



Dear Friends,

The last few months have just flown by. Looking back at what has been happening recently, we can see how we have been sustained through a very challenging time by God's love and care. We are grateful for the prayers and encouragement of our faithful supporters spread across several countries. Thank you to you all, and to our Father above who has often acted quietly through other people in the whirlwind of the moment.

The transition to Base Manager has not been easy. It has been hard work simultaneously administering the base, training new staff, covering staff absence and generally coping with the chaos that is an everyday feature of our charter flying in this environment. As part of 'work experience' at the start of the new school year, the boys spent alternate days helping with the baggage handling and office duties, and Jen has often helped with administration. The other staff have been very supportive and flexible, but David has only been able to fly occasionally. However, this has provided more time for his back injury to heal, and we hope for a time of stability in the next few months as the new staff settle in and he returns to flying more regularly.



Andrew Newton (relief pilot) has returned to Elcho for a few months and we welcomed the Vogel family for their first community posting. Michael, Jael and Janaya (18 months) are from Switzerland, having first completed the Mission Aviation Course at BCV in 2007 and spent their first six months at Gove. We celebrated Michael's first 1000 hours flying the week after they arrived. The de Jong family moved to Gove in early February just in time for the birth of their second baby, Benaiah, born several weeks early.

As you may know, the Government has made an official apology to the "Stolen Generation" and Aboriginal people in general for the policies of the past. A community 'Sorry Service' was held here on Elcho Island outside the church where the apology was again read out and local leaders reflected on this further step towards reconciliation. This is against the back-drop of the Intervention Programme and local government reorganisation which is changing the welfare system, community funding and health management.

Since Christmas there has been a constant stream of funeral ceremonies in progress in Galiwin'ku and local communities. Each one may last from several days to several weeks and they are the main cultural focus, drawing relatives from neighbouring areas. Being a traditionally oral culture, these events are times when the history of the land is recited in song and enacted through dance.

Ceremonies are a collision point for traditional beliefs and Christian faith – a conflict that every Aboriginal Christian has to wrestle with. It takes wisdom and discernment to separate the different elements, and we continue to be uncertain in how much we can participate and how best to support our friends during these events. Sunday fellowship meetings often take place at the ceremony in place of the church venue. A Christian family may have fellowship meetings every day throughout the event and this often leads to reconciliation between families and a recommitment to the Lord.

A funeral can also place a huge strain on a homeland when the population may double or triple overnight. We are kept busy flying people, food and fuel into the homeland every few hours throughout the ceremony's duration. We had the pleasure of flying a mission team of Yolngu from Galiwin'ku church to nearby Mapuru homeland to encourage Christian believers and lead worship during the most recent funeral.



We have had continuing encounters with the Australian wildlife. A saltwater crocodile was shot just off the beach after it had been chasing swimming children. We all went down to the beach with most of Galiwin'ku to see it close-up and see those teeth! We removed a snake from the Koehler's bathroom, and have had more hungry pythons in with the chooks, losing several chicks, hens and a rooster.



On Easter Sunday we were in Gawa homeland visiting Jen's adopting sister, Gotha. We stayed overnight in the old school and shared a communion meal of damper and wild berry juice. Jen found a 1.5m crocodile blocking her way to the school bathroom! The Yolngu didn't believe the news but it was a good joke after the anxious reptile had been trapped and returned to the local creek! We returned home to find that dogs had killed all the chooks except one rooster. The egg-count is obviously right down now, but Graham remains buoyant and he hopes to start again with more chooks later in the year.



We recently saw samples of the Djambarrpuyngu New Testament which is close to its production run. It will be the most significant literary work in the Djambarrpuyngu language, both for content and length, and it is hoped that it will have a similar positive influence on the wider community as did the first English Bible on the people of England. We will leave Elcho for home a few days after the Dedication Service in June and very much hope to bring a New Testament with us.

Our plans for furlough are coming together and we are very much looking forward to spending time with our families, friends and partner churches. We will send out our itinerary in the next few weeks so you will know where to find us! In the remaining eight weeks there is much to do in preparation for our furlough, both personally and at work. We are delighted that Daniel, Silke and Zoe Roth, our friends from Lake Evella base, will be covering our leave and caring for Potato. We are looking forward to catching up with everyone and hopefully seeing you soon.

With our love, David, Jen, Graham and Jonathan

### **Praise Points**

- Approval from the NT government to continue homeschooling in 2008.
- Lisa Detlefsen, MAF's new support teacher, assisting Jen with homeschooling each month.
- Full recovery from David's lower back problems.
- Provision of suitable long-term accommodation for a fourth staff pilot arriving in May.
- Short-term and long-term engineering staff have been recruited to work at Gove.
- Official apology to Aboriginal people from the Australian Federal Government.

### **Prayer Points**

- Vogel family now temporarily back in Nhulunbuy awaiting the birth of their second child.
- Timely approval of our visa application which has now been submitted.
- Predictable supply of aviation fuel to Elcho and other MAF bases.
- Time for reassigning duties, training new staff and handing over the base to Daniel Roth.
- Final preparations for the Djambarrpuyngu New Testament print-run and dedication event.

**David, Jen, Graham and Jonathan Pett** serving with **Mission Aviation Fellowship**

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