

Prayer Letter

May 2009

Greetings from Tirana, Albania!

I am now over halfway in my planned time here going into my seventh month; winter has been and gone but you still regularly see snow on the Dajti mountain tops; rain keeps coming and the sun also keeps shining too. The pace of life doesn't seem to slow down. I have now witnessed a few Albanian cultural events such as New Year's celebration, Valentine's day, Women's day, and Summer's day which all generally involve thousands of people meeting in the city centre like at a massive fair or doing something with their family.

Braking in Albania – 27 March to 4 April

For those of you who still don't know what this was, Graham, Tim, Ildir and myself came up with this crazy idea to cycle the length of Albania on our mountain bikes.



Mark Russell was our support vehicle driver who kept us going over the approx 400km from north to the deep south – to raise funds and awareness for BMS World Mission and for the sheer challenge of cycling an uncharted country.

www.justgiving.com/brakinginalbania Fundraising for BMS World Mission

www.facebook.com/Braking-in-Albania/67696485800

School life

A current concern is ensuring enough emergency cover at school as there has been a lot of sickness spreading through the school



affecting pupils and teachers alike. I have been impressed by the adaptable nature of the staff and their willingness to stand in at very short notice, even if it's meant to be their break.

At the teachers' faculty meetings this term we are looking at the strengths and weaknesses of the school to see what opportunities there are to improve the whole teaching and learning process within the school, especially in the light that year 9 will be added next academic year, followed by year 10.



My PE teaching this term included Ultimate Frisbee and floorball (a bit like ice hockey without violence) and recently flagball. The upper school are training hard at basketball, getting ready for their next TIS challenge.

I've done some substitute teaching and class cover for absent teachers – so far 8th grade Bible, 5th grade art classes, grades 5, 6 & 7 form room tutorials and registration at the start of day.

I am still working with Roger (head of upper school and

school director) and Gjergji (Albanian premises custodian) reviewing the premises fabric action plan on a weekly basis. We now have a fire safety plan, anti-slip flooring strips, new PA and alarm system, sorted the schools doors (numbered) and keys scheduled (now fully colour coded) – all of which help make the school safer and more user friendly.

Church Life, fellowship & friendship

Church life for me is fairly uncomplicated at Udha es Shpresas (Way of Hope). Parts of the service including the sermons are helpfully translated into English. I still go to the prayer meetings held every Wednesday at 5.00pm, which are an essential part of church life. I also go to the worship practice, which takes place on Thursdays – all the songs and hymns are in Shqip, of course. I get along to the men's fortnightly football evenings held on a Saturday; I am becoming quite handy as their goalkeeper.

Benni, the pastor of the fellowship, continues to encourage the fellowship to be out in the community taking every opportunity to share their Christian faith. During every national holiday or special day you will find a group of members giving out leaflets, or going through a questionnaire /survey on 'What is the Bible? Who is God? Who is Jesus?'

Klubi Mrekullia (Miracle Club)

The under 12s group is well attended with about 25 children coming regularly. The boisterous boys take a lot of effort to keep them calm or focused on anything even when playing football, the girls are far more co-operative and listen well. The programme includes Seat or Turi telling a Bible story, sometimes using puppets, which seems to capture the children's interest.

Numbers in the teens group are smaller with ten children. Once again the boys can be a handful! We do age appropriate talks and Bible studies and have a monthly joint youth event at the International Church.

Health and food

Since the last newsletter I've slimmed down even more, my waistline has gone down from 42 to 39 inches due to a combination of healthier eating, a very active workday as a PE teacher and my cycling training. Currently the weekly schedule includes two cycling outings covering between 40 – 60 miles depending on the route. My knee joints are benefiting from the low impact exercise and are becoming stronger day by day.

Reflections

Life here is very different. Under the surface, culturally, religiously, ethically, the Albanians see things differently or just don't see things. In the UK we are task and event-orientated and very legalistic. Here people are more relational and close family-orientated and consider they have a right to roam or do what they like. Looking out for the wider community doesn't happen, so if you have no family you can soon find yourself on your own. So it has been great to find friendship and fellowship in our little biking team, WOH Church and GDQ School.

Things to pray for

- ◆ Learning Shqip (Albanian) enough to be able chat and communicate. I now have Mondri as language helper.
- ◆ Definitely more established, good contacts, cycling friends/fellowship with resident missionaries and local Albanians
- ◆ School staffing short and long-term
- ◆ Way of Hope ministry of the church in the community
- ◆ GDQ school expansion and development
- ◆ GDQ Klubi Mrekullia children and youth work, for continued inspiration and energy
- ◆ General wellbeing and health/safety of all staff including myself, especially as getting cover means a teacher doubling up or parents stepping in.

Gary

BMS World Mission supports 350 personnel working in 34 countries of the world. Together they are involved mainly in church planting, development, disaster relief, education, health and media and advocacy. If you would like to support BMS you can make a one-off donation, or you can become a 24:7 Partner for as little as £2 per month. Visit www.bmsworldmission.org or call 01235 517617 for a 24:7 Partners leaflet, or 01235 517641 for our donation hotline.