

Thursday, October 27, 2005

I awake to find I am indeed catching a cold and today will be the suffering day with nose congestion makes breathing very difficult. But, no time for that as we are on the go again.

Today we are going to our friend Rev. Melikaya's church at the Kuhlani Congregation. This is a very rural and poor congregation. I should say poor in financial resource but by no means in spirit. In spirit that are probably among the richest congregations around. It's about an hour's drive and on the way I snap probably 40 pictures or more. Later in the evening I find that I've been particularly lucky as probably at least half turn out to be keepers.



We arrive to find the congregation waiting for us all decked out in the traditional black and white of Presbyterians of the UPCSA. We share the Xhosa handshake and hug and are then ushered into the manse where Melikhaya lives. The traditional cooked mutton innards prepared for important visitors is offered to us. Though not my favorite dish, especially when a cold has me down, I manage to get down a piece mutton kidneys.



As was the case at Nangelizwe, the nearby school uses the Kuhlani Church to supplement their inadequate classrooms, in part due to a cyclone which demolished one of their building's roof. This same storm knocked down a portion of the new and partially constructed church wall and roof trusses. Upon examining it after the service, it is apparent that this project was attempted without the necessary expertise and the cinder blocks were built with no structure rebar and undoubtedly substandard mortar. It's a simple case of a poor congregation doing the best they could with very meager resources. Larry offers some advice for when the start again.

Before the planned church service, we go to meet the staff of the school and afterward the school's students. The teachers and staff number about 20, and are all crowded into one fairly large office room. They are a very dedicated group, working under difficult circumstances, and with FAR too

little resources. The school day is separated into three sections, literacy, enumeration and life skills. Barbara, as a teacher of fifth grade in a Mennonite School back home is especially interested,

After our meeting with the staff, we go out to find the students numbering some 600 or so crowded around the door in the yard of the school. Their numbers dictate classroom sizes of 60 or 70! We are greeted with this mass of smiling faces. Barbara I think is in heaven. One student is asked to come forward to greet us.



Afterwards it is to church we go, with Larry scheduled preaching the sermon and Aaron and Sarah reading the scripture taken from Genesis and Romans. It's turned out to be a very hot day, 32– 34 degrees Celsius (that's 90 – 95 degrees Fahrenheit). The heat does little to ease my suffering, congested head, but there is no choice but to try to ignore and enjoy where I am. The spirit of the service helps in making this happen ..... sort of.

The music, Larry's sermon, all just build on the wonderful feeling of friendship, and love shared between two very different peoples who despite the differences have become one. We all receive wonderful woven gifts from the women, and a blue t-shirt of Thebo Mbeki (President of SA) from the men. The woman presenter is especially vivacious and offers us each a giant hug at the end of her presentation. We all also entertained by dancing children of the church.



We leave the church and are directed to a huge tent set up to receive us. Barbara, Denise and Sarah have small gift bags, candy and bubble gum to hand out to all the children.

We then re-enter the church manse for..... you guessed it, the typical banquet of beans, rice, potatoes, mutton, beef, chicken greens prepared especially for us! Given my cold, if at home I'd probably be eating oatmeal and dry toast. This isn't exactly that, but I suffer through and try to eat at least a little. I survive ..... just barely.

After the meal there is no time for the sick (me, Sarah who has also caught a cold, and Denise, who has a queasy stomach) and injured (Aaron and his sore ankle right and dog bitten left leg .... or is it the other way around) as we are off the Indian Ocean and the hole in the wall.

The road is bad and deteriorates the further we go before becoming a rutted dirt track. The landscape gets more and more desolate as we go. The probably 30 kilometer (20 mile) drive takes about an hour due to the road conditions. We arrive, park and open our doors to find a near gale wind blowing in our faces. We must walk down a long hill with difficult footing. We are accompanied by three little boys with a mini soccer ball. Their playful actions demonstrate that boys will be boys in any culture. The walk is well worth the effort. The hole in the wall is a fantastic site to behold. It is a formation just off the coast that includes a small tunnel like hole at water level through which the waves wash in and out. Hence the name hole in the wall.

Ignoring my suffering, I roll up my pant legs, take off my shoes & socks, and wade through a small channel out to a sand bar, as do Sarah, Aaron, Larry and Barb. I alternate between taking still shots and movie shots with my Dad's little camera. I'm glad he offered to let me borrow it as it has offered me many, many great shots.



I head back with Denise slightly before the rest. My vision is almost nil due to the salt air pushed by the gale like winds salting up my glasses. We walk up the hill accompanied by our soccer playing friends. At the top of the hill by our car we find a group of girls with beads to sell for 5 rands each (75 cents each). As the rest of our group arrives some purchases are made.

As dusk approaches we are off for Mthatha and home. As darkness settles in it is apparent that this is a very remote part of the Eastern Cape. No electricity is to be found in any of the huts and homes dotted about. At this point in our stay we are going everywhere in two cars. I am in the left (passenger side in this British influenced country) of Percy's car for the ride back. We converse on the way back on various topics. He tells of how there are various references in the Bible that have enabled Africans to claim ownership, e.g., Moses, Joseph and plus others who all have African connections.

We arrive back home to find Victor there to greet us. We all share dinner together at our home away from home. We bring our group of six from Donegal, plus Percy, Melikhaya, and Victor. Thankfully, while a banquet, it is not a large one, and one where we can select our portion size. My cold dictates a small one. Tandy arrives as we finish up. He says needs to suggest a change in our schedule for tomorrow. For those who are interested he will take them to a handicap workshop where crafts can be had. Following this will be a day at the Lower Ngqwara Congregation, the site of our potential second garden plot project. Unless I am miraculously feeling better tomorrow I doubt I will be going along to the shopping trip.

Soon after our day ends as all depart. Thanks to some pills from Barbara I am soon asleep despite my cold. Hopefully, tomorrow will find my suffering a little less.