

"Under the Greenwood Tree"

Mark Bloomfield

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"It is advisable and highly recommended to always have your 'panic button remote' and 'pepper spray device' in your hands upon leaving the lodge." --an exact quote from the info sheet issued by the backpacker lodge in Johannesburg where I'm currently staying.



"Give me your money. I won't ask again!" threatened the street thug, having pestered me for money for several minutes without success, whilst one of his friends, taking an interest, started approaching from the opposite direction.

Gesturing with my left hand to calm down, I held in the other my steel retractable baton in my rear right pocket which was poised for immediate use at the first sight of a weapon. The resident of the Quaker house of worship came out and opened the gate just in the nick of time to spirit me through into a room and a welcome cup of tea. It was the morning the Quaker "Society of Friends" truly earned their name.

An hour earlier, the secretary of the District Grand Lodge of South Africa, a fellow of the most genteel and splendid sort, had given me the full tour of the lavish Freemason's Hall as part of one of the most rewarding visits I had so far enjoyed in Johannesburg. As a result, two Urantia Books were left with him for the Lyceum Lodge of Research, the research arm of the Masonic movement that will likely as not publish a research paper on the book's contents, as well as additional papers on the text potentially being written by prospective Masonic candidates as part of their initiation process.

All in all, no trifling matter when one pauses to consider that the current worldwide membership of the Masonic movement stands in excess of 36 million.

These last two weeks had been spent seeding greater Johannesburg entirely on foot from a small backpacker lodge in an inner suburb called Yeoville that in recent years had experienced a demographic shift as to render mine virtually the only white face in the neighborhood. My memory of it will be Jacaranda trees in radiant, full-violet bloom lining streets of discarded rubbish, broken glass and cold, icy stares. (The very day this report was written the cleaning lady at my lodge was robbed nearby at knifepoint by two thugs.)

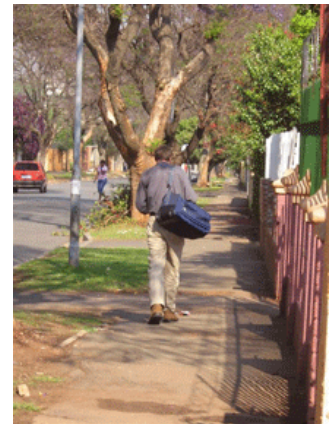
Each day's twenty- to twenty-five kilometer hike through what is statistically the world's second most violent city has been to tread the uneasy line between that polarization of humanity on either sides of razor wire, electric fences and "armed response" security warning signs. But it seems that the worse a state-of-siege human beings are forced to live and suffer under, the more touched they are when a benign and well-meaning stranger suddenly drops by to leave with them a potentially life-changing gift before departing just as abruptly. As a fifth epochal fieldworker in this kind of environment, one gets to enjoy witnessing this heartwarming sort of response each and every day:

. . . standing in the drizzle one morning at the gate of an Orthodox Jewish academy with an Orthodox Chief Rabbi (complete with long beard and black hat) as we related so well together in reciprocal tones of fraternal brotherhood as to not want to part each other's company; . . . a long visit at the Jesuit Institute to be received with much interest and many thought-provoking questions; . . . a bewildered but grateful librarian at Hillbrow Public Library (Jo'burg's most dangerous inner suburb of all) asking how I really made it to his library, reluctant to believe that as a white man I had actually risked walking there on foot.

Another full week should break the back of Johannesburg, then another week or so to take nearby Pretoria before hauling overland to neighbouring Botswana the remaining books of the recent shipment of 200. Any overspill from Botswana will be used to start seeding Zambia on my way overland through the 'heart of darkness' to Mombasa, Kenya, where another 300 Urantia Books will by then have hopefully arrived by sea.

In addition to the bare facts and statistics of the fifth epochal World Seeding Mission, there perhaps might be seen here something of a story to tell, but it's ever a fieldworker's dilemma as to how much or little of it to attempt to communicate to the Urantia community. To offer too little might be taken as being incommunicative and unsociable whilst to offer too much might appear boastful and self-congratulatory. Striking a sensible balance between the two has over the years always been my aim.

Either way, be assured that the accomplishment of the mission itself, for me at least, takes overwhelming priority to merely writing about it. To that end, the wise and far-seeing souls out there who constitute this mission's support base should be comforted by the fact that their hard-earned funds firstly reach me safely, secondly are profoundly



appreciated, and thirdly are slowly but surely causing a tectonic shift for the better in the entire planetary status quo. That, dear reader, is no idle boast. It's happening. Nothing else can happen when the systematic person-to-person bestowal of the highest revealed truths mortal ears can ever hear takes place in the multitudinous learning centres of whole nations and across whole continents.

But regular light-hearted banter with the Australians -- the heaven-sent humourists of this movement -- affords light and refreshing relief from the enormity and immensity of the issues at hand. How I'd manage without them I really have no clue. That and any good book I can find for an hour's escapism each evening: "One of Thomas Hardy's most greatly loved and gentlest books, "Under The Greenwood Tree" is an unashamed idyll and picturesque portrait of the long-vanished pastoral society of early Victorian England," -- so it says on the rear cover of my latest find.

Ah, yes. That'll do. That'll do nicely!

In search of the Father's will,
Mark Philip Bloomfield

