

News from Sarah Casson November 2017

"For everything there is a season, a time for every activity under heaven: a time to plant and a time to harvest, a time to cry and a time to laugh, a time to grieve and a time to dance..." Ecclesiastes 3:1-4

Dear friends, I'm sorry that it's taken me so long to let you know the outcome of my viva exam in September. I passed, with minor corrections. What a relief! I don't think I've ever been quite as nervous as I was going into that small bright examination room. At the end of an hour and a half's robust grilling, I was taken by surprise by my two examiners' complimentary comments. They were enthusiastic about my thesis and encouraged me to publish it as a scholarly book. This was a huge boost for me and helped reassure me that the labours of the past four years have been worthwhile. Thank you very much for your prayers for the viva, for your financial support throughout my studies and for cheering me on through the doctoral marathon. I have now finished the corrections and have been awarded my degree. The official graduation ceremony, complete with bright blue and maroon academic regalia, will be on January 16th. Meanwhile I've been exploring possibilities for getting my thesis published.



completed thesis



October hawthorn

Sadly the past four months have also been marked by shocks and sorrows. That's why I've delayed in writing this letter. I have lost two very dear friends, brothers in God's family, both of whom died very suddenly in the prime of life. I am still coming to terms with their deaths.

At the end of July, at the beginning of a holiday in the Cairngorms with my brother John, I received the news that my friend Dave Renno had been killed in Uganda in an

accident involving his work tools. Dave lived in south-western Uganda with his wife Dani. We were students together at London Bible College. Dave first sensed God calling him to work in Uganda when we were on a month long Bible college placement there in 1999. I will never forget the remarkable way God planted in Dave a love for Uganda over those four weeks of youth training. Dave went on to work there for sixteen years in grassroots youth discipleship. Dave and Dani's home in Kilembe, overlooked by the magnificent Rwenzori mountains, and graced by their gift of hospitality, has been an oasis for me over the years. I would arrive depleted by the demands of life in Bunia and soon found my batteries recharged, spiritually, emotionally and literally too!



Dave and Dani

I travelled to Uganda for Dave's funeral with his mother Julie and his sister Suzie, partly to support them in this most painful of journeys by providing a little local knowledge. More especially, I went to say goodbye to this exceptional brother of mine. Dave was creative, innovative, patient, quirky, hilarious, a deep thinker, a great listener, indefatigably determined. His burial beside the house he had been building was unutterably sad. There was comfort, though, in the ritual of covering his coffin with handfuls of the rich volcanic soil as we sang, with arms round each other, *"The Lord's my Shepherd, I'll not want. He makes me lie in pastures green... I will trust in you alone, I will trust in you alone, for your endless mercy follows me, your goodness will lead me home."*

Then in October, as I was returning from a wonderful week's holiday in Scotland, I received the devastating news that our vicar, Trevor Patterson, had died of a heart attack while out running. Trevor had been at Holy Trinity Richmond, my home and sending church, for nineteen years, ever since my Dad left in 1997. It is especially difficult to write this letter as I know that many of you reading it knew and loved Trevor. Trevor was married to Kate, with three wonderful sons, Johnny, Connor and Ben. In our church family we are all grieving deeply.

Trevor was like an older brother for me, a spiritual mentor who was incredibly supportive of our work in DRC. He loved Africa himself, having worked in Kenya as a missionary before he was ordained. He visited me twice in Bunia, and his spiritual wisdom and committed pastoral care helped me to survive the toughest moments I have experienced while working with the Eastern Congo Group (ECG). He accompanied me through all the twists and turns of work in DRC, and was always available to help me explore my sense of calling and discern God's leading for the next step. In his sermons he used to refer often to what he had learnt in Africa. This helped me to bridge the yawning gap between life in south-

west London and life in DRC. I feel spiritually bereft without Trevor. This is an opportunity, though, to learn more deeply that God alone is our everlasting rock that the Holy Spirit is our comforter and counsellor, and that Jesus is the Risen One who has faced down death and conquered it.

I was privileged to have a long chat with Trevor a few weeks before he died. We talked about my possible return to Bunia in January. He counselled me that it would be unwise simply to return to DRC and try to pick up where I had left off, without making changes. Trevor reminded me that I was nearly burnt out when I came back in 2012. I realise that I need to be open to new ways of living and working that honour God with a rhythm of rest as well as work, and space for creativity, listening, compassion and faithfulness in small things. I need to learn that I am not indispensable. The work is God's, not our own. Sometimes I need to let things go even when they are not complete. This is a hard lesson for me!

There are many possible roles for me in DRC, in particular, teaching at Shalom University in both the translation and the PhD programmes, translation consulting, and training and mentoring translators and consultants. I am still trying to discern which of these may be the best fit. I would also like to write more, whether academically or otherwise. And another surprise: in the last six months I have begun a relationship with Nick, who works in Sheffield as an engineer. We met in February on a Christian retreat at Scargill House in Yorkshire. At the moment we are getting to know each other and trying to discern how God may be leading us for the future. Our relationship is an unexpected gift from God which adds another element to the mix of uncertainties and possibilities for the future! If we decide to stay together, it will affect my role in DRC and the way I may work there.



autumnal Cairngorms



with Nick

I plan to return to DRC at the end of January to work with ECG for an initial period of three months. In March I will work with the Omi translation team checking the book of Romans, still fresh in my mind from my PhD. The Omi translators are well on their way now to finishing the New Testament. Once Romans is complete, only 1 and 2 Corinthians will still need checking. I will also participate in ECG's annual group meetings, and in a translation consultants' training seminar. During this time I hope to explore options for my future role, discuss with Shalom University how I could be involved there, and look at housing possibilities. Between now and my departure for DRC there is much to do preparing for work with the Omi team, reconnecting with friends and supporters, and packing up my life in Twickenham. As I return to DRC, I will continue to rely on financial gifts from churches and friends for my income.

Thank God...

- ✂ that I passed my viva and that my studies are complete!
- ✂ for a restorative holiday in Scotland.
- ✂ for the progress the Omi team have made towards completing the New Testament.
- ✂ for the gift of friends.
- ✂ for God's unshakeable love, even in the face of death.

Please pray...

- ✂ for comfort and strength for the Renno family and the Patterson family in their grief.
- ✂ for God's encouragement and direction for Holy Trinity Church.
- ✂ for discernment regarding my future role in DRC, and fruitful discussions with colleagues.
- ✂ for God's guidance for Nick and me for the future of our friendship.
- ✂ for stability in DRC as the country moves towards elections, and for just leaders with integrity and vision.

With love, Sarah