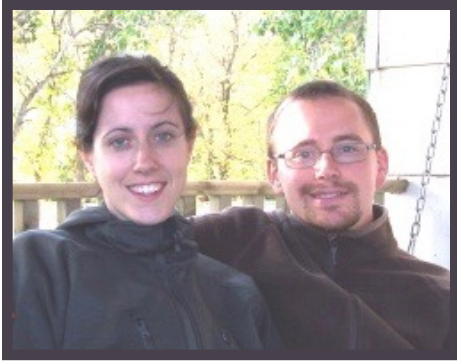


Real Life Stories *"Just One Year" of Missions*



After finishing university, I was excited to get out into the world. The summer I received my degree was one of the best summers I had ever had. I was living with my brother, his wife, and brand-new baby nephew. I had a wonderful godly boyfriend named Raymond, and I was about to go to Zambia to teach for a year.

Years prior, on a short term trip, I had committed to God that I would serve him in missions for a year. "Just a year, God, that's all I can do." For a few years I had been researching different organizations and different programs and had found the one that seemed like a good fit. After praying, Zambia was where I was going.

The day I left for orientation that August, I had mixed emotions. I was upset because I was leaving my family and Raymond, but I was also elated. I was an independent person and now I was headed out on my own to work in an African village. After a week of orientation in the States, I was plopped into Zambia, where I had further orientation and language training in Lusaka, the capital city. At last two other young ladies and myself were dropped off at our volunteer locations.

The village where I would be living was Macha, and it was dry, red, and hot. I would be staying with a host family who had several children and nieces living with them. They were a kind, loving family that accepted me. The day I arrived, I found out that I would be teaching the next day: Grade 10 and 11 math, biology and chemistry. I had no curriculum and no clue what to do. Eeek!

The day that I began was very difficult, because I was one of two women teaching in the school and the students wanted to test how much they could get away with. By the grace of God, I was able to control my classroom. I began to love teaching, and although I was preparing the curriculum and lesson plans each night as I went along, I had a good month of teaching with the students.

A month or so later, I had to head to a neighbouring village to take in an exam seminar on cheating. I had a good time getting to know the other teachers. The mode of transport to and from the village was a lorry, flat bed truck, that was loaded with pop bottles. People from other villages were sitting in the truck until it was loaded with people. On our way there, the truck picked up people along the way. I remember being uncomfortable along the way as I was sitting on a case of Sprite bottle tops (ouch!), but loving the experience, thankful that I didn't have to walk. After the seminar, we all jumped back on the truck to drive back to Macha.

Something strange came over me, this weird feeling, and I heard a voice say, "Something is about to happen to you, but you just need to trust me." I thought it might be the Lord, but I also knew that I had gotten a lot of heat that day, so I sat back and enjoyed the conversations on the lorry.

When I arrived at my village, I jumped off the lorry and walked to my host family's house. Later that night, I walked to the store with Mr. Muleya and his son and began to feel a strange sensation in my hip. It was pitch black outside but I made it home. As we ate supper, Mr. Muleya noticed that I was limping. "What is wrong with your leg?" he asked, concerned.

"I'm not sure," I said, "But it might have been from my hop off the lorry truck." I went to my room and packed my bags to go to Lusaka. I had to leave for a team meeting there the next day. That night I did not sleep because my hip was in so much pain. The next day, I managed to walk several kilometers to where the minibus picked me up and traveled with my new friend, Amanda, who was another volunteer. I managed to make it from Macha to

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Choma and back to Lusaka, where I took part in the meetings. The team leaders were concerned about my hip and kept me in Lusaka to have it checked out.

The next few weeks were filled with insomnia, malaria, intense pain and frustration that doctors around the city could not solve the puzzle as to why I had such hip pain. I had X-rays, massages, needles, many types of medication, nothing seemed to help or elucidate the problem. After a month in Lusaka, the team leaders decided to send me home to Canada. We had called an orthopaedic surgeon in Canada, who suggested that I needed a bone scan, which was not available in Zambia.

Because I was still in excruciating pain and unable to walk, the team leaders had arranged for me to have wheelchair service throughout the flights as I returned home. The Lord placed individuals, some of them may have been angels, along the way to help me and encourage me. On the flight from Zambia, another passenger helped me down the aisle to the washroom when I needed. When I stood up, he would be right there. When I arrived in London, I was brought up to a hotel room. I had been using a cane that hooked on my arm for several weeks and it was excruciating to walk, even with the help from the cane, so the moment I arrived in the hotel room I collapsed on the bed and lay there, thankful to God that I had made it that far. A moment later, a man from Saudi Arabia came in to fix my television. I protested, because I did not intend to watch the television, but he came in anyways. He then proceeded to share the Gospel with me!!! I told him that I was a Christian, so he told me the story of how he had come to know the Lord and how he was trying to reach his family. I was so encouraged!

The next day, I was brought by taxi to the airport. The taxi driver refused to help me carry my bags inside. I had to use signs and different things to hold onto while I walked so I was unable to pull my luggage behind me. As the driver drove away, tears filled my eyes.

Suddenly, a man walked beside me, grabbed my bag and motioned for me to follow. He wheeled my bag up to the flight counter and walked away, while I limped with my cane to keep up. After checking in, I sat down waiting for a service rep to come by with a wheelchair. A man from Nigeria came up to me, and asked me if I was a Christian. He worked with Youth for Christ and was helping teenagers in his country. He was a pastor. He told me stories of his work and the wonderful things God was doing in and through him. Finally, we boarded the flight from London to Toronto.

Once again, the Lord placed a man just a few rows down who noticed each time I struggled to get up to go to the washroom and helped me. I then boarded a late flight to Saskatoon and was overcome with joy to see a large group of people waiting for me outside the gates. Raymond used Skype to contact me by phone in Zambia and I was able to talk to my family as well, they were glad to have me home when I was so sick.

When I was wheeled to them in a wheelchair, some people had horrified expressions on their face. My mom said, "Lisa, you look awful." My skin was grey and I had lost nearly 30 pounds so that my clothes, which used to be more fitted, were baggy.

That night, I was able to sleep a few hours and woke up screaming in pain. I was taken by ambulance to the hospital. Several weeks of painful tests, many X-rays, CT-scans and MRIs began. Doctors in Canada were equally puzzled, however, they were able to see that significant damage had taken place in my hip joint. They wondered if they would have to do a hip replacement, however, the orthopaedic surgeon was hesitant about this.

They tested me for many types of diseases, including cancer, TB, rheumatoid arthritis, HIV, and at one point thought I had avascular necrosis, a degenerative disease that causes your joints to crumble. I had an arthroscopy,

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where the doctors did surgery to try to find what was happening in my hip. I spent three weeks bedridden in a hospital, wondering if I would walk normally again. I felt useless and very alone.

During this time, I know that many people were praying for me. My older brother organized a group of people to come and pray for healing over me. I was blessed by that time in the hospital, but wondered if I would actually be healed. Several days later, I began to make progress. I could get out of bed, into a wheelchair and use the washroom. A few days later, I was discharged from the hospital.

The doctors were never able to determine the cause of damage to my hip joint, but slowly the intense pain was dulling to a more mild pain. I spent the next six months learning to walk properly again, gaining energy, and preparing for my wedding! Raymond had asked me to marry him shortly after I was out of the hospital!

Three years later, we are preparing to go overseas to do long-term missions in Kazakhstan with SEND International. We are excited about the journey that God has taken both of us on; he continues to go before us and we are hanging on tight.

Though my hip will never be perfect again, I am thankful that I can walk on my own. When I experience mild pain, I remember all that the Lord did and does for me. I guess He had other plans for my "just one year" of missions!

. . . . Lisa (Worthington) Thiessen