



Mite

2024 MAGAZINE



CHILD SOLDIERS IN LIBERIA

WHAT 9/11 LEFT BEHIND

FORGOTTEN TRIBES OF BANGWEULU

HOW APPALACHIA MET HELENE

VOL. 9 | JULY 2025

Letter From Abigail

Before I begin sharing a story with our donors, I try to pause and invite God into the process, asking Him to guide my words and help me honor the stories you made possible.

This magazine is no different. I hope you'll take a moment to ask Him to be part of your reading too.

Because these aren't just updates or photos—they're living reminders of what He's doing in the world. And because of His goodness, you're a part of every single story.

This past year, I've had the blessing of looking closer.

Closer at maps marked by conflict and recovery. Closer at faces, some smiling, some tired, all resilient. Closer at the needs that brought Mite's Giving Community into these corners of the world.

Closer at the hope that follows when people like you, our donors, choose to give freely and love like Jesus.

As Project Coordinator, I've spent the year diving deep. I researched not just the logistics of our projects but the histories that make them necessary. From the emotional and physical scars of civil wars to deep-rooted cycles of generational poverty, from crumbling infrastructure that threatens communities to the desperation of fishing camps on the brink of starvation, these stories reveal the brokenness of our world.

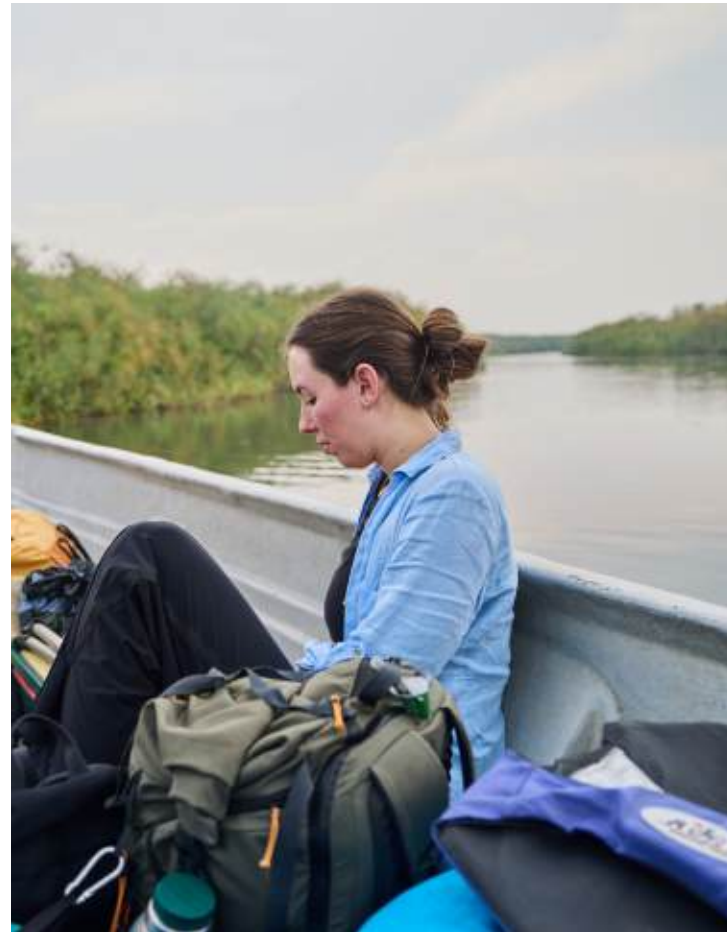
And yet, in every place, God is at work.

We've seen it by listening closely to those living these stories: fathers and mothers providing for their families in Zambia, students serving their communities in Guatemala, veterans healing on horseback in North Carolina, and doctors changing babies' futures in Pakistan. Each conversation revealed something new.

This year, we wanted our Mite Magazine to reflect that depth. We're inviting you to dive in, to explore the why behind each project, the context that makes every need so urgent, and the humanity that makes each story unforgettable.

Your generosity made these stories possible. Our team, and thousands of people across the globe, are so deeply grateful.

Abigail Toal
Program & Communications Coordinator



Program & Communications Coordinator



Project 60

- Liberia is like no other African nation:
- Established in 1822 by the American Colonization Society as a settlement for freed African Americans.
 - Declaring its independence in 1847 to become Africa's first republic.
 - Electing Joseph Jenkins Roberts, an African American born to enslaved parents in Virginia, as its first president.

They were surely in uncharted territory.

Liberia's early government and societal structure were modeled almost entirely after the United States. Its capital, Monrovia, was named after U.S. President James Monroe. Its flag is a near replica of the Stars and Stripes. Its currency, constitution, and core values mirrored those of the United States, the country from which its settlers had come.

Though Liberia, whose name literally means 'Land of the Free,' began as a dream of liberty, the tension between the freed settlers, known as Americo-Liberians, and the indigenous African tribes would simmer for decades. Later, this social divide would reach its boiling point, and the ensuing civil wars between the two lineages would cause such destruction that the country is still working towards recovery today.

The Americo-Liberians, many of whom brought with them American customs and hierarchical thinking, maintained control over politics and power. Meanwhile, native populations were largely excluded from decision-making and relegated to the margins of the new society.

And you won't believe one of the major catalysts for this divide and eventual violent conflict. Rubber.

Like many African countries, Liberia is rich in natural resources. In 1926, Firestone Tire and Rubber Company signed a 99-year lease for one million acres of land, gaining near-complete control over Liberia's most valuable export commodity. That year, they paid the Liberian government six cents per acre—an outrageously low rate. Still today, it is the world's largest single natural rubber plantation, though Firestone has renegotiated and extended their lease to now expire in 2041.

However, while the company grew to be one of the most prominent rubber manufacturers in the world, most Liberians saw few benefits. The wealth generated from Liberia's rubber industry flowed almost entirely to Firestone and the Americo-Liberian elite ruling Liberia, while the plantation's workers, many from indigenous backgrounds, labored in poor conditions with low wages. This sharpened the social divide and laid the groundwork for tensions that would explode in 1980.

On April 12, 1980, Samuel Doe, an indigenous Liberian, staged a coup, killing the president and ending 133 years of Americo-Liberian rule. But instead of ushering in lasting reform, it introduced new waves of violence, corruption, and suppression. Doe's brutal regime fractured the country even further and set the stage for Charles Taylor's rebellion and two successive civil wars a decade later.

Between 1989 and 2003, more than 250,000 Liberians were killed. Armed factions, many led by warlords and often including children forced into combat, terrorized the population.

Villages were burned, families torn apart. Rape, torture, and mass killings became common tools of war. Liberia's infrastructure was reduced to rubble. Its hospitals, schools, and roads ceased to function. Nearly half the population fled the country or became internally displaced. Neighbors couldn't trust neighbors, and they certainly couldn't trust their leaders.



The war left not just physical devastation but deep emotional and spiritual scars that are still evident today.

To better understand this tragic period, we spoke with Dr. Teun Voeten, a Dutch war photographer and anthropologist who covered Liberia's second civil war for Vanity Fair. Dr. Voeten, who has witnessed armed conflict in places like Iraq, Colombia, and Sierra Leone, told us that Liberia's war remains one of the most brutal he's ever documented. He called it "a truly failed state," a country where the government has lost its ability to govern and provide basic services to its citizens.

In 2003, after fourteen years of devastating civil war, Charles Taylor resigned from office and went into exile. He is now serving what will likely be a life sentence in a British prison for war crimes not just committed in Liberia but also in Sierra Leone. He left behind a country in ruins.

But where there are wounds that seem too deep to heal, you can find Jesus.

Our partner, Wordsower Africa, knows the hope that can only be found through the Gospel, and every day, their Liberian missionaries travel to remote, unreached people groups to spread the Good News.

That's where Project 66: Revival Riders comes in. Wordsower's missionaries are only able to reach these villages by motorbike. In post-war Liberia, 94% of roads remain unpaved, with many reduced to red-dirt bogs during the rainy season. In most places, the two-wheeled narrow body of a motorbike is the only vehicle that can traverse them.

This year, through the generosity of our giving community, 10 new motorbikes helped extend the Wordsower Africa team's reach to another 50,000 people in villages across Liberia.

The motorbikes purchased are carriers of the Gospel message to people who have never heard. But they also serve as ambulances and delivery "trucks" for urgent medicines and construction materials used to build churches. And the missionaries that ride them are more than messengers—they're builders, prayer warriors, and servants to the communities they reach.

In Liberia, humanitarian aid is vital, and national rebuilding is ongoing, but only one force can heal its wounds: the transformative love of Jesus Christ. Equipped by your generosity, Revival Riders are carrying this message from village to village, and whole communities are discovering hope that can't be burned down, driven out, or destroyed by war.

Revival Riders





"I saw children—nine, ten, eleven, twelve years old—walking around with assault rifles," Dr. Voeten recalled. "They looked like they had been totally drugged and drinking palm wine. If you give a kid of twelve a gun, some drugs, and booze, he becomes an unpredictable killing machine. He can be very friendly and childish, but he can also be cruel and dangerous."

They're used as cannon fodder, sent to walk through minefields or run to the front lines. The thing with child soldiers is they're small, they don't eat much, and they're happy with just a few bucks. But most terrifying of all: they think they're invincible. So you can pump them with drugs, give them the craziest assignments, and they'll do whatever you want."



Photo Credit: Dr. Teun Voeten on assignment for Vanity Fair in Liberia

Project 59

Let's talk about one of the most common birth deformities in the world: clubfoot. Affecting around 1 in every 800 babies, clubfoot is a condition where one or both feet twist inward and upward, tightening the muscles and tendons and pulling the bones out of place. Left untreated, it leads to a lifetime of pain and disability that makes even short distances difficult or impossible to walk.

It's a condition as old as civilization itself. Evidence of clubfoot can be traced back thousands of years, etched into the walls of ancient tombs and wrapped in the bandages of kings.

The earliest known depiction of clubfoot comes from ancient Egyptian tomb paintings dated around 1400 BCE in Egypt. Pharaoh Tutankhamun, also commonly known as King Tut, was discovered to have had clubfeet after performing CT scans and DNA analysis on his mummified body. Also found in his tomb were over 130 walking sticks that would have helped with his physical ailment and symbolized his authority and power in ancient Egypt.

One thousand years later (around 400 BCE), Hippocrates, the Greek physician hailed as the father of medicine, laid the groundwork for the modern conservative treatments used today. He recognized that without early intervention, clubfoot would lead to lifelong disability. He proposed gentle manipulations and bandaging as the recommended form of treatment to maintain correct positioning. He even suggested the use of special shoes to help prevent recurrence. But his ingenuity didn't catch on, and those planted seeds of understanding would take millennia to blossom.

Misunderstanding, mistreatment, and ignorance are what history wrote for clubfoot for the next two thousand years. In medieval Europe, congenital deformities were often seen as curses or bad omens. "Cures" ranged from ineffective splints to brutal surgeries without anesthesia.

It wasn't until the 18th century that real progress began. French surgeon Jean-André Venel, the father of orthopedics, developed some of the first foot braces, and German orthopedist Friedrich Dieffenbach pushed for more invasive surgical techniques.

By the early 20th century, tendon-release surgeries were common, but they left many patients with stiff, painful feet and limited mobility. Often, the deformity would return.

Then, in the 1940s, Hippocrates' work circled back around through an Argentine physician named Dr. Ignacio Ponseti, who changed everything for clubfoot treatment. His method, consisting of gentle manipulation, casting, and bracing, corrected clubfoot without invasive surgery. It was safe, affordable, and highly effective.

Today, the Ponseti Method is the global gold standard, offering a 95% success rate when treatment begins early. But access to care remains difficult where it's needed the most.

Enter MiracleFeet—an organization making clubfoot care accessible in 37 lower-income countries where the odds are steepest.

MiracleFeet collaborated with Dr. Michael Ahdoot and Stanford engineers to design the MiracleFeet Brace, the world's most affordable and effective foot abduction brace. This device, crucial to the Ponseti Method, helps maintain alignment during the years-long bracing phase of treatment, ensuring permanent correction.



They work with local clinics and physicians in country to provide care to infants born with clubfoot. One of these physicians is Dr. Ramla Zafar.

Born in Pakistan in 2000, Ramla had clubfoot at a time when the Ponseti Method had barely begun spreading beyond Western medical systems. She received invasive surgery, and miraculously, her clubfoot never returned.

Ramla decided to make something of her miracle. She now treats over 200 children with clubfoot each year in Pakistan. Now, her once-deformed feet carry her from patient to patient, delivering hope to them and their families.

We met both Dr. Ramla and Dr. Ahdoot through our partnership with MiracleFeet for Project 59: Be a Miracle Step.

This year, our giving community worked with MiracleFeet to help bring these life-changing braces to 400 children in Pakistan, giving them the opportunity to run, play, and walk into a future with freedom.

These children, Dr. Ramla and Dr. Ahdoot, and now you, are connected to a medical journey that began thousands of years ago in the tomb of Egyptian pharaohs. Your giving is just as essential as Hippocrates' groundbreaking research or Dr. Ponseti's first cast and brace.

Because of you, a little boy or girl is walking today—freely, fully, and with two forward-functioning feet.

Be a Miracle Step



Project 62

September 11, 2001, dawned unusually clear along the eastern United States. A crisp, blue sky, which pilots often call “severe clear,” meant light air traffic and on-time departures nearly all morning. This rare calm would soon give way to unprecedented chaos in the deadliest coordinated terrorist attack in history.

At 8:46 a.m., American Airlines Flight 11 struck the North Tower of the World Trade Center.

At 9:03 a.m., United Airlines Flight 175 hit the South Tower.

At 9:37 a.m., American Airlines Flight 77 crashed into the Pentagon, the heart of the U.S. military.

At 10:03 a.m., United Airlines Flight 93 went down in a Pennsylvania field after heroic passengers gained control of the plane from hijackers, preventing it from reaching its likely target, the U.S. Capitol.

By the time the second plane hit the Twin Towers, the world watched in stunned silence as live footage confirmed this was no accident. Strangers crowded around TVs in diners, gas stations, schools, and sidewalks. Skies emptied as every U.S. flight was grounded for the first time in history.

The attacks claimed the lives of 2,977: office workers who had just arrived at their desks, firefighters climbing stairwells in heavy gear, paramedics running toward danger, and travelers whose ordinary morning flights turned into weapons of terror.

On September 12, blood banks across the country saw historic donation numbers as Americans tried to help however they could. Within days, American flags appeared on porches, in windows, and across city skylines. Slogans like “Never Forget” rippled through communities, shaping a new era of patriotism that echoed through military recruitment offices nationwide.

Just nine days after the attacks, the United States formally launched the Global War on Terror, with support from NATO allies. Military recruiters saw a surge of calls and walk-ins, with some offices reporting up to a 300% increase in inquiries.

When the towers fell, a generation’s ideals and future plans collapsed with them. Military service transformed overnight from a noble career path for someone else into a deeply personal mission. Teenagers traded college applications for enlistment forms, driven by a fierce determination to protect and defend their nation.

Over the next two decades, more than 2.7 million U.S. service members were deployed across the Middle East and other regions. Unlike any conflict before, soldiers faced repeated deployments: the average service member completed 3.7 tours, though some served seven or more.

Each deployment could last 12 to 18 months, with only brief flashes of “normal life” in between. Often, these moments do more harm than good, forcing soldiers to abruptly shift between worlds before they can truly heal or reconnect. Veterans speak of coming home to a world that no longer makes sense—to civilians who are oblivious to their battles abroad. Some even describe it as feeling “like a stranger in their own country.”

Coming home presented a new battle many soldiers weren’t prepared to fight. The numbers here are stark. In 2021 alone, 6,392 veterans died by suicide.



That’s more than seventeen lives lost every day. Since 9/11, over 30,000 veterans have died by suicide, a toll four times greater than the number killed in combat operations.

Facing post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and a deep distrust of themselves and those around them, the best way for veterans to find healing is through patience, consistency, and a gentle hand. Surprisingly, one of the most effective allies in this fight is a horse.

Horses are a powerful antidote to the turmoil that too often follows soldiers home. The simple act of grooming, feeding, and riding a horse restores a sense of purpose and control that war can strip away. Time spent in the saddle lowers anxiety and stress, offering rare moments of peace that veterans describe as the highlight of their week. The unique, non-judgmental bond they build with a horse helps them process emotional pain and rebuild trust. Group riding sessions create camaraderie that cuts through the isolating fog many veterans face.

Our partner, Shining Hope Farms, offers exactly this through their Saddle and Salutes Program, using equine-assisted therapy to support veterans living with anxiety, depression, and PTSD. For Project 62: Operation Warrior Wellness, our giving community ensured this life-changing program remained accessible for thousands of veterans across North Carolina.

You recognized that these veterans deserve the same peace they fought so hard to secure for our nation. Because of your generosity, they have a safe, consistent environment to heal. Thank you for reminding them that there are those who will never forget their sacrifice.

Operation Warrior Wellness



Project 64

Humans were never meant to sit still. It's our natural inclination to move forward, move faster, push boundaries.

We used to cross continents on foot. When that forward motion ended in a sea of water, we built ships that could take us across oceans. We launched rockets into space, split atoms, and built machines that can think faster than we can. The need for movement, in both body and mind, is wired into us for survival.

When the ability to move is taken away, the loss is debilitating. Throughout history, people have refused to accept a fate of immobility.

The oldest known prosthetic, a wooden big toe, was discovered in an Egyptian tomb dating from 950 to 710 BCE. Crafted for both function and appearance, it shows early ingenuity in restoring mobility. Centuries later, in ancient Rome, General Marcus Sergius famously lost his right hand in battle. Undeterred, he was fitted with an iron hand so he could hold his shield and return to combat.

That same unyielding spirit would reappear centuries later in the story of a 1500s German knight named Götz von Berlichingen. He lost his right hand when a cannonball struck his sword, causing it to ricochet and sever his limb. Rather than retire from the battlefield, he commissioned a blacksmith to create one of the most remarkable prosthetic devices of his time. The mechanical metal hand featured four fingers and a thumb mounted to a glove with hinges, allowing the fingers to curl inward in pairs. With this prosthetic, Götz could once again grasp his sword and hold the reins of his horse. By pressing a button on the back of the hand, the fingers would snap back into an open position, ready for the next move.

His iron appendage didn't just restore his function—it became his identity. From then on, he was known throughout Europe as "Götz of the Iron Hand." After using the device in battle, Götz made several upgrades, learning firsthand how to refine and improve the design. The iron hand would serve him for fifteen years on the battlefield.

After World Wars I and II, prosthetic technology advanced rapidly to meet the needs of millions of wounded veterans. Yet, this progress was primarily limited to wealthier nations, while developing countries were left far behind.

Today, 85% of the world's amputees live in lower-income countries, where frequent armed conflicts, unsafe road conditions, and limited access to early treatment for conditions like diabetes and severe infections make amputations far more common. Only 5-15% of amputees in these countries have access to adequate prosthetic care. Prosthetics are expensive, custom-built devices requiring ongoing fittings, maintenance, and rehabilitation. For those in rural communities, traveling hundreds of miles to specialized clinics is often impossible.

In The Gambia, where this disparity is stark, amputees frequently wait 3 to 8 years for prosthetic care, if they receive it at all. The country has only one rehabilitation center in the capital, Banjul. For amputees living in remote areas, reaching this center means 8 to 10 hours of travel using unreliable public transport that is often inaccessible for people with disabilities.

This is where Mite's giving community and our partnership with STAND come together to help rewrite their stories.



Through Project 64: Mobility on the Move, we joined forces with STAND, an organization that repurposes prosthetic legs destined for landfills to help amputees across sub-Saharan Africa regain mobility. This year, they brought us a new challenge: How can we reach the rural amputees who remain out of reach? The answer was to bring the clinic to them.

With your support, STAND launched its first mobile rehabilitation clinics, delivering care directly to two rural hospitals—Edward Francis Small Teaching Hospital in Bansang and Farafenni General Hospital in Farafenni. These traveling clinics offered prosthetic fittings, wound care, and physical therapy, eliminating the need for long, expensive journeys to the capital.

Just as importantly, they provided emotional counseling. Amputation is a profound trauma that impacts identity, independence, and mental health. Many amputees describe it as a kind of living death, mourning not just a limb but a part of themselves. In fact, 66% develop mental health disorders like PTSD after limb loss. That's why the trained counselors who guide patients through this emotional recovery are as vital as the prosthetics they receive.

Thanks to you, these stories don't end with loss. As Götz von Berlichingen proved centuries ago, losing a limb doesn't have to mean losing forward motion. Your generosity paved the way for these amputees to move forward in their livelihoods, their families, and their communities once again.

Mobility on the Move





A family travels with their belongings in a mokoro, a traditional dugout canoe, through the water channels of Zambia's Bangweulu Wetlands. These long, narrow canoes are carved from large tree trunks and have a shallow draft, making them ideal for gliding through shallow waters. They are propelled by poling, where a person stands at the back and pushes against the riverbed, and are essential for transportation and fishing in this region.

Project 61

Little is actually known about the people who call the Bangweulu Wetlands home.

You can read about the shoebill stork, the papyrus swamps, the black lechwe antelope found nowhere else on Earth. Conservationists and tourists have long marveled at the vast biodiversity that makes up one of the largest wetland ecosystems in the world. But the tribes who’ve lived in these lands for centuries? Their histories remain largely unwritten.

What we do know begins with movement. The first inhabitants of the wetlands are believed to have arrived during the Bantu migration, one of the largest and longest movements of people in human history. From their ancestral homeland in West Africa, the Bantu peoples fanned out across sub-Saharan Africa, settling in river valleys, grasslands, highlands, and swamps. The Bangweulu Wetlands became home to at least seven tribes, including the Bemba, one of Zambia’s most prominent ethnic groups.

The first documented notes on the Bangweulu Wetlands come from the Scottish physician, missionary, and famed explorer David Livingstone. Presumed to be the first European to enter the region, Livingstone arrived in 1868 in search of the Nile’s headwaters, a quest that would ultimately elude him. Instead, he spent his final years in Zambia, where he befriended many tribes and listened intently to their stories.

One of his lifelong goals was to help end the illegal slave trade that persisted long after its supposed abolishment. He was also among the first to accurately describe insects as carriers of disease. Over roughly twenty-eight years exploring Africa, Livingstone faced countless dangers that left many questioning why he kept returning: he endured at least twenty-seven bouts of malaria, was famously attacked by a lion, and, according to his journals, survived drinking water “swarming with insects, thick with mud and putrid with rhinoceros urine and buffaloes’ dung.”

Livingstone died in 1873 in a small village on the southern shore of the Bangweulu Wetlands. His heart was buried beneath a tree there, a lasting symbol of his deep love for Africa and its people.

While Livingstone’s journals offered the world its first written glimpse of Bangweulu, the true heartbeat of these wetlands belongs to the tribes who call the marsh home. For many, it’s all they’ve ever known: paddling dugout canoes through winding channels, watching antelope gather in the dry season, and welcoming the return of birds with the rains. To them, the wetlands were never a mystery—they built a life that moves with the water.

To this day, the tribes live under traditional tribal law, guided by chiefs and customs handed down through generations. Their calendars aren’t marked by months but by the rhythms of rain and fish. Their fathers, grandfathers, and great-grandfathers were all fishermen.

Many families spend only three months each year on their home islands; for the other nine, they relocate to fishing camps, temporary makeshift settlements perched just above the water channels. This 9-month on, 3-month off cycle is officially regulated by the Zambian government to protect fish stocks and ensure sustainability. Each year, a fishing ban from December to February allows fish populations time to recover and multiply. Yet despite these traditions and regulations, recent discoveries show that after centuries of fishing for food and livelihoods, the wetland’s fish populations are no longer repopulating fast enough.



At the same time, generations of farming cassava—the main, and often only, crop—have left the soil exhausted and unable to produce sufficient harvests. So, when your net comes up light enough to feed only one, and you walk day after day through cassava fields that yield nothing, what are you left with?

Empty plates and empty stomachs. Malnutrition, vitamin deficiencies, and preventable diseases follow in their wake.

But just like Livingstone, our partner FARM STEW isn’t afraid of discovery or the unique challenges that come with it. When they saw the wetlands’ dwindling fish stocks and depleted soils, they didn’t turn away. Instead, they arrived with a simple, colorful promise: “Let us show you how to eat the rainbow.”

Through Project 61: Farmland for Souls, our giving community joined FARM STEW to bring farming knowledge and vital resources to Ncheta Island in the heart of the Bangweulu Wetlands. Families there learned to grow tomatoes, onions, carrots, beetroot, leafy greens, pumpkins, soybeans, and orange-fleshed sweet potatoes.

They discovered how to heal the soil, how to nourish their bodies with real nutrition, and how to turn surplus harvests into new income.

Because of your generosity, these families aren't just surviving—they're building something lasting for the generations that follow them. They're putting down healthy, sustainable roots in their land and growing a future finally full of fruit.

Farmland For Souls





Pictured is the FARM STEW agroforestry site made possible by your generosity on Ncheta Island in the Bangweulu Wetlands. Surrounding the site are three miles of barren cassava mounds, a result of depleted soil caused by continuous planting without crop rotation. To restore the site's land, community members planted legumes and other soil-enriching crops first, improving soil structure before introducing a variety of other crops.

Project 63

What we call “green” today was simply normal for most of human history. Long before concrete jungles and air conditioners, ancient civilizations were masters at stewarding the environment, designing homes and cities uniquely adapted to the land around them.

The Romans perfected concrete by mixing volcanic ash, lime, and seawater, creating structures that still stand today. The Zulu people in South Africa built traditional beehive-shaped huts called iQukwane, woven from wood, reeds, and thatch, all materials easily replaced from their surrounding environment. In Yemen, the mud-brick skyscrapers of Shibam, often called the "Manhattan of the Desert," rise up to eleven stories high, built entirely from sun-dried mud. These structures naturally stay cool in searing heat and have stood for centuries.

This is called vernacular architecture: a type of regional construction that uses materials and resources from the local area combined with traditional building knowledge and community labor.

Today, we often treat green design as an optional upgrade or luxury. Yet, for most of human history, it was simply how people built because survival depended on understanding and respecting the local environment.

In ancient Mayan civilization, grand cities like Tikal and El Mirador were crafted from local limestone, mud, and timber. They created intricate rainwater catchment systems and massive reservoirs to secure water during dry seasons. On steep hillsides, they positioned terraces to prevent erosion and protect precious topsoil. Mayan architecture blended seamlessly into the dense rainforests that today cover much of Central America.

Guatemala, considered the cradle of Mayan civilization, is a land as dangerous as it is beautiful. The country sits on three tectonic plates, making it one of the most geologically active regions on Earth, with frequent earthquakes and volcanic activity. In 1976, Guatemala experienced an earthquake that lasted less than a minute and left nearly 23,000 people dead. It is home to thirty-seven recognized volcanoes, with Fuego and Pacaya in near-constant eruption. During the rainy season, entire mountainsides can give way to landslides, destroying everything in their path.

Like we said: beautiful but dangerous. This is where the Maya chose to build their homes and mastered the art of living in balance with their surroundings.

However, while the Mayans once built to work with the land, modern Guatemala struggles under a different reality. Centuries of colonization, rapid urbanization, and economic instability have led to sprawling, fragile settlements that no longer respect the contours of the land.

Today, many Guatemalans live in makeshift homes pieced together from scrap metal, tarps, and cinder blocks. These improvised structures cling to steep ravines and unstable hillsides, the very same landscapes the Maya once carefully terraced and reinforced. When heavy rains arrive, landslides sweep entire neighborhoods away in minutes. Earthquakes shatter buildings not designed to flex and breathe as ancient stone walls once did.

Meanwhile, a severe waste crisis compounds the danger. Without strong systems for recycling or proper waste management, trash accumulates in rivers and overruns landfills. In Guatemala, towering landfills threaten the health and safety of the communities they're meant to serve. What was once a culture of collaboration with the land has given way to a struggle against it.

But in remembering the lessons of the Maya, there is an invitation to build with respect and a deep understanding of place. A return to vernacular architecture, not because sustainability is a buzzword but because it means survival.



Our partner, Long Way Home, has accepted this invitation, equipping young minds in Guatemala with the skills and opportunities they need to build resilient, sustainable infrastructure for their communities. Through their innovative Hero School, students not only follow Guatemala's general curriculum but also receive hands-on training in transforming waste into valuable, life-changing structures.

Their take on vernacular infrastructure is different from Mayan times because the resources around them have changed. One thing they have in abundance now? Non-biodegradable waste.

Amazingly, they've found a way to blend traditional knowledge with modern solutions—building with natural materials like wood and mud alongside repurposed items like rubber tires and plastic bottles. This approach not only reduces waste but also creates structures designed to withstand Guatemala's challenging landscape.

For Project 63: Hero Students Building Tomorrow, our giving community built a new Hero School classroom to support their growing student body and provided materials for the student-led projects that strengthen their communities.

This year, these talented students built smoke-efficient stoves, offering families safer and more efficient ways to cook while reducing harmful smoke inhalation. They constructed water tanks to ensure reliable access to clean water and designed dry composting latrines to improve sanitation without relying on scarce water resources. Finally, they built tire retaining walls that are flexible enough to move with the frequent earthquakes yet strong enough to prevent devastating landslides on Guatemala's steep mountainsides.

And you gave them the education and tools they needed to get the job done. Thank you for helping students become leaders who serve their communities and care for their land with purpose.

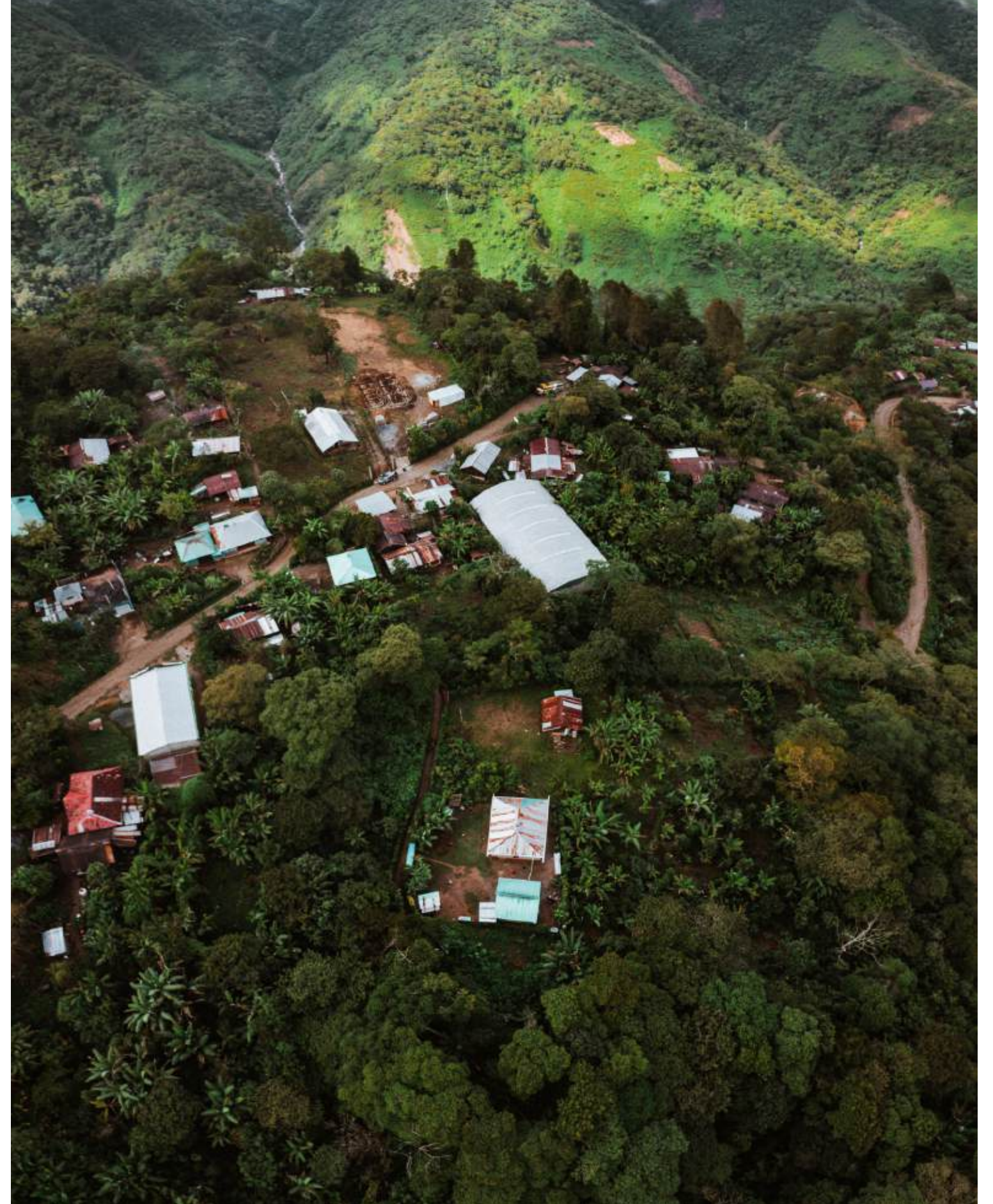
Hero Students Building Tomorrow



Village Pal



Quiché Department, Guatemala



Project 65

The Appalachian Mountains are among the oldest mountain ranges in the world. At their peak, they once rivaled the towering Himalayas. Geological research reveals evidence that relentless erosion across millennia has worn them down into the rounded, forested ridges and shadowed valleys we know today. These slopes have been traversed by explorers, sheltered Cherokee communities, watched over generations of settlers, and weathered countless storms. But in 2024, even these steadfast mountains could not hold back the floodwaters.

To understand why, let's look into the science that made Hurricane Helene's arrival in Western North Carolina on September 27, 2024, so devastating.

Days before Helene arrived, another storm had already set the stage. A stalled weather front over the Tennessee Valley dropped 8 to 12 inches of rain on the Appalachian slopes, soaking the ground and filling rivers to their edges. By the time the hurricane roared in, the mountains were already saturated. To put it simply, their "cup" was already filled to the brim.

As Helene moved north from the Gulf Coast, it carried an almost unimaginable plume of warm, tropical moisture. Far more than most storms, fueled by hotter ocean waters and favorable upper-air currents. Helene's moisture transport was measured at 1.5 times historical records for the area, equivalent to about 3,000 kilograms per meter per second pouring into the atmosphere above North Carolina.

To help picture that, imagine a one-meter-wide gate in the sky. In just one second, 3,000 kilograms (or 3 tons) of water vapor rush through that tiny "gate." Now multiply that by the full width of Helene's moisture plume, likely hundreds of kilometers across, and you have a truly massive river in the sky.

Then came the mountains themselves. The steep ridges of Appalachia's ranges forced Helene's humid air upward in a process called orographic lifting. As air is pushed over peaks, it cools and condenses into heavy rainfall, squeezing the moisture from the storm's swollen clouds like a sponge.

Over just three days, communities saw up to 30 inches of rain. To put that in perspective, a total of 3 inches in 24 hours is often considered a heavy rain event. This deluge was so extreme that it's been described as a once-in-a-thousand-year storm.

When the rain finally stopped, the danger wasn't over. The mountain valleys acted as natural bowls, trapping heavy rainwaters and creating significant flooding. Then the soaked hillsides gave way under their own weight. Nearly 2,000 landslides thundered down slopes, tearing through forests and burying homes and roads.

In Western North Carolina alone, at least 108 people lost their lives to the storm. Over 7,000 road sites were damaged, including 654 bridges connecting communities. And nearly 1,000 homes were completely destroyed in the hurricane's wake, with 2,360 more suffering major damage.

Michael Boone is pictured on the next page—his home accounts for one of the thousand completely lost to the storm. Michael had lived in his mountainside cabin for over 30 years. In the far-right photo, you'll find him standing in front of what remains of it. When Helene's rain came, Michael remembers stepping onto his front porch and seeing a wall of water, mud, and trees rushing toward his property.



The photo on the left is of Michael showing us the debris that struck his home. Within seconds, it stripped his house down to its foundations and carried it away, with Michael still inside. He was knocked unconscious and came to hundreds of yards away, suffering crushed ribs and internal bleeding. Miraculously, Michael survived for thirty hours until a rescue team reached him.

Today, because of our giving community, Michael's home is being rebuilt on the very foundations of what the storm left behind.

For Project 65: Hurricane Helene Relief, we partnered with Conduit Carolinas to help rebuild homes for families in McDowell County, one of the hardest hit areas in Western North Carolina. They have identified 400 families in need and have begun a five-year commitment to help restore this community.

Michael's home is just one of the many you've helped rebuild. Your generosity has not only provided roofs and walls, but has restored safety and hope for families who lost everything. With each home rebuilt, each bridge repaired, and each life supported, you're helping Western North Carolina build strong foundations once again. Thank you for being part of this remarkable renewal of our Western neighbors.

Hurricane Helene Relief



THE GOOD STUFF

56,141 immediate lives impacted

35.8% new donor growth

76.4% donor retention rate

\$484K TOTAL DONATIONS

49.95% increase compared to 2023

\$172.7K raised for projects

\$311.3K raised for Mighty Fund

\$287K TOTAL EXPENSES

\$231.3K (80.5%) total program costs

\$35.2K (12.2%) development

\$20.5K (7.1%) administration

We promise: 100% of every project donation goes directly to the project it supports.

To cover operational costs, we created the Mighty Fund—to support our team and continue spreading the joy of giving. In 2024, the Mighty Fund overflow also helped carry a few of our projects over the finish line.

Foundations/Churches 11.1%

Corporations 10.4%

Individual 78.5%

GIVER TYPE



Roughly two thousand years ago, a widow slipped two copper coins into the temple treasury in Jerusalem. These coins are called mites, representing the smallest Jewish coins in circulation during the time of Jesus. By every worldly measure, her offering was small and inconsequential. But Jesus saw what others missed: the widow's heart. In those two coins, He saw that she had given everything she could, she gave willingly, and therefore, she gave more than all the rest.

That quiet act of surrender became one of the most enduring stories of giving in Scripture and is the story our organization is built upon.

The world is still full of gifts like the widow's. There are those who give their mite and are overlooked because their gifts seem small to human eyes. But to God, these gifts hold immeasurable weight and can do immeasurably more when offered freely to Him.

That's why we exist: to Make Giving Better. To ensure that what is given in faith doesn't go unnoticed but is seen through real outcomes, with real hope, in real lives.

Mite is still growing. We're expanding not just in reach but in conviction. We believe God never intended charity to be transactional. He designed it to be deeply relational, something born out of love and far more than numbers on a chart or statistics on a page.

When giving reflects His heart, it transforms both the receiver and the giver.

That's the kind of giving we're here for. The kind we see with the widow's mite in Mark 12. The kind that mirrors Christ Himself.

Here's to another year of looking closer, giving better, and serving you, our valued donor and our Savior, who is the greatest giver of all!

Gratefully,
Abigail & The Mite Team



