

Many moons have come and gone, and a lot of water has run into the lake since we last wrote... There's so much to tell. I hope you have time to sit down and read a while! Better go get a cup of coffee too!

We are blessed to be alive and flourishing again after the disaster caused by Hurricane Stan last October. It was a terrifying and stressful experience. Our town had no water for two weeks, and both roads leading here were impassable for traffic those same two weeks. Gas, propane, groceries and potable water had to be carried in partly on foot, from the neighboring towns. The gymnasium, schools and churches were full of people who lost their homes. All the tourists were flown to Guatemala City by helicopter, taking away the source of income for most of the citizens of Panajachel, and they only started trickling back in after the roads were repaired, approximately one month later. Despite such dreary circumstances, it was a real blessing to see neighbors helping each other, those with wells were sharing water freely and many individuals were feeding the desperate or volunteering in the refuge centers. We have become experts in catching rain water from gutters in our neighborhood. These memories will forever be with us and have definitely made us more grateful for such luxuries as running water in the house!

They say the destruction in Guatemala caused by the flooding and landslides this time, was worse than the earthquake in 1976. We still see the dramatic effects in the landscape around us - all the hills around the lake look like they have been scratched by a huge cat, some places on the roads still have only one lane open with the other lane fallen away, and the river bed here in town is a field of rocks and parts of houses. According to the facts for Panajachel that I have (there are many differing opinions and it is hard to know what is exactly right), 85 houses were destroyed when the San Francisco river flooded. Some were filled with mud and they were able to clean those out and make it livable again, many others were completely washed away. These families have all been taken care of, mostly by temporary houses that have been put up on several properties in town. There are plans already in action for settling them permanently in one year. As far as I know only three people died - two babies were swept right out of their mother's arms as they tried to wade through the water and one old man. One of the two bridges that connect the two parts of town, is still gone. In its place there are several small footbridges (which replaced a precarious log that was serving as a crossing during the first few weeks), as well as a tuc-tuc bridge (an association of the small three wheel motor taxis constructed a bridge). Buses, trucks and some brave cars drive right through the river instead of going a mile upstream to cross at the other bridge.

Our property (Mooibos) were slightly damaged by huge boulders that came down from above, breaking through our wall in the two places where it crosses the ravine. Several trees also fell over, one landing on the little storehouse. The wall was just completed in September, and we had a grand celebration with the builder's family and other friends at the beach on the Pacific Coast. So, we are repairing the breaches for the next few months, after which we REALLY think we could start building our dream house!!! The progress is painstakingly slow, but we are moving mostly forward! And we are growing in patience and endurance!

In May and June we were gallivanting all over the United States in our new rig, visiting old friends and family from west to east. We closed our shop, after warning the customers to stock up on caffeine, welding the door shut (yes, that's what it takes!), then flew to Colorado with bags full of coffee to sell! We picked up the Ford in Pagosa Springs and from there drove 11,000 miles in two months, ending up right back here at our door on July 2nd. It was a tiring and invigorating trip all in one! What a joy to see everyone and so much beautiful country. The part through Mexico, which we dreaded most, turned out to be smooth and fast, with no problems at either border crossing! Yahoo! We were glad to go and glad to be back home again. One month later Michael did the paperwork for registering the van in Guatemala, and we were blown away by the ease and cost involved this time. The taxes were only half of what we expected to pay!



Jan 2006

We have also had a miraculous experience with our residency paperwork. We submitted our application for permanent residency in September and six weeks later we received word that they accepted our papers without any of the usual run-around-the-block stuff! The man we hired to do the footwork for us in the city, said he has never seen something like this. "Obra de Dios", he says. So, even though I was ready to pack bags after feeling some frustration with life here recently, I accept this gift as a "work of God", and it brought a settled feeling in my heart. As we like to say, the cloud is not moving, so we are staying put. (Read the history of Israel's exodus, and you'll get the idea!)

The coffee business is booming. Crossroads coffee travel all over the world these days, in backpacks and suitcases of visitors, etc. After five years of work, our machines and furniture show the wear and tear. We are waiting for Cimbali parts from Italy, for the espresso machine, to replace the worn insides. On the outside you would never say that machine is that old and that busy. Michael carefully keeps it shiny like a Cadillac. After enough complaints from our faithful customers, as well as numerous (constant is more like it..) repair jobs on the old ones, we are thinking about getting new chairs and bar stools. Our small 5 lb coffee roaster has roasted roughly 12 tons of coffee these past five years! It squeaks often and needs lots of regular tuning and cleaning, as well as extra fans, but it still does the job. (Reading through the list of repairs and replacements, reminds me of our aging bodies! We are definitely not getting younger!)

Kasia and Lungi are starting the new school year in about ten days. Kasia is in the third year of the logic stage and Lungi in the first year logic stage. This year we are concentrating on the late renaissance to early modern period (1600 - 1850). Last year they finally convinced their dad that they should play basketball in spite of the dangers involved! They were in training for about three months and hope to start again soon. Twice a week they ride their bikes with me, up and down the hills around us. We go at dawn and enjoy watching the sunrise on the lake as we huff and puff uphill. We do about 18 kms at a time. It's a good workout. Kasia has started baby-sitting and does a fantastic job. She goes prepared with games and crafts and turns it into an educational time with the toddler. They also took care of a friend's dogs for three weeks, and felt quite rich after he paid them generously in the end. Lungi has shown enough interest in the coffee business, that Michael started to train her. She often cleans the roasted beans outside, looking for stones or burnt beans. She loves helping downstairs and chats up a storm with any and all. People regularly write about her in the guest book!

The girls' Spanish have greatly improved since they started attending a Bible Club once a week - it is the Spanish version of the AWANAS in the States. Here it is called OANSA.

Phew! That was many stories! I'm at the end of the tale here. You may want to see some pictures. Jeff McArthur put hundreds of new photos on our website. You may even see yourself among them! www.crossroadscafeana.com (new address)

Take care, everyone! We send our love and a big hug.

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