

Mango Musings
October 5, 2008

Link to Picture Album:

<http://picasaweb.google.com/andrewstr/MangoMusingsOctober52008#>

It's a rather warm afternoon, and I hear the noise of the mason who is repairing the bedroom ceiling that came down with a crash yesterday afternoon. Esther spent Saturday morning cleaning in that room, and about five minutes after she left for some lunch, we heard the loud noise of falling masonry. This is the bedroom in which Mr. Sah the surveyor spent the week. We thank God that the ceiling didn't come down during his stay, and that Esther was out of the room when it fell. We hauled the broken tiles out to be dumped alongside the soccer field (no littering or dumping laws here), and today the mason is taking down the residue and patching the holes that remain in the ceiling. Tomorrow he will start to remove the ceilings from the other bedroom and the living room. Esther is of the opinion that we should ask him to remove the ceilings in the hallway as well, although, being a narrow space, those probably aren't as much at risk. Whatever we decide, the place is going to be a mess for a few days. Plaster dust tends to get on everything. And the living room ceiling, which is about 20 feet square, isn't going to be much fun to take down. I don't think I even want to be here when they start on that.

This morning I heard church bells, probably from the Catholic cathedral in town. It was such a refreshing sound, and provided a welcome change from the cries of the muezzins that go out over loudspeakers everyday from the minarets of the various mosques all over town. We had a worship time with our workers and the Niles, meeting out under the paiotte in the front yard. A paiotte is a cone shaped shelter, usually made of dried grass that is mounted on pillars and roof supports. It's a cool place that is open to the air, and quite popular in West Africa. Ours is a deluxe model, with tile floors and large cement beams that support the roof. It's big enough to service a hotel, and is an ideal place for gatherings of small groups. Our congregation was made up of men and women, and a few teenagers, who have known the Lord for some time, along with several apprentices to whom the Christian faith is still a mystery. It was good to pause from the rush of life just to worship the Lord and consider His Word. He is why we are here, and this week we have been reminded that God did not promise us a picnic, but a battlefield.

On Monday Kevin Hall and Mr. Sah came from the south to begin some survey work on the latest proposed property, and try to find out if there is

any chicanery afoot. What Mr. Sah learned is that the status of the property is by no means clear, and that we need to proceed with caution. The Lord keeps bringing to my mind his admonition to the disciples to be, "As wise as serpents and as gentle as doves." There will be a meeting of various interested parties on Monday or Tuesday, and we hope that it will make things a little clearer. On Friday they spent some time looking for other possible properties, and think they found one or two that would be excellent. Please do pray with us that God will make clear His place for the coming medical ministry, and that it will be a place of peace. We learned a bit of interesting history in our meeting with the Préfet. It evidently used to be the custom during colonial times to grant the reigning chief title to all the land around the city. The family that claims to own the property had a powerful chief among their ancestors, and is basing their claim on a document that was written long before Togo became an independent country. The government obviously doesn't recognize the document, and on the face of it, claiming to own all the property around a city is ridiculous. This bit of news caught the Préfet by surprise, and he snorted in derision when he heard it. But as we left our meeting, we saw a large number of people waiting to greet the Préfet, and learned that they were members of this family. In fact, they were waiting to see the Préfet when our party of "yovos" arrived at 7:00 that morning, and it gave me some carnal satisfaction to be ushered to the head of the line, while they cooled their heels during our 45 minute visit. I'm not used to that kind of preferential treatment. May the Lord forgive me for taking pleasure in that. It doesn't happen all that often.

The work on our house is progressing at a good pace. We now have the foundation on the wall on three sides, along with rebar for pillars that will provide support. The bathroom walls are mostly up, and the foundation and pillars that will support the roof over the carport are now in place. Electricity has been installed, and much of the wiring is done. We will see how well it has been done! I hope the electrician (who comes from Lome) knows what he is doing. The tangle of wires that I saw look like a rat's nest to me, but he seemed to be able to make sense of it all. I expect that by the end of the week we will have the sheet metal roof covering the dalle (flat concrete roof), and much of the wall enclosing the yard should be in place. It's getting exciting, although some people think that we are still a couple of months away from being able to move in. I'll send some pictures to a website you can access if you would like to see the progress.

On a more sober note, we learned this past week that a major bridge between Atakpame and Kpalime was washed out by the continuing heavy rains that are hitting the Plateau region so very hard this year. We don't know

how badly damaged the bridge is, but if it is gone, it will mean at least a five-hour detour for us down to Lome and then up the Kpalime road in order to get to the hospital at Tsiko. Thankfully, they were able to re-open the main highway (over a temporary bridge) before this latest blow to Togo's infrastructure. But it reminds us to pray for the country and for those who are in authority and who have to deal with these problems. Brethren pray for us.

Yours in His service,

Tim & Esther Neufeld