

Howell e-Mail News

Tuesday, September 20, 2005

Dear Friends and Family,

Greetings from Johannesburg, South Africa! It hasn't quite been a full two months since our last newsletter, though it feels like longer to us since we have been so busy, so this may be a lengthy update! We left Montepuez on Sunday September 11 for Nacala for the annual meeting of Good News for Africa (our legally registered organization here in Mozambique), before leaving Thursday the 15 for South Africa. We enjoyed spending two days here with our teammates Chad and Amy Westerholm, (who are expecting their first baby in January!) who were returning from their furlough and have now flown back up to northern Mozambique, and we are scheduled to fly tomorrow evening to London and on to the States for our first furlough. Here in Jo'burg we arrange doctor's appointments (to purchase next years' malaria medications), and we always enjoy a day or two of rest before those long flights, as well as hot showers, ice cream and McDonalds french fries!

When we wrote our last newsletter, after over a year of praying and waiting, we had received official permission to live and work in the Cabo Delgado province and we were preparing to wrap up our lives in Nampula. Those last few weeks in Nampula were very busy - tying up loose ends, paying bills, and making lots of good-bye visits to our friends there. We also hosted a get-together with some of the members of the churches we had been working with to "despedir" (say goodbye, take our leave) and express our love for them and our thankfulness for getting to spend a year of our lives with them. Our last Sunday with them was also full of thankfulness and good-byes, and Abby stayed a record three-plus hours during the fellowship that morning (she usually doesn't last that long), so we were able to fully enjoy it together. Also, in early August, Alan took a four-day trip with Silva, one of our friends who worked for us, to get some work started on our house up in Montepuez.

So then on Friday, August 19 we loaded up the car (an understatement - it took over three hours) and closed the over-a-year-long Nampula chapter of our lives to open a new one again in Cabo Delgado. The drive up was an adventure in itself - we had lived in Nampula for over a year, and we still managed to get everything we had into our one pick-up truck for the drive up, and we were quite a site (think Beverly Hillbillies, minus the rocking chair). We attracted a lot of stares on the drive, even though piling stuff high on top of a vehicle is not at all strange for Mozambicans, they rarely see foreigners do it!

And so began our return to Montepuez. We knew it would be a very busy time, since we would only have three weeks before having to leave again for the Good News for Africa meeting in Nacala, immediately after which we would leave for furlough. Our main goals for the three weeks were to renew relationships and get our house more "liveable" so we can hit the ground running when we return from furlough in January. We received very warm welcomes from our friends there in Montepuez and enjoyed visiting again in their homes. Many of

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them have had new babies in the last year, and their children have all grown so much taller. They also enjoyed seeing how Abby had grown (she was not walking when we left in June 2004), how much she talks, and hearing her count to five in Metto always brings a big laugh. Martha, Mika, and I were also able to participate in a 2-day women's conference at one of the churches in town, which went very well. In addition, Alan also squeezed in a couple of trips: one to Ancuabe (Ahn-kwah-bay) to follow up on contacts with our friend Alberto who is from there, and one to Meloco (Mel-oh-koo), to bring our landlord's aging father to Montepuez to live because of his deteriorating health.

Working on our house was an adventure of its own. Half the job was unpacking and moving in - for the first time (for all practical purposes) - since we never really unpacked much at all back in 2004. So we spent a lot of time opening boxes that had been shipped over on the container, putting books on shelves, hanging family pictures, hanging curtains, washing out dusty sheets and towels, and laughing at ourselves at some of the things we had packed back in late 2002/early 2003 ("why did I bring *that* ?!"). But then in addition to unpacking, the house itself needed a lot of work. The house we live in is a pretty old Portuguese/African style concrete house that was never completely finished when it was originally built and is really showing its age. It was more or less a concrete shell with a little plumbing and a little electricity, but with a lot of room for improvement. During our three weeks there in Montepuez, we had a latrine finished outside for our workers, a water pump put on the cistern outside, pipes run from the cistern to the house (so we could have running water all day instead of only for a few hours), a bamboo fence put around the latrine and cistern (for safety for Abby), iron grating put on our front and back porches, a sink installed in the second bathroom, the toilet actually hooked up to plumbing in the second bathroom (so you don't have to bucket-flush), a hot-water shower head installed in the second bathroom, new electrical wiring installed for the shower head and for several new lights and electrical sockets throughout the house, a bamboo guard house added around the back corner of the house, and the front of the house painted. Most of these house improvements we paid other people to do (electrician, plumber, masons, bamboo workers, etc.). However, Montepuez is far enough "out" that you can't really find a good plumber (or plumbing parts, either) because there isn't a demand for a good plumber or good parts there, so Alan took a day trip to Nampula at one point to buy supplies and bring back a really sharp contractor-guy with him to stay a couple of days and work. We feel good about the amount of work that was done, with only a few things left to do when we return in January. Along similar lines, if you have noticed that we have not been emailing much over the last month or so, it is because the dial-up internet connection is unbelievably slow - about one-third the speed we got in Nampula. It makes it very time consuming and expensive for us to send or receive anything more than text emails, but our teammates are looking into whether or not we have any other options, so we will

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keep you updated! Even though it is so slow, we are very thankful that we can even have email in so remote a place.

Another very significant point is that the day we arrived back in town, we heard that the Montepuez district administrator was being transferred to another (very distant) province, and that his replacement had already arrived. We were all very interested to hear this news, since the old administrator had been very unhelpful to us, and probably our main antagonist in the problems over the course of the last year. Alan, Jeremy, and Aaron went to greet the new administrator and introduce themselves (and take him banana bread), and they were very encouraged by their meeting with him, saying that he was very open, welcoming, and positive; seeming to be a "man of peace," which is in stark contrast to the former administrator. We are hopeful and prayerful about how this may shape our future work in the area. We also took a quick trip over to Pemba (our provincial capital) one morning to check the mail and greet several government officials there before leaving for our furlough, thanking them again for all their work with us over the last year.

Overall, we all three families expressed feeling a strong sense of peace in returning to Montepuez and of working long-term to share the news of the Kingdom of God there in that area. We are very aware, though, that in several ways we are more or less "starting over," with a lot of learning to do as we continue to seek to understand our context in Montepuez, and to then discern how we best fit in that picture, developing the details of a vision for our work in that area. On that note, we ask that you ask God for:

- *Understanding for our team as we seek to understand our context and then from that to discern the details of a vision.*
- *Understanding for our team as we immerse ourselves again in language and culture learning.*
- *The Makua-Metto people and the Montepuez area to come to know and have life in God's Kingdom.*
- *Peace to replace fear and contempt in the Cabo Delgado province.*
 - Even this last week a coastal town way up north in Cabo Delgado (called Mocimboa de Praia), experienced some violent clashes between the two political parties, and several people were killed. This created tensions as some sympathizers started rumors of plans to create similar problems in other Cabo Delgado towns and cities, which thankfully, though, were only rumors.
- *Health for us, our teammates, and all our children.*
 - The last two months have brought more sickness for the team than we have had since we arrived: all of us on the team have been sick at least once if not twice or more, with malaria, or gastrointestinal illnesses that drain all your energy and make it difficult to stay hydrated, or lingering allergy and sinus infections.

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- *Health for me and the baby in our last 2 months of pregnancy, and for a safe delivery and healthy baby in Dallas.*
 - By the way, a doctor in Nampula says that we are having another girl... so we will see in November if she is right!
- *Peace and smooth transitions for our family with all the travelling during our first furlough.*

We arrive in Dallas Wednesday afternoon (the day after tomorrow), with a couple of days to have an appointment with our midwife there and try to get over jet lag before heading to Nashville this Saturday to spend a month with our Donelson church family. Then we go back to Dallas Monday October 24 for six weeks (roughly 3 weeks before due date (November 17) and 3 weeks after - as much as you can plan these things!) with my family, after which we will go to Memphis around December 10 to be with Alan's family. In the end we will head back to Dallas in time to pack our suitcases and depart for Mozambique on January 16. Please contact us by email if you want to get together - we are very much looking forward to spending time with those we love so much but live so far away from!

in Christ,
Rachel, Alan, Abby, and baby Howell

PS - we will be uploading pictures of these last few months in Mozambique when we get to Dallas and have access to a nice speedy internet connection later this week - we will you posted!