

May 2013

To the team's sadness, Edward and Susan concluded they could not complete the study program and should return to the USA. As they shared their decision with the team they said, "The Lord's ways are mysterious but we trust Him. Why did He bring us out here for such a short time? Maybe later we'll understand." As soon as they made the decision, their peace showed. The last few weeks of their stay seemed to be less stressful for them. They had taken time to seek the Lord's leading; now we as a team could process their goodbye. Each team member had worked to support and minister to them. We all could see how hard it was for them to keep up with the program through crises and illnesses. Yet we loved them and felt sad for them to go.

Our team had, as part of our program, endured three months of a "techno-fast." For three months we did not use electronics except on Saturdays. No computers, no ipods, no phones, no kindles. On Saturdays, however, we could use them for relaxation, as well as to send a prayer request by email to our prayer partners. This was to help us invest our time talking to our neighbors, learning language, and living like everyone else around us did rather than isolating ourselves with our technology. (Interestingly enough, we continued to live with a constant "partial techno-fast," because we could only get a phone or internet connection if we climbed up a tall hill, or if we drove down the coast to Bethany.)

My neighbor Nancy continued to drop by to visit. She asked me to save her my empty peanut butter jar. I asked her to save me some sesame seeds when she harvested her crop. One day, feeling brave, I mentioned the likelihood that I might offend her sometime. "It's good to ask forgiveness when we offend one another, just like we should ask God to forgive us," she told me soberly. "If you just come and say sorry, I'll forgive you, don't worry." I thanked her for her graciousness, and mentioned again that the reason God could forgive us was because our sins and offenses were paid for and the demands of His justice were satisfied by Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. She listened, nodded without comment.

Colin decided to join in the local culture by planting a garden with our neighbors. They loved showing us how to make a nursery and grow seedlings, then transplant them into a large area we had weeded and hoed together with them. Abundant rains had made the ground soft in April. In May there was still plenty of water just under the surface of the ground.

Once, when we were going to Bethany, Nancy's son Brad asked us to bring back a "ken." This would help them a lot now that the grain harvest was over and the time to plant vegetables had begun. Hmm... we pondered what in the world a "ken" could be. That was a new word, we finally admitted. When we asked for a description, he said it was a thing for carrying water that had a long spout and little holes at the end. Aha. A watering can. We found one, and brought it back in triumph. Nancy and Brad dug a shallow well in the lowest part of the property, and filled their new

“ken” with water. To our amusement, they planned aloud in our hearing how they would sell the surplus cabbages, tomatoes and green peppers when our plants started bearing. We started observing the business mindset of the culture.

The team continued to meet for prayer and academics. One week we studied Elijah’s prayer for rain, how he kept sending his servant to look at the sky till the cloud the size of a man’s hand appeared. We asked ourselves what we would consider “clouds the size of a man’s hand” if we saw them? That prompted us to list signs of spiritual interest we’d seen so far: the request of a shopkeeper and his wife for prayer, an opportunity to pray “on the spot” when a boy was injured, a man helping translate a testimony of faith in Christ, a woman’s pledge of friendship after a visit in her home, children asking for stories of Jesus’ death and resurrection, a woman’s request for prayer for healing for her sick child. Many of us had experiences to share with the rest that might qualify as “little clouds.”

As we talked, we made a decision. When we all drove to Dar es Salaam at the end of the month, we would purchase Bibles. If we as a team were praying that we could read Scripture with 20 people in their homes, we’d better get ready for the Lord to answer that prayer by having the Bibles on hand.

Near the end of May we drove out of the village, Edward and Susan and the children’s luggage strapped to the roof. In Dar es Salaam we said a bittersweet goodbye to the family, with repeated hugs, and managed to get them to the airport in time to catch their flight back to the USA. All of us felt a huge hole in the group after they were gone. During the next few days we relieved stress and got ready for our return. We played cards in the evenings at the guesthouse, ate ice cream, did shopping, and met at the central church office with the Africa Inland Church bishop for our official welcome as a team. All of us received Tanzania residency permits.

It turned out to be more complicated than we thought to find English-Swahili Bibles. Finally we were able to locate 22 bilingual New Testaments across town and had them delivered by the hands of various motorcycle couriers the night before we headed back to the village. The next Sunday as we met together for worship in Cana, we each took a copy. Should we give them away for free? Probably not the best idea. We agreed to ask for a small fee, so whoever received a Bible would appreciate it and care for it. Then we would invest the proceeds into buying more of them. As we held the books, Peter prayed aloud, asking the Lord to use them, and to show us who would like to read them with us. A few nights later, Joseph was able to read John 1 with Nathaniel.

We all felt sad that our team had shrunk. What would our “new normal” be? Would other team members be unable to finish? What would the next few months hold? How would God work in our friends and neighbors’ hearts?

Below: Village goodbyes; the team visits the central church office; gardening.





