

Angels

on the Road to Sinda

BY BRYNN ULISNIK

The African sun is hot and I drew a white linen cloth over my head, ears and shoulders and secured it with a billed cap. There is work to be done before lunch.

I've chosen site two because it is the furthest out and I've seen Omar the homeowner himself digging the mix pits, shoveling in sand and mortar, and carrying the water that will turn into the glue that will hold soil bricks together.

We shared pushing the wheelbarrow at the end of the day through the sand the entire way back to our guesthouse. The trip was a thirty minute doleful dread.

It was then that the angels appeared: It was quite unexpected, and very unannounced; just a touch of the fingertips by a little grasping hand.

I looked down, ready to give that conciliatory smile that I often give to children, but the peaceful, almost expressionless face stopped that even before the muscles of my mouth could begin to curl. The variables aren't the same here. This is nearly the face of an adult, wrought with a mysterious tranquility that hardly befits the disaster of poverty and hardship around me. And the child walked with me the miles back to the outside of Sinda's town proper—three or four steps to every elongated stride of mine—never changing the intent look of her countenance.

There aren't words. They are the eyes of the attendants of God taking a moment to effect the causal connection directly to the maker himself. A man like me can't stand up to that, and the tears came. Hard.

All of us soon had these companions on the road to Sinda, both going and returning. Many times our hands weren't big enough to hold the multitude and we carried them on our backs.

These solemn faces that thanked us initially with that mix of question and gratitude also turned to laughter in time. Sometimes only the sinking of the sun and the cool of the evening forced us to continue the walk when drum improvisations and primal rhythms interrupted our journeys.

The little ones in tow were gradually reclaimed by their mothers, and the last steps to the compound were once again unwatched.

Habitat for Humanity is conceptualized around putting people—all kinds of them—first under a roof and then into a world of hope based on their own design. It is the collective effort of many resulting in the empowerment of the individual. And on the road to Sinda, as on roads to any one of the many places that Global Village offers us to be a part of Habitat, angels are watching, and waiting to make that first unexpected touch.

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