



MOLDING LIVES: John Hunter displays a piece of pottery he made to children with outstretched hands at Community Hope School, which he and wife, Suzanne, established in Windhoek, Namibia, Africa.

Hunters Grow Into Namibia Life Following Teachers For Africa's Mission

By PATRICK BUTLER
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When John and Suzanne Hunter of Tyler's Bethel Bible Church moved to Namibia, Africa, in 1997 with Teachers For Africa, it was "a culture shock for sure," said Suzanne Hunter. Familiar with an abundance of stores with "plenty of shopping" in America, the couple relocated to the edge of the remote high regions of the dry Kalahari Desert.

Their task was ministering at their new Community Hope School to AIDS orphans made parentless by Africa's HIV holocaust.

The couple's love for the ocean -- John is a California native -- seemed initially to be met when Teachers For Africa was located just across the street from Hunter's "favorite surf spot" in a trendy part of South Africa. But it was not to be.

Invited to visit Windhoek or "Windy Corner," Namibia at the 5,000-foot level, Hunter said the call from God was "clear."

"I was in tears from the moment I got there, until I left," he said. "This was where we were supposed to be; not the coast where the ocean was."



Mrs. Hunter speaks to an audience at Traditions Restaurant on Thursday. She was seeking monetary support for the school. With a \$100,000 budget, the school provides meals, clothing, teaching materials and medicines daily for 70 students who were orphaned as a result of Africa's HIV holocaust.

Community Hope School now accommodates about 70 students with a meal program that feeds the students with good nutritional food. The remote location and lack of the trappings of civilization was at first a difficult adjustment.

Suzanne began journaling her thoughts and tracked her spiritual growth as she transitioned from a life of American conveniences to one of deeper discoveries. The following is an excerpt from her journal:

"A desert is waiting to be discovered. For someone who loves water, snow and just being around water the idea is not so appealing. I might as well had landed on another planet. Dryness crept in, I ached for the comfort of an American friend, my family, a waterfall. God brings us to the desert to strip and restore the soul.

"Stripping away, not what I signed up for. Yet, there is something to be said about an uncluttered lifestyle. Waking up to the sound of birds instead of morning traffic, sirens, fewer decisions for where to buy what..

"God can seem like a desert. Mysterious... Daily there is something new to discover about Him... if I search. Silent, He seems to ignore my groaning, my pain, my longing, my fears. Whether living in the city or in a desert life is the same. One must learn to find the quiet place, the inner sanctuary. Moving to the Namib brings me to this reality.

"A young lamb must learn to follow the shepherd through the dry rocky veldt to green pastures for nourishment. The adventuresome and rebellious starve or learn to follow obediently. Wiser more experienced sheep can expect a richer life, a life built on trust patience and endurance.

"For a time, my heart withered, my stomach ached from dehydration. As time passed, I gave up longing and stopped to listen to the pure sounds of nature. I drank more water and slowly adjusted to a life that was not my own. Only then could I see the majesty of the desert.

"He restores my soul;

He leads me in paths of righteousness for His name's sake."

Hunter's adjustment after his many initial tears in Windhoek was not easy either, he said.

"I was mad at God about being in Windhoek the first six months we were there because it was so hard," Hunter recalled. "And God said, 'That's OK. You can be mad at me. Just don't take it out on anyone else.'"

Soon Hunter met Tertu, a woman that filled in the blanks for him.

"Tertu, an oshivambo speaking Namibian, told me, 'When I heard Teachers For Africa was in South Africa, I prayed and prayed that they would come to Namibia to teach our children. And here you are!' And I thought, 'So, you're the one responsible for this!' And when I realized God cared more about this praying woman and her children being educated more than he cared about my beautiful surf spot right across the street, I had a revelation."

Now Windhoek is a beautiful place, he said.

"We'll stay there until we die if that's what God wants," he said.

"It's actually a great place to retire, and has an active arts community. You should come see it," he added, smiling broadly.

The Hunters spoke at Traditions Restaurant on Thursday to seek new supporters and help raise the annual \$100,000 budget for the school, which currently provides school uniforms, teaching materials, medicines and two meals a day for 70 students.

A free all-Church potluck, themed "Empty Bowls," will be presented for the Hunters beginning at noon Sunday at Bethel Bible Church, 17121 U.S. Highway 69 South. The Empty Bowls event is free, but bowls can be kept for a suggested donation of \$30. Please bring a covered dish -- meat, vegetable or dessert -- for the potluck on Sunday, information from the church said. For more information about Community Hope School and Teachers For Africa, visit www.teachersforafrica.com.