

These are my reflections on four decades of Gospel ministry with my wife, Dayna, in Uganda, Hawaii, Kazakhstan, and China.

Mark Twain described my challenge, “There is one great trouble about writing an autobiography and that is numerous and varying ideas offer themselves when you sit down and are ready to begin. Sometimes the ideas come flooding from twenty directions at once and for a time you are almost drowned.” He then describes the added difficulties for an autobiography amateur, like me, “in almost all amateur cases, praise is impossible – if it is to be backed by honesty...There is something about (their) childlike daring that compels admiration. It is a reckless daring which I suppose is exhibited in no field but one – the field of literature.”¹ Reader, beware!

Another challenge is the negative baggage the term ‘missionary’ carries around the world today. Cross-cultural mission workers are ‘the point of the spear’ - sent to bring Gospel-light into our needy world. That is why some still leave home and family in life-long obedience to His missionary call. Jesus commands us to go, whether it is popular or opposed.

We pray our story will be a lense for people to see through us to Jesus Christ, who has saved and sent us with Good News that is true and powerful-to-save. All things have been by His grace; all will be for His glory.

Main Stops of My Life

1955 – 1975 California

1975 – 1978 Tennessee

1978 – 1981 Pennsylvania

1981 California

1981 – 1982 Hawaii – married; Dayna and I joined in life and ministry

1983 Pennsylvania

1983 – 1990 Uganda

1990 California

1991 - 1998 Hawaii

1998 - 2009 Kazakhstan

2009 – 2021 China

2022 - Hawaii

The View from Under the Bus:
The Downs and Ups of a Life in Christ from Uganda, Hawaii, Kazakhstan, and China

Part 1 – Uganda, and getting there 1981, 1983-1990, 1994, 2011

Reading Other People's Mail p. 4

"Twenty-six miles across the sea, Santa Catalina is a-waitin' for me..." p. 5

A Coffee House with No Coffee? p. 6

The Call of God? p. 6

Everyone Believes p. 7

Called to the Local Church p. 8

My First Trip Outside the USA p. 10

A Holy Man from America p. 11

Garbage Evangelism p. 13

Nature Calls us All p. 14

Lifted High to Save p. 15

Magendo p. 16

Another Island Adventure p. 17

When the Coconut Fell on My Head – the first time... p. 18

From Hawaii to Uganda: *From One Side of the Earth to the Other* p. 19

A.I.M. Assignment: Ringili p. 21

Booth's Barrels p. 21

Encouragement in England p. 22

African Driving Lessons p. 22

Welcome to the West Nile p. 24

Going a Long Way with My English Bible p. 25

Ministry must be Head AND Heart! p. 27

Waiting on the Lord p. 29

A Home Worth Waiting For p. 31

Saturday Night Invasion! p. 33

Life and Death on the Golf Course p. 33

Wheels from Mombasa	p. 35
A Family Bigger than We Think!	p. 38
Joys and Sorrows in West Nile	p. 39
“Higher, Higher, Lift Jesus Higher!”	p. 41
Move to Mukono	p. 46
What is a Furlough?	p. 47
‘Three-Self’ Mission Strategy	p. 50
Encouragement from Eliphaz	p. 51
Going to the Dogs	p. 52
Opportunities in the Capital	p. 53
Thieves, but Not Robbers	p. 55
Beware of the Dogs	p. 56
Fired by the Students	p. 58
Death in our Front Yard	p. 59
The Grim Face of HIV	p. 60
The Family of God	p. 61
Time to Leave BTTC	p. 65
“The Continuing Education of a Missionary Theologian”	p. 66
Course Corrections at the College	p. 68
Back Home to Uganda	p. 69
At Home on Namirembe Hill	p. 71
Sharing our Liberated Stuff	p. 72
The Rest of the Story – Uganda Christian University	p. 73
Sources Cited	p. 79

Reading Other People's Mail

When I was a teenager, our only telephone hung on the kitchen wall in our apartment in La Crescenta, California. One day during high school I stood there talking to a friend as my mom was writing at the table nearby. My eyes aimlessly wandered to words in her letter to a friend, *"Mark still does not know about his real Dad."*

That evening my parents tearfully told me about a life I never knew. My birth parents were **Fred and Jean (McClarín) Nielsen**. Jean was Elizabeth Blair's stepsister. I was their first child, born in San Francisco, baptized in the Lutheran church. Before I was 3, Jean was pregnant with my brother. Like many young families they struggled on a tight budget. Fred thought he could get ahead by betting on racehorses. Instead, he got trouble – gambling addiction, spiraling debt, and pressure from bill collectors. The night before Jean was going to deliver my brother by Caesarean, she and Fred argued about their finances. In a burst of unexplainable anger, Fred grabbed a rock from her nightstand and crushed her skull.



Fred called the police. They arrived to find him sitting on the front porch sobbing, *"I killed the most precious thing God ever gave me."* My mother and brother were gone. He went to prison. After seven years for his unplanned crime of passion, he was released. I am thankful I was able to meet him and extend my love and forgiveness, and urge him to seek his peace in Jesus, for what set both of our lives on a completely different course.



At 3 I became the foster child of a wonderful family who loved me as their own – a Mom and Dad, **Richard and**

Elizabeth Blair, and three older sisters. I am very thankful to be adopted into the Blair family.

“Twenty-six miles across the sea, Santa Catalina is a-waitin' for me...”

You gotta be REALLY old to know that song by ‘The Four Preps’!

I was caught up in the wave of Southern California kids who entered Christ’s Kingdom in the early 1970’s. In 1972 my high school buddies and I signed up for an Easter week **YMCA camp at Camp Fox on Catalina Island.**



I had no idea the ‘C’ stood for ‘Christian!’ When we gathered for camp briefing I was shocked to hear about Bible Study and Campfire Talks! I had never done that. My friends and I thought it would be a good time to head into the hills to enjoy the adult beverages in our duffle bags. But as we hit the trail, I noticed the pretty girls carrying their Bibles toward the meeting site. Whatever it was, Bible study looked good! That was the first time I heard the Gospel. I am forever grateful that the Glendale and Crescenta-Cañada YMCA’s kept their ‘C’ vibrant. Thank God for extending saving mercy to this seeker with mixed motives. He opened my eyes to the simple truth, “I sin, Jesus saves!” Fifty years later, that has not changed.



My glam shot as a Senior in High School. Here is proof salvation does not prevent hair loss, sadly! June 1973

It was a few months after the YMCA camp until party on the weekend became church on the weekend for me. I eventually followed some friends to Montrose Community Church. I professed my faith through baptism there during my Senior year at Crescenta Valley High School. Our MCC Youth Group was twice as big as the church’s membership! Truly a wave of saving grace hit Southern California, and the Lord of might and mercy drew me in.

“JOY = Jesus, Others, Yourself” was placarded on the wall of MCC. Many of us found that great joy following Jesus – growing in the knowledge of Scripture and deepening in love for new brothers and sisters. Our Christian faith was more than a list of ‘don’ts.’ I have

subsequently heard bitter complaints from disillusioned present and former Christians about hypocritical churches and pastors – too often I am *that* pastor! I am so thankful for the grace and truth we enjoyed in MCC as many of us took our first steps in faith and service. I am still rejoicing to walk with Him in all of life, through all the earth, to the end of the age.

A Coffee House, with No Coffee?



John Svendsen, son of our pastor at MCC, became a great friend. At 15 his folks allowed him to turn their car garage into a cozy sanctuary. Then he invited his school mates to the “One Way Inn Christian Coffee House.” Sometimes there was a bottle of instant coffee on the snack table, but nobody came for that. About 100 kids stuffed into the garage, and spilled out into the yard, singing, and studying the Bible on Friday nights. I became a regular.

Pastors Dennis Bone, me, and John Svendsen before we looked very ‘pastoral’ – 1974

Our pastor, Charles Svendsen, advised and greatly encouraged us. Many Friday nights he’d stand inconspicuously outside his garage and patiently listen to our mistakes! After about a year I asked to take a turn at sharing the message. Their acceptance set the direction of my whole life.

Before long I was on the Speakers Team. Under our pastor’s guidance, and through the encouragement of our peers, we learned preaching. Part of our learning process was imitation. One Friday night my message was a Charles Spurgeon sermon I cut out of one of his volumes and hid in my open Bible. I still remember the confused faces as I read, *“The coach of morality has a broken axel, and the ombudsman of legalism has lost his badge.”*!!?? Despite ourselves, many of us heard our ministry calling in that garage.

We had several opportunities to share the Word each week - “One Way Inn” on Fridays, John’s cousin, Ron Svendsen’s “Lost and Found Coffee House” also on Fridays, Sunday School classes, youth group on Sunday nights, and Bible studies during the week at our Glendale Community College and two different high schools.

We were not afraid of taking risks. We had no degrees, no professional positions, and no salaries; we were just kids who loved Jesus and one another. Serving together was invaluable for sharpening our lives and ministry. We were pilgrims growing in the Lord and wanting to help one another. We were young and naïve but by God’s mercy and providence did many things right. I wonder whether any of us are so free and teachable today?

The Call of God?

The Coffee House, Montrose Community Church, college, great friends, and the fellowship of service stirred me to wonder about my future. My mediocre high school grades did not beget any invitations for further academic studies. Thank God anybody could get into Glendale Community College then – and it was free! Great teachers at GCC awakened my interest in lots of topics - Art History, Geography, Sociology, and every history class offered by Professor Earl Livingood. My new faith was like polarized sunnies; God was helping me see all truth coming

from Him, and all things for His glory. I realized if I paid attention in class – I had too much fun in high school for that – I could learn something. I understood serving God was the duty of every believer, no matter their specific vocation. Back then I heard Charles ‘Tremendous’ Jones on a cassette tape saying, *“If you are not in the full-time ministry before you enter full-time ministry then when you go into full time ministry you will not do full time ministry.”* Tremendous!

The sermons and songs of Keith Green impacted my life. Toward the end of his short life – he died way too soon at 28 – he became zealous for world mission. I met him randomly as I drove through Tyler, Texas on my way back home to California from Philadelphia. I had recently returned from a mission trip to Uganda and excitedly told him my story. He responded, “yeah, I am really getting into missions too!” Challenging the current notion that a person needed a call to the mission field, Keith read Jesus’ clear command at the end of each Gospel and asked, *“What Christian is not called to global mission?”* He lamented how the embarrassing riches of American Christianity rarely impacted the lost world for Jesus. As I write, that has not changed much. Today the unreached people groups which Ralph Winter helped the Church see are being slowly reached. Christian witness is gradually being established in the language and culture of more and more peoples who have never heard His Gospel. But most of these peoples live where Starbucks and Wi-fi cannot be found – not like the soft spot we enjoyed in Beijing. For “every nation, tribe, people and language” to finally hear, American Christians need to spend more on frontier missions than their pet’s Halloween costumes.

I enjoyed new people and experiences, but I still needed a day job. Over the years I’ve had many conversations with young people at life’s crossroads that remind me of the pressure I felt then. I am much further down the road, but I am not sure I have better answers. It is way above my pay grade to know the will of God! In my life-long habit of Bible reading I never found a verse telling me where to study or work, whether to marry or not – not even what to eat for lunch. Scripture is God’s Story. He made us and all things. He rules the world by His sovereign power. He is moving history toward an eternal revelation of His glory - that shrinks my big life questions! In seeking God first – in my case very poorly – God truly does guide and provide.

Great books helped clarify my life direction. In my 20’s *“Called to the Ministry”* by Edmund Clowney, *“Lectures to My Students”* by Charles Spurgeon, and *“Preachers and Preaching”* by D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones helped set me in motion, and in my 60’s *“Just Do Something”* by Kevin DeYoung keeps me plodding. I still remember Professor Chuck Anderson saying in a Covenant College chapel talk, “I cannot say for sure if it is the will of God for me to be a teacher here. But since I am a teacher here, I will strive to please God.” That helped me relax and trust God to take care of the details, as I try to follow day by day. The light of His Word shines at least far enough to take the next step.

Everyone Believes

My call to share the Gospel has been bolstered by realizing that everyone has a religion. My college general education requirements said I needed a science course. Yikes! I had to repeat Biology in high school because I failed the first time. I barely squeaked through the repeat with a weak C. So, since I knew the subject so well, I signed up for Biology at Glendale Community College. My professor was young, bright, and engaging. Her doctoral studies were in Evolution.

Her view of 'bio' was starkly different from what I was reading in my Bible. She passionately explained that time and random chance were the Maker of heaven and earth. I was quite sure He who was re-making me was the true Maker of heaven and earth. But my limited knowledge and fledgling faith were no match for my persuasive professor.

One day I went to her office with some questions about our course. I shared that I believed the world had a Creator and I was one of His followers. We had a calm and cordial conversation. I asked, "Why do you believe in evolution?" She cited some evidences, proofs, and scientific dating. Long before I met Cornelius Van Til or even heard the word presuppositionalism, I kept asking her, "Why do you believe that?" Like layers of an onion, she peeled away more and more supporting facts and statistics. I kept asking why. Finally, with some exasperation, she said, "I believe it because I believe it!" Aha! She did have a religion.

She made a leap of faith. We all do. Her presupposition was that evolutionary theories hold ultimate truth. She mastered impressive sounding data to buttress her basic life conviction. When I got to Westminster, the teaching of Professor John Frame helped focus my fuzzy understanding of these foundations. It has been Gospel-empowering to realize we all hold fundamental core values – everyone worships something. Whatever holds our highest allegiance gets us out of bed and out the door each day. During my first 17 years I served myself, seeking the elusive god "Fun." Now I try to deny myself and serve the Triune God - and have more fun than ever!

I would need several more lifetimes to understand all the religions and beliefs of our world. Nevertheless, I have shared the Good News of Jesus with people from many religions – formal and informal. During these conversations I try and take the elevator down to their basement and ask, "Why do you believe that?"

Called to the Local Church

After two years at GCC, I joined ten other Montrosians accepted to Covenant College on Lookout Mountain, Tennessee. The classes and community were great. At that time just 500+ of us students lived atop scenic Lookout Mountain. So, John Svendsen and I searched for a church community beyond the campus to broaden our horizons. Our priority at Covenant was to study; but we knew learning also comes through serving. Our new home in the South offered new discoveries.

One Sunday we drove along our tabletop mountain all the way into rural Alabama. We saw cars parked outside a church and stopped in. Those kind folks received us politely, but two Californian kids in casual clothes got some attention. The worship service fit their culture, but we were far from home. The preacher had an unusual cadence of huffing, puffing, and shouting. Snake handling was part of their tradition but thankfully they stayed in their cages that Sunday. After the final Amen we greeted the pastor at the door. We told him we'd come to study at Covenant College for two years and asked if we might serve in their church. He hesitated and replied, "We'd have to get to know you first." We asked, "How long would that take?" "Oh, maybe about four or five years." Nice knowing you, see you in Heaven!

The next hot August Sunday we drove the opposite direction, down the hill into the city of Chattanooga. With the windows rolled down we heard some great Gospel music in one neighborhood. We followed our ears until we entered Alton Park Bible Church. We soon realized we were the only white guys in the house. A great message followed the great music. The people in the pews were very welcoming. As we met and shared with Pastor J.C. Upton after the service, he asked if we would consider filling a need they had for Youth Leaders. We started that Wednesday night!

Pastor J.C. was familiar with Covenant College and probably figured they had vetted us before admission. It was not the first time J.C. had taken risks in ministry. Before pastoring Alton Park, he served with New Tribes Mission in New Guinea. And maybe back in 1975 there were not as many fears of creepy church workers?

We might have seemed creepy to the kids in the Youth Group. On Wednesday we borrowed a van from Covenant and got ourselves to one young man's place in the Alton Park housing projects. With some trepidation he got in the van and navigated us from home to home. Finally, the van full of church kids and Californians arrived at our host parent's home. The kids had no vote in choosing the new youth leaders. So, they decided to test these latest candidates.

For our first couple months the youth did a lot of laughing at the frustrated foreigners. John and I, far from our comfortable suburbs, got a great education in Alton Park. We survived as brothers in ministry; I am sure if there had only been just one of us he would have quit. With God's help we hung in there. Gradually the youth realized we were staying - to love and encourage them in the Lord. Once they trusted us, we all learned and grew. A couple months later Pastor J.C. asked John and I to also team-teach an Adult Sunday school class. It was a highlight of my college years to serve and worship with such dear brothers and sisters.

I still remember my angst during Pastor J.C.'s pastoral prayers on Sundays. As a faithful shepherd he brought the praises and petitions of the flock before our Chief Shepherd. But once he got there, he stayed and lingered in His love. I was a Bible Major at Covenant College, proud of my growing knowledge of theology. But as Pastor J.C. led us in prayer, I realized how little I knew about Jesus' first command – loving God with my whole heart! Without pretention he would often say, "I love you, Lord...we love you, Lord!" I sometimes felt like Michal watching David dance before the Lord. Why is he so passionate? Why is my heart so cold? More than forty years later I still find the simple things of Christianity to be the hardest.

We did not join Alton Park Bible Church to make a social statement. As we aimlessly drove that August Sunday, we never noticed we were in low-income housing projects. We walked into the sanctuary to hear great music. What we found was a family. We were warmly welcomed into homes and hearts. Lots of them took turns feeding two starving college kids. We were always ready to eat – and stayed skinny! We were trusted with their greatest treasure, their kids. On our final Sunday in Alton Park a beloved Elder we had worked closely with for two years, shook my hand and said, "I love you, John! Thanks for all you have done." All white guys look alike! 😊

Forty-five years later the world is still very fractured. How I wish the world's people would see different kinds of people doing life together in local churches. Thankfully, in some places they

do. But what Martin Luther King, Jr. said in 1960 is still sadly true, “I think one of the shameful tragedies of our nation is that 11 o’clock on Sunday morning is one of the most segregated hours in Christian America.” Some people who generously supported us to go to Africa would have been offended if we brought those Africans into their homes. Some defend their “homogeneous” strategy of church growth – arguing we’re most comfortable with “our kind of people.” But does this strategy simply enable our prejudices?

Church segregation is a global plague. I was shocked to meet strong prejudice in Africa. We often heard Ugandans talk about “that man from the North...South...that tribe...this tribe...so brown...so black!” While in Uganda in 1994 the people next door in Rwanda were killing each other over false categories of ‘Hutu and Tutsi’ imposed by the church! We found this scourge in Central and East Asia too. Prejudice lives in the hearts of people of every color. In this internet age I sometimes view sites of churches and ministries. Too often their leadership is mono-color - many white blizzards, sometimes with a drop of color in the custodial staff. God founded the Church to declare and display His glory. With all our faults and failures, the local church is still God’s most important instrument to reach our lost world. And one of His greatest revelations of glory was to tear down the dividing wall that separates us from one another and Him.

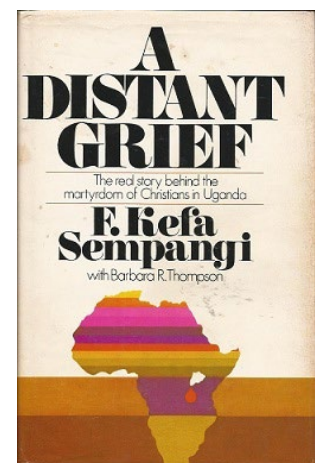


**Graduation Day at Covenant College, John Svendsen, me, Dennis Bone, with Chuck Anderson, one of our favorite professors
May 1978**

In 1978 John, Dennis, Ron Svendsen, and I found our way to Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia. What a blessing it was to study there. God has been gracious and faithful to each of us through many years of friendship and service.

My First Trip Outside USA

It was Final Exams week at Westminster Theological Seminary, December 1980. I needed to prove there was a place for me among the esteemed Reformed theologians I imbibed. So, I sat at a table in Montgomery Library with great resolve – a day in the books was ahead! But on my table was a little book by a recent WTS grad that looked more approachable than the theologs, *A Distant Grief* by Kefa Sempangi.² What a perfect time to learn about a place I knew nothing about called Uganda! I did manage to pass my finals. But something more life directing happened that day in the library. After a couple hours, I turned the last page, stirred by Him to visit the battered and bruised “Pearl of Africa.”





Peterson Sozi from Uganda studied at Westminster when I was there. As he was heading home in January 1981, he recruited 8 of us students and 2 profs to return with him and his family for a mission trip.

We drove from Philadelphia to JFK Airport and boarded Pan Am to Nairobi. We skipped across West Africa, stopping in Liberia, Ivory Coast, Ghana, Nigeria, and finally landed in Nairobi, Kenya. We could not land in Uganda's Entebbe Airport because it was still damaged from the 1976 Israeli raid. I still

remember wondering anxiously late that night over the Atlantic, "*Will God be the same in Africa as He has been in America?*" He was! Forty years later, we have praised Him in many nations.

We bused from Nairobi to Kampala. Our bus to Uganda's capital was packed with people, huge bags, and small farm animals. The chassis was so bent it felt like we were going down the road sideways *and* forward at the same time! We watched and prayed at the border as baffled officials wondered what to do with ten crazy white guys who dared visit broken Uganda!?

Kefa Sempangi was back in Uganda, serving as Deputy Minister of Rehabilitation in the first Transitional Government after Idi Amin. He helped in many aspects of our month-long visit, including securing lodging in a crowded orphanage at the foot of Namirembe Hill in Kampala.

A Holy Man from America

One of the Westminster profs who led our team to Uganda was Harvie Conn. He was my mentor as I studied Missiology. His mind was incisive, and his laughter infectious. He served in South Korea in the 1960's as the nation moved from war-time rubble toward their now roaring economy. He had many insights as we struggled to absorb the collapsed country of Uganda. He was a wise and compassionate guide for us seminarians from the suburbs on our first meeting with wide-scale suffering.

Harvie Conn preaching outside Kampala Football Stadium, Tom Kenney and Peterson Sozi listening, Edward Kasaija translating, January 1981



Looking across the seven hills of Kampala we saw a tall unfinished minaret. It was a project of Idi Amin, a Muslim General who seized control of predominantly Christian Uganda, to expand the footprint of Islam. The unfinished tower next to the Islamic Center reminded the city that Amin failed and fled. Yet the murder and mayhem he launched still deeply infected the nation.



Uganda National Mosque in Kampala today. It was finished in 2008 with funds from Gadhafi in Libya.

One afternoon I strolled down the hill and saw the doors open at the Islamic Center. The previous semester Harvie took our ‘Encounter with Islam’ class to the Islamic Center of Philadelphia to learn from

their Mullahs. So, as I walked into Kampala’s Islamic Center, I thought of an opportunity for my beloved professor. I asked someone to introduce me to their Chief Mullah. There were so few somebodies foolish enough to visit Uganda then that an anybody like me could beckon their Boss. I greeted him with ‘*Salam a le kum*’ and he responded with the Arabic for ‘*and peace to you*’ also. After a bit of social banter, I told him I had some big news, “*a holy man from America had just come to Kampala!*” And I could arrange for my new friend the Mullah to meet him. He eagerly accepted and asked us to come Friday.

When I went back and told Harvie – my holy man from America – he was not as enthusiastic. I suddenly appreciated that I would not be graded on this short-term mission trip. But with his characteristic confident joy Harvie led us down the hill to the Old Kampala Mosque that Friday. On arriving we discovered our Mullah had invited the Islamic Supreme Council for this big opportunity. The holy man from America and his groupies were warmly welcomed and seated around their big table. Sadly, no smart phone was available to capture that moment. Harvie respectfully and winsomely gave them something to think about; “There is no God but Al-lah (simply means ‘the God’ in Arabic) and ‘Isa (Jesus) is His Full and Final Prophet!” They probably never heard that before. They could keep their culture and come to Christ! Their farewell was even warmer than our reception. I pray some of them have met ‘Isa - the Holy Man from Heaven.

Garbage Evangelism



The other Westminster professor leading our team was Jack Miller. What a treat it was to have a month with Jack and Harvie! Jack was a passionate Evangelist - ready to preach Jesus any time any place!

Jack Miller declaring Good News for Uganda, January 1981

In 1979 Uganda was liberated from nearly a decade of Idi Amin's terror. We saw some of his terrible legacy - people and things still broken and shattered. Garbage had

not been collected for years – there were stinking heaps on many streets. Amin's troops had commandeered garbage trucks for Army use and very few remained for their intended purpose. On a trip to Uganda in 1980, Harvie asked Kefa to supply a garbage truck and shovels through his connections in the Ministry of Rehabilitation.

Kefa tells the story in his second book *From the Dust*,

"Two Americans came to Uganda that first year and had a very positive impact for the gospel. Jack Miller and Harvie Conn were two of my professors at Westminster Seminary. Jack taught evangelism and Harvey taught missions. Jack did not hesitate to launch an evangelistic crusade in Old Kampala, but the meetings were not very successful. Harvie, on the other hand, came up with a more creative way of reaching the people with the gospel. He had taken a walk in the short streets of Old Kampala and was shocked that everywhere he turned, he saw huge, stinking mounds of garbage. As he gazed at these garbage dumps, he thought of a strategic plan for evangelism.

In the evening evangelistic meetings, Harvie asked whether it was possible to get shovels and a garbage truck from the City Council. By ten o'clock the following day, the garbage truck was



parked outside the students' residence. Right away Jack Miller, Harvie Conn, and the students they had brought from the seminary began shoveling garbage in our immediate neighborhood along Namirembe Road.

For nine years people had not seen a white man, for Amin had expelled both the whites and Asians at the same time. It was a spectacular sight

to see white men shoveling garbage and making the city clean. This scene attracted a huge crowd

to the extent that some climbed on top of the tall buildings to have a clear view of this rare occurrence. The people could hardly believe what they were seeing. An old woman was heard thanking God for enabling her to live long enough to witness this spectacular event.

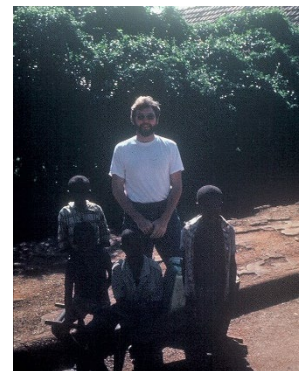
The work continued until four thirty in the afternoon. After the truck had made several trips to dump its loads, the professors were ready to climb the platform and preach the gospel to a bewildered crowd. The people were ready to listen to these amazing white men who had humbled themselves to labor so hard to clean up their garbage. The preachers had earned themselves a hearing, for they had fully identified with the public.

We called this method “garbage evangelism.” Later Harvie Conn held a session with the students and explained the lesson that we all had learned that day. Preaching the gospel sometimes involves getting out hands dirty. It could involve touching mud, mixing clay, and anointing the eyes of a blind man with it, just as our Lord Jesus Christ had demonstrated. Harvie warned the students not to use hygienic methods only, but to realize that, sometimes, unhygienic methods can yield more far-reaching results. Our “garbage evangelism” had made a powerful impact on the people, and many lives were transformed because of our willingness to humble ourselves.”³

Nature Calls us All

Things happen on mission trips that one never anticipates. None of us imagined we would share ‘the loo’ with hundreds of orphans for a month. We ‘mzungus’ (Swahili and Ganda term for person of foreign descent; literally translated it means “someone who roams around aimlessly.”) had little experience with “squatty potties.” We found the sights and smells so horrid we wondered if we could hold it in for a month!?

One of our seminary team especially hated that closet of privation. So, he searched the nearly barren shelves of Kampala’s shops to find soap and a brush. He would have donated a kidney for some rubber gloves! Every evening after our long days outing he held his breath and hit that toxic zone with full force. After the cleansing scrub, he even lit some candles in the newly sacred space. And then, on our return the next day, things had returned to normal. He was crushed to see his sanctuary defiled. We joked that he needed to start all over again – urgently hoping he would! Nature calls us all.



After our first week in Kampala, we divided up into pairs and fanned out to villages outside the city for evangelism and teaching. This was the time for us chicks to be pushed out of the nest and trust the Lord to be with us. He was.



Tom Kenney and I with our new Ugandan friends.

When we came back together a week or so later, we learned one of our seminary brothers had contracted malaria. His hosts guided him to a village clinic for relief. The medic prepared a syringe full of chloroquine with a long needle. He was told to unbutton his trousers and bend for the shot. Maybe it was the sight of the big needle, the tropical heat, or just

exhaustion from the malaria, but the next thing he remembers is lying on his back on the clinic floor – his pants down around his ankles with a big crowd gathered around him. Behold the man!

Lifted High to Save

One day a young man from the orphanage offered to show me Kampala's Owino Market. We followed the throng down a dirt road to find hordes of people buying and selling just about everything!

One man sold medicine to cure snake bites. Rural living amidst fields and vegetation instilled a healthy fear of snakes. Perhaps another reason for his crowd of on-lookers was the big cobra the man was holding. The guy was living proof for his effective medicine.

People smiled and chattered when I stuck my white face into their circle. I was as eager to see that snake as anyone. The doctor shouted warnings to me that snakes would especially attack a *mzungu*. I better buy some of his medicine quick!

A well-dressed man standing next to me kindly translated these threats into English from Luganda. I asked if he would be willing to translate my reply.



The crowd grew silent and looked at me. I seized the moment to share how God healed the Israelites from snake bites in the wilderness. They remembered with me how God told Moses to make a bronze serpent and lift it high on a pole. The dying found life in a look of faith. Jesus told Nicodemus this was a picture of the day He, the Son of Man, would be lifted high on a cross to save dying sinners. I called

my new friends in Owino Market to put their trust in Christ who alone can save us from the deadly snake bite of sin.

Afterwards, as I thanked the kind gentleman who became my able translator, I asked if Jesus had forgiven his sins? He said it was not possible for him to be forgiven. He had been in prison

during the Amin years. One day a guard came to his cell with a hammer and ordered him to kill his cellmate. Of course, he refused! But then the guard offered his cellmate the hammer to kill him. In a flash my translator grabbed the hammer and struck his cellmate first. This privileged American seminarian had never heard a story like that. And now the murderer stood right in front of me. He saw I was shocked. But as one sinner to another, I pled with him that there was no sin God could not forgive. All are invited to look in faith to Jesus who was lifted high on the cross to save.

Magendo

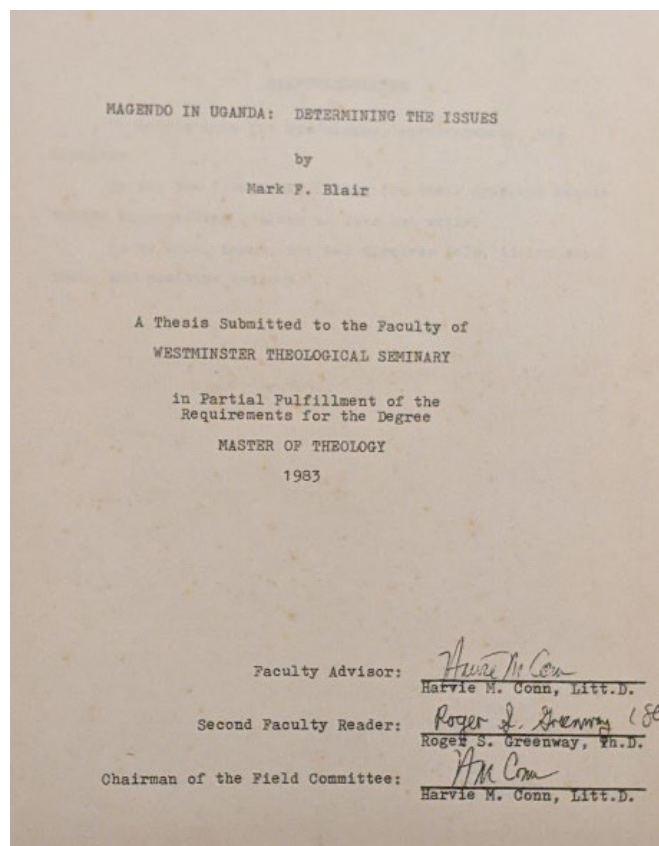
Another big surprise on my first mission trip was ‘*magendo*,’ the Swahili word for contraband, or the black market. During those broken days in Uganda the functional economy was outside of government regulation – way beyond. Magendo was the way of life.

My first exposure to this issue was as we drove from Philadelphia to JFK airport in New York City. Jack Miller said he had something for me to pack in my suitcase. The orphanage where we were to stay was partially supported by American volunteers who recruited funds from the USA. So, I guessed Jack was handing me a bag of cash. But, on the other side of the Atlantic, I was shocked when the orphanage director in Kampala pulled \$30,000 out of that bag! What shocked me more was the circuitous path necessary to get the most Ugandan bang for those bucks. The legal government exchange rate then was 7 Uganda shillings to \$1. But people fortunate enough to have dollars got over fifteen times more on the open market – the magendo exchange rate. Every Christian we met got the most bang for any bucks they managed to obtain.

When we returned to Philadelphia, I needed to choose a topic for my Missiology master’s thesis. I chose “*Magendo in Uganda: Determining the Issues.*” My paper raises lots of questions, a few of them I almost answered.

Theory put on sandals as my wife, Dayna, and I moved to Uganda in 1983. How would we get the money we needed for our new life there? As faith missionaries we have trusted “where God guides, He provides.” He has done so for decades now abundantly through the generosity of His people.

Once gifts were sent to Africa Inland Mission and tax receipts issued, how would the Blair’s get funds in Arua, Uganda? At that time AIM banked with Standard Chartered which had a strong presence in Africa. We got Standard Chartered to transfer our funds to Uganda Commercial



Bank as they had a branch in Arua. Yet on our first drive through Arua we saw the UCB building there had been blown up, like most of the town, by anti-Amin marauders.

When our money was gone, I had to make the long and dangerous drive to Kampala for a bank withdrawal from the UCB. There was still a significant gap between the government rate of currency exchange and how much you could get on the street. Thus, there was always a warm welcome for this foolish mzungu in the UCB Kampala office. Our money – the full government exchange amount – was safely in our account. And it made many of them happy too! I could have written another chapter about *magendo* for my thesis! *“How to profit from dollars dumb guys send us – especially when he can only come on collection runs every couple of months!”*

Before long, life in Arua got hectic. Teaching and preaching invitations increased, struggling to learn the local language (Lugbara), my wife getting pregnant, and no money, no funny! Travel to Kampala grew increasingly dangerous with over 20 armies then vying to seize the State House. When I shared our financial dilemma, and the profound insights I gained from my studies on *magendo*, our dear, wise, and filled-with-real-life experience mission colleagues smiled kindly. Then they drove me to the best kept buildings in Arua town to meet the Chawda's. This big family had a 50-year history in Arua. Their shop was the only place to buy petrol, and just about anything, at that time. Their family had come from India to build the railroad across East Africa in 1896. Gradually cousins and brothers were strategically positioned in the UK, USA, and Canada. So, the Chawdas could receive bank checks in many currencies – and return the highest rates for Uganda shillings, a cup of tea, and some nice conversation. Every month or so I enjoyed tea with the Chawda's. They even came to our son's birthday party! As we moved to Kampala for our second mission term, I met another Chawda there. By then the Uganda government had closed the gap on the currency exchange rate, and Standard Chartered had opened a beautiful new branch in Kampala.

Another Island Adventure

The best and most important things in my life have happened on islands! My **Pastor Charles Svendsen** moved from Montrose Community Church (where he served 38 years) to **Haili Congregational Church in Hilo, Hawaii** in 1980. When his son John finished Westminster, I was invited to visit in July 1981, after my first visit to Uganda. My Dad had to loan me the \$99 for the air ticket from LAX to Hilo. He kindly gave, but I still remember his concern about my borrowing money to take a vacation! Wise advice. But it was the best \$99 ever spent.



As we drove to the 'Hale Kahu' (pastor's house) from Hilo airport, John said, *“Mark you gotta meet this great girl, Dayna Lee!”* I am forever in John's debt. Team mission has been far more blessed than going solo.

Our courtship was brief – met in July and married in January. We joked that two desperate people had finally met! We were committed to a life of Christian service even before we met, but we followed the Mosaic admonition for newlyweds to wait a year before going off to war. So, we enjoyed wonderful first year of marriage in Hawaii. We began to learn about each other and our families in our first year together.

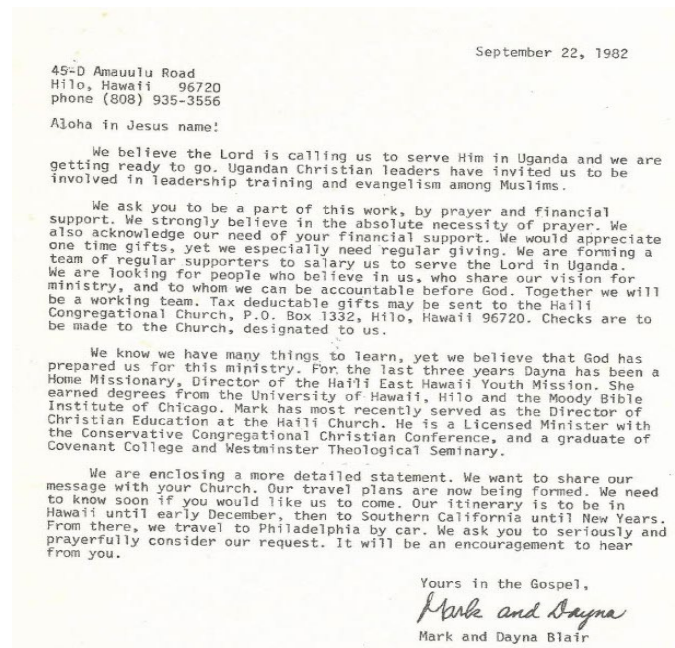
Our Wedding, January 9, 1982



When the Coconut Fell on My Head – the first time...

I can still taste the envelope glue - the bane of missionary mailing back in the day. Dayna and I had to work quick to stuff and lick envelopes. We had scrounged for addresses of everyone we could remember from Kindergarten to College. Could they support our move to Uganda?!

There is a Post Office down the road from the Airport in Hilo, Hawaii. Less than an hour before my parents landed from Los Angeles our first epistle was in the mail. Dayna had just enough time to run to her cousin's lei stand so we could greet them with flowers.



My parents never traveled much in their 50+ years of marriage. But this was their second trip to Hawaii in 1982. They were with us for our wedding that January. And now they had a lovely daughter-in-law to visit! They were proud of their son too - a pastor in Hawaii! (Truth be told, I was just a Director of Christian Education then.) But now with my career starting in beautiful Hawaii, they were sure I'd give up on my crazy plan to move to Africa! As we sat down for their welcome dinner, we gave them a copy of the letter we had just mailed. They were kind but disappointed. Maybe a coconut did fall on my head?

From Hawaii to Uganda: *From One Side of the Earth to the Other*

My year-long contract as Director of Christian Education ended November 1982. We began our trek to Uganda with the first of many farewell services, this one in Haili Church. We've had a lifetime of these good-byes now and they never get any easier.

For three years before our wedding, Dayna served as Youth Director in 8 small churches in East Hawaii. So, friends and colleagues from around the island, loved ones from Dayna's big family, and our Haili 'ohana' (family) came together. I still remember how the tears flowed. As I sat on a pew blubbering, one kind 'Auntie' sat and encouraged me, "Don't say good-bye, say *a'hui hou* (see you again!)"

At that time there was a Christian song by Scott Wesley Brown, "*Lord, Please Don't Send Me to Africa!*" And now I was taking this daughter of Hawaii there! Dayna had more faith than me to move to Uganda. She had never been there. She trusted her crazy husband who kept quoting Churchill's praise of Uganda as "the pearl of Africa." It truly was, but in the early 1980's the pearl had lost some luster.

We drove across the States, arriving in Philadelphia in February 1983 the night before the city's heaviest snowfall to date. Lots of things happened during our six months in the city of brotherly love. I finished my master's thesis at Westminster and earn my Th.M., thanks to Dayna's kind and persistent support. All was done pre-computer – gather resources, organize notes, write a draft, type it, advisor suggests fixes, re-type it, and then, pay a guy to type the final copy – old school.

It was wonderful to reconnect with the Maple Glen Bible Fellowship Church, my ohana during seminary days. In fact, we moved in with one of the pastors and his family, Lou and Lynn Pronnicki and sons. We enjoyed their fellowship as we lived on the third floor of their row house in the Logan section near city center Philadelphia. We got our feet wet in urban ministry.

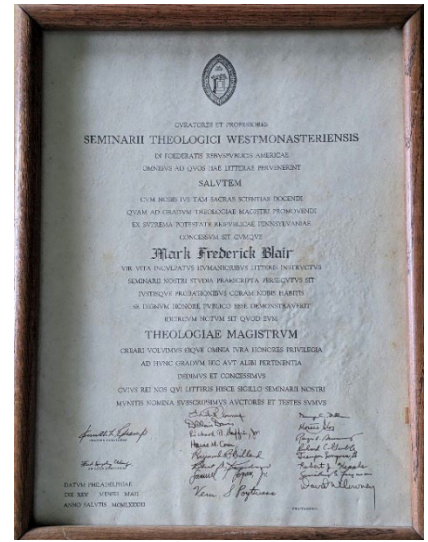
Jack Miller, who was both a Professor at Westminster and a Pastor in Philadelphia, had recently become the founder of a mission organization. When we were still in Hawaii, he announced Mark and Dayna Blair would be among their first mission workers to Uganda. We so appreciated his love and respect; Presbyterians can work with Baptists! When we got to Philadelphia and considered all the uncertainties of Uganda, we thought it best to go with a more established mission organization. We were accepted by Africa Inland Mission, founded in 1895. AIM in Uganda served under the Church of Uganda (Anglican). We respected that the established African church determined their needs and invited the personnel they thought right for them.



I was encouraged to be ordained as a pastor before serving in Uganda. This was an important time for me to consider whether Gospel-ministry was a job or a life calling? Since then, there have been seasons of unemployment but by His mercy I have remained engaged in Kingdom service. My pastor, Charles Svendsen, made a deep imprint on my life and ministry, and like him I too graduated from Westminster and was ordained in a Congregational church. It was an honor to be examined by pastors and professors who affirmed the

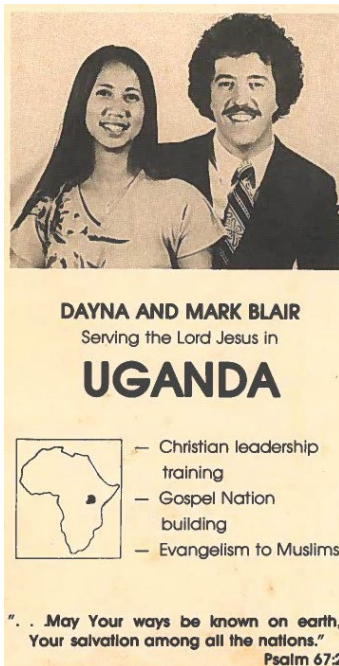
call of God on my life to serve Jesus, especially Carl Spackman, Harvie Conn, Lou Pronnicki, and John Svendsen. It was encouraging that Jack Miller gave the final prayer, supporting us heading to Uganda via a different path.

My second master's degree, ordination, then acceptance into AIM – this was happening! God also provided a great team of supporters who gave and prayed for us to do mission work. Some of those same churches still support us today, almost 40 years later! Our new association with the Conservative Congregational Christian Conference – the 4C's – opened doors for us to come and share in several churches. Eventually our support stretched from Florida to New York and dotted all the way westward to Hawaii. We never imagined the challenge of returning four years later and trying to visit all these places with 3 little guys!



One church in upstate New York faithfully sent us \$10 a month during our first term in Uganda. So, when we came Stateside on our first furlough, we wanted to report to them and say thanks. We were based in Philadelphia, again, where our third son, Aaron, was born. Money was tight and I called the pastor in New York asking if they might help us with travel expenses to come to them. “Oh no, I am sorry,” he quickly replied, “we have been giving you \$10 a month for 4 years!” I apologized that we just could not afford the trip to see them. He threatened to stop their support. We could not go. They no longer gave.

But we have very few sad support-raising stories. God's people have consistently overwhelmed us with kindness, sacrificial giving, faithful prayers, and abundant encouragement! We struggle to convey our appreciation for all we have received. Won't it be wonderful to spend eternity sharing what God has done by the Gospel of His Son throughout the whole earth! Our small contributions – like the boy's lunch – achieve much in the multiplying hands of Jesus.



Support raising can also expose our sins – at least it did mine. Bob Cappel was a good friend when we studied at Covenant College. Later when I was at Westminster, I traveled to Boston to see Bob who was studying at Gordon-Conwell Seminary one Spring Break. As he took me to his place, he told me how gullible his roommate was, he would believe anything! So, we two ‘spiritual seminarians’ thought it good for me to pretend that I was deaf. We played it well. Even weeks after my visit Willis told Bob how sad it was that such a nice guy had a disability. Five years later Dayna and I were working hard to get our support pledged to leave for Uganda. We were excited by an invitation to share in a 4C church in Virginia. The plan was to meet their mission committee at the parsonage.... Do you see what's coming? 😊... As the door opened, we were warmly greeted by Pastor Willis. My mind raced - I knew that face from somewhere?! When I remembered who he was I shouted, “I’ve been healed!” He knew that by then. Maybe Pastor Willis invited us partly for the pay back of shame. I felt it! The committee in the parsonage were not quite sure what to make of the story!? As we

left, I doubted whether they'd offer support to a liar. But in mercy their church became one of our faithful supporters.

A.I.M. Assignment: Ringili

As was their practice, AIM 'offered us' as mission workers to the Church of Uganda (Anglican), specifically to Madi and West Nile Diocese where AIM worked since 1918. After some back and forth we were invited to teach at Ringili Diocesan Training Center near Arua. Ugandan ministry families came to Ringili to study theology and agriculture in men's and women's programs.

We would be the only Americans on the AIM team then, joining faithful servants from England with 200 years of cumulative service in West Nile. Arua was Idi Amin's home area. Our new colleagues courageously stayed during Amin's eight years of anarchy. In the see-saw of tribal politics the Amin years offered a few improvements to West Nile. All of Uganda languished in varying degrees. But revenge hit Arua like a hurricane when Amin was driven out by Ugandan and Tanzanian forces. People were killed and nearly every building was damaged or destroyed.



Three years before we arrived, 'liberators' lined up all the men in Ringili to be shot. At the last minute, ordained clergy were pulled out of the line. That left ten students who were not yet ordained that were shot dead. I learned this after I got ordained! During our years in Uganda, I often traveled wearing my clerical collar, it really helped at the many roadblocks! We lived through three more coup d'états while at Ringili. After those nights of shooting in the distance, sometimes frighteningly near, we would find the campus abandoned. I understand why scared students ran from the place where their brothers had been killed in October 1980.

Booth's Barrels

Before leaving for Uganda, Dayna and I met the Rev. Bob Booth, a former AIM member and founding Principal of Ringili in 1959. Bob was then pastoring a Reformed Episcopal congregation in Philadelphia. He and his wife became a living link to a far-away place. They lit up with joy describing their years of service with our soon-to-be teammates. We began to attach names to stories of friendship and faithful service. The Booth's gave us many practical tips about life in the heart of Africa. Then Bob took us out to the garage to see their 'missionary barrels' – fifty-five-gallon oil drums – that carried their stuff home from Ringili. Then he said, "They're ready to go back to Ringili with your stuff!" So, we packed four barrels on the Pronnicki's porch and watched them trucked off to the port of Philadelphia.

Almost a year later we finally got news about the barrels. They had made it as far as Kampala, 300 miles south of us. We got a letter from a Uganda 'shipping company' that 'someone'

Encouragement in England

When we were in London, Luis Palau and his team was launching Mission England. It was a thrill to stand with hundreds of people in Trafalgar Square listening to Luis preach Jesus. At one point in this outdoor service, we were asked to gather into groups for prayer. Turning around we met a gentleman who had spent his life as a missionary to Uganda. He wept as he met us kids heading out to stoke the fires there. Sunday was an opportunity to visit churches we had often heard about. In the morning we arrived at Westminster Chapel and found Luis was the guest preacher, he preached another wonderful message. That night we went to All Soul's Langham Place and the pastor, Richard Bewes, and the singer, Garth Hewitt, reported about the mission trip they had just taken – to Uganda! Meeting them afterward was a God-moment as we could see His hand on our lives and labors.

Seeing people in the UK drive on the wrong side of the road got us ready for driving in East Africa, sooner than we expected. We landed in Nairobi, Kenya and met the leadership team of AIM International. We were grateful to finally stand together on African soil. But we were still one country away from our new home. We discovered that a new vehicle for our soon-to-be teammate was stuck in Kenya. We agreed to drive this much needed resource the





1000 kilometers to Arua. The Daihatsu Jeep was for **Joy Grindey**. She was a linguist who had already served more than 30 years in Uganda. She and her team were in the final stages of producing a Kakwa translation of the Bible. Kakwa was the tribe and language of Idi Amin.

What a baptism into our new life in Africa! Before we could load up and turn the key, we needed to get the car's papers - lots of them -

for Kenya and Uganda. We are especially thankful for two Ugandan young men who took turns riding with us from door to door. I can't remember their names but honor their memory. English was widely spoken in East Africa; it was the national language of Uganda. But lots of people only speak their tribal languages and Swahili. These guys became our first vital interpreters of language and life so far from home.

After a long day driving, we got to the Kenya-Uganda border. "Gotta show this paper, no that's the wrong paper, get this stamp from this guy, he's out right now - finally all done - but the gate is locked by dark, and by the way do you have 'something' that I might share with my children?" The next morning, we drove a few meters to Uganda and spent much of the day jumping through their hoops! It was our first experience of what has since become a conviction - the worst of both countries shows up at their borders!

We said goodbye to our first traveling friend when we reached Kampala. He was a relative of the Rev. Ephraim Adrale, a dear brother from Arua, who was then a pastor in the Church of Uganda Provincial office in Kampala. The Adrale family gave us the first taste of the love and welcome that we always received from the Lugbara people in West Nile. There were some hopeful improvements in the two years since my first trip to Kampala; most of the military were in their barracks, many shops had opened, and more goods were available. But bullet holes, burned buildings, broken glass, and damaged roads were still everywhere. We were glad to be locked inside by dark as random shooting was still the nightly after-dinner music. After a few busy days and still more papers in Kampala - a license plate for the jeep and a work permits for us - we started the 500 kilometers to Arua with our second dear brother guiding.

The 'tarmac' from Nairobi was generally good. But it was terrible or non-existent the rest of the journey. I couldn't speed like I learned to do on the L.A. freeways. Joy was eagerly waiting for her new Daihatsu - in good working order. We started down the notorious Bombo Road through the infamous Luweero District. Many former Amin soldiers settled in this area and hundreds of people were killed there in the back and forth of rival 'governments' in the 1980's. One treacherous stretch of 'road' went through hills and swamps. We sped downhill on decent pavement. But at the bottoms of the hills, swamp water had cratered the tarmac. So, we headed down the road speeding and slowing as needed.

I spotted an Army Land Rover in my rear-view mirror speeding down the hill behind me. But he did not slow for the bottom! He swerved around me at high speed - way too high. We watched in

shock as they flew past and nosedived into a gully about 10 meters down the hill. As the vehicle turned end over end, soldiers, girlfriends, and baggage came flying out. If we did not have our Lugbara brother with us, our mission career would have ended before it started.

Naturally, I pulled over to help these accident victims. But our friend fervently shouted, “Go, go, go!” Against my instincts I went. I was thankful I already had 600 kilometers of experience to work those Daihatsu gears to maximum speed quickly. In a matter of minutes those soldiers got to their feet and started shooting – at us! Since they wrecked their Land Rover, they needed another vehicle to speed to their destination. A bend in the road got us out of harm’s way and we never saw them again. I exercised my L.A. freeway driving speed as much as possible the rest of the day. We still have no idea what happened to those unfortunate passengers in that Land Rover. That horror scene of their crash landing sobered some of our missionary idealism. Our time in Uganda was going to be a matter of life and death.

Welcome to the West Nile

We knew we were near our destination because the roadside became increasingly crowded with burned out tanks and military vehicles. Just a couple years before, Idi Amin and his army were chased down these roads by liberation troops from Tanzania and Uganda. When the petrol ran out, they abandoned the vehicles and ran north. In June 1979 Amin flew from the Arua airstrip to Libya. Amin’s final mobile command post, a broken-down Winnebago, still sat in front of Arua’s District Offices.

AIM Uganda Team 1990



We finally met the whole team of brothers and sisters who were praying for us. What a happy moment to present the Daihatsu keys to Joy. She became a dear friend and wise counselor. Most of our AIM colleagues were not on missionary compounds. Our home and work-stations were dispersed through the region. They served on teams led by Ugandans doing a defined task requested by the Church of Uganda. Bible translators, nurses, and a surgeon were part of our first team. During

our almost four years in West Nile, we were joined by more medical doctors, hospital lab technicians, water engineers, midwives, theology tutors, and nurses from several nations. We became a family from Africa, Europe, America, and Asia.

The leader of our AIM team was the Rev. Canon Seton Maclure. He and his wife Peggy arrived in the West Nile in 1942. What a privilege it was to live in their guest house for our first several months and have them kindly pour their love and wisdom into us. They embodied faithfulness to the Scriptures, love for people, and seasoned insight about many areas of life. Our teammates in West Nile were survivalists who learned to build houses, plant gardens, raise chickens, repair

vehicles, and tune their short-wave radios to hear BBC News while enjoying a cup of tea each night. They even tolerated us listening to the Voice of America!



Peggy & Seton Maclure, Arua, Uganda 1983

Seton was a Cambridge graduate, Anglican clergyman, and a 'Canon' of the church, an honorary title conferred for faithful service to the church by Namirembe Cathedral. He was soft spoken. When he did speak everyone listened to his thoughtful wisdom. Peggy had no trouble filling up Seton's silent spaces. Her Lugbara name was 'talkative.' But she was not self-absorbed. She blessed and encouraged others as she chattered.

The Maclure's were much beloved in West Nile – by people in and out of the church.

Going a Long Way with My English Bible

English is the national language of Uganda. Many opportunities for teaching and preaching in English opened soon after arriving in Arua. English was the medium of instruction in most primary schools, and in all secondary schools and colleges. Ringili, the theological college Seton partly founded, was also an English language program. Nearly every secondary school and college had vibrant Scripture Union groups that were always looking for speakers for their weekly meetings. Schools in remote areas were so starved for stimulation that they would stop for the entire day to hear what visitors had to share. Students and teachers would listen attentively for hours – sometimes standing outside because they had no other place to gather.



I connected my roles in Scripture Union and Ringili by taking teams of students/pastors for a Gospel-day in many schools in the West Nile. Leaders were trained and people were saved!

Seton surely rejoiced in the many doors God was opening. He and Peggy had long prayed for the return of peace and Gospel-opportunity in West Nile. Still, I think Seton was a bit disappointed. Their deepest concern was for the faithful pastors and church leaders in far remote areas; most of them had little education and less English. By that time Seton had already guided Bible translations teams for seven tribal languages, and he was working on number eight. He also

helped begin vernacular language – Lugbara, Alur, Madi, and Kakwa – rural training centers in distant corners of West Nile.

As the Maclures neared retirement they wondered if the Blairs might pick up their mantle of serving these centers – using the local languages. Every couple days during our first months, we'd travel bumpy paths toward a village training center in their Daihatsu Jeep. Seton and Peggy were buckled into the front seats, Dayna and I were bouncing in the back! I'd arrive nauseous from the total-body pummel to find pit latrines with pungent smells, and then be offered strange food and drink that quickly sent me back to those latrines. After the vigorous shake back to the Maclures' home, I usually wanted to 'toss my tacos' and take a nap. Now, being the age the Maclures were then, I am in awe of their service and stamina. And I realize how much of a city-soft wimp I was! And still am.



Peggy and Seton Maclure, Ordination Service in Arua, Uganda - 1983

Seton and Peggy began patiently teaching Lugbara to us – they hoped the Alur language would be next. Dayna had some affinity for language and made good progress. She learned enough Lugbara to teach in the vernacular language wives' program at Ringili. One day while trying to grapple with the tones of Lugbara, Peggy told us a story during lunch. After having translated the Scriptures into Lugbara – that means they knew it well! – she and Seton went off on safari. She shouted in Lugbara to the man who kept their house, *"Take care of the chickens!"* 'Take care' in the Lugbara language is 'ofu.' (I did learn something!) But 'Ofu' in Lugbara has lots of meanings depending on tone and sentence syntax - one Lugbara meaning is 'kill.' You guessed it. All their chickens were very well taken care of – killed, plucked, and in the fridge!

The chicken story did little to motivate me to learn Lugbara. If that can happen after 20 years of usage, what hope was there!? It all sounded like a noisy soup to me. I am not sure which was stronger – my lack of discipline or my lack of interest! In my academic career I have passed exams on Spanish, Greek, Hebrew, and French. I am not sure how!? As he handed back my Greek final at Covenant College, which I barely passed, Dr. Allen Mawhinney spoke prophetically, *"Mark, you will go a long way with your English Bible."*

I am somewhat ashamed of my failures in language - but apparently not enough to start learning! We later lived over a decade in both Kazakhstan and China. People we meet often say, "your

Russian/Mandarin must be great!” Not so! I was like a dog. I could understand a few things but could not speak!

Many mission organizations require their workers to do language learning before getting busy with anything else. This is a good policy, because if you want to learn a language it demands focused dedication. The local language is essential for many mission tasks, especially in reaching the final frontiers. For example, the intimacy and opportunity of pastoring and doing medicine is best done when you speak the language of those you serve.

Our life has been teaching the Scriptures and encouraging Christian leaders in English in foreign lands. During our eight years in Uganda, it was rare for us to meet a person with no English understanding. Beyond our many English ministry opportunities, when not serving internationals in Kazakhstan and China, I have been in a bubble - not able to enter heart-level conversations with most of my neighbors. But in not spending years to learn local languages, we have been able to hit the ground running in the calling the Lord gave us. I have known mission workers who spent years in language acquisition and were never able to be well understood by the people group they loved.

In many places God has provided us with skilled co-preachers. Gifted translators have enabled us to have many ministry opportunities with non-English speakers. In the process we mentored and resourced these fellow messengers, often seeing them grow into gifted teachers and preachers – both in English and their heart languages. Translators we worked with for a couple years in the seminary in Kazakhstan grew to become teachers of the courses they translated. So, by God’s mercies, we have gone far with English Bibles.

Ministry must be Head AND Heart!

As a former British protectorate, nearly all academics in Uganda followed the British system. That was true for most pastoral training there then too. Those with the best scores advanced. Looking back, I appreciate Seton Maclure’s keen Kingdom strategy for Uganda. His Cambridge education was part of what enabled him to do so much for God with his life – but I never heard him flaunt it! As I landed fresh from my second master’s degree, I drank the Kool-Aid that said academics were essential to ministerial formation. I assumed intellect was a fruit of the Spirit – and essential to a ministry calling. My false notion has proven wrong.

Life did not allow the rural vernacular language training centers that Seton developed in West Nile to prioritize academics. There was no minimum academic level for student entrance. If you were serving in the church, you were welcome. And it was no use assigning readings. If they could find the time to read, and afford the books, and see without glasses (which were almost impossible to obtain) - there was no light for reading at night! Rural pastor’s days were long and busy, with much of their time and strength spent in subsistence farming. When it was too rainy, they could not gather in their outdoor classrooms. What little free time they had was given to preparing sermons and caring for church members. Most leaders walked on those terrible roads that we bounced along at high speeds. Bicycles were luxuries, that often broke down – especially when piled high with crops, people, and goods that needed transport! Yet these simple, humble, hard-working leaders were building strong churches that still endure in difficult places. Leaders

with any training were so scarce that those few who were trained had to lead hundreds of Christians. As parish leaders there were often 5 to 10 churches under their charge. I do not think I will see most of these laborers in Heaven, because they will be too far up in the front! A few younger Ringili students arrived with an entitled attitude of having passed the exam to be there. They achieved higher marks than those in the rural training centers, but not top marks. Those with the highest scores were invited to Bishop Tucker Theological College for diploma and degree courses. Our students came to Ringili for a three-year Certificate Course. But some imbibed enough Kool-Aid that they were convinced they needed to spend another three years getting a Diploma afterwards and then another three years getting a Degree after that. And if they could not be accepted into those advanced programs, they would spend precious years trying to find some back door. Several were convinced I did not love them because I offered no scholarship to America. I did not see these things as clearly then.

Most of our students at Ringili were humble and thankful for the chance God gave them to come and learn. Most of them were older than we were, several were grandparents. It was not an easy life. They brought their entire family. There was a Wives Program. Primary and secondary schools for their kids were a long walk away. Each family was given a simple house, no plumbing, no electricity, and they shared a mud-walled kitchen. A plot of land was given for them to farm for their survival. Ringili had no dining hall. We did have a small library with a pressure lantern for reading on some nights. The chalk board was so cratered it snapped our few chalk sticks. The classroom windows were wooden shutters, a couple of them nailed shut. Classes were often visited by crying children, squawking chickens, and lost goats. All this proved a challenging environment for academics.



Archbishop Silvanus Wani (ret.) While driving thru Kenya we stopped for this picture with a giraffe! 1986

It was our privilege to know Silvanus Wani. He was a great friend and help to Joy Grindey as she translated the Scriptures into Kakwa. Wani and Idi Amin, both Kakwa, knew one another. Pastor Silvanus was Chaplain to the Ugandan Army when Amin enlisted. In 1969 Wani became Bishop of Madi and West Nile Diocese. He was the first pastor to visit us after our first son Nathan was born. He took Nathan in his arms and prayed for him, giving him the Kakwa name “Adoke” which like Nathan means ‘gift.’

Wani’s predecessor, Archbishop Janani Luwum, Church of Uganda (Anglican), was killed by Idi Amin in 1977. We can only imagine the shock and fear Luwum’s murder incited throughout the entire nation, especially among church leaders. Nobody was safe. With great courage Wani accepted the appointment of his brother bishops to Archbishop just a few weeks later. Silvanus

then kindly but courageously visited President Amin, whose hands were stained with the blood of his forerunner, telling Amin he came to continue the work of the Lord and Luwum.

Waiting on the Lord

Like all people everywhere, missionaries do lots of waiting. Waiting is hard anywhere, but it can seem harder far from the comforts of home. Even after years of experience, I still want everything my way on my time. As I write this in ‘COVID’ lockdown. I am still waiting petulantly! Yet our always-right-on-time-God is mercifully growing this impatient man.

One of the blessed fruits of our waiting has been a stronger marriage. We slowly learned it was better that our two strong personalities cooperate, not collide. We are still learning. We set goals that only God could achieve, moving us from East Hawaii to a war-torn African town on the other side of the earth. He carried us on eagle’s wings. We waited to raise support, to make new friends and colleagues, understand new cultures, and bring blessings to our new community. We waited at dangerous roadblocks and corrupt borders. Sometimes we waited six months for mail to arrive. We waited for supplies that ‘got lost’ on hijacked trucks. And we waited for a space we could call home.



Tearfund UK was building three staff houses on the 100-acre Ringili campus. One would be our home while we served there. But it was not ready when we arrived. We struggled to understand that schedules were merely suggestions during those troubled times. From the distance of decades, we understand those delays better. But at the time, I did way too much grumbling.

Dayna watching our house at Ringili very slowly rising. 1983

Yet if we had landed to a finished house, we would not have had those valuable months with Seton and Peggy Maclure. Their lives might have been more pleasant without our invasion! Yet their kindness and patience forever shaped us for better service. Long before we used the words ‘mentor’ and ‘coach,’ they embodied them.

When we began teaching at Ringili the house there was still not ready. Several of our AIM colleagues lived and worked at Kuluva Hospital. So, we moved from the Maclures’ into our ‘Sunset Home’ on the grounds of Kuluva – just over the hill from Ringili.



Karibuni! You are Welcome!!

Dayna – carrying Nathan, our first-born - at our 'Sunset Home' at Kuluva Hospital, 1984

We often worshipped in Kuluva Church, participated in fellowships, enjoyed meals together, and received the hospital's excellent medical care. Waiting on God gave us a year with wonderful friends from Ireland, South Korea, Germany, England, USA, and various parts of Uganda at Kuluva.



Kuluva Hospital was founded in 1945 by the Church of Uganda. When we were there all the buildings were still mud walled. There was a generator that provided two-hours of electricity nightly. The whole community went frantic during those two hours - charging batteries, ironing clothes, listening to shortwave radio, reading, and baking cakes! This was long before mobile phones and computers – which would have made us even more harried. When it got dark, we fell into bed exhausted.

We wondered if our little house at Kuluva might one day be featured in “Sunset Magazine.” For us over-sized Americans it was a considerable down-sizing. We could stir the skillet while reclining in the bathtub – seriously! But everything we needed was there. We even found room for our first-born son, **Nathan Kapono Lee Blair**, born July 9, 1984, just 3 pounds, 7 ounces (1.7 k).



**Nathan our first son
being weighed by
Nurse Juliet and
loved by his mom.
Kuluva Hospital
1984**

A couple days each week our ‘houseman’ Mario came to help with tasks. He always entered with a smile for Dayna saying, “Good morning, Sir!” Then he would look at me and ask, “How are you, Madame?” We spent some time trying to sort out his gender references, but he must have been ahead of his time! No matter, both Sir and Madame were grateful for his faithful labors.

Everyone in our Kuluva prayer meetings would smile when Nurse/Midwife Young Soon Shim from South Korea prayed fervently for 24-hour electricity. God must have smiled too, because 5 years later it was on! A German hydro-electric team found a nearby stream that carried sufficient year-round water flow waiting to be channeled. Now that hydroelectricity serves Kuluva Hospital!

A Home Worth Waiting For

Our house at Ringili was ready in God’s good time, about one year after we arrived in Arua. We enjoyed the next two years of stability there. After 23 years renting apartments in places where landlords can evict you at their whim – in Kazakhstan and China – we appreciate that stability more now! We enjoyed turning the house into our home, sharing with students, colleagues, and friends.



We had no electricity or running water. Dayna cooked on two kerosene primus stoves and a small propane gas oven. We had a small refrigerator that was powered by kerosene. A small flame activated the fridge's Freon. It was a pain to keep that flame just right to sustain the cold. If you can't wrap your head around how a flame keeps things cold, I never did either. The 'loo' was a couple dozen steps from our backdoor. It seemed much further on dark rainy nights. Thankfully, our fears of being attacked by wild animals on our nature calls were never fulfilled! Our corrugated iron roof had gutters that sent precious rainwater into two cement cisterns. We stewarded that liquid treasure very carefully. We took 'splash baths' while standing in a basin trying to catch every drop to water our garden vegetables. We grew tomatoes, sweet and Irish potatoes, onions, cabbage, beans, herbs, and eggplant (or as our British colleagues called it 'aubergine')— lots of eggplant – one memorable meal was eggplant prepared three different ways. Not sure if that was a factor in my losing 25 pounds our first year on the 'Diarrhea Diet Plan' – sorry if that's too much information!

Our water cisterns emptied during the 'dry season.' Then we hired schoolgirls who carried a jerry can of water (20 liters / 20 kilos) on their heads! They made a couple trips before school to the bore hole about a kilometer away from Ringili. If that sounds hard, it is!

**2 Young Ladies from the Team who Quenched
our Thirst During the Dry Seasons. 1985**



By the time staple supplies arrived from the long journey to West Nile, they were usually worse for wear. One Arua shopkeeper honestly answered the question, "Does this flour have weevils?" He said, "Yes, madam it does have evils, but they give extra protein!" Before we stored staples like flour, sugar, and rice in our pantry, we would spread them on metal trays in the sunshine so those 'evils' would scurry for a shady refuge.

Using regular kerosene lanterns worked if all we needed was dim light. But to really see at night we had a kerosene pressure lamp. Both of us taught at Ringili and a couple nearby schools, so we needed to prepare lessons almost nightly, struggling to keep at least a step ahead of our students. Pressure lamps make good reading light – if you don't mind raging heat and lots of interested bugs. But if the lantern's cloth mantle broke – as it did often on nights with lots of reading and preparation to be done! - it was too hot to fix until morning. If you hear a lot of muttering in the background, that was me on those frustrating suddenly dark nights.

After about six months of lantern life, and with two little men exploring our floors, we decided to go solar. With all the mayhem in Uganda we doubted the salesman who promised delivery from England direct to Arua. But it happened – on time – duty free! A couple talented Ugandan men welded a frame for our new solar panels and mounted them securely on our roof. Low voltage fluorescent lights and switches were hung in every room – just like your house! But it was a marvel in West Nile then. Friends over the hill at Kuluva had their two-hour generator. Friends in Arua agonized over the town's erratic power supply. But the Blairs had as much light as they needed, replenished by the African sun. Some thought we were wizards; other people were jealous.

When we shared our good fortune of illumination with our British mission colleagues, they found it hard to rejoice with us. Adding all the years our team had served there, they had fiddled with frustrating lanterns for 200 cumulative years of long dark nights. We thought they might have been cheered to know we bought the system in England; not so. We later heard the ditty, “The British will live with anything they cannot change; the Americans will change anything they cannot live with.” It was often true for our AIM Uganda team. But soon lights were no longer a sensitive subject. Within a few months all our teammates had their own solar systems, so we all walked in the light together!



Our nearest neighbors were people recovering from leprosy and their families. Kuluva Hospital is known around the world for their treatment of leprosy. Small villages of different language groups were founded near the hospital so leprosy out-patients could easily access their regular treatments. We had friendly, but distant, relationships, helping them in small ways as we were able. Yet living in our newly lighted house we felt a century away from our nearest neighbors!



It was not long before we discovered that our palace of light attracted shrews. Our rough wooden doors were not flush with our floors, so our solar radiance shone out the floor-gaps like a welcome sign to those smelly needle-nosed vermin. But all was well, a wife of noble character I had found! The beautiful woman who killed B-52 cockroaches with her rubber slippers in Hawaii still wore those dangerous stompers. Dayna went into attack mode and protected me and the children from all invading shrews. I would stand on a chair and scream!

We were growing used to waiting, but it intensified when we had three little sons. Getting out the door with the stuff we all needed took half an hour! As I taught Old Testament Survey, a verse from Genesis 33 jumped off the page. At that point in the story, Jacob was broken and blessed by God and reconciled and restored to man. Instead of running from his brother Esau, Jacob was invited to walk with him.



“But Jacob said to him, “My lord knows that the children are tender and that I must care for the ewes and cows that are nursing their young. If they are driven hard just one day, all the animals will die. So, let my lord go on ahead of his servant, while I move along slowly at the pace of the flocks and herds before me and the pace of the children...” Genesis 33.13,14 ESV

Blair Family, Nairobi, Kenya 1988

Jacob had more wives than I had children. And he had no Datsun double-cabin pickup. But like him, I needed to walk more slowly, waiting for them, and on the Lord, who daily bears our burdens.

Saturday Night Invasion!

In 1984 we got a letter from the kids at Mustard Seed School in Hoboken, New Jersey asking “*what we did for excitement?*” We shared our big news...

“Hey kids! It’s an exciting Saturday night here in Arua. As we were eating dinner, we heard screams and shouts outside our window. A dangerous African culprit was on the rampage. Fear struck our hearts. I rushed to find a deadly weapon. Even a Christian must protect his home. Quickly, I put the deadly weapon near our door. In fact, I put a lot of it near all three of our doors, right on the ground. Some people were watching but I had to do it. This enemy does not play games – it is for real! The enemy? Ants! No, silly, not the friendly little red or black ones you watch in your Ant Farm. These ants are big, mean, and nasty. They only travel in gangs, millions of them together. They scamper up your feet – especially big feet like mine! Once they invite themselves, they quickly run upward. And in one horrendous concert of sheer pain, they squeeze their pincers into your flesh. See what I mean? This is no game! Live, in Arua, it’s Saturday night! So, these invaders forced me to get the deadly weapon - ashes – from the fire pit where we heat our bath water. I scooped out heaps of ash. I had no choice. I have a wife to protect – a pregnant one at that. So, compelled to the deadly act, I heaped gobs of ash in deep lines outside each door. If these monsters come near it, they will turn and run away in fright. (Don’t ask me why they do not like ash?? Maybe that would be a good extra-credit assignment your teacher could assign??) I just know that if you do not take strong measures, they will invade, even though uninvited. They have been known to climb right into your bed. Imagine being pinched in pain when you’re deep in Dreamland?! We thank God that this army of ants found somewhere else to gobble this night. Well, it’s probably not as exciting as all those video games you are enjoying in New Jersey. But we are saving lots of quarters.”

Life and Death on the Golf Course

Encircling the south side of Arua town was a well-manicured 18-hole emerald island. Long ago wise British planners surrounded towns in their Protectorate with closely cropped lawns for mosquito/malaria control – and golf! In 1983 I shattered the color-barrier becoming the only

white member (at that time) of the West Nile Golf Club. I could not share a brew with the guys in the bar (AIM had a ‘no alcohol’ policy!), but I enjoyed their company with my Coke.

Blair Family Picnic at Arua Golf Course, 1986
Josiah, in Dayna’s arms, was probably thinking,
“Oh, this is where my Dad was!”

My golf ministry connected me to the highest and lowest levels of Arua society. A couple dozen eager young men hung out at the entrance to the golf course. They waited to be hired as caddies – and in my case, ball searchers! Given the economic inequities then, I could easily have hired half a dozen guys. As my golf shots went in all directions, I should have enlisted a full dozen! I got to know those guys well on our many searches in the brush. Several were Christians, sometimes with faith questions. A couple others were Muslim but happy to talk about ‘Isa – why not, I was paying them! I learned a lot about life from those eagle-eyed brothers. And some days I ended up with more balls than when I started.



Bordering the golf course was St. Philips church. I had the privilege of preaching there periodically. Back then Sunday meant going to church for most Ugandans. There were two choices in Arua then, Roman Catholic or Anglican. Both were packed. People pressed through their doors in and out of the worship services like riders push onto the Beijing Subway!

Whenever I participated in the service at St. Philips, I joined those praying in the vestry beforehand. One Easter Sunday there was a joyful anticipation of our resurrection celebration as we gathered for prayer. According to the tradition of the East African Revival, the ‘saved’ greeted one another with “Praise the Lord” or “Hallelujah!” So, there was lots of praises as service participants entered. But when one young lady, a pastor’s daughter I later learned, entered, there were just polite “Hellos” and “Good mornings!” Obviously the ‘saved’ did not include her in their inner circle.

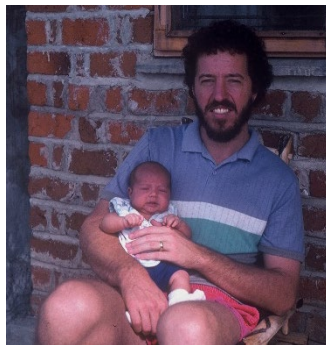
From the vestry we processed into the sanctuary. I still remember that wonderful moment in our Anglican order of worship when we all stood for the reading of the Holy Gospel that Easter. Up stepped the pastor’s lovely daughter to read the Good News of the empty tomb! We all responded, “*Praise to you, Lord Christ.*” I later learned that the young lady who read with clarity and conviction was a call girl. I am sure her dad was grateful to see her in church on Easter Sunday - probably proud of how well she read – certainly praying that she, like the rest of us sinners who filled the church, would find the redeeming grace of the Risen Lord. Jesus was a friend of sinners. But, sadly, His Church often struggles to welcome them in.

Golf gave me an informal connection to politicians and professionals who sometimes heard my sermons at St. Philips. So, whenever I stepped into the clubhouse their language sanitized instantly! Our friendly discussions gave me perspectives about life in Uganda that I never heard from church friends.

One day a wave of fear struck our Club. I happened to be golfing with my friend Dr. Johnson Lulua, one of the few doctors in Arua, and a great preacher! A young boy came running across the fairway shouting for Dr. Johnson. When he reached us, he panted out frantic news, the Chief Magistrate was dead. He was a member of our Club and one of the highest officials in the district. Johnson, who had spent several weeks trying to diagnose his strange symptoms, gave me a panicked look and said, “It’s called AIDS!” This government jurist regularly traveled back and forth to Kampala. He likely contracted the deadly disease there and became one of the first to bring it to West Nile. AIDS/HIV became a terrible scourge across all Uganda for the rest of our years there. The guys in the clubhouse, especially those who lived as recklessly as the Chief Magistrate, worriedly asked Johnson about their fate. What a powerful ministry Johnson had – he cared well for the body which perishes, and for the soul that lives forever.

I was on that golf course when one of the biggest events in our family occurred. Occasionally AIM would send a small plane to us with personnel and supplies. One day I welcomed their Cessna as it landed on the grassy Arua airstrip. As they taxied toward the small air station the front wheel fell into an Amin-era fox hole covered over with thick grass. The still whirling propeller snapped into the ground. Nobody was hurt. But another AIM-AIR plane needed to be dispatched from Nairobi with a new propeller. So that night we hosted 2 pairs of pilots. The next morning one plane needed to depart by 7 a.m. for Nairobi, and the other plane would leave about noon for Zaire. Since Ringili was about 15 miles from the airstrip, we decided to hang out in Arua between flights. The Zaire crew and I would golf.

When great-with-Josiah-Dayna got moving around that morning in Ringili, she felt like he would also land soon. Fortunately, our dear friend, Nurse/Midwife Young Soon Shin, got over the hill



from Kuluva Hospital in time. Our house workers scurried for hot water and towels as Young Soon shouted instructions in her best Korean-English-Lugbara. She shouted even more as the waves of Dayna’s contractions

Josiah Keola Blair, born at home in Ringili, January 4, 1986

surged across our queen-sized waterbed. I missed all the noise and drama!

After the golf I got the pilots to their Zaire-bound plane. When I finally drove back toward our house, I saw a bunch of neighbors gathered at our door. I was worried until smiles broke across their faces. I parked and rushed inside to see the reason for their joyful gathering. “Hello, Son!”

Wheels from Mombasa

A vehicle was essential for what we were called to do in rural Uganda. Of course, being Americans, we were expected to have a vehicle. But that assumption does not always send the most God-honoring mission-advancing message as we strive to reach the world for Jesus.

One of the challenges of having a vehicle where almost no one else does is that everyone needs a ride. I often wondered what our Ugandan friends muttered as we sped past on unpaved roads leaving them to choke on our dust as they walked along. We helped during a number of ‘emergencies’ – transporting sick people, pregnant women, and even dead bodies. But it was always hard to discern what truly was an emergency.

Three years later as we moved into our home in Bishop Tucker Theological College in Mukono, our neighbor came over in a panic. “The cow at the college farm is sick!” I knew vehicles had been donated to the college, even for their farm. I also knew we were all quite tired from a long hard day, so I chose to care for my family instead of the cow. I was also leery of sending out the message that I was a soft touch on Day One in this new community. I do not remember if the cow lived, but our relationship with that neighbor eventually died. He was the Head of the Old Testament Department and we later clashed over the inspiration and authority of Scripture. But I wonder how much of our falling out was about cows and cars?

A Ugandan we met in Nairobi was importing right-hand-drive vehicles from Japan. Our supporters generously gave the \$7500 for a Datsun double-cabin diesel engine pickup truck.



Dayna was pregnant so I journeyed the 1500-kilometers to the port in Mombasa, Kenya alone. It was a long and eventful trip for our vehicle – for both of us. Dayna was expecting our first child while on the other side of the earth from her family in Hawaii. Thankfully our Kuluva community gave her lots of support and encouragement, especially as she battled with malaria.

The bureaucracy and corruption we endured at border crossings thrived in the port of Mombasa. On my first day I strapped on my clerical collar and stepped into the fray of endless offices. I met lots of smiling Kenyans who offered to be my agent for the process of getting my vehicle released. Why should I pay for that? I could do it myself. My magendo aversion made their requests for “something extra” especially repugnant. It was not a charity house, these guys all got a salary. But refusing to play by house rules and pay extra to an agent came with a big price. Somehow most of the clerks I needed to sign and stamp my documents had “just stepped out...and won’t be back until tomorrow!” Lots of empty chairs had a suit coat carefully positioned on the back. “He is around somewhere. His coat is here!” After three weeks of bouncing, I grudgingly hired one of those smiling agents. All the bribes were bundled into the bottom-line price – I knew nothing! And I thanked God when I finally drove our truck out of the port of Mombasa.

But waiting was not all work and no play – Mombasa is a beach! I stayed at the Church of the Province of Kenya (Anglican) Guest House. I appreciated being near brothers and sisters there as I fought giants daily at the port.

There was a mission base within walking distance from the CPK. One night I joined several dozen young people for worship. I did not know them, but their songs were familiar and encouraging. There was a sad announcement about a leader's wife, the mother of little ones, who was battling malaria fever. We stopped to pray for her. The mood lightened when someone stood declaring a word from the Lord about her recovery – “she will be fine!” There was a wave of joy and celebration through the group after this hopeful word. We continued in song, prayer, and sharing for the rest of evening.

The next morning as I headed to the port, I saw a group gathered outside the base and stopped in. She died during the night! A young wife and mom in her twenties, gone. I still remember that exceedingly sad morning. Of course, I thought of Dayna. I am thankful I had no idea she too was battling malaria 1500 kilometers away.

That surely was not a ‘teachable moment,’ but I silently thanked God that “*We also have the prophetic message as something completely reliable*” (2 Peter 1.19 NIV) in the Bible. Our living God can speak, but our greatest treasure is the Word he has forever recorded in Scripture. The Lord's inspired and inerrant promises in the Bible can never fail.

Once I had some wheels, I took a ‘beach day’ before driving into the interior of Africa. A prior visit to Mombasa schooled us in ways to enjoy the luxury hotels while staying at the cheap church guest house. I headed 30 kilometers south to Diani Beach where a dozen posh hotels waited for me. I pulled in and parked with such swagger the hotel security guard must have believed I belonged there. I found a changing room – and even a towel station – and marched confidently to the pool. I strove to slip in casually and establish my base camp for a day of pool and beach. Drinks and lunch were on me, of course.

Choosing the right chaise lounge was key. I needed a recliner for reading and sunning, comfy cushion, umbrella, and a little table for my gear. The pool area was crowded but my quick glance spotted my easy chair for that day. Just to clarify, it was a quick scan, I did not want to stand and gawk like a doofus that did not belong there! So, I hustled over and settled into my chaise lounge. As I settled and surveyed my surroundings, I noticed women sneering angrily at me, and men smiling enviously. I discovered the reason for their reactions on the next chaise lounge. A woman decided to bare her breasts to the sunshine. Her European sense of freedom collided with Muslim-dominated Mombasa. As a surprised gate-crasher, I thought it good to just lay back and stare into the sky. Soon her beau scooted closer to confirm their domestic bond. When I did have the nerve to get up, the first people I noticed were from AIM Kenya. We made no exchange of recognition. Maybe they did not remember me, I had lost weight, grown a beard, and was hanging out with half naked women!

A Family Bigger than We Think!

In 1985 Campus Crusade sponsored EXPLOR '85, a worldwide video conference to train evangelists. Messages by well-known speakers were broadcast to hundreds of sites around the

world, including Uganda. Each of the 50 host countries also invited speakers from within their country. I was privileged to join the speaking team at Makerere University in Kampala.

I traveled the 500 kilometers from Arua to Kampala with Roman Catholic Fathers and Sisters from the USA, Ireland, Italy, and Uganda in their Land Rover. We confronted almost 100 roadblocks on that very long day's drive. Pulling up to the many tree-branch barriers across the road was always intimidating. The young boys with big guns on duty were unpredictable. Thankfully, they often had some fear of God so our car full of clergy was often waved through. Just in case they hesitated to let us pass, the Catholics would hand out cigarettes and I gave Gospel-tracts. We were a full-service ministry team – helping soldiers get bad lungs and new hearts!

Ministry far from home, especially in difficult places, enlarges our circles of friendship. When I served Haili Church in Hilo in 1982, I never even walked across the street to St. Joseph's Catholic Church. But in Arua we depended on Catholic friends for survival! They too had suffered. In June 1981 Ugandan soldiers opened fire on the Ombachi mission station of the Comboni Missionaries in Arua, killing 55 and wounding 100. When we arrived in 1983, Ombachi was once again an active mission station; with schools, carpentry, car repair, and friendly priests from Italy who shared their wine and pasta. They made a beautiful rocking chair for Dayna when Nathan was born. On one safari I broke the chassis of our pick-up truck on the high-centered dirt paths. I was far from Los Angeles, but I still drove at freeway speeds! Deep in the bush we tied the broken chassis together with rope. We limped to Ombachi where their mechanics welded it back together.

Hand-made rocking chair with growing room for Nathan, 1984

We made friends with young doctors in Médecins Sans Frontières ('Doctors without Borders') – who worked hard and played harder. They kindly doctored us; and were fun to hang out with. We enjoyed life with many NGO workers. Even if they did not believe Jesus is God incarnate, they were grateful for a Christmas dinner. The Church needs to venture outside of its comfort zone - where lost people long for friendship.



One long and scary night in 1989, Aaron, our youngest son, needed emergency hernia surgery. We rushed to Nsambya Catholic Hospital in Kampala. Dr. Miriam Duggan, an Irish Sister and Surgeon, got out of bed to perform surgery on our two-year-old son. I was in a panic, and Dr. Duggan kindly but firmly rebuked me, "Put your faith in God!" I needed that! In 1991 we returned to Haili Church in Hilo, but this time I walked across the street to St. Joe's. I met brethren there who knew Dr. Duggan! They even invited me to come over and preach. The priest gave me a hug after my message on "The Finished Work of Christ."

Joys and Sorrows in West Nile

There were many challenges to life in West Nile in the 1980s, but there were far more blessings. We grew to love the people and rejoiced in the many ministry opportunities. We began to understand why Seton and Peggy spent over forty years serving there.

Friends, Students, and Colleagues helped us celebrate Nathan's first birthday in our front yard at Ringili. July 9, 1985



Both of us taught pastors at Ringili. Dayna also taught in the Wives Course, sometimes with a little Blair strapped to her back! There were also many opportunities to share Christ with Secondary and College students. We thank God for His life changing Word.



Scripture Union Student Conference, Arua, 1986

During our time in West Nile there were three coups d'états'. Because of the post Amin-waves of terror that struck the District in the early 1980s, there was panic with each turbulent transition. The rival armies ran from their opponents but were ruthless to civilians. Many aspects of life and society lurched backward with each coup. One of our dear friends and teaching colleagues at Ringili was the Rev. Hezekiah Opiga. He was especially troubled by the chaos as his son was one of the ten killed on the Ringili campus in 1981.

Moyo is a small city located in the far northeast of the West Nile district. This area was cut off from the rest of the region since the overthrow of Amin's regime. Thousands of people, including church leaders, fled from Moyo into nearby Sudan. When security was stabilized thousands returned to Moyo, but most of their pastors remained in exile. Several of us West Nile church leaders prayed for Moyo. I wanted to offer my help, so I drove a group of Ringili students to Moyo. We were warmly welcomed into schools, churches, army barracks, and government offices. They were very hungry for the encouragement of Scripture.

When we returned and shared about the open doors we found in Moyo, others were encouraged to go. Seton Maclure, on his final West Nile safari before retirement, led a ministry team there. Several months later I took another team from Ringili and we had 60 people pray to receive Christ in one meeting. One of our Ringili students that I took on the mission trip returned there to serve as a pastor after graduation.

On the Ferry to Moyo from Adjumani (L) - Pastor Manasseh Dramani, (in clerical collar) was appointed Archdeacon in Moyo after Ringili course, (R) Moyo Secondary School Leaders



The final Uganda coup – forever, I pray! – was commanded by Yoweri Museveni who led his National Resistance Army on a several year campaign for power. The NRA were uniquely just and disciplined and brought a new order of stability in the regions they controlled. I remember Dayna rocking our new-born Josiah in our Ringili living room in January 1986 as we listened to Museveni's inauguration in Kampala over Radio Uganda. But there were still regions of Uganda controlled by opposing rebel forces, including our West Nile. As the forces controlling West Nile became the out group we feared they would begin looting and killing. I joined church elders on some of their visits with rebel military commanders, urging them to surrender and disarm. We were inspired by the resolve of the local people for peace. Some even disarmed fleeing soldiers! And we were discouraged by some pastors who ran to hide in Zaire and did not return when peace came.

Most schools closed for a couple months in early 1986. We were proud of our courageous student families at Ringili who decided to stay and study. The killing of ten students on our campus five years earlier was a grim reminder of our vulnerability. We wrote our supporters at that time: "We are still convinced that only the power of Jesus Christ can conquer the gun and subdue the evil in our hearts. We thank God for the freedom to move about and speak His Word... We especially value your prayers for the people of Uganda. We have grown to love and weep with them. This is it for them, they do not have an America to run home to. A few are victimizing the many, holding the entire nation hostage to terrible crimes against property and life. This new wave of terror has given a new sense of importance to the Gospel ministry of our Ringili students."

The first months of 1986 we lived in a "now, but not yet" political reality. Our new President ruled peacefully in the capital far to the south. But we lived in land he did not fully control. President Museveni's National Resistance Army determined to control all Uganda. So, we followed the B.B.C. nightly reports of NRA troops marching north toward us. We did not know whether the soldiers who held our town would put up a fight. On Good Friday 1986, NRA troops marched within view of Ringili toward Arua town. We prayed while we listened for shots or explosions. But all was quiet in West Nile. Rebels laid down their arms or fled. Museveni's rule

was recognized without a shot fired. What a sermon illustration this became! We preachers pointed to our King of Kings and Lord of Lords who will come on His white horse to usher in the end of time and rule unrivaled for eternity. His enemies and their armies look fierce. But John does not describe any battle, just an instant capitulation (see Revelation 19:19-20). The victory Jesus won at Calvary will be fully acknowledged throughout the Cosmos.

“Higher, Higher, Lift Jesus Higher!”

We witnessed Arua, Uganda, striving to get back up on its feet. The city of 15,000 was on a wild roller coaster through the 1970s. When we arrived in 1983, they were near the bottom, getting ready for a steep climb. When we visited in 2011, Arua was still rebuilding; but citizens were asking ‘modern’ questions about the fastest Wi-Fi and best restaurants.

A brief height of Arua’s ride was when ‘their man’ Idi Amin was the President. I suppose hometowns in every nation get a bounce when their boy or girl climbs to the top. But Arua’s boost came with a battering for the rest of Uganda. West Nile enjoyed stolen treasures for a few years while the rest of the nation was plundered and punished. But by 1974 the entire nation was suffering from Amin’s terror. ‘Liberation’ from Amin hit Arua in three crashing waves of death and destruction - Amin’s fleeing army, Tanzanian troops looking for Amin sympathizers, and then Ugandan soldiers wanting revenge. Each strike went deeper.



We sincerely wanted to bring Gospel-hope to the West Nile friends we grew to love. Covenant College and Westminster Theological Seminary equipped me with a Reformed world and life view that Christ transforms culture. My convictions are unchanged, but they’ve been tempered as I realize how unlike Christ I still am. And if I still have so far to go, how can a whole world get turned around? Only God!

There was a big chasm between our American abundance and Arua’s afflictions. Our families back home were well protected in a prosperous nation, we were sent fully supported by givers and prayers, and we landed softly into the care of our colleagues. We even managed to book a telephone call at the Arua Post Office to assure Ohana (family) in Hawaii that we arrived safely. Our nine-minute call was not cheap to us, but it was more than two month’s salary for the Archbishop of the Church of Uganda. One day our friend Dr. Johnson Lulua jokingly wondered if he could be our houseboy. We had no idea the meager salary we gave our worker was triple what Johnson made!

Nevertheless, we witnessed birth pangs of hope in Arua. God used the economic zeal of Muslim shopkeepers and traders. Many of them had fled across the nearby borders of Zaire (now known as Democratic Republic of Congo) and Sudan (South Sudan today) to survive the post-Amin attacks. Some regrouped and returned peacefully. Most of West Nile’s returning soldiers were exhausted and disillusioned from their fling with power. Many returned home and turned their swords into plowshares. Someone said, “Uganda is so fertile that if you plant a pig’s tail, tomorrow a pig will sprout!” From our own vegetable garden and across the whole District we

saw the fruit of peace; settled people planting, harvesting, and enjoying the bounties of their gardens. Parents sacrificed to pay for school fees, uniforms, and books – planting in faith for their children’s better future. Students who appreciated their parent’s sweat equity studied diligently. People confronted with the brevity of life packed the churches. Hope was growing.



Several hundred people marched to the “East African Revival Conference” Arua, 1984

Adversity can be a time of Gospel advance. We saw this happen twice, hopefully even a third time now as we trust God to be using COVID. In the 1990’s people in Kazakhstan, like all the former Soviet Union, were especially open after glasnost and perestroika. When

our support structure has fallen, we need something to hold us up. Christians have used these opportunities to declare the One who is a strong tower. But the window closes quickly as soon “the cares of the world choke the Word.”

In the early 1980s we were invited into prisons, military camps, and even mosques to share Jesus in West Nile. We accompanied teams taking the “Jesus” film to the far corners of the region. One trip was to Pawor, a fishing village of about 3000 people on the Nile River. I went with 4 Ugandan brothers for a 3-day mission. There was no church in Pawor at the time. We found fewer than 10 people who professed faith in Christ. We taught them some Christian basics in the mornings. In the afternoons we did open-air preaching in the marketplace. Each night we showed the “Jesus” film on the football pitch to big crowds from Pawor and other river villages. For most of them it was their first time to see a film – certainly never one where the characters of the Bible spoke their Alur language! We prayed with 14 people to receive Jesus and connected them to a pastor in that district.

The most feared group in West Nile were soldiers. Soldier is a loose description. Very few of those waving AK-47s in our faces at roadblocks had proper military training. And with 20 armies roaming the land then it was always hard to know the players and the score. But those of us marching with Jesus were convinced they all needed to join His forces.



Soldiers receiving Good News Bibles, 1985

A mzungu in a clerical collar could sometimes open doors. Several times I drove groups of Ugandan Christian brothers to barracks asking if we could pray for them and share Scripture. They were usually eager to receive us. They put down their guns and opened their hearts. Most of them were homesick boys with guilty consciences.

Heaven will fully reveal how our small efforts fit into the plan of God's redemption. Sometimes we even get glimpses of His grand design while still on earth. God used lots of gifted Ugandan brothers and sisters to stand in the gap during those challenging days in West Nile.



Dr. Johnson Lulua was our neighbor and dear friend at Kuluva Hospital. He was the first Ugandan doctor to become Medical Superintendent of Kuluva. This was a huge job. He was the CEO and COO. He was often the only doctor on duty in the only functional hospital within a 100-mile radius.

Feast at Kuluva Hospital, Stephen Gordon, and David Lacey (med students from UK) with Dr. Johnson Lulua, Medical Supt., 1984

Johnson was a highly respected Lugbara Christian in a region that did not have many highly educated leaders at that time. So, he was in demand to preach, which he loved to do. But his day job was managing Kuluva Hospital's 75 beds in their mud-walled facilities, stewarding their very limited finances, and maintaining good relations between staff members from all around Uganda and the world. In subsequent years, a dozen people did the jobs Johnson did alone. There just were not enough qualified people to do all that needed to be done in war-battered West Nile.

Canon John Ondoma is a gifted educator and committed Lugbara Christian. He served as Headmaster of the best secondary schools in Arua. Like Johnson he did much with limited resources amidst many challenges. There was religious freedom in the schools of Uganda. Indeed, all the government schools then were founded by either Anglican or Roman Catholic missionaries. Many Christians served in schools.



John had the vision to launch Muni Girl's Secondary School, providing girls a more affordable and distinctly Christian education. He had the loyal support of parents who worked hard to clear the property, build the mud walled classrooms, thatch the roofs, and nail boards together for desks and benches. John recruited Dayna to teach there one day a week.



Canon John and Kezzy Ondoma in Arua, 2011

More than 25 years later, in 2011, Dayna and I worshipped in St. Francis Chapel at Makerere University in Kampala. After the service, a well-dressed woman came up to thank Dayna for teaching her at Muni. As she walked away, the Chaplain told us she was a Uganda Supreme Court Justice!

Canon Isaac Anguyo has spent his life trying to reach his Aringa people. He is a teacher and faithful Christian leader. We often shared in Gospel outreaches through Scripture Union. Isaac asked me to look for scholarship for him to go to a US university. Instead, I referred him to Daystar University in Nairobi which I thought could prepare him better for his work in West Nile. He was challenged to think of his own Aringa kinsmen in northern West Nile, almost half a million people bordering Southern Sudan who needed real life. For decades there had been just a small Christian presence in that predominantly Muslim area.



Canon Isaac Anguyo – Ringili, 1984 / Lausanne 3, Cape Town, 2010

Isaac founded and lead “Here is Life.” Today HIL continues to faithfully show and speak the Good News of Jesus. Aringa has been forever changed by their service and sacrifice. Isaac describes their mission, “Here is Life, an indigenous Christian organization, aims to eradicate spiritual and physical poverty among the Aringa. Our mission is to enable each person to live a whole and integrated life for which he or she has been created: through health services, radio, education, economic programs and social services...To enable the people of Aringa to develop economically, socially, educationally and spiritually.”



Henry Orombi was the dynamic Youth Leader of Madi and West Nile Diocese. The Gospel-partnership between Johnson, John, Isaac, and Henry reminded me of my spiritual brothers from Montrose Community Church. Henry was the Traveling Secretary for Scripture Union and I was his Assistant. We knew the Lord equipped Henry for leadership, we can only praise God for global impact he has made.

Henry, far left in light blue coat, me on right in dark blue. Open air preaching in Arua. 1984

When a new diocese was carved out of the southern West Nile, Henry was the enthusiastic choice as the first Bishop of Nebbi Diocese. Then in 2004 Henry was appointed by his brother

Bishops as Archbishop of the Church of Uganda (Anglican). From that pulpit his clear Gospel message was heard throughout the nation and the world.

I was proud to find my friend Archbishop Henry Orombi presiding over the 4000 Christian leaders from 197 nations at Lausanne 3 in Cape Town. 2010

The 1986 Arua Scripture Union Student Conference was a time of great joy. Uganda had just passed through another coup d'état and I was asked to speak on "The Power of God." Schools were reopening during this time of increased security. Students could afford to return, thanks to the good harvests and their parent's labors. The Lord who proved His faithfulness through good times and bad was among us. The first day of the conference we learned this simple chorus,



*"...Higher, higher, lift Jesus higher...
Cast your burdens on Jesus, for He cares for you..."*

It soon became the ballad of our gathering. We were eager to share this Gospel-hope with the whole town. I can't remember how it started, but somehow our conference went mobile.



We all fell in line behind Tito on his guitar, and whatever instruments could be carried, marching out from the Arua Secondary School campus toward town. The streets were still filled with potholes and broken glass. Burned out buildings still lined our route. We sang a few different songs, but "Higher, Higher" – with hundreds of hands reaching for the sky – kept looping through the mix. Soon the parade doubled, then tripled...



People of Arua Praising Jesus, 1985

For all kinds of reasons on that otherwise boring afternoon, Protestants, Catholics, and even Muslims marched to lift Jesus higher that happy day. "...Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven..." - briefly seen on Arua's unpaved streets.

Move to Mukono

The Rev. Eliphaz Maari, Principal of Bishop Tucker Theological College, invited us to consider joining their faculty. BTTC is in Mukono, 12 miles east of Kampala. At that time BTTC offered the highest-level of pastoral training in the Church of Uganda – Diploma in Theology and Bachelor's in Divinity – to over 100 students from all over Uganda. Uganda was very much a reached country; the gospel could be heard in any corner of the nation in the local languages. The task was to strengthen and enlarge the Church for its faithful witness in and beyond the country. Because of the tremendous growth of the church, there were not enough trained Christian leaders. So, the ongoing work of BTTC was vital.



Eunice and Eliphaz Maari with their daughter, in their home in Kampala, 2011

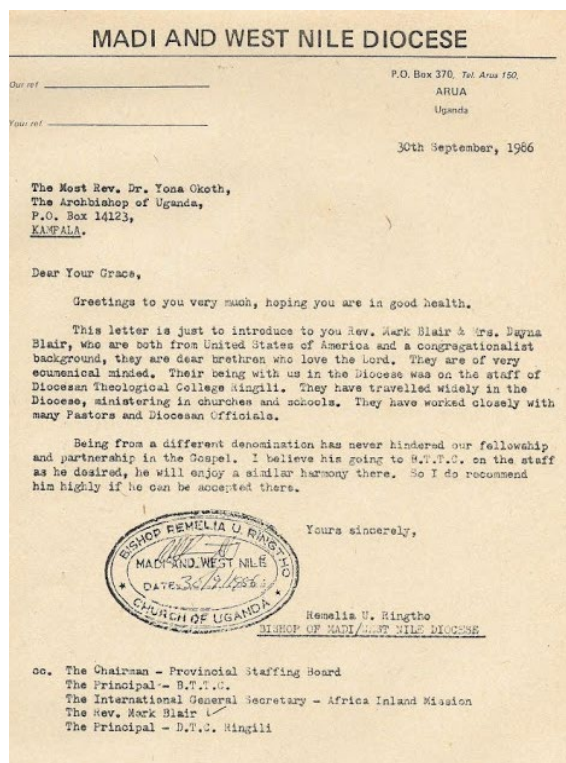
Despite the impact of the East African Revival, we saw the embers of Gospel-zeal cooling at BTTC. Many gifted young leaders of the Church of Uganda were given scholarships by the World Council of Churches and sent to well-established, but no longer evangelical, schools like Harvard, Yale, Oxford, and Cambridge. Many Ugandan scholars entered those programs with a lively faith in Jesus only to graduate as critics of the Scriptures. Then they returned to become highly placed leaders within the Church of Uganda, including faculty in BTTC, making disciples who advanced their doubts.

Eliphaz hoped we would encourage evangelical convictions in BTTC. But there were several obstacles to our moving, the biggest was that we were not from the Anglican/Episcopal tradition. Also, AIM's work in Uganda was historically focused on West Nile and did not usually provide faculty for BTTC. Our appointment to the top school in Uganda needed to be approved by Archbishop Yona Okoth (who helped us free our barrels held hostage in Kampala!). We shared the invitation to BTTC with colleagues and supporters and we prayed for the Lord to guide us.



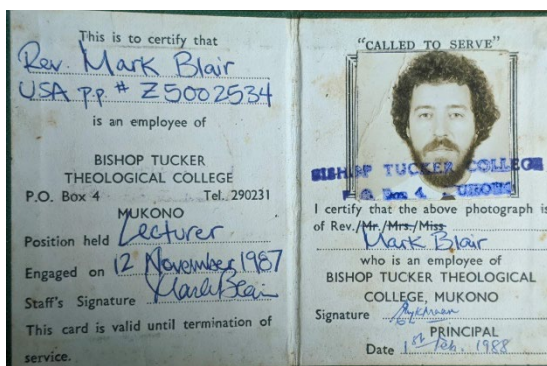
Our Bishop, Remelia Ringtho of Madi and West Nile Diocese, supported our move to BTTC, 1986

Our appointment to the faculty of Bishop Tucker Theological College was confirmed before we left for our first mission furlough from Uganda. Shortly before moving from West Nile, I turned yellow.



One Sunday afternoon I enjoyed a visit with Drs. Dick Ayers and David Morton, good friends, and colleagues at Kuluva Hospital. As we enjoyed the view from Ayer's front porch, their house worker kindly served us tea and snacks. We can't be sure, but we suspect Hepatitis A was also on offer then. After the couple week incubation period, Dick, David, and I had weakness, yellow skin, and brown pee!

It happened that I turned yellow when our family was in Mombasa on a beach holiday – missionary life has lots of perks! My vacation became a week in a simple room at Mombasa Hospital with a great view of the Indian Ocean. When we got back home to Arua, life for Dayna and the boys carried on normally (thankfully they did not get Hepatitis!). But I was frustrated that several things I hoped to do in our final months in West Nile never happened as I recuperated. It was a reminder that the Lord of the Harvest is sovereign in the sending, and the setting aside, of His workers. He gives the increase.



We said our sad good-byes to dear friends in Arua and moved our stuff into temporary storage in Mukono. One consolation was that we would be in the same country as our friends from West Nile. And in 1986 God was using the government of Yoweri Museveni to bring a new day of peace to Uganda. As I write in 2022, Museveni is still Uganda's President!

What is a Furlough?

As she watched a family treated like returning heroes, housed in style, fed with delicacies, lavishly entertained, just for giving the same boring talk once or twice a week, a little girl said her life's ambition was to be a missionary on furlough. She was basically right.

As we shopped for furlough plane tickets in 1986 we found the best way to get to all the places we needed was to buy round the world tickets. So, Josiah circled the globe by the age of 2! On the way home to Hawaii, we visited friends in Asia.

Nathan and Josiah were both delivered by South Korean mission colleagues who trained at a Presbyterian Medical School in Busan. That school community took a special interest in our little guys born in war-time Uganda, so we were invited to stop there and show them off. What a great time to visit Korea, all dressed up in eager anticipation of their 1988 Olympics. As the Lord would have it, Aaron, our third son was born during this furlough. He was delivered by a Korean doctor with connections to the Busan school, then practicing in Philadelphia. So, the first face all our sons saw was Korean! Dr. Henry Oh, who delivered Aaron, was the father of Michael Oh, Executive Director/CEO of the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization. What fun it was to meet Michael at a Lausanne conference at Manila in 2015 and tell him the story. We sent his dad Henry a selfie!



From Korea we hopped across the pond to Japan. We were invited to visit John and Jean LaDue who moved from Hawaii to Tokyo with YWAM. When we landed at Narita Airport in Tokyo I was quite sure we would connect with the LaDues. After all, I had their P.O. Box number! I guess our years with no telephones in Uganda made me forget how essential a PHONE NUMBER is to contact people! Extremely polite Japanese airport workers thought something was lost in translation. We wanted to meet people in a city of 30 million people and all I had was their P.O. Box number!?! Not my brightest missionary moment.

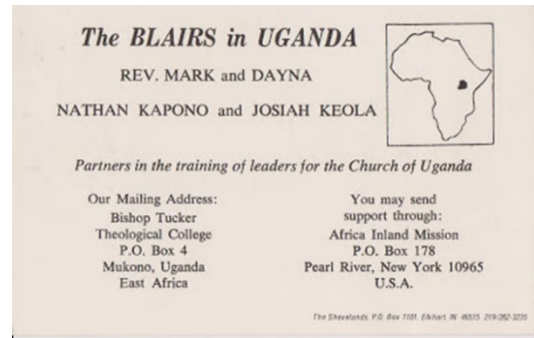
Before giving up and catching the next flight on to Honolulu, I remembered Dr. John Young. He was my mission professor at Covenant College, and he was serving again in Japan. He wrote me just before we left Uganda. As a wise missionary, Dr. Young sent his phone number! I called to greet him and asked the random question if he knew the LaDues. He did! We blessed our God of good providence as we rode the bus from the airport to meet the LaDues in Shinjuku. During our short visit to Japan, we had the privilege of sharing some encouragement from the Scriptures with their YWAM Tokyo team.

One day we took the bullet train to the beautiful town of Nikko. At the end of a great day touring, I showed another flash of international travel brilliance. At the train ticket window, I pulled out my Traveler's Checks for our return to Tokyo. Not just any Traveler's Checks, these were American Express, and they were good anywhere. Anywhere except Nikko after the banks were closed. Again, the exceeding kindness of the Japanese came to our rescue. The train was coming, and we were going to get on it. But we would have special seats. The conductor escorted the four of us directly to a secured cabin where he locked us in for the ride. When we pulled into Tokyo he freed us from our comfortable cabin and walked us to the train police station. Our family was seated comfortably there. Then another officer walked me to a nearby hotel where they kindly cashed my Traveler's Checks. I got a new sermon illustration for redemption as I paid the Yen to free my captive family!

What a great joy it was to land in Honolulu and show our little guys to the Ohana. Like the missionaries on furlough the little girl envied, we were showered with plenty aloha. We experienced reverse culture shock. After four years away, many things in Hawaii felt foreign.

The day we arrived we met family members at a shopping mall where we needed to get cash, toothpaste, and lunch. These three tasks would have been a day's work in Arua - and one day might not have been enough. But our family showed us a plastic card to get us greenbacks in seconds with the press of a few buttons on an amazing device called an Automated Teller Machine. Wow! No trips to Kampala necessary, and we did not even need a member of the Chawda family!

If any of us foreigners found the rare tube of toothpaste on the gaunt shelves of Arua's shops, we'd buy them all and share the treasure. But now this SUPERmarket had an entire aisle full of toothpastes! It was overwhelming - brands, colors, flavors, dispensers, discounts, gimmicks – the stress of abundance. Lunch? Our ohana had no idea they were forever seducing our Ugandan sons with golden arches. After that, our quickly-becoming-American boys wanted every meal to be Happy!



In our March 1987 prayer letter to supporters, we wrote: “We have been living in a 2-bedroom house which was rented for us by Haili Church. Josiah has taken advantage of the carpeted floor to take his first steps. He and Nathan enjoy the ocean too. Dayna and I are taking a night class at University of Hawaii Hilo on Word Processing. We hope to purchase a computer for taking back to Uganda. We’re using a ’77 Chevy Nova. We sit in lounge chairs before a wide-screen color TV. Welcome back to America!...We’ve got slides to show. Nothing more wonderful than a dull evening watching boring Missionary slides... *“The guy on the far right of the slide has a second cousin whose great uncle was a friend of someone who played a rather insignificant role in a little-known early church...”* Bet you can’t wait!”

Dear friends asked the obligatory question, “*How was Uganda?*” Then we struggled to summarize four years on the other side of the earth with a few sentences. Many times, we got five minutes into a story only to watch their eyes glaze over then look at their watch. They did care, but they were busy, had places to go, TV shows to watch, malls to troll, and other pressing concerns. It did not take us long to jump on the same demanding American treadmill.

Churches we visited remembered our names. But we had hundreds of names to retrieve from the deep recesses of our mental rolodex. It is awkward to be so well loved and supported by someone for years and then come home and not remember their names! We appreciated churches where people wore name tags. Dayna and I schemed a plan to introduce someone whose name went blank by saying, “Do you remember my wife, DAYNA?” Then Dayna would reach out her hand and say, “Hi, I am DAYNA!” That usually prompted the person to say, “I am _____.” When our skullduggery failed, we sometimes had to awkwardly admit that we forgot their name! Even more painful was to ask how a loved one was and be told they were dead or divorced or afflicted by some malady. When we returned home from Kazakhstan after I had pastored in Hawaii I asked a young woman, “How is your Dad?” On the verge of tears she answered, “Kahu (pastor) don’t you remember? You presided at his funeral?” A senior moment when I was in my forties!

Our first furlough lasted eight months. We divided our time between Hawaii, California, and Pennsylvania – stopping to see friends and churches as we traveled across the States. Typically, we had just one weekend with each supporting church. It was always too short. Sometimes we were invited to Sunday school classes, small groups, youth meetings, senior citizens fellowships, and other opportunities for deeper sharing. These smaller gatherings were best for people to ask

questions and better understand our mission. People who kindly hosted us along the way got to know us better than they wanted.

The Maple Glen Bible Fellowship Church, near Philadelphia, was my home church when I studied at Westminster Theological Seminary. As we headed out to Uganda, they pledged one third of our financial support. With that we agreed to spend one third of our furlough time with them. One church family provided a mission house on their property that was well furnished by the members. They found a missionary vehicle – a huge 1968 Pontiac Parisienne – from the Jonestown PA Bible Church. We affectionately called the car the “Jonestown Massacre.” We remain forever grateful for that opportunity to stay put and go deeper in Maple Glen as we shared our stories, enjoyed meals and fellowship, and did some preaching and teaching.



We came home from Uganda four, we returned five. **Aaron Kaniela Blair** was born August 11, 1987 in Philadelphia. The mission house became his first home. He was warmly welcomed into

our Maple Glen family. As we announced Aaron’s birth we wrote our supporters, “Four years ago the carefree couple set out with zeal to serve the Lord Jesus in Uganda. Now we return with a precious cargo of three boys. Our zeal has matured somewhat, but we are eager to continue in that glorious ministry.”



More than thirty years ago I hugged my parents as they cried saying good-bye to our young family heading back to serve in Uganda. We gave them such a short time to enjoy their three grandsons. But only now as we have three grandchildren in distant lands can I imagine the pain they felt in those farewells. And we have amazing technology to interact face to face daily. Just exchanging letters with Uganda in the 1980’s took months.

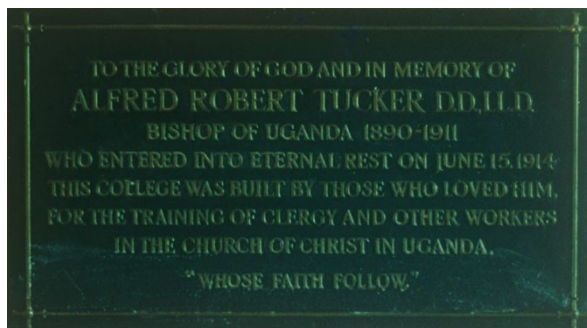
‘Three-Self’ Mission Strategy

Bishop Tucker Theological College was founded in 1913 by British missionary, Bishop Alfred Robert Tucker. The college leadership, like the entire Church of Uganda, is Ugandan. Partly because of Tucker’s pioneer vision, the Church of Uganda is blessed with strong leadership.

More than 30 years after we left Uganda, and a continent away, we advanced the mission strategy of Bishop Tucker through the Three-Self Church in China. The large government sanctioned Protestant ‘Three-Self’ church in China took its name from the missionary principles of Henry Venn and Rufus Anderson. They taught three mission advancing tenets in the 1800’s - self-governance, self-support, and self-propagation. Bottom line, the church is birthed by the Holy Spirit, not the missionary. So, the missionary, like a mid-wife, should help leaders and churches mature in their trust to depend on their Lord.

In 1890 Tucker was appointed Bishop of Eastern Equatorial Africa and sent out by the Church Mission Society. At that time CMS was profoundly influenced by the Three-Self mission strategy of Henry Venn, who was their honorary secretary from 1841 to 1873. Venn expounded basic principles of indigenous Christian missions that still guide the Lausanne movement today. These basic biblical ideas were quite radical to their first hearers. Many then thought, and sadly still think now, that the foreign missionary needed to maintain control of churches filled with primitive peoples. Many are sure the foreign expert is essential and indispensable.

Similar bold declarations of independence were later made by Roland Allen who served in China and Africa. His books, *Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours?* and *The Spontaneous Expansion of the Church: And the Causes which Hinder It* forcefully advanced Venn's, and Tucker's, ideas in the early 1900's. Allen believed Paul's success came in recognizing the church as a local entity and in trusting the Holy Spirit's indwelling within the converts and churches.



Through our life in mission, we have come to appreciate this Kingdom strategy. When God pours out His Spirit through the preaching of His Word, He gathers His flock, enabling His people to lead their local churches, shouldering the costs, and reaching out to others for Jesus in Word and deed. Missionaries should be like the best man who honors the Bridegroom, doing all to advance His purpose and joy. Key to this spontaneous

expansion is faithfulness to Scripture, fullness of the Spirit, and followers who serve. So, we joined the faculty of Bishop Tucker Theological College in 1987 asking God to help us to these noble ends.

These great theories of Venn, Tucker, and Allen look good on paper, but it is rare to find them well lived out in church and mission – or a theological college. As some pastors have said, and many more have thought, “*What a great church we would have --- if not for all those people!*” So, as we headed out to Bishop Alfred Robert Tucker Theological College, we wondered whether Alfred would recognize the place?

Encouragement from Eliphaz

We would never have gotten to BTTC without the strong advocacy of **Principal Eliphaz Maari**.

As we sweltered through the hot summer of 1987 in Philadelphia, waiting for Aaron to arrive, Eliphaz wrote, “The staff and students are generally O.K. but we are anxious financially due to the recent monetary change by the Government... We have a new currency which is not yet widely circulated. As usual, we can only look to God and pray that he will help the College and all of us survive... Please do not get worried... I feel you are friends with whom I should share freely... I hope and pray that together with you, we shall try to make Bishop Tucker College a great place for God's ministry.”⁴



Then, after Aaron was born, we received his well wishes: “Congratulations to you and Dayna for the birth of Aaron Kaniela. It is pleasing to hear that he is fine... You will be staying in a house... on the upper side of the college commanding a good view. It is a three-bedroomed house with a separate study. I suppose this will be sufficient for your large family... you will be responsible for Mission and Evangelism as an extra-curricular duty. Also, you will be Chaplain to Mityana (a Diocese within the Church of Uganda) students who at present are three in number... we look forward eagerly for your coming and for sharing fellowship with you. Greetings to Dayna, to the children, to your home church, and greetings from Eunice and all of us here in BTTC”⁵

Going to the Dogs

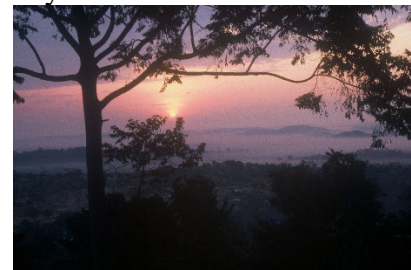
Sometimes little decisions, made without really thinking, have significant impact on ministry. As we arrived in Mukono, friends offered us two German Shepherd puppies. Three little boys were ecstatic, their parents were oblivious.



In November 1987 we moved into our beautiful home on the Bishop Tucker campus. It was a delightful tropical garden. Our expansive view was enhanced with no fences between neighbors. Our boys enjoyed the open territory, making friends with the other faculty children. Sometimes we did not know where they were, but they were secure and loved amidst our college family. When they came back home at dinnertime without an appetite, we knew they had enjoyed a good meal from a friend’s kitchen.

So, kids ran freely across the campus, along with neighbor’s dogs, chickens, and goats, and our puppies. The months quickly moved along, growing our sons, preparing for classes we had never taught before, discipling students, and our little puppies became big dogs.

When the dogs were about a year old, we were sad and embarrassed to get this note from our colleague and neighbor. “Yesterday your dog squeezed itself into the chicken run and started catching our chickens... we have lost 24 chickens all eaten in our compound by your dogs and we expect compensation... we are sending our bill... (signed) Neighbor Seeking Peace with you as Christians.”⁶ After checking with the man who worked in our garden we learned the numbers were a bit inflated, but our dogs undoubtedly enjoyed chicken dinner. Wanting to keep peace with this fellow pastor, we paid the compensation. But I foolishly questioned whether so many birds had been eaten. I should have just paid the money and kept my mouth shut.



A year later the neighbor on the other side of our house wrote that our dogs had varied their cuisine. “Your dogs have killed my goat. Since it was a special project for my children, we have

no choice but to ask you to replace it. A complaint has been raised that these dogs are becoming wild. I hope they will be kept in chains. The dead goat is in my banana plantation. It can be collected and fed to the dogs.”⁷ We did pay for the goat. We did make a dog enclosure. But we should have eaten the dogs, or at least found a better home for them. With our American eyes we saw lovable pets but many of our Ugandan neighbors saw dangerous pests. I regret my failure to better love my neighbors.

Opportunities in the Capital

There was a palpable feeling that a new day had come for Uganda in the early years of Yoweri Museveni’s presidency – curfew was lifted, roads were being paved, businesses were reopening, and churches were filled. Living in Mukono, 12 miles east of Kampala, allowed us to serve ministries in the capital city. Shortly before returning to Uganda we wrote our supporters in August 1987; “We are excited for the opportunities for ministry which we will have in the classroom, with students and staff outside of class, and in the greater Kampala area. WE ARE EAGER TO GET THERE AND GET STARTED.”

In the 1980’s Makerere University in Kampala was the only degree-granting institution in Uganda. Even the degree course we offered then at Bishop Tucker had to be monitored by the Makerere Registrar. During my Westminster Seminary short-term mission in 1981 we befriended Professor Byaruhanga Akiiki of the Department of Religion and Philosophy and the Chaplain Lusaniya Kasamba at Makerere. In 1987 I was able to renew their friendships. I was invited to lecture in Religion a couple times. But I soon found that most of the Makerere Religious Studies students were there for debate, not discipleship. Yet I always enjoyed the opportunities to present Christ and the Scriptures amidst that comparative religion smorgasbord.

We found an eager reception for the Gospel in the Christian Union of Makerere University. In April 1988 I received an invitation, “We would like you to do a Character Study of Daniel in the light of our theme, ‘The Secret of His Presence’...As a Christian Union, we feel that God is calling us to a place of intimacy with Him as we dwell in His presence...Our fellowship consists of saved people from all faculties and all Bible-believing denominations around town.”⁸



**Preaching at
St. Francis
Chapel,
Makerere
University,
2011**

On February 2, 1989 they wrote, “Greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. On behalf of the Makerere University Christian Union, I would like to invite you to be one of the main speakers during ICUSEA (Christian Unions of East Africa) week. This will be a week of evangelism, involving Christian students from the Universities of Dar-es-Salaam, Nairobi, and

Makerere... We shall be having open air meetings in the suburbs of Kampala during the afternoons, visits to schools and colleges in the morning, and evangelistic meetings in the Main Hall at night. It is in such night meetings that you will be expected to speak to us, with your messages mainly evangelistic since non-Christians will be invited to attend... you will be expected to give an overview of Isaiah 43:15-28 with the emphasis on God as the agent of renewal. You will also give the main message on Sunday, March 5th... Please pray that God will move during this Mission and bring many souls to Himself.”⁹

After another opportunity to share Makerere wrote, “On behalf of the Main Christian Union I thank you for the introduction you did on our theme, ‘Attaining Higher Ground,’ on April 27, 1990. It was a unique approach you took. It is just that you almost lost some of us before we realized that you were driving us back to the foundation of attaining higher ground, the Cross. Your Scriptural approach shows the need for deeper study of God’s Word. I hope you will be available to us again. Idibya Peter, Vice-Secretary”¹⁰

Lake Nabugabo, Uganda, Easter 1988

We wrote our supporters in May 1988, “A couple of Sundays each month Mark is asked to preach in different churches in the Kampala area. Churches are large and filled with eager listeners. Preaching to them is a moving experience. A special joy was spending Easter-weekend with about 120 University students for a conference on ‘Christian Leadership.’ We gathered at beautiful Lake Nabugabo with our Leader – Crucified and Risen.”



Our family enjoyed worshipping in All Saint’s Cathedral in the center of Kampala. Christians from all of Uganda’s people groups gathered there for English language services. We would often meet friends from West Nile at All Saints. It was a vibrant congregation with lively music. Squeezing into the sanctuary and finding a seat was always a challenge!



All Saints Cathedral, Kampala, 1990

In February 1988, our Principal Eliphaz was invited to be the Bible week speaker for the Namirembe Cathedral. He replied to the Dean of the Cathedral, Canon Bugimbi, “I am sorry I am unable to participate because of various commitments. However, I do recommend to you Rev. Mark Blair, a new member of our staff whom I feel would be a good substitute for me. I have talked to him

and he is willing to be one of the speakers. Perhaps you might remember that Mark was one of the main speakers during EXPLO ‘85 at Makerere and he did very well. He was a teacher at Ringili Bible College in Madi/West Nile Diocese. He comes from the United States. He is a gifted preacher and loves the Lord.”¹¹



St. Paul's Cathedral, Namirembe, Kampala

In April 1988 they replied, "Dear Brother, Greetings in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Thanks for your ministry to us during our recent Bible week...God used you during the week...many people were blessed, and we pray that the work started in their lives will continue... Please give our greetings to your family, and we look forward to seeing you at Namirembe again in the future."¹²

We greatly appreciated the friendship and counsel of Bishop Misaeri and Geraldine Kauma, the Bishop of Namirembe Diocese. As a former Principal of BTTC, he was eager for the purity of the testimony of Christ and the Scriptures to remain strong in our college.

In November 1988 I was one of the speakers for Namirembe's "Home and Family Convention." Their invitation described the convention, "It will include, singing, preaching and prayer to God for our churches, ourselves, our children and nation." In a personal note to me about these meetings Bishop Kauma wrote, "My dear Mark, Thank you for accepting to be used by God to attend the two Bible studies...we would like you to feel guided to the Scriptures that will deeply talk about the Christian home and family and challenge us to deeper meaning and loving as you see the theme...What we need is people to meet the Lord Jesus Christ. I am hoping to come and see you tomorrow at Mukono about 10 a.m. and talk with you for a little while."¹³



Bishop Misaeri Kauma, John Stott, Mrs. Geraldine Kauma. Misaeri was one of Stott's 'Langham Trust' Scholars, Uganda, 1989

Thieves, but Not Robbers

We slowly adjusted to being off the electric grid during our years in West Nile. When we lived there we knew our nightly fare would be lantern light, and then we went solar. But our modern house in Mukono was wired for power. However, the power supply was very erratic. We quickly learned we needed stabilizers so our electric gadgets would not blow up during the frequent voltage surges. We spent many dark nights in our all electric BTTC house.

During the Spring of 1988 there was a political dispute between Uganda and Kenya and the border was closed. We wrote our supporters, "Supplies became scarce and prices inflated rapidly...We have had long periods of no electricity. This has made lecture preparation, and life in general, more difficult. Fuel from Kenya was unobtainable. Dayna makes great meals on a charcoal stove. But candlelight has lost all romance, especially with six busy little hands threatening to torch the place! We have already ordered our back-up solar lighting system."

Late one very dark night, without even the glow of the moon, we were awakened by metal cutlery dropping on the cement floor of our kitchen. By the time I dared to get a flashlight and

investigate, they were gone. Thanks to our cheap metal forks and spoons, they ran away before taking much. I was scared and ran out our door to the front lawn and yelled, “Help” into the darkness. I woke our fierce dogs, and eventually the college security guard woke up too!

The next morning our dear friend, Eliphaz, came to console us, “...*we have some thieves, but we don't have robbers!*” My life had been too sheltered in safety to know there was a difference. But as our Principal explained, thieves avoid you, but robbers attack you. But no matter how aggressive their intentions, it was unsettling to know there were people walking in our home while we slept. After that we reinforced the hallway door to our bedrooms and kept it locked at night. We had no more visits from thieves or robbers.

Beware of the Dogs

There were even more dangerous dogs freely roaming at BTTC in the late 1980's. The East African Revival began in the 1930's, challenging people to a deeper faith in Christ. The Lugandan term 'Balokole,' meaning '*the saved ones*,' was one signature of that revival. Fifty years later, that vibrant revival was still confronting our theological college. From the early days of the revival, enthusiastic balokole outspokenly doubted whether some established Ugandan church leaders were born again and Spirit-filled. But unlike the church splits in many parts of the world, many Ugandan balokole remained loyal members of their Anglican Church. As you can imagine, this unity was not without its challenges.

Academic advancement often widened the chasm between church leaders and balokole. Many young Ugandan leaders who went overseas for higher degrees professed to being balokole when they left home. But too often their simple faith was challenged, sometimes shattered, by professors who denied evangelical fundamentals. Many newly minted scholars returned home to Uganda conflicted. They mocked the simple faith of the balokole – even as they secretly envied the humble folk who still had real faith.



Bishop Tucker Theological College, Mukono, Uganda, Main Building

We wrote our supporters in August 1987: “It is sad that most of the funding for the education of African church leaders is coming from NON-evangelicals. This has begun, and will continue to have, a negative effect. The need is for an education which is both thoroughly African and thoroughly Biblical. We as missionaries can play some small role in this, if we are willing to follow and listen.”

One of the courses I was assigned to teach my first term in BTTC was the Pentateuch. It did not take long for me to get in trouble. As we opened Genesis, I revealed my foolish belief in a real Adam and Eve in a real Garden! My views were investigated in the next faculty meeting. The Dean of Studies asked if I believed there was a serpent that really spoke? I immediately replied,

“Yes.” Then the men entrusted with the highest level of pastoral leadership training in the Church of Uganda roared with laughter.

As my new colleagues laughed, I better understood the challenges our Principal Eliphaz faced to advance evangelical faith in BTTC. With a similar burden the Apostle Paul warned leaders of the Philippian church to “beware of the dogs” who denied the sovereign, saving, sufficient Christ. Eliphaz, and several other Ugandan leaders, had been sponsored by John Stott’s ‘Langham Trust’ to pursue advanced studies in evangelical schools in the UK. In fact, we had the great privilege of having John Stott come for a week of teaching, and bird watching, on our campus. The Langham scholars, like my own experience at Westminster Theological Seminary, read books by liberal authors, but they also read books by Bible believing scholars who refuted false teaching. But many of my colleagues at BTTC were unfamiliar with the writings of scholars who answered the liberal denials of an Almighty God who had spoken reliably through His inerrant Word. They did not realize how clearly they heard the voice of that old serpent.

Not long after that challenging faculty meeting, the Dean of Studies wrote, “Dear Rev. Blair, Please, would you let me have your academic achievements plus parish or teaching experience for the Dean of Studies records.”¹⁴ I had already been vetted by the leaders of the Church of Uganda for my appointment to the faculty. Nevertheless, I gave him my CV, but I anticipated trouble. I soon found I had stepped into a power-struggle between the college’s Department Heads. I also learned, sadly, that some of the vocal anti-evangelical faculty struggled with moral purity and alcohol abuse.

It came to light that a missionary on the BTTC faculty was sleeping with some male students, giving them academic opportunities for homosexual favors. It was especially tragic that this professor was a scholar in Ugandan church history.

Martyrs of Namugongo, Uganda

Just 16 kilometers from Mukono a plaque hung in the church at Namugongo that commemorated a tragic event. In 1885-86 forty-five newly converted Catholic and Protestant Ugandan young men were brutally killed for refusing the homosexual advances of Kabaka (king) Mwanga. One hundred years later, a missionary who knew better was taking similar advantage of young Ugandan men preparing for pastoral ministry on our BTTC campus. When this was discovered by the Bishop who chaired the BTTC Board of Governors, the offending missionary was quickly sent home. But he had already preyed on young men in the college for over a decade.



Fired by the Students

In my years of teaching Bible to ministry leaders, I have always been ambivalent about grading. In a world that trusts and follows academia, it is important to have Christian leaders who have read widely and thought deeply. To “take every thought captive to obey Christ” requires a Church with scholars from all disciplines. And individual excellence and achievement is recognized in Scripture. But we are warned that knowledge, especially human praise for

attainment, can “puff up” our pride. After decades of grading students and then watching their lives, highest marks do not guarantee holiness, humility, or harvests in the fields of the Lord.



Graduation, Bishop Tucker Theological College, 1989

The evangelical schism at Bishop Tucker College even divided the students. Final examinations we administered at Bishop Tucker College were reviewed by external examiners, our Diploma by the Association of Theological

Institutions in Eastern Africa (ATIEA) with its administration office in Nairobi and our degree course by Makerere University. Specific exam questions were determined by these external examining bodies that then sent the printed test sheets to each participating academic institution. All the teachers of each course in their various colleges were asked to submit their suggested questions. Several times the questions I wrote were chosen for the students around East Africa. After the exam is given, the class teachers in each institution corrected them first and assigned an internal mark. For every course I taught the external examiner never made any alteration to my marks; this was common. The final nod from external markers added another layer of fear to the BTTC academic course. It became fodder for accusation against me - a non-Anglican, mulokole, American. Fear spread that I could not adequately prepare students for Finals which would determine their future lives and ministries.

During the middle of my first term teaching at BTTC, the Old Testament Department Head asked me to “lighten his teaching load” and take over his course on “Isaiah.” After a couple weeks he put a note in my staff mailbox. The students – who were in their third and final year of the degree program – wanted me replaced. This note was both first warning and final verdict. I was told they were afraid because I did not believe in three Isaiah’s, as they had been taught all their years in our college. How could they pass an externally marked exam when this young foreign teacher’s perspective was so out of step with African academics? I believed Isaiah was a real man called by the living God to preach. Furthermore, I credited Isaiah as the primary source for a unified, 66-chapter, Spirit-breathed, compilation of his story and his sermons which God sovereignly placed within the canon of His inerrant Word. I still do.

Yet since it was a classroom and not a church meeting, a study and not a sermon, I did my best to present several views of the question of Isaiah’s authorship – one, two, three, or more Isaiah’s! As I met my Department Head and asked what might be done about the rift, he said it was finished. The students had made up their minds that there was no going back. He recommended I consult with the Dean of Studies. When I did, the Dean shared that he thought I was improperly hired by the college and there should be a full review of my qualifications.



Robert Runcie, Archbishop of Canterbury, planting a tree during 75th Anniversary celebration of Bishop Tucker Theological College, 1988

One day in the next academic term the Dean of Studies handed me a note saying the students in my “Ethics” course wanted me replaced. (*Hey, no snickering, please! I have SOME ethics!*) As I was on my way to class, I went ahead and asked the students if we could have a class conversation. I read the note aloud. Then one by one

students stood to speak. They spoke for an hour. All said they had no knowledge of this complaint. Then they asked me to step out so they could discuss freely. As I met them the next day, they confirmed that none of them had made any complaint and they were angry for being falsely libeled. I met the Dean later and he insisted one student had complained.

The next term it happened again. This time I received a letter of dismissal from an Old Testament course, containing signatures from several students. The letter accused that “just giving them Bible verses” showed my lack of academic understanding and would not prepare them for the externally marked exams. As Principal Eliphaz was away, I decided to wait for his return to deal with the issue. We had been praying together about these troubles. The Principal returned and asked the Department Head what happened, he replied, “Blair quit the course, so I



had to take over.” In the next couple days, the students came and apologized, claiming that members of staff had pressured them to sign the letter. When the Principal called for a review, the Head of the Old Testament Department said, “Blair won’t teach any more classes in my Department. I am tired of all the problems he has caused.”

75th Anniversary celebration of Bishop Tucker Theological College, 1988

In my last conversation with the Dean of Studies before moving from Mukono, he said, “*When are you going to realize that there is no place for you in this college? If I were you, I would be praying, ‘God, isn’t there some place in the world where I could go and serve?’*”

Death in our Front Yard

The worst tragedy of our time in Mukono came from an act of kindness. We had a beautiful tree in the front yard that was perfect to hang a tire swing for our boys and their friends. As I was climbing on the branch to suspend a rope, Sam, our teen aged milk man, kindly volunteered to help. We all enjoyed Sam’s radiant smile as he faithfully

delivered milk from the college farm to faculty families. Together we hung the swing, and the boys were delighted.

A few days later Sam went back up into the tree to make some improvements. Somehow he fell to the ground. I rushed him to a local doctor, and then to the best hospital in Kampala. When he was admitted he seemed stable and started to improve. But his condition deteriorated and the blow to his head proved fatal that night. We were shattered.

It was a bitter reminder that life is precious and fragile. There was no 9-1-1 to call for help. Indeed, most Ugandans who even got to a hospital then went by bicycle. And if they die, your family and friends become the mortician, wrapping the body in a grave cloth, and nailing the rough wooden box closed. Then they struggle to transport the coffin home for burial in a hand dug grave. Sam's home was a full day's journey from Kampala.

A kind-hearted 16-year-old young man was gone. We were consoled that as a follower of Jesus, Sam had gone to be with Him. But I still wonder, "Why, Lord?" It was devastating, but God was near even in our despair. We were upheld by the loving kindness of brothers and sisters in Christ at BTTC. Sam's family, of course, received the hardest blow. We were so humbled as they extended their comfort to us. Their deep faith was seen in their gracious understanding that somehow this tragic accident was in God's perfect plan.

One night during that season I overthought, and under prayed. Memories of Sam dying...thieves invading ...attacks on Scripture...looped incessantly on the big screen of my worried mind. I felt my chest tighten and had shortness of breath. In the middle of the night, I was taken to the hospital. An ECG in the morning showed my heart was fine. They sent me home and told me to "Relax!" I struggled with panic attacks for several more months. I still struggle to bridge the wide chasm between the theological truths in my head and my faithless heart.



The Grim Face of HIV

As the faculty advisor for BTTC's Missions and Evangelism I got a front row seat for several student-led outreaches. During one term break, 20 students and I confronted the enormity of AIDS. We divided into small groups for four days in a rural area of Uganda, near Tanzania.

BTTC Student, William Pashi, shares the Scriptures, 1989

We thought we were well prepared for our mission; but visiting from house to house was shocking. Invited into dozens of homes to pray for the sick, we saw dying young people, drained of all vitality. Many people in the villages we visited were slowly wasting away unto death. Hardly a single home had escaped. New grave mounds stood in front of most homes, from mud walled huts to comfortable homes of a few wealthy people. Some houses were completely closed

because all the occupants had died. Sometimes it was blood transfusions or unclean needles, but more often it was sexual transmission that spread the scourge. Many widows struggled to care for young orphans, fearfully awaiting their own death. In many homes the sole adult survivor was an elderly grandmother, battling to raise several children.

We encountered many reactions; fear was the most palpable. Death was near and people had no idea how to escape. Some were angry at God. The pillars of their families were pulled down. At that time, I had medical doctor friends in Kampala with access to the most current knowledge of this fearful epidemic. Half of the patients in Mulago, the largest hospital in Kampala, were HIV positive. But there was much they still did not know. Yet village leaders we met confidently knew the source of this plague – witchcraft! I was stunned by their firm conclusion, and angry about the implication of their deduction. Sexual behavior in this area was boldly unchanged.

Local church leaders' calls for chastity were rejected like the preaching of Noah. But in these villages that rarely had visitors, especially mzungus, our team was welcomed into nearly every home, no matter their profession of faith. Perhaps it was desperate curiosity amidst their panic, but we seized the opportunity to tell them about the Resurrection and the Life. We were invited into dozens of homes to pray for emaciated sufferers who lay on mats on the floor, covered by simple blankets, barely breathing. The slang description of this woe was 'slim!' It truly did. Many people whispered the sinner's prayer. A home in heaven is a gift of grace. Sometimes we heard the wailing of death in homes we had just recently visited. It was a heartbreaking time of harvest.

The Family of God

God kept us strong in the hope of the Gospel through our years at Bishop Tucker. We would never have imagined the most hostile opposition to Biblical truth would come from faculty colleagues! But most Ugandans we met were friendly, and eager to hear God's Word. Even Muslims we met as I took my "Islam" students to mosques were keen to hear.



The best gifts of life have been my wife and sons. BTTC, 1989-90

Along with our Principal Eliphaz, there were several fellow balokole faculty and staff. We grew in the Lord with them through daily morning and evening Chapels, fellowship meetings, and dropping in each other's homes for 4 p.m. teatime – lots of milk and sugar, please! One of the blessed fruits of the East African Revival was a deep level of honest

sharing with trusted brothers and sisters in our Lord and Savior.

Our BTTC motto was ‘Called to Serve’. This slogan was a reminder that we were gathered on that beautiful campus by His grace and for His glory – to equip men and women for their life of Kingdom labor. Observing the hierarchal Anglican structure – Archbishop, Bishops, Archdeacons, Rectors, Vicars, Curates, Deacons – servanthood is not often the first word that comes to mind. But thankfully many in all those levels of responsibility throughout the Church of Uganda faithfully served The Master.

The heart of a servant – not structural hierarchy - is key to effective church ministry. In our years of ministry, we have worked under three church structures – episcopal, presbyterian, and congregational. At each stop along the way we have met zealous adherents who argued their model was the biblical church. I believe Scripture texts can be found to support all three models.

Culture makes a big impact on church operation. It is not surprising that episcopal bishops can be effective where African tribal chiefs have led. Independent Americans gravitate to the one-person-one-vote feature of congregationalism. Perhaps the presbytery is reflected in the Federal Council leadership of modern Switzerland, one of the homelands of the Reformation. Which one works? They all can, when all acknowledge The Head of the Church who leads by His Word and Spirit; when everyone is humbled by the privilege of being called to serve. God resists the proud; but gives grace to the humble – no matter their denominational label.

Dayna taught God’s Word in the BTTC Degree Program, Ordinand’s Village Courses, and to the Kids in our Home, 1988

Amid our theology wars, we received encouragement from faculty, staff, and students. The Rev. George Tibeessigwa, a faculty colleague in Christ, wrote on April 30, 1988, “Dear Mark, Praise God. Yesterday I was away in Kampala...I was all the time thinking about and praying for you. I was remembering the meeting you were to hold with the Dean of Studies ...May God be present with you and yours in this time of trial and temptation. Do not be discouraged. Take it all to Jesus in prayer, *“What a friend we have in Jesus”*! Your concerned and sympathetic Brother in Christ.”¹⁵



BTTC students found themselves living in a laboratory of contrasting, and sometimes conflicting, views of life and ministry. There were as many opinions as there were noses. We enjoyed hosting those who came for tea, fellowship, and prayers. It did not take long for word of Dayna’s warm welcome and good cooking to spread. Our sons were blessed to have lots of uncles and aunties. Most of them had more energy to run with our boys.

One evening about bath time the Rt. Rev. Livingstone Nkoyoyo, Bishop of Mukono, popped in. He calmly sipped his tea and conversed with the naked boys who streaked through our sitting room. Another day Bishop Livingstone, who later was appointed Archbishop of the Church of Uganda, passed Dayna standing next to our broken-down vehicle on the road from Kampala. He

told his driver to turn around and then he got out to help. Formerly an auto mechanic, the Bishop in his robes got our car running, and Dayna and the boys returned home safely!

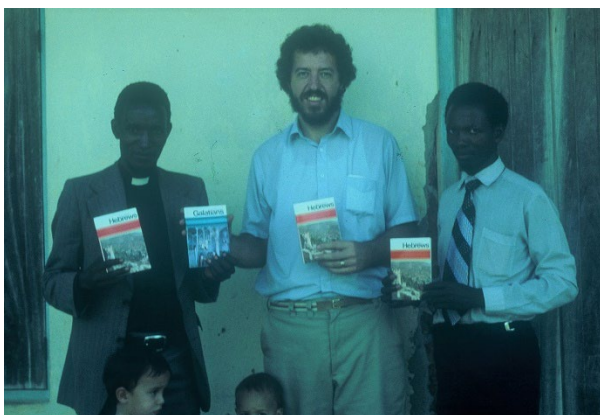


Bishop Tucker Theological College, 1990

One student couple sent this encouraging word: “Dear Rev. As we continue to think of you and the testing experience you are going through, we are praying fervently that God adds you more courage, patience, boldness, and wisdom. The weapons we believe have enabled you to fight and defeat the devil so far. Such an experience is really a trying one, especially when one remembers that it is groundless...To our side as students, I am

praying to God, the author of discernment, to enable us to sort our ideas...Let us pray together that the Lord makes us instruments of peace... Please pass our best regards to your closest friend after Jesus, Dayna. Yours’s in Christ, Gideon and Kellen Byamugisha”¹⁶

(At that time, we had no idea Gideon’s beloved wife Kellen would soon die of AIDS. She kept that secret from him to her grave. Six months later Gideon was diagnosed HIV positive. Although attacked by some church leaders, Gideon spoke openly about his diagnosis, his marital faithfulness, and his trust in a God who saves sinners. In 1992 Pastor Gideon became the first African religious leader to openly declare his HIV-positive status. In 2012 the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Rowan Williams, awarded him the Cross of St Augustine him calling him “a beacon of hope whose energy and joy have been an inspiration to be alongside...A theologian, pastor, teacher, and activist, the Reverend Byamugisha has transformed the HIV response of churches in the Anglican Communion, and influenced many other Christian and other faith communities throughout Africa and around the world.”)



“Banner of Truth Trust” donated Commentaries for Ugandan leaders which we presented to the Principal and Vice Principal of Bishop Barham College, Kabale, Uganda, 1988

We sought advice and prayers from several good friends. We were cheered by a letter from Geoffrey and Isobel Bromiley. Dr. Bromiley was a great Church Historian and humble servant of the Gospel. Geoffrey was the guest preacher at Montrose Community Church when

I was baptized, and Isobel added me to her prayer list that night. We visited Isobel many years later, she was then a widow in her 90’s, and she told us that she had prayed for me – and Dayna and the boys - daily since that night in January 1973!

On Easter Sunday 1975, Dr. Bromiley was the Preacher for our One Way Inn Coffee House Sunrise Service. All of us Glendale College students were so excited that our beloved history professor, Earl Livingood, was there to hear the Gospel proclaimed by a scholar he knew of and respected. When we got to Arua we found that Seton Maclure and Geoffrey had served together, fellow evangelical Anglican clergy in their homeland of England. It was our privilege to have Geoffrey and Isobel as heroes, friends, and supporters.

In March 1988 Geoffrey wrote, “We were pleased to hear of your doings at Bishop Tucker. We hope and pray that your troubles with sickness and thieving are now over. Despite those who teach a health & wealth message, Scripture seems to show clearly that God’s people will have their share of afflictions, and that God can overrule them for our greater good.

The liberalism at the college is particularly disheartening in view of the great evangelical tradition and vitality of the Uganda Anglicans...One thing you can emphasize is that you stand not merely for the gospel of Scripture, but also the early church and its creeds, and the reformation ...it is liberalism itself that is an aberration – not even a novel one at that!

So, with firmness and conviction, yet also love and courtesy, do not be slow to proclaim the truth of the gospel. God, I am sure, will use your witness to strengthen many of the students who might be shaken by teachers who are no doubt intellectually their superiors, though not spiritually or ethically. It is hard to know how to swim against a tide – and it will not make you popular in some circles. But this tide is really only an eddy, strong at times and places – surely not the main flow of the church’s ministry. The power of the Holy Spirit is with you and not with them...

Isobel and I continue in prayer for you and are pleased that even if indirectly, by gifts and prayers, we can have a share in your ministry, now at Tucker, and wherever God may lead you in the future. With love and good wishes, Geoffrey W. Bromiley.”¹⁷

Reading these wise and kind words from 1988 brings tears to my eyes. Geoffrey and Isobel, like so many dear and faithful friends, walked with us for a lifetime. In the 1990s they visited us and preached at Haili Church. Then they supported us in Kazakhstan and China with daily prayers and generous support until they entered the Lord’s presence.

Time to Leave BTTC

Pastor Charles Svendsen used to say look for a push and a pull when asking God if you should make a ministry move. There is hardly a day of service that we don’t feel one or the other. But when both push and pull are strong, it is wise to prayerfully consider if the Lord is speaking.

We definitely felt the push from the Dean of Studies who tried to shut me out of the classroom. He succeeded in reducing my teaching schedule. Although there was still more than we could do in BTTC, we were teaching several classes, discipling students, and had a growing ministry in Kampala. With support from the Principal, Vice Principal, and other balokole faculty and students, we were happy to endure the struggle. The joy of the Lord was our strength.

One increasingly strong pull was the challenge faced by many mission workers with children. Nathan, our oldest son, studied his first year in Lincoln International School in Kampala. Josiah, just 18 months younger, would soon need to begin school. Frankly, we could not afford tuition for two children in that school! There were limited options for their education, but we probably could have made something work.



Another determining factor as we prayed for the Lord to lead us was the growing peace and stability of Uganda. There was a time when mission workers were not coming to Uganda, especially not the West Nile. Now the warm welcome of the people of the Pearl of Africa was being extended to the world. We praised God for this! We enjoyed the company of more mission colleagues in BTTC and AIM. We still felt useful, but not as vitally needed. Bishop Tucker Theological College was 75 years old and going strong.

Clearly the decisive pull homeward was my father's fast-growing cancer. Our family warned if we wanted to see him alive, we better come soon. So, within two weeks in August 1990, we downsized to suitcases and flew to Los Angeles. He was lucid for just one day with us, perhaps holding on for a final visit. Three days later he died. We moved into Ted and Helen Barnett's guest house a couple blocks from my parent's small house in La Cañada, California for six months. As we tried to provide some comfort and closure for my Mom, we sought our Father for the next assignment.

As we were leaving BTTC, Bishop Misaeri Kauma, who Chaired the BTTC Board of Governors, asked me to write a summary of the challenges to orthodoxy we encountered. I sent a draft to him and he replied, in August 1990 "My dear Mark, You have put the whole matter very well and in a true Christian presentation. I should go ahead and present it as is. Make sure every Bishop gets a copy.

It is clear there is a loss of evangelical vision in the College as a whole. I have noticed it among the students who leave BTTC. This is very sad and serious; no wonder the new Pentecostal churches are gaining momentum. We need more and greater emphasis on the evangelical gospel. It is possible to be a full evangelical having studied all theologies there are in the world, the Lord's finger always points to the right way of life.

May God give you his peace as you walk through these waters of the Red Sea with a wall of water on the side! The battle is the Lord's!... When humanity presses to take over, you are not alone, the Lord is with you and His people. With loving prayers."¹⁸



Like so much of our *“now, but not yet”* life in this fallen world, we had mixed feelings about leaving Bishop Tucker Theological College. We moved there hoping for many years of service as members of the faculty. But after three years we made a hasty departure.

It was our shortest mission assignment up to this point of our lives. Before moving to Africa, Dayna and I determined to stay at least three years in each field of our mission life. We hoped that would be long enough to pass through the emotional euphoria of cultural adjustments, and then determine if it is effective to stay longer. Through providential pushes and pulls the Lord made it clear that our BTTC assignment was only to be three years. We trust the seed of God’s Word is still being used by the Holy Spirit for the Gospel advance of His Church in Uganda.

“The Continuing Education of a Missionary Theologian”

As we ended our eight years of service with Africa Inland Mission, they asked me to write an article for their Winter 1991 magazine. From the other side of the world in California, we looked back with fondness and frustration on our life in Uganda. We went to teach, but we learned much more. We learned how much we need to keep learning. For fifty years I have agreed with one of my favorite theologians, Bob Dylan, “he who is not busy being born is busy dying.” Thus, I coined the audacious title, “The Continuing Education of a Missionary Theologian,” as I reflected on our journey: “After doing theological education in East Africa for seven years, I have never been more convinced about its importance – nor more confused about what it exactly entails.

My wife and I, missionaries serving with Africa Inland Mission International, taught in two Ugandan theological colleges. Our first term was in a regional pastoral training center, Ringili, at Arua. Our second was in the theological college at Mukono, Bishop Tucker.

Students endured three years of intensive studies, barely affording a ball point pen. Wives kept their families going by collecting water and firewood and weeding their crops. Guerrilla warfare raged in several parts of the nation...

Despite such adversity, my theology was impeccable. Convincingly I proved the truth of inerrancy, guided students safely through the millennial debates, and ended all confusion about signs and wonders.

Then I asked my students if they had any theological issues to discuss. “Can Christians pay bribes to soldiers at roadblocks?” they asked. “Can a repentant polygamist be baptized?” “What

is wrong with traditional healing?” “What is the role of the church in a coup d’état?” “Why are so many young people leaving the church?” “How can Africa be rid of tribalism?”

I found nothing similar in my prized seminary lecture notes. Even my volumes by theological giants were strangely silent...



With tears we said good-bye to these wonderful people who loved and cared for us in Mukono, August 1990

Africanizing one’s theology is more than just substituting drums for organs. Uganda forced me to examine fundamentals I had never dared question. My American theology gave me no ideas about the role of the Christian’s deceased ancestors, the living dead, who play a vital role in the lives of

many Africans. My theology of Scripture left me unprepared to counsel Africans who hear the voice of God in their dreams. If the laborer is worthy of his hire, why do hardworking Ugandan pastors earn less than 10 dollars a month?

How could I speak God’s eternal Word in a changing world? All this does not lower my view of Scripture, nor does it minimize the importance of rigorous theological studies. We must work hard to hear the Spirit speak through the Word.

What is the future of the African church? Theological education holds a big part of the answer. The church in Uganda is known around the world as being vibrant and alive. About 80 percent of the population profess faith in Christ. Many know the saving miracle of the East African Revival. But can the young theologians now being produced fuel the fire of that revival? Being saved and revering the Bible is looked at with disdain by many young theologians. Yet do they reject Jesus or our characterization of Him? Do they reject the Bible or our misapplications of the text?

Every nation needs the Word of God. Only a Sovereign God can confront the enormous problems challenging Uganda. Only the power of God can grant purpose and joy to a despondent Ugandan. Only the Word of God holds principles by which Uganda may be founded in righteousness. Jesus alone is the desire of this and every nation.

Ugandan pastors are in very short supply. The Church is growing faster in Africa than anywhere in the world, and mission forecasters predict uninterrupted gains. A typical pastor in the Church of Uganda serves several congregations, some more than ten! Hundreds of Christians look to him for spiritual care. Many more shepherds are needed to feed Jesus’ lambs.

Missionary theologians still have a role to play in East Africa. Senior Ugandan clergymen speak of the words, and more often the lives, of their missionary tutors from decades ago. Carefully chosen outsiders can have a vital role in Uganda.

Holding the answers still allows us to ask many questions. Strong convictions can be held in tension with staggering confusion. The Gospel is the ultimate answer, but the questions are extremely complex.”¹⁹

Course Corrections at the College

After our return home to California, I heard more from Bishop Kauma about the situation at BTTC in November 1990, “My dear Mark, I am sorry to hear about the death of your father. I praise the Lord to know it was possible for you to be with him for those precious four days before he went home to be with the Lord Jesus.



I am Chairman of the fact-finding committee. We are beginning to visit the College next week ...Do pray for us that we may be used to reveal God’s will for the College. We will be praying for you as God guides you into a new area of service.”²⁰

Blair Family, February 1991

In February 1992, as I began my second year as pastor of Haili Church in Hilo, Hawaii, I received an update about the investigation into BTTC from Bishop Kauma, “My dear Mark and Dayna, Thank you very much for your lovely letter and the lovely photograph of the family. I rejoiced to have heard from you and to know that the Good Shepherd has taken very good care of you all and provided for you and His ministry...

The team which I led, sent by the House of Bishops to examine the foundations of Bishop Tucker College, which were very badly shaken, did take place, and a confidential report sent to the House of Bishops. The important points that emerged showed mainly the following:

- (a) That something was going wrong into the area of spiritual life of the College.
- (b) The way the appointment of staff made was and is being carefully reviewed.
- (c) There were personal pastoral approaches needed by some members of staff.
- (d) The team was able to meet the staff in discussion and praying; I am sure the Lord did more than could be written on paper.
- (e) On the whole, the whole College team was deeply challenged. I think both Uganda staff and missionary staff found need to re-examine their Christian understanding of one another.

(f) Foundations are very delicate things to touch. We have asked Jesus the Foundation Himself and the founder to put his light deeply in different corners of the weaknesses in the foundation.

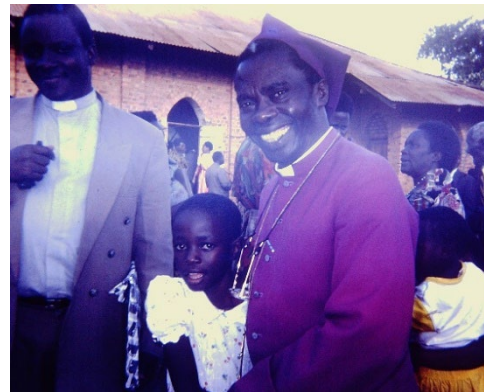
(g) The evangelical stand was being heavily compromised, and this was partly due to the lack of strong Balokole brethren within the College, who truly stand in all things for the truth as God has revealed to them. Also, the mix up of spiritual emphasis among Anglican, Pentecostals, and conservative Anglican traditionalists, plus the unspiritual liberal teaching which is eating into the lives of many of the theologians. In short, the whole problem is so complex, it is only the breaking in of the Holy Spirit in a fresh way that can renew the College and the Church, and this should be our prayer.

When I have opportunity to meet you, we will share and pray about it all, continue to pray... Please give our love to Nathan, Josiah, and Aaron. With our love and prayers, Yours sincerely”²¹

Misaeri Kauma, Bishop of Namirembe Diocese

Back Home to Uganda

We returned to Uganda sooner than we imagined. In February 1991 I became the pastor of Haili Congregational Church in Hilo, Hawaii. At that time, their pastor was generously given a three-month sabbatical after three years of service. The Lord arranged for our first sabbatical from Haili to coincide with the retirement celebrations of our dear friend Bishop Kauma. Our family was honored to receive an invitation to come and share and serve.



Bishop Kauma wrote, “We look forward to welcoming you in Uganda in June 1994...The program we are making for you includes at least once or twice a week visiting an Archdeaconry. There are seven Archdeaconries and there you would teach about methods of preaching, choosing a text and letting God speak through the text to people...

I am arranging with the Dean of the Cathedral to see if he can provide a series of sermons and talks at the Cathedral for you to lead. There will be arranged school visits for education and evangelism. We have a Seminary at Namugongo and there we would like to invite you to talk about preaching and we would be grateful if you can arrange some talks about pastoral care and spiritual counseling of families that are bereaved or saddened in one way or another.

When you come Mark, we want you and your wife to be our pastors in our home. We have many burdens to bear and we need a pastor, that is why I believe God is sending you and your wife.

How much we praise God that you are coming to us at this great time of our need. You are coming where you are certainly needed. May God bless and fulfill all your plans including the funding of the trip, etc.

Yours in His Name, Misaeri Kauma”²²

At Home on Namirembe Hill

We watched the Lord open the door for our short-term ministry visit to Uganda. Africa Inland Mission gave us Volunteer status and a dozen churches along with individual donors from Hilo to France gave over \$12,000 for five Blairs to board the Uganda bound plane.

We settled comfortably into the Bishop's Guest House on Namirembe Hill in the middle of Kampala. As Bishop Misaeri and Geraldine kindly showed us around, we better understood why they hoped we would come as pastors. Their son and his wife spent their last days on earth in those quarters. Just over a month before, David had gone to be with the Lord, one of thousands of Ugandans taken by HIV. Their orphaned little son ran happily amidst the loving extended family at the Bishop's house, a great playmate for three Blair boys.

That summer of 1994 Bishop Misaeri was turning 65, the mandatory retirement age for a Bishop in the Church of Uganda. The Lord opened a unique continuing ministry opportunity for him. President Museveni invited Bishop Kauma to serve on Uganda's AIDS Commission. He could speak from his heart about the loss and the hope of this terrible scourge to the entire frightened nation. Uganda adopted the 'ABC' campaign to try and eradicate the spread of HIV.

A - Abstain from sex.

B - Be faithful if you cannot abstain, keep to one sexual partner.

C - Use a Condom if you cannot be faithful.

Church leaders, understandably, resisted B and C, with most preaching Abstinence only. After the death of his son David, Bishop Kauma became one of the first Church of Uganda leaders willing to come out in favor of condom use. He linked the **B** and **C** messages—being faithful and condom use—saying that *"If you are foolish enough to have sex outside of marriage, don't be stupid enough not to use a condom."*

Josiah greets our host, Bishop Misaeri Kauma, with a lei, 1994

Our three boys brought lots of gusto to our new family on Namirembe hill. Our friend Steve Wood in El Segundo, California, hooked us up with a sports equipment distributor who donated fifty soccer balls for youth in Uganda. The football (that's soccer, Americans!) most Ugandan kids had then was what they made themselves with tightly wound banana fiber. So, when word got out that some American kids arrived with new leather balls, the spacious grass of the Bishop's property was filled with neighborhood kids playing soccer from dawn to dusk. After dark, another toy from America provided lots of fun, the whoopee cushion - the rubber bag you fill with air that makes flatulent sounds when someone unknowingly sits on it. Our boys pranked the Bishop a couple of times! And then he became the instigator. As he welcomed important guests with all the African decorum into their formal sitting room, he would sneak the whoopee cushion onto their seats just before they sat down. When government or church leaders came to see the



Bishop, we'd go into another room to respect their privacy. But then we would hear the burst of flatulence and the roar of laughter.

That summer of 1994, the World Cup was held in the USA and thus broadcast into Uganda in the middle of the night. Every football fan in Uganda, meaning nearly everyone, became nocturnal. We held meetings on days without matches and enjoyed watching football with pastors in the middle of the night. Steve 'Mugerwa' Coulson was a missionary pastor at Namirembe Cathedral who was invited to give nightly World Cup commentary on Uganda TV. Sometimes he would pack me on the back of his motor scooter, and we'd ride through the city – 2 mzungus in clerical collars – I basked in the aura of people shouting greetings to Uganda's newest celebrity, "Rev. Football!"



Namirembe Diocese -Serving with Diocesan Staff, Pastors, and School Children, 1994

There was more than football and flatulence during our two-month visit to Uganda. Our football packing family from Hawaii was warmly welcomed into schools, pastor's meetings, and churches. We fulfilled most of the Bishop's ambitious ministry program for us. Having the backing of a well-respected mulokole Bishop opened many doors throughout his large diocese.

While the world cheered the World Cup, a terrible event occurred right next door in Rwanda. We arrived in Uganda toward the end of the 100-day Hutu-Tutsi genocide. But even months afterward, people continued to flee. A steady stream of Rwandese church leaders fled to the Bishop's home on Namirembe Hill, knowing they would find a welcome. We heard their shocking stories as we sat around the Kauma's big dinner table. As often happens, the world rushed to the aid of Rwanda long after the killing stopped. After all, they were just Africans, and there was no oil there.

We also had the privilege of visiting our friends in West Nile. Eight years had passed since we moved from Arua to Mukono. Nathan and Josiah saw where they were born. It was Aaron's first trip there. So, it was both going down memory lane and making new memories.

Lots of Memories – Ringili College, Equator Marker, ‘Sunset Home’ at Kuluva Hospital, Arua



Sharing our Liberated Stuff

When we moved from Uganda in August of 1990, we booked a shipment of some personal effects home to the USA. We found a friendly agent in Kampala with a price almost too good to be true - door to door shipping from Mukono to Hilo, Hawaii. During the next four years we were reminded why someone coined the phrase, *“If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is!”*

Wouldn't you know it, our friendly agent demanded more money. Shipping costs increased, oil prices rose, there were all kinds of reasons why our little consignment was still sitting on the same palette in his warehouse. Over the years several friends in Uganda visited the business and tried to find a solution. But we kept getting letters from him demanding more money.

I bet you can see this coming! That agent never expected this mzungu to find his way back to that Kampala warehouse. I did, driving a pick-up truck from Namirembe Diocese to liberate our things. The agent was so shocked that I surfaced after four years I managed to load and leave before he calculated any storage charges. Once I got back to the Kauma's, we tore into those boxes like Christmas in July. There were a few keepers – family photos and memorabilia – but the boys had completely outgrown the clothes we anticipated they would someday wear. And Dayna and I did not need anything else to stuff into our already bulging closets in Hawaii. So, we became Santa's elves to our friends on Namirembe Hill.

The Provincial Secretary of the Church of Uganda was about my size, and they also had three kids, so the Michael Oboth-Owino home enjoyed Christmas in July too. When we got back to Hawaii we got a nice letter from Pastor Michael, “Greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Hope your travel back to the U.S.A. was safe and enjoyable. I want to express my sincere thanks for the great surprise of gifts... When I arrived home the children received me with shouts of excitement, ‘Uncle Mark has brought us so many things...’...I tried on the clothes you left, and they were exactly my size...

Dayna, thank you for having such a love for the Lord and great support to Mark in his ministry. Surely your visit and sharing has been of tremendous blessing to our family. Please tell Nathan,

Josiah, and Aaron that they are very special children...Give our love to your parishioners. Shalom.”²³



Our Family and a friend at the Diocesan Convention, Namirembe Cathedral, Kampala, 1990

As Bishop Kauma invited us he wrote, “We will be having a Diocesan Convention in August and we want to request you to be one of our main speakers.” The Bishop told me later the President of Uganda, Yoweri Museveni, might join the service in Namirembe Cathedral. When I arrived that Sunday, I found the President was not able to come. I was relieved. After a wonderful time of worship in the huge cathedral, the Bishop invited me to climb the pulpit to preach. Then, just as I began, he motioned for me to stop. The President had come! Everything stopped as the Bishop went down the cathedral’s long aisle to meet the President, his wife, and their children. He and several cathedral leaders escorted the First Family to the front row. As the hundreds in the building stood in awe and curiosity, the important visitors sat down just a few meters in front of the pulpit. Then I was invited back up to speak. I was quite nervous, yet it was a privilege to preach to the leader of the nation and his family. It was an even greater joy for me to hear his message after mine. The people in the cathedral sat in stunned silence when their President said, “There is a cure for AIDS!” Then Museveni added, “If you live a life of faith in Jesus as this Rev. has just preached, you will never have to worry about getting HIV.” I doubt whether many Heads of State would dare to preach that!

The Rest of the Story – Uganda Christian University

When we made our hasty departure from Bishop Tucker, we would have never dreamed what the next decade would hold for our College. In August 1990 BTTC was a theological college with about 150 men and women from around Uganda studying for pastoral ministry. In 1997 the beautiful Mukono campus was christened “Uganda Christian University.” Bishop Livingstone Nkoyoyo of Mukono, who became the Archbishop of the Church of Uganda, envisioned students receiving a quality university education from a Christian perspective. The idea received enthusiastic support. So, today 10,000 UCU students are engaged in over 70 diploma, bachelor’s, master’s, and PhD programs. UCU is authorized by the Uganda government to grant degrees through their Colleges of Law, Medicine, Communication, Dentistry, Business, Engineering, and Bishop Tucker School of Theology and Divinity. There are now 5 UCU campuses around the nation, including Arua, at Ringili.

One of our students from Bishop Tucker was the Rev. Canon Benjamin Twinamaani, who has since pastored an Episcopal Church in Florida for many years. He wrote us in 2020, “...your prayers for Mukono were all answered long after you were gone from there, but isn’t that how Church history works? One plants, one waters, one harvests. Mukono is an evangelical

institution...So your pains and rejection at BTTC were not for nothing. Well done. Even baseball is catching on!!”²⁴

I had to go all the way to South Africa to learn about Uganda Christian University. While serving as a pastor in the Beijing International Christian Fellowship I was invited to be a delegate for Lausanne 3 at Cape Town in 2010. It was amazing! I joined with 4000 brothers and sisters from 198 nations in learning, worship, and fellowship. We heard the latest about the global advance of mission and wrestled with the challenge of finishing the task of global evangelization.

For me Lausanne 3 brought the joy of seeing colleagues from all our ministry life. I saw classmates from Westminster Theological Seminary who spent decades in the work of mission. I met mission leaders from Hawaii. I caught up with pastors I worked with in Kazakhstan and China. And I met several dear friends from Uganda.



Peterson Sozi, took me to Uganda for the first time in 1981; reunion in Cape Town, 2010

The West Nile of Uganda was well represented at Lausanne 3. Henry Orombi, who was then Archbishop of the Church of Uganda, was the presiding pastor of our Cape Town meetings. Isaac Anguyo was there representing “Here Is Life” that he launched and led to reach his people in Aringa. And Joel Obetia, who was then Bishop of Madi and West Nile Diocese was with us too. We praised God for His faithful care for us all.



I also met Bishop Kauma’s daughter **Ruth** and her husband **John Senyonyi**. Our dear late Bishop Misaeri would have rejoiced to know his well-qualified son-in-law was leading Uganda Christian University. John holds advanced degrees in mathematics and theology. He brought his academic excellence, enlivened with balokole faith, to lead the team to make UCU the top University in Uganda. John invited Dayna and me to come from Beijing to speak for the UCU Missions and Ministry Conference in June 2011.

As we had done 28 years earlier, we landed in the Pearl of Africa, now empty-nesters. In the years that had passed the population of Uganda nearly tripled. Church membership struggled to keep pace with population growth, and almost half the population was under 15 years old. We reminded our UCU hearers of the Church’s responsibility to reach each new generation with the Good News of Jesus.



Opening Service of UCU Conference “Extending God’s Kingdom,” June 2011

The UCU missions and ministry week theme was “Extending God’s Kingdom.”

The community enthusiastically came together each morning and evening for music, dance, drama, and Bible teaching. What a privilege it was to meet hundreds of young Ugandans learning on the Mukono campus. Many saw their academic opportunities and vocational calling as a strategic platform for Gospel demonstration and proclamation.

As UCU Vice Chancellor, the Rev. Dr. John Senyonyi, wrote in his April 2011 letter of invitation to us, “Our desire is to instill in the Staff Members and our Graduates the spirit of serving God as agents of the gospel, either as ordained or in a lay capacity in the churches, at their stations of work subsequent to their study at Uganda Christian University. We look forward to your fruitful ministry among us.”²⁵

We were so grateful for this opportunity to see old friends, even to meet their kids and grandkids, and make new friends. Many of our BTTC students were faithfully serving in strategic positions - pastors, Bishops, professors, and chaplains. We visited the churches in Kampala that we occasionally served during our years in Uganda, Namirembe, All Saint’s, and Makerere University. They were still vibrant, faithful to Scripture, and exceedingly full of worshippers.





During our visit to Uganda in 2011 we also visited the West Nile. Arua had become a vibrant city of 50,000 people, with over 750,000 in the surrounding district.

Our friend Isaac Anguyo, in the white shirt, greeted our plane at the Arua airstrip, July 2011

We toured Aringa with Isaac and saw the work of “Here is Life” that he founded. In 2004 an AIM missionary couple and a Ugandan student were killed by Muslims trying to stop the work of the **Esther Evangelical School of Technology in Yumbe, Uganda**



Bp. Joel & Joy Obetia (far right) hosted a dinner for us with Diocesan Staff

Back in 1983 Joel was a Campus Crusade staff worker and Joy was one of our students at Ringili. Now a retired Bishop, Joel is on the faculty of Bishop Tucker Divinity School at Uganda Christian University in Mukono.

We shared with the students and staff of the **Uganda Christian University, Arua Campus**, located at Ringili where we lived and taught 25 years earlier.



Voice of Life Radio, Arua, founded in 1997, reaches across the entire district. I was invited to speak for 5 nights. I taught the book of Jonah in 4 nights and invited call-in questions on the 5th night. Several called and shared that they had come to faith in Jesus when we shared in their schools with our Scripture Union programs 25 years before! It was a taste of what we will enjoy when we gather before the Lord and hear the rest of the story of His glorious kingdom advance.



Mission week ends well



Rev. Mark Blair preaches to UCU staff in the VC's gardens last Friday
(Photo by Walter Washika)

BY JUSTIN EMEDOT
STAFF WRITER

This semester's Mission and Ministry Conference has ended well, according to the university chaplain, Rev Canon Frederick Balwa.

The mission week that ran from 19th-26th July had the theme 'Extending God's kingdom: Our Mission' and had Rev. Mark Blair from China as the main speaker.

"Teaching people to extend God's kingdom is at the centre of the institution. The church wouldn't have any business in establishing a university if it didn't have that in mind," says Balwa.

He says that for this semester, the focus was not about people getting saved, but to see more people get involved in God's mission in the world. They would also be sensitised and encouraged to join ministry and outreach programmes.

"In the January semester, the focus was on leadership, and in the September semester, it will be on evangelism," he says.

The purpose of the theme was to make people know how they can extend God's kingdom even at their work place. A lot was discussed that included Islam, children and the secular world. People were challenged to think about the ordained

mission.

There were morning and evening sessions held daily, with different choirs singing during the different sessions. Among the choirs was the Mustard Seed, the Chapel choir, the Law Fellowship Choir and the Unlimited Sound.

The chaplain however said they had a challenge with the evening sessions because some students attend lectures during that time. He promised that that challenge would be looked at when making preparations in future.

Rev. Mark Blair is a church leader at the Beijing International Christian Fellowship in Beijing China, which has a congregation of about 3,000 Christians. He arrived in Uganda together with his wife Dayna on 14th June.

Mark and Dayna are no visitors to Uganda. They lived here for eight years before moving to Kazakhstan. They lived in Arua for four years and then shifted to Bishop Tucker Theological College the precursor to UCU.

While in Uganda, Dayna who is a teacher by profession, taught first at Ringli in Arua, before teaching at Bishop Tucker Theological College.

The couple will travel to Arua on the 4th July, where they will stay up to 12th. They fly back to Beijing on 13th July, where they currently work.



Sources Cited:

1. *The Autobiography of Mark Twain*, by Mark Twain, Prabhat Prakashan ISO 9001: 2015 Publishers, chapter 26.
2. *A Distant Grief: The Real Story Behind the Martyrdom of Christians in Uganda*, by F. Kefa Sempangi with Barbara Thompson, Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2006.
3. *From the Dust: A Sequel to A Distant Grief*, by F. Kefa Sempangi with Jennifer Melvin, Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2008.
4. Eliphaz Maari to Mark and Dayna Blair, Personal Letter, 29 June 1987.
5. Eliphaz Maari to Mark and Dayna Blair, Personal Letter, 7 October 1987.
6. Dunstan Bukenya to Mark Blair, Personal Letter, 23 September 1988.
7. Elisha Mbonigaba to Mark Blair, Personal Letter, 6 December 1989.
8. Nathan Bakyaita to Mark Blair, Personal Letter, 17 April 1988.
9. Joyce Kagoye to Mark Blair, Personal Letter, 2 February 1989.
10. Peter Idibya to Mark Blair, Personal Letter, 8 May 1990.
11. Eliphaz Maari to Canon Bugimbi, Personal Letter, 3 February 1988.
12. H.S.K. Lugolobi to Mark Blair, Personal Letter, 13 April 1988.
13. Misaeri Kauma to Mark Blair, Personal Letter, 15 November 1988.
14. George Enyagu to Mark Blair, Personal Letter, 2 May 1988.
15. George Tibeessigwa to Mark Blair, Personal Letter, 30 April 1988.
16. Gideon and Kellen Byamugisha to Mark and Dayna Blair, Personal Letter, 28 March 1990.
17. Geoffrey W. and Isobel Bromiley to Mark and Dayna Blair, Personal Letter, 21 March 1988.
18. Misaeri Kauma to Mark Blair, Personal Letter, 4 August 1990.
19. "The Continuing Education of a Missionary Theologian: Taking Theological Education Cross-Culturally, Holding the Right Answers – Asking the Right Questions" by Mark Blair, Africa Inland Mission USA Magazine, Winter 1991.
20. Misaeri Kauma to Mark Blair, Personal Letter, 19 November 1990.

21. Misaeri Kauma to Mark Blair, Personal Letter, 21 February 1992.
22. Misaeri Kauma to Mark Blair, Personal Letter, 14 May 1994.
23. Michael Oboth-Owino to Mark and Dayna Blair, Personal Letter, 25 August 1994.
24. Benjamin Twinamaani, Personal E-mail, 20 July 2020.
25. John Senyonyi to Mark Blair, Personal Letter, April 2011.