



Images of my grandfather
Steve Vinton, June 26, 2007

I sat down totally spent having spoken to the thousands of people gathered on the hillside in the village of Ulolela.

And then Emmanueli rose and started to speak and I found myself looking out at him silhouetted against the sun as it sunk lower in the sky. And suddenly I was enthralled with what he had to say. I was tired, my energy drained from speaking myself, but the crowd was energized and they were hanging on Emmanueli's every word, and it brought energy back into me. Maybe it was the way Emmanueli would turn every now and then and rays from the sun would seem to almost glisten off of his face, but suddenly the images just started flashing back to me -- of my grandfather. I remembered all over again the way it was when my grandfather spoke back in the villages in Congo, I saw in my mind again the looks on people's faces when Baba spoke, the way his hands moved all the time as he spoke, the way he never stood in one place, the way he became a part of the crowd and the crowd a part of him. It suddenly dawned on me that Emmanueli was speaking in that same way! I think my mouth hung open there for a moment as it all became clear to me. Emmanueli was moving the way Baba used to move. His hands were gesturing everywhere. His voice was strong and loud. I could see people's faces the way they looked up at him and followed where ever he moved, the way they laughed with him, the intensity of it all.

My grandfather never taught me how to speak.

I guess I was just with him all the time watching him, hearing him, sensing his passion, being enthralled with what he was saying. I remember the first time he called me

to stand up there with him and be a part of speaking with him, my knees nearly buckled under me I was so afraid. He never told me to move around, to become a part of the crowd. He never told me to use my hands as I spoke to draw people into conversation with me. He never said a word about how to do it. He just let me be with him.

Suddenly I was remembering the very first time I had Emmanueli stand up in the village of Malolwa back when he was still my student and I had him come up there and stand with me and to speak briefly with me as I spoke to the crowd in that village.

The wonder of it all is that for these past two and a half years Emmanueli has mostly been in the background in all of our meetings in the villages -- I gave the key opportunities to speak to Godfrey, I had to. I had to concentrate on reducing my role and on giving Godfrey more and more opportunity to speak, I had to watch him progress -- and I felt the tremendous joy of seeing Godfrey morph from being the timid, frightened, nearly limp speaker he was in the beginning into the wonderfully powerful and convicting speaker that he is today. I've had a wonderful feeling of pleasure each time I've watched Godfrey speak lately knowing that he could speak as well or quite frankly often better now to the crowds than I could myself.

But I never would have guessed that Emmanueli had become in the process such an equally excellent speaker. Here he was enthralling me -- and enthralling the thousands of people on that hillside. And suddenly it dawned on me -- Godfrey wasn't with us because he had to be in Mbeya having it out with the inspectors one last time over our

school at Sawala and he couldn't be in two places at once. Those inspectors who had played a painful game of cat and mouse with us for all of these months, who wasted our time and our money, opened the doors today for something that was priceless, of incredible value, a true treasure.

I firmly believe with all my heart that one day soon there will be a school on that hillside where we stood. There are so many kids in that village and I believe that the time has finally come for the kids there to get the chance to go to school. Those people stole my heart by carrying us singing and dancing to the hillside, by giving me a goat to take home with me for my sons, by letting all of the bricks that they had already made speak for themselves. But what I'll never forget -- and what I'm so thankful for -- is that it was in the village of

Ulolela that, in Emmanueli, I saw again the images of my grandfather.

You know I never travel with a camera because cameras spoil the moment, they detract, they make people nervous, make them wonder why I'm there, make people suspicious of my motives. But this was a day that I do indeed wish that I had had a camera with me. I would have loved to have had a picture of Emmanueli speaking to that huge crowd, with the sun setting in the background, with the mass of the crowd staring at him, if for no other reason than to be able one day to give Emmanueli that picture. For me personally though I'll never need that picture. That image is one that is forever frozen in my mind that I'll always be able to see anytime I want.

Just like the image of my grandfather.