

My Trip to Kenya

Blog of Matushka Marina Holland

Part 05

Friday, January 25, 2019

I slept poorly again last night, and am still quite tired. But not as tired as Papathia (FM's wife), seven and a half months pregnant! She is just worn out. Part of me wants to stay at the house and help her, for she stoops to wash all her laundry by hand in a bucket of water, then hangs it on the line. She washes out the hen and rooster houses and their water houses and feed containers. She washes dishes in a tiny kitchen sink, or stooped over a bucket on the front porch, using water she has heated up on the stove. And she cooks on a little two-burner propane stove. She is lovely and doesn't complain at all – I expect she sees no reason to complain! But I know she is tired. She has Ann here helping her, but that is only right now while we are visiting. So today we are bringing little Panteleimon with us to school. I hope she will get some rest!

One of the teachers here explained to us about religious education. ALL schools in Kenya are required to teach religion. They teach either Christianity, Islam or Hinduism, and students go to the school that teaches their religion. St Barnabas teaches Christianity, and every day there is a religious education class.

Today I got to teach the level 3 children how to write the English alphabet. They have had some practice



with this in their little notebooks, but this was their first time to use the lined surface that beginning writing students use in America, with the top and bottom solid lines, and the dotted middle line. The kids were very excited again to get to use the lined dry erase boards. I was amazed at their attention span! They worked for over an hour carefully drawing their letters on the new boards, learning how to use the lines. We talked about the sounds the letters make, and they gave many examples of words that start with those sounds. I was so impressed with their attention span.

After this class, the kids were released for a break and breakfast, which we served again. They had time to run around, chasing each other, rolling in the grass, visiting with their friends. FS aptly noted they get THREE breaks like this, every day, getting fresh air and exercise and visiting time. No wonder they are then able to sit in the classroom so attentively. Compared to our western students who get one brief break on a small playground, walk quietly in single file in the halls, and then squirm and are restless and inattentive.



After this break and breakfast time, I got to work with the level 8 students. They also used the dry erase boards. After their regular teacher talked with them about verb phrases, I talked with them about verb tenses, and how verbs change with singular and plural subjects.

We served lunch again, and afterward I sat in the grass with some of the teachers. I was curious about how long they have worked there. One teacher had been there 3 years, one 7 and one 8. Had they ever worked at another school? All three had. Did they like working at this school? "Yes!" very enthusiastically and warmly. Why? They "like helping disadvantaged kids"; "the kids are so happy to see us and to learn". I happened to know, from FM, that it is difficult to find a job in Kenya. Generally, he does not have to seek teachers, although one year he did put a notice out through social media. He had 69 applicants! He told them he cannot pay them; it is a volunteer position. They still wanted the positions, at least for experience. Many stayed on, and ended up earning a meager salary. Their food is provided at the school, for they eat with the children. I was very impressed with their dedication.

After the lunch break, FM took FS and me back home to have lunch with his wife. I asked to be relieved from helping at the school to take a nap, for I was quite tired. FM readily agreed, and asked if I could be back at 4 to read to the children while they waited for their bus. At 3:30 I got up to head down to the school. It is a 10-15 minute walk. Papathiya was there at the gate, waiting for me; she had to go to the tailor to have some mending done. So we walked together and talked; I really like her! At the school, we waited together till a public van came to bring her the rest of the way to the tailor. Then I went to read to the children. But the head teacher said, "No, this is Friday. On Fridays we do not read to them during this time. They have extra play time." Since he didn't need me for anything else, I decided to walk home. I knew the way. It wasn't difficult. But I took a wrong turn, and walked and walked and walked till I finally admitted I had done something wrong, and turned back around. But on the way I met several people who all looked at me very curiously. When I greeted them in a friendly way, they



immediately responded in kind, and we'd chat. There was a pair of women I met coming down the hill as I was walking up. We met and chatted, and then I saw them again, heading back up the hill as I was heading back down. But this time they had heavy loads of what looked to me like chopped down plants, perhaps 6-8 feet long, carried on their backs, sticking out on each side at least a couple feet. The loads were obviously heavy, but there they were, walking up the hill, smiling, chatting, doing what they do. So we stopped and chatted again, and I asked them about their loads. "Oh, we must go every day to get feed for the stock. Our cows will eat this. They will make good milk!" I was just amazed.

Of course, I ended up going back to the school, since I obviously didn't really know the way home. And now they *did* want me to read to the kids who were still waiting! When the bus finally returned from the previous load, I boarded with this last load for their ride home again. At one stop, who was there as the kids got off the bus, but Papathia! She had finished at the tailor, and knew the bus would be coming by, so she waited to ride home with us.

That evening after dinner, the kids and I read the next chapter of our Magic Tree House book. They are loving it! A couple visitors came by, unannounced, and it was clear that this is very normal. Everyone chatted, leftovers were offered to them, and 45 minutes later they left.

Off to bed to rest up – hopefully! – for another day.

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