

May 23, 2012

Departure date for Africa. It had been quite an emotional journey through the two-year transition out of ministry on staff at our home church in CA. When Colin first proposed we should return to Africa, I felt a fierce, grief-stricken resistance. Didn't we already do that? I could not possibly return to life on the frontier. Too hard, too raw, too late for this old lady in her 50's.

We took a trip in 2011 to see what the teams lived like, out in the bush. The idea was to live as close as possible to how local people lived. I was appalled by the primitive conditions. Once again, tears and dismay.

Colin was like a kid in a candy store. Or maybe more like a retired quarterback asked to play again in the Superbowl. Of all the assignments in life, this was the absolute best: reaching an unreached group. Being the very first to share Jesus with them. How could ministry in America even come close to being that thrilling?

I had been struck when dating him by his eagerness to reach tribesmen in northern Kenya. It would not be fair or honest, I knew, to marry him intending to talk him out of his call. I must be prepared to go the far reaches of the desert and make a home there, or else back out of our relationship. Sarah's example of following Abraham out from civilized Ur to the wilds of Canaan spoke to me. I wanted to be one of those daughters of Sarah, one of those women who "did what was right without being frightened by any fear." God gave me courage, and we went. We went for a long time: sixteen years. They were hard years; they were good years. Then we returned for ten years to the USA, and life got a lot easier.

I liked having amenities. I liked being able to disciple women in English. I loved being part of our home church. Our three children were all on the brink of adulthood. Two were working; the youngest had finished a year of college. Our parents were ill. My dad had bladder cancer; Colin's mom had bone cancer. My mom had broken a bone, and was gradually healing.

Life was going on in the USA. Maybe we were needed? I hoped something would come up to make it obvious we should stay in this nice comfortable place. Instead, everything lined up for us to go. Our home church gave us a lavish send-off with a dinner for 300 people who came to say goodbye. Our children

raised not one protest. Our parents encouraged us not to stay to help them. Our financial support came in.

Over 240 people signed up to receive weekly prayer requests for our work in Tanzania. As they emailed us one by one my heart both sank and lifted. It's such a confirmation that God is at work when His people volunteer to pray. People we did not even know asked to be added to our prayer team.

Colin was patiently, gently stubborn. He had confidence this was the right decision and God's next assignment for us. He did not underestimate what the cost would be, but he thought no cost would be too great in order to do what God sent us to do. I cried; he hugged me and patted my back. I kept asking the Lord if we couldn't get out of it; then I kept being very convicted by overwhelming Scriptures that came to my mind whenever I was most drowning in self-pity. No one can be Jesus' disciple without giving up everything to follow Him. He died for me so that I would no longer live for myself but for Him who died and rose again on my behalf. Remember Sarah? No, I was not too old to still follow this man of faith.

Eventually what became clear was that I had a choice: I could do this with a good attitude, or a bad one. And if I did it with a bad one, I would lose most of the good the whole experience had in store for me! Besides which, I would be at odds with Jesus. I hate it when I'm out of step with Him. I decided to stop whining and go willingly.

So there we were in the Atlanta airport, checking our large plastic trunks onto the plane. Final destination: Arusha, Tanzania. As the plane landed in London, young energetic traveling members of the Maryville College Concert Choir sang, "Busy serving my Jesus." I wondered what the passenger ladies with black head coverings thought about that old spiritual as they listened. Colin and I took the underground to St. Paul's cathedral and walked around in the sunshine, then boarded the next plane to Dar es Salaam, where we discovered that our visas from the previous summer's visit had not expired. Oh, good, we saved \$200. We loaded our six large boxes and bags on carts. These we wheeled through narrow winding corridors, up steps and down ledges to get to the "domestic flights" section of the airport. There we were told we were over our luggage allowance. Price to add the extra boxes: \$200. Oh, well.

Arusha is a lovely city. Our welcome from the others who also were there to attend a leaders' training conference was warm. A cozy duplex cabin with

bedroom, bath, kitchen and living area became our temporary home as we completed the conference and I started a Swahili refresher course at a local school. Oh, my. Because I could already say more than the average beginner, they put me in the intermediate class.

Each morning Colin walked me to school and back through the forest, where the Colobus monkeys swung from the trees. Farmers hoed fields; we crossed a flowing stream by balancing on strategically placed stones. My two fellow-students: a woman who worked in Kenya and wanted to learn “really good Swahili,” and a young British man who wanted to do research for a dissertation in Mtwara, TZ. Our teacher was a cheerful, patient, creative woman near retirement who spent the next three weeks teaching in a way we compared to “verbal waterboarding.” Six hours of classroom study, followed by hours of homework every evening. Meanwhile, Colin made some basic furniture for our house in Cana.

The young man in the language course did not know Christ. He said one day that he thought people were basically good. Gently I pointed out that all people sin, and that when we trust in Christ, accepting His death and resurrection on our behalf, He begins to change us. So often we sin because we are afraid. We behave in self-protective ways. When Jesus takes away our fears by showing He has conquered everything we are afraid of, we are set free indeed. He listened without comment but without rejection, either. Near the end of the course we were able to host my fellow-students in our home for lunch.

The language course ended. We received residency permits. Colin and another worker went to Cana and tried to rent a house for us. Who would rent to American Christians? We did not know if anyone would, although we had a permit from the government to live there with our team and study language and culture for three years. A man whose ancestor was famous for fomenting uprising against the German colonialists years ago, offered to rent Colin and me his brand new house, and agreed to let us dig a latrine, enclose a bathroom on the side of the house. Local houses did not have bathrooms attached. Instead, some distance from the houses, a latrine would be dug and surrounded by palm thatch fencing. This house had a cement floor, four rooms and a porch, plastered walls, corrugated steel roofing. Quite a palace compared to the simple mud and thatch houses mostly around.

Contracts signed for not one but three houses. Great. But we still had very little furniture, almost no kitchen supplies, no vehicle. All our belongings in six

plastic boxes. How in the world would we set up house? I felt safe in our little nest. Couldn't we just stay here? Or how about I stay here and Colin can go get everything ready and just call me when it's all set up?

As you can tell, we were only just beginning.



Left: Colin with his mom and dad, our last visit with her.

Below: Colin catching up on emails in the airport before flying to Africa.





Left: The duplex cabin where we spent our first two months in Africa.

Below: Kitchen table set to host my fellow-students from language school for lunch.





Left: Language school trek, over the river and through the woods.



Below: A light moment with my fellow-students at break time.



Above: Colin and I dressed up and ready to go to church on Sunday.