

AFRICA SAFARI

-by *Alma Gordon*

Our month in Nigeria to visit our daughter Sonia and her family, in September-October 2003, was a sequence of amazing sights and sounds. We were able to look out over the grasslands on the four-hour drive from the airport in Abuja, the new capital, to Jos farther North. The bushes and low trees looked very much like the savanna in the interior of Brazil where we grew up. The roadside markets in the villages had piles of produce and baskets. Women peddling snacks carried them gracefully on trays on their heads.

Jos is a commercial center for the area, with many markets and dense traffic. We saw a large hospital comprised of low cement-block buildings scattered over an area of about ten blocks. Jos is also home to the Hillcrest School which serves missionary families all over Western Africa.

We spent a week at Miango, a Christian Retreat Center a few miles from Jos. There we tasted great Nigerian food like fried plantains and breaded yams. Enormous mango trees shade the center, and our cottage was a comfortable vacation spot for the six of us.

The two-day trip Northwest from there to Tungan Marke in Kebbi State was an adventure over roads that became more and more precarious. The "Operation Fire-For-Fire" police brigades stopped us several times, looking for bandits that roam the roads harassing travelers. We were always treated with respect and wished a safe journey. The Dettweiler home, named Chew-Stick Corner, was an oasis at the end of our trip – a cement-block bungalow, freshly painted in light green, with friendly windows and a fence of young trees around the packed-dirt yard. Solar panels provide electricity for basics, and the 350-gallon water tank out back is the source of water used frugally.

At Chew-Stick Corner we were greeted by dozens of their Lelna friends. Our two weeks were a kaleidoscope of visiting with the people, some of whom spoke English, some translated by Steve or Sonia; eating delicious gourmet meals prepared by Sonia with no supermarket for hundreds of miles; playing games with grandsons Joel & Micah, and reading "Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone" as a family; and learning from Steve about translation work. Life in the bush of Nigeria is hard and hot. Translation and literacy work demand both accuracy and acceptance by the people. Rain, blessed rain, can come in through the roof and stain freshly painted ceilings. Solar power depends on having sun, and on using electricity judiciously. The Power to go on depends upon staying closely connected to God.

We shared life with a very dear family that works hard, plays, sings and laughs together, and is content to do the job God has set before them. We brought back from our Africa Safari many pictures, some on paper, and some in our hearts. The Dettweiler Lelna Friends write-up describes some of these pictures.

DETTWEILER FRIENDS WE MET IN NIGERIA

--- by *Alma Gordon*

Mr. Haruna –

When we came out of customs at the Abuja airport in Nigeria, Mr. Haruna was there to greet us, help carry our baggage, and escort us through the crowds to his station wagon. Mr. Haruna, who employs drivers for his fleet of vehicles available for hire, is a long-time friend of the Dettweilers, having taken them on many trips throughout the country. Upon Steve's request, he came the four hours from Jos to the Abuja airport in order to drive us back to Miango, near Jos. Since our plane came in around 6 A.M., and bandits are a frequent hazard on the roads at night, Mr. Haruna arrived at the airport at sunset the previous day, and spent the night in his car. As we covered the miles that morning and I looked out at a countryside very similar to Brazil, I marveled at this man who would put himself out, in order to serve us in safety and comfort.

Later I was to learn that even though Mr. Haruna is a Muslim, because of his association with Christians, his house was burned down during ethnic riots a couple of years ago. Even so, he continues his service with a calm and friendly spirit.

Father Mike –

On the second day of our trip to the Dettweiler's home in Tungan Marke, we stopped at Galadima to visit Father Michael Fogarty, one of the Irish priests who have been good friends to the Dettweilers. The Fathers have provided a safe haven for many travelers, and any of them are welcome to the Dettweiler home to celebrate a family Thanksgiving or Christmas. Besides feeding us royally, Father Mike showed us a very interesting detailed map he had made of the area, using a Global Positioning System (GPS). He also brought out a little book of information about "Irish Family Names" which included "Doherty," my maiden name. My eyes filled with tears when he gave me the precious little book, and said with a smile, "I will get another when I return to Ireland." In the back of beyond, individual Christians are giving of themselves joyfully.

Rev. Ibrahim Gommawa and his wife Mamav Gideon, also named Mary -

When the Dettweilers moved to the village, Rev. Ibrahim and Mamav Gideon were their closest neighbors, and dear friends. They have taught the newcomers a great deal about the Lelna culture and language and helped them over many a rough spot. As with all those who came to greet us, honorable visitors, their greeting speech included the phrase, "Your being here is very sweet." Rev. Ibrahim is a tireless worker in publicizing the work of the C'Lela Translation Association, especially among the 50 Christian churches in the area. The idea that Lelna people can read the Bible in their own language, rather than in the trade language, Hausa, has yet to fire the imagination of the people. One of the young chiefs who visited us saw a Transition Primer in which explanations are in Hausa and the text teaches C'Lela. Excitedly he said, "Look, that is my language written on that page!" The Lelna people are beginning to realize that their language can be written and read, and Rev. Ibrahim is a mover in this endeavor. The higher chiefs, who came to greet us formally, thanked us for Sonia & Steve coming to help them write and teach their language. They also wished us a long life, and that our grandsons, Joel & Micah, would marry well and bring their wives to meet the villagers someday.

Aiuba and Mamav Justina –

Aiuba, one of Rev. Ibrahim's brothers, and his wife Mamav Justina live about 500 yards away from the Dettweilers, hidden in a field of tall corn. The night that we arrived, many villagers came to greet us, and a flock of kids helped unload the car. It was almost dark when Mamav Justina, a wiry, energetic lady in her flowing robes, showed her joy at our coming by dancing and singing right there in the kitchen. The one word we could capture was "Hallelujah." This spontaneous demonstration of affection touched my heart. This couple has a daughter, Rebekah, who is in Bible College. It is an amazing feat for farm peasants to want an education beyond the elementary years, and to be able to afford such a luxury. The whole community is very proud of Rebekah.

Aiuba was helpful to our family many times during our visit. The night that Steve's car got stuck on the muddy road, Aiuba was one of 10 neighbors who lifted the car out of the mire. He helped Steve and the grandsons gather rocks to make a camp stove, and the kindling for the fire over which we had a hot-dog cook-out, complete with "s'mores." The ingredients had, of course, been brought in by the travelers. As we left at the end of our visit, Aiuba and Mamav Justina left their own work to come and help us get off. Mamav Justina announced that she had chosen C'Lela names for us: Alan was named "Dudu," meaning "the first man," and Alma was named "Zegro," meaning "the first woman." As the car started down the road, we looked back and there stood two faithful friends, their hands raised in salute.

Kongama – meaning "Old woman."

Kongama lived nearby and came around often. She was very old and very tall, but walked around with the grace of a young girl. She was there to greet us the evening we arrived. The next morning she came by and asked, "And how did the old lady rest last night?" That made me smile. Sometime later, as the day was ending, the sky darkened and rain was on the way. I looked out the window to see Joel and Micah playing in a pile of sand. Kongama, standing there straight and tall, was watching them, the wild wind billowing her purple robe. The boys, the very old African, and the wind made a beautiful picture.

Peter Nasoma and his wife, Ladi

On one of the days of our visit, Peter Nasoma and his wife Ladi came to Chew-Stick Corner to work with Steve in his home study. In this way they could also greet us. Peter & Steve have worked together on the translation of Luke, and are now nearing completion of the translation of the "Jesus Film" soundtrack, which, of course, is based on Luke. It is hoped that the film will be ready for viewing using the C'Lela language at Christmastime 2004. Peter & Steve have worked for weeks on what is called "loops," bits of what is said in the movie. Before our visit to Tungan Marke was ended, they were finished with the translation. The next step in the dubbing is for the advance team to come from Campus Crusade in Orlando to record the Lelna voices.

While the men worked in the study, Ladi enjoyed the activity in our home, and, from the clothes we had brought from the US, was able to choose some nice pieces for her large family. We all enjoyed a late lunch together, and then they took off for home on their motorcycle, leaving a trail of dust behind.

Shantali Hango -

While we were at church on Sunday, we received a message from the elderly retired chief, still the seat of power in the area. "Since I cannot walk, I will expect you at my home after the services, where I will have the honor of greeting you." After the service, we walked the few minutes through the brush to his compound. Almost blind, and unable to use his legs, Shantali Hango sat on a mat at his gate with his wife sitting on a tree stump beside him, and many relatives milling about the tree-shaded clearing. Stools were brought out for Alan and me to sit and be received with a broad smile and long speech, translated for us by Steve. We then presented him with formal photos which Jim & Fran Kraft had taken of them some years ago. He could hardly see the photos, but even so he showed great pleasure in receiving a gift. The rest of the family was delighted to see themselves on paper. Chief Santali is much revered and loved by his people, the village and local elementary school having been named for him. He is a Muslim; however, he has children who are Christians. A sign of the respect in this area between Muslims and Christians was the closing prayer said by one of the Christian chiefs on both visits from their delegations to Chew-Stick Corner.

During their visits we asked them, "what are your responsibilities?" Their interesting answer was, "We keep the peace among our people. We also decide whether a stranger has a good character, and can be allowed to live among us." That puts to shame the commonly held view that the Western World holds the best of everything.

The delegation of chiefs coming to greet us brought gifts. The first group came with two roosters. Lelna people eat roosters, not hens, because hens provide continuing food in the eggs. The second delegation brought us eggs, hard-shelled, brown guinea hen eggs. The church folk also brought us eggs on their Sunday visit to our home. Seven dozen, each family contributing one or two eggs. Undoubtedly, some one went to bed hungry that night because they had given away the only food they had.

Bulus Rikoto -

Bulus Rikoto was one of the most interesting visitors who came to greet us. Of course, his command of the English language was a great help in our communication. He is the Superintendent of Education of the district. He told us that he taught school for 19 years, and after that was made Superintendent. Education is obviously very important to him, and he prizes Steve & Sonia's contributions to the writing and reading of C'Lela. He was the spokesman for the delegation of the Higher Chiefs, and, with a flourish, wrote all their names in the Dettweiler guest book. Rafi Kaima was the most powerful chief present. He seemed an amiable person, carrying his power lightly.

Mr. Sunday Samu -

Mr. Sunday Samu is the chairman of the C'Lela Translation Association (CTLA). He has been one of the most constant encouragers in language work and in the Dettweiler's contribution to the C'Lela written language. He and Alan got along famously, so much so, that he came back for them to spend an afternoon together. He is a biology professor, now working on a thesis for a higher degree. His heart wish is to be a missionary. In order to do that, he would have to find a way to go to the UMCA Bible College in Ilorin. At the moment the Bible College does not have a specific course for preparation of missionaries. Maybe that is where our prayers should begin.

Ishaku –

Ishaku, one of our most enthusiastic “greeters,” is the Secretary (clerk of session) of the Tungan Marke Church. His English was excellent, and his interest in language work very encouraging. During the service he read the Scripture portions in Hausa, the elderly preacher paraphrasing them in C’Lela. They alternated all through the sermon until coming to a passage in Luke, the preacher beamed, and read it himself from the recently finished Gospel of Luke in C’Lela. My heart was blessed at being able to hear, along with the church folk, that portion of Luke in the language of the Lelna people.

Danzuru –

Danzuru is a village head, also a brother of Rev. Ibrahim, and an elder in the church. Throughout the service he sat near an open door, facing the congregation. Like many Lelna, he is a very tall Nigerian, with classic chiseled features. In his sparkling white robes and cap he looked like a master’s painting. Unfortunately, we could not single him out for a picture. That large family surrounds the Dettweilers, and has shown them many kindnesses.

Bulus Doro –

Thirty years ago Bulus Doro started collecting, in a wooden box, cards on which he wrote individual C’Lela words. In recent times, he had amassed 35,000 words. A year ago, two young volunteers came to help Bulus, Steve and others to compile these words into a three-language dictionary, the first of it’s kind. During our visit, the trilingual dictionary was put in our hands. This beautiful volume includes Hausa, English and C’Lela words. I looked into the face of the man who thirty years ago had dreamed of his people being able to write and read their language, and I thanked God for such vision and perseverance. We were some of the first few who actually saw this newly-published dictionary. It will be launched for the public in December 2003. What a Christmas present! We loved being with the elderly man who made it happen.