



# Phil & Vala Long

*Taking Life to the forgotten people of Madagascar*

## Mad 4 Life Ministries

*"I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly." John 10:10*

[www.Mad4Life.org](http://www.Mad4Life.org)

Dear Pastors & Prayer Partners,

Bonjour and Salama Tompko from the Big Red Island of Madagascar! Anniversaries...sometimes they are good, sometimes not so good. I personally try not to think about the not so good or even bad anniversaries, most of which are historical markers like 9/11. However, the good anniversaries are always good to remember, like May, 1993 when I graduated high school, February 17, 1995 - the day I was called a United States Marine for the first time, and, of course, February 9, 1996 when I made Vala Dawn my own. The beginning of May marked the 24-year anniversary of the day I first met my Vala Dawn Freeman.



So, as you can see, the historian in me loves anniversaries. In the next few weeks we will celebrate a new anniversary; it will be one year since we made the move to this Island. The first year on the field for a new missionary is vital. The truth is, the first year can make or break a missionary and their family. Thanks to a comment made by a veteran missionary before we left the church staff, one of the things I tried not to do before we moved here was to romanticize the field. Not that I thought Madagascar was a horrible place, but I tried not to look at our future home, a place in which we had spent only 2 weeks before we were here permanently, with rose colored glasses. As we look back over this first year, Vala and I both can laugh at some of the things we did...well, really things that I did since I am usually the one running my mouth. Things like when I almost made the waitress cry - I told you about her in the last prayer letter. Probably the funniest memory I have of the past year is when the boys and I made our first trip to the store by ourselves. We had only been in country for about a day and, because of other obligations, most of our fellow missionaries had to leave town right away. So we walked a few miles to pick up some food at a market. Before we left I gave the boys a stern warning to stay focused on Daddy, move quickly, and some other instructions that probably made the boys wonder if we were going to go get some bread or going into battle. We probably looked like a strange boy band version of "Charlie's Angels" walking down the road.

There are memories from the past year that we can laugh at, but there are also a lot of things that really warm our hearts. A few months after getting here, we were having a conversation with a friend and talking about all the walking we do. A comment was made about how difficult it is to walk down the street and how the people yell, "Vazaha, Vazaha!" at you all the time, as if a freak show just rolled into town. My first reaction was, "Yeah, no kidding!" But then it hit me. That happened all the time when we first arrived, but now we usually hear, "Bonjour," or "Salama." Yes, every once in a while I still hear, "Bonjour Vazaha," but it's a rarity. In fact, after I returned from Mum's funeral, I had several people who I did not know make the comment that they had not seen me in a while. We did not even realize it until that little conversation, but I guess we have become a normal part of the community.

I think the biggest takeaway as we look back at this first year is that ,while Madagascar is not some "Island Paradise" as depicted in a Dreamworks cartoon, and here in the capital it's honestly pretty dirty, there are some absolutely beautiful things all over the Island, There are a lot of dangerous people here, but there are also a lot of beautiful people that have our safety and best interest at heart. The life we have here in Madagascar is not perfect. Because of where so many of the Malagasy are spiritually, there are days I feel like the shoe salesman who phoned back to headquarters and said, "Don't send any shoes because no one wears shoes here." However, there are more days when I want to call headquarters and say, "Send every shoe you have because no one has shoes" (i.e. Send every missionary you can because the people here need Jesus!) We want you to know having a year under our belts and without rose-colored glasses, we absolutely love Madagascar and we are so thankful that the Lord and all of our supporters back home have sent us here!

As I close, I want to let you know how you can pray for us over the next several weeks. At the end of June we will return to the States for about 7 weeks. On July 12<sup>th</sup>, Vala and I will give Tabitha away to Matthew Smith in marriage. During the seven weeks in the States, we will be under the gun to not only make the final preparations for Tabby's wedding, but we will also be busy getting Gabe his driver's license and getting him settled at college. You would think that it gets easier to say goodbye as each child leaves home, but it doesn't. Pray for us as we return to Madagascar with only one of our kiddos, and pray for Deacon as well; not having his big brother here with him maybe a bit hard. Lastly, we ask that you continue to pray for us as we continue in language learning when we return home to Madagascar. While it has not been easy, we are finally starting to envision plans to step out with another missionary to plant a church after the beginning of next year.

Thank you so much for your prayers and remember, we are also praying for you.

Phil and Vala Long

***Praises & Prayer Requests:***

- 1-year anniversary of moving to Madagascar
- Received renewal of Visas to stay in Madagascar
- Safe travels as we return to the U.S. at the end of June
- Gabriel as he settles into college
- Matthew & Tabitha as they begin their new life together
- Deacon as he adjusts to being the only child at home



*Pray for Gabe as he gets ready to start college*



*Pray for Matthew and Tabby as they start their new life together*

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