Lunch was a dollop of congealed mashed cassava, with slimy okra & fish sauce. Reminded me of nasal exudate from bovine malignant catarrhal fever. But it tasted great! And it’s fun: you fork a wad of cassava mash into the okra-fish slime and try to get it to your mouth before it slides back off.

Clint groaned apologetically about eating certain textures and retired to his room to feast on Pringles he’d joyfully found in the market. As he left, I called after him, “If you muscle past the gag reflex, it opens a whole new world of possibilities.” (Emil, in Pixar’s “Ratatouille.” My kids would be proud I quoted a movie…)

Last November I was honored to join the Christian Veterinary Africa Network gathering in Nigeria. In our last couple of letters, you’ve met Mandieka, Quarcoopome, Soku, and Joseph. Today, meet the imperturbable Stella, and the colorful Reverend Abuba. It was his little Corolla I mentioned last time that aspired to become a road grader…as we went out to the Fulani camps.

Treating their animals was a blast— white, long-horn Zebu-Sanga cattle, long-legged dogs, black headed sheep and a variety of goats. So fun to work on animals again! Steve, Clint and I wore scrub tops; Clint had brought extra. Steve spilled Berenil cattle medicine all over his—but his good humor invited everyone to laugh with him.

Stella, like the other Nigerians and Ghanaians, wore a white lab coat, and jumped in with exuberance and energy, eagerly treating animals. But while most of us had boots, Stella wore sandals and very white socks. I don’t know how she did it. Our boots were always decorated with manure—in minutes. In some parts of the corral, it was at least 6 inches deep, with just enough dried crust on top to deceive you—like a Chinese tiger trap—into stepping on it. But even at the end of the day, Stella’s socks were still pure white—and she’d worked as hard as anyone! I watched for levitation, maybe hovering on angel wings… found no scientific explanation, but lotsa laughs.

The Reverend Abuba is a fascinating, energetic Fulani believer and evangelist. He drove that little Toyota Corolla through potholes and gullies like he thought it was an indestructible tank, bottoming out, scraping the
undercarriage. Sometimes I said, “Ouch” for the car; Abuba would say, “O sorry!” thinking I was bruised, not the car.

Joseph asked if he knew where he was going; none of us had ever been on this road before. “Of course. Over behind that hill,” he replied confidently, pointing with his chin. “Don’t worry, Fulani have geography in their heads. We never get lost.” And we didn’t.

As he drove, he told his story. Years ago, when he was just starting his Fulani Christian Association, someone gave him a car, another gave money for gas, another, the salary for the secretary. Each Spring, for the last 30 years, believers come from different countries to encourage each other and grow together. But this year he canceled the meeting. Persecution had ramped up. A believer was martyred. They are raising support for the widow and seven kids. He has had death threats, but he continues undeterred. What an example!

That second day on our way in, we stopped unexpectedly by a small church, near the Fulani settlement. Abuba likes to involve the local church so they can follow up afterward. He opened the dusty Corolla’s trunk and rummaged out a thermos of hot coffee and three fresh loaves of bread. Sitting in the pastor’s sparsely furnished mud-walled house to “take breakfast,” we tore chunks off a loaf and sipped hot coffee, chatting with the pastor and his wife, encouraging and praying with them. Then we left them the other two loaves and headed on to the Fulani camp with a song in our hearts. If that was all we’d done that day, it would have been worth it. What a joy to visit courageous front-line brothers and sisters in Christ!

Another evangelist named Yohanna rode with us the third day. He told about how he once had a Land cruiser that could take these roads better than Abuba’s Corolla. It had been carrying him out to a village where the Lord helped him start a new church; they grew enough to build a small building, but didn’t have money for a roof. Then one time his Landcruiser burst into flames and burned up! He sold it for scrap metal and bought the roofing. “I don’t feel bad,” he smiled. “That Land cruiser helped me start a church, then pay for its roof.” Good investment.

Re-shaping priorities, Fred & Vicki

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