



July 25, 2016

Dear Oftebro Family,

I first heard about Great Great Uncle Ommund as a missionary in Zululand from my Aunt Gudrun when I was six years old. I recently felt like I finally had met him! That is, as close as I could get to know him, by experiencing KwaMondi in person.

While Deborah and I were not able to join the Oftebro Reunion in 2007, we rectified that by traveling to South Africa in May, combining a safari experience with nearly two weeks with Garry Oftebro, the family's most incredible South Africa Guide.

After two days touring Johannesburg and Pretoria with an excellent guide, we were captivated with the history and culture of South Africa and its struggle through the apartheid years. Hearing the colorful and tragic history of SA, its indigenous people and how they struggled with settlers, conquerors and immigrants was amazing. Trying to imagine the difficulty of a young Ommund Oftebro in establishing a mission in Eshowe would become even more amazing as Garry related Ommund's life and the Zulu history. Wouldn't you know it. Garry is fluent in both Afrikaans and Zulu!

After three days of exciting animal sightings at the Zulu Nyala Reserve, we had a fantastic "braai" at Garry's with son Karl, brothers Mark and Ken and Diane. Then off we went on a 10-day odyssey, first meeting cousins Thelma Oftebro Piccione and her daughter Helen and Brian Wilkes at their beautiful home in the Midlands for high tea and shots of Aquavit, compliments of Garry. Then off on a four-wheel drive adventure to Sani Pass to the highest bar in Africa, then explored the gorgeous Drakensberg Mountains. Two days at the Berg House and cottages owned by cousin Vaughn (Helen's brother) and Chantal Piccione where they and their daughter Chanel entertained us and took good care of us. Then we visited the Battlefields where Garry eloquently described the incredible Zulu battles with the British in early 1879. After a wonderful native experience in Shakaland where we were immersed in the history, culture, and food of the Zulus, we were finally off to Eshowe to visit Ommund's church.

Of course through years of hearing Torstein and Reidar's stories of Ommund and Christian's missionary experience, and re-reading the same in the Oftebro Familien Book, we were prepared for the experience. We arrived and stayed in a wonderful guesthouse on Oftebro Street near the KwaMondi church. The Zulus had difficulty saying Ommund's name, so it became Mondi.

Just prior to seeing the church on Saturday, we visited the Norwegian Church Cemetery. It is a walled and locked graveyard with dozens of beautiful tombstones in company with the many Oftebros and other missionary and Norwegians buried there from the 1800's. It had been recently restored by Garry, Karl and Mark after vandals had toppled many of the stones and crosses a week before our arrival. They did a masterful job!

I can't describe how excited I was to finally see Ommund's church after 67 years, and I was not disappointed as we drove into the grounds. It was beautiful! We gazed at the church bell which was the only relic found after the Zulu warriors burned the mission and church (built in 1861) at the end of a 72 day siege in 1879. The current church had been rebuilt by Christian Oftebro in 1887. The bell had been stolen in late 2014 and recently retrieved and restored by Garry, and it sounded wonderful while ringing in the Sunday service.

Entering the church was the beautiful plaque honoring Ommund's founding of the Mission in 1861 gifted there from the 2004 Oftebro Reunion in Lyngdal. We met with the Dean of the church and two elders, and discussed the needs of the church and our participation in the service on Sunday. The sanctuary, altar and pulpit were beautiful. The raised pulpit was originally built in Norway, was shipped there for the opening of the new church in 1887. It was easy to see it needed painting and other repairs so Deborah and I volunteered to cover those costs, and we were warmly thanked by the church officials. They asked if I would speak for a few minutes on Sunday to relate some of the Oftebro history to the KwaMondi congregation. WOW!

Sunday morning, as the bell was ringing, we entered the church, which was nearly full. About 70 children were enthusiastically singing as we were ushered to the front row. To adequately describe the a cappella singing would be difficult, as it was so passionate and beautiful to both hear and feel. Those of you who traveled there in 2007 know exactly the feeling! After participating in the singing and psalms and readings as best we could, considering the service was in 100% Zulu (Garry, since fluent, later described all the pertinent words), we were invited to speak. Garry translated my words explaining how Ommund started the mission, how my grandfather Henry immigrated to the USA, and why we were so happy to finally be there worshipping with them in Zulu.

I then presented a check to provide funds for roof repair and painting the church to an elder who announced the news to the congregation, which was very grateful for our help. Garry explained, in Zulu, more information regarding the recent cemetery and bell events and was followed by the Zulu Chief who reminded the congregation of the important legacy of the missionaries, how all the properties should be honored and cared for, and who thanked Garry for all he has done over the years, including rebuilding and replacing the vandalized bathrooms located behind the church. Lack of security is a huge problem there and a much needed expense.

After many more beautiful hymns, and three parades around the altar for offerings, the service ended after 2 hours and 45 minutes! WOW AGAIN! We were again warmly greeted and thanked by church members, officials and the visiting pastor, Vicar Thembinkosi Zondi, and here's another part of the story:

Vicar Thembinkosi Zondi, while appearing to us as an accomplished and experienced service leader and incredible preacher is only in his first year of divinity school. We also learned in our meeting with the church elders, that the parsonage across the street from the church property is

(due to disrepair) unusable, thus a detriment to hiring a permanent pastor to the church. Reverend Zondi in training, is married, has a son, and has no financial support to complete his next three years of training to become ordained.

He and the church elders have made a request for financial assistance, and we and Garry have initiated a fund to assist this request. The estimated cost to support Vicar Zondi's education for the remainder of this year is 46,000 Rand (approximately \$3,200 USD). We hope there will be some assistance from the Oftebro Family since there is a major shortage of ministers in the region. We want to help continue the missionary legacy of Ommund and Christian Oftebro at KwaMondi Mission. To that end, Garry has established a bank fund in Durban and will administer the funds and allocate according to set policies for assistance in funding his divinity school housing and tuition in Johannesburg, while his wife and son live at their home in another town still seeking employment, which will help, but there is a 40+ percent unemployment rate in South Africa.

Hopefully many of you will find this request for financial support a worthy cause. We know that Oftebros around the world have been generous to many community and world needs, so we are realistic that this appeal will not suit everyone. Depending upon how this goes, we may propose assisting the congregation in fund-raising appeals to finance the restoration of the parsonage as well. Any donation will be greatly appreciated.

Later on Sunday, Garry took us to the Martyr's Monument erected to honor Ommund's first baptized Zulu who was killed by the tribe in 1877 just for getting baptized. All in all, the whole KwaMondi visit was fantastic and a fulfillment of a life long dream to personally experience.

Garry then took us "camping" in a rustic log cabin on the Indian Ocean at a huge national park where we experienced even more game sightings including the elusive Black Rhino. Fishing in the ocean and hiking the pristine beach, seeing a vervet monkey snatch a bag of Doritos off the kitchen counter right under Deborah's nose, and more game sightings was the perfect end of a wonderful adventure with Guide Garry... He returned us to the safari lodge for three more days of animal viewing, again seeing all we wanted to see, learning more about the horrendous plight of the rhinos and elephants from horn and tusk killings for ignorant people's misguided pleasures, and the awful drought that is jeopardizing the future of all the animals.

Our last evening in Durban we had a Mozambique dinner with Garry, Karl and Mark, then we were off to Cape Town for four days of touring Table Mountain, the Cape, the wine lands and the gorgeous waterfront. We finally returned to Redmond, after a Trip of a Lifetime, which was way beyond our expectations!

John and Deborah Oftebro

