

# the delorenzoflyer

missionary news from mike and renee delorenzo - in east africa with AIM

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## August 2007

Renee and I curled up by the fireplace today. It's quite cold in Nairobi, unseasonably rainy too. Today is the tail end of an overdue week of vacation for me... the week itself an end to three overly busy months. I have fallen behind on nearly everything, including this letter. Finding time to write has become the elusive quest of my life these past couple years - but one I may be finally gaining on.

I took some vacation days and an airplane and headed off to Kenya's **northern frontier** with the family this past week. We picnicked in the desert, encouraged our missionary friends who are working in a remote and lonely place, saw the stars again, and generally rested from the pace of the past several months. Upon our return, we welcomed back to Nairobi a missionary family who has become dear to us over the years. They have also now become our neighbors, much to our delight, and will soon be our co-workers in the Media Ministry.

September marks the beginning of AIM's On-Field Media Ministry, which I hope you already know some about from our previous letters. Myself, along with two others, are now in the throws of developing a viable ministry model for this new department, and looking forward to jumping in with the actual work. *Looking forward* is perhaps understating it... We three are giddy with excitement, but attempting to keep a low profile lest our new ministry looks like too much fun (which it probably is.)

I have arranged to share my time between AIM AIR and the media department equally. Some have expressed concern (unwarranted I assured them) that I would simply resort to filling two full-time positions. Such imbalance is not entirely out of character for me (Renee rolls her eyes at this point in the conversation) but I have taken careful steps to make sure that proper boundaries are in place. I will, in effect, have two bosses. Despite my best efforts, however, this will be something to pray about. Both my flying and the media work are ministries of *service*, and it can be difficult for me to say *no* sometimes when I ought to.

AIM AIR will be losing me as an administrator as I shift over to this dual-role. But my flying will probably continue at pretty much the same intensity as before. The past three months were full - typical runs in and out of Sudan (where they have seen the worst flooding in decades... making travel impossible at times, and giving me plenty of opportunities to muddy the airplane.) I've experienced quite a few of those moments which bring a smile: Arriving at an airstrip to be greeted with welcoming handshakes and a heartfelt "*boy are we glad to see you.*" As I continue to serve and interact with the missionaries who rely on the airplane, I am tuning my senses, now more than ever, to see the stories of God at work through them - stories I will then be able to develop in the media office.

Renee's also excited about the work ahead of us, as it brings me a little closer to home, but also presents a few ways for her to get involved - something that's not as possible for a pilot's wife.

At home... school is in session again. Renee has started Amelia in third grade and Zach in first. The home-schooling is going well. Renee is a natural at teaching, and I think we have some pretty smart kids too. They say the principal is too mean, and that he shouldn't kiss the teacher in class... but I can't help it (she's rather cute.) As for being mean, well I hardly think lectures on *responsibility* qualify as torture.

It's September now and the sun, a bit behind schedule, is shining again here in Kenya. Sometimes I just walk outside and stand in it. After a few cold months, the warm rays can feel like God is smiling down on you. This, our fourth term in Africa, has been mostly sunny days - full of wonder and blessing, and an appropriate measure of hard work to ensure we don't take any of it for granted. Especially all of you. *Thank you* again for your faithful prayers and support that touch us every single day. It feels like a privilege to be here (have I ever said that before?) and we know very well that we are not here alone.

Blessings from the city in the sun,

**Mike&Renee**

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Far north in Kenya's arid semi-desert, in a place dotted with little rises of rock, and speckled with stray camels, is a river and a town called Lokichar.

Arriving in our smallest Cessna some weeks ago, I made a swift pass close to the ground, eyeing the ruts on the runway and inadvertently emptying out a nearby schoolhouse of several hundred children who ran out to see the plane up close. I circled around to land.

Successfully dodging both rivulets and children, the landing was smoother than expected, and my three passengers and I made a hasty retreat to a waiting truck that would take us across the river and toward the reason we were there.

We soon happened upon a new church under construction and then a complex of neat and whitewashed buildings, all fairly new, arranged purposefully, well kept, and out-of-place for Africa.

As we arrived at the compound gate, a boy appeared. He struggled to reach the latch while we waited awkwardly in the back of the truck. The boy continued to struggle, his motions unnatural. I realized after a moment that he was crippled. A view of the compound revealed children all about – hobbling, wheeling, and shuffling to the car park to greet their visitors. Every disability seemed different, unique. The smiles were all the same however. Bright, and beautiful.

Some of the children peered in the open door to the small office where we gathered. Sister Catherine, a gracious Kenyan nun, stood behind her spotless desk, proudly passing out a guest-book to sign. "The John Paul Home for crippled children," she explained, "is named after the late Pope." His picture sat squarely on the wall behind her, looking down with kind approval. "We have forty-four children here currently."

All forty-four gathered in the main rehabilitation room. They sat on floor mats, a mass of giggles and crutches. Each wore a blue tee-shirt with the John Paul motto wrinkled across the back, borne of the Apostle John: "*that they may have life abundant.*"

The doctors I had flown out set up to examine the children, one by one. Each waited for his or her name to be called, and upon hearing it, clambered to his feet (or foot) and took a seat opposite one of the physicians. Our one-day trip to Lokichar was a short visit, simply for follow-up examinations, and to prescribe the next treatment or surgery for each child. I basically helped with filling out paperwork, misspelling every manner of medical term.

The injuries and deformities were shocking to me. Almost as much as the gracious little souls who bore them. These kids formed a marvelous little community of shared pain and struggle. And a shared, if uncommon, pleasure in ordinary things – the things "whole" people take in stride and seldom savor. Swinging on the playground. Greeting a visitor. Singing a song. Meeting a pilot.

I had pulled the gold stripes off my shoulders before we arrived at the compound – they often attract too much attention when I don't particularly want to. Pilots are celebrities out here, and I was trying to keep a low profile. But the kids at the John Paul Home were on to me, and they cornered me after lunch to get my story.

So I reached down into the cargo pockets of my khakis and produced a set of tattered Captain's bars. I buttoned them in place upon my shoulders and watched the eyes of the children light up, their imaginations soar. Two boys, both amputees, leaned in closer on their crutches, gazing at me as if I wasn't the same person who was just standing there a moment ago.

Transformed, I began to tell about my work as a pilot and what it is like to fly around – how exciting it is to climb above the clouds, and to come down and land again. I motioned with my hands, gripping an imaginary control yoke in mid air. I maneuvered the plane through the phases of flight, made a picture perfect landing, and had a captive audience before it was all through.

Some of the boys asked questions about what I studied in order to qualify as a pilot, and how long it would take to learn – questions about the process of becoming. It took me awhile to realize, while answering each question academically, that these boys were imagining themselves there. They were imaging themselves *here* – in my shoes. In my gold bars.

Initially, I couldn't see beyond their broken bodies. With righted eyes, however, I saw these children more whole than most who could look in a mirror and count four perfect limbs. Courage in their souls, love in their spirits, Jesus in their hearts, and the ability to dream impossible things - these count more.

I could understand why the doctors had come. It is truly an awesome calling to be a healer of crippled children. And sister Catherine, laboring patiently without compensation or complaint, she is a saint by any denomination. The marvelous hearts of these children must be largely her doing. Unlike the others, I didn't have much to give the children, except for a few short stories of flying adventure.

My feelings of inadequacy must be the reason that, shortly after taking off that afternoon, I leveled the airplane low to the ground and, with a devious smile, turned directly toward the John Paul Home for Crippled Children. With the throttle pushed wide open, my little Cessna rocketed past the compound and caught the children by surprise. For one second suspended overhead, as the late Pope's picture rattled on the wall, I rolled the gleaming white wings left and right in a raucous wave - my salute to the soaring spirits of a bunch of really great kids.

What I saw, in that fleeting moment, was a courtyard of hands raised skyward, waving joyously into the rumble of a furious fly-by. And even from fifty feet at 150 miles-an-hour, I could see their smiles. Bright, and beautiful.