

# Howell's – eMail Newsletter

Thursday, February 8, 2007

Dear Friends and Family,

Greetings from warm, sunny Mozambique! We last wrote a newsletter in early December before our trip to South Africa, yet it feels like ages ago. We feel like February snuck up on us and have been asking each other "Where did January go?"

We took our trip to South Africa in early December, and that was a blessing. For us it was much-needed rest and relaxation, both physically and mentally. The best part of the trip was going to Cape Town, which Alan and I both said was the most beautiful place we had ever been, and we found ourselves trying to figure out when we could go there again (probably 2009 at the earliest!). The rest of our time was spent in Johannesburg trying to rest while also doing some shopping, and I was able to see a dentist and have my teeth fixed (I chipped off the ends of my two front teeth when I fell in the dark during a power outage in November).

We came back to northern Mozambique and were welcomed warmly by the heat. November and early December are still the hottest months in our opinion, before the rains really get started. We enjoyed Christmas together with our girls (all the packages sent to us made it to us before Christmas, which is quite impressive for the Mozambican postal services!), and with our teammates. We were going to have a pool party for all the kids, but it started raining on Christmas Day and hardly stopped for three weeks straight, which of course is great for everyone's crops, as well as helping cut down on the heat quite a bit. Christmas is not a big holiday for many of our Mozambican friends, but New Year's Day is a big party day that everyone celebrates. We had our workers and their families over for a meal on New Year's Day, though it seemed they were all pretty tired from staying up so late the night before, so maybe next year we will do it a few days early.

With the rains many people are spending a lot of time out in their machambas (small single-family farms) outside of town, clearing the land, tilling the soil, and planting their corn, beans, sorghum, millet, peanuts, pumpkins, squash, watermelon, and cucumbers. They do all of this work by hand and with hoes, machetes, and shovels. People don't irrigate here in northern Mozambique, so they rely entirely on the rains to water their crops, which usually start sometime in mid-December and end sometime in April in a good year. By the end of April people are harvesting some of their first crops, and they continue to harvest certain crops on into July and August. The food they harvest has to last them until the next April, when they will harvest again. Last year's Hunger Relief project (to which so many people gave so generously!) was a big need because so little rain fell in December 2004, and so little food grew, that in 2005/early 2006 people had very little to eat. Last year's rains, though, were plentiful, and produced crops in abundance for this year, and many people harvested more than they ever had. We have noticed that a lot fewer people have been coming by asking for help to buy food. So far this year the rains have been very good, and we ask you to pray for God to continue to send rain here in Mozambique so people will have food for the coming year. Along with good growth for crops, the countryside is beautiful and lush and green right now. About a month or so before the rains started we hired a couple guys to plant grass in our yard, and the timing was good, in that now that the rains have come, our grass has flourished and now we are really enjoying having a "real" yard, instead of the sandlot that it was a few months ago! We have even planted some flowers and trees, and are going to plant a garden this week. Another frequent beauty we see during the rainy season are gorgeous pink sunsets since there are often so many huge clouds to reflect the sun's rays.

We finished going through our infant church curriculum with the church in Chipembe and are now visiting with them less often. In January, we began meeting with a small group of believers in a village called Nakwaya, also north of Montepuez, and have begun teaching there. In this region there are a handful of small churches in surrounding villages that were started by a Mozambican evangelist friend of ours named Germino. These churches are new and have very little knowledge of God and the whole Story of him working in the world. A little over a year ago our team worked with Germino to plan for each of the families on our team to partner with one of these small churches, building relationships with them and teaching them the God's story from the scriptures, usually on Sundays, all while we were focusing on language and culture learning during the rest of the week. Together our team has worked on forming a curriculum for teaching with the churches at different stages of their growth and maturity, and the first stage, when a church is still very new, consists mostly of teaching chronologically through the Old Testament and then the book of Mark, and then a section on the basics of the life of the church. This was what we studied with the church in Chipembe, and what we are now beginning with the church in Nakwaya. We are working on developing the curriculum for churches in the next phase, who are no longer "infant" churches, but are not yet really mature churches, like Chipembe.

Another big event this time of year is the initiation ceremonies, called Ekoma. Many cultures in sub-Saharan Africa have initiation ceremonies where boys and girls are transitioned from children to adults, with a lot of

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celebrating, though the ceremonies vary greatly between people groups. In our region, December and January are the big holiday months before the next school year starts, so the Ekoma are done during this time. It is done separately for boys and girls, and children are taken from their families out to the bush in groups with other children who are going to be initiated and with the adults in charge of the ceremonies. Though it is thought of as a transition from childhood to adulthood, the age-range of children participating is quite big – for boys from 6 to 13 and sometimes older, and for girls from 12 to 15, usually once they have begun menstruating. For boys Ekoma involves circumcision (they are not circumcised as babies), and they may be out in the bush for 3-4 weeks. Girls may be out in the bush for Ekoma from 1 to 3 weeks (female circumcision is not really done here like in other parts of Africa). Obviously for the boys there is time for healing from the circumcision, but for boys and girls Ekoma also involves a lot of advice and instruction by the adults who are with them. We have heard that it often includes encouragement and instruction towards sexual promiscuity, and that beating and humiliation are also frequent. For girls instruction also includes instruction on hygiene when menstruating. A few of the churches in town have declared themselves against the Ekoma, saying that it shouldn't be done, but a few have begun trying to have a Christian version of the ceremonies, which we are excited about. After all, there is nothing inherently wrong with celebrating the transition from childhood to adulthood, and there is actually a lot of potential to teach these kids about their creator God and his desires for their lives – what it means to be a man or woman of God. (This reflects some of the theory we were taught in missions classes, that too many times in history Christian missionaries have entered a culture and in their attempts to bring people to God have made them leave behind most of their cultural identity and practices, when in reality there is much that is redeemable and that can be claimed for Christ in the world's different cultures.) The women on our team have been invited to participate in two different Ekoma Yathiyana (girls ceremonies) with different area churches (I taught at one at a church in town two weeks ago, and Martha and Mika took some Christian women from town and taught at one in the village of Amenhauene last week), and next week Martha and I are going to a third ceremony in Nakwaya. We are still learning and asking questions to better understand what happens during the Ekoma, the history behind it, why they do what they do, and what they think about it, and it is fascinating. We feel excited as a team to get to participate with these churches as they work to claim the Ekoma for Christ, and we look forward to next year to see what God will do.

February will be much of the same language learning and ministry routines with a trip to Nampula for groceries and construction supplies, and then sometime in early March a contractor friend will come up to do some major repair and improvement work on the house (water tank so we can have running water all day, a hot water heater, put in a bathtub, some electrical wiring, and some floor work). Then at the end of March/beginning of April we will make our first weekend visit with one of the churches out in the bush farther south in our province (we don't like to go out much earlier than that because of the heat and the rain!) We have also been sick a lot lately in our family, so please pray for our health so we can have the energy to keep about our work. Abby and Ellie are doing well and growing like crazy. Ellie walks like a pro and is trying hard to form a few words, and has more hair than even Abby had at this age, so we keep it up in a little ponytail so she won't get too hot and sweaty. Abby seems so tall for only being 3 1/2, and continues to talk all the time, which we enjoy since we get to know what is going on in her head. We recently acquired a pet turtle which Abby decided to call Naaman, so Naaman is enjoying the grass in our yard probably even more than we are!

Please pray for:

- Our health
- The rains to continue so people will have enough food for the coming year
- Energy and perseverance in language learning
- God to bless the formation of the church in Nakwaya
- The church in Chipembe to grow
- The Kingdom of God to come among the Makua-Metto

Please don't forget to visit our website to see pictures posted at the end of the year! We love and miss you all!

In Christ,  
Rachel, Alan, Abby, and Ellie