

Helping out at home: Jim Kirkwood with granddaughters Micaela (left) and Laurena.



Jim Wiley Photo

A man for Africa

After more than three decades of work for Africa in the United Church, Jim Kirkwood is retiring.

Rev. Jim Kirkwood is musing happily about his one-year-old granddaughter, Micaela. Last week was his first day on his new job — looking after her once a week while her mother, Jane, resumes her teaching career. He was a little worried; she's been "clingy" the last few months to her mother, and "it's been hard to get to know her."

But last Friday both Grandpa and Micaela coped magnificently, with a long, cheerful walk in the stroller before they picked up her sister, five-year-old Laurena, at school. ("Senior kindergarten," he says, "French Immersion.") He looks as proud as it is possible for this very humble man to look. "It's going to be good."

Kirkwood, at 61, is retiring from his position as the Southern Africa secretary for the United Church. He's a gentle man, but he's been very tough there, unshakable in his conviction that we in the North have much of what we have not through "fortune or fate or God," but because of "systemic injustice, greed, power and control." Naturally enough, there have been "people in the church in Canada," in the words of colleague Paula Butler, "who have resented, disagreed, felt threatened by him."

But he is utterly beloved in Africa. Anyone who visits there knows that; when they find you are from Canada, faces light up. "How's Kirkwood?" they want to know; because if you are from Canada,

you must surely know him.

So it is interesting he has decided to retire. Jim Kirkwood has spent his life struggling to let African voices be heard on this continent. He has moved adroitly through warring factions in Angola, sometimes risking his life to bring in dollars, helping churches survive. He's been banned from South Africa, where Archbishop Desmond Tutu declares many millions of South Africans are "deeply indebted" to him. He "never gets tired of doing good," according to Rev. Jose Chipenda, general secretary of the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC), who calls him "the voice of the voiceless, not only by words but in his deeds."

So why is this man now contemplating life on the up side of a baby stroller?

There are a lot of reasons. One is that once you get onto the notion of liberation (and Kirkwood has understood what it is for a long time) any kind of liberation — black, poor or women's — makes good sense. This is the man who quietly helped establish Women's Desks in churches all over Africa. So now he wants to help out his daughter.

Another is his desire, typically, to free up a job for someone else: "He has nurtured and empowered people here and in Africa, spotting potential in other people," says Butler.

Retiring now means he can live on his pension and do as a volunteer the kind of competent, far-sighted work only possible when you know Africa in your bones. He has never been just "some dispenser of money," says Rev. Hal Llewellyn of Kingston, Ont., who travelled with him in his former capacity as general secretary for theology, faith and ecumenism. "He knows what's going on, takes their context extremely seriously."

In Africa, they know a hero when they see one: someone who, in solidarity, lives as simply as it is possible to live in Canada, opening his house as a place for African students to live, and who, Llewellyn says, "has little patience for the ivory tower theologizing that doesn't try to assess its value and truth in terms of what the liberating consequences will be."

On the way to see Kirkwood I stop to chat with a couple of mutual acquaintances

tances. I have thrown my jacket on in a hurry, and one of them straightens the collar. "It's okay," I joke. "I'm on my way to interview Kirkwood."

"Oh," he laughs, "you're way too dressed up. You should be wearing jeans."

Has there been a cost, I wonder to Kirkwood, in consistently viewing the North through the eyes of the South.

"Yes," he says quietly, "it is lonely, and yes, it does matter." He had a few sessions with a psychologist once, who told him "you like to be popular, but you have all this critique; so you will be fairly frustrated." Kirkwood goes on in that meditative voice — he talks in long paragraphs, long thoughts — "you have to kind of find your allies, and when you find them, you have to grab them and hang on for dear life."

There is always a price when you give your heart away to those at risk. Kirkwood's pain was clear to those around him when "Angola had elections, and then it collapsed, and the war started and churches were bombed and pastors were hungry and people were killed and hurt. He felt that inside himself," says Hugh McCullum of the AACC in Nairobi.

It's easier, of course, not to make the kind of friends who might be tortured. But there is Kirkwood's profound sense of duty, reinforced by his marriage to Marion Woods and their sojourn in Saskatchewan after his ordination. They "recruited themselves" for work in what is now Zambia. Interspersed with the years there, from 1962 to 1976, was a year at Union Seminary in New York, and a stint at the Canadian Urban Training Project in Toronto, doing casual labor and learning how to analyze and work for change. "There is a clear mandate for justice in the Gospels," he told himself then "and it's a big enough bite; you can spend the rest of your life on that."

So that's what he did. By then, of course, Zambia had taught him what it was to be unconditionally accepted; to arrive without warning and stay for two or three nights in a village house, being offered food and a mat on the floor, and "sitting around the fire and hearing stories and having enough language to understand the stories, and feeling part of it."

"He is really in love with Africa," says McCullum, "in a very intellectual, physical, emotional way. Africa is like a magnet to him. He loves the people, understands Africans as well as any



In Zimbabwe (above) and across Southern Africa, Kirkwood nurtured and empowered.

non-African can."

McCullum tells about travelling with Kirkwood on one occasion and "a bunch of development types" looking over projects. "It was like supermarket shopping," he says, "a piece of this clinic and a bit of that classroom at some church school, but sorry, and we can't help that water project, not well-managed, and maybe we could do something with the goats."

It was burning hot, he says, the van was like an oven, and both men were furious. "We saw people who had prepared for this visit for days get sloughed off because we were running late and had to get back to Mariental before the restaurant closed." Kirkwood tried to get him to shut up: "I think we've both got flat heads, Hugh, from having our backs pushed against the wall so many times."

Pushed against the wall because Kirkwood's vision is so prophetic and so radical. "The extra we have here," he says this very clearly, "is the result of systemic exploitation. What we have, some of it belongs to the South, and should be shared with the South."

Somewhere along the way, in Zambia maybe, or Angola, missing meals and "surreptitiously eating Spam while cycling through the bush," because he couldn't manage on what Africans could, Kirkwood discovered "that you can subsist on very little" as long as you have a community and the land. That's where his critique comes from, and it places him at odds with most development types, who want to get people into a money economy as fast as possible. Maybe he's an old fogey, he says, but he "still holds the vision of that kind of related-to-the-land community which in pretty well all devel-

opment theories is something to be left behind."

Like any good prophet, he can read the times; and he has a very clear picture of what it is to be the church now. "Generally in the past, our voice would be heard," says Kirkwood. "But we don't know very well how to do advocacy in a post-Christian era. We are still doing it the old way."

Churches desperately need ways to stand up for those we care for. Perhaps advocacy will involve "street methods: demonstrations, jail, as (the low-level flight protests) in Newfoundland, some of the things people have done where others have to pay their fines and know that they are doing it." Perhaps it will mean "small groups around specific advocacy," like the urgent action networks that spring into action from the Division of World Outreach.

"I guess I've always felt our role was to be a kind of fifth column, a kind of subversion against the basic power structures. Unless it is a spinoff for our own advantage, not many mainline people still in the Christian church want to play that role; there is a minority of people who tend to subvert."

Bishop W. C. Mfula, of Copperbelt Presbytery in Zambia, recalls how "the Kirkwoods' house was open to everybody, old and younger." He was impressed by the fact they mastered the local language, and by the way Kirkwood "walked in the townships to do his pastoral work. He used a bicycle or Honda to visit distant congregations and rarely he used a motor vehicle." Above all, he "would try by all means to see to it that the man who has a problem is helped to find an answer him-

self/herself," Mfula wrote in a letter on Kirkwood's retirement.

Kirkwood really likes to give power away. With partner churches, he tried to "transfer the power over that money to their side. . . . We have something which belongs to God, which we have illegally. This is a symbol of what we should be doing," he would say, "to share with you a small percent of the total we raise."

The relationship—not the money—is the most important thing. And in all the years of giving away United Church money (and, some suspect, much of his own money as well) he tried hard "not to be the person with moneybags."

He's carried quite a weight, "his basic faith in the social Gospel, calling him to do justice," in Butler's words. But he also has "a great sense of humor, underneath all that. Very dry. It keeps him sane."

Llewellyn was in Zimbabwe with Kirkwood when the Blue Jays were play-

ing in the World Series; he reached for, he unobtrusively tried to catch the score on his radio. Kirkwood looked over at him—he was wearing earphones too—and said, "Any news?" Llewellyn looked quizzical. "About baseball," Kirkwood went on sheepishly.

"We'd both been trying to hide from each other what we were listening to," says Llewellyn, who suspects Kirkwood of tuning in to the play-by-play all along.

In Zambia, when their daughter—now Jane Kirkwood-Lazazzera, and mother of Micaela and Laurena—began school, it was "an all-black school, in the vernacular, and she was able to hold her own and make close friends." He speaks with some awe of this, and of the way Marion, too, without the status that came with being clergy, simply set about forging a community around her.

So now, retiring, he is reaching for

that same wholeness. "It was a beautiful thing that Marion did, over the years." In spite of her skills, he fears it was "quite lonely for her in some ways. I hope I was appreciative of it." Now, he says, Marion's involvement in the "women's liberation struggle is also very liberating to me."

So he will luxuriate in his granddaughters. "I've always been fascinated with Laurena, conversing and playing reliving childhood." His whole face lights up, the intensity with which he talks about justice-seeking stilled for a moment and replaced by a delight in "the roles of grandparent and child. It's acceptance from children—the same experience as in the African village; to be accepted by people who don't need to accept you, and maybe normally wouldn't. It's quite beautiful."

Donna Sinclair

"So many memories; so much still to do"

Following is a condensed account by Rev. Jim Kirkwood of a visit to Mozambique in November, 1993.

Sunday, Nov. 28: Only a baker's dozen show up for the service in the village of Thungama. Three men, a couple of children, the rest are women. We wait for more to show up; a message arrived yesterday that a young man stepped on a land mine and blew himself up. Most of the church members have gone to the funeral, a very important obligation in African custom. Funeral lasts all day or two or three days for relatives.

It turns out that most villagers knew where the land mines were, the soldiers had told them when they planted them there against the guerrilla opposition. But this young chap either forgot or didn't know and he paid the price. The cultural value of community and solidarity between dead and living takes precedence over a weekly service of worship, even with the Bishop attending and celebrating Holy communion.

The service proceeds with a set liturgy; people know many of the Psalm responses by heart; in other places they repeat after the leader. Very participatory.

Young Bishop Matlande speaks simply and directly; his wife, a university graduate, translates for me. The

preacher is exhorting these village folks to share, to help one another as if they were doing it for Christ. I know their possessions must be meagre; they are mostly living in houses made of reeds and grass because they have more recently come to this area to escape the war. But I feel sure they do share even if they have little. Their culture and history of community required that just as much as the Scripture does. It is a mixture of virtue and survival. How can I, coming from the North, escape the judgment of that? I haven't shared all that I might have, I do have more than I need, even for my future. Is there any hope really for me or for those of my country, class, income level, etc?

This system divides us against each other, against our children. Each one must look out for himself and for his own future until the day he dies. Completely the converse of what this village society does. Our society does not promote responsibility for the neighbor but allows us to get away with only charity for the poor.

Another sober thought; on this my last visit to Mozambique, I know it has been my job to tell people in the United Church how people live here. I have over 30 years experience of Africa, I've tried to share, I've tried to persuade people

to share not just the resources but the power which brings in those resources.

I doubt that I moved many, I don't see any change in the system or the culture. Individualism grows, community seems more difficult. But I am moved to hope by these people sitting before me; I don't know them personally but I know so many like them in Zambia.

It seems the less you have the easier it is to share. These people have shared not only their goods and their food but the wear and tear of war, the uncertainty of mines, the omnipresence of guns.

During a few moments I am given to speaking to the people, I express sorrow for the death of the person who is killed by the mine. I confess that mines are made in the economies where I live and from which I benefit. I express shame and regret and say that we have tried to stop the production of these things but up to now we have largely failed.

The Bishop allows me to distribute the wafers while he serves the cup; he asked me to do the benediction, and I read it in halting Shangan.

So many warm memories and feelings; so much still to do, so many changes needing to be made. But Mozambique has changed within the year; there are hopes for the future of peace. Without hope, like vision, we perish.

The United Church

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Marion
Kirkwood
puts her
beliefs
into her
shopping



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Every little bit counts

Like Marion Kirkwood, you can adapt your way of life to match your beliefs.

By Bonnie Greene



When Marion and Jim Kirkwood moved to Toronto after more than a decade in Africa, their real estate agent was surprised that they wanted a house without a garage.

"But we pointed out that we didn't even own a car and had no plans to get one," Marion recalls. "It was more important for us to find a house with a small space for a garden."

It's not that the Kirkwoods are frustrated farmers languishing in the core of Toronto. They just stopped taking a car for granted during their years as United Church missionaries in Zambia, where gasoline cost \$2 a gallon. Before returning to Canada, they had decided against buying a car and the life-style that goes with it.

The term "conservar life-style" comes close to describing the Kirkwoods' way of life, but doesn't capture it entirely, because they're not part of the crowd using that phrase as a catchword for a political cause. Their life-style is integrated with all of their other choices in a commitment to justice.

The Kirkwood home doesn't shout "conservar life-style" at visitors. No copies of Schumacher's *Small is Beautiful* or Taylor's *Enough is*

Enough are lying around conspicuously. The lampshades aren't made out of recycled egg cartons. In fact, many people would enjoy living in a house as nice as the Kirkwoods'.

What the house conveys is a sense that it's there to serve the needs of those who live in it, rather than the needs of those who have products to sell. And right now the three-storey house in Toronto's Riverdale section is full of people with very different needs. Besides the Kirkwoods and their four children, the house shelters a family of three from Japan, one of whom is studying at Emmanuel College. And temporarily it also provides a home for a young man recently arrived from Japan, who speaks only a few words of English.

As Marion Kirkwood puts it, "This house is bigger than our family really needs, so we've decided to share it with others."

In the same way, everyone who lives in their home tries to distinguish between needs and wants. The evaluation process involves not just price tags and budgets, but factors such as the energy, resources, and human investment required to produce, transport, and maintain a particular item

or activity.

Still, the house harbors a few contradictions that suggest the continuing struggle to live responsibly. African art hangs on the wall over a dining room table covered by the 11-year-old's thoroughly American plastic race-car track. Like other urban homes, this one also has its south window full of plants. But these aren't only the usual, decorative varieties; some will produce bedding plants for the vegetable garden.

Like their cheerfully chaotic home, the Kirkwoods don't seem to have things neatly tied down once and for all in the struggle to live responsibly. The parents don't seem to be threatened by the differences between their choices and those of their children. Jim, for instance, is a vegetarian; the children are still meat lovers. Most meals include protein side dishes to suit both tastes.

The Kirkwoods learned to question their living habits during their years in Zambia. Their first years there were spent in a rural area where life-style choices were exceedingly easy.

"If there was no sugar, you didn't make a cake," Marion laughs. She



In the early spring, Marion and Jim Kirkwood prepare the soil of their small backyard garden (above) before planting seeds and seedlings grown indoors during the winter. Jim Kirkwood does most of the food shopping, stopping at their co-op on his way home from work to load up his bicycle (right).



admits now that the lack of luxury items made their adjustment to Zambian life easier than their return to Canadian society two years ago. In Zambia, they bought supplies every six months, relying on local markets in between. When local supply dwindled, they simply did without, along with everyone else. Even the children could understand that and adjust to it.

"People always comment on what a hardship it must have been," Marion says, "but it wasn't. Our basic human needs were met, and the experience helped us to appreciate the value of doing things for ourselves." She and Jim found that their life-style in rural Zambia made it possible for them to relate to people rather than to things. Their relationships more than made up for stores whose shelves lacked flour or sugar for weeks at a time.

The Kirkwoods found their return to Canada difficult. They had wanted to settle in a small town, where they hoped it would be easier to stress the human values they had learned overseas, to be less dependent, and to grow some of their own food. Then Jim was asked to work in the Division

of World Outreach at the United Church's national offices in Toronto.

Living outside Toronto in a small town might offer community strengths and space to grow food, but it would also mean a car and daily commuting for Jim. That meant increased energy consumption, and wasted time on the road. And so they decided to plant themselves in downtown Toronto and live by their principles as best they could.

Marion says they've found big-city living isn't particularly conducive to a conserver life-style. She agrees, however, that it might be just as difficult in the suburbs, small towns, or rural areas — where doing without a car is scarcely an option. So she tries to shape her own life-style according to principles that are consistent with her concerns about global justice, regardless of where she finds herself.

So far the Kirkwoods have concentrated on transportation, food and housing as key areas.

Not buying a car was quite simple, and less painful than handing over several thousand dollars for a ton of metal that rusts, requires insurance, license plates, and expensive maintenance. In fact, with good public trans-

it in Toronto, not owning a car looked like the easy way.

But the Kirkwoods' eating habits made transportation a bit more of a problem. In Zambia, they had become accustomed to relatively unprocessed foods. Packaged convenience foods had been prohibitively expensive. In Toronto they joined a co-op, where they could get grains, nuts, and staples at better prices than in supermarkets and where they had some say in the kinds of foods stocked.

In Africa they had also come to feel they should buy directly from producers if possible. In southern Ontario that meant driving beyond the suburbs to rural communities.

"Even without a car, it's not that difficult," says Marion. "We use the bus, the train, or car-rental. We plan our shopping needs over a long period and buy in bulk on a trip to the country. We find we spend less on transportation than we would if we owned a car, and we hope we're consuming less of the world's metal and oil resources."

To replenish cheese and butter supplies, for example, the Kirkwoods rent a car and head for a farm in the



With their TV set banished to the basement, the Kirkwoods' living room reverts to the family. Jim and Marion watch, as Joy and Ken compete at Othello.

continued

country, where the family gets in some recreation with friends who farm. At the end of a relaxing day, they head home, surrounded by enough cheese and butter to keep them for several months.

Marion shops in supermarkets only for items she can't get elsewhere. And even feeding a total household of ten, she would hardly fill a shopping cart every second week. The family manages nicely without the heat-and-eat foods that supermarkets often promote. With several sharing the cooking load, it's relatively easy to plan ahead for cooking responsibilities, even with minimally processed foods.

Another principle, after transportation, was their commitment to growing some of their own food. Neither Jim nor Marion came from a farm family. Nor do they appear to be hobby farmers following a fad. For them, growing some of their own food is one way to be a bit less dependent on present food marketing systems. So they are learning to make a small backyard produce the largest possible crop in the smallest possible space.

Little savings count in city gardens. Marion plants seeds just a bit closer than the packages suggest, and she pairs compatible crops like tomatoes and beans or peas and carrots to take advantage of soil and light conditions.

More fundamental, though, is the choice of what to plant. Marion gives

top priority to foods that freeze well or produce over a long period—Swiss chard, for instance.

Marion has been influenced by Frances Lappé and Joseph Collins, who wrote *Food First*. Their analysis of the global supermarket confirmed some of the conclusions she had reached in Zambia.

Lappé and Collins stress food self-sufficiency, for persons, families, regions, and even nations. While some critics object to self-sufficiency as a form of isolationism, others insist that it is one way of making sure local

Where the food comes from is more important to Marion Kirkwood than what it costs.

land meets local food needs first, before providing for the export market.

Marion finds that argument consistent with her convictions. Where the food comes from is more important to her than what it costs.

"We avoid things like tomatoes from Mexico," she says, "because the land to grow those tomatoes could be used to produce food for Mexicans, not wealthy North Americans."

Marion's interest in the origin of her foods began because she didn't want to buy food from South Africa. However, after studying materials published by Ten Days for World

Development, she realized that people were suffering in many parts of the world. Now she tries to avoid buying food grown in those third world countries where the land might better be used for the local people.

The Kirkwoods' commitment results from their awareness of the growing gap between third world peoples and the people of wealthier, industrialized nations. The injustice of that gap convinced them that changes in structures for the distribution of resources and goods would have to come. But when pressed about the real effects of life-style changes, Marian is realistic: "It won't change anything structurally, but it's a way of freeing ourselves from our dependence on the present system and on material possessions."

Marion's life choices won't appeal to numbers of people. They can involve hard work, especially in the learning stages. What's more, many "conservative life-styles" are built on the sacrifice of women, who march back to the kitchen to watch bread rise on the counter and make awkward daily bicycle trips to the co-op or farmers' market.

Marion argues that any life-style that places more burdens on the woman in the family is not a conservative life-style; everybody has to work co-operatively. She has a chart on the wall scheduling household tasks for everyone. Tonight, the woman from Japan prepares the meal; someone else cleans the kitchen; a third person tidies the house.

Marion agrees that having teenage children makes co-operative work easier than for a family with young children. But she also points out that simplifying their life-style eliminated some repetitive and time-consuming jobs. Jim's decision to restrict his wardrobe to real essentials (he has only one suit, brought back from Africa, and normally wears an open-necked shirt to the office) means less laundry, ironing, and cleaning, not to mention shopping for clothes and accessories.

The simplified, co-operative approach to household management apparently works for the Kirkwoods.

Both of them have fulltime jobs outside the home, Jim at Church House, Marion teaching music in a school for mentally handicapped teenagers. Since she gives no evidence of being Wonder Woman, there's no reason to doubt her word when she says that life-style choices have not been oppressive to her as a woman.

But Marion's work outside the home raises a sticky question: is it fair to talk of a conservator life-style in a family with two salaries? When the Kirkwoods first planned for their return to Canada, they began looking for two part-time jobs, or one fulltime job that both of them could do. They also considered having Marion bring in the income by herself. Those jobs didn't open up. They now struggle to resist the pressure to live as their combined incomes would allow.

"We can find plenty of good ways to use the excess income," Marion says, "but we still hope to work out a way for both of us to work without earning more than one income."

One could argue that only middle-income people can afford to choose a conservator life-style. How many low-income people can afford the home-freezing, for instance? Or own land on which to garden? Marion agrees that low income families may have fewer options open to them, but insists that they do practise a conservator life-style, by necessity. "We learned our methods from really low-income people in the third world," she says. "People of any income can do it — it's a matter of sorting out your priorities; you want vs your needs."

Marion doesn't see herself as a leader, an example for others to carbon-copy. She makes her life-style choices as a middle-income person. Others have to make choices appropriate to their own situations.

"We're still growing with this," she says of the house, which they've recently had to insulate. "We had forgotten what it costs to heat a large house in a Canadian winter!"

The Kirkwoods are also looking for new ways to work out the convictions that grew on them in Africa, particularly with the current economic encouragement for Canadians to consume more, not less. And there are always the changing needs of growing teenagers; life-styles don't fit into neat, pre-packaged categories.

Marion and Jim have felt a need for support in their growing process.

She says they find it in a reflection group that meets weekly in their community. Although the group members are deeply religious people, they don't talk formal theology. They try to discover the meaning of what has been happening in their lives, in their families, and in their community.

In another sense, their co-op has been supportive. It has provided contacts with people who care enough about the same issues to put time and energy into their common venture. And their church has kept them in touch with Christians who also share their concerns and convictions.

"Thirty years ago," Marion says, "my father (who was a minister) was always pointing out the injustice in the gap between rich and poor nations. He always said, 'Some of us will have to give up some of what

we've got.' But no one really did anything about it.

"Now we find people saying, 'There are things we can do, and we're going to do them!' Jim and I have noticed a change, even in the last five or ten years."

Marion doesn't expect the food system, or any other major system, to change overnight. Her optimism is grounded in her belief that God is in control, and she agrees with those who say that justice between peoples is part of the wave of God's future.

She sees her life-style as a beginning step, but a step she has to take, if only for her own integrity. She says she couldn't expect the big institutions to put their houses in order if she weren't consciously doing the same with hers. ■

Bonnie Greene, who lives in Honeywood, Ont., is a former editor of *Vanguard* magazine.

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