

NOTES FROM THE FIELD

AUGUST 2009 | RWANDA



August 2009 Entry

RWANDA RE-IMMERSION

Since we were not anxious to leave Rwanda in January, we were greatly looking forward to returning in June. The Land of a Thousand Hills did not disappoint us.

Our re-immersion into Rwanda on May 30th was smooth and comforting. There were many familiar faces and surroundings which genuinely welcomed us back to our Rwanda home. Fellow expat friends, the Bennetts, picked us up at the airport while the Sheers had stocked our refrigerator. Professor Barongo was finalizing curriculum activities for the soon-to-be-completed first year of the Family and Community Medicine (FAMCO) program and preparing the schedule for the second year of this pioneer program. The seven FAMCO postgraduates were actively engaged at Ruhengeri and Kabgayi District Hospitals and eager to participate in bedside teaching and finalize their abstracts for the World Organization of Family Doctors (WONCA) Africa meeting. All the postgraduates and faculty wanted their PDAs (personal digital assistants)! Bob's business partners and mentees had new ideas and opportunities to explore, and positive progress with ongoing deals.

There had been, of course, many changes during our four months of absence. Donner and Blitzten, the two dogs at our house, had been very ill and Blitzten had died. The Dean of the Faculty of Medicine (medical school) was being replaced and our project coordinator was resigning. A new, bigger water line was being laid to our section of the city. The airport had a partial remodel including the opening of the third Bourbon Coffee (modern upper end coffee café) in Rwanda. The house under construction on which Bob is consulting was completed.



June through August has been busy for the Rwanda Medical Training Initiative (RMTI). Five visiting faculty have taught, with a heavy focus on the FAMCO postgraduates: Dr. John Cohen, Dr. Gretchen Heinrichs, Ms. Cindy Rapp (ultrasonographer extraordinaire), Dr. Jim Smith, Dr. Frank deGruy. Dr. Heinrichs, obstetrician-gynecologist and Global Health Track Co-Director, spent the month of July with the ob-gyn and FAMCO postgraduates. Two family medicine educators from Kenya, Dr. Bruce Dahlman and Dr. Bill Bevins, also visited to explore how they could facilitate family medicine development in Rwanda.

Rwanda, Land of
a Thousand Hills

UCD Global Health Track medical students Amy Willis and Ben Deaton spent six weeks getting the PDA project off the ground and moving forward. I provided bedside ward teaching at both Ruhengeri and Kabgayi in addition to working with Dr. Herbert the FAMCO coordinator on all the details for all these folks, and brain storming with Prof. Barongo on the next steps for the FAMCO program.



Amy Willis, a UC Denver medical student working with Dr. Gabriel, a Rwandan post-graduate physician, on how to use a PDA as a clinical reference tool.

Bob has taken on additional projects. Since a friend was leaving for a few months in the States, Bob has taken over managing two rental houses, mentoring the assistant manager for the houses and sorting out the future of an internet cafe. His business partners and mentees have taken on another partner, and are moving forward with successful business proposals. The Kumbya eco-resort project is moving forward and looking for investors so the actual development may begin. Oh yes, we also moved to a different house, just two streets away, since the family for our house returned to Rwanda, while another family left for a year in the States. This house has more pets – 1 bird, 2 dogs, 3 cats and 6 kittens.

Amidst all this business, we were invited to attend the annual missionary retreat at Kumbya – yes, the proposed eco-resort site on Lake Kivu. Needless to say, Bob was excited to both see this exotic location and force his wife to give up (most of) work for a few days. After four hours of really bad dirt roads, we arrived at Kumbya. This haven is a peninsula off of the southern half of deep blue Lake Kivu with monkeys, exotic birds, swimming, boat rides, great bucket showers and no internet! So, yes, we enjoyed three days of refreshment, fellowship and rejuvenation. Bob also realized the challenge for potential vacationers to reach this location. Addressing this will be a concurrent issue with investment raising for the missionaries Bob is advising on resort development.

As the dust settles and we reach the mid-point of our six months in Rwanda, there are good changes to report. The seven FAMCO postgraduates will begin their second year of the program in September fully committed to family medicine and with three abstracts accepted at two WONCA meetings – Europe and Africa. Prof. Barongo feels empowered to aggressively work with the Ministry of Health for full support of the FAMCO program by the Ministry, and our abstract was also accepted for WONCA Africa. A new dean has been elected who wants to continue work with UCD and the vice-deans with whom we have developed relationships (and really like) have been re-elected. All the postgraduates and faculty heads in all the specialties have received their PDAs and one-third have consented to be in our PDA-use research study. Bob's management of rental houses will end in mid-September!

Our final three months in Rwanda promise to be busy and worthwhile. So, there will be more tell...

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Dr. Bardella and husband Bob at Nyuengwa National Park