

## Link Letter No.17 August 2014

### Dear all,

One thing about my life is that although it is a little strange – in that I come to the UK and don't feel that I really belong any more – I have been shaped by a culture that is not my original one and which has changed a lot since I moved to live in South Sudan. And yet I do not fully fit into the culture here either, however loved, accepted and welcomed I am. Even if I live the rest of my days in South Sudan, I will never be South Sudanese. But I am also in the most privileged position to be able to share what the Lord is doing here, which you may not hear elsewhere.

I would like to introduce to you two friends who are doing simply amazing work with a real heart and love for the Lord; I believe that these stories must be told. God has NOT left the South Sudanese, but it can be hard to make sense of all that is happening here. I hope that these stories will remind us of the Lord's love for this country and her people who are so longing for peace and to be able to continue to develop.

John Chol has been working in the radio department almost as long as I have been here. He has somehow welcomed me to share with his family too. Together, we have enjoyed birthday cakes, thanksgivings, celebrating the new babies arriving in his family and all sorts. His family



*Chol on the Nile, reaching communities that he is working with*



### Ruth Radley

CMS mission partner

### South Sudan

Ruth is a CMS mission partner seconded to the Children's Department of Across and serving in Yei, South Sudan. Across is an interdenominational Christian NGO that has worked in Sudan for over 30 years. Ruth's ministry includes developing child protection policies, leading trauma workshops and training Sunday school teachers. The years of war in Sudan make this work so vital to a future generation of Sudanese.

are from the Bor area, an area that has been horrendously affected in the current crisis, although he has grown up elsewhere. Since 2012, he has been working in the area and has made a number of trips up there, making relationships and sharing the "DAP's" in the cattle camps. DAPs (Digital Audio Players) is a relatively new technology that radios are using, small solar powered machines onto which many different radio programmes can be loaded for groups of people to listen to together. His work here is centred on peace building, and people have been very receptive to his hard work and dedication.

The groups of people he works with live in the “cattle camps”, which are a collective of pastoralist families who have animals and want to stay together, even though they are not relatives. They will move into a free place and stay there. The length of time they stay depends on the season; the camps will move to be nearer water season, closer to the River Nile for example in the dry and further away in the wet season.



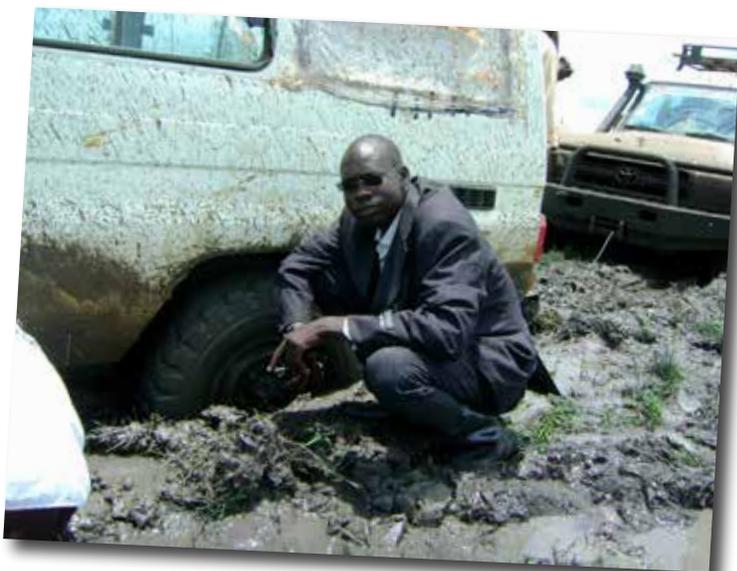
*The cattle camps (I can never work out why they don't attack us with those horns!)*

In April, Chol made another visit, to try to meet the communities he has been working with, the first since the beginning of the current conflict. We sat and prayed together before he went, but this was an extremely difficult visit. On his journey into the town, he saw many bodies by the side of the road; none of us can even begin to imagine how hard that is to witness.

In the area where Chol is working, he found that mainly people perceive this war to be a political conflict; just a few believe that it is a tribal one. For those perceiving it as not a tribal conflict, they still have love for one another, Dinka to Nuer and vice versa. However, for some in the three major towns affected, Bor, Malakal and Bentiu, the fact that civilians were killed makes people believe that this is a tribal conflict.

In addition to the DAP work, there are also radio programmes which are aired, giving a much wider audience. The recent impact on the radio programmes is that most of its listeners who call in acknowledge positively that this is the right time for people to talk about restoration and reconciliation. While it is acknowledged that it's hard to reconcile through the difficult memories, they are still messages that people like and want to listen to. Our radio department continue to write scripts on conflict resolutions and restoration and reconciliation.

People from within the cattle camps also give their suggestions on how peace can be achieved. There is a feeling that elderly people should advise the young men and politicians on how to respond positively to conflict and related issues, rather than retaliate. There is a great respect here for the elderly and the wisdom gained over so many years of different experiences, and is a very common method of solving difficulties.



*Chol with a very stuck vehicle - showing many of the challenges of his work*

New challenges were also shared with Chol from the community on the islands in the Nile. In addition to the fear of violence, four children have been taken by the crocodiles. Most of those who are suffering, as in all conflict situations, are the women and children. They are trying to find food and shelter – the greatest challenges – which will be growing now the rains are here.

Amazing stories always emerge in these times. In one area, a man from the Nuer tribe took his wives, each having four children, to live among his Dinka friends where people are in hiding to evade the violence (which they were able to

see from their hiding place). He knew that they would be safe hiding there with his friends, and they are all being well looked after.

Another friend is Peter Bol. Peter is also a Dinka by tribe, but is fluent in many languages, including Nuer. Often people do not actually know where he is from such is his relationship building with other people and language abilities – something he sees as a gift from God. As such, he is able to produce some very important radio messages. He has joined together with one of the students from the neighbouring teacher training college, who is from the Nuer tribe, and together they are producing joint radio messages to go out.

He joined Across in 2012 as a casual worker, working through into 2013. As part of this work, he would go in the Nuer areas, in Jonglei state. He has distributed peace building messages through the same DAPS that Chol uses. This year he has joined the staff as a full time contracted member of staff. Two years ago there were some real positive stories coming through, and Peter received many phone calls from people having heard the programmes. Some people now are in the UNMISS compound in Juba but they are still contacting Peter by phone to ask for his advice; this is all down to his hard work, and dedication to work for the Lord. This year, he is continuing the peace building messages in Nuer. Previously these programmes were purely talking, but now he has been able to get some Nuer songs – which are also connected with peace building – incorporated into the programmes. Songs are a really good way to spread messages here. He is hoping in the months to come to visit some of the refugee camps in Uganda and meet with people there from the Nuer tribe.

As with all my friends here, Peter shares how grateful he is to know that there are prayers being said for us in the UK and is confident that God will hear them, and peace will come. There is still hope he says! He is urging you all to keep praying and holding us before God.

**I am sure you are aware that there is also a serious famine looming here.** It's heartbreaking. Most families survive on the food that they are able to grow, but due to the violence many people have fled their homes, meaning that they have not been able to plant. The first harvests are due any time now, which also gives another opportunity for planting a second crop. It really will be catastrophic if people are not able to return home to plant, which is looking unlikely, and aid agencies are not able to raise the money they need to provide food. Four million people – that's almost one third of our entire population – are said to be at risk of severe hunger. I can't imagine it at all. This area is far from me and my area largely remains calm and crops have been planted, but of course it's concerned about what the future may bring.

Thank you again for your continued prayers. I have had on my mind the scripture



*Peter Bol in the radio studio recording onto the DAP*

Matthew 24:6: “*There will be wars and rumours of wars.*” I can only say that this world is in so much pain, suffering and sorrow, with so much injustice – *Maranatha*, Come Lord Jesus.

It is fair to say that life has been a little strange here the last few weeks and months. I think that this is a spiritual battle like none other I have been involved in – largely involving issues around the country but also the organisation I am seconded to, which is having many challenges, and there is a lot of pain about. I have found myself in a real period of lamenting, recognising this as a way of worship during painful and hard times, and not pretending everything is okay and putting on the brave face we in the church are so often willing to hide behind. I have been reading an excellent book by Michael Card, “*A Sacred Sorrow: Reaching Out to God in the Lost Language of Lament*” and can thoroughly recommend it. Reading more of Job, David, Jeremiah and Jesus’ laments have been really helpful to me in processing my own. I even blogged about it: <http://www.ruthieradley1.wordpress.com>

It’s a very funny time to be going through and I am not sure that I can ever remember a period quite like this one where I have been so low and tearful for such a long period. I am holding onto God’s promises, and trusting Him that in all the mess, chaos and pain I see around me, He will bring something good out of it all for all involved, and the tears – not just mine but of many – will bring forth a rich harvest. Please do continue to pray for us.

In happier news, we are celebrating two new babies! Baraka (blessing) was born in May to my good friend Robina, who works with Sam and me. I was so blessed by another friend here demanding that we go to see her straight away to give thanks to God and pray over the baby. So we did! Totally uncultural but Robina was so happy to see us and looked amazing! WHAT a privilege for me to pray over this new tiny baby. The birth had been incredibly fast, which Robina attributes to the prayers from the UK! I have been able to see a lot of her since, and enjoyed many cuddles! Being typical me, I used to talk to him before he was born (*not really what is done here!*) and Robina would always say he responded (and was very obedient to my instructions of not coming too soon!). Then just yesterday, Chol’s wife gave birth to a new baby daughter – at 6.25am. The little girl was named Aluet! I had been on call for both these friends for trips to hospital, but missed Robina’s call as I was at church (NOT impressed!) and didn’t take my phone. Veronica went into labour during the night, and due to security concerns they didn’t call me as they know we can’t travel at night! But we praise God for both these precious gifts to us, and their safe arrivals, not something we take for granted. I look forward to seeing them grow. Baraka is now eight and a half weeks old and growing so fast. He really is living up to his name and I know that God has great plans for both these babies – the next generation bringing forth such hope.

In Chol’s culture, the baby is kept inside for seven days, and then brought out where there will be a celebration. This morning, I was privileged to be asked to be the guest of honour at this occasion – where even a goat will be roasted! Last year I was also guest of honour at another friend’s baby’s thanksgiving – it is such a privilege to be asked to undertake such a role and I feel very blessed.

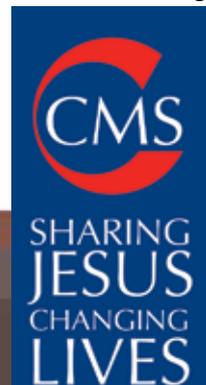
I remember arriving in Tanzania as a short-termer back in 2001 and being told by my neighbours Les and Lyn Jesudason that this life overseas is full of hills and valleys! I can certainly agree with them – it most certainly is, tears of sadness mingled with laughter but through it all we know that we are not alone.

Please continue to pray for us in this season. It is quite unlike any season I have lived through before; there is certainly a major spiritual battle going on, on many levels, but we keep on keeping on trusting that God is with us through it all.

Many blessings to you,

Ruth

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