

May, 2009 - Prayer Points

Dear Friends:

Since my report in March our family made a quick trip to South Africa so our two oldest children could take their college entrance exams (SAT) and the rest of us could make the usual round of doctor visits and annual purchases. The three weeks in SA were some of the most profitable our family has enjoyed. We are thankful for new friendships with choice saints and potential team members, but we did pay a price as we encountered more than the usual problems on the road both coming and going.



Our route from Nampula to Johannesburg, RSA – 1700 miles

With a tight schedule because of the annual FIEL pastors' conference bearing down on us June 9-12 we could not afford to waste time, but repeated major vehicle breakdowns cost us ten days beyond what we had projected for traveling. In the end, a friend in South Africa who before was barely known to us came to our rescue as we were stranded in the bush with our second blown head gasket of the trip. This Godsend personally covered the cost of flying the family to Nampula while he nursed our ailing Land Rover the rest of the way. We left Kent behind to help him as translator and summoned our motorist/mechanic to travel 1000 miles by bus to meet them in order to handle the remaining breakdowns. Their combined efforts were blessed of God and when they finally pulled into Nampula after a prolonged and arduous trip the rest of us gave them the hero's welcome they deserved!

1) Thank God with us for wonderful new friends acquired during this brief trip and for His deliverance from the multitude of difficulties that beset us on the road both coming and going.

For those interested in sampling some of the potential pitfalls of travel in the African wilderness, the following story is provided. If you already have enough problems of your own to savor, please jump ahead to the next section!

The trip out was marred first by a blow out on a section of Mozambique's rough unpaved road. This was handled in the routine manner, but with our new Land



Crossing the Zambeze River by ferry

Rover we were carrying only a single spare wheel whereas formerly we always took two when traveling through the wilderness. Because the tire was destroyed after the blow out, we had to stop at the next large town to find a new spare before another flat left us stranded in the bush. We were grateful to find a suitable tire after only four hours of searching, but the delay caused us to arrive at the Zambeze River three minutes after the ferry shut down for the day. Those three minutes cost us an additional 13 hours in our timetable. How discouraging! Until recently, that three minute delay would also have necessitated sleeping in the car at this desolate location, but just two months earlier a deluxe lodge had been opened by a South African entrepreneur only a few minutes away. We were the sole guests at the still unknown resort, and there we had the most luxurious accommodations of the entire trip. The new dwelling we stayed in was built high on a bluff with a beautiful view overlooking the river. Because of the expense we would not normally have contracted such extravagant lodging, but as we had little choice in the matter, we suffered it to be done thus unto us!



Suffering in style!

The next morning we resumed our trip, now almost 24 hours behind our original timetable. To reach South Africa by Easter Sunday we drove through the night and consistent with our new schedule were just two hours from the border early Saturday a.m. when one of the pulleys on the drive belt broke. That resulted in an overheated engine and a blown head gasket. Surveying the damage to the car we were profoundly grateful God had postponed the breakdown until we had reached the outskirts of Maputo, the largest city in Mozambique, and had not permitted that we be stranded by the road in some remote part of the country.

Even so, I spent the entire day searching for someone who would sell me for less than \$215 a used pulley that in South Africa goes for only \$15! After eight hours and



Earning a living on the Zambeze

a large taxi bill I finally found someone willing to make only \$70 off our misfortune. However, replacing the pulley was just the beginning of the repair. To replace the head gasket we had to wait three days as the shops were all closed in observance of a national holiday. We much appreciated the mechanic's zeal who finally accomplished this major repair in only one day, but by the time we reached Johannesburg we were four days behind on our tight schedule.

The return trip was even more eventful. As a portent of things to come, the night before leaving Johannesburg the trailer sustained a puncture and the tire was destroyed before I realized what had happened. Because the tire was an irregular size, finding a replacement took four hours the next day. This precluded us from reaching the border in time to cross, so reluctantly we postponed our departure by one day. The next day, after traveling 300 miles, almost within sight of Mozambique,

it became evident our alternator was overcharging the battery. In fact, the battery was destroyed and nigh unto exploding before I detected the problem. As in Maputo, we thanked God that our breakdown occurred in such a strategic location, for we were just 100 yards from an auto-electrical shop erected in this isolated part of South Africa.

Unfortunately, the owner had no compatible alternator and after calling all around the region, neither did anyone else. His repairman worked valiantly to get us underway again, destroying two new alternators in unsuccessful attempts to manufacture a solution. After ten hours of labor (and much money spent) a third effort finally worked, but by then it was too late to cross the border. So we backtracked to the country home of Jimmy and Tombie Guthrie, friends we had come to know only recently. To our relief they were at home and warmly welcomed us into their lovely guest house. Their hospitality was so appreciated we tarried another day, building up steam for accomplishing the remaining 1400 miles through the rough terrain of Mozambique.

However, it was not to be. Only 300 miles into the day the engine suddenly overheated and I had to pull off the road. Investigation revealed we had blown another head gasket and our cooling system was filled with air escaping from the cylinders. This was probably my fault for not re-tightening the bolts at the prescribed interval after the first repair. This time we really were stranded in the bush, 50 miles from the nearest town and 170 miles from the nearest shop able to do the repair we needed.



Repairing the head gasket

Two days earlier, after our first breakdown, a friend from South Africa had offered to take all our troubles onto his own shoulders, getting the car to Nampula himself while sending the whole family ahead by plane at his expense. At that time the family had heartily declined, considering it too extravagant a gift to accept, but now that we were stuck yet again, this time in the middle of the farthest corner of the earth, we all began to think otherwise! For me as for our patron, the overriding consideration was the urgent need to begin preparations for the conference, now only three weeks away. I had the impression that the evil one could too easily hurl down endless delays as long as I was chained to our faltering vehicle in the midst of the Mozambique wilderness. So I called on the cell phone to ask if our friend's offer was still on the table, and to our relief it was. By the next morning our deliverer had flown to Maputo and was making the necessary arrangements to fly the rest of us to Nampula far from our vehicular afflictions.

However, the first evening of our breakdown we had more pressing concerns than getting the car repaired. There is no law enforcement in rural Mozambique and the poverty of the people renders some of them dangerous. In Nampula armed desperados roam the mud hut neighborhoods in the evenings such that no one dares leave his dwelling after 11:00 p.m. Even our guards would sooner spend all night on our compound than risk the walk home when their shift ends at 10:00 p.m. The section of road directly in front of our property on the outskirts of the city is the scene of several murders each year as pedestrians and unprotected people on

bikes and motorcycles are ambushed by bands of lawless opportunists. Rural Mozambicans are much friendlier, but there is even less protection in the wilderness than in the cities, and if opportunists happen to pass a stranded motorist late at night, the situation can turn dangerous. Friends in Nampula aware of our predicament contacted a missionary couple 50 miles away who hurried out to whisk the women folk away to their safe haven on the Indian Ocean while Kent, Andrew, and I stayed with the car to discourage would-be looters.



The Indian Ocean – a two-minute walk from where the women stayed

The next day the missionaries sent a truck out with a towing lance so we could tow our equipment to safety 50 miles away. The day after that a local mechanic removed the cylinder head which I immediately carried to Maputo on a crowded bus for skimming, backtracking another 120 miles in the process. The family came with me to take advantage of the opportunity to fly home from the capital city. In Maputo we met up briefly with our friend Zander, who got us tickets on the earliest available flight and then himself started northward by bus with the newly skimmed cylinder head.

It took another day for Zander to have the cylinder head reattached to the motor, then the Land Rover embarked once more on its fateful journey. But 100 miles later it was again down for the count, this time with a stuck valve and ruptured air intake hose, problems arising from the hasty repair of the head gasket. Expecting the worse by this point in the trip, I had already instructed Marques, our mechanic/motorist, to take a bus from Nampula to join up with the ill-fated party. The next morning his bus reached the stalled Land Rover, still 1000 miles from home, and he quickly went to work. With ingenious African engineering involving, among other things, plastic grocery bags and duct tape, he was able to carry out major repairs beside the road that got the car running again. With a mechanic on board the nettlesome car finally began behaving itself, and to everyone's relief and surprise meekly accomplished the rest of the trip without further incident.



Our mechanic, Marques, attending the stricken vehicle



Total cost arising from the breakdowns coming and going: over \$4,200. Time lost: 10 days. However, when we measure that against the benefits that came from our time with friends in Johannesburg, we think the blessings were well worth the cost. Also, despite our exasperation with the unending delays, we were impressed with the

Lord's constant provision and protection at every step. Someone mentioned that it was one of those "faith-building experiences," and indeed it was. The Lord's deliverances all along the way were such that, if we had not been pressed for time, we could have greatly savored better than most planned vacations the unexpected stopovers with choice Christian friends we had not visited before in scenic locations we had not previously known!

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Once Zander reached Nampula with the Land Rover the mystery of why God caused us to become stranded so far from civilization became evident. Because of fully booked flights, Zander was "forced" to stay in Nampula a full week after his arrival to help with preparations for the conference, our true great need. I asked if he knew how to pitch large marquee tents. In fact, he had erected many during his days in the South African army and knew exactly how it was done. So I commissioned him to take on that task and in a mere matter of hours he had the tent up and perfectly square. Even more importantly, the workers got an excellent lesson in how to do it and one of our most troubling assignments was already scratched off the list. Zander was an encouragement in other ways, but his help with the tent was alone sufficient to make me suspect the real reason for our troubles on the road. If only we had accepted Zander's first offer of help, God probably would have allowed the vehicle to make the rest of the trip without further incident!



In fact, the Fiel Conference is my constant preoccupation these days. This will be our 10th annual meeting and already over 250 church leaders and spouses from all over the country have registered to come, making it the largest conference yet. The theme is the Christian family, a topic poorly understood in this part of Africa, and our plenary speakers are Jaime Marcelino from Brazil and Wayne Mack from the U.S. Multiple electives will be offered as well with five other speakers taking part. The meetings will occur 9-12 June.

2) Please thank God with us for the unexpected help we have received already through Zander Viljoen in preparation for the 10th Annual Fiel Conference,

3) and beseech His blessings upon the church leaders who will be attending, that godly homes and strong churches may begin to fill the land as a result of their labors.

In other news, in South Africa we had the pleasure of knowing better Barry and Michelle Jamie from Brackenhurst Baptist Church, a Sola Five congregation in Johannesburg. Sola Five is a sister association of churches similar to the Fellowship of Independent Reformed Evangelical churches in the States. Barry and his pastor, Doug Van Meter, will participate in the Fiel Conference just two weeks from now and at the same time will be evaluating opportunities for future service in Nampula.

We also were pleasantly surprised to receive a visit from Hester Austin of Antipas Baptist Church in Vereeniging, another Sola Five congregation, notifying us of her interest in getting personally involved in the Nampula ministry. As a nurse practitioner and former bookkeeper she is well-qualified to help us on several fronts. She will be surveying the land during the Fiel Conference as she oversees the bookshop.

4) Thank God for encouraging us through these interested friends, Barry and Michelle Jamie and Hester Austin, and pray that God will grant His long term direction for them as they help during the Fiel Conference.



On the family front, the Woodrow kids bade farewell to their Turnbull brothers and sisters as the latter tarried in South Africa en route from Nampula to the States for furlough. On their return to Africa the Turnbells will be moving to Zambia to help establish African Christian University. Both families enjoyed one last day of fun and fellowship at a local museum/amusement park before the final separation.

While in Johannesburg, Kent and Sarah, our two oldest children, took their SAT's in preparation for applying for college. It is hard to accept that they are really on the launching pad for leaving us. We were happily surprised to learn that Kent did quite well on the verbal section of the SAT's. A year ago he missed only one of the questions finishing with a score of 770. We expected he would have to accept a lower mark this time around, but to our delight he scored a perfect 800! We are reminded of how grateful we must be that despite limited opportunities missionary kids must accept in certain areas of their development, God is able to overrule that, and even more than compensate through experiences uniquely afforded young people growing up on primitive mission fields.

Until our next report, please especially remember the Fiel Conference, 9-12 June, and the following week-long seminar, that God may use this time to strengthen, encourage, and equip faithful pastors who normally labor under adverse conditions with scant human and material resources.

By His grace:
Charles and Julie Woodrow