

Dearest friends all over
Once again we have some real news to share, therefore the newsletter.

Five years ago we drove into Guatemala on Michael's birthday. This Tuesday we are celebrating his fortieth birthday (with fireworks, of course) and half a decade in the tropics! Phew!

We have felt for a while that it's time to make a family trip to the States and we are excited to announce that Jesus answered our prayers by making the way straight for us to go soon. It all came about when one of our friends in Colorado recently offered us their '89 Ford van! You all know about our hunt for another vehicle, which ended successfully in such a surprising way! Isn't God good! This van is much stronger than our Toyota and will meet our needs exactly. Our friends have driven it to Guatemala before and have helped us several times haul tons of green coffee around the lake in it. We have a buyer for the Toyota as well. He lives in a neighboring town and should show up tomorrow with cash in hand. (Keyword: "should". Yes, we have learned something in these five years!) The sale, along with all the help we received during our fundraiser last year, will help us towards paying the import tax when we bring the Ford in. We feel a bit sad letting go of the faithful flagship, but sentiment won't get us up the hills anymore!

Well, our plans are to pick up the van beginning May and first drive around to visit as many people as we can in five weeks, before we head back to Gaute. It smells of adventure and we are all READY! We have mapped out a route that looks like an upside down G on the US map, with purple dots in many cities, waiting to be connected. I am sure we'll have a colorful story to tell at the end!

Our apprentices, Brett & Havila Burton, were ready to strike out on their own earlier this year. We enjoyed getting to know them and appreciated their help tremendously. Many people in town miss them along with us. They have established a coffee roasting outfit in Birmingham, Alabama, called Primavera Roasters. We hope to check in on them while in the States. Maybe they'll pour us a hot cuppa!

The coffee harvest season ended in February. This year we found some new coffees from other parts of Guatemala. I have to tell about especially one find. There is a customer in town who loves the coffee from Huehuetenango, and kept bugging Michael to get some. We tried some Huehue in 2002 and were not impressed. At the beginning of the harvest this time, we called a farmer in Huehue who visited Crossroads a few years ago and left his business card. He sent us a sample and Michael liked it right away. It was really smooth and chocolaty. This farm won the Cup of Excellence Award (best cup of coffee in Guatemala this year) from the Specialty Coffee Association. Japanese buyers bid the highest and took about 80% of their crop. Michael was happy to get his hands on some of it. It was just amazing how these events played out. Every year it is a stressful time, trying the coffee and making the deals. Nothing is simple, but it is never boring!

In general life is not boring here, as you can imagine. Even our medical stories are worth publishing. We have always called our medical plan the Wait and See Method. Wait and see if it doesn't just go away. Now we wait and see who shows up to treat us! Michael had a big toe that became infected right next to the nail. It grew redder and the swelling increased, regardless of soaking it in salt water or antibiotic cream applied to it. He left on a two day trip to Tajumulco to buy coffee, in pain and barely being able to stand on it. Meanwhile, "back at the ranch", I met a doctor doing his residency at Walter Reid in Washington DC. Over his latte we discussed Michael's "condition" and he offered to look at. So the next day...yep, in our kitchen, with sterile instruments and anesthesia galore, he operated on the toe, draining the infection successfully and immediately bringing relief! What do you know!

Another happy ending to report, is our wall at Mooibos. The Great Wall of Pana is 40 meters away from being completed. The last stretch indeed! It looks very possible that we can start digging foundations for the house upon our return in June, D.V. (Ask Kasia & Lungi what that stands for. They finished Latin Primer I this month.)

The sun is setting behind the volcanoes, so I am signing off. Bye for now! Totsiens maatjies! Adios amigos! Chuak chic.

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