

From Brad Lancaster, Tucson, Arizona

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Mr Phiri changed my life as he has changed many lives. He did so with the example he lives, and a challenge he offers.

The example

Spending a day with Mr Phiri on his farm enabled me to see: I was able to see how an individual and a family could make things better for their surroundings, not worse. I saw how they could create a relative oasis out of a wasteland, simply by working with nature and planting the rain.

I was inspired by the stories, the jokes, and the vision of turning adversity into ingenuity – I *wanted* to do likewise.

I was empowered by the hand-built strategies made only from what was at hand – I *could* do likewise.

These were not stand-alone strategies, but integrated ones – all overlapping and contributing to the health and abundance of the farm, its watershed, its soils, and its family. After several years of having studied the integrated systems of permaculture and water harvesting, I finally saw, through Mr Phiri's farm and community work, how these concepts could be manifested in a synergistic, dynamic, effective whole.

Something clicked. Thoughts and ideas became real.

The challenge

After touring Mr Phiri's farm, I was amazed by what had been accomplished there, but I was also troubled.

I told Mr Phiri how bad the situation was in my community of Tucson, Arizona, how we had killed two rivers, abundant forests, and numerous springs, and dropped our water table over 100 meters in less than 50 years by over-pumping our groundwater, sealing our watersheds with pavement, and draining the rain. I told Mr Phiri how I no longer wanted to be part of the problem, and how I was planning to move away.

Mr Phiri said I could not move away. He said if I ran from my problems, I would take them with me, and plant them wherever I went, growing still more problems. "Go back home, set your roots, and commit to finding and living solutions," he challenged me.

“If you succeed,” he continued, “then you will plant solutions wherever you go, not problems.”

I left Mr Phiri’s farm at the end of the day for Bulawayo, determined to meet his challenge.

Now, years later, I hope I have done just that. I, along with my brother, have turned our urban wasteland of a lot into a relative oasis, a sustainable mini-farm of sorts that plants the rain and more. Mr Phiri’s example and the challenge he put forth are infectious. They inspire others who hear of his work, stories, and call to action. I feel they are extensions of him, and they have spread throughout much of our neighborhood and city, and beyond, to parts of our state, our country, and the world, as his example and challenge are shared with others.

I tell these stories and pass on the challenge through my actions, my words, and my books, *Rainwater Harvesting for Drylands and Beyond*. Mr Phiri is at the core of it all. If it were not for him, I never would have taken this incredible, rewarding path.

Thank you, Mr Phiri. I thank you, as do hundreds more who continually approach me to express their thanks for the inspiration and motivation given them by the Water Farmer of Zimbabwe.

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