

DEC. 2009

THE DELORENZO FLYER

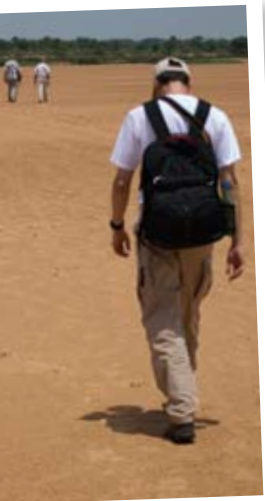
{ Missionary news from Mike and Renee }



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NEWS SINCE APRIL

Dear Friends,

It's been 9 months now since we've been back in Africa. Returning after our extended stay in New York last year felt a little like starting over again. But it also felt like coming home. I laugh at myself sometimes, creeping along in the Nairobi traffic following a typical day of small absurdities, at how this place could feel anything like home. But it does, strangely.

Is it the warm equatorial sun? The smells? The earthy reality of life in Africa that reminds us we are alive? Or is "home" simply bound up in the familiar faces of our friends, to whom we are familiar, and understood. Maybe it's just the unyielding affection of a faithful dog who waited 14 months for our return and loves us as if we never left. Home nonetheless. And back in the fight.

We returned to our place with AIM's small media team. It had grown in our absence, busily darting from country to country capturing stories for the mission. I had missed some pretty cool trips. Rwanda, Mozambique, some island in the Indian Ocean, and some other place we can't mention in print. The guys had managed fine without me, which was an encouragement even if it was a small disappointment. I quickly got back online however. One of my first projects had me producing a video for AIM AIR to present at the world's largest airshow this past July. Since then I've travelled with the team -- sometimes as the pilot, the writer, the "grip" -- to Sudan, Chad, Congo, and Central Africa Republic. To the desert in northern Kenya, and the mountains of Lesotho. It has been a grand adventure, most of it. As some of the videos get produced, I'll put links on our website.

We also returned to our place in the flying ministry of AIM AIR -- the pilot's seat in the Caravan feeling a little bit like home as well. Somalia, Sudan, Congo, Chad... I was quickly reminded how vast this troubled continent is, and why the airplane matters. As I ticked away the hours aloft, my nose occasionally pressed against the glass in peering down, I was happy to be back in view of a world of unmasked reality, where the harvest is plentiful and the workers few -- and where I feel really privileged to be counted among the few.

Returning, we found AIM AIR to be in a state of transition. New management. A lot of new faces. And a new initiative to make some needed changes. In the previous twelve months, our team had experienced two airplane accidents which resulted in some injuries and two crumpled aircraft. I had missed a very hard year in AIM AIR... and it was going to get harder.

On August 1st of this year, not too many months ago, we experienced yet another accident -- this one fatal. Two of our colleagues and friends were killed when the Cessna 206 they were flying lost power and went down right here in the city. Frank, one of our pilots, and Ryan, one of our mechanics, were suddenly gone, leaving behind two young wives and eight young children. Our team was crushed. The month of



August was lost in time. We parked the airplanes and only twice put on our uniforms -- for two funerals.

Frank and Ryan were our compound neighbors as well as our coworkers. For Renee and the kids, home suddenly became a place to where husbands and dads might not return. This was hard, especially since losing my dad last year in the month of August. We grieved and questioned God's plan all over again. But we also got to see His goodness, all over again.

After the accident, "counting the cost" found renewed meaning in our missionary venture. Airplanes lost a little of the admiration I held for them. Time with my wife and kids gained new importance. The prayers of our supporters back home were never so appreciated. The blessing of our teammates here was never so obvious. We realized that this event had probably changed us all.

Now in December we are still in the midst of change, but are finally (maybe) feeling settled. Not in every way (our home is currently in boxes as we prepare to move houses), but settled perhaps in the most important way -- secure in the sovereign care of our King. The curious thing is, we have always been here. It's just that we forget sometimes.



OUR NEW REALITY

In October I shifted roles. AIM AIR asked me to take on a key administrative job in the organization, one I was hesitant to accept. It would mean a seriously diminished role in the media ministry, and a lesser role as a pilot too -- two things I hold dear (possibly too dear). But after a couple of months praying about it, and considering Renee's wise counsel (among others'), I moved into a new office at the hangar. On the door it says "Flight Operations Manager" but in my heart it simply says "OK Lord, OK."

My new reality is almost full-time administration with an occasional day at the media office or on a flight. So far I'm hanging on to enough of the creative and technical parts of my ministry that I can cope. But I'm also getting deeper and deeper into the complexities of management -- management of a flight program spanning nine countries with 12 airplanes and twenty pilots. A program dealt a difficult blow when two of our teammates perished, a program wrestling with change from within, and without. Africa, this massive swath of it at least, is getting less stable, more needful, more regulated, and more perplexing. AIM AIR is asking all kinds of questions right now. From the whys to the hows and everything in between. And I'm standing in the middle of the whirlwind with questions of my own, and some answers too. The biggest struggle perhaps is walking away at the end of a day with the job still unfinished. But I have accepted that too.

For Renee, her husband is a little more predictable. Home for dinner more than he used to be. But also home with a head full of problems to solve... many of which she, on many a night, will fall asleep mid-sentence as he bounces his unconventional ideas off her pretty little head. She is, without a doubt, a greater and greater support to me as every year goes by. Of all the grand ministries I'm involved in, the epic and dangerous missions, the strategic opportunities -- I believe that the best they will ever do is take second place to the most important thing I can accomplish with my life: glorify God in my marriage, and in my family.



Zachary turned 8 in August, and just recently had his hair cut into a mohawk. He is growing into an awesome, adventurous boy. Amelia turned 11 this month and is, much to our dismay, growing up too fast -- becoming a young lady. Smart, beautiful, contemplative, and a lover of books. Renee continues to homeschool, and continues to make it look easy. Our family is blessed, and we try hard not to forget this.

AFRICA IS

I was surprised, two years after the fumbled elections here in Kenya, to learn that there are still tens of thousands of displaced people here. I visited some camps recently and realized that many of the people there would probably not get their lives sorted out before it all perhaps happened again. Kenya never properly dealt with the issues leading to the chaos and violence after the 2007 elections. And while I wouldn't categorize our home country as unstable, it is certainly unpredictable right now. The next elections are in 2012 -- which promises to be an interesting year.

By 2012 Sudan should have either voted on splitting their country in two, or proceeded to do so by reigniting the civil war. There are widespread fears that Sudan will be back at war as soon as next year -- and depending on what sort of war it is, our flying there may seriously increase or cease altogether. To the east, Somalia has descended into perhaps the most "failed state" on the globe. We suspended flights there not long ago -- sort of... if I were flying there I couldn't tell you. To the west, Congo continues to languish along on the edge of functionality, and today has the added blight of the LRA (the Lord's Resistance Army) taking up exile in the country and terrorizing innocent villagers wherever they can. The LRA's murderous leader, Joseph Kony, is among the most wanted war criminals in the world. We still crisscross the broad, forested landscape of Congo, serving a remnant of missionaries, and zigzagging around the red hash-marks on our charts where Kony and his army have been or may be going.

On a trip to Congo and C.A.R. in July I was flying and filming for a short documentary for AIM. The film isn't quite finished yet, but the theme is already well developed in the draft. It is twofold: (1) Africa, and particularly this part, is a deeply challenging place to do ministry, and (2) there is but one hope for ever seeing things turn around. As Bill Hybels put it, "The local church is the hope of the world." No amount of government or money can remedy the problems here, because they are problems of the heart. And for that, the Church has the answer.

GRATEFUL HEARTS

The Church has also been the reason for our continuing ability to be a part of all this. Renee and I have been very much on the receiving end for at least two years now, absorbing support and care from the Body of Christ -- through our unanticipated return home, dad's death and our decision to come back to Africa. Then again this year as we walked in yet another sad valley. There are some of you who haven't heard from us in over six months, others who follow our updates on the website. But we have never been short on prayer, or financial support. We have never felt alone in the shadows. We have not had a need which God didn't provide for through the Body -- through you. So we need to say thank you, and we never tire of saying it.

As we engage a continent of many questioning souls, we can do so pointing resolutely to **Christ as the answer**. And many of you are an example of that to us. Thank you. Thank you for holding our family close to your hearts. We pray that your Christmas is filled with everything that matters.

In Him,

*Mike and Renee
Amelia and Zachary*

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TO CERTAIN POOR SHEPHERDS

For a week in November I travelled throughout the “mountain kingdom” of Lesotho. I visited with a missionary family living in a quaint village tucked within a breathtaking valley on the eastern side of the small country. Over the course of several days, John introduced us to a ministry among the shepherd community of Lesotho. In reality, John was just beginning to understand the shepherd culture himself. Lesotho is unique for its relatively homogenous ethnic demographic. There are no “tribal” divisions, and the country is a little more stable and peaceful as a result. But alongside the Basotho culture, which covers every niche, there are these shepherds. They are boys and men relegated to a life of hardship, outcast in many ways, tending animals belonging to wealthy stock owners; living on the fringe and on the edge.

From age six to sixty. They are easily identified by their tell-tale garb: Gum boots, and a filthy wool blanket wrapped from shoulders to toes. Beneath a knitted cap, dark and distant eyes peer beyond a tattered slit into seemingly nothing. The shepherds are ubiquitous. They are visible near and far; on every distant hill or valley or field. Animals punctuate the landscape around them -- scattered like stars in the sky -- and it is a mystery how they ever gather them up at the end of a day. But these men have uncanny skills. At one point I watched a shepherd count his goats with a wave of his hand and a methodology which escaped me. Over a hundred animals moving about in a rocky corral, in the fading light of the day no less. What took him thirty seconds, I never accomplished.

But they are considered to be ignorant. They smell like the animals and look like trouble. In a country that boasts Africa’s highest literacy rate, they are illiterate. They smoke pot and possess neither the manners nor the attire required to be welcome in a church. My dad would have loved these guys. Jesus would have loved these guys. Still does.

John’s heart to reach this community is perhaps one of the most pure I have ever seen. Because even a child knows that God has a special place in his heart for shepherds. From the earliest of human history until now, they represent a lower class of person. In man’s eyes they are foolish and weak and most certainly “last”. Yet God relates to such as these. Sends his Son and calls him the “Good Shepherd.” And then tells us that the “last” will be first. Imagine what the shepherds of Lesotho will think when they learn the King of Kings is one of them? Imagine how the shepherds felt that night long ago when angels shattered the silence and announced to them, of all people, the arrival of the infant King?

One night I sat with a couple of the shepherds there at their encampment and thought about this. It was deathly cold and rained ice that night. We were engulfed in a fog as the sun set, blanketing the land in misery. John spoke to them a little about God’s love and it sounded small in such a vast and empty place. As a promise of something unbelievable, a tiny coal of warmth that could only be felt if you were very, very close to it. And I could see in the longing eyes of the shepherd sitting beside him, a desire to move closer. As if no one in all of history had ever been more prepared to do so. Except that it couldn’t be possible. Could it?

Christmas is for shepherds. I’ve long thought so, but now I know for certain. Christmas is for the unsuspecting, the open hearted, the downcast and outcast dressed in rags. Because no one at the feet of Jesus was ever more appropriately dressed than the shepherds were. We are all like filthy rags at His feet. It is only that the shepherds know it.

