

August 2010

Pastor Ben and Julie walked out of Liberia into freedom!

Dear Friends,

Last month, in the *Lectern*, I began to tell the story of our escape from Liberia after being released from jail. In that letter I recalled my need for hip replacement surgery & how my need was heard and accepted by First Lutheran Church. On November 8, 1993 I arrived in Cleveland for my first visit to the USA for hip surgery. But it was a long journey for Julie and me before I was ever able to get on the plane to the USA!

The journey home to Ghana... which led me to the USA...

When Charles Taylor launched his final bid to overtake Monrovia, the capital of the Republic of Liberia, we heard that some of his soldiers had plans to execute any remaining ECOWAS (Economic Community Of West African States) citizens still living in Liberia. Charles Taylor and his soldiers were leading a rebel uprising against Samuel Doe, who was then the President of Liberia. So Julie and I decided to finally leave Liberia at all cost. We were advised by our Liberian coworkers at the Lutheran Training Institute to get out while we were still able. We fled into the bush with other coworkers to hide from the marauding soldiers. We were told later that these soldiers were specifically looking to kill us, for reasons unknown to us, even today.

We were in the bush for three weeks and our survival was a miracle! We parted with our sparse belongings so that our Liberian friends could show us the way to the border. Julie & I walked across the Northern border of Liberia into Guinea, and were helped to go to the border town of Zerekore, where we stayed for two months.

Unknown to Julie and me, during this time, Dr. Elike Takyi had managed to get the need of my hip replacement all the way through to First Lutheran Church. But, because there was no news from us, or about us, we were presumed dead. It was a rare miracle in those days, in that particular place, for an ECOWAS citizen to survive an escape.

As soon as we were able to get some money, we got letters out to Dr. Takyi and our friend Barbara Walters in the USA. She had been the Mission Business Manager for the Lutheran Training Institute in Liberia, and had been taken back to the USA just in time before she would be stranded. We got a letter of reply from Dr. Takyi saying that I had been accepted for the hip surgery and needed to get back to Ghana, and then contact Dr. Denis Radefeld of First Lutheran.

Julie and I left Guinea May 19, 1993 and arrived home in Ghana on May 23, 1993. We were reunited with our two older children, who had been staying in Ghana with family, who also presumed us dead. Our third child, who Julie carried in her womb while in jail and through so much of this, is our daughter Ida. She was named after the wife of Dr. Takyi, who was an integral part of our freedom and my eventual hip replacement.

Immediately, I contacted Dr. Denis Radefeld, but the US Embassy refused my Visa application twice. It was former Congressman Sherrod Brown, now Senator and First Lutheran member, who wrote letters on my behalf to the Embassy in Accra, Ghana to help me finally get my Visa. And on November 8, 1993 I got on that plane, headed towards the future with all of you!

With love - Pastor Ben



Left to Right: Ida Takyi, The late Dr. Ike Takyi, Julie Wilson, Pastor Woody Chamberlain, Pastor Bennett Wilson (2004)