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## **Letters from Chad: Lasting image stirs Augustine, friends to action**

*by Matt Brennan*

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Gary Augustine, pastor of the Evangelical Fellowship Church in Elburn left Africa last November when a trip he took ended. But since then, he and the group he traveled with have not forgotten who and what they saw.

Augustine spent from Nov. 5 to Nov. 19, 2003, in the north African nation of Chad. The trip was a result of meeting Ngarndeye Bako, the highest elected official in the Protestant community of Chad, while he attended Wheaton College.

On the trip, Augustine and his partners witnessed a poverty-stricken nation filled with orphans, which was the main reason for the trip. While Bako attended Wheaton College, he worked on research that would help orphans in Chad.

"What they are doing is taking kids who have lost parents and putting them into foster care situations," Augustine said. "So it's really more of a foster care program, but it's with orphans."

Orphans are more difficult to deal with in Chad than they are in the United States, because of the poverty level, Augustine said.

"We tend to think that if there is somebody to depend on, like a grandparent, then that person isn't exactly an orphan. But that isn't really the case, because it's not like they have food for themselves. They can't take on kids from somebody else's family because they can't feed themselves."

Since the group has been back, the members have not forgotten about those homeless children. Their purpose since they returned has been to raise as much money as possible to help support and fund Bako's network of foster families.

The group has helped on several fronts, including making a video, attempting to form a non-profit company and networking to raise interest in the issue.

### **The Video**

When Bako asked Augustine's group for help, he realized there would be a need for a concrete aid to help raise money. That is where the idea of shooting a video developed.

Steve Hoffman, who went on the trip, has been interested in video production for a long time. It seemed a natural fit that Hoffman shoot a video intended for use as an aid for the fund-raising process.

The video was the best option that the group had for fundraising, Augustine said.

"We didn't really know how to raise money, it was just something we figured we'd learn to do as we go," Augustine said. "But we realized that we would need concrete stuff, like a video. And he, Steve, is a video maniac. The guy is just into it."

Shooting the video was no easy task for Hoffman. He ran into several problems from the Chadian citizens and government.

"It was very difficult," Hoffman said. "You had to get a permit from the government to shoot video. And with the people, a lot of them didn't like having their pictures taken. They think if you take a picture, you're going to use their picture to make money because you are from America."

The government was more interested in the content of his video. It issued Hoffman a list of bridges, intersections and public buildings he could not photograph. He added that there were armed guards who would stop him if he went too far with his camera.

The restrictions did hinder the video, but Hoffman was still able to complete it, he said.

"The only way I was able to shoot this was with some Chadians acting as my body guards," he said. "It would have been impossible to do on my own."

Hoffman estimates a June time frame on the completion of the video. The video takes a long time because they have a lot of raw footage that needs editing, Hoffman said.

"When I got back, I had 22 hours of video," he said. "It was a matter of logging all my shots. When you have that much information, it takes a long time to organize it."

Once it is completed, a copy will be given to each member to be used as a fund-raising visual aid for the potential corporation they wish to form.

## **Non profit organization**

Once everyone in the group went to Chad, it did not take much to convince them they needed to help. The video would go a long way, but they wanted to make a commitment to the cause. So the decision was made to try and form a non-profit organization.

The first thing they tried was to acquire one, but Augustine said the group would be responsible for the previous group's actions. So they are in the process of trying to form one themselves, he said.

The purpose of the non-profit is not to run anything hands-on in Africa, Augustine said. The non-profit will be an American fundraising extension of Bako's foster care program.

"That's what is unique about this organization is that we are not here to go in and do it with them," Augustine said. "We are just here to help them do what they need to do. It's unique in that sense."

Augustine said the experience of trying to form a non-profit organization is new and complicated to him. He hopes it will be formed soon, but there is a lot of legal work that goes into the process, he said.

Once the non-profit corporation is formed, the group will have more organization in its official fund-raising duties. It will be able to make a more concentrated effort to spread the word of its mission, and raise money.

## **Fund raising**

The group has not been waiting for the formation of the non-profit organization to begin its fund-raising efforts, however. Scott Hafemann, a prospective member of the non-profit group, has been traveling to different churches in the area trying to get them to take a collection for the Chad project. One church gave a private donation of \$5,000, Augustine said.

Augustine also has raised some money through the Evangelical Fellowship Church in Elburn. A small portion of each dollar donated to the church ends up going to this project in Chad, Augustine said.

"That doesn't count the people who donate to this project specifically," Augustine said.

All together, the group has raised between \$25,000 and \$30,000 for the project within the last year, Augustine said. Augustine estimates the cost of taking care of the 40 kids who are enrolled in the program at about \$1,200 per month, or about \$30 per child.

But Augustine figures that number will rise.

"With some of the other stuff we'd like to do, like building a center, that figure would go up," he said. "We hope to build a center for activities, recreation and medical needs. It wouldn't be for people to live at, necessarily."

He also wants the program to be able to take on more children as soon as convenient, which would also make that number rise.

Augustine stressed that even though Chad may not be a strategically important country for the United States government to provide aid, it is still important to help it.

"Chad is not going to get the pull heartstrings kind of thing," he said. "It's one of those places that is not going to get a lot of accolades. But we can pull something together for Chad. Here's a project where no one else is really involved, but it is still an important place."