

A Foundation of *Dreams*

By Robert Valentine



Youthful surgeon, Dr. Michael Capriatti, holds one of his patients during a recent Volunteers in Mission trip to Bo, Sierra Leone.

“Giving is the first sign of real success,” says Lee Beard of the Wake Up . . . Live team. “Chances are that many people were generous in the creation of your success, so it is both natural and important that you give back to humanity.”

“That’s the charge Steven E and Lee gave us, and it was more than enough to get us started on a great project,” said the Wake Up . . . Live Foundation director Vicki Jo Stevens. An educator with over ten years’ experience in religious education and administration, Vicki’s charge was to find a focus for the Foundation’s charitable activities.

“I’ve been into the inner city and into the hardcore poverty areas of Appalachia,” she said, “But there was one place that immediately came to mind. Today, it seems especially appropriate that entrepreneurs from developed countries all over the world would want to look here for a place to help.”

“Here” is Sierra Leone, a coastal nation on Africa’s Atlantic shore. Recent surveys have identified Sierra Leone as the poorest nation on earth. Out of 174 impoverished countries, Sierra Leone is ranked 174 – last and poorest. Unlike the victims of natural disaster, such as the tsunami that struck near Sri Lanka in December, the people of Sierra Leone go unnoticed and, too often, unaided.

“Wherever you go, there are people selling things,” says Vicki. “Whether it’s something they’ve made from scrap lumber or discarded metal, or something they’ve grown or harvested from the jungle, everyone in Sierra Leone is an entrepreneur.”

Many of the vehicles in the country are either U.N. Peacekeeping equipment, or trucks and jeeps from the many aid agencies that work in food distribution, medical care, or development. A savage civil war in the 1990s destroyed roads, industrial sites, farms, schools and hospitals. There is no electricity, little telephone service, and few paved roads.

Instead of giving up, however, the people are coming back from the deepest kind of poverty with the only tools available: hope and hard work. There are thousands of amputees left by fighting and land mines; childhood mortality is common as untreated water is often a vehicle for parasites and diseases which lead to dehydration, illness and death among the weakest. Still, the people of Sierra Leone refuse to give in.

“Many of the people associated with Wake Up . . . Live the Life You Love just needed little things: help in finding a purpose, guidance in structuring time and talents, or encouragement that they can achieve things they never thought possible,” says Vicki, as she pages through photos from a 2004 visit to Sierra Leone. “These people (she points to a photograph of laborers pushing a small truckload of lumber through the streets of Freetown) need things that seem even smaller to us: water, basic education, the tools to build. They inspire you with their optimism and their hard work.”

So she is in hopes that the Foundation will undertake a mission to Sierra Leone as its focus for the next few years. “There are many reputable agencies who can take our contributions and turn them into realized dreams,” she says with a smile. Early in 2005, Vicki returned to Sierra Leone as part of a team from Mid-South Africa Link. She visited Taiama, a small, remote

(Right) Wherever you go in Sierra Leone, there is commerce and industry. (Facing Page) The cottonwood tree that stands near the center of Freetown is a symbol of freedom for the nation. Slaves were once bought and sold in its shade.



village. The mission on this trip is to support a team of medical specialists and to help engineers install three water purification systems.

“How many times have we said, ‘I could do more if I just had a better computer,’ or ‘I could succeed if I had a few thousand dollars?’” she asks. “Well, these people just want a glass of clean water, or a path to the fields that is not bordered by land mines. Those of us who have big dreams should honor their bravery and their spirit.”

If you are interested in supporting the Foundation’s work, please contact Vicki through her website at Vicki@wakeuplive.com. Contributions are tax deductible, and the Foundation is a 501(c)3 non-profit corporation associated with the Heritage Foundation.

“This is the tip of the iceberg,” said Steven E, co-creator of the Wake Up . . . Live the Life You Love series. “The people we’re associated with are success-oriented, and that means that they appreciate the needs of others. We are going to share success with the whole world, and this is our starting place.”

From the looks of things, this is a great and very promising place to begin.

(Left) Foundation Director Vicki Stevens posed with her new friend, Prospect. "His name says it all for Sierra Leone," she says. (Below) Dozens of children mobbed Vicki and her fellow mission workers to experience the simple joys of bubbles. The tiny bottles with their bubble wands brought hours of fun, just as they would to any child, anywhere.

