



# Gather The Fragments Bible Mission

## *Stephen & Laura Holt*

### *Sierra Leone, West Africa*

## **FIELD REPORT: JANUARY 2018**

*Dear Praying Family and Friends*

We're still trying to believe that he's actually here in the States! After almost nine years in the bush, Stephen arrived on December 29 and life has been a blur since! He continues to marvel at changes in family, American culture, and most especially - technology. Thank you to The Bible Baptist Church family for the lovely "Welcome Home" celebration; it was an afternoon we'll long remember.

We had my first appointment with the neuro-surgical specialist in Tampa on January 9. This doctor taking a conservative approach so that means more testing before deciding what needs to be done to help alleviate my symptoms. On February 9 I will have a specialized Cine-MRI to assess the flow of spinal fluid as well as a CT Scan to get a view of the amount of skull and cervical vertebrae bone removed during my decompression surgery 20 years ago. We appreciate this cautious approach rather than quickly jumping into a corrective surgery as some neuro-surgeons are known to do because surgery may not be the best course for me. Currently I'm completely unable to do any artwork as bending my head forward places too much pressure on my brain stem which severely aggravates my symptoms.

Immediately following this appointment, Stephen flew to Rhode Island to spend time with his family especially his mother, Frances, who had recently been admitted to a nursing home following an injury; she will be 98 in March. Though her health is quickly declining, she did recognize Stephen and was able to engage in conversation with him though this was minimal as she has very little strength. Last week Mom was "moved" to hospice care which is simply a paperwork technicality rather than an actual move; she'll stay at the same nursing home in the same lovely private room that's become home for her. Immediately following this trip was the annual Bible conference at our home church.

**IN SIERRA LEONE:** Stephen is in daily contact with several of the leading church men via WhatsApp as well as our son, John, who has been left in charge of the mission compound. As of this writing all is going well and there have been *NO* problems with the church or the compound! That is really big and represents much growth. The testimony of the church and mission has produced a second layer of security as the town population at large has a greater respect for the property than they formerly held. We have several families who now live on mission property giving a physical presence but additionally we have others in town keeping eyes and ears open for any potential trouble. Stephen left on a very good note and in excellent favor with town leadership which is primarily Muslim. He had some very difficult good byes to say and all are eager for his return. It's taken nine years for all of us to grow into this mutually respectful relationship.

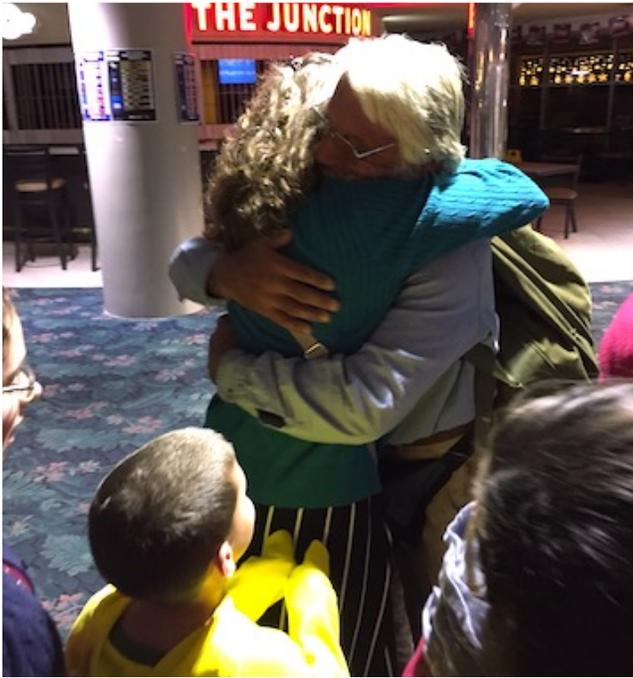
**STATE-SIDE WORK:** We're in the process of overhauling our website to give it an updated look and add new photos. We're also planning a new approach to our Field Reports whereby we can bring you more of the stories from life in Sierra Leone and keep you well connected with the work you so faithfully support through prayer and finances. We plan to put out a Field Report every other month and pack them with pictures so you can see the hearts and lives you are touching. Additionally, Stephen is enjoying class time at DeLand School of the Bible, especially because he's attending with our two oldest grand daughters, Ruth and Rebekah. He's also assisting with ministry at an Orlando rescue mission, is regularly on the streets for public ministry, and is just generally enjoying digging in and helping with church ministry activities. He's also getting some much needed physical and mental rest.

At this point we have no way to know how long Stephen will need to remain in the States. Because of this uncertainty, we understand if any of our financial supporters feel the need to suspend our support. Any support which continues to come in to Gather The Fragments Bible Mission will be held in the GTF savings account and used solely for the ministry of the mission. All of our personal, living, and health expenses are paid for by Stephen's Coast Guard retirement benefits. We will keep you well informed as to the progress of my health and any plans for Stephen's return to Sierra Leone. We are so grateful for you all, our co-laborers in Christ to the people of Sierra Leone.

Because He is Worthy

*Stephen & Laura Holt*

# Home Again ~ Family Time



From Top Left: At the airport. After 8 years in the bush, the first hug rightly went to our daughter, Danielle, while the kids impatiently wait their turn.

Meeting Caleb for the first time.

Cut-throat Uno rounds; just because he's their Pa doesn't mean the grand kids take it easy on him!

Story time with Pa is always fun and action packed.

Jeremy introducing Stephen to the all-new (for him) iPad.



# Church Activities & Ministry Opportunities



L: A panel of church men taking Bible questions from men at the rescue mission.

B: What are the chances? Meeting a man from Sierra Leone at the rescue mission. It was the first time for each of them being at the mission!



L: At the Welcome Home Celebration.

We are wearing traditional handwoven garments given as a gift from The Bible Mission Church on Stephen's last Sunday in Sierra Leone. The colors are specific to Valunia Chiefdom of which our village, Baomahun, is a part. This gift is a very high honor and was quite costly for the church members to give.



L: The bus driver and his young charges as they head off to Bible class at church.

R: On the streets of DeLand with Caleb. The older teaching the younger. Stephen is really enjoying his time as "Pa".

