

July 20: KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa

The plane ride(s)... Well, let's not talk about that too much. Yes, we spent forty hours in airplanes, cars and airports. Yes, I slept a grand total of under four hours during that time (Adam got a smidge more). Yes, the kids did amazingly well. Praise God. And jetlag, by the way, was a breeze. After two nights of waking up just once, the kids are back to sleeping through the night in the same room!

Where we live is gorgeous. There are canaries and a zillion other constantly tweeting birds, a few flowers even in the winter, and a lot of brown hills but potential for a spectacular view when things green up in spring.

Our home is a decent sized farmhouse with some quirks (thatched roof, hot water only when we light a big fire in the water heater-thing, beautiful herb gardens all around.) The weather is warmer than we expected. No need for winter coats, just layers of sweatshirts and good blankets for sleeping. Midday is often warm enough for T-shirts. I'd love this weather all year round! If it drops colder, we do have a coal stove we could stoke up.

The kids are absolutely thriving here. Phoebe walks around outside, climbs lemon and avocado trees, plays with a little Zulu girl named Mbali whose mom works here, and *loves* the dog. It's the best kid-dog I've ever met. Probably about 80 in dog years, but happy to lay around and let Phoebe pet her, sing her bedtime songs, make her plates of grass to eat, and whatever else Phoebe does. Zeke dislikes crawling in the grass, so he's getting plenty of walking practice, though he still won't go more than a few steps without holding hands. Our parents will be happy to know the swimming pool we heard mention of is now covered by a tight net, and will be drained soon (too hard for our low-budget landlord to keep up).

Zulu is intimidating. If anyone ever says African languages are easy, tell them it's a dumb stereotype. Zulu has twelve different types of nouns, each with a different way to make a plural. Holy smokes. Fortunately we have a great textbook, plenty of people around to teach us, and time to learn. By this afternoon I could even say the following during lunch: "uPhoebe uthanda ishizi. uZeke uyadla ishizi, kodwa umama uphuza itiye." That's "Phoebe likes cheese. Zeke eats cheese, but Mama drinks tea." Not bad, eh?

I haven't met many Zulu people yet, except those clearing bushes for our landlord, but they live only a short walk away, so I hope to visit once I get a few more phrases to say. I also hope to ask one of the women to help me start a garden.

Adam has been to most of the work-related meetings, so he's met more of the teachers we'll work with. Teachers speak English, but most students speak very little. We'll be attending weekly meetings with the teachers and students, which are held in Zulu, so it feels pretty pressing to understand the language by January when we officially take over our predecessor Betsy's job. We haven't yet figured out how Adam and I will split our work responsibilities, but so far we both feel the job is a great fit for us.

Betsy is in fact staying for at least the coming year, and she's excited to work more with another branch of our organization which is the Home-Based Care Workers. These are women who volunteer to care for AIDS patients. Her job thus far has been just offering microloans to them, but she wants to branch into getting training for them and advocating on behalf of people with AIDS.

Betsy's an intense 27 year-old woman who knows how to get stuff done. It will be hard to fill her shoes, but we're thrilled she'll have more time to work with what she's more passionate about. Yesterday I accompanied her on a meeting with the head nurse of the clinic in the black township. The sad state of affairs is hard to describe. Most of the dying here is from AIDS or tuberculosis, both of which are quite treatable (won't get healed, but can virtually be non-contagious) if people get meds and keep taking them. But this clinic, for example, doesn't even have AIDS meds because there's so much stigma about the disease, people won't take the meds. If they do take meds, many will stop taking them, which means the disease mutates into drug-resistant varieties which spread to others and make the disease more and more dangerous to the public. At the same time, this area is so poor that nobody wants to be there—there's no doctor, no social worker, and nurses keep leaving. Betsy and this whole mess are worth praying for lots.

Aside from seeing a touch of the harsh nature of many Zulus' life here, we're still in a pretty easy phase. There's a lot of work ahead of us—mostly in language learning now—but it's exciting. It's a honeymoon stage, which I'm likely will transition into some culture shock doldrums, but now life is good.

As anywhere, life is an adventure in figuring out how Christ's love and resurrection applies to life here and now.