

Imperishable Seed

Uganda

October 2017

The Unconventional Life of a Furloughed Missionary

Living with Emily Arndt as a roommate during this past summer offered me some unique experiences and perspectives into the backstage world of what it means to be a missionary. During the winter of 2017, I offered Emily furlough lodging in my house, and I offered to help as an ‘administrative assistant.’ The first, and most important focal point, of course, is that God must be the center of everything: every decision, every plan, and every thought.

What is the reason a missionary takes furlough? Emily’s mission organization, Christian Veterinary Mission, requires furlough time so that the missionaries can take part in reflection, counseling, rest, and meditation with God. Also, during furlough, missionaries visit and share with supporters the work they have done to further the kingdom of God. To accomplish all of this, furlough time requires careful planning and preparation.

Administrative Preparations

There are many aspects to a missionary’s furlough time that happen behind the scenes.

Preparations for Emily’s visit started in April. Scheduling visits with 220 people (all over the United States and even a couple of people in Canada) in the span of three months was no easy feat. We had been given some guidance from other missionaries: organize visits around regions of the country and plan rest days. To begin, Emily made a list of names of people she needed to visit. I printed the list of names and taped the multipage list to a piece of poster board. From there, we separated them into two groups: local and non-local. We then organized four regional trips for the non-local visits, and Emily planned the logistics for the travel. Throughout the course of the summer, Emily and I methodically made notes about how the people were contacted, and we checked off the names so that no one was forgotten. There were many local people to visit, and there simply were not enough days. We came up with the idea to group the local visits and hold them in a central location to cut down on travel time. We reserved our church house and asked people to meet Emily there. Emily also made plans to speak at various local churches. Finally, we organized and promoted a community night so that Emily could give a presentation to anyone who wanted to see pictures and hear a more detailed explanation of her work. It was a bit of a challenge to fit in all of the visits, but because we had carefully planned, we met September with satisfaction because our marked up, beat up piece of poster board represented the many people with whom Emily was able to share her mission work.

Rich Man’s Pizza

In what Emily called ‘reverse culture shock,’ there were some aspects of American life that took some getting used to again. For example, because she grew up in Wisconsin, Emily loves cheese. However, in Africa, cheese is very expensive and is not the same as Wisconsin cheese. One of my specialties is homemade pizza. On one of the first days that Emily was back, I made cheese pizza using an entire pound of local mozzarella cheese and locally grown and processed pork sausage. Emily savored this ‘rich man’s pizza,’ as she called it. She said the amount of cheese on the pizza would have cost close to \$15 in Uganda. Emily did have a food ‘bucket list’ for the summer, and I believe all of her requests were met. Among those requests were Wisconsin cheese, eggs, American beef steak, and Jack’s supreme pizza.

Stories from Uganda

During the quiet evenings, Emily would tell me about her ‘family’ in Uganda. She told me about her ‘ex-patriot’ community and how they share burdens and joys. She is an honorary auntie to the children of her friends. She also enjoys fellowship with her community Bible study, and I see that the connections she has built with these ladies are deep and committed and centered around Christ’s love. I asked Emily if she ever gets lonely, as she is a single woman halfway across the world from her hometown. She said that she does get lonely at times, but wallowing in loneliness is harmful, so she visits friends, and they are very happy to have her. It seems to me that her Uganda community is filled with people who together draw from the love of Christ to remain strong and walk in His will.

Preparing for Return Trip

Preparations for Emily’s return trip started in July because there were many items she had to take back and she had limited luggage space and weight. Anything Emily wanted for the next two years, she had to pack and take on the plane. Amazon does not deliver to Uganda, so she had to order personal items and clothing here in the US. Mailing items to Uganda later was not really an option because a box, not much bigger than a shoebox, costs almost \$60 to mail. As time went by Emily would approach me with various items and we would have discussions about the puzzle of packing: how to group the items to conserve space and how to group the items based on its weight. The weekend before she left, everything had been packed and anything not packed was going in carry-on luggage. Because of the security challenges with airport personnel in airports at some of her stops, Emily needed to prepare largely printed notes stating that all the items within the luggage had been cataloged and she would prosecute for theft.

After Emily arrived back in Uganda and I received confirmation on Facebook, I messaged her that I missed her. Not only was it personally enjoyable to have a roommate for the summer and have someone to spend down time with, but it allowed me a different perspective on my own spiritual walk and relationship to Christ.

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