

Africa Update  
May 8<sup>th</sup> 2008



Dear All,

As I write today, I am enjoying a full day of electricity or have so far. Since returning from Australia in March, there have been regular power cuts, some lasting all day and some during the evenings. Because of chronic power shortages, each district has been given a timetable for when the power will be turned off in their area. But over the last few months, it has been switched off frequently at all manner of unscheduled times. For the last two Mondays, the power has come on for about 1½ hours each day at which time there is a scramble to boil kettles, do washing, charge mobile phones, charge laptops and cook food etc. The greatest value of this 1½ hour window is the preservation of coldness in refrigerators and freezers. In some places where the power has gone off for up to ten days at a time, people have lost all their refrigerated and frozen foods. This happened at my house over February. I guess power shortages are part of the birth pangs experienced when developing nations try to progress without adequate infrastructure and resources. Power shortages are being experienced all across Africa right now. Of course, many people here still don't have access to electricity at all so all our trials are relative.

In this newsletter, I'd like to introduce you to Collins Mwansa and Mischech Banda who have been working casually for me since January. Both live in the shanty compound of Kawama which is about 45 minutes from my house by foot. Both are in their twenties and support young families. They own almost nothing and appear to live off almost nothing.

At the beginning of the year, these two young men were sitting by the road as I began my usual morning walk with the dogs. "Slashing Sir?", Collins called out in his halting English. Since the grasses around my house were getting to the jungle stage, I asked these two men to come to my house the next morning. Sure enough they were waiting at the end of my driveway when I went to walk the next morning and they have stayed working for me ever since.

Here is a little from Collin's life.....

Today Collins arrived with a badly swollen eye that was probably black under his dark skin. He left quickly with some of his owed salary to seek some sort of treatment. Whether he was in a drunken fight last night at the compound I don't know as little explanation was forthcoming. Local employers fire people for such things so they are not readily admitted to. Only yesterday Collins had to go home because of bad diarrhea so he is having a challenging week.



## *Collins and Mischeck*

Earlier in the year, Collins arrived one morning looking very subdued. After some hesitation, he told me that his mother had died the day before. Collins did not have the fare to travel to the place of burial and had faithfully come to work instead. After being given the fare (a few dollars), Collins was sent on his way. At this stage, salaries were being paid and spent daily.

Back in March, Collins arrived one morning and told me that his baby daughter had malaria. Malaria is a big killer here and babies are especially vulnerable. They frequently kick off their bedclothes during the night. I gave Collins some of his salary and suggested that he go home and take the baby for immediate treatment. The next day Mischeck arrived without Collins and reported that the baby's condition had deteriorated to a critical level and had been hospitalized with compounding diarrhea. Many babies die at this stage. The hospital here is not like a western hospital. Patients are often neglected and relatives normally monitor the patients themselves and bring them food. Lifesaving medicines and treatments are not administered without payment and patients can therefore suffer or die from treatable conditions. Fortunately, a very happy and relieved

Collins arrived back at work after a couple of days to tell of the baby's recovery and imminent discharge from hospital. Having even a little money can sometimes make a big difference.



*This bridge is where the dirt road I live on crosses the stream and marks one of the corner boundaries of my property. We are trying to record the altitude and position of this spot using a hand held GPS. But we are finding out that this particular GPS is not giving us precise readings but rather ones that vary every few seconds. We need accurate data to demonstrate to the "Water Affairs" department that damming the river a little downstream will not cause the flow of back*

*water to flood this bridge and road in the rainy season. The  
process continues.....*

A month ago, Collin's baby survived a second bout of malaria.

Earlier this month I traveled to Malawi to begin the preparations for a women's conference being held there in July. My journey across was an experience in itself. It started with a visit to a travel agent here in Kitwe to book and purchase an air-ticket. This was initially very straight forward and I was able to book a return ticket with good connecting flights between Ndola in Zambia and Blantyre in Malawi. The flight time each way was to be between 2½ and 6 hours. A week later, the agent spoke to me again. Air Malawi had cancelled my booking and had automatically rescheduled my flights for two days later. I now had domestic flights on two Zambian airlines that no longer connected with my new Air Malawi bookings. They had been paid for and one was non transferable. The agent was trying to phone Air Malawi's Malawi office to get Air Malawi to find a solution. There was much buck passing as calls were made back and forth over the next two weeks. Eventually Air Malawi agreed to take responsibility for the problem and agreed to pay for all the necessary flight changes. When the agent tried to re-book the Zambian connecting flights, it was discovered that there was no flight available from Lusaka to Ndola after my return flight from Malawi.





*Fire season again! – Mischeck takes on the challenge*

Air Malawi were contacted again and agreed to accommodate me in Lusaka until I could get a flight back to Ndola. Since none of my original flights remained, I asked the agent to issue me a new ticket reflecting the new flights. They told me that this was not necessary and that I should just explain the changes each time I checked in for a flight. I pointed out that my name was misspelt on the ticket but they said this wouldn't be a problem either as this was common in Africa. I also had no documentation to show that Air Malawi would accommodate me in Lusaka between flights. So in the end I left for Malawi with a ticket that had none of the correct flights or dates and had my name misspelt. Only in Africa!

My first internal flight to Lusaka went without a hitch and my ticket presented no problems at all. In fact, my ticket was never questioned any where and I was always given boarding passes at each check-in point along the way. Each airline seemed aware of my new flight arrangements. On arriving in Lusaka however, the reality of my changed bookings kicked in. Air Malawi was suffering a shortage of planes due to an ongoing lack of aircraft maintenance. Airline profits had apparently been going elsewhere. The plane I was to connect with had been re-routed to Johannesburg on route from Blantyre to Lusaka and would be running 4 hours late. I sat waiting at Lusaka airport for a total of 12 hours.



*Collins smothering the final dying flames*



*Finally the fires are out!*

My flight back from Blantyre to Lusaka was ticketed as a Blantyre – Lusaka flight. As we took off, word filtered down the plane that we would be touching down at the Malawi capital of Lilongwe. To my surprise, the plane then proceeded to Johannesburg. Air Malawi had again merged two flight runs because of plane shortages. This plane was certainly being worked hard and one had to wonder what further maintenance consequences might result. Finally we touched down in Lusaka after an 8 hour flight. I wondered whether the Air Malawi personnel here would even know about let alone honour the accommodation arrangements made with their head office across the border. But as I left customs, there was a

little man holding a sign saying "Mr. Kru". He had been assigned to me by Air Malawi. Being driven by him at speeds of up to 160 km/hour confirmed that it was indeed alcohol that I could smell on his person. However, all my needs were met that night at a lovely hotel and I finally reached Kitwe the next day in one piece.

As you can see from the photographs, I am already experiencing my first fires of the 2008 dry season. Those of you who read my 2007 October update will know that fires are frequently lit and left to burn throughout Zambia at this time of the year. Last week's fires were probably lit by local boys trying to flush out grasshoppers. Fried grasshoppers are apparently very tasty. The fire photographed above was lit on my neighbour's property and we crossed over and spent an hour or so putting it out. My neighbour was no where to be seen but we stopped the fire from reaching my property. Collins and Mischeck have been slashing through the long grasses on my property for a couple of months now and so we are somewhat prepared for when other fires come.

Even as I write now, there are new fires crackling merrily through the tall grasses across the road and river here and thick smoke billows into the air and upwards. Hopefully the road and river will act as a barrier and keep these particular fires from my property. Outside the house, Mischeck is busy raking together the dry, slashed grasses for controlled burning. It's amazing how quickly the rainy season has transitioned into the dry season. Floods to fires within a couple of months! As the environment takes on a very different mood, some of the various bird species have now migrated to Europe for the summer (such luck!).

On another note, I have now resumed teaching bible courses in both Chingola and Kitwe and am currently preparing for further work to be done on the house. The environment is quite harsh here and some of the work done on the house last year already needs further attention. For example, some of the fly screens installed last year have already rusted through because of the effects of the heavy rainy season. They will need replacing with better materials. Then there is additional new work that needs to be done towards getting this house liveable.

My main priority at the moment is to get the fish ponds up and running and to this end I am continuing to work towards getting the water permit granted. There is also a team of ladies coming from Australia to conduct conferences here from late July, so I am assisting them by helping to organize their conference program before they arrive. Slowly I am creeping forward!

That's all for now.  
Have a good month,

*Mike*