

Thankful greetings from Goma:

I am sorry that I have been so slow to write to you all. The last couple of days have been a blur.

As most of you know, our family (Barry, Marybeth, April and Andrew) were in a plane crash on Tues afternoon in Goma, DRC as we were traveling to visit our son Keith in Kisangani, DRC.

As the plane took off on the remaining runway (1/3 was covered with lava from a volcano in 2001) in Goma, we were just at the point of liftoff when we heard a small pop under the plane in front of us. it was the front tire blowing out. The pilot did all he could to stop the plane, but it was hopeless with the short runway.

The plane skidded ahead after it left the runway, then a short uplift from a little hill caused the plane to catapult over a building and land on a busy and crowded market. We hit hard and this caused the seats two rows in front of us to collapse down about 4-6 feet. marybeth and I both lost our eyeglasses upon impact as well as my cell phone. I started looking for my glasses frantically, but April said, "Dad, we have got to get out of here." I looked across the aisle at Marybeth and saw through her window that the plane had burst into flames on the wings where the fuel was stored. I knew we had a lot of fuel, so we knew it could blow up anytime. April leaped ahead while I got out of my seatbelt and we started forward. Then, I realized that Marybeth had not yet gotten up, so I went to help her and Andrew. The stampede of people headed for the front of the plane delayed me, but marybeth handed Andrew ahead to me. I lost 1 shoe at that point.

I had hardly started to move ahead when I was caught in this mass of humanity and could not budge. Andrew's leg was caught between me and a seat and I couldn't move from the crush of the crowd behind me. I could not leave Andrew. As I pushed back against the crowd, marybeth seemed to come from nowhere and managed to pull Andrew up. That is when we broke his leg. During this time a woman grabbed me, she was covered in blood on her face. I could hardly see and the plane was so full of smoke I could hardly breathe. Marybeth started crawling over the tops of seats to get ahead. I was at the drop off in front of me due to the seats that had collapsed. I dropped Andrew onto the seat in front of me and jumped down. There were bodies there under the seats. I grabbed Andrew and headed for a hole in the side of the plane. Marybeth was trying to pull the arm of a man trapped under his seat, but could not. He was pleading for help. I handed Andrew out the hole to someone. The plane was now fully engulfed with flames on the outside. No emergency exits got opened and I do not know why, but it may have saved all of us as it prevented the flames from coming into the cabin and burning us immediately. Marybeth could see that her efforts to pull the man out was delaying the whole crowd, so she left him. We then went out the hole in the side of the plane together. I don't think the man lived and Marybeth cannot forget him pleading for help. We were suffering from smoke inhalation at this point.

April had run ahead from the beginning and said she never saw a dropoff. That is impossible and I will have to wait to heaven to find out how God carried her across it without her knowing. She reached the front of the plane way ahead of us and saw a man pulling fiberglass from a crack in the side of the plane. She told him in swahili, "We have to open this hole or we are dead." She started helping him pull chunks from the side of the plane to make a hole. When it got big enough for her to pass through, she dived through it, but got stuck half way. Someone pushed her out the rest of the way.

She started looking for a white face, but no one paid any attention to her. The exterior was complete chaos. The plane had crashed into a busy market and everyone was screaming and running around. Bodies were on the ground and people were burning. She finally saw a French man who had escaped through a window and he helped her to move away from the plane as it seemed it would explode any second. She never saw us get out of the plane.

When we got out, we started looking for Andrew, but without glasses, could hardly see. We started running looking for him and the man who had taken him. He thought it must be the child of someone else since he was black and we were white. People grabbed us and started pulling us away from the plane which was now an inferno. Finally, a man came and put Andrew into our arms. We had to convince him that he was ours. I looked in my pocket and was amazed to find our passports still there. I showed him and he agreed to give us Andrew. Then we started looking for April, but a police vehicle stopped and pulled us in. They raced us to a very good hospital which was in total chaos at that point with wounded people. We collapsed onto a bench in shock and waited for April. We started describing April to people around us and a Philippine man said he was the one to push her out the hole in the plane. Then, we knew she was alive. We shouted for joy.

People kept going by on stretchers who were burned. We couldn't believe we were not hurt, only cuts and bruises. Andrew was in shock and we did not know his leg was broken just below the crotch. After 20 minutes we saw April coming and screamed for joy. We hugged and hugged. April had told people that her parents burned up in the plane and were dead.

She could hardly believe we were there. Marybeth kept saying "I can't believe we are all alive."

We then left our names there and got a taxi to the Union office to get news to Keith who was waiting for us in Kisangani. He had only heard that the plane had crashed. When we got there, we got news to Pastor Mtenzi who contacted Keith. Then someone told us that Andrew's leg was swollen. For sure it was and we headed back for the hospital where we got xrays and excellent medical help. A team from Denver happened to be in town, but the hospital itself did a fantastic job.

They put Andrew in a cast from just below the rib cage to his toes. He cannot even turn over by himself now.

That night we stayed with the Union treasurer—a Tanzanian man. They have all been so helpful to us. The embassy man asked if he could release my phone number from my borrowed cell phone. We decided that if God's name could be glorified, it was the right thing to do. Wednesday, we must have done 20 phone interviews as well as taking Andrew back for more xrays. It was a very tiring day. The xrays showed that they might have to reset Andrew's leg.

Today we found out that the leg will heal fine and we finally got some eyeglasses. How wonderful it is to see again.

We praise God that we are alive according to God's mercy. I have to leave the email place now as it is closing. I will write again. We thank God for his protection and for so many answered prayers. Thanks to all of you who lift up our names before the throne of Grace day by day. That is the reason we are alive.

We know God has more work for us to do as he has spared us. I wish I could write more. Sorry I have to end this.

Thank you all and PRAISE BE TO GOD!

Love

Barry, Marybeth and April and Andrew.