

## *Emails from a Short Term Missionary to Lesotho Africa*

These are the emails of John Yonker. John is a University of GA Student and a young short term missionary staying in a block house in Kho-klonsto Lesotho for a few weeks during the summer of 2009 working with a very dear friend of Scotty Davis and Mission Team Inc Pastor Phoka and his wife Mae Maneo. These are emails to his mom but designed to be shared. These are uncut and unedited and quite revealing of the work and life of this young Missionary. Definitely worth reading for those who would like to be on an extended short term trip.

5/26/2009

Hey Mama/ Everyone,

Sorry it has been this long since I last wrote. We have been very busy and the cell coverage has been off and on these past couple of days. We have moved in to our little house by the church in Kholo-Ntso which is about 15 min away from the Dials in Katse Village. We've figured out our coal stove and we are sleepy cozy. There is a team from Belle Shoals Baptist Church in Tampa here for the next 10 days so we have been very busy since Monday. They will be here until Wed.

We wake up usually around 7:30 and I put my fleece and hat on and walk down into the Donga to collect firewood to start the stove again that night. A donga is a mini-gorge with a creek in it. They are everywhere in the valleys like where we live. There are 500 year old Sand Bushman Paintings in ours. After we return, one of us (we take turns) has cooked breakfast then we gear up for the days events. We eat breakfast outside where we have an incredible view of the village and surrounding mountains. We walk down to the road and pass our neighbors to meet Alan in his truck. We usually wait at a Taxi stop, where the locals look (and probably talk in Sesotho) at us very weirdly why we are there. Only high school educated people here can speak English and the language here is Sesotho. Alan picks us up and we meet up with the other team to follow to the village we are going for the day. Roads here are a very loose term to say the least. Anything that is flat and wide enough to support a truck that has no grass is considered a road. Alan is a very good off-roader to say the least. There are villages everywhere on the sides on mountains, there isn't much flat area to be had. Most of the flat area here is taken up by the huge lake made by the dam. The Basotho have created these small terraces on the mountainsides, but they live on a mountain as steep as our driveway and twice the height of the Appalachians. When we arrive at the village, we circle up and pray for the village before we go and see the people.

The Basotho are incredibly kind people. They are also an incredibly poor people. I have never seen such poverty and it has deeply touched me. Some children do not have shoes or pants to wear and many only eat 1-2 times a day if that. They eat a cooked corn meal, called Papa, which is somewhat similar to grits except its really dense. It sits like a rock in your stomach, which is probably why they eat it. They may have beans with it. The Papa does not have much nutritional value, but corn is really the only thing that will grow here (except like sorghum, cabbage, and beans).

We share the gospel in a way that I have never done before, but it is definitely the most effective tool for the Basotho. It's called Creation to the Cross. You start at the beginning of the Bible at Creation and go into Adam and Eve, Abraham, Joseph, and Moses. Then you segway

into the story of Jesus after talking about the sacrifice system of the old testament. After explaining the Gospel by John 14:6 and parts of the Roman Road, you then start asking them questions about their understanding and if they are a Christian or not. We do not ask them to accept Jesus then because everyone will expect Christ out of courtesy if you asked. We ask to come back and tell them more so they can understand we care and they can ask more questions about Christianity. It's a tough road because there are the Jehova Witnesses, Zionists, and Roman Catholic's (it's not the same as the normal Roman Catholic Church) who try to discredit Christianity as well as mix traditional African religion of ancestor worship. The Basotho have a tough time letting go of Ancestor Worship because it's all they've every known and it has been told to them that it's ok to worship Jesus and the Ancestors.

On Thursday, we went Horseback riding to a small school to pass out some soccer balls and play with the kids a little. It took about 2.5 hours to ride up the mountain road to the school. We were the first white people to the school ever and the kids had a perplexed look on their faces as the Mahoa (that's white people in Sesotho) rode up the hill on horseback. They got together when we got there and sang for us. It was one of the most beautiful things I have ever heard. As they sang, Babs encouraged us to donate money to the school because they did not have any money for candles to light the school house. The poverty is just so extreme and its very hard to deal with. We came back from the school through a really steep gorge on horseback and it was the most beautiful thing I have seen since I have been there. It's pretty incredible God has given me this opportunity to reach the lost, share the Gospel, and experience his incredible creation.

I'm glad Dad is doing alright. Let me know how things are at home. I'm doing good. Babs is feeding us delicious food, we're warm, and sprits are high. I'll try to send an email more often. As usual, forward this to everyone so they can know what's going on!

Love yall!

John

5/28/2009

Hey Mama/ Everyone,

The team from Florida left on Wednesday morning so we had the day off yesterday. We went down into the Donga (that's where the creek makes a large gorge) towards the big reservoir in Katse. Dada, Uncle Marty, and Dad will love this; Yesterday when we were by the creek, I saw a big splash and it could only be from a big fish. I remember watching Man vs. Wild (the discovery channel show with that Bear Grylls guy doing all the survival techniques) and Bear was showing how to catch a fish without any rod and reel. As soon as we heard the fish, I grabbed a big rock and scared it into the shallows. Then, Drew and Therron grabbed rocks and threw it at the fish which stunned it enough for Drew (who was the closest) to throw it up onto the shore. We got it out and looked at it and it was a 14 in. Rainbow Trout!!! I have pictures us holding the fish for y'all to see when I get back. I cleaned the fish and then Drew cut the filet. Also, on our hike we saw a 7 ft waterfall into a deep pool, so we couldn't pass up the chance to go swimming in Africa in the Fall! Drew and I tested the pool below and then Therron jumped off the waterfall. The water was about as cold as I have ever been (minus the Tellico that time when it was in the upper 20's). So I swam in the pool after jumping off the waterfall for about 5 secs before I realized how ridiculously cold it was. We hiked up to the road out of the Canyon (it

was probably at least 1500 ft deep) and walked on the road back to Khohlo-Ntso (pronounced Ka-Clon-Zo). Needless to say, we got some really weird looks as to why the Mahoa (white people) were walking like everybody else was and not driving. A front is coming into South Africa on Saturday so there could be some snow this weekend. The high's have been in the upper 60's and the lows have been in the upper 20's. We are all well, warm, and full.

Hope everything is ok back home!

John

5/30/2009

Hey Mama/ Everyone,

I had some free time so I thought I'd shoot you an email. We aren't as busy as we have been these past couple of weeks now that the team has left. With more time away from Alan and Babs, we are starting our ministry in our village Khohlo-Ntso (pronounced Ka-klon-zo). We are planning to build a Keyhole Garden for a widow in the village that is very poor and may not have a lot of food to eat this winter. You can Google or YouTube "Keyhole Garden" and check out more what it's about. Basically it is a garden that can produce food year round for a family of four. It is raised off the ground and allows an elderly or AIDS infected person work the garden without having to bend down. It is made of layers of dirt, manure, wood ash, more manure, and more dirt. You build it up by stacking rocks and making a waist high wall to raise the garden off the ground. There is a bag in the center of the garden that you put your food waste in to return nutrients back in the garden. It's about 2 m wide. We will be cleared to make it once we talk to the chief (in Sesotho, Chief is "Morena") of the village and get his permission to help the widow. We will then meet her and get started. We have an expression here called "This is Africa (or shortened to TIA)" which basically means things don't always go as planned due to different cultural norms around here in Africa. Hopefully we will get started soon, but you never know in Africa what mean the meaning of "soon" will actually be. We are also planning to play soccer with the Elementary school in the village once a week, once we get it cleared with the principal. Sefiri our translator and basically our Basotho brother is away at seminary until next Wednesday. He has been gone for a week taking exams in South Africa. He graduates from seminary in November. Sefiri is very passionate about the Basotho and is a great guy. We will then help him with his youth group and probably do some True-Love-Waits stuff with them and some AIDS education. That's the plans we have so far but again "This is Africa," so I have no clue what will actually happen. The next team comes June 30<sup>th</sup> so it won't be as crazy as it has been going to new villages. Looks like we'll be in Khohlo-Ntso for a little while. Not much to this update since Tuesday, but I thought I'd keep all of y'all apprised as to the plans we have so far for our (Me, Drew, and Therron's) ministry. As always the views are ridiculous and we laugh a lot because pictures won't do the scenery justice, it's amazing. It did not snow today. We are warm, full, and spirits are high! Each of us will preach over the next 3 weeks at church, so we'll see who does it tomorrow! Hope all is well in Sunny, Warm Georgia!

Signing off from Katse Village in the Maluti Mountains of Lesotho!

John

6/04/2009

Hey Mama/ Everyone,

The Dials have been in Jo-berg for the past 3 days, so I haven't been around a computer since Saturday, but they got back 2 nights ago. I just got your email today. We have been VERY busy ever since the Dials left in Khohlo-Ntso. We are helping the Moruti Pokka (Pastor Pokka) in his fields with corn. This is the first time mahoa (white people) have ever been in the fields. You can imagine people's faces when we were walking to the fields (In Sesotho: mossimoong sp?). One of the days, I was on horseback to the fields and that got a pretty weird look. Moruti Pokka and Mema Neo have been our Basotho Mom and Dad. They are making sure we don't get into too much trouble haha. Pokka and Neo don't really go to the fields with the same enthusiasm as we do though. They go because they have to. They go because they live on what they grow; beans, corn, potatoes, and cabbage. They can't believe people go to a grocery store to get their vegetables and food. They wish they did not have to eke out an existence for themselves by spending most of their year in the fields. Maybe America needs more subsistence living... The value of a hard day's work, providing for the needs of a family, knowing to trust God to literally provide your sustenance. When they pray to bless their food it carries a whole new weight. They mean it because they tilled the ground, planted the seed, prayed for rain, cut the stalks, shucked the corn, and ground the kernels into cornmeal. To be able to live the incarnate life of a Basotho for a little while in day was a privilege. We asked each other funny questions about our cultures like "Do you ever get tired of Papa (super thick grits like material made out of cornmeal)?" or "Why do Americans walk so fast?" or "Why do Basotho wear gun boots, a blanket, and always carry a stick?" or "Do Americans eat Donkey?...mmmhmmm I love Donkey (says Mema Neo)." We also started our first trial run of the Keyhole Garden and it has been a lot tougher than we thought. Pokka was making fun of us because we were fetching too small of rock for the wall. He was getting these massive 70lb rock for the wall, making us look like little sissies. Here's this 45 y/o, 5'6 man making us look bad. Pokka and Mema Neo kept asking us if we were tired, because they think mahoa can't work hard. We always say no, because they don't know that American young men are extremely prideful and would refuse to admit that they were less of a man haha. We are about 40% of the way done on that garden. We also went to the primary school in the village and played soccer with them. We drew a pretty huge crowd of about 50 people. It just turned into a big chaos of kicking the one football around, but it was ok. They can't afford to have a ball, so this was a big treat for them to play. They have soccer goals, but no net, so we just kicked the ball around. At about 4:30 pm, the sun sets below the mountain line, so it gets pretty cold. We walked back with some the kids on their way home, on the way to our place. We definitely looked like a motley crew. Three mahoa and about 15 kids kicking a soccer ball in the road on the side of a cliff walking home from school. This is another one of those moments where people give you a funny look haha! On top of all of that we, met a Kenyan (Basotho call any African that's not Basotho Maqueryquery because that's what they think they sound like haha) named Isaac who is a nurse at the clinic (there are no Doctors for at least a 2 hour drive) who said if we would like to come and help him treat AIDS patients he would like the help. I would love to do that some here, but it seems we already

running out of time in the day to do things!!! God is good, this is an awesome place! We can't wait until Sefiri comes back so we can start working with him and do some more Horse Trekking! I am warm and well fed. All is good! Talk to y'all later!

John

6/12/2009

Jun 12, 2009

Hey Mama/ Everyone,

It has been almost a week since I have been to the Dials house, so I haven't had a chance to send you an update. We all got a shower and pancakes this morning, which was really nice b/c I was beginning to smell myself, so I know that had to be pretty bad. We went down the mountains on Monday to get our visa's back in order because our 30 days is almost up. We went down to Maseru and met the missionaries in the lowlands and then went across the border to South Africa. In South Africa, Alan had to do some business, like going to the bank and going to the post office (its kinda crazy when you have to drive 5 hours to go to a bank or a post office, that's not just 5 hours away, but in another country b/c Lesotho has neither). In South Africa, we went to the cities of Ladybrand and Ficksburg. Ficksburg has a modern supermarket (which is nice), but everything was in either Afrikaans or Sesotho, so it wasn't exactly like in America. When we went back into Lesotho from Ficksburg, South Africa, we got our visas extended 30 days. As we crossed the border it was like we went back in time 50 years. South Africa is far from being a rich country, but it makes Lesotho look like one of the poorest countries in the world (and it is). One the way back up it wasn't snowing (when we arrived in Lesotho it was snowing and when we went down it was snowing), so we got to see some of the amazing scenery of the drive. Lesotho is called "the roof of Africa" for a reason. The mountains our of the lowlands seem to come out of nowhere. You are looking like you're out west with buttes and grassy plains, until these giant grassy mountains come out of nowhere. You go up a steep mountain range that looks like a grassy version of the Rockies, then when you get to the top of those mountains, you realize there are grassy versions of the Appalachians on top of those when you reach the pass. When we were going up, I noticed some strange things I hadn't seen the first time when we flew in. First off, we saw a baboon! It was probably coming up from a village where it had just eaten trash and was climbing like 5,000 ft back to its cave. The second thing was the amount of marijuana growing everywhere in the foothills leading to the mountains. It's known as Lesotho's cash crop (b/c they eat all of the corn, cabbage, and beans). It was in the 30's, probably, so one house had a Basotho Blanket on top of it like that was going to keep it warm haha. Speaking of Basotho blankets, we are going to go to Thaba-Tseka (pronounced Taba-say-ka) to pick some Basotho blankets and gun boots up so we can really turn some heads in the village. Almost every Basotho in the Mountains wears one of these blankets and some gun boots (like extra tough rain boots). Alan wanted us to "live the incarnate life of the Basotho," so this will definitely do it haha. Should be funny what people think of us. We also finished our keyhole garden!!! That must be the most fertile ground in Lesotho b/c that thing has about a pick-up full of manure. We lack a net to cover it, so we're probably going to deal with some government dudes to see if we can finagle some kind of deal to score one of those coverings. Also, Sefiri returned last night! We are very glad he's back, b/c we can really start getting to work now haha! We are going on our 3 day pony trek, I think a week from today to a super isolated village in the mountains that Sefiri has a church plant in. Should be fun, pony trekking, sleeping on top of mountains, and doing ministry out in the middle of nowhere.

Sounds right up my alley. I'm pretty pumped. We learned how to make papa last night from Mema Neo (you just add finely ground cornmeal into boiling water until it's like super thick grits). She made us cabbage with curry to go along with it! YUM! Papa sits in your stomach like a rock though. They laughed at me, b/c I couldn't eat a lot b/c it sits so heavy. You can see why they eat it, it has zero nutrition, but it makes you full. Well I can't think of anything else that's going on at the moment haha. A lot of plans, but you know what happens to plans in Africa haha. We will be halfway done in 3 days, it has seemed like we've only been here 2 weeks. Time is absolutely flying! Love y'all! I don't know when the next time I will be in front of the computer or see the Dials again. Also, anyone is free to skype me after 1 pm to 3:30 pm EST (7-9:30 Lesotho time) any day. My mom has the number. Love yall! Hope all is well! I am warm, well fed, and spirits are still high! Talk to you later!

John

6/18/09

Hey Mama/ Everyone,

It's been a while since I've been to the Dials house, and I am very excited about the meal and shower I'm about to get! I think it has been a week since we've been here. It has been raining the past couple days. When it rains here, the country basically shuts down, as the roads turn to mud and everybody stays inside. It kind of made for a couple boring days, but it has given me a chance to read. I don't think I've ever read this much in my life, so it's been good to read a couple new books. The dirt here is nothing like the Georgia clay we all have come to know and love. It is like this black, volcanic dirt that turns into this incredibly thick and vile black mud. When you go walking somewhere, you inevitably walk through or near a corn field, so the mud gets straw in it and makes these giant bricks of mud underneath your shoes. Sorry for the complaining, but I hate the mud here, it's one thing I will definitely not miss. That, and the beggar lice (that plant that the seeds stick to your clothing), it's everywhere. All we did for those days was hang out at Moruti Pokka's and wrangle some chicken back to the coop, milk the cow, and watch generator powered African television (which isn't great at all) on Pokka's satellite TV.

But it did stop raining! On Monday, we went to Thaba-Tseka. It was nice going forward maybe 30 years to some modern conveniences we all take for granted. 1. There was electricity in this city (Katse is the only city in like an hour radius that has electricity, even though there is Africa's largest dam that could power the whole country, but it just serves to hold back the water so South Africa can use it)! 2. There was a restaurant where we ate food (Mind you it was still Papa, but it had meat with it, so it was nice to eat some meat and not beans for a change)! 3. There was a Basotho version of a Walmart (The Chinese speak Sesotho here, not English, which is really weird and own stores in the major cities. This one was like a small warehouse, it's crazy they are here. These guys are the new imperialists, they take advantage of the people here by lowering prices so much the Mom and Pop stores go out of business...hmmm.... Sounds familiar...). I got my Basotho Blanket, so I'm almost a full Basotho entate'. All I need is a Malamu, which is the decorative stick they all carry that they receive once they finish circumcision school at age 18. They are very cool looking, but it's hard for a herd boy to give them up b/c they mean so much. I may get a guy in Khohlo-Ntso to make one for me. The going rate for one is like 100 rand. 100 rand for me is like \$10, but to them it's half a month's wage.

Last night, we had probably my favorite thing that has happened to us since our first pony trekking experience 3 weeks ago. We decided that we wanted to make a Basotho meal for our neighbors and invite them over for a dinner, and just all of us talk and socialize together. We went down our little row, this side of the gorge, and asked each Mae and Entate' to come and enjoy some Basotho food cooked by Mahoa (white people) haha. They all said yes, and they wouldn't pass up the free food either. What Drew, Therron, and I wanted to do was just enjoy each other's company and just love on some folks. Our neighbors have full-blown AIDS, so they only have probably 18 months to live, but they are on anti-retrovirals, so they look normal. There were some South African Christians who stayed at the house where we are staying, and they have trashed and used the bathroom in our neighbor's garden, so they blame Pokka for all of this. It has really turned them off to Christianity because of their experiences with Christians. Hmmm sounds like what it is back in the U.S., people being turned off to Christianity because they know what Christians act like... Anyway, we basically wanted to just love them and extend grace to them for who they are, not trying to "convert" them on a mission like we Christians all love to do. We had no clue what we were doing in the kitchen. We were cooking for 13 people (by the way, none of us had ever cooked for that many, grilling doesn't count) and trying to make Papa (which we really didn't know how to make), chakalaka on the papa (it's like a spicy sauce from a can), beans (got that one down by now...geeze), and cabbage (never cooked that and only had verbal directions by Sefiri how to do it). We ended up making the Papa perfectly which was great. Drew and I were calling it the Holy Spirit papa," cuz we had no clue. Everyone brought a plate and a spoon and we served up everything. We wore our Basotho Blankets so everyone got a kick out of that haha! They ate so much food! You could tell the hunger here, because after everyone got their fill, they asked for more to bring home because they had nothing else to eat for their children. They didn't care for the beans b/c they were sick of eating beans (me too!) and they loved the chakalaka! They kept saying it over and over again b/c they never had it before b/c it was too expensive. The can costs roughly 80 cents, that's a day's wage. We just enjoyed the food (and one of the Mae's gladly finished what I left on my plate) at sunset. At one point I asked if anyone has questions for us, thinking how it works in other countries where they ask how it is like in America, or how many brother and sisters do you have. But Entate' Chopa our next door neighbor with full-blown AIDS, who is so turned off to God, and turning to all sorts of evil things asked this question, which is the single greatest question anyone has ever asked me in my ministry life: "How do I become a true believer in Jesus Christ?" We were just floored b/c we weren't expecting anything but just hanging out and loving on folks. We shared the Gospel and told him that these were difficult teachings and that we wanted to talk further to him about them not from our minds, but from God's word. He said he wanted to ask us some "hard questions" and take several hours to do so. We are going to talk to him next Wednesday, and we are pumped to answer questions about being a Christ follower.

One thing I have learned here is that I need to extend more love and grace to people in my life. I go to church and hang out with my Christian friends and never really get to spend time with non-believers. People just want to be met where they are with love and without all the judgment which comes along being associated with Christianity. If we all would do that, maybe then would they ask us what drives us. We go on mission trips with our formulas and our plans to go "convert" people, when we really just need to be loving people with love and grace like Jesus did at home, at school, at work. I want to be a Follower of Christ not a Christian. I want to be in the world, but not of it, like C.S. Lewis says "a Little Christ."

We leave in the morning to go on our pony trek and will return Saturday. Hope all is well back in Hotlanta! I am warm, well fed, and can't wait to go pony trekking!

Love Yall,

John

6/21/2009

Hey Dad/ Everyone!

First off, HAPPY FATHER'S DAY DADDY-O! Hope you're having a spectacular day! Sorry I missed it, but I wrote you a card in May when I left. I'm thinking this email will find you via Mom's blackberry or sometime during church this morning. I just wanted to tell you I love you a whole lot and I miss you (and everyone else of course, but hey its Father's day and I'm half way around the world ☺)! I'm very thankful for you!

We got back last night from one of the greatest adventures I think I will go on in my entire life, and you know you I'm always looking for the next great adventure. So we saddled up in Khohlo-Ntso on Friday morning, only to find out that the horse Sefiri would ride was not there when we needed to leave. So we started on the road toward where we were going and he said he would catch up with us once he got his horse. An hour later Sefiri came galloping down the road to meet us and then we started to actually ride our horses. We went off the road and up and over mountains "as the crow flies" toward the village where Sefiri has the Church plant. We must have gone up 2,000 ft and then right back down it 5 times each way. And this isn't on nice groomed trails like the Appalachian Trail. These are game trails we are using, and they are precariously set against a couple thousand foot sheer cliffs. It definitely made for some adrenaline filled moments. About an hour away from the village, we had to cross the Malibatso (Black Springs) River. It was about stifle deep for the horses and in the middle of a rapid, so that was really exciting, too. We arrived at the village right at sunset at 5:30 pm, so that made for a 6.5 hour ride over 5 mountains, 3 streams, and one major river crossing. We sat up our tents when we got there right in front of the crawl entrance where we put the horses, so there wouldn't be stock theft (by the way stock theft is the only crime in Lesotho you can't bribe your way out of, for instance it takes 150 rand or \$15 to get out for murder). After we set up the tents Sefiri started singing with the children by a rundown rondobbe and crawl. It was pitch dark then so we couldn't see how many people were there or their faces. All I could see was the stars (with the milky way galaxy, shooting stars, and a satellite) and the silhouette of the mountains off the light of the stars (no moon, as it has been rising at 11 pm here lately). We walked down and then each of us shared from our hearts and from the Holy Spirit. Drew talked of the love God has for us by sending His Son, I talked about how much God loves you and wants you to love him because he first loved you, and Therron talked about the greatest commandment: love your neighbor as yourself. It was great that none of us planned what we were going to say because it was all spirit led. It was also great sharing my heart with all of the stars (more than I've ever seen in my life) as the only thing I could see. God was so good that night and it was a privilege to be with the Basotho. We woke up the next morning and the villagers stayed to have another service instead of going to the fields for harvest. I was thinking that morning that this is about as close as you can get in this world to how Paul did it in the New Testament. He went to far off places (the tents reminded me of him, as he was a tentmaker) and set up churches and discipled them (this is what Sefiri has done) and returns to them periodically. It was great to do this kind of mission work. We packed up the tents and Sefiri had

a question period that he said would last 20 min but ended up being an hour and a half. If it was any possible to get any poorer or become more isolated, this village did it. They were especially poor. We then made the trek back home and it only took us 5.5 hours. We went upstream at the river and had lunch on a sandbar at a rapid and then cut up this canyon (which was especially steep and treacherous). We made it back home to Khohlo-Ntso right at sunset, and then I fell asleep at 7:45 pm and woke up this morning at 7:15 (yeesh!).

We woke up to find the skies overcast and cloudy and we thought it was going to snow but the sun burned off the clouds, and we decided to go to Church at Khohoba (pronounced Ha-ho-ba) Baptist Church (it's the village across from Katse village, the Basotho live in Khohoba and serve Katse Village where the South Africans and the Dials live). We hitch hiked there, as Alan and Babs said they were going to a village they go to on Sundays (that made for another cultural experience sharing a back of a pickup truck with 7 other Basotho). Khohoba Baptist Church has a sound system and a keyboard, a bass guitar and two singers sing, and they get it going. I know 3 Basotho Church songs (well kinda) and they played all of them this morning (well, they better have, it lasted 3 hours all on generator power). It was fun to just dance with the whole church and lift up the name of Christ! Khohoba Church consists of a Carnival tent with a sheep tied to it that baaas all the time. I really liked it though, Church should be a lot more like Khohoba Church was this morning. Now, I'm at the Dials and we just had some of Alan's delicious Veggie soup and Bab's awesome cornbread, and I'm about to hop in the shower (YIPPEE!).

Love y'all a lot and HAPPY FATHER'S DAY again Dad!

John

6/26/2009

Hey Mama/ Everyone,

Well, when the first day of summer arrived back home, the first day of winter arrived here in the Southern Hemisphere and WOW, it has been really cold. It rained all night Sunday, all day Monday, and on Tuesday, it snowed for the first time. It was only a dusting, but it definitely was cold enough for us to stay inside and burn through a bunch of coal in our stove. When it rains, no one comes out of their rondables (huts), when it is windy no one comes out, and definitely when it is snowing! It made for a couple boring days. I have read 7 books so far here. I'm going to Alan's tonight to get 3 more to read before I leave.

We started our keyhole garden yesterday and made some quality headway on it (or at least we thought). Pokka went with us today and worked for an hour and, man wow, he tripled the amount of work we did in that one hour he spent with us. As soon as he left, we slowed down as I was the chief stone wall builder and Therron and Drew were dirt and manure shovelers. One of the many things I have learned here is how to stack rocks to make a wall. You would think this would be a really easy task, but you would be very much mistaken. Today I officially graduated from the Pokka Sepepi School of Rock Wall Building. He actually gave me a compliment and left my stone where it was and did not pick it up and replace it. Drew is from Soperton, GA so he has a little bit of the Southern Draw. Today Drew was talking to Pokka and Pokka stopped him mid sentence and said "I don't know what you are saying, all I hear is 'Blah Ba Blah Blah'." I think he may have gotten his "behind the back name." In Lesotho you get 3 names: Your English name (John), your Sesotho name (Teboho), and your "behind the back name." It's the name you are called that you don't know about and it's about how you look or how you talk or the way you act. I have no clue what mine is, and I will never know.

Maybe mine is about my beard, it's at "Civil War Status" right now. All is well, sorry for the short email, but time is short and I need to shower! I'm full and all is well. It's chilly, but we're hanging in there. Hope all is well in Hotlanta! Love y'all!

John

6/28/2009

Hey Mama/Everyone,

I'm back at the Dials b/c the U.S. is in the Confederation Cup final against Brazil and we're all going to watch it (they have electricity and satellite t.v.). Three days of meat in a row WAHOO! Last Night we had dinner with Isaac, the nurse at the Khohlo-Ntso clinic. He was really nice to us. We found out that he went by taxi an hour away in Thaba-Tseka to get meat and oranges for us to eat. He is a Christian and very educated and worldly aware, so it was good to get to talk about African politics and culture with an African Christian. He gave us from Kenyan tea that he gets when he is home, and it was really good! I think he enjoyed spending time with us, b/c he doesn't have that many people to speak English with him, and certainly no one speaks Swahili here. We woke up today and said farewell to Imposi who is a double orphan (both his mom and dad have died from AIDS, he's Pokka's nephew) and has been staying with Pokka while on winter break from school. His school starts back tomorrow. He is 21 and is graduating high school (that's normal here). He's really smart, so he will get a chance to go to a University in Maseru (the capital). It was sad to see him go, and we have only known him for 2 weeks. He told us that if he did not see us again that he would see us in heaven. I can't believe how sad it's going to be in 16 days when we leave here. The teams from Texas, the media team from the International Mission Board, and Alan's boss are supposed to be here tomorrow, if the pass up the mountain is clear with snow. I think they will because the temperature got up to about 50 degrees and melted most of the snow on the tops of the mountains here. We finished the garden Saturday, but the man was out in the fields working, so we did not get to see him. Next week we are going to share the Gospel with him. Sorry I don't have any super exciting news from the past two days, not much adventure this week, just a lot of snow and cold. Our last pony trek is this Thursday and we may make another garden this week for someone. We're just kind of going to play this week by ear. Hope all is well back home! Enjoy some homemade peach ice cream this week!

Love y'all!

John

7/9/09

Hey Mama/ Everybody,

Wow, it has been a while since I've been at the Dials, with the team from Texas being here. It was nice to get a shower, and I'm also looking forward to some Cuban Chicken tonight (yum, meat!). I don't even know where to start, but here goes. If there was any possible way to have a more exciting week this past week, then I think we may have accomplished it. Last Monday, we (the Georgia Boys and Sefiri) climbed a rocky topped mountain that looks over our village around sunset. On top of the mountain ranges looking over each village, there are shepherds

that keep watch over their flocks of sheep and goats. When we reached the summit of the mountain, Sefiri yelled and brought the shepherd over, and we met him. There are dogs at the cattle posts there at the top of each range where the shepherds sleep and, man, are they vicious. They are trained to kill people, and they even have a taste for human. Once we met the herd boy he went and tied his dogs off while we pitched our tents near the cliff at the summit. After we pitched the tents, we called out to the shepherd so we could come (it was pitch dark with no moon) and spend some time with him in his montabo (cattle post). He made a fire for us and cooked some papa for himself and his dogs. We just spent time with him, asked him some questions, and just got to know him. This was the first time white people had been to that summit and to those cattle posts. I guess I just keep going to places where white people haven't been with Sefiri. We went back to our tents and froze our royal Rastafarian nini's off because we were at over 9,000 ft altitude. We woke up in the morning with our breath frozen to the inside of the tent, all of our Nalgene's completely frozen, and all of us in the fetal position for warmth. As soon as I saw the first light, I popped out of the tent and went to the cliff's edge to see the sunrise from the mountain. It was one of the most beautiful things I have ever seen. The sun slowly moving over the far off ranges and striking the snow covered south faces of the mountains to the west. We took some pictures and then Sefiri had to leave us to go translate for the Texas team. Alan picked him up and we all waved down to him from the summit (there are hardly any trees in Lesotho, so you can see sooooo far away). After Sefiri left we packed all the gear up and then our herd boy friend from the night before took us on a hike over all the different mountains on the range. I don't know the correct spellings, but the names of the mountains were Tsepukong, Yabinyaba, and Thaba-Mohape. Yabinyaba was even higher than the Tsepukong (the rocky mountain we slept on). You could see Katse Dam (lake) from the mountain which means we were so high, you could look over and down over the mountain range hugging the lake. As we were hiking (with our packs on), we were herding the sheep for the shepherd. He took care of about 70 sheep (7 of which were his, he gets 12 a year). It was awesome to spend time with him (even though he spoke little English, but enough to communicate and ask questions) and share the love of Christ with him. He introduced us to his fellow herd boys, and they were a hoot. It's like another culture up there in the mountains. He left us at the last mountain and said goodbye, as we hiked down into our village again.

Last Wednesday, the media team from the International Mission Board came to start a story on us. I don't think they came just for us, but as they spent more time with us, I guess they realized our mission experience isn't the norm for most mission trips. We took them to the fields where we shucked corn with our pastor, his wife and some other villagers working for food. They took pictures of us talking and just spending time together working in the fields. They left after an hour and a half, as their boss flew in from Richmond, VA, on a Mission Aviation Fellowship plane. His name is Craig Martin, and he's a really awesome guy. The Media team consisted of Craig (big boss and videographer), Ethan (videographer and editor), Jesse (writer and a little photography), and Kristen (photographer). They liked what we were doing and wanted a "day in the life of the Georgia Boys." So, we invited them to spend the night in the shack while we slept outside in our tents so the village wouldn't expect anything. I think they got exactly what they wanted, as I'll tell you later haha.

On Thursday, we went to the school we went to with the Florida team again, this time with the Texas team. It was really nice to ride a horse without a 40 lb pack on this time. After my last pony trek, my skills have improved immensely, and I was able to lead the entire group when Sefiri had to drop back to help someone. It makes me want to ride when I get back, but I think America will be pretty boring after going over mountains on a horse. When we got to the school, the Texas team gave the kids lunches, took their pictures, and then told them a story

about how they were special. While all this was going on, Craig was interviewing me on camera to share my experiences for the summer. After the interview the team passed out hats, gloves, tooth stuff, soap, and candy along with the pictures they had taken earlier. It was most of the team's first international mission experience, so it was nice to see "green," but passionate missionaries. We left the school and traveled back down to the valley and had a Basotho meal in Paquang (mmm... meat again, goat spinal cord is actually not that bad!). That night the media team came to our shack, and we stoked up the fire real well for them before we went to bed. We all sat and talked about Christ and the Church. It was so amazing to talk with a group so passionate about the Gospel and having it spread to all the nations. It made me miss my friends back in Athens.

That Friday, we woke up at 5:30 and climbed back up that rocky mountain where our herd boy friend lives, with all of the camera gear and 3 fresh to Lesotho people. They all huffed and puffed on the way, but they all made it fine. I was impressed at my acclimatization, as I made sure there were no dogs for the media team when they arrived. I beat them to the summit by 30 minutes. I can't wait to get back to America and try out all my new red blood cells (such a geek, sorry)! We got interviewed up there at the summit and it was awesome! God really spoke through us and the scenery couldn't be more spectacular. We got all the photos from the team that they took of us those 3 times they were with us.

This week we have been in the fields and preparing for the climax of everything we do in Lesotho. The villagers have seen us for two months walking to the store, in the fields, on top of the mountains with shepherds, and they all have been wondering why we have been there. In Basotho culture they have feasts to the ancestors. These are sacrifices to the ancestors and they have sheep, goat or cow at these feasts. Last week, there was a feast, and Sefiri remarked about how he wanted to eat meat sooo bad. He just wanted to have a feast with everybody and celebrate Christ. A light popped in our heads and we decided to throw a feast for the whole village. Someone had given me money before I left and told me to use it the best way I saw for God's glory. Not only are we going to have meat, but we are going to tell the village why we are here. We are going to share with them the love and grace from Christ. We are going to share the Gospel with them. It is traditional for someone to speak at the beginning of each feast and this will give us the audience of the whole village. I need you all to pray earnestly for Saturday! Pray that:

We will demonstrate Christ's Love in a tangible way

That the Holy Spirit will soften hearts

That there will be enough food

That above all, God would gain glory, honor, and fame in Khohlo-Ntso

The media team left one of their cameras, so we could document the lead up and the feast. I'm going to slaughter one of the sheep in the morning, so that should be interesting! Whatever comes of this media project should be interesting. We will see where it goes. May God be in control! We fly out next Tuesday in a Mission Aviation Fellowship small plane from our village, and I'm so excited to see Lesotho from the air! All of this is coming to a head and God is good. Please be in prayer for the feast! Thanks! I miss all of you!

For His Name and Renown are the Desire of our Hearts,  
John

John's Final Email before he returns home to the USA July 13, 2009

Hey Mama/ Everyone,

It is sad that my time has ended here in Lesotho. It has gone by so quickly here, where time flies and smiles abound. It seems like a long time ago I left Atlanta, but it also seems like I've just gotten here.

The feast went amazing. I got to slaughter my first sheep, which was indeed a cultural experience. I then got to help all the shepherd boys butcher the meat. I ended up slaughtering two b/c Therron didn't want to slaughter (chickened out) his. Drew made his south Georgia brethren proud by slaughtering and helping prepare the meat. Phoka (the pastor) was surprised b/c I wasn't scared to get in and slaughter and butcher the sheep. He told me that the shepherds told him I worked like a Basotho (which is a huge compliment by the way these people work). After butchering we put all the meat in giant cast iron pots that the church members had borrowed. One pot for the normal meat (with bones), one pot for the organs, and one pot for the heads and feet. After much bragging about my international cuisine adventures, I bragged to Phoka that I would try anything he would give me (oh, how he would take me up on that promise!). After the organs were boiled for an hour, all the men gathered around and ate the heart, liver, lungs, and rectum (why just the rectum, I don't know. they kept those for the feast nothing is wasted). Heart was actually pretty good, it tasted like meat, but the liver was horrible (you wouldn't think I would have had a problem with liver). The lungs were alright as well and the rectum was ok, but it was really chewy. After that culinary adventure, we boiled the meat for a very long time (like 8 hours). They cooked until about 11:30 pm. The women cooked on the large bonfire we had for the meat with smaller versions of the cast iron pots. They cooked samp (it's split corn that looks like feed or something), beans, a tomato and onion soup thing, and of course 'the piece de resistance,' mutton. Phoka woke up every 2 hours to put another huge log underneath the pots after everyone went to bed. At sunrise the day of the feast, Mema Neo and Phoka woke us up and we started cooking the samp and warming the meat back up. By 1, everything was made and ready to go. A little after that, Moruti Molapo (the pastor of Ha Hoba church) came with his people that lead worship and they set up their sound system up off a generator. They started singing, dancing, and playing (keyboard and bass guitar) and slowly you could see people coming from the surrounding villages (a bunch of small villages make up the big one of Khohlo-Ntso). It was about 2:30 pm when everything kicked off. Molapo and his crew got everybody dancing a little (there was no beer, so there wasn't that much dancing). We (the Georgia boys) were in our Basotho Blankets and had our malomus (Basotho fighting sticks), so we definitely looked the part at the feast. Everyone was happy to see us wearing the blankets. After they sang a little, Mema Neo (the pastor's wife) said a kind word about us in Sesotho claiming us as her own children (and other stuff I didn't get b/c it wasn't translated). After that we all spoke a little about how much we were grateful for the village letting us live with them for two months. When we were speaking, the church presented us with Basotho hats (elaborate cultural straw hats), which is a huge honor. All the ladies screamed in laughter and happiness when we put the hats on. We were officially in full regalia. After I gave my thanks, I shared the Gospel to all that came. Babs followed after us and said a kind word of "I wish you knew how much we love you," which spoke my sentiments exactly. Sefiri came along afterwards and thanked us in English with some incredibly moving words like "You are a part of me, from the depths of my heart," and "God is on the move, it's your choice whether you want to move with him, go and move." After that, some of the women came and performed for us a traditional dance. It was really cool b/c the lady that was leading the dance

was one of our neighbors who is not a Christian, but said because we were so nice that she wanted to know more about "our Jesus." One of the other ladies in the dance team worked with us in the fields and was so impressed with our work and our use of Sesotho, that she picked all the beggar lice (or "hitch hikers," they're called, annoying plant seeds) off our clothes. After the women, the girls of our small village came and did a dance for us and then the boys from a village right next to ours did a dance for us. We were sitting at the place of honor in the midst of everyone dancing and singing. It was one of the most amazing cultural experiences of my life. After all the dancing, Phoka came and shared a little and then blessed the food and everyone rushed to get in line for meat!!! We ended up being the last to get served b/c we wanted to make sure that everyone had enough to eat. People were a little confused at why we did that, as we were the guests of honor. But the real guest of honor was Christ, and I'm sure He wouldn't have had it any other way. God provided and everyone had enough to eat. In fact, there was enough for the women who helped to have one last meal of meat as the sun set. Phoka left us and got the heads we had prepared b/c only men eat heads. As the sun set, he warmed the heads back up and we ate brain, eye, and nasal sinus together. I can't think of a more fitting way to end such an amazing day. On Sunday, the church gave its official goodbye, and it was sad to leave them.

Today (Monday, July 13) has been one of the saddest days ever. We woke up this morning and went over to Phoka and Mema Neo's, and she had fixed us our favorite Basotho food, maquenas (fried bread). We shared and thanked each other, and Mema Neo cried the entire time. She said it was almost like losing a child as we were leaving and that she wouldn't be able to sleep tonight b/c she was so sad. She told us she was scared at first of us b/c she knew a lot of mahoa (white people who aren't South Africans) and that they hadn't been very nice to her, but that we treated them and loved them as if we were family... and we were and still are. When I introduce myself in Lesotho it is Teboho Seephephe, not John Younker. I told Mema Neo that she is my African Mae (mother). Phoka told us that he dreads going to the fields b/c it is so much work, but he has to do it to put food on the table. He said when we went with him, he did not dread it b/c we would do such great work for him. He said this as he was fighting tears from his eyes. Those 2 hours this morning with my African parents were some of the saddest times ever. We took a "family" picture one last time and Alan and Babs came to move us out of our little mountain shack we've been living in these past two months. After we got to Katse were the Dials live, we walked over to Ha Hoba (the whites live in Katse where it's nice and the Basotho live in Ha Hoba) to say farewell to Molapo and gave him a farewell gift. He almost cried as we left, as well. We also said goodbye to Ntate Edward who fought in WWII for the British (Lesotho used to be a British Colony) against Rommel in the Desert of North Africa and Musilini in Italy. I wish someone could write his memoirs (like every time America is mentioned he goes off on a cool story about the war and seeing Roosevelt in person). All in all, it has just been a really sad day... I'm going to miss this place a lot. I'm going into culture shock so bad on Thursday, I know. It will be good to be back with family, though, in the States.

So ends another adventure. I have many stories to tell. Now that I've seen, I am responsible. This experience has changed me to the depths of my heart. I have experienced what Paul calls "the extravagance of our God's Love and Grace." What does it mean to go and tell others the Gospel? What it means is this: Love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, and soul and Love your neighbor as yourself. It's that simple, and it's that complicated. People are hard to love sometimes. Only through Christ Jesus can we love others who are sometimes hard to love. I love people b/c I love my Savior. How will people know His power unless they see Him

abundantly in my life? It's not going to take Gospel tracks and formulas, 3 point sermons, cool songs and lighting, nice clothes and cars, and personnel committee and budget meetings. It takes someone going and living "the incarnate witness." Paul says that we must be all things to all people. I don't care who you are in this world, you want to be loved. Not loved for what you have, but just because you exist. If we loved people without agendas or strategies, people would come to know our Savior. But it's really not that way in America, is it, amongst Christians? Nope. We're too judgmental, too hypocritical, too political, too anti-homosexual, and too sheltered. There's one person we love even though they do horrible things all the time, and we forgive them and show them grace all the time, and it's ourselves. If we step away from the mirror for one moment and realize the hurting and all the social injustices around the world, we would be able to provide the love and grace people need. What the dying and hurting of this world need is love and grace, not a judgmental glare or a pathetic sigh. How do we understand love and grace? Look it up in a dictionary? Oh yeah, maybe we can look it up in the back of our leather-bound \$75 bible. No, we learn the nature of Christ by being an apprentice to him, as Paul says in Ephesians. Living out your faith is the only way to understand the full depths of what Christ did for us on the cross. If we come close to this understanding, then we can share to others what he has done in our lives, like when Moses came down from the mountain and his face was glowing because he saw the Lord. When we were sitting at the place of honor at the Feast and the people were dancing and we were in our blankets and straw hats, a woman who is not a believer came to Mema Neo and said, "I don't know a lot of Mahoa, but they look like Jesus." If we don't go, who will? If we won't love others who will love them? If we lose our lives, we will gain a new one in Christ, but if we keep our lives, we will surely lose it. God wants reign over my life. All of our lives. We need to step back from our Upper Middle Class American, I-driven box and help the world. Let His Name and Renown be the desire of hearts! Ask God to allow all of us to die to self and live abundantly in Christ. I hope these words don't fall as some jaded college kid who's seen poverty in Africa. Thank you all for reading and joining me in the greatest adventure of my life.

I am off on the plane from my village to Maseru in the Morning and then Maseru to Jo-berg and then to Atlanta...

Now that I have seen, I am responsible...

Teboho Seephephe