

February 2013

Colin and I went to our first local wedding, at a neighbor's house. "It's a small one," our neighbor said. "Next year when we can afford it we'll put on a big party for them." Colin hung out with the men and listened to the groom and the father of the bride as they finalized the marriage contract. Three times the father stated how much the groom had paid and how much he still owed, and three times the young man agreed to the terms. Meanwhile, the women welcomed me into the bedroom of the house where the bride was dressing in layers and layers of finery. An old woman kept saying, "Start with the right hand or foot!" It seems it's bad luck to start with the left. When finished, they brought the bride out to the living room to sit in a fancy mat, and after a while the groom was allowed to come see her. They shook hands.

We ate coconut rice and chicken, sang songs, and after some speeches and a religious prayer while all were assembled together in the front yard, the maid of honor carried the bride on her back to the waiting motorcycle, and they both got on behind the driver. Friends strapped the household goods people had brought as gifts on another motorcycle ("Don't forget the coconut grater!") The groom rode on a third motorcycle between two men. As they roared off to the groom's house in the next town, the women gathered around the bride's mother. "Don't be sad tonight. Just think about the grandchildren coming."

Each afternoon the neighbor children at our new home came to my porch after their chores were done. "Can we read the Bible story book?" First I poured water over each child's dirty hands. Then I brought out a straw mat for them to sit on, and the Bible storybook. They crowded around it and read aloud together. At first there were just four little girls, reading in unison. Later there were about ten kids and two women. I could hear them discussing whether they should take turns reading, since it was so hard for everyone to see the text. "I wonder how long it will take us to read to the end?"

Colin had a great chance to explain the gospel to our landlord's brother, who asked, "So...what it is you Christians believe, anyway?" He did not know that his religion of Islam teaches that Jesus did not die; instead his question was, "How do you know Jesus rose from the dead?" Colin took the opportunity to present all the evidences for the death as well, in case the man returned to his religious leaders to find out more from them later. The schoolteacher also continued to meet with Colin to read the life of Jesus. "I noticed Jesus had brothers and sisters," he observed. They reviewed together the virgin birth and Jesus' human family. We could tell he was very thoughtful, taking it all in.

The last house was progressing, and the team of helpers, including our faithful helpers Tom and Enoch, left the village on February 8. Our prayer was that all the team would have their support pledged by Feb 1, and when Colin climbed the hill to receive emails on Feb 2, he got confirmation that the Lord had answered that

request. All in all the team coming consisted of a Tanzanian family, four single women, and two American families. We were expecting eight children in all.

We scrambled to whitewash the walls, get tables and beds in the rooms, buy dishes and mosquito nets and plastic chairs and water buckets. My long list guided us through the process of buying that much stuff at the small stores in Bethany, then hauling it all home in the back of the Land Cruiser, distributing it in the houses. Priscilla helped me go around town and purchase household goods, but I left the purchase of food till we went to Dar to pick up the team. I began to get very worried. Within two days a house in Cana could go from moderately clean to filthy, just because of the rustic living conditions. Wouldn't the Americans be totally disgusted by the houses we had worked for so many months to prepare? Yikes.

Church and mission leaders continued to discuss the best way forward for a team placed in a Muslim area like ours. Colin and Mr. Jordan had a long meeting with the local sheriff in which the parameters for our team's presence were specified and documented. There was a strange dichotomy of hospitable, friendly welcome extended by the villagers and the government's hostile suspicion. We prayed for guidance through the legal and political minefields.

Before we drove to Dar es Salaam to pick up the team in early March, Colin asked five village families to host our students for a five-day initial "homestay" that was part of their academic curriculum. We would bring them to the village, take their trunks and boxes to their own houses, then deliver them to their host families to have a few days watching how local villagers lived. This would give them a jump-start on language and culture, and at least one family who would be their first friends.



Left: Coconut pile

Below: The way to get them down: shimmy up with a knife in your pocket, and cut them, dropping them with a heavy thud.

Last: Our neighbor boy with his coconut pile, worth about \$0.30 each. Money for candy and marbles!







