

Report: Mission to South Africa

Marilyn Cook

By Phil and June Landrum

October, 2011

To Supporters of Marilyn Cook:

We all know what it's like: We send money to a missionary we believe is spreading the Good News to a foreign land, and if we're fortunate the missionary occasionally comes to our church and we hear first hand about their work. This is good—but have you ever thought “I wonder what *really* goes on in the field”? What's it like, week after week?

We are Phil and June Landrum from Austin Texas. We have been married for 53 years. Phil served as a full-time staff minister of [Southwest Christian Church](#) in Austin, Texas for 28 years, retiring in 2006 and is currently serving as an elder there. June has been leader of the church's Mission Team for the past 8 years. We have been blessed to visit several of the missionaries our church supports, and as this is being written we are with Marilyn Cook in the Limpopo Province of South Africa.

Our church has supported the Cook missionary work for over 45 years. In 1995, Stu was in Austin bringing us up to date on their work, and he invited us to visit them—probably never dreaming that we might take him up on the offer! In October 1997 Phil and I flew to Johannesburg to see first hand Stu and Marilyn's work with the homeless, addicts, prostitutes and other street people in that huge city. This trip was a world-view-changing experience, and thus began a deep relationship with the Cooks. In 2007 we returned to South Africa, to visit Stu and Marilyn and their ministry work in the bush country—a little town named Vaalwater and the poverty stricken township clinging to it called Leseding. This visit was even more gripping because of Marilyn's work with the young children and youth in the area.

Tragically, in a terrible auto accident on May 5, 2010, Marilyn sustained the loss of her life-partner and severe personal injuries that required surgeries and physical therapy over several months for her recovery. We knew she would need extra hands from time to time for both physical assistance, along with spiritual and emotional support. We arrived here on September 5th and will leave through Johannesburg on November 7th. Our visit has been blessed with good health and many deeply moving experiences. We want to share our firsthand knowledge of the work of this remarkable daughter of God. A work that goes on even as we will go about our comfortable daily lives back home. Her work is physically, spiritually, and emotionally demanding. It requires great wisdom, great faith and great perseverance. Marilyn is sustained through all of this in humbly searching God's Word and through prayer without ceasing.

Marilyn's farm lies 10-11 miles out of town. Although she does have internet access, cell and land phone lines (when they are working), her physical link to civilization is a 7-8 mile road that is absolutely terrible for vehicles and bodies alike: When riding into town you cannot relax your body, one must stay tensed up or most body parts will be severely shaken. Add to this the constant clutching and shifting of gears. Phil has been driving for her since we've arrived and has said he is astounded that this sweet



fragile lady of 75 years, can physically manage the drive.

But when there's no one here to help, she does! It's like driving on a huge, washboard with many severe potholes. You must really experience it to believe it. Naturally, this near daily trip takes a toll on her vehicle as well. We've had to take it to the shop several times since we've been here for replacing, tightening, bolts, exhaust manifold gaskets, muffler brackets, etc.



The center gem of Marilyn's work is the Kids' Club, formerly known as the Soup Kitchen. Preparation begins on Tuesday, with Marilyn driving to town and purchasing the necessary 85 loaves of bread, peanut butter and jam. She delivers half of these rations to the local private academy, where some of the students make P&J sandwiches. She delivers the other half to

a lady she pays 100 Rand to put the sandwiches together. Together there are 680 sandwiches made each week. Any leftovers quickly find needy homes.

On Wednesday, after loading into her SUV everything she'll need to accomplish her task, including a 25 liter (over 6 gallon) bottle of water to wash and rinse the glasses (as there is no water source at the property). She then picks up 100 liters (over 26 gallons) of milk and delivers these huge plastic jugs to the fenced lot and tin roof (no sides) that is the Kids' Club property. She can usually count on some of the teens from her Saturday bible study group to be there to assist with the unloading. Next she drives to the home of the lady who prepares half of the sandwiches. After singing a few songs with the children on the street (who always run to her van) she returns to the Kids' Club property.



By this time many of the children have arrived and are waving and shouting as she enters the gated fence with her load. Young people from the Academy arrive with the remaining sandwiches.



More youth from Marilyn's Saturday bible study class arrive. The 200 or so plastic glasses are brought out and filled with milk. Buckets of water are prepared, so the used glassed can be re-washed for re-use as necessary.

From a tin shack (on the property) children bring out the wooden planks and braces to set up the seating. A number of the children will arrive with a small baby tied tightly to their back.

Some of these are far too young to have such a burden on their backs. Nevertheless some of these pitch right in to assemble the seating.



All the while, hundreds more children continue to line up outside of the property fence waiting patiently to enter. Finally, when all is set, the older youth open the gate and the children pour in. It's really amazingly orderly *to a point*. There are always from 500 to 700 hundred children every week.

Youth from the Saturday bible study group lead the singing, and these kids sing at the top of their precious little lungs! Some of the songs are familiar and sung in English, some are not familiar and are sung in the local language. They love songs with motions and they “motion” with great gusto.

It's hard to not lose my composure as I sing with them and look at hundreds of these precious faces, dirty noses, tattered clothing, dusty feet and sweet, ear to ear, smiling faces. I know Jesus loves them and I want them to know His love intimately and so to love Him in return. As long as I

am here, what I can do is yield to be His hands on this small piece of land in the Limpopo Province of South Africa and to pray for them, and I can financially support this precious, loving sister in Christ as she carries out Christ's mandate to love even the least of these.



While the children are still singing, Marilyn gathers any adults around to pray for the day's events and for the children. After the singing the children are led in prayer and oh my, do they ever pray! Most Wednesdays they also say the Lord's Prayer in unison and it's a very touching sight.

Marilyn will ask the children if they know Jesus loves them—and if they love Jesus. She'll ask if they want to have Jesus in their hearts. Then they all pray for that very thing: That Jesus will come into their little hearts.

Marilyn organizes the weekly lessons—and assigns one of the Saturday youth to deliver it. This is very good for the older youth—they must prepare and deliver the lesson, which reinforces the lesson to them, gives them self-confidence to speak in front of a large group, and teaches them personal responsibility.

Following the singing, prayers and lesson, the children line up for their rather large peanut butter and jam sandwich and full glass of whole milk. They eat, socialize a bit, and go home. Home to nothing but



meiliemeal (ground corn) cooked into a mush (much like our grits) three times a day. Home to outdoor toilets, often a dirt floor, and in most cases, no running water. Home to where the name of Jesus may never be uttered.

Marilyn does have help with this Wednesday work. She could not accomplish it without others' hands. But SHE is the driving force, the reason, that the Kids' Club exists and is sustained. Without her prayer, dedication, hard work, organizational skills, contacts, and financial resources, the Kids' Club would no doubt, struggle to exist, if at all.

After the glasses are washed for the final time and the benches and tables put away, Marilyn is ready to leave. But wait: There's a line waiting at her SUV—every week there are requests for everything from sanitary napkins to school supplies or food. More than occasionally there is an elderly lady who desperately needs something: kerosene, matches, candles, meiliemeal. Using her judgment based on insight from God and past experience with the individual, Marilyn patiently deals with each request. Sometimes she takes someone to her doctor as the free clinic here is badly lacking with proper medicines and supplies. Sometimes she denies a request. Many times she needs to drive someone home; either an elderly granny or a young mother with a baby who has walked a very long way to be there this day.

As two who have been blessed to experience this Tuesday-Wednesday event 3 times in 2007 and for the past 6 weeks as well, we find the operation nothing short of amazing and exhausting! Fulfilling and satisfying to be certain, but it is a long, tiring day.

On Saturdays Marilyn bakes a large cake and drives back into Leseding to conduct her weekly bible study with the older youth. They meet in the church where the Kids' Club tin roof is located. The tin church has no windows, but recently received a gift of concrete for 3/4 of the floor. There are usually 10 to 16 who attend, mostly boys and young men. Marilyn leads the study—currently the book of Acts—although if someone is visiting she will ask them to lead the study to give the young people a different voice and perspective.



We have found them attentive and interested in learning. After they have the cake she has baked, they often sing together. They make lovely harmony and it makes my heart swell to listen to them. Marilyn has such hopes for these older young people. They seem to be firmly planted in Christ, and they are working to be good examples for the little ones.

There is *so much more* to Marilyn's ministry here than we have written, but the Wednesday event and the Satur-

day bible study give you an idea of what her work is like. Many ad hoc acts of mercy and ministry flow from these two occasions.

She organizes and implements a Christmas party for the children. This involves travel to Johannesburg and shopping for 1,300 small gifts. 1,300 don't attend the weekly event but when there's a party, they come. They will hear the Christmas story, and some new ones will be drawn to attend the weekly sessions and hear more about this Jesus.

Her budget for each gift averages 10 Rand, or about 1.35 USD. Imagine trying to find meaningful interesting gifts for that amount in the States! The huge boxes of gifts must be purchased in Johannesburg, transported back to Limpopo, then taken to the Academy to be sorted, packaged and labeled. A jumping slide is to be rented, and the tin roof is decorated with many lengths of multi-colored foil garland. The food (a sausage and roll and glass of chocolate flavored milk) must be organized, purchased, cooked, prepared and served. And when it's all over, the grounds must be cleaned up. I do wish we could be here for the party!

Marilyn also gives prayer and emotional support to two children's homes, The Fold and Bushveld Mission, as well as Aletheia and A World Aware, both in Johannesburg. All of the missions seem to work hand in hand with one another, and when one is in need, all of the others pray. They all give as much physical support as they can: transportation, sharing of resources and contacts, etc.

We are convinced that Marilyn's focus and life is centered in Christ and His work through her here in Limpopo. Her days are long and sometimes physically difficult. Her heart is often saddened by the plight of the children in Leseding. She is a faithful prayer warrior. If anyone has the time and resources to come here and help her, she can put you to work. If anyone has financial resources to share, Marilyn can certainly use it and you can rest assured it will be carefully spent.



If you would like to speak with us personally, feel free to contact us directly (after November 18th) at 512-282-1622, or you may contact us by e-mail at philnjune@att.net.

In Christ's Service,

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