



Happiest Faces on Earth

BOOK ONE



STORIES FROM UGANDA



Into Eden and Back Again

We left all things familiar January 19, 2015 as we served in the Uganda Kampala Mission. It proved to be a world opposite in more ways than one.

This is not our story, but the stories of the many incredible people we met and learned to love.

Uganda is a crucible of contradiction. It is a land of hardship, poverty, war, and disease. But it is also a place of great faith, love, compassion and charity.

All photos and entries were taken from our journals and our website (bernelltaylor.com). We sincerely thank those who made this adventure possible, especially our God.

Contents

This book is a symbol of our offering to our Lord Jesus Christ as we have served the people of Uganda. It is our prayer that He will bless them abundantly as they become His people, as we know they will.

Our hearts have broken as we have witnessed the struggles and trials of this people, and yet we have triumphed in the Lord as we have seen them rise above the ashes of defeat in faith and righteousness.

We feel certain that the African people, and especially those of Uganda, will become known as the most faithful and righteous people on earth, once they leave behind unwholesome tribal traditions, witch doctors and other evil practices. The strength of their families will become an example for the world to follow.

A temple will be built in Kampala, LDS chapels will dot the land, and the members will be known as the covenant people of the Lord. *The first shall be last and the last shall be first.* Once this happens, the Church here will explode like fire and burn in the bones of its members. This will prepare the way for the Lord's second coming, and He will stand personally to greet and accept His chosen people. Many of these beautiful saints will be in the ranks of the righteous when that day comes. We hope and pray that our little contribution will make a difference.

It has been our greatest honor to wear the name of Jesus Christ on our chest as a symbol of the testimony that burns in our hearts every day.

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You'll find links to videos throughout this book just like the one below. You may click on the link (for eBooks) or snap the QR Code to be taken directly to the youtube video.



1. African Culture

The Open Market

29 January 2015



We went shopping in an open-air market today. While the environment was very foreign to us, we loved it. There are so many fresh fruits, vegetables, seeds and grains available here that I wonder if maybe this is where Eden was and not the U.S. The size and scope of all that was offered was overwhelming.

Uganda is sometimes called the crucible of contradiction, and this photo of RaNae in the open market is a perfect example of that term.

Tonight we had fresh tomato sandwiches and fresh mango. Delicious! I can't say much for the open-air meat market, however. All the meat was fresh-killed and hanging from poles. The pile of tripe (cow guts) was anything but

appetizing. There were live chickens to buy, but we don't eat meat so the temptation soon passed.

The white vans you see here are part of their mass transit system (like city busses in the U.S.). The motorcycle you see to the left is a bodaboda, which is their taxi system. We learned today that there are an estimated 300,000 such motorcycles in Kampala alone. The traffic is absolutely unbelievable, as evidenced by the smashed up van in this picture. One young man was traveling to the mission home to leave for his mission. He was in a van like this one when it rolled in traffic and two people were killed. The company was

trying to take him to the hospital to be checked out, but he said he was on his way to serve the Lord and couldn't be late. He caught another van and made it to the mission home in time to leave for the MTC.

We were again impressed with how loving and happy these people are. There is about 70% unemployment in Uganda and many of those who have jobs are paid a pittance. Full time guards at homes, for example, earn about \$60 dollars (U.S.) per month. Others eke out their living by buying produce from the farmer and stacking it in the open-air market to make a small profit. The number of smiling faces doing this was astounding.

Summer in the City

11 February 2015

1. African Culture



Our first trip into downtown Kampala was an adventure in a true urban jungle. The traffic here is completely indescribable. Unless you have been here and driven on the roads, you simply cannot comprehend it. In the U.S., traffic essentially flows in two directions. But here in Uganda, it is like navigating a raging river after a flood. The big pieces knock the smaller pieces, and the little pieces (called Boda Bodas - motorcycles) flow over and around and through the big pieces.

After being here a few days, we will never again complain about traffic or roads or rude drivers in the U.S. (at least until we forget). While the

people here are very friendly and loving, many turn into Tasmanian devils behind the wheel. There are police everywhere here, but still there are no rules. You enter a line of traffic by nosing your car into it like swinging a club. Eventually someone will give way.

The aggression of the taxi drivers (blue and white vans) and boda bodas (motorcycle taxis) are beyond any description. It is truly amazing how few bumps and accidents we have seen here. But when an accident happens, it is often serious. We pray for protection daily, and feel its miraculous shielding power.



A Boy and His Mama

14 February 2015

Meet Mwesigwa (means Lord is Faithful) and his loving Mother Justine in this moving testimonial of how happiness can be found in the most challenging of circumstances. See how turning to God and Jesus can lessen pain and suffering and increase inner peace. Wonder at Mwesigwa's ability to forgive and be happy even after a painful life of torture and abuse.

Mwesigwa is the gardener here where we live. He is 28 years old and a most gentle and remarkable man. As we got acquainted, I grabbed my video gear and interviewed him. His story is very similar to many if not most Ugandans. He is not a member of our Church, but has a powerful testimony of Jesus and God, and faith like a lion.

Mwesigwa was born into a very violent and abusive home. He left home at age five to live with a relative who continued to neglect and abuse him until he was 16. He met a man in the village who liked him because he could see that Mwesigwa loved Jesus. He took him home to his village of Gangu, where Mwesigwa was received as a new child (no formal adoption). I have two mothers and two fathers, Mwesigwa explains. My second parents taught me what a parent's love is about (he tears up). They are the best people in the world. My other parents were not good.

Our new friend then asked if we'd like to meet his mother and family in the village. Within a few minutes we three were driving to Gangu, 90 minutes away.

Justine Nabaasa is Mwesigwa's adoptive mother. She has four children of her own and three "adopted" children they have taken in and raised. She is a most remarkable woman. After serving us fresh-squeezed mango juice, which was delicious, I asked if she knew why we had come. She replied, I don't know unless God has sent you to me. I told her that indeed He had, and we had a message for her. RaNae and I then told her about the Church, Joseph Smith, the first vision, and the Book of Mormon. It felt so good to testify in her home. We promised her a copy of the Book of Mormon only if she would promise to read about Christ's visit to the America's. She said she would.

The Nabaasa home is filled with the Spirit. There are small plaques that decorate the humble walls about being grateful and enduring trials. They are very devout Christians and were most receptive to our testimony. As we ended in prayer, I asked God to help them see and understand the beautiful truths we had shared. I'm satisfied there is not a more spiritual home to be found.

As we left, we embraced each family member and they walked us to the truck, begging us to come again.

As we drove down the dusty red rutted road through the village, RaNae commented that this was the best day of our mission. She said how she has no desire to see the sights or go on safari. She just wants to testify and share

her love with the most humble and lovable people on earth. I could not agree more.

There are people like Mwesigwa and his family that are eagerly looking for truth and already living Gospel principles in their home. They are examples to us of what real Christians are. There was a Spirit and power of majesty in that home that swallowed us whole.

Mwesigwa - Lord is Faithful indeed.

Mwesigwa was baptized on Saturday, 11 April 2015 by Elder Kim Loren Squire. Kim and his wife Nancy were among the first to befriend him when he became the gardener at our apartment complex. They later moved away to Jinja, but drove into Kampala for the baptism, which was Elder Squire's first convert baptism. It was a rainy but beautiful day.

We have since traveled with the young missionaries to teach Mwesigwa's adopted mama in the village. She is presently reading the Book of Mormon and wants to know more. Today, RaNae and I call him son, and he calls us papa and mama.



Into the Jungle

29 May 2015



We left city life in Kampala yesterday and made our way seven hours north to Gulu, which is near South Sudan. This was the first time since our arrival in Uganda we felt like we were deep into Africa. The drive to Gulu was wonderfully beautiful and physically punishing. But oh, what we saw along the way!

Here is where we saw our first Black Mamba. We've learned that if you're in Africa and you see a snake, it's deadly. When we saw it, I commented to a nearby soldier about it and he yelled Kill it! He ran and got a rock and came to do the job, missing. The small Mamba slithered into the grass to safety. I nearly stepped on it to kill it but was later glad I wasn't that foolish.

Then came the baboons and monkeys. There is something deeply spiritual about looking into the eyes of a wild animal. There is a majesty or perhaps even reverence to see wild nature eye-to-eye. You can never experience that in a zoo or on the screen. The baboons were near the road as we crossed the Nile. Many mothers carried their babies clinging to their under-belly. The monkeys were very cool as well.

We finally arrived in Gulu at about 8 PM. We were exhausted from the rough road (think of Hole in the Rock Road in Southern Utah) and long hours. We have a small house in a gated complex where six young Elders share two additional houses. This house is very small and lacks many of the conveniences of our place in

Kampala, but we have no complaints.

The reason we are here in Gulu is to put into practice a new technique of Member Leadership Support we call Building the Kingdom. With our President's approval, we'll move between two branches, implementing the process with each. We're very excited to get started on Sunday. Meanwhile, we've cleaned and organized this little place.

Once again as we drove, RaNae commented how she would not trade this adventure for anything. Amen. We're so very thankful to be here, not just to see the spectacular sights, but far more importantly, to share the most spectacular vision of Eternity with our brothers and sisters in Africa.

Tribal Burial

3 June 2015

1. African Culture



Whatever you thought you knew about an African tribal burial is about to change. Come and celebrate a life with us. Get up close and personal with the joy of these wonderful people and enjoy their unique and beautiful culture.

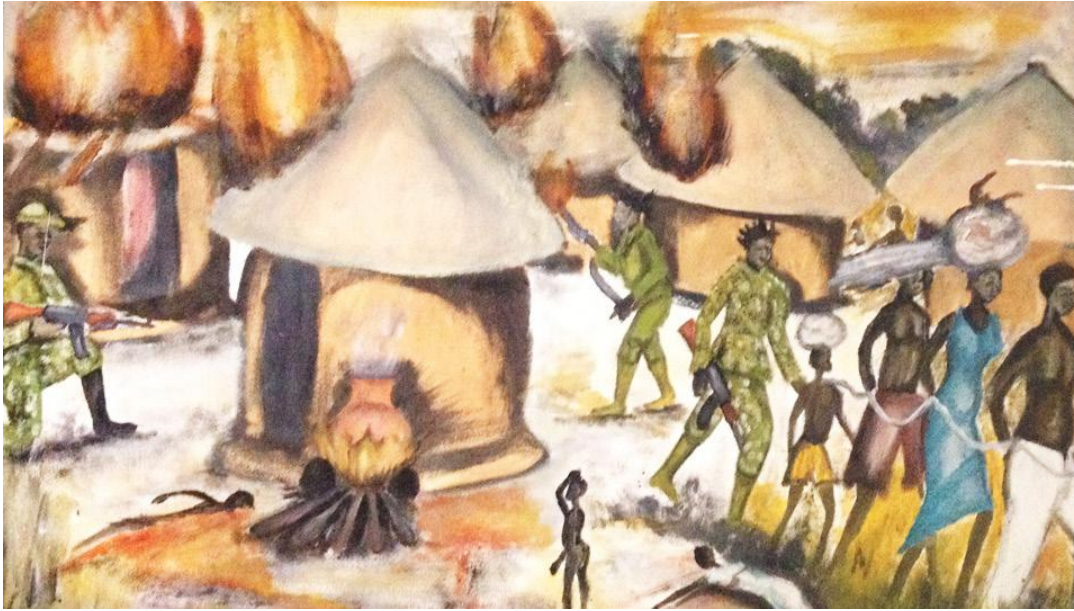
During the burial service there was a lot of crying and wailing. It was quite disturbing to hear, and a feeling of hopelessness prevailed. But after the men began to fill in the grave, the food came out, the music resumed, and a great feeling of joy took over.

I'd like to have my family dance and celebrate when I'm gone. Tears and wailing aren't part of the Gospel plan of happiness.



Joseph Kony

20 June 2015



Here in northern Uganda, there is a man whose horrific fame has reached around the world. He is among the most barbarous monsters ever to have lived, and his atrocities against the people of this region, and especially children, stagger any logical human mind. His name is Joseph Kony.

Today we learned from two people whose lives he has affected. His name evokes terror among anyone in this region, and now in other neighboring countries. He has gone into hiding and uses his invisible children as human shields.

We noticed the painting (shown above) inside Mary's home today. She essentially told this story:

That man has affected every family in northern Uganda. There is no one in Gulu who has not been changed. The war he caused lasted over 20 years, and it is only recently that he has moved on.

The painting depicts his army burning the village and stealing children. The murdering and disfiguring and abuse is indescribable.

In 2008 his army came through here for a second time. They were abducting children just here (Mary points to the village pictured) and one of the soldiers demanded 500,000 schillings from a child. She pointed to our home and said they could get it here, but that our door was very strong. She then showed us the bullet holes they made in the attempt to enter.

Then Vincent, who was with us, added his own account.

I remember when his army came to my village. I was 8 years old and every mother was screaming and trying to run and save her children. My mother was running with us kids and I got separated in the dark. I was running through the village and crying mommy, mommy! but so were all the other children. It was crazy.

Then I fell into a new latrine hole which was 10 feet deep. I didn't know it was there. I was in the bottom crying and crying, but then I realized I must be quiet or they would get me. Somehow, I fell asleep in that hole.

The next morning, I could hear people coming back into the village so I yelled for help. They helped me out and my Mom was so grateful. She was so worried that I had been taken by the army. It was a very scary time.

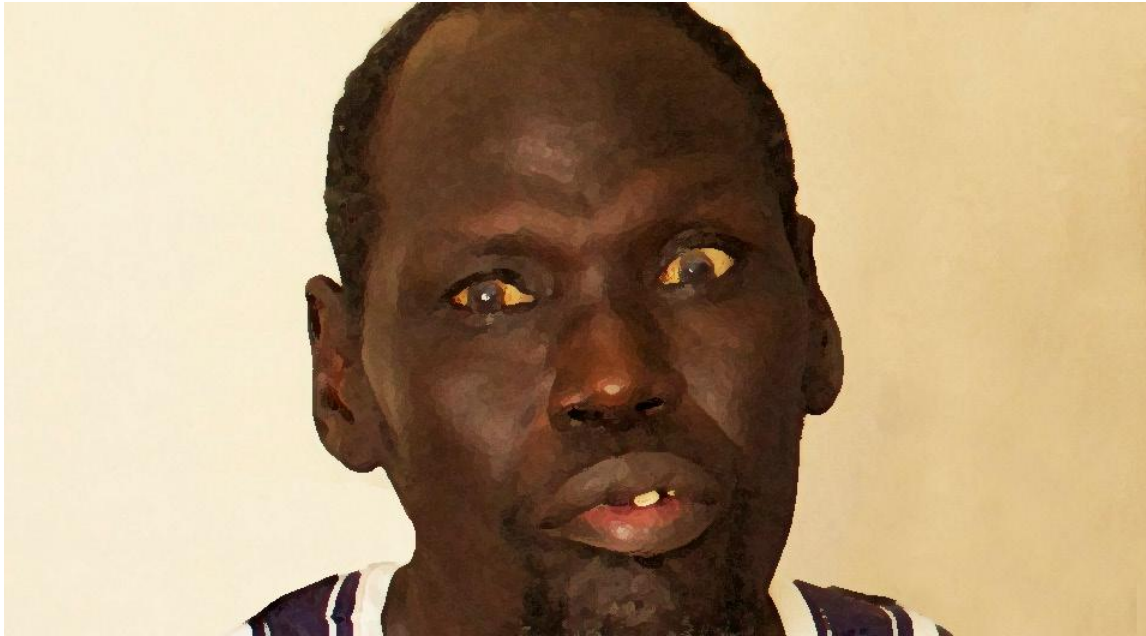
Since being in Gulu we have heard many first-hand stories from people who have been abandoned or abused. We have teared-up many times as we have learned of the terribly sad lives these people live. To find a complete family with a father and mother and children where there has been no death is extremely rare.

It is important not to ignore the challenges for they make the happiness so much the sweeter. As we visited with our two friends today, we were struck not only with their tragic stories, but also with the number of times they laughed during our visit. They are truly indomitable.



The Man from Bor

16 July 2015



Meet Peter and his amazing son Jacob from Bor, South Sudan. Hear his heartbreaking story of being driven with his family from their home and farm, leaving everything behind as they fled for their lives. A few months later, they find their way to a refugee camp in Uganda where Peter is hit by a truck in the night and left for dead. We meet him at a local hospital here in Gulu and hurt with him as we hear his tale. When

will the war end? When can he return with his family to his homeland? What is the meaning of all this killing of brother against brother? No answers are given, but a plea for help from America will draw on your sympathies. The man from Bor is only one story among hundreds of thousands just as difficult. Join us in a prayer for increased peace in this war-torn region of Africa.

Break Dance!

9 October 2015

1. African Culture



Your opinion of the impoverished, war-torn country of Uganda is about to change. See what young adults are doing to celebrate life instead of mourn the past. Come on, let's dance!

An African Family

7 August 2015

Yesterday we took Reagan and Joyce to the village of Pakwach, on the Nile River, where they are from (they are seated on the right). We went to appeal to Joyce's father for permission to marry without paying bride price, which is a very difficult tradition here in Africa. It causes most couples to live together because the payment to buy the bride from her father is about 3 million shillings (\$1,000 U.S.), which is unreachable for most. Reagan and Joyce are strong members of the Church, but are not legally married. They must be married before they can be sealed in the temple, which is their greatest desire. During this trip, we saw a wonderful African family and were so impressed with their culture. Not all African families are this strong, but many are.

We first met the man who raised Reagan (wearing pink shirt top right). In virtually all cases where a child has relatives, they can look to them for help if their family dies or can no longer care for them. Because of war, poverty and disease, this happens often.

When Reagan was ready to leave home, his wise uncle gave him this advice:

- Know what to do for your business and work hard
- Do not borrow money
- Do not steal
- Do not pay back when someone hurts you
- Find a woman to love and cherish and be completely faithful to her
- Give your life to your wife and family
- Never despise your wife or she will poison you

Bride Price

I represented Reagan's father for our meeting with Joyce's dad, John. (pictured with her step-mother Julia on the back row). Here was my presentation:

Bride price was first paid by a returning African soldier after World War I, who wished to express gratitude for his new bride by giving her father some nice gifts using his army savings. Then another soldier did the same, and soon a tradition was established where a father could expect large gifts for raising a good daughter when she married.

We believe the family is eternal and that husbands and wives can remain married after this life if they are sealed by proper authority in holy temples (showed pictures of temples).

Reagan and Joyce are very devoted Christians with a wonderful family. They want to follow Christ by having a church and temple marriage, but cannot afford the bride price.

We have come to request permission for them to marry in the Church without paying bride price.

John and Julia then had a discussion speaking Acholi (tribal language) as we sat. Then they left the hut to talk. Reagan then told us what Julia had said:

We should not prevent these people from following Christ and being married because of an African tradition.

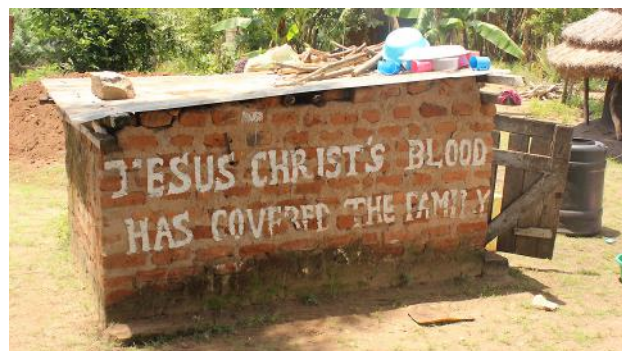
When they returned, John said they did not object to the marriage.

The Power of the Family

Upon entering the hut for our discussion, Julia greeted us by kneeling and saying *praise Jesus*. Then she prayed in Acholi. Christ is the center of this family. The size and reach of the family is enormous. We met people all day in many villages who were relatives. They build their huts next to one another in tight clusters. They raise one another's kids. They care for the elderly. They cook and eat together. They dig in the same garden, and share everything they have. They practice their faith openly and are buried next to their hut.

About a year ago, we had a family discussion with our adult children and their spouses. We wondered about moving onto the same piece of property, building adjoining homes, and sharing responsibilities of children and income. It was a very fun discussion with much input. We thought how wonderful it could be if we lived close enough and cooperated in order to lift burdens and strengthen one another. Here in Africa, we see many examples of exactly that. There is so much of their lifestyle, as hard as it is, that is enviable. Perhaps we should reopen our family discussion.

Reagan and Joyce have a very bright future. They are an anchor in the branch. They will soon be legally married, then sealed in the Holy Temple in Johannesburg, South Africa. They will continue to build the Church here as they bless their family and many, many others.



Something Small

15 September 2015



Yesterday, Kennedy asked us to drop by his hut for *something small* he wanted to share with us before self-reliance class. Things then transpired to prevent us meeting him, including some urgent difficulties with two Elders that demanded attention. This took some time so we didn't make the appointment.

Then today, Kennedy's father asked us to drop by for *something small*. We arrived at 5:00 PM to meet both the father and son. After an opening prayer, the son presented us with this hand-written document (which we still have) of *something small*:

5 September, 2015

Dear Elder and Sister Taylor

RE: Recognition of love to my family

On behalf of my family and on my own behalf, I wish to register our overwhelming gratitude for the true and sincere Christian love, care and concern you have exhibited to our son in particular and the family in general especially at this moment of dire need.

Sincerely, words are not enough to express our deepest appreciation. It is only God who knows how we feel. However, in recognition

of the foregoing, the family has resolved in principle, to offer you a token of 50 acres of virgin land free of charge. Yes, the land is therefore yours. See what you can do with it. This is in line with what our Lord Jesus Christ himself said: There is more happiness in giving than receiving. Acts 20:35

In conclusion, may our Heavenly Father bless you and bless your family back home abundantly. May the Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you always in the sacred name of the Son, Amen.

The offer was agreed by the following family members...signatures, witnesses, etc.

Perhaps you might guess our stunned tears and humble thanks for this amazing gesture. Wow. A gift of land! We learned that this 50 acres includes fertile ground that can grow anything, with some banana trees, and is bordered by streams and a river. It is part of the family property in the village where they plan to build their homes and establish a productive farm - and they want us to be their neighbors forever.

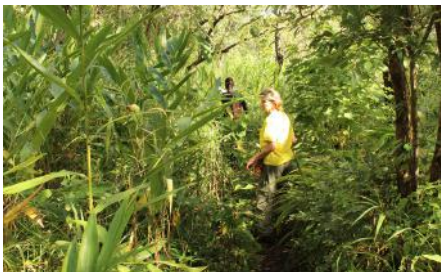
Of course you know that we could not accept the offer, and we had to talk gently with careful reasons why. We did not come to receive gifts, we explained. We did not come for blessings. We came to share the love of the Lord and to bless lives, with no hope for thanks, just to be tools in the Lord's hands. We further explained to the son: You can give us a more precious gift than this generous parcel of land. You can

make of your life an example by becoming well educated, serving an honorable full time mission, marrying a worthy girl in the temple, and spending your lives in His service.

It took some time to convey that we wished no offense and that we greatly appreciated the offer. After many emotional words, we again prayed and parted.

We never dreamed of a people so generous and kind-hearted as these. And this family will always be dear to our hearts, forever more. We keep in our possession the legal document of the land gift, as a memento of the incredible love of the people of Africa.

Recently, we went with our friends to see “our land”. We hiked about 10 miles round trip and had a great time. Here is a photo tour of the journey and the destination..



The \$52 Burial

8 October 2015



Today at 1:00 PM a man was found dead in his field in a nearby village. By 8:00 PM his grave was filled in and the burial was over.

We got a call at 2:40 from our dear friend Patrick. The deceased was his uncle, whom he loved as his father because his biological father left when he was just three years old. We changed our plans and rushed to assist. The process of burial here in Uganda is beautifully simple. Here's how:

- Buy a coffin on the side of the road at a cost of about \$20 U.S.
- Buy some white cloth to wrap the body in, and another to drape the coffin = \$22.
- Pick up sodas and water for the guests = \$10.
- Take the coffin to the family compound in the village and lift the wrapped body inside.
- Two men dig the grave by hand.
- Women mourners sit together near the hut. Men sit together nearby.
- After a short prayer by the local priest, bring the casket to the grave side.
- The priest prays and sprinkles holy water over the casket and in the open grave.
- The casket is lowered into the grave using

ropes.

- A song and prayers are given at the grave side.
- Mourners sprinkle dirt onto the coffin and say farewell.
- A short service is held while the grave diggers fill in the grave.

Our experience with this process was touching. It was wonderful to help Patrick at this difficult time. Using gloved hands, I helped lift the body into the casket and close the lid (I was scolded by our mission doctor later for doing so). I learned what a dead body feels like after rigor



mortis sets in, and the smell of death. I was also asked to be the main speaker, which was an honor. It was good to present the Plan of Happiness and explain where the man's spirit was, along with the purpose of life.

The highlight of the evening was when we were asked to meet the family. We were taken into the dark family hut and sat on the only chairs while everyone else sat on mats. One by one, starting with the oldest sister, we were introduced to about 20 family members. The spirit was powerful and we felt great love for these people. We shook hands with each person and greeted them in Acholi and English. Then Patrick, RaNae and I sang *God Be With*



You Til We Meet Again, and a family member gave a prayer.

This is yet one more African tradition that we like. Burial is simple and inexpensive, yet



effective. The fact that the body is buried next to the family hut is wonderful. As previously said, the ensuing party after burial was a delight.



Meet Janet, a member of the Adyel Branch in Lira Uganda. We met Janet while I was performing an audit of church records in Lira. I noticed that she paid an honest tithing weekly and was very impressed with her apparent faithfulness in the Church. Before leaving town, we stopped to meet her in her thriving shoe shop downtown. Here is her beautiful testimony:

I joined the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints seven years ago. I met the missionaries who began to teach me the restored Gospel. My husband chose not to hear their message.

About this time, my infant son became seriously ill. I was afraid he might even die. The missionaries had taught me about prayer, so I prayed for my baby. I felt an impression to toss him in the air three times, which I did, catching him each time. Then I took him to

the hospital for treatment. By the time we got to the hospital, my baby was fully recovered and we were sent back home. This was a first experience with being guided by the Spirit.

Later, the Elders taught me about fasting and prayer and paying my tithes. I fasted and prayed for two days and nights without stopping. At the end of this experience, I had a most curious dream. I saw myself in a shop down town and doing very well. At that time, I did not have a business or had I even thought about owning one. In the dream, as I marveled at the healthy business, a voice came to me which said: "Be sure to pay a full tithe on this business." Then I woke up.

Some time after my baptism, I started selling shoes along the roadside here in Lira. I paid my tithing every time I got money. The business grew step by step. Within not long, I had

enough money to rent this shop I am in. Today, my business does very well. I go to Kampala often for more inventory. When I'm coming back home on the bus, I calculate how much my shoes cost, along with my rent. Then I figure my tithing. I pay my tithing every Sunday. I have been richly blessed by paying my tithing. I have a strong testimony in God's blessings when we do what He asks. I will be forever grateful for my membership in this true Church, and for impressions and dreams that have saved my son and blessed us so abundantly.

Perhaps the most remarkable thing about this sweet, beautiful Sister is how she glows. We could see how the Gospel has lighted her from the inside out. We felt a reverence while sitting in her shoe shop and hearing her amazing testimony.

Ugandan Diet

23 November 2015

1. African Culture



Trying to get your mind around what it's like to be Ugandan is like trying to understand the perils of Everest by watching a movie. It simply cannot conjure.

We've been here for over 10 months now, and have been deep in the bush and deep in the lives and challenges of these amazing people. But we have come to realize how impossible it is for us to truly understand them. We are so well cared for as missionaries that we are among the most pampered people in all of Uganda. We are very, very comfortable by Ugandan standards. So, we meet with the people and try to grasp it, but the full concept escapes us.

Just one example is how often, and what our friends eat. Many adults eat just one meal a day, and that meal consists of posho (corn

mush) and beans, eaten with the fingers.

I started taking a little informal survey and found many people who have not more than one meal per day. At first I thought it was rare, but have come to see it is common. While with people in their huts, I'll ask, *Have you eaten today?* Often their response is "not yet". Based on my unscientific poll, I'd guess that more than half the adults here live on just one meal daily. Otherwise, they may take some tea, or just drink water.

To better understand how this feels, I decided to do a personal experiment, which will not surprise those who know me. Starting the first of November, I have had only one meal per day. The experience has been enlightening. The first several days were difficult, but then I got used to the feeling of being empty, and just

marched through the day. Surprisingly, I have a sense of lean health that I enjoy.

Add to this the fact that many of these people work and sweat like crazy every day. They dig and haul and walk and bicycle. So even now, I cannot fully comprehend it in my white shirt and tie.

There are dozens of other things we cannot fully experience as missionaries, such as sickness and disease, death, corruption, and living in a hut without electricity or plumbing.

My experiment has allowed me just one additional view of the life of an African, and for that I am thankful. But I think I'll stop at that, and not venture to surrender all our modern conveniences and protections to fully understand. This is enough for now.

B's Story

24 November 2015



My name is B____ of Gulu, Uganda, and this is my story.

After being married to my first husband several years, and having three children, he was killed in northern Uganda due to war. We never knew if it was the LRA (Lord's Resistance Army) or Uganda military that killed him, but he was gone and I was alone.

Because of the ongoing war, my parents and eldest brother were burned alive when their mud and grass huts were set afire by the rebels

with them locked inside. After that, I had no living family.

After some time, I began staying with a new husband. With him I had two more children, but life was very difficult. This man was not good. He did not know God, and took alcohol very very much. One day he told me he was going to do something that was so big it would be told over the radio. I reported it to the police, but when they interviewed him, he denied it, so they did nothing.

Later, I went to the village to get some food and was gone several days. When I returned, I found that my husband had defiled my two daughters several times. The youngest was then 8 years old. I went to the police, but my husband ran away and I have not seen him since. A charitable organization helped pay for my little girls to be tested and treated for disease. Fortunately, they did not have HIV. After some time and medication, they healed from the abuse.

As I was again alone, I moved around trying to find work to get food and shelter for my children and me. I found nothing for many months. We became destitute. I prayed and prayed, and searched and searched, but still found nothing. I told God I did not want to steal and was willing to work for our food. I asked if He would please help me find work, but still I found nothing. I was behind on my rent four months. I went and told my landlord that I had nothing to pay. I said "You can chase me away if you like, and I will understand." But he said he did not want to chase me away and would pray that I could find work and pay him something small.

After all this time I was at the end. There was no work. We had no food. There was nobody to support me or help me. I had been four days without eating anything. My children had gone daily to the rubbish pit to pick bits of food from the garbage. That is all they had. I took some seeds, these little black ones, and ground them into a very fine powder to make poison. Then I stirred it into water in a jar and set it high on the shelf. I kneeled down and told God I was at the end and could not go any further. I begged Him for help. I said, "This is our last day on earth.



If you will please help me find some work, I will press on. But if not, at the end of this day, I will come home and drink this poison and give it to my children so we will not be in pain any longer." Then I went to look for work.

That evening, after finding no hope for work, I was coming back to my home and I knew it was my last day alive. I was crying and crying because I did not have any other option. A man stopped me and told me of a woman nearby. He said, "First you go knock on that gate. There is a woman there who might need help." I knocked the gate and the woman said she had some work for me, but I would have to wait one week while she was away from town. The man I had first talked with told me to hold on a little

longer. I went home and threw the bottle of poison in the toilet. Then I prayed to God and begged Him to forgive me for losing hope.

The following week I got work from the woman for some small money. I bought food. I paid for our back rent. We survived. We had oh so little, but we did not die.

I have now been with my current husband for one year. He is a good, God fearing man. We met the missionaries just a few weeks ago, and things have

begun to change. We are planning to marry next month. Then we can be baptized into The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. We will start paying our tithing and honoring the sabbath day. We will live the Gospel. We will be okay. I am so thankful for the missionaries coming to my home and helping me see the true Gospel. I am doing my level best and will continue forever.

I do not want charity. I only want to work hard along with my husband so we can eat and live and learn to grow in this True Church. Even through all the struggles of life, I have faith we will be blessed if we keep trying and never give up. I'm so glad I did not give up on God. He was there all along and now I know it.

LaRon's Visit

19 January 2016



It was such a delight on January 6th to welcome my brother LaRon for a visit. He stayed just 10 days, but man did we pack a lot of adventure in that time.

LaRon's purpose in coming was to experience some missionary work with us, meet the people, see the beauties of Uganda, and go on safari. We did it all, traveling across a large section of the country. With the exception of lost luggage (happens often), power outages (even more often), and the dangerous and crazy traffic, his trip went according to plan. So come along for a photo tour of my brother's visit. If you choose to come in person, give us some notice and we'll try to duplicate our adventures with you.

Humanitarian Service

While here, LaRon wanted to help someone in need. We introduced him to a mother whose circumstances could greatly be improved with a little help. He chose to help rebuild her hut.

We also visited a shelter for at risk girls called *Set Her Free Foundation*, where we shared a gospel message, had a prayer, sang songs and presented treats.

Safari!

We went on three safaris during LaRon's stay; a boat safari, a land safari, and a hiking safari. We were all continually amazed at the beauties of this country. Our visit to Sipi Falls, near

Mbale brought us the most picturesque and lovely country we've seen since being here. Even the families washing clothes in the river seemed to be overlaid with serene background music.

Marriage

At the end of his stay, we invited LaRon to join us for the marriage of another couple in the Church at Kampala. This was our first pre-baptism family to be married, and was a delight.

As he left for the airport, we said a fond farewell to our hero brother. Thanks, LaRon, for everything you are to us.



Look at Them!

29 April 2016

In a world of selfies and Facebook posts, where the number of friends, likes and shares we can gather is seen by some as the measure of our personal worth, we have seen something very different here in Uganda. It makes us pause and say, rather than look at me, *look at them!*

We have been asked to visit nine wards and branches in eastern Uganda over the next few months, spending one week in each. This week we visited Busia, a wonderful tropical town which straddles the Uganda-Kenya border. We've been in the homes of perhaps 20 families, and we've shed tears of amazement.

Over 15 months ago, we began this journey as service to, and a study of the people of Uganda, and what makes them happy in the face of heartbreaking poverty, violence and corruption. Today we realized how little we actually understand. These faces do not belong to the stories that come from their mouths. Let me share just a few examples:

David and his wife have nine children (opposite top right). They live in a house made of mud and sticks. They are self-proclaimed peasants and have very little money. Their stories of poverty and struggle took our breath away. But look at his smile in the photo! Does that look like a guy whose life is so difficult? Not to us. As we sat inside this house and visited, we were amazed at the giggling kids who poked their heads in the door (on a dare) to take another look at the Mzungus (whites) inside. One of David's daughters glided back and forth on a rope swing, using a broken board as a seat. Her face was a picture of peace.



We visited Sister Susan in her one room house. She has a two-year-old baby girl, and is expecting another next month. As she explained how they often have nothing to eat, my wife asked if she could sew using the sewing machine in the hut. Yes, she said, but there are no customers. Our local escort informed us that no one in the area can afford to buy pre-made clothes. They just make them their self. So Susan depends on what small, small money her husband brings home, and hopes for brighter days. She spoke of Heaven as being her only great hope for peace.

We sat with seven women and two men under a flowering tree for a visit. As I explained our love for the Ugandan people, I became emotional as it hit me again how very much they have changed us. We thought we came to help them, but we have been lifted and blessed far more than any aid we may have given. We dearly love Uganda and these poor, humble, yet incredibly happy people.

Lawrence is an aged man who lives alone in a hut similar to the one pictured here. His



wife died 20 years ago, leaving him with five children to raise. Now that they have grown and moved away on their own, Lawrence farms his little plot of ground which measures 50 x 100 meters (164' x 361'). He farms to grow food for himself. There is none left over to sell. He eats what he grows and he is very happy. His gnarly bare feet were caked with dirt from the day's work when we arrived. As he shared his testimony of Jesus Christ and his knowledge of the Church, we were amazed to learn that he's only been a member for 18 months. His cheerfulness betrayed his living conditions.

As we left Busia to drive back to our apartment in Jinja, I was again in awe at what we feel here. It feels like my childhood home in Loa, Utah in the 1950s; dirt roads, humble homes, not much money, and very happy people. Those whose lives are consumed by acquiring more and more stuff, and trying to raise their image in the eyes of others, should come here for awhile and see what is truly important.

We will never be the same after Uganda. Thank you, our dear African friends.



Love is Blind

15 May 2016



After being in Uganda for sixteen months, we tend to overlook many things that shocked us when we first arrived. Because of the beauty of these amazing people, we are generally blind to the level of poverty that is ever-present. To see a bright, shining face, worn by a clean and neatly dressed woman erases the fact that she just stepped from a mud hut. In fact, it rather stuns us when we stop and wonder how in the world she does it.

Take a little tour from our recent photos to see where and how our friends live. Don't you dare

compare it with where and how you live, for if you do, you might think twice about wanting more. Keep in mind that we remove our shoes every time we enter one of these huts or homes, so we don't track dirt onto their neatly swept dirt floor. We've sat in places we would not have dared sit before our mission. We've eaten food that gave us pause. And we've ached for what seems to us to be a level of pure misery. And yet, the smiles on the faces blow it all away. In so many ways we want to be just like our friends here; happy, grateful, content, prayerful, and purely humble.

Where to Hide Your Children

24 June 2016



While visiting a large primary school today, we saw this decal on the wall of the school administrator. It is very sobering to consider that child sacrifice is still performed in many parts of Africa, usually by a local witch doctor. We've met some of these, and even known one who joined the Church, but soon fell away.

In this land of the *happiest faces on earth*, there exists a kind of barbarianism and cruelty beyond fathom for those in more developed parts of the world. Who would think that black magic, witchcraft, child sacrifice, child slavery, brutal murders and even cannibalism would exist in our modern world? But they do.

We have met and loved many people who have experienced such horrific tragedies as having their children poisoned by a family member in order to *humble them* when they have prospered too much for the liking of the clan. Family members have been burned alive in their huts, locked inside so they had no escape. We've seen huts burned (with no one inside to our knowledge). We have heard graphic stories of how people were abducted or murdered by the LRA (Lord's Resistance Army) in northern Uganda, in very recent years. We will never share such descriptions, for, like other atrocities of war, they are so far beyond comprehension that the very thoughts make us quake and cry.

So why make this kind of post in the *happiest faces* book? Because we must acknowledge that this kind of cruelty exists today, and it is very real. Satan is alive and well in the land, and making progress within the realm of his





influence. He is not stronger than those with faith in Jesus Christ and priesthood power, but among his followers, he wrecks havoc.

One thing that has become abundantly clear to us, is that there is no place on earth to hide from the powers of Satan and his followers, except within the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Even then, we are not guaranteed safety. But in the shelter of the Gospel, we have the very best chance to not only survive, but to thrive, even in these troubled times.

Yea, they shall not be beaten down by the storm at the last day; yea, neither shall they be harrowed up by the whirlwinds; but when

the storm cometh they shall be gathered together in their place, that the storm cannot penetrate to them; yea, neither shall they be driven with fierce winds whithersoever the enemy listeth to carry them.

But behold, they are in the hands of the Lord of the harvest, and they are his; and he will raise them up at the last day. (Alma 26:6-7)

And moreover, I would desire that ye should consider on the blessed and happy state of those that keep the commandments of God. For behold, they are blessed in all things,

both temporal and spiritual; and if they hold out faithful to the end they are received into heaven, that thereby they may dwell with God in a state of never-ending happiness. O remember, remember that these things are true; for the Lord God hath spoken it. (Mosiah 2:41)

Thank God that our family is safe in the U.S.A., where freedom and protection still abide. And may God bless and guard those within the shadow of the dark powers of the adversary here in Africa. Come and hide within the protection of the Lord God. It is the only safe place on earth.



2. Missionary Life

A Call to Serve

6 September 2014



We first chose to serve a mission on June 8, 2014. Several of our children had encouraged us to serve over the past year or so, but we could see no way to go since we had a mortgage and two businesses to run. Then that Sunday evening, we were at our son Spencer's home in Mapleton. He and his wife Jaime suggested again that we go now and not wait. As we considered what would need to happen, we realized that things might be arranged to leave. Little did we imagine what was in store.

After committing to the Lord in prayer that we

would serve, almost immediately things began to turn upside down. Our clever plan was dashed within the month. RaNae experienced some frightening health concerns (possible cancer) and our strong business collapsed overnight. For three months we experienced great challenges, and every time something new would happen, we could hear a voice saying, *well, are you still going?* The reversals were so dramatic and the tests so tough that we at times could not see how we could proceed. But we answered yes each time, and took one more step.

At the end of this three-month interview with the Lord, I had a singular experience I cannot fully share here. I was first asked what I would give in order to serve Him, and a question followed each answer until I had surrendered everything and everyone to His will. We were all in and nothing was withheld. It was at this point that I learned the most powerful lesson of my life. For, after answering the final question, which was the most difficult of my life, the Spirit said: *It is well. For only by you giving all to Me, can I give my all to you. Now watch!* As long as I live I will never forget the power of that moment, for I then knew that RaNae and I had fully committed our all to His service.

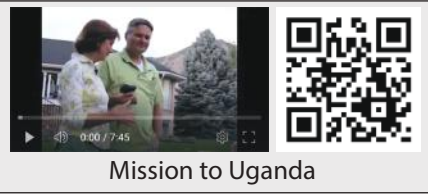
Since that day, and for the next four months, things got much better. We still encountered challenges, but we were entirely engaged to proceed and progressed to the day we received our call.

We are eternally grateful to serve as missionaries at this time of our life. We still have concerns about things at home, and all is not in order. But we have found that there is no perfect time to serve - there is always something keeping us back. But serve we will.

While at the MTC, I wrote this in my journal during class:

This will be your lot for the rest of your lives.

While I don't think that means we'll serve continual missions, I do believe we'll be somehow engaged in missionary service or training for the duration. We pray we'll have the health and strength and opportunities to do so.



<https://youtu.be/K5ieb91i1wY>



https://youtu.be/pJ9Sm_U1R7U



Into Africa

28 January 2015



We arrived in Uganda late last night, January 27, 2015. We were met by President and Sister Chatfield (on the left), Elder & Sister Wallace (right), and our driver Godfrey. The drive from the airport was memorable because they use English-style cars and drive on the left side of the road.

Security is a very big deal because there is a lot of theft here. Our apartment has a guard 24/7. It is protected by a high wall with razor wire across the top. We must honk or knock to gain entrance.

The barred windows and many locks let you know not to leave things open or unsecured, but the people we met on our morning walk (worth a whole entry of its own) were very friendly.

We were told that our apartment is one of the

nicest places in Kampala. Given the huts and shanties we saw on our morning walk support that claim. We are comfortable and very well cared-for. There is no air conditioning, but this place is most comfortable.

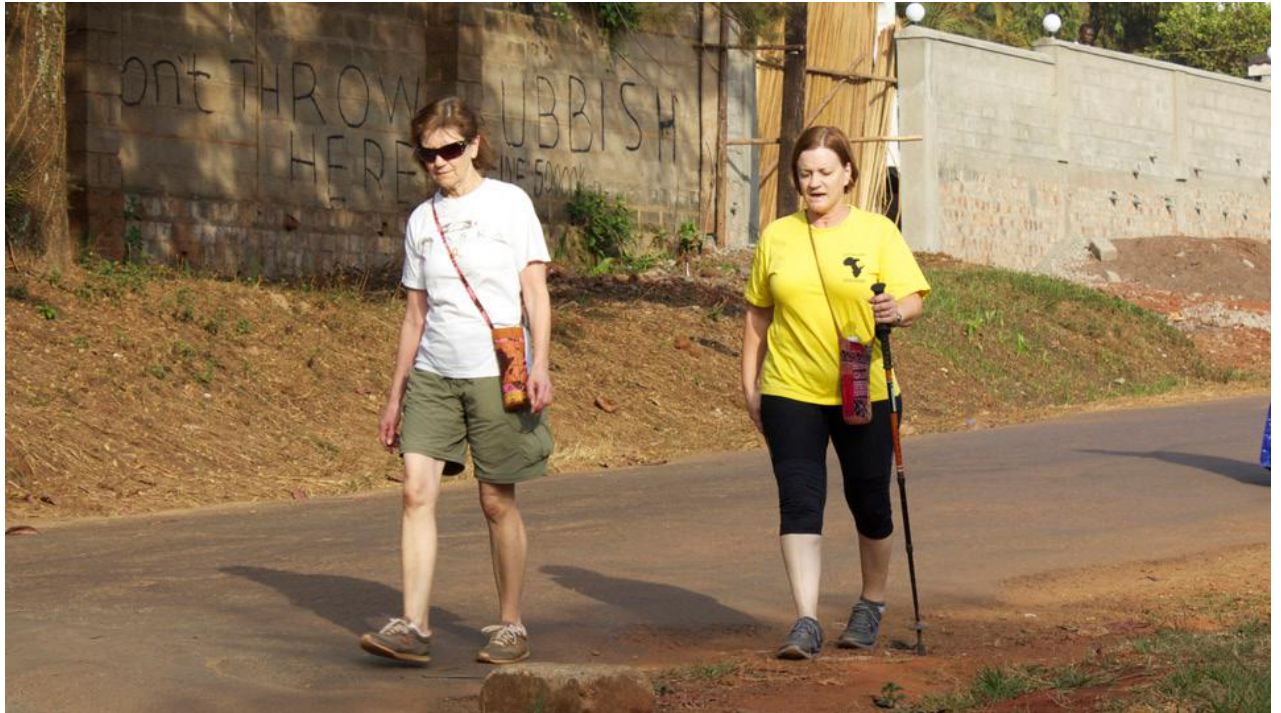
Our bedroom features a king size bed. Notice the mosquito netting for draping the bed. If we keep the doors and windows secure, we can sleep without the net and a fan keeps the air moving.

From our balcony, we could lean over and pick a mango when it ripens. There are tons of fruits, grains, seeds and vegetables here. The stores are handy and there is plenty of quality food if you wash it carefully. Since we're mostly vegan, we don't need to worry about the meat issue. Meat and all other foods are hung outside and there is no refrigeration in the open market.

There are a few grocery stores with chilled and frozen goods, but the open market offers fresh.

The morning after our arrival, one of our senior couple neighbors, the Chabras, brought us Pani Puri, an Indian breakfast. You chip off one side of the little shells, add potatoes and two different savory sauces, and pop it in your mouth. Amazing! It was delicious and we felt loved and cared for.

We're so very excited to be here! As we went on a morning walk today with three other couples, we were stunned at the poverty, the rutted dirt roads, burning garbage along the roadside, tiny huts made of tin or block or bamboo - and beautiful, smiling black people everywhere. As we greeted them, we were rewarded with a stunning white smile and kind words. This is going to be a great experience.



Missionary Life

1 March 2015



This week, we worked in the office during the days, edited video at night, then left Saturday morning for an open house in our branch in Njeru. The photo of us standing on the Equator was taken as we travelled to Masaka to do a branch audit.

The trip to the branch took us 3.5 hours and it was a challenge. The traffic was so crazy that we traveled about a mile in one hour. We were almost two hours late to get set up. Then the projection equipment failed. The temperature in our little make-shift theater must have approached 100 degrees. We were so keyed-up by the end of that day that it felt great to collapse into bed. We stayed with another

couple in Jinja so we wouldn't have to drive back to Kampala in the late hours.

Since Saturday was our 40th anniversary, we wished one another a happy anniversary as we worked through the day. By late that night, we stopped at a Chinese restaurant where we spent literally our last schilling on dinner (we had left the rest of our cash at home in the safe).

We would not trade this for anything. It is as if we began a whole new phase of life when we became missionaries. We do miss our family at home at times, and the luxurious American lifestyle we took so much for granted.



Elder & Sister Wallace leave for home this week, so RaNae and I will take the reigns as the office couple until April 23rd when the permanent office couple arrives. Then we anticipate being here another few weeks while they assume the office and we are sent to our next assignment. We know that our mission president will be inspired and that we'll go where we can do the most good. He said we might be moved around in our mission and to not expect a permanent assignment. Since we love change and adventure, we're good with that.



Not many missionaries have the ideal companion, but I am one of the blessed few. This woman who has been constantly at my side for over 40 years has been the greatest blessing of my life. Thanks to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, whose Holy Spirit has sealed our love for eternity, I never have to worry about being transferred and receiving a new companion. This one is for keeps and hallelujah for that! She is indeed a Super Trooper.

Only those who know her well can understand who RaNae Taylor really is. I think she

generally doesn't even realize it herself. She is the consummate servant, caregiver, and friend to everyone. To watch her interact with missionaries and guests in the mission office is a joy. She radiates the love of God. I want to be just like her.

When we were set apart as missionaries just before entering our mission, we were blessed that we would grow closer on our mission than ever before. I told President Sommerfeldt that I could not imagine that happening. And yet it already has.

Just last weekend RaNae rode in another truck while Sister Chabra rode in my truck so she could give me directions. When we came to a light, RaNae turned and waved from the back window of the truck in front of us. I realized I missed her. It had been less than 20 minutes. I know, sounds both crazy and sappy. But it's true.

Here's to eternal marriage and forever, giddy love!

True to the Faith

28 March 2015



The other night we had three soon-to-depart missionaries in our apartment. They were Elder Lunga Xolisa Mkutswana, Elder Llungisi Felix Thomo and Elder Lungelo Nyoni. We were discussing their future plans upon returning home; schooling, work, career, marriage, family, and remaining true to the Faith. It was one of those rare and very candid discussions about their concerns regarding the future.

As we shared our thoughts, it occurred to me that there are two general ways that returning missionaries fall away from the Church.

The first is that life is too easy, as is often the

case with Mzungus (whites) who return to the states or other first world homes. They can go to school or get a job and get married and, if they are not watchful, easily become relaxed about Gospel living.

The second is that life is too hard, where missionaries from third-world nations go home to extreme poverty, unemployment, a depressed economy, unhealthy traditions and other hardships. Then life demands can drag them away from the Gospel they love.

Our discussion, therefore, centered on keeping alive the flame of testimony that was

ignited in their bones as missionaries. They may find that balancing life challenges like education, employment, courtship and the filth of being back in the world clouds their eternal perspective.

We showed these Elders our Declaration of Faith which RaNae and I try our best to live. We developed this years ago and have modified it many times. We suggested that they carefully prepare their own declaration and take a stand. We agreed to record them making their declaration just before leaving for home (see below). Then they would give follow-up reports in one and five years. If they did this, they would be far less likely to drift into disobedience or discouragement as life gets hard. They were all in.

Three Steps to Success

There is an amazing power when a declaration is written.

That power increases when it is spoken aloud to others.

And having a sense of future accountability welds their resolve.

As these amazing Elders left our apartment that night, we were deeply touched with their wonderful faith. We pray that all returning missionaries will not allow the too easy or too hard challenges to pull them from being True to the Faith.

Crucible of Compassion

6 April 2015

2. Missionary Life

Our experiences this past weekend were both life-cleansing and challenging. We first went to a village near Jinja to help with another Jiggers service project. This time, rather than run the camera, I got into the action with RaNae and my heart nearly burst. We did the post-op wash and sanitize on the little guy featured in our video. As he stood in the disinfectant bath and we watched the water turn red with his bleeding toes, I could not hold back my tears. As I carefully washed and dried and put medication on his feet, RaNae and I shared a sympathetic look and kept on working.



I also worked on an old man (old here is about 50) whose tough feet may never have had a pair of shoes. This was the ultimate barefoot runner. I cried again as I washed and dried these tired gnarly old feet, then handed him a pair of plastic sandals as a gift. I wish I had a picture of his face as he was wearing them. He was a rich man indeed.

When we finished, we wished that every human being could have this kind of experience. There's something about washing and treating feet that is so deeply personal to both the giver and the receiver. It pushed us once again into the crucible of compassion, and it was good for the soul.

We next visited a small orphanage in Bwenge and another layer of the world fell away.

And now this, from RaNae:

When we visited the orphanage Saturday I was talking with one of the guys who is helping there. He's a handsome 21 year old from Spain. When I asked him what his religion is he simply said, "I don't do any of that. I wasn't blessed with the virtue of faith". I thought a lot about his response and how sad it is to live without faith

in this world. "Feed your faith and your doubts will starve to death". Faith is something that needs to be continually cultivated all our lives. We can't afford to go a day without doing something to build it.

Spencer W. Kimball:

"Is there not wisdom in Heavenly Father giving us trials that we might rise above them, responsibilities that we might achieve, work to harden our muscles, sorrows to try our souls? Are we not exposed to temptations to test our strength, sickness that we might learn patience, death that we might be immortalized and glorified? If all the sick for whom we pray were healed, if all the righteous were protected and the wicked destroyed, the whole program of the Father would be annulled and the basic principle of the gospel, free agency, would be ended. No man would have to live by faith".

Sometimes we do things being guided by the Light of Christ and we don't even know why. Giving provides so much more joy and inner peace than any possession. To give is to truly live, and this past weekend we and many others were very much alive.

One Week

2 April 2015

We don't want this book to be a diatribe of meaningless dribble, but just for fun we will take you on a tour of the past week of our mission. Today is Thursday, April 2, 2015. It represents the variety we experience as missionaries here in Uganda.

Friday March 27

The baby RaNae is holding in the first photo is the niece of a woman who works in our office. We went to see Suzy on Friday to cheer her up. She just had been in the hospital and was convalescing. We love meeting in the homes of these sweet people.

Meet the awesome APs (assistants to the president). We love being around all missionaries and it is especially nice to watch these three do their work. They are so dedicated and full of the Spirit. We want to be just like them.

We participated in the MLC (mission leadership conference), after which we enjoyed dinner at Nanjing's Chinese restaurant. Delicious.

President and Sister Chatfield are two of the busiest people on the planet. They are so selfless and spend all their energy helping missionaries, church leadership and anyone else they can bless. They are remarkable servants of the Lord.

Saturday

Saturday is our P-day since we're in the office during normal business hours. Today we went on a walk/hike with two other couples who live

in the same complex as we do.

After our hike, we met to go to Chaat House, an Indian restaurant, for breakfast. One huge surprise of our mission was the types and variety of foods we can enjoy. You can't get this kind of food in Utah. And all the food shown here is strictly vegan. Wow.

Sunday

Although the traffic here in Kampala is a challenge, our drive to Njeru Branch for church is scenic. Today it was raining and the temperature was mild and pleasant.

We have baptisms on many Sundays right after Sacrament Meeting. Most missionaries baptize monthly. We're growing to love the people in our Branch and will miss them when we are transferred next month.

Monday

We work a normal 9-5 shift at the mission office, and it is loaded with activity and challenges. With 177 missionaries, a fleet of trucks, about 70 apartments in three countries, and lots of money to track and bills to pay, there are very few days that one could snooze at the desk. The staff handles all baptisms, mission calls, pre-mission applications, and travel in and out of the country. We love that most of the time.

Wednesday

Tonight we went to the Ndere African Culture show here in Kampala. We were blown away.

The photos are terrible and can't compare with what we saw and felt. The thundering drums at the end cannot be described. The performers came into the arena carrying these huge tree trunk drums on their heads while beating them. Once they put them down and all played at once, the impact of the sound could be felt in our bodies. No bass speaker system at home could duplicate it. We may go another time and I'll be better prepared. It was everything we hoped for in an African performance.

Friday

The landlord is putting a new face on our building. This is one of the few projects that actually uses steel scaffolding. Most scaffolding here is made from wooden Eucalyptus poles, which look flimsy but are in fact very strong. The workers here get supplies up by passing from one person to another all the way to the top.

Saturday

Even though there are stresses of living in a third-world country, we see things that make us laugh every day. I wish you could have seen the guy on the bike in real life. We named him Ronald McDonald. To see him peddling his old bike down the road with skinny black legs, giant red and black basketball shoes, the striking yellow jump suit and wild hat had us laughing all afternoon. He also wore bright pink sunglasses. The winter scarf he is wearing is very typical. We often see people wearing winter stocking caps, scarves and even heavy winter coats. The other day we saw a very hip



black man wearing a bright red and yellow Tweedy Bird stocking cap. Things like this take the edge off the day.

Our good friend Elder Squire strapped this Hartebeest to president Chatfield's car. He and his wife are a senior couple who have helped us pre-mission as well as here. Having a sense of humor is critical to coping with the stresses of missionary work. President Chatfield loves to have fun and has a great sense of humor. As a group of kids examined the skull up close, he

honked the horn, causing them to jump from their skin in screams.

We have learned that the experiences and value of a mission for senior couples is almost entirely up to the couple. Most of what gives our mission character and depth are the things we do outside the minimum daily requirements. We worry when we hear of couples who get up in the morning with nothing to do, and end up spending their day cooking, reading or watching movies. We are determined not to allow that to happen to us once we're

transferred to our next area.



The Boogie Man Cometh

6 June 2015

I was jerked awake this morning at 2:30 by the phone ringing. I staggered into the hallway trying not to disturb RaNae and answered. It was Peter, a member who has been helping our disturbed friend Dixon this week. He was calling from Kampala and was frantic. He said *"They're coming to get you and beat you! You must hide! Turn off all the lights. Hurry! I love you, dear Brother"*, then he hung up. With the culture we live in here in combination with the goings on of this week with Dixon being beaten, I went into a panic. I called the zone leader and asked him to wake all the Elders and come help us *right now*. Within 60 seconds they were at the door - sleepy-eyed and staggering. Meanwhile, I called Peter back. I asked him to slow down and explain what was going on and asked who told him we were in danger. He answered that he had had a dream and the Holy Ghost told him. He then proceeded to ask if we had a black cat, and urged us to sit in complete darkness where we would be safe. That is when I realized my panic was unfounded. I explained the story to the Elders, apologized, and sent them back to bed.

This culture is so mingled between religion and witchcraft that the lines get blurred. I realized as I spoke to Peter the second time that he was



confusing the two. While mob justice is a very real thing here, his fears for us were based on superstition. I'm thankful to him for his concern.

It took us awhile before we could get back to sleep, but our fears had subsided and rest eventually came.

RaNae has said several times that this mission is not for wussies, and that is true. We love being here, but it does have its many and varied challenges. Faith and fear cannot occupy the mind at the same time. I'm so

thankful that our faith was awakened soon after fear gripped us, and drove it away. By the way, I'm also very thankful that we have six strong and courageous missionaries just next door if the need ever arises.

Be calm and preach the Gospel. You are surrounded by angels. All will be well. Fear not.

The Potato Prompting

30 July 2015

Today we visited Ayella Denis at his orphanage about 15 miles from Gulu. Although we have been very careful not to give gifts to the people, today we felt differently. We both felt impressed to take Denis some potatoes. We went to the open market and bought about 200 pounds of spuds and a sack of onions, then drove to the orphanage. When we arrived, we showed our gift to Denis (pictured left) who was very grateful. He told us that this morning his kids had eaten the last of their beans before going to school, and that they had no food to feed them when they returned. Our potatoes were an answer to his prayer. That humbled us as we realized that we were directed. This is unique because we have never given material gifts on our mission other than missionary literature and a meal here and there. But this morning we felt compelled to help. We're so glad we did.

Denis just called tonight at 9 PM to tell us the kids were eating a late supper of potatoes. He told us the kids had never tasted a potato before and that they were most thankful. Wow. Can you imagine never tasting a potato? He told us they don't buy them because they are too expensive. We offered another prayer of gratitude for our bounteous blessings.

Love you all. Now eat your spuds!



Dive! Dive! Dive!

1 May 2015



Several have asked what it's like being a senior couple serving in Africa. This is my attempt to explain. Living at home in Utah is much like sitting comfortably on the deck of a boat at sunset on the ocean. It is beautiful and serene. It has its adventurous elements, but is secure. You think you have a pretty good perception of reality. But you can't know what you don't see.

So you don't scuba gear, sit on the side railing, hold your mask in place and tumble backwards off the boat into the MTC (not empty sea). You are 100% committed. Instantly, your whole world changes. You have entered a different dimension.

Once you push away from the surface and descend towards the reef below, you begin

to see things that you could not even imagine before - many, many things you would never expect. The pressure of the water against your skin, your controlled rhythmic breathing, the aquatic life, the vegetation, the coral, and all things oceanic makes this truly unique to anything you have ever done before. And your attempts to write home about this fail because those on the surface can't understand the life of those beneath.

There comes a point on your mission that you find yourself suspended in the abyss amid the sea life and you realize you are experiencing an eye-popping stupefying adventure that can never be duplicated nor adequately described. You are completely vulnerable to the sea, yet you feel safe and confident. And you wouldn't

trade this for anything back home.

Thanks to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and your experiences in the Church, you can leave fully equipped for a great experience. What you may perceive as meager talents on the surface back home are magnified in this ocean of missionary service.

To those who might consider taking that first plunge off the boat, we urge you with all our heart to do it. Until you do, you can't know what you are missing. And when you do, please talk to us before you submit your papers. We'll help you know how to specify the Uganda Kampala Mission as your destination - for this mission of all missions is the Great Barrier Reef. Come and SEA.



The Gulu Truck

13 June 2015



There is a great difference between our trucks here in Gulu compared with those of the rest of the mission. The Gulu truck has battle scars and mud typical of our terrain.

Today we finished a two-day trip to Mbale where we attended mission conference. This required our driving the Gulu road twice in as many days. I haven't captured photos of that road yet, but will on our next trip. It really is indescribable.

On our return trip today, it had rained heavy during the night so the roads were very muddy

and wet. Huge mud holes littered the road and our two trucks fishtailed wildly when we accelerated too quickly. On one occasion the other truck, driven by Elder Rogers, was trying to pass a semi by driving along the side of the road. I wish I had footage of that attempt. Elder Rogers timed it perfectly so his speed and the size of the mud holes were just the wrong distance apart. As his truck accelerated, it began to leap from one hole to the next, shooting huge sprays of mud and water up over the hood and in all directions. It resembled a dolphin in a mud bog. After four or five jarring crashes from hole to hole, he gave up the

chase and slid behind the semi just as I passed them both on a less challenging side of the road. That was luck, not skill. I laughed for a long time at the sight.

What passes for roads here in Gulu is amazing. This past week we had our truck in 4-wheel drive twice. Once while trying to leave the church driveway and another while navigating a trail to a hut.

We love Gulu, even with its lousy roads. This is an adventure never to be forgotten or perfectly duplicated.

A Gulu Week

3 October 2015

2. Missionary Life

It's Saturday, 3 October, and I have time to post some photos and comments about our adventures in Gulu. It's nice to sit here in my casual clothes and try to recapture all that has happened. We're currently teaching several couples, or helping them get married.

Every night this week we have collapsed into bed and slept like logs. We get so tired, but love these people and this Work so much that it is very worth it.

Shopping has become a challenge. These empty shelves are inside Uchumi, the only grocery store in town. Because of internal corruption, the store is near failure. Some days they have no change and offer you a pen instead. Go figure. These shelves once had staples like bread, flour, sugar, oats, and yogurt. The bakers stand around an empty kitchen with nothing to do. The inventory must be below 25% of normal. Today we left with almost nothing. I've had no problem keeping my weight down. If it weren't for our occasional trip to Kampala, we'd be in pretty bad shape.

We visited the orphanage of Ayella Denis again this week, this time to introduce a local member whose family is organizing a non-profit to help such institutions here. They live in the UK and Germany. It went very well, and we hope the kids will soon be getting the essentials they so desperately need: beds, mattresses, bedding, mosquito nets, used clothing, shoes, etc.

We went to preach to 200 people at a local Christian Church in town. This Mama gave RaNae the necklaces as a gift. We shared



an hour for our talks. RaNae gave a touching testimony on our basic beliefs and dispelled some popular myths that some churches promote. For example, some say that Mormon's pray naked, and that we take people under the water (meaning we worship the devil). I was so moved as she stood and recited several Articles of Faith and expressed love. My talk was about the great apostasy, the dark ages, and the restoration. I think we were both pretty bold, and we felt good about the experience.

We spoke with several of our family this week for RaNae's birthday. It was good to get caught up, express love for one another, and count our

blessings. I have shifted from my criticism of our own corrupt government and what is wrong with the country. Today, I'm much more grateful that the U.S. is so strong in spite of its faults. I admit that I will love to stand on American soil again.

However, there is so much to love here as well. Just two weeks ago, we were standing in the Gulu Branch for the rest hymn, and singing Beautiful Zion. These people can really sing. We were both moved to tears as we felt the love and faith of these members. So no, we aren't ready to come home. Just counting blessings.

Helping Peter

4 August 2015



Today we took our friend Peter into the village and deep into the bush on a quest to get three key signatures for his passport application so he can proceed with his mission papers. We left at 9 AM and returned tonight at 7. He achieved his goal for the three signatures, which were unbelievably challenging to get. But, oh, what fun we had. Come join us here for another photo adventure! We can't believe they call this kind of fun missionary work.

17 June 2016:

Peter was our greatest high-maintenance burden. He wore us out.

We love him, and hurt for him, but he required so much attention that we eventually had to sever communications, once we *shifted* to Jinja.





Hump Day

19 October 2015

Today is Monday, October 19, 2015. It is the halfway mark of our mission - already. Since it's our preparation day today, it started with a little time to think. As I lay in bed this morning, listening to the "big rains" outside our open window, I was thinking about the things we really miss about home. I started making a list of conveniences and luxuries at home in the Rockies, and how absent they are here...and then the phone rang.

It was our friend Sharon, a recent convert who we've been helping prepare for a mission by earning money from her garden. She said her "uncle" was deathly sick, and could we come quickly and transport him to the emergency room at the big hospital? (we learned later that this "uncle" was her live-in boyfriend). We changed all our plans for the day, dressed in missionary attire, and raced to her nearby village. While two neighbors were carrying the uncle to our truck, and others were putting food and bedding supplies inside to take with us, I thought again, what if we weren't here to help? That's when the impact of this hump day hit me the hardest.

What would our life be like on this Monday if we had stayed at home? It is Fall in Utah now, with crisp mornings and colorful foliage on the mountains. We'd have our family nearby, of course, which would be great. Laura would be planning the annual family Halloween party, which is usually epic. We'd have things to do today such as winterize the garden and wrap up the central air conditioner unit before the snows. But what else we might do is completely



beyond my comprehension. I can't even think it.

Tears come to my eyes as I consider what we would have missed by staying nestled in our Mapleton home at the foot of our beautiful mountains in Utah. We would never have known true suffering. We could not even fathom how common death can be. And we would not have helped people get married, or start a business, or learn of the True Church restored. Our lives would doubtless have been good, but we could not have enjoyed the dimension and texture we've discovered here. We have been intimately involved in the lives of people who desperately needed our help. We have been blessed to be the critical link at times of great need. We've grown to love these people even with the harshness of this society, of which we only hint at.

As if to drive all this home, I just received an email from our adopted African son, Kennedy, who is away at Law School in Kampala. I will include some here so you can get a taste of what it is like to be senior missionaries in Uganda.

Its me your son and am grateful for the super love you always give to me, I promise you all worthy examination results. No amount of words can express my sincere appreciation.

Honestly I can't explain what is happening to my life ever since I got to the True Church on earth and above all you my lovely parents, I didn't think I was going to have light in my future basing on the background of my family but from nowhere, God performed unexpected miracle, through you. Always I treasure you.

The best payment I can ever give you and mum is my way of living, pressing fourth to the Gospel principle. Always I will defeat the devil and dedicate my humble spirit to Jesus the source of my Joy.

While we aren't ready to submit our papers for another mission, it is impossible to comprehend the blessings we have enjoyed by being here. And we didn't even come for the blessings. We came for Him, and His plan of happiness. We came for them, and their temporal and eternal welfare. And we also came for our family at home, who are aware of what we are doing and why. But the blessings come pouring in anyway.

How we wish we could convey the feelings of our heart to our friends back home, who might, with a little effort, come and do what we are doing. Please prayerfully consider it. You may be needed in a corner of the world far from your snug environment at home, or even nearby. We beg you to just ask.

Christmas Week

20 December 2015

2. Missionary Life



It's safe to say this past week has been eventful and educational. We began with a Christmas sing-along at our apartment. What we experienced was touching.

One of our guests confessed that after receiving our invitation she jumped up and down for joy and was amazed that anyone would think of her. She said she has never celebrated Christmas because of her terrible past of painful neglect and abuse.

Another guest said she read our text invitation in the middle of the night, then could not sleep

for excitement. She calls us her Mzungu (white) parents.

During the week we made tons of donuts (called Spudnuts because the recipe includes potatoes) and cinnamon rolls for various parties. I showed our friend Vincent how to make and fry donuts so he can make money. We had a great time.

Christmas movie night was a record-breaker. Almost 70 people showed (typically 10). Was it the movie or the Spudnuts? We were thrilled that so many showed up. We barely

had enough donuts for them. We also sang Christmas songs while we waited for the movie to start. What a fun time it was to be with these wonderful Saints.

We had an early Christmas surprise this year. Not only did we add our 22nd grandchild, but we suddenly sold our home in Utah. This wasn't planned, but happened when our current tenants asked for release from their contract. To our surprise, the house sold in 12 days (We later learned that the market had changed and we were underpriced).

Celestial Fusion

21 December 2015

As my Christmas gift to my family, I want to share some very personal feelings about my testimony of Jesus Christ and His Gospel.

I first knew for myself that the Church was true when I was fifteen years old living in American Fork, Utah. I was taking a seminary class where my teacher, Brother Patey, challenged us to read the Book of Mormon. I was not a committed student, but respected my teacher and wanted to please him. He instructed us to pray before reading, then ask as we turned each page if the book were true and translated by the gift and power of God, or if was simply written by a cleaver man. I was sitting in my dad's study in our home. I had read to chapter 8 in 1 Nephi (about Lehi's dream) and was captivated by what I read. As I turned each page, I asked the questions again when a sudden and very clear voice came into my mind which said,

Bernell, everything your parents have been teaching you about this Church is true, including this book.

For the first time in my life, I knew something for certain. The realization that this was not a pretend story like Santa Claus overwhelmed me with indescribable joy. Tears flooded my face and I nearly sobbed with gratitude. I knew. That testimony created a feeling of warmth throughout my whole body. I was not aware that a spark had been ignited which would never die.

From that day until now, I have always known

the Church is true. I have not always acted according to that knowledge, for which I am ashamed. But gradually, over time, my life has become stronger and clearer in the light of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

While on my first mission in Texas, I continued to receive revelations needed for the work. I was coached regarding how to teach, what to say, and how to behave. I was chastised at times and pushed onto the right path. Some of these revelations came as simple thoughts, while others could be written word for word, like taking dictation. My testimony became like a fire in my bones.

Because I had learned to hear the voice of the Spirit, it guided me in choosing my wife upon my return from my mission. Both RaNae and I received very clear and distinct revelation that we were to marry. I didn't even need to propose to her because we both knew from the Spirit in the same instant. That knowledge has helped us greatly throughout the challenges of parenting and marriage. I have always known she is my Queen because the Lord said so.

While serving in Church leadership at the Missionary Training Center in Provo, Utah, my testimony clarified still further. I was often prompted who to help and how. Some of that guidance was more like a push than a nudge. That is where I determined that a testimony is like celestial fusion burning in my bones. It is unquenchable. It drives me to seek the Spirit in my every thought.

Now that we have been serving here in Uganda

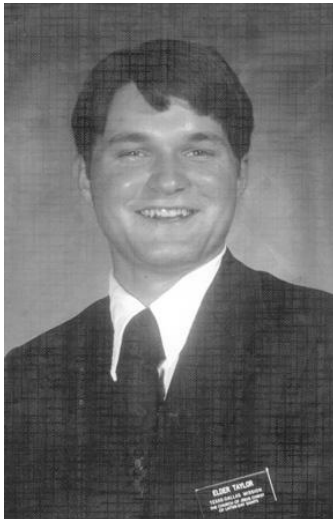
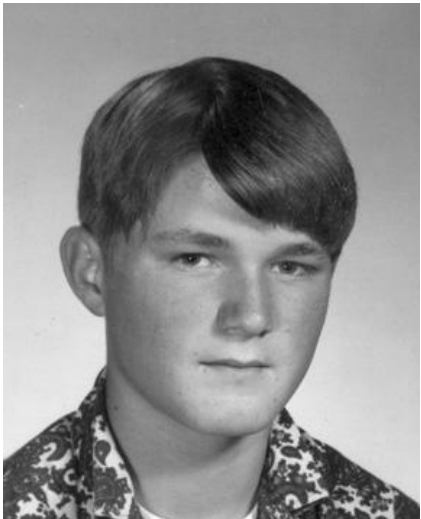
for a year, I can see that celestial fusion continues to progress in its effects. What I once thought was something in my bones, has since percolated into my muscles and tissue and now seeps from every pore of my skin. I am now at a point in my life where I can say I have no other desire than to do the will of the Lord. I want for no worldly possession, no recognition, and no status. I want to be transparent like glass so that others, seeing me, will see Christ as if magnified through me. I want to spend all my remaining days in His service, deflecting all praise and thanks to Him.

An added blessing which I had never supposed, is that RaNae has been at my side in this entire journey. Her testimony burns just like mine. Her love of the Lord matches mine. We are walking hand in hand in this mortal state, and we are experiencing both the Refiner's fire and His tender mercies together.

The spark was struck at age fifteen. It grew into a flame at age twenty. It burned into my bones in my fifties. And today it surrounds my soul. It is who I am.

He lives. His true Gospel is on the earth today. And because of that sure knowledge, I can gladly testify, teach, love, and proclaim even with those who have gone before that there is a most marvelous plan for our happiness now and in eternity. Of this I am absolutely certain with no doubt. This knowledge is my greatest song of joy.

In the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.



Lock down

18 February 2016



We were in lock-down for nearly a week. Each day our member friends would advise us of what was going on outside our compound walls. We could occasionally hear gun shots and shouting, but were otherwise insulated from it all.

Reagan, a member, told us some people had been killed in the streets during the rioting.

Joseph Museveni won by a landslide, and because his sham democratic system allows him to load the ballot boxes and in prison any who oppose him. He is a tyrant.



This week is elections here in Uganda. It is one of the most predictably violent times each five years, and almost all Ugandans and foreigners go into a kind of lock down to avoid trouble. As missionaries, we are staying in our compound for three days. As such, we have time to be together, to play and to testify. We're doing all of these. Here is the agenda we prepared for the three days:

We started yesterday with fresh fruit and games. We really enjoyed playing Phase 10. Then we shared a hymn and prayer as a zone.

Today has been great. It rained heavily on this election day, so the weather has been cool and sweet. We've made peanut clusters and donuts, sharing with the Elders for a skill they may need later. We also shared our feelings about remaining true to the faith after our mission.

Later, we'll watch a movie, share a hymn and prayer, and go to bed happy.

Tomorrow we'll play together again, eat big, watch another movie, and close with a spiritual song and prayer.

We really love these six young Elders. It's so fun to parent them during times like this. They often teach us as much as we help them.

I was sitting with two branch leaders in a nearby town in deep discussion. The branch president had been missing from Church activity for several weeks. He would not answer his phone, and could not be found even when people went looking for him at his home or work. The two leaders in our meeting were very concerned that perhaps the president had abandoned his calling, thus crippling the work in the branch. Our mission president and others had sought him in vain the week previous.

We were meeting to determine how to reconcile the church records regarding donations and use of church funds. We could not see how to move forward in operations. We had reached an impasse without access to this man.

I turned to the first counselor and said: *How strong is your faith?*

Very strong, he answered. I asked the same question of the branch clerk, Dennis, who gave the same answer.

Then we need a miracle right now, I said. *We cannot move this work forward without the help of this man. We need to find him today.*

I asked Dennis to offer a prayer, asking God to help us find the president *right now*. After his wonderful and faithful prayer, I knew we would have success. As we left the church, we told the full time missionaries where we were going. They informed us they had not been able to contact the president for weeks even after many attempts. I asked them to pray for our success. They said they would start praying.



The three of us got into the truck, and started the long drive to the branch president's house in the village. No one talked. I believe we were all doing the same thing - praying earnestly. My prayer was asking God to provide a miracle so that these good brothers and the missionaries could know that He was aware and would answer their prayers. As I prayed, I must have felt a little like Ammon when he showed his power in defending the king's sheep (Alma 17:29), because my desire was for these men to see faith in action.

Arriving at the president's home, we found he was not there. We had been waiting for an hour when his wife said he might be on the road bringing their children from school on his bicycle. We started back for town, praying all the way. As we drove, I suddenly had a surge of joy and said these words in my mind: *Father, I thank Thee for hearing my prayer.*

Only seconds after this prayer of thanks, Dennis yelled from the back seat, *There he is!*

We stopped and met the fugitive president, along with two of his children. In a few

moments, he and his kids and bicycle were all in our truck headed back for his hut.

After our meeting with the branch president, wherein we got his signature on a much needed document, the three of us were again in the truck headed back toward town. I told them of my certainty that I knew we would be successful that day. The others expressed that they had also had the same faith and confidence. We called the missionaries with the news, who yelled in triumph and joy. It was an emotional moment we shared, and we would each express grateful prayers that night. We had experienced one of the great miracles of faith in action.

It is very difficult to express the emotion that gripped me from our first leap of faith when we offered that prayer for help. It was as if a power came into my veins that surged my faith. As we progressed from one step to another, I had no doubt of the outcome, though my prayers were constant. The discovery of the missing man brought an overwhelming feeling of joy and thanksgiving for a prayer answered.

Experiences like this make me dumb with wonder when the naysayers claim there is no God and no miracles in our day. Not only is there a God in heaven, but He hears and answers our prayers according to our faith. This dramatic experience with faith reinforced this testimony in me, as well as the other men. Prayer works. Faith works. And when combined with obedience with a purpose, nothing can prevent miracles. Of this I know and testify, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

What's Next?

19 April 2016



When we were kids, we could hardly wait for Christmas. Then we yearned to go to school. Next, we put on a uniform and became a Boy Scout, then received the Aaronic Priesthood, or joined Young Women. Soon we held our ticket to freedom - a driver's permit. Each event marked a milestone in our lives. Next came a mission, then marriage, University, and a profession. Somewhere in the midst we became parents and engaged in the greatest challenges and blessings of our lives.

Fast-forward forty years to our 60th birthday. Our children have left the house; they are married, on a mission or at college. All of a sudden we notice that the clock on the wall has

a tick-tick-tick, which we never noticed all those years when the kids were being raised. We have time for one another and time for a nap. The years of amassing money and all that stuff are in the past, and now we're just taking care of it all. The house and property have suddenly outgrown us and we feel dwarfed like two marbles in an empty shoebox. At some point, we ask a question which we may have never considered in all our lives. What's next?

What shall we do with ourselves now that the demands on us have reduced? Even our calling in the Church may have become too easy since there are so many younger members with more energy who can fill callings. Our grey hair has

placed us in the category of "those beloved older folks" who have so much experience, yet the bishop struggles to give something meaningful to do.

We are faced with some options that we may not have seen coming until they are standing at the front door like a woman selling shoelaces.



Now that we can afford it, maybe we could buy that sexy, designer brand sports car we've always dreamed of. If we do, how might we look, driving a rich young man's car wearing our cardigan sweater, bifocals and grey hair? Yeah, I know. Old. And where on earth would we drive, Walmart? Now that the family has moved out, we are beginning to realize how unnecessary all this stuff actually is, and we are left to care for it like a slave in a coal mine. Stuff! What were we thinking?

Maybe we should get a really nice 5th wheel trailer or motor home and hit the road. We could travel the coastal highway along the Pacific ocean from San Diego to Victoria Island.



But sooner or later, we'd find that we had traded the peace of our home and yard for a crowded campground. Our trailer would be just one more very expensive empty can lying on its side on a little strip of gravel or asphalt, amid all the others. Our evenings would be spent sitting in a folding camp chair under our retractable awning, listening to those two yapping white dogs that every campground has, and the thrum of portable generators stinking up the seaside air with their exhaust. We'd go to bed in our little mansion and listen to that oversized man in the motor home next door snore the night away. Humph. Not quite what we had pictured.

Perhaps now we can tour the world and see all those sights we have wanted to visit. Even with an unlimited budget, this option will take even less time to tire of than the others. We discover that everything we wanted to visit was created long before we were born, and the life has gone out of it. As we stand on the rim of one more grand canyon, only a few dozen yards from our vehicle, we look into another abyss and wonder what we are doing here. Hmm. The Sphinx is a giant headstone for some spoiled



boobie who wasted his wealth and the lives of men to make him somehow immortal - yet he died anyway and nobody knows anything more than his name, and that he was a tyrant in real life. Some legacy. So we pack our bags for the last time and head back home to that tick-tick-ticking clock. And then we unpack all those trinkets, knickknacks and gewgaws we've collected on our exotic travels and try to figure where to put all our new stuff. Oops.

Finally, we just decide to retire. We don't need more money. We might downsize a bit, but we still spend most of our time caring for all this stuff we've accumulated. We pay taxes on it, store it, dust it, and don't often use it. It's a boat anchor around our neck and we sicken of it.

It may seem that we have entered the twilight years of life. The tree that is our life is losing its leaves, and the branches are lifting their bony fingers toward heaven which seems to be our next stop.

Is this it? Is this what people our age do? Do we go quietly into the night and putter away our years trying to stay out of the way of those younger kids who are anxiously engaged in



all the noise and clutter of the gathering and striving years? How many years will we need to sit in this dusty corner? What a bummer.

Rather than watch our lives wane away like a dying campfire, wouldn't it be better to suddenly see a new dawning, a new brightening horizon as we enter our senior years? What if we were really, desperately and anxiously needed again, and that what we said and did actually mattered to someone in a very personal way?

As full time missionaries, we've seen this dawning and it has reshaped our vision of the future. We've been in the Uganda Kampala Mission for over 15 months now, and our experience has been like the beginning of a whole new day. We feel younger in many ways than when we started. While here, we have cried and testified and loved deeply. As our biological children and grandchildren have missed us, and of course we have missed them as well, we have become the parents and grandparents of a host of new adopted children - not in a legal sense but even deeper. Our souls have reached out to them and they have embraced us. We have used our time and talents to bless others in a far greater way

What's Next?

CONTINUED

than we ever could have achieved, had we elected one of the other options available to the older generation. There have been countless nights we have come home to our apartment completely exhausted, and fell into a coma-like sleep with a smile on our lips.



We have become closer as missionary companions than ever in our lives. We have associated with other senior couples in what might be called missionary jubilation. We've embraced our full time missionary sons and daughters who have come to serve in their youth. And our whole world has enlarged and swelled and brightened.

We have found we yet have something of great



value to give. We are not done by any stretch of the imagination, and our primary desire is to spend the rest of our days in earnest service. As the Lord's grey-haired army, we are on the front lines fighting for truth just as valiantly as our younger missionary comrades, albeit at a slower pace. We have found a genuine need and discovered that we are perfectly fitted to fill it. And that feels really, really good.

What of our family at home? What of our finances, our possessions, our future? Our family has been more blessed in our absence than while we were at home. They have pulled together in a way that seems almost miraculous. We are financially better off than when we left, even though we have paid our own way and received no compensation. We've sold almost everything we owned to come here and we could never be more pleased. Talk about liberation! When we return home in only a few months, we will thrill and cry as we embrace our family once again. Then we'll take some time to stabilize some personal matters. When we are ready, we will launch again to continue promoting the greatest work on Earth prior to the second coming of our Lord.



Acquire. Travel. Camp. Retire. Phooey! We've got better things to do. God willing, we have at least another thirty years of living before we leave this planet, and we don't plan to spend it slumped in a corner playing Canasta and drinking warm milk.

Or do you go along day by day, like a door turning on its hinges, without having any feeling upon the subject, without exercising any faith whatever, content to be baptized and be members of the Church and to rest there, thinking that your salvation is secure because you have done this? President George Q. Cannon 1827-1901. Millennial Star Apr. 23, 1894.

To any of our friends of similar age or circumstances, we beg you to please, please consider coming on a full time mission. It will certainly require you to make sacrifices; to trust an aged parent to others, to leave your family and pet for awhile, to rent out or sell your home, and to reduce and simplify and rethink all that stuff hanging around. And as you do so, we can promise you a feeling of relief and release that will give you wings. Not the kind that angels have, but those of eagles. *You will find you can yet fly!*



Arrested

30 January 2016

2. Missionary Life

Today has been the most challenging day of our mission so far. Tonight, we are emotionally drained and physically exhausted. Let's not repeat it, okay?

It started this morning when our friend Kennedy was playing host for a video we've been working on. He and I were shooting short pieces in the market and on the dirt streets of Gulu when we ran into troubles with his mic. The wind was creating problems. While RaNae waited in the truck, we tried a few different places, ending up about 20 feet into a field under a tree. A few men nearby summoned us, so Kennedy went to learn their issue. It so happened that we had wandered onto military property where the soldiers and their families stay. That's when our "Happiest Faces on Earth" turned upside down. The demarcation of the property boundary was a branch laid across a trail, which we had stepped over.

Standing amid their huts, we were reprimanded for trespassing. We apologized while the next in command was sought. Not finding him available, we were instructed to delete the 15 seconds we had shot on the property, which we did, then told we could leave by the normal entrance (opposite where the truck was parked with RaNae inside). As we walked amid the huts, we passed a huge old military gun (only Spencer could identify it) with a 20-foot barrel. We were almost free when along came the next in command.

We were taken into a small metal hut used as an interrogation room where we received our



first dressing down of the day. The captain was very abrasive and mean. He told us we had no right being on military property and would be punished. He told Kennedy he deserved 100 stripes with a cane. That is when I noticed that all the military men were carrying bamboo canes about 36" in length for that very purpose. A second officer entered, recognized Kennedy, and launched an assault on him, calling him a liar and a pretender and accusing him of serious offenses, which were not true. In this room we spent about an hour in much fear. At times the soldiers would leave the hut to talk. That's when Kennedy told me he expected to be severely beaten, but assured me he would

take all the hits so I would not be hurt. We both shed tears as we anticipated what was to come. I hurt so much for him and felt deep love for this wonderful friend.

Finally, the soldiers came in again to give more interrogation. At this point I was so worked up about RaNae being alone in the truck that I stood and said I needed to go to her. That's when I was told I was under arrest and commanded to sit down. Hearing those words was the most chilling of all. I sat down. After awhile, the men again returned to the hut after deliberation, and we were told we'd be moved to the base intelligence officer nearby and I



was to drive. We moved with one of the officers and a soldier packing an assault rifle (AK47?). Mom was pale as a ghost when we came to the truck and the men all climbed in the back. I could not explain a word, and was not in the frame of mind to do so. We drove to the base nearby.

Next came a smallish man whose office outweighed him. He was what Devon would call “badge heavy”. He again interrogated us, explaining how serious our actions had been, especially just before a national election. Again, we both feared the cane or jail, although I was pretty sure I would not be whipped. But I ached for Kennedy. After another long while, my camera was taken from me and we moved once more to another higher officer to be questioned.

Then life got better. This man was very kind, and we could instantly see that we would be

okay. He asked many questions, but not with punishment in mind but understanding. RaNae was sitting in the truck while Kennedy and me were being interviewed under a Mango tree. The officer explained kindly about security, which I agreed with, telling him how Spencer had been in the U.S. Army for many years, and his deployments, etc. We were then told to calm down and given permission to leave. My camera was returned as the officer explained that this should not change our positive opinion of Uganda. He told me to comfort RaNae, but I asked him to go tell her things were okay. Again, he was very gracious and kind. We drove off base shortly after that, exhausted and emotionally drained. We were so relieved to be free.

The irony of this whole incident is that it happened even as we were making a movie called *Finding Happiness - the happiest faces*

on earth. By the time we left, you would say our faces were anything but happy. We were there at our own expense, promoting Uganda, and trying to be a blessing to the people. And yet, we were the center of a very scary experience, which we will not soon forget.

Tonight we are in meltdown. It will take a day to get our feet under us and find our grit. Then we'll be back to work and doing all the good we can.

When you say your prayers tonight, please thank God for America. Even with all its challenges, incompetent leaders and flaws, it is still the best land on earth. We'll love seeing that flag over the jet way when we again land on U.S. soil.





3. Perspective

The Avon Lady

13 March 2015



This morning our daughter Sarah sent a short editorial I want to share with you. It has to do with the Avon Lady.

But first, I'd like you to taste a little of what we see here every day. Rather than editorialize, let's just take a silent tour of Uganda so you can see and imagine how challenging life can be. See the children and give 'em a hug. See how the workers transport their goods, what an ambulance from a leading hospital looks like, where the children go every day to haul water to their homes (which have none), the food they eat with bare hands, where they shop, what an outhouse (called a long drop) looks like, and their handicrafts. Take your time. Go slow. Then, when you end the photo tour, read Sarah's insightful comments about our pursuit of stuff. Enjoy.

Now, from Sarah:

We have this Avon lady who comes into the library every other Wednesday. I tend to completely ignore her. As she was there showing some new items to the ladies I work with yesterday, I couldn't help but think of you

out there in the bush and wondered what those Africans would make of an Avon lady. She's got this little bunny that plays a rock tune and struts to the music, a large stuffed Anna doll from Frozen who sings a cutesy song, and there's the new clothes and the jewelry you've just got to have and of course there are the serving dishes. Just felt like all this meaningless clutter she's trying to sell and it's all such an illusion, such an utter waste. I flipped through her magazine and thought, There's not one thing in this little book that would make me feel better about my life, better about who I am. I may have my vices but the Avon lady and I will never be friends :-). Nothing against her personally, but isn't there a greater hunger out there? A greater need for substance and truth than Avon could ever sell you? That's my soapbox for the day.

Here in Uganda, you can see what a person must do to get enough for just one meal of Posho and beans. You see the shoe less children (with Jiggers in their feet), the lean, sweaty men who toil all day for a few schillings. You watch tiny women street sweepers with their bush brooms, constantly sweeping the red dirt at the roadside every day. Then things

begin to come better into focus.

Try this on for size: Uganda has about 80% unemployment. The average monthly income in Kampala is 250,000 schillings (about \$95 U.S. dollars). As you go to smaller towns and villages, that average drops dramatically. Most people here have a subsistence garden where they grow most of what they eat or they go hungry. One teacher here got a job at a local school for 100,000 schillings per month (\$38 US). Her rent is 80,000 schillings. That leaves just 20,000 schillings per month for food, clothing, transport (few own cars so they use taxis). Can you imagine what she can do with that each month? And this is a college-educated professional woman.

Whatever your circumstances, be grateful. That is actually one of the most significant keys to the happiness here in Uganda - their gratitude for the simplest things. Just this morning in our office meeting, the Ugandan office worker offering the prayer thanked God for the gift of life. May we be blessed with a little more gratitude and a little less lust for more and more stuff.



Video Vignettes



<https://youtu.be/y6kA3EihG9M>

The Phoenix

Elder Paul is from Rwanda. That's not his real name because he doesn't know what it was at age three when his entire family was butchered during the Rwanda genocide. His parents and all siblings were killed, but he was left alive since he was so young.

He was sent to an orphanage where he later assumed the name of Daddy Paul, because he was like a father to many of the younger children.

When I recorded his story, he said it was the first time he had talked about it. You will also be moved as we were.



https://youtu.be/R2_eQhbcYQ

Helping Hands Service

Early in our mission, we visited Mehta Hospital in the city of Lugazi. This was part of a huge sugar plantation which included its own walled community complete with housing, shopping, schools and the hospital.

The missionaries had not been welcome inside the walled township, but when they offered to do a Helping Hands service project on the hospital grounds, we were admitted on the property.

This is when I first learned the power of a camera and microphone. By wearing my gear and interviewing the hospital administrator, we were permitted to go anywhere on the hospital property and see every room.



<https://youtu.be/1FdpcqBpTTo>

Isaac and Janneth

Isaac and Janneth were one more couple we helped to get legally married.

Bride price is a very strong tribal tradition which we worked so hard to deal with. This, along with the several other harmful tribal traditions will dampen the growth of the Church in Uganda until they can be overcome.

Uncle Tom's Cabin

12 July 2015

3. Perspective



One of our favorite books of all time is Uncle Tom's Cabin by Harriet Beecher Stowe. Our oldest daughter recommended it to us years ago. Published in 1852 in the U.S. at a time when slavery was a critical issue and the Civil War was on the brink, Mrs. Stowe's bold novel addressed very sensitive issues that caused an uproar on both sides of the Mason-Dixon Line. She was one of the great masters of the English language as well as a revolutionary in defense of freedom of all men regardless of race. She was a very devout Christian who raised seven sons, all of whom became ministers. If you have never read this great American classic, we urge you to do so.

"If ever Africa shall show an elevated and

cultivated race, —and come it must, some time, her turn to figure in the great drama of human improvement. —life will awake there with a gorgeousness and splendor of which our cold western tribes faintly have conceived. In that far-off mystic land of gold, and gems, and spices, and waving palms, and wondrous flowers, and miraculous fertility, will awake new forms of art, new styles of splendor; and the Negro race, no longer despised and trodden down, will, perhaps, show forth some of the latest and most magnificent revelations of human life. Certainly they will, in their gentleness, their lowly docility of heart, their aptitude to repose on a superior mind and rest on a higher power, their childlike simplicity

of affection, and facility of forgiveness. In all these they will exhibit the highest form of the peculiarly Christian life, and, perhaps, as God chasteneth whom he loveth, he hath chosen poor Africa in the furnace of affliction, to make her the highest and noblest in that kingdom which he will set up, when every other kingdom has been tried, and failed; for the first shall be last, and the last first."

If you want to experience a literary work on the human condition, parts of which that are akin to scripture, read and ponder Uncle Tom's Cabin. God bless Harriet Beecher Stowe and all like her who are willing to speak out against prejudice and in favor of all mankind as a united family.

The Cure

20 May 2015



Back home in the U.S. and in many other places, there is a pandemic of hedonistic self-absorption. We get so wrapped up in our stuff, our properties, and our social status that it becomes easy to forget to count our blessings. Well, here's the cure:

Being here in Uganda, we see whole families staying (few actually own any property) in a mud hut with a grass roof that measures no more than 10' x 10'. They have no source of water other than by bucket from an unclean stream which the children are required to retrieve twice daily. They sleep on a dirt floor on shabby mats amid lice and fleas and Jiggers. They have one change of clothes and many have no shoes. Some old men in the villages

have never owned a pair. Their gnarly bare feet resemble tree roots. They eat one meal of beans and posho (corn mush) a day, if they are lucky. Generally speaking they are at least 30% underweight. Their bones stick out and their muscles are tawny and strong. They toil in the sun grubbing trenches or sweeping the dirt streets with brush brooms for a few schillings a day. And yet these are among the happiest people we have ever met. Why? Because they have the gift of life and no one in their family died today.

The blessings that flow to us in America are completely inconceivable to these beautiful Ugandans. But in so many ways they are better off than we are. They haven't got the means to

slather on another layer of luxury that dulls a thankful heart. Their gratitude for the simplest blessing is deep and profound. Ah, that we could be more like them.

Please look through the following photos and read the captions. Take your time. Then go into your comfortable, air conditioned home, fall to your knees beside your king-size bed on the plush carpet, and offer a real, honest, heartfelt prayer of thanks. If that doesn't do the trick, then come on over and serve here for awhile. It'll cure hedonism like nothing else.

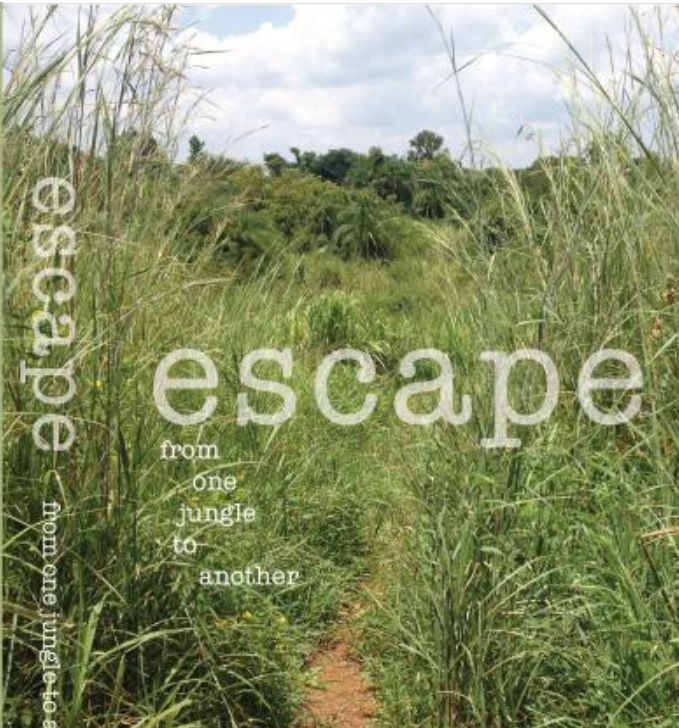




Bernell had been to every state in the union, most of them several times. He'd seen every major metropolitan city in his 35 years of business. With his wife RaNae, they had visited most of the significant sights in the U.S. They had toured parts of Europe, Canada and Mexico, and their six children had been along for the ride. Bernell took each child on business trips so they too could see the world.

Then, at age 61, Bernell and RaNae left the U.S. to serve in Uganda as missionaries for their beloved Church. They expected to *go help those poor people*, but they were introduced to a whole new way of living that re-shaped their view of all things important...forever. They were helped far more than those they served, and they didn't even know they needed the help.

This is their story of escape from the clutches of modern day America to the jungles of East Africa. Join their journey from the *Type A* business mentality to a far simpler way of life.



**“Someday
I’m Going to
Write a Book...”**

How many times have you said that? An amazing thing about being here in Uganda is that we see things and feel things that most people would not believe if they were written in a book. However, RaNae and I have been undergoing such a dramatic change of attitude and focus, that we'd love to share them. For the sake of our family and friends back home, stuck in the jungle of modern day America, we hope to share insights we are learning that may help.

Book Summary:

Bernell had been to every state in the union, most of them several times. He'd seen every major metropolitan city in his 35 years of

business. With his wife RaNae, they had visited most of the significant sights in the U.S. They had toured parts of Europe, Canada and Mexico, and their six children had been along for the ride. Bernell took each child on business trips so they too could see the world.

Then, at age 61, Bernell and RaNae left the U.S. to serve 18 months in Uganda as missionaries for their beloved Church. They expected to *go help those poor people*, but they were introduced to a whole new way of living that re-shaped their view of all things important...forever. They were helped far more than those they served, and they didn't even know they needed the help.

This is their story of escape from the clutches of modern day America to the jungles of East Africa. Join their journey from the *Type A* business mentality to a far simpler way of life.

What can we learn from Africa? In a land of poverty, war and AIDS, emerges a loving people of God, peace and simplicity that puts the Western lifestyle to shame. There is still a place where family is strong, God is important, and peace presides. It may not be a geographic location as much as a place in ones soul. Make your own escape into a new life radically apart, *under a Mango tree*.

Don't Worry, Be Happy

25 June 2015

My train of logical thinking was finally jolted from its tracks last night, sending it jouncing and jangling down the rutted roads of Gulu...all because of watching men play board games. This morning, I found it resting in a grassy field near a village. After a few more creaks and pops, and a final exhaling hiss, it sat quiet. Today I see that what I took for the locomotive of right thinking a few months ago now sits motionless in a kind of Eden.

At a mid-week priesthood activity night, six men showed up. They took a table and chairs outside and started playing board games. I came out from another meeting midway through their games, so I watched. That is when my train left the tracks. Watching them, I realized that these six men, with daily struggles I cannot fully grasp, were delighted to just play together.

When we came to Uganda in January, we expected to learn how the people found happiness even in the midst of misery. But now I see that they are closer to delight than misery. Let me replay some of their animated banter from the chess game (sitting on the wall).

Wow! Nice move. But you just watch, I'm going to get you.

You think so? I am the master of this game. You don't have a chance!

There! See? You cannot stand up against me.

Awwwww. You came from behind. Nice play. But look at this...

Move to the board game (in the foreground):

I am winning! I am king! Nobody can stop me now.

You talk too much. You will be humbled. Just wait.

Wow, I can't believe I always roll a 1 or a 2.

Here I come, you cocky man. No more peace for you...

Aha! See? I told you I was the king, (jumps from his chair doing huge fist pumps into the air and dancing around the table). I am the king! I showed you. I am the king!

As I observed these men, it seemed that they had not a care in the world. They were completely joyful in living and exhaled love from their core. They might not have eaten that day, and perhaps had no means of eating today, but they completely loved life and took the greatest pleasure in the moment.

I tried to imagine our Elder's Quorum at home having such a night as these men were having. I tried to picture the Quorum President doing fist pumps and running around the table in triumph. It would not conjure.

As all of this settled in my mind for the very first time, I saw that we at home are the ones whose life paradigm is messed up and not these people. They have it more right than we do. They are not just enduring their hardships, but finding joy in them. They live so simply. None owns a car. Very few own a motorbike. Virtually none own a home. Many grub in their village garden to eat. There is less cash here than in the days of the Great Depression. And yet...they are happier and more balanced and

grateful than we are in the states.

As Kennedy offered the closing prayer, he included these phrases:

We're so thankful for the gift of life.

We pray that we will live to see the sun tomorrow.

Some may have thought it very strange to see me turn away from the games with tears in my eyes. I found myself envious of them. I wanted to live in a round mud hut with a grass roof and a few chickens and goats in the yard. I wanted to sweat to earn a few shillings for posho and beans, and to play board games like it was the Super Bowl.

I know I've said many times how much happier these people are than we Americans. But last night was the first time I really saw why. I used to think they were in some kind of denial, or were ignorant of how good life could be if they only knew. But suddenly it all made sense. They have none of the numbing clutter we have to mess up their perspective. They are not driven by a hunger for stuff. They are completely happy being with one another and celebrating life and thanking God for a new sunrise. And I want to be just like them.

When the time comes for us to return home, I believe we will experience a kind of mourning for the loss of this simple, beautiful way of living. It will not be easy to return to all the noise and competition and trinkets found in *the good life* back in the USA.



Laws of Relativity

10 August 2015

Jon is a neighbor from California. He recently returned from a visit home. We talked of the dramatic differences between life at home and life here. He told a funny story about working at a Starbucks after having been in Africa. He was amazed when a customer came and yelled at him because the amount of foam on her latte was not up to standard. He said to himself:

Are you kidding me? You are upset about the amount of foam on your coffee? Do you know where I've been and what I've seen? And this is a big deal?

Everything is really relative after all. To one person, foam is a crisis while to another, death in the family is a regular occurrence. It is apparent that everybody has challenges within their realm of experience. It is not fair to judge any challenge based on the yardstick of others and we must withhold judgement because someone's world crisis pales by comparison.

How will we look at issues at home upon our return? Will we be able to make the jump from Uganda to the U.S. without mental whiplash?

Even here in Uganda there is great disparity in the circumstances people are handed. I shared how I hate it when I get my socks wet when I go to the bathroom if the floor was not properly dried after using the shower - while others use a hole in the ground (called a long-drop) for their potty and feel fortunate.

So, your challenges are big to you regardless of those of others. Look at these categories and consider your life by comparison. It's all relative.

Transportation

Missionary trucks are usually the only vehicles in the parking lot at church. There may also be a boda (motorbike) and a few bicycles, but everyone else *foots it*.



Housing

From sleeping under the veranda on the streets to palatial living. Life is certainly neither fair nor equal.



Food



Work



Sanitation



Play



Death of the Type A

2 September 2015



Now that RaNae and I have been here nearly eight months, I can see that my anxiety over running my life just so, has faded into the most amazing, peaceful tranquility. This is not to say I no longer care, but that I have come to see the incredible beauty of what Ugandans have.

Many Ugandans live in simple mud huts in a family village. When a son marries, he brings his wife home and another hut is built. When a muza (muzay = old person) dies, she is buried next to her hut and a marker is set in place. The family digs in a shared garden for food. There is very little cash to buy things. At night, the family gathers in groups under a mango tree to chat or play games. We've driven by many villages at night and seen groups of people along the roadside, sitting under a tree or veranda by a little shop, laughing and talking of the day - and watching the Mzungus drive by in our nice truck.

Whatever happened to those days? At what point did our electronics, digital media, bright

lights, and fast lifestyle drown out the simple beauties of just being alive another day?

My Dad, who is 94, says he wishes he could take his children and grandchildren back to the days of his childhood to see what it was like. Well, Dad, it's right here in Uganda. You can go barefoot, with your feet in the dirt, plowing behind a matched pair of cattle as you plant the sweet potatoes. Watch the star-studded night sky with its Milky Way perfectly clear, like a cloud of white, from horizon to horizon. Do chores daily so you can enjoy simple meals of foods you've grown in your own garden. And life is good.

Almost nothing we eat is packaged or has a label. We seldom go out to eat. We read and play games in our spare time. Sometimes we dance in the kitchen. When we go to visit a person, we may be there for two or more hours, sitting under a tree and being introduced to every family member in the village, one by one. We walk rather than drive when we can. If we

had our bicycles here, we'd ride them.

Our life is frittered away by detail. Simplify, simplify, simplify! I say, let your affairs be as two or three, and not a hundred or a thousand; instead of a million count half a dozen, and keep your accounts on your thumbnail. Henry David Thoreau

So, if you are one whose digital calendar is swarming with appointments and daily tasks, if your heart races just thinking of all that absolutely must be done by Friday, if you are driven by bills and deadlines and social pressures...come on over to Uganda. Almost anyone here will welcome you and invite you to sit under their Mango tree to talk and let all that stuff just seep out of the soles of your bare feet into the tidy, neatly swept dirt that is their yard. It may take several months, but you will surely find what we have found here. Life is simply beautiful if you can just un-clutter yours and take time to see it. Better yet, take the steps to do the same things in your own hometown.

Family Photo

15 July 2016

3. Perspective



I'm standing in front of 35 teachers and administrators of the Main Street Primary School in Jinja. Behind me are five full time missionaries; two Sisters, two Elders, and my sweetheart, RaNae. We've come to share a discussion centered on *The Plan of Salvation*, as taught by our Church.

Since this is a mixed group, I greet them first in the name of Jesus Christ (for the Christians), and second using the greeting Mash'Allah, meaning *God wills it* (for the Muslims). As we proceed to sing and pray and teach, I am impressed with the diversity in the room. I invite our missionaries to introduce themselves to the group. They hail from South Africa, Tanzania, Ghana, and the U.S.

Today I am impressed more than ever how the origin, religion, position or background of any person has vanished like smoke in the wind. Of course there are obvious differences, but our unity as a human family and children of a loving God overwhelms me with a feeling of peace.

Before coming here to Uganda, we knew this logically. But now that knowledge has migrated to our hearts. We no longer see race. We don't see poverty or power. We just see brothers and sisters from all over, doing the best they can.

I pray we will remember this when we return home next week. I feel certain we will. We're all in this together, you and me. We're here to live and breathe and learn and struggle, to forgive



and love and teach and forgive again.

As we pass out the *American donuts* after singing *Families Can Be Together Forever*, I feel at peace. We take the family photo at top after we arrive at the missionary apartments. How grateful I am to be part of all of God's family. *Every one.*

The Avatar Live

6 October 2015



Something has been boiling inside me for over three years now, and it's got to come out. It has to do with living an avatar life.

From my experience as a Church leader and from personal acquaintance, I have known many people whose life focused on living through other people or things. We all do it, to a degree. We attend a football game featuring our team, and we leave the stadium as if we had won or lost the game personally. We also live through books, which is a personal favorite of mine. But the kind of synthetic life I'm concerned with is when we allow our fantasy self to overshadow our real self.

I know a Church member who was happily married to a beautiful and devoted woman, having made sacred covenants with God and each other. They had children together, and life moved nicely for a few years after their marriage. But, because of his previous addiction to pornography, he allowed his former self to creep back in. He permitted his lust for pixels on a screen or dots on a page to replace his lovely, breathing, touchable wife. His avatar self traded her in for imaginary lovers who could neither touch nor satisfy.

A family friend was hooked on gaming. When his children came for a visit, they would spend

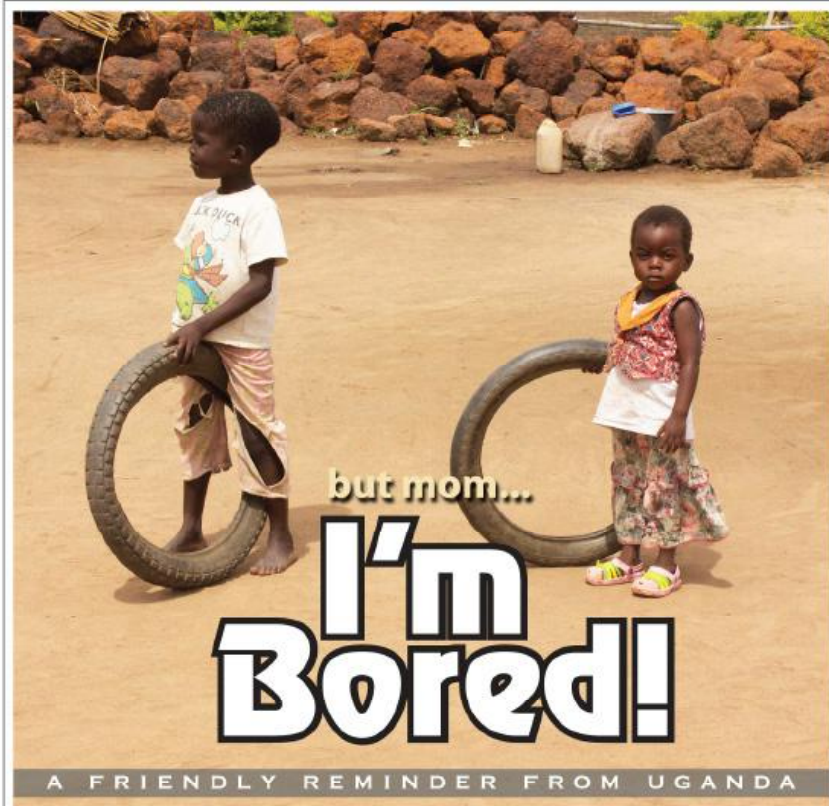
hours playing computer games to achieve the next level. Rather than play in the yard, or go on a hike, or bake cookies, they would slay dragons, kill aliens, or knock birds from a wire. And what did he get? Another level, and a divorce.

How closely does our Facebook self match our real self? Do we post only those photos or stories that make us into something we aren't? Even worse, do we copy and paste stuff to share that we neither created nor experienced? So, even social media can become an alter-ego lifestyle that can rob us of our time and living breath.

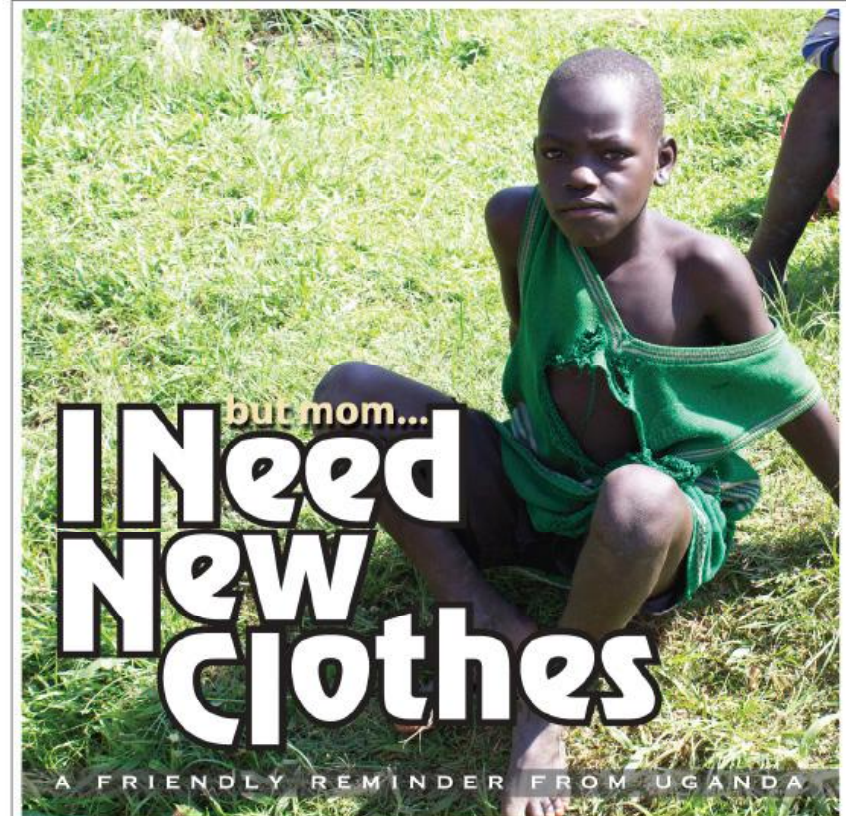
Being here in Uganda as missionaries has given RaNae and me time to think this through. We do stuff every day that make for good stories. These are the kind of things people might play in a game or dream of, like driving through the jungle or talking with Africans inside a mud hut. But this is real life. We actually experience the sights, smells, tastes and people up close and very personal.

My great desire is to avoid a kind of vicarious living that trades the real for the unreal. There is One who performed a vicarious sacrifice for us, which, if we take advantage of it, will save and even exalt our souls. His name is Jesus Christ. But we must truly live and repent and breathe and love in order to receive it. Only then can we achieve the highest level of all, *for real*.

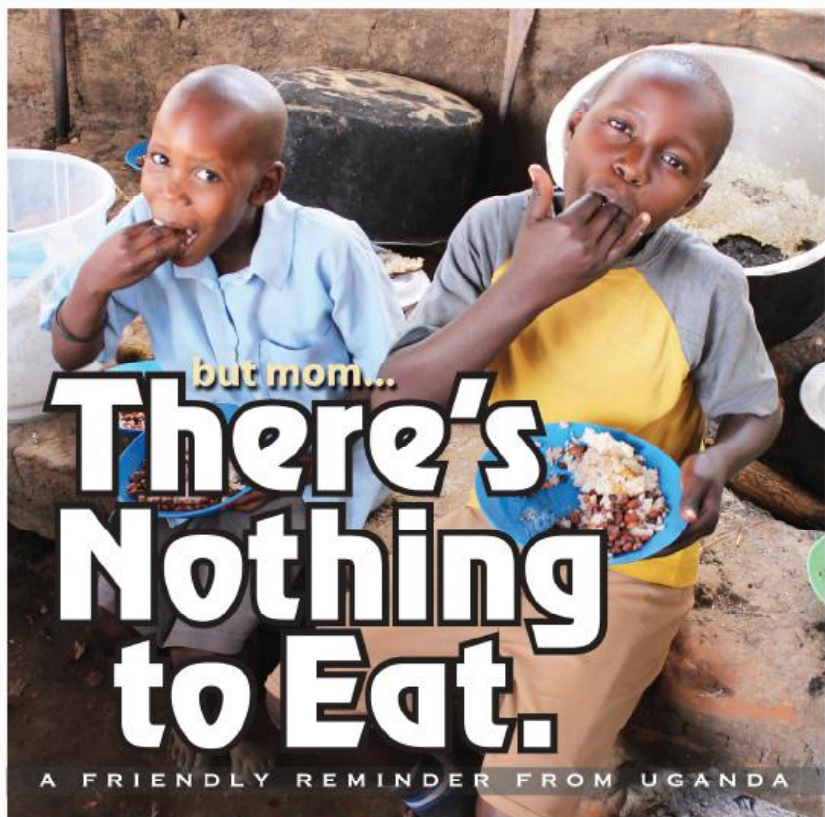
I'm happy to send you the hi-res PDF images of these posters. Just ask. So glad to share.



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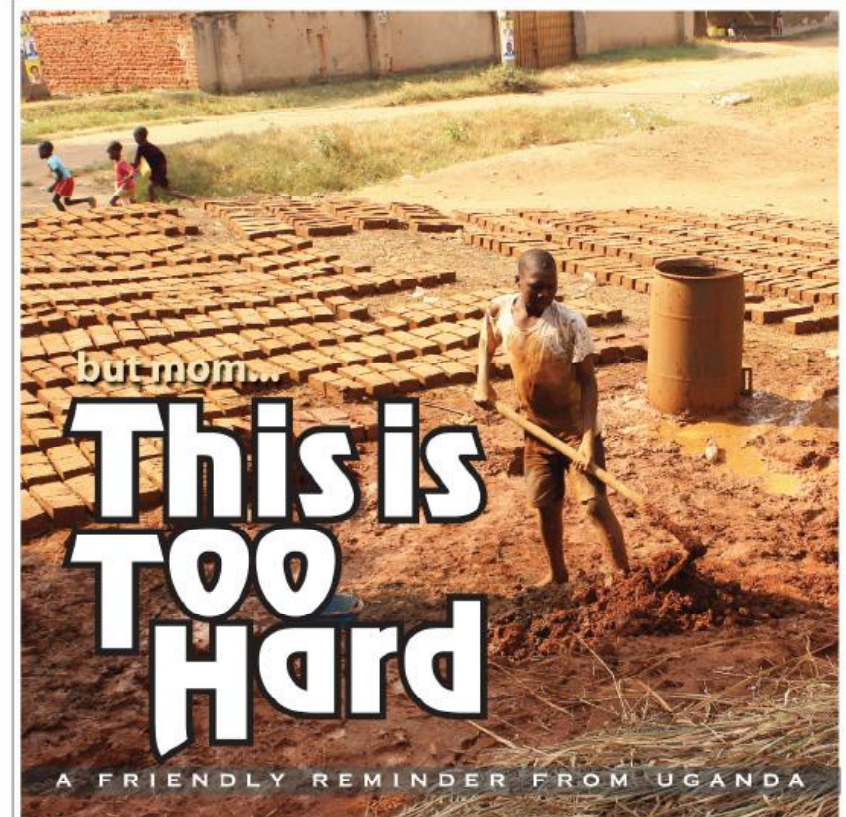
but mom...

There's Nothing to Eat.

A FRIENDLY REMINDER FROM UGANDA



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but mom...

This is TOO Hard

A FRIENDLY REMINDER FROM UGANDA



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4. Charity

African Service Adventure

1 February 2015

Neither words nor photos can capture what we have experienced this week. We cannot believe all this change has happened in only 5 days in the field. We will never be the same again. I'm working on a video post of our experience in the bush yesterday (Saturday), but am sending a photo summary here along with a re-cap of an epic rite of passage.

We're beginning to understand what President Chatfield means when he says you cannot explain Africa, you have to experience it. There is a feeling you get here in this third-world country that is both raw and sacred at the same time. To see the mass of humanity in Kampala and the isolation out in the bush is indescribable indeed. Words fail. Pictures don't capture it. You have to feel the dirt and the grit and smell the odors and see into the eyes...and be truly humbled as if looking at a mighty redwood tree or standing in a sacred place rather than amid squalor. And, as we had anticipated, the happiness of people who have every reason to be miserable. Maybe that's why it seems higher than we are.

Our visit to a village near Jinja was the most transforming of our week. Just the drive there shook our world. We will never complain about bad roads in America again. You can't imagine the driving conditions on these roads (if you can call them roads). The experience resembles navigating through a battlefield after a war. I'm not kidding here. There was one section of road today where the skimpy pavement had so eroded that two cars could not pass in the same spot, and the traffic was horrendous.

One side the road dropped 8 feet into a ditch and on the other a mere 4 feet. Slipping off the road on either side would result in a roll. We're protected every day on the roads.

As we neared the village, we turned off the pavement and jostled down a rutted red dirt trail such as you have seen in documentaries. We saw every site you might expect; bikes loaded with sugar cane, natives dressed in dirty, holy T-shirts (one read "my rules or no rules"), and beautiful smiling faces worn by the poorest people on earth.

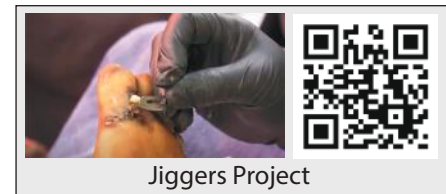
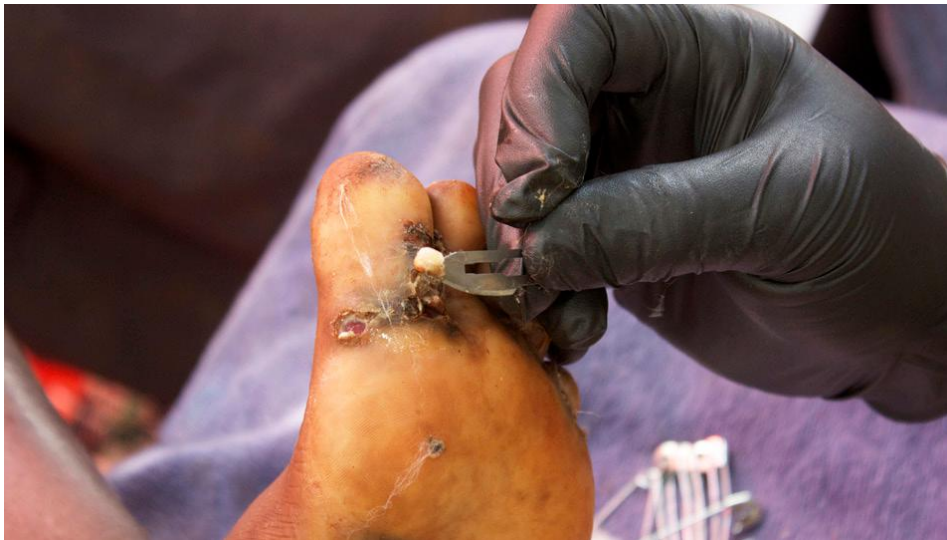
The Jiggers project was to scrub the feet of children and cut open the festering sores and extract the maggot-like Jigger, which lived inside. A Jigger is a flea that lays its eggs beneath the skin, producing larva which drink blood and grow inside. We took turns scrubbing dirty feet and preparing the children for the procedure. After the Jiggers were cut from their feet and hands, each child was given a sucker as a reward for coming. Some with severe cases received a pair of new shoes to protect their feet so they could heal. Others might be outfitted with used clothes. The whole experience was so emotional and soul-wrenching that we were too stunned to cry. I had mistakenly worn my new sandals and was told I might get Jiggers myself. I felt creeped-out all day and was anxious to get to our temporary apartment in Jinja to scrub my own feet. I kept wondering all night if there was a critter burrowing under my skin.

This morning was our first Sunday in Africa.

We attended the Walukaba branch, which itself was an experience. When we arrived for PEC, we found that the church had not been cleaned and it looked like a dust storm had been there. Two priesthood brothers were busy frantically sweeping the chapel. We pitched in with brooms and mops and each person who arrived early was rewarded with the same opportunity. Just before sacrament meeting, the last of the cleaning was done and we all sat down sweaty and ready to worship together. The power had gone off in the night so RaNae had to go with wet hair (we're talking no curling iron!). There was no water at the church that morning so the priesthood boys washed and dried the sacrament trays using a spigot from a wall near the church.

Once begun, church services were great. It was remarkable to be among just four white people (called Muzungus) in a congregation of 70 blacks. Their testimonies today were strong and very direct. Not one person went off about some trivial thing. They all testified of Christ and miracles and gratitude. And, by the way, our car was one of two in the parking lot the whole day. The second car belonged to the Elders. No one in the branch owns a car so they all walked the dirt roads to get to church.

We are changed people. We are grateful for this opportunity to serve in this part of the world. May you all be blessed and grateful for simple things like clean water, electricity, safety, health, and of course, the Gospel of Jesus Christ. That is really the only thing these people have as abundantly as you do.



Jiggers Project

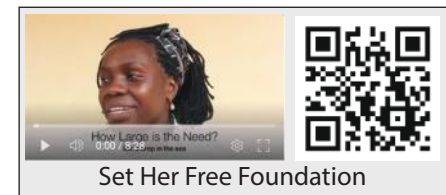
<https://youtu.be/K15ybfMIFVY>

Set Her Free Foundation

25 February 2015



Slavery is still very much alive in many parts of the world. Human trafficking is a huge problem in Africa. Meet Robinah and see how one courageous woman can take a stand to save one girl at a time from this horrible plague. You can drop to your knees and thank God your daughter is not a victim. You'll come away with a new appreciation for courage to take a stand.



<https://youtu.be/ZYNbp4qzlsI>

Child Soldier

31 July 2015

4. Charity



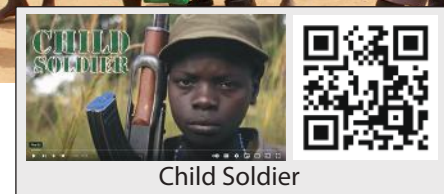
When your young life starts with terror and violence and your family is destroyed before your eyes and you are forced to commit all manner of atrocities...for six long years...what will you do once you escape?

Meet Ayella Denis (see the video here), once a child soldier of the LRA in northern Uganda, he escaped to start a new life on a very different path. See how one man can change not only his life, but the lives of many, many others.

As missionaries, we are discouraged from soliciting funds for worthy projects while on our mission. We've struggled with that, trying to know how to share the great needs here

without asking any one person for money. We've concluded that we will describe the needs, then leave any contribution between the giver and the recipient so no money is passed from our hand to theirs. This seems to be the cleanest way to help those here who have genuine need without putting ourselves in the position of the giver.

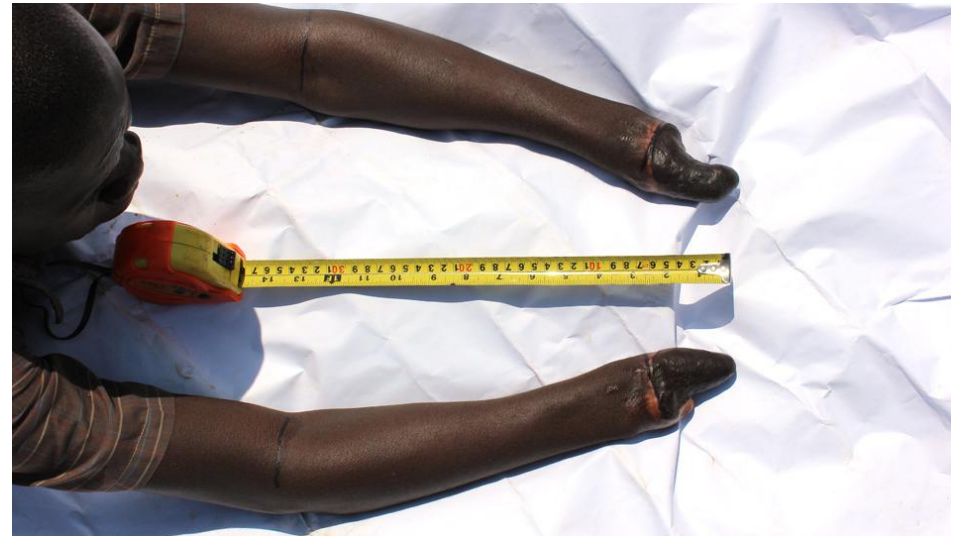
The beauty of this cause is that there is no concern regarding government corruption or a greedy middle man who siphons off the proceeds before they reach the recipient. We're confident that Denis will exercise care in using the money for its best purpose.



<https://youtu.be/jDM9kxuuy50>

Hands for Cosmas

27 March 2016



This story began in January 2015 in Jinja, Uganda, and was started by Elder Kim and Sister Nancy Squire, who served as senior missionaries in the Jinja area. It was later turned over to us when the Squires completed their service in July. After a few failed attempts at getting prosthetic hands from charitable organizations, we started our efforts afresh on August 14, 2015 in Gulu, northern Uganda.

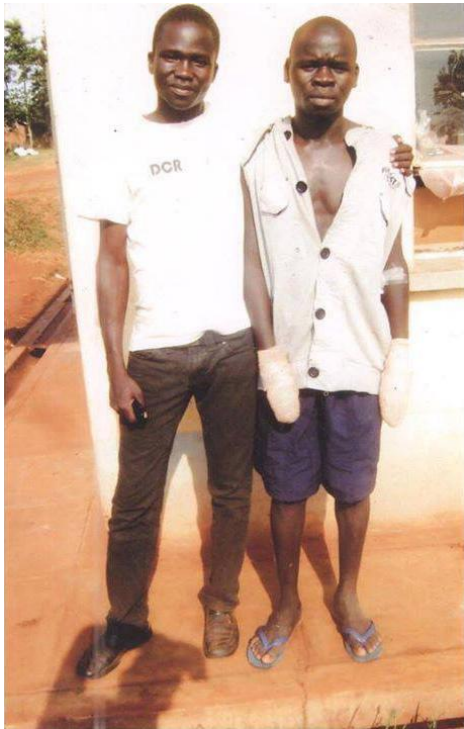
Meet Cosmas Opedmoth, age 23. His life changed in an instant the night of January 12, 2015 while working with a grinding machine. His hand was caught by the blades, and before he could pull it free using his other hand, it too was sucked in. The horrific result was the loss of both hands, leaving only thumb-like stubs. It's a miracle he didn't lose his life.

After posting his story here on our website, we

were contacted by friends and other concerned people in Utah, asking how they could help. What ensued was heart-warming and miraculous to us.

With the help of these friends, here is how the campaign came to be:

Medical practitioners were found in Utah who specialize in prosthetic hands. Three different types of hands will be created for Cosmas. A



Sunday pair (lifelike hands for social meetings and light duty), a work pair (pinching hooks which are durable for every-day use), and a plastic pair (mechanical hands which look like robot hands) for light duty work.

An organization called Hands for Cosmas was formed to raise funds for Cosmas and his older brother Reagan to come to Utah for his hands. Reagan will accompany Cosmas to aid his travel and personal assistance due to his limited abilities.

The campaign included a logo, website, hats, and printed fliers which were distributed to several thousand residents of Utah and



beyond. Thanks to Lance Black and Eli Kirk Riser for their kind help in creating the campaign and image.

Dr. Steve Aldana, a health and wellness consultant with Wellsteps, directed the entire effort spending hundreds of hours and personal resources to manage the way forward. Many meetings were held at homes in Mapleton, Utah, to plan and execute the campaign.

Others came forward to offer assistance (generally free) for the men to be fitted with clothing, glasses, receive dental care, and meet with key leaders of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints based in Salt Lake City.

Newspapers and television helped with publicity, running feature articles including;

Daily Herald: Mapleton LDS missionary couple hoping to help Ugandan man without hands

Deseret News: Mapleton community raising funds to buy Ugandan man new hands

KSL: Mapleton community raising funds to buy Ugandan man new hands

Fox News: Community in Utah raising funds for prosthetic hands for Ugandan man. Then a follow-up story here.

KUTV 2: a-Utah-community-connects-Ugandan-man-with-second-chance-at-life

242 Donors came forward to help. Donations ranged from a few dollars to thousands. The total raised was over \$29,000.

After many letters, bank statements, and phone calls, the two finally received their passports and visa to travel to Utah.

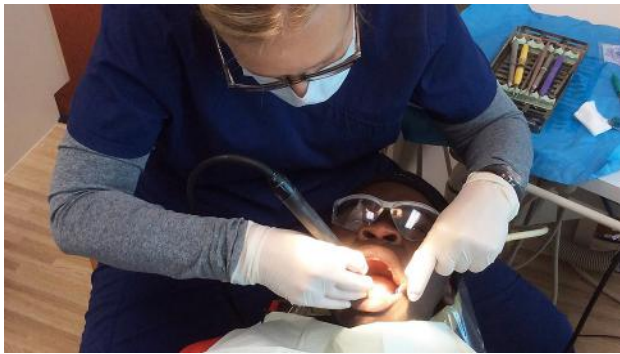






Today is 8 March. We delivered the two happy travelers to the bus which will take them to Kampala.

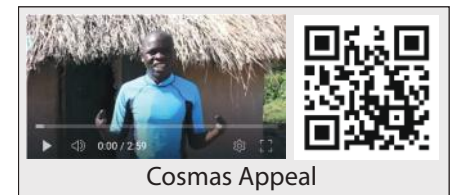
I wish I could capture our final homecoming interview with Reagan and Cosmas. Their gratitude for all that was done to help them both is tremendous. Tears were shed as they discussed the dozens of new friends they made, and the services they received.



Reagan described the future of the Church in Gulu in a way that was prophetic to me. I wept as he explained his visit with Elder David R Bednar and how the Church will become established and grow here because of Ugandans, not because of missionaries or others from outside. Whites provide the support at the beginning, but the real growth and success will come when Ugandans take responsibility and move the work forward. I feel certain that both Cosmas and Reagan will become key players in the establishment of the Church here in Gulu, and expanding outward to other parts of Uganda.



One more sincere thanks to all who saw a need, donated services, time or money, and provided an epic life experience for two humble and happy men from northern Uganda. God bless you all..



<https://youtu.be/A--g3QvQNeI>

Help from Nexdor

15 March 2016



Having our feet on the ground here in Uganda has provided countless opportunities to reach out and help. The degree of poverty, violence and corruption here is among the most challenging in the world.

When we first arrived as missionaries, it was suggested that we not offer financial or material support because of concerns that people would flock to the Church for a handout, or perhaps join for welfare purposes. Gradually we discovered ways to help that were discreet and not simply charity. We have found that

we can help people become self-reliant by offering the kind of assistance that puts them to work in their own business, get married, or get education. There are some who have taken advantage, but for the most part, we feel very good about the results.

We call our efforts Help from Nexdor, closing the gap between Uganda and our friends in the U.S. who have stepped forward to help. We created an accounting system, like a check register, to track donations and how monies are used. In most cases we keep the donor anonymous so the recipient does not contact

them for unnecessary help, and so they can feel good about a secret act of kindness.

Here is a collection of projects that donors have sponsored. Many other projects could not be shown for privacy reasons.

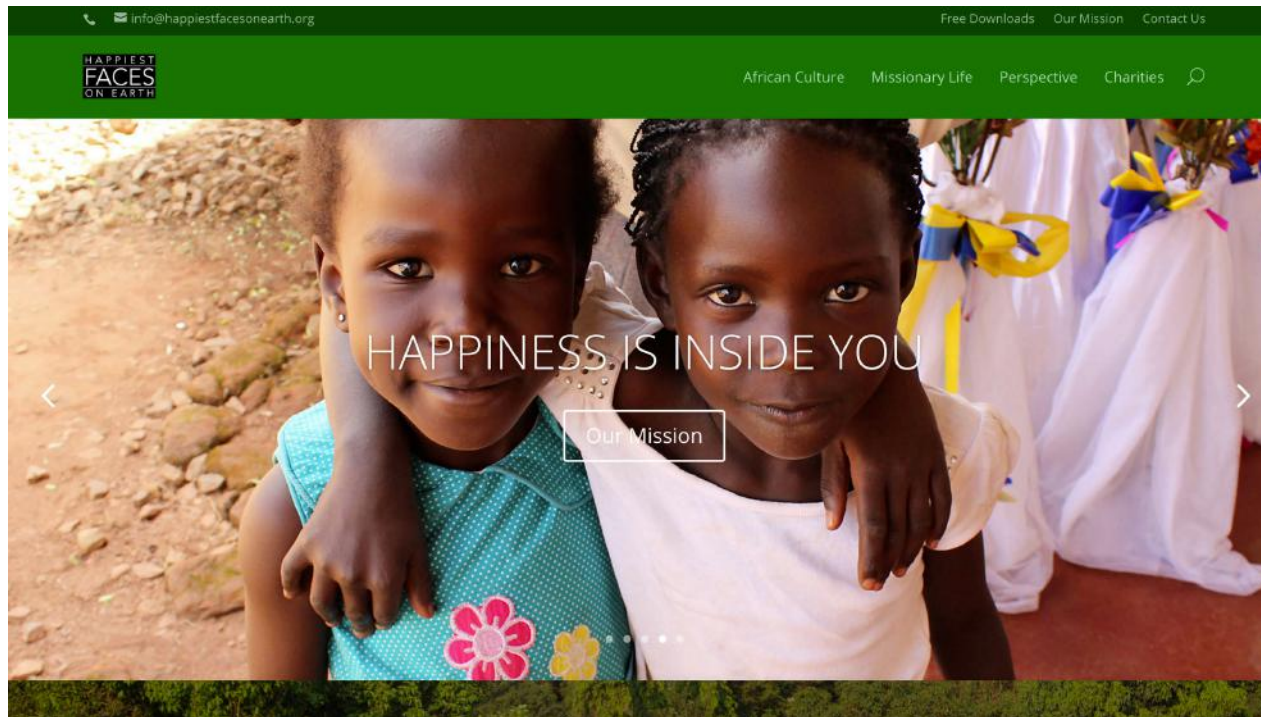
The feature image at the top shows how a family is set up in business making and selling American pancakes. We've done this for two families so far. The pancake is rolled and sold on the street. It is very unique here, and the customers love them even without syrup or other condiments.



5. Afterward

From Bernell

29 June 2016



When we began this website, we named it *Happiest Faces on Earth* because we saw in the Ugandan people an indomitable spirit in the face of great challenges. While that is still true, it is not exclusive to Uganda. It can be found anywhere.

We've discovered the key to happiness lies in how we live life far more than where we live. Those here who appear to be the most happy have common characteristics, which we can replicate.

1. **Faith** in God and Jesus Christ, and practice religion regularly and openly.
2. **Sweat** and work to provide for needs.

3. **Care** for one another in an extended family model.
4. **Avoid** materialism, and find **peace** sitting under a Mango tree.

We do not need to move to Uganda to experience this kind of happiness. We can do it anywhere in the world, and in many cases much easier than our friends living with the inherent challenges of Ugandan culture.

The website has taken time to create and manage, but we feel it has been useful both as a living journal and a missionary tool. We hope our friends and family have benefited from our mission in some way.

So today, with only three weeks remaining, we ask ourselves what we have learned through all this. While a full answer is impossible, we can try to summarize.

Time is measured not in days, hours or minutes, but by how much living we put into them. We've done more living in the past 18 months than perhaps in our life. We've seen things, experienced things, and felt things that have groomed us for future service.

All things are relative. We should not compare our lives at home with those of our friends in Uganda. In many ways we have it better than them, and in other ways they are our superiors. So we must live our lives as best we can, lift and share with others as we are able, and *not inhale* the struggles and suffering of others.

The gift of life is precious to Ugandans, because they never know when it might end. This land of poverty, violence, disease and corruption has created a very different perspective on the value of a human life. Being here, I have seen three dead bodies. The life expectancy of 52 years is at the top of the scale, and many families have lost loved ones at a very early age.

Like Ugandans, we now have a **biological family and an adopted family**. We have our loved ones at home, but have *adopted* many here for whom we feel great love and compassion. We will not forget them.

The **restoration is still going on**. Christ's true



Church was restored to the earth on April 6, 1830. But that restoration was only a pinpoint in a small village in upstate New York. Then it began its slow spread over the earth. For over 100 years, it was largely a U.S. Church. It spread *slow by slow* to other nations until it has become somewhat global. But it has by no means been preached to every people and spoken in every tongue. The Church reached Uganda in 1991, and began a similar growth pattern as it did in the U.S. But even today, there are only a handful of cities and towns where the Church exists, and then only by a very few. The work goes on, but it will not be complete until the second coming of Christ.

We've learned that there are **two African challenges** that need resolution before the Church can truly be established here. They

include tribal traditions and pastor mentality. Until these have been reduced significantly, the Church will be restricted in its growth in Uganda. **Tribal traditions** include lobola (bride price), and PHD (pull him down), which is the act of *humbling those* who begin to prosper by hurting them or their family. **Pastor mentality** is an attitude that the bishop or branch president will take care of everything.

I realize that there may be many meanings to scriptures that read **the first shall be last and the last shall be first**. But in once sense, this could apply to Africa. The African people have been last throughout time in so many ways. But it is my belief that they will one day be counted among the first because of their faith and righteousness. They will outshine the rich Americans, who will become last because of

their pride and Babylonian lifestyle.

The Gospel of Jesus Christ provides **the only shelter from the storm**. There is no place else to hide and find refuge. Only there. No matter where we live on this earth, there will be trouble. But when we come under the protection of the Gospel, we can find true shelter. See Mosiah 2:41.

Choosing to serve as full time senior missionaries takes planning, commitment, and a lot of faith. It is not an easy thing to do. In all candor, there have been parts of this mission that have truly tested our metal. We've had health issues, emotional issues, and great tests of our faith. But it is so very worth the effort, and we would not trade it for anything.

Til we meet at Jesus' feet. We'll not likely see our Ugandan friends again in this lifetime. Our hearts have been changed by them. We thought we were going there to help them, but we have been so tutored by this amazing, humble, and faithful people. We want to be just like them in so many ways.

*Happiness
is discovered in one's
attitude and discipline.
It is not a place on a map.*

From RaNae

17 June 2016

The Spirit of the Lord us upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor, he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised. Luke 4:18

What have we done all our lives to ease the suffering of others? How much have we denied ourselves or given of our personal ease and pleasure to bless the place we live or imitate the life of the Savior? Are we always to go on doing as society selfishly dictates, moving on its narrow little round never knowing the pain of those around us? Charles Sheldon

Expanded Efforts to Love & Serve

Helped Cosmas get new prosthetic hands by traveling with his brother Reagan to the U.S.

Helped many couples stop cohabiting and get married. This required several visits to families to ask for permission to marry, and many trips to Kampala. We bought rings for each couple and supplied cakes for refreshments.

Helped with temple preparation by teaching, promoting using signs and registration sheets, and assisting members to earn money for passports.

Participated in two jiggers projects, where we cleaned feet for treatment and sanitized them afterward.

Assisted victims of human trafficking at the *Set Her Free* foundation. We introduced our humanitarian missionaries, who later provided



new sewing machines for the group.

Traveled to Kitgum to support the small church group there, and encourage prospective missionaries to pursue their mission.

Delivered potatoes to the orphanage of Ayella Denis when the kids had no food to eat. Then provided more food using money from donors.

Took gifts of dishes and towels to married couples since they received little or no gifts at their reception.

Donated a baptismal font to a local protestant church in Gulu, then gave talks to 200 people

in order to dispel myths about our church.

Helped save Kennedy's life by getting him to the hospital and medicine, which he could not afford.

Visited Dickson in mental health ward, taking food and bedding for him.

Visited and comforted Peter, a Sudanese father in the hospital from a hit and run accident, then shared the gospel with his family.

Helped Kennedy get money for law school, money for food while in school, and paid for stolen motorcycle in his care so he would not



go to prison.

Assisted Kennedy's mother with cash when her hut burned to the ground.

Took Peter to the village for signatures for his passport in preparation for his mission.

Held family focus group for couples to encourage reactivation of families.

Taught Apio to make cookies and donuts. Helped her see how she is a child of God.

Taught keyboard to Elder Gwazvo, Sister Kongo, and Dora.

Taught self-reliance classes.

Delivered muffins, cookies, donuts, Liahonas, hugs, and hope to 100s of people in need.

Hauled chairs to and from burials. Took coffin to a burial. Prepared a body for burial. Gave speeches at burials.

Taught Reagan graphics for his business.

Taught Fred & Alice, Vincent, Christine, Steven & Beatrice how to make donuts and pancakes for their own independent business.

Using donated money, we paid school fees and rebuilt the house of Maxwell and Joan.

Shared 70 donuts with Gulu members at movie night.

Held Christmas party for couples, and another one for missionaries in Gulu and Lira.

Bought clothes for the three children of sister Kevin as Christmas gifts. She later died of Malaria and Typhoid, leaving all three children as orphans.

Had a Christmas caroling party with young single adults.

Traveled many times to Lira for audits and leadership support.

Helped fund a water business for Musa, a Polio victim, and supplied clothing, a logo, and transportation.

Visited 9 wards and branches in 6 towns, giving talks, training, and making many, many home visits with local ward leaders.



Final Word from Uganda

24 June 2016

For most of my life I (Bernell) have believed that the road to perfection and sanctification was an individual one; that we gain a testimony of our purpose on earth, and pursue that purpose to exercise faith, repent, be baptized, receive the Holy Ghost, and continue to cleanse our souls through Christ toward an exalted goal. But on our mission, I have come to realize something above and beyond that thinking.

We can only become pure by ourselves to a certain point. Beyond that point, we must go hand-in-hand with an eternal companion. We cannot enter the highest degree of the celestial kingdom alone.

And again, verily I say unto you, if a man marry a wife by my word, which is my law, and by the new and everlasting covenant, and it is sealed unto them by the Holy Spirit of promise...it shall be done unto them in all things whatsoever my servant hath put upon them, in time, and through all eternity; and shall be in full force when they are out of the world; and they shall pass by the angels, and the gods, which are set there, to their exaltation and glory in all things, as hath been sealed upon their heads, which glory shall be a fullness and a continuation of the seeds forever and ever.

Then shall they be gods, because they have no end; therefore shall they be from everlasting to everlasting, because they continue; then shall they be above all, because all things are subject unto them. Then shall they be gods, because they have

all power, and the angels are subject unto them. (D&C 132:19-20)

We have seen this on our mission as we have served. The process of sanctification is a joint venture. It happens together. We have both grown and blossomed in many ways as we have served. We have become more united than ever before. We have experienced miracles and testimony in His service. The process has been purifying to our soul (I use the single form of *soul* on purpose, for our souls are no longer two, but one [see 3 Nephi 11:27]). The result has burned away more of the debris of life's troubles and worries, and made us one more than we ever dreamed, and we thank God for this incredible gift.

To those who are yet alone in this world, we plead with you to find your worthy soul mate, and begin that journey. For those with a spouse, we beg you to become one in the faith. Stand together. Cry together. Continue to work together toward your united goal of exaltation.

We are not yet perfect. We still have a long way to go. But we are on the path, and we know where it leads. Glory be to the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost for the plan that will lead us back to them, hand-in-hand, through the atoning grace of Jesus Christ, to dwell forever in their presence. Many of our family will be there with their spouses. It will be a jubilant reunion with joy forever and ever for those who qualify. *Please, dear family, come along. We'll see you there, by and by.*

Elder & Sister Taylor, aka Dad and Mom.

Our Purpose



Our purpose is to be transparent so others, who could not see on their own, can see Christ through us.

We do not serve for recognition, praise, or even blessings, but because of our love for God and His children.

We have no vain ambitions as if we are climbing some ladder.

Stuff and status are not important.

All-in service and sacrifice for Christ is all that really does.

This is not about us, but about Him

All else eventually turns to dust in one way or another.



6. Coming Home

Coming Home

20 July 2016

It's Christmas Eve, 2022:

Since the purpose of this book was to focus on the amazing Ugandan people, and how they found happiness in any situation, I expected it to end with our departure from our mission. But that would not be the complete story. So I'm adding this last section so you can see how things turned out after our return.

Coming home from Uganda was one of the hardest things we ever did, yet we have been blessed beyond anything we could have ever hoped for.

Our perspective on what matters most has so dramatically changed that not many people would agree with us. We have discovered a pearl of great price in our lifestyle, our habits, and our very nature, much of which was started or improved while serving as senior missionaries in Uganda.



It's 6 AM on July 20th, 2016. I open my eyes with a jet-lag hangover, and look around the still dark room. It takes me a minute to get my bearings. I'm laying next to RaNae, who is waking as well, in our bed in the old barn apartment my Dad has owned for many years.

To say I feel exhausted and confused is not a full description of my mental fog. When we arrived at the Salt Lake City International Airport yesterday after our 18-hour journey from Uganda, we didn't own a key to anything. No house, no car, no office, nothing. Not even a lock box. We had laid it all on the line to serve our mission, and today is the day we start trying to find our next step.

I look out the north window in this bedroom through no bars. That's a change. We dress and step out into the cool morning air, leaving the door unlocked. Another change. We walk past no guards, no dogs, no guns, no walled compound with broken glass or razor wire across the top, and out no gate. We just walk up the road towards Hobble Creek Canyon and start to cry. The sensation of this utter freedom from our Uganda lifestyle is so dramatic that we simply weep as we hold hands walking up the road. The air is so different here. Perhaps its the altitude. As we

continue to cry together, we discuss all the strange feelings we're having.

We made it. We are safe back at our hometown in the Rocky Mountains after all our mission adventures. And we both feel strangely guilty. Our dear Ugandan friends are still back there in their villages, waking with empty stomachs, corruption, violence, disease and hardship. It's not fair and we know it. But here we are and there they remain, stuck in a very challenging situation.

A second wave of survivor's guilt sweeps over us and we return to the barn apartment to express our immense gratitude to God and pray for our friends "over there".

Over the next several weeks we'll cry allot. I marvel at the sensation of opening my mouth and letting the warm water splash inside my mouth as I shower with no fear of what might be in the water. I brush my teeth using water right from the tap, which I can also drink as I please. There is plenty of food in the fridge, thanks to our adult children stocking it for our return.

When we first step into Costco we both cry in the aisle, watching the shoppers with mammoth-sized carts piled high with an assortment of anything their hearts desire. This kind of abundance would be so foreign to our friends back in Uganda.

And so our first challenges begin as we try to re assimilate back into society here, yet holding back the appetites for stuff we once enjoyed.

Health Challenges

13 October 2016

Soon after our return home, we schedule physicals and dental appointments since we haven't had them since leaving for Uganda. RaNae gets a clean bill of health from her doctor, but mine discovers I have kidney issues. I'm referred to a Urologist who tells me my kidneys have many stones that must be removed. He schedules surgery to "blast them" on October 14th.

The evening of October 13th, we're at a birthday party for Laura and Spencer at a church building in Spanish Fork. Since my surgery is tomorrow, I ask our son Spencer and son-in-law Brian Clem to give me a priesthood blessing. After the anointing by Brian, Spencer lays his hands on my head and pronounces the blessing, part of which says *"Dad, this is going to be difficult. It will take a long time to recover, but know that God is with you and you'll be okay."* That of course comes as a surprise since my surgery is supposed to be simple with a quick recovery of a day or so.

The next day after the surgery, the doctor comes to my bedside as I'm coming out of the anesthesia while RaNae holds my hand. He informs us that something went wrong. He successfully blasted the stones in my left kidney, but as he was running his instrument up to my right kidney, it punctured the wall of my Ureter, so he aborted the surgery. RaNae and I look at one another as Spencer's remarkable blessing comes to mind. Now we understand.

Over the next several weeks, I am in and out of the hospital and a very sick boy. I have chills,



fever and vomit often, and sometimes wonder if I will make it. Then I recall Spencer's blessing. Infection enters my abdomen from the tear, putting me in danger of going septic, so they have to install a Nephrostome tube through my back into my right kidney so the urine can drain into a bag.

While in the midst of my health challenges, I am one day laying in my recliner, weak and dizzy. RaNae has been outside taking



something to Dad's house, when she comes into the house crying in anguished pain. She has fallen on the ice and broken her wrist. She uses her recliner next to mine as we are both laid up for many days.

Through all these health challenges, we are so grateful they are happening here with excellent health care and friends nearby to assist us.

The Party Barn

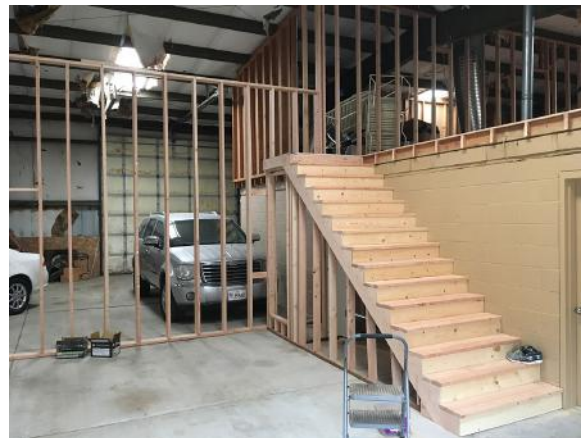
As we gradually find our way back to some degree of normalcy, we find we have both lost our desire for our former abundant Western lifestyle. You could say Uganda did that to us. While we were never really caught up in much of the stuff of the world, we discover we have no appetite even for what we once had.

After a few months living in Dad's barn apartment, I conclude that I'd like to try to subdivide his last 1.89 acres into two one-acre lots, leaving the barn with its own legal lot so we can stay here and make it our home. This turns out to be a multi-step by step process since there isn't even enough acreage to do the split. So I take the first step by meeting with our city administrator, Sean Conroy, who says it can't be done, and that both my Dad and brother have tried before and failed. I say to him,

"I don't need to hear how it can't be done, I just need to know what it will take to make it happen."

After a rather incredulous look from Sean, he suggests I start by seeking tentative approval from the City Planning Commission.

I take each step and move to the next one, all of which seem impossible at first. But I feel driven and even inspired to make this barn into our permanent home. It takes over a year of taking these steps until we succeed.



On my Dad's birthday, August 7th, 2017, we purchase the yet-to-be approved one acre barn and lot and begin to build what will become *The Party Barn*.





This is where our big family gathers for special occasions. It is a place of refuge from the storms of life. It is where we experience the

happy chaos of family, then retreat into our little two bedroom, one bath apartment to live our grateful life together.

Lessons from Uganda

24 December 2022

And so, as I sit here in my loft office in the Party Barn on this Christmas Eve, I'm once again enjoying tears of gratitude to God for the incredible blessings He has surrounded us with since our mission. We were certainly blessed before, but many more have been added since then.

We have a much better sense of who we are, why we're here, where we are going, and who will help us along the way.

Below are just a few of the priceless souvenirs we have brought home with us from the jungles of Uganda, Africa:



Happiness is most often found in relationships.



Stuff smothers happiness.



Eden is wherever RaNae is.



Thank God every day for the **Gift of Life**.



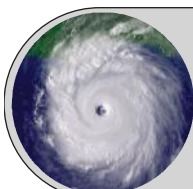
Money is just the byproduct of an art performed with passion.



So much of this doesn't matter. **It's Laughable**



America is still the greatest nation on earth.



The **Vanity Vortex** can suck you in and create a vacuum of misery.



<https://youtu.be/laqTzEjeFms>

Personal Declarations

26 December 2022



Daily Dozen

1. We are diligent disciples of Jesus Christ and not just casual Christians.
2. We walk the lonely road of obedience rather than travel the freeway of the self-indulgent.
3. We make one another and family our highest social priority.
4. We develop faith like Peter to walk on the waters of the impossible.
5. We think before speaking and are civil and respectful of all people.
6. We invest time in prayer, sacred music and scripture study as a reminder of who we are.
7. We extend charity, service and testimony to others to save their souls from rising storms.
8. We shield ourselves from worldly lusts, vulgarity and violence.
9. We eat a whole foods, plant-based diet for health and long life.
10. We sweat every day except Sunday to strengthen and tone the body.
11. We own no possession of pride, nor boast of any achievement.
12. We maintain a sense of humor, even in the face of ugliness.

Doing all this, we experience peace in our heart, quiet in our mind, and health in our soul.

This is Me

I am an immortal soul with a divine destiny.

I existed as a spirit son of divine parents, whom I call God,
before I came to earth.

As such, I have a little of the divine inside me.

I came here to obtain a body and have a mortal experience.
I'm here to learn obedience to heavenly law, exercise faith to
control my appetites and passions, and help as many as I can
return to our heavenly home.

But I make mistakes all the time.

I sin and fall down and fail often.

Thankfully, I have a Savior who has provided a way for me to
repent and become clean, and return as a resurrected being to
God.

I am not defined by my accomplishments or failures, my
possessions or positions.

When I stumble and fall, I repent, get back up, dust myself off,
and continue on my progressive journey.

I am blessed with an eternal companion who helps me become
the best version of myself I can be.

Someday we will each die physically, but we will eventually
ascend hand in hand, with resurrected and perfected bodies,
back to our heavenly home.

We will continue to cultivate the divine within us until we
become divine ourselves.

One day we will live in heaven with God, our Savior, and our
eternal family.

I am an immortal soul with a divine destiny.

This is Me.

A Pair of Miracles

14 March 2024



Miracle #1

We had not seriously considered another full time mission away from home. There were a few important reasons preventing us from serving again, not the least of which was that Uganda pretty well cured RaNae of wanting to do it again. It was not easy for either of us. But all that changed when we were invited to meet with Bishop Taylor Safford in his office one Sunday afternoon December 31, 2023.

After greeting us, Bishop said we had been on his mind lately, and he had been fasting and praying regarding us. You can imagine how humbling that was. Then he asked if we

had considered serving a second mission, expressing how we might serve again if we chose to do so. RaNae and I looked at one another and burst into tears. Why? Because as we had entered the church doors just minutes before, she had jokingly sang “I hope they call me on a mission.”

This was sign number one.

We told Bishop we would think about it, and went home to fall on our knees. RaNae said a prayer, asking Father in Heaven for his will to be made known. My greatest concern was that we would be unified in our decision.

We left for a walk around the block and had not reached the end of our lane before RaNae asked, “Why wouldn’t we serve?”

This was sign number two.

I said “The only reason we wouldn’t serve is if there were something more important to do if we stayed home.”

On our walk, we discussed all the reasons for or against our serving. By the time we reached the elementary school on your way back home, RaNae simply said, “Then we’re going.”

This was sign number three.

The next morning, RaNae offered *the commitment prayer*, wherein she promised we would serve no matter what.

Thanks to our good Bishop and all who have been so encouraging and supportive, we’ve been all-in to serve a second mission since

New Year’s Eve, 2023. It has been the greatest miracle of our life since serving in Uganda.

Since then, we’ve been as busy as we could be to move our mission forward. Our interview with the stake president was February 7th, and we waited anxiously for the call to come. After five weeks, we finally got our call by email on Tuesday of this week. We opened it in front of family Tuesday night, to learn that we’ve been called to serve in the **Canada Winnipeg Mission**, entering the MTC on May 20th.

Honestly, I was a little disappointed in our call, though of course we would accept it. I spent a sleepless night on Tuesday, trying to figure why we hadn’t been called to serve in India or Mongolia as we had requested.

Wednesday morning, I left to substitute at the temple for Oscar Mink, who was ill.

Miracle #2

I met a Brother Fish at our post in Name Issure, and we chatted between patrons. I told him of our Uganda mission, and that we’d just received our new call to Canada. He asked which mission, and I failed to remember it. I was still pretty muddle-headed from lack of sleep.

“My wife and I served in Winnipeg,” he said.

“That’s it!” I said. “That’s were we’re serving.”

Brother Fish shared how much they loved their mission and a few stories.



Payson Utah Temple



Winnipeg Canada in the Winter

This was sign number one.

“President Hitchcock and his wife were our mission presidents,” Brother Fish said. The Hitchcocks were on shift at the time.

As I walked to my next post, I saw Sister Hitchcock and told her of our call. She lit up light a Christmas tree and said, “You’re going to live it!”

After my assignment at the Veil, I stepped into President Hitchcock’s office, where he told me all about the mission. They were the mission leaders just before the Carrs, who are the current ones.

This was sign number two.

I was walking toward my assignment in

Initiatory and met my good friend Conrad Kolba, whom I’ve known for years through a business relationship.

“We just got called to serve in the Winnipeg Mission,” I said as I passed.

“Winnipeg! Are you kidding me?” he nearly shouted. “That’s where I’m from!” Conrad went on to tell me about the area and promised we will go to lunch so he can share more.

This was sign number three.

By the time my shift was ended, I felt very humbled that I had had three profound confirmations that our mission call to Winnipeg was from the Lord, and not just a whim from a church leader.

I came home to share my experiences with RaNae, and we had a good cry together.

As of now, I’m fully vested in our call and will not doubt any longer. I’m amazed at the love I’ve felt in the past day, and the tender mercies of the Holy Spirit to give me a testimony of our call.

And so we embark on another service adventure, this time to the people of central Canada. We are humbled and excited to serve again.