

Trip inspires African outreach

By Cindy Card, Journal correspondent Saturday, December 15, 2007

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From a mud hut in Uganda, Africa, a recently widowed woman named Faith prayed to God to help her and her five children. Some 8,400 miles away from her home in Rapid City, Karen Lantz asked God for someone she could help while she was visiting Uganda. The women's prayers were answered, leading to life-changing experiences for both.

Lantz planned on visiting the country just once to visit her son Lawrence and his family. She wanted to help one family.

"I told my son at the time I wanted to help a very poor family," she said. "I wanted to give them a goat. For years I read about Heifer International and some of these charities and how a dairy goat seems to change people's lives a lot better than any gift."

She said she was impressed with what Heifer International could accomplish, but that organization was not serving the Soroti District area of Uganda that she was visiting.

"My son kept cautioning me and saying they think they won't like goat's milk, but they didn't have any dairy goats, so they really didn't know," she said. Lantz was not able to find a dairy goat and instead bought the widow a meat-type goat.

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Lantz said that a widow in Uganda endures more suffering than just the loss of her spouse.

"Many family clans still believe women have no ownership rights of property," Lantz said. "When a couple marries, they go to live at the husband's clan. If the husband dies, his brothers take all the couple's property, even the dowry the woman had brought into the marriage.

"Some clans then don't want to keep the widow and children of the dead husband. Those widows and children may become displaced persons, as their own families may not want to take them back because they already got their inheritance in the form of the dowry. There may be some day labor available to men, but it is next to impossible for women to find any kind of employment," she said.

With the help of her son and his interpreter, she met Faith and presented her with a goat.

She took joy in that one exchange; she had accomplished what she set out to do. She knew she could not help all of Africa and had no plans to return to the continent.

"When I left in November 2006, I thought I would probably never return to Africa," she said.

All that changed when she heard in March that Faith's goat had had a baby. "I was so thrilled for her and knew that she'd taken good care of it. I wanted to reward her. She had done the work and hadn't gotten money or food, so I told my son I want to give her something."

Lantz was thinking chickens, but her son told her chickens weren't a very good gift and suggested giving Faith a cow.

"I said a cow would draw attention to her. Everyone would think she's wealthy," she said. "Either people would try to steal it or men would try to marry her."

Every time she suggested a dairy goat, he reminded her that they did not like goat's milk.

"Finally I was just determined. Every country in the world, people like goat milk, and I know they'll like it," she said.

In May, she thought she was the only person in the world interested in helping these people. "I thought that if I don't do it, I don't think there's anybody else who has the interest that I have to help."

She asked two of her friends, Carol Dormann and Bonnie Longcor of Rapid City, to help her form a nonprofit interdenominational charity. "We thought we could organize this and find enough people to help."

She said her two friends are vital to her project. "I couldn't start a nonprofit without two non-related people, and they're so interested in missions, too. We knew that every widow with hungry children who is milking her goat will thank God that she is milking her dairy goat," she said.

Lantz returned to Uganda this year and presented four 50 percent Toggenburg dairy goats to four widows, including Faith. She was able to purchase the goats from Farm Africa, a British charity similar in design to Heifer International.

They knew they were getting a nutritious food source that would do very well grazing on the lush area situated between the Congo and Kenya.

Donna Fisher of Rapid City said she is amazed at her friend's determination and courage to undertake such a project.

"What is remarkable to me is the courage it takes to go do something like this," Fisher said. "I know her family was there, but to travel as she did and to just plunge into the challenges of a culture in interior Africa is just amazing. I admire her for her humor and courage and spunk."

She said she knows that Heifer International, which does not provide services to that region of Africa, was an inspiration to Lantz's project, which is similar but on a much smaller scale. Nevertheless, she said, the project is effective.

"People of sensitivity, courage and faith can always make a difference," Fisher said. "Every little bit makes a difference. I suppose you could say, 'well one widow or one orphan family with one goat, what difference does that make in the face of all that poverty in Africa?' Well, it makes an enormous difference to that family."

Lantz said she plans to return to Uganda next year to further the project, which includes starting their own herd so they will not be at the mercy of others when we are ready to give goats to more widows and orphans.

"We will then be able to give better advance training and notice to recipients," Lantz said. She said she already has received estimates for purchasing land and enclosing it with high chain link fencing. They have enlisted the services of a veterinarian to oversee much of the work there. She already has acquired a basic core herd of four female and one male Anglo-Nubians.

"We are looking forward to an exciting year in 2008," she said.

Charity helps widows and orphans

Story Photo



Karen Lantz, left, poses with Faith, recipient of a goat given to her by Lantz. Faith is a widow in Uganda. Lantz's new charity, Help Orphans and Widows Inc. was inspired by her trip. (Courtesy photo)

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Karen Lantz, Carol Dormann and Bonnie Longcor, all of Rapid City, created a nonprofit, interdenominational Christian charity called Help Orphans and Widows, Inc. (HOW). Lantz said they chose a name with that acronym because when they tell others about their mission, they are always asked how people can help.

She said all three work full time and have spent their weekends for the past half year setting up the paperwork and technicalities that are involved in establishing a charity that works in a foreign country.

"We know that we three alone can't do much to help these widows and orphans," Lantz said. "We will be inviting local individuals and churches to add our charity to their list of missions they support. We are already receiving good response and great interest from the first people who have heard our story."

The group's mission in Africa is:

- n To provide widows and orphan families with the means to become self-sufficient, one family at a time.
- n To provide domestic animals for the purpose of sustainable food products.
- n To demonstrate improved farming techniques in the production of crops and gardens.
- n To encourage private enterprise and business opportunities.
- n To help establish a market for their products.
- n To encourage families to pursue education in the hope of a better future.

For more information about how to help, go to www.helporphansandwidows.org, e-mail Lantz at karbonn@aol.com, or write to PO Box 9362, Rapid City, SD, 57709.

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