

NYLSTROOM SCRAPBOOK

December 2007

Dear friends:

We continue to feel so very blessed, and we sometimes ponder why, especially when we know so many good Christians who are experiencing severe trials. This month we had several misfortunes concerning THINGS, and Les and I also asked ourselves if maybe there was not some lesson we should be learning from that! We kept saying over and over, "At least we aren't in Zimbabwe!" Yet, amidst the trials, we were awed by how God blessed us in so many ways.

We decided to take a 10-day break and go spend a couple of days by the sea, visit Paul & Helen Williams (Paul preaches in Natal) and also visit Gloria, the recent widow of a much-loved preacher, Basic Cass. On our way there, we got lost and ended up in a rural African town which I still don't know the name of. We were going up a hill, and the camper's engine died. After an hour and a half of futile work, Les decided to look around for help. Not far away was an African man, sitting beside the road, welding the exhaust pipes of passers-by. He came over to look, decided the car needed a new fuel filter and went off in his rattletrap pickup to find a cheap brand. As he started to fit it, he noticed a tract Les had written lying on the dashboard called Faith in God. It is a story about how Kuvoni ("to see") teaches Kombelani ("Seek!") how to become a Christian. Les gives them out to toll booth operators, gas station attendants, etc. The man expressed interest in the tract and Les said, "You can have it!" When Les subsequently asked him how much we owed him for the fuel filter and the installation, he refused to take any payment – the tract, he said, was enough! We gave him some apples that we had with us and got his address so we could get someone to send him the correspondence course. Perhaps God was looking out for this honest heart as well as for us! We subsequently reached the N2 main highway to the coast, mostly skirting, but sometimes connecting with the horrible potholes. The government erects signs that say, "Potholes!" I wonder how much the signs cost compared to how much it costs to fix the potholes? Anyway, we arrived safely, but the next morning as we were traveling slowly through the campground at less than 10 MPH, the ball joint on the front driver's side came out of the ball joint socket and the car crashed down on top of the tyre! Had this happened when we had hit one of those potholes of the previous day at 50 miles per hour, I shudder to think what would have happened to us - and possibly also to other people! The fault was with a new part. We give heartfelt thanks to those of you pray regularly for us: perhaps it is those prayers that have kept us safe to this time.

These past few weeks we were also reminded over and over of how misfortunes concerning things are really nothing compared to other kinds of trials. Those of you who have read my newsletters for a long time will remember my friend Martha Mohlala at Maboloka, whom I first met nearly thirty years ago. We were both young mothers, and we both loved the things of God – but we could not communicate with each other. Every week I would go to Maboloka and teach the children a Bible class lesson – and one of the older girls would interpret for me. I would also hand out a little booklet with questions for the children. One of the men translated that little booklet into Tswana each week. Martha used the Tswana booklet to teach her children (who could say the books of the N.T. when they were 3!). She also asked for an English booklet so she could compare the two booklets to learn English. I enrolled in a N.Sotho class so I could learn a language close to her language. Of the two of us, Martha was the better student – she became excellent in English and even translated the Know Your Bible correspondence course from English to both Tswana and N.Sotho. Because we could talk to each other, we could share our sorrows and our love for God – and we became good friends. When I was having trouble with my pregnancies and could not travel to Maboloka, Martha began teaching the children, and continued that work for many years. She read her Bible every day to her family, shared the gospel with many, and was a good neighbor. Although her life was hard, and she did hard physical labor to help provide the needs of her family, she never complained about her circumstances, but was always so very grateful for any blessing that came her way. She always had a smile on her face because she was so grateful for what the gospel had done for her and her husband. She took care that the meeting place was clean and that the things for the Lord's Supper were provided. She kept the faith through times of tragedy, eg. when her teen daughter was killed in a car accident. Two years ago, Martha was diagnosed and treated for uterine cancer. From the scanty information Martha had about her cancer, I realized her cancer was probably stage 4. Her husband lovingly planted fresh fruits and vegetables to help her keep her cancer at bay – and she remained strong for about two years. But the cancer returned. Because she was so strong spiritually, she was able to hide her physical pain and keep giving of herself unselfishly to her husband, children and grandchildren's needs – until one day she collapsed and went to a pain-free place of rest. Grieved as we all are, it is SO wonderful to know that God has made a way for us to be together forever with Him one day! But I truly grieve for her family, especially for those children still at home who will sorely miss her godly influence. Martha was one ordinary, uneducated woman who was an extra-ordinary Christian. She made an extra-ordinary difference in my life and in the lives of many, and I only wish more of the Christian women here in South Africa could have known her and been encouraged by her.

I have been telling you about how the Zimbabweans are struggling to find food, but on our last trip it really hit home how much they are suffering in other ways as well. When we arrived, a Christian woman was there who sat lethargically huddled under a cotton wrap in near-100-degree heat. I asked Nyama what was the matter with her and he said that she had herpes (common in AIDS patients) on her neck and face. Nyama, a former witchdoctor, had been treating her by heating a plant called bobajaan-se-stert (baboon's tail) and applying it to the spot. There was no pain killer – not so much as an aspirin – available at the clinic. I gave her a supply of paracetamol and tea tree oil cream – and she perked up and was able to attend all the services. When another one of the sisters got home after the Friday evening service, she went to spread out the grass mats for her children to sleep on and a large scorpion stung her – the fat-tailed deadly kind. I was stung once by a small thin-tailed kind and within minutes had red streaks emanating up my leg – and I doubt I could have done what this sister did: walked over a mile to ask for help. The hospital in Beit Bridge (40 miles away) closes at 9 pm and does not open for ANYTHING until the next morning at 6 or 7 am. There is no car whatsoever in the village (except us). To get to the hospital, one must take a taxi – and walk (or take a donkey cart) several miles to the pick-up point. So I did the best I could – Rescue Remedy (homeopathic treatment for shock). She did manage to survive the night OK, and we were able to take her to the hospital early the next morning. They did (amazingly) have the anti-venom, even though they often lack antibiotics. On Sunday morning at 5:00, the brethren distributed the boxes of clothing, songbooks, etc. among all the congregations so that they could start walking home immediately after the worship service (which started at 8). They did this in such an orderly fashion that it didn't even wake us up! :-) At 6:30 the people started lining up outside our door for reading glasses and medical problems that needed more than an aspirin. We gave a brother Z\$50 million (less than US\$20) to have a cyst on his face the size of a golf-ball removed. And I really didn't know what to say about this poor child's feet!

Although I know the spiritual is more important than the physical, there are just SO many times I wish I was a doctor! We are truly blessed to have access to good medical care. We are also truly blessed to have you as our friends and brethren – may God bless you all! With love, Linda (and Les)

P.S. Here are a few things going on at our house lately:

This is a male Paradise Flycatcher balancing on its nest – which is visible outside my study window. I imagine it's quite an art in a strong wind! The female's tail is about ¼ the size. These birds kind of "twitch" around – and their tails loop around behind them, reminding me of the "ribbons" event at the Olympics.

Dinner anyone? This is one of the major sources of protein for many rural Africans – Mopane (Mow-paw-knee) worms. But I have to apologize - these are inferior-tasting worms. The really tasty ones are the "long-thorned" worms! They are gutted, then boiled, and then dried so they will keep indefinitely. To eat them, you can boil them, fry them or eat them like potato chips! Les has tried the potato chip form, but I can't get past the smell!



Lack of good medical care



male Paradise Flycatcher



Mopane worms