

Last week, 50kms outside Garissa, driving into North Eastern Province, I felt buoyant.

- Kelly and kids (even Katie) were all aboard (dads with their kids are like generals with their armies around them).
- The Land Rover was running excellently.
- I was armed with an exciting “to do” list - some significant big picture stuff for Kelly and I like introducing 2 ladies (nurses from Germany with much Somali experience) to Dadaab and to the possibility of using our centre as a long-term base - and some smaller jobs for our “soldiers” like delivering sanitary pad packs to school girls, painting and cleaning (our boys didn’t get involved with the sanitary pads).

40kms outside Garissa the surprises began (good and bad).

- 1st - We stopped at a Somali village to buy charcoal and got a flat tire. No surprise there as the tires are the Landy’s weakest component - I’m approaching Indy 500 tire changing efficiency.
- 2nd - Halfway through the change (being witnessed by every village kid) a gust of wind that only the desert can produce slammed into the vehicle and I watched helplessly as it rolled off the jack (I’d only rocked one side of a tire).
- 3rd – Beckoned by the beautiful evening, Kelly and the girls had walked on ahead down the road (assuming the boys and I could handle the tire change). But some nomads suspected them of being connected with a white woman who, with the help of candy, had kidnapped one of their children last month. What? So the boys and I, now back on the road, found them being “guarded” by an opportunistic nomad (he needed a ride).
- 4th – The telling of their Hans Anderson-like story was cut short by ominous bangings from the recently replaced wheel. I stopped and spotted a large stick jammed into the coil spring (a gift from the village kids and the cause of the trouble no doubt). But back at speed, the banging resumed and just as I was pulling over again the whole wheel flew off.
- 5th – Even nightmares contain comic scenes. As our wheel overtook us and headed into the bush on the far side of the road Kelvin commented from the back of the careening truck: “Now that’s cool.” More humour was provided by the nomad jumping out, fetching the wheel and optimistically jamming it back into the empty wheel well – all to the mantra of “No problem, no problem...”. “If only things were so easily fixed,” I thought while surveying (by flashlight) the poor brake disc and buckled up rear end.
- 6th – A tanker truck stopped and the Somali driver stayed to help, even after my deflated, no-longer-buoyant manhood insisted I could handle it. Wheel on, he escorted us into Garissa. Thank God for Adan Ugeys - a Somali angel!

- 7th – It was now 10pm, I was completely beat after 3 weeks with a short-term team, the quick turn-around back to NEP and the last 40kms, but the hotel had held the rooms for us. Thank God the Nomad Palace (they even have brewed coffee now)!
- 8th – The next day after repairs we had two more flat tires on the way to Dadaab. There are only two spares so I held my breath for the final stretch, hoping the remaining tires would do the same and wondering what in the world was going on.
- 9th – Katie and Kara got to help a doctor friend with cleft lip operations in Dadaab (until light-headedness took over). I got to fetch a 3 year-old cleft lip patient from a new-to-me settlement 60kms outside of Dadaab and return him and his father (with a load of mosquito nets) the next day after the operation – lots of new relationships, lots of desert driving and no more punctures! We were given an incredible goat feast at a friend’s house. Some of the jobs got done. The boys had a couple of good soccer games. And the German ladies liked Dadaab!
- **10th – One afternoon though, when Kelly and Katie were walking down a village path some large stones were very forcibly thrown at them from behind a fence. Most missed but one hit Kelly in the arm and another on her back. Prejudice bruises the soul even more than the body we found.**

When you’re old hands you don’t expect such an intense and surprising trip. We’d forgotten Peter’s words: *“Dear friends, don’t be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you.”* He then gives 2 instructions we found profound and practical:

1. *“But **rejoice** that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be even more joyful when his glory is revealed.”* When I told my Muslim friends in Dadaab about our string of “bad luck” they said, “When that happens to us we call a sheikh to read the Qur’an over us – that breaks the cycle.” Such advice at once appeals to that hard-to-shake, religious, appease-the-gods mentality we all know. “This is my fault or an attack and I need to get myself out of it,” I began to think. But the gospel will have none of that! No, we are to respond to trials with joy. Though they physically weaken us (and how!), they spiritually strengthen us (only realized after recovery), remind us of Jesus (our real Sufferer), reveal that we’re actually affiliated with him and on the right track, work for us (not against us), and get us banking on future dividends.

2. *“...do not be **ashamed**...”* Kelly was amazed at the sense of shame that hit her along with the stones. Those rocks represented a lie and a judgment she was tempted to accept. The worldview that condemned Jesus was pervasive and pointed, but, though he was an obedient sufferer, he was not a willing one and he despised the shame. The praying we needed to do was not about appeasing God but opposing lies – getting our eyes off ourselves and onto God (“My God, my God, why haven’t you forsaken me?”).

God bless you all – for no doubt you are in the midst of trials of every size and shape.

FINAL ITEMS:

- The school farm in Garissa is up and running and harvesting.
- The Dadaab Community Services Group continues to move in the right direction towards development and God. Please pray for the members.
- Yattani and I are at a conference and exposure time in Lebanon June 12-22 (I'm taking Kara who has a heart for Muslims and the conference is on youth issues).
- Our kids finished school well – Kenan did a year-end test to determine his level – he's going into grade 5 – unimaginable back in January – Kelly is a gifted teacher and plans to continue with the half day home schooling hybrid next year.
- Tension is mounting in Kenya as we approach the August referendum on the new constitution.
- We need more short and longer-term volunteers to help in NEP.

Many thanks for your faithful support,

Paul and Kelly

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