

NYLSTROOM SCRAPBOOK

February 2006

I have been eagerly awaiting our return home so I can tell you all about the birth of our latest grandson - Titus Kelso (after his father and grandfather) White. From Les's report you can see that it was quite an ordeal, but thankfully all ended well. I must admit that it was very hard for us to be so far away at that time, even though Gloria was well cared for by Sam's mother and aunt. Fortunately a very friendly resident of the Windhoek campsite with internet access offered for Sam to send pictures through her email. So even though we are not yet home, we have seen him! Isn't modern technology wonderful! In the left-hand top corner of the picture you will see a black blob that is our cell phone. This spot in this tree, under which I (together with the chickens) held Bible studies, plus another spot in the adjacent cooking hut are the only two places where cell phone reception was possible, by some freak of atmosphere, 20 miles from the nearest tower.

I suppose what you really want to see is a picture of Titus himself. Note the long fingers! Somehow we think he is genetically programmed to be tall, having had a good start at 22 inches. Titus seems to be a good baby with a lot of character that keeps his parents awestruck. He is sure to get plenty spoiled from both Mt Olive and Sayre congregations, with whom Sam enjoys working. Titus is just 3 months younger than his cousin Nathan - so future family gatherings should be a lot of fun.

We have just spent over 3 weeks in Namibia. Apart from the long journey, working in Namibia is in some ways easier than in Zimbabwe. Everything is available there so I am not tensed up worrying about what important food item I've left behind or what will happen if the food in the refrigerator spoils or freezes. (Because the refrigerator does not work with a compressor, you have to keep remembering to adjust the thermostat yourself.) However, in other ways the work is harder. Instead of an eager, rural audience who loves simplicity, the urban audience is more sophisticated and desires more challenging lessons to make it worthwhile for them to fit a study in to their busy lifestyles. Mixed with highly educated women earning good salaries are those who never finished high school and who are lucky to find menial jobs. Most girls drop out of high school because they get pregnant - and from then on it is a hand-to-mouth struggle to survive. One of the latter group paid rapt attention to a Bible study in Luderitz and asked if she and her sister (also a Christian) could come see me the next day, which they did. The sister had just spent a month recovering in the hospital because her husband, who has abused her for years, very nearly strangled her to death. He has not been apprehended because she is too afraid of him to lay a charge. This fear is very justified in a society where violent criminals are likely to be back on the streets in a few years. I feebly tried to give her words of encouragement from the Scriptures. I am thankful that God's Words are so much more powerful than mine - for I really had no words. After the lesson my original student said she wanted to give me a gift. I was at first nonplused because I knew she had no job. I told her the greatest gift she could give me was to stay pure and that the next time I came I would hear that she had been faithfully serving God. Yes, but she wants to give me a gift -? a child - her five-year-old child "because my mother is getting too old to look after him and I want to finish high school so I can get a job."? In all the poverty and desperation I have seen in Africa, this is the first time I have ever been approached with this request. Is this woman extra desperate - or extra selfish? As gently and with as much motivational language as I could muster, I pointed out to her that the child was her responsibility and she could never be at peace in her heart unless she fulfilled it. There was also the emotional damage she would cause the child if she abandoned him to strange people with whom he could not communicate. Although we were there for two more days, I neither saw either of them again. At the other end of the spectrum, I met a highly successful young woman in business who was dissatisfied with her position and possessions - and not interested in staying for the Bible study. "The thing is," she lamented, "you are always seeing things, and you feel you must have them."

Someone who did come to every study was Helena. I met her briefly last year in the hospital - having a nervous breakdown due to an abusive husband. She is fortunate to have a menial job with the roads department. She came to the studies directly after work, but had to leave before they were over to walk home before dark and feed her 6 children. Her eldest two sons have fallen into the typical trap of alcoholism. They have finished school and are unemployed and have too much time on their hands. In Namibia you don't need any money to be an alcoholic. It is the custom that you must give anyone who asks a sip of your drink - and so many go around from customer to customer, getting sips until they are drunk. Sister Elly, a true "mother in Israel" and also like the "elect lady" of 2 John, converted Helena. Helena had come to Elly and cried because she had had to go to work and leave her sick daughter (3 years old) alone in the shack with two stone-drunk boys. Elly said they must both pray hard and she invited them all for a braai (Bar-B-Q) on New Year's Eve. After a nice day, Elly took the boys aside and spoke to them about how hard their mother worked for them and how alcohol was destroying them. The one boy said, "I know. I'm sorry. I want to stop drinking." Elly said, "Is that a promise?" "Yes," he said. Elly is chief personnel officer for a large fishing firm. A week later they were hiring some people so Elly phoned Helena. "Has your son been drinking again?" "No." So she called in the boy. "Have you touched alcohol this past week?" "No, aunty, I promised you I would not and I haven't." So she hired him. After 2 weeks, he was able to get another job, training to be a cook on a fishing boat. The last night of our studies, as Helena prepared to leave, I stopped the study and prayed for her. She hugged me goodbye with tears streaming down her cheeks. God is so powerful and prayer is something that I do not do enough of.

Janetty, a friendly sanguine San (Bushman) lady about 35 years old, was elected by her village to attend a human rights workshop in Windhoek. The San are the original inhabitants of the deserts of Southern Africa who learned to live by such interesting strategies as hunting with poisoned arrows and hiding ostrich eggs full of water in the sand. Although some still live this way, Janetty lives in a village on the Botswana border in a nature conservancy over 200 miles from the nearest tarred road. As she passed the security guards who line the streets of Windhoek, she enquired about churches. When she found a brother who told her that he belonged to the church of Christ, she said, "It is the same as my church. I want to come with you on Sunday."? It was quite an effort for her to get there, but when we arrived at 8:30 am, she was already there smiling with her well-worn tiny green Gideon New Testament. I found it hard to believe that she, along with about 25 others, could have heard and obeyed the gospel in such a remote area. This is what she said. She spent every day going around getting sips from everyone's drink until she got drunk. She also smoked marijuana. One day she got so sick that she couldn't get up for two days. She realized that she needed to change. A man from Zimbabwe who comes there every year hawking baskets and second-hand clothing prayed for her, taught her and baptized her.? She then suffered terrible depressions and the man told her that when that happened she should go somewhere and read her Bible and ask God to help her. She did that and now she is fine. She had such bad pain in her joints that she thought she had AIDS, but her blood test was negative; and now that she has been so long without alcohol and drugs she is also pain free.

There are times when we wonder if anyone in Africa is able to break free of the world - but then we remember the Ellys, the Helenas and the Jannettys - and we know God wants us to keep on spreading the gospel. We sincerely appreciate your support, prayers and encouragement. We feel privileged to do this work with these people. May God bless you as you also work for Him.

With love, Linda



grandson Titus (3 days old)



Janetty