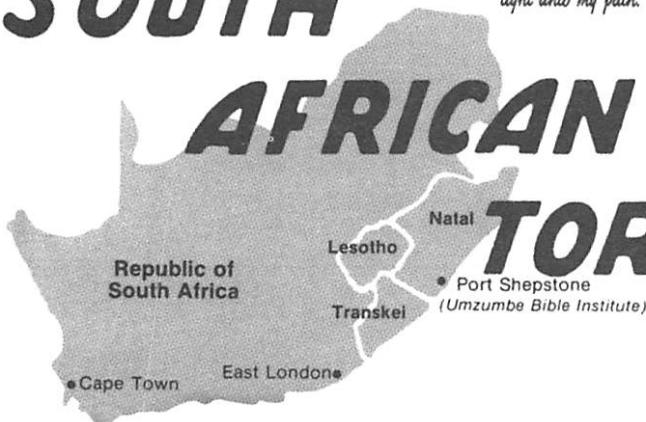


SOUTH AFRICAN TORCH

"Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path." --Psalms 119:105



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Easter by Michael Stanley

Easter is a major event for African Christians. This year Christians from all over KwaZulu Natal gathered at Shikishela (near Mtubatuba) for the Easter weekend. The venue was a school with the addition of a large tent which was erected on the sports ground. I was not happy about their electrical connection but fortunately there were no accidents or injuries.

The first meetings went well. The schedule for Friday was well established – preaching on the Seven Words of Jesus from the cross. The enormous task of feeding about 500 people was handled well and the early hiccups were quickly dealt with. During the next 24 hours singing filled the gaps between sermons. The usual lessons were taught.

It was on Saturday when the elections were held that serious cracks appeared. There was an unusually large number of people who refused nomination (including me since we were planning to return to the States before the end of the year). People were elected according to the requirements of the draft constitution, but this did not satisfy everyone. The ministers wanted all of the officers to be ministers even though there were not enough ministers to rotate into new positions. This caused confusion and some were even angry because they felt the elections were being rigged. After a lengthy debate the decision was made to accept the elected chairman who was a minister. A final decision on the others was deferred to the next Province wide meeting (July).

The elections were a reflection of a rift that has developed in church leadership. The ministers met certain requirements to be recognized as ministers. Now they are trying to maintain that standard. Unfortunately circumstances have changed over the last twenty years. A new generation of leaders has not had the same opportunities that the older generation had. In the mean time we need a functioning body of leaders who are recognized as such. We pray that God will grant grace to navigate through issues that threaten to divide the church. Please pray with us.



Israel Mfeka often serves as Michael's interpreter and the Easter meetings gave them a lot of time together.

School ministry – Magog Primary School

Last year the Magog Primary School staff asked Michael if he would do devotions for them like he has been doing for the local high school for the past few years. He decided to volunteer me for the job! We decided that he would take me to the primary school, he would go to the high school and then he would come back for me. So I started doing a Bible lesson for the grade seven children. There were 30 students last year.

This year I arrived to speak to the grade seven class and found that there were 48 students packed into the classroom! I have spoken to them about Old Testament heroes. The school wants me to speak English to the students in an effort to help them learn English. I am not sure how effective that is, but I pray that they are learning more about God and his plan for their lives. Pray for the students and for me to make my lessons meaningful and helpful to them. What a blessing to have the opportunity to speak about God in a public school. When we return to the U.S. later this year I have asked a lady from the church to continue the lessons.



The word overcrowding took on new meaning when we were introduced to the group of grade 7 students. All 48 are in one classroom!

Easter Anecdote

Caryl and I arrived in the afternoon with the help of GPS. We found the school (even though GPS took us on some bad rural roads that I had never seen before). We were told that Mrs Mashaba had prepared a room for us. The challenge was to find her house. GPS did not help us as it could not identify the dirt tracks we had to drive on. When I asked people for directions I was not sure which dirt track I was to take. I drove until I was sure I was on the wrong road then returned to an intersection near the school. Again I asked for directions. I drove until I ran out of dirt track. To turn around I had to drive into someone's yard. When a man appeared I again tried to get directions, but the man spoke only broken English. A woman came out and as she approached the pickup her face broke into a big smile and she greeted me by name (Mfundisi Stanley). I had no idea who she was but I found out that she knew me from youth camp. Suddenly we were "found" and among "friends." She asked her brother to go with us and show us the way. As the crow flies we were very close to our destination – by road it was significantly further. We quickly learned to identify the tree where we had to turn.



At one stage part of the tent collapsed because of wind. Reconnecting the tent involved an amazing level of acrobatics.

Family News

The April birthday party was lots of fun! Gabriella planned it with a Western theme so we all wore our denims and boots (more “winter” boots than cowboy boots since that is all we have). There were cowboy hats and guns to complete the outfits. We played family games and enjoyed a meal of sloppy joes, salads and, of course, our traditional home-made, hand-cranked ice cream.

I was admitted to hospital on the 26th of June and had my appendix removed on the 27th. I was released from hospital on the 28th - my birthday. Michael and I stayed with Diane and John for 2 nights and then spent the weekend with Dina (who is a nurse) and Sean. It was good to get back home and I recovered well and was soon back to all of my normal activities.

Rebecca finished all of her studies for grade 12 and has gotten her certificate. She is not sure of what she wants to do or study so she is looking for a job in the meantime. She is very involved as a volunteer with National Sea Rescue Institute. They provide emergency assistance for swimmers and boaters in the ocean and rivers and also for people who face emergencies while hiking in the mountains.



Michael and Caryl joined in the fun of dressing up for the Western-theme birthday party in April.

The three little girls are at the age where they are losing their baby teeth. Chayah is 8, Erin is 7 and Seanna just turned 6. Dawn says the tooth fairy is going bankrupt! Presumably Matthew, who will be 6 in October, will also join them soon.

Seanna fell recently - she and Matthew were skidding in the sandbox and she fell and sat on her leg. She damaged soft tissue. She had to have her leg immobilized and she had to learn to walk with crutches.



Seanna fell and damaged soft tissue in her leg. She had to have a back slab and crutches for a few weeks.

Overseas Visitors

In April we had a short but wonderful visit from Bill and Verna Weber. They are former South African missionaries who are special friends. While they were here we were also able to have all of our family here for a braai (barbecue) so they could see our girls and meet our sons-in-law and grandchildren.

We talked a lot with Bill and Verna in the couple of days they were with us. The Webers are involved with missionaries throughout Africa now and gave us some great advice regarding our future plans. We are so thankful for their advice and encouragement.



When Bill and Verna Weber came to visit we mixed business with pleasure. We had plenty of time to visit and strategize.

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Day care center (Sinothando Creche)

Our main teacher left without any notice in mid-May. Michael met with her after she left, but she did not give a satisfactory explanation for her departure.

The parents met and one of the moms agreed to be the teacher, but then she backed out two days later. Michael decided to ask people to apply for the job and he got two applications. They were interviewed and both were good candidates. In the end he hired both of them. The day care center has grown and we now have 32 children attending. About half of the children are still in diapers so Zuzile and Nomfundo take care of them and Busi and Sanelisiwe teach the older children.



The two new teachers have their hands full teaching the older children.



The lawn at Umzumbe Bible Institute provides a good place for the children to run and play.