

Howell's e-Mail News

Friday, May 19, 2006

Dear Friends and Family,

Greetings again from northern Mozambique! As Alan and I prepared to sit down and write this (overdue) newsletter, we laughed at the title I gave our last newsletter "Language Learning and Potty Training," joking that we could probably use that title for several newsletters to come, as neither of those challenges appear to be anywhere near completion!

Soon after we wrote our last newsletter it became pretty clear to us that our language learning setup (having our language helper Boromane come work with us at our house every morning) wasn't working very well – there was a steady stream of interruptions from visitors or from Abby and Ellie. So Alan started riding our bike to his language helper's house every morning to have class there, and I began looking for a woman who would be a good language helper for me. A few weeks later I began riding the bike (very challenging in a skirt with pants underneath!) to a friend's house at the other end of town, and we both feel that changing our language learning situation to our teachers' houses was a very wise decision. Language acquisition is rewarding in that every week we can name a list of things that we can communicate/understand that we could not at the beginning of the week, and to be able to communicate with people is always an exciting thing. While rewarding though, it is also very challenging and at times we feel overwhelmed at the volume of things left to be learned.

We have wrapped up the Food Project, and we are so grateful to God for giving us that opportunity to show his love in this area, and grateful to you for participating in that process! Our teammate Jeremy wrote an official document in Portuguese reporting all the details of the Food Project: how much and from whom the funds were given, how and when that money was spent, and how and to whom the food was distributed. We distributed the report to the different government offices that we have regular contact with so they would have their own copy to keep. Over \$30,000 was given by churches and supporters in the States, which came out to about 1 billion Mozambican Meticaís, which was fun to report.

In early March we had a team retreat, jointly with the Caldwell and Holton families who live in Lichinga, which is in the Niassa province in northern Mozambique. The plan was to fly with MAF (Missionary Aviation Fellowship) across to Lichinga, and then ride with the Holtons and Caldwells over into Malawi to a retreat facility for a few days. Our time of meeting and retreating together was good, however the travel to and from the retreat turned into quite an adventure! It is actually such a long story that we decided to include it in another short email, which will follow this newsletter, so keep an eye out for it.

We have a Mozambican evangelist friend from another province who has been in Montepuez for 5 years now, and who has started several small churches in the surrounding area. Each of the families on our team has chosen one of these churches to worship with and teach at on Sundays, and so for three months now we have been going up to the village of Chipembe every week to meet with the small church there. First Alan started with an overview of the Old Testament narrative over about 8 weeks, from Genesis up to the coming of Christ, and now we are going through the book of Mark. (Mark is one of the few books that has been translated into Makua-Metto). Alan has gone back and forth experimenting with which is best at this stage: for him to teach in Portuguese or in Makua. We already speak Portuguese well, but the level of education is very low up in Chipembe – none of the women who have been coming speak Portuguese, and even the men have had trouble with vocabulary that was no problem at all back in Nampula. They all understand Makua-Metto, of course, but we are still very much in the early stages of language learning, building up our vocabulary and working on the first few basic verb tenses.

Sundays have been pretty long because of the drive up to Chipembe, which is about 26 km (a little over 17 miles) but takes almost an hour since the roads are so bad (though the government is working hard on improving them, including replacing all the little bridges this year, which is GREAT). We leave about 8am, and we are usually home again by 3pm, since we usually eat a meal out there before we come home. We have been blessed that the girls have usually done pretty well with Sundays being so long, and we are very thankful for that – if the girls weren't so flexible, that could quickly make Sundays very difficult. Most Sundays when we arrive we go to greet the "Chefe de Aldeia," who is more like a mayor figure than a "tribal chief" type person. We check in with him and let him know we are there, and often he takes us to visit someone in the village, usually a family where someone had just died.

Two weekends ago we began "bonding," which is when we go and stay out in a village location. Practically, it looks a lot like camping, though the purpose is for language and culture acquisition and

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building relationships. We drove up to Chipembe on a Thursday morning and stayed all the way through until Sunday. We slept in our tent, but ate meals with our host, took baths and went to the bathroom in their latrine. We basically do whatever they are doing for those three days, whether it is going to the machamba (their small plots of land where they grow their food), visiting other people, going to funerals, etc. We really enjoyed spending so much time up there, meeting new people, learning our way around Chipembe, and Abby was a hit. While fun, it is also tiring, though, to speak only in Makua for almost 4 days straight, so by the time Sunday afternoon arrives, we are glad to go home to scrub ourselves clean, get some rest, and eat something familiar!

We have had several visitors over the past month or so. First, in mid-April Mark Berryman, who was one of our missions instructors and mentors at Harding University, came to visit both our team and the team in Lichinga. We spent time with him altogether as a team and also individually as families, and it was a blessing to be encouraged by him and get his perspectives and feedback about different aspects of our lives and work here. Not long after that, Jacob and Jaynie Michael, who are missionaries with Good News for Africa (our legal organization) down in Nampula, came up to visit and brought with them Emily Ulrey, who is an intern with them right now and who is considering full-time mission work in Mozambique. Also, in about 2 weeks our team will be hosting Dr. Vann Rackley from the Marriage and Family Therapy Department at Harding. He will be with us for about a week, and we are looking forward to working with him together on team dynamics and also receiving counsel as individual families.

In early June, as Dr. Rackley leaves, so also will our teammates the Smiths and the Rolands each be leaving for furlough, both to return to Mozambique in September/October, so we and the Westerholms are going to miss them and look forward to their return. Right after Dr. Rackley and our teammates leave, my mom is coming for a two week stay, and we are all really excited about that! We are very much looking forward to showing her around and introducing her to our friends here (we only wish she was staying longer!).

Abby and Ellie are doing pretty well. Abby is really excited that Nana is coming to see her and is going to sleep on her trundle bed "the bed that is under my bed," and is picking up Makua and Portuguese slowly (she had a bit of a hard time transitioning back to Mozambique after furlough - three months of so much attention in English!). Ellie just turned 6 months old, and is a chunky, smiley, happy baby.

As I close, we would like you to pray for:

- For the Kingdom of God to come more fully among the Makua-Metto
- Our team, as we continue to go through more transitions, with two families leaving for furlough.
- Our health, as each of us in our family have been suffering from strong allergies or colds or stomach bugs or fevers lately.
- A proper balance of work and rest
- Balance also between teaching with existing churches and still committed to spending the bulk of our time right now in language and culture acquisition.

Due to our slow internet connection at home and our busy schedule, we have not posted pictures on our website in quite awhile, but we hope to make time for that next week (we have to go up to the computer at the telephone company office) – we will send out an email to you as soon as we do that. Thanks to all of you for your love and support – we miss you all.

In Christ,
Rachel and Alan Howell, Abby and Ellie