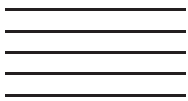


# DEPARTMENT OF AMPLIFICATION



*The recorder continues as an instrument for social change*

This past December, I was fortunate to be able to fulfill a long-lasting desire to work with children in Africa. Before I tell my story, I would like to thank all the ARS members who have supported me in spirit and in funding, making possible my visit to South Africa. I am privileged to be part of such a community, which shares my musical passion and is also aware of the importance of music as a tool for social justice. (See the September 2006 AR for Daphna Mor's initial story.)

I would also like to thank Yamaha for donating 200 green plastic recorders. They were generous in their spirit from the moment I approached them.

On Christmas day 2006, I took an 18-hour journey to Johannesburg, South Africa. Once there I met with other international volunteers for World Camps, and we set out to meet the local women with whom we would lead a summer session at Camp Sizanani.

Our rendezvous was in the yard of the HIV/AIDS Clinic in a hospital in Soweto, one of the largest townships in South Africa. Once we were all on the bus, we were treated like locals, and from then on we were one team. The young South African women were an inspiration during both training and camp. Some were as young as 16 (junior guides); all come from the same background as the campers, and most had been campers as well.

Camp Sizanani is a camp for South African children affected by HIV/AIDS. Some of the children are HIV-positive, and all of them have parents with HIV/AIDS. Most of them have lost one or both of their parents to the virus.

The children are from very poor backgrounds to begin with, but the presence of the virus in their lives adds to their already tough situation. Many live with parents who are too sick to work. Some live with a family member who took them in after a parent's death and who are often unable to provide the necessary material and emotional support the child needs. Some children have been living in an orphanage since a very young age. There is also, obviously, the emotional stress of losing parents and of living with the stigma of HIV.

The camp's purpose is to take them out of that stressful environment—for many of them, for the first time ever—and to bring them to a campsite in a beautiful surrounding. In camp they are encouraged to have fun. There is an emphasis on helping them feel safe, loved and valued—and, most important, educating them about their situation and their options.

To ensure best results, the camp has separate sessions for boys and girls. They alternate the two every three months, whenever camp is in session. We were starting a girls' camp, for ages 10-15.

First we had four days of training, run by the camp managers, in which we got to know all the guides and learned how to work together. Guides would need to collaborate in special activities and in the everyday camp life. The various tribal orientations of the local women can poten-

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***“The girls who played [recorder] were not people who had even considered playing a musical instrument before.”***

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tially create separation within the group. As the focus needs to be consistently on the campers, the training proved to be crucial in the bonding of our *voceli* (the camp's name for the guides).

In these days of training, I also got to know the two *voceli*, Lunga and Martha, who would be my assistants for the week.

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I used the time to teach them the basics of recorder playing, so they could help me in real time once the classes are in session. Their joy in learning the instrument, and self-pride (while the rest of their friends looked on jealously!) gave me a very positive feeling about the power of this activity. Again and again they practiced the notes I taught them.

We also planned the rest of the musical activities, which included African dancing. I felt that it would be wise to divide up the hour and 15 minutes we would be assigned each day to work with the group. This way they could learn their own traditional music and dance (which is encouraged in the camp), and would not tire of learning the new instrument.

When training was over, the local *voceli* went home for New Year's Eve. The foreign volunteers stayed in camp. We used the time to rest before the campers arrived, and to travel around with Phil (the head of World Camps) and his family, who came to volunteer as well.

The day the campers arrived was very emotional. The girls were so shy as they arrived, but were immediately swept up by the love and enthusiasm the *voceli* poured on them. We started singing with them, and we all hugged the girls to welcome them to camp. The girls seemed pleased by the attention.

The camp started well, and the next day we began classes. As there was a shortage of classrooms, I conducted my class outdoors (see photo at left). We had a circle of chairs, with shade from the trees.

Each of the girls was very excited to receive her own recorder for the week. Anyone who has taught young children knows how long it takes for a child to get used to holding the recorder with the correct hand position. I decided, based on the short time I had, not to impose the "left hand on top" playing rule. I realize it is not ideal, as the double holes on these instruments are built to have the left hand on top, but I felt that it was the correct thing to do under the circumstances. Any joy and confidence these girls could achieve by playing the recorder would be the purpose of this course.

During the week I taught the younger girls notes from G up to D, and the older girls also the notes down to middle C.

We played South African rhythms on one or two notes, plus we played in unison and in harmony. We learned "Three Blind Mice" (all of them already knew this song) and also the one song they *all* wanted to learn—"In the Jungle" or "The Lion Sleeps Tonight," which we know most recently from *The Lion King* but which is actually an African melody, "Wimoweh."

As the week progressed, I got to know the girls and approached them according to their special needs. My objectives were to learn to be sensitive and not to push too much: to be process- and not goal-oriented, and always to find ways to praise the girls, even when they felt something was too hard for them to play. The approach was of music therapy, with focus on the girls' mental health.

It was a joy to see the girls—who were dismissive at the beginning about having any ability to play—getting more motivated and involved as the week progressed. Their smiles grew from day to day!

In addition to the recorder classes, I was involved in helping manage the dining hall routines. Most campers and *voceli* are not used to three full meals a day. It was surprising to see the amounts of food each of them would eat at meals. It is impossible not to reflect at how cruel this situation is, when compared to the excessive amount of food we waste. Hunger is one of the most overwhelming aspects of poverty, and its senselessness really hits home when one shares meals with a person accustomed to hunger. Now I think about it with almost every good, nutritious meal I eat.

I also volunteered during the evening shift to help the camp doctor distribute HIV medicines. The girls who needed medicine would come to the clinic three times a day to receive their doses. They have taken these medicines for years. The amount of medicine each girl takes is extremely high and not easy to consume.

Most of the young girls do not really realize they are carrying HIV. It is a very delicate situation, and heartbreaking to see the partial understanding each has of her condition. We got particularly attached to these girls during the week, and their well-being has entered my prayers.

The other activities the girls were involved in during the day were swimming (the highlight of the activities), nature and nutrition, where they learned the importance of hygiene and of a balanced diet for them and their family.

There were also art, drama, and life skills. This is the most serious activity, in which they openly learn about HIV/AIDS, STDs, rape, pregnancy, abortion and women's rights. It was very sad to realize the level of misinformation and ignorance regarding such crucial topics.

The camp days flew by, with both its fun activities and the more serious matters. As the level of connection tightened, between the campers themselves and with *voceli*, emotional stresses came into the open. Being a woman in such circumstances can make for an extremely devastating existence. There is a high amount of sexual and emotional abuse; girls are forced, from an early age, to be responsible for the traditional woman's role of housekeeping and care-giving. This interferes greatly with their development and schooling.

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whole camp. In the presentation, the drama class wrote very touching monologues and scenes about poverty, their love for Africa, their cry for the world to pay attention, and learning to accept people living with HIV/AIDS.

The music class presented traditional South African songs and dances, with recorder playing.

During the week I found ways to create songs from the few notes

I was able to teach every class. I especially found ways to incorporate Camp Sizanani songs, which the girls sang all week and which became a sign of their increasing comfort and love for the camp. In the performance, the whole camp cheered as they heard parts of the songs they all knew. Of course, the highlight was "In the Jungle."

We had hoped originally to give the recorders to the girls who played them, so they could take the instruments home (and they really wanted them). Yamaha South Africa advised us about the sad fact that their experience showed that the families of the girls would sell more than 90% of the recorders. We decided to keep the recorders in the weekend clubhouses, which the camp runs every other Saturday, so the girls could come and practice.

Here is part of Phil's report regarding the impact of recorder teaching at the camp:

"... We were lucky to get a recorder performer and teacher, Daphna Mor, from New York to come over and teach the girls how to play the recorder. Daphna contacted Yamaha and got them to donate 200 recorders.

"There was much discussion on the value of bringing someone in for a single camp session and giving the campers the bare basics of playing and then leaving. As you can see from the photos, the concentration and excitement at the breakthrough of learning the basic vocabulary of this new language of music made us change our minds.

"The power that this brought to the personal reserves of self-esteem and self-confidence were very impressive. The girls who played were not people who had even considered playing a musical instrument before. It was simply not a part of what was considered possible in their lives.

Many stories surfaced that were heart-breaking to all of us, and especially shocking to the foreign counselors who are less familiar with these girls' backgrounds. Even so, the strength and spirit of these girls is admirable, and made me hopeful.

The camp was filled everyday with beautiful singing and dancing, as it is part of the culture and traditions. These girls can improvise a second and third voice to a song without even realizing the complexity of it. Their dancing is so graceful and natural, that you can't help but join them in their tireless stream of expression.

I brought with me letters from seventh-grade recorder students at The Ella Baker School, a public school where I was teach in New York City, NY. It was very educational for the students in New York as well, as we were discussing Africa and its challenges before writing the letters.

In the letters the New York students wrote about their personal lives and about their recorder studies. I was truly astonished by the reaction of the girls reading the letters. They treated them like their most valuable possessions—reading them again and again, sharing them with the rest of the campers—but making sure to get them back. They were very surprised that anyone in New York would care enough to write them personal letters.

The South African girls wrote letters back, which I brought to New York along with photos of them holding the letters for the New York students to see. Later, in New York, the Ella Baker students read the difficult yet grateful content of the letters from South Africa. It was touching to see their reaction. Some of them expressed how unaware they were of their own good fortune in life.

On the last day of camp, the drama and music classes gave a presentation for the

"By camp's end, they were performing in front of the rest of the camp, in groups of 8 to 10 together, playing "Wimoweh" (The Lion Sleeps Tonight), or "Three Blind Mice." They did this by learning the proper fingering for the notes and by identifying the notes by their proper designated names.

"Like so much else at camp, it was a moving experience to see this happen in the short time they were at camp.

"We are now asking Yamaha if they can find a volunteer to work with the girls at the Kids Clubs to further their training."

I would like to end this article with a song that is sung by the South African volunteers to the campers at Camp Sizanani:

*How could anyone ever tell you  
You are anything less than beautiful?  
How could anyone ever tell you  
You are less than whole?  
How could anyone fail to notice  
That your loving is a miracle?  
How deeply you're connected to my soul.*

Daphna Mor

For the Yamaha report, see <[www.yamaha.ca/bandorchestra](http://www.yamaha.ca/bandorchestra)> (go to News section: Recorders for South African Kids). If you want to learn more about the work done in Camp Sizanani, please go to <[www.globalcampsafrika.org](http://www.globalcampsafrika.org)>.

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