6/3/2011

I have no idea **who** has heard **what** from us, regarding the early news of our journey, so I'll write it all here and you can mentally edit out the bits you have already heard. Are you sitting comfortably?

It has now been seven weeks since our journey to Zambia of four aeroplane hops here with KLM and Kenya Airways. The longest was a 10 hour hop between Amsterdam and Nairobi during which we found it nigh impossible to sleep. No matter, we were surrounded by interesting Dutch men; some were going to investigate the flower industry of Kenya and one was visiting the rather less secure DRC (Democratic Republic of Congo – until 1996 Zaire), in the capital Kinshasa.

From Nairobi we had a short stop at Lubumbashi in the south of DRC. From the plane window we could see a rather smart airport building, several people standing around the tarmac relating African fashion, a few mud huts and a mind-etching impression of brilliant wet green vegetation and red brown mud.

The last short hop of a mere 25min (c200 miles) winged us to Ndola …..... and chaos. One small building catered for arrivals, departures, immigration, luggage collection, Zambia mail collection, imported goods and customs. Fair play, it is not intended to be a major international airport. Two friendly faces were ready to greet our haggard faces on the outside; one Rev. Kondolo of Zambia and Deepak who is here with his family from Council for World Mission, from North India.

What immediately struck me on our journey by road to Kitwe was that, despite the African flavour, it is quite a contrast to our previous experiences of rural life in Malawi and Uganda. We drove on a fairly well conditioned paved road. Not a bicycle was in sight, probably due to the *me first* driving ethos and the steep drop off the edges of the roads. We did see numerous people walking, carrying loads, roadside snack vendors, school children heading for home. All was vivid green. Taliesin commented very soon on the different shapes in tree foliage; the papaya, acacia, an occasional palm and other trees which we have yet to become familiar with.

We ambled neatly into avocado season, caught the tail end of local mangoes and the beginnings of guavas. Here we have to wait for avocadoes to rattle (their seeds) and then wait a further week for them to be brown and soft – they can be enormous. The land seems very fertile here and we're told that it is possible to grow most vegetables all year round, with watering when dry. Greens are available in numerous forms; pumpkin leaves, sweet potato leaves, rape (not so popular), Chinese cabbage, beet greens, three types of amaranth and so on. Tomatoes are abundant and not cost prohibitive so we have many tomato based sauces. Lunch time is generally local fare – vegetable and dried fish or caterpillars. Julu and Kathleen eat these with gusto, Taliesin and Tsunami's faces are pictures but they always have to try a little. A local, agricultural trained, Zambian delivers us vegetables fresh from his garden on a regular basis. Evening meals are Julu's bread based or a meal from more supermarket type goods, bought in Kitwe.

We have been granted a large, one storey house, once a training facility, which has gone a long way to alleviating the kids' cultural strangeness and we have all settled in extremely well. From having one small room in rural Uganda and Malawi, this is, as Glen put it, another planet. The centre of the house was the teaching room, our lounge. On the western side there is the large kitchen, dining room and schoolroom and on the eastern side, three bedrooms, study, bathroom, toilet and ensuite toilet (all painted ghastly puke yellow). We have a large garden surrounding the house, amazingly it is virtually all lawn so we are rapidly seeing to that. We can't have a huge fertile area dedicated to grass that we can't eat!

Our house is on a campus containing a variety of training facilities; teacher training, a Copperbelt

University, theological institutions (UCZ and Anglican), vocational. There are also several projects in various states; a thriving piggery full of the archetypal pink pig, fish ponds, a declined pottery and even more declined swimming pool club, a place literally buzzing with buckets of honey for sale, a struggling agricultural something (Hew and Jinny!). The campus also contains a rather attractive dam twittering with islands of cattle egrets and brilliant yellow weaver birds. The dam "No Fishing. Beware of the Crocodiles" is the source of our rather intermittent water supply. We have received sand and small stones down the pipes but no crocodiles as yet! There are a variety of opinions as to whether crocodiles really do live in this dam. Meanwhile we take no near chances at the waterside since there are definitely crocodiles nearby. The Kafue river (see below) is full of them.

We also see Bishop birds (brilliant red and black), widow birds with ungainly long black tails and myriad colours of butterfly. On the less desirable side we encounter cockroaches of various size and armies of ants, either marching across the road or up our legs. Mosquitoes are more often heard than seen.

As well as bird sound and insects sounds, and although the campus and its surrounds look countrified to our eyes, there is sufficient noise to remind us that we are on the edges of a city, or at least in a well populated area. We hear people talking and in song all the time, brass bands on appointed days, traffic and numerous sounds to remind us what sort of country we live in – the sounds of the mines; explosions, thrice daily shift sirens and other sounds of uncertain origin. Every now and then we also hear gun shots, usually due to the security guards shooting stray dogs as far as we know. Indeed, when we had friends over for a social evening last night, there was a gun shot closely followed by a yelp. Dogs of unknown origin are feared for their bites and rabies.

Kitwe is a city with a population on a par to Edinburgh. However, it looks nothing like Edinburgh. Even the Hotel Edinburgh in the centre does not remind us of Edinburgh, even though it does honour by name to that marvellous Scottish city. The crocodiles don't remind us of Edinburgh either. If someone was unfortunate enough to drown in the Forth there's a fair chance that more than his feet would be found, as happened recently when a poor man was edged off the bridge over the Kafue river by a passing lorry.

Our house is surrounded by Zambian families, all who called in to welcome us soon after we arrived, many bringing something they had baked. A short distance away on "the other side" there are also expatriates from America, UK, India, Switzerland and Norway. We therefore have an active social life and the kids never lack friends to interact with if they wish to. As I write, Taliesin is playing chess with Ryan and Mollie from New York (young couple from Global Ministries Fellowship with Maddison Avenue Presbyterian church and Ryan shares a birthday with Sally Webb), Jason from Los Angeles (a 7 year old friend, here with parents and brother Brendan from the Mennonite Central Committee) is over to play as usual, Tsunami is off at our neighbouring Bishop's son's party. I go to a UK lady's house for film night on Monday, Tsunami and I join a group of students for singing on Wed., we generally have people over on Fri evening and Glen and the kids have been joining students for a games night on Sat. I thought it would be a quiet social life here.

The Sonlight home education materials from America were here waiting for us when we arrived. We managed to select materials that weren't just on American history. The kids have been enjoying them a great deal. I work most closely with Taliesin and Tsunami who are following the same materials. Julu is mostly self motivated to educate himself with us keeping a watchful eye for slackness and Kathleen (yahoohey!) has a great lass working with her each morning, called Mercy. Her dad is trained in Special Needs education and she has just completed a certificate in Teacher Training. She, with advice from her dad and us, is practising on Kathleen.

Kathleen gets on very well with her and is blossoming both through that and through her social life here. We're hoping, with any help from others, to help Mercy to follow her interest through a four year course in Special Needs education beginning next year. It will mean that we'll have to do without her, except in the holidays, and need to find someone else. However, perhaps after a few years there will be more special needs educators in Zambia, a worthy goal.

After beginning Horizons Maths with great enthusiasm and gusto, Taliesin and Tsunami have become a little tired of the repetition so we are adjusting it to suit us, and will bring in some more interesting maths from other books that we have. They follow the books, do music practise etc from 7am to about 12.30pm. After lunch, depending on their attitude and application to work, they are awarded a certain amount of *Golden Time* for which they usually choose computer time and Kathleen watches one of her favourite DVDs. When time's up, there are usually kids waiting at the door to play or, occasionally, I chase our kids away to go and play elsewhere – quite idyllic.

The main frustration for us all is a) that many of the materials require use of the internet for further study and we do not yet have internet here and b) our shipping still has not left the UK and it contain some more necessary materials, such as the microscope for Julu's biology study.

All of us have been exceedingly well – minor gut adjustments to the local lurgis, short bouts of chuck up and out, minor colds. Kathleen obviously still has underlying nasty night time epilepsy. I cautiously say that we have managed to balance it with medication for the moment and have had two seizure free weeks. We have made some contact with a local paediatrician at Wasikili mine hospital. To go to see him (taxi fares and additional extras not counted) it costs only about £5 more that it took to call out the local vet (wonderful man, a great educator) to see Kathleen's puppy when she got tick fever. Her name is Miss Hoolie, after the teacher on the children's programme *Balamory*. After Kathleen's initial fear, she has really taken to her puppy and we often find them playing together – not many teeth marks yet. A lady from Arizona, USA made a delicious chocolate cake for K's birthday in February and we all had a beautiful day with several friends calling for a piece of cake, some for longer to do K's hair and play.

Julu looks down at me now, from a higher stature. He is the bread maker, very much his domain. The local bread flour is closer to cake flour, even the wholemeal, but we soon hope with Deepak's help to get some sacks of wheat to grind ourselves. Julu also makes soup and regularly practises guitar without being reminded! Taliesin and Tsunami made some cinnamon biscuits for a while but I haven't managed to persuade them to continue. Taliesin is in his element with all the trees to climb and local lads to do mischief with. He applies himself so much better to his education now and doesn't require too many reminders to do his recorder practise. Tsunami adores Ryan and Molly because they are happy to talk Julie Andrews and Sound of Music with her for large lengths of time. She is progressing well on her cello but we really need help with fingering advice.

The theological college is across the campus entry road from us, very close. Glen usually leaves for chapel at about 6.30ish, comes back for breakfast, then leaves for his office as Acting Head Librarian. We see him, late, for lunch, sometimes for a while, and then not until 6pm. I think he's really enjoying his work there, in particular the teaching but also the more time occupying work at the moment of sorting out the computer network and library related work. There, that's my perspective, now I'll let him wax lyrical. If there is anything else you'd like to know, I'd like to tell you.

I have just read this letter to him and it seems to have silenced him. He can't think what to add. Wait for it …..... it's ticking …..... I can hear it ….....

Somewhere between Britain and Zambia, I was transformed from an Australian New Testament scholar into a Scottish Old Testament scholar. As a result this semester I am teaching a course on the prophetic books of the Old Testament. I'm finding it very enjoyable and stimulating. My nine second year degree students, mostly ministerial candidates in the UCZ, haven't given me any feedback on my teaching yet, so I assume that they find it enjoyable and stimulating also. We have certainly had a few animated discussions along the way. My image as a mad professor is coming on nicely due to my quirky sense of humour and the unusual alerting activities I conduct with the students at breaks in our 2.5 hour class together.

Having only found out that I would be teaching the prophets of Israel when I arrived in Zambia, I have greatly appreciated the notes of the lecturers who came before me. I'm assured that next semester they are going to give me plenty of New Testament courses to keep me occupied which is good since there are no other New Testament scholars in college.

There are about 34 students in the college, most of whom are ministers in training representing both genders and a wide age range. The other students at the college are training as deacons (deaconesses), social workers or theologians (studying theology for interest). It is the students who usually lead the early morning chapel each week day, the standard of which is usually very high. There are quite a few other students who come to the college for twice yearly intensive courses. Increasing the number of students is currently a major priority for the leadership at the college.

In addition to myself there ten or more members of teaching staff, most of whom teach a single unit here and there. The main reason for this is that they are employed in full time ministerial jobs elsewhere and can only spare a small amount of time to teaching at the college.

There is plenty of work to be done in the library and with the college computer system. In addition to myself in the library, we have four other members of staff, one of whom is shared with the general administration to do typing and AOB. The library has a reasonably large collection of books for a college of its size but it could do with some more recently published books. It would be also good for the library to gain access to some better online computerised resources that other colleges have. The cataloguing and lending system needs updating. Computerising the library information has become a priority. About 16,000 books were previously entered into a database only to have all the hard work lost when a computer upgrade went badly wrong about a year ago. I don't have much of a clue about any of this at the moment so any offers of assistance or expertise are greatly appreciated.

Through various local and international sources the UCZTC has collected quite a few computers for staff, students and an Internet cafe. The setting up and integration of the computers has been less well developed. When we arrived the Internet access at the college was quite challenging. Speeds were very poor and the college was using up it monthly quota of working hours usage halfway through the month. I have managed to improve this by chasing the broadband provider until they fixed the connection problems and have recently installed an Internet gateway to monitor and control usage. This is new territory for me so I am learning on the job and still have a long way to go to get the Internet at the college to a nicely managed state. At least things are much better than when I arrived.

I have also been trying to get an reliable local network up and running in the college so that staff and communicate and make use of common resources via the network rather than having to physically move around with memory stick. This is also beginning to show promise and some staff are already beginning to enjoy the benefits of being reliably hooked into a local network. Hopefully I will make some more progress on this over the next few weeks.

There is lots more to tell. Some of it will be in Church of Scotland mission partner newsletter which should be finished and distributed this month. I must finish this now so I can send it off while it is still off-peak.

Hope this give most of you enough news to keep you going until the next instalment.

Much Love,

The Red-hairs