

Liberian Mission Trip

March 14th through the 29th, 2004

Sunday, March 14, 2004

Southwest flight 96 is delayed for approximately two hours due to fog in San Diego. I arrive in Baltimore (BWI) around 7:00pm. Donald Hurst is already in the Hampton Inn. Fred arrived around 10:00pm. Donald lives in Hatch Bend, Lafayette County, Florida and is a retired agricultural teacher/administrator. Shadrach Saywon, founder of Willie N. Wylie Memorial Baptist Children Village, has 100 acres for the village and farm land. Putting in wells and crops to support the school is a possibility. I need to talk with Dave De Lozier (my Sunday school class) about a portable sawmill. I will do more research while there. Need a lot of blades or the ability to sharpen them as there's nowhere there to get that done.

Monday, March 15, 2004

I'm up at 3:30am and can't get back to sleep. All three of us are in one room and everyone is up by 4:00am. We get ready and repack our clothes. We are to be at the airport by 7:30am even though the flight is scheduled for an 11:00 am departure.

When we arrive at the airport there are about twenty people in line ahead of us but each one averages 7-10 large bags. The check in counter is not open till a few minutes after 8:00am. By now the line has doubled. Donald is visiting with several people around us. He reminds me of Pa in that regard.

The one flight from Accra, Ghana is late. It was supposed to be here at 7:30am but is now due in at 1:08pm. Estimated time of departure is now 3:00pm. We get our boarding passes and our luggage checked in without any trouble and then get some coffee and wait. The person processing passengers through the security area will not allow us through until 12:15pm as he doesn't want people coming back out and then having to be re-screened. Our gate is E-8.

Some things that we want to do while there are 1) Go by the U.S. embassy. Tom Leverette says we really need to let them know who we are and where we are going and when we'll be back, 2) Visit Lincoln Brownell at the Liberian Baptist Seminary in Paynesville, 3) Look at the Monrovia side of Shadrach's operation (truck, jeep, ice making, etc.) and 4) see what part a plane could play in the work there (this is me of course).

Finally we board and leave around 5:00pm, 5.5 hours late. They said one flight last week was 30 hours late. The boarding process was chaotic. They managed to get the first class and children loaded then everyone else just piled on in no particular order. I was midway getting on and bin space was already gone. Fred was almost the last one on the plane. It's a DC-10 with two seats on each side and five in the middle.

Before the plane left the ground Fred was throwing up and he's been sick several times in the first three hours.

It's been another 5 hours and 45 minutes and we're descending into Banjul, The Gambia. The local time is 4:46am and Fred is still sick. He's trying to maintain a good spirit but looks rough. It's dark so I can't tell what things look like. The pilot says the temperature is 24 degrees Celsius and it's clear outside.

On the flight to Banjul I met Plato Autridge (609-394-4972) of Trenton, New Jersey, He is a Liberian citizen and managed the Port of Greenville for a time back in the 1970's. His son is a communications engineer. They are staying in Accra for a week then a month in Monrovia. His brother

is a chemist for Firestone and they will stay with him. He says Liberia used to be the top country in this part of Africa and that it had all the major airlines flying into Monrovia. It was the model for other developing countries in West Africa before the civil war. Plato was friends with the new interim president, Bryant, while in Greenville. He is excited that we are going to help but concerned about our trip to Sinoe County. He is concerned about the roads, the heat and the mosquitoes. I should keep in contact with Plato as he could be of help in the future.

Tuesday, March 16, 2004

We finally land in Banjul and at least half of the passengers get off with few new passengers getting on. Plato says that The Gambia is a big tourist area, especially with Sweden. They also are big in peanuts but then every West African country has said that so far.

We stay on the ground in Banjul about an hour and then we're off for Accra. The trip took about three hours and we arrive to some very hot weather.

We deplane and go upstairs to the transit area to get our boarding passes for the next leg of the flight to Monrovia, Liberia with a stop in Freetown, Sierra Leone. A mob of people are crowded around the counter when I hear an announcement that the flight we are trying to get on is leaving. The people in line, if you can call it a line, all start screaming. The poor ladies at the counter took a beating. She tells everyone that the next flight will be at 3:00pm on Thursday. Then things really heat up. At first we were going to have to pay for our own hotel rooms while waiting but then they said they would pay. We go downstairs to the Ghana immigration office, fill out a temporary visa form for Ghana, pay \$20 each for the privilege and get our passports stamped. On the way back we pick up our luggage at the bottom of the stairs. We go back upstairs to the transit area to ask where to meet the bus to the hotel and the lady says to wait there that they were "working on something". I'm waiting with a prayer that we will go forward today.

The Ghana Airlines people promise that we will leave today at 4:00pm. Suddenly everyone's attitude is great. It's a matter of circumstances and emotions for most but we are praising God. I've prayed for my Sunday School class by name today as well as some of those on our sick list. I'm also praying for the families of Kevin, Jake, Jonathan and Debbie (our church staff). We're supposed to be fed in a few minutes while we wait. It's been almost 24 hours with no food for Fred. They bring baked chicken and spicy rice in around 4:30 (Fred doesn't feel up to eating yet) and we're still waiting to board.



It's 7:00pm and we're still here. They are going to take the same DC-10 on to Monrovia but are trying to justify the expense by loading every possible bit of freight that can be shipped. The U.N. peace keepers are in Liberia now and their trucks in Ghana bring all kind of material over to be loaded onto the plane.

I spend thirty minutes talking to Ben, a young Liberian man attending Duke University in North Carolina. He left his parents and Liberia nine years ago to get an



education at Duke. He has not seen his parents for eight years and tomorrow is his mother's birthday. He has a record business in North Carolina and wants to come back to Monrovia and open a gospel music studio to reach people for Christ through music. He is excited that we are here to help his people. He loves America and sees us as the "Big Brother" to his country.



Donald also met a Liberian who is a pediatric nurse in Florida. She wants to come back to Liberia but must pay off her school loans first. There's also another woman who is a social services worker in Maryland. Her father has a large farm in Sinoe County. It looks like opportunities abound for us to make good contacts.

Finally we move to the final staging areas, can see the plane and wait another 45 minutes. Then we're on the DC-10 with 18 people, all in the first class section along with some U.N. soldiers and a plane load of supplies. Fred eats two bites of chicken for the first time in over a day.

We land at Roberts Field in Monrovia at 12:01 (officially March 17). There are almost no lights on the field and I wonder how the captain sees to taxi. The outbuilding we pull up to has U.N. equipment and planes all around. When the door opens there is a group of 30 to 40 people standing outside, some military and some civilians.

Wednesday, March 17, 2004

What a relief to see Shadrach and his cousin, Shad (short for Shadrach as well) there to greet us. Shad works for the immigration office in Monrovia and is there to help smooth our entry. It looks just like a WWII airfield might look. Shad gets us through immigration and keeps our passports to process at the embassy today. Six of us (one of Shadrach's minister friends also came) get in Shadrach's car and start the 1-1/2 hour drive back to the house they have rented as a staging area in Monrovia. The road from the airport to Monrovia is in good shape but the houses and buildings along the way are very run down, many abandoned due to the rebels having shelled them. The area looks more and more like a war zone as we go along. We see thousands and thousands of bullet holes and marks. We drop Shad off and go on to the house. It looks like a refugee camp where we turn in but then the house shows up. There are people waiting for us. Several families and others are sleeping everywhere. They were prepared to go out to Sinoe County much earlier but we were late. One lady with her children are asleep on the front door stoop. The house is full of the boxes from the container that was shipped over. Shadrach, Fred, Donald and I spend an hour going through the plans, pictures and opportunities. The opportunities are endless. Finally some sleep comes around 3:00am.

We're up at 7:00am to shave and bath off using water from a dug well. The Monrovia house is much nicer than most in the area (rent is \$1,800 per year) but there is no running water, sink or mirror. There is, however, a bidet. With no running water everything potable must be bought. All other water is from the well.



Shadrach has a breakfast for us of eggs with onions, spam, bread with mayonnaise, tea and coffee. This is a luxurious meal for these folks. A fellow preacher (Harrington) is invited to join us but declines not wanting the other people to think he is slighting them. We spend some time with Shadrach

talking about his plans. Dave De Lozier had asked about a portable sawmill. Shadrach has bought two chainsaws with a special attachment to turn them into sawmills. A portable sawmill would be great. They have enough trees on the 100 acres to cut a lot of lumber. The plan is to teach the students to make furniture using the lumber. Then they will have a trade that can earn them a living. Extra lumber could be sold.

We go into Monrovia at 9:30am and meet Shadrach's cousin who has our passports ready. We go by a Stop & Shop grocery store and get some things we need for our trip. The goal is to get some food for us as the primary food while we're there is rice and cassava. For three of the days there will be beef as Suwannee Baptist has provided money to purchase two cows. About all we selected was two large jars of peanut butter and some saltine crackers. Donald got some canned sardines. Then we tried to find some audio speakers for the revival but had no luck. We went by the U.S. Embassy to fill out a form to let them know where we were and when we would be leaving. We return to the Monrovia house after leaving the embassy.

The truck is having its oil changed and everything greased in preparation for the trip. We have a lunch of white rice and cassava leaves with pepper spice and chicken. We eat this in Shadrach's bedroom but haven't seen anyone else eat in two days. Then Shadrach leaves to get the car serviced.



The jeep is loaded on top with a lot of bags and a spare tire. Then the truck arrives and most of the people begin loading it with all the stuff from the container plus many bags of rice and other supplies. The women are extremely hard workers. Even with a baby on their back they help carry the 110 lb. bags of rice. One woman picks up the bags and places them on a man's head to carry. Soon we're ready to go and we have to fuel the truck, jeep and car. Shadrach is distressed because he has run out of money before getting gas for his car. He thinks it will take \$345 U.S. to make it there and back. Fred and I look at it and think it will only take \$150 or so. Fred gives him \$200 and he fills the

tank and gets enough cans to fill it again for the return trip.

It's now 8:00pm and we're finally off. There are approximately fifty people in the three vehicles. Five of us are in the car (1996 Cutlass Ciera), fifteen are in the jeep with four more riding on the bumper and the rest are in the truck. Shadrach says the ones on the back of the jeep will stand there for the entire trip. The trip is only about 200 miles and it's hard to believe it will take twelve hours. That's only about 25mph.

The first 75 miles are paved and we make good time. We go back out by the airport and then through the Firestone rubber plantation. It's the first time we've seen a whole area of lights. After leaving the plantation we came to a checkpoint where everyone but the driver has to get out and walk approximately a mile. This keeps people from taking guns through in their cars they say. There's a continual market place along the side with cooked foods (fish, chicken, etc.), things to drink and other stuff.

We load back up and go again. We stop briefly every 45 minutes or so to add water to the jeep. The paved road becomes frequently filled with large pot holes. This causes us to slow down and maneuver, sometimes even stopping completely. The pavement is almost gone and the road is compacted earth and rock.

Thursday, March 18

We have the first flat tire on the jeep. There's a spare so it is changed in about 30-45 minutes. Then we turn off on the Sinoe Road. We're now in Rebel Territory. The U.N. hasn't set up checkpoints here yet. The road is all dirt now and is narrowing. We come to the first rebel checkpoint which is just barrels in the road. We give them a little money to get by. Almost immediately we come to the main rebel checkpoint. Several young men come out. None have guns. After talking for a while they take Shadrach away and out of site. I started moving cash to my sock in anticipation of being held up. After several minutes we see a 100 lb. sack of rice thrown down from the truck. The rebels take it and Shadrach soon comes back. Everyone shakes hands and they roll the drums out of the roadway and we pass through. It's not until the next day that we find out that they had stopped Shadrach before and he had not given them anything but had promised rice on the next trip. So this was not really unexpected to him. Of course we were thinking the worst. Shadrach said that you really didn't have to worry much about them unless you try to run their roadblocks.

We continued on into the night at a very slow start and stop type of travel. There are several stops for various reasons.

Shadrach has been promising a bridge "you will see" he says. When we come to the bridge it was worth the wait. It was about 20 feet long and was only a pile of large boards and logs that were loose and just scattered across. At one time there were probably 30 people standing in the headlights of the truck making suggestions. Finally they moved a few planks around and brought the jeep across. After that they spent a lot of time arranging things for Shadrach's car. He finally brought it across but it scrapped pretty bad coming off. A few more arrangements and the truck came over and we were off.

Sometime after daylight the jeep had its next flat and there was not another spare. So they brought out the tube patching equipment. A tire iron to break the tire loose, a piece of rebar to slide under the tire and some glue to hold the patch. They used a hacksaw blade to rough up the tube and patch (a piece of used inner tube). They patched the tube, aired up the tire with a hand pump with no connector and we started off again. After a mile or two the tube would fail again. It would take another hour or more to repair each time. The tube already had numerous patches on it. After



about the fifth flat, Shadrach sent the truck with all the people (except nine of us) along with all the luggage to the village. Some of those mothers and children had been involved in this trip for three days. We patched the tube twice more and then Shadrach decided to drive it the rest of the way on the rim. He didn't want to leave the jeep and people alone while taking the tires to Greenville to be fixed. This turned out to work well as we finally made it into the village about 5:00pm. A trip of 205 miles that took twenty hours plus the four hours spent loading and fueling the truck before we actually left.



When we pulled into the children's village access road a herd of children began running next to the care singing "We love you Shadrach". They were happy to see him return.

Gertrude and many others were there to greet us. They had fixed one of the floors of the guest house (the rest were still dirt floors) and had placed a bed and other items for our use. This was to be Shadrach's and Gertrudes' bedroom but they insisted that we sleep there while here. It would be hard to be treated better than we were by these people.

We looked around
looked around some more.
brought in from a nearby
with a monkey that had been
monkey's tail tied to his head
suitcase to carry the monkey

I talked with
system and looking at the
connection for
had better communication
Monrovia he would not have to travel back as often to receive mail, make phone calls and check on the business (assuming he can use someone like Skipper to run the Monrovia business in his absence). We will talk more later.



and talked, rested, unpacked and
A truck load of people were
village and one boy came up
killed. He had the end of the
and used it like the handle of a
around more conveniently.
Shadrach about an accounting
possibility of satellite internet
communication purposes. If he
with the U.S. and with

We smell hair singed from the cook fire area. A while later Fred and I walk over to see what's going on and find that they are cooking the monkey. They had most of the meat cut up to boil and some in a home made tin smoker. When I asked about it they offered me some and I said "a small piece well done". Karpu, one of the ladies that came out with us from Monrovia, threw a piece of the meat in the



hot coals under a pot and later picked it out with her bare hands. While waiting I asked about what was smoking. She pulled out a front quarter of the monkey that still had the hand attached and the head. She said that they eat the head and suck out the brains. One of the other ladies sitting there said that the brains "had a sweet taste". The meat is cooked and I have my first taste, along with Fred, of monkey meat. It tastes a little like a piece of steak that you've left on the grill too long so that it gets a little charcoal flavor to it (since it was thrown into the coals I guess this is to be expected). All in all, it wasn't too bad.

We went to bed around 8:00pm. The radio, a keyboard and drums were going. Then a heavy rain came but we were all quickly asleep. Around 5:00am the tape player starts and we get up and began to get ready. There's not much to hurry for here. People, especially the women, work steady but a specific start time is not very important to them.

Friday, March 19, 2004

The revival starts today. Many people came yesterday but most will be here this morning. They send to town for someone to help kill the cow. It is quite a production. You can tell it doesn't happen much. They lead the cow in, finally get it tied up and then over onto its side. Then big poles are run between its legs and across its neck where they were tied into place. Next several men hold the poles down to keep the body and head from moving. A man takes a machete and begins trying to cut the cow's throat. It isn't going too well so he stops in the middle of the effort and sharpens the blade some. He returns to the job and saws on through the cow's neck. Not very humane but then they don't kill a cow out here very often (maybe never before). After the cow is dead they begin butchering it. A lot of people are involved in this process.





We take a walk through the compound area with Shadrach. The clinic has several (six) rooms plus a waiting area. Most of the rooms have grout floors but a couple are still dirt. They grout the floors as they have the money to buy the cement. The Officer-In-Charge of the clinic is Mrs. Ester. She is a nurse, I believe, and runs the place. They have hand written signs up telling who they see on what days and the prices. Currently the amount they charge does not even cover the supplies. They hope to charge more as time goes on but the primary purpose of the clinic is to provide health care not to become self sufficient.

The school is next and has grades K-9 at present. Half of it is mud brick and the other half is bamboo poles with tarpaulins covering the outside. Their future plans include housing and caring for 250 orphans onsite plus an additional 1,500 local students. Currently they have about 650 local students registered. Shadrach talks about books and supplies and says that agencies such as UNICEF will give you help but that if you take it they tell you what you can and cannot teach. Shadrach is committed to remaining independent of anyone that can have this type of power over the children's village.

We stop by the cook area on the way back and have a piece of bread made with flour, baking soda, sugar and something else I don't remember. It looks like an oversized hushpuppy and is deep fried. The taste is good. After that Gertrude brings over breakfast at 9:30am. It was cooked cassava and stewed monkey meat. We eat it and it tastes a lot like beef stew.

Shadrach is trying to get all the churches to come in at 10:30 to register so he will know how much to cook. We were originally scheduled to have a 6:30am service this morning but that didn't happen due to the late arrive by many of the churches. Shadrach and Gertrude are complaining that when you say the conference starts on Friday at 6:30am that means be there then, not several hours later. Given that many of the people are walking for several hours away I guess they would have had to come yesterday in order to be here. If they don't get an accurate registration they will not know how much food to cook. The ladies feed the people who are here the bread balls for breakfast.

Shadrach mentions that some of the tin we see on the roof of the guest house was a different color (dark red) than the bright silver tin. When the rebels were coming through they took the tin off and sent it out into the bush with the people for safe keeping. It would be stacked up, used to cover their hidden huts or other purposes which would discolor and rust it. When the threat was over and the tin was brought back, it was sprayed with a rust inhibiting paint that was the dull red color. So you could tell which pieces were new and which were sent out during the war.

When Fred and I return, Baby Girl (Gertrude's second to youngest sister – actual name is Sarah but no one calls her this) is sweeping in the next room and singing about adoring God. What a peaceful sound as we lay back for a nap. We're fighting sleep deprivation due to the flight, late arrival and 20 hour trip out. Last night helped but it's hard to sleep late due to the time change our body has not adjusted to and the noise that starts as soon as anyone gets up. Since the walls do not go all the way to the ceiling and there are no windows (only openings) any noise comes straight into the room.



As mentioned earlier, we were to start services at 6:30am this morning with another one around noon and a third one at 7:00pm. The time to start continues to be pushed back due to late arrivals and the registration process. Finally we are only going to do the evening service. The various churches continue to show up throughout the day and into the evening.

There is a problem with the generator that will be used to power the lights and other things at the church. It is hauled about 50 yards from the church into the very hot sun and work begins some water in the gas and the carburetor as well. the primary people working on with several others. When the going on they begin to sing Several men come out with down some small poles. built a shed over the generator them in the shade. It's amazing what can be done here in a short time.



yards from the church into the to fix it. As it turns out it has there's probably a little trash in Shadrach, Skipper and Jared are the generator and I stand around people in the church see what's about loving their pastor. machetes and begin chopping Within 15 minutes they have and the guys working on it to put

Food was supposed to be served around noon but it is 4:00pm when we're ready to begin. Some people have waited all day without complaint but they get more serious when the food service starts. They are receiving large servings of rice with beef stew on top. Probably three times what we would eat. But they are required to feed their children out of this as well. About half way through the crowd the food runs out. This is making the unfed people angry. The ladies have to start cooking again from scratch. We finally finish feeding everyone around 9:00pm. Something happened that proves these people are not Baptists. Shadrach sent all the people that had eaten before the food ran out into town to wait until the service. Baptists wouldn't have come back but every one of these folks seem to have returned at 7:00pm for the night service.

Fred preaches the service and does a good job. Since a good percentage of the crowd speak the local language rather than English it is necessary to use an interpreter. This makes the message more difficult to present as it is hard to get into a pattern of emphasis that is longer than a single sentence. It also makes it very difficult to use humor due to the difficulty of communicating the nuances necessary for most of our humor. I'm guessing there are 500 – 600 people here but it is difficult to tell. They sit so close together that it defies logic. Some of the people walked several hours to get here and will stay in the village until the conference is over. Shadrach thought that the attendance might be as high as 1,500 but God has been good not to allow more than we can (just barely) feed.



The singing was different than I expected in that it's not as robust. I think this is due to having over 40 different churches from all over the area mixed together. There seems to be some competition between the churches both in singing and in eating. The management of the crowd during food service was difficult. The food was served by Shadrach's people bringing plates of food and cups of water to the pews where everyone was sitting. This was time consuming. Personal hygiene is a little different here than in the States. While everyone was dressed appropriately and was very clean given the distance most had traveled, the eating utensils were not cleaned much between servings. The plates and spoons were mostly wiped with a cloth but the cups were simply refilled and given to the next person to use. At

first I asked Pastor Harrington where to wash the cups and he said to just refill them without washing. Noting the questioning look on my face he smiled and said “there are no germs in Africa”. I refilled the cup and passed it back out.

We run out of water and it’s raining. No one wants to get wet so I find a young guy to go with me and we run down to the well about 250 yards away. We take an 18 gallon Tupperware storage container with us to bring the water back in. When we get to the well the rain has about stopped and we begin filling the container with buckets of water drawn from the well. There’s a hole at least two inches in diameter near the bottom of the bucket and it has been plugged with leaves. You lose about 25% of each bucket you bring up before you can get it in the container. We fill the container to the top and put the lid on it. Of course I’ve forgotten what 18 gallons of water weighs (148 pounds at 8 pounds per gallon). The other fellow and I start back up the hill to the church and have to stop twice and rest in the first 75 yards. Then this teenage girl meets us and says, the best I can tell, that she will tote the water for us. I try to discourage her but she insists so the young guy and I (barely) get the container lifted up high enough for her to get under it. She gets it centered, stands up and begins walking up to the church. I am both amazed and embarrassed that she is doing this. I keep following along asking if I can help but she’s quite sure that I cannot. She makes it almost to the church and I ask her for the tenth time if we can take it and she finally gives in. We take it down from her head and carry it the remaining 30-40 yards. Think what embarrassment this saves us he-men. We get to carry it up in front of the crowd.

In order to eat you had to have registered upon arrival and received a meal ticket. The problem, other than running out of food, was that people just arriving would get a ticket and sit down in front of people who had been there for hours. As only one of three white guys in the crowd of hungry black folks, I am getting nervous.

The service didn’t start until almost 10:00pm so when Fred finishes preaching we head back to the room, eat a couple of crackers with peanut butter and go to bed. It’s around midnight when we get to bed and we have an early start tomorrow. I’m supposed to bring the morning message at around 6:30am.

Many of the ladies have been cooking all day plus the emergency cooking when the food ran out. When we get back to the room just before midnight they are cooking beef for tomorrow and fried bread for the people’s breakfast. It’s the same bread we had this morning and it’s very good. Fred wonders about the calories, I wonder what kind of oil it’s fried in.

Fred is a little worried that his recommendation to have the revival and feed everyone has caused a lot of trouble for Shadrach and the other people here. It will work out.

Did I mention that we had another thunderstorm while trying to feed everyone? The people say that it never rains in February and March. I think we’ve thrown off the entire ecosystem with our arrival.

Saturday, March 20, 2004

Music starts playing around 3:45am from Shadrach’s room I think. It’s a wakeup call of sorts. We are still trying to sleep when the rooster starts crowing. I think we slept through him yesterday morning due to exhaustion but there’s no missing him today. He roosts on the rafter under the front of the guest house. Since there’s no ceiling the area is open to the roof across the entire building including the outside, the rooster’s crowing echoes, over and over, down the underside of the tin room and it sounds like he’s in the bed with you. He continues to crow and seems to be getting louder. Finally we open our eyes and he’s staring down at us from the top of the wall that our heads are against. It’s as if he wants to visually see that everyone is really getting up.



3:45am from Shadrach’s room I think. trying to sleep when the rooster starts crowing yesterday morning due to exhaustion but on the rafter under the front of the guest house open to the roof across the entire building

including the outside, the rooster’s crowing echoes, over and over, down the underside of the tin room and it sounds like he’s in the bed with you. He continues to crow and seems to be getting louder. Finally we open our eyes and he’s staring down at us from the top of the wall that our heads are against. It’s as if he wants to visually see that everyone is really getting up.

We get up and start getting dressed while we have a couple of crackers with our malaria pills. I have a headache so I take some of the Motrin that Gayla made me bring. She's a lot smarter than I give her credit for sometimes. Fred has bet me the rest of his money that we will get to sleep late based on yesterday's experience with the start time for services. But Shadrach sticks his head in and says that they are waiting for us to start the service. Fred will have to hitchhike home I guess.

We start up to the church and the people are up and singing. They have gone to sleep at midnight on the ground in people's houses in town but are up and singing at 6:00am. Fred says that this and their 16 straight hours at church yesterday continues to prove they are not Baptists. I remind him about the fuss over the food yesterday and that there may be some Baptist in them after all.

I am bringing the message this morning. It is titled The Only Difference That Matters. A quick outline would be:

I. Differences that don't matter-

Tall vs. short (use the Judge as an example)

Old vs. young (use Fred as an example)

Black vs. white (use the crowd as an example)

Long vs. short hair (use Shadrach as an example)

Male vs. female (pick a lady from the crowd)

Adult vs. child (pick a nearby child)

Rich vs. poor (don't use anyone as they think all Americans are rich)

Educated vs. uneducated (don't use anyone)

Pretty vs. ugly (use Rhoda as an example)

II. The difference that does matter-

Saved vs. lost (use Luke 16:19-23)

III. How to be saved-

Sin – Romans 3:10, 3:23

Payment – Romans 5:6, 5:8, John 3:16

Requirement – Romans 10:9-10, Acts 3:19

Result – John 1:12

The people seemed attentive and interested. Of course I might have been to them like the monkey was to me, okay to try but not something they'd want every day.

Shadrach gave the invitation and some came down to the altar. I am not sure what all the decisions were but Shadrach commented that one of them was a local man that really needed to get his heart right with the Lord.

Shadrach implemented a new feeding system that gave the number of tickets for each member registered to their pastor to distribute. Then they ate by church. This seemed to work much better than last night.



We go back to our room and eat some breakfast of cassava with stew and have hot tea to drink. I'm not sure why I drink coffee back in the states instead of hot tea other than coffee is easier to make by the pot.

After a little rest Shadrach invites us to watch a big tree being cut down by the lumber crew he has hired. We make our way back into the forest area on the back of the 100 acres they were given to where the men are working. First they take machetes and hack all the smaller underbrush away from where they want to drop the tree. Then the head guy begins cutting the tree so that it will fall where he wants. He's good and puts it down where he planned. More brush is cleared from around the fallen tree and the main trunk is measured and cut into the proper lengths. They will saw the boards later. The next service is supposed to start at 10:00am so we go back, at 10:15am, to pick up our Bibles. Nothing is starting yet so we're napping as we wait. It is very hot as it has been each day. Shadrach comes by around 12:30pm and says the wood cutters are cutting boards and that church is about ready. Donald and I go to see the woodcutters and Fred leaves for church. We watch the process of cutting huge boards (4 inch thick) with the special chainsaw rig they use for the purpose. It's quite an activity. They are handling a fifty foot long, four foot diameter log. They section it and cut approximately one foot wide slices between each of the lengths of log that they measured. This gives them room for the saw rig to work. This tree is so big in diameter that they have to handle it with levers. They don't have Cant Hooks and are using long poles to move it around. It's very labor intensive but I am continually reminded that labor is their cheapest and most available resource. Donald mentions several tools that would help them and I write them down on a little note pad I carry to keep track of needs that people in the U.S. might want to help them with. We head up to the service at the church and get there about the time that Fred starts preaching. I have Dusty and Gena's video tape recorder and tape part of Fred's sermon. It's about 1:45pm. The crowd is responding to his comments. The biggest response comes when he tells them that people in the U.S. want the Liberians to have the same peace and prosperity that we have. They are desperate to change their lives and believe that everyone in America is rich. I would agree that even our poorest families have more conveniences than most Liberians but they believe each of us are millionaires.



There are some decisions at the invitation but I don't know the number or type. I think Shadrach will provide this information to us before we leave to come home.

After the service Shadrach pulls Fred and I aside and asks about ordaining the local Baptist pastor. He is concerned that the man is "clueless" at times about the Bible and doctrine and wonders if it is the right thing to do. The man asked Shadrach if he would ordain him. Fred agreed that we would question him and then make a decision based upon his responses.

Gertrude brings us rice with beef and Baby Girl brings us some "soup". It is spicy and is used as seasoning much the way we use Tabasco or Red Rooster sauce at home. We've napped this afternoon in preparation of another late night service.

I keep kicking myself for not bringing my video projector. Shadrach has a generator out here and also had a VCR back in Monrovia. With a white sheet we could have shown the Jesus film and other doctrinally sound movies. Gertrude says that the people would stay all day for a chance to see something like that. It would be good to find an old video projector that someone no longer uses and send it over.

The evening service was preached by Pastor Harrington. He's a college graduate and teaches for a low salary back in Monrovia. He seems to be well grounded in the scripture and does a good job. The crowd keeps getting larger as people continue to come and register. So far they have 43 churches in attendance. They fed a larger number today but it went much smoother other than for some people breaking in line ahead of others. This led to a lot of shouting and pushing which Shadrach had to get



stopped. Fred and I have decided to skip the feeding sessions in the interest of self preservation. I believe that Donald is hanging in there and helping to serve the food and water.

The building committee must be good here. We left from the afternoon service and there was about a 25% addition to the church, including seating, when we returned for the night service.

No rooster over our bed so far.

Sunday, March 21, 2004

Fred wakes up early and can't sleep so he walks out front and sees some young men with a bucket chattering and catching thousands of termites that have been drawn to the light (they run the generator all night and leave the lights on). Suddenly they remember the four lights that have been burning all night up at the church and they take off up there. Fred follows them to see what's going on. He says they find huge piles of the termites under the lights there and are scooping them up by the thousands and are very excited. When he returns to the room he comments that we may have something interesting to eat today. When we come back out of the room there are kids everywhere with any sack they can find filled with the termites. The ladies around the cook fires explained that they soak them in water, pick all the wings off, dry them on a piece of tin, salt them and then parch them much like we would peanuts. It's supposed to take about a day. I plan to try them tomorrow.

We dress for the morning service. Shadrach has asked only the pastors and two other leaders from each church to come for EvangeCube training. This is a Rubic's Cube type device that opens repeatedly to step the user through a presentation of salvation with an unsaved person. It has only pictures so it can be used with any language group. It opens to show seven different pictures: 1) Man in sin separated from God, 2) Christ on the cross, 3) The sealed tomb, 4) The risen Christ, 5) The cross as a bridge to God, 6) Heaven and Hell and 7) Steps for followers of Christ. It's a great tool for a group like this. There are 43 churches represented and Fred has brought enough to provide three for each church plus a few left over.

Shadrach sets the rules at 7:00am and then Fred begins to demonstrate the Cube by going through the presentation first. It is tremendous to hear them ooh and aaah as each new picture comes up. When they see the picture of Christ on the cross they really are impressed. When Fred finishes Shadrach hands out three cubes to each pastor. He then gives them to his people (some brought more than two additional people).

Next Fred works them through opening the Cube to each page in the proper sequence. Some struggle to get the box open and Donald and I help them. They seem to get the sequencing part down fairly easily. Then he takes them through as though he was presenting the plan of salvation to them with them following along using their Cube. When he finished he asked for everyone to share the plan of salvation with someone today using the Cube. It was stressed many times that they were to keep the instructions because they show the way to present using the Cube along with appropriate Bible verses.

Shadrach asked if there were any questions and the first couple related to the Cube but quickly turned to questions about the Bible in general and the Truth as it relates to several matters from sin to baptism to polygamy. It was amazing to see the people (church pastors and leaders) with a thirst to have their scriptural questions answered. Shadrach plans to open a Bible college to train pastors and church leaders and it is seriously needed. The questions that they need help with are matters of doctrine that we

would see as basic and simple. Yet these folks are the pastors of churches and don't have a clue about much of this. Shadrach stresses over and over that there are no inappropriate questions and that it doesn't mean that you're stupid if you ask a question. He tells them repeatedly that getting the right answer today will enable them to spread the truth throughout their congregations rather than errors that will in turn be spread. It's possible that this pastor training center that Shadrach wants to start might have the biggest impact on the region of anything he is doing. Getting a pastor grounded means that all his/her (there are several women pastors) congregation will then receive the truth and then everyone that they talk to after that. It could change this entire area if people actually know the Truth and tell it to others. By the way, almost every denomination you can imagine is represented here and several of them have women pastors. Polygamy is also common in Liberia and some of the pastors in attendance have multiple wives. Shadrach doesn't get into the woman pastor part but he is very straight forward about polygamy being against God's will. He explains the reason very well and without being confrontational but he doesn't sugar coat it. The question and answer session goes on for nearly an hour until the food arrives. Breakfast is served to this smaller group and we head back to the room.

We have cooked fish and fried plantains for breakfast. I skip the fish. It's very hot each day and I usually don't feel like eating much at all. Other than a few peanut butter and crackers at medicine time, I don't eat anything we brought either.

Soon it's time to return for the final service of the day. There will be no evening service today as people will need time to walk home before dark. The crowd is up in numbers as people are still coming. There's a good bit of singing from the various choirs. Then a few pastors had a few comments. Shadrach spoke today about sin and didn't pull any punches. He addressed the pastors a lot and has noted numerous times that some (many?) of the pastors are not well grounded and some he believes are unsaved. It looked like a large number of people made a decision during the invitation. I slipped out and returned to the room.

Back at the guest house the ladies were cooking and a boy had a baby chimpanzee. It was just like a baby. Everyone there held and carried it around like we would a puppy or kitten. I asked where they got it and they said "in the bush". I didn't ask any more as I might have eaten his mother and didn't want to feel guilty.

The tremendous number of people at the service have come down to get their clothing that the Florida Baptist churches have sent over with the container. They have over 1,500 bags prepared. Each registered person gets one which looks to contain maybe two articles of clothing. They take whatever is handed to them as there's no way possible to try to match up size or gender. The hope is that someone in the family can use it. They've been handing them out for 2.5 hours and are near the end. They will be served a meal at the church and then go home.

The conference/revival has been a success but it has been very tiring on the people here. Not having done this before the administration of the crowds was something for which no one had been trained. Putting the burden on the individual pastors to handle their members was a great move which made things possible.

The termites are ready ahead Buggybugs and they are quite handfuls and pop them into their Fred and I try a few but he thinks and have a lot more salt on them. something that I wanted seconds on.



of schedule. The people call them popular. People grab them by the mouths like we would do popcorn. that they need to be cooked more The taste is not bad but it's not

Everyone goes to bed and plans to sleep late tomorrow.

Monday, March 22, 2004

I sleep in this morning. It's almost 7:00am but it's been a restless night and I am still tired. Fred and Donald have been up a little while. Everyone left is tired and things are slow getting started. Today we're to visit the school and walk through Karmo's Town. It is hot early today, I'm guessing 90+ at 10:00am. We skip breakfast due to the heat. It's been hot every day but today is at least 100 degrees.

We take a bath with some warm water provided by Gertrude and the ladies. With cold water you can take an entire bath with six cups of water. When it's warm it takes ten cups. Both Fred and I have bathed and there's over half a bucket of water left. I'm surprised at how little you can use and still get clean.

Shadrach takes us to the school for a visit. The age of the children does not correspond to their grades. Many of the older students are just getting started in school. Shadrach mentions that he visited a Christian school in the states where all the students were taught in one big room. He thought this might be good here given that it was embarrassing for the older students to be in class with much younger kids. We walk through and take a look in each class room. Some have 5, 10, 15 and 20 students. Fred doesn't finish counting but gets to 84 in the kindergarten 1 class. They are small and pack tightly into a 12x24 classroom. Shadrach has asked the principal to take an early recess so I can make a picture. Children everywhere love recess and to have their picture taken. They finally get them together and I make



pictures of everyone and then of the teachers.

As we leave the school and start to town I ask Shadrach what time school lets out. He says 1:00pm. I mention lunch and he says that they would love to be able to give them a meal of cornmeal and sugar (cheaper than rice by about half) but there is no money to do this currently. It would be a never ending expense and we've seen what it's like to feed a large crowd. As they become more self sufficient in earning income he would like to make this school lunch available. When the orphanage is up and running they will be responsible for providing meals for the 250 orphans that they hope to house here permanently which will be significant in itself. Shadrach believes the school will eventually grow to 1,500 students or more.

As we approach Karmo's Town we see mud huts. Most have tin roofs but many are thatch. Shadrach shows us the house he was born in and the first clinic that they operated prior to building the one on their property. The house he grew up in and two others are the only ones not burned during the rebel invasion of the village several years ago. We see the foundations and blackened walls of several houses destroyed in the war. We visit the home of a man who is sick with malaria or Typhoid or some similar sickness. Shadrach tells his family to take him to the clinic to see Mrs. Ester. Later we stop by the house of a woman who has a leg that is so sore she is confined to bed. He lectures her and her family on waiting before getting someone to check it. He tells her family to take her to the clinic for a checkup.

We go by an overgrown field. Shadrach says that it is the cemetery. When I ask how many people are buried there he says everyone who has ever died in Karmo's Town. He shows us a tall tree at the edge of the cemetery and says that his grandmother is buried there. His grandfather was killed by

the rebels and they did not find him until the animals had eaten much of him. They gathered the remains in a bag and buried him where they found him. I hope to get Shadrach's full story. Fred says it is amazing. His family was killed, he was captured multiple times and threatened with death.

We come to the camp again and move to our room for some water. It is very hot. By the way, while in town a truck load of men came by with automatic weapons. Shadrach explains that they are actually what passes for the police. Not bad but actually helpful in keeping order. He says that when the U.N. arrives they will turn in their guns in exchange for money.

We rest a bit. I hope to videotape Gertrude and maybe Shadrach today about their vision and experiences so far with the children's village. About the time we are to start taping the afternoon rain comes. So we wait for it to stop before going up to the church where we can have some peace and quiet.

While waiting a local pastor comes up and says he did not get an EvangeCube due to a mix up in the invitation process. Shadrach takes one of the extra Cubes and says the man can have one but must be trained first. Fred goes out and does a one-on-one training session with him. The man catches on pretty fast and ends up making a presentation to Fred and does pretty well. Then the man comes in and talks with Shadrach. Shadrach takes him through the plan of salvation and quizzes him closely. The pastor is very weak in the scripture and knowledge but is anxious to learn. Shadrach spends the rest of the afternoon working with the man. What a great ministry he has here.



We finally get Gertrude to the church to film her response to some questions we ask. The purpose is to let people hear directly what it's like to be a missionary's wife. She is kind and gentle in her comments and gracious in her closing thoughts.

Shadrach comes down next and we do a more extensive interview with him about the ministry. We hope to film his entire testimony while in Monrovia. When we show Gertrude herself on video she says, "Oooh, I'm so black".

Tuesday, March 23, 2004

We're leaving today it seems. We've packed and they are loading our bags on the truck. There has been distant lightening all night and thunder is still rumbling far off this morning. Shadrach hopes to leave by 11:00am. It will be nice to travel during the day to see the countryside (and the rebels). The refueling process is akin to a Chinese fire drill but it gets done. A hand cranked fuel pump would be good. We get the info on the chainsaws and blades to take back with us so that we can send over files, parts, etc.

Around noon we drive truck. It is loading up with packages. I see some red oil Gertrude says that it may be \$10 \$50 Lb in Monrovia. There also roots as well. The truck stops a their stuff up. Shadrach is stopping and potentially we're off and making good time.



out to the main road to meet the paying passengers and their (from palm nuts) in gallon jugs. Lb in Karmo's Town but will bring looks like some sacks of cassava few more times to pick people and concerned about the frequent overloading the truck. Finally We come to the turn off road and

the “toll booth”. As soon as the car and truck stop we have an instant marketplace of people selling sacks of bread nuts for about \$0.10 U.S. each. Several of our people pile off and start buying stuff. We stay about thirty minutes. They’re working on the truck as a battery cable has come loose.

We make good time until we come to the first bridge.

The crossing goes okay. Next we come to the big mud hole and everyone unloads and walks across. The recent rains have made it much worse than when we came through on the trip out. The car is not the problem as it has a narrower width than the truck and there is a wide enough place between the mud holes for it to go. The truck can’t use the same place because the mud hole drops off sharply on that side and it would slip off. So they take it through the other side where some tree trunks have been stacked into the far hole. The truck rocks back and forth but it makes it through. Without some repair I’m not sure how much longer the truck will be able to make that crossing.



Soon after that is the infamous wood plank bridge and time for everyone to unload and walk again. In the daylight it looks bad but it seemed worse at night. The car does fine but we see just how little room the truck has. The outside rear tire of the truck is barely on a board as it comes across. Everyone loads back up and we’re off again.

We’ve gone through a few “official” checkpoints but now it is time to go through the main rebel checkpoint. I expect that we will pass through more easily since we gave them a whole bag of rice last time but I am wrong. Shadrach gets out to talk them into letting us pass and they start off wanting \$4,000 Lb. That’s about \$80 U.S. We’ve been here for about thirty minutes or more and they are still arguing. Shadrach has explained, I believe, about the work for Jesus that he does. Gertrude mentions that they are uneducated and are making fun of Jesus. She’s quite agitated and this is the first time I’ve seen her give Shadrach any trouble. He asks her repeatedly to stay in the car and keep Kenyette with her but she refuses. I can feel the stress in Shadrach and am concerned that she is adding more to him in a difficult time. I hear infrequent references to black people and white people, I think, and wonder if the trouble is the three of us and the universal Liberian belief that we are all rich. Anyway, we’ve been here longer now than the first time through. To make matters worse the truck has been getting air into the fuel lines and is not starting. They are working on it at the same time the negotiations are going on. The women, especially the young ones, do not seem concerned at all. A man told us a couple of nights ago “Liberians can adjust to anything in one week”. No threat whatsoever has been made to the women. Fred punches me as I’m writing this and points out a young guy walking by with a shoulder launched missile of some type (maybe just a grenade launcher, I’m not up on my rebel weapons). He continues up the road and eventually turns into the woods toward the way we will have to go if they let us through. A white land Rover full of people and bananas that we saw quite away back comes up. They pull around the truck, talk a couple of minutes with the rebels and are allowed to pass. They are confident enough to stop and put water in the radiator before taking off again. I would have waited until down the road a piece first. It’s closing in on an hour and we are still here. I think we’ve settled with the rebels but now the truck will not start.

Shadrach comes out and says that we’re going on and that they will get the truck started and come along. We go maybe 200 yards and there’s another “road block”. The kid that comes out this time has an AK-47 on him. Shadrach talks with him a little, shows him is Children’s Village ID and tries to get him to let us through. A group of women come by and give the boy a hard time about

stopping us so he walks off back to his house without opening the roadway. Shadrach waits a minute and follows him to the hut that he enters. A boy comes out in a little bit and rolls the barrels aside and Gertrude drives the car through. Still no sign of the truck.

Shadrach is still talking to the young man. The truck has not showed up yet. Shadrach comes back to the car and we drive off a little way down the road before pulling over to wait. He says the kid with the gun says that the rebels killed his mother and father and that he has no education and no hope. He was going to open the road block earlier but said one of the women came up and started cursing him to open the gate, so he wouldn't do it. Shadrach says the boy with the gun is probably 15 years old. Shadrach explained about the school he has and invited to boy to come there and get an education so that he will have something to look forward to in life. He also spends some time telling him about Christ. I guess that's one of the big differences between Shadrach and me. He loves these people and is willing to put his faith into action in dangerous situations.

We hear the truck coming and are glad. It's topped at the second road block so Shadrach walks back to check on it. While we're waiting some young guys come out of the woods. One has an Ak-47.



He looks in the window where I'm sitting and sees my camera (which I've foolishly put back in my lap after clearing the road blocks). I figure I'm about to lose it and the hundreds of pictures I've taken so far. He motions for me to get out but only wants me to take his picture. Several other kids about the same age run up and want to be in the picture. After taking it the kid with the gun comes up to give me his name and town so that I can mail it to him. Shadrach comes up about that time and I tell the boy that I will mail it to Shadrach and that he can get it from him on one of the trips through. I explain that it will take maybe three months to get it back

over here. He seems fine with that and goes on about his business.

We hear the truck engine running and, in a little while, the truck stops again. It's still getting air in the lines. The driver decides to bleed the entire system and retighten each connection to solve the process. It takes a while but he gets it done by flashlight and everything is working well. The rebel road blocks and truck problems have cost us about three hours.

The roads are extremely bumpy and driving Shadrach's car consists of brief sprints with sudden hard braking and swerving, coming almost to a complete stop and then sprinting again. The car frequently bottoms out its shocks. It's an Oldsmobile Cutless Cierea SL and is not the car for this type of trip. It is too low to the ground and the muffler and rear bumper drag frequently. It doesn't help that Donald, Fred and I are in the back seat with some luggage in the trunk.

We pass a van in the ditch and people scattered all over the road with baskets of stuff everywhere. They wave us down and Shadrach knows them. They've run off the road and two people are slightly hurt. An old, blind man has bumped his head and a woman has cut her lip somewhat seriously. They want us to carry the old man to the hospital but Shadrach does not want to. He says we can't care for him during the trip nor get him to a hospital. Instead we shine our lights on the van and help them push it out of the ditch. Then we start again. This is one of the ways that we are different than the Liberians. I believe the extreme hardship brought on by the war and economic disasters have brought on a more harsh sense of practicality than we have in the U.S. We finally make it to Buchanan and stop for a few minutes for Shadrach to rest and to add some fuel. I sleep a little on the trunk where I can stretch out. I don't realize my left leg has gone to sleep and jump off to get back in the car. I fall down on my knee as if I don't even have a leg. It's a weird sensation. Fortunately I only scratch my knee rather than breaking my leg.

Buchanan is over half way to Monrovia mileage wise but has a worse road. It's paved but has frequent and deep pot holes. The sprints and stops are shorter and harder for the next thirty or so miles and it's difficult for Shadrach to see the holes at night. If we can make it through this stretch we will reach the Firestone plantation where the roads are much better. It's grueling and very tiring driving for Shadrach requiring constant attention when he's the most tired.

Finally we reach the Firestone plantation after having gone through several U.N. checkpoints. The road is much better. We go through the main checkpoint (the one we had to walk through on the way out) and stop at the far end to wait on the truck. There is a foul smell and Shadrach explains that it is the rubber being harvested. Fred says it has that sour dairy farm smell and that's about the closest I can come to explaining it.

We make it the rest of the way home with no problem. It's about 3:15am or so. This has been a 15 hour journey this time compared to a 20 hour one on the way out. Take out the three hours for the truck trouble and rebel road blocks and we're down to 12 hours. I don't see how it can be done any faster given the road conditions. Two hundred miles divided by twelve hours would be an average of 17 mph.

We arrive at the house and Shadrach insists we take their room. They sleep with Gertrude's mother.

I wake about 7:30am and things are stirring outside. Our luggage is waiting and the water business is underway. I need to brush my teeth, shave and take a bath terribly.

A quick note about Gertrude's sisters while it's fresh in my mind. Josephine (JoJo) is 16 and the youngest. Next is Sarah (Baby Girl) at 20, Justine is 22, Gertrude is 29 (I think) and Philomena is 32 (I think) and is married to Jared. Gertrude also has an older brother and sister who are twins but I do not know their names or ages.

I'm thinking that we need to look at how best to utilize the trucks and other assets. There's several items (red oil, bananas, cassava, etc.) that have a five time markup between Karmo's Town and Monrovia. Shadrach also says that there are things (salt, soap, sugar, etc.) that the people in Karmo's Town need that is only available in Monrovia. Since the truck makes a trip each week to Greenville, they could start a wholesale system whereby they trade the villagers the staples they need in return for the goods that can be hauled to Monrovia and sold at a substantial profit. This would help to pay the costs of the children's village and other ministries. Unless the truck is already fully loaded, the vast majority of the income will be profit.

While I'm thinking the church house at 30' x 13.5 feet each for the main 18 benches at 15 feet each density levels we observed adults plus 2 lap babies on would mean about 928 many people standing and I'd say a more conservative each service would be 700



about it, Fred measured 75' with 52 benches at part and 10' x 48' with for the addition. At the in the front pews (13 a 13.5 feet pew) that person capacity plus the seated around the outside. estimate of attendance at - 800.

Wednesday, March 24, 2004

Today has primarily been for rest. We all shave and take a bath. The water is warm and I take a “Hollywood shower”. Probably the best I’ve felt since I got here.

I continue to move between the tremendous opportunities here and the infinite needs. The chance to have an effect on an entire area is difficult to bypass.

It is enjoyable to relax and lay around but it gets old pretty fast. A man comes to talk to Shadrach. It seems a woman from Karmo’s Town is in the local hospital. It might be a relative of Shadrach’s but I’m not sure. We go to the Monrovia Hospital with Shadrach, Skipper and the man to check on the lady. The hospital is orderly and clean given no air conditioning and little electricity. There’s no dignity in hospitals anywhere I guess and this one is no different. Several of the women in the room we visit have no tops on. They don’t seem to be concerned and neither does anyone else except Fred and me. We step outside with Skipper to wait. When we leave we drive deeper into town to find this woman’s relatives so they will know to check on her. It’s somewhat like Mexico City in that there are shanties everywhere. Skipper, Fred and I wait in the car for quite a while. There is a lady cooking under a nearby lean to. Skipper says it’s called DoKun (spelling is probably wrong) which is a Ghanaian dish made from corn soaked overnight in water then beat to a pulp while cooking. When they get some of the DoKun cooked the women take plastic wrap and package it up like little loaves of bread for sale. I guess this is how she makes enough money to feed her family.



We talk with Skipper a little about life in the city. He thinks that it is harder than living in the bush for most of the people. Everything must be purchased. The wood, charcoal, cassava, water...everything. In the bush you can grow what you need and harvest quite a bit from the surrounding forest areas.

Shadrach and the visitor come back and we drive home. It gets dark and there’s not much to do so we go to bed before 8:00pm.

Thursday, March 25, 2004

Fred and I are up at 4:00am. You can only sleep so long. We sit on the front porch and talk about the mission work and the money making end of it. It’s evident that Shadrach can use some help in administration of the Monrovia piece. He needs to concentrate on the ministry aspect and get someone else to do the business part. His support will dry up unless some accountability is added. We’re trying to find a time to talk with him without distractions.

Today we’re supposed to go by Ghana Airlines and confirm our flights for Sunday at 1:15pm. We have breakfast of eggs with onions, buttered bread and hot tea. Then we leave for Monrovia. Shadrach goes in and takes care of reconfirming and when he comes out they have told him that we leave at 9:00am Sunday. We’re not sure whether that means to check in and clear customs at 9:00 or to leave at nine. Shadrach says we will leave his house at 7:00am in any case.

Next we go to a car shop to get his air conditioner checks as it is not working. The shop is not able to get to it right now so we leave to go have the turn signals, which have stopped working, fixed. It turns out that it will take two or more hours to get them fixed and Gertrude calls concerned that Donald will miss his noon time medicine. So Shadrach sends Skipper with Donald home by taxi. After they leave we walk down to a restaurant called the Pizza Inn. It is a nice place with air conditioning (the only

building I've been in with A/C since arriving). They have table clothes and prices to match. Everything is \$10 U.S. or more. We all have chicken. Fred and I have ours with French Fries while Shadrach has his with rice (I'm pretty tired of rice). What they don't have here is pizza. When we ask they say it will make people sick. Not sure what that means but I think I will skip it anyway. The meal comes and the chicken is like our rotisserie chicken and is very good. But it's actually the French fries and ketchup that I'm most hungry for. The real purpose of coming here is to work through the financial numbers with Shadrach so we can get a realistic budget of their total operating costs and see how realistic the income projections for the current and requested business assets are. I start through the specific details of each ministry and other activity. Employees, salaries, supplies, etc. Every detail that I can think of is discussed. Shadrach has most of this information in his head but I have difficulty getting it in the manner that I need it for analysis. After about three hours I have most of it. We work through it and I think I can work up a comprehensive budget. But I'm afraid the numbers aren't going to work out anywhere close to supporting the day to day expenses. Fred and I talk extensively about the need to have accurate financial reporting in order to help him and to satisfy the supporters of this ministry. He says that he needs the help and has been praying for it. It will be a lot of work for all of us but it must be done.

The meal costs \$40 U.S. with tip but it might be the best money we've spent other than the revival decisions. I've been so busy talking with Shadrach that I've not eaten much of my chicken. Probably just as well as my stomach is not used to such big quantities over here and has shrunk.

The three of us walk back to his car and it's finished. We wait for Skipper who is coming back and then go home. We're just sitting around for the day as it's 5:00pm or so. I need to pick up something for Gayla, Luke and the girls. Maybe tomorrow we can go into town. Also, I will use Shadrach's laptop to set up the info I have into a spreadsheet format.

Friday, March 26, 2004

It is 6:30am and we leave in two days. We're much less busy in Monrovia so you think more about going home. Our prayers are centered around Ghana Airlines. If we miss the connection in Accra there's not another flight for a week.

I'm struggling with how to present Liberia and this mission to people at home. For the first three days I was astonished and bewildered but now I've adjusted to the routine and it seems almost normal. Of course we are protected from the worst of things. We have a bed to sleep in (all three of us), a decent house, food, water and a car. Most people are in a shack with little food and no transportation. Still, to try to communicate this country to someone else is very difficult. I've listened to missionaries before and it's obvious that I didn't get most of what they are trying to say.

The country of Liberia is similar to Tennessee in size. Monrovia has, at best guess, around 1.5 million people living in it. This is at least one-half of the entire population. They have high rise buildings, paved streets and other things just like Nashville. But there is no electricity, running water or sanitation. Electric generators are the only sources of power. Water is trucked in. Sanitation is nonexistent. Trash pickup is not available. Many high rise buildings are abandoned. The ones in use have windows removed for ventilation. The primary government buildings look like stuff we would be demolishing. People are everywhere. They walk or, if they have some money, they take buses that are packed so tightly that we would not put up with it. A trip of several miles is \$15 Lb (\$0.25 U.S.) but you sit in a minivan with perhaps 20 people plus some on top if there is a rack. The bathroom is wherever you chose to use it. Trash is dropped wherever you are. Fortunately there is very little packaging to create trash and anything that might serve as a container is kept. There are very few jobs. Shadrach thinks maybe one in ten have what we would consider a job. The rest sell anything they can

get their hands on. Food (bread, fish, corn, chicken, cassava, etc.) are carried up and down the street and sold. Anyone who can purchase a wheeled barrow can hire themselves out to carry loads for people who have money to buy heavy stuff. People buy small bags of cold water and sell it to people on the street. All of this effort is designed simply to gain enough money to eat the next day. Government regulation is almost nonexistent because the government doesn't have any money either. Corruption in prior administrations have prevented any upkeep of infrastructure that would be required to provide business opportunities that would, in turn, create jobs. In Monrovia you can't build a house or acquire land without buying it but there are no taxes, no business regulation, no health regulations. There is very little in overhead type costs. But everything must be purchased in the city. Food, water, and everything else must be purchased. You cannot live in Monrovia without money. (I do see a lot of shacks against buildings and in alleys that were probably not bought, just thrown up.)



In the bush the situation is desperate but different. Anyone who will work can grow their food, build their house and exist almost without money. There is absolutely no regulation or tax of any kind. You can trap game in the woods (monkeys, raccoons, ground hogs, etc.) but they're not that plentiful. The land is free to farm. You can build a house anywhere you please without asking anyone and with no regulation. If you need money you have to get something of value to the city. Red oil, bananas, plantains, coconuts, etc. usually increase in value. About a five times price increase from the bush to Monrovia. Oil, bananas, etc. are all examples of high profit margins. The problem is getting the goods to Monrovia. There are few trips in at all and you have to pay for the trip. Thus the profit from several gallons of oil would be used up just for the trip. If you're already making the trip anyway then it makes sense.



thrown in.

You can go to someone's house without permission, maybe even stay but sharing of food is not really practiced. I guess if you did there would never be enough for your family. If someone has something, like a piece of candy, they will eat it in front of you without even thinking to ask if you want any.

The other side of the situation is the richness of the country. It has a long coastline with at least four major ports. The interior is rich with timber, gold, diamonds and other natural resources.

The people are the biggest resource. They are literate to a fairly high percentage (I'm guessing the last 10 years have seen this diminish due to the war) and are far from lazy even though their ways are not ours. Their work is steady but at a slower pace. The older woman that farms part of the mission is an example. I'm guessing she has rice and other crops planted across 3-5 acres. It's not very dense planting but all is done manually. Every day she comes and works. She clears small amounts and hand plants the rice with a small garden spade. It takes about five months to complete the harvest. Soon she will have to build a solid fence around the entire crop to protect it from ground hogs. This will be done

using sticks, bamboo and other small material. Once the seed heads come out she will have to sit with the crop until it is ready for daylight and leave after dark each water around the seed heads which long string with cans with rocks in corners. When a bird comes she him off. She will also have at the birds with. Then she will it before it can be stored. All of very hot environment.



harvesting. She will arrive before day to keep birds from drinking the kills the plant. She will have a them attached running to the four will jerk the nearest string to scare something like a slingshot to shoot harvest the rice by hand and thresh this is done in direct sunlight in a

Some people have given up. Many in this group are the uneducated youth who were rebels. These are the kids that Shadrach hopes to get into school. Others are looking for any way to survive and are not above lying to you for assistance. But most of the people are only looking for a chance to work and improve their lives.

Business opportunities abound. The primary barrier is capital. The Liberian people do not have capital to invest in equipment and the infrastructure is nonexistent for the most part. Now would be a good time to invest in Liberia. Signs of improvement are already showing. I notice several of the burned out and uncompleted buildings have new roofs added. The U.N. has a firm presence and is spreading out to all the outlying areas. This stability will let good things happen.

We don't get up and around very early today and I feel restless. I need to get the rest of the info from Shadrach. As I'm writing this he comes up and says he's ready to go through it.

We need a bookkeeper willing to come to Monrovia for a few months to get this accountability and management reporting process going.

Shadrach brings me a copy of his projections for the ice and trucks. I can see why everyone is so excited. Net revenue is at \$176,000 U.S. I also think revenues are overstated and expenses understated but will need to get it into a projection in order to see for sure. I'll break all of this down using Shadrach's computer tonight. The ice is shown as the big money maker. The freezers are not working (I think there's a power problem but don't have enough sense to know why). I've asked Shadrach to take me to see an ice operation. We're supposed to do this today.

A construction manager for six months would be great as well as they seek to build the church and other buildings.

All transactions are cash. That is a nightmare for security and accounting. What do other businesses here do?

Handling cash is a pain. Here a wad of cash ¼ inch thick is \$1,000 Lb which is about \$15 U.S. Stacks of cash are kept everywhere. I wonder if a small safe would be useful.

The mechanic is putting some lifters on Shadrach's car to raise it up for additional ground clearance. It's a 1996 year model. The shocks seem to be worn out. We should send over a set.

Fred thinks the cost of shipping the 40' container (including delivery and pickup) was \$2,600. But the loss of the tax exempt status costs nearly \$5,000. This needs to get fixed before another container is shipped. They picked the container up from Chipley on December 19, 2003 and it arrived in Liberia around March 1, 2004.

I don't think that I've mentioned that there are bullet holes through the front door. You can see where they struck the wall inside the house. Can you tell that I'm a little bored?

The farming situation in the bush is interesting. A farmer goes into the woods, clears a three foot circle, puts two sticks in the shape of an "X" and from there forward a certain distance in both directions is his to farm. They farm a new piece of ground each year due to allowing the ground to rest. They will

not farm it again for at least three years. During that time it grows over with brush and must be burned and cleared again. This slash and burn type of farming is what the environmentalist hate the most. I can see why. But with no fertilizers I'm not sure what they can do. A solid parcel would help efficiency greatly but the soil may not support it.

The guys are playing a game of UpWords on the front porch. Someone tries to make the word "beeping" but there's a difference of opinion. One says "beping" while another "bepping" and another "bipping". The correct spelling comes when Shadrach brings his computer out and opens up MS Word.

Shadrach, Skipper, a lady and I went to see a local ice making business. We got inside the compound which was very orderly. They wouldn't let us stay as they didn't want the competition. I did see their setup. They had two refer trailers on the ground that they made the ice in. They had four compressor units and a room full of diesel generators powering them. It was a neat operation and well managed. This was all I could see before they threw us out.

Fred, Donald and I discussed the potential problems. 1) Power – are we getting the proper power? 2) Wiring – is it big enough to carry the required load? 3) Time – it might take three days to freeze the first time. We would like to test a single freezer out back by the generator (which would need to run 24 hours per day during the test) and have a direct line from the freezer to the fuse box. 4) Heat – all the freezers are flashing an overheat light. Perhaps an external fan pulling from the hot air vent? 5) Water temperature – start with cooler water. Right now they let it sit in the hot sun prior to bagging which raises the temperature quite a bit. I need some professional help with this refrigeration piece. I put a diagram of the rear out building in my notebook. Could these become walk in coolers? (Shadrach later says that he would have to get permission from the landlord who would then likely raise their rent.)

I need to get a record from Carl; Hadley of all money sent to Shadrach along with the dates it was sent. I want to see if the jeep and truck have been paying their way.

Shadrach asked us to go with him to visit his aunt. We go through a nicer part of town and his aunt's place is clean and neat but nothing fancy. She's well spoken. She says that Shadrach's mother(?) called yesterday from Benin where she had just arrived from Ghana(?). We sit on a bench provided and people begin to accumulate and talk much like happens in Suwannee. A boy shimmies up a coconut tree and cuts down a bunch of six coconuts. One of the men takes a machete and cuts the brownish-green husk off. Then Shadrach cuts the top off and it is full of water. All of us get one. We're to drink the water and then eat the softer coca meat. The water is a little funny tasting but is not sweet nor sticky (which is good for Fred as he has it all over himself). The "meat" is soft and not as good to me as a dry coconut. We're polite but Fred finds a way to give the rest to someone that doesn't have one. The truck driver walks by while we're sitting there and Shadrach offers to take him home. He lives in Dicksville which is a couple, or more, miles away. We go through a neighborhood of government housing which is laid out on squares with paved roads. This is the only place I've ever seen where government housing is nicer and better kept than private housing.

Shadrach needs to keep things clean at both places to enhance appearances and improve business.

Saturday, March 27, 2003

We're up at 5:00am this morning. It's already warm. Shadrach brought me his laptop last night so I could use it to put together an accurate picture based upon the information he has given me. The first rendition doesn't look good. With depreciation added it looks like they're running about a \$45,000 U.S. deficit. The water and jeep look like a deficit rather than an income generator. I need to go through all of these numbers with Shadrach today. When he gets back from the mechanic's we are supposed to go to town.

I feel better just knowing what the numbers are (preliminary). We can work through a solution as long as we have good information

Shadrach, Gertrude, Skipper, Fred, Donald and I all drive into town. On a cross street of Broad Street we turn toward the harbor. There are crowded stores and booths down both sides of the street for half a mile and on many of the cross streets as well. Shadrach wants to know what we want so they can buy it without us being in the store. They usually double the price to us. The problem is figuring out what we want so we can tell them. Over time we make some selections and they bargain the prices down. Four dresses and a shirt cost \$45 U.S. A wooden hanging map of Liberia is \$15. I get so hot and thirsty until I am willing to drink the hot water in the car. We finish up and head home. About 7:00am Shadrach and I get together to discuss the budget. We go through it extensively and he makes changes. The three primary changes are that 1) I had the exchange rate at 64:1 when it is actually 54:1. 2) The number of water bags sold per day is 3,000 not 1,500 as I had understood. 3) The jeep usage was much different and the resulting revenue significantly higher than I projected. All of the changes result in a decrease in the deficit to around \$12,000 U.S. We finally finish by going through the changes that might help. Ice production is better than water so Shadrach is to take one freezer out of water production and try to make ice by doing the following: 1) Put 200 water bags in and do not open the lid for three days, 2) Put a small fan drawing out of the exhaust panel of the freezer to help with cooling, 3) Run the generator 24 hours per day for the test period, 4) Start with as cool of water as possible by bagging the water in the shade as soon as it is received from the delivery boy and 5) If the first 200 bags freeze, leave them in the freezer and add 200 more and check back in two days to see if the cycle can be increased by having a frozen mass already in the freezer. I am to call Shadrach on Wednesday to check on the results of the first 200 bags.



We go to bed around 10:00pm but sleep comes slow. It is hot and anticipation of going home is high.

Sunday, March 28, 2004

I wake up at 1:00am and can't get back to sleep so I talk with Fred, who's also awake, about the generator. Shadrach says it is a three phase system and carries three times the rated 65 amps. Fred thinks that a three phase does fine with 115v stuff but not the other way around. I've mentioned to Shadrach that we can afford to buy another generator if the ice freezing works. That would allow each one to run only twelve hours per day.

I sit in the bathroom and read by the light for a while and finally go back to bed. Sometime I fall asleep and wake up at 5:30am. Everyone is up so we start taking baths and getting ready to eat. Although we have threatened Gertrude not to cook breakfast, she still brings hot tea, coffee, bread and eggs with onions. So we eat. We finish packing and take our bags to the front porch around 6:00am and wait. Shadrach comes out, eats his breakfast and we load up the car around 7:00am we leave the house for the airport. The ride is longer than I remember but the road is good. We go through Paynesville and see the sign for Liberia Baptist Seminary. I wanted to go by to see Dr. Lincoln Brownell but it didn't work out. I'll try him by email when I get home.

The quality of the homes and the beauty of the land improves greatly as we leave the city for the airport. It's more like plains with brush, grass and palm trees. In the distance you can see large forests. As we get closer to the airport we pass a Firestone bus picking up workers. We can also smell the pungent smell of rubber. We see a very large U.N. headquarters and large areas of tent houses which

were for the “displaced” Liberians during the war. Finally the airport comes in site and there are some planes there. The old terminal is shot up and burned. The newer terminal is smaller and less impressive but we don’t care as long as we get on a plane.

I talk with Shadrach about the import process. He says he has “duty free” status for one year but then talks about paying duty. It seems that you need to be very friendly with a good broker and the customs agent in order to avoid paying a lot of tax. I still don’t understand what we would have to pay if we shipped something.

We get here at 8:00am and Ghana Air doesn’t open until 9:00am (so much for leaving early). We sit under some shade trees on benches. A bird poops and just misses me. I move.

As we’re sitting on the benches we hear some of the U.N. Peace Keepers having a church service. They are singing and clapping. Most of the songs are familiar hymns. It’s a comforting sound.

We sit around until after 10:00am before they let us enter the airport. Shadrach tries to go through with us but they have tightened up the security and turn him back. We’re on our own. At the ticket counter we find out that we have to pay a \$15 U.S. airport tax. They have no change, of course, so Fred and I come up with the right change for two. Then we start through immigration. First one desk, then to a second desk. Then we’re told to go through the door but are turned back to pay the \$25 U.S. immigration fee. They don’t have any change, of course. I pay mine and Fred’s but this still requires change. Donald comes over and he only has a Traveler’s Cheque, which they will not take. So I pay his as well but still need \$5 back in change so I wait while a guy tries to find change. After an extended time he comes back with change. I now have \$5 to my name and I’m thousands of miles from home on a third world continent. Let’s hope no one else needs money.

I wonder if orange groves would be lucrative enough to make them worth planting? Maybe it would be better to just buy them from others.

We leave Monrovia almost on time and fly straight to Accra skipping Abidjan entirely. It amazes me how they change schedules with no advance warning. We arrive in Accra less than two hours later.

Upon arrival we go upstairs to our, now familiar, transit office and get in line for our boarding pass to Baltimore. Ben, our Liberian friend from North Carolina, comes by and says he’s upset because we’re not leaving until tomorrow morning instead of 11:30pm tonight. This will cause him to miss his connection to North Carolina. This delay is news to us. When we get to the desk sure enough the plane will not arrive until early in the morning. Now we start through the customs mess again. They want \$20 for the temporary visa. Everyone is mad and refuses to pay so we can’t go to a hotel. I don’t mind staying here but some food and water would be nice. I’m not hungry but you never know. Fred and I walk down the hall and the Duty Free shop is selling large, cold bottles of water for \$1 U.S. each. Fred buys three bottles and gives the lady his \$100 bill. She doesn’t have change but calls for some. She tells us to go sit down and she will bring it to us. Fred would rather wait. We wait quite a while and finally the change comes. She owes Fred \$97 but only has \$96. “Why don’t you buy something else,” she says? So we get a Snickers bar for \$1.

The roar in the waiting room rises and falls with the frustration of the passengers. Right now it is rising. About half the people have left for the hotel. They had African passports so they didn’t have to pay for the temporary visa. Everyone with a U.S. passport (a surprising number of the Liberians did) had to pay the \$20 to get a visa. A woman comes over and lobbies us not to pay the amount. Then she wants us to all go up to the desk and demand that we get an explanation. We stay near the back of the mob so we can deny everything if bloodshed begins. The poor lady at the desk is only a clerk and cannot get anyone higher up to help her with the problem. She says she will go up to the office and try

to find some cash to pay everyone's \$20 fee. The mob is afraid she will not come back (I know I wouldn't have) so they won't let her leave.

We decide to walk down to a little shop that sells Danishes and drinks. Fred and Donald get a Danish but I eat three bags of crushed Cheese Nips and drink a Coke. I'm really still full from the chicken dinner on the flight from Monrovia. If they can get everyone else into a hotel I believe I can get a good night's sleep on a couch.

If we can get off by 8:00am tomorrow I should get to Baltimore by 2:00pm EST. Then a flight to Nashville (depending on the timing). And I could be there by 6:00pm. Not what I wanted but not that bad. I'm pretty calm about the delay as long as it doesn't go beyond tomorrow morning. I am missing Gayla and the kids. More now that it is (was) closer.

The natives are growing restless again with a lot of shouting and threatening. I write the ticket lady a note saying the three of us will stay here tonight but would appreciate a meal if possible. Then we leave for a Danish and some quiet. After a while we decide to go back to the waiting room. People are now screaming and beating their empty water bottles on the counter. It's getting pretty ugly. After a while most of the angry ones got their temporary visas and are off to the hotel. Reasonable quiet returns for those of us still here (about 25 of us). They bring in a meal and bottled water. It's the same chicken, rice and salad that we had the last time we were stuck here. We eat and then bed down. I'm quickly asleep.



I forgot to mention that the boy in the Duty Free shop said we could use his cell phone to call home for \$75,000 (\$8 U.S.). Fred calls Cathy to let her know of our delay and she is to call Gayla and Margaret. It's about a three minute call.

Monday, March 29, 2004

It's 4:00am and the phone in the waiting area is ringing. My first thought is that I didn't get my boarding pass back from the lady (she wanted it last night when she had food brought in). I worry about it for a minute or two then get up. I look in my backpack for my camera and there is my ticket. Fred later tells me that the ticket lady woke me up and gave it to me last night shortly after I went to sleep. I can't remember it at all.



I talk with Fred for a few minutes. The lady in the couch to my right wakes, sits up and begins singing and clapping. Then she stands up and begins speaking in a loud voice. Maybe she's praying. I can't understand the language. Anyway, it's loud and 5:00am. Some of the people not already awake are awake now. The Ghana Air people had said that the plane was to leave at 8:00am. No plane yet.

I'm thinking about the (in)efficiencies of the Liberian people. As mentioned earlier, the women seem to have a steady work flow that continues throughout the day accomplishing a good amount. This is especially true given the extremely manual processes they use. The men, on the other hand, are harder to gauge. Many of them seem to spend most of the day sitting around talking. It's the women who cook, clean and, as far as I can tell, farm. I think the clearing of the land, logging, building,

etc. are all done by the men but there wasn't much of this going on during our stay. Also, anything to do with vehicles is handled by the men. There seems to be a lot of time available that the men could use more efficiently. Division of duties, delegation, etc. aren't very evident among the men. Perhaps the culture is one of the plantation owner type. But preparing ahead of time doesn't seem to matter. If three things must be done prior to an event, they don't start until time for the event. No concept of preparing for the unexpected that I can see.

Neatness and orderliness are also not high on the priority list. Trash is thrown down where it occurs. The cooking area and indoors is swept once per day and the accumulated trash and dirt is piled up nearby.

Maximizing the use of land and other assets is not practiced to the extent we are used to in the United States. Perhaps the lack of fertilizer prevents a more structured farming method. Planting fruit trees for the future doesn't seem to be a priority.

I think the guest house needs to be finished to give Shadrach and Gertrude a more normal living environment. Don't muzzle the ox. Getting the pump hooked up to the water tower and some indoor plumbing would be a real improvement.

At about 6:35am they announce we are to move to the gate area. This should be the final move prior to boarding. One more step.

I should make a list of things that need to be accomplished and assign some priority to each. Some of my own medicine would be a good thing.

We board around 7:15am and then wait until nearly 9:00am to leave. They have five unaccounted for passengers. I haven't seen Joe and Cindy, the couple from Orlando. They had come from Sierra Leone and had been delayed three times already. I hope they make it. They finally went to the hotel last night to get some rest.

We are served breakfast (at least it's not chicken) of scrambled eggs, potato hash, beans (like in pork and beans) and a tomato, all hot. Also included is a roll, croissant and fruit cocktail. I have hot tea. I've eaten small quantities for a while now and somewhat infrequently while in Africa. Yet now I find myself eating more out of habit. While not hungry, I eat anyway. I would like to know my weight before gaining anything back (the day after getting back I weigh at Chuck's and am 193 lbs which is 14 lbs less than when I left).

It's curious how you change and adapt over such a few days. Initially each change in location brought an overload of feelings. The check in process and delay out of Baltimore began our education as did the boarding process. Then the arrival in Accra (we didn't deplane in Banjul, The Gambia on the way in) loaded our senses up again. Hearing your plane depart while you are standing in line to check in (and being told the next one is in 2.5 days) together with the ensuing riot helped us understand that things were different. The arrival in Monrovia to a crowd of people, most with automatic weapons, adds more data to process. The devastation of the city, even at night, is overwhelming. Staying at a house with no water, no electricity, etc. and with people sleeping all over the place adds still more. Then a twenty hour journey to go 200 miles, not being able to purchase a tire or tube in the county capital, and other such things continue the disbelief. Seeing people so desperate for transportation that they will sleep on the ground for 1.5 days while waiting, endure the twenty hours crowded like cattle with little or not food and yet be grateful for the opportunity is tremendous. Then Karmo's Town and the children's village in general. Mostly bamboo, dirt floors, outside cooking, well water, no electricity and all those people. But then you start to accept things. You become used to the people being different (actually we're the ones who are different). You don't really think about being white as much. The lack of sanitation isn't as offensive nor is the slower pace. You just start to accept things and they seem fairly normal. Going back to Monrovia is the same. The trip is not the same (except that the rebel checkpoint

still bothers you). Back in Monrovia we start to get bored because we're used to things. Even Market Street on Saturday is not alarming. We watch people and look at stuff but it seems routine somehow. Maybe I have some Liberian blood in me and can "adapt to anything in a week".

The plane descends into Banjul, The Gambia and there's a big lake or an inlet from the ocean below. The land looks pretty dry with sparse growth. The green spots seem to be irrigated. The rest is bare ground.

There's a lot of houses but not like in Accra. As we're coming in they announce that everyone has to deplane with your carry on and go through security due to U.S. immigration rules (at first they said African Aviation rules). So we take our stuff, get on a bus and head for the terminal. It's a nice, modern air conditioned terminal and the trip through immigration isn't too bad. Fred has trouble with his disposable cameras but keeps all but the one new, unused one. He'll have to tell that story. We're back on board and, based on our trip through the terminal, it looks like there are a lot of passengers coming. I hope for some seats left to stretch out and sleep on but it turns out that nearly every seat on the entire plane is full. It takes eight hours from Banjul to Baltimore but we finally make it. It's not a bad flight but incredibly boring.

We make it to Baltimore and start the process of clearing customs. I think it's harder to get back into the U.S. than to get into most other countries. As we go through the U.S. customs guy asks what my purpose to Liberia was. I say that it was missionary work. He asks which church and I tell him. "Southern Baptist" he asks and I say yes. He says that if it had been to Chile he would have known I was a Southern Baptist. We pick up our luggage and head up to the domestic ticket counters to find a way home. Fred and Donald stop at the United counter and I go down to the Southwest. The lady sets me up for a flight in 20 minutes if I can make it. If not, I have to wait two more hours. I run back to where Fred and Donald are, tell them I'm leaving and get my picture frame from Donald (it wouldn't fit in my suit case). I run as fast as possible to the gate which is a long way away. I make it through the security checkpoint and to the gate and the flight is still boarding. I have to get a ticket and pay an upgrade but I make it and still have a couple of minutes to call Gayla and tell her when to pick me up. I board the plane and settle in. 1 hour and 45 minutes later I'm in Nashville. As I walk out I meet Gayla and Lizzy. It is wonderful to see them. We pick up my bag and head home.

Now, if I could only figure out how to communicate this trip to everyone back home.