

Thursday January 4, 2008

Curran Lutheran Hospital Zorzor, Liberia

Hi All,

Gary already sent everyone a pre-mission letter telling of all we did trying to get ready for the trip. I'm writing my first mission letter telling you of our safe arrival in Liberia. Our trip began when Gary's brother Charles and his wife Ruth met us bright and early Tuesday January 2 as we barely fit all of our suitcases into their car. It was nice to begin the trip with friendly faces sending us off with love.

They drove us to our drop off point where we met Paul Shaner, a fellow team member traveling with us, and Bob Bradford who heads up the Liberian program for the Upper Susquehanna Lutheran Synod. Bob drove us to BWI where Paul, Gary, and I made it through customs fine, but then found out that the plane we were supposed to fly to NY had a two hour delay because of de-icing in Chicago. That gave the three of us a chance to grab a bit and get to know each other better. I officially asked Paul if he would be our chaperone for all those of you at UCCW who were a little worried about that! ☺

We flew out of BWI just in time to make our connecting flight from JFK to Brussels. It was an uneventful 7 1/2 hour flight with a chance for us to watch the movie Ratatouille. We arrived in Brussels safely and had a 3 hour lay over until our next plane left. The waiting gave us a chance to meet some more folks traveling to Liberia, particularly Bill Martin who is with the Ministry of Health and was very instrumental at the end of our 8 hour flight getting us all through costumes.

We only lost one suitcase and of course it was the one with all of my clothes in it. Bill Martin had two cars waiting for us along with one Butch and Jim Foster (other members of our team) drove down to meet us in. We drove to the Lutheran compound and then went out to our first meal in Monrovia, the capital city. It was a fun night of getting to know the team a little better and finding out who I could borrow clothes from! And as Gary says, it's not often we get to see the sun set over the Atlantic Ocean.

Early the next morning I went with Gary to meet Mercy, a 10th grade student who Gary has known since 1998, so he could videotape a message from her to Judy & Ted Goregoire and I learned how to use the video camera for the very first time--a tool I am sure to continue to use especially taping some of Gary's escapades! We then left to do some shopping for needed items before we went up-country and Paul, Gary and I officially registered at the U.S. embassy. From there it was on to Phebe Hospital, a trip made a little longer due to the Chinese working on one of the few main roads. When we arrived at Phebe Hospital I met Patrick Jackson, the coordinator of the Tuition Sponsor Program (TSP) in Liberia as well as others who have worked with Gary on various building projects. It seems that Gary is quite the celebrity around these parts.

From there we turned on the main road to Zorzor, a dirt road you had to see to believe. We could sell tickets for it as a real-life off-road adventure, except after 3 hours of being "blutzed" (one of Gary's Pennsylvania Dutch words which basically means holding on

for dear life in the back of a van praying pretty continuously) we all very gingerly got out of the van thankful we could still walk. After unloading the van we sat down to a nice dinner prepared for us by Edna Johnson, an ELCA volunteer missionary who works at Curran Hospital, and settled into our rooms.

Tomorrow morning we begin the work we were sent here to do thankful for the safe passage here, for all the ways God has provided for us, and for the team that is now assembled to do the work set before us. Thank you all for your prayers as you all continue to be in ours. God bless, Deb