

## **BLUE SKIES AND CLOUDS**

Marsali Campbell  
HOGMANAY 2011

I usually begin with a title and a theme and this time I have neither! Much has happened since I last wrote, I may narrate it factually or with the myriad of emotions I experienced during this period.



It's Hogmanay (New Years Eve), I'm in Scotland and I'm struck by the privilege/task to write about my life. I was in Portree, Isle of Skye at Christmas and folk there were commenting on my article and photos in the Monthly Record church magazine, it's often strange for me to see that, and hear folk's comments – thankfully they are usually very pleasant (though I'm open to helpful comments too!). I suppose I'm usually in Africa when these articles are circulating. I appreciate all the interest and support from these communications, I guess I'm just not sure what to say about them, after they're written – if I ever reread them, I don't even think it's me that's written them, just like when I see photos, or even not recognising my recorded voice!

AIM asked me to be involved in CSPN (Child Safety and Protection Network - [www.childsafetyprotectionnetwork.org](http://www.childsafetyprotectionnetwork.org)), this is a network of global Christian mission organisations who have gathered together to address the important issues related to child protection and safety. I have been asked to be part of small teams who will travel at times to assist if/when concerns are raised. Sadly child abuse is a global issue and we need to be proactive in more teaching, education, and awareness to endeavour to protect children in all circumstances, within their homes, schools, communities and churches.

Over the years working with children I have gained some experience in this area, and though it is a difficult and often draining challenge, I sincerely count it a privilege to assist children in this difficult time. I spoke with DP, AIM and my home church and it was agreed that I would try and incorporate this new role within my current ministry. The first part of this was to attend a training



conference, in Malaysia! My enthusiasm paled leading up to my departure as I had so much work in Uganda, and also the flights Uganda – Kenya – Thailand (floods!) – Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia) – Penang (Malaysia) were all tight changeovers and therefore stressful in an area and languages I am not familiar with. Landing in Penang was wonderful, and I clicked into loving this new adventure in this new part of the world. I have to pinch myself that this was real! The week-long conference was excellent, about 35 people from various countries, organisations and ministries gathered for this training – partly theoretical with research and statistics, also practical with role playing and useful tools to utilise in scenarios of interviews and discussions. As is often the case the meal times were a great encouragement too, discovering new friendships and hearing of challenges and blessings in other countries – I must mention the spectacular cuisine that Malaysia is renowned for, now legendary to my taste buds!



As our days were very full with lectures, the evenings I spent wandering around Penang Island. We were staying on the coast and it was so easy to travel around on public transport – other participants thought I was so brave to explore as I did, until I told them about my last trip to Sudan! One evening was particularly



poignant as I wandered around Khoo Khangisi, an ancient Buddhist temple, and saw a slow procession of monks gathering and began chanting and singing, it was ethereal and beautiful, like Gaelic psalm singing, I was tingling with excitement and amazement!

My return flight was through Thailand and I requested a few days stopover there as it was such a unique opportunity to see yet another new place in this spectacular world we live in. It was sad to note the continuing impact of the recent floods in the country, much had been done to try and safeguard Bangkok city, which is below sea level and therefore difficult to release excess water. I was struck by how huge this very developed city was – I had chosen a small Christian guesthouse in the centre of the city to get a real feel of the place. The next day I found the “Grand Palace”, a sacred place for

Buddhists, where the emerald Buddha is located and a colourful array of temples and statues. Later I went down the coast into the Gulf of Thailand and just loved being by the ocean, I slept and woke with the sounds of the sea.



Now if it’s all sounding idyllic, most of it was wonderful, but in amongst it all, I received news from Scotland that my Mum was

sick, diagnosed with cancer and required immediate surgery. In fact, I got the biopsy results on the morning of my birthday, just as I returned from one of the most amazing sunrises I have ever seen. I had woken early at 5am, and walked along the shore, and just revelled in the joy I was experiencing in nature. It seemed clear to return home to Scotland as soon as possible, which meant an earlier flight to Uganda (Saturday), arriving there on a Sunday morning and left that night to London, Glasgow, Inverness (Monday night), and arriving at the hospital after 3 days of travelling, and the nurses tried to tell me that it wasn't visiting time!!!

Mum required fairly extensive surgery, mastectomy and removal of lymph glands also affected. She's out of hospital now and continues to have more investigations to ascertain the extent of her condition, taking medicines, and will be having radiotherapy sessions in Feb/March. As some of you know, my Mum struggles with chronic pain due to osteo arthritis, and has had hip replacements, and was due to have a new hip replacement soon, those plans have to be postponed until her general health improves. It's not been an easy time for her, or for us as a family, seeing a loved one suffer with pain, operations and a cancer diagnosis.

During this time I went to church with a heavy heart and low mood and the sermon was about 'Christian joy', and my heart sank in anticipation of hearing how happy I am supposed to be, however it was a beautiful God-sent message directed exactly for me at that time. The main message was from Luke 2 'the joy of Mary, the joy of the angels' with the news that Jesus the saviour of the world was to be born, and yet the message that particularly struck me was the references to the source and depth of the real Christian joy. Our joy in the reality of God and His salvation is not dependant on 'happy stuff' around us, as we all know that fades and varies in life. We read from Habakkuk 3 v17-19 *'Though the fig tree does not bud....no grapes on the vines...no cattle in the stall, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my saviour. The sovereign Lord is my strength.'*

I was reminded of another difficult time in my life when I read James 1 v2 *'Consider it pure joy whenever you face trials of many kinds...'*, I didn't like hearing that, then someone sent me a book

with that title and I didn't read it – my heart rebelled against the message that I could possibly know joy in dark times.



The truth then, and now, is that God's truth is true. His word and promises are not dependant on my circumstances, whether I am happy or sad, whether my Mum has cancer or not, whether my family are well or not, whether DP has enough funds to help rescue more children from the streets, whether a child is born with HIV or not – God is still Creator God, and He still loves us, and He always has, and always will.

I am thankful and grateful to AIM/DP and my church for their support and encouragement during these days. Following more discussions it has been agreed that I will return back to Uganda on 6<sup>th</sup> Jan, and then return to Scotland to assist my Mum during her radiotherapy sessions in Feb/March. After that, I'm not sure, but I know someone who knows and I have found trusting Him is by far the best course for my life, whatever today or tomorrow brings.

I realise this letter will not be distributed until 2012, but as we are closing 2011 with all that has been happening in my life, and I'm sure in your lives too – I pray a great blessing of peace for all that is in the past, and joy, peace, hope and love for 2012 and beyond!



As always, my huge thanks to all the supporters who have so faithfully given towards this ministry, and those who remember us in prayer, and those who simply love us – thanks from me, my family, Rita and all at DP, and all the precious children that feel the touch of love, from God, through us. We hope and pray God's light will shine even brighter in the year to come to rescue children from the darkness of abuse and life on the streets.

As I began writing, Scotland looked beautiful, blue skies, snow covered mountains, wild sea – as I close, dark clouds cover the sky, the mountains have been cloaked with mist. This image resonates with the message of this newsletter, our lives change from blue skies to clouds, sickness and health, joy and sorrow, and yet the joy that God offers will always bring light, even in the darkest days.

WITH LOVE AND JOY

MARSALI

PS: You can see a video clip of the singing monks at Khoo Khangisi at;

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wh\\_flA0KZb4](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wh_flA0KZb4)







