

# Howell's e-Mail News

## Friday, February 10, 2006

Dear Friends and Family,

Greetings again from Montepuez! We are finally home after a wonderful but BUSY furlough and also finally recovered from travel fatigue. As I write, we have been home for two weeks, and our land line was only connected for our dial-up internet access yesterday (after multiple visits to the Telephone company office and multiple guarantees of "oh, yes, it will be started up tomorrow" and then no one showing up!), so tonight we hope to send this newsletter and receive almost three week's worth of emails. We will see! We also had the guys from the electric company here at the house four or five times our first week back. The wiring in this house is old and cheap, as are also the lines connecting us to the pole at the street, and for the first week or so we were without power more than we had it! Welcome back to Mozambique! =)

We are so thankful for God's blessings on our furlough and travels. We have been reminded that despite the many miles in our lives and living so far from our families, that in the Kingdom of God we have many homes and many families, and that has been a blessing. We arrived in the US at the end of September, staying a couple of days in Dallas for a visit with the midwife before heading to Nashville to spend a month with the Donelson Church of Christ, our sponsoring church. Our calendar filled up very quickly, and we were richly blessed by our time with our Donelson family. It was an encouragement for us to experience again *in person* the love and support they have for us, to renew friendships and share again our stories of Mozambique. Abby also surprised us by not having any shy moments – she was outgoing and acted as if everyone at Donelson was her oldest friend!

During our month in Nashville we attended the Look to the Hills Leadership conference with the Zoe Group in Nashville, the World Missions Workshop in Searcy, and then after we went to Dallas, the Ministry Impact Conference (Provision Ministry Group) at the North Richland Hills Church of Christ. All three were refreshing opportunities to spend time learning and in dialogue about missions and ministry and to renew old relationships – things we miss very much when we are in Mozambique.

After our month in Nashville we left at 37 weeks of pregnancy for my parents' home (Papa and Nana) in Plano, Texas, which is north of Dallas. Ellen Grace Howell (Ellie) arrived just before 7am on the 17<sup>th</sup> of November (her due date) and was born at my parents' house with the wonderful help of Gail, our midwife. Alan was able to "catch" Ellie, and my mom, who had rushed up to her school to leave lesson plans for her substitute teacher, got back home just in time! Thanksgiving was just a week later, so we enjoyed time with family and friends. During our time in Dallas we were also very blessed every week to be with the New Heritage Church, one of our supporting churches, and to meet with the missions committee from the Highland Oaks Church of Christ who helped us finish our start-up fund back in 2004.

About three weeks after Ellie was born we left Dallas for Alan's parents' home (PapaB and Nettie) in Memphis. We stayed there for a month, including the Christmas and New Year's holidays, which meant that we were able to spend a lot of time with extended family. Abby enjoyed Christmas with both sets of grandparents (since we celebrated both in Dallas and in Memphis), especially opening presents, though we didn't really see any snow. We are pretty sure that Ellie enjoyed it too, though she mostly slept through it all.

During our time with churches and families we tried to see as many old friends as we could, which was wonderful. However, we are disappointed that we didn't get to see everyone we would have liked, and for those friends we were not able to see, we are so sorry. We were genuinely surprised at how busy and full our furlough was (though we probably shouldn't have been – some of our more experienced missionary friends have laughed at us when we expressed that we were surprised that furlough was so busy!).

We left Memphis for a couple days in Nashville to return the vehicle lent to us by a family at Donelson and to introduce Ellie to our Donelson family. We then returned to Dallas for a few days to pack our suitcases before flying out on Monday January 16<sup>th</sup>. We arrived into Johannesburg early on Wednesday, though 2 of our suitcases apparently decided to do some extra sight-seeing in London. Thankfully, one bag showed up the next day, and the final suitcase arrived Saturday. We had a difficult time finding a convenient flight schedule up into northern Mozambique, but were finally able to fly on Monday the 23<sup>rd</sup>, though that involved over 8 hours sitting and sweating in the Maputo airport lobby with all our luggage on carts (don't forget – it's summertime over here!) We spent two days grocery shopping and greeting friends in Nampula before driving up to Montepuez on Thursday January 26<sup>th</sup>. Whew! Traveling in Africa is no simple thing!

We are glad to be back home and getting started again with life and work here, and our bodies are adjusting again to the heat (Alan did not stop pouring sweat for our entire first week back!). In addition to unpacking and getting organized, we had some pretty thick layers of dust and dead roaches to clean out.

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We are good for awhile with our electrical and plumbing situations, though later in February we may have a contractor friend from Nampula come up and work on the house to hopefully get things going so we won't have to spend any more time fixing things. We have enjoyed being with our teammates and greeting and visiting our Mozambican friends, introducing them all to our little Ellie. In addition, we have started with a new language teacher named Boromane who seems to be pretty good. We also received some very exciting news from the States a week ago – our teammates Chad and Amy Westerholm welcomed their first baby, a daughter, Margaret Ann "Maggie", into the world on Friday February 3<sup>rd</sup>. Praise our God the Giver of Life!

As many of you may already know, while this time of year is always a time of hunger in Mozambique (with several months left to go before people can harvest their crops around April), this year has been especially bad for all of southern Africa. God has given our team a special opportunity to show his love in our area by raising money in the States from many of you to buy corn (and rice and beans) for distribution to provide relief in our area. Over \$30,000 has already been raised for this Food Project, with more rounds of distribution to come at the end of February and of March. Some of the corn, which is four times the normal price for this time of year, was sold at 1/8 of the price to churches and mosques and that money put back into buying more corn, and then some of the corn was given to the hospital, the jail, and to people with special needs (villages whose crops have been wiped out by pests, families who have had recent tragedies) through several community agencies. We are thankful for God's mercy to use his followers (you) to help meet the needs of people here in the Montepuez area, and we are also thankful, in light of the history of political rumors spread about us almost two years ago, for the opportunity for involvement and transparency in the Montepuez community and surrounding region to demonstrate that we are here to do good.

Just yesterday Alan and Jeremy went with a government representative from Montepuez to carry ten 50kg sacks of corn to a remote area in the northern end of our district. They drove several hours to the town of Nairoto and then 60km farther out to an area that has not gotten much rain and whose crops have suffered. We rejoice in the irony that Nairoto is the place where the rumors that we were spies working for the minority political party were started about our team in 2004, and that this trip, the first trip for anyone on our team to return to Nairoto, we were bringing food to bless people in a time of suffering! The village they carried the food to was the remotest place Alan has been in Mozambique to date (and we have been in some pretty remote places!) – many places there was no road at all, and he said there were elephant droppings EVERYWHERE (he joked with the government representative from Nairoto that it sure didn't look like the elephants were having any problems with hunger!) They ended the day by getting our truck stuck in the mud in the dark about 50km on the other side of Nairoto... we are all thankful that they took two trucks and that Jeremy's truck has a winch to pull Alan out of the mud, and that they returned home safe and unharmed, though very late and very muddy! Feel free to watch the video on our website about the Food Project for more information (the elephants didn't make the video).

In addition to jumping back into language and culture learning, we have also begun potty-training with Abby... both seem to be pretty intimidating tasks to Alan and I at the moment! So keep us in your prayers! We love and miss you all.

Please pray for:

- For the Kingdom of God to come more fully among the Makua-Metto
- For those in this area who are hungry
- For rain and a good harvest in March/April
- Blessings of endurance and ability in language acquisition
- Our health (this is the "high" season for malaria mosquitos)
- Our adjustment back to life in a different place and culture after furlough

Please visit our website to see the video about the Food Project ("A Time of Hunger"), pictures of baby Maggie Westerholm, and pictures from our furlough!

With our love,  
Rachel, Alan, Abby, and Ellie