

January 2013

In December 2012 our whole team left the village. Tom spent the month with American friends in another part of Tanzania. Enoch went home for the holidays to his wife. Andrew returned to the USA to marry his sweetheart. And Colin and I traveled to the USA for his mother's memorial service, our middle son's graduation and commissioning into the army, and Christmas with our family.

When the four of us returned in January to Cana, we missed Andrew but were thankful that Mr. Jordan brought several guys to help us with last-minute construction. Back in the USA, our team of trainees were preparing for their arrival in a few weeks. Two single young men had dropped from the team, so we had only six houses to prepare, not seven. Soon after our return to the village Colin and I were able to move to another house and build an "outdoor classroom" for our team meetings, a rustic thatched-roof cabana. Although I missed my former neighbors, I frequently stopped by to chat with them whenever I walked to town to buy food. This had to be done several times a week because I had no refrigeration. At first I was annoyed by the necessity; later I came to appreciate it.

As we drove into the village after our month in the USA, the roads had puddles and the corn was tall and the water tank of our house was full. Half the shop owners had closed their shops and gone to live on their farms for a month. Supply trucks had a hard time making it through the mud and there were no more tomatoes to buy. People told us January was the month of the light rains, but some of the downpours were torrential. "February will be dry, then we'll have three months of heavy rains, then comes the harvest." I began to worry that when our team arrived in town, there would be no people for them to get to know.

A neighbor asked one Saturday, "Where will you worship tomorrow?" That opened the door for conversation that eventually allowed me to share that Jesus paid the price for our sin on the cross, rose from the dead, and is the Savior who gives eternal life to anyone who trusts in Him. One afternoon six children showed up at the front door. "Can we sit on your front porch and read your Bible story book?" I eavesdropped on their conversation. "This is a picture of Jesus after He rose from the dead."

Our new house was in a valley full of coconut palms, banana trees, fields of corn and rice. When the wind blew, it made a great rustling that refreshed my spirit.

Whenever I poured dishwater out the back door, a cloud of brightly colored butterflies came to drink it. In the early mornings, the neighbors and their children were all out hoeing weeds. One darling boy and two equally darling girls carried water for me before they went off to school, till our water tank was installed.

House # 1 had plumbing, but all the others were at various stages of preparation. Each water tank needed a cement platform to sit on, then gutters on the steel roofs to catch the rain, and a pipe from the water tank into each house. We didn't want the team to have to go outside to get their water. One house's water tank platform collapsed after a big rain, and all the water began pouring out of the broken pipe. The neighbors around it rushed to bring buckets and pots to fill with rainwater. The most common question we got at this stage of the house construction was, "Will you leave the rainwater tanks here when you are finished?"

Three neighbor women and six children visited me one afternoon when Colin had gone to take a sick woman to the hospital in another town. They were delighted to see that I had a small solar charger and asked if they could come charge their cell phones with it. They tried my freshly baked rolls and showed me some vegetables I did not recognize. When they left they said, "Okay, now you have to walk with us to make it a proper send-off. You can't just sit on the porch and wave goodbye." I walked, they laughed, and when we got a few yards down the path they said, "This is far enough. Just remember to do this with all your visitors!"

Our teammates were at varying levels of support. Our prayer was that by February 1 they would all be fully supported. Three of the single women had all their support, and the Tanzanian family, but two families and one single still had more support needed. As a team we prayed together, and Colin and I sent the support need as a prayer request to over 500 people who prayed for us. What a pity it would be if anyone were delayed and had to join a different team.

One Sunday we worshiped in our new house with the work team from the USA, and after lunch a neighbor lady came to escort us home with her. "This is a special event, the birthday of our prophet, Mohammed!" We watched the women dancing and singing around an array of flags, listened as the men chanted prayers in Arabic, then ate beans and sweet bread and drank tea with the crowd. By asking questions we began to learn more about their religion.

Hopefully, as we showed openness to listening to them, they also would become open to learning about Christ. We already loved and appreciated them.

One day a torrential rain fell as Moses came by to sell me a papaya. Within minutes, a rushing river divided the valley. Moses was stuck with me on the porch of my house, longingly looking across at the main road that would get him home. Teenage neighbor boys chopped the trunks of a couple of banana trees that had been swept down in the torrent. Using the buoyant trunks, they slid down the river over and over, laughing and shouting, until they noticed Musa standing forlornly on my side. One of the biggest boys waded across and helped him escape.

Below: A river through the yard; an open-air classroom; installing a water tank.



