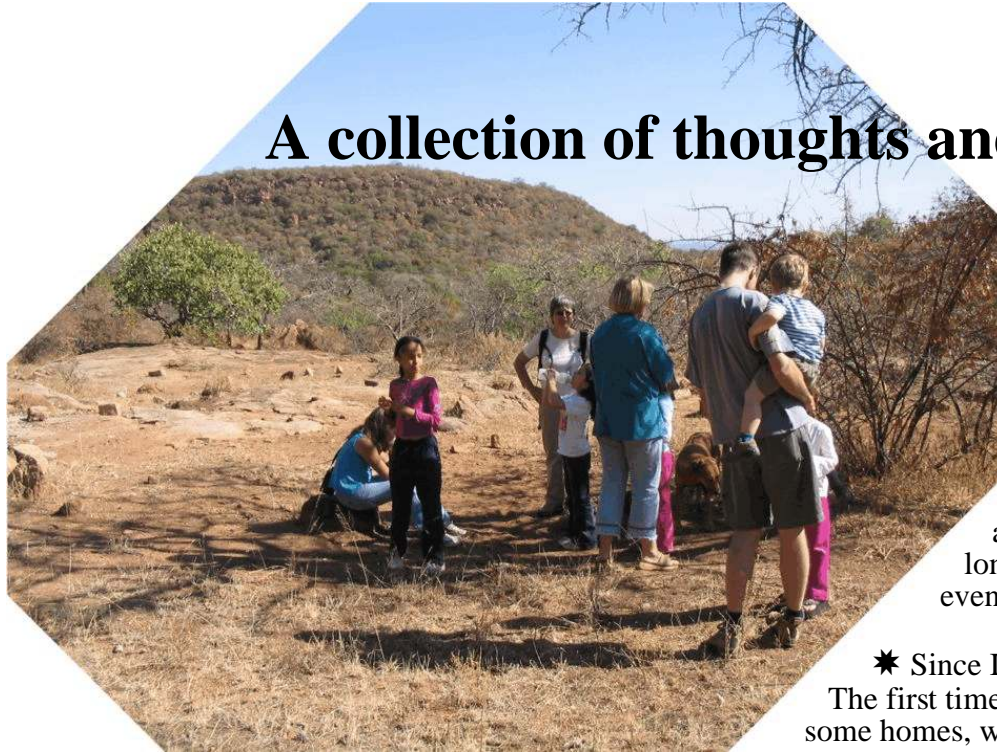


From our street to yours ... Glyn, Susan, Maeyken, Adriaena

July 2004

#4



Walking in the hills near Gabane

A collection of thoughts and observations ...

★ The other day I was looking at some pictures we had taken a year ago in Ontario. They were mostly taken at cottages beside lakes. I realized that part of my struggles here have been because there is a very different aesthetic here. Wherever we have lived, even Egypt, we have lived close to water. I am having to learn to appreciate something new. Last weekend we were with friends at Gabane, a town on the way to Kanye. We went for a long walk in the hills and it was really wonderful, even without the water.

★ Since I last wrote I have been to Francistown twice. The first time I visited with the Bible class teacher, visited in some homes, went to two churches, connected with the Bopaganang Basha youth centre (an organization that Mennonites have supported strongly) and was at the Bible class on Monday evening. The second time I also connected with folks in the youth centre, but led a Bible teachers training workshop. Both times while I was there I stayed with a wonderful family who are in the midst of building a house. People build their homes here as they have money, so they do things gradually. They do not wait to have all of the utilities and conveniences ready before they move in. So this home had no lights or running water. A bit different from what I am used to, but thankfully I know how to bathe with less than a bucket of water.

★ On the way to Francistown the first time I went to Serowe to the “dressing” of a bishop. Bishop Kokoro has been an acting Bishop for a number of years at the Spiritual Healing Church here in Gaborone, and was finally made into a full Bishop through dressing him in a proper bishop’s uniform. This was a major celebration, with a worship service that went from 9 till about 3, and then we ate. A significant part of the worship time was a free will offering for the Bishop. Church leaders are not paid in the African Initiated Churches, but people were able to respond generously to the Bishop and his wife at this celebration. Significant cash was contributed, but also a bull, a wheel barrow, various folding chairs, an axe, a stove, pots, blankets, and many things that were harder to see in various boxes.

Glyn

Partners

We need partners to do what we have been sent here to do. Part of our task is to develop African partners. This includes the people who teach bible classes, and the congregations and congregational leaders who we work with.

We also need North American partners. This includes Mennonite Church Canada Witness our sending agency. Yet we need individuals and congregations who will partner with us in the work we have undertaken. Congregational Partners are congregations who will take an interest, pray and support the work that is happening here. Partners are also congregations that share with us needs so that we can pray for you. If you think that your congregation would be interested in being a partner with us in this ministry with African Initiated Churches in Botswana let us know and we will help make the connections, or contact Ingrid Miller at the Mennonite Church Canada offices.

HIV/AIDS close up!

When God called us to live in Botswana one of my stumbling blocks was the HIV/AIDS crisis. I didn't know much about it but what I did know left me wondering about the risks I was placing myself and my family in. I feared most for our family's physical safety. Were we putting ourselves at risk? Now that we're here and I know more about the virus that is no longer my fear. But after this past month my fear has become one of emotional attachment. Once we are involved in people's lives we cannot remove ourselves from their pain and problems.

This month I accompanied a young mother to an HIV test. Till then the HIV/AIDS was still at a distance. Yes, I had met people who are HIV positive. I had wondered a lot about people's status. I found myself sizing up crowds wondering who is positive. But now it is personal. A few weeks ago a young woman came to me for help. Her newborn baby was not well and the local clinic was not helpful. Upon the advice of my Doctor the young woman went for an HIV test. It came back positive. The mother and the baby are now "in the system." The baby is on medication. We need to pray that the baby can fight off HIV with the help of the medications. The mother has some steps that she can take to extend her life. Now that she has been tested there are government services that she can access. But she has to act upon them. Many people live in denial. They don't want to talk publically (or even to their family) about being positive. I don't know how this young woman will respond. Because of language limitations I don't know how much she understands intellectually or emotionally. I do know that I am now "hooked" emotionally.

As I sat at the testing clinic with this young woman hoping so much for a negative result yet knowing that it probably wouldn't be my heart was heavy. This is a young woman who has so much going for her. She has the same dreams as 21 year olds in Canada - to get married, have children and do some good. All through this process this young woman was stoic. Quiet but stoic. On our way home I fought my own tears. Tears for a young woman whose life is being destroyed by this virus. Tears for an innocent baby. Tears for my children who will have to come to terms with the presence of terminal illness and death. Tears for myself. Those tears are harder to define why. Perhaps they are tears of sympathy and of grief. Perhaps they are tears of anger. Perhaps they are tears for the seemingly hopelessness of this epidemic. The government has developed a strategy to raise awareness and reduce the transmission rates. There is money and services available for people to access. But the government cannot fight this epidemic on it's own. We believe that the church has a role to play. And we believe that God will open up ways for us as we work with AIC congregations to address issues of marriage and family life. With MCC leaving us as AIMM workers need to find a way to work directly with this issue.

Neither of us feel equipped for this crisis. We are pastors. Not health care workers or social workers. Right now our biggest gift is friendship and prayer. Friendship and prayer for this one young woman and her baby. But also for the thousands of other people who are in the same situation. Our responsibility is to pray for the people of Botswana and respond to the people God sends our way. So we ask you to join us in prayer. Pray for a miracle of healing for this baby and young mother. Pray that God will open doors for us. Pray that we will be able to find ways to work with individuals and churches in the area of family life and marriage.

Will we be able to stay emotionally unattached? No. But as we have experienced in the past it is when we walk with people in their pain that God works amazing things in their lives and in our own.

Susan

In the Future

July 17 Celebration of the opening of a branch of the Abanaeza Association church in Ramotswa

July 27-29 Maeyken's school musical

July 25 - 31 Glyn travelling with members of the Francistown Bopaganang Basha youth group to Lusaka, Zambia to look at AIDS work.

Aug. 7 - Sept. 6 Winter school break.

Aug. 8-15 Vacation trip with MCCer's Deanna Neustaeder and Nathan Penner to Kasane, Victoria Falls and Lake Kariba in Zambia.. We will visit former Botswana MCCers Ruth and Art Thiessen.

Aug. 16 Maeyken's 11th Birthday!

Oct. (Exact dates yet to be confirmed.) Meetings with AIMM mission representatives and our Batswana partners here in Gaborone.

From the girls...



Adriaena and her friend Rebecca with her siblings and father.

moving to Swaziland with her family. So Maeyken has been busy using her friendship and organizational skills to plan farewell parties for Jenna.

Parcels: Thanks to those who have sent parcels. We all appreciate both the contents and the fact that we are not being forgotten. Mail between Canada and Botswana seems reliable. However surface mail takes about 2 months to get here. Letters and parcels sent via air mail take less than two weeks.

Keep sending them the "cheaper" way. Just remember that they take longer to get here. We try to sent off a thank you when we get something so you know we have received your parcel.

Life for the girls continues on with a regular schedule of school, homework, after school activities, piano lessons and of course playing with friends! All of us continue to adjust to a different school system. It is an excellent school and the girls are receiving a well rounded educational experience. However, subtle differences to what we experienced in Ontario keep popping up. So we all keep trying to be sensitive to the "culture" of the school and work on each issue as it arises!

Since it is winter we have the additional challenge of getting up in the dark and cold to get off to school. Dark we are used to from Canada but the lack of central heating means the house is fairly cool (cold!). As we gather round the heater in the morning it brings back memories of a cold farmhouse for at least one of us...

Thornhill is a school with a large expat community. This means that there is a lot of coming and going. Both of the girls have made many good friends. At the end of this term one of Maeyken's friends is



Maeyken and her friend Isabel

Contact us

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Please Pray for...

AIC Bible teaching ministry. Thank God for wonderful people that are dedicated to teaching classes in a variety of locations. Pray for us as we discern ways that we can be most helpful in nurturing these teachers.

Ministry Colleagues and Friendship. We want to thank God for the many people we have got to know recently. Twice recently we were at events where we had good conversations with people we previously did not know. Sadly one of the realities here is that people are very transient, and one of those events was a goodbye for a friend of Maeyken's. Continue to pray for us as we work at building a network of friends.

A year already! We are thankful for a year with Mennonite Church Canada Witness, most of it here in Botswana. This fall (April, May, & June) we have carried a number of mixed feelings. Remembering people and events that we left in Canada. Remembering the various goodbye gatherings. Thinking of all that has happened in the intervening 12 months. We are thankful for God's hand in our lives. Recently part of my devotions included that passage "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness." 2 Cor 12:9 Thank God for his grace and ask for help to rest in God's grace.

HIV/AIDS affects a large portion of the population, particularly young and middle aged adults, those who are parents and are in their most productive years in the work force. Pray for this country and the challenges that are faced. Please pray for the young woman and her child Susan mentioned.

Our gardener has disappeared and reappeared. He had been gone for over two weeks. Several weeks earlier he had been deported to Zimbabwe. He returned very fearful of his own personal safety. Then a week later he disappeared again. Today he appeared at our door. He is very concerned for his safety. Botswana deports thousands of illegal Zimbabweans a week, and yet life here is still better than life in Zimbabwe. So our gardener and many other like him keep returning to an uncertain and illegal existence here. (Those from Ontario who heard Rudy and Sharon Dirks may remember their account of his life here in Botswana.)



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