



Brandell e-Scr@pbook

A monthly report on our life in Vanuatu



We hope that you and yours had a wonderful Christmas, and that the new year will bring many blessings. December marks the first month of summer temperatures here in Vanuatu, but they didn't slow us down. Thanks for taking the time to catch up with us...

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A "THANK YOU" FEAST

December marked the end of the year, and thus our arrangement to worship with the brethren in Marou Village every Sunday for the last three months of 2008. To say thank you for our efforts, the brethren



organized a custom kakae (feast) to show their appreciation for our interest in their spiritual well-being. As we stepped off of the boat we were met with a custom song to welcome us to Emao

Island. A place had been arranged for us to sit down and get settled. Lunch wasn't ready yet, so Titus and Kaela took advantage of the beach and ocean along with the local kids while we waited. Cindy's dad, Dalton, also traveled with us, so some of the brethren took him on a

From the home-front...

We enjoyed a hot, but very good Christmas here in Vanuatu. Titus really had a good time opening presents! He couldn't understand why he couldn't just stop and play with the first thing he opened though. Lexi enjoyed chewing on the wrapping paper the most. Both kids enjoyed the Christmas music and lights on the tree. They also enjoyed Grandma and Grandpa Dietz (Cindy's parents) being here.

The Vila and Etas ladies had a joint Christmas party where Cindy and I introduced the fun "stealing the present" game when we opened presents. We got lots of laughs out of that. It was a time of great fellowship for all of us.

Titus continues to talk more each day, and is mixing Bislama in with English sometimes as well. He's talking almost exclusively in 2 or 3 word sentences. He also is understanding us a lot better and responding in kind. He is doing pretty well obeying, but is still working on it. And to our delight, Lexi said "Mama" and "Dada" this month for the first time!

We love you all.
- Shawnda



quick tour of the village, during which he met Chief Nobat. Lunch consisted of local favorites such as manioc, laplap, pig, cucumbers and cabbage. We were asked to supply the juice, which was much-appreciated by all the children. After lunch, George led the festivities by expressing the congregation's thankfulness verbally, which was followed by the giving of handmade mats (for the guys), an island shirt (for Titus) and island dresses (for the ladies). In Vanuatu, any time you want to manifest a feeling

(sorrow, forgiveness, thankfulness, etc.), you give a gift. We were humbled by their outpouring of sincere gratitude. These people have very little of a physical nature - even fresh water is in short supply - but they were excited to share these gifts with us. We were also sent home with several different types of fresh fruit.



We arrived back in town that evening grateful for the opportunity to know and work alongside the brethren in Marou Village. We will be worshipping with the congregation there once a month in 2009, and plan to conduct a campaign there in April. Please be praying for these brethren as their faith will be tested in the coming months.



I will also mention that Claude, Rose Mary, and their son, Tari, (from Port Vila) were able to accompany me on my last trip to Marou in 2008. Claude very capably presented the lesson during the morning assembly, and both of them did a great job interacting with the brethren after worship. It is such a joy to see these young Christians growing and maturing in so many different ways.

EPAU VILLAGE

I was grateful that our entire family was able to go and worship with the brethren in Epau Village this month. I have been going there the last Sunday of the month for several years, and they have asked me to continue in 2009.

One of the greatest parts of going is watching Titus. He has SO much fun playing the kids. His favorite activity is chasing chickens. He says he wants to catch one, but whenever one of the other boys catches one and tries to give it to him, he promptly runs in the other direction! There are rocks to throw and sand to play in as well.



Arthur, Max, Kolin, Kalsef and Bob, shortly after requesting that we begin teaching TBS classes in Epau Village in 2009.

During the announcements that Sunday morning, I reminded the congregation that our Trutok Baebol Skul would be starting back up in February, encouraging them to take part. After services, I noticed that all the men stayed in the building. I hung around outside watching Titus, and was soon asked back in. The men had discussed it and wanted to know if we would be willing to teach classes in Epau village on Saturday mornings this quarter, so that more people would be able to attend. I told them that we would be more than happy to conduct them, so long as they were willing to make a serious commitment to the classes (attendance, homework, tests, etc.). They understood, and we agreed that we would talk again in early January to set up plans. We are very excited that the brethren are desiring a greater Bible knowledge, and are willing to make this type of commitment.

CHRISTMAS IN VANUATU



Christmas is quite different in Vanuatu - most noticeably, IT'S HOT! People traditionally go to the beach or have a big meal to celebrate. We Americans tend to keep our own traditions alive, while assimilating some Vanuatu-culture in as well. The best part about this year's holiday was the presence of Cindy's parents, Dalton and Mary Beth Dietz. They are like parents to us (Titus even calls them Grandma and Grandpa), and we have thoroughly enjoyed visiting, playing cards, working, and sharing meals together with them. What a pleasure it is to have family around for the holidays!

We were supposed to all go to the beach on Christmas Eve, but Melia woke up with an ear infection and it was a rainy day. So instead, our family went to The Fun Factory, an indoor playplace here in Vila. Titus and Lexi thoroughly enjoyed the few hours we spent there (there are videos and photos of the trip on their websites). Afterwards, we picked up Mike and had lunch in town. That night, we exchanged gifts and had snacks. Christmas morning meant MORE presents. Oh how fun it is to watch kids open presents. Titus spent the entire time confused as to why he couldn't play with the toy he'd just opened, and instead had to open yet another one. Lexi just enjoyed chewing on the boxes and wrapping paper! We topped off the day with our team's favorite meal - fajitas! We have homemade tortillas, homemade salsa, wonderfully-marinated beef, and several sides. Yum! We hope that you had an equally delightful holiday. See photos on PAGE 4.

FAMILY UPDATE

We'll let the pictures (PAGE 5) do most of the talking here, but there are a few things we have to mention. The big changes this month were Lexi learning how to pull herself up, and Titus moving into his "big-boy" bed. Lexi loves showing off her new skill, and we know it means that walking is just around the corner ... can it be?!? Titus adjusted wonderfully to his new sleeping arrangements, thanks in part to the *Cars* bed-sheets he got from the Bakers for Christmas. The last thing he sees every night is Mater and Lightning!



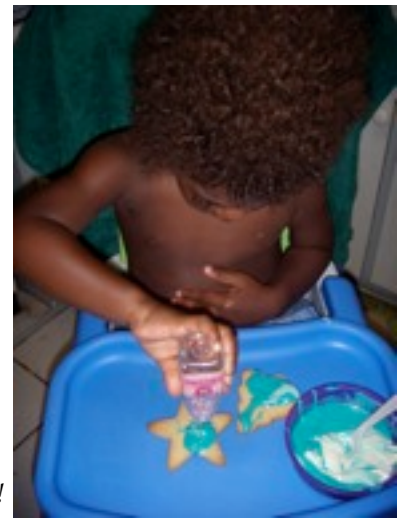
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Our team digging in to the snacks on Christmas Eve.



Above: Shawnda, Lexi and Cindy on their way to deliver Christmas cookies to our friends and neighbors. Right: Titus busy decorating Christmas cookies ... his new favorite tradition!



Titus was scared-to-death of Santa Claus when he visited play-group. He certainly looks funny, but scary?!? Anytime Titus hears "Santa" since then, he hunkers down and says, "scared."





Lexi showing off her new skill



Titus with his friends in Epau



Happy Birthday, Uncle Mike!



Reading with Grandma

