

2004

## To Ghana: February-March 2004

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Keith Clouten

The first indication that Ghana might be on my travel itinerary came during the ASDAL Conference 2000 held at Andrews University. Vida Mensah, who is library director at Valley View University in Ghana, was among several librarians who came to that conference from places worldwide. As the conference workshops drew to a close, Vida stopped by my office to talk about Valley View's need for a new library, and to ask for my help in preparing specifications for a building. Nothing was promised, but there was an underlying assumption that I would come to Valley View University sometime soon to give some help.

Reality met expectation in February 2004, when Ngaire and I flew to Accra to spend three weeks at Valley View, responding to a formal request to prepare a library building program and to help in developing some strategic goals for the library's development. We expected to be kept busy, and we surely were. But we also experienced the exotic cultures, the ethnic foods, the torrid climate, the off-again on-again power and water supply, the wonderful people of Ghana, and a multitude of blessings.

Valley View is a relatively young institution on an extensive tract of savannah land north-east of the capital, Accra. Lack of a reliable water supply has dogged the university's development, but during our visit they were installing pipelines to a new cooperative water project involving some nearby communities. The school is currently operating at maximum capacity with 900 students, but has ambitious plans to grow a campus capable of accepting 2,000 students within five years. The university has the good fortune, due to a special grant, to have retained two architects from Bauhaus University in Germany for campus development. A new library is high on the building schedule. First priority, though, is a campus church which is one of the mission projects selected to benefit from the Sabbath School offerings in the second quarter of 2004.

West Africa is one of the world's hot zones (historically it was known as the "white man's grave"). Several years ago, I spent an uncomfortable week in Nigeria, the cornerstone and "big daddy" of West Africa. From Nigeria's western boundary, more than a dozen smaller countries, like a bunch of sometimes unruly children, stand in a long line fronting the Atlantic Ocean. Ghana, better known to older generations as the Gold Coast, is sandwiched between Togo on the east and the French Ivory Coast on the west. Its capital, Accra, is a sprawling city of two or perhaps three million.

## **Tuesday, February 10**

Waiting to board our evening flight to London at Calgary Airport, we sense adventure ahead. It is more than a year ago that Valley View University first asked us to come to Ghana and assist with growth planning for their library. We were living in Michigan then, on the countdown toward retirement, unable to afford the time for an African trip. But the invitation remained open, so we promised we would come for three weeks soon after moving into our new home in Alberta. Now, with visas in hand, and a mountain of luggage successfully checked in, we are on our way to Ghana.

Tonight's Air Canada flight, non-stop to London, is not full, so we hope for space to spread out a little and catch some sleep. Scheduled arrival at Heathrow is noon tomorrow, but since the daily British Airways flight to Ghana leaves at 11.45 in the morning, we will have a 24-hour layover in London.

## **Wednesday, February 11**

It is mid-afternoon, and we have a place to lay our heads tonight. The Wedgwood Hotel is a small private hotel in a quiet street at Bayswater in London's West End. We found it on the Internet as a half-price

February special of forty pounds for a room with private bathroom. That's really cheap for London. Predictably, the room is diminutive with two single beds and barely space to turn around. The tiny bathroom is small enough so that while sitting on the loo you could easily shower and clean your teeth in one efficient operation. Fortunately, we were able to deposit all our check-in baggage at the Left Luggage Office back at Heathrow Airport. That set us back twenty pounds but gave us the freedom to take the Underground into the city and walk the couple of blocks from Bayswater Station.

We were able to catch some sleep last night on the plane, so after a brief rest this afternoon we will take a ride into Leicester Square where the great musical, Les Misérables, has been playing continuously for at least ten years.

### Thursday, Feb 12

It is dark by the time our British Airways jet touches down at Accra's Kotoka International Airport after a seven-hour flight from London. A muggy blanket of humidity envelopes us as we walk to the terminal building and line up for immigration. Once past that, we are glad to be re-united with our baggage and even more glad when we don't have to open anything for inspection as most arriving passengers seem obliged to do. Outside the airport, we fall into the welcoming arms of Vida Mensah and her library team. They are clearly excited about our arrival and soon have us and our luggage safely aboard a van en route to Valley View University, several miles north-east of Accra.

Once there, we are escorted to a room in the fairly new Women's Centre, built and operated by the South Ghana Conference. Our room, well ventilated with louvred windows on two sides, contains two beds, a table with two chairs, clothes closet and bathroom with cold shower and toilet. No air-conditioning here, but happily there is a large ceiling fan. This will be our home for the next three weeks. Vida places a tray of juice and fruit on the table, and someone else deposits a carton of bottled water. We turn on the ceiling fan to high speed but are both a lather of perspiration by the time we unpack our cases and answer a knock to find Chris Carey there to welcome us. We knew Chris from several years ago at Andrews University. He will take us on a tour of the campus tomorrow. Meanwhile, we care for little else but a cool shower and bed. There are no sheets to cover us, but we don't need them anyway. The ceiling fan is barely enough to absorb the perspiration from our bodies during the night.

### Friday, Feb 13

We awake at six to bright daylight and bird song. Our room is one of forty that surround a grassed courtyard on all four sides. Once up and dressed, we meet Isaac, the Women's Centre caretaker, a short pleasant man



Left: Entrance to Valley View University.

Right: Women's Center, our home for 3 weeks in Ghana.



with a set of unbelievable teeth that sprout in every direction. There are no washing machines on the campus, but he will take care of our washing every couple of days and will iron everything, including the socks and underwear, whether it needs it or not.

After lunch, Chris Carey comes with his car to take us on a tour of the campus. Last night's impression that most of the campus is uncleared bush is confirmed as we drive from the new ladies' residence hall (next door to the Women's Centre) along a dusty red trail to the large administration / classroom building. Nothing in the layout of the campus makes much sense until Chris unrolls the campus master plan on his office desk and we see that a large area of virgin bushland will soon make way for a church, a classroom block, and a library. Valley View University (but where is the view?) is a relatively new institution on the brink of significant development. Chris, as Vice-President for Development, is the catalyst to make this happen. A new cafeteria building is nearing completion, and a men's residence complex is at several different stages of construction. The guys who live in the completed section call the place "Afghanistan", and we do admit that it's present stage of construction gives it the appearance of a bombed-out shelter.

The library occupies a section of the university's administration / classroom building, and is packed solid with students at almost any hour of the day. The book collection is small but relevant to the three academic programs in religion, business administration, and computer science. Vida has a full-time associate librarian, several fine support staff and, of course, student help. The needs are great, especially at this time, for computers in acquisitions, cataloging, and public access.

### Sabbath, Feb 14

Our first of three Sabbaths in Ghana. Last night we attended the Advent Youth meeting in the Chapel. Sitting



From Top Left: Vida Mensah, library director; Two men making corn meal; Ladies Residence; Charles Amoah, Associate Librarian; Chris Carey at Chapel Desk; Administration / Classroom Block, Library at left end.

by an open door to avoid the stifling humidity, we were inspired by the sincerity and spirituality of the students. This is the first weekend of a new semester, so all new students were called to the front to introduce themselves by name, course, and their purpose in coming to Valley View. Most also shared whether they are single, engaged, or married. At the end of the program, everyone sang "I Will Wear a Crown" with all the appropriate actions.

In the absence of a large enough building for Sabbath services, there are usually two separate "churches" on campus. Today it is "Corporate Church" when the entire campus family comes together to worship out under the trees. It's a special Sabbath held once each semester. Today's visiting preacher is Dr. Boateng, an Andrews University graduate who currently pastors a Ghanaian church in Ohio. He is in Ghana to conduct an evangelistic campaign on the campus of the large public University of Ghana. After the meeting, the cafeteria serves a lunch of rice and curry under the trees.

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There is no water tonight, so Isaac brings us two large buckets of water for bathing. Water is scarce in this part of Ghana, and ever since its establishment Valley View has been dogged by lack of a reliable supply. Currently the university has its own tanker which brings water from Accra several times a week and pumps it up to a tower reservoir in the center of campus. The water shortage may soon be solved with completion of a cooperative project with several nearby communities.

Because of the water scarcity in this region, Valley View is involved in some interesting ecological experiments. Yesterday Chris took us to the men's bathroom to show us the dry urinals that do not flush and channel the urine directly to the avocado orchard. The specially designed toilet bowls also separate the urine from the solids. Interestingly, the dry urinals produce virtually no odor because a thin layer of oil floats on top. The government of Ghana is very interested in these experiments.



From Top Left: Sabbath-School under the trees; Water truck; Ngaire stands by a red Termites nest; Our daily trail to the Main part of the campus; Computer Lab.



## Sunday, February 15

Phew! This equatorial climate is a bit rough on foreigners coming from the frigid zones. There is no winter here. Daily temperatures range from 30 at night to nearly 40 during the day (for our Fahrenheit friends that is 85 to 100). Also, at this time of the year the Harmattan winds blow south from the Sahara Desert, creating a constant dust haze in the atmosphere. But the humidity is the killer. Whether indoors or outdoors it is “sticky hot” and we drip with perspiration. We are broiling slowly in a steam oven. Cooking time will be three weeks.

\* \* \*

When Ngaire lifts the curtain from our supper basket this evening, she exclaims in surprise. What is that thing in the curry pot? We’ve been told that bush rats are regarded as a delicacy by some Ghanaians, but this looks more like the neck of a chicken! I bravely volunteer to check it out and conclude it is plant, not animal. What kind of plant we cannot guess. But it tastes OK. (Later, when we described it to Chris, he laughed and said it was a type of bush mushroom that they sometimes use in their curries).

Power outages are fairly common here, especially at weekends. That means no ceiling fans, so we just sweat it out until power is restored. These outages play havoc with the computer lab, since they have no reliable UPS to take over. This morning, though, we managed to check our email there before the power failed. The Computer Science Department operates a small Internet Café -- the only place on campus with an air-conditioner.

## Monday, Feb 16

This has been a frustrating day! According to the printed program, we were to leave at 8.30 this morning for a visit to two libraries in Accra. (I requested these visits so that I can understand and evaluate Valley View library better, in the context of other academic libraries here in Ghana.) We were set to go, but this is Africa, so it was mid-morning before everyone was ready to leave. The late start worried me, since we were supposed to be back for a meeting with university administrators at two o’clock.

The road from here to Accra becomes increasingly congested as it passes through communities on the city outskirts. Dusty stalls and markets line the roadside, selling just about everything, and whenever the traffic slows, peddlers walk between the rows of vehicles offering bread, sachets of water, handkerchiefs, phone cards, soap, cassava chips, slices of pineapple or orange, and whatever. Most sellers carry their wares on their heads, as does nearly everyone in this society. We saw many women with bundles on their heads and babies tied on their backs.

Ghana is officially a Christian country, but we were surprised and amused at the many signs on shops and vehicles. On our drive this morning we passed “King Jesus Fast Food”, the “Showers of Blessing Hair Salon”, “Be of Good Courage Concrete Works”, and my favorite, the “Hallelujah Pork Shop.” Almost every minibus (called tro-tro’s here) has a Christian slogan painted on the back – “God’s Power” (may be needed on steep hills when passengers are hanging out of the doors), “God’s Time” (when stuck in a traffic jam?) and “Jesus Saves” (unless the driver is careless).

It was nearly 3.30 when we arrived back at Valley View, having visited only one library in Accra. We were stuck in a traffic jam for an hour due to road repairs, so reluctantly had to forgo our visit to the library of Central University. We did spend an hour at a new privately funded institution known as Ashesi University, really

a well-endowed business school that has less than fifty students and everything that an African library could wish for.

Meanwhile, the administrative committee had been postponed until our arrival. A meal awaited us in the faculty lounge, then we met for a time in the president's office.

**Tuesday, Feb 17**

Our real work at Valley View begins this morning at the library. The path from here to there is a dusty track through the bush, with tall red termite nests along the way. We are already learning to move slowly in this torrid climate. This does not come easy for someone accustomed to walking at a brisk pace, but the hare is gradually turning into a tortoise.

After a tour of faculty offices, I meet with the librarians to discuss the objectives of my visit. During the next three days I will be very busy, working on a Library Building Program for Valley View, and at the President's request, preparing goals for the library's development during the next five years. Not everything about the library is hunky-dory. I will need to be sensitive to the culture here, and have some private conversations with several individuals.

A trip to Kumasi is scheduled for the weekend, and Charles Amoah (the associate librarian) asks if I will preach at one of the 100 churches in that city. He isn't sure which church it will be, but the service will be translated into the Ashanti language. Fortunately I have with me a sermon that I once used in Russia, where it was also translated, so I can use those notes again.

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On most days we are guests at one of the faculty homes for either lunch or supper. On Sunday we enjoyed lunch with Daniel Opoku-Boatengs and his family. Daniel is an Andrews University graduate and worked part-time at James White Library while they were there in the early 1990's. He is now the Academic Vice-President at Valley View. His wife prepared a delicious meal of traditional Ghanaian food. Tonight we are guests at Carey's for supper. Chris and Setsuko came to Valley View nearly four years ago, and were the only ex-patriots here until recently when a family arrived from India. But they have adjusted very well to life here in Ghana. Setsuko comes from Japan and their two small children have Japanese names – Misato and Mika. We enjoy a pleasant evening of good food and interesting conversation.

Below: Faculty and Staff of VVU; Right: Campus Master Plan in 2004





## **Wednesday, Feb 18**

Although this is the dry season in Ghana, there are occasional rain-storms. There was one last Sunday afternoon, a brief but heavy downpour to lay the dust, and suddenly the campus is much greener. They tell us that in the rainy season the red dust turns into red mud, so this dry season is probably the better choice for our visit.

Meals continue to be delivered to our room in a clothes basket, sometimes on the head of a student. We are often perplexed by the quantities of food. They must think that westerners have voracious appetites. We notice that food is prepared without salt, surprising in this climate where one loses a lot of body salt through sweat. We also conclude that the cafeteria staff have some problem trying to figure out our food needs. Yesterday we had several slices of bread, but no butter or spread, today there is a pot of jam but no bread. They also sent mangoes, but no knife for peeling. We are managing to improvise, but have decided to keep on hand a couple of plates, two glasses, some silverware and a sharp knife. The fruit here is delicious. Almost every day we have mangoes, full of flavor and juice, and the pineapples are luscious. We've also enjoyed our first taste of custard-apple.

A very large flying cricket has his home in or under a concrete planter not far from our room, and he chirps very loudly each night. This evening we search for him with a flashlight and suddenly something about the size of a swallow soars down the passageway. We try to corner the creature, but he eludes us. Soon he is back at his favorite planter, but after we hassle him a couple more times, he decides to make his home elsewhere.

## **Thursday, Feb 19.**

Breakfast does not arrive at a predictable time, probably because students are served only two meals a day, the first around mid-morning. This morning we decide to head for the cafeteria and eat there. The dining area is a concrete floor with several long tables and many old rusted chairs in various stages of disrepair. Kitchen facilities are poor, but a new cafeteria building is nearing completion, so improved conditions are just ahead.

Today we have lunch with Robert and Patience Akpalus. Robert teaches business and Patience works in the library. She has prepared a meal that is typical of their home region in eastern Ghana. One dish contains banku, a white dough-like ball made with maize flour and cassava. We take pieces of this and dip them in a soup that contains okra, eggplant, ginger, pepper, mushroom, garlic, and fresh tomatoes. Our willingness to try local dishes is appreciated by our Ghanaian hosts, and we enjoy being adventurous.

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I completed the first draft of two major documents today and will discuss them with the library staff next Monday. Tonight I am working on the Sabbath sermon. Vida told me today that I will be preaching at the university fellowship church in Kumasi where everything is in English, so it will not have to be translated. That is good news, even though it now means retyping the sermon to make it longer, and including some illustrations appropriate for a student congregation. While I am typing on the computer, Ngaire is packing a suitcase for our trip to Kumasi tomorrow. It is a six-hour drive, and we were told to expect pick-up from the Women's Centre at ten in the morning.

## Friday, February 20

Noon Friday, and we are still at Valley View! Robert Osei-Bonsu was here with his car at ten o'clock to pick us up. We then drove around to the library to collect Charles Amoah who is also coming with us. But Charles wasn't ready, and Vida gave Robert a check which he then had to cash at a bank several miles down the road. We waited at the library until we were instructed to go back to our room for lunch. So here we are again, still waiting. Relax, this is Africa.

Standing in the shade of the verandah, we see two figures appearing on the horizon. Lunch is approaching on the head of a cafeteria worker, with Vida leading the charge. By the time we have eaten it is 1.00 pm. and Robert is back with Charles on board. Robert's six-year old daughter, Roberta, is also coming along for the ride. We are finally on our way to Kumasi.

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Our driver, Robert, teaches in the Theology Department, and has been to America a couple of times. He was born near Kumasi and began his pastoral ministry in that area. He is an excellent teacher, a good preacher, and a competent but furious driver. We are overtaking practically everything on the highway -- trucks, taxis, tro-tro's. Ngaire is scared to look ahead. Jehu would have a heart attack in this chariot.

Our route northwest leads first through mountains, where the air is refreshingly cooler, then through lush tropical valleys most of the way to Kumasi. Cocoa and gold are Ghana's biggest export money earners, and both come mainly from this region. We stop briefly in a small highway-side village where Charles' wife lives with their two small boys. She gives us a bag of grapefruit to take along.

The highway takes us through villages and towns. We pass stalls selling palm oil, yams, ground nuts, cassava, and colorful beads. Other sellers try to tempt us by holding out bush rats, sometimes already cooked and smoked. We stop at a stand selling plantains baking over hot coals. Charles buys some for all of us. They are sweet and tasty. The streets are crowded with people carrying stuff on their heads -- bundles of firewood, buckets of water, and we can't help laughing at one guy supporting an old Singer sewing machine. We explain that we never see this at home.

Robert understands. "When I was in New York," he says, "I bought a suitcase in a shop and carried it down the street on my head. But everybody stared at me, so after a while I took it down and carried it in my hand."

I am constantly amused by the signs along the highway. "Faith Plumbing", "King of Kings Bakery", "Salvation Motor Works". A town just ahead advertises that it has "Free Toilet, Free Urinal, and a Mosque." A rather derelict-looking shed by the highway -- available "to let" -- has a neatly painted sign over the door, "God First."

As we approach Kumasi late this afternoon, the sky northward is black and threatening. Soon a strong wind is coming from that direction, and suddenly we are driving through a choking dust storm from the Sahara. People everywhere are running for cover. Driven by the wind, swirling clouds of dust envelop us and reduce visibility to a few yards. We have never experienced a dust storm like this before. Minutes later, though, raindrops splash on the windscreen, and quickly the rain comes, torrential and cleansing, washing the streets and buildings.

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It is now 9 p.m. and I feel tired and a bit confused. We are in a room of the La Sab Hotel somewhere on the fringe of Kumasi. It was dark when we arrived, only to discover that reception had no knowledge of the reservation made by Valley View. We were urged to sit down and relax while everything was sorted out. Robert and Charles were gone for some time, presumably to look for another hotel, and when they returned there was more conversation with the man at the reception desk. Finally we were told that the hotel had rooms available and we were escorted upstairs, with instructions to come down to the restaurant in 15 minutes for a special vegetarian dinner. There I learned of a change in my preaching assignment: it will be at a very large city church tomorrow, and Robert will translate my sermon into Ashanti.

Why is this happening? Before bed I must go through my sermon again, shorten it considerably, and avoid idiom which may be difficult to translate. I argue with the Lord quite a bit this evening: Lord, I need your help. You know I am just a librarian, not a preacher. I finally give in. OK, Lord, just do whatever You want with me for the next twenty-four hours. (That was a dangerous prayer, because I had to preach at a second church on Sabbath afternoon).

### **Sabbath, Feb 21**

Kumasi is Ghana's second largest city, with a population of around one million. Historically, the city is interesting on two counts: it was the capital of the Ashanti empire which once encompassed all of present-day Ghana and beyond, and it was the site of the first permanent Seventh-day Adventist mission in West Africa. The church has a strong representation in this city, with over 60,000 members in 100 churches. I learn this morning that I will be preaching in the largest church in the conference, with a membership of 1,500.

Adjoining the large Amakom Church is a church school where 1,300 students are enrolled. The compound also houses the offices of the local conference. On arrival we join a small English-language Sabbath-School class of about a dozen members, then Robert leads me to the room where the elders meet prior to the service. I ask if there is a toilet handy, and that sends several elders scurrying all over the place, searching, it turns out, for a key to the only western-type toilet in the building. I could have simply asked for directions to the urinal! Terminology is important here.

As the service begins, the church is packed. The preliminaries occupy an entire hour, with announcements, testimonies, prayers, hymns, and songs by two choirs, all in a language I do not understand. Finally the preaching service is underway. Last night I did a quick edit of my sermon to reduce its length. Now with Robert's dynamic translation (including a good sprinkling of Hallelujahs and congregational Amens) we are through before the clock strikes one. By that time my undershirt, shirt and jacket are soaked with perspiration.



Far Left:  
Amakom SDA  
Church, Kumasi.  
Left: Amakom  
SDA School.

No rest for the weary, though. En route back to the hotel for lunch, Robert asks if I'm willing to preach at another Kumasi church at four this afternoon. I tell him I don't have stories prepared for that, but he says, No, just preach that same sermon again. What can I say? By the time we reach our hotel (traffic in Kumasi is something else!) and eat lunch, it is time to head back into the city, this time to the Ashanti New Town Church which also has a congregation of several hundred. Here in Ghana most members bring their lunch and stay for afternoon meetings, so there are two hundred or more in attendance when Robert and I stand up to preach at 4 p.m. This has been an incredible day, but I feel relaxed and blessed.

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This evening, though, we have another visit to make. Robert's oldest brother lives in Kumasi and makes traditional Ghanaian costume as a home business. At his house we are shown several beautiful garments and instructed to each choose one that we would like to take with us. We are overwhelmed by this generous offer, but we accept graciously and make our selections. Ngairé chooses a purple dress with embroidered gold designs on the front. Mine is gold and grey, and comes in three pieces – trousers, tunic, and cap. Robert asks if I will sometimes wear it on the street in Canada. I tell him I will get about the same reaction as an African carrying a suitcase on his head in New York.

### Sunday, Feb 22

This morning Robert plans to show us some of Kumasi's historic sights before we head back to Valley View. We come for breakfast at the pre-arranged time and find Charles waiting in the foyer with a gentleman he introduces as the Communications Director of the South Central Ghana Conference. This man has come to ask if we are willing to accompany him for a brief visit to the home of his conference president a few miles from here. Kumasi is divided between two conferences, and since we met the president of the North Central Ghana Conference yesterday, it would be politically correct for us to pay our respects to the South president. This is Africa. We will do the right thing, after we've had breakfast. When we finally arrive at the president's house about 8.30, unannounced, he is still wearing his night attire—red shorts—but he welcomes us anyway.

Here is a riddle: When is it possible for your mother to be twenty years younger than you are? The answer: If you happen to be chosen as the "Queen Mother" of the Ashanti King. She is not necessarily of royal blood. Kumasi is the traditional capital of the Ashanti kingdom, and even though Ghana is now a united republic, the Ashanti King still functions from a hilltop palace overlooking part of the city. Although the palace itself is off bounds to visitors (it is even forbidden to photograph it), Robert has arranged for us to see the palace museum. Our guide is a well-educated Adventist who has published several history books about the Ashanti

From Left: Royal Palace, Kumasi; Ashanti Priest receiving the Golden Stool; Original headquarters of the SDA Church in West Africa.



people and its royal family. He gives us an excellent and very interesting tour. We are indulged by being given permission to sit on royal chairs for photographs.

Before leaving Kumasi, we drive by the vast city market which claims to be the largest in West Africa. There is a fine overview of the market from the western side and we stop there to take a picture before commencing our journey home.



Far Left: Kumasi Markets;  
Left: Talking Drums at  
Ashanti Royal Palace, Ku-  
masi.

Ghana has some interesting practices in regard to funerals. When a person dies, the burial usually takes place within a few days as a family event and is followed by several weeks of mourning. But the funeral can occur anywhere from two months to two years after the death, and is really a time of celebration, often lasting for an entire day and often associated with partying and drinking. Traditionally, funerals were held on a Monday or a Thursday, but to lessen disruption to the business week, they are now usually held on a Saturday or a Sunday. Some communities designate a particular day in the month when all funerals will occur. This is particularly convenient for anyone who wants to do the rounds of all the funeral celebrations going on in the village. As we travel home this afternoon we pass through several villages and towns where people are garbed in black, indicating that funerals are taking place there.

Ghanaian coffins are also something of a novelty. Coffin makers in Accra will design and build a coffin in whatever style is appropriate for the deceased. A pilot may be buried in a coffin the shape of an airplane, a fisherman in a boat coffin, and so on. A librarian, of course, would choose to be buried in a book, but why is a parrot coffin the choice for a teacher I ask? The answer: Because they talk so much!

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It's now Sunday evening, and we are back at Valley View safe and sound (praise the Lord!). The next couple of days promise to be busy ones for both of us. Tomorrow morning Ngaire is presenting a short seminar to most of the secretaries on campus. She wants to involve me in a skit, so before bed we spend awhile practicing our lines.

### **Monday, February 23**

Back from our weekend in Kumasi, the next few days promise to be busy and interesting ones. This morning Ngaire is to meet with most of the secretarial staff at Valley View and share some tips and pointers from her own experience at Andrews and other places. The meeting is set for nine in a conference room here at the Women's Centre, but whether it happens at that time is anyone's guess. This is Africa.

Tomorrow I am to conduct a full-day workshop on strategic planning for about thirty librarians who are coming here from public and private universities and colleges in and around Accra. This is a significant event for the library staff at Valley View, and I sense they are both excited and nervous. Although thirty librarians

are expected, Vida has confirmations from less than ten, so she worries about the cost of catering lunch for thirty if the numbers are much less. I tell her that we will pay the difference if that happens.

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Ngaire's presentation is now re-scheduled for ten this morning, but we are the only ones there at that time. The secretarial coordinator, "Aunty" Lily, soon arrives to survey the scene and goes back to round up the troops. By 10.30 we have a dozen participants on hand, so we begin. Ngaire has prepared a skit in which I am her boss (a role reversal, of course) and everyone enjoys that. After analyzing "Dorothy's" mistakes, Ngaire goes on to demonstrate bad and good telephone etiquette, then there are lots of questions and discussion until the seminar finishes about noon.

Ngaire was busy most of last week checking the order in the library's card catalog, finding and correcting scads of filing errors. She is also suggesting that we do a physical reorganization of the library here, similar to one we did at Caribbean Union College several years ago. We may tackle that project next Sunday if enough help is forthcoming.

This afternoon everyone is busy preparing for tomorrow's workshop. The program for the day is yet to be printed, but a first draft leads me to wonder aloud if I will get to begin my presentation before the midday break. Part one lists a multitude of speeches and introductions. These, plus a break for snacks, threaten to take up the entire morning. I will have to be flexible.

By late afternoon they are busy setting up the room, so we go back to our abode where I can review my workshop notes. Nearly one third of our baggage was taken up with workshop binders that we assembled before leaving Canada. With each binder is a neat plastic case filled with an assortment of pens, markers and high lighters. We pray that tomorrow will be a successful day for everyone involved.

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Tonight we dine at the home of Kenneth and Mahruai Swansi and their two small children. They moved here a year ago from Poona, India, where Kenneth served at Spicer College for many years. He now heads up the Business Department here at Valley View. Mahruai comes from a remote mountainous part of India, close to the Burmese border, almost severed from the rest of India by Bangladesh. She has prepared Indian food tonight, which we enjoy very much. We spend a pleasant evening at their home.

## **Tuesday, February 24**

This is a big day for the Valley View librarians, but in a way, it is also a significant occasion for the university. My workshop, "Choosing Your Library's Future," is scheduled to begin at nine and my computer and the video projector are set up, ready to go. Visitors begin arriving soon after eight and by nine all 30 librarians have arrived, two from as far away as the city of Cape Coast, west of Accra. The registration process seems rather convoluted, with separate trips to the desk to pay the lunch money and later to receive a binder and a nice name badge. A large colorful banner prepared for the event hangs at the back of the platform.

Starting time arrives, but not the Communications Director of the Ghana Union Conference, who is supposed to give one of several welcome speeches. We all go outside for a group photo, then at 9.40 we decide to go ahead without the Communications Director to open the program. There are several speeches, then the chair for the workshop is introduced. Mr. Joshua Aryeety is Head of the Computer Science Department at the University of Ghana. After a short speech, he declares the session open, so everyone breaks for

morning refreshments. About this time two reporters and a photographer arrive from *Ghana News*, the country's national newspaper, so I am ushered to a private room for an interview.

Finally, though, the workshop is underway. I want this to be an interactive event, so after a brief introduction at the podium, I use a roving mike to move about the room and encourage participation through discussion and questions. At the middle of the day we break for a very nice lunch catered by the wife of the university president, Mrs. Laryea, then everyone re-assembles for part two.

As we close the workshop, the missing Communications Director arrives and gives his welcome address. At day's end, everyone feels that it has been a successful event. The Valley View library staff are exhausted but pleased that so many came and that there were no power outages to disrupt the program. Besides working up a sweat, I enjoyed the experience and learned a great deal about libraries and librarianship in Ghana, including the many challenges that are faced here, even by the large public universities.

Tomorrow morning we leave for a three-day trip to the coast of central Ghana with Chris Carey. We pack our suitcase before going to bed.

### **Wednesday, Feb 25**

Chris is at our door on the dot of nine. Vida is coming on the trip too, and we are to pick her up at the library, but no-one has seen her this morning. Chris enlists a couple of student scouts, and soon we get the message that she is waiting at the police barrier on the road to Accra, so we set off in that direction.

Skirting the city of Accra, we head westward on a road that connects numerous villages and towns along the coast all the way to the Ivory Coast. Our destination today is the regional city of Cape Coast, about 80 miles west of Accra. Once out of the urban sprawl, Chris pulls off the road where three guys stand beside a pile of coconuts. With a few deft machete strokes, four coconuts are skinned and decapitated. We quench our rising thirst with the sweet juice, then the guys hack each coconut in half and cut "spoons" so we can scrape out the white pulp.

Around noon we stop at a busy market, parking behind a vendor's van advertising the unlikely combination of "Angel Ice-cream and Soap." A woman is roasting plantains on a griddle, another cooks coco-yams in hot oil. We grab some of both for a quick bite.

Our abode for the next two nights is a rather picturesque forest resort known as Hans Cottage Botel. An enterprising Dutchman has built a wood-and-thatch restaurant on a stilted platform over a small lake stocked with fish and crocodiles, and connected it to shore via wooden walkways. In the lodge behind the lake we may choose a room with fan or one with an air-conditioner. We choose the latter.



Left: Hans Cottage Botel near Cape Coast.

Right: Weaver Bird Nests.



Half the day is still ours, so we hop back in the car and drive a few miles further to one of Ghana's most novel tourist attractions. Kakum National Park is an extensive stretch of rainforest, and its chief attraction is a forest canopy walk, the only one in Africa. The swinging cables support a wood-and-rope walkway suspended more than 100 feet above the forest floor and connecting several gigantic trees where viewing platforms have been built. This unique experience is not for the faint-hearted, but it provides wonderful opportunities to view the rainforest. We are disappointed in not seeing any bird or animal life, but this may have something to do with a rumbling thunderstorm during our visit.

Back at the Botel, we cleanup for our dinner at the restaurant, choosing a table over the water where we can spot crocodiles, observe kingfishers diving for supper, and watch hundreds of colorful weaver birds at their noisy colony on two nearby trees. By the time we finish eating it is getting dark and great flocks of white egrets settle in the trees, occupying whatever space is not already taken by the weavers. Finally the bird chorus dies away, and we make our way back to our room, cold showers, and bed.



Canopy walk at Kakum National Park; Weaver Bird Nests.



#### Thursday, Feb 26

Today we are privileged to visit a part of Ghana that is pivotal in the history of all West Africa. This is the original "gold coast" where Europeans landed in the 15<sup>th</sup> century to trade cloth and metal goods for gold and ivory. Soon afterwards, though, it became the "slave coast" where the trade became "guns for slaves" - live African bodies that could be transported across the Atlantic and expended on the plantations of the Americas. In more recent times, though, this coast was the place where the first Adventist missionaries landed in West Africa in the 1890's. But their bold attempt to salvage Africa for Christ took a heavy toll in privation, disease, and death. Nearly all the early missionaries died of malaria or returned home sick -- a sober reminder that West Africa was known for a long time as "the white man's grave."

Modern visitors to Ghana, like us, come here to see some of the dozen or so seaside castles that were built by different European powers and used as holding tanks for the slave trade. The largest one is built on a headland at Cape Coast, close to the city center. The castle is available for tours, but Chris wants to take us to a much older castle at Elmina, a few miles west of here. Before leaving Cape Coast, though, I need to cash some travelers' checks, so we stop at a Barclays Bank. The Ghanaian currency is the Cedi with an exchange rate of nearly 10,000 to one dollar. The largest bill, however, is for 5,000 Cedi (about 50 cents), so I receive a thick wad of paper money for \$60 American. I feel wealthy with more than half a million Cedis stuffed into my camera case. The businessman ahead of me packs a suitcase with the bills he received. A wheelbarrow might be a more convenient way to transport his money.



While I am in the bank, a street peddler comes by and agrees to do a quick repair job on the soles of Chris's runners. By the time I return to the car, the guy has run out of glue so has trotted off to find some more. Finally he returns to finish the job, and we are on our way again.

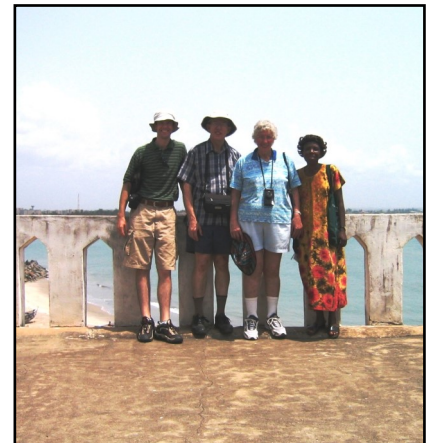
En route to Elmina, Chris pulls off beside a long stretch of beach where we watch fishermen hauling in their net. Six men in a line heave and yell in unison as they pull their net out of the sea, finally landing a catch of flapping fish, along with some eels and crabs. Then the women arrive with large pans on their heads. They will carry the fish to their village where there are clay smoking ovens, or sell them in the market.



From Left: Cape Coast Castle; Fishermen pulling nets; This guy sells rolls of cloth.

Elmina is a fascinating place, the site of the first European structure in sub-Saharan Africa. Here the Portuguese landed in 1482 to trade guns, metal goods and alcohol for gold and ivory which the natives brought from the interior. The Portuguese built a fortress on a rocky headland to establish and defend their post. About 150 years later, the Dutch snatched the castle from the Portuguese and enlarged it to what it is today. By that time slaves were worth more than gold, so the newcomers turned the dark basement storage rooms into dungeons where at least 150 Africans at a time were held pending shipment to the Dutch colonies in the Caribbean.

This castle is a "must see" for visitors to Ghana. Our guide has many lurid stories to tell. He admits that some of them are "oral traditions." The sad reality is that the Ashanti people themselves were involved in the diabolical trade, raiding defenseless villages, decimating their populations as they hauled men and women away to the coast to trade them for more firearms. Altogether it is estimated that between twelve and twenty million natives were shipped across the Atlantic from the Gold Coast during a period of 150 years. By that time the British were the lords of this kingdom, operating the slave trade from several castles along the coast.



From Left: Elmina Castle; Castle Dungeon; Chris, Keith, Ngaire, Vida.

After the castle tour, we stroll through some of the smelly streets of the town, stumbling across several old Posuban shrines. In the slaving days, companies of military men built these rather elaborate shrines with sculptured figures of animals, ships, policemen, and biblical characters such as Adam and Eve. We find three of these peculiar shrines, all in a sad state of disrepair, though soon to be restored with a grant from the Dutch government. Finally we return to eat lunch in the Castle Restaurant. Ngaire orders a dish of steamed vegetables, and I choose rice with groundnut sauce. Both are tasty meals, costing 25,000 cedis (less than \$3) at this exclusive restaurant inside West Africa's oldest castle.

It is hot of course, as usual, and we long for a refreshing swim in the Atlantic. Ghana has dozens of beautiful beaches, but unfortunately those near towns and villages are used as public toilets, flushed a couple of times each day by the tides if you are lucky. We were unlucky this morning when we stopped at a rocky foreshore to photograph the Cape Coast Castle, and had to choose our steps very carefully.

Our guide-book mentions a nice swimming beach a few miles west of Elmina, so Chris drives there. A beautiful white beach shaded by a row of tall coconut palms provides the perfect setting to enjoy the deliciously refreshing surf. Clean toilets and showers are provided at the resort which apparently owns this stretch of sand.

We've already eaten today, so on our way back to the Motel we just stop at a market to buy five pineapples and a hand of fifteen bananas, all for 15,000 cedis (US \$1.50). At the lodge, Vida washes and deftly peels four pineapples, handing us one each. They are loaded with sweetness and juice, so we stand in a row leaning over the balcony of our room, enjoying the luscious fruit. They should call this the Pineapple Coast.

We've had a great day, but we decide to drive back to Cape Coast tonight to visit the campus of the large public university there. I would like to inspect the newest library building in Ghana, and we would all like to attend an evangelistic meeting on the campus. The speaker for a one-week-long series is Dr. Samuel Pipin, whom we knew several years ago when he was studying at Andrews University. Currently in charge of Adventist evangelism at secular university campuses in Ohio, he has come back to Ghana for this crusade. The



Above left: Elmina Castle;  
Above right: Harbor and Fish Market.

large campus auditorium seats 1200, and by the time Pipin gets up to speak the place is packed to the doors with extra rows of chairs along the front and on the sides of the platform. He is very candid with his audience in answering questions they've submitted about oral sex, diet, and Sabbath observance. Rats, cockroaches, and vultures are not clean meats, he emphasizes. The consistently large nightly attendance of students and faculty at this public university is amazing. No wonder the church is growing so quickly in Ghana, with a membership now topping 300,000.

### **Friday, Feb 27**

Our mini-vacation comes to an end today. After breakfast we head back towards Valley View University, stopping en route at the old Fante capital of Mankessim. The old posuban shrine here is quite astonishing, constructed in three stories and topped by a nondescript beast with seven heads and fourteen eyes. We are captive to a half-hour lecture by a retired local teacher who recounts the history of the Fante people and explains all of the rich symbolism of this remarkable shrine.

As always, I am intrigued by the signs along the highway. "Prevent the Spread of Aids -- Keep it Zipped" is pretty good advice in any country. The "Arm of the Lord Repair Shop" might be a good choice for auto repair, and there is something final about "End Time Concrete Works", but I'm a bit puzzled by "Sister Mary Pasta Hair Design."

Passing through Accra again, we stop at a souvenir and craft market, and with the bargaining assistance of Vida and Chris, buy a nicely crafted wooden stool with a traditional Ghanaian motif. It will be fun getting this home, but once there it will make an interesting and useful addition in the main entry.

We've had a wonderful three days. Thank you, Chris, and Vida.

### **Sabbath, Feb 28**

The power was off all of last night. No power equals no fans equals gallons of perspiration. Happily, though, there was a light breeze from the west throughout the night, so we opened the louvres wide and let the air waft over our half-naked bodies. At six we awoke to the sound of joyful singing in the conference center across the way. Last night there was an influx of perhaps 200 women who have come here for a short retreat weekend. Every room here in the Women's Centre is occupied, with extra mattresses on the floor in most of them. This Sabbath morning the women are beginning a day of prayer and fasting. We lay on our beds for an hour, enjoying the music. Africans love to sing, and their voices are melodious and strong.



After a breakfast of mangoes and pineapple, we dress in our new Ghanaian costumes and make our way across campus to the chapel for the morning meetings. Today we are guests for lunch at the home of Emmanuel and Elizabeth Takyies. He is the dean of men and she works at the library circulation desk.

The large Posuban Shrine of the Fante people, located at the old Fante capital of Mankessim.

The women's retreat at the conference center continues throughout the day. During the afternoon we hear some fiery sermons, energetic singing and orchestrated amens coming from that area. Then we learn that the women are having an all-night prayer meeting, so tonight we get only snatches of sleep between the periods of hymn singing. At 3.30 there is another fiery sermon by a male visitor, followed by several more hymns until 4.30 a.m. when it all comes to a noisy end.

### **Sunday, Feb 29**

This is a lazy day. We send some e-mail messages at the faculty internet room, enjoy another interesting and tasty meal at the home of another faculty family, and plan as best we can for our final two days in Ghana. We had originally wanted to have a big library work bee today, the purpose being to physically reorganize the entire library for better service and more efficient use of space. But everyone was exhausted after last Tuesday's workshop event, so we dropped that plan. We are still hopeful, though, of accomplishing the goal during the next two days.

### **Monday, March 1**

When we came to Ghana we were carrying one suitcase full of gifts. Many of our friends donated items such as soap, toothpaste, T-shirts, children's clothing, and Bibles. We also went on a shopping spree and bought pens, high lighters, calendars, books, glue sticks, note pads, and dozens of other sale items. We have found many worthy recipients for these gifts during the past two weeks, but still have several dozen cakes of soap, toothbrushes and paste, and about 25 T-shirts advertising a Run for Breast Cancer in Alberta. This afternoon Chris and Setsuo will take us to a nearby orphanage where we will distribute these items. A cash donation has been given to a needy student from northern Ghana where most of the population are Muslims.

A meeting with the president and academic dean has been postponed until tomorrow, since they are not yet back from meetings in the Cameroons. I had expected to report and share documents with the library committee today, but that too has been postponed until tomorrow afternoon. But we have nailed down 4.00 p.m. today for the library's physical upheaval. The library will close at that time, and the entire staff plus several students will help us with the rearrangement of book stacks and furniture.

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By 7.00 this evening we have made good progress with the library rearrangement, and all agree to meet again at 8.00 tomorrow morning to complete the job. We've moved the large and heavy circulation desk to a new location and are re-using the space for newspaper reading. It has been hot and dusty work, but there have been plenty of helpers – more than we needed, really – to move books, shelving, tables and chairs. Everyone seems excited about what is happening here.



Left: Church service in the Chapel.

Right: A tree is planted by the library staff in my honor.



## Tuesday, March 2

Our final day in Ghana promises to be a busy one. It will begin with another moving experience, but by noon the job should be completed and the library ready to re-open. A meeting with the library committee is scheduled for one o'clock, followed by a final interview with the president and academic dean before we head for the airport. Our bags are already packed, and Isaac, the caring director of the Women's Centre, has helped Ngaire to package our precious Ghanaian stool so that it can go as checked baggage.

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It's noon, and the completely re-arranged library is ready for business. The new arrangement provides space to double the size of the book collection, and we have re-located most of the furniture to better cope with the crowds that fill the library whenever it is open. A new library, with space for students and growing collections, is urgently needed.

Vida arrives at 12.30 with a specially prepared lunch for us. I remind her of the library committee to start in 30 minutes, but she insists that we will eat first and postpone the meeting until later. Relax, please, this is Africa. It is also Africa when we sit down to lunch without any eating utensils. We are familiar with "finger food", but soup?? This is to be our first experience – since babyhood, probably – of eating soup with our fingers. Vida has gone to great lengths to prepare a genuine Ghanaian meal, having pounded cassava roots into flour, gathered a variety of leaves and spices and heaven knows what else, to make a special farewell dinner for us. We take pieces of the sticky dough-like substance in our fingers, dip it in the soup, then suck it all into our mouths. Emmanuel comes by with his camera to record the event for posterity. Well, what can we say except to enjoy a truly African experience.

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It is nearly 7.00 p.m. when we arrive at the airport. Vida and her staff wanted so much to accompany us in the school van, but at the last moment it was not available, so we had prayer together and said our good-byes before leaving by car. We have plenty of time to check in at the British Airways desk, relax and reflect on our Ghanaian experience before our overnight flight to London. There we will rent a car and drive down to Cornwall to spend a few days with our cousins, Beverly and Rob Symonds.

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Ghana, in our opinion, is a lucky country. Politically, it has been stable since it gained independence from Britain in 1957, the first West African nation to do so. The stability is good for the economic development of the country, but it also means that it is a safe country to visit and travel. We would feel safer on the streets of Ghanaian cities than we would in most North American cities.

Ghanaians are a happy, friendly people, perhaps the most friendly of any African country. Even though most are poor by western standards, the people exude happiness and contentment. An outstretched hand



is offered in friendship rather than in asking for money. We saw few beggars on city streets. Almost nowhere did we experience the pressure to buy that one encounters so often in developing countries. While many African nations are caught in an AIDS epidemic of catastrophic proportions, Ghana is fortunate to have a low incidence of the disease, and seems determined to keep it that way.

We have been blessed many times over during this visit to Ghana. It has been a learning experience, and an enriching cultural experience. Our minds are already busy cataloging hundreds of special memories. We've challenged our taste-buds with a diversity of new foods, and still enjoyed perfect health throughout our time here, the hot weather notwithstanding. Being so far away from our house and home affairs has not been a problem, thanks to our friend Joan Spangler who has been making regular visits to our mailbox and checking that the home fires are still burning.

### **Wednesday, March 3**

Cornwall in early March is a land of daffodils. Spring comes early in this southwestern corner of England, and we are astounded to find flowering gardens at the same latitude as southern Canada where the sun will struggle for several more weeks to melt the snow and open the lakes.

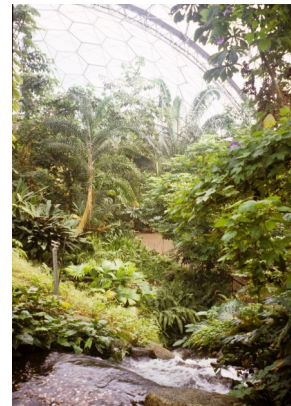
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Our rental car is a mid-size Vauxhall with less than 6,000 miles on the odometer. It is not an automatic, so it has been a bit tricky getting re-acquainted with a clutch and a stick-shift, especially in London traffic this morning. It turns out that most British cars have a manual gearbox, which helps explain why most visitors to the country pay a lot of money for an automatic. We selected a local rental company from the Internet and are paying only 103 British pounds, including tax and insurance, for a five-day rental.

### **Thursday, March 4**

"In the beginning there was a clay pit." So begins the description of the Eden Project, which must rank as one of the creative wonders of the modern world. Cornwall has rich deposits of china clay and until recent times the mining of this clay has been a major industry around St. Austell where we are spending these few days. Now that plastics have made a big dent in the china clay market, many of the quarries have closed and the landscape is pocked in some places with abandoned clay pits, great gaping holes of mud that are sometimes a thousand feet in depth, not a tourist attraction.

But someone had a dream. The Eden Project is about transforming a derelict clay pit, sterile and ugly, into a vibrant living thing. More than that, it is a marvelous demonstration of human stewardship, reversing mankind's history of environmental destruction. So we spent most of today in Eden, exploring tropical rainforests, tumbling waterfalls, and magnificent gardens on a scale that one never thought possible. I could wax



eloquent about this, but suffice to say that as we plan our next group tour of the British Isles, the Eden Project will be one of the “must see” attractions.

### **Sabbath, March 6**

The town of St. Austell has a small Adventist Church and we were there for Sabbath School and the service this morning. We were a total congregation of thirteen souls, including the visiting preacher, his wife, and ourselves. The contrast between Adventism in Ghana and here in England did not escape us. What we did find startling, though, is that we attended college in Australia with the preacher’s parents, Jim and Marita (Engelbrecht) Johansson, that one of the local parishioners is a niece of Dr. Neville Matthews of Canadian University College fame, and yet another is a relative of Lois Zygovic at Andrews University (she worked in an office adjacent to Ngaire). It’s a small world after all.

### **Sunday, March 7**

We have spent several wonderful days here in Cornwall with our cousins. They have treated us royally, taken us to some of the historic and beautiful places in this part of England, and we have had a fun time with them. We have become re-accustomed to driving on the left and dodging around all manner of vehicles parked along narrow roads through villages and towns. Early tomorrow morning we will be on our way back to London and Heathrow Airport, a drive of between four and five hours, depending on the motorway traffic. Our Air Canada flight is due to depart at 1.00 p.m.

### **Monday, March 8**

It has been a long afternoon, traversing the top of the world through seven time zones en route from London to Calgary. Dave and Shirley Schafer arrive at Calgary airport with our van, and after a very long day, it is nice to be driven right to our door in Lacombe. It is wonderful to be home!

