



Dear Friends,

First, we would like to wish you a joyful Christmas season as we remember the gift of a baby who would be revealed as the promised saviour – for all people in all places. Christmas here in Arnhem Land is stripped of most of the cultural and commercial trappings we are used to, but He is very much their saviour and their simple Christmas celebrations reflect that key fact.



We wrote our last newsletter during the start of the government's intervention programme in the Northern Territory. Thankfully, this initiative has slowed down and some elements may not be implemented owing to the recent change of government. It has now been admitted that the intervention was a piece of electioneering to win voters, and it is interesting that both the Prime Minister and the Indigenous Affairs Minister lost their seats after the election.



On a more positive note, the threat of further change has led some Yolngu to consider ways to regain their independence from welfare payments and we have seen work restart on two abandoned market gardening sites. David and Graham were able to visit one of them this week. The site has a diesel generator to provide electrical power for the bore pump and irrigation control system, but the generator controller isn't working. Getting a technician to Elcho to solve the problem is proving difficult and expensive.



We were able to spend a week in Darwin around Jonathan's birthday and we had a quiet week catching up on sleep, swimming in the pool and making numerous visits to Bunnings (a DIY warehouse) to satisfy Graham and Jonathan's carefully prepared shopping list for garden equipment! The two-hour trip back to Elcho was made on the Numbulwar MAF Cessna 210 and our pilot took us over the stunning Kakadu escarpment.

Graham and Jonathan remain dedicated to their 19 bantams and are fostering two Rhode Island Reds and a clutch of eggs whilst our neighbours are away. When not schooling or in the chook pen we often find Graham reading about chooks, and Jonathan installing a wireless rooster, sorry, router!

Jen was recently able to supply Christian resources to Kaye, the former school principal, who embarked on a month-long safari by road through the mainland communities. All the initial stock was sold at the first stopover but a second puncture forced Kaye to return to Elcho by air. Jen was able to send more stock out with Kaye and her new tyre, and MAF subsidised the flights. The resources were very much appreciated and we hope to be able to revisit these homelands next year by plane with the "mobile market".

The Koehler family from Germany arrived in November and we have been helping them to settle into life on Elcho. Their children, Lea (5) and Lars (3) don't speak English at the moment so our boys have made a start at learning German!

Photos from the top:

- Nativity by Joanne Bayalawuy
- Our dog, Potato
- Graham & Jonathan unloading AirNorth
- Marthakal Rangers removing an unwanted python from our garden

Jonathan Dillon, our base manager, will depart at the end of December to prepare for his forthcoming marriage to Renee. He will be leaving MAF and hopes to settle in New South Wales whilst Renee completes her childcare training and we wish them well in their new life together.

Accommodation for another family has not been found so the Elcho Island MAF base will reduce to three staff from January. We have agreed to take on the management of the base with David flying part-time. We will be trying to maintain our current level of service with help from the Lake Evella base. It will be a challenging time for all the staff, but we remain hopeful that suitable accommodation will become available soon. David has been recovering from a lower-back injury sustained during August. It has been a steady improvement with the family and the other staff taking on many of his regular duties. He has been able to renew his pilot medical last month but still needs to exercise caution when loading aircraft.

Our friends, the Fiorito family, will leave soon bound for MAF Kenya via England and the US. Please remember them in prayer as they move between climates, cultures and continents to complete their induction into the Kenyan programme. MAF is soon to complete the process of becoming MAF International, which will make it easier for staff to move between the different operational groups in Asia-pacific, Africa and South America.

The church here in Galiwin'ku have been encouraged by the recent visit of a former pastor who led Bible studies and teaching each afternoon. A new board of church elders has just been appointed after prayer and discussion, rather than the usual election process. The appointments were made after considering the Bible's teaching on godly character. This is an important change as it bypasses the cultural obligation to vote for clan leaders who may not even be Christians!



The proceeds of the Friday market stall and Kaye's 'safari' have been sufficient to cover all of the proof-copy costs for the Bible Translation project. The proof-reading is now complete and the layouts have been released for printing. The dedication celebration is set for early June next year,

Thank you for your faithful support, generosity and prayer which has made it possible for us to live here alongside the Yolngu in this environment. May God bless you in 2008.

With our love, David, Jen, Graham and Jonathan

Praise Points

- Graham's excellent assessment results, which have encouraged him and us.
- The opportunity to spend a week in Darwin over Jonathan's birthday.
- David's steady recovery from his back injury.
- Attending the Djamburrpuynngu language course in September.
- Arrival of the Koehler family from Germany who are now the third MAF family on Elcho.
- A softening of the government's intervention programme and slowing down of the changes.

Prayer Points

- Wisdom, humility and courage for the new Australian Prime Minister and his government.
- Our visa application needs to be submitted in December to allow time for processing but we are still awaiting some official documents from the UK.
- Elcho base staff as we adapt our activities to run with only two full-time pilots, and we take on the base management.
- At least two more licensed aircraft engineers are needed in Gove in the coming months.

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