

Letters from Africa
By
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Introduction

The following letters began with a friend's brainstorm and sacrifice. Ruth Metzger, from Church of the Open Door, wrote to me midway through our second missionary term in Kenya. Would I be willing to write a monthly letter, telling about our life as missionaries, for her to reproduce and distribute to the women in her Sunday School class? Not a prayer letter exactly; just some descriptive information about everyday occurrences and the circumstances of remote area living.

I agreed; she faithfully deciphered and typed and distributed. We thought others might enjoy the collection, so here it is.

June 1991

Dear Ruth and Ladies,

Shall I give you a brief introduction to Colin McDougall and Rebecca Beaty? I grew up as an MK (missionary kid) in Central America, and Colin grew up in La Mirada, CA. We met at Biola in one of his dad's English Literature classes. His dad was my favorite teacher and I figured his son must be pretty neat, with a dad like that. Besides, Colin wrote such fascinating articles for the school newspaper!

My only hesitation was that Colin wanted to translate the Bible with Wycliffe, (which I thought would be dull) and wanted to live in a remote area (which I thought would be miserable, being a city slicker). I thought it would be so much more interesting to marry an urban pastor. I did want to be involved in helping people come to know the Lord and grow, though not the ways Colin did. But the longer we dated, the more convinced I became that God could help me overcome the hurdles of fear and distaste if He wanted me with this man.

On our wedding day, the Lord had brought us to a gradual adjustment. Colin decided although he would finish his studies with Wycliffe, he would above all be a pastor and evangelist, a job I felt enthusiastic about participating in. And I got braver about living in the bush!

The Lord brought us to Kenya, first in 1986 to replace Howard and Doris Andersen during their furlough, and, after a year "back home" in 1988, He brought us to Ileret, north Kenya. I'll tell you a bit about "our place" in my next letter.

We waited a long time for children. Finally the Lord answered our prayers and in August 1988 Mary Cathryn was born, named after my mother and Colin's sister. Stewart Victor came in September 1990, named after Colin's paternal grandfather, who was a missionary in West Africa. We know the longings of childlessness and the joy of children, and we are grateful for both experiences.

Mary Cathryn, at age three, enjoys Play Dough, coloring, "pretend" games with her baby doll and tea set, music and story tapes, and especially books. I believe we could read a book every hour of the day and she'd still beg for more! We are busy memorizing the books of the Bible with her in the evenings, which she enjoys as well.

Stewart, at almost one, is nearly walking. He is already pointing at everything and asking, "That?" He seems fearless, which makes me nervous about leaving him alone; I never know when he'll grab a scorpion. He endears himself to visitors and neighbors by grinning widely and shaking hands readily when they greet him. He and Mary Cathryn love to wrestle with their daddy in the evenings.

Both children thrive on the country life at Ileret: lots of animals, sand, summer weather and other kids. They play happily together about half the time, and squabble the other half, which I suppose is normal for young siblings. They entertain us a great deal, especially in the absence of Cosby.

Love, Becca

August 1991

Dear Ruth and Joint Heirs,

We were in Kalacha recently with Herb and Ruth Andersen and they gave us your package of goodies. Such fun! Thank you for the mixes, M&Ms, Lifesavers, etc. Mary Cathryn was surely impressed by all that American candy. Now she thinks America is wonderful. Thanks also for the tape for Mary Cathryn (she loves looking at the pictures along with it) and the books. I read "A Man Called Norman" in a single Sunday afternoon and enjoyed it thoroughly.

We were fortunate to get your package so soon. Ruth Andersen said I should explain a bit how our mail works so you can understand why we have gaps and delays in our communication.

When you send a letter or package from the USA, it arrives at a PO box in Nairobi belonging to AIM (Africa Inland Mission). Letters for about 100 other missionaries also arrive to that box. Every day someone goes to the PO in Nairobi and brings the day's mail to the AIM AIR hangar at Wilson airport where AIM's small planes are.

Then they sort each missionary's mail according to his name and location in Kenya. Whenever a small plane flies somewhere, it carries the mail for the people in that location. It also collects those missionaries' outgoing letters. If a location has many flights scheduled, the people there receive (and send) mail often. If the flights are few, the mail piles up coming and going.

Ileret is the farthest place from Nairobi in Kenya. We receive mail about once a month (or every six weeks) and send it out a bit more often with a police truck, a game warden's vehicle, or another missionary driving downcountry. When the mail plane arrives, we usually get an average of one personal letter for every day we've waited.

Colin opens all the business mail first right away and tries to answer it in a hurry, to send back on the same plane. We also send all the letters we've written since the last time we got mail. Then, after the plane has gone, we sit down and read the letters one by one, usually over a period of hours. It is sheer pleasure.

When we have read each piece of mail, I write down in a book all the people who wrote us, and the date. As I answer each letter, I write the date of my answer in my book also. I try to pray twice over each prayer request: once when I first read it, and again when I re-read the letter to answer it. It is helpful to me to have a system.

Thanks again for all you do for us. We dearly treasure each letter, note, package, and goody anyone sends.

Love, Becca

September 16, 1991

Dear Ruth and Ladies,

Let me tell you about "our place." Kenya is a country divided. Divided almost in half by the equator, and bordering on the Indian Ocean, Kenya is divided in other ways, too. In my mind's eye I see my two Kenyas: Nairobi--a bustling, crowded urban center. Fresh flowers for a dollar a dozen, fresh vegetables in the food shops, chocolate eclairs at the French bakery. Almost everyone speaks English, since it is taught in school. A typical third world city, exotic and foreign, but also full of things which are part of city life anywhere--indoor toilets, buses, furniture stores, tall buildings, places to eat. Nairobi is where we go three times a year to shop, do business, repair the truck.

The NFD is where we live. It stands for "Northern Frontier District" and is marked so on the map. It is the other Kenya, and we begin entering it about five hours' drive outside Nairobi, when we run out of paved road. We drive steadily north for three more days on that road, stopping each night to camp out or stay with missionary friends like Herb and Ruth Andersen at Kalacha.

The towns have no electricity; the homes are often mud-walled and thatch-roofed. Cars are almost unknown. Occasionally, we see a Land Rover or a big truck. The terrain is desert, not barren like you see the Sahara in National Geographic, but with thorn trees, prickly bushes, and in rainy season, even grass. We catch glimpses of giraffe, zebra, ostrich, antelope and foxes, as well as passing by the inevitable shepherds' settlements along the way. Camels, sheep, donkeys, and goats are all kept as these people's wealth and means of livelihood.

Having come from the USA, which has various ethnic groups but a great unity in its diversity, I was unprepared for the tribalism in Kenya. A Kenyan doesn't think first of himself as such. First he thinks of himself as a member of his tribe, whatever that may be, even if he is a well-educated Kenyan. So the people we minister to are first Daasanach, and proud of it, and only incidentally Kenyan.

Our location on the map is Ileret, right at the top and a bit on the eastern edge of Lake Turkana (Rudolph, if you have an old map). We are just a few miles from the border of Ethiopia. Ileret is actually the name of the river that runs (in rainy season) through the town. The local people call Ileret "Siri," and it has a school (grades 1-3), a government dispensary, and a police post (since we are on the border). Siri has about a thousand people in it.

Between Siri and our house lies the airstrip. It takes about 25 minutes to walk there from here. We live on property granted to the Africa Inland Church (our denomination in Kenya) by the Kenya government in a 99-year lease, since churches may not own property. Our house and our Wycliffe neighbors' house are side by side, and we also have a workshop and a translation office and a row of storage rooms.

What is your dream house like? Probably not like this, though as we have lived here and seen the local homes, my own seems to me to be a palace. It is a corrugated steel house with cement floors, three rooms and a pantry. But I have a lovely front porch with a lakefront view, a kerosene refrigerator, and a small guest room and 1/2 bath right next to us. A shower and sink in our bedroom, a waterbed to keep us cool, and solar power for lights at night. Isn't that great for being out in the sticks?

We have several neighbors. Actually, their numbers fluctuate quite a bit as the seasons change, but some of our neighbors are here all the time. Nangolei is about 40 minutes away and Iloilo is further (these are villages). The big Daasanach village, with not one steel roof on any of the 300+ dwellings (nor running water, nor outhouses) is called Koro-Lokwaarie. It is right on the border of Ethiopia. The people say the majority of the Daasanach tribe live up further in Ethiopia, but of course we haven't been up to see. We think there are quite a few here!

Till next time, enjoy your "places!"

Love, Becca

October 20, 1991

Dear Ruth,

We're really looking forward to having these three men come see us, not only because they can help us practically, but also because it will be a boost to have someone from Church of the Open Door be with us "on site" and share in the experience! I wonder why it is that we crave that? For someone else to see it all firsthand and share in it is truly a blessing, which is one reason we are thankful for Jim and Sue Ness, our Wycliffe neighbors.

Shall I tell about our tribe, the Daasanach? It is hard to number them accurately, because many of them live across the border in Ethiopia; but estimates say they could be as many as 40,000. They depend heavily on livestock - sheep, goats, cows - for their livelihood, but they are also farmers, and during the rains they plant millet and beans. Millet is to the Daasanach what rice is to the Chinese. They boil it, grind it, make pancakes and porridge and mush out of it. They eat it with beans, with butter (homemade!), with milk or alone.

They live in low, round houses with skins for coverings and cowskins inside to sit on. The task of building the houses, interestingly enough, is a woman's work, as is the task of bringing water and firewood. The men are in charge of caring for the animals. Men begin their duties of animal husbandry quite young (even age seven or eight) and retire to administration once they have enough children of their own to do the blue-collar work!

Daasanach people like to look nice. The men often wear elaborate mud-pack hairdos with ostrich feathers and the women make their own leather goatskin skirts, rubbing the skins for hours to make them pliable. Men and women wear glass beads (women numerous strings) and young girls of marriageable age wear stacks of enormous steel anklets which clink-clank as they walk. Some say they wear them so they cannot run away with a boyfriend without Daddy's noticing

Daasanach are friendly people, to each other, and to us. They clash frequently with neighboring tribes, mostly when there's an attempt to steal each other's animals. But they enjoy visiting in each other's homes and few of them are shy. A typical day finds me entertaining three or four visitors. The visitor arrives and calls me by name: "A-Mary!" (Mother of Mary). I must then call that person's name by way of response, sometimes a tricky memory game. Then they'll say, "I'm here!" I say, "Are you here? How are you?" "Fine." Then they say, "A-Mary, cook me a big pot of hot water. I'm thirsty." I say, "Well, you sit there in the shade of my porch till my fire's ready." Then I heat a pot of sweet, milky tea on my gas stove.

After we've drunk together, the visitor might chat a while or come right to the point: the item(s) he or she wishes to ask me for on this visit. Sometimes it's something like a tin can, a bit of salt or tea leaves or matches. Sometimes it's something only Colin can give, like small nails for their shoes, or a piece of steel. Sometimes it's a large item, like a skirt. We have learned the polite ways to agree to or refuse these requests, but they can also be wearying, especially if a visitor stays several hours.

Some characteristics of our tribe we like very much; some we feel neutral about; some we dislike. We try to focus on the things we like, but on days when the irritations crowd us, we say to each other, "We didn't come because these are lovely people. We came because they need the Lord." We know from personal experience that knowing Him brings change in our lives, and we long for these people to know that same Savior and be transformed from glory to glory by the Spirit also.

Our goal is for every Daasanach person to have the opportunity to hear the gospel before the Lord's return. So often in these visits with people on our porch, we are reading Scripture to them and discussing who Jesus is. One man said, "Well, we always knew there was a God who created all things, but we never knew He had a Son!" Little by little the message is getting across.

Love, Becca

November 15, 1991

Dear Ruth and Ladies,

Would you like to hear how a typical Daasanach woman's day goes? It begins whenever the sun rises. The goats and sheep, which sleep in a thorn-bush corral just outside the woman's house, begin stirring and bleating. The good housewife hurries to get up, get the coals of her fire stirred up and a big pot of water on, get the kids mobilized as her helpers so the milking can begin. If there is no water in the house she sends one of the children to the well.

After the milking the family drinks "hot water": boiling water with coffee shells or tea leaves, sugar if they have it, and milk. Babies are given plain milk. (The Daasanach will boil goat's milk but categorically refuse to boil cow's milk. As a result a number get brucellosis.) Daasanach women try to have as many babies as they can, so there is usually a baby in the house. They space them about two years apart.

After breakfast the goatherders (sometimes relatives, sometimes her own children, sometimes her husband), take the grown goats out to graze all day, while the baby goats stay home and play around the house. The woman might then do any number of jobs: grind millet into flour, sew or prepare a goatskin for a new skirt, repair her house if the branches are getting old, collect firewood, hollow out a gourd to make a new container for milk, repair a donkey's pannier.

Her children play and squabble around the house. Only tiny babies are closely supervised. Once a child walks, he is allowed to toddle behind the older children, and they are responsible to take care of him. All adults in a neighborhood or small settlement have the right to discipline each other's children but by custom children are rarely spanked, and never with a hand. Instead, the adult picks up a small stick and chases the child with it. The children usually just go somewhere else.

While a mother is not required to supervise play, she is falling down on the job if she does not feed the family. Daasanach people do eat once during the day. They cook and eat food, if they have enough for supper as well. The father often eats first, then the mother and children. The afternoon hours are hot and drowsy. The mother may nap with the baby, then wake up for visitors or as the evening approaches. Women often sit and visit with each other in the hot hours, braiding each others' hair or relaxing in a shady spot.

Toward evening there is water to be fetched and goats to be milked, and woe to the child who stays away during milking! Supper is eaten late, around 8 PM. The adults talk and tell stories for a couple of hours after that, while the kids play games, sing, and finally fall drowsily to sleep wherever they are. The mother then carries them into the house and sleeps with them on a cowskin. The father sleeps just outside the front door, keeping watch over his family and his flocks. Thus ends another Daasanach day.

Love, Becca

January 10, 1992

Dear Ladies,

Your notes and letters have begun coming, and I'm enjoying this exchange. So many of you I don't know very well, except that we are in the same stage of life, and that your concerns are similar to mine: to love your husbands, to love your children, to be sensible, pure, workers at home, kind, being subject to your own husbands so that the Word of God will not be dishonored (Titus 2:4, 5). These things we strive for, no matter what our living situation is.

In your homes you have some marvelous modern-day "servants" which simplify living. Your dishwasher. Your vacuum cleaner and microwave and clothes washer and dryer. As able wives and mothers you administrate these servants in order to keep your households in order.

Here in the bush, without electricity, I have two servants, too. Their names are Fatuma and Naachi. Fatuma is a woman of about forty years old whose husband abandoned her long ago. Having had no children, she is fairly destitute even by these people's standards. Every morning she comes and washes clothes for me by hand, hanging them on the line to dry. She claims to be Muslim but is really not much of anything, though she wears a black scarf on her head. When we talk about Jesus she smiles and nods and seems completely blind to spiritual reality, though she is very superstitious.

Naachi is a young girl, around thirteen or fourteen, who comes five mornings a week to help me keep the house clean. Every day she sweeps the floors, feeds the chickens, burns the trash, washes dishes, and scrubs whatever cabinet needs it. She helps me serve tea to the visitors and knows how to fire up my charcoal cooker so as to put on a pot of beans and millet for lunch. Naachi is very bright (in one year she has learned the alphabet), very cheerful, and has made a ready profession of faith in Christ. Her favorite time is when we look at the pictures in Mary Cathryn's Bible story book and she hears what God is like and how He deals with people. I think one day she will be a fine wife and mother, and a faithful servant in the church. Every hour we spend together is somehow an opportunity for discipleship and she is eager to absorb everything of value.

So these are my two servants, who make managing my household much smoother. When you throw a load into your washing machine, or run your vacuum cleaner, how about praying for Fatuma and Naachi?

Love, Becca

March 19, 1992

Dear Ladies,

Somehow February came and went without a letter to you all, but I am hoping to get back on schedule again now. During these last four weeks or so we have been in Nairobi. The Lord has provided us with a nice big house to rent with two other missionary families so that whenever we come downcountry we have a place to stay. The house has no electricity and only intermittent water pressure, but it's a mansion compared to our Ileret house. I've had a lot of fun picking out new curtain fabric, buying straw mats for the floors, and hanging pictures.

Living in such luxury has provoked me again to thinking about what a crazy economic situation we have. In the USA, we are just average, middle-class people. We are not so poverty-stricken that we can only eat meat once a week, but our budget is tight enough that we could not buy absolutely whatever we would like. Now we arrive in Kenya, and from the moment we step off the plane, we are wealthy. Not just well-off, either. Now the limit to what I buy at the grocery store is my common sense and our own decision about how much to spend, not that I ever seem to run out of money.

You may think, "Wow! That sounds great!" But actually, it's a rather difficult situation, because so many people around us are so much poorer than we are. This is true in Nairobi, and especially true at Ileret. Although some of our Ileret friends are actually well-off (even by our standards) in terms of the enormous herds of animals they own, they still live in grass houses. Their wives may own two skirts, one or two cooking pots, and no shoes. When they come to my house, no matter how simply I live, they cannot help but feel that I am extremely rich.

I now have a dilemma. I can live at whatever standard I choose. I can surround myself with luxuries because it is economically possible. Or I can choose to live more simply and try to close the gap between my lifestyle and that of my neighbors. And even when I live simply, I must remember that to them it is still wealth. However, it would be impossible for me to cook on three rocks over an open fire, to give up running water in my house, to live in one room, and to own only two changes of clothes without going crazy. (The Lord knows what my limits are!) So very often Colin and I are praying for wisdom about how to balance between what we are used to in our culture and what our neighbors are used to in theirs.

I find it a great comfort that the Bible doesn't condemn my "wealthy" state. Instead, it says, "Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy. Instruct them to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is life indeed." When you think of me in this wealth, please pray that my generosity and good works will increase proportionately!

Love, Becca

April 6, 1992

Dear Ladies,

We went to the lake this afternoon, and on the way home we saw rabbits hopping on the road, darting wildly to try to escape our blinding headlights. Stewart and Mary Cathryn squealed with delight, and it came into my mind that I should write to you describing some of the particular delights of our living situation.

I never expected to enjoy living in the desert, much less away from the city. I like to go out to eat, to stroll at the mall, to have a library and a clean, wide-aisled grocery nearby. Yet here I am in the bush (and of course I miss those things and look forward to enjoying them on furlough!). However, many days I am arrested by the vivid beauty of things around me. For instance, Mary Cathryn and I recently took a walk along the river bed.

"The Lugga," as our neighbors call it, is a wide, sandy riverbed near our house. It only runs when it rains. Then it is a powerful torrent. Tall, majestic trees line the banks, waiting for the next rains. If you can be very quiet, you might catch glimpses of gazelle trotting through the brush. The Lugga is a birdwatcher's paradise. This time we saw a flock of about 30 Superb Starlings, a small bird with rust-colored breast and iridescent turquoise-blue wings and head. It looks like a flying jewel.

We saw birds tonight, too, down at the lake. A huge white pelican was wading in the water when we arrived. Boss, our neighbors' Rhodesian Ridgeback dog, was after it in a flash. The big bird waited till the dog was almost on him and then flew in slow-motion out of his reach, farther out into the water. He was elegant, like a white boat on the shallow waves, with a backdrop of blue mountains across the water and an orange sun sinking above it all.

When we looked along the shoreline we saw a herd of zebra drinking far away from us. Erik Ness (our neighbors' teenage son) and Boss began walking toward them, and the rest of us waded out into the water. The lake is very shallow. It is possible to wade far from shore without even getting waist-high in the water. We adults sat up to our necks in it, while Mary Cathryn and Stewart splashed around us in their inner tubes. After a while we looked down the shore and saw that Erik and Boss had almost reached the zebras' place, but the animals had scattered. They are not yet so tame as to let men come near. Looking in the other direction, we saw a fisherman pushing his boat out for the evening's expedition. Several others strolled along the shore. The sun rested on the mountains for a few moments, then sank below the horizon.

When we got home we saw the new moon and a thousand, thousand stars. Some nights we sit out for a while and look at them. But tonight we were contentedly weary, so we came inside the house. Ileret has its own particularly piercing and lovely sights. Some days I have eyes to see and appreciate it.

(And some days, like Mary Cathryn said recently, "I wish Ileret had an ice cream store!")

Love, Becca

May 13, 1992

Dear Ladies,

The day after tomorrow we will drive to Kalacha to see Herb and Ruth Andersen's daughter get married. I have to begin preparing for these safaris way ahead of time or inevitably I forget some Very Important Item like Mary Cathryn's shoes or Stewart's bottle. It has been raining frequently and heavily here at Ileret, so I'm taking enough food for at least a week, just in case we get stuck several times in the mud and delay longer than the allotted four days we've set aside (two days on the road, two days there). As I've been packing I've been meditating on the hazards of being a bush missionary, just in general.

I could mention snakes and scorpions but you know about those. Recently, however, the rains have brought interesting developments here in our village. During dry weather neighboring tribes have a hard time stealing each other's animals and getting away with it. The waterholes are too few, for one thing, so everyone knows where you've gone and can chase you there and get their herds back. During rainy season, however, water is plentiful and so is grass. It's easy to steal animals and hide them on the way back home.

Not long ago some Daasanach shepherds came across a party of Boran young men feasting on an antelope barbecue. Since they are enemies, they attacked the unsuspecting revelers, killing four of them. A few days later some other Daasanach conducted a successful raid on Boran shepherds, stealing their animals.

Now comes reprisal time. A local Daasanach "seer" predicted a few days ago that the Boran have targeted two villages for attack: ours, and the other main village where Colin has done evangelism, Nangolei. Shortly after this prediction we had a sudden influx of gun-toting Daasanach shepherds (with their herds!) arrive to live at Baulo, our village, to protect us from raiders.

On Sunday night when Colin went to conduct his regular men's Bible study, he found not only his "regulars" but about twenty armed teens as well. They come by our house during the day (without guns; since guns are illegal, they bring those out only at night) to sit on my porch and ask for scabies medicine, or soap to wash their clothes, or tea leaves. And they enjoy listening to Scripture tapes of the life of Christ while they are passing the hours here. It's been a great opportunity to witness to a group we don't otherwise encounter much.

But back to danger. Of course it is possible that our village could be attacked. We would lie low (literally!) and stay out of sight till the gunfire was over. We've had to discuss a plan and procedure for it all. But this is just part of the hazard of living among a tribal people. They fight with their neighbors. And what's more dangerous: living at Ileret, or driving the LA freeways? We don't even lock our car here.

I understand that Los Angeles is built on an enormous fault which one day, according to scientists, will surely bring a terrible earthquake. Why do people still live there, knowing this? They pack an earthquake kit and settle in. To them, the advantages are worth the risks. And that's the way we calculate, too. The advantages of being practically the very first people to evangelize the Daasanach are so numerous, so HUMONGOUS, that the risks seem paltry beside. Even gunfire at midnight.

Love, Becca

July 29, 1992

Dear Ladies,

We arrived back at Ileret a few days ago after a break in Nairobi to find a house where literally every surface was covered with dust. Such is life during the drought, and rains are not due until the end of September.

In the midst of a drought, it's hard to imagine a great harvest, but the day after we arrived, the women from our village began to leave to go up to the border, carrying their gunny sacks for grain. Up there the people plant millet according to the rise and fall of the lake, fed by the Omo river in Ethiopia. And just at the time of dust and dry winds, the millet is ripe, ready for harvesting.

Naachi asked for four days off work to go. Curious, I asked what she would do when she arrived at the fields. She said she would go from field to field, and when she met anyone she was related to, she would help them a bit with their harvesting and in return, they would say, "Come, let me give you some of my millet."

For several days the millet harvest continues, until the round, white grain is heaped up in piles eight feet tall. This will be the staple Daasanach diet for months. Even after the grain gets infested with moths and weevils, the people continue to eat from their supply until it's gone. It is remarkably filling, bland as wheat but just as much a staff of life.

Today our village is nearly deserted, and suddenly we have no visitors on our porch. In a few days the women and young children will return, carrying the precious cargo on their heads or on donkeys; the men will perk up again and life will be back to normal. I imagine this is a happy change for those women, whose life is so routine and confined. They are probably laughing and chattering and singing together as they work.

In the meantime, I'm trying to get my house clean, unpack three months' worth of food, keep two children playing happily, cook meals and answer letters. I'm grateful Fatuma is here to wash clothes, or my load would be quite heavy.

It's hard to believe we have only fourteen more weeks at Ileret before we leave for a year. I look out my kitchen window and see the dust blow, and there by the window, a desert rose bush is in full bloom, with bright pink flowers flaunting their colors. Amazing! I cannot help but pray that the young Daasanach believers will bloom likewise in this desert while we are away, and that one day we will share in a Great Harvest, with joy.

Love, Becca

September 10, 1992

Dear Ladies,

Have you ever read Edith Schaeffer's book, *What is a Family?* If not, I highly recommend it. Those of us who are busy with parenting need her kind of encouragement periodically. Anyway, I've been re-reading it recently and came to the chapter on the family as a door, a door with hinges and a lock. In it she discusses striking a balance between hospitality and privacy. It came at a good time for me, since hospitality is something I'm called on to practice several times per day, and privacy is something I need personally, and my husband and children need as well, in order to be better hosts.

When we have several days in a row with one visitor after another coming to see us, the children's fussing, whining and insecurity increases dramatically. Mom doesn't have time to stop to settle a dispute, get the crayons, read a story or help find the lost toy because she's so busy fixing tea, washing cups, and talking to people.

Daasanach visiting customs are different from ours. A visitor arrives, ready to be cared for in whatever way they request. They also have in mind a list of items they will ask you for, because it would be quite embarrassing to go home "with your hands dangling empty" as they say. If they receive nice gifts from you, it shows what a close friendship you have, something they can be proud of.

A Daasanach visitor may stay an hour, or five hours. However long they stay, the host should not send them away (as also in our culture) although the hosts may lock up their valuables in a box and leave their own house to go somewhere else, leaving the visitors behind! The visitors may stay a while longer, or they may take the hint and leave soon.

I had to learn how to entertain visitors without offending them and without feeling offended. It has taken four years to come to a place of peace within myself about how to handle the challenges of a Daasanach visit. No longer do I feel offended when people loudly command me to cook a big pot of tea for them. If I can do it at the moment, I do. If not, I invite them to sit for a while until I am free to do so. Almost all my living room furniture (a wooden bench and three chairs) is out on the veranda, and my visitors sit there. This eases our family life to continue no matter how long the visitor stays, and when I have sat and chatted a while, I can return to my work without feeling rude. We can have meals at regular hours and the children can take naps without interruption.

When the visitor is ready to go home, he or she presents various requests and I listen to them all, again without being offended. What I can give (in harmony with the level of our relationship) I do, and refuse the rest, without feeling guilty. Sometimes I have to interrupt my visit with someone in order to help my husband or children (sometimes to give a spanking!), and everyone knows that the McDougalls go inside and don't answer the door from lunchtime till the kids wake up from napping, no matter how loudly people knock or call.

These small habits of privacy we've had to maintain in order to keep a balance between family life and hospitality. It's a far cry from life in the USA where a housewife might not see anyone all day if she doesn't go out of her house. This is a testimony to

God's grace: that we have learned to cope with a very public kind of life and still feel like a family.

Love, Becca

POSTSCRIPT

In November 1992 we left Ileret to begin our journey to Nairobi and then back to the USA for a year of furlough. Ileret, and the Daasanach people, still remained our mission field. In 1994 our family returned under SIM to northern Kenya, and spent four more years among the Daasanach. During that time, as in the previous term, I wrote letters to the women in our supporting churches in the USA, describing our everyday life experiences. Here they are together for you to enjoy.

June 1994

Dear Ladies,

Life is impossible without water. This has come home to me in a vivid way since our arrival at Ileret. We arrived, after four days on the road from Nairobi, to discover that our house had no running water. Neither did our neighbors'. Neither did our village. In fact, no one in any of the Daasanach villages had running water, because the pump had gone down. When we asked how long it had been since the water pump was operating, people shrugged and estimated eight or nine months. Zowie!

Colin and a crew of workmen dug every day for two weeks in the riverbed, trying to repair things. I am afraid I can't explain all the ins and outs of the process, but even at the end of two weeks they had made no progress. "We need to wait a month, until the water table under the riverbed is lower," they concluded. So now we know that we will not get running water before we return to Nairobi at the end of this month.

The riverbed is a couple of miles from our house. Colin carries big drums in the pickup truck and fills them with water every other day, a two-hour process. He drives back home and everyone in our small village--five or six families--fills their buckets morning and evening. I take my buckets to the truck along with everyone else, but to my chagrin, our family consumes twice as much water as anyone. Where does it all go?

The most obvious use is for drinking and cooking. Since Ileret is a hot, desert place, we consume more liquids, and every day we entertain numerous visitors, almost all of whom drink a cup of tea before they go. One morning recently I served nine cups of tea to the group assembled on the front porch, and one more visitor arrived as we drank. Entertaining visitors is a big part of our work.

Another place the water goes is for bathing, although we have learned to bathe all five of us with one bucket of water. Believe it or not, we all get fairly clean! Then I use the bath water to rinse Timothy's diapers.

Another place we use water is in dishwashing, though I have learned to make it last through several meals, and when it is too grimy, to wash my compost bucket with it. Since our house has stood empty for over a year, we used a couple of buckets of water to get the furniture and floors clean.

But there are two ways we are NOT using water. One is to flush toilets. Instead, we use the outhouse. The other is to wash clothes. Instead, when Colin and the neighbors go to dig water out of the riverbed, Naachi carries our clothes, washtubs, buckets, soap and scrub brush down and washes the clothes down there. That way we don't have to haul water for clothes-washing.

It's astonishing how much time it saves to have running water in the house. I won't say I'm used to dipping out of a bucket now and don't mind the river-sand in my dishpan (we filter our drinking water). Returning to Ileret after a year's absence is a major ordeal, and adding this "inconvenience" has pushed us to our limits.

But I am determined to be instructed by this graphic illustration: water is necessary and precious to life, so important that digging it and hauling it take precedence over other activities of the day. And if muddy river water is so essential, how much more precious and essential is the Water of Life, which the Lord Jesus Himself gives.

Love, **Becca**

August 28, 1994

Dear Ladies,

Please don't feel sorry for MK's. Missionary kids get some of life's greatest adventures, and are shielded from a great deal of trash.

Take my three, for instance. Do you think they were bothered by the lack of running water in the house this month? Not a bit. Timothy could hardly keep his hands out of the buckets Daddy brought in every day. Mary Cathryn happily dipped out of yesterday's bath water to play with her tea set on the porch. Stewart enjoyed the hikes to the outhouse, just to have a little chat with Mom. Now that we have running water again, they are equally enchanted as Naachi fills her washtubs on the front porch and scrubs our clothes. What wonderful entertainment.

Mary Cathryn, newly age six, enjoyed her birthday thoroughly. Presents from America arrived in the mail. She and I baked and decorated her cake together. In the early evening, we drove to the lake for a swim. She went to bed exhausted and happy.

Stewart is happy these days, too. He has four neighbor boys who come every morning to play. He shares his trucks and his ball, and they reciprocate by teaching him how to make a trap to catch doves, or by giving him a homemade bow and arrow and teaching him to shoot it.

This experience of cross-cultural friendships is priceless. Both children are picking up Daasanach words, and both dearly love sharing their books and toys with their friends. I wish you could witness Stewart narrating the story of Peter Pan--in English--as his friends crowd around the big picture book.

But it's more than that. Stewart proudly announced recently that he had talked to one of his friends "all about Jesus." He and Mary Cathryn take turns helping lead songs and show the pictures on Friday afternoons when we have a little Bible Club on our porch. They have learned to be patient when we are witnessing to the adult visitors who come, and to pray for Daddy when he goes out to preach. They see a lot of Colin, and are very aware of what it means to be a missionary family.

Mary Cathryn said tonight at supper, "I'm so glad I wasn't born into another family. I'd be missing all this fun!" That about sums it up, from a child's perspective.

Love,

Becca

September 12, 1994

Dear Ladies,

During our recent home assignment (furlough), several questions came up repeatedly whenever we described our life at Ileret. One of those questions was, "What do you eat?"

Ileret is a very remote place, four days' drive from the grocery store. One small shop in Ileret town usually stocks such things as tea leaves, sugar, ground corn meal, and hard candies the children call "pfermenties," their way of saying peppermints. However, since the local supply is always uncertain, I prefer not to rely on the local shop, and use it only in an emergency.

Otherwise several products are available locally: meat, millet, milk, mung beans, and black-eyed peas. Our meat we buy alive and kicking, as in goats. We've tried sheep, but they have too much fat for our taste. Sometimes someone butchers a cow and Colin buys a leg and carries it home slung over his shoulder. In both cases, we usually cut a good portion of meat off the bones to grind in my cast-iron grinder; and of course you know how many ways a cook can use ground meat! Occasionally we buy fresh fish, caught that morning in Lake Turkana. Fish and rice is one of our favorite meals.

We buy powdered milk in Nairobi, since the local milk is often infected with TB, and bring it up to Ileret in 50-lb. bags in the back of our Toyota pickup. Beans and millet we buy and eat most happily, boiled, ground or sprouted for a tasty stir-fry.

All other groceries I buy and bring from Nairobi. "Like what?" you ask. Well, like canned and dehydrated fruits and vegetables, flour, sugar, canned butter and cream, spices, jam, honey, peanut butter, baking supplies, tea and coffee and cocoa, baby cereal, tomato paste, spaghetti, condiments, and yes, even eggs. Fresh things we bring with us on the road to last the first couple of weeks that we are back at Ileret.

Remember, every three months we leave Ileret, drive four days downcountry, and spend a month in Nairobi. There we feast on as many fresh fruits and vegetables as we can at every meal. You may be astonished to know that generally our family's health is better in Kenya than in America. At any rate, we are not suffering, and when sometimes I find myself stretched to come up with creative menus, I can usually get inspiration by browsing through a cookbook.

Love,

Becca

October 5, 1994

Dear Ladies,

This morning after breakfast a delegation of men arrived to ask Colin to drive out to Ilkemere to pick up a child who'd been bitten by a snake in the night. They left at 10 AM and returned at noon. The child was a little boy, age 9 or 10, who had been herding cows with several other shepherds. During the night a saw-scaled viper had slithered between him and his friend. When the friend jumped up, the snake bit Ir-Gudo.

Colin got out his little machine that gives electric shock. The snake bite was on the arm, close to the elbow, and the whole area was quite swollen. The child cringed and cried at the shock, which is a very effective anti-poison. We use it on scorpion bites to good avail. Then we gave Ir-Gudo an adult dose of antihistamine, a big drink, and some millet and black-eyed peas, which he ate hungrily.

He spent the afternoon lying on a goatskin in the shade of a tree, obediently taking the antihistamines and painkillers we doled out. His father, slightly inebriated, slept beside him. I cannot help wondering what will happen in the next few days as they live here in the neighborhood. Colin prayed this morning that the Lord would continue to give us opportunities every day to share the gospel. Maybe this is a very special answer to that prayer.

Love,

Becca

PS - Ir-Gudo recovered and went back to shepherding. We talked to him and to his father several times about the gospel, using the approach of the "Wordless Book." Please pray that the Lord will bring them to faith in Jesus, who saves from sin just as he was saved from the snakebite.

October 10, 1994

Dear Ladies,

Yer'boogoich was fearful. After all, Kalacha was enemy territory, in the heart of the Boran homeland, and he was stuck there for a week, waiting for a ride with us back to Ileret. He had come "downcountry" to have surgery on an infected foot, so he was hobbling with the aid of a walking cane when I first saw him.

That week, I was the only Daasanach-speaking person around. Colin was at the district church council meetings in another town, and the children and I were enjoying a visit with our friends at Kalacha. Yer'boogoich spent a lot of time with us, eating meals or sitting on the porch watching the kids shoot water guns. He was worried. He often mentioned his fear of the Boran people, and shifted uncomfortably when his back was exposed.

I confess I felt his fears were a bit exaggerated, and I frequently reassured him that this mission compound was the place where God's people lived. No harm would come. Nevertheless, he did not relax completely until our truck had bounced over the roads on the long journey home, and he was back in Daasanach territory.

Then this week a runner sped through each Daasanach village, bringing the news that the Boran had stolen a large herd of Daasanach cattle during the night. That day we saw a steady stream of armed warriors walking through our village with the long, steady stride of men on a mission. The children crowded excitedly around them, and everyone found it difficult to work.

The concern was that the Boran rustlers would incorporate the Daasanach cattle into their own herds before the warriors caught up with them, and that is just what happened. But when the Daasanach men caught up with the herds, they simply shot several Boran shepherds and began driving ALL the animals back toward Ileret, several hundred cows, goats and sheep.

They might have made it with their booty, except that reinforcements arrived for the Boran troops. Then, they claim, there was a terrible battle, and they finally let all the animals go to the Boran.

We saw them return, three days after they left. They looked weary, and many stopped for food and drink before going on to their villages further north. What confused me was that they did not seem downcast, like men who had just lost a battle. Instead, they seemed rather grimly satisfied.

Sue Ness and I talked it over as we burned trash in the evening. "They must have killed several Boran men," she mused. "And although a few Daasanach men were wounded, only one was killed."

Now comes reprisal time. The police received a radio message today that a large group of Boran warriors are heading this way, seeking revenge. The police inspector has put "home guards" on the lookout in nearby Siri, and advised all the women and children of our village, Baulo, to move elsewhere for a few days.

Colin has parked the truck near the front door, put his spear by his bed, and has gone out this evening to pray with the village men. Into my mind comes David's Psalm, when he fled from Absalom:

"I lay down and slept; I awoke, for the Lord sustains me. I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people who have set themselves against me round about" (Ps. 3:5, 6).

Love,

Becca

October 15---The crisis seems over; the tribal chiefs and the government officials have met and come to an agreement on terms of peace; the women and children and animals have returned to Baulo. Once again we see the answer of God to our prayers. Yer'boogoich has heard the gospel clearly now, repeatedly, and has turned in faith to the Lord Jesus. His foot is healed enough that he can make the journey to his own village, farther north. Please pray that the Lord will encourage him and help him to grow, and that he will tell others about Jesus.

January 1995

Dear Ladies,

Ay-gur lost her baby three weeks ago. It was her seventh child, but only her second daughter, and oh! how she had longed for another daughter. The baby was about a year old, and when she died, Ay-gur was beside herself with grief. She wailed, she rocked, she writhed in such anguish that her husband had to physically restrain her. Even then she hurt herself.

When she calmed down, she refused to eat or drink. In a few days she was so weak she could not sit up, and had to be brought back to our village from the place where she'd been staying near her family's goats. Soon after her arrival I visited her, concerned about her health. Her husband said she was eating again, but not speaking much, except to complain that she felt sore. She sat stolidly through my visit, hardly replying to my questions, staring at the ground. If ever I had seen a broken heart, this was it. I felt helpless to comfort her.

Today, a week later, she came to a women's "party" at my house, along with the rest of the village women. We listened to several vignettes from the life of Christ on cassette tape, narrated in Daasanach, and I passed around large illustrations of each story so each woman could see them. One of the stories was the raising of Jairus' daughter. As Ay-gur held the picture, she looked hard at Jesus raising the girl by the hand. When the tape was over and we were drinking tea, Ay-gur began telling the story to one of the women who had come in late. The rest of us sat still, watching, struck by the poignancy of the moment.

Ay-gur doesn't know Jesus yet, but I'm certain He's seeking her. I pray that her precious daughter's death will be the catalyst that drives her into the arms of the Savior, who conquered death once for all.

Love,

Becca

January 6, 1995

Dear Ladies,

A spitting cobra is no joke. Especially when it's curled up, ready to strike. Even now I shiver when I think what a close call Colin had.

He went out to the bathroom tonight after dark. Our bathroom is a small room adjacent to our house, but it does have a flush toilet, running water in a sink, and a 12 volt light. Most of the time we prop the door open with a rock, as Colin found it tonight. He reached up to the light switch, turned it on--and discovered a spitting cobra coiled up on the lid of the diaper pail just below him, poised to strike.

Colin's reflexes are good. He backed away, scurried back in the house, grabbed a flashlight, threw on his socks and shoes (he'd been wearing thongs), and in less than two minutes was hurrying back to make sure the snake didn't escape, while I, quivering and shaking, ran next door to ask Jim Ness to bring his air rifle, "quick!"

The snake must have sensed it was in danger, because it slithered out and tried to hide in a drainpipe, but Colin kept following it with his light. Then Jim came and shot it several times. Sue and I and the children crept out in horrified fascination to find the snake still writhing, its jaws yawning. Jim cut its head off with a knife and buried it, so no pets would ingest the venom. He threw its body over the fence, down a cliff. The snake was four feet long and as thick as my wrist.

When I think that it could have been me confronted with that reptile, I shudder again and marvel at the mercy and wisdom of God. Colin escaped unharmed this time--he hasn't always been so fortunate in the past--and this also makes me grateful.

Our days, our times, are surely in His hands, and He knows the day of our death as well as the day of our birth. He knows all our "close calls," too, and shows His power in them. It is a comfort to trust in Him when living in cobra country.

Love,

Becca

January 20, 1995

Dear Ladies,

This was a typical day at Ileret.

6:30 AM---Colin prayed; I fixed breakfast.

7:00 AM---Breakfast, then Scripture reading and prayer with the children.

8:00 AM---Mary Cathryn and I worked on one hour of first grade: math, reading, writing.

9:00 AM---I opened the front door. Thereafter came a blur of activity. Our neighbors, Jim and Sue Ness, together with two visitors, are leaving for the four-day safari to Nairobi tomorrow, so I invited them to come to meals today. I put the sweet and sour beef stew in the solar oven, sorted the rocks out of the rice, baked brownies, cooked the rice, and baked bread and sweet rolls. Between the cooking I talked to a girl who wanted to borrow a needle and thread, a sick man who wanted to sit and listen to the tapes of the life of Christ, a lady who wanted a tin can, a lady who wanted tea leaves, Naachi who came to say she was feeling too sick to wash clothes (NOT good news after a weekend!), a girl and a boy who wanted a drink of water, and a man who wanted me to fix the broken handle of his knife. I also helped Stewart color a picture, changed Tim's diaper three times, served tea and cookies to all assembled, mixed a pitcher of Kool-aid, and fixed a broken LEGO helicopter.

12:00 noon---Colin returned from Nangolei from his Bible study; at 12:30 he turned on the two-way radio for the usual call-up of all the mission stations in northern Kenya. Messages were passed and taken.

1:00 PM--Jim and Sue and Alice and Mary came for lunch. We had to close the front door to eat, since four visitors were sitting on the porch waiting to talk to Sue after lunch.

2:00 PM---The neighbors went home; the children went to bed. After washing dishes, I retreated to the bedroom to read and pray. Today it was difficult to concentrate. Tim was talking in his crib, Stewart came in several times to ask when could he get up, Colin got word the town's water pump is broken, and several people sat and talked loudly on the front porch.

3:00 PM---Mary Cathryn and I did another hour of schoolwork. Then I let Stewart and Tim get up, and opened the front door to talk to the crowd on the porch.

4:00 PM---By now the heat of the day was slowing us down, so I let the children play on the front porch with a bucket of water while I chatted with the visitors. A boy arrived selling fresh fish. Colin cleaned it for me and I made bouillabaisse for supper. I read a chapter of Prince Caspian to the children.

6:00 PM---Baths for all three children. Fed Tim his supper and a bottle and put him to bed. Set the table, read a Bible story to Mary and Stewart, reviewed their verses, and heated the soup.

7:00 PM---The neighbors arrived for supper. The talk was of their packing and journey. Jim and Colin discussed the best possible routes for avoiding rocks.

8:00 PM---The neighbors went home. Kids to bed. Dishes washed; showers; reading and bed.

April 26, 1995

Dear Ladies,

Living at Ileret is like stepping back into the pages of Genesis. The land itself is like I imagine Palestine was, back in the days of Abraham's sojournings. The occasional rolling hills give way to flat desert, broken by dry riverbeds lined with towering acacia trees. Thorn bushes and tumbleweed abound; in the dry season, the landscape would bore a painter, being only varying shades of brown and gray. During the rains, which come twice a year, the countryside is transformed. Our eyes are soothed and refreshed by green leaves, green grass, wildflowers and even the rare but majestic sight of the riverbeds flowing with water. As we look out on the plains around us we can see gray clouds pouring down, and we smell the rain on the earth just before the winds sweep the storm on top of us. Occasionally we can sit on our porch and watch a rainstorm over the lake. It seems lavish extravagance.

Our corrugated steel roof is loud but waterproof. Most of our Daasanach neighbors are not so blessed. Their houses are low, round homes with a diameter of ten to twelve feet, built of strong thin branches bent into a frame, covered with animal skins, woven grass mats, and occasionally a piece of corrugated steel which the owner has painstakingly smashed flat with a rock to stretch it as far as possible. Inside the house, donkey pannier baskets line the sides, the ground is covered with a cowskin or two, and cooking is done on three rocks over an open fire. The doorways to Daasanach houses are low and narrow; more than once I've gotten stuck going in or out, to my chagrin and my host's amusement.

Their houses are movable. Even after six years of living here I'm still learning what it means for a tribe to be "semi-nomadic". You probably think Americans are very mobile, and indeed we are, but nothing like these people. Can you imagine not ever thinking of a location or property as home, but merely your house? And what if you could physically move your house now and then, just for convenience? The closest analogy I think of is some of our retirees who live "on the go" in vans and campers, and don't actually own property anywhere.

Now, step back into Old Testament times. Why would a Daasanach ever need to move house? Well, Daasanach life and prosperity revolves around their animals and their farming seasons. They keep goats, sheep and cows, all of which graze from place to place, wherever grass and water are most plentiful. Meat and milk are a big part of Daasanach diet.

The millet fields are ready for planting just after the water recedes from the floodplains where the Omo river empties into Lake Turkana. A family will move house during planting or harvesting season to be busy with that work. Millet, too, is a Daasanach staple.

They complain at the inconvenience of the rains, but it is their life flow. Without rain, the crops shrivel and the animals die. We've been here in drought; I've seen the hunger and sickness with my own eyes. So they sigh over wet firewood, but even when the storms blow they pray in our hearing, "Give us more big rains, God."

Do you suppose Sarah lived in a tent like a Daasanach house? And did she ever grumble at the rain, even while praying for more? I shall have many questions to ask her in heaven, now that I have lived at Ileret.

Love,

Becca

May 20, 1995

Dear Ladies,

Getting ready for a trip to Ileret is a major enterprise. The journey is long from Nairobi, where we buy all our supplies and groceries. We travel three and a half days, mostly on unpaved roads. Usually we are able to stay in hotels or with fellow-missionaries, but occasionally we have to camp.

Thus, preparing for the trip means anticipating every contingency. Colin makes sure we have tent and bedding; I pack a toolbox of emergency food and cookware, in case we need a hot supper or breakfast. Matches? Silverware? Bowls? I check off the list. Two cans of corn, a package of dry soup, canned tuna or stew meat, a can of pineapple slices, powdered milk and granola . . .

I also prepare a cooler of food for our snacks and lunches along the way. This one goes in the car with us, since we like to munch as we drive. Cheese, crackers, carrot sticks, apples, nuts, raisins, dates, beef jerky, potato chips, granola bars, pita bread or rolls and a jar of peanut butter go in. I wedge several bottles of drinking water in the back seat, and juice. In the bed of the truck we carry 20 litres of clean water as well, and each night we replenish our supply. We fill the thermos with hot tea.

Miscellaneous items have to be remembered. A ziplock bag with two wet washcloths for wiping sticky hands. Cassette tapes and player. Sun glasses, sunscreen, chapstick. Pillows. Diapers for Tim. A comb. A sharp knife. Toilet paper. Camera. All these go in the front with us.

Then the items for the overnight bag. I used to pack a backpack for each of us, but it's actually simpler to just haul out one big suitcase, so that's what I've done recently. We each need clothes for four days' journey, and a few extra items like jackets for Nyahururu, where it's cold, and swimsuits for Kalacha, where it's hot. Also towels, toiletries, and a bag for dirty clothes.

Whatever we have bought in Nairobi to be used at Ileret must be packed with special care, since it must arrive intact to be any use at all. Small, sturdy boxes are easiest to load. Colin sets aside a whole morning to pack the truck once he gets it ready to go. I make a division between piles of boxes: these must go, these could stay behind if necessary. Food, hardware, books, bottled gas, fuel, clothing and housewares all go in bit by bit.

As we pack our belongings, we also clean up our apartment. Other people will stay in it the three months we are away, so we empty closets, put away belongings, and try to leave everything neat and clean for the next occupants. I try to plan meals so we leave an empty fridge when we go. The children pack away their toys and choose a few favorites for the journey.

The day we leave, we always eat out for lunch. One last meal in a Nairobi restaurant, a quick check through each room to make sure we haven't left anything behind, prayer with our SIM neighbors, and we're off!

Love,

Becca

June 8, 1995

Dear Ladies,

Our prayer letters don't always contain news of our children, so let me put them on a page and perhaps your mental image of our family will be sharper.

Mary Cathryn, our firstborn, will be seven on August 14. Her hair is light brown and curls when the weather is humid. She is trying to grow it to her feet. Her eyes are large and green; her nose is round and dusted with freckles; her grin is snaggle-toothed. By choice she wears dresses almost exclusively, and a ribbon in her hair. My mother's-eye lingered on her with the exasperated affection you young mothers all share this very morning as she played in the road at teatime. Gale-force winds whipped up her skirts, tossing dust everywhere. Heedless, bare feet planted wide, she leaned over and with cupped hands energetically bulldozed a road through the sand, shouting orders to her two brothers behind her.

It was a very typical pose, but it is equally typical to find her curled up on her bed, reading aloud or telling stories to herself. We have just begun second grade. She reads well; her desire to devour books is insatiable. When she is temporarily satisfied, she searches for me with questions about what she just read. Her Baby Doll then receives the digested repetition of my answers as she is bathed, changed, fed and pushed in the small wooden wheelbarrow in the late afternoons. Later I receive reciprocal descriptions of what Baby did today.

Mary Cathryn trusted Christ as her Savior when she was four. She continues to grow in her understanding of what it means to walk with Him. Recently she fussed and whined as we tackled some difficult math problems. Then she became silent, bowed her head, and quoted aloud, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me," and plunged back in.

Stewart Victor will be five on September 20. He is blond, blue-eyed and freckled. His nose is very pug, and his body is slim and light-boned as a bird's. When I cup his hand in mine to guide his pencil, I feel the quick, nervous energy of his nimble fingers. The books all say he is not supposed to be able to write yet, but they did not count on his keen interest and dogged persistence. He sheds tears of frustration but never gives up until he has succeeded.

He was like that with Legos, too. Before he was three they drew him like a magnet. His coordination would not allow him to build such delicate structures, so he cried at his own clumsiness, yet refused to let us do it for him. Sometimes we insisted he lay the pieces down and go cry in his bed because watching his agony was torture for all of us. Eventually he became adept.

Do all boys thrive on instruments of war? Like Mary, Stewart tells stories. In them he is the Hero, and the stories always include guns, bows and arrows, pocketknives and a dragon. His father has promised him a pocketknife for his sixth birthday. The

anticipation fills him with ecstasy. Recently he declared he was too old for his blanket, although he would like to keep his teddy bear. He and his dad had a blanket-burning ceremony.

Stewart also loves Jesus. "Thank you, God, that I have trusted in Jesus," he prays, and "Thank you that darkness and light are alike to You," and "Thank you that now I'm old enough to learn how to kill scorpions and spiders." (Mom winces at that one!)

Timothy will be two September 17. He also is blond, blue-eyed and round-nosed. His smile is merry and his body is chubby with hearty eating. The older children have dubbed him "Curious George," due to his insatiable urge to explore and experiment.

More than Mary or Stewart, he is growing up in a group. His time with each of us, including his dad, is evenly divided throughout the day, and I find myself wondering if this affects his behavior. For instance, he talks. Not just words, but rough sentences already. (Did desire to communicate speed up speech?)

And he laughs. (Such a clown at the table! Did the ready-made audience produce a show-off?)

And he demands. ("Pees! Juice!" Does he go ignored in the bustle otherwise?)

And he is a tough warrior, using rattles and trucks to best his opponents six inches taller and twenty pounds heavier. (Survival of the fittest?)

And he is so tender-hearted, he rushes to the side of any crying child to wrap sympathetic arms around them. (Has the pathos of his siblings' crises moved him from earliest days?)

And he cannot sleep alone. If left in his crib, he wails until sister or brother comes to nap, and then, content, settles down to slumber. (Does he feel bereft? Yet he can play alone for an hour in that same room.)

We love him dearly. Even the children call him "our baby."

My days are very full with these wee three disciples. I sigh with relief when they are all in bed at night. Yet when I contemplate our life at Ileret, I am moved with leaping joy at the grace of God.

"Behold, children are a gift of the LORD; the fruit of the womb is a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of one's youth. How blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them" Ps 127:3-5.

Love,

Becca

July 1995

Dear Ladies,

Sometimes I try to see things from a Daasanach woman's perspective. How would I perceive dirt, for instance, if I'd never heard of germs and believed that illness came from someone with an "evil eye" looking at me? How would I perceive bathing or washing clothes if every drop of water in my house I had to carry on my head from a well in the riverbed, sometimes over a mile away?

If I were a Daasanach woman, how would I perceive my looks, since I would never see myself in a mirror? How would I perceive childbirth, after squatting on a cowskin with no painkillers?

How would I perceive my own worth, having been purchased by my husband from my father and uncles for a certain number of cows? If I were a Daasanach woman, what would my relationship with my husband be like, since he would most likely consider marrying another wife if he could afford her, especially if I could not bear children?

How would my view of cooking change if I had to chop and carry firewood, or cook on three rocks, or if I owned only one cooking pot? How would my view of night change if I had no light but the cooking fire? What would my children's bedtime routine be like if we all slept together on a cowskin in a ten-foot-round house? How would my view of travel change if my trips were all on foot, mile after mile on a narrow path between the thorn bushes, balancing my belongings on my head?

As I muse on these things, it is easy to feel that the chasm between us is so great, we can never even begin to empathize with one another. It seems ludicrous for me to even try. But then I think of my Lord Jesus. He left high-tech heaven to live for 33 years in a culture not too far ahead of this tribal one. I take courage to keep befriending the Daasanach women, trusting in Jesus, who understands us both and can make us sisters. One day we'll live side-by-side in the mansions of heaven, and all our chasms will be bridged perfectly.

Love,

Becca

August 28, 1995

Dear Ladies,

I've always wondered how Jacob could use a stone for a pillow. Wouldn't it be more comfortable just to put his head on the ground?

Now that I live at Ileret, I have begun to understand better.

You see, the Daasanach have no pillows. The women and children lie on cowskins in their low, round grass houses, and the men sleep outside, guarding their families and herd against enemies and wild animals. Each man has a special carved stool, called a *kara*, which serves as his pillow.

The *kara* is all carved from one piece of wood, which often means that a whole tree has been sacrificed in order to get a piece big enough for the purpose. Many men carve their own, painstakingly personalized, and most have a leather strap-handle for carrying. In Daasanach land, it is a common sight to see a man striding across the desert with his *kara* and his walking stick in hand.

We were recently reminded of how valuable each man's *kara* is to him. An old man came to sell us charcoal. Colin was busy that day, so he left me with instructions to pay him after the man had drunk tea. Now, I-makolo is a grizzled, shrewd, conniving salesman, and when I overpaid him he spat tobacco juice with practiced skill and left hastily, grinning. Not until Colin came home for supper did we discover what I had done.

Colin was incensed. It was not the first time the old man had cheated him. "That scoundrel! Well, I guess we won't see him again for a while." But to our surprise, I-makolo arrived early the next morning. Sheepishly he greeted us and said offhandedly, "I just came to get my *kara*." In his haste to escape with the money, he had left his stool-pillow on our porch! Quick as a wink Colin pounced on it. "You may have your *kara* back either when you return our money or bring its equivalent in charcoal."

I-makolo fussed and argued, but eventually he brought the charcoal. "You sure you wouldn't just like to give me your *kara*?" Colin twinkled. "Ha!" the old man bellowed. "There's not another like it!" He left us with the charcoal and went home, stool in hand. I wondered if, in the absence of his *kara*, he had used a stone, like Jacob.

Love,

Becca

October 25, 1995

Dear Ladies,

Naas died last night, a few houses away. We heard the gunshot signaling her near-end at 9 PM, but thought merely that one of the shepherds must have spotted a hyena. We did not hear the women wailing at midnight, although it was very still, stiller and damper than Ileret nights usually are. The clouds hung low and the rain fell softly on this desert for many hours, and Colin and I slept soundly through the grief and burial until morning, when Akol informed us soberly that Naas was dead.

Naas was Ay-gur's half-sister (remember Ay-gur?). I met her for the first time five or six years ago when she came to a ladies' Christmas party. She was big-boned, strong, and young; just married. We heard the Christmas story and played party games and took a picture of the group. Naas is the tall one in back.

She married a man from Nangolei and they had a baby boy first. He must be about three now. Then, two months ago, she gave birth to twins. It was a hard birth, and several family members mentioned her poor health. Last Sunday her husband came to ask Colin and the other church men to come pray for her.

Colin arrived home very sober after that prayer meeting, and Jim Ness went with his truck the next day to bring her to our village. According to Daasanach custom, they were withholding food and drink "till she gets better." She was so weak, she could not stand alone. We did everything we could to rehydrate and strengthen her, but she declined steadily and in 48 hours was dead.

Jim and Sue Ness heard the women wailing in the night and went to sit with them. The crying was loud and expressive, with words of despair and consternation and the grieving of those who have no hope. When she died, the mourners settled down and became very busy. The men went to dig the grave, since she must be buried before she stiffened. The women shaved Naas' head. They pried her steel bracelets off arms and ankles, and removed her numerous glass bead necklaces.

Even though she was so thin, she was heavy. As they buried her in the grave, one of the Christian men prayed for her relatives. I wondered this morning: Could she have believed in Jesus? Colin preached often at Nangolei; perhaps she listened and accepted. I hope so.

Colin and Jim drove the family back to Nangolei this evening, two of the women clutching the infants in the back seat. They will give them goat's milk and maybe find a wet nurse. Again I wonder, did Naas believe? Oh, let me not pass up even one opportunity to tell people about the Lord Jesus.

Love,

Becca

January 13, 1996

Dear Ladies,

Nagabite came to see me this morning. She is a pitiful old woman now, although I thought so when I first met her, years ago. At that time she told me that she was the first Daasanach prostitute, and gave me her life history, which was sordid and sad. Her two children, a boy and a girl, were grown. She and her daughter never got along. The girl also had become a prostitute.

Anini, her son, she got along with in her own way. He was a fisherman who aspired to do better, so he joined the army and went downcountry. His mother finally badgered him into taking her to live in Nairobi. But Nairobi made her miserable. She hated living in the slums, so she began nagging him to bring her back to Ileret.

He took her halfway, as far as Marsabit, and there he left her. Nagabite spent a miserable year on Marsabit mountain, living as a beggar and surviving on handouts. Finally someone took pity, put her on a truck, and sent her back to Ileret.

When she arrived, she found her house dismantled and all her earthly belongings stolen. She went to her daughter's house but was refused help of any kind. So after a few days she came to me.

"Do you have any cardboard boxes to give me so I can build a house?" she begged.

"Nagabite! Where have you been all this time?" I asked. And then the story came spilling out. When she finished I gave her a cardboard box and a dress. She was so excited about the dress, she literally jumped up and down. "God bless you!" she exclaimed repeatedly. Finally she calmed down enough to go home.

When she came back today she said, "Guess what? Everybody in town came to see my new dress! They even called some of the policemen over to see me!"

I sat with her and said, "Nagabite, I want to tell you a story. Once there was a woman who lost everything. All she had to wear was one old skirt with holes in it. But one day her friend gave her a new dress to cover her body. Everyone who saw her said, 'Look, Nagabite is wearing Rebecca's dress.' Just like your old skirt was dirty and torn, your spirit is also dirty. God saw your dirty spirit and He said, 'Nagabite can't come live with me like that. I'll send my Son Jesus to die for her. His blood will wash her sin away, and she can put on His righteousness. When she trusts in Jesus, I'll clothe her spirit with Jesus' goodness and one day she can come live with Me.' Then I asked, 'Nagabite, have you ever asked God to wash you with Jesus' blood and make you clean?'"

Nagabite answered, "I want to!"

So she prayed. She said, "Father, you know my spirit is wicked. Please wash my sins with Jesus' blood. Give me His righteousness. Make me His child." She didn't know how to say amen, so she didn't.

I prayed as well. Then I said, "Nagabite, God has forgiven all your sins. Now He also wants you to forgive your daughter, who has sinned against you. I know she has

done terrible things to you; in your own strength you cannot forgive her, but God will give you the power to do it.

She replied, "You're right, my daughter HAS done terrible things to me. I can't forgive her! But if God helps me, I will."

Those words seemed to show a real change of heart from the old Nagabite of years ago who could only spout bitter invectives against her enemies. May God continue to change her from glory to glory till the coming of our Lord Jesus.

"And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude and as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty peals of thunder, saying, 'Hallelujah! For the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready.' And it was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints" (Rev. 19:6-8).

Love,

Becca

May 1996

Dear Ladies,

Is it a waste for us to be missionaries to the Daasanach? From time to time people ask or imply this question when we are on furlough. They seem to want to say, "Both of you come from a world the tribesman could never imagine. Your training and gifts would be so much better used among those of us who can truly understand and appreciate them. Hasn't God poured out a wealth of spiritual privilege and enrichment on you which those people will never even perceive, much less appreciate? And we could profit so much more from all that you can teach us!"

We could give many answers, of course, to this question. It's tempting to defend the intelligence of the Daasanach, or to emphasize that the mission field needs winners, not losers. But the best answer I've found, which faces and settles all the issues completely is this one: Our leader and example is the Lord Jesus Christ, who did not consider equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bondservant, and devoting Himself to a motley crew of "uneducated" fishermen who, until He rose from the dead, never fully appreciated the half of what He taught them. His life He recklessly poured out for the many, and though they craved the bread He multiplied for them, they remained indifferent to the Bread of Life.

Was it a waste? Certainly the world thinks so, when they consider His death on the cross, but to us who have received salvation, that cross in our joy, the Lord Jesus is our great riches. Through His poverty we were made rich, and grace upon grace was poured out on us. Do we then consider the manifold grace of God as something to be reserved for the worthy? God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, the weak to shame the strong, the base and the despised (even the Daasanach), that no man should boast before God.

Those things, then, which were gain to us (even our Christian upbringing and privileges, training and experience) we count as loss for the sake of Christ. Gladly we give up our right to appreciation, if only the Lord Jesus can be lifted up. We rarely explain the world we came from in the USA to our Daasanach neighbors; it's more important to discuss the world we are going to. We are with them in weakness, with tongue-tied stammering, and we rejoice to see that the power is not in our eloquence but in the message itself, and in our Savior.

Perhaps we who think the wealth of our spiritual heritage is too precious to be squandered on remote tribesmen should take a second look at our own unworthiness, and be reminded that while we were ignorant sinners, in darkness and excluded from the life of God, Christ died for us. May our gratitude abound and our lives be poured out to seek the unworthy, as He did. Jesus said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains by itself alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world shall keep it to life eternal. If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me, and where I am, there shall My servant also be; if anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him" (John 12:24-26).

Love, **Becca**

June 1996

Dear Ladies,

Daasanach travelers have it rough. Consider the case of the couple who arrived in our village today. They came from another village north of us, and had walked two days to get here. They had no telephone to call ahead, so when they arrived they found that the man they sought, Job Yergalech, is away for several days, and they had no other friends in the village. The wife has a small child which she carried in a goatskin sling on her back.

When Job left, he locked his house. Some Daasanach have only a goatskin flap for a door, so any visitors who came would simply go in and stay there, using (and perhaps taking) whatever they needed until they got ready to leave. But Job's house has a door, and it was locked with a padlock, so these visitors stood around a bit and then went a few houses away to Job's friend Ghosh and asked for a place to spend the night. What could they do? There is no Holiday Inn nearby, not even one in all the Daasanach villages.

Ghosh took them in because he is a kind man, and because to refuse hospitality is rude in this culture. The visitors must be fed, since there is no McDonalds nearby, nor any other restaurants. If they should stay in a village where no one fed them, they would sleep hungry, since they rarely carry food, and only sometimes a gourd of milk. They do not carry bedding, so Ghosh will give them a cowskin for the mother and baby to sleep on inside the house, with his wife and children. The men sleep outside, wrapped in the blankets they wear around their waists, using their wooden *karas* (stools) for headrests.

You can understand what I mean when I say that travelers rely heavily on the hospitality and generosity of the people they meet on the way. I think it must have been very much like this for people in Bible times, too, which is perhaps why the Bible has so much more to say to hosts than to guests. Some passages that come to mind are these:

"Be hospitable to one another without complaint"

"Be devoted to one another in brotherly love . . . practicing hospitality"

"Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it" (1 Peter 4:9; Rom. 13:10, 13; Heb. 13:2).

The next time you are called on to house and feed unexpected visitors, please think of us and pray that we--and all the Daasanach believers--will show that we belong to Jesus in the way we practice generous hospitality.

Love,

Becca

October 1996

Dear Ladies,

Lolim was one of the first people Colin and I met when we came to live at Ileret in 1989. He called himself the "chief engineer" of the water system. Each day his job was to walk down to the river, turn on the engine that ran the water pump, and send water to the three local water tanks: the town, the police post, and the mission.

He and his diminutive, cheery wife lived on the mission property with their two girls and one boy: Susanna, Kolle and Asich. At one point they built a large mud house adjacent to the property, and surrounded it with intricate thorn fences and corrals for their sheep and goats. Colin had our few goats in with theirs, and whenever he went to Marsabit he would bring back heavy sandals for the shepherds.

I well remember the day Lolim trusted Christ. He and Colin had been butchering a goat together, and they came in for midmorning tea. Two prostitutes from town were visiting me that day, and as we sat together, Colin said casually, "Lolim, tell Rebecca what you just did." He looked a bit abashed but answered readily, "Today I decided to ask Jesus to be my Savior and wash my sins away with His blood." The prostitutes sat agog.

How we later rejoiced at his baptism! And when Nyoro also came to the Lord Jesus and was baptized, our cup was full to overflowing. Many afternoons I walked to Nyoro's house to sit on a cowskin in the shade and drink hot tea. She had more children, two boys. We had more children, two boys. She helped me teach Sunday School. Lolim composed Christian songs in Daasanach and taught them to us all.

But gradually Lolim's heart grew cold toward the Lord. He started using his Sunday mornings to go check on his livestock rather than coming to church. One time when Colin spoke to him about a particular absence, a Sunday that he had chosen to go eat meat at a party and had taken most of the Christian men with him, Lolim exploded in anger. From that time onward his attitude was hostile.

He moved his wife and children to another village, too far away to come to church. And he began preparing for Dimi.

Dimi might easily be considered the most important event in a Daasanach man's life. It is a rite of passage spanning several months. During that time, men who are passing from manhood to tribal eldership must live in one place and host anyone who chooses to come stay with them. Special songs are composed about each man's life, his feats and successes. On the evening before the day of the final feast and dance, the men of Dimi must brew enormous quantities of millet beer for the elders to drink that they may be drunk when they bless them.

The preparations for Dimi are so extensive, and the expenses so enormous, that most men spend many months preparing for it. Lolim was anxious to have a particularly impressive party, and he spent a lot of time working on accumulating wealth and animals.

His work on the water system suffered; sometimes he simply did not do his job. How we prayed for Lolim!

At one point he had a half-hearted reconciliation meeting with Colin, and came to church once or twice later. Each time he stood and said, "I've been wandering far from fellowship, but as soon as I finish my Dimi, I'll be back."

About six months ago he came to Colin and said, "I'm ready to retire from my job. I've been doing this work for more than fifteen years, and I'm ready to retire." We realized his retirement benefits added up to a huge sum of money which he wanted for his Dimi. Colin gave him a retirement party, and they roasted a goat by the river. He took his money and moved away.

Shortly afterward he became sick. He became very weak and thin, and when he came to see us his voice was so hoarse we could hardly hear him. The day of special songs came and went, celebrated in a village near Il-gele. His Dimi had finally begun.

Then he died.

The shock of his death stunned the whole Daasanach community, especially the Christians. On the day of "paying respects" a group of Christian men went together to offer condolences to Nyoro. She looked at them silently, numbly.

My own grief over Lolim feels a lot like Samuel's over Saul, or David's over Absalom. Deep regret. Disappointment. Such potential. Such waste. It's not only his death that grieves me, but such a death after such a life. Maybe the Lord in severe mercy looked down and said, "Son, I love you too much to let you go on like this." Who can say?

Love,

Becca

March 1997

Dear Ladies,

From August to October, 1996, we saw roadblocks and problems springing up one after another as Colin and his friend Tim tried to dig a well and begin housebuilding at Il-gele.

Tim's wife, Janis, and I looked at each other one day and said, "This is serious spiritual attack, and we need to confront it head-on!" So we began meeting every day at Jan's house for prayer. Our prayers were simple at first: "Lord, help our men be protected and make progress at Il-gele today." Soon we began praying about other things, too.

We prayed that the men working with Tim and Colin would be spiritually sensitive . . . and recently, when Colin took his Bible story pictures along, they listened to the account from Adam to Moses and still begged for more.

We prayed for physical protection . . . and no one has been injured, even while installing a 600 lb. water tank ten feet in the air.

We prayed for our Christians to begin sharing the gospel with their friends and families, and since then we personally have seen several witnessing to others, or heard about it.

We prayed for Tim and Jan's work permit to be granted; it was.

We prayed for several people's salvation, and have seen eight people come to faith in the Lord Jesus in just a couple of months.

We prayed for our travel logistics, and the Lord intervened.

We prayed for diesel fuel, and it came on a plane.

We prayed for wisdom to see how to help a few young mothers whose toddlers were giving them fits. A few days later the Lord opened an opportunity to talk with those very mothers, and during that teaching-time, the rowdiest toddler fell asleep on his mother's lap.

We prayed for a very sick little boy, and he is healing.

We prayed for help in translating a Bible story book, and the Lord sent a man who sits all morning faithfully writing it out.

We prayed for Janis' reading class to make progress, and the group has grown to include nearly every adult in the neighborhood.

We prayed for a missionary vision among the Daasanach, and recently one man confided that in his heart he yearns to be an evangelist to the Hamarkoke, the tribe's traditional enemies.

Janis and I have been so blessed by our prayer times together that we have begun calling all the neighbor women to Jan's house to pray on Saturday afternoons for Sunday's meetings at church. You must understand that these are Daasanach women, most of whom have never prayed aloud in their lives, prayer being left to the men in Daasanach culture. They sit in a circle and listen as I explain that each of us will pray aloud in turn, and as we briefly list a few items for which to pray. When their turns come a few pray easily, but most pray haltingly at first. As they focus on what they are saying, the words come more smoothly and even the beginners find they have a lot to say.

Do you have a prayer partner? I highly recommend asking the Lord to send you one!

Love,

Becca

September 1997

Dear Ladies,

"These people have nothing!" exclaimed one American visitor some years ago. I have pondered the remark often since then, certain that the average Daasanach would disagree.

It is true, their houses are not much to look at: low frames of sticks, 10 or 12 feet across, covered with a motley assortment of woven grass, animal skins and a piece or two of corrugated steel, pounded flat. Inside, a cowskin on the floor, a cooking pot or two, some gourds of various shapes and sizes serving as dishes. Usually they also have a steel or wooden footlocker for storing other belongings.

No, anyone looking at a Daasanach house would conclude abject poverty, as my friend did. But a Daasanach person primarily measures wealth not in terms of inanimate objects, but rather in terms of living things. After all, isn't a living being much better--intrinsically better--than a gadget of stone or steel?

All their lives Daasanach accumulate what they term wealth. They accumulate cows. They accumulate goats. They accumulate sheep. And donkeys. They know by sight each cow, goat, sheep and donkey they own. They also know each other's animals, and which animals who gave (or sold) to whom. They seek for a lost sheep; they move to where the best grass and water is; they drink the milk every evening as they walk among their herds. A Daasanach finds great pleasure in his animals.

They accumulate wives, too. Wives are a great help to a man in his work. One wife can tend the cows; one can plant the garden; one can care for the sheep and goats; all can bear many children. The proud husband travels between them, sojourning in each place long enough to see how things are going. He is respected among the tribal elders as a man of influence and importance.

They accumulate children as well. Children, like wives, are intrinsically good. The more the better. They bring such joy when they are born, the little wonders. Daasanach people dote on babies. They play with them, sing to them, carry them, hold them, love them from dawn to dusk, simply because God gave babies to be enjoyed. To suggest to a Daasanach woman that she is poor because her baby has no clothes is ludicrous. No shirt can make a baby worth more. She is rich simply because she bore this living treasure, and has him still.

As the children grow, they continue being part of their parents' wealth. They join the household work force. Some tend the animals, some may go to school; the girls learn to carry water and firewood. A wise father surveys his growing brood and administrates his children's placement and training. A wise mother gives her girls plenty of practice in household tasks--especially baby-sitting--and hopes for many grandchildren.

If you came to our village today, you might call me the richest lady here. I have a refrigerator, a stove and a bed. My husband and I own no cows or goats, however, and our children are only three. The Daasanach survey our situation, call us rich, and, in the absence of shopping malls, go on avidly collecting Living Wealth.

Love,

Becca

October 1997

Dear Ladies,

Perhaps it is no accident the children and I are memorizing the book of Philippians this year. Paul wrote it while he was in prison, and it is about joy.

Many times throughout this year I have felt myself to be in a kind of prison. The circumstances of my life are particularly unpleasant, and release seems nowhere near.

Like many women, I find myself emotionally uplifted or drained depending on my "nest." This year as we are building our new house at Il-gele, we are "camping out" in a small corrugated-steel workshop on the same property. I do not enjoy using an out-house, living in one room, sleeping on a mattress which I have to move when it rains on me, coping without running water, and having two thirds of our belongings stored at Ileret, only available when we drive up there on Sunday afternoons.

This week God handed me a file. Not an open door, nor a key, but certainly a file with which to weaken the chains. Colin has now completed enough of the house to allow me to begin to paint it. At last, after months of standing by and waiting, longing for progress but unable to do anything physically to speed it along, at last I can help.

Of course, my mornings are busy with cooking, teaching homeschool, and hosting the workmen for their Bible study-teatime. But every afternoon for two precious hours I can wield a paintbrush and thus bring us closer to our goal of moving in.

Several verses in Philippians have struck with severe force during my months of divinely appointed confinement.

"Now I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel, so that my imprisonment in the cause of Christ has become well known . . . What then? Only that in every way . . . Christ is proclaimed; and in this I rejoice, yes, and I will rejoice" (Phil. 1:12, 13, 18).

I confess that I have not been so consumed by a desire to see people come to Christ that I have rejoiced in my "imprisonment." Yet Paul was glad to be a prisoner, if it meant that more people would hear about Christ. Cheerfully he writes,

"I know how to get long with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. I can do all things through Him who strengthens me" (Phil. 4:12, 13).

A precious secret, that contentment anchored in Jesus' strength. A secret I acknowledge with my head and find too often absent in my heart. I have not yet learned

to suffer need and get along with humble means without sensing a deep wordless complaint at the "injustice" of it.

Paul did not plan to spend forever in prison (Phil. 2:23, 24). But, unlike me, he was not setting his hopes on a file to finally unshackle him. Instead, he calmly looked forward to a time when the prison doors would swing open.

"For I know that this shall turn out for my deliverance through your prayers and the provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ . . . for to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain." (Phil. 1:19, 21).

There is no deprivation I have suffered while camping at Il-gele which remotely approximates the deprivation my Lord Jesus suffered for me in His life on earth. He who humbled Himself had no place to lay his head. And shall I spurn the fellowship of His sufferings? Let me learn the mystery of God's gift:

"For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake" (Phil. 1:29).

At the right time, my God will bring release. Meantime He will tutor me in joy.

Love,
Becca

POSTSCRIPT

In May 1998 we completed our house, just as our third missionary term in Kenya ended. Then we came to the USA for a year before returning to the Daasanach to continue sharing the gospel and planting churches in 1999.

October 10, 1999

Dear Ladies,

It has been over a year since I last wrote, and for some of you it will be the first time to read one of these “ladies’ letters.” A short introduction might be in order.

Halfway through our second missionary term in Kenya a friend asked if I would write her a letter periodically, giving a description of bush missionary life, which she could then reproduce to share with the ladies in her Sunday School class. This I did and, in time, the Lord provided one woman in each of our seven churches to reproduce the letters for other women there. If you are reading this letter, it is thanks to the time, effort and generosity of a woman in your church.

The life here is so far removed from yours, I’d best take this first letter to describe the environment where we live. This will provide a “frame” for other “pictures” you may read from me in the future.

We live on a great, rolling plain in the deserts of East Africa. To the south and east of us lie low bluffs, but we must drive many hours to see anything like a mountain. This is Il-Gele in northern Kenya, and if we follow the road that continues past our “driveway” for just a couple of miles, we cross the border into Ethiopia.

The plain itself is dotted with thorn bushes and acacia trees that line the banks of the dry riverbeds. Here, near the equator, the sun rises and sets at nearly the same hour every day, and to a visitor it might seem that seasonal changes are imperceptible. But we have lived in this area for ten years now, and we notice the variations.

Right now it is a “cooler” season-July being the coolest month, averaging 85-90F in the day-and also a time when the rainy season is about to begin. High winds send the dust swirling through my house. Clouds build in the afternoons, but are not yet relieving the land’s crying thirst. The women are no longer digging wells in the riverbeds. They are dry. When the rains finally come, those riverbeds will turn into torrents, and the plain will be carpeted with green grass and wildflowers.

But right now the women are carrying their water from the lake. The lake water is somewhat salty, and the fluoride in it turns people’s teeth brown, but it is water, and it is plentiful. Lake Turkana is 25 miles wide and 120 miles long. It refreshes the harshness of this land. Its shores always grow a tough, stickly grass that is painful to walk on but paints the ground a soothing green. The goats and sheep with their velvet-soft mouths can eat that prickly grass and survive on it.

In the mornings the wind blows furiously off the desert, hot and dry; toward noon, still air makes us drip sweat, and the men stretch out to sleep under the shade of the acacias; in the afternoon the wind begins to blow off the lake, cool and damp. From my kitchen window I can see the wind whipping up the waves. Occasionally a fisherman in his small boat is on the lake, checking his nets. Women and children with buckets of water or large platters of fish on their heads follow the crooked paths across the plain.

This year the lake seems temperamental. Rather than receding from its shores at the proper season, leaving fertile ground for the millet farms, it has stayed swollen and flooded, due to extra rains in Ethiopia which keep the Omo River flowing rapidly into the lake. Since the animals lack grass and the farming land is flooded, there is very little to eat except fish. Twice in the past few months the government of Kenya has sent large trucks of corn to this area, and once the government of Ethiopia sent wheat.

Our house is built on a knoll in the plain. It is a knoll with wide, tall trees, old trees that have been here for generations, and a shallow indentation to one side that turns into a pond in rainy season. The house is a rectangle, 20'x30' and two stories high. Downstairs the walls are cement block; upstairs they are made of white steel siding. Verandas shade both front and back. The roof is also white, and the whole structure can be seen for miles around. Lost travelers have guided themselves by it on moonlit nights.

On the same land Colin also built two structures of corrugated steel with cement floors. One is a house for the two watchmen. The other is a clinic. The corners of the plot are delineated by four upright poles in the ground, and the only real fence runs around the sides and back yard of our house. During the day all the shady spots are occupied by people: fishermen mending their nets, patients for the missionary nurse on Wednesdays, children bouncing on the lower limbs of the trees, shepherds sleeping. At nightfall they go home.

Home is the village scattered around us. Low round grass huts, more than a hundred of them, cluster in small groups here and there. Near some of them, people have built thorn-fence corrals for their animals. Some have no corrals, but if you stroll by them you will see fish, gutted and sliced in half, drying in rows in the sun. Those are the fishermen's homes. The fishermen and the herdsmen don't mix much; those who own animals consider themselves superior.

But more about interpersonal relationships in another letter.

Love, Becca

March 2000

Dear Ladies,

Drought has a way of turning Daasanach society on its head. But then, so does Christianity.

During most times, the shepherds are considered the Upper Class. They have sheep, goats and cows, which provide food and security for the future, like a living bank account. They plant millet and black-eyed peas on the banks of the lake as it recedes, and eat that harvest for months. Their men are the Big Shots, their women's bodies gleam with oil, their children are plump and well fed. Shepherds normally do not build their houses next to the fishermen's. They keep to themselves and do not invite fishermen to dinner, nor do shepherd's wives normally make close friends with fishermen's wives.

The fishermen, on the other hand, are definitely on the low end of society. In fact, "fisherman" is often used as a synonym for "poor person." They live by fishing and selling those fish to the foreign Somali traders in town. They have no "cushion" for the future, no inheritance to pass on to their kids. When they want meat or grain, they have to buy or beg it from the shepherds. When they don't work hard, their families get nothing to eat. The shepherds' wives gossip about the fishermen's wives and children, the wild and unrefined way they live.

Enter a drought. The lake did not recede fast enough to plant food. The grass did not grow. The animals began dying, and there was no grain anywhere. Old people began dying. During those days, the only ones who had enough to eat were the fishermen. Every day we saw the men, women and children carrying the fish home from the lake. The shepherds watched with envy. Some even bought nets. "We don't know how to fish like these fishermen do," they sighed, when their nets caught nothing. They saw that the fishermen's wives had enough cash from the sale of the fish to buy new skirts, and their children did not have to go to sleep hungry.

Then something began to happen among the Christians. Those who were fishermen began sharing their fish with the shepherds whose families had no supper. The fishermen began leaving free fish hanging on my fence, for us to enjoy at lunchtime, and they began bringing dried fish to contribute to the offering at church. Can you imagine what that did to those class barriers? It is very hard to resist the force of love and generosity.

Colin and I rejoice that those barriers of prejudice and pride are beginning to be broken down, by the inexorable, severe mercy of our God who longs to reconcile us to each other and to Himself. Even now that the famine conditions have eased, Christians passing through town are just as likely to spend the night in the home of a Christian fisherman as in the home of a shepherd. And recently one shepherd's wife remarked to me, "If it hadn't been for these fishermen, some of us might not have made it." For a Daasanach, that is equivalent to a deep expression of gratitude.

Love, Becca

"As for the saints who are in the earth, they are the majestic ones in whom is all my delight." Ps 16:2

*“For who is our hope or joy or crown of exultation?
Is it not even you,
in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming?
For you are our glory and joy.” 1 Thes 2:19, 20*

November 2000

Dear Ladies,

Twelve years ago, there were only two baptized believers among the Daasanach. Two years later, there were four. Two years later, eight. And every two years since then, the Daasanach church has doubled in size.

In the early days, every message was evangelistic, whether from Genesis or Revelation, and most of the group was unsaved people, completely unfamiliar with God. “You mean God has a Son?” they asked. After one message, an old man stood and addressed Colin, “You’re a stranger here, and we don’t really know you. So maybe you’re a sinner, as you say. But I can assure you, there are no other sinners in this village!”

Nowadays, when believers hear that story, they chuckle. They all know the Ten Commandments by heart, and can clearly explain how the whole human race became sinful through Adam, as well as how to know Jesus and be forgiven. Christians meet on a regular basis in three different villages, and, most recently, a number of them have begun making evangelistic trips to faraway areas where people haven’t yet heard the gospel.

The Christians are now so numerous that a new culture is springing up, a Daasanach Christian culture. As new believers are added to the church, they are also learning the habits and practices of the others. And Daasanach Christians are characterized by a number of things.

Such as prayer. Oh, how they love to pray! When they visit in each other’s homes, they pray for each other’s problems. Before a drink or a meal, they thank the Lord for the food. When embarking on a journey, they gather to pray for protection on the way. In the public worship service, they pray for the spread of the gospel. When they are sick, they call for other believers to come pray for their recovery. When they have quarreled, they confess their sins and pray for forgiveness. Having come to know God in a personal way, they revel in the privilege of fellowship with Him.

In the old days, their songs were accounts of their wars, their sins, their exploits. Nowadays they compose and sing songs of praise to Jesus. They delight in singing that He is their perfect Sacrifice, their Savior, their Elder Brother, their Life and Light and Truth, the Only Way to God. In the evenings, it is quite common for all the Christians to gather under the moon and sing till almost midnight. Many of their songs are taken directly from the Scriptures they are presently memorizing.

This is because Scripture memory is also delightful to them. Most Daasanach people are still illiterate. For this reason, we pay special attention to the public reading of the Scripture, and devote part of every public meeting to reviewing verses we know and learning new ones. Parents review verses with their children at home. Some Christians have heard the Gospel of Mark and Genesis so often, they have memorized them in their entirety. His Words are sweet to their taste, yes, sweeter than honey to their mouth.

Daasanach Christians have rejected animal blood sacrifices as a way to be protected, to be forgiven, or to be healed. They see clearly the sinfulness of adultery, theft, lying, envy and gossip. They are learning to bear with persecution patiently, not retaliating in anger or hatred. Daasanach Christians recognize the importance of living holy lives before their unsaved friends and family so that the Name of the Lord Jesus will not be dishonored, and perhaps some of the people they love might be saved also.

They are precious in His sight, and in ours.

Love, Becca

March 2001

Jesus said, "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple. Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. Luke 14:26-27.

Dear Ladies,

Even now, months later, I sometimes set five places at the table. When I catch myself and remove the fifth plate, my thoughts fly briefly 600 miles south. My 12-year-old daughter, Mary Cathryn lives there now, in the high, cold, green mountains overlooking Kenya's widest valley, at a boarding school called Rift Valley Academy.

They said seventh grade was not a propitious year for a girl to start there. That's the year they begin changing classrooms every hour, they said, and besides, her hormones will be kicking in and making all the adjustments harder. But Mary wanted a year at home after furlough and spent sixth grade in homeschool.

Did I think she would have second thoughts about wanting to go to RVA? Or that I would find it unbearable to let her go? As the time drew near we sewed nametags on her clothes, bought snacks for her snack bucket, discussed friendships and sensible bedtimes and good study habits, and always we were calm and cheerful. But every now and then when she came and hugged me in the kitchen, she patted my back and I patted hers, and we cried. "I love you," we said.

She's happy at school. Her dorm parents are steady, gracious, godly people who love her, listen to her, and dispense good advice and discipline. Her teachers challenge her academically, and she thrives on the social dorm life, the sports events, the extracurricular activities. She loves Sunday School, Bible class, chapel, dorm devotions, and quiet prayer times with her friend Cheryl. On Sunday afternoons she comes and talks on the two-way radio to us, full of cheerful chatter.

"I can type 31 words a minute on the computer now," she exults, "and my English teacher sent my poem in to a contest. I'm also making you a surprise in tech ed, Mom. We got to see a video Friday night, and tonight is my small group meeting. Do you still think you can come butcher a goat for my science class, Dad?" My ears listen and my heart listens and I am newly reassured. Our conversation is lighthearted, but when Colin takes the microphone he can hardly croak, "Hi Mary," for the tears. And there is a long pause. Finally, "Hi Dad," from an equally tearful daughter.

She comes home every six weeks. Three times a year she's home for a month, and three times a year she's home for four or five days at midterm. She doesn't seem to want anything more from us than just to be "normal," to sleep in her own bed and eat at her own table and read books and walk to the lake and visit with her friends, many of whom are now married. She sleeps a lot and bakes bread and helps her brothers do dishes. Colin takes her for driving lessons on the airstrip in the old blue Land Rover, and she and I sit in her room and talk. Being together is wonderful.

Being apart is hard. Living at school, living at Il-Gele: these are not hard. Being apart is.

She never says, "I want to come home."

We never say, "We think you should come home." Because she doesn't want to, and we don't think she should. But she hugs me in the kitchen and pats my back and whispers, "I miss you." And I answer, "I miss you, too."

Then we both cry.

June 2001

Dear Ladies,

A Daasanach man's circumcision is supposed to show off his courage.

For ten years no one in the tribe had been circumcised. This year the Daasanach decided to correct that. Everywhere preparations for the festivities began. Women sewed animal skins together to make fancy skirts for their husbands or sons. They cut poles and branches to make leafy shade booths for the men to recover under afterward. They composed songs lauding the men's bravery. They arranged for some of their animals to be brought in from the range to provide milk for their heroes.

The men formed themselves into groups, each with a chosen captain. Prior to their circumcision they marched through the villages, singing songs to bolster their courage and spitting *gunite* root on anyone who fed them, as a blessing. On the day of their circumcision, they were carried into the animals' corral on the shoulders of their friends, while choirs of women surrounded the fence and sang energetically. (At the party we attended, one young man's mother swooned into the arms of her neighbors. "Is she ill?" I asked anxiously. "Oh no, it's her son's turn now," they answered.)

The surgeon's assistant poured water on the knife to clean it (!) and the young man was required not to utter a sound during the operation to show his brave manhood. Afterwards the young men went to their shady booths and were given only milk, water and porridge for the next four weeks. Each man had chosen a friend to "hold his back" while he was circumcised. That friend was in charge of giving him food and presents during his first month of recovery. The friend also had to supply a set of bows and arrows and a new blanket for the second month, when the men are allowed to roam about, shooting birds for fun and begging goats for meat feasts.

During the months of April and May about 500 Daasanach men were circumcised. Twice Colin carried groups home when they sent word they had lost too much blood to walk the last few miles to their booths. He began treating men who got infected with hydrogen peroxide in the evenings. He also spent some time teaching that "neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything" when the Christians became confused about whether there was any spiritual value in the rite.

Although we have profited from being able to observe an important cultural event in Daasanach life, we have been saddened by the detriment the long celebration has been to the church as a whole. The weeds and thorns of fame, riches, and worldly concerns are

choking out the good Word and preventing people from producing spiritual fruit. One night two young men came to us, like Nicodemus, under cover of darkness. “We want to come to church this week but the rest of the group is violently opposed. Please pray that we’ll have the strength to obey God rather than men.” We prayed, and they came.

“That,” I thought, “is Real Courage.”

November 2001

Dear Ladies,

The first Muslim we ever met at Ileret was a Somali missionary who told Colin sourly, “You’ll never be able to convert these people. I haven’t.” Twelve months later he was dead of malaria.

The one remaining Muslim shopkeeper in Ileret, Ahmed, was not very devout. Since there were no other Muslims around, he didn’t observe many of the religious customs, and over the last twelve years Colin has had numerous opportunities to witness to him. Although he has not yet become a Christian, he is becoming more and more convinced of the truth, so much so that once, when his life was threatened, he sent a letter to the AIC church on Sunday to ask the congregation to pray for his safety.

Meanwhile, after an interval of about ten years, more Muslim traders have begun moving to Ileret, setting up shops and even building a small mosque. They insist that everyone who works for them must also attend Friday services. It is obvious that they consider it their duty not only to make their living but also to convert people to their faith. Four Muslim traders even moved to Il-gele.

The Lord is stirring up our church to witness to these dear lost people. Why should they convert us? Why shouldn’t we, instead, take advantage of the times we live in and witness to them so that they can know our great Savior, the Lord Jesus? This is the recurrent theme when the Daasanach Christians meet. In our ladies’ meetings the women pray fervently for the salvation of “the Muslims You have sent here, so they can hear the gospel from us.” As we prepared to come to Nairobi this month, a Muslim trader asked Colin if he could buy him an Old Testament, and, when Colin explained that he could only buy a complete Bible and it would cost him about 600 shillings (some 7 dollars), he insisted he wanted one.

So to Nairobi we came. And then on to Mombasa on the coast, for a few days’ vacation. While there, Colin began conversing with the shopkeepers from the roadside stands, who were trying to hawk their wares. “I can’t stop and see your wood carvings right now, but if you’ll walk along with me to where I’m going, I’ll be glad to explain to you the whole gospel of Jesus Christ.”

Five of them countered with an invitation to come back later and bring his “holy book” so they could discuss matters more thoroughly. When he did, the Muslims wanted to argue about Mohammed and the Koran. “I don’t know much about them,” Colin

answered pleasantly, “but I do want to take the time to extend to you the invitation of Jesus to know Him and receive eternal life.” He was able to clearly explain Jesus’ deity and read several passages from the gospels, which Muslims accept as authoritative. Later he gave the New Testament to the man who seemed most interested, and who could read English. “Here are the passages we read together the other day,” Colin began. At that the man interrupted, “Actually, I think what I really want to do is start at the beginning and read through this whole book. I really want to know what is the truth.”

This is a time of great opportunity for all Christians everywhere to witness to Muslims. Even if we have not had much previous contact with them in past years, the Lord will gladly send searching Muslims to anyone who prays for opportunities to share the gospel with them. Our whole church is finding this out, and rejoicing in this clear evidence that “greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world.” I myself can’t wait to get back to Il-gele and invite the shopkeeper’s wife to come drink tea with me. This month I’m praying for her heart to be prepared to sense her need for a Savior.

Love, Becca

April 2002

Dear Ladies,

Anthropologists generally sneer at missionaries. We are the cause, they say, of the destruction of primitive groups that were previously insulated from the decadent excesses of Western culture. We barge in from outside and impose on them our standards, unraveling the very fabric of their traditions and customs. Why can’t we leave those poor people alone?

Much of this is true, and should be. Every missionary worth his salt (or his calling) should leave the place and the people among whom he works dramatically changed, and their culture as well. I think of our work at Il-gele as a typical example of what happens to a tribe and a culture when missionaries come to stay.

We did not bring a “community development” project there, except we built a small clinic and staffed it with a nurse who treated people’s illnesses. We also built an airstrip and a house, which we lived in ourselves. Then we spent our time teaching Bible studies.

A Catholic priest asked us, “Why do you teach these people the Ten Commandments? That just lays an additional burden of guilt on them that they were not aware of before. They have enough sins in their own culture without your adding these on top!” But it was as people began to realize the depths of their guilt before God that they were then driven into the arms of the Lord Jesus Christ, and with faith in Him came a renouncing of those former sins to which they had been enslaved.

A young man who formerly stole people's fishing nets stopped stealing and became faithful in fishing for his own family, and often shared his fish with those in need. A witch doctor stopped charging fees for her "healing" services to people and instead began going to pray for the sick in their homes. Men and women publicly confessed their adultery and became faithful to their spouses. So thieves became honest workers, liars became truthful, adulterers became faithful, the covetous became generous, murderers laid down their arms and refused to raid their enemies any longer. Most of all, people became worshipers of the true and living God, renouncing their former idolatry and religious practices. In fact, many Christians are now carrying God's Word to other parts of the tribe, and a major part of their message is: "You can be free from all the sins and traditions which formerly bound you, through faith in Jesus Christ."

Although we did not personally bring much in the way of civilization to Il-gele, it followed us and the people welcomed it. First of all, the village grew. And grew, and grew. From four houses to four hundred. This was because the people perceived that this was a safe area in which to live, a place of peace, even though throughout their history the very spot where we built our house was the site of many fierce battles with their enemies.

After a while, people began to want us to build a school for their children. "Even if we build you a building," we objected, "that will do you no good without a teacher." So they found a Daasanach young man who had been to school, raised money for his salary from the children's tuition, and hired him. The school is completely community-run, and now they are raising money for their building.

Then, when the traders in another town realized that there was a large community of fishermen living at Il-gele, they began moving to our village to set up their shops for business. From the fishermen they buy dried fish; from the shepherds they buy milk. In return they sell tea, sugar, cooking fat, clothing, razor blades, blankets, and a number of other items which make people's lives a bit easier.

All these things have happened in a span of just six years. This is a typical example of what happens all over the world when missionaries take the Gospel to a new place. How could we possibly expect people--or their culture--not to be changed by it? It is the very power of God to salvation! (And it usually makes their life on earth better, too.)

No apologies.

Love, Becca

EPILOGUE

On July 1, 2002 we left the Daasanach tribe to return to live in America. The church had grown from two baptized believers in 1989, to over a hundred in 2002, steadily doubling in size every two years. Leaders are now emerging and evangelistic teams are carrying the gospel to previously unevangelized areas of the tribe. The Muslim shopkeeper's wife recently became a believer, and other Muslims are asking for a Bible study.

Colin and I are constantly humbled and amazed that we were given the precious privilege of taking the gospel of Jesus Christ to the Daasanach, seeing Him plant and establish His church, and witness the Holy Spirit's transformation of people's lives, not only theirs but ours as well. We have been greatly instructed and enriched by these years among the Daasanach, and we perceive that the Lord's purpose in calling us to them was so that He might not only pour out His blessings on them, but also on us. We give all thanks to the Lord Jesus Christ, "for from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen." (Rom 11:36)