

From our street to yours ...
Glyn, Susan, Maeyken, Adriaena
February 2006

Gobojango

Six hours north of Gaborone there is a small village called Gobojango. Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) volunteers as well as Africa Inter-Mennonite Mission (AIMM) workers have had special relationships with the people of this village in the past. So three weeks ago when I travelled to this village with Jonathan Larson (a former AIMM worker), a group of students from a university near Atlanta and two young adults from Wilmot Mennonite Church, we were warmly received. One of the families that knows Jonathan well opened up their home and their lives to this group of foreigners. A goat was killed to provide meat, tours were taken of the cattle post and the lands and many people came by the house to greet the group and especially their long time friend Jonathan. I, being the “older woman”, was given the master bedroom and had lots of opportunity to talk with the other women as they scurried around meeting the groups needs.



The main purpose of the visit was to learn about a community’s response to the HIV/AIDS crisis. Gobojango is in the district that has the highest rates of HIV infection in Botswana. The community has been devastated as they watch their people become sick and die. The good news is that they have not become paralysed in the face of this disease. Instead a Community Development Committee and a Home Based Support Group have been working together to discover ways to address this crisis and encourage people to be tested. They talked of reduced stigma in the village and of increased support from family members as people cope with the special needs of an HIV/AIDS patient. As we sat and talked with these committees the toll of this disease on the living was very evident. When we asked where they saw the hope lying they all said they placed their hope in a vaccination that will provide a cure. They were puzzled why scientists haven’t come up with a cure yet. It is difficult for people with little experience outside of a village in Botswana to understand the complexities of both the disease and the finding of a cure. The

village leaders were very positive about the fight against HIV/AIDS citing reduced stigma, better education, people being tested and medication being taken.

That night some of us joined others from the village to go and pray with a woman who was sick. As we gathered round her she smiled and welcomed us warmly. As we sang a hymn of encouragement her smile disappeared and tears overflowed. The woman



Life's Interesting Moments

In Gobojango the woman who hosted us broke out in laughter when we discovered that she was one year younger than I. We talked about the differences of our lives especially the ages of our children! Both of us grew up in small villages. But that is where the similarities end. She was having babies when I was finishing high school and going off to college. She has spent her whole life living in a small village in Northern Botswana and I, well... I've moved around a bit. I go home to my "home village" every once in a while to visit my family and get renewed. She is the one who receives people returning home and provides a place of renewal for them. As a widow she has experienced death in personal ways. I have experienced it through the eyes of others. Incredible what circumstances and a few opportunities and choices make in the direction of one's life. Both of our lives are very rich for the opportunities and choices we have had and made. One is not better than another. Just different...

Susan



Jennie Bowman, Jonathan Larson, Susan and two of the Atlanta students relaxing in Gobojango.

family. She is very worried about what the future holds for the next generation. She knows that a vaccination as a cure is not where one should put their hope. Yet how do you go about educating and enabling people to work at behaviour change. This is the question that we continue to ask and to pray about. Soon we want to call together a group of people to begin the process of doing something concrete. Please continue to pray for us.



Susan

knew that her burden was great. Her outward persona of being in control broke down as God spoke to her through the presence of believers and the words of a hymn. Her illness was not identified. But as she showed us her feet, swollen twice the normal size and covered in sores, we all wondered. Beside her sat her twin sister who is walking the journey of living with HIV/AIDS. We continue to pray that God will give this woman the strength to take an HIV test and the courage to live with the results. This prayer visit underlined the pain and difficulty of living with the reality of this disease.

Last night I was talking with a friend who also comes from the northern part of Botswana. She comes from a family of 11 children. Two of her siblings have already died from HIV/AIDS. Of the remaining 9 siblings all but one have been tested and have shared their status. Of those 8 she is the only one that is negative. Her comment, "What do I do about my family? I have lots of nieces and nephews. I wonder if I need to call them together and talk to them about staying free from this virus." Here is a woman who is in deep grief for her



Our Support

We are here because people like you are supporting us in many ways.

We know there are many people praying for us. Some people have told us. Some times we discover it coincidentally. (I searched the web and found a church bulletin saying we were being prayed for).

Many people write us - some have called - to encourage us. It is good to hear what and how you are doing.

We could not be here without financial support. If your congregation is part of Mennonite Church Canada, some of the money you send to your local conference is used for mission work through Mennonite Church Canada Witness. Some congregations have chosen to increase their giving to specifically support the work in Botswana. Some congregations have chosen projects to support. It is possible to send support money directly to Mennonite Church Canada. See the address below.

All of this helps us do the work that we have been called to do by God through the Mennonite Church.



Jennie Bowman, Maeyken, Meghan Wagler and Adriaena

both improved their strokes and their speed and have a sport that we hope will provide them both recreational enjoyment, employment possibilities and a means of exercise in the future!!!

The Guesthouse/Office

You may have picked up in our correspondence that the AIMM owned house beside us has been turned into an office/guesthouse. A lot of time and energy has been put into fixing up this house so it is a pleasant place for guests to stay. We are happy to say it is nearing completion!!! The guesthouse is to provide mission minded people a place to stay while they are in Gaborone. It is also a place for our guests when they come to visit! Currently there is a couple from Global Mission Fellowship staying there who are moving here from Lesotho.

This space has been an answer to our prayers. We needed a bigger working space for ourselves. One office for the two of us inside our own house was a bit tight. We also appreciate having this space especially for people who are coming for a longer visit such as Jennie and Meghan. It allows us to offer short term opportunities without giving those who are coming an opportunity to experience all of the dynamics of our family!!!

Family Life

Recently family life has revolved around our many young adult guests! We have enjoyed having extra people hanging out in the house. Meghan Wagler and Jennie Bowman (friends from Wilmot Mennonite Church) were amazing to have around. They gave the girls lots of extra attention and even took them out for a meal without Mom and Dad! Their medical studies here went well and we all learned a lot from their experiences.

Maeyken and Adriaena have resumed their busy school schedule. This year both of them are in choir while piano lessons also continue. They have also both joined a drama class that meets once a week. Both of their classes plan to have a play in the Maitisong Festival at the end of this term. (An annual arts festival that brings together the best of the arts in Botswana.)

Swimming is an important part of this term. Both of them are swimming at the Southern Schools Trials this weekend. (The top swimmers from these trials form the Southern Botswana team which has a gala against the Northern Schools in a few weeks.) We are very proud of their individual accomplishments. They have

Thanks to Meghan Wagler who took many of the pictures used in this letter.

Contact us

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267-390-5554
(Just remember that we are 7
hours earlier than Ontario
time!)

Our web site:

which includes pictures and
previous newsletters:
<http://www.thegatheringsite.ca/susanglyn/>

Please Pray for...

... **Maeyken and Adriaena** and their school year. We have seen an improvement in Adriaena's work as well as her moods. But she still comes home very tired and anxious some days. She is also feeling the loss of several of her friends who are no longer at Thornhill. Maeyken is in her final year at Thornhill. We need to make decision about her next phase of education. There are several options to choose from. It is knowing which one is the best for her and for us as a family.

... **Ariel Campion**, a young woman from Stratford Ontario is living and working in Zimbabwe for the next while. Pray for her as she sees and learns much about church and life in Africa.

... **Glyn and Susan** as we look forward to the next two years. Ask for help for us to be realistic in what we can accomplish in ministry, neither setting goals too high nor too low.

... **Bible classes** which are growing. Please pray for the leaders, and for the new students.

.... The **Southern Africa AIMM team**. Phil and Christine Lindell Detweiler and Joe and Anna Sawatsky (and their children) are both settling into their homes and ministries in Pietermaritzburg and Mthatha (it was spelled Umtata) respectfully. Pray that God will meet their needs in this time of transition. Dan and Yvonne Nighswander will be coming to Pietermaritzburg in August. Pray that God will continue to prepare them for this next stage of ministry.

... A **medical crisis** in the northern part of Botswana. An unidentified gastro-enteritis is leaving many children under the age of 5 very sick. A recent paper reported 140 deaths in the past three weeks. Babies who are being bottle fed are particularly vulnerable. (Many babies are being bottle fed as an attempt to reduce mother child transmission of the HIV virus.) Please pray for the medical personnel as they work to get this crisis under control. Pray also for the many sick children and the families who are now grieving the loss of young children.



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