



Rural Ramparts

by Michelle Lapp

In the mountains of Lesotho, Africa the sun often slipped away suddenly, without vibrant displays of fanfare. Shadows spread their darkness at the foot of the towering, creviced mountains and oozed like inky, dark puddles until the whole village eclipsed into gray. It was then, as the light dimmed, that the cadence of distant drumming beat its way toward our house on the edge of the village. Bum-pa-pum-pum. Bum-pa-pum-pum.

We had left everything we owned to place ourselves, and our six children, in the remote mountain community to build relationships deep enough to belong. Our first priority was to learn the language, but our prayer was that a mutual love would grow strong enough to share the love of Jesus. Even the basics of life had to be re-learned: how to prepare food, fetching water, and even bathing.

The methodical evening beats of the drumming stranger snuck up on us quietly from the rocky path in the distance and grew louder near our cinder block house. Moving closer to the drafty window, we'd peer out toward the rutted dirt road that led into the village. Our gaze followed his trance-like slow walk and bum-ba-bum beat resonated from the patting of his dark, weathered hands. When a nightly pattern developed, an ominous darkness fell over us and birthed an urgent need to know why this man thumped his way around our compound.

Chris and I set our minds to figuring it out, going hut to hut, stumbling through our questions like preschoolers just learning to talk. As we strained our brains to piece together hints, the answer evolved. The drummer was in training to be a witch doctor and was practicing his call to the spirits. Whether or not this was true made no difference. The thought that someone could be calling on evil spirits to descend on our home was unsettling.

The first deep pulse of the slow spirit-march triggered our war cries to God. With heads huddled together, we prayed in Jesus' name against spiritual forces of evil. Chris begged God to fortify our property against unseen enemies. Asking for a fortress with tall, strong walls and ramparts to hold back the darkness was his most consistent request. We stood on God's promises and our prayers developed into reflex responses to anxious thoughts. My own mind repeated the same request, "Ramparts in Jesus' name, LORD, battlements around this compound."

We remembered and repeated Scripture back to ourselves as reminders of truths to dispel our fears and strengthen us, "*You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world.*" 1 John 4:4

While countless trials weighed heavy on us, there were also times of refreshment that lifted our spirits and kept us going in the battle. The coastal city of Durban was a day's drive away through winding, dirt roads and harrowing mountain passes. The colorful, bustling beach city reminded us of home and brought us deep breaths of respite. We met a body of believers there that became a lifeline. Outreach trips to the mountains were routine for them, so they were eager to make the six-hour, death-defying trip through treacherous roads and mountain passes just to support our missionary work. The main task of their timely visit was a prayer hike through the huts and rustic buildings of the sparsely populated village.

At the end of their three-day visit, the last phase of their mission was to gather around our family and lift us to the God who saw and heard things we could not see. They prayed with power and fervor, their voices joined together as an ensemble of passion. As the fortitude of their prayers swelled into praise, one of the men began to describe a vision God was showing him, "Thank you, Lord, for your protection over this family. I can see walls like a fortress and strong towers like ramparts at every corner."

Our teary eyes met in wonder. No other human knew what we had been praying for, yet God was supernaturally showing us He was answering.