

The day started out like any other waking around 5am but this time instead of preparing to go catch the 6:27am train to Brisbane Central railway station from Nambour it was to finalise packing before heading off to St Luke's Lutheran church in Nambour at around 8:30am to meet up with other members of the EMPOWER mission team.

However there was one important email to check as the previous evening Jacquie rang to say that Cathay Pacific has a special form to complete for checking in medical supplies that would enable us to increase our baggage to 36kg. I had sent off an email and rang the office the previous evening only to be told by the recorded voice that I should ring during office hours, mind you that didn't say what the office hours are. With no email response I will take my chances and hand over the letter Lynne had typed ready to be picked up from the church office.

Final weigh-in for the backpack, 13Kg (well under the 20Kg limit) and the day pack, 5kg (2kg less than the limit of 7kg). After breakfast the car was packed and we headed for the church to be met by the morning prayer group, Pastor Maurie and Lynne. The mission team of Jacquie, Stephanie, Edna and Tony (we will meet up with Rod and Helen at the airport) were sent on our way with a psalm and a prayer, lots of hugs and blessings.

The run to the airport was smooth sailing, no traffic bottlenecks and we were at the airport around 10:30am, plenty of time to unload the vehicles and find out we would be going through gate 6. We thought it would be good to get all our luggage plastic wrapped for \$10 an item however they reduced the price of wrapping the medical supplies to \$8 and \$9, next hurdle to cross would be check-in.

By now the full mission team were assembled as we made our way to the check-in counter and the gentleman that called us to the counter was very courteous after reading the letter about the medical supplies said no worries, all for a good cause. The luggage was weighed in at 165Kg at an average of 27.5Kg, slightly above the 25Kg limit but as we checked in as a group they let it through, especially since there were three boxes of medical supplies that would go to a hospital in the Angetta region.

A cup of coffee, fill out the immigration form and it was time for the farewells with Narelle, Stan and Robyn before heading downstairs to go through customs. Since the airport redevelopment they have changed the layout upstairs as well as downstairs, but the process was extremely quick due to this new layout. We knew that Narelle, Stan and Robyn were not going to hang around, so we lounged around until it was time to head to gate 69.

On the plane we all commented about the bit of extra leg room, however the seats do not recline but a section of the seat moves forward just under the legs, not the most comfortable, that this is our tin can for the next 8 hours.

The plane left on time, fantastic given the drama we went through on our mission trip in 2008 when we missed the connecting flight in Hong Kong and were sent to Entebbe via Joburg. The only thing we would have to do on arrival at Hong Kong would be to collect our boarding passes. The flight was a little bumpy in places, must have been really bumpy as Jacquie was sick from the fish she had for the on-flight meal and filled a couple of vomit bags while the rest of the team continued to eat our dinner, poor chucker (Jacquie).

On arrival at Hong Kong (5 minutes early) we were like lost sheep being sent from one counter to the next, level after level taking the underground train in one direction and then back the other direction. We finally found the Ethiopian Airlines counter (a tiny sign at the bottom of the screen), handed over the passports and luggage check-in dockets, collected our boarding passes then once again go from one level to the next and train ride before we got to the wing that had gate 64. A quick text message to Robyn to let her know we had arrived in Hong Kong.

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The plane by now was 1 hour late and not as comfortable as the last trip in 2008, guess we expected the same wide comfortable reclining leather seats only to be met by an older aircraft, only one big screen with overhead projector, seats really pushed together, and about a 10 degree incline for the seat, nothing like the aircraft from Brisbane to Hong Kong. The flight was much smoother; food was fantastic and the ride uncomfortable for the 2hr flight to Bangkok. By now Jacquie had started to pick up and a little colour returning to her face and was able to pick at the food.

During the flight people rushed to take up empty spaces so they could lie across 2 or 3 vacant seats instead of sitting upright in their straightjacket, well that's what it felt like. More food, more eating and when we arrived at Bangkok we had to sit in our seats in the plane while they refuelled the aircraft and brought on new supplies. The cleaners were very busy up and down the aisles and cleaning the toilets etc.

Day 2 – Friday 11th June 2010.

After more passengers got on the plane it was rather full as we started the 8 hour flight to Addis Ababa. During the flight we played musical chairs as Rod had a window seat and the seat next to him was vacant so Rod, myself and then Stephanie took turns to stretch out and get a couple of hours sleep, most welcome. Edna went off and found another two spare seats to sleep across, so I guess it wasn't that bad, but we were pleased when the announcement was made not long after breakfast that we were beginning our decent into Addis Ababa. By now we were 7 hours behind Queensland time and the sky was getting brighter. On our arrival at Addis Ababa it was covered in fog and we were told the temperature was 15 degrees but stepping out of the aircraft to walk down the flight of stairs to catch the bus across to the airport was refreshing after being couped inside planes and airport facilities since 10:30am (Brisbane) until 1:40pm (Brisbane time) or 7:40am Addis Ababa time. A quick text message to Robyn to say we had arrived.

At Addis Ababa we have a 3 hour wait until our 10:45am flight to Entebbe and with the airport being rather small, it doesn't take long to walk around, and around, and around the duty free shops. Eagerly we return to gate 3 to board our flight only to find a notice on the digital display that flight ET811 has been delayed until 1:00pm. Resigned for the further delay we sit around waiting for the minutes to tick away and the time delay now blows out to 1:45pm. A number of passengers queried the staff who informed everyone that lunch will be served in the cafe while we wait. A great line up builds as more planes are also delayed but the goats meet, fried rice, spaghetti, vegetables washed down with Sprite soft drink wasn't too bad.

Finally we are called to start the process of boarding. First everyone must take off their shoes and they go into a plastic container to be put through the scanner with the rest of our take on luggage. Each person is allocated a coloured dot that goes on their boarding pass, green (first to board), and yellow (second) and so on. At around 1:30 a porter holds up a coloured sign to signify people with green dots are to board and then yellow and so on until everyone is on board. This aircraft is much newer with more leg room, comfortable seats and since I am sitting in the second last row (yellow dot), I have two seats to myself, utter luxury. Then we sit, and sit, and sit until our plane is pushed out at 2:35pm, well it is Africa after all. The captain now tells us the route has been changed and so our first stop will be Kengali International Airport before heading onto Entebbe. He anticipates we will arrive in Entebbe around 6:30pm, not bad for a flight schedule that should have had us arriving at 12:45pm. Without any telephone contacts for Patrick, Jacob or Charles, I guess they will find out what has happened to us.

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The flight to Kengali in Rwanda took around 2 hours, good meal and a little shut eye were welcome, and the country side as we came into land was green, plenty of small crop farms and a small town area, probably much more over the other side of the mountain but not visible from the aircraft. Those not disembarking stayed on the aircraft for around 1 hour while they take off and put on luggage and passengers. I went to the top of the stairs at the back of the aircraft to take a photo of the terminal but was told by the hostess please step back inside, I guess she thought I was going to do a runner in my yellow socks but no shoes. Oh well, I got my photo of the terminal before returning to my seat.

As passengers file on board the plane fills up quickly and now I have a young man sitting next to me in the window seat, as it is only a short flight to Entebbe, around 30 minutes, the aisle seat suites me perfectly. No in-flight service for as soon as we reach cruise height it's time to start the slow decent into Entebbe where we arrived at 6:30pm, not bad for a scheduled 12:45pm landing but at least it was daylight.

After filling out the immigration forms, paying the \$50USD visa each, we collected our luggage (amazing it all arrived) and headed out through customs. As we walked toward the baggage claim area we were challenged by a young lady (Grace) who wanted to know what was in the boxes. We explained that we are in Uganda to facilitate a trauma and rehabilitation and she proudly declared that she is a born again Christian, thanked us for what we were going to do in Angetta and spirited us straight through the doors to find our luggage before meeting up with Patrick and Rev. Jacob.

There was a taxi bus and Rev. Jacob had his Toyota 4 wheel drive so all the luggage and people climbed in and took the traffic chaotic journey along the streets back into Kampala and on to the Aphirama Guest House. It was too late for the scheduled welcome ceremony with representatives from LCMU, just enough time to sort out the sleeping arrangements with the 4 rooms, prayer, shower, bottle or drinking water and bed.

Day 3 – Saturday 12th June 2010

Last night was a strange experience with all the noises of people and cars coming and going, people talking, opening and closing of doors, loud music and the noise from the world cup soccer on the TV, seems like everyone was up and about doing something and keeping us awake. The 5am call to prayer was a signal it was time to get up and get ready for breakfast and the road trip to Lira. Everyone else in the team was up and mobile as well, so at 6am we were having breakfast and sorting out USD to exchange to UGX.

When Patrick and Jacob arrived a little after 7am all the bags were packed and outside ready to be loaded into the two vehicles. On the way out our taxi headed to the Travelex money exchange at the Royal Hotel in the centre of Kampala itself while Jacob headed to his office to pick up a few things before heading to Lira for a wedding.

A deep discussion took place between Patrick and the taxi driver to determine the price to drive us to Lira; back and forth Patrick would go as the taxi driver wanted to re-negotiate the price. Finally a price of 160,000UGX plus fuel both ways was agreed and we headed off. As we reached one of the roundabouts the taxi ran out of fuel and there we sat, traffic all around beeping their horns, dodging from one side to the other until finally a group of young men came over and pushed the taxi around the roundabout across the median strip and into a shell service station. The taxi took 69 litres of fuel (159,964UGX) and after paying we were off again heading through the busy streets on our way to Lira.

The journey was long, especially in a taxi with the minimum cushioning in the seats but as the country side opened up and the traffic got less, the driver increased his speed to 100 to 120 kmh. The countryside is certainly green, plenty of road works and construction which shows that life in Uganda is improving as their confidence grows. We drove straight through to Lira without making any roadside stops for food or drink, also not slowing down as we crossed the Nile finally reaching Lira and the on to Farm View to meet and greet the workers who we remembered us and

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likewise we remembered them. The return fuel cost 100,000UGX a total of 260,124UGX or \$135.18AUD not bad for a 170Km journey.

Unfortunately Florence and John were attending the funeral of their son who was killed in a car accident so they were not there to greet us. Just about all the rooms were booked so our mission team, Rev Jacob and his team from LCMS, three girls doing voluntary work in Uganda with primary school students were allocated rooms. As there were no more rooms that had two beds, I was given a master suite with a king sized bed and ensuite and Rod was also given a larger room while the women shared a room with two beds. Later Rod found out that he would have to share his bed as there was one guest to many for the number of available rooms.

By now it was getting on toward 1pm with the wedding supposed to start at 11am; however since the bride and groom as well the minister were at Farm View I guess the wedding can't start without them. Eventually the Rev Jacob and his team and the wedding party in one vehicle, and all the rest in the Farm View vehicle headed out to Akia.

On our arrival everyone was sitting outside waiting from the ceremony to commence the ceremony. Tarps were set up outside the church and it was good to see the church building with a thatched roof instead of the blue tarps. The wedding ceremony was a mixture of African and traditional with the bride arriving first with the bridesmaids, flower girl and pageboy. With the music from the loud speakers blaring, the older women (from the wife side of the family) chanting and yelling they slowly moved toward the church door. When they made it to the door, the groom and best man arrived and it was his turn to make the slow walk to the church door with his side of the family chanting and yelling.

There was a string across the door and a special ceremony was held by Rev Jacob to bless the church as this had not been performed in the past. The traditional wedding ceremony was witnessed by the immediate family with the rest of the approx. 1000 guests sitting under the tarps outside listening to the service from the speakers. Unfortunately the sound system kept cutting out and at one stage the generator ran out of fuel so no one could hear what was going on. After the ceremony the wedding party slowly made their way out of the church to the lounge chairs that had been arranged for the activities in from of all the guests.

One very special symbol was the husband washing his bride's hands; they gave her some food and a drink. This was repeated by the wife for her husband. After that they both cut the cake, gave each other a piece, then they took the trays of cut cake to family and special guests that were seated behind them, we were in that group which was special. Then started the speeches that included just about everyone, even calling upon our team to say who we were and what we were doing.

The special guests were fed first of a meal comprising beans, cassava, chicken, goats meat served with a soda. As it was getting dark we headed back to Farm View where most of us just crashed as we were so tired.

Even though the staff at Farm View had prepared a light snack of fish for us, most of the team headed off for a shower/bath and bed to catch up on some well deserved sleep. Pity about the pillows that felt like bags of cement, nothing a couple of rolled up towels can't fix.

Day 4 – Sunday 13th June 2010

Most people were up around 6am for breakfast as the church service at Akia where the wedding was held the previous day was supposed to start at 8am. Breakfast didn't finish until 7:30am; bags were packed and stored in my

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room before we headed off around 9am. With things to do and people to pick up along the way we didn't get there until 10am with the service starting around 11am.

A traditional LCMS service lead by Rev Jacob, Patrick reading the lessons, Johnson the sermon, Jacob performing a baptism for 4 children, speeches that went on and on from just about everyone before finishing around 1pm. Before we could leave however, we had to taste some of the food they had prepared before getting into Lira to shop for essential supplies for Angetta. The team broken into three groups, one to purchase food, another for blankets, towels, pillows and pillow cases, with the third group purchasing reed mats to go under the mattresses, a gas 2 ring burner for our cooking, toilet paper, coffee mugs and a couple of other items for the kitchen.

Next stop was to meet up with the ute that would carry all the supplies and luggage to Angetta and it was off to Farm View to load the baggage while the Farm View vehicle continued on its way. Packed into the Farm View vehicle was the EMPOWER mission team, the three American girls and Susan acting as their guide for the 60 mile journey, doesn't sound far, but were we all in for a surprise.

Given the poor condition of the track, leaving late in the afternoon added to the difficulties of negotiating pot holes, wash outs, rocks, cattle, people, push bikes, cars and trucks. To make matters worse, a heavy thunder storm had developed turning tracks into boggy mud puddles that at times, required the passengers to get out of the vehicle and push it through the mud. Two of the American girls absolutely refused to get out and push which added to the stress and frustrations of the other team members.

Meanwhile the ute had developed complications of its own busting a ball joint in the right front causing the ute to veer into the ditch on the right hand side of the road. As darkness closed in and the mosquitoes multiplied in size, numbers and volume, Patrick had tried to ring for assistance only to find out he had run out of mobile phone credit, so here we are sitting in the ute, black as the ace of spades outside, voices from people walking up and down the track, no mobile phone, and now the rain is starting to fall. We quickly covered the back of the ute and the canopy with a large plastic tarpaulin to keep our luggage dry hoping that someone would ring to find out where we are.

Eventually Anna (Patrick's mother) rang as the other vehicle had arrived around 7:30pm and they wanted their luggage to set up camp. After explaining what had happened the Farm View vehicle turned around and headed back toward us so that we could at least finish the journey and get settled in Angetta. We waited, and waited and waited until around 1:30pm for the vehicle to arrive as they had spent around two hours bogged on one stretch of the track. We were met by the driver, Tony and David (Patrick's brothers) and one other person covered in mud. Sounds funny now, but sitting squashed in the front seat of a ute for 6 hours is not my kind of fun, especially on a country track in the middle of nowhere.

The village of Abongonyeke is located at the coordinates of ***E 33.439105 and N 2.14228*** and using Google Earth, Abongonyeke is around 60 miles East of the town of Lira. With the Farm View vehicle packed with baggage and our supplies, we set off leaving the ute and its driver behind having paid him 50,000UGX even though he did not complete the journey; well it was about half way actually. As we reached the top of the rise we stopped to get fuel as the vehicle was nearly empty.

The fuel stop is just a mud brick house that sells fuel out the front yard, however this is now around 2am when the knocked on his door to buy petrol. Lucky for us he got out of bed and we purchased 25 litres of fuel and we were on our way. A couple of times along the way we also got bogged but lucky for me the other blokes got out and push the vehicle finally arriving at Abongonyeke at around 3:30am.

No time for formalities in unpacking the vehicle, just climb into bed without mosquito nets, pull the sheet over your head to stop being bitten and get some sleep as day 1 of the EMPOWER program was to commence in the morning, not a very good way to start our mission program.

Day 5 – Monday 14th June 2010

After a couple of hours sleep it was good morning Abongonyeke, reunited with the team who by now had started to pick up their baggage and take a look at the village in which we will be living for the next 12 days. Once the gas burner was assembled the women were into making a hot breakfast and you could see from could the looks on the faces for the American girls that they were not impressed with the village, their accommodation at Susan's place, the drive in the night before, getting bogged and having to push the vehicle, the storm and rain coming through their thatched roof and the facilities generally. Once they had been reassured by our team that everything will improve now they had their luggage and they saw the hot breakfast and bottles of fresh water their spirits improved otherwise I am sure they would have got back into the Farm View vehicle and gone back to Lira and possibly all the way back to America.

They were not the only ones feeling like going back to Lira with a disagreement between a couple of members in our team threatening to disrupt the start of the program in 5 centres in just a couple of hours. After a fair amount of discussion involving all team members the disagreement was finally resolved (or set aside) and we could focus on the reason why we had volunteered to come to this village in the first place, i.e. to facilitate a trauma rehabilitation program. Seems the devil had started his work early to disrupt both our program and the program in the schools, thank God he didn't win. During breakfast Patrick let us know where the 5 training centres would be and who would be our interpreters and it was up to us to decide which centre we wanted to go to. Rod and Helen chose the closest centre making it easier for Helen to walk that distance:

Centre	Groups	Times	Leader	Interpreter(s)
Abongonyeke	2 groups	11am and 1:30pm	Jacquie	Patrick
Oyiracong	2 groups	11am and 1:30pm	Rod and Helen	Sam
Abalu	1 group	11am	Tony	Robert
Omukowie	1 group	11am	Edna	Fred
Oyokoyoo	1 group	11am	Stephanie	David and Richard

I headed off with Jacquie and Patrick to their meeting place where I was going to meet up with his father who would walk me to my village in Abalu, however when he didn't turn up and their first group was about to start, one of the young men walked with me to the trading centre in Angetta where we found someone to show me the way to Abalu. As we walking along the tracks we noticed a group of people under the mango trees so we approached them to find out if this was the group going to participate in the EMPOWER training. We found out they were having a clan meeting and the training would not start until tomorrow. Having received this news my guide walked me back to our village which meant that I would already be one day behind the other groups. Little did I know at that stage what an influence and impact a clan would have on the operations within this group.

It was pleasant sitting under cool shade of the lemon tree and as the girls from LCMS had also experienced the same delay in the start of their program, we were able to have a bit of a chat about where they came from, backgrounds, how they got involved in the program, what they hoped to accomplish, travel plans, and also about their anxieties from the previous day, sleeping in the hut with Susan.

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The three girls who joined us are all Lutherans in their early 20's having just finished college and started their first jobs, Courtney from Portland, Brenda from Nebraska and Lucy from North Carolina. Each applied through LCMS for the program and apart from a few emails and telephone calls making arrangements as to who would be responsible for what, they had not met before. Their program is to visit the schools in various regions and take a bible story to the children. As they had not had time to rehearse their stories, not having the start today gave them the opportunity to work through each of their stories and who would be taking each part.

Sounds an excellent program and although they knew that they would be living with a Ugandan family in each region they went, they were not expecting the sort of location, circumstances and living arrangements in this village.

The first day of the EMPOWER program is all about gaining trust and getting to know each other and is not meant to be a heavy long session, so all the teams were back in camp early in the afternoon to reflect on their groups and their levels of participation, cooperation and willingness to complete the program. All groups spoke of the positive attitudes within their groups and their keenness to continue.

The rest of the day was spent testing the shower and toilet which has to be taken during the day as there is no electricity in the village and all you rely on is the sun to warm up the water in the container on top of the facility. Time to unpacking and hang the mosquito nets, arrange things in the hut before preparing the evening meal on the gas stove. What a difference a gas stove makes compared with the charcoal burner Anna (Patrick's mother) uses inside her cook house. It seems she starts around 5am to get the fire going and is still in the kitchen when most of us are in bed. When not doing kitchen duties, there is always the millet to dry, thrash, sieve and store in the bin ready to make millet bread which unfortunately contains grit due to the way it is swept off the ground. Additional taste is added as the chooks have a great feed scratching their way through the husks and doing their droppings amongst the heads. I can't say that I ever got use to the taste and the grit but was always polite to take a small piece.

As evening set in, the boys in the village started to play their string instruments and before long people from the surrounding villages started to assemble to check out the story that there were wzungo (plural for white people) living in a Ugandan village as they normally see white people come in their 4 wheel drives for a couple of hours and go again. They did not believe we had set up camp for the duration of the program as whites in this part of Uganda usually carry guns or have an armed guard for protection, so in their eyes, us living in the village gave us more credibility and I believe provided us with a greater opportunity to build trust, respect and open up communication channels. The music, singing and dancing are something to experience, you may have heard it on a CD or on the television screen, but being part of this experience is hard to describe.

Days 6, 7, 8 and 9 – Tuesday 15th to Saturday 19th June 2010

The days run into each other in the aussie camp as we prepare breakfast, do the washing up and as a group, revise the session(s) and activities that would be covered for the day. Any other decisions that have also to be made are discussed as a group so everyone has an input. When we reassemble at the end of the day, we discuss what went on in each group, how they interacted, the types of questions they asked, the activities they appeared to like the most, and the stories they told about the stress and trauma.

Regardless of what happened each day, people continued to come into the village each evening around 4pm to join in the evening musical festivities until around 10pm or until the regular evening thunder storms come in from the east and wash out the festivities. The interpreters who can make it join us each evening and shared our food, join in the discussions about the program, a perfect opportunity to bond, learn about their lifestyles, goals and ambitions for the

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future. During these discussion we encourage them to continue the work we have started and run their own EMPOWER programs after we have left.

By now we had been made aware that there were three rumours going around the village that could count for the different numbers of people turn up each day and why some have stayed away all together. It was believed that the rumours were being spread throughout the sub-country by members of the Pentecostal movement and which is very large in this region, and those who practice witchcraft.

Rumour 1:

That we were there to teach them that there is nothing wrong with homosexuality;

Rumour 2:

On completing the course each certificate contained a number which means that person would be taken below the water, i.e. descend into hell; and

Rumour 3:

That were using the devils number 666 from the bible in the course and that they should stay away.

We were encouraged to take about the rumours within our groups, I raised the first two in discussions in our group in Abalu, and while no one would speak about their origins, I was reassured that those who remained in the group did not believe that this was the desired outcome from the EMPOWER program. Thinking back on the meetings with Jackson early in the program I have a feeling that his questions on the EMPOWER program and what I was going to do each session pointed toward finding out the truth. I thank God that truth prevailed, and while three members did not return after the first session, about 6 or 7 more joined as the word spread about the program around their village and especially up at the trading centre.

Apart from our obvious white skin, we had wondered why many people in the trading centre looked upon us with suspicion and would not come near us, but I am pleased to report that as the days and the training progressed, this suspicion also decreased and we back very friendly with the locals. So friendly that the local Pentecostal Pastoral leader for the sub-county (Peter) came to the camp twice to thank us for what we were doing and prayed for us and those participating in the program. He also went to several of the groups including mine to meet with the participants and dispel any of the rumours, encouraging them to continue and to tell their friends how good the program is for everyone.

The decision was made not to return to Lira for the weekend because of the condition of the tracks, availability of a vehicle to come and get us, as well as the need to run the program on Saturday to give us a day at the end of the course if we haven't finished all the sections, this however has upset the people in Akia, Ngetta and Lira as well as thrown out our scheduled to visit Gulu. The clan from Abalu are planning a clan meeting on Saturday and will not be available to do the course which means that I have a spare day to finish the course in the available time.

During these discussions with Patrick, Rev. Johnson has informed us that due to the large number of NGO's living and working in Gulu, the cost of a room in a hotel in Gulu would be \$90USD or \$100USD a night which is far in excess of what we had included in our budget. It has also emerged that Pastor Charles and LCMU think that there is little or no activity taking place in Gulu and there is no viable congregation. This being the case, our role for the visit to Gulu was to discuss possible projects and issues within the congregation and since there is no viable congregation we have

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offered to pay for the return bus trip for him to come to Lira the following weekend and join the combined meeting of all Lutheran churches in the district.

Rev. Johnson wanted us to also pay transport and accommodation for two university lecturers to come with him to Lira as they could possibly help in building the church numbers in Gulu. This we did not agree to, only Rev. Johnson so he would arrange to come down on Saturday, stay with Patrick at his house, take the worship service on Sunday and then attend the meeting on Sunday before returning to Gulu. During these discussions I also agreed to lead the worship service on Sunday in Ngetta at the congregation's request. Originally Patrick wanted me to deliver the sermon as says that only a pastor could take the liturgy. Rod and I explained how in Australia a lay person could take the liturgy but we are required to deliver a sermon prepared by a Lutheran minister so as to prevent anyone preaching anything they wanted to regardless of its truth or holding to the Lutheran doctrine. This was news to Patrick who now understands the relevance and importance. According to Patrick this is not a practice in Uganda which made us think about what might be preached in Ugandan Lutheran churches.

Not returning to Lira for the weekend as previously planned was putting pressure on our food and drinking water supply but as we were able to purchase food from the trading centre, had food supplemented by Anna, and getting the odd item given to us, we felt that we would survive as trying to return to Lira along the boggy tracks was out of the question. Besides, I am sure that had we returned, many of the team would not be looking forward to the return journey to the village for the rest of the week.

Day 11 – Sunday 20th June 2010

Today has been set aside to take the medical supplies collected and packaged by Ray and Edna Borchers to the maternity medical clinic a distance of 7 miles away from camp. Patrick had arranged boda bodas for all of us except Helen who had decided to stay in the camp as her legs were giving some pain. By 9am we had set off along the tracks that took us through the trading centre, along the road toward Omoro Sub-county.

While the original road map I downloaded from the Internet showed roads like in Australia, their condition was nothing like it and the rain we had experienced nearly every evening since arriving in the camp didn't help with mud, pot holes, pools of water, and streams rushing across the track. At times we had to get off the bikes and walk which gave us the opportunity to stretch our legs as the padding on the carry tray on the back of the bike is not all that comfortable.

Our arrival at the clinic caused great interest among the locals and soon a small crowd had assembled outside the clinic grounds where we were met by the midwife in charge and an attendant. Presenting the medical supplies and the Australian flag gave us a sense of achievement and as they read through the list were most appreciative of what we had given them after all, it would appear they have very little to start. The centre is run by a mid-wife, no doctor is available, and the family have to provide the food for their family while in the hospital.

After signing the visitor's book and noting the gift was from the congregation of St. Luke's Lutheran Church we headed to the village centre as there were supplies that had to be purchased to keep us in food until Friday morning when we would depart for Lira. A short distance from the medical centre is the township of Omoro which, during the height of the LRA war was a police barracks and an IDP camp. One of the stories we heard about the camp was when one of the young men captured by the LRA forced them to them to a hospital, he knew that the police barracks were there so he lead them straight into their barracks and all were arrested. At least that was one positive story we heard to come out of the war.

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Sunday is not a market day however one of the local shop owners open up his store so we could purchase sufficient supplies to keep us in food for the remainder of our stay in the village. On our way out we visited a small clothing shop and to my surprise, there was a cow hide wide brim hat, perfect to keep the hot African sun from burning my nose and the tops of my ears.

Back on the boda bodas for the return ride back to the village along the same rough track, only this time the water from the puddles and creeks were starting to recede as the sun dries out the countryside.

The rest of Sunday was spent relaxing before once again preparing the evening meal and the assembly of the people to once again sing, dance and praise the Lord.

Day 12, 13 and 14 – Monday 21st to Wednesday 23rd June 2010

We are constantly amazed how the participants in our groups are completely immersed in the stories, openly discussing their traumas from their smallest level of trauma to their greatest level of trauma and how they are prepared to comfort and support each other. This level of group commitment is essential as we will be returning home while they must live with the memories every moment of their lives. The knowledge and skills acquired during the program prepares them to recognise the symptoms, use one or more of activities to reduce its effects, and able to call upon someone else in the group for help needed.

Time now to shed some insight into the participants in Abalu and observations of the way the program evolved. Abalu is a small community made up of many small family housing units like about 30 minutes walk from camp along narrow winding tracks past, or walking through small housing units. After a couple of days having an escort, I was confident enough to walk the tracks myself which also helped to being accepted by the community who would see me walking alone through their fields of maze, sunflower, cassava, sorghum, sweet potato, beans, paw paw, oranges, mangoes, avocado, mandarins, shea nut trees or 'moo-yahoo tree', cows, goats, chickens, pigs and the odd dog and cat.

As each day went by, the greeting of ebulo aber (good morning) or erio aber (good afternoon), kop ango (how are you?) followed by the reply kop pe (good) became as natural as if I had lived in their community for years. Ninji nga? (what is your name) is politely answered and when they would ask me my name Okello Tony they would smile and laugh, some asking how, when and who gave me my African name. When I told them I was given my African name in 2008 many were surprised by the fact that I had returned an indication that it is rare to see white people returning to Uganda to continue their work. There are many well meaning people who come to Uganda for a couple of weeks to undertake some project then leave expecting the local community to continue what they had started. Uganda like many parts of Africa is littered with buildings, farming projects, churches, roads, health clinics, schools, and other forms of infrastructure that are left empty, no money to run them, have been demolished to use the resources for other projects the locals want.

Whites seem to think the locals cannot build, need infrastructure and services but do not consult the locals resulting in the locals expecting the white to continue funding those projects as it is not their project. This is broad open statement and I am sure there are many projects that are successful, but these are few and far between and the successful ones have a great foundation, committed local people to keep them running, and financial support to ensure they succeed.

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Nearly every evening it would rain and as I walk along the track the farmers would start ploughing their fields around 5am to plant the bean seeds. As they saw me they knew it was time to stop, cleanup and make their way to where we run the program under the shade of the shea nut tree.

For the first couple of days, Jackson their pastor and clan leader and I would meet in the meeting house to go discuss the program and what would be covered in each session. He is very protective of the clan and explained proudly that no member had become infected by HIV/AIDS while they were in the IPD camp in Omoro (6 miles away), they have protected their heritage which has unfortunately resulted in some of their children been kidnapped by members of the Acholi people. Once Jackson was convinced the program would be of a major benefit to the clan, each morning from then on we would just meet and greet outside his house before heading under the shea nut tree.

One morning while waiting for the group to gather I watched the first stages of making shea nut oil from the nuts that had been peeled and boiled the night before. After boiling they are pounded into a paste before being ground with two stones to refine the oily paste, a very labour intensive process one that would be simplified if mechanical machinery were available. I would have liked to see how they turn this black paste into the finest golden oil that has a beautiful texture, good for cooking and to rub into your skin.

The program started with around 28 participants, however as the rains continued, the pressure was on to cultivate and plant bean seeds resulting in four not being able complete the course this time, but Robert my interpreter will take them through the section they missed so they to can receive a certificate of completion.

Robert is the son of Jackson, a very proud man who has completed his high school education but the family does not have the money to educate him at a higher level. In Uganda, primary school is free, but there is a fee for pre-school and high school education. Most Ugandan families in the north cannot afford education, so the children work on the farm. Farming provides a subsistence living with any excess produce taken to the markets in Angetta or Omoro. A number of years ago Robert, along with many other young boys from the villages, was captured by the LRA and while being marched off to the LRA camp came under fire from army helicopter gunships and fortunately during the confusion he and his best friend were able to escape. They hid in the bush for around a week before making their way back home, two of the lucky boys. We heard stories of those who did not escape and are still missing or awaiting them to be returned by the UN or other NGOs.

All of the group openly shared stories of the trauma and stress they have, and are still facing and it was good to see that the program was able to bring them together to form a strong support group where they can continue to provide support and comfort in time of need. As this clan has strong Pentecostal beliefs, part 2 of the program that focuses on 'Forgiveness' and poses 9 questions on what God has to say on forgiveness in passages of the bible, the 'bible hour' as they called it was one of the most enjoyable and rewarding sections as it promoted discussion and personal insight into what forgiveness is about, who to forgive, when to forgive, and why it is so important to forgive so that they can move on with their lives.

One never knows how successful the program is but if their actions are any indication, then the acts of forgiveness and reconciliation between family and clan members shows that deep and meaningful healing took place. Forgiving and saying prayers for the LRA, the Acholi tribe and the Karamojong cattle rustlers who live on the next ridge watching them through binoculars and will return like they always do and steel their cattle, killing anyone who stands in their way is testament to the EMPOWER program, their faith in God, and a personal belief that they want more out of their lives, Obanga Ber (God is Good), apwoyo Yesu (thank you Jesus).

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After 13 sessions the program came to its conclusion and all those who took part in the program freely share what they have learned from the program, from each other, what is really meant by forgiveness, the goals they have set for their future and how they will use what they have learned to identify the symptoms of stress and trauma. They identified activities they will use to reduce the poisonous effects of stress and trauma, as well as how they will help others by either becoming EMPOWER facilitators or sharing the program with at least one or more of their friends. As they received their certificates they were so proud of their achievement and I have no doubt they will fulfil their dreams.

But there was one more surprise in store, on the third last night we were in the camp, Jackson arrived unannounced Jackson to reconcile with the family in Patricks village. The traditional welcome and the small ceremony was missed by most people, this simple but powerful act brought together two family clans that once were at war with each other and where members of each tribe would die from spears for some of the most simple wrongs. Reconciliation was limited to these clans, but was witnessed nearly every night as more and more people would come into the camp of an evening to be met with much ceremony, hot milk tea with two tablespoons of sugar, beans and cassava and singing and dancing. Before we left it was reassuring to hear that the clans have arranged amongst themselves to continue meeting in this way to celebrate, discuss issues, and from what I witnessed, allowing inter-tribe marriages, something that rarely occurred before the EMPOWER program.

Day 15 – Thursday 24th June 2010

With the EMPOWER program completed, today is a day of reflection, recuperation and preparation to break camp and return to Lira tomorrow for the next stage of the mission program. On the Wednesday evening we agreed to help Susan harvest her millet, not fully realising what we were doing as none of us have ever done this before but as we were in a state of exhilaration and relief that the program had concluded so successfully, it shouldn't be that difficult so we promised to meet at Susan's place about 200m up the track at around 7am before breakfast.

Getting up was easy as it was a beautiful morning, however the heavy rain during the night combined with the wind had flattened most of the millet and as this must be harvested first before it went bad, bending over cutting the millet heads with a blunt knife played havoc on us. As the sun climbed higher in the sky and the day becoming hotter and hotter, we all agreed that while the decision to help Susan since she helped us so much was admirable, maybe we bit off more than we could handle. That acre of millet looked huge and although we filled many buckets with millet heads, it didn't make much of a dint in the field. Finally Susan and her mother suggested we stop and return to camp for breakfast, no one complained.

Back for breakfast and assess what food we had left and to our surprise, we still had a lot of food as people within our EMPOWER groups had supplied us with so much food we realised that we will be able to give the remainder to Anna (Patrick's mother) to help out feed her family and try to repay her for all she has done for us. We have been purchasing charcoal, bags of rice and sugar, beans and other food supplies at various times as well as chickens, cooking oil and a goat that will be slaughtered by a Muslim man from the next village and shared for dinner tonight. Must tell you about the goat, Susan offered us a goat for 30,000UGX as she need the money to purchase bean seed for her open field. I paid her 50,000UGX the proper price but when she asked me to choose the goat from her heard of three, I couldn't do it and explained that no way could I have the memory of the goat pictured in my mind as I sat down to eat it that evening. Boy I'm a squib but could you do that?

I think we will miss Anna bring us bowls of black or brown beans, boiled or deep fried cassava, boiled pumpkin leaves that when sliced and prepared only how Anna could do, were very tasty and especially welcome when we would walk

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back into camp after our sessions, or at dinner to supplement the food we had prepared. A couple of food types we wouldn't miss (didn't try in the first place) will be flying ants and cooked goats head. I am sure they have goodness somewhere in them, but we didn't need to try them. Rod and Helen ate the flying white ants when served to them by members in their program group, luckily I wasn't asked to eat them even though I saw them in the bowl at Jackson's place.

After breakfast we were involved in washing clothes, sorting out our bags, taking it easy and generally relaxing. The day dragged on and all were waiting in anticipation for the tomorrow even though it meant leaving the friends we had made in the village. Peter a boy soldier (now 16 years) who nearly had his lower leg blown off by the LRA to prevent him from escaping but now making a full recovery having been placed in this family environment for rehabilitation by the UN. Soon he will have to return to his village and farm his father's land otherwise squatters already on the land will be able to keep it. The children who are our constant companions playing, singing and trying to teach us Lango. The musicians who come into the camp from all the other villages around 4pm every evening and stay until late or at least until they get washed out with the evening storms that mainly come from the east.

For anyone who is interested in finding out where the village of Abongonyeke is located, type in the coordinates E 33.439105 and N 2.14228 into Google Earth and it will take you directly to the spot, give or take 1m. All the other villages are close by or within 1 hour walking distance.

During the afternoon we planted out the paw paw, pumpkin and passion fruit seeds into a plot between the huts and the shower block as part of our contribution toward their food supply. The biggest threat to their survival will come from the goats which eat anything and everything. To keep them away they wrap thorn branches around the plants that need protecting.

As the sun goes down and the people start streaming into the camp we are not prepared for what is about to transpire. Certainly we are prepared for the music, singing and dancing as we have experienced this every night since arriving, but not know to us was the songs composed for our farewell and the heart rendering speeches to follow. Sam who was the interpreter for Rod and Helen sang his song, Robert my interpreter sang his song after he used the ball to identify each person in the mission team (an exercise used on day one of the EMPOWER program for people to get to know each other). The young people sang their song, the older women sang their farewell song, Pastor Peter prayed for our safe return, Patrick spoke words about what the EMPOWER program has meant for the Angetta region, not a dry eye in the house. It was very difficult not to be moved by their songs and speeches and the mission team were left in no doubt that their lives, and the whole community had been changed in just 10 days, so rewarding.

All that remained to do now was to thank everyone for allowing us to be part of their community, welcoming us into their lives with all our funny western talk and ways of living and certainly an experience we will never forget as we have learned so much from them and the way they live.

Day 16 - Friday 25th June 2010

The day has come for us to leave Abongonyeke and Patrick has left early in the morning to try and find out where the truck is as it was supposed to be in the village by 6am. Meanwhile we boiled the remaining eggs and water for a cuppa. From the distance it was great to hear a truck slowly making its way down the track. As it had rained again the night before, we were pleased to be able to hire a truck rather than a taxi of the vehicle from Farm View as no one wanted to get out and push if it became bogged.

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After loading the truck with the luggage and two forms for us to sit one, the team said their farewells to the family friends we made in the village and the people from the various EMPOWER groups, not a dry eye in the house. Lucky and the other young children had disappeared to school early to avoid the good byes', we will miss them and they will always be in our hearts. As we climbed on the back of the truck with Patrick, Sam, Susan, Robert and the mechanic as Helen and Jacquie sat in the front with the driver. Just as well we did have the truck as I am sure a conventional vehicle would have got bogged. As we slowly picked our path along the muddy and slippery track the wazongoes on the back of the truck were a distraction for the school children in the many schools we passed, the locals in their farms, villages and trading centres and those walking, riding push bikes, motorbikes and trucks.

Along the way we stopped for 20 litres of fuel (20,000UGX) so it would get us to Farm View. As we got closer to Lira the number of people increased, so to the number of cars and trucks until finally we turned into the drive. As it seems common practice in Uganda, as soon as we got out of the truck and unloaded the luggage the driver disputed to cost, so instead of 160,000UGX he was demanding 200,000UGX. By now I had had enough and told him to go away as this was the agreed price and he wouldn't be getting any more money. Finally he left with Patrick, Sam, Susan and Robert but broke down not far down the road resulting in them having to get boda bodas into Lira leaving the truck driver and mechanic to fix the truck. Later after we had settled into our rooms and got a lift into town we saw the broken down truck on the side of the road with the driver and mechanic working on what looked like the tail shaft. They immediately recognised us and guess they were not very pleased at all.

In town we walked around the markets, ladies looking at clothing etc while Rod and I went to price solar panels. What we would normally pay around 2000AUD you can purchase the same German product here for 85000UGX, except if you purchase it from a store owned by some from India they wanted just over 1000000UGX. So cheap and useful, that if I had known the cost before we headed out to Angetta I would have purchase one and left it with them when we left. This would have enabled them to charge their mobile phones and a source of income as they charged people from other villages to charge their mobile phones. Power stored in a battery could also provide lighting to several of the huts.

As agreed, we all met back at the Mango Tree before 5pm but not before Rod and I saw ice creams in one of the supermarkets, wow the taste of my strawberry twirl was something to savour, we haven't tasted ice cream since leaving Australia. We thought we were smart in finding ice cream only to be told by the women they also found them in another supermarket and devoured one as well.

Back to Farm View and the long awaited Tusca (beer), the first time we had a beer since the in-flight meals and didn't it go down quickly, so much so we had to sample a second just see if it was real. For the first time since leaving Farm View someone else prepared our meals, chicken, rice and beans which tasted really good. Not only that, we sat at a table, used a knives and forks, cups with saucers, tea spoon for the sugar, waited on by two staff who cleared the table while we had coffee or tea, didn't have to bend over and do the washing up in a plastic bowl, what a pleasant change. It also gave us time to relax and reflect on what had been accomplished since leaving Australia.

What we had hoped though was for hot showers only to find the water was cold just like back in the village however, no one complained as poor young Tony didn't have to climb up on top of the shower block and fill the plastic drum so people could have a shower and flush the toilet.

By 8:30pm everyone was so tired that we all headed for bed, unfortunately Rod had to share my room and once again put up with my snoring. I tried very hard during the night not to snore, but it became too much for Rod and he vowed that in the morning he would fund a room to himself.

Another packed day as we attempt to visit each of the congregations and talk about what has transpired since we were here in 2008, the goals and directions for the future as well as talk to those who were in the EMPOWER program in 2008. First stop was a return to Akia to meet with the congregation and the leadership group and as we sat in the cool of the mango tree we were presented a list of projects they would like us to fund. The projects include a school, purchase more land to square up the block Good Shepherd Witta had already purchased for them and to fund the construction of a church building, transport, public address system bibles and rhyme book among other requests. The church building project alone came to 66,000,000UGX. I had to politely inform them that the micro-credit loan from St Luke's was a gift for them to manage and be accountable as no further funds would be provided from St. Luke's Nambour to the congregations of Lira, Ngetta, Akia and Gulu unless there was a specific cause put forward by the council and supported by LCMU. In addition we had to explain how our congregations in the Nambour Parish do not have the financial resources to fund these new projects, especially those that have not been fully costed, a detailed budget prepared, the possibility of government funding, and support from LCMU.

When I asked for a show of hands of those who participated in the EMPOWER program in 2008, the majority of them were present so I said that the students have now become the teachers and requested they tell us about what skills they learned, are using, and what how the program has changed their lives. To our amazement, they spoke about the exercises and games they use to help them overcome the return of bad memories or when things become stressful. It was also heartening to hear how part 2 of the program on forgiveness had changed their lives, forgiving people for all sorts of acts that had been inflicted on them in the past, as well as to ask forgiveness from those they had caused harm. All told around 20 people spoke with such conviction that we could see the success of the EMPOWER program.

Following our meeting under the mango tree we headed off to see the fruit trees that were still growing. Unfortunately there were only one or two of each species that had survived the drought, passion fruit (Nathan), paw paw (Tony), jack fruit (Rod). They told us that all species had survived but they are scattered around the district. We also inspected the church block and the additional land they wanted Witta to purchase. We asked why the maize and millet on the block could not be sold to raise funds to construct the church? Seems that the lady living on the block owns the block on which the current church stands and although the church owns the block, she gets the crops, strange setup indeed. It would appear they have a chicken and egg situation. They can't build on their own land until a new house is built for the lady, but they can't build the house because of the church is in the way. Well that's one they have to resolve. They presented Rod and myself with a complete set of drawings and costings for the new church, but the price tag of 65.9m UGX (\$33,400AUD) is well beyond our mission funding.

While we were walking around I met my name child, Okello Tony born two days before we left for Angetta. I couldn't meet the baby then as mother and baby have to stay inside the hut for three days before coming out and being met by the community.

A beautiful baby who slept the whole time in my arms as we walked around the village looking at micro-credit loan projects. I gave the mother a pair of shorts and shirt for the baby to grow into as he gets bigger. As you can see from the photos, there is no resemblance. While we were getting into the vehicle another mother ran up with another baby and said his name was also Okello Tony named after me, but I based on his size, I am it was an after thoughts when she saw other mothers receiving clothes, hopefully I am wrong.

The vehicle took us to Ngetta where we inspected the church the LCMS had funded. Unfortunately the building is not complete as the money was not spent wisely and LCMS had informed them that no further funds would be provided,

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so they have this large church with most of the brick walls complete but open at the top both ends and earth floor. Hopefully when James returns from the seminary at the end of the year he will be able to encourage the congregation to complete the project. We inspected the piggery funded through micro-credit loans; however it would appear that most of the funds have been spent off school fees and not micro businesses that would produce income.

Just like in Akia, when Stephanie and Jacquie asked how the EMPOWER program had changed their lives we were met with the same responses as those in Akia and the stories they told us of their changes made us realise how affective the program is and the influence it has played not only on the individuals, but also within their immediate community.

The only negative aspect to occur was at the end when we were about to board the vehicle to return to Farm View when Patrick approached me asking on behalf of Rev. Johnson that not only I pay for his return bus trip 20,000UGX which I had already agreed to fund, that I should also contribute toward food, the cost of boda boda for him and also pay for the food of the others who had come down from Angetta. We explained to Patrick that he has to be firm, make and keep decisions that were made prior to us leaving his village where he discussed with Rev. Johnson on the phone what we would fund and that having made that agreement, he should abide by it regardless of the pressure being put on us by others. We suggested that they come and discuss this with us instead of Patrick but only Rev. Johnson came forward and we spoke about keeping agreements and how it appears that in Uganda the people still think that all wazongoes have unlimited amounts of money and that all they had to do was ask and they would receive a handout or change the terms and conditions of an agreement by putting up the agreed amount. Both Patrick and Rev. Johnson understood our message however you could see in the faces of the other people they were not happy. As we walked to the bus we privately gave Patrick extra money so to help feed those staying with him as he himself is given very little from LCMU and he had no food back in his house in Lira. An unfortunate sour ending to what had been an extraordinary day of events, it is a pity that most Ugandans have not yet passed the handout phase and taken full responsibility for their own destiny. This is only compounded by aid organisations who think they are doing the right thing by handing out money and doing building projects, but in affect are holding back many Ugandans from moving forward.

From Ngetta we returned to Farm View for a little relaxation under the trees as the sun was so hot, mind you the odd tusca crackers and cheese helped as well. Tonight we had fish cooked in a type of batter which didn't taste too bad, however some of the team were not game to eat it just in case it upset their stomachs.

Day 18 - Sunday 27th June 2010

This morning the church service will be held in Ngetta and I will lead the general service, Rev. Johnson will perform two baptisms, confirm four people and Holy Communion while Patrick will interpret and the sermon. The church building is nowhere near complete and while it has a roof, the mud brick walls at the ends of the building and the two store rooms do not go all the way up to the tin roof. The floor is still dirt and not levelled and temporary seating and alter make up the body of the church. The first thing I noticed was the wall above the altar lacked a cross so I asked if one could be constructed and the young man came back with one and nailed into the brick wall. They will now keep that one in place in memory of our visit.

Someone had already picked the hymns from the old black hymnal, the first reading I gave to Rod and the second reading I gave to Edna. It soon became evident that these hymns are not suitable for Africans and they came alive when they sang their songs of praise, absolutely uplifting the passion the energy they put into singing and dancing. Toward the end of the service I gave a wave to one of the young girls that was just staring at me all service, next thing

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her mother brought her forward and we sang and danced during the last song of praise. After making the sign of the cross on her forehead, some people spoke to Patrick and next thing we had a mat full of sick people sitting in front of the altar wanting a healing prayer and a sign of the cross on their forehead as well, this I was glad to do and hope it brings them some comfort. This was one of the most moving church services I have lead in the many years serving as a lay reader in Australia. The Christian faith and commitment of the people of Uganda is ever present in their daily lives regardless of the trauma, stress, poverty, poor health conditions, the cost of education and not many prospects to improve their situation in the immediate future.

After church one of the old men of the village (Nicholas) asked through an interpreter if I would please buy him a mosquito net, so tomorrow I will head into town, buy a mosquito net and get it out the village by boda boda. The women had prepared a hot lunch for us of goat's meat, cassava, beans and millet bread washed down with a bottle of cold water, while I didn't eat the millet bread, the rest was beautiful.

Next stop was the Lira church for a council meeting with representatives from Akia, Ngetta, Lira, Kakogge and Gulu. Unfortunately they are still under the impression that Australia will fund all sorts of building and farming projects so right from the begging of the meeting when Patrick was drawing up the agenda, I hijacked their agenda and set the boundaries for the discussion identifying what we can, and what we can't do, what was LCMU, LCMS and Government responsibilities not ours. I introduced the team and got them to detail their church leadership and industry experience and suggested to them they draw upon this wealth of knowledge and experience so they could learn how to develop, fund, run and maintain their own projects.

Unfortunately this did not go down well with the majority of the representatives as all they wanted was for us to totally fund the building and running of a school, to send teachers from Australia but they would have to fund their own way with no financial help, supply and build new churches, send evangelists to the north so as the build new churches, fund agricultural projects and the requests went on and on. We had to reinforce upon them the microcredit loans was their responsibility and no more money was coming from St Luke's, that we had to pay for our pastors, the church, contribute to LCAQD and LCA and it is their responsibilities as good stewards to begin developing budgets and strategies of their own and to support their own leaders, pastors and programs.

The reports from the Lira congregation were general, not specific replies to my questions but from what I understand, they have around 8 members and say they hold services every Sunday except two to which I could see Patrick shaking his head in disagreement. I pointed out that last time we were here Noah spoke about the condition of the church building and that a sheet of tin on the roof was missing nails and pointed to the hole where 2 sheets of tin roof were now missing all together and the bearers and trusses were rotten, extremely disappointing since Davis and his family live on the block of land and act as caretakers. They have constructed three new buildings for themselves, but no effort is being made to maintain the church.

The representative from Kakogy would only speak in general terms, providing no details of what is happening except to say they have around 8 congregation members, not the answers we were seeking. It would appear that both Lira and Kakogy are hiding the truth and not willing to provide details, I will raise the issue with Pastor Charles and Rev. Jacob on our return to Kampala. At this stage I could not make any recommendations to the congregation at St. Luke's for any financial assistance for any project now or in the future.

After two hours of discussion I said it was time for the wazongoes to leave so that the council representatives could start planning. Before we left I gave them the packet of Neem tree seeds to help overcome malaria provided by Isabelle Shippard and suggested that they take them to a nursery and get them to propagate the trees and once they

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were big enough, divide them amongst the Lutheran community and grow them following the instructions from the nursery. I used this also as a symbol of them growing together just like the trees and using the leaves, their combined energy to overcome their reliance of foreign aid to solve their problems. They thought this was a good idea and one of the members is a school teacher and has proposed they start to develop a plan following my advice on seeking government subsidies for education and farming and once they had developed a complete plan and gained LCMU approval, they would forward it to me.

Mission accomplished, so we left them talking and walked the short distance back into town but not before Rev. Johnson provided me with an accountability document for the micro-credit loan total of 1,420,000UGX provided by LCMU for Gulu. On reading through the document it became evident that the money, designed to be given to the poorest of the poor did not reach those intended, rather for the construction of the Lutheran Church in Gulu. Having read this, is saddens me when I reflect on his comments that LCMU had not forwarded all the money that was supposed to Gulu but kept some in Kampala. He was also very evasive about the congregation in Gulu, the number of people worshiping on a regular basis, if there was a formal structure for administration, and its relationship with LCMU.

Our impressions however are that Akia and Ngetta congregations have sufficient members to sustain a viable church, but Lira church building has had no maintenance, only two rows of bricks around the base, and although they say they have worship services regularly with around 8 members, the evidence does not support their reports. Similarly the report from Rev Johnson about Gulu leads us to confirm the message from LCMU that there is no functional church although I was provided with church documents and a statement that there are around 18 church members. All the information will be forwarded to LCMU when we get back to Kampala.

When it came time for dinner we were all looking forward to eating the mixed vegetable, spaghetti and goats' meat only to find it was so salty that none of us could eat much at all. We told Walter the cook that in future could he please cook with little or no salt and we would add what we wanted while the meal was at the table. The meals and accommodation at Farm View are not up to the standard of our last visit, cold showers, less variety of food for breakfast and dinner, and Mike the manager is always trying to put new charges on us whenever he can, guess this is how his wage is funded as Florence has not been around. The team will be pleased to leave on Tuesday and get back to the hotel in Kampala.

On a lighter note, we watched some of the England vs Germany world cup soccer match on the local TV, don't think the locals were impressed with England losing 4 – 1 as the majority of locals are English club supporters. Also, Rod had organised another room so he moved his stuff out to have a peaceful night's sleep, away from the chainsaw noise of my snoring.

Day 19 – Monday 28th June 2010

Up early this morning to catch up on the diary, without a means of recharging the batteries in the notebook and the mobile phone, I didn't use the notebook very much except to charge the battery on the mobile phone through the USB port.

While writing the diary I can hear the security guard making his rounds, not sure why they have one as it would appear that peace is truly here in Lira, however as John (Florence husband) is the local politician, he is provided with a security guard and with the general elections coming up in 2011, there is a travel warning advising people not to visit Uganda from December 2010 to July 2011. Today is our last day in Lira, so we will go into town, I received a

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request from an old man named Nicholas from the congregation in Ngetta for a mosquito net so I will purchase it this morning and get it out to him. Jacquie has a dress that she had made for her to collect and a few others just want to chill out at the Mango Tree or walk around the town. We are certainly not doing as much shopping for ourselves this trip as most of the items are identical to what we have back home so what's the point.

I have been sending text messages back and forth to Robyn to see if we can get an earlier flight out of Entebbe, and while the flight has now been scheduled for 5:15pm instead of 6:00pm, trying to get a connecting flight out of Hong Kong could be a problem but Frances at Flight Centre would check to see what she could do. After many text messages back and forth with Robyn, while we could change our flights out of Entebbe trying to get an early connecting flight out of Hong Kong was a real problem so the team decided to stay in Kampala instead of sitting around in airports, the current waiting times were bad enough.

Walking around the markets the team bought various items to fulfil the promises we had made to various people. I bought the mosquito net for Nicholas and Patrick took me around to where Frances (vice chairman from Ngetta) was working so I could give it to him and he would pass it on when he gets home from work. Similarly, Patrick found one of the congregation elders from Akia so Rod and Jacquie could pass on various items for distribution when he got home.

The rest of the day was spent walking around the markets and it is a real shame to see so much cheap junk from China or shirts that you could buy at home and little or no African style shirts, plenty of women dress but not African men's ware. Lunch at the Mango Tree was a highlight, fried chips and coleslaw with a soda, 9 servings cost 25,250UGX or around 12AUD, pity we couldn't get the same deal at home. At first we thought we would not be able to eat all the chips, but given the meagre breakfast we get each morning, everyone devoured their plate of food.

After lunch Patrick noticed Susan walking down the street so he ran after her and bought her back so we catch up on what has been happening since our last visit. Susan and her husband own and run Internet cafes in Lira and Gulu and love the place so much they are considering selling the Internet cafe in Lira and moving to Gulu. During the height of the LRA incursion into the Lira District Susan was the manager of Samaritans Purse distributing thousands of shoe boxes full of food and other essential aid to the people living (surviving) in the IDP (internal displaced persons) camps. Now that peace is in the region and the IDP camps have been dismantled, she did not renew her contract.

While the team sat back and relaxed waiting for the vehicle to come from Farm View, Patrick and I took off to the bus depot to purchase the 9:30am bus tickets to Kampala, each ticket costing 15,000UGX a total of 105,000UGX, we were not going to miss the bus out of Lira. As Patrick negotiated the tickets there was a young (mid 20's) American girl sitting waiting for her bus to North to Pader where she will interview the residents and take pictures before heading West to interview the Karamongong cattle rustlers who regularly make raids into the Angetta region to steal their cattle and kill anyone who tries to stop them. She didn't seem to be afraid on their reputation, I just hope that at some stage I don't hear about her being kidnapped or worse still, killed.

As we were all tired, we called Abraham from Farm View to come and pick us up and Patrick spoke briefly about the outcomes of the meeting the day before. The group had expected that the money raised from the sale of the learning and teaching resources would have been given directly to them as they had to save face with the schools and teachers. I explain to Patrick that they should not expect any financial handouts and where do they think the money came from to feed their congregation members during the famine? It is very disappointing to see they still have the handout aid mentality that was cultivated during the many years they were living in IDP camps. Patrick also said they had agreed to divide the number of neem tree seeds (eat the leaves or drink the leaves as tea to fight malaria) between the

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various church groups and each group would put them in a nursery bed and grow them themselves. While this is their decision, I asked what will happen if one or two of the nursery beds failed to provide and trees? Patrick's response was that they would go and get trees from the congregations where they had grown. They still do not trust each other and have just one nursery, they still divide everything then squabble afterwards, very disappointing. Let's hope and pray that each nursery plot bears many trees and no division is caused among each congregation. There are many other points Patrick wanted to discuss but I suggested they wait until we reached Kampala.

Edna and Patrick went to the post office to check if the parcel of beanies from Edna Borchers had arrived from Australia. They informed them that it normally takes 3 months if it is sent via surface mail, so Patrick will check again when he gets back from Kampala. Farewells with Susan, Sam and David were emotional as we had spent so much time with them in the village and here in Lira. I am sure they also realised that this will be the last time we will ever see them again for unless something very special happens, I don't think the team will ever return to Uganda so it was a very emotional time for all, especially Susan who has matured and taken on such a level of responsibility far beyond her age.

The team is so tired that instead of sitting outside under the trees at Farm View drinking a Tusca or two, a cup of tea or coffee was consumed before various members went for a nap before tea. For me, I am heading off to my room to write some more of the diary and prepare for the discussion with Mike (the manager) about the bill for our accommodation, meals, transport and his proposal to fund the maintenance on the farm View vehicle.

As I walked out to the lounge room I noticed the local artist had set up a number of her art works of African animals in 3D, unfortunately they were too large and heavy to fit in our luggage and I am sure the earth she used to get the 3D image would be hard to get through customs back in Brisbane. The red crested Crane features on the national flag while the chimpanzees and buffalo are a tourist attraction at various national parks.

Not long afterwards Mike asked me to discuss the bill with him. He set out a comprehensive list of accommodation, food, bottles of water, washing and a 90000UGX amount for the hire of the vehicle. All the other amounts I accepted without reservation, however I said I would not pay the cost for the hire of the vehicle as our original agreement was for us to pay for the fuel we used. This I explained we had done and while we know the vehicle was used by the staff to run around town picking up food supplies and conducting Farm View business we had no problem with that. Mike agreed and removed the cost of hire making the total amount 1,403,000UGX and Rod and I went to my room to check the bill and count the money. While we were doing this I remembered we had already paid a deposit of 140000UGX so we deducted it from the bill making a total 1,263,000UGX so I rounded the amount to 1,270,000UGX. When I explained to Mike what I had done he apologised for not deducting this amount from the original bill and we shook hands agreeing to the amount. Edna asked what was the outcome of our discussions and when I explain what had happened and the total amount she commented that the amount was more than was paid for the whole time we stayed at Farm View in 2008, so I now wonder what the rest of the money paid by each person was used since the team this trip paid the same amount of \$3500 as in 2008.

As we were sitting in the lounge the town power supply went off so the farm power generator was switched on. We all remarked that last time we were here the power was off more than it was on, also the women commented they had hot water and we told Abraham in the vehicle this morning that there was no hot water. He immediately phoned Mike saying that we were complaining about the lack of hot water and to turn it on, guess Abraham has more knowledge and power than Mike the manager.

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After dinner of fried chicken, roast potatoes and mixed vegetables, we sat around watching the photos that had been downloaded on to the computer from all the cameras brought back memories, laughter as well as emotions about what and who we have left behind in the villages. As we have to leave by 8:30am in the morning, everyone decided to go to bed as they will be fresh for the early start and bus ride to Kampala. Wow, I hadn't realised how good a hot shower was until tonight as this was the first hot shower since leaving Kampala at the start of our Uganda mission trip into the north.

Day 20 – Tuesday 29th June 2010

Today is the day for leaving Lira and returning to Kampala so it was an early rise, breakfast, pack and off to the bus depot but before we did, Mike the manager from Farm View presented me with another invoice, this time for 20000UGX for coffee and tea in the evening. I pointed out to him that the tea and coffee we used was our own, not from Farm View and I was not going to pay for hot water and milk given we had cold showers for 3 nights. Although he was not impressed, he accepted my explanation and the matter was dropped.

Abraham had the vehicle ready for our departure at 8:30am and along the way we once again paid 20000UGX for fuel, picked up Patrick and arrived at the bus depot at 9am ready for a 9:30am departure. The words on the sign of the bus company 'Service beyond your mind' was about to be realised. Waiting for the bus to arrive we noticed a woman preparing the 'goat on spoke' to BBQ and sell to passengers that would come and go throughout the day and well into the night. Before the bus could leave all seats had to be filled meanwhile a rooster under one of the seats kept crowing which simply added to the trauma of waiting in a bus that got hotter and hotter with little breeze making its way inside. Mean while, outside life went on as busses came and went, people packed goods on to the back of bicycles and motorbikes and sellers went up and down the rows of busses selling newspapers, food, water and all sorts of odds and ends.

If anyone reading this diary wants to go to Lira, maybe one place you might want to check out inside the grounds of the bus depot (transit centre) would be the 'New Sheraton Hotel', looks very impressive and we bet it's at the same standard as you would see back home. Eventually we rolled out of the depot around 10:45am. Rod had said we wouldn't leave until 11am and after stopping for fuel, we finally departed Lira at 11am so Rod won the bet, can't remember what it was but the main thing was we were finally on our way to Kampala. As the bus rocked, rolled, bounced and swerved its way along the road beeping its air horns to get people, bicycles and animals off the road, the rooster kept crowing its heart's out.

Although the bus was supposed to be express from Lira to Kampala a number of times along the way it stopped to let people off and pick up new passengers. Three times along the road the bus stopped for people to purchase food from people who would walk along the side of the bus selling goat on spoke, boiled peanuts, cassava, water, mushrooms, chickens, soft drinks and a variety of food stuff. Also the bus had to stop at numerous police road check points to make sure the bus was registered, the driver was licensed and every passenger had a seat. On a technical matter, it was good to see the rollout of wireless broadband across Uganda using WiMAX technology.

Other points of interest along the road to Kampala included crossing the Nile River at the main intersection that heads toward Masindi. In 2008 as we were crossing the Nile and stopped to take photos, a man from the Ugandan army tried to confiscate all our cameras and we paid 10,000UGX to get them back, this time I didn't notice the army barracks or the soldiers and the bus kept driving anyway. Time enough to take a couple of photos of the Nile river and the baboons that line the roadway waiting to be fed by the tourists.

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Apart from stopping at various points for police checks and to pickup and set down passengers the rest of the journey went without incident.

Finally around 3:30pm we rolled into the congested traffic of Kampala and made our way to the bus depot and while Patrick went to arrange a taxi to take us to the hotel, young men tried to get us to pay to take our luggage from the bus storage area and taxi drivers tried to get our business. I don't think the young were very impressed when I told them to get a real job but as we get closer to the end of the journey I am afraid I am becoming tired of being asked constantly for money for the most simple of things. Besides, when we saw the state of our luggage that was covered in dirt and coal dust we were not impressed, heaven knows what gets stored in the luggage compartments of the busses.

The area where the hotel is located is very nice with a supermarket, gift shops, bar and restaurant, pub, bottle shop and hairdresser within 100m and as we sat under the thatched roof pergola having a few drinks before dinner of fried chicken, chips and coleslaw was served, we realised that we were back in the city with all the smells, traffic and noise. Unfortunately all the words and phrases we learned in Luo are not understood here in Kampala, those who do not speak English speak Ugandan lango, completely different. By around 8:30pm everyone was so tired so headed off for to our rooms for a hot shower, pull down the mosquito net and turned off the light.

Day 21 – Wednesday 30th June 2010

Call to prayer from the local mosque woke me at around 5:30am but I had enough sleep by then anyway. What I really found good was being able to have a shave using hot water instead of cold for the first time since leaving home, what a difference hot water makes, so simple, but so enjoyable.

The planned meeting with Pastor Charles at LMMU has been post phoned until Friday morning so we headed into the market area in Kampala and it reminded me so much of the markets in China with crowded streets, hundreds and hundreds of small stores all selling the same products, mostly from China and tiny little alleys and walkways full of sellers and buyers. The traffic chaos of the taxis, motorbikes, pushbikes and pedestrians added to the colour and activity. It was unfortunate that most of the clothes, shoes, baggage, material and other goods is western and could be bought any store in Australia. Trying to find traditional African men's shirts took many kilometres of walking and when you did find a shirt, the style, patterns and colours were the same.

As it drew close to lunch time I suggested we find a sit down cafe so that Helen could rest her legs. The place we chose wasn't too bad so we ordered plates of chips and sodas for seven people with the bill coming to 21000UGX.

While we were there I asked Patrick about the tourist African market we went to last visit, so he contacted Robert Wako and he came from the Police Headquarters where he works with computer and Internet fraud to greet us and supposedly take us to the market. Unfortunately the communication and understanding was not that great and he finally ended up going in the wrong direction, fortunately the direction we were going was toward our guest house so the taxi took us there. Robert stayed with us all afternoon and it was good to catch up on the latest news about his family and work.

Robert is completing a Bachelors Degree in Business and attends classes at the university on a Saturday and Sunday so this is limiting his involvement in church activities. While we were having a chat Rev. Jacob arrived with Rev. Brad Aldrich of cross pollination ministry St Louise Missouri invited to Uganda to tell people about Christ and teaching people to tell others about Christ. While in Uganda he and his team will visit homes, schools, prayer groups and community members. Patrick has been invited to accompany Brad during his mission work and this will prove a

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valuable learning experience as he returns to the seminary to complete his training to become a pastor and work within his own parish.

After a brief chat Jacob invited us back to his place for a soda and chat so we squashed into his Toyota 4 wheel drive for the short trip into a fully secured compound. The houses in this compound are luxurious and Patrick told us later that they rent for around 8,000,000UGX a month, so different from the mud huts just outside the compound. I do not agree with this luxurious living when the people he is serving live in such poverty, maybe I would do the same if I came to Uganda with a wife and two children.

As we walked back from his house toward the guest house we are staying, the views of Lake Victoria from the road as well as from the other mansions built on the side of the hill are magnificent, all with electric fences on top of the high walls that surround their houses. By the time we reached the guest house and said goodbye to Robert, we thought we would go to the bar and restaurant down the road for dinner as we had checked it out the previous evening.

On our arrival we were met by the waiter who remembered us from the previous evening and we picked out a very comfortable area to sit and have a few drinks before ordering our meal. We all ordered poke chops with vegetables with a rice dish and while we watched the tennis from Wimbledon live on the television, the meal took over 90 minutes to prepare and serve, much longer than we anticipate. Eventually the manager came over and apologised for the long delay in serving the food, but it was delicious and for me, well worth the wait. The bill for 7 drinks and meals came to 59,000UGX a small price to pay for such tasty food. On our way back Rod bought a bottle of Ugandan cherry for a night cap and despite our reservations about taste and quality, it tasted good.

After we had consumed the bottle it was time for a hot shower, bed and update on the diary. At least tomorrow we will get a chance to visit the centre where African artefacts are sold, probably will cost more, but at least they are in the one location and it will be easy to compare items and negotiate the price.

Day 22 – Thursday 1st July 2010

Our last full day in Uganda so we had better make the most of it as I doubt many, if any of us will ever return. At breakfast we met Melissa and her daughter Brenda (turns 21 on the 5th July) who will join Brad in the evangelising program in various parts of Uganda. Jacob dropped off Brad and we all went into the African artefacts circle in the city to do some more tourist type shopping for authentic African gear. The 30 or so stores are packed with everything imaginable and we noticed this time that the prices were more competitive than last time.

Finally after the ladies had finished shopping back and forth to each and every store more than a dozen times we headed up town past the parliament building to the same cafe we went to last visit. They still served the delicious cocktail of fruit juices and just like last time we all had toasted ham, cheese and tomato sandwiches on brown bread, real bread which tasted foreign to us even after this short time.

Patrick called a taxi and on our way back Brad, Melissa and Brenda were supposed to get out at LMMU but as with all things African, the schedule changed and they all climbed back into the taxi and returned to the guest house. As soon we returned we got our bags and shoes outside and gave them a good wash with soapy water to get all the dirt and any other bugs we may have collected in the countryside. We are trying to avoid a repeat of the last episode having to go into the quarantine area to wash everything.

The African sun is sure powerful and it didn't take long for our bags and shoes to dry but gave us a chance to sit in the breeze under the gazebo and chat about our experiences while having a drink or two.

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The mood of the group is starting to change our thoughts turn toward returning to Australia, especially the long flight home and how our lives have been changed in these short few weeks. For the evening meal we made arrangements with Jacob to meet him at the La Petite restaurant closer to town, so after catching a taxi that keeps stopping until they are filled, we finally stopped outside the Tickle and Giggle bar to walk across the road and wait for the others.

The owners of the restaurants set up a huge table for 11 people and after Jacob and his team arrived we ordered all sorts of delicious foods, mine was the talarpi fish with mushroom sauce, mushrooms, vegetables and chips with a salad, perfect meal. The total bill for the group came to 168,000UXD. Jacob dropped us off at the corner supermarket and we bought chocolate ice cream topped off with a cherry, the perfect end to a great day.

As we had put washing to be done in the morning, the owner delivered the dry cleaned items together with the accommodation and meals bill for 6 people, 3 nights totalling 508,500UGX (\$252.58AUD), much less than Farm View with better service, accommodation, showers and comfort etc. Tomorrow we must check out by 10am at which time Patrick will come with a taxi to pick us up and take us to LMMU offices, packing can wait until the morning.

Day 23 – Friday 2nd July 2010

I shouldn't be surprised the way plans are changed each day and today is no different. All the team is up and early, packed and ready for breakfast. The last couple of days the food has been ordinary so this morning we have asked for sausages, fried eggs and toast with the normal cereal, fruit, fruit juice, tea and/or coffee and as we are in no hurry, told the cooks to take their time.

Once again most of us had cold showers as it seems that they turn off the hot water but no point raising it with management as we are leaving as soon as the taxi arrives. During the whole visit I have been searching for suitable gifts for Robyn and while there are many things that would be suitable, all of them you could purchase in Australia, except for some African items that are really not her taste. During our stay at the Aphiram Guest House I noticed some beautiful flower vases and pillow cases in a two gift shops just down the road that looked African and would fit in with what else we have at home. So before the taxi arrived I went down to the shops and bought two vases and two pillow cases. One of the young women serving in the store asked me to fill in the visitors' book and include my email address. Not long after I got home I received an email from Diana asking if our team had arrived back safe in Australia, very thoughtful.

All the team had assembled with our packed bags well before 10am and we all commented how light and empty our bags had become now that we had given just about everything away. Patrick arrived right on time so all that was needed was to load the bags, take a photo or two, and head to the Lutheran Media Ministry Uganda headquarters to meet up with Pastor Charles and his team. Our plans for the day were simple we thought, head off to LMMU for a while Jacque went to get some photos developed then off to the airport to wait for the flight back to Australia.

Earlier in the morning Rev Jacob had called around to pick up the mission team to take them to LMMU headquarters as they were conducting a mission training session, and when we arrived at LMMU headquarters our first stop was to sit in on a session where the participants were learning how to go out into the community to pray for people and situations in need.

As soon as Pastor Charles was available we headed into his office for a chat and relay some of our experiences during this mission trip. It was good to have this conversation in person instead of our regular email dialogue we have been having since our last visit in 2008. The LMMU runs a huge outreach evangelistic ministry across Uganda. At the headquarters they produce radio and television programs, run training programs, correspondence courses and

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coordinate preaching stations. Their goal is *“to proclaim Christ Jesus and bring many unbelievers to his church while strengthening the faithful with Word and Sacraments”*.

Patrick had been asked by Rev Jacob if he would accompany Brad as he took his mission training program to various parts of Uganda and since we were leaving to go to the airport around 1pm, we said our goodbyes at LMMU headquarters as there was no point he coming with us to the airport just to see us go inside and disappear through customs. Before we left however we gave him some money that would cover many of the financial costs he incurred while we were in Uganda as well as funds to help him when he returns to Nigeria to continue his seminary training in August.

Our taxi drive to the airport was taken in silence, no one talking as our minds focused on the long flight as well as the home coming. I am not sure the taxi driver had ever been to the airport and so it was that we were guiding him to the departure ramp and where to park. With our bags unloaded we headed inside to have them wrapped in plastic, checked in and weighed. This time the total weight of our luggage came to 84Kg (we arrived with 165 Kg of luggage) and so the process of handing over the tickets and passports began making sure our luggage would go right through to Brisbane instead of being offloaded in Hong Kong. This process took some time, but we were in no hurry and wanted to make sure everything was correct. Finally we headed through customs and into the departure lounge for lunch and some last minute duty free shopping.

The time went slowly but no one was complaining and when they finally made the call to go to the gate we were ready and eager to make the walk out to our Ethiopian aircraft and climb the back stairs to find our seats for the flight to Addis Ababa, a journey of just 2 hours. Robyn had already let us know in a text message that the aircraft would be leaving at 5:15pm instead of 6pm, however by the time the doors were shut and the aircraft pushed out onto the apron it was close to 6pm anyway. No rush as the next leg of the flight out of Addis Ababa not leaving until 12:40am there was no rush. Like the flight into Entebbe, this aircraft was an older model without individual screens to watch in flight entertainment.

By the time we reached Addis Ababa it was getting dark and so the wait began until we are called for our next leg of the journey to Hong Kong via Bangkok. Trying to kill time in a small airport where there is no smoking restrictions and limited food and eating outlets takes it out of you especially since we arrived around 8pm and leave again at 12:40am Saturday. Most of the eating places have television and one of the soccer finals is on so they are full of people shouting and screaming every time a goal is scored or near miss etc. None of the team were interested in competing for a spot in one of the cafes so we found a quiet to park our baggage and took it in turns to do slow walks around the terminal.

Day 24 – Saturday 3rd July 2010

Finally the call came through to start the boarding process which requires each person to take off their shoes and everything else out of your pockets to go through the scanners. Once cleared and you have your shoes back on it's over to the counter to check-in. We have our boarding passes issued in Entebbe so a coloured dot is placed on our boarding pass to indicate which group we are in for boarding. Since our seat allocation is all over the plane we have different coloured dots.

They are very efficient in calling the groups and before long everyone is seated and our aircraft is pushed out ready for takeoff. The rest of this leg of the trip is taken up with eating and sleeping before the announcement is made that we are preparing to land in Bangkok.

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Once again everyone who is not disembarking the aircraft must stay in their seats while it is cleaned, food restocked, luggage unloaded and loaded, re-fuelled and the new passengers allocated their seats. We had hoped that there might be a little space so we could stretch out, but not this time as the aircraft is full. What was interesting was the conversation with a family from Petrie in Queensland who were returning from completing their mission work with the Catholic Church. The next part of the trip will take around 3 hours but we are in no rush as there is a wait in Hong Kong airport for around 5 hours before we catch the flight to Australia.

Flying into Hong Kong this time was in broad daylight so we could get a good view of the islands and water that surrounds the airport, very interesting seeing all the ships in the harbour, the hills at one end of the airport and the cable car that goes to the summit. Would love to take that trip to the top one day as the view must be magnificent.

As we disembark it is time to make our way through the maze of walkways, security checks, customs, lifts, underground railway, escalators, restaurants, duty free shopping outlets, toilets and shower areas, people everywhere and finally the departure gate at the end of the terminal. Hong Kong airport must be about the largest facility in the world.

Taking the underground train from one part of the airport to another an experience, especially the computerised trains that enable you to stand at the front of the carriage and take photos out of the window as it speeds to the next stop with such precision that the doors of the train align with the doors on the platform. Just follow the arrows when the doors open as people enter in one direction and exit at the other end. It is like being in a roller coaster at the Ekka without the sensation of going up and down or being tossed around.

One good point about Hong Kong airport is the free WiFi Internet access so I was able to use my notebook to check my emails, look at the online newspapers and catch up on the news back home. The only exciting news was the overthrow of King Kevin Rudd by Queen Julia Gillard and how she has single handedly changed policies and the direction of the federal Labor government as she prepares to face the people in a general election. I made the prediction that the election will be called before August 24 as there is no way she would be game to face the opposition in question time when parliament resumes on the 24th August after their winter break. As we sat around dozing on and off we didn't hear the boarding call and someone looked up at the display screen and yelled out that the final boarding call was flashing. Boy did that wake us up and make us scamper to gate 74 and rush down the boarding tunnel. When we got on board just about everyone was seated and to make matters worse, the plane was full.

The first thing we noticed on this Cathay Pacific flight was that the seats were closer together with little leg room, the seats don't recline, just the section under your legs moves forward, the seats were uncomfortable as they are made from carbon fibre and I was stuck in the middle section where they have four seats, wasn't happy Jan. At least we are onboard and heading home.

Day 25 – Sunday 3rd July 2010

The flight from Hong Kong left around midnight and so the most uncomfortable flight in the world began. You can't get comfortable, can't sleep, too much noise, cramped in like *'for here, am I sitting in a tin can, far above the world Planet Earth is blue and there's nothing I can do'* sorry David Bowie but the words seem appropriate. Must have got some sleep somewhere along the way and it was good to hear the pilot saying we were starting our decent into Cairns to drop off and pick up passengers. At least we can get off the plane while they clean, restock and refuel the aircraft. The stretch in the airport was welcome, so to the fresh coffee from the coffee shop before boarding the flight and heading off to Brisbane.

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The flight from Cairns to Brisbane is rather short thank goodness as the seats haven't got any more comfortable since last night. We could see the coast line from where we were sitting and could make out the landmarks along the way, especially as we got closer to Brisbane and view Fraser Island, the inland dams, Sunshine Coast, Bribie Island, Caboolture and the airport, before we started the decent and bank left then right to align with runway 01.

The slow decent across the bay looking at Morton Island was a welcome sight and before long the pilot had made a perfect landing and soon we were making our way toward the terminal where we could pick up our duty free alcohol supplies paid before we left Australia before making our way through immigration. They have installed a new system for people with Australian passports that have the biometric image whereby you place your open passport on the scanner and if you have not visited one of the countries listed on the screen you are cleared to go straight through and collect your luggage before going through customs.

Unfortunately Uganda is on the list so we had to line up and be put through immigration manually producing our yellow fever booklets and answer a couple of questions. No worries there and by now our luggage was turning up on the baggage turntable. By now most of the passengers had cleared customs and because we have come from Uganda we are shown the way for a full customs check. One by one we pass through inspection answering all sorts of questions, showing our goods and chatting away.

The only problem arose when they saw the little wooden bird I brought back from Uganda. The varnished painted sections were okay, but the bark that formed the wings. They offered a couple of ways for radiation and treatment but the cost far outweighed what I paid for it in the first place. The customs officer used his pen knife and gradually peeled away the bark, a service they do not normally offer according to the senior officer. So I was the last one to clear customs as all the other team members had already gone through the doors and were out in the arrivals hall.

Finally it was my turn to pass through the doors to catch up with the rest of the team who by now had been acquainted with family and friends and they thought I was never going to be released. It was great to catch up with Robyn after being away for 3 ½ weeks. Even though we text messaged regularly, we never spoke on the phone so the sound of her voice was extra special. The only thing left now was to take a group photo before we split up and went our own way home to catch up some sleep and think and the mission adventure and the friends we have left behind. So different being back in Australia compared to the basic simply life living and farming in Abongonyeke. This is a mission trip we will never forget.

Postscript:

Since our return \$1,500AUD has been transferred into the LCMU account to purchase 190 bibles in the Lango language and 10 in English from the Bible Society in Kampala to be distributed to those who have completed the EMPOWER trauma rehabilitation program, and the remainder to be spent purchasing mosquito nets to be distributed to the most needy women and children in the Ngetta, Akia and Angetta districts who are suffering from malaria. In addition, we are starting a drive to collect reading glasses no longer needed in Australia and send them across to the people in these regions, as well as start collecting more medical supplies for the birthing clinic in Omoro district.