

Howell's – eMail News (April 2007)

Friday – May 10, 2007

Dear Friends and Family,

Greetings again from northern Mozambique!

We can't believe it is almost the end of April, but here we are. The rains are tapering off and the air is getting drier and more breezy, pleasant, and less hot. People are harvesting their first crops, so we are receiving pumpkin and corn and cassava and cucumbers almost daily from visitors stopping by. We have also gotten our first green beans from our garden, which is exciting since this is the first time we have ever had a garden. The last couple months have also included some construction work/repairs on our house in preparation for all the visitors we will receive this year. In March we had a contractor come up from Nampula and put in a bathtub, water tower, and hot water heaters, among a few other things. Currently we also have some workers bricking in a small area to be a sort-of utility room to make a better use of space.

Throughout February and March the rains flooded a number of rivers and kept several roads under water and impassable. The original road we used to take to visit with the church in Nakwaya (usually took an hour and a half to get there) was one of the ones that was under water, so that meant we had to start taking a different route to get there, which meant that the travel time was over 2 hours (one-way!). After taking the long route the first time, we decided that I would stay home with the girls on Sundays until the shorter route was passable again. It seemed too much to expect our girls to ride for over two hours bumping through the bush, and then to expect them to immediately sit still and behave quietly during a long, hot, sweaty, very crowded worship time in a language they don't yet understand, and then get back in the car and drive for over 2 hours again to go back to Montepuez! But the roads are drying up now, and they also built a small bridge over the worst spots in the road, so we have already been back. In early February we made a trip up to Nakwaya with a group of women from the church in Montepuez to together do a Christian "Ekoma Cathiyana" (women's initiation ceremony), and that went really well.

At the end of March we spent a weekend in the bush a few hours south of Montepuez in the village of Ocuca with the churches from the Chiure district. They are right on the Lurio river, which is the border of the Nampula and Cabo Delgado provinces. They are also at a linguistic border as well, since they are speaking a mixture of Makua-Metto and Nampula Makua. Practically for us this meant they understood just about everything we said, but we didn't always understand them due to several vocabulary and pronunciation differences. We really enjoyed our weekend with them, with the only drawback being that the batteries in the little pump we have to blow up our air mattresses were dead, so we slept more or less on the hard ground - we were pretty sore and stiff by the end of the weekend! The churches down in the Chiure district are a few years older than the ones up here in the area surrounding Montepuez, and so are a little more mature, which is a refreshing change from working mostly with very very new churches. They have a hunger for learning and take a lot of initiative on their own, and we enjoy hearing the issues they are discussing together and participating in their lively worship. That weekend I also surprised myself by deciding to bathe in the river with the women from the church! I hadn't planned on it, but when I went down to the river with them, I didn't have the heart to ask them to carry water the quarter mile or so back to the village so I could wash myself off when there was so much water right there in the river! I kept myself much more clothed than they did, so it was really more taking a bath with clothes on, and the next evening I took Abby with me and washed her in the river, too, which she loved and didn't want to leave when we were done!

Language learning is going really well; Alan and I have accumulated a lot of vocabulary and basic grammar. We have spent so many hours with people listening and talking and clarifying and listening again and questioning and trying out new phrases and being corrected and repeating ourselves and asking people to repeat themselves and listening again! Language learning is such a long process of endurance – it really requires a certain level of stubbornness to keep at it, but it is fun to gain new ground and be able to communicate with people. Alan gets to spend more time with people than I do, so he is farther ahead than I am, but we are both at a place where we can communicate well and we can see that, even though much language remains to be learned, it does not feel dauntingly impossible. At times we are amazed (and tired) at how many words there are, but then we realize that it is only because life is so full and rich that there is such a depth of language that tries to describe it!

We have been with the church in Chipembe a few times recently, several weeks ago for some baptisms, and then again last week for 2 funerals. This has been the first time for Alan and I that someone connected with a church we work with personally has died. The mother of one adult church member died, and also the only child of one of the most faithful young women (Maria) died (we've heard the father lives

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somewhere else and we've never met him). Last Monday, Maria came by our house in tears. She and her mother had walked the 4 hours down from Chipembe to take her son to the hospital. He was 3 years old, but had been sick a lot, and had never been strong enough to walk, though Alan and I had never seen him that sick. She said that the people at the hospital said he was anemic, and didn't even treat him but told her to take him home to Chipembe. It took me a minute to realize that she understood that that meant he was too sick to be treated here and she was worried that she wouldn't be able to get home in time before he died, so Alan drove them up to Chipembe that evening. Then on Thursday a church member from Chipembe named Joanito asked Alan take his aged mother who was already here in town to the hospital first thing Friday morning. Very very early Friday morning we had several people at our house who had come down from Chipembe to let us know that Maria's son had died and also that Joanito's mother had also died. So, Alan took Joanito's mother's body up to Chipembe and met with the church members there. When we arrived a couple of the leaders had already buried the boy, and had done a good job ministering to the young mother and her family. In Makua-Metto culture, when someone dies, the day of the death, the third day, and forty days are the days when the community gathers for consolation. They had both died late Thursday, so Sunday was the third day, and everyone went to the graveside to put a cross by the grave of Maria's son. Funerals are a big deal here and this was the first time for the church in Chipembe to come together to care for each other in suffering as a community of Christ. This is really important because people want to be sure that they'll have a proper burial – and that others will be there to cry at their own funeral. The churches have a neat counter-cultural tradition here that makes a big impact. When someone dies the family of the deceased is expected to feed all the mourners, this is a huge burden. But the practice of the church here when someone dies is to go and tell the family that we don't expect a meal and instead the church makes a contribution to the family to help them in the midst of their hurting.

Another significant piece of news for us is that our house has been robbed three times recently, though writing it that way seems a little dramatic. Violent crime, though never impossible, isn't much of a concern for us here, but petty theft is very very common. The first incident was in the middle of March when in the middle of the night someone cut the screens on our dining room window that faces the street, reached a very long bamboo pole through the iron bars all the way across the room to where the small bag I carry was hanging on a hook, used the bamboo to lift my bag off the hook and bring it all the way to the window and turn it diagonally to pull it out through the bars. In it were my cell phone, my Bible, my journal, my planner, and my wallet with my drivers' license but very little money in it. Our freezer is also right next to the window, and the thieves also opened up the freezer and took what they could reach – several bags of pasta (I keep pasta in the freezer to kill the bugs!). They also slit the screen on the kitchen window and took what they could reach and get through the bars: all our cans of jelly, tuna fish, and mushrooms. Hence the "petty" in petty theft. The cell phone was the biggest item of worth to the thieves, though honestly I was the most annoyed about my Bible, journal, and planner! Then about a week later again in the middle of the night someone came in through a back corner of our property where the latrine is. It is a border we share with a neighbor, and the thieves came in through the neighbor's property (which is apparently not well guarded) and then through the latrine (that wall was of tightly woven grass) onto our property, and they stole 2 bags of cement and 3 shovels. Our guards, who are supposed to take turns resting or being awake, were both asleep and did not wake up. Then a little over a week ago about 130am one of the guards came to our bedroom window to wake us up to and tell us that a thief had just been there. He had heard the neighbor's dogs barking and run around the house in time to see someone jump over our wall near our main gate. Apparently he had climbed over the wall and gotten our garden hose and thrown it back out over the wall to his accomplice and then jumped out himself, and they took off running. They were too far for our guard to catch up to them, but apparently our hose is so heavy that it was slowing them down and they ditched it about a block away, and someone brought it back to us. We have already taken care of several things that were creating opportunities for theft: shutting and latching the glass panes at night in the windows that face the street, replacing the latrine wall with a very tall bamboo fence, and our guards are more vigilant about staying awake and making sure everything is locked up properly at night (the cement and shovels are coming out of their salaries), and we had broken glass put on top on the wall near our gate so no one will want to climb over the wall. We'll be making a few other changes soon to deter thieves, so hopefully that won't be such an issue in the future. We are of course thankful that we weren't really in any personal danger, though it is discouraging to feel violated and trespassed upon, even though the items were not of extremely high value.

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The next few months are going to be very busy for our team; there is a lot of traveling on the calendar and several visitors coming over from the States. For our family, next Saturday we leave for a VERY quick trip to the States for Alan's brother Andrew's wedding, and then when we return in the middle of May, a group of Harding students will have arrived just before us to do a six week internship with our team until the end of June. Later in the "summer" we will receive my parents for a visit, followed up with a visit from Donelson, our sponsoring church in Nashville.

As I wrap up, we want to ask you to pray for the following things:

- For God's Kingdom to come among the Makua-Metto
- For our girls to sleep very long and very well on our long flights coming up: April 28 and May 18
- For enough rest and health for our whole team during this very busy season
- The churches in Chipembe and Nakwaya to grow in understanding of the Kingdom of God

We will send pictures to our website manager when we arrive in the States in a little over a week, and we will send out an email notifying you when the new pictures are up, so you can see pictures of what we have shared with you. We love and miss you and think of you often. Take care, and may God bless you as you walk with him.

In Christ,
Rachel, Alan, Abby, and Ellie Howell