories!
www.Tredessa.com