

BRO. TOM OSTER

Celebrating 60 years of profession

We are each a unique gift of God and have our own story, to reflect on and share if we care to. Suffering a fractured skull around the age of eight or nine was a touch of God experience for me. Although I was in and out of consciousness, I heard the family doctor tell my mother that it was questionable if I would live for I was bleeding out of my left ear. A little later, I experienced being given a choice, no spiritual vision, or bright lights, but a clear choice to relax and begin my eternity or to choose life. There is no doubt but that the fractured skull has affected my life in different ways, as I'm still learning.

Though I started out as a Marianist doing various forms of maintenance there arose a greater need for cooks. I enjoyed the cooking experience until a second varicose vein operation (1957 and 1962) gave the doctor the impression that a change in work was required. I was doing maintenance, until there arose the need for a cook, in January 1966, at the novitiate near Charlottesville, VA, until July 1967.

In July 1967, I was doing maintenance and some cooking, but then the properties, Beacon and the novitiate, were sold (early 1968) and I volunteered for Africa. I arrived at Matero Boys Secondary School in Lusaka, Zambia, in October 1968.

The students had come from all over the country and I think most of the students had grown up in their own village with its traditional language, stories, dances and songs. Their enthusiasm to share of their heritage made me wonder about my own cultural heritage, Polish and German. John Michener's "Poland" was a great help with that. The charismatic renewal was just beginning in the states, when I went to Africa in 1968, and I had a small but meaningful touch of it before I left. I knew it would be some time before it would arrive in Africa.

On home leave in 1974, I was able to spend some time with a number of other religious connected with "HOPE" (House Of Prayer Experience) in New Jersey, which confirmed God's presence and abiding love. On returning to Africa in 1975, I found some other religious similarly touched by our God, by grace, with whom I could share prayer and of God's unfolding offerings of cooperation. God's gifting of religious seeking peoples over the years currently has my interest, Confucius, Buddha, Hindus, Taoists, Abraham, Moses, Mohammad. But also God's gifts of cultures and peoples. As we consider the various European nations, Irish, English, French, German, Italian, Polish, Russian, we recognize distinguishing characteristics and qualities.

In Africa we can find thousands of different tribes with their own language and heritage, but the same qualities of kindredship, very relational, respecting of all life, of ancestors, nature, the earth. Many of the thousands of African saying affirm their unique gifts of God.

We should learn of, know and appreciate our heritages and remain open to God's unique, differing gifts, presence in others.

May our God, and Mary, grace you in discerning, as you select what ought to be used, selected.