TEN YEARS GONE

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Category: Observations

Four houses, two countries, two degrees, one dog.... what the noughties held for the Arthurs.

I know that technically the decade doesn't end for another year, but in popular perception the decade ends tonight and I'm happy to go along with that.

This time ten years ago we were living in Abidjan, where I was director of the SIL CÃ´te d'Ivoire-Mail Branch and Sue was working on the Kouya New Testament Translation. Dave and Sam were in French government schools in the city and everything was very tense! Just before Christmas 1999 a coup d'Ã©tat shook the country and things still really haven't got back to normal ten years later. This has not been a good decade for CÃ´te d'Ivoire.

In January 2000 a plane carrying our friends and boss, Bob Chapman and his wife Ruth crashed into the Atlantic off Abidjan. I found myself having to identify the bodies, which was one of the most harrowing events of my life. In May that year, we returned to the UK and Dave and Sam started school in Southampton. After a few months we were able to move from the cramped house we were living in to a larger house with a huge garden. Shortly after we were installed, Bassam moved in to stay.

We very much enjoyed our time in our house in Blenheim Gardens. It was the first time in our married lives that we stayed anywhere for more than a couple of years and we imagined being there till retirement.

In 2002 the Kouya New Testament was published, but owing to the political situation in CÃ´te d'Ivoire it has still not been possible to have a public dedication ceremony. Still the important thing is that people are reading and using the book. We hope that an audio version of the New Testament will be available soon.

Freed from her responsibilities working on Kouya, Sue started her regular travel to Madagascar as a translation consultant with the Seed Company. I filled my time working to combine three translator training schools into one unit the ETP. Around the middle of the decade, I'd done all I could with the ETP and it was time for me to move on and do something different. For a while I worked in strategic planning and leadership development across Francophone Africa while also working on a Masters in Theology, which I completed in 2007. Sue is also working towards a Masters (in Biblical Interpretation) which she hopes to finish in a couple of years.

David, spent four years in Bristol as a student and after graduating with flying colours is now gainfully employed as a web developer in the city, while Sam is in his second year of studies in Colchester.

Despite being very happy in Southampton and having a wonderful and very supportive group of friends in the city, we realised in 2007 that it was time to move on again. At the end of that year I was appointed Executive Director of Wycliffe Bible Translators UK and in 2008 we moved up here to High Wycombe. The house is nice (though the garden is tiny) and we can be up on the Chiltern hills

in ten minutes from our front door, but we still don't quite feel settled here. Perhaps all of the moves over the years are taking their toll.

In the second half of the decade both Sue's mum and my mam died after a few months of illness. These were stressful times. It seems strange to think that we are now members of the oldest generation in our families. I still think I'm seventeen.

There are lots of other things I could mention. Family holidays in France, walking in the Lake District and lots of good books. But how to sum up a decade?

Bits of it were very tough. A military coup, losing friends in a plane crash and then moving home to another continent all in five months was very hard. Thankfully, the rest of the decade was not lived at that intensity, though our mothers' final illnesses were equally distressing.

On the other hand, some bits were very good, too. We visited some amazing places (sometimes getting to visit them together).

One thing that hasn't changed over the last ten years is the debt we owe to those who faithfully pray for us and support us financially. We literally could not do it without you - thank you so very much. And lying behind all we do is the promised presence of Jesus Christ. Sometimes we are aware of Him, and sometimes not. But he continues with us, guiding us, upholding us and all too slowly transforming us. I still can't quite believe that he entrusts the message of his gospel to people like us, but he does.

Here's to another ten years. I wonder what they will bring?

No prize will be awarded to the first person who comments on where the title of this blog post comes from.