
The African Report

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WINDING DOWN

“Life in These United States”

As the year winds down and comes to a close, my thoughts reflect on the days and months just past and the effects of our work in Africa this year. Sometimes it's hard for returning missionaries to settle down once they leave a place they have grown to love. Well, it's not the place so much as the people they know there who have been so much a part of their lives for a long time. So it has been for Ann and me after leaving South Africa in mid-October. We had mixed emotions before and after our departure from Benoni, South Africa. We miss our Benoni “family” very much. We have sent (and received) numerous emails to keep in touch with our many friends in South Africa. Making such a move as this is never easy, physically or emotionally.

BUSY, BUSY, BUSY

However, over the years as we've traveled back and forth from our home in Tennessee to and from Benoni, we have learned that our time in the States is never idle. We spend many hours catching up, reading all the mail that has accumulated, transferring important data between computers, visiting family and friends that we haven't visited in months, hugging our kids, Rick and Kathy with their two grown-up kids, Brandon & Erin, when we can catch them, and also Rhonda and her two, our younger grandchildren (Jasmine & Joey) until their eyes almost pop out, unpacking and stowing things away around the house, and so many other activities like doctor and dental appointments, etc. It is tiresome but necessary work we must do on each side of the ocean!

I am one of the fortunate missionaries who has an “agent” stateside that looks out for our interests and for the work we do in the mission field. My long-term friend, **Larry York** of the West End church, had speaking appointments set up for me from that first Sunday in October and on into November and December. Consequently, he and I have been “on the road” ever since our arrival back in Knoxville.

Ann also travels with me on occasion when I go to present the story of our work. She also prepares hand-out packets for all my speaking engagements. When Larry and I are ready to leave on a Saturday night or Sunday morning, she gives us the material we hand out to folks along the way so that when we leave, they have information about the work that we do in Africa. After working so many years in the public workplace wherever we have lived while also helping me accomplish the mission work I do, Ann can now spend time at home after her retirement

while still assisting our work to go forward. She also answers some emails and helps with reports and newsletters. She has been my secretary for years. Between her and Larry, they keep me on schedule. Don't know what I'd do without either one.

BACK IN THE ROUTINE

I have always loved to tell the South African story, but sometimes I also like to just preach the blessed news of Jesus and His church. Often, I get to do both, where I show a PowerPoint presentation during the Adult Bible Class about the work, then just preach during the worship hour. To me, that's Heaven-On-Earth!

In general, fund-raising is a part of every missionary's work. We wish it didn't have to be this way, but it is. That's the system. I think every foreign missionary longs for the day when churches will seek them out to go fulfill a mission they have selected and offer to pay total expenses. Some missionaries have been fortunate in this regard and are not required to wear themselves out (and their vehicles) seeking mission dollars from the brethren. The miles and hours do add up, but I count it a blessing in that we meet so many interesting folks along the way and feel perhaps we have broadened their knowledge just a bit by the information we share about life and the work on another continent. As the Apostle Paul reported back to churches after his Missionary Journeys (as we call them), so I am privileged to have fellowship with many churches!

SOME TELL A DIFFERENT STORY

This reminds me of a statement **Brian van der Spuy**, long-term preacher in Welkom, South Africa, once made to me. He said he never knew what it was like to raise funds. Among the scores of South Africans who came from there to the States to be trained as a preacher and Bible teacher, Brian was one of the very few who returned home to work among his own folks. Just before his graduation from a Christian College back in the '50's, when he was preparing to return to his homeland in South Africa to preach, the Granny White Pike Church in Nashville called him to come and visit them. They offered to fully support Brian and Shirley in their mission work back home, and have done this for about 50 years, along with their family that grew to number five children. This church furnished everything he said, and would bring them back to visit the States every few years. After Brian's death in April, Granny White continues to support Shirley, we are told. What a blessing to foreign mission work! I'm sure there are other churches like this out there. We need more such mission-minded churches who focus on spreading the flame of the gospel throughout the entire world, as the Lord requested. God bless you richly.

REPORTING TO CHURCHES

My first speaking appointment on Sunday morning, October 19th, was at the Wooddale church (formerly Ault Road) in Knoxville where Ann's sister's husband, **Bob Huff**, is one of the elders. **Bill Bryant** preaches there. Early in Oct., Bill returned from participating in our **Southern Africa Bible College** lectureship (Sept. 28th-Oct. 2nd). We are grateful the Wooddale church assisted him to visit the work in South Africa. He was a blessing to the church and made many friends on that side.

Since returning, I have either spoken or visited at the following congregations in the Knoxville area: Claxton, Karns, Lenior City, Norwood, South Knoxville, Wooddale and West End. Also I spoke at the Great Smoky Mountains church in Pigeon Forge, and preached in Athens, TN, Old Hickory in Nashville, Moss & visited Northwest in Clay County, Starr Mountain at Engelwood, Odd Fellows Hall church near Pulaski, visited Gainesboro in Middle TN, Crieve Hall church in Nashville, Sycamore church in Cookeville and New York Ave. church in Oak Ridge. In Kentucky, I preached for the Shelby Valley congregation near Pikeville, and at Tompkinsville, then the visited Main Street church on a Sunday night in Pikeville.

In Alabama: Bethel, Elkmont and Leggtown all near Athens, AL, also Fort Payne, AL. Larry and I attended the campaign meeting at the Memorial church in Houston in late October and visited Sunset church (and the school) in Lubbock, TX two days in October. On the return trip from Texas we visited with Glenn Boyd in Searcy, AR regarding my December trip to Nigeria and worshiped with the saints at Wynne, AR. As you can see, I have been busy these last two months of the year.

NIGERIAN TRIP

What an experience! Though on the same continent, Nigeria is a "world away" from what I know about Africa after 40 years in South Africa. Earlier in 2008, I had been invited to speak at the graduation ceremony for the Nigerian Institute of Arts & Theological Studies (NIATS) December 6th, and to teach in a seminar for preachers. I left Knoxville the day after Thanksgiving for this 10-day trip to Nigeria. I had to spend one night in Lagos to catch an internal flight on to Owarri and Aba where the school and the Christian Hospital are located. I taught daily classes during the seminar on leadership, participated in the graduation on Saturday and preached in Aba that Sunday.

Nigeria is one of the most densely populated nations on the continent with 148 million people in a land area about the size of Texas. There were people everywhere. Traffic in Lagos was a nightmare, and though in Aba and Owarri, not as many vehicles on the road, traffic was still unbelievable. I don't think I ever saw a red light or stop sign in either place.

Even if they were there, local drivers would pay them no mind. Everyone seemed to be a "law unto themselves" by driving when and where they pleased. I sat gripping the seat or door handles most of the time. Large potholes were bad with heaps of rubbish everywhere you looked, and with Nigeria being so close to the Equator, the heat and humidity were both high, I sweated profusely all the time, and it was difficult to get a breath of fresh air.

Comparing all that was wrong in Nigeria, it was so different (so right) inside the school and the church in Aba when I met with the brethren. As I described in another report, it was like coming out of darkness into the light - the Light of the Gospel! My fellowship with the Christians of Nigeria proved to be such a blessing to me. They were eager to learn and, refreshingly, had plans of their own for evangelizing their areas. I plan on returning to Nigeria sometime within the year to further teach at NIATS, preach for some of the congregations, and do my part in promoting the preacher-training programs in Aba and other areas.

MY KNEE PROBLEMS

Sometime back in May or June, while teaching at the Bible College in South Africa, I developed a severe pain in my left knee. Previously, the right knee had given me problems. In November after we returned, I had an appointment with an orthopedic surgeon, then an MRI. It showed arthritis in both knees and the right knee was worse with "bone-on-bone" - no cushioning left. However, the right wasn't hurting at the time. The doc gave me a cortisone shot just 2 days before I went to Nigeria, so the entire time I was there, I had NO PAIN. For that I was very thankful. I'm sure the shot helped, but also thought perhaps the heat was part of it.

Upon my return from Nigeria, pain in the left knee came back and I knew something had to be done. As I write this report in January now, I am having therapy following the orthoscopic surgery to remove torn cartilage from the left knee. The original pain is gone now, but I must still recover from the surgical pain. The stitches are due out in a few days. I may need complete knee replacement in the future, but for now, I'm glad to be in the recovery stage with much less pain.

FINISHING UP THE YEAR

I landed at the Knoxville airport around 9:00 on Dec. 8th, just in time to greet my wife for our 47th wedding anniversary. It was too late to celebrate, but I gave her a book I'd bought in Atlanta written by one of her favorite authors. We didn't celebrate the holidays in a big way this year either as there was so much going on in our lives. It was just good to be together at the close of the year and look forward to next year's schedule.

As we report to churches to confirm commitments for our continued work in all of Africa next year, we need your prayers and support. We will keep in touch by way of reports and newsletters. Remember us in your prayers always. Love to all.
- Ann & Jerry