

Sunday, October 30, 2005



Today is grand finale day. The plan is for us to attend the 8:30 a.m. church service at the St. Andrew Church, the only former PCSA church or “white” church in the Presbytery. This means the service is structured just like our services back home. The pastor is Rev. Errol Theophilus, who is originally from Durban and of Indian descent. After the service we briefly stop for tea and biscuits. There I have a chance to speak with a Canadian, Mennonite family in Mthatha doing mission work. I also get a chance to talk to Nomathemba, who was among the first Mthatha delegation to visit Donegal back in 1999. We also

stopped to visit her during our trip in 2002. She mentions that she soon will be retiring and hopes to travel, especially to places she’s been before. I tell her if she plans to come back to Donegal let us know. She asks about a church she remembers going to in 1999. She said it had a British name. I ask if it was Oxford. She says it was. I point her to Sarah and Denise as both coming from churches in Oxford. She said it was called the second church. I tell her Denise is from that church, but Denise is in heavy conversation, and before I have a chance to connect them up, we are being pulled away for our second church service of the day at the T. P. Finca Memorial Congregation.



We are slightly behind schedule, as we head off to the Ngangelizwe Station, where Tandy is preaching but will leave to be one of our drivers to T. P. Finca. We are ushered in very briefly to greet the congregation. Then it is off to T. P. Finca and the main course of the day, a FULL church service there (in 2002 we were only able to enjoy about 45 minutes with them).

We arrive about 30 minutes late, but it hardly matters. As we arrive, the whole congregation exits the church singing and swaying as they go. We feel very welcome. We are then ushered in a side entrance to meet the church’s elders where greetings are exchanged.

It is finally time for the service to commence. The whole service is beyond description. The spirit of the Lord surrounds this simple but elegant church. The service consists of some solemn Xhosa hymns and some that rock and roll. I am master of the camcorder by this point and catch many of the hymns. Unfortunately, this also means I must remain completely still, no easy task, as my stiff



American body has gotten used to the joyful movement that is part of the services here. Luckily I don't have enough minutes to tape every song, so am able to let my body move with the rest on some hymns. Larry preaches a sermon that speaks of brotherhood of all God's people. That is certainly true in this place today.

The service comes to an end after the offering is taken, but that is only the beginning as the reception / entertainment portion of the day's events begins. Tandy, as Presbytery moderator, welcomes everyone. Percy also speaks, as does the church's moderator and a representative of the church's women and men. The latter two offer us gifts of a traditional Xhosa beaded necklaces that are placed around each of our necks, and a beaded Aids pin.

Finally, it is our turn to speak. We each speak in turn and offer similar messages explaining our feelings of our joy and how overwhelmed we are. I personally speak about how good it is to be back after exactly three years, and how good it is to be able to be here for an ENTIRE service. I say that in 2002 I felt like an observer, ushered in and ushered out, but I am, at least for today, a member of the T. P. Finca Memorial Congregation and that makes me smile. After the formal introductions and speeches, its time for the young children of the church to dance for us. Which we have come to enjoy in the past few days.

At home I often find myself glancing at my watch about forty five minutes into the service (sorry Pastor Chris), but here we were well over three hours before I even remembered I had a watch on. Finally about 3:30 p.m. the official events of the day are completed. But, we are far from finished.



We are ushered over to the nearly completed church manse. It is a well constructed home built by a local contractor. Actually, Percy and his family, which includes his wife, two teenage daughters and two year old son, all live up the road in Maclear. They are waiting the day when the plumbing is put in the manse before moving to Tsolo. His son is adorable and takes to us all, but especially Grandma Barb. He enjoys it when I put the camcorder into playback mode and he gets to watch himself and other dancing. He puts the camcorder up to his ear to try to hear the faint noise that comes over the camcorder in playback mode. The music puts his tiny body into movement. He also likes to play with the buttons. At the manse we are fed our final church banquet. I won't give you the details as you should now the menu by heart by now.

After the meal Larry and I take Percy aside to teach him to drive his new laptop, Dell computer, compliments of the Westmister, West Chester Congregation. Percy is VERY overwhelmed, but is truly OUR pleasure.

Percy is one of those very special people you meet once in a very long while. There are not sufficient words in either Xhosa or English to describe what he means to me and all of us at Donegal Presbytery. He works tirelessly and for not nearly enough money (as do all the pastors down here), I found in trying to call him to set up this trip that the best time to call was at the end of his work day. That usually means after 10:30 p.m. South African time. He works from sun up to way past sun down doing God's work for his people. It is not unusual for a pastor in Eastern Cape to perform two or three funerals a week (usually on Saturdays). This is partially explained by the

fact that a pastor's Congregation consists of a home church plus up to 18 out stations, but is also explained by the hard life here in Mthatha and the problem of Aids. And, some pastors even have a second responsibility as the convener for a second Congregation.

Percy, despite being worthy of endless praise and accolades is also the most humble person I know. When doing interpretation in Xhosa for one of us, whenever we mention his name, he will not repeat it in his interpretation. Rather, when it comes time to say his own name, he instead, with a big smile, puts his hand above his head and points down without saying his name.

And to conclude, Percy just may be the most intelligent person I have ever met, not to mention most spiritual, kind and gentle. We all fear, including Graham Duncan in Pretoria that Percy is in danger of burning himself out. He is so devoted he just never seems to take the study leave that is coming to him, or any other time off for that matter. We all hope to find a way to get him to take his study leave and we, on the Donegal South African Task Force side, would love to arrange a way for him and his family to do so in America. Financial concerns play into it. It's a dream at this point.

Anyway, our plane is landing in Joburg, as it is already tomorrow as I write this. I'll have to write Monday version some other time. Anyway, our Sunday evening ends with many of the faces we've met this week joining us for one "last" supper at our home. Percy's family is there too, and Aaron enjoys interacting with Percy's daughters as they are of similar age. After the meal all depart save us, with many hugs, Xhosa handshakes and many, many tears. With everyone gone, it's time for cramming everything into our bags for the plane ride to Joburg. For everyone but me it is just the beginning, because after an eight hour layover it's time for the long flight back to the USA. You might remember that I have a week more of vacation in Tswahne (Pretoria) with my archaeology friend Dores before heading back in a week.

