

## Personal News Update from Loxley & Mavis. November 2009

I have just found my last newsletter and was horrified to see that it was dated April 2009! Where has all the time gone?

Loxley Has just returned from Mozambique this week travelling with a younger pastor from our own church. They were visiting several people and churches, as well as the Beira Lifeline Base, and I am heartily glad that I no longer have to travel with him, as it is the hottest time of the year in one of the areas reputed to be one of the hottest on earth! They had more vehicle adventures whilst out in a remote area. Here is his description of events:-

The Toyota Hilux 4x4 we were in broke down. (This vehicle is owned by the church). Two of the four fan belts had broken and the other two had come off their pulleys while we were out in the bush 70 kms from our nearest friends and far, far from any Toyota dealer. This was at 2.30pm. Some local kids came along bringing one of the belts that had broken just as we were passing them a few hundred metres back. We had cell network as they have recently run power lines along that road and the cell towers were already there in expectation of that. Our friend had no transport but he borrowed a truck and went 25 kms in the other direction to see if he could find some fan belts. We managed to find a number on one of the broken ones.

One of the guys with me went with the cell phone to another small town we had passed thru about 10kms away. He got a lift in a big semi-trailer and found 22 other people in the back cab. So we waited and it got dark at 6pm. Big trucks were roaring past in both directions but we had got the local kids to push us back about 500m up a slight hill to a lay-by. We noticed trucks stopping there and hooting and people came out of the bush with 20 litre cans of fuel. After dark some of the big trucks stopped and these guys came out of the bush and filled their cans from the truck's fuel tanks. About 8.30 pm our friend and the guy who had gone off appeared in a small truck with another guy who was a mechanic. They had four fans belts all the same size and the right size for the two broken ones.

I had a light on a headband and a big torch and he got to work. By 10pm he had finished and then we found out that he had done exactly the same job on another Toyota Hilux two days before - in daylight in the garage. So he knew exactly what to do and in what order to do each belt. He charged us US\$8 for his labour. We paid US\$10 for fuel for the borrowed truck and US\$42 for the four fan belts. Then we went back to our friend's house from which we had set out 9 hours before. No problems since then and now safely home in Zimbabwe. So we thank God for his provision of the exact size of fan belts and a mechanic who knew exactly what to do.

The rains have started here, right on time – our office manager used to say they always start on the 15<sup>th</sup> November, and he has been right most years! Having seen weather reports from UK on our SkyTV, we cannot help feeling that we are in a far better place! Exactly a year ago I was there, and enjoying that most unusual time of hard frost and even a bit of snow.



The jacaranda season is now over, and some of the streets have been exhibiting the amazing spectacle of the flamboyant trees. They have such a beautiful spreading shape and spectacular colours. We are again enjoying a daily swim, but many days it is too hot to walk except in the very early morning.



We both keep fairly fit and well, though of course beginning to suffer a few aches and pains as we get older. Also find that the memory is not as good as it used to be, so have to write **EVERYTHING** down (and then try to find the paper it was written on!). Loxley is still very active, and has recently found a new form of exercise – filling some of the potholes in the road with the help of our gardener. The neighbours look on in amazement, but the other day one of the gardeners offered to help. Maybe eventually all the holes will be filled by “citizen volunteers” as Loxley described himself. Certainly the Council aren't doing anything except on the main roads. We have however had our rubbish collected for two weeks running, and there is also a huge trench dug in the next road where they are replacing the water mains – although as I write the trench is filling up with rainwater and the piles of dirt are spreading across the road.

I realise that Zimbabwe has slipped out of the news headlines, so some of you may not be aware that the Unity Government has been in trouble, and some say cannot survive, although we don't necessarily agree with that view. There are many outstanding matters to be dealt with that require a change of attitude from the previous regime, and the optimism that existed back in February is rapidly fading.

Most people are still desperately poor, and although the many NGO's are doing a sterling job in averting major tragedy by feeding the starving and treating the sick etc., the major donors are holding off until there is permanent change. So investors are holding back and the government is permanently broke. Now that South Africa as well as SADC have got involved we are hoping and praying that there will be some concrete progress, as the prospect of going back to the situation of a year ago doesn't bear thinking about.

Prices in the shops are still fairly high, but a few goods have come down a lot now that there is more competition, and even some Zim manufactured goods are appearing in the shops. But, utility bills, especially electricity, are ridiculously high, and we consistently get bills for hundreds of US dollars a month even though the meter has never been read! We even take the reading in to them, which they ignore. Similarly, the water bill, which should be nothing, as we have a borehole and never use municipal water, is a made-up amount each month. We now just pay enough to keep them all happy and prevent them from cutting us off, which they are doing to all the poor folks who have no chance of meeting their bills.

We have continued with the vehicle sagas, with one or two, and occasionally all three cars out of service. Our Aussie friends were here for six weeks recently, and had to take Loxley's Mazda truck on their journeying around the country, as the LifeLine truck had been involved in an accident while we were in England in July – it is still having some work done on it as I write. We took my Opel Zafira down South last month to get it properly dealt with after the new engine had been put in here by a very willing mechanic who was not always sure what he was doing! That was a six-month marathon, starting in March when we brought a replacement engine from South Africa, and finishing with a horrendous leak that sprayed oil over the back of the car as we drove the 1000 km to Joburg! The garage there kept it for over a week waiting for parts, during which time we inflicted ourselves on kind friends in the south of the city who were only expecting us to stay a couple of days. But although the car now goes very well, it has some annoying rattles, and will have to be taken back for adjustment next time we go to SA in the New Year. If it were possible we would have got rid of it and bought another, but having laid out so much on repairs we feel we should keep it for at least a little while longer.

Our two sons and particularly their wives seem to be getting plenty of work, and Jo and Eleonora are at last contemplating buying a house now in the USA they have their green cards. Property in the part of LA where they live and want to stay is quite expensive, and they are trying to get enough together for a deposit with a little help from elsewhere, so we are hoping that they can get themselves settled soon. We were able to see them for just a couple of days in the UK in August, when they were passing through on their way to Greece. Soon after they returned to America, Jo had to have an urgent operation on his back for the second time, when he developed severe pain and foot-drop. Apparently the operation was a success, though the foot is still recovering its rightful position. Meanwhile, Eleonora is having a lot of trouble with an ankle injury sustained a couple of years ago, and probably needs more surgery. Apart from that, they are well!

Loxley's sister Hilary and her husband will be coming to stay for a break in February, as they have been told their visas in China will not be renewed as they were hoping. They've been there teaching English to students for 5 years, but are now both over 70, so have been forced to retire. It will be good to have them to stay, as they've never had the chance to come before. Our self-contained cottage is ideal for long-term visitors, of which we have very few these days!

We have again lost our gardener, who we have discovered has at least 2 wives (or girl-friends) and 4 children scattered around. He was demanding that we provide accommodation for them or lots of money to support them in lodgings, which we declined to do! So now Loxley has to mow the lawns and trim the bushes, while I act as assistant and look after the pool. We have already had 3 guys come to the gate within 24 hours asking for a job, but we are a little wary of employing anyone whose background we don't know about. This time last year we were in a similar position.

Happily, our maid is very trustworthy and sweet, and has become almost part of the family. Her little boy, Jonathan is 10 months old and proving to be quite a handful as she tries to do the housework, but he is really delightful, and we enjoy having them around (*photo taken last May*)

We must get this off before there are any more delays, or it will become a 2010 letter and have to be amended again! So may we wish you all a very happy Christmas and a blessed New Year. With our love, **Mavis and Loxley**

