

September 30, 2012

Every other week we drove to Bethany, where we bought hardware and food unavailable in Cana, ate a nice meal, had coffee and dessert and prayer at the home of our friends I'll call Priscilla and Aquila. Once while we were there, Colin got a phone call from the immigration officials, who told him to come immediately to their office and explain what the two young Americans were doing without proper permits. The laws about visas had changed, so Tom and Andrew had to pay \$200 to get permission to stay and work with us. The immigration official was very aggressive, demanding why they had only bought tourist visas when they actually had come to work? These are the kinds of situations that try a man's soul, and Colin rarely emerged from a confrontation like that without feeling battered.

We continued to learn about life in Cana as we lived there. Our landlord had a small shop on main street, and his wife often tended the store. Customers stood on the sidewalk and looked into the room, scanning the shelves for flashlights, clothing, dishes, or food. On a table at the window were bins of flour, sugar, cornmeal and rice for sale by the kilo. I'll call our landlord Philip and his wife Melissa. Melissa wanted me to come buy something from her every day, I discovered, and fussed at me when I didn't. She herself came by our house often to sit in the living room, nursing her youngest boy and accepting a little package of cookies for her little girl. She was curious what we ate, how we lived. Finally one day she asked me to come visit her at her house. She beamed as we walked through town together and people asked her where we were going. "I'm taking Mama Mary home with me to eat today."

When we got to her house, other women were there, too, relatives whose various relationships I never sorted out. They laughingly taught me to crack a coconut and grate it. "Even our little kids know how to do this," they teased. The oldest son, in sixth grade, butchered and plucked and boiled a chicken while the mother fixed rice with coconut milk to go with it. We sat in the yard and ate it together. Delicious.

Tom and Andrew were invited to have a different kind of adventure. Because it was the season when the wild pigs were tearing up the farms, eating the corn and rice, all the young men decided to have a pig hunt. This was announced by loudspeaker as a pickup truck slowly wound through town. Andrew took his knife. Both came back filthy, flushed and happy, describing how the men spread out and tried to capture the pigs in a large net, but the wily creatures escaped after leading them on a long chase through the forest. Later a couple of women were talking in my hearing. In shocked tones they agreed it was terrible that the town teenagers had led our unsuspecting volunteers through an area of wild vines with fuzzy pods guaranteed to bring massive itching.

Most of the time, though, the six months were spent building, building, building. I did all the cooking at first, then the three men began cooking for themselves. Soon we all learned to like rice cakes, sweetbreads, tortillas, fried cassava or bananas that

were available to buy from vendors in town. One by one the houses got finished, but it seemed like it was a painfully slow process. We fell into bed exhausted every night.

September 12 we drove to Bethany for supplies and finally were able to download emails in the early afternoon while we were at Aquila and Priscilla's. Among the emails was one written by Colin's dad that very day, saying that his mother had just passed away. Colin immediately went outside and called his dad on the cell phone. His dad sounded sad and weary from caring for Jinny through her last days. "Don't come home now," his dad said. "I know you can't make it back by Monday. Your brother Kevin will come preach the funeral, and in December we can plan a memorial service at our church in CA so all the family can be there." Although we were thankful that Colin's mother was with the Lord and no longer suffering, we grieved that we were so far away. The sadness of her death came over and over through the next few weeks and months whenever we thought about her. We remembered that before we flew to Africa, Jinny said, "Don't come back if you hear I am failing. I can go to heaven without you." Brave lady; courageous final words to us. We were thankful.

Colin had met Andrew as a student in 2011 when he taught a course at Ecola Bible School in the USA. He had encouraged his class to devote themselves to making disciples of all the nations. Andrew was the driver sent by the school to pick Colin up from the airport and drive him back and forth through the snowy mountains. On the way back after a week of class together, Andrew volunteered to come help Colin with our setup and logistics in Africa. He was getting ready to ask his girlfriend to marry him, he said, and then after completing Bible school and before getting married he had six months he would like to invest in the Lord's work overseas.

Tom came to us through our mission agency. He loved Africa and had come previously on a short-term trip to work at a children's home. His hope and prayer was that one day the Lord would send him to work full-time in Africa, but meantime he wanted another assignment after he finished college. He worked and saved up enough money to come for six months with AIM.

Enoch was married. He and his wife had one grown child who was married, with one grandchild. Because the Africa Inland Church (AIC) in Tanzania wanted to partner with us in every way, they sent Enoch to join us for the six months of setup for the long-term team. One day, perhaps, Enoch would lead such a team himself. After his assignment with us was finished, he and his wife would move to work in another coastal town where other AIM personnel were ministering. I was touched that they would make the sacrifice of such a long separation in order to serve us.

Each man brought his quirks. Tom loved to go barefoot, and to eat slowly. He had a real aptitude for learning the language, and had prepared himself to be spiritually strengthened by downloading sermons onto his ipod and bringing along his hymnbook. He had a natural curiosity and a creativity that kept him inventing

things: a wire mesh he bent into shape to be a dish drainer; our water filters he lay on their sides to filter more water faster.

Enoch amused us by fanning himself with the large bandanna he always carried while he draped his leg over the arm of a chair and told stories that made us laugh. He was strong, so strong he could lift Colin straight up out of a latrine pit. He had the cheerful composure that comes from walking with the Lord for many years. As a young man he had served in the army; when he came to know the Lord he began serving the King of Kings. Enoch was a vivacious conversationalist and passionate preacher, gregarious and friendly to everyone. Although he knew more than all the rest of us put together about how to live and minister in an African village, his attitude was never condescending.

Andrew thoroughly enjoyed the village life, and people were drawn to him. Everywhere he went small boys flocked after him and called his name. He spent a lot of time talking on the phone to his fiancée, and more than once he asked Colin and me for advice about how to be a godly husband. He and Tom were very different in temperament and interests, but they enjoyed living together.

When Enoch was with them, they had so much harmony, the neighbors marveled. "How can an old African man live with two young white men so peacefully?" they asked Enoch. "Each of you takes turns cooking. Each of you takes turns digging, working hard. All of you sit together and talk in the evenings, and we never hear you fight." Enoch smiled. "We are brothers in Christ," he explained.

It was part of our ambition as well as our strategy wherever Colin and I go to make disciples to Jesus of the people God gives us. We were not sure how much discipleship we could give these dear men while they worked with us, but we did our best to lead and be a good example. Colin taught them a Bible study every day while they drank tea mid-morning. Later, when Enoch was invited to preach in other towns, we heard him preaching Colin's lessons.

Andrew confessed, "I thought you and I were going to disciple me. Like, maybe take some time each week and go out to drink coffee and talk." Colin smiled. "In the USA that is how we think of discipleship. Take two hours a week and meet over coffee. But look at what you and I do here. Every day we work together, walk together along the road, talk together. When we meet other people along the way, I talk to them and you listen and watch. We pray together for the things we need, and see God answer. Which of these two ways is more like the way Jesus disciplined His friends?"

Tom and Andrew grew visibly. On Sundays the five of us met together for worship, prayer, Bible study and lunch. We sang a mixture of English and Swahili songs, and mostly studied the Word in English. Enoch liked to sing at top volume. I wondered what the neighbors thought as they watched and heard us. Some Sundays the

neighbor kids came and sat nearby, on the porch. We knew they reported back to their parents what they heard and saw.

Once a month or so we attended a very small Tanzania Assembly of God church, perched on a hill some distance from the cluster of shops and town center. Their service was long and the benches were hard; our two Americans did not understand the Swahili, so we only visited occasionally. It is necessary for Americans to learn to appreciate an African church service, but it is also hard to get much nourishment or refreshment from the experience in the early years of working overseas. Attending church in Africa is one of the most difficult tasks new missionaries have to do, made more difficult by the memory of the wonderful churches they miss "back home."

If, however, our main goal is to establish Christ-centered churches among all African peoples, we must walk by faith and not by sight, believing that all Jesus says about His Bride and her worship is the truth. Western missionaries want to encourage African people to worship the Lord in their own culturally appropriate way, but so often the way they then choose is not what we think is best. It takes grace on the part of the missionary to relax, pay attention, and learn.

We were, then, a team. A rather motley crew that the villagers puzzled over and discussed, sometimes while we were with them. White and black, old and young, three single men and one couple. We rented six houses and renovated them all. Every part of our daily lives, it seemed--our habits and interactions and projects and conversations--were scrutinized by the villagers around us. Little by little we began to get to know local people and make friends.





