

South Africa



the '2nd' time around !

March 2009

Dr. Joseph E. Marshall Jr.
Co-Founder/Executive Director, Omega Boys Club

In March of 2009, I got the opportunity to go to South Africa again. It wasn't a long trip this time—only six days. But the program was growing there and a second training was needed. I was glad to go back.

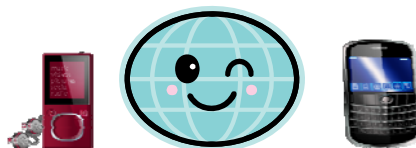
So I'm going back to South Africa. It's a year and a half since my first visit there, and here I am on a plane headed back. This time it's not under the sponsorship of the State Department. A freeze has been put on speaker funded travel—there's a recession you know—so they told me they couldn't do it this time. This trip's on Omega. Got a good ticket price, though. The rand is down against the dollar.

Llowellyn has asked me to come do an **Alive & Free** Training Institute. He thinks he's got some more people ready to do the work. It's apparent that things have moved along pretty well since my first visit. Llowellyn's Ubomi Foundation ("Ubomi" means "Life") is up and running and they have been working with kids and building partnerships all over Cape Town.

Folks from the Ubomi team have been to America several times and last year at their request, I sent Ms. Estell down here. Now it's my turn again.

The plane ride is long, but this time I'm prepared. My staff has forced me into 21st century technology, so now I've got a Blackberry and an iPod and all sorts of wizardry and gadgets on my computer. So when I'm not sleeping I shouldn't get bored.

Hey if this stuff works for Obama, it'll work for me.



Besides listening to a lot of music on the plane ride, I read two books on the way over.

The first was Suze Orman's *2009 Action Plan—Keeping Your Money Safe and Sound* (what little I have). I know a whole lot of folks are reading that book too. The second is *The Pact*—the story of three young brothers from Newark, NJ who made a promise to each other to become doctors and then actually fulfilled that dream. I always wanted to read it, and boy I was not disappointed. The story is immensely inspiring. I think it would be a great movie, and do a lot of good too. I'm hoping it's on somebody's radar in Hollywood. I should know better though, I've been trying to get *Street Soldiers* done for years. At any rate, I think I'm going to buy a bunch of these books and do a give away on the radio show. And I'm going to give one each to Tino, RJ, Gary and Ty—the four Omegas from Richmond, CA who are at Tennessee State together.

Llowellyn and his wife met me at the airport and took me to Allen and June Subban's home where I'll be staying. I met Allen on my first trip here. He works for the Western Cape Department of Education and is a key part of the Ubomi team.

He recently got a huge promotion and will soon be working for the national Department of Education. That will be great for the Movement. He'll have access to all the schools in the country. Wow, Alive & Free curriculum in all the schools! If Allen has his way, that's the way it'll be.



Allen and June are perfect hosts. They turn their home over to me, feed me, check on me and drive me all over town. They're always making sure I'm comfortable and have whatever I need. "My home is your home," they say. They want me to come back one day and just hang out—no work. You know, like a vacation.

I know I sure could use one.



The first day of the training was great. We did it in a public school in town. Llowellyn got the space and the food donated. Nice crowd—almost 30 people. The best thing was seeing all the rest of my South African Street Soldiers—Whidney, Deon, Davina and Yolanda. They've all been working hard. Man. I'm telling you, these people are serious over here. They live and breathe Alive & Free. They really believe in it.



Last night I stayed up and watched a South African film called *Tsotsi*. *Tsotsi* means thug or little gangster and the movie is kind of a South African *Boyz in the Hood*. It's extremely well done, and won a bunch of awards a couple of years ago. It's just what I need to make the connection complete. When I showed it with the other films I use to teach about the disease of violence, everybody got it. No questions asked.

I can't say enough about the connections that Llowellyn and the Ubomi team are making. Before I even began the training there were three speakers who addressed the group--a city councilman who is the chair person of the city's safety and security committee, a gentleman who is the managing director of the South African Ubuntu Foundation and Amy Biehl Foundation Trusts, and an urban planner charged with the redesign of the townships. All of them want to be involved with Ubomi. All of them want to be involved with Alive & Free. That's pretty cool.

That evening we went to a reception given in my honor at the U.S. Consul General's office. It was nice to know they hadn't forgotten me. I got to speak to the entire group and tell them all about Alive & Free South Africa. The new Consul General is an African American woman from Houston, TX, and even though she wasn't there the first time I came, as a woman who had raised four black boys, she completely understood my mission. Like everyone else she was extremely excited and complimentary about the work. ("We've got to let President Obama know about this," I told her.) She promised to get me back here when the freeze was lifted. I know she will.



The Consul General of the United States of America

Dr. Alberta Mayberry

*Requests the pleasure of your company
at a cocktail party in honor of*

Dr. Joseph Marshall

*Founder and President of the Streets Soldiers/Omega Boys Club U.S.
and creator of the “Alive and Free Movement South Africa”
(a movement dedicated to youth empowerment and the eradication of
violence)*

on Tuesday, March 24, 2009

from 6:30pm – 9.00pm

*“Fiesole”
24 Upper Bebington
Bishopscourt
(map enclosed)*

Dress: Traditional or casual dress

Day 1 was finally done.

Now why did I say that! I should have known better. It's Tuesday night back home and I should have known that I would wake up in the middle of the night and not be able to go back to sleep. The class and Family meeting are going on. I know the kids are wondering where I am. Dre and Ms. Estell will tell them. If they only understood how much Tuesday night means to the whole world. When I get back home, I'll tell them again.

Every Training Institute is special. It's an experience. It's both exhilarating and exhausting. No matter how many times I've done it, I take each one seriously, because the folks in front of me have the potential to save someone's life if I do it well. So I put every ounce of my being into it. I can never afford to give it less than my best.

Each day of the Training builds on the previous day. **Day 1** is all about explaining about the disease of violence— what that means, why we call it a disease, how and why young people get infected, the treatment process, what the germs and symptoms are. For just about everyone, it's an entirely new way of looking at the problem of violence. There's a homework assignment I give that *must* be done. It gives me some idea about how serious they are. I get very upset when folks don't do it.

Day 2 deals with the fallout—the Emotional Residue—of someone getting into violence (or as we say “getting infected”) and the toll it takes on them. It's an essential, but probably the most difficult part of the treatment process. There's a lot of film study and discussion about concepts and techniques. The whole day is pretty intense.

I think everybody did well today. Certainly, they all seemed immersed and engaged in the material. I made it a point to continually ask for feedback and check for understanding. A particular question I'm always asking is “does this make sense?” So far just about all the responses have been ‘yes’.

(By the way, I just got the evaluations from the first day. Understanding, clarity and style of presentation are rated on a scale of 1-5. There are a lot of 5's so it seems to be going well).



I wrapped up Day 2 with a showing of *Daddy Hunger*, Ray Upchurch's film about absent fathers and the importance of fatherhood. There wasn't a sound in the house when it was over. I let them go for the day. No homework tonight. They'd been through enough.

Believe you me, I was tired, but my day wasn't done just yet. Llowellyn took me out to the Eureka Youth Center, a juvenile detention center about 20 miles outside of town. The Ubomi team has been working with the kids there and he wanted me to meet them. The boys were really happy to see us—apparently it had been a while since they had come.

They were 9-16 years of age and were there for a variety of offenses—housebreaking, burglary, auto theft, armed robbery, rape and murder. The main thing they wanted to know was when Ubomi was coming back. They had learned so much in their **Alive & Free** sessions. They had watched and discussed film clips from *Boyz in the Hood* and *Sugar Hill* and *American Me*. They had learned that a **Friend Will Never Lead You to Danger**. One of the boys said to me the Omega motto:

“The More You Know, The More You Owe”

—in Afrikaner no less!

It sent chills up my spine. When Llowellyn told them that I was the one who came up with the whole **Alive & Free** thing - they just beamed. You know on my next trip, I'm gonna be right back here with these boys. Maybe I'll learn to speak a little Afrikaner and shock them.

On the drive back into town, I checked my email. This message was in my inbox. It took my breath away. It was really special to read:

To Everyone involved in Street Soldiers Radio,

I just want to say first of all that I have been listening to you since I was about 11 or 12. I'm now 25, and I just want to thank you for having been and continuing to be THE most inspiring, positive, and beautiful thing on the radio. I really don't know why you don't get airtime more than once a week. I know a lot of young people are talking about how there are no role models for them these days, but I think you all are doing a fine and much needed job of filling in those shoes.

The reason I'm writing you is that I've recently discovered your podcasts and I can't thank you enough for setting that up. I want to request that you let people know about the podcasts on your show every week and how to get them.

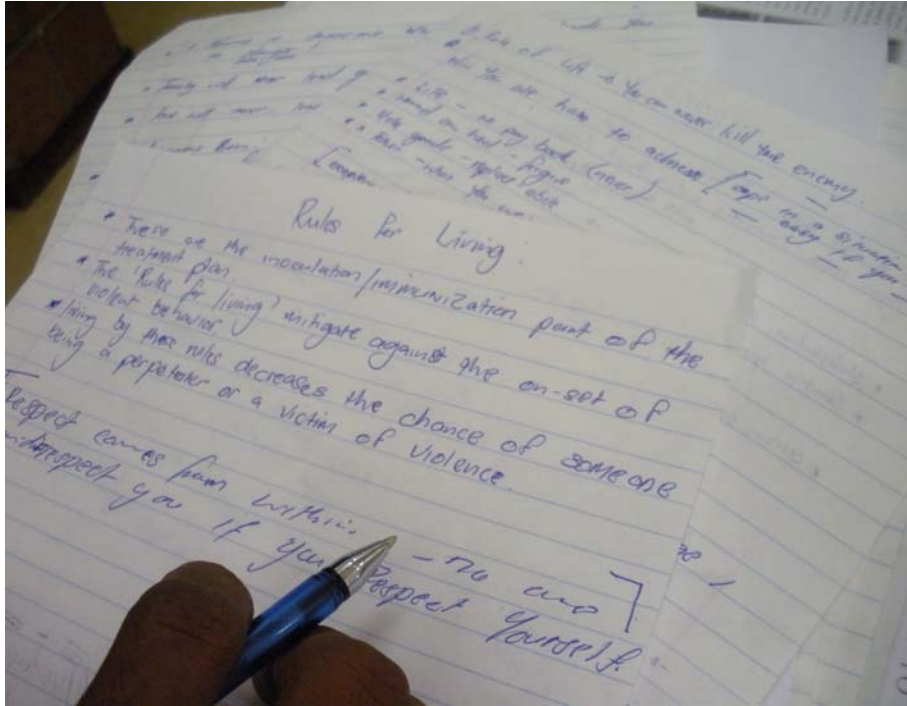
Times are real heavy right now, and I've found myself listening to older Street Soldiers episodes during the day instead of the radio and it's doing me a lot of good. I also think that if people need to revisit an episode to help them with something they're going through that it would be good for them to know how to get to the podcast so they can put it on their iPods or cd player and take it with them.

**Much Love & Respect,
Jason**

Day 2 was finally done

(P.S. I just read through the homework assignments the group turned in. Some of these folks have been through it in their own lives. They don't know it yet, but they are going to have their own Family Meeting tomorrow).

Rules for Living



The **third day** of the Training is for me personally, the best of the three. That's the day the '**Rules for Living**' are given. It's the final piece of the puzzle, the last ingredient in the **Alive & Free** lifestyle. The Rules for Living are pretty powerful. I love teaching and illustrating them.

It all went pretty smoothly. I rolled the rules out one by one—

1). Life,

2). Friendship,

3). Change, and

4). Respect. → Respect is the toughest one. It's the most challenging concept to teach. It's really deep and always takes the most out of me. I try to teach it last because after that, I'm pretty much done. But everybody seemed to get it. In fact everybody seemed to get them all. The real challenge will be to see if they can live by these Rules. If they can, I've got a new group of **South African Street Soldiers**.



There was still one more task to do before I let them go. It was time for their Family Meeting—the time for them to stand before the group, read their homework assignments and share their stories. This is really important, because they are going to be asking young people to do the same. I always say, **“don’t ask young folks to do something you’re not willing to do yourself”**. One by one they got up—some with a little push by me-- and read their papers. It was tough for some of them--a lot of Anger, Fear, and Pain in there—but they did it. I was proud of them. Then we gave them their certificates and let them go.

Mission accomplished.

Later that night, Llowellyn and the Ubomi team took me out to dinner. The restaurant is located on a wine farm called Spier. I really can’t describe this place. The farm is huge—restaurants, shops, concert venues, picnic areas. They’ve even got a cheetah preserve on the grounds. (Hey, you know you in Africa when there’s a cheetah preserve). The restaurant itself was an all you can eat buffet with all kinds of food—traditional African dishes and all. Dre would love this. A young lady came to the table and painted our faces.



When I took off my jacket and put a blanket around my shoulders, everybody told me I looked like an African chief! There was musical entertainment and African dancing—man, it was cool. It was their way of saying *‘thank you’* to me. You’re definitely welcome!

Last Day

I got to sleep in late this morning, but we had a radio show interview at 11am. Llowellyn, Whidney and I appeared on 107.5 FM to talk about Alive & Free South Africa. Every bit of publicity and exposure we can get we’ll take.

Llowellyn then drove me through the coloured part of town, actually where he grew up. It’s called Mitchell’s Plain and it houses the largest coloured population in South Africa. Llowellyn told me the story of how his family was forcibly relocated out here during apartheid and how he ran from the gangs when he was a youngster. Kids were everywhere, walking to and fro and there wasn’t an adult in sight. Then we drove through Mannenburg, the most gang infested township in Cape Town. We were advised to have a police escort and not to go in there on our own, but we did anyway. Gang signs were on almost every building. The living conditions—well I’m sure you can figure that out. It was definitely the hood. You always know it when you see it,

Goodbye

They didn’t want me to leave. June (Allen’s wife) even asked me to extend my ticket. I just laughed. They gave me a few more gifts of thanks—one was a beautiful etching of the Ubomi logo—and we hugged and said goodbye. Then it was off to the airport. They didn’t drop me off though—they parked and walked with me to check-in. They said that’s the way they do it South Africa.

Final Thoughts

Well, what can I say? It was wonderful to come again and it was hard to leave again. It went by so fast. I gave the folks here my word that I would be back and I came. It’s good to keep your word. We planted the Alive & Free seed here a year and a half ago and it’s blooming. The Movement has begun. It’s underway. Ms. Estell has seen it and now I’ve seen it. Alive & Free South Africa is for real. With Llowellyn and Allen and Whidney and the whole Ubomi team behind it, I’m sure it’s here to stay. See you guys in a few months.

Now where is my iPod.....

