

David, Jen, Graham and Jonathan Pett

Newsletter – September/October 2006



Dear Friends

Greetings from Elcho Island! We hope this letter finds you well. It was great to catch up with many of you in the few months while we were in England enroute to Elcho Island via Cairns and Yirrkala. We are so grateful to you for your kindness to us, hospitality, prayers, encouragement and support – we could not have embarked on this venture without you.

After a week in Cairns, we had almost five weeks in Yirrkala receiving cultural and operational induction ready for moving to our remote placement. The six-monthly staff conference was held in June and we were able to meet the whole Arnhem Land team in one place – a rare event!

We have been here in our new home on Elcho Island off the north coast of Australia for a few weeks now. It is an amazing place and we have been quite overwhelmed by life here as we have been settling in and getting used to so many new things. Thank you for your messages, emails, letters and parcels - we have really appreciated receiving these. We are sorry not to have been in contact with more of you personally but hopefully now that we are becoming more settled in our new surroundings we will be catching up on all our correspondence – thank you for your patience.

Elcho Island is off the northern coast, 150km west of Nhulunbuy and 500km east of Darwin. The planes are the only real method of transport to and from the island. Elcho Island is MAF's major remote base which serves many of the communities in the surrounding area. MAF provides pilots and management for the Aboriginal-owned airline called Marthakal Yolŋu Airline and employs four Yolŋu staff. At Elcho there are two planes a GA8 Airvan (shown above) and a Cessna 206.

Marthakal has three pilots and a (newly-appointed) Base Manager covering a 6-day flying programme. Days for the pilots are often very long, typically 11 hours with many short flights. David flies a different programme each day but has regular booking for teachers, community health clinics, patient travel and generator fuel distribution. One Sunday, he flew a pastor to conduct a funeral and the family were able to travel with them. Another flight relocated a family subject to domestic abuse at short notice. Women regularly travel into Elcho to shop and, sadly, funeral charters are a constant feature of the programme.



When I am afraid, I will trust in you. Psalm 56.3

The people here – the Yolŋu – are a very family focussed people and they put a large emphasis on relationships and their interaction with each other. Their family structure is very complex – like an interwoven mat we have heard it described - so when new people arrive they are often “adopted” by someone so that they fit in to the web-like structure of the community. After being here a while we have been “adopted” by a lovely Christian lady from the church and now wherever we go we are greeted by “relatives” who come up and say “Hello, I am your nephew or mum or brother or aunty”. It has been quite confusing at first trying to remember the names and the special relationship terms but it has made us feel as if we are starting to belong here.



When we arrived on the island there were no other MAF families here and no base manager so we were in at the deep end and have had to learn very quickly how to “swim”. The first few weeks were very hard for all the family as we tried to adjust to the new way of life with very little guidance. Later a MAF family from Lake Evella base came over to be a temporary base manager and that was a great help to us.

We are now getting to know others in the community and working out how things operate out here. There is only one shop on the island and that is very expensive because of transport costs. However the fruit and vegetables are subsidised as they are “manymak ŋatha” (good/healthy food). Graham and Jonathan have been very enthusiastically planting vegetables in our huge garden. They have cassava (a kind of long potato), bananas, sweet potato, sunflowers, sugar cane, limons and coconuts growing in the garden. They also have a couple of bantam hens which provide us with a supply of little eggs (when they are in the mood for laying!). The boys have named them Babs and Ginger after the characters in the film ‘Chicken Run’.

We are enjoying doing homeschool and are pleased that all the gardening, etc. which the boys are engaged in is able to be included in their evaluation for their studies. We are now adding some curriculum materials from Light Educational Ministries (based in Canberra) who are very helpful in supporting families educating in remote locations. We are in the process of obtaining government permission to homeschool.

There is a church on the island run by the Yolŋu themselves and we have had opportunities to meet Yolŋu believers through work and fellowship meetings. These are always encouraging times and it demonstrates the ability of the the Gospel to unite people across cultural and ethnic divides.

PRAISE POINTS

- For safe arrival and settling in here on Elcho Island
- For being adopted by a Christian family and the friends we have made
- For all the training finally being put to use serving the local people in the name of Christ.
- For the Lord’s amazing provision in placing us here – it suits us in so many ways.
- For the de Jong family just arrived on Elcho who we know from Bible College last year

PRAYER POINTS

- For safe flying daily
- For help with learning the local languages
- For help with application and compliance with the government homeschool regulations.
- For us as a family to make a difference for the LORD in the community we seek to serve.

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