

Saturday, August 09, 2008

Afternoon

A quiet day here; not a lot going on around the campus or, at least apparently so. In fact, the potluck luncheon for Women's Day has just broken up and Sue is home with reports of its success and loud music. Women's day..yes, it's a national holiday, and were this a weekday, things would be closed all the way round. It commemorates the time in 1955 when 20,000 women marched illegally on the government palace in Johannesburg and occupied the courtyard there for 30 minutes in total silence...a protest for their total lack of rights.

Grocott's Mail is the local twice-weekly newspaper, one of the oldest in South Africa and it is highly regarded (wins lots of journalism prizes). Interestingly, it's staffed largely by some senior newsmen and women and lots and lots of students from the journalism program at Rhodes University here is Grahamstown. In fact, the abundance of young reporters hunting for stories means that the local government is under constant scrutiny, as are the police and businesses. Fun to read and fun to read the letters from the mighty protesting reports of their doings or undoings.

Quite often, we find other bits of information, some of which one would not expect in a U.S. newspaper:

- *The local prison is "still dry" due to water shortages. Businesses in the area are somehow unaffected. The fire department sends two tankers daily to the prison.*
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- A local protester, for the second time, threw a brick through the window of the courthouse; he had been moved out of his home & relocated to a slum under apartheid; the government has done nothing to help him regain his property in the time since.
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- *Radio Grahamstown tries to get back on the air---the board is making a public appeal for donations to help purchase a new 250 watt transmitter at an estimated cost of 32,000Rand (US\$4,000).*
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- **OSTRICH COMPANY CREATES MUCH NEEDED EMPLOYMENT** ...LINKS EMERGING BLACK FARMERS WITH OSTRICH GROUPS TO RAISES OSTRICHES AND PRODUCE OSTRICH-MEAT PRODUCTS. THE OSTRICH MEAT DEBONING AND PROCESSING PLANT IS BEING SET UP JUST OUTSIDE GRAHAMSTOWN.
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- *(Ad) Taiwan Film Week at Rhodes University. Free entrance. All welcome.*
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- **Transit Camp Switches On(to) Electricity**
- Transit camp residents have thanked their 'approachable' councillor for the recent electrification of the informal settlement...Ntombizakhe Mkolo had to lend all her electrical appliances and equipment to friends and relatives when she moved to Transit Camp a few years ago...since then she has relied on paraffin (kerosine) to prepare food and keep warm. ...Transit camp was established eight years ago
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- ***(Ad)Pork Rashers are 29.95Rands/kilo and Chicken sosastie 32.95Rands/kilo at the Pick&Pay.***
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- *(Ad) Items for the SPCA White Elephant Sale may be dropped off at the **Rat&Parrot** (pub) in New Street.*
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- ***(Ad) Dr Manyamba Herbalist--Real Original African Medicine 100% Guaranteed to solve all your problems...bring back lost lover, powder for love proposal, bring back stolen goods, breaking unwanted relationship...Sendawwana oil help financial problems.***

So, as you can see, there is news in Lake Wobegon. Also pages of cultural events, meetings, lectures, and more.

Our week was somehow very full. Monday: class in the morning, with various follow ups on up coming assignments & more. Tuesday Sue & I both auditing classes in the morning. All-college team building exercises in the afternoon. Wednesday meeting on fund raising, company for dinner. Thursday, more classes, meetings with students, tea with students. Friday, classes. Meeting in the afternoon re: our class & assignments. Dinner guests. Saturday--farmers' market, Women's lunch, and out to dinner to celebrate Sue's birthday, a bit belatedly.

All of this is on a framework of up at 6, coffee, chapel for meditation @ 6:45; Morning Prayer or Holy Communion at 7:15, breakfast with students at 8:00; lunch with students at 1:00, on Sundays, Tuesdays and Thursdays, chapel at 5:00 with evening prayer or holy communion, depending on what was or was not done at the morning service. Thursday's service was entirely in Xhosa language.

In here somehow, I've managed to run most days, and we get a walk to the Pick & Pay or elsewhere downtown...a mile or two, every day. Sometimes it's just to get the newspaper, sometimes (often) groceries for the day or two, sometimes a trip to the bookstore, sometimes a trip to the hospice shop (2nd hand stuff) to get things we like to have in the kitchen...like food storage containers.

Sue's half way thru War and Peace. And, on one of our walks, we explored the public library...where we can check out books when we want them. Free.

Last night, we had as a dinner guest, Rev Moses Madywabe & Mrs.--he is responsible for much of the on-going work in Alice (mentioned before) regarding orphan care and hospice. We talked about the hospice's needs, which are astoundingly basic--for example, people in need of hospice care in villages, others in need of the ARV's (somehow part of the services organized around the hospice) but unable to get to them at the distribution point 102 km away...no viable transportation, esp. for sick & dying people. Anyhow, it was a worthwhile evening, and both Sue & I are glad to have had the opportunity to meet this man that everyone talks about...very engaging, but not charismatic in the usual leadership sense. We will be working with him to get a wish list of the things he needs, then move on to finding funding if possible back in the U.S.

Meanwhile, Sue's been tasked with helping out on the College's fund raising for a new Library, which effort is running concurrently with everyone jumping through the hoops needed for accreditation by the state. A good time is being had by all, as someone somewhere said. And, our class is purring along, though we expect the purr to resolve into a full-throated clatter when we drop an assignment on them Monday next...you'll probably hear the muttering from wherever you are at the moment. In essence, we have three 'live' management projects for the college (input to the library planning, starting a Greening Program for the college and planning & executing the annual 'Leaver's Dinner' which is the great good-bye activity for those who are graduating or otherwise finishing their programs. All of these will be a lot of work that will have to be shoe-horned into already tight schedules. But, such is life for clergy and laity alike, no? Bottomline is these projects and their papers about them constitute 50% of their final grade in the management course.

One of the great things here is the endless opportunities for good conversation. People readily tell their stories & listen to ours, of course, but there is also a lot of attention to ideas. You really

can get into discussions of the political impacts of various approaches to theology, for example. And there is candid talk about the upcoming South African elections and apparently everyone's fears about what may or may not happen. And about the problem of bringing the many, many poor into the mainstream of society. And art. And music. And the difficulties of getting the same idea across in 7 different languages...some of which have completely different systems of thought. For example, how do you explain the Christian concept of "Trinity" in a language that counts only "one, two, several, many"? There is also curiosity about American elections; the students know very little about the U.S.--newspaper coverage is focused on South Africa, the Rest of Africa (and the many countries in it), international trade (exports of S.African products and foreign investment), and occasionally the United Nations and its works on health, labor, peacekeeping, children's relief and more. The TV in the student lounge (also used as the biggest classroom on campus) is tuned to S.African news OR american soap operas or american wrestling. Not a very wide picture of us....

Our flat is comfortable, bright and spacious. We're lucky. The electrical system is dicey, however, and I think that after two weeks I've found a circuit that doesn't go snapcracklepop when I plug the computer into it. Or, being a new circuit, it just hasn't learned to do so. We shall see. And the plumbing mostly works. The water pressure is low, but the shower will give you a good stream if you turn the dial to a temperature a little hotter than you can stand. Any attempt to dial it back or to cool it off with cold water reduces the operation to a drool. The toilet will flush, and praise the powers that be, it will refill and be ready to flush again within 2 hours. Sue describes the shriek that the taps make as "evidence of demonic possession".

We have admiration for our students and the faculty, and in some cases we're in awe over their abilities and over what they're overcome to be here, doing what they're doing. Examples: Kearabetswe is a woman of middle years who has a successful construction business...from which she felt called to take three years and to seek ordination, with the full knowledge that 'priests are treated like slaves here' (many are not paid at all by the church) but feel called to do what they can to be agents of change & transformation in their communities. (Appearances aside, this is not the church of the status quo.)(or, at least, it is trying not to be such.) Mduwe was a teacher of Zulu & head of his department in a high school. His biggest concern is that his teen age son will follow him into the priesthood too soon. Dr. Isaias Chachine told some of his life story in a sermon last week--about the rights of women and children and their neglect in the gospel of the day. Isaias spent the first 12 years of his life tending his father's cows and was allowed to go to school only at age 12. He learned portugese there, then english. He just finished a PhD at Uppsala (Sweden) analysing African contributions to and differences with European Christian theologies. Janet was a partner in a law firm, and now dean of students here, and lecturer in theology, 'transformation'(being change agents in the secular world), and much, much more. Jonathan is a PhD from Scotland, teaching new testament and related topics, such as church history. Nolutando was one of our students jin 2006; she is finishing her program this year, and has gained amazing confidence and skill, in addition to the copious talents she had when she came here. Vongai, sponsored by St Dunstan's, is finishing a 2 year program; she is a natural leader. A refugee from Zimbabwe, she and her family are contemplating their future--will it be in South Africa or New Guinea? Going "home" is out of the question, since her husband's life is under threat, as well as her own and their children.

After three weeks, our tongues are relaxing into the syllables they once found impossible. We now know the three basic Xhosa tongue clicks (teeth, palate, side) (there are others, we're told). We will never master them, but can do some of them in hymns and, for instance, in pronouncing "xhosa". The english here occasionally surprises us, too, but we ask when things don't make sense...and that's often good for a laugh.

Be sure that more will unfold. We'll try to pay attention & tell you about it.

