

Sheryl Howe

From: "Sheryl Howe" <sahowe@wbt.org>
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Sent: Saturday, May 21, 2005 11:32 AM
Subject: Week #1: The rather lengthy account of my first week...

Week #1: The rather lengthy account of my first week in Ethiopia even when I left out the spider, the rain and why they need to have the cake and the guy serving cake on a high, high pedestal at wedding receptions in Ethiopia

Alright, I sat down to write this email and my neighbor stopped by to tell me that they'd killed a rat in their apartment. I've heard these things in the ceiling. They sound big. My neighbor said this one was about a foot long and she's never seen one this big. I was happy thinking the one in the ceiling is gone. She said this one was actually in their living room. Lovely.

Work is going so very well. This is a pleasant surprise considering how poorly the week started off. I promise I'm not a pessimist but I was thinking that the point of this trip would just be for me to document things and then someone else would be in charge of fixing it. But things started to look up on Thursday. And yesterday, I decided it was going well enough that I could take some time off to go see the big huge market type area in Addis.

This market place is just overwhelming. Driving in Addis is an obstacle course anyway --- people, trucks, goats, buses, cows... Nobody seems to watch where they're going --- and they don't really care if you honk at them either; the other day, some ladies were standing in the road on the way to church, we made a U-turn and were coming straight at them. They're looking right at us, we couldn't have missed them by more than a few inches and neither lady moved. If it were me, almost hit by a Land Cruiser truck thing: (a) I'd move out of its way and (b) my heart would be racing having a big truck thing nearly hit me.

The market place was my first shot at being a pedestrian (way too close to big buses), in addition to the place being a huge maze jam packed with people --- and buses and cars and trucks and donkeys... It's kind of divided into sections: the car parts section, the plastic bucket section, the butter section... lots and lots of little shops --- some maybe only two feet wide back in these dark, narrow alley-ways where you can't really see where you're walking through the mud, stepping over vendors who are squatting on the ground making things while other people carrying huge amounts of stuff on their heads push you out of their way and into piles of whatever the merchandise happens to be. There are also shops with low, low ceilings so I had to walk around them bent over. I managed to buy a pair of sandals while I was there, which I needed for today when I went to a wedding.

The wedding was very cool --- although I didn't actually see much of the wedding ceremony. It was to start at 10am. We got there shortly after 10:00, place was pretty empty but the woman in charge of decorating sent us off to get flowers that actually matched (wedding colors were blue and white; red and orange flowers were delivered) so we were hanging out in the flower shop until about 11:30 waiting for the florist to finish with the flowers, the whole transaction was rather complicated by the fact that the people I was with had little to no (me) Amharic language skill and the florists had little to no English language skill. When we got back, the wedding had just started, but the church was already packed so I saw some of the ceremony (shoving my way past people to get to a spot where I could kind of see until somebody else shoved me out of their way). I gave up and hung out outside (with at least half of the guests) until the reception started. The reception was nice --- especially nice because some guy came and got our group and put us near the front of the food line...

It's been quite the action-packed week...

And also, Ethiopia has a fruit fly season. It's now. All of the sudden, lots and lots of flies appear. They're everywhere. I should have been clued in to this possibility even before the fruit flies appeared because in my apartment here, there is a fly swatter prominently displayed in every room. The only thing on the walls in my bedroom: hook with a fly swatter. I'm definitely honing my fly-swatting skills while I'm here --- but didn't manage to get the one irritating one in here last night. He was outside the mosquito net so he couldn't get close to me to bother me --- just the noise, amplified like everything else in this apartment with the tile floors.

Thank you so much for praying, whoever among you were praying --- I'm just so pleased with how work has been the last two days and there's really no other explanation. It wouldn't have just naturally turned from how things

were on Monday to how I left them Friday.

Sheryl