



# News From Mark and Diane Vanderkooi

October 2010

*Recently Diane tried her hand at farming Kwong style. In her own words...*

Farming is in my blood from several generations back. As a consequence, every year we haul more manure, pond-bottom black soil, compost and wood ash to improve our backyard vegetable garden here in Tchaguine. We then enjoy eating *our* kind of vegetables: tomatoes, beans, cucumbers, lettuce, bell peppers, green onions, sweet corn, and this year, much to Mark's chagrin, lima beans. The only vegetables grown by the Kwong are okra and pumpkin, which we enjoy as well – sautéed okra, pumpkin pie, pumpkin soup and pumpkin bread – Mmm...

Farming is likewise in the Kwong people's blood, but for them it is a matter of life or death. As the first rains soften the parched ground in May, every able-bodied Kwong man and woman rushes out to work the ground from sun-up to sun-down. Women major on the sandy, high ground crops - peanuts, sesame and beans - while men stick to the flood-plain crop of millet.

For 10 years the women have harangued me with the assertion that a *real* woman cultivates *peanuts*. It didn't matter that I could grow American sweet corn or could fill the back yard with pumpkins. Nor did it matter that we produce a steady supply of books and radio programs which Jesus called *real* food. The insinuation was clear – unless I grew peanuts, I would somehow be lacking as a woman in their eyes. So I asked myself: How difficult would their style of farming be? Could I handle it? Could I even possibly improve upon it by applying knowledge gleaned from the internet and books? There was only one way to find out.

I began in June by cultivating a single “bloque” – a nebulous measure of area which works out to something like 1/7 of an acre. Since my goal in this experiment would be to better understand the challenges a Kwong woman faces, I resolved to do the lion's share of the work myself.

Now it is October. The experiment is complete and the results are sobering. I hired out the two tasks that I really could not manage: a full day of chopping down scrub trees that had grown up since the previous year – an expense of \$2. I also hired oxen and a plow to turn over the ground – another \$2. The seed cost \$1.90. The only other expense was \$0.50 spent on tea to compensate the boys who hauled the harvested peanuts by ox cart. Total expenditures: \$6.40 plus 35 hours of personal labor – cultivating, planting, weeding, harvesting, and pulling the pods off the plants. So far, so good.

But then I measured out my harvest which came in at 23 “coros”- about a bushel. The ecclesiastical consensus in Chad is that the tithe is calculated on the gross. That leaves me with 21 coros. At a market value of \$0.30 a coro I should receive \$6.30. Oops! There's something wrong with this picture: 35 hours of labor earned me a negative 10 cents.

As I bemoan my low yield, the ladies try to lift my spirits by informing me that their peanuts produced much less than mine. Other friends say I could make more money if I hold onto the peanuts 7 months (barring they don't rot or get eaten by bugs in the interim). Still others tell me that if I haul them 35 miles to another market, the price will be better (but as usual, they fail to consider the time and expense of hauling them). Furthermore, if I shell them all myself, or if I had not hired out any of the work in the first place, I would show a little profit (but at the price of many more hours of labor.) The truth is, no matter how you slice it, growing peanuts Kwong style is a no-win proposition.

Nevertheless, my peanut project was a success insofar as we better understand the challenges the Kwong face in their quest for survival. We have seen again that life for them is like trudging through deep sand – lots of effort, and not much to show for it. We empathize all the more with their struggles and we feel their hopelessness and discouragement. Even as I write, they are crying out for just one more rain storm to water their staple crop of millet. We, too, cry all the more urgently along with them.

*Oh Lord, have mercy upon our friends and neighbors. Bless them with the rain they need and food to eat. And show us daily what we can do to help those around us.*

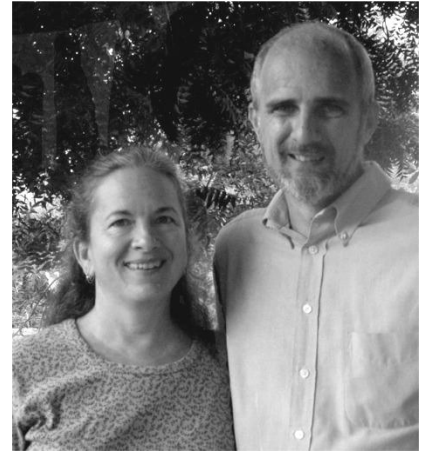
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# The *Flip* Side

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## The next big thing

We have finished Luke and Genesis in both their written and audio forms. (Colossians, 1 Peter and James were finished some years ago.) So what's the next big thing? **The Psalms** – or at least a substantial portion of them. We could have chosen to do Acts (which is the sequel to Luke, of course) and the Kwong would have been richer in ecclesiastical history, or we could have chosen Revelation (of which we already have substantial portions in draft) and the Kwong would have known the future better. But quite frankly, they live very difficult lives right now in the present, and nothing in Scripture is more suited to that than the Psalms. The first Psalm we translated was #30 – sung by David when he recovered from a disease of some kind. The second was #32 – sung by David when the Lord forgave his sins. The third was #33 – which meditates on the sovereignty of God over all things. These are themes which touch the Kwong in a profound way which few parts of the New Testament ever can. As we embark on this project, the thing that amazes us, besides the exquisite beauty of the text itself, is that generations of Bible translators have neglected it in favor of the New Testament (which, sooner or later, we too will translate in its entirety.)



## Sparks of Life

As we have mentioned in years past, we have been concerned at our seeming impotence to impact the leadership in the Kwong protestant church. It's not much, but we have seen some recent stirrings of enthusiasm where previously there seemed only apathy. This is particularly the case among the women Diane meets with every Thursday morning. Besides coming in greater numbers to pray and study the Scriptures, this year they did not, as in other years, cancel the meeting for the duration of the rainy season. "We need to keep praying," they said. Similarly, the elders here in Chageen are being more faithful about getting together for prayer and Bible study on Friday afternoons. Interestingly, the people taking the lead in these meetings are lay men and women – and in the case of the women, some Catholic ladies. Both of us have thoroughly enjoyed being a part of these meetings and seeing these new sparks of life. Please continue to pray for the leadership of our Kwong churches.

## Our ministry vindicated – from the sublime to the ridiculous

*"When I read this in Nancere, it is just words. But when I read it in Kwong, I tremble."*

Spoken by Pastor Old Moses after reading the story of Jesus' passion in our newly published translation of Luke. Pastor Old Moses has ministered most of his life in Nancere which is one of two favored ecclesiastical languages for the Evangelical Church of Chad.

*"You guys have a real ministry of providing such nice kittens for all the village people."*

Spoken by Tabitha, our sweeping lady who, it seems, has a somewhat less sophisticated vision of our ministry than Pastor Old Moses.

## Furlough

On October 28, if all goes according to plan, we will arrive in the USA for a 7 month home assignment. Our tentative schedule is the following:

November – Union City, Indiana.

December – January - Springfield, Ohio

February – May – Dekalb, Illinois.

We are scheduled to fly back to Chad on June 1, 2011. You may contact us by email or call us at 765-964-4942.