

4-21-09

It's Richard here, to start, since this week I have marginally more going on than Lois. After Easter it has been focused on getting work done and ready to leave things in other peoples' hands. Six weeks from today we fly home, and my work is definitely winding down. This is a holiday-filled month and so my schedule has been affected. Last week Monday was Easter Monday, a legal holiday. Wednesday (day after tomorrow) is the big South African election, and election day is a holiday. May 1 is also a holiday, so these have been 4-day weeks.

Today I held my final research seminar. The students have begun writing their research proposals, and so I had better have covered all the preparatory material (and I have). Thursday I have my final management and administration class, wrapping up what turned out to be a shortened module anyway. Whatever they get – that's what they get! All of my lecture notes are on PowerPoint and already on the university computer system, so they will have that for review before exams.

Tomorrow I go to Alice again for more staff interviews on the evaluation project that I am doing. I finished my interviews with EL staff today, and begin my Alice interview tomorrow and next Tuesday. One piece of BIG news – the motor pool in Alice is going to go over our car and either deal with some of its issues or give us a different one. Lois wondered if I would come home with a Lexus, but I assured her that I would settle for nothing less than a Mercedes. Or I may just come back with the same old Chico. We will see!

The big news today at work was that they are trying to hire a really senior person to come here to EL and be the head of the combined department. Today they interviewed a man from Univ. of Johannesburg who is very impressive. I know that everyone hopes that he will come, and I think he might. He is looking for a challenge, and EL is a nice place to be. Anyone in his/her right mind would want to get out of Jo-burg. Nasty, dangerous city.

The Univ. of Johannesburg, by the way, is one of the reorganized universities in this country. The core of it was the former Rand Afrikaans University, to which was attached a couple of community-technical colleges. It was then renamed. It is an Afrikaans language university (or was – not sure about now), and the man we interviewed is Afrikaners background.

John (dept. head) had said that the forecast all weekend was for rain, but in fact it was glorious. Sunday we went to the beach and watched surfers, sailboats, kayaks and one large tanker. It was a great day to be on the ocean. Tonight after our

candidate and his wife flew back to Jo-burg it began to rain! This is a point where the EL weather and the Minnesota weather sort of meet, but they go in opposite directions – winter is coming here to the southern hemisphere. It was certainly cool when I walked to the bus this morning at 6:40 and cool again late afternoon when I came back on the bus. In between I was indoors all day and it could have been a blizzard for all I knew (well – not a blizzard in EL!) This would probably be my last morning bus ride, because my 8:00 seminar is finished!

Tuesday now, and Richard is off in Alice and I, Lois, will add a bit before we send this off. Elections are tomorrow, yet the people we are around have said little about it. The papers are full of it, and there are posters everywhere. It was interesting to note the different posters when up in KwaZulu Natal, where the IFP is big. We had seen none of their posters down here in the Eastern Cape area of EL. Some are written in Africaans, some in English, some in Xhosa down here. We happened to meet a large rally on Sunday on our way back from the beach, and it was fun to see their enthusiasm. They were COPE folks, one of the opposition parties. So far we have not heard of any violence, and hopefully it will be a peaceful election. USA election results made headline news here. I suspect some of you will have to search to find the results of the SA elections in your papers.

Mornings are cooler, as are evenings, but basically the weather here continues to be pleasant. I note the grass has dried a bit from lack of moisture, although the whole area we drove in over our break was beautiful and green because of the rains.

I spent a morning at REHAB helping them write some new pamphlets about mental illnesses. They have only a few good pamphlets, and if they order them from the SA organization they have to pay for them, so they want to print their own with their own logo and info on it. I helped cull through some info and highlight what I thought should be included, keeping it simple, informative and hopeful. I believe they will get them printed and use them.

John has asked me to come to two of his clinical classes and discuss mental illness and treatment, so I will do that the first week of May. And then yesterday I sat and entered data for Richard on the survey he is doing for his part in the program evaluation. He had warned me it was tedious work, which it is, but I have more time than he does to do it. And no grad assistants here to do such tasks!

The gardener is here today working, in spite of the rain falling earlier this morning. She seems a pleasant person, although her English is limited so we don't

converse much. Last week she did not show up, and Caroline complained to me that “they just don’t show up and you never know”. It bothers me to hear how often white people use “they” implying all the black population. A good reminder to me not to generalize. But this wiry little woman is here today, and she works constantly all day, regardless of weather.

I am due to take a man to a psychiatric clinic appointment soon, but it may or may not happen. It has been cancelled a couple of times already, once because of a strike and then because he was ill. He recently had a car accident and was injured. He has no insurance and no money to fix his car. He usually prefers to drive as it is easier for him than trying to get in and out of a vehicle. But, his car might not be fixed. So there are a number of reasons why I suspect that I will not be accompanying him to this appointment, which is in a neighboring town. The hope is to get him on anti-depressants, but the whole process is taking a very long time. Meanwhile, as you can imagine, he is depressed and not improving.

On Sunday Pastor Dieter made the announcement that the adoption of their twins was finalized last week, and that is good news! They have had these kids since they were 7 weeks old, and they are now 2 ½. They are going to have a meal after church on Sunday in two weeks and they ask that those of us who come bring some canned goods to donate to the agency where they got the kids, rather than gifts for the children. Although that is a common thing in the US we have not heard much about such things here. However, the grocery store does have a large bin at the entrance and a sign that asks for food donations for stray dogs. I mentioned this to someone who commented that there seems to be more concern in this culture for stray dogs than for homeless children.

Time to think about lunch. At one of the nearby supermarkets they sometimes have shredded smoked chicken in a little container. They are really just scraps, almost like what is left after one would slice smoked chicken. But they make a tasty sandwich. Basically we find the sandwich meats here disgusting looking, so we don’t buy any. There is always a lovely assortment of SA cheeses, though. Oh, that reminds me, a few weeks ago I actually saw turkey in the supermarket freezer section. Jennie-O turkey. I peeked, and it was from Willmar, MN!! I must look and see if they still have some as we can use the Weber grill here and we could have turkey. Otherwise I have never seen turkey in the stores or on the menu in restaurants here. Curious.

Peace and enjoy Springtime! Lois

P.S. Richard again - I am now back from Alice, where I interviewed 4 full- and part-time staff members about the curriculum. It is obvious that morale there is very low, whereas it is generally good in EL. The curriculum is not the problem – an outrageous student-staff ratio is (227:1), and I will make some direct statements to the administration about this. The program earns 12 million rand (\$1.2 million) from these students by way of bursaries for social work students, and UFH is not providing the resources that the program requires. It is clearly seen as a “cash cow”, and not as a valued program that they should help develop.

The better news is that the motor pool worked on the car and it is running better. They replaced a spark plug and worked some on the engine timing. They EVEN put the door handle back on the driver’s side – the one that came off in my hand the first morning. I still would not go far from here in that vehicle, but I plan two more trips to Alice and it should handle those.

My hair is growing back, with some strange results. As most of you know, I have rather little on top and more on the sides. The side hair is sticking up and is not long enough to comb. So, yesterday, I looked at myself in the mirror and saw an unfortunate resemblance to the pointy-haired supervisor in “Dilbert”. Not an image that I intend to retain, but it is really quite funny!! Blessings! Richard