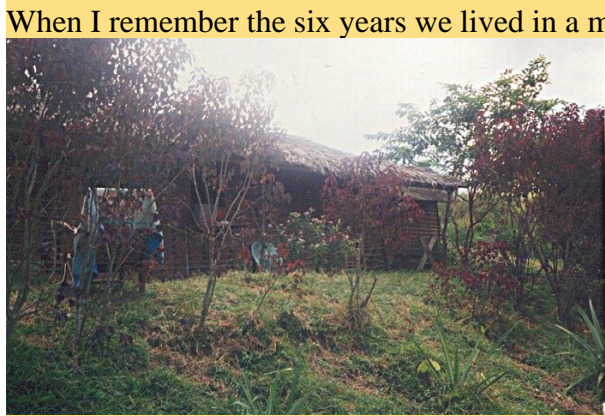


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Tell Me About Living in a Mud Hut

by [Lorella Rouster](#), ECM Missionary who lived in the [DR Congo](#) from 1990 to 1996 in a mud hut



When I remember the six years we lived in a mud hut in Congo, I also remember how I used to be amazed that the Amish could POSSIBLY live without electricity. It seemed impossible to me, and I certainly couldn't understand why anyone would choose to do it. [Yet when God called us to start a new mission station from scratch in Congo](#), I knew that living in a mud hut would be a part of it. I had visited in the mud huts of many African friends during our first term in Congo and even slept in one through the hospitality of a stranger when a rainstorm stopped our travels one night. We slept on a lumpy straw mattress with rain dripping in on us from the thatch roof only about three feet above our heads. We appreciated all that, however, when we remembered that our host and hostess were sleeping in straight hard wood chairs at their insistence because they wanted to use

the little they had to welcome the missionaries. I had sat out another rainstorm in a mud hut in Idiofa that had only little stools for furniture, and a few sacks of grain stacked in the corner. I had some idea what it would be like.

Our adventures with our own mud hut began the night we arrived at Lac Mbulu. We had sent money ahead to have a simple mud hut constructed, and we had received pictures to show the progress. So we were very disappointed when we arrived to find that the hut had no door and no window shutters to keep out the rain or unwanted animals. We learned that somehow a rumor got started that we were not coming after all, so the workers stopped work on the hut. But the worst part was that the workers had not leveled out a place for the hut before beginning construction. There was so much fall that every step was going uphill or downhill. There was no bed, but some friends found one and installed it that night. We had a hard time staying on the bed because of the slant of the floor. In the next few days we had shelves built, but nothing would stay on the shelves. Walking up and down in the house was very tiring to me. I remembered I had told the Lord that I was very happy to be serving Him in Africa and would not complain about a single thing. The floor of that house surely tested my promise! I have to say, however, that this is not typical of African mud huts. I have never seen another one with a floor like that.



After a few days my patience with the crooked floor was exhausted. I called in one of the mission workers. "Look," I said. "This is a dirt floor. Couldn't you take some of the dirt from other there on the high end and throw it over there on the low end? Couldn't you even this floor out so it would be flat?"

"Sure," he replied.

"Well, would you please do it, then?" That very day I had a flat floor. Life in the mud hut suddenly became much more tolerable, and I learned to praise God for flat floors!

Overall, there was a lot to appreciate about our hut. The thatch definitely broke the sun and provided a much cooler place to rest. When kept in good repair, the thatch did not leak. We didn't have running water (unless you count running down the hill to the spring), but we had the Africans build a platform by the door made of sticks woven together with tough "nkodi" vine rope. On that we placed a bucket of cool water for washing hands and splashing water on hot faces.

We built a simple outhouse toilet outside the house. It was just a hole in the ground, covered with a bench with a



round hole in it. John had lots of fun trying to cut that round hole with a simple hand saw! Then there was a simple hut built over it and a second screen to provide total pri-

privacy. The walls and ceiling were made of thatch. I didn't mind it at all, although it was a little inconvenient to get to when it was raining hard.

Termites were constant visitors in our mud hut home. Our first encounter with them happened that very first night of our arrival. We had no furniture so we laid some small logs on the floor and set our suitcases on them. The next morning our suitcases were full of termites. Some of our clothing had holes eaten in it, but worst, the computer diskettes we had brought in our luggage for special protection were all totally destroyed, ruined by the grainy mud tunnels the termites built overnight.



Every evening we could hear the termites drumming rhythmically on the thatch roof, and if we went outside and shined a flashlight, we could see them thumping their back legs on the roof in some kind of dance or communication or something. We got so used to it that it became kind of a comforting sound. We soon learned to live with them. We learned that polished paper stapled into the mud walls was fine, but soft paper would be eaten overnight. We learned to save little tomato paste cans, fill them half full of kerosene, and set the legs of furniture in them to discourage termites from eating our simple wood furniture. One time we were away a few days and the hut was locked up. When we returned, termites had built a tunnel straight up into the air, attacking the bottom of our wood table.

We had other visitors, too. Rats were the least welcome. We learned that they were attracted by bright, shiny things. One day they took a shiny scarf from my suitcase and tried to get it to their home. The next day I found it woven in and out of the thatch in the ceiling. I guess the rats gave up on it. When I was sick with malaria one time, I looked up at the big box of toilet paper on the shelf in our room (we only got to the city once every three months, so we had to buy big quantities of essentials). There was toilet paper unraveling and coming out of the box, seemingly by itself. I looked on the floor. The paper seemed to be disappearing under the bed. I looked on the other side. It was coming out and disappearing down a hole in the floor! The rats were pulling it out, unwinding it to make a nest down under the dirt floor! I cut off the paper, thinking maybe a rat would come out of the hole looking for more, but he seemed to think he had unwound the whole thing.

The rats were attracted by shiny materials. I had one scarf with shiny metallic threads. One morning when I woke up, I found it pulled up through the thatch roof, in and out, inextricably stuck as if it had been woven into the roof. Apparently some rat had been trying to drag it home and finally gave up.

We didn't have electricity in our mud hut, of course. There was no electricity anywhere in the area, although eventually we installed solar power to run lights in the [Bible School](#) we built. For light, we used a kerosene lantern. At bedtime, we turned the flame as low as possible. If we needed to take it to the outhouse in the night, we just turned it up a bit. I learned that some colors are not easily distinguishable by lantern light. We loved the card game "Dutch Blitz", but in lantern light it was nearly impossible to tell the blue cards from the green ones. Even more difficult (well, impossible!) was purple and brown. One evening I brought home a bunch of Jesus pictures to color for Sunday school. I carefully selected brown crayons, but in the morning I found Jesus' faces were all purple! I told myself that from then on, I'd choose my crayons more carefully. The next time I looked VERY carefully and made SURE it was brown. Yep, in the morning Jesus' face was purple once again.



The walls were painted with mud in a wide variety of earthtone colors. It's surprising how mud paint can brighten the walls, as you can see in the picture above.

I didn't mind living in a mud hut, especially since it gave us a chance to serve the Lord Jesus in a place where that was the standard kind of housing. We didn't hurry to build a better house, because we didn't want to give the impression that our own comfort was our primary concern, nor did we want that to be so. Only after [the Bible school](#) was built did we build a cement home. We actually have many happy memories of those six years in our little mud hut, and we have a special gift that will last the rest of our lives. Today when we sit in our simple but comfortable living room, we feel we are living like kings. We look on what God has given us with eyes of real appreciation, and we are able to truly enjoy His good gifts.