

MARCH 2020



(This prayer letter is written partly by Chad and partly by Dan)

Hello all,

It seems like a very long time since the last prayer letter. So much has happened in the past two weeks here in The Gambia, though we recognise that we have been shielded from so many events that have been taking place in the UK.

Shortly after the last prayer letter, in recognition of the halfway point of our trip, we visited Boboi. This is a beach resort in southern Gambia, close to the border with Senegal. Accommodation ranges from the more standard mud huts to tree top houses with a simple mattress to sleep on. Our activities varied from attempting surfing to a rather longer than expected walk to the Senegalese border. The walk - which I proposed as a pleasant 8km round trip - quickly turned into a 9km one way journey (I'm going to have to work on my map reading skills before September!). Luckily we were saved by Ed who arranged a return taxi back from a small fishing village. The night away offered us time to reflect on the successes of the previous two and a half months so that we know how to make the most of the second half of our trip.



Breakfast at Boboi



Treehouse at Boboi

That same weekend, an inter-school sports championships took place at the Independence Stadium. Sophia and I had the joy of witnessing our former school win the competition as the girls' relay team crossed the line in first place. As the last official school event that we were attending, it was a fitting send off to the ten very enjoyable weeks we had at Latrikunda.

Luckily though, after every ending there is a new beginning. For me that was a few days off from teaching where I could visit the Gambian National Beekeepers' Association and bottle some honey for the team. Sophia, working hard as ever, went straight into joining Tom and Ellie at Greater Banjul School as an English teacher. Of the two days Sophia has been there she has thoroughly enjoyed it.

Coronavirus has been of huge concern in The Gambia on a health level however the Government has now started to introduce pre-emptive measures. A week last Tuesday we were told that our schools would be shutting their doors and large gatherings would be banned.

This has naturally given us a lot more time on our hands so we have turned our minds to other activities. At the house we are now having a 8.30am prayer meeting led by a different team member each day. We are also trying to do some practical work around the house. Ed and I have been learning to concrete under the careful eye of Mr Modou, our handyman. We have also all been scraping the paint off the walls in preparation for using 80 litres of paint.



Boy's relatively unsuccessful fishing trip

Free time has also given us the opportunity to explore The Gambian a bit more. The girls have enjoyed a quiet coffee afternoon in Senegambia, the local tourist area, while the boys attempted a fishing trip on the River Gambia. We returned with two quarter pound fish (one of which we were advised not to eat) and a bag full of oysters that our captain had picked for us. Dan would want me to mention that it was him who caught the 'only fish on a rod' after reeling in his line to see if he still had bait on. Clarice expertly cooked the oysters for us that night and they were delicious.

Over the past week we also had the pleasure of having Sarah's childhood friend, Mairi, come to visit us. Mairi led a brilliant seminar on assurance. Having Mairi over was a breath of fresh air and we all really enjoyed having her to stay. On Saturday, after a few stressful days when her first flight was cancelled, she managed to get a flight home - after she probably worried she would be stuck with us for a few months!



Girl's outing to cafe in Senegambia

(Dan is taking over the letter from here)

Sadly, also on Saturday, we had to say goodbye to Chad who has now returned to the UK (but not before a final quick game of 'Mango Stick'). This firstly means a new writer to the second half of this letter. It also means we'll have no one to make sure we go to collect our water at the right times! Chad will be really missed by the whole team. He was such a blessing to have on the team and we will be praying for him as he settles back into a much changed UK. Thankfully we were able to have a leaving party before he left, where many of his teachers and friends were able to come and say goodbye (although I think Chad really wanted it as an excuse to buy another goat to kill for the meal and add the skin to his growing collection of animal skins to take home!)



Chad's leaving party

Like in the UK, churches over here have made the decision to suspend services during this time. This did however enable us to virtually join St Leonard's, Exeter (Ellie's home church) on Sunday morning, which thankfully wasn't too much for our wife to handle. It was really nice to be able to do this, especially for Ellie to be reunited with church family - even if it is through a computer screen!

On Monday, Tom and Sophia headed up to Tubakuta and really enjoyed spending the night with the Algeo family to help entertain their children Phoebe and Arthur for two days (although I think they entertain us as much as we do them!). The rest of the team (sadly minus Ed and Sarah) joined them the next day thanks to a lift from our favourite American, Katie, and her reliable companion Chabou

(her car). We had a really helpful seminar on the Holy Spirit from Nick Algeo before we had a tight match of volleyball with the students who are still living at SOW (Servants of the Word School of Ministry)

Yesterday, we had a lovely day with David, a student from SOW, learning how to paint Batik (pictured at the top of the page). Although some designs were more interesting than others, we all came out with a bit of Batik art to take away with us. It was a lovely way to spend most of the day, especially getting to know David much better.

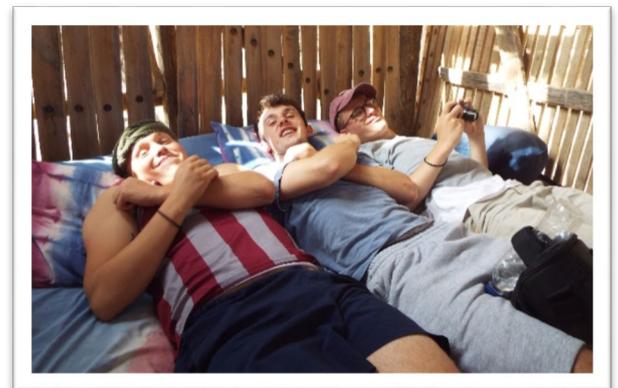


Unfortunately, the more coronavirus spreads, the more uncertain the rest of our stay here will be. It is likely we'll be returning home sooner than first intended but flights are uncertain at the moment so it's difficult not knowing how long we have left here. We've also introduced strict social distancing rules for the team and compound. Please pray that we'll make the most of every day we have here and not dwell on what we could miss out on. We have been reading Esther with the GamFES staff the last few weeks and it's so encouraging to us during the current situation. Although God is not mentioned in the book, you can see his hand constantly as work. Though so much is so uncertain for us and everyone in the world during this time, nothing is uncertain with God and he has a plan for his people.

Love from Dan, on behalf of the team

Thank God for:

- The lovely break and rest we were able to have in Boboi last week.
- Answered prayer that Chad and Mairi were able to get a flight home before all the flights were suspended.
- David and his Batik talents and his clear faith in God.
- The Algeo family for being such an encouragement to the whole team in their character and their reliance on God.
- Ellie's wrist pain has resolved.



Boys in their treehouse

Pray for:

- Chad as he returns to the UK as he settles back in, that he'll continue to serve Christ in all that he decides to do back home.
- That we'll continue to learn from our bible studies and seminars.
- That we'll make full use of time here despite schools being shut.
- That we'll always remember that God is in control even when it really doesn't seem like it.