



U.S. PEACE CORPS/ZIMBABWE

REFERENCE LETTER FOR TOM R. CHAMBERS

I have known and worked with Tom Chambers from October 1992 through the present date. During this period Tom has been a Peace Corps Volunteer serving at the National Gallery of Zimbabwe, and I have been Director of the Peace Corps program operating in this country.

Tom was originally assigned to the National Gallery to guide and assist them in the planning and implementation of a Permanent Collection project. For decades, this African Gallery had been amassing an extensive collection of art works and artifacts - from Southern Africa, as well as other parts of the continent and the world - but had been unable to organize, classify and catalogue the pieces. For lack of both staff and expertise, much of the collection had simply remained in storage, unable to be used and to a great extent unrecognized. The Gallery wished assistance in terms of both expertise and training, so that their own personnel could learn through the cataloguing project and carry it on after the departure of the Peace Corps Volunteer. Tom Chambers came to work on this project in December 1992.

To make a long story short, the Gallery's Permanent Collection Catalogue is fully expected to be complete and in published form by the close of 1995/early 1996. It will contain over 5000 pieces of the Permanent Collection, photographed, organized and classified, and entered into the Gallery's new database, set up by Tom on computer equipment which he helped the Gallery obtain through a project grant from the African Archives and Museums Project (Smithsonian Institution). In guiding the Gallery in this computerization/cataloguing/ permanent collection effort, Tom has trained a member of the permanent Zimbabwean staff in all aspects of this project and in the general organization and administration of the Collection. Tom will leave Zimbabwe in December 1995 and will not need to be replaced by any one else from the outside. Left behind will be an organized, catalogued Permanent Collection, an up-to-date publication and, in place, an organized system and a trained person to continue the process.

The Permanent Collection project has itself been a full-time three year job. But, above and beyond that job, Tom has been able to carry out an impressive amount of other work in the Gallery and launch two other major secondary projects at the same time.

Within the Gallery itself, Tom has lent valuable assistance and training to staff in researching, preparing and installing art works and artifacts for exhibitions. His role as a member (and trainer) of the regular Gallery staff has been a particularly active one, as the permanent collection has been made more and more available to the public through exhibitions.

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In addition, he has left a lasting mark on the Gallery through his work (1) to guide the Gallery in the preparation of the African Archives and Museums proposal to computerize the permanent collection, (2) in the implementation of the proposal, once it was accepted, and in the training he has given staff in the process of that implementation, (3) in the subsequent computerization of other sections of the Gallery with that equipment, and (4) in his proposal for another project, an Art Education and Outreach program, which the Gallery has embraced and intends to implement with the assistance of Peace Corps.

Outside - but connected to - the Gallery, Tom also designed, obtained grants for and implemented the "McEwen Photographic Studio" (named for a former director of the Gallery) which is now in its third year. This "Studio" is actually a workshop course intended to train young Zimbabweans in photography and has resulted in an annual Exhibition at the Gallery of the best works generated by the participants. It has been an excellent opportunity for young, promising Zimbabweans who otherwise might have had no chance or resources to develop their talents in this medium and find a forum for presenting their works.

Apart from the Gallery - but outside its door all through the city - Tom launched a major project, called Street Kids in Action (SKIA), intended to help the Zimbabwean Urban Community mobilize and focus its resources and energy to find solutions for the increasing street kid situation in Harare. In the space of two years, SKIA has become a major organization, completely Zimbabwean directed, with a creative and practical plan to help address this very real problem of youth at risk in the capital city. Tom's skills in researching this problem, promoting efforts to organize and find solutions, mobilizing and motivating members and leaders, guiding fund-raising activities, and then pulling into the background to let the organization find its own way, were a role model of community development in the most difficult of conditions.

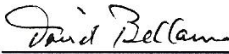
Finally, while all of the above was going on, Tom found time to assist and mentor a number of students in their projects through the Scripps Pitzer/University of Zimbabwe Study Abroad Program and the School for International Training Program in Zimbabwe. In this same advisor/counsellor role, he also provided guidance and assistance to a number of individuals and organizations seeking help and practical guidance in urban youth programs as far away as Kenya (where he made presentations to PCVs), Botswana and Ghana.

In summary, I have been continually impressed by the energy and the combination of skills Tom has applied to help people and organizations get things done. He has demonstrated outstanding technical skills in art, grant-writing, fund-raising ("development"), programming and marketing. But he has backed up these technical skills with the ability to counsel, guide and work with people, to communicate, to motivate and to step into the background at the appropriate time to let people and organizations take over

and own their own development. His work in the valuable area of "empowering people" has been exemplary.

As must be clear to anyone who works for the Peace Corps, Tom has some very desirable skills for a number of positions in our organization, ranging from an overseas APCD to training and OTAPS functions. He has a variety of career experiences, some very tangible technical and helping skills and a clear ability to function in a cross- or multi-cultural environment. I have seen Tom work very successfully, as a colleague or an advisor, with host country nationals and Americans, and with volunteers from Peace Corps, as well as a number of other groups. He does this well, and I see in him especially strong potential for an overseas staff position. He would bring to the job not only these useful skills but also a strong understanding of what sustainable development and 'ownership' are all about. I recommend him highly to Peace Corps as a potential APCD, OTAPS specialist or trainer.

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David Bellama
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