35 YEARS AS NOMADS FOR THE KINGDOM

Posted on September 2, 2019 by Eddie

It's 35 years this month since we left our jobs and started on an adventure that has carried us around the world, with more house moves than we can count; thanks to God and some incredible supporters.
Category: Observations

It's the first working day of September 2019. On the equivalent day 35 years ago, in September 1984, we were starting our first month without any visible means of financial support. Since before our wedding in early 1983, we had been convinced that God was calling us to some sort of mission work in the Francophone world; though exactly what and where eluded us.

Over the early years of our marriage, we met with friends to pray and discuss our future and spent a lot of time talking to the leadership of our church, Above Bar in Southampton and eventually decided that we should apply to be Bible translators with Wycliffe.



By our flat in Granges les Valances during French Study.

So, at the end of August in 1984, my contract as a university researcher drew to a close and Sue left her job as a bilingual assistant with an engineering company and we set off for Moorlands College for a studying the Bible and mission. This was followed by another year getting to grips with field linguistics and translation studies with Wycliffe near to High Wycombe before we headed off to France for seven months to bring my French up to standard. Dave was born in the short hiatus between our linguistics study and us moving to France.

After a few months back home in Southampton, during which time we were formally commissioned as missionaries at Above Bar Church, we headed off to Cameroon for a three-month course orientating us to life in Africa. We then moved on to Ivory Coast, which was to be our home for the rest of the millenium.

From 1988 to 1994, we lived in the Kouya village of Gouabafla, where we were part of the team translating the New Testament into the Kouya language. For the most part, I took the lead in the Kouya translation, while Sue took care of the boys (Sam was born during this time). The first four years in Africa were particularly tough, all of us suffered with malaria to an extent, but Sue had repeated attacks and was ill for a significant amount of time.

In 1994, we moved to Abidjan, where I moved into mission leadership and Sue stepped into the translation project on a more or less full-time basis. Working with translators in the village and Didier, a Kouya friend who was living in Abidjan, Sue was able to push ahead and together with our co-workers, Philip and Heather was able to more or less complete the New Testament before we left Africa in 2000 for the kids' education.



We came back to the UK, fully expecting to return to Africa once Dave and Sam had left home, but that never happened. We settled back in Southampton, where I took on a role leading a team redeveloping the training which Wycliffe provides for Bible translators and linguists in Europe. Meanwhile, Sue and the team worked on putting the finishing touches to the Kouya New Testament. At some point shortly after our return, Sue was asked if she would like to help with a project in Madagascar - little did we know that almost two decades later that would be the main focus of her work.

In 2008, I took over as UK Director for Wycliffe Bible Translators. In one sense this was a massive privilege and I'm very grateful for the team that I got to work with and the exposure it gave me to the wider UK mission scene. I built some very important contacts and friendships during that time. However, it was a job that I never really wanted to do and which I certainly didn't enjoy. Looking back, it is clear to see that I was the right person for the job however, I was able to guide Wycliffe through some changes which were not popular, but which were very neccesary. We had always expected to stay based in Southampton, but it proved impossible for me to do the director role from there, so we moved up to High Wycombe.

Sue carried on working in Madagascar, making two or three trips a year to work with teams. Her role is to check the translation that the teams have worked on in her absence and to ensure that it is faithful to the original. Her aim is always to help the teams improve their work and to grow in their understanting of what translation entails. It's more the role of a friend and mentor than an examiner or teacher.



Having stepped down from my role as director in 2014, I spent a couple of years working for Global Connections during which time I also started a PhD. Then in 2017, we moved up to Yorkshire so that I could concentrate on my studies - as long as there is a good internet connection and an airport, Sue can do her work.

Thirty-five years ago, Sue wanted to be a professional translator, while I was quite happy doing research in plant biology. Today, we have returned to our roots. Sue is actively involved in translating the Bible, while I am on the fringes of Christian academia researching, writing and teaching about mission.

This brief sketch hasn't mentioned all of the house moves that we did; there are a lot of them. Somehow, in the midst of it all, we brought up two boys who have grown into well-rounded men. We've even got two grandsons - how did we get that old?

So what are the lessons of thirty-five years? Well, I'm vaguely hoping that by the time I retire, I'll have worked out what it is that I want to do when I grow up. On a serious note:

- We are immensely grateful to God for the privilege of doing what it is we do. We've been incredibly privileged to be exposed to different people and cultures in many parts of the world. Our lives have been enriched by making friends from across the globe and seeing the way that God is at work in different situations.
- We are also immensely grateful to the friends who have prayed for us and supported us

financially over the years. We moved to France in 1986 with less than 100 pounds a month income - which was less than our rent, but we survived and even thrived. A special word for Above Bar Church, who have been and continue to be incredibly supportive.

