

NYLSTROOM SCRAPBOOK

November 2006

Dear friends,

The first rains of the year have arrived. The grass is green and the frangipani trees are filled with sweet fragrant flowers which can almost hide the smell of the spring blossoms of the aptly named herdersestinkgat (shepherd's latrine) tree. The bushbabies that live in our roof have had their litters, and one baby twice fell through the cracks and landed on my desk! At dusk when it was time for his parents to come out, Les carefully took the ladder and placed him in the gutter next to the bushbabies' "front door." Because of the wet autumn, we had an unusually beautiful spring. The bougainvillas (magenta/orange/gold), jacarandas (lavender), & flame trees (red) were riots of color. According to Tina, they were all in mourning for Willie. How caring God is to provide comfort for us through the beauty of the things he has made.

My Zimbabwean friend and sister in Christ, Jennie Edy wrote me that she and her husband went to a music recital and craft market. I thought it wonderful that people who are so down-trodden could still take time to appreciate beauty – even MAKE beauty. An example of this is the Venda traditional basket. This time I told the women I would buy baskets since I had finally managed to sell all the previous baskets I bought to a shop here in Nylstroom. To make the baskets, women unravel gunny sacks made from plastic thread.

Then they wrap these threads around grass, using different colors to make traditional designs. There were too many women, so I told them I could buy only one basket from each one. It seems incredible to those of us who have so much that women would endanger their souls by cheating about this – all for the sake of about US\$5. But I repeatedly had to chase women away who were telling me they had made baskets that other women had already tried to sell me.

The girl in the middle of the picture claims to have made the basket she is holding. She is just 12 years old, but was my brightest pupil. However, I am sorry to say that she did not get her Bible knowledge from Christians. I am really trying my hardest to motivate women to teach their children. The first hurdle, getting Bibles for them, is, thanks to you brethren, slowly being overcome. But the women find it so hard to read the Bible with understanding – so then how can they teach their children? All of you reading this letter have had the blessing of growing up with an education where you were given comprehension exercises in graduating degrees of difficulty – so that now you can understand the Bible. Most of these women have not. They have never been inside a library. Books, even at school, are a rarity. They learn by copying sentences off the chalk board into exercise books and memorizing them. So I thought to first try to get them to read the simple stories of the Old Testament and answer simple comprehension questions. This material has been translated into their own language. I don't know if it will help or not – we are only trying. This school at Penemene has 7 grades, 196 pupils, and FIVE staff members, including the principal.

Every morning at 7 the children arrive with – not books, but PLATES. World Vision has delivered to their school hundreds of bags of maize meal (stamped USA). Shortly after school begins, mothers arrive carrying firewood on their heads and begin cooking over open fires in the broiling sun. (It was 105 in the day and 95 at night – common summer temperatures.) Each child in primary school gets one free meal per day – a large plateful. Surprisingly, no one steals the maize meal. The school was very grateful to receive our \$25 donation to use one of their classrooms for three days. As I walked past the classrooms, I could hear a lot of chanting – that's the main way these children learn. In the picture below, taken of part of the congregation at Mapati, you can get an idea of the inside furnishings of a school class room.

How do these people survive? From the previously well-to-do whites to the most rural Africans, people can only survive by mutual aid. As we entered the section of Gwanda where Bigboy lives, we were met with scores of women carrying their water buckets to their friends on the west side because there was no water on the east side. We try to arrange our schedule to be in a city at least once a week to get water (our camper holds 15 gallons), but this time both Gwanda and West Nicholson were out of water. A kindly petrol station manager in Collen Bawn (I have seen no petrol there for years) let us fill our tank. And Bigboy kindly carried buckets and buckets of water since our hose would not reach to his bathroom sink. Bigboy also searched all over Gwanda, West Nicholson and Colleen Bawn for bananas – an ingredient for our shake (lunch) each day. I needed 12 for the next 6 days. We found two. A few days later, when we saw Bigboy again, he proudly presented us with a bag full of bananas. We simply could not survive even two weeks in Zimbabwe without the loving care of our brethren!

Of course, they also look to us for aid – some legitimate (like school fees) but impossible for us to fulfill – some we perhaps should fulfill but we are not sure of the expediency or honesty of the request, and others requesting luxuries like cell phones! Les made some men angry this trip by refusing to help one of them get in to South Africa illegally. ("It is easy for you to preach Romans 13 – we are starving!") We spend hours and lose sleep agonizing over these requests and praying for wisdom. Just as we were leaving for Zimbabwe we received a letter from the ladies of the Matsheloni church. "Greeting you in the name of Jesus Christ saying how are you and some family members. With a hope that you are fine. We are also fine, only looking forward with your visit end of October. We thank you so much for your teaching saying come again and teach us – truly you real edify us. 1. We are notifying you that Boardin Ndou had passed away – the man you spoke to wearing a brown jacket who said he had a problem of swelling legs. [I remember how terrible I felt when I spoke to him – a young father with small children, also with TB – obviously AIDS.] 2. Elias' mother had passed away. 3. Also we got a lady whose house nearly caught fire – but all clothes, blankets were burnt to ashes. Neighbors helped to extinguish the fire, Dt.5:20. So they are in need ... 7 children...." This was a first! Not one request for themselves (and they are struggling), only on behalf of a sister. I was so proud of them, and I praised them for this in front of the ladies who attended from other congregations. Fortunately, thanks to those of you who sent clothing, we had already packed the trailer with as much used clothing as we could carry. While we traveled from Nylstroom towards the border, Joanne Beckley (who lives on the way) got busy shopping for blankets for us to take. The letter did not even have the right amount of postage on it and it reached us in record time. God is so good!

Here I am now, back in my lovely home, back in communication with our healthy children and grandchildren who have every physical need provided. I know God wants us to use what we have to help others – but so often we are not sure the wise way to do that. May God bless you for your prayers on our behalf.

With love, Linda (and Les) Maydell

