



# The Rafiki Foundation, Inc.

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July 2007

*“There will always be poor people in the land.  
Therefore I command you to be openhanded toward your brothers  
and toward the poor and needy in your land” (Deuteronomy 15:11).*

Greetings from Joanne in Liberia,

I'm sitting at my laptop in my apartment about one-quarter mile from the Atlantic Ocean with the air conditioner running. No kidding! Later I will hand wash some clothes and take a cold shower because I have no washer or hot water. No kidding again! Liberia is a country of contrasts. The lush tropical environment is delightful but the humidity is sometimes oppressive. The richness of the land is abundant but produce is scarce. The amount of cement used in new construction for rebuilding is mind-boggling yet there are hundreds of thousands of people without work. I can't say that I am becoming accustomed to Liberia, yet, because the hardships are great. The number of unemployed people is staggering; there are so many missing an arm or leg (or two) from the civil war. Children with families are sent to live at "orphanages" so they can receive food and education. Yet the spirit of Liberians is upbeat and positive, looking forward to peace and prosperity.

Another contrast is in the language spoken by Liberians. English is the national language, but it's "Liberian" English, otherwise called "pigeon" English. I frequently have conversations during which I understand less than fifty percent of what is being said. Liberian English is based on "standard" English, but with a distinct set of logical rules, many of which I have yet to learn. For example, why talk about a "bunch of bananas" when a "bunch of banana" says the same thing, and isn't redundant? Why not say "menicure" when you mean manicures, since "men" is the plural form of "man"? Liberians also drop the end of a word if it is a hard consonant. Therefore, "egg" becomes "eh" and "aid" becomes "a." I am hard at work practicing my comprehension of Liberian English, as well as speaking it. I have used some common phrases here to tell you about the progress of our Rafiki work.

## **"How you makin' it, o ma?"**

I am so pleased when someone addresses me in this way, since it probably means they think I can

understand it. I think my new Liberian dresses give folks the impression I have been here awhile. Surely you know the first part means, "How are you doing?" But "makin' it" is much more expressive in a land where many don't have the provisions to truly survive well for even a day. I am also happy to be addressed as "o ma" or "old mother," but more affectionately, "Grandma." Like other countries in Africa, there are not many older women, so anyone with gray hair is a grandmother. I don't mind, since I'm old enough to be one. I will probably age a little more quickly here, as the toll of poverty strikes at my heart daily. Every time I drive through a U.N. roadblock I am reminded of the war. Every time I park downtown I am reminded of the desperate need for rebuilding. I don't mind; it's worth it. Other phrases commonly used in Liberia express the desperation of people to ask for money to just get by. If someone asks where is my "co-water" (money for cold water) or weekend (money to buy food this weekend), they are asking for a small cash gift. What would you do if you had no money and no job prospect? *Please pray for continued peace and restoration for Liberia, as well as the creation of jobs.*

It is good to participate in a project that is quickly becoming an integral part of Liberia's strong future! We are grateful for the enthusiastic support of the President, Madam Sirleaf, and the Ministry of Health. The president came to visit recently, as did the minister of health, and both are happy to know that our Village will serve "true" orphans—those with no viable means of support. We have a social worker assigned to specifically help us locate and screen these children, the ones whom God has already chosen to live at the Village. Pictured below is Donna Bland with Zoe Gray, our social worker, in cottage one under construction. *Please pray that our construction will be substantially complete by July 24, when Liberia's president and Rafiki's president, Rosemary Jensen, will officially dedicate the Village.*



DONNA AND ZOE

### **“Tryin small”**

In a country where everything seems difficult, especially during the rainy season, “tryin’ small” seems an appropriate answer to, “How are you?” It can have many meanings, as far as I can tell, from “fine” to “I am barely surviving.” Always implied is: “I could do better.” A missionary friend told me that Liberians treat the rainy season as Westerners treat the snowy season, and for good reason. As of this writing it has been raining for most of the last two weeks. Unlike other places where I have lived, the drainage is amazingly good. If one can wait out the very hard downpours, most of the water will drain off while the light rain continues. However, we ROS do not wait for the rains to ease. Rainy or not we are driving around doing whatever is necessary to be ready for our Village to open. If the road is muddy (like soup), so be it! If the streets are flooded, so be it! If we have to wear boots, so be it! We just put the car in four-wheel drive and get our boots on—it’s the rainy season in Liberia. *Please pray that God will have mercy on us during our dedication and setup, so we have no heavy downpours.*



BOOTS IN RAINY SEASON

### **“How da body bossman?”**

I’m sure you figured this one out already. Basically, it’s, “How are you feeling?” Who’s bossman? Anyone you want him to be, but usually a man in charge of something. I haven’t quite worked myself up to say this one yet, being a single woman who doesn’t want to be misunderstood. So far I have been quite healthy, and have adapted to the climate. I am asking God for patience as I reside in my little temporary apartment in Monrovia as we await completion of our homes at the Village. God uses current limitations and restrictions (such as having no power between 8:30 A.M. and 6:30 P.M.) to encourage great anticipation of life at the Village. Each time we visit the site I become excited afresh at the prospect of being there soon, with small children running around, rain or shine. *Please pray for the continued health and safety of all workers helping to establish our Rafiki Village in Liberia. Pray for protection for the children who will be coming to live at Rafiki Village.*

### **“Rice here, where da soup-o?”**

Rice is the staple in the diet of Liberians. You haven’t truly had a Liberian meal until you’ve had butter rice, in particular. Soup is what goes on top of the rice, and can actually be just about anything—potato greens with meat, chicken, fish, or any other kind of sauce. So far I’ve only had potato greens, which I liked very much. Another kind of “soup” is palm butter soup made from the abundant palm nuts found in our tropical paradise. So, you’re wondering, what about that “o?” Well, in Liberian English we get to add an “o” to just about any word that comes last in the sentence. *Please pray that the Rafiki team will be able to understand all those who interview for Village staff positions.*

### **“I’m here-o!”**

Friends, I couldn’t be happier to be in Liberia. Thank you all for your support, financially and prayerfully. If you would like to make a donation to support our work, please go to [www.rafiki-foundation.org](http://www.rafiki-foundation.org). If you would like to come for a short-term mission trip, an application can be obtained from the Rafiki Home Office at the same address. You hep us soon-o?

From Liberia,

Joanne

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WEST AFRICA

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NOTE: Please visit [www.rafiki-foundation.org](http://www.rafiki-foundation.org) to find information on your ROS, what *Rafiki* is doing, the centers, and the Exchange.