

Parks' Adventures in Africa

SAM AND AMANDA PARKS
 SERVING THE LORD IN NAIROBI, KENYA
 livingtheadventure.discoverly.com

FAVORITE STUDENT QUOTES

"Mrs. Parks, how long are you going to stay in Kenya and keep teaching us?"

"Mrs. Parks, how tall are you...without high heels? Oh, and how tall is Mr. Parks?"

Written in papers about the American Revolution:

"When they cut off a limb, they used opium, which is a seductive."

"The British had many advantages in the war, but they had some weeds in their garden..."

PRAYERS FOR THE PARKS

Pray for healing in Kenya. Pray for the physical healing, but also spiritual healing and reconciliation.

Prayer for Sam has he starts his new internship with the Christian development agency World Concern.

Prayers for soaring inflation. It is hurting local people and missionaries who rely on support gifts.

VIOLENCE IN KENYA THE NATIONAL CRISIS

Chaos in Kenya was the lead story all over the world at the start of 2008. Disputed elections plunged Nairobi, and the whole country into the most turmoil we have ever seen. Burned down markets, bonfires in the streets, empty store shelves; all new experiences for sheltered Americans like ourselves, and truthfully, new experiences for many younger Kenyans, as the country has experienced over 40 years of relative peace since its independence.

So beyond the headlines, what is really happening? It is hard to say exactly. The international community has overwhelmingly denounced the elections as flawed. President Kibaki was sworn back in

several days after the election after much public outcry, and then chaos set in.

Some say the issue is tribal, others say socio-economic, even others generational. Whatever the truth may be, it appears this unrest was brewing for years just under the surface of East Africa's most stable nation.

The numbers are officially: 250,000 displace peoples and at least 600 dead due to election violence. We saw first hand some of the refugees living in tents on church grounds. As we met their immediate need, lunch, I couldn't help but wonder about their future needs. They have no homes, no jobs, no schools. Multiply



Empty shelves following the post-election violence. There were rampant country-wide shortages of food and other necessities.

NEXT YEAR: AND THE DECISION IS...

As most of you know, we've been wrestling for the past few months with the decision of whether to stay for an additional year. Thanks so much to everyone that has given us input on the matter!! That's been really helpful; you've challenged us to really consider our priorities and both our short-term and long-term goals. Any input is still welcome – the process isn't exactly over. We can't thank you enough for your prayers and all the ways you've supported us over the past few months.

Most of you also know by now that we've have decided to try to stay for an additional year. We are excited to have this decision set! It really frees

up our hearts to commit to Nairobi and the relationships we are building here.

As to the factors that led to our decision, it's been kind of a myriad of things. We've been praying and thinking through these things since West Nairobi School started up. Amanda really enjoys her job. And man, I'm so proud of her. She's been great at engaging with these kids, in meaningful ways. To her, she's already investing in her most demanding year - developing all her lesson plans from scratch, learning entire curriculums – and she looks forward to spending more energy on the kids themselves.

As for me, I've been

studying development for a while now, and I'm excited about finally putting things into action – starting with an internship in January, with a Christian organization called World Concern. In the long run, I hope to work for a Christian development organization, either based out of the US or abroad. I can talk more about my passions later, but getting a year of real experience in the field would be incredible, both in the present and for the long-run.

And we do feel like this is where God is pushing us towards. We've tried to dedicate ourselves to praying about this, and to really try to listen and observe. Of course

V I O L E N C E I N K E N Y A , C O N T I N U E D . . .



Sam and Amanda celebrating Christmas with a couple of WNS families. Amanda was so blessed to have two Christian moms as her mentors who “adopted” us.

these 300 people exponentially and Kenya has suffered a major setback, even if no more violence occurs.

Personally, Sam and I are fine. We are in a safe neighborhood, but just a few blocks away major protests occurred. The West Nairobi School is a bit outside of the city, and it seems all our students and teachers are safe and accounted for. Praise the Lord!

On the other side, we still feel the affects (and I am not just talking about the hour long grocery lines or a few days without milk). Our dear house helper, Jocinta is from Kisumu, where the worst violence nearly burnt down the whole city. Her family friends lost four school age children, who were shot by police while in a car. The family could not afford four caskets, so the bodies rotted away in the over-

crowded city mortuary.

These stories break our hearts. It breaks our hearts even more when we hear people gloating about the pain and losses of another tribe. One man in a café callously laughed saying, “Now they will see what it is like to be refugees. They are getting what they deserve.” His buddies grinned and chuckled.

Where does the country go from here? I don’t know. Hopefully, the worst is over. As outsiders, it is hard to know what our role is in the aftermath. Please pray that God will guide us in how to serve Him and the people of Kenya. Thank you for all of your prayers and concern for us. We felt so blessed by all of the emails and notes we got from caring friends. Don’t stop praying now for Kenya, they need it more than ever.

N E X T Y E A R , C O N T I N U E D . . .

Amanda’s school has given her an open invitation, but we’ve also seen some doors opening for me too. I’ve made some great connections with organizations like The Reckoning, World Concern, and World Vision, and I feel confident about having a place to serve next year. But we don’t want to over-spiritualize the whole deal, either. We both think that we can meaningfully invest ourselves here.

So on December 1st, we signed a “statement of intent” to stay on for another school year with West Nairobi School. We told the school, officially, that we intended to stay. (They want an early gauge of what jobs to post.) Amanda will be asked to sign an actual job contract later in the spring, which is more binding and committal. Our intentions are that I will find a job with a Christian develop-

ment organization, for us to be able to secure a financial situation (through a salary or support, depending on the position), and for Amanda to stay on teaching for another year. If the doors open for a position for me, if we have a viable financial situation, and if we don’t feel like we’re being led in a different direction, we will be signing the real contract this spring, making our commitment concrete. Like I said earlier – the process isn’t exactly over!

So for our financial supporters this means... well, not much, in once sense at least. We don’t want anyone who is supporting us throughout this year to feel that they are expected or obliged to continue through an additional year. We are so thankful for how people have teamed with us this year. Actually, it’s difficult to

say what our financial situation would be next year. Some larger Christian development orgs have fully-paid staff. It is likely that we will have to raise support again, and if so we foresee devoting a lot of our summer in the US to that.

We are excited about what God may have for us! This first year in Kenya, we’ve felt like we’re in the process of sticking our toes in the water in order to test out our inklings that we should jump in. So far, things have been successful for both of us, and we’re trying to follow through with a deeper commitment. There so much more that could be said about this—I feel like I’m still just scratching the surface. So please, feel free to contact us in any way if you’d like to ask us any questions about the whole deal!

“In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.”

2 Corinthians 5:19

P A R K S P R A I S E S

Praise God for our health. Several teachers have gotten typhoid recently, so thank God for the protection against that.

Praise God that Sam survived exams despite the technological difficulties that can frustrate the research and paper writing process.

Praise God for the opportunity Sam has to work in an internship in development with World Concern and to help with The Reckoning.

Praise God for all of the faithful friends and family who pray, stay in touch, and faithfully support us here.



“Exploring” caves at Paradise Lost.

SEMESTER IN REVIEW

SURVIVING AND THRIVING AT WNS



By the exam week at the end of semester I was more than ready for the Christmas break. But, in the midst of exhaustion, poignant encounters with students kept reminding me how much I really enjoy teaching these kids.

My favorite was a Christmas card from a sweet Korean 8th grader. "Mrs. Parks, you make history so fun and easy to learn. You rock! I love you so much," it read beneath a hand drawn Christmas tree. Here is a girl whose family came to Kenya for her father's job, and then sent their daughter to a Christian school, so she could learn English. And through it all, they all became born again. It was so sweet to take communion with her and some of my other 8th grade girls at the school Christmas chapel. I got to break the communion bread as a teacher in Kenya with a Korean new Christian and a Dutch student who has Asperger's syndrome, but loves the Lord and has slowly found a place in our school.

God is good. That amidst some of the struggles of being a has slowly found a place teacher and learning how to

love and discipline students and teach them academics and raise them up as Christians and all of that, He always reminds me that "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

It really is only through Christ that I can do this job for which I was not trained in a country I never saw myself going to.

I really have a heavy burden for the souls of my 8th grade students. They are a group that is pushing the envelope, trying to see how far they can go on swearing and bullying and all of those middle school vices.

We have had great conversations about everything from racial issues to illegal music downloading to how old you should be when you start dating. Sometimes I forget how impressionable they really are. One of their favorite games is to play "ask Mrs. Parks any question about herself." I really pray that I can influence them for the Lord.

So, I ask that you will pray with me for these teenagers. Pray that God will raise up leaders among them who will follow him and draw others to Him.

WHAT'S NEXT FOR SAM?

With all that has been going on in Kenya, I'm afraid I've left people back home in the dark in terms of what I'm doing now! I finished one semester of classes in mid-December, which is in fact my last as a full-time student. From now until we leave in June, I will be putting what I've learned into practice through a professional internship with a development organization. I have been talking to a few different organizations, and I have found a place to serve at "World Concern", a Christian organization based out of Seattle. I

started my full-time work with them on Monday, and I'm excited about what is to come. They do development work in Narok and Embu, and I will be helping in each of those areas with village bank projects. I'm really sold on this organization—they are strong on proclaiming Christ in both word and deed to the poorest of the poor in Kenya. I'm not exactly sure what my role will as an intern, but I will be sure to keep everyone updated.

For any info about World Concern, check out their website: www.worldconcern.org

