

2010 Spring Edition

# MALAWI MOMENTS

A newsletter update from Bruce and Beth Smith



## Prayers

- ❖ For patience, persistence, and memory with language learning.
- ❖ For patience, peace, and a calm interior and exterior over those surprising, frightening and particularly unwelcome "Hello's".
- ❖ For early awareness of anger so that it can be dealt with appropriately.
- ❖ For people with whom we can form close friendships.
- ❖ For long-term resolution of our legal/immigration status in Malawi.
- ❖ That we will find the vehicle right for our work and funding at the time we need it.



✘ "Beyond this land of parting, losing and leaving..." ✘

So begins a gospel song I hadn't sung in years, but it came to me while driving a Montgomery street. I sang, Beth cried and I too, as I ran out of words before the chorus. . . It began in Redlands where I probably became a little more aware of my heart, years ago. So many people, from every phase of life: church, neighbors, colleagues, patients, even the ones gone on. So long. Only 19 years . . ., but so long. But we *have* to go. There is not room to mention you all, so I won't begin. But I think of you, especially on Sunday morning, and Wednesday night, and Tuesday at 8:30, and Thursday afternoon, and . . .

Then a new town, a new group of people. "This won't be like that. Six months. A piece of cake." Wrong. Thankfully, painfully wrong. Brothers, sisters, colleagues, neighbors, patients, family, as complicated as the last set, mixed emotions, but love woven in it all. Still too many to mention. So, more pain. I'll be glad when this is over. Lord Jesus, come quickly. "Beyond this land of . . . leaving lies the summer land of bliss." Oh yes. Maranatha.

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## *Transitions- From Redlands to Lumbadzi*

One of the saddest times was to say good-bye to Charlie, the 73-year old homeless man we had become pretty close to. He came by the very last day before the truck pulled out and sat by the front door with his head down. There were few words because he didn't really know how to say what he wanted to say. It was the only time he allowed Bruce to hug him.

And then there was our home where our children grew up. We decided to rent it so it had to be painted, repaired and cleared out for the new tenant. Stuff the kids had left behind finally had to be dealt with. Jeremy the oldest, was in Mozambique with his family and Susanna, the youngest looked like she was headed to Korea (where she currently resides with her husband), so it fell to Nathan, our "home base" as he said, to help us out in that area. But it wasn't just their stuff. It's amazing how much one can accumulate in 38 years of marriage! And we didn't do the sorting thing very well. We ended up needing a 22-ft. Penske truck to get our stuff to Montgomery, Alabama where we were going to live for six months, getting to know the folks at the Landmark Church of Christ, the congregation who had decided to sponsor us in our HIV work in Malawi and southern Africa. Carol Parks championed a large crew of brothers and sisters who helped with everything from packing to major repairs and clean-up, and giving the truck-packing a second shot. Charley and Martha Roberts accompanied Bruce on the road; he'll never forget that help.

And so the first move was made. On the way to Alabama, we attended our niece's wedding in Jonesboro, Arkansas. It was a wonderful time of family reunion and celebration. We arrived in Montgomery on June 22<sup>nd</sup>, unloaded all our "stuff", stayed temporarily with Jeni Huggins, and made preparations to head out to Africa on the 26<sup>th</sup> for a six-week trip to Malawi, South Africa, Tanzania and Mozambique. In South Africa and Tanzania, we held two HIV seminars and then visited our son and his family (our three grandchildren) where we got to see how their ministry was going. We even got to "mud" a church building and build an adobe stove for a sister. Bruce encouraged the team to consider the possible effects of HIV on their ministry and how they could confront it.

On August 9<sup>th</sup>, we were back in Montgomery, setting up our household in a one-bedroom apartment, which was quite a switch from having our own home. But we soon found that without kids, it did very nicely. We began working diligently to meet Landmark members, raise working funds and moving expenses as well as try to tie up some loose ends. Each family we came in contact with was a special treat. Beth attended Ladies' Bible Class. We went to the Wednesday evening meals before class and tried to sit with a different group of people each time. We attended different worship services to meet different people. We invited people over and were invited to many homes for meals. Attending Life Group was another opportunity of getting into peoples' lives.

Meanwhile, Bruce was working at Montgomery AIDS Outreach part-time and learning how HIV was affecting people right there in Montgomery. He also spent a lot of time on the phone and emailing folks about funding the project. In addition, we made road trips to Arkansas and Tennessee to talk personally to churches and individuals about partnering with us in the work.

One of the most challenging yet helpful things we did was to participate in a course on Islam during the months of September through November. While our ministry is not aimed particularly toward Muslims, we will definitely come in contact with them in Malawi and southern Africa. It was eye-opening and helped us to better understand their faith.

All too soon, the departure date was arriving. We were to leave Saturday, February 13<sup>th</sup>, after Missions Sunday (February 7<sup>th</sup>). We began ordering the items we needed such as a generator, voltage regulators, clothing, personal medications and other supplies to last a year. Most of our stuff was still packed in the Missions barn but some of the boxes we had unpacked and needed to re-pack. We had to choose what to carry on the plane and have for the next three months until the container got there, and what should go on the boat. Some of the things were family archival photos—those went to other family members to store or use or manage.

And we began to say good-bye again. To family, to the Mission Vision Team, to the elders, to the Life Groups we met with, to those we got close to as we ate and conversed with them, and to Bruce's HIV patients at the clinic. Though we had only been there for six months, we felt very close to many in the congregation and about.

Missions Sunday! What a day! We were surprised by a videotaped blessing from Redlands elder Jim Parks, commissioned by Wes Gunn, the Missions Minister and then prayed over by the elders and Mission Vision Team members. We felt loved and blessed. When the time came to leave Montgomery on that snowy Friday, many of the Mission Vision Team braved the snow and went with us to Birmingham on the bus to eat a final meal with us and pray for us once again.

The trip went fairly smoothly. But it was hard to realize that this time was the real deal. We had made this trip several times before and up to the time we got to the Blessings Hospital compound it had not really sunk in that we are here to stay. Instead of taking the suitcases into the Guest House, we went up the stairs to the main house. We are now in Malawi in the "house on the hill" setting up house in a very new environment. Many simple things are different than home—like how to change a light bulb, how to clean fresh fruits and vegetables so that we won't get sick, what to plug in where (220/110), sporadic electricity, slower internet, keeping the mosquitoes at bay, driving on the left side (Road on the right! Road on the right!), sharing a car.

But the people are delightful and we are anxious to begin to study the Chichewa language that will help us understand the people and culture of Malawi. We are also looking forward to meeting lots of new people as we practice our new language. We're ready to get on with the next step in this transition time, making Malawi our home for the next several years.

## *I don't know why you say "good-bye", I say, "hello"...*

Fortunately, for every "Good-bye" there is the opportunity for a new "Hello". All kinds of new things and new people have greeted us. Many "Hél-lo's. Among them are:

Not drinking from the tap—even when brushing your teeth.

Washing your vegetables with a little Clorox solution.

Shifting the 5-speed with your left hand. Reveals just how automatic a standard can be and goes with "Road on the right!"—See Beth's article.

Getting around a new car's multiple security devices ("Oh, that little beep. When you hear that you have to push this little button or the second time it beeps your engine will stop." And it will—wherever you are!)

And the turn indicator. The *turn* indicator! On the *right* side of the steering wheel. Down for right, up for left—with the right hand. *Every* time the right hand. (You guessed it. The windshield wiper's on the left. No, they don't recognize the wiper start-up as "The new guy's gonna turn right", even when it's not raining.)

Things found in different stores. Rat poison at the grocery store, but no mosquito spray or any other form of DEET. (Maybe that's because there were rat droppings on the cereal shelf. We aren't going back to that grocery store. Not because of the droppings, but because when Bruce told them they said, "Oh, yeah." Like, "So?" At least not this month.)

Renewing ties with the children, teens and house mothers from Mtendere Village, the orphanage we look out over every morning when we walk out the front door. So many names, so little memory. (Lord, could you double my RAM and make my hard drive about 10 times bigger?)

The frustratingly easy-going pace of everything. At the bank in the airport (nearest our house), 3:05, same people and windows as always: "The bank is not open now. We only change money now. We can give you the forms to fill out now but we can only receive them between 8:30 and 3:00." Ohh-káy.

Living in a place where anger is **THE CARDINAL SIN**, and anger has always been one of your most difficult problems. (Thank the Lord that Beth says it's a little better than it was 38 years ago. Haven't lost it yet, but have come close twice. Coming up: week 2. Something to add to your prayer list.)

Welcome at a new church. Lumbadzi Church of Christ now has pews, Beth would call them benches, but they're like the recycled dynamite crates I sat on at Lamar, Arkansas, when preaching there the '68-'69 school year. Great improvement over a bamboo mat—at least for *our* physiognomy and customs. Being asked to preach, which I expected, but quietly declined "Until I can do it in Chichewa." (It's hard to get out of that translator thing once you start. Language assignment for this week: a closing prayer, or opening, which I did this morning, in English; or maybe both; "Be prepared".) And individual, paper communion cups. Not that I'm opposed to one cup, but "sweet communion" can sometimes take on a whole new meaning that way. And the embrace, the "right hand of fellowship" of good people who are doing their best to serve

God, are aware of their own sinfulness, and trust him for his grace. Fellowship made possible by the blood of Christ.

Good-bye also means hello, and I think we are laughing more than the first time, 28 years ago (when we moved to Nicaragua) at the many new "Hello's".

Now, it's 10:00 pm, and we're off to the airport to use the Wi-Fi hot spot so we can use Skype to call a brother on the weekend at a reasonable Sunday afternoon hour. Here's hoping we can make Skype work this way. (Straight calls are between \$2 and \$4 a minute here to there, pennies a minute there to here. We'd love to talk with you and we're working on a better solution. But even offices in the US are usually closed on Saturday.) Still more "hello's" await us.

### MANNA FROM HEAVEN (WITH B12)

When we pulled into the carport, it seemed the rain had gotten harder and softer at the same time. (Snowing at 65 degrees?) Floating from above were what appeared to be smaller versions of those seeds that have one propeller that helicopter down on you. Hundreds of them. Not filling the sky, but enough to get your attention. When one hit the windshield, the veins in the "leaf" didn't look quite right, nor the symmetry. Termite wings!

We had seen some kids the other day, just outside the gate, behind the car, eating termites, sans wings. They (the termites) come out at this time of year, shed their wings, and the kids catch them and eat them—all but the wings. We were seeing a shower of wings from termites who'd made it up into the tree.

A bit later we were walking down to Mtendere, the orphanage, and saw two boys just inside the gate. They were on either side of a low pile of grass, cuttings of some tall, rainy season growth along the path. From the pile, termites were emerging rapidly in large numbers and taking off, only to fall not too far away, shed their wings, and move on. The boys were catching them as they took off, stripping them of their wings, and eating them. We stopped to watch.

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## News, Notes and Prayer Concerns

•We're settling into a weekly schedule that is meeting our needs with going to the grocery store (a 30-45 minute one-way drive) and shared transportation.

•We have begun Chichewa study (today is day 2!), working with a couple of the older teens from Mtendere who are home for two weeks on holiday between terms. Beth's helper is Treeza, the eldest child of Ruthie, the worker who was killed a few months ago in an auto accident. We are still looking for more long-term language helpers.

•On my first day of language work, out on the road talking to neighbors, a young man shared with me, for no particular reason that I could see (there's nothing about HIV in my first day of language text), that he was HIV-positive, along with his wife and the child they lost.

## OUR FAMILY

Our children and their spouses are well, scattered around the globe as they are.

1. Susanna and Josh Borgelt moved to Korea just before we moved here.
2. Jana and Nathan Smith are expecting their first in early to mid-March.
3. Martha and Jeremy Smith and company will be traveling from Mozambique to the States around April first in anticipation of the coming of their fourth in May.

### MANNA CONT...

"Swoosh"—a half-cocked left forearm comes down, meeting a termite in rapid take-off, fingers close, a thumb nimbly maneuvers the termite against the fingers, the right hand comes across and strips off the wings; forearm up, defrocked termite popped into the mouth: crunch, crunch, swallow.

"Are they good?" I asked.

"Yes." When there's good free food flying away, you don't waste words.

I'd heard about this for years, but had always been here in the dry season. They can't be too bad, I reasoned. One flew my way, then another. "Swoosh", maneuver (wiggly little creatures), strip, pop, crunch, crunch (not much taste) swallow. Another: crunch, crunch crunch, roll the tongue, still not much taste. (No, Jim, they don't taste like chicken. More like Nsima. Not much taste.) One more for the road. Still no taste. Just free fast food. And I'm sure it does a lot more for developing hand/eye coordination than Donkey Kong, World of Warfare, or whatever your favorite is. And, being an animal product, it comes with B<sub>12</sub>. And no, I haven't gotten sick yet and it's been more than 24 hours. But those roasted field mice are another thing.

## VEHICLE NEEDS AND COSTS

Due to the cost of most vehicles that would meet our needs being considerably higher than we had been told, we are submitting a revised budget of one-time expenses.

A)The total needed for that fund would be \$89,000.

B)At this time we have spent about \$10,000 on the move here, which with other planned expenses will put us just about on budget for that item.

C)Approximately \$25,000 remains in the One-time Expense fund.

D)We have a remaining need for approximately \$53,000, all of which would be utilized for a vehicle. (Yes, they really cost that much.)

E)We have investigated used vehicles here in Malawi, and every one is 10-15 years old. That does not seem to us a wise investment for a vehicle we expect to use in international travel.

F)We have seen vehicles of more recent vintage advertised on the internet, but running over to Tanzania to pick up a car would seem fraught with danger since we do not even know a trustworthy mechanic there to check it out.

G)We will be talking to appropriate government officials about the possibility of obtaining a car free of import duty, which, though unlikely, would mean a considerable saving.

