

Back in the Bush Mission Letter #4 2010

Hello from Sanoyea, Liberia! After spending a week making sure the Jerry Freeze Memorial Camp Site was up and running, it was time for us to be about the task of renovating Curran Lutheran Church and parsonage in Sanoyea, for Carl's team to start renovating Day Memorial Church and Sandy's team to get the teacher's training and women's workshops up and running. The last we talked with the group from Day, the first teachers' training workshop had been held with 17 in attendance from the Emma V. Day Memorial Lutheran School, the Harrisburg Schools and from the Millsburg Schools across the river. The women's group will start next week with 20 women expected to attend from the church and surrounding areas. Carl and his team have finished removing the church's bell tower and pouring the second footer so all will be ready in time for the steel to go up. It was rather amazing watching 20-30 men unloading the steel from the container by hand.

Gary and I both wish we could have stayed longer at Day, not only did we enjoy the team that had come to take over and were impressed with all of their talent, we also enjoyed setting up a campsite from the first steps of clearing the jungle to watching 10 volunteers now calling the campsite home for the next few months. For this city kid it was a fascinating experience. I don't remember the name of the program, but it reminded me of the show on PBS of the man who moved to Alaska, built everything from scratch and lived there for thirty some years.

We first picked the site we felt would work best for our camp and watched as it was cleared and the bush was left for a day or two before they burned the site (this is the way they do farming in Liberia, they cut the jungle and then burn the area before they plant their crops). We then leveled the ground and prepared each site with sand for where the tents would be placed. Gary built 3 shower stalls out of wood to go on top of the shower floors made by Paul Shaner which were shipped over in the container. One edge of the stall was higher with another piece of wood attached to it from which we hung a five gallon bucket. We put a hole in the bottom of each bucket and Gary attached one of the kitchen sink hoses we brought with us from the States. Each morning we filled the buckets with water and by afternoon two people could get a really hot shower before each bucket had to be refilled.

We made our own "Job Johnny" complete with a toilet seat we were able to buy in Monrovia, shelves for the warehouse that was built to house our tools and kitchen supplies, and benches for the 8 tables that would eventually arrive in the container. All in all it was a fun experience and we enjoyed not only setting up the camp but also working alongside and getting to know the people from Day Memorial Lutheran Church. When all is said and done we pray God blesses the renovated church and our "warehouse" they will be turning into a school, to the life of this congregation.

Once Gary and I left Day we joined Jim and Butch at our new home in Sanoyea (ask me sometime what it is like trying to retie a mattress on top of a jeep on the side of an African dirt road...). Gary, Jim, and Butch have the renovations started on the church and parsonage here in Sanoyea and the teacher workshops are up and running as I am honored to be teaching the full faculty of the Marie Kristen Jenson Memorial Lutheran School, 9 teachers in all.

In these letters you have so often heard of our impressions of Liberia, we thought you might enjoy reading the impressions of a Liberian Pastor as he traveled to Europe for the first time. Rev. Edwin Flomo, Pastor of the Curran Lutheran Church in Sanoyea, gave us permission to share with you his first trip to the airport in Amsterdam:

Edwin told us while he was at the airport he noticed a large container covered with glass full of sodas.

He went over to get one but didn't see anyone in the container to help him so he started knocking on the glass, "excuse me, is someone there? I would like a soda please. Hello, is someone there to help me?" He finally decided to wait to see what someone else would do and stood there until someone came over, put some coins in a slot and watched the soda drop down and the person picked it up and walked away and that's how he learned to use a vending machine!

He went to use the lavatory but could not figure out how to get the water to come out of the spigot, so once again he stood by and waited and watched as a man came up to the sink, placed his hands underneath and water started coming out all by itself!

Edwin had flown in with a delegation from Africa who were there for a series of workshops, none of whom had used an escalator before. When they got to the top the first delegate wasn't prepared for the steps to disappear and all of the sudden he fell at the top of the stairs creating a domino effect as all those following him followed suite.

By the time Edwin finished telling us of his first experiences in the West, Gary and I had tears rolling down our faces and our sides hurt from laughing so hard. It was fun to hear of Edwin's impressions of our society and it made me feel better about the many times I have had to ask Edwin to explain a custom in this area or to translate what someone has just said to me in Kpelle. I am sure our African friends laugh and shake their heads at some of the things we "white folk do." For example, Gary just asked me why we were honored by given the fish head complete with eyes on top of our rice at lunch today while I am sure our African friends are wondering why the Americans did not eat the whole head, (cartilage, bones and all which are a great source of calcium in the Liberian diet), and especially the eyes which are a delicacy to them. Anyone for some fish head soup?

For anyone trying to reach us, we are having trouble with our email back here in the bush so please be patient if you have not had a reply from us in a while. We did hear about the earthquake in Haiti and our thoughts and prayers go out to the many families who lost loved ones.

Thank you for your prayers for us and for the teams here in Liberia.

God bless,
Deb & Gary