



Ruth Radley
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Sudan

Link Letter No 9 March 2011

Dear friends,

Greetings from Ye!

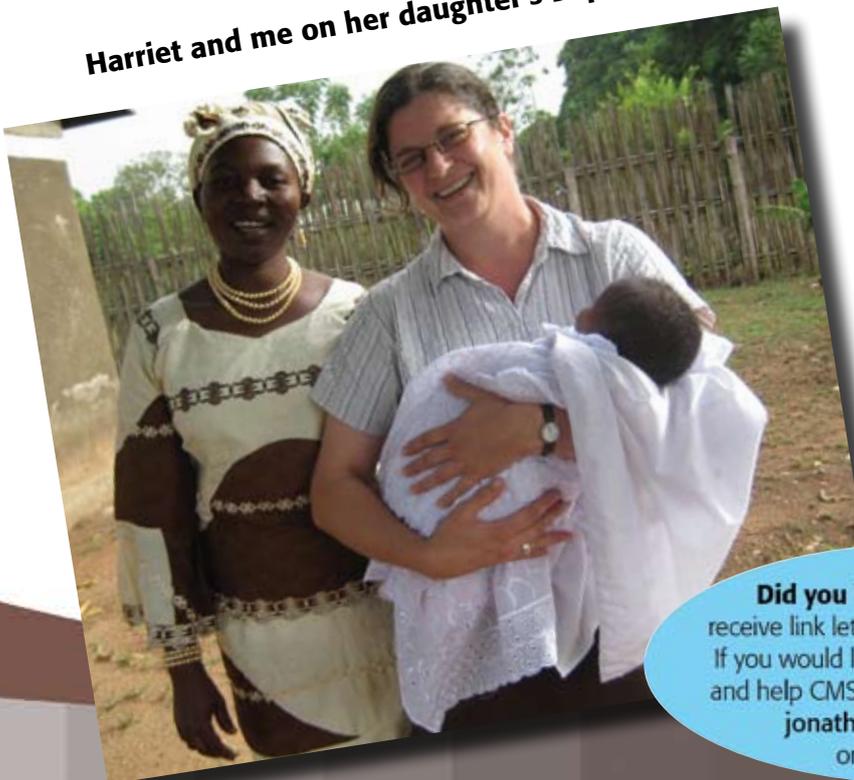
I really hope that you all are well, and were able to have a great time celebrating our Lord's birth and have some good rest time with friends and family.

A real tragedy

This link letter highlights some of the real highs – and also lows – of the past five months. The end of last year was a really tough one for all of us in Across, especially those in Ye. We were awoken one morning with tragic news of the death of Harriet, wife of the college Principal and beloved person within the Across community. She had been travelling to Kampala with her brother and her sick father, taking him to hospital. They were sadly involved in a horrific accident in which many, many people were killed (road accidents kill more people in East Africa than anything else). All three of them perished that day.

I cannot begin to imagine the pain of Harriet's family, especially her mother losing two children and her husband on the same day, and Harriet's husband losing his dearly beloved wife, father and brother in law. The grief on this compound that day was

Harriet and me on her daughter's baptism day



plain to see – grief in Africa is played out very openly and loudly, a very different contrast to home, but I can't help but feel much healthier. All day people came to grieve together, with loud wailing, and also singing. Harriet was such a warm welcoming person, I had shared meals and drinks with her at her home many times. Indeed when I first arrived here, Harriet and James were the ones who opened their home to me and fed me each evening. Both my parents enjoyed hospitality there as well whilst they visited me. Harriet had been married not quite three years and her daughter, Gloria, was not quite two. In many ways I think we are still in shock, and still find it hard to believe that she is not coming back to us.

A fitting tribute

But for sure, all who knew her and who had had contact with her, either in her work as a nurse or as a friend, are surely richer because of the friendship. At the graduation in December, a fund was launched by the executive Director of Across called the Harriet Memorial Fund. It will run over the next few years, raising money for a female dormitory to be built at the college, in her memory, as we have many students and not nearly enough classrooms or accommodation.

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Jumping over a river on our way to the village

I didn't get to Harriet's funeral for a few reasons, but I managed to get to the village where she was buried the following weekend with friends. It was quite an adventure getting there; we drove as far as we could, almost getting stuck at a couple of places, then we used motorbikes to get us the rest of the way, although we had to hop off to leap over streams and rivers. I was so pleased to have had the opportunity to go. In this culture, people will visit the bereaved for many days, and often prayers and singing happens impromptu, and this is what happened this day too. Christine, Suzy and I were all asked to share about Harriet, and we sang, we prayed and we wept. It was such a privilege to stand by her graveside with her husband and daughter, weeping and praying together.

Because He lives...

We also had a memorial service here in Yei, which was amazing. It was treated like a funeral service, for those in Yei who were not able to get to her funeral in the village. Singing and dancing occurred through the night – yes, mingled with tears and sadness but some very energetic praising of the Lord happened too. People here know how to grieve and support each other. I stayed until 2am with friends here and returned the following morning. Elly, my supervisor, preached that night and many people responded to the gospel, and the Lord's love for them. The service the next day was also full of hope. James had requested a song be sung so a small team of us got together to sing 'because He lives', a song I had not sung in well over 10 years. He had been singing it in the village, and I couldn't believe how apt it was. *'Because He lives, I can face tomorrow, because He lives, all fear is gone, because I know He holds the future, and live is worth the living just because He lives.'* It was an honour to be part of this



The Across team who managed to travel from Yei to Arua for the wedding celebration

small choir and sing on that day.

Another tragedy

In December also, the mother of another tutor was involved in a fatal car accident; she was not killed, but did need treatment. Following this, just days before Christmas, one of our tutors who had been sick for a while died. I am sure that you are starting to see just how painful this period was for us here. Please do keep praying for the safety of travelling here, as there have been some other minor accidents too. We do not take travel lightly, and are always praying in devotions for people travelling by road or air.

History being made...

We have also had the official results of the referendum – virtually 99% voted for independence, and on the night after the announcement boy did we know it! I cannot describe the feelings of being here on such a night. The day was a normal day: we knew that the results were being officially announced (they had already been unofficially announced and praise the Lord as no one had contested them so they were then announced officially).

Enjoying a cuddle with Godfrey Emmanuel, my friend Ben's son; I am pictured here with Godfrey's mother Jackline





Philliam and Doreen



Philliam serving his wife

All was fine and normal and then, at about 9pm, the whole of Yei erupted in jubilation and joy! Gunfire surrounded us continually for a whole 90 minutes, near, far, VERY near, but all being shot into the air in celebration; the rest of the night there were bursts here and there. Cheering, horns tooting, drums beating, even the electricity celebrated as I woke at 2am and my fan was still blowing (it is usually turned off at midnight, perhaps that person was out celebrating too!). It was quite a momentous occasion – history *was* being made!

We were all saying what an honour and privilege it is to be here at this time. I really wish I could have transported you all here to get a feel of the atmosphere that night as no words can really describe it! I know that the emotions that night would have been so mixed, and I heard such stories of people weeping as the reality dawned on them of what was happening, and grief for those who did not make it this far.

Off to a wedding

Towards the end of January, I travelled with colleagues on the long, dusty, hot, and cramped journey down to Arua for Philliam's wedding. Philliam is a young Ugandan who has been working here for a couple of years as a volunteer with Scripture Union (SU). He is also a trained electrician, so he does as much as he can of that to earn money, but throws himself fully into the SU work as well. Over the years we have known each other, he has become like a younger brother to me, and I was so happy to be able to be there to celebrate with him and Doreen on this special day. It was also lovely to be with colleagues celebrating together.

As we entered the church, Philliam was already seated at the front,

beaming away at us as we arrived; this is a day that we have talked about for so long, more than a year, so it was almost unbelievable that the day was finally upon us. Amazingly, everything kept to time, a very rare occurrence here but very encouraging also. It did mean that as the service started, less than half the invited guests were there, but the church soon filled! It was lovely that, although the service was in English, there were a mixture of songs from Lugbara as well, Philliam's Tribe.

There were many similarities to a wedding in the UK, but also many differences. One of the things that I loved about being at the wedding here was that so many friends from Across were also there; many have their families in Arua, so I was able to meet them. Walter's wife and newborn baby girl; Ben's wife and newborn baby boy; Rachel, a tutor at the teacher training college, with her baby boy born last October. She had been in Kampala with him since then, so it was great to see them again.

A counter-cultural gesture

Yes, I enjoyed lots of cuddles... a real blessing! After the

Philliam and Doreen with their bridal party



service, we enjoyed time with each other, chatting and laughing, and then went to sit for the reception. Phillip and Doreen had gone for photos, but were not away too long. When they returned, we had more fun at the reception. It was so interesting to see the different things that happened. Before anyone else could eat, it is customary for the new couple to feed each other (not the whole meal, but at least some of it!) Traditionally the groom will sit on a chair, and the bride will kneel in front of him, a sign of respect, wash his hands and then feed him. The groom would then do the same, except he would stay on the chair. Phillip, however, chose not to be bound by his culture (not an easy thing to do anywhere) and got down on his knees to wash his wife's hands and feed her too. I felt very proud of him!

An interesting gift

Gifts are given in a time of loud celebration! The gift giving here seemed to go on for ages, as people from both Sudan and Uganda brought their gifts up. We were told the order of who was to bring their gifts when, and it became a long procession of dancing people joyously giving their gifts to the newlyweds. As we would often give gift to the parents, bridesmaids, ushers etc, this also happened, but the gifts were cakes – which tasted beautiful!

Finally, we were to learn that in thanks of the generous giving towards the wedding (all the community pitch in to pay for weddings here) and support given to Phillip in the time running up to the day itself, the Yei team were given a sheep! Now that was an interesting thing! We had to get it in and out of the Land Cruiser, and then clean the Land Cruiser before we could drive back home as the sheep had used the vehicle as its personal toilet, and then work out how to get it to Yei as you need a animal transport certificate! In the event, we left it at a friend's house in Arua, and it came to Yei at a later date! It is currently enjoying the dry yellow grass for food, and is awaiting its fate of being slaughtered for a party! I really still do not like meeting my food before I eat it, I AM a country girl, but I guess it's obvious that I am not a farmer's daughter!

An exciting new development

From a work perspective, things are going well, but we are still praying for donors to fund the work. We are using up remaining funds from last year. This week Elly and myself are excited because we have someone coming to join us; he is more than we could ever have hoped for in this area as he has experience in training children's workers. I think some of the things we are hoping to tackle will be new to him but, equally, I think that he will be a fast learner. I am so looking forward to working with

him, and am feeling confident that the ministry will take off in a new way, with fresh eyes as well.

Other work

Currently I am planning work which will take us into the refugee camp that Across are managing, housing Congolese people who have fled their homes due to the devastation that the LRA (Lord's Resistance Army) have caused there. We are looking at training some of the teachers and church community in various issues affecting children – one thing we hope is that we can foster clubs where the children can come to purely play and have fun, so badly needed in childhood.

We have started working now in three of the PAP communities (for further explanation on these, please see earlier link letters) and so far the trainings have gone well in each one. We are *considering* doing things a little differently in one community, piloting a scheme as to how communities can respond to the huge issue of orphans but without going down the orphanage route. This is a huge task, but orphanages seriously concern me on so many levels, and I cannot believe that this is the Lord's chosen best for His children. I am hoping that if we do this, something will develop as a natural community response and other communities can learn from. I am not pretending that I have all the answers – I do not (I can't even profess to have a single one!) – but I hope that as we walk this path together, something will emerge. We will see!

I had a great time between Christmas and New Year, but to know what that was – you will have to read the kids' link letter as I have run out of space here!

Blessings to you all

Ruth x