

# Howell's eMail Newsletter

Thursday, October 19, 2006

Dear friends and family,

Greetings from Montepuez! It is starting to warm up for us here, and the landscape is very brown and dry. People have started to burn their fields lately, so that doesn't help the views of the land much either! Come December, though, and when the rains begin the land will become green and lush again, so we look forward to that!

Many of you have asked to hear more details of our daily lives and ministry so you can imagine more closely what goes on around here, so this is a "week in the life of the Howells" newsletter describing a recent week for us.

## **Thursday**

On Thursday morning we get up and after getting everybody dressed and ready and eating breakfast, we open the door at 7am for our worker Taju to come in and start working. He cleans up around the kitchen and starts washing our cloth diapers in the twin-tub washer we have. He actually has help today since we have hired a new worker named Beto and he is still being trained by Taju. After washing and hanging up the diapers on the line he will start making matapa for our lunch (greens that we eat with rice or with a cornmeal mush) and maybe wash another load of laundry later. Between 8 and 8:30 I nurse Ellie and put her down for her morning nap and head off to a ladies' Bible study at a church in town with my teammate Amy and some of our Mozambican friends. Amy teaches the Bible study that day in Makua and does a great job. The Thursday study is great language practice, and after the Bible study we go visit Jacinta's house, and I arrange for our family to visit Daima's house the next afternoon. I get home around 11 to Alan and the girls. Alan has had several Mozambican visitors while I was gone, and then another missionary family we know has stopped by our house on their way from Balama (further out in the bush) to Pemba (provincial capital) for a pit stop and to say hi. They take off soon after that and we eat matapa for lunch. We close our door between about 12 and 2pm (because of the number of visitors that come by the house every day). We wash up the girls and put them down for naps, and we use this time to catch up on emails, do lesson preparation, etc. After we open the door again for the afternoon, Alan goes to meet with a group of pastors who are planning an ecumenical prayer day at the end of the month for all the churches in town to get together and pray about AIDS.

## **Friday**

Friday morning Alan leaves at 8 to go to the home of his language teacher, Boromane. He studies with Boromane for about 2 hours, working through some Makua grammar and vocabulary and getting some help correcting the grammar of a lesson he has prepared from the book of Mark. He comes back a little after 10, and most Fridays I usually turn around and go to my language teacher friend, Lurdes', house, taking Abby with me to play with her kids. This Friday is different, however in that today she is coming to my house. The week before we had taken Lurdes and her husband and their four kids with us to Pemba to go to the wedding of her husband's younger brother, and I mentioned in passing that we have a video of our wedding. She was amazed and said that she wanted to come to our house this week instead of us going to her house so she could see our wedding video, so she soon arrives with all of her four kids in tow (no small feat since they walked from the other end of town!) We had Taju make chicken curry with rice, and after watching our wedding video and playing together, they all ate lunch with us (minus her husband, he has a government job with the health department and doesn't get off until 3pm). I give them a ride back home and Alan starts getting the girls ready for their naps. After their naps we start getting the girls ready for our visit to Daima's house that I had arranged the day before, and Alan realizes that his friend Hamissi (he is a Muslim from Tanzania that lives here but speaks Swahili and only a little Makua) is waiting for him outside. Hamissi tells him that he is getting married this afternoon and wants Alan to come. This is significant because twice before Hamissi has told Alan ahead of time of a certain date for his wedding but then not shown up to get Alan on the scheduled day; he later would tell Alan that he hadn't been sleeping well and decided he shouldn't get married that day. So now that this wedding is actually happening, Alan feels that he should go, even though we are scheduled to visit Daima. We decide that he should go with Hamissi, and I will take the girls to visit by myself.

The wedding is not far (so Alan can walk with Hamissi), so I take the truck and strap Ellie in a car seat and we drive to a local church building where Daima has said she would meet me since I don't know

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exactly where her house is. My friend Madalena who lives next to the church tells me that Daima came by her house early that morning to ask her if she would mind showing me where they lived that afternoon, so after Madalena finishes getting ready, we get back in the truck and she directs me on how to get to Daima's house. I am only a tiny bit nervous about this, since Alan is usually the one driving when we take our truck into a bairro ("bye-roo": neighborhood, think hundreds and hundreds of mud huts) where the "streets" (a.k.a. space between the houses) are barely wider than the truck (I just don't want to drive over someone's toe or take off a low thatch roof...). It doesn't take us long to get to Daima's house, and I realize that it would have been closer if I had walked from our house, but I will remember that for next time. We have not been sitting down but for a couple of minutes when a man I do not know (and neither do they!) comes into their yard asking if I can please help them and take a woman in labor to the hospital. There is a little confusion as I look to Madalena and Daima to see what I should do since I am a woman by myself and I do not know this person, but they look almost equally as surprised at the interruption of this person they don't know either. They decide to go with me, and the man actually doesn't get in the car with us, but sends a woman who knows where the pregnant woman lives, so we fire up the truck and keep driving through the bairro. We arrive at the pregnant woman's home, and she and her mother and her friends (slowly) get in the back of the truck (which I can't imagine was that comfortable, but that was what they wanted), and we drive back through the bairro, bumping over the sand to get to the road that will take us to the hospital. We get to the hospital and I drive around back to the maternity ward, and attract a lot of attention (as there are lots of people standing around but no other cars and no other white people) as we pull up and open the back to let the women out to enter the hospital. We wait while my friend Madalena goes in to make sure they get checked in, and Daima holds Ellie, and Abby plays in the front seat, accidentally honking the horn while she plays, so we continue to be quite a spectacle. Eventually Madalena comes back out and we go back to Daima's house for our visit. She had made beans and rice for our visit, and they are still warm, and so we eat and talk together. Since our side trip to the hospital took awhile, it is almost getting dark, and so we stay as long as possible (I don't want to be rude and rush off!), me balancing eating beans and rice, entertaining Ellie, trying to practice speaking Makua, and keeping an eye on Abby running around the yard ("don't play with that knife!" "don't play near the well!" "don't hit the chickens with a stick!"). We finally pack up and head home... and find that the electricity is out, and Alan isn't home yet. It is dusk, and so we enter the house and I rush around trying to get some candles lit before it is completely dark, hoping the girls will be content to play with toys for a bit while I try to get some bath water heated (this is usually a fussy time of day for Ellie). My mom calls from Texas and we talk briefly, though I am a little distracted trying to parent a 3-year old and a fussy baby in the dark while getting their baths ready. Alan comes home soon after that and helps me get the baths finished and the girls put to bed and then the electricity comes back on. He enjoyed going to Hamissi's wedding – though he spent much of the time waiting for it to start. The ceremony itself was quite short, involving mostly Hamissi kneeling and making promises and repeating phrases, all in Swahili, with the man conducting the ceremony, and the woman is nowhere to be seen! At the end Hamissi took Alan inside the house to meet his new wife and her sister, and then they all ate a little together inside the house, though Alan felt a little awkward since the other guests were eating outside. Soon after that Alan walked home in the dark.

## Saturday

The next day is Saturday and we get up and get ready to go to Chipembe. We have normally been worshipping with the young, small church in Chipembe on most Sundays, but we have other commitments the following day, so we have arranged to go today. We pack up snacks, water, diapers, and a few small toys/coloring books for the girls, drinking water for ourselves, and then we head off. The drive takes about 40 minutes or so, depending on the state of the roads, which are very dry this time of year. After several months without rain, though, some parts develop washboard-like sections, which can really jar your teeth when you drive over them! Today Alan finishes going through the book of Mark. Mark is one of the few books of the Bible that have been translated into Makua-Metto (the translation is continuing with other books), and we have Mark in print as well as a recorded copy on CD. Before going through the book of Mark, Alan did an overview of the Old Testament, and now that Mark is finished, he will begin going through an "infant church curriculum" with the church in Chipembe. Once that process is finished, we will likely start the process over again with another very young church and continue to visit the church in Chipembe, though less frequently. This week we brought a soccer ball with us that was

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recently left by a short-term mission-trip group of Americans recently in the area, and we gave the soccer ball to Chipembe's soccer team, and they were VERY excited about that. We eat lunch with the church members in Chipembe before heading home.

## Sunday

Sunday morning we have a small crowd formed in our yard by 630am. Our friend Sabao came by to tell us that the small church outside of town that we had arranged to visit today had sent him a message saying that today was actually not a very good day for a visit as many of their people were out finishing their cotton harvest in preparation for selling (many people live quite far away from their small subsistence farms called machambas). Sabao and Alan discuss this and decide to go visit another church outside of town in a small village called Milapane, and then Sabao leaves. However, Hamissi and another man named Mattias are also in our yard at 630 am. Hamissi wants to study the Bible and has brought one in Swahili, and Mattias has come to ask for some help for some church members who are sick in another village called Menhauene. They both stick around for a couple hours and study the Bible in a mix of Portuguese, Makua, and Swahili until 830 when Sabao comes back and they all head off to worship with the church in Milapane. Today the girls and I don't go; sometimes when we are visiting a new church for the very first time we stay home, since it can be unpredictable what the setup will be like.

(Many times worshipping with a church can be really difficult for our small children. There is nothing geared for children, so we basically try to bring enough books, paper and crayons, etc to keep their attention during the singing, praying, teaching, communion, etc. Depending on their personality and their developmental stage, sometimes this is realistic, sometimes not. Many of our Mozambican friends just leave some or all of their kids at home when they walk to church, since their neighborhoods are so communal, they know that the neighbors are near and that chances are nothing bad will happen. The children who are present mostly just sit quietly and stare at our girls and watch what they are doing. Teaching geared for children is a very big need here, so curriculum development and teacher training both have big potential for the future). The visit goes well, and after the worship they visit the home of a blind woman who amazingly still goes out on her own to cut capim ("kah-pee-hm" – the long savannah-type grass that people use for their roofs here)! Alan returns to Montepuez after this visit, and later in the afternoon Januario, one of our night guards, comes by the house. Earlier in the week a family in a village outside of town had gotten very sick from eating food that some rat poison had fallen into. Several people had died, and one of these people was a relative of Januario's wife. He came to get Alan, and together they went to get the body from the morgue at the hospital and carry it in the back of the truck back to the house of the family. They showed Alan the sack of food that still had the rat poison in it, and when Alan asks to make sure they are going to destroy it, they assure him that they are going to bury it. Sunday night is date night for Alan and I, and after putting the girls to bed we usually watch a movie (missionaries have an impressive library of DVD's – they are lightweight to carry in luggage or mail in a package, and we have no other "entertainment" options like going out to a concert or to a coffee shop together)!

## Monday

Monday is our sabbath day for play and rest, and we have decided to paint our bedroom today. Our house is made of concrete blocks, and the bedrooms all have a coat of very faint pale blue paint heavily diluted in whitewash – it is pretty unevenly distributed and it also shows a lot of dirt. There is also a lot of water damage due to a leaky roof and too-high sand content in the cement used for the blocks (construction here in Mozambique very often involves a lot of short-cuts). So we get the girls up and dressed and fed and start pulling the bed and dresser away from the walls and putting masking tape around the windows and door and Alan gets started. Once Ellie is down for her morning nap we put in a Veggie Tales show for Abby and I help Alan paint (though Abby enjoys coming back to watch and ask questions about the painting.) The missionary family who passed through on their way to Pemba on Thursday is on their way home and stops by again to visit. When the girls go down for their afternoon naps at the same time we work through lunch to make some progress and finish the painting. Later in the afternoon Abby plays in the yard and Taju entertains Ellie for a little bit so Alan and I can re-hang our mosquito net. Since we had to take it down to paint, and since we were borrowing a teammate's ladder, we took the opportunity to repair/reinforce the bamboo frame that we hang our net from. Our first attempt of a frame for the net needed fixing, so we did that and also did a better job hanging the frame from the ceiling this time. We managed to get the room painted and the mosquito net and frame hung just before

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dark. We try to space out the sabbath days that we choose to do home improvement projects, since it isn't always very restful. A coat of paint sure does make a difference, though!

## Tuesday

On Tuesday Alan leaves early for a day trip with our friend Germino to go visit churches in two villages north of Montepuez, called Nakuka and Nakwaya. Nakwaya is the village we have considered going to next as we work with young pre-existing churches. I have a number of Mozambican visitors throughout the day while Alan is gone, including a group of women we know from a neighboring village of Chipembe called Omeringue, who have come down to take a sick child to the clinic here in Montepuez. There aren't any clinics up in that area, and the women have walked all morning to get to Montepuez. Alan's visit goes well and he is back before dark, and of course we are glad to see him. There is no cell coverage outside of town, so it is always a welcome sight when teammates arrive home when they expect to, since driving around on bad roads out in the bush can sometimes lead to unexpected delays (flat tire, stuck in the mud, etc) and little possibility of notifying a teammate! Tuesday nights we eat together with our team and then put the children to sleep all in one house so we can have some extended fellowship time together without the kiddos. Normally we have some worship time together and then later play games over dessert and coffee. This week it is still just us and the Westerholms since the Roland and Smith families had not yet returned from their furloughs. We may have to change up the schedule for team nights soon, though, as with the whole team we may have reached the limit of how many kids we can put down to sleep in one house!

## Wednesday

Wednesday is team day, beginning with a business meeting in the morning. We discuss our team goals, our upcoming calendar, upcoming visitors, upcoming events with local churches, our team response to various requests for assistance from different people or groups in town. We also make sure we report to each other on the different things we are involved in: church visits, relationships with pastors in town, and meetings with government officials. After the meeting our family gets in the car and we go visit the home of our new worker Beto. He is actually the youngest of our workers now, but speaks no Portuguese at all, which of course is great practice for us. We live in a highly social context where visiting friends is very important, and it is also a sign of trustworthiness for a person to show you where he lives (the thinking is that if he was up to no good then he wouldn't want you to know where he lived). We meet Beto's wife and three kids and stay there for half an hour or so before heading back to the house. On Wednesday afternoons we alternate every week between the women and men on our team having extended time for prayer and accountability together. This week is the guys' turn, and Alan and Chad head off to a place on the edge of town where you can buy a coke and have a quiet place to study or talk.

Well there you have an example of a recent week from our lives here in Mozambique (this was about a month ago). We have a basic weekly routine of language learning and ministry, though nearly every week involves several changes (some expected and some unexpected)! We constantly seek to find a good balance of time given to language learning and time given to ministry, though as we make progress in speaking Makua more and more activities can fall into both categories. We also try to be sensitive to the needs of our girls, since many kids do well with a good routine, but we also desire to do a number of things as a whole family. One lesson we have learned is patience – nothing happens quickly here, from language learning to finding good balances in our weekly activities, but with prayer and patience things generally come around.

We hope you enjoyed getting a peek into our lives, and that it helped create a picture of what life is like here. We love and miss you all!

In Christ,  
Rachel, Alan, Abby, and Ellie