

Reflections from the Field

April 25, 2024



Not quite 5 years ago, when we moved into our unfinished home in Wairaka where we'd been building for about a year, we had no power and no running water. It was a challenging season like none we had yet known. Embracing the challenge and rising to the occasion, we powered through an electric-less season. Being a lover of Little House on the Prairie, I often reminisced about early pioneer days in America, as we dove into farm life and fetching water, and candle-lit evenings. One thing the Ingall's family never did, though, was look for a place to charge their cell phones! We sure did! I'd often wake early to beat the heat and walk about a mile to a neighbor's home to charge our phones and flashlights. Later in the last light of day, I'd walk back to retrieve them, often exhausted and weary from the work of the day. We dreamed about days to come, a sense of normal, and the ability to simply charge things in our own home.



In the building phase of our home we carefully and strategically “planted” our home between saplings of mango, avocado, and even shade trees. Cutting down as few as possible, we looked forward to a day when those trees would grow and thrive. The house was planted and the trees were left to grow. Many times we had to fight for their “right” to remain. They sometimes were in the way of building and “progress”. We looked ahead to when they would provide fruit and shade. We nourished and protected them in a season that would have been easier to remove them. Again, we looked forward to what the trees would be later and how much goodness they’d give! Potential is often hidden before our eyes, but we live in a world that wants easy pickings and ready fruit.

Psalm 85:12 *“Yes, the Lord will give you what is good, and our land will yield its increase.”*

Moving to Wairaka was a season of hard work and adjustments. Ministry came easy though, in the walks to charge our phones and lights I’d meet neighbors and children, I’d see who has goats and chickens and how the community was knit together. We got busy serving by developing relationships in our new village, sharing a meal or provisions with a family in need, offering work to a

struggling young man, or praying with a hurting widow. In a community that one of the elders told us, “Doesn’t throw each other a bone!”, we started caring for our new community even as it went against some norms. Pastoral care was seemingly absent among the society here in this new village of ours. Love and care and support (practical and spiritual) were pleasant surprises to a people worn down by life’s hardships and suffering. Relationships and rapport didn’t come in easily most of the time, but natural interactions sprung out of all our needs—theirs and ours as the newbies on the hill with no power, no water (and truthfully, limited stamina).



September of this year, will mark 5 years in this home that the Lord provided. *“For unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain.” Psalm 127:1.* This week brought some full-circle moments that simply begged to be shared for their sheer ability to bring about hope! In a world that prefers instant results, low-hanging fruit, and easy solutions, we are offered “rewards” (God winks) in the routine, and often hard work of life. This week, a family in the community called to let us know that our dear friend and elderly woman in the village is slowly dying. She is a woman I have shared about before, being the oldest person in Wairaka and the oldest person we know. It is

guessed that she is 125 (born in 1899) though her younger brother passed away last year and took with him dates and facts of their lineage. We've come to know her and love her, and she calls us her children. The family called us because we normally can cheer her up so well. We know she loves her chai (milk) tea and her pretty bar of soap. So, naturally, we carried those to her when we went to visit her just a few days ago. I packed her goodie bag and prayerfully wondered what to gift a dying woman. Decidedly, I knew our presence and prayers were of most comfort. We took the milk and soap and headed down into the village. The visit was sweet, quiet, and prayerful. She was peaceful, with shallow breaths coming slowly, but no stories or smiles for us this somber day. Her great-granddaughter and I (the same age) knelt on the floor and laid gentle hands on her as Peter prayed a closing prayer of strength and comfort on the family and our dear 'jaja'.



Pictured above, one of our earlier visits with jaja, still chatty and vibrant! (2021).

After the sweet visit with our elderly jaja, we proceeded to another not-to-be-missed member of the community! This was a surprise visit to a young woman who had just given birth one week and 3 days before. Mama joyfully embraced us as we approached the home. For the first time, she held my hand and

hugged me several times as we walked through her garden to the front door of the home. She had tears in her eyes and a huge smile on her face and exclaimed, “You are most welcome!” several times in the one minute approach to the house. Clearly, she was thrilled to have us. Our concerns that we were taking a new mama off guard disappeared. Inside the 2 room house, she retrieved the baby from the curtained off bedroom and carefully deposited him in my arms, beaming. Peter and I each took turns holding the baby and speaking of his absolute cuteness, and how well the mama was doing. We brought gifts for mama and baby—basic needs and some fun baby boy outfits. We asked to pray for the family and baby, and blessed the home and new baby with their eager permission. She held back tears as she thanked us, “Auntie Kate, thank you for loving me! Uncle Peter, thank you for caring! Oh, thank you for loving me and my baby!” You see, she isn’t married. She doesn’t know the father. It’s her 3rd child by this method. She is very much rejected by society even as she struggles with mental health. Oh but she feels and knows the love of Jesus, even as she steps into parenting this 3rd time with new capacity, wellness, and support! What a gift!



The next day, we heard that the elderly jaja was perking up a little, maybe she will live to tell us more stories. She had begun taking her milk again and the family was thrilled and puzzled at her returned energy. We thank God for any more days added to her beautiful and full life. There is something more I couldn't miss as I held these two visits so close in my heart these last few days—the reward of authentic connection in these sweet relationships we've been honored to grow these last years. We've come a long way. The God wink in this for me was that on the same day, without intentionally meaning to do it, we visited the oldest and youngest members of this community. Thank Jesus, for these wonderful people—young and old. Thank God that we are a part of them and they a part of us!

Some other ironies presented themselves this week as well! This week the electricity has been off in the village. This is on top of being unreliable and unstable to begin with. We can hear the purr of generators day and night to compensate for the power being out. We have only solar power and so it's the only way to know if the community has power, unless it is night, then we can see the lack of lights surrounding us. After a bad storm last Wednesday, Peter and I were both awake checking windows and our surroundings, Peter noticed, "We are the only light around!" As various friends or workers come to the house/farm they are asking to charge their phones, and so we have charged phones on solar power because the local electric company isn't sourcing their power this week. Thinking metaphorically, it surely matters where we source from! We pray we would continue to be not just a source of power in powerless days, but a resource of God's love and light to a world that so desperately needs him. Our overflow can only be from what we have invested in ourselves. We no longer need to walk miles to charge our phones, but have invested in systems which stand the test of time, and provide to others in their time of need as well. Surely, I do not just mean our solar power system, but the investment of spiritual growth and our walks with Jesus that reflect his love to our friends, neighbors, and community.

I used to jokingly dream that if we protect our trees, we will be able to pick fruit from our house windows. You recall, the trees that were in the way of building? Well, in another God wink, this dream is nearly a reality. Peter has cut back the mango tree outside our bedroom windows several times. And outside our dining room window (picture below) we have avocados on the tree ripening for their harvest—you guessed it—from inside the house! Ripe fruit within reach

out our windows. Years of nourishing and protecting them have produced a harvest we couldn't miss if we tried! These trees take time to give fruit. Ministry takes time to bear fruit as well. Sometimes, we may never know if the seeds we planted or watered took root and grew to fruition. Often, we have protected saplings (young in faith or age) for a season of vulnerability and never know the outcome of such efforts. Growth and fruit is not our job, but God's. Ours is simply to take care, to be intentional, to give nutrition as investment to others in our path of life. For we have hope, a hope that doesn't disappoint. And we trust that we will eat/see fruit, if we continue to work and pour into the lives around us.

Romans 5:5-6 *“And hope does not put us to shame (disappoint us), because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.”*



Psalm 128:1-2 *“Blessed are all who fear the Lord, who walk in obedience to him. You will eat the fruit of your labor; blessing and prosperity will be yours.”*

Sometimes, seasons of life are so absolutely fruitless, despite all our best efforts. Circumstances can be absolutely bleak with no hope for life or growth or positive outcomes. But in the impossibly hard seasons of life, we trust God enough to put our hand to the plow, our hearts fully into the work of the Lord, sweat rolling into our eyes mixes with the tears of the pain and hardship. *“Let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.”* **Galatians 6:9**. When it comes down to it, God has never left us. He sees the big picture, trusts us to carry out a few details on his behalf, and has good in mind for his people. When we finally break from the hardships and stresses of life, we can look up (or look in) and find that God has been in each and every detail all along. This week, and this season of ministry and service to the Lord, we thank him for reminding us of the importance of investments in relationships and building rapport. We thank him for fruit that has become easy to pick after many seasons of hardship. We thank him for resourcing us to be in literal and figurative places to share LIGHT and POWER. He’s holding nothing back. And we are surrendered to his awesome plans!

Ephesians 4:11-13 *“And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds, and teachers to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the son of God...”*



Blessings,
Peter and Kate (Levi, Aiden and Eliana) Walugembe