

Hands Across Nations Newsletter

5-22-2015

God's rain has brought life out of the dry ground!

Greetings from damp and muddy Northern Uganda. We're in the land of power outages on a regular basis which have often provided us with quiet, beautiful starlit nights without security lights or fans! Everything is green and beautiful.

For the past 6 weeks, the teacher training workshops were put on hold so that Keith and Carolyn could catch up on administrative tasks while Peter, our "Apwony Dwong", meaning Big Teacher, followed up with the teachers and classes from the previous 26 Teacher Training workshops. There are challenges to be sure, but the stories that are coming from both the teachers and learners are enough to give us all the uplifting motivation needed to "keep pressing on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called us heavenward in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 3:14)

Recently, Andrew, one of our literacy teachers, told a heartwarming story about a special student in his "Learning to read to read the Bible" class, his mother. She had never attended school, and struggled her whole life to send him to school. He had, in fact, done well and is able to read and write in both English and his tribal language, Leblango. He's a gifted teacher, able to give a vision to his learners of what might become of them once they learn to read and write. His mother has become his star pupil, as they spend time even outside class, working on the lessons. She is able to listen to words and write them down well. Andrew is encouraging his learners not just to start the race of learning how to read and write, but to complete it well.

Local pastors of 4 churches have been so impressed with the progress the learners have made, that they are planning a "Learners' Sunday" where they will do the Bible readings and the preaching for the services! These are people who up until now, suffered the embarrassment of pressing their thumb print on documents because they could not even write their own names.

Peter stated his delight about the Learners' Sunday saying "I wouldn't even think of this!" He's given many talks about the possibilities once the learners have succeeded in their quest for

learning to read and write, but this is a new one for him. Peter has continued to spend himself 5-6 days a week, to improve the way the trained teachers are instructing their classes. He never knows what the weather will be like, how the roads will be, what might break down on the motorcycle, what activities might get in the way, or even that he might need to try something that is quite frightening to get to the training centers.



Recently he took a chance to cut his time in traveling to a remote village, by traveling through a swamp, to meet with some teachers. Since he doesn't swim, the thought of putting his motorcycle in a small canoe -like craft along with 6 other people and 2 bicycles, was a fearful one.



The swamp wasn't deep but for a non swimmer it's too deep.



Many of us love to swim, but this would have been a bit of a stretch for any of us as there are crocodiles and snakes in the swamps. When asked the plan if the boat should turn over, the owner of the boat, stated he would jump into the water and rescue them. Ha Ha! We had a serious discussion with Peter about taking off all heavy clothing and his helmet to assist him in being able to maneuver if the boat over turned. He thought his jacket might work like a life preserver!

Recently, we were given an unexpected opportunity to meet and dine (cassava and black beans) with the Paramount Chief of the Lango Tribe.



It was a real honor to be introduced to the man who is regarded as the tribal leader over the 1.8 million Lango people. His granddaughter, Dorcas, is the daughter of our friend Ruth, who was instrumental in helping get the literacy program into the Lira Prison.



Dorcas and her fiancé married the next weekend and they visited the Chief to receive a blessing on their marriage. Already into his 80's, he continues to be active and is now building a secondary school in honor of his late wife who expressed her desire to build one especially for girls so those in the area could be educated close to home.



The chief was quite interested in the adult reading program we are using and could be a strong, influential advocate for moving it throughout all of the Lango sub-region. He also has a sense of humor, letting us think he spoke only Leblango so we struggled along with our not-so-perfect phrases until he changed the conversation to his excellent English!

A second surprise meeting came at the prison where we had the honor of individual time with the Regional Prisons Commander. He has been following the progress of the adult literacy classes being held in Lira Main Prison. Their results will be one of the main considerations when deciding whether or not to expand it throughout the prisons in the Lango territory. 4 men's prison classes completed Primer book 1 in just 6 weeks and are now into book 2. A 5th class started almost a month ago and they are 2/3 done already! They've been reading aloud from the Bible when I come - not just 1 or 2 verses which they might have memorized, but 10 - 12 verses at a time! Most never went past 3rd grade, and many never had any schooling, yet most are reading quite well now and are even able to write short sentences dictated to them. They are asking for more math and letter writing lessons! The rain is the main stumbling block as they can't hold class outside when the rains come. The women are continuing to move forward working their schedule around the work they must do each day.

What really interested the Regional Commander was what might come after the basic learning to read and write, which would benefit the inmates in preparing for their return home to their villages. The Farming God's Way (FGW) method Keith has been using for 2 years sounded to

him like a good method to use on their 15 prison farms in the future depending on its success on the demonstration plots.



Keith's demonstration garden, on the right, is again surpassing the traditional Lango method, on the left, both planted on the same day with the same seeds. Peter, our teacher trainer, has also planted a demonstration plot on his village property which is the first time the method has been tried in his village. Prayerfully we are hoping that God will bless his land with a bountiful harvest as God will be harvesting a bountiful crop of Bible readers through Peter's efforts and those of his teaching team.

Isaac Odongo, our wonderful illustrator for the literacy program primer books, has been increasing his skill for the work by reading books and practicing with pen and ink.



The photo on the left will be part of the cover artwork for Primer Book 2. The lady reading to the children was on the cover of the first Primer book, showing her walking toward a bright future through learning to read. This illustration is showing how she might use her reading skill for the children and others. The drawing on the right, is a "gulu", a cooking pot, which is used for one of the picture words in a health lesson about boiling water for drinking. Isaac's drawings are becoming masterpieces of African art with his own unique flavor. He often exclaims "God is so great!" when describing the joy he feels as he makes each illustration for the books. His physical disability, having significant cerebral palsy, has not limited his ability and influence in using his talent for the Lord's work.

The rains are coming regularly and the white ants are flying many nights! It is a serious occasion as there is a particular time period to catch them, usually at night or very early before dawn. Preparation of these special insects is critical: Taking off the wings, cleaning the little buggers, cooking, drying, frying, crushing, and making into a paste. It all takes time, so pretty much everything else takes a back seat to the preparation of the white ant delicacies.

We have a very nice white ant trap in our hallway where the light is on at night, and the exhaust fan in the ceiling is blowing into the attic space. The flying ants get sucked up into it, their wings get pulled off and the bodies drop to the floor to be easily swept up. Our chickens are happy as we take all the wings and bodies out to them in the mornings. (None of us are big on eating them ourselves.) In seconds, they've put them "down the hatch".



Debbie, Lucy (our house girl) and I have been coddling the chickens, trying to get them to lay eggs for us. For months it was not working. Then we started getting 1 egg, several days a week, and once were gifted with 2 from 3 of the hens.



But last weekend, Deb and I were amazed to find 6 eggs in the pen one morning! We were high fiving and singing halleluiah to the Lord for such a great bounty of eggs! We hardly noticed that we had 3 large brown ones which were quite large, though none had ever produced eggs like those wonderful specimens! As it turned out, Keith talked Lucy into putting those 3 into the pen as a late April Fools on us, and we were gullible enough to fall for it! But we decided that it

had been an inspiration for our girls to produce one egg each on the same day! One other small hen is in rehab, tied to a tree getting special treatment as the others harassed her so much she had nearly all her tail feathers removed, and was barely hopping on one leg. She gets caresses, sweet talk and lots of her favorite foods including a big dose of white ants.

We're still battling the rats and snakes which appear from time to time - all have been small snakes so we're wondering where the Momma is.....

Last week was a bit rough for Keith. It turned out he had Typhoid, fairly common here. After several days of R&R in bed and meds, he's back feeling healthy again, praise God. That was an experience not to be repeated! Carolyn had the chance to repay some of the great care Keith provided to her last year when she had malaria.

Debbie is continuing to help out with all the daily chores in the house while putting together some special Bible bookmarks using scripture verses in Leblango. These will be given to the prison Literacy Program graduates when they complete Primer Book 2, hopefully in June before we leave.

We are grateful for all that God has done to help us be a unified team, serving Him with all our heart, mind, soul and strength. We are also grateful to hear of the support coming from our USA home team, all of you who have sacrificially contributed to help the Lango people learn to read and write. 3,500 pairs of reading glasses have been donated so far, for the literacy students and teachers. We will probably have to wait until we return next fall to bring them to Uganda, but they will provide tremendous improvement in the elderly people's ability to see the written word. Thank you to Helen and Mike Salapka and all those who have responded by helping financially to purchase and ship them here. Donations can be sent to Hands Across Nations, PO Box 711, Chewelah, WA 99109.

Thank you to all who are praying for us. God's peace has been with us and in us while much doesn't quite go our way and yet the Lord keeps us on flat ground, as he lowers the mountains and clears the pathways.

Sharing the love of Christ in practical ways,

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(We love getting email, even though the internet is very sketchy much of the time)