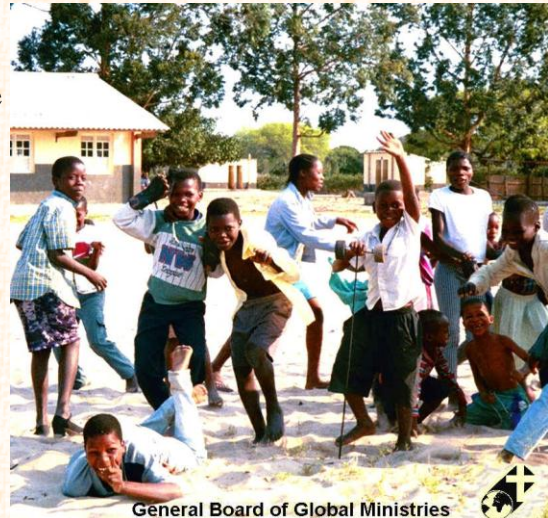


The following is a short summary of a stop we made in Mozambique. Often what is planned and what becomes reality are two different yet compelling realities. Such was my encounter with Sajio.

It was an unscheduled visit. We had been traveling for over eight hours and I wanted to stop at a school that had been built on a location that had been cleared of landmines.

School, or at least recess, was in session and children were playing in the school yard. Soccer, or football, was being played and laughter was everywhere. As we got out of the truck, children swarmed the camera. Everyone seemed to want their picture taken by Donnie (a friend and professional photographer). There seemed to be magic in that video camera. Stop, kneel and point it in the direction of anyone and suddenly smiles seemed to be everywhere. This stop was no exception. We filmed the children playing and laughing. Filmed the filling of buckets of water in the school yard well. And, we even filmed the flag waiving over the entrance of the school. Yes, we had captured what I had wanted to see - results of the demining program.



As we started to leave Jacky D'Almeida, National Program Director of the Accelerated Demining Program, told me of a child that attended this school that had his legs blown off in a landmine accident. I was moved, but I had focused most of our efforts on the removal of landmines, the process, and the result. I had done almost everything possible to avoid direct contact with landmine victims. This was my plan - not Jacky's at this moment.

Soon we were driving across a sandy field littered with patches of grass. There did not seem to be any road and the trails or paths were not clearly marked (at least to me). Houses blended into the landscape and an occasional goat scurried across our path as we traveled deeper into the fields.

We stopped to talk to a child playing along the path. Words were exchanged and two children jumped in to give us final directions. There were only a few more turns and yes, another small sandy path led us to as small clearing where a few small houses stood. We stopped.

Jacky got out of the car and Donnie & I watched as he approached the home. Donnie had the camera running as Jacky approached the yard and he stopped. Across the yard, moving on hands and the stumps of two blown off legs a smiling young boy greeted our host. Yes, we were filming the encounter, even if we were 40 yards away.

I was not sure what to expect. Jacky motioned me and Donnie forward and said that it was alright to do an interview. I was not prepared for this. Still, when is anyone ever ready to talk seriously



with a victim - a young child about the end result of any act of war or terrorism.

As we were getting ready, I noticed this young boy's hands. They were callused, even large and signs of old cuts and scarring were present. The stumps of his lower legs were not covered and I wondered how anyone could spend most of their life walking across hot sand on your hands and stumps of one's legs. I tried not to think about this and tried to prepare for the questions I might ask. The obvious ones were easy. How old are you? Do you go to school? And then it got hard. When did the accident happen? "Over 5 years ago". What were you doing? "I was taking the goats to the field for the morning and as I walked into the field, a mine exploded". What happened next? "I don't remember too much.



There was blood everywhere. Someone, I don't remember who, took me to the local clinic and then to the hospital". How bad was your accident? "Both my lower legs were mangled and shattered. Both had to be amputated". Do you have artificial legs? "No". Why not? "They told me I was not eligible". Who are they? "The people at the hospital". What do you feel about the people who planted the landmines? He would not answer this question for me. He did tell Jacky that he did not feel safe in talking about this part of his injury. How are old are you now? "Seventeen". Where do you go to school? He pointed to the school we had visited earlier where the children were playing in the school yard. How do you get there? He pointed to a tricycle style cart with bicycle size tires. The tires were flat. Jacky noted that he was going to give him money to repair the tubes. Even so, with these small tires, it seemed a daunting task to push this wheeled chair to school. Do you get any help in getting to school? "Yes, sometimes someone helps push me to school". He then asked me "Do you want to see me get into my chair"? Yes, if you want to I answered, but not now. Do you want to get married someday? His yes reply was accompanied with a large smile, a twisting head and there may have even been a little blushing.

With the interview over, our new friend "walked" to his chair, and climbed into the seat. As proud as anyone could be, he sat there waiting to have his picture taken and ready to answer any more questions we may have.

Yes, after asking Jacky if we could give him some money, we did leave him what we felt we could give and not place him in danger. It was not enough - I am not sure what would be.

In the safety of our vehicle and time to reflect on time we had just shared with this young boy named Sajazo, I wondered where were the mine victim assistance dollars being spent? Had they not heard Sajazo's story? Were stories like his all too common? Wasn't there a three wheeled hand driven bike on large rubber tires that the people in the U.S. were shipping to Africa? Could he get one of these units? How could I help? Was this my responsibility? Could I tell his story and pray that someone says "I can help"?

I will not attempt to answer the above questions. Partly because I know some of the answers and partly because I do not want to know the others.

Sajazo is a landmine victim of war! While he is not a veteran, he is no less a casualty. And for him, his scars will be with him forever. His struggles and his continued courage should humble us to action, or at the very least compel us to tell his story. Sajazo goes to school, and plans to get married. For now, perhaps this is enough for a seventeen year old young boy.