

Parks' Adventures in Africa

SAM AND AMANDA PARKS
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FAVORITE STUDENT QUOTES

"Is Condoleeza Rice Barak Obama's wife?"

"Mrs. Parks, why aren't you our English teacher?" (I think that was a compliment)

"So Abraham Lincoln was tall and skinny, like Mr. Parks right?"

"The real elections aren't until November! Why do they take so long?!" (A very intelligent student)

"Could angels still sin?"

"I think Heaven is a place with a bunch of old people sitting around- like a retirement home."

MY FAVORITE:

(Female) Student: "You don't like babies Mrs. Parks?!"

Mrs. Parks: "Not really."

(Male) Student: "Does Mr. Parks know?!"

Mrs. Parks: "Yes."

(Male) Student: "And he still married you?!"

ONE MORE QUARTER WEST NAIROBI SCHOOL

I now realize that I am not just a history teacher from 8 am to 4 pm. I am an attendee of after-school sports, a field trip coordinator, a class fundraiser leader, a substitute teacher, a pilates teacher in gym class, a curriculum guide writer, a friend, a mentor, an example, and even a sex and dating panel member.

Yes, the last one is true. Last month I got to participate in a Sex and Dating panel for our middle school and high school girls. I also had the great pleasure of being the only married teacher on the panel. Let's just say I can't remember how many times I blushed.

However, we got great questions like "How much should I open up to my boy

friend?" and "If you know you are going to be with someone forever, why do you have to wait to have sex until your married?" and of course, "Was waiting worth it?"

I feel like the relationships and the atmosphere at West Nairobi School is similar to the atmosphere of our CRU (Campus Crusade) at Bowling Green. The girls feel comfortable enough to ask me questions they would never ask their mom or their auntie. The students know if I show up for their game or not. When I come to the picnic tables at lunch, they have no problem being seen eating with a teacher. They want to know about



Heidi, Kate, Miss Arnold, Amanda, and Rachel on the 8th grade class physics field trip to the Bowling Alley.

NEXT YEAR:

DECISIONS, DECISIONS, DECISIONS

At the end of December, we were working through a major decision - do we plan to stay or go? After a lot of praying, talking to people, getting advice, seeking God, etc., we finally decided that we should move forward towards staying on for the next 1 to 3 years. At that point, Amanda's school had asked her to stay on, but as for me (Sam) I had no kind of job or ministry. We were trying to step forward in faith, trusting that God would confirm our direction by leading me to some specific work here, or give us a new direction by not providing a job.

A lot has changed since then. Kenya erupted into ethnic and political violence for a month. I got a job for a Christian development organization, World Concern. I worked with some refugees, and

eventually starting working with village banking. This internship has been really successful - I've come to be good at my job, and have found a place with an organization I really believe in.

Then, the other week, I was offered a job!

A few weeks ago, I talked to my boss about some ideas that rushed my mind during a random meeting - ideas about creating a liaison between our organization and the churches where we work, building up the church to address the needs of their communities, specifically of the needy and vulnerable among them. My boss told me that's not really what they do, but they had actually been exploring those kind of things lately.

Suddenly, the other week I found myself being presented with some possible job descriptions and a benefits package. They asked me to be the "Discipleship Coordinator" for World Concern Kenya, working initially with assisting church in meeting the needs of internal refugees in their areas, and moving into coordinating training sessions for church leaders in rural areas. Basically, they offered me a tailor-made job!

Initially, both Amanda and I were really excited about the prospects. Actually, I was ready to sign on the dotted line, sign a new lease on an apartment, and start raising support. But I think we were sobered up pretty quickly. Once the initial excitement, we were sobered up to the

Special Need

We are looking for a car for Amanda to rent or borrow this summer for June and July. If you are able to help or know someone who can please let us know. Thank you!



Amanda in Olepolos being blessed with a Massai name. We got to spend Easter Sunday there.

ONE MORE QUARTER,
CONTINUED...

my life, and I hope they know I want to know about theirs.

The mentoring teenagers aspect of my job is my favorite part. That, and of course whenever I get to talk about American Government or politics!

Some of the students have amazing parents who do great works for missions, but they sometimes neglect their kids in the process. Some students don't come from Christian homes, but we have the opportunity to mold them while they are with us. Other kids are learning English and trying to keep up in school. Some are in school for the first time after years of home schooling when their parents were ministering in the bush.

One sweet 8-th grader has been struggling this whole year because her family is

leaving for a 2-year home assignment in June. She has been at WNS since early elementary school. Kenya is her home, not America. She is devastated, and I think believes that if she mopes long and hard enough her parents will change their minds.

Another girl has been through 3 schools since her family moved back to Kenya. She is a Kenya raised in Maryland. Maryland is her home. She was an average student, but has only passed one class during her time here. She will probably have to repeat the ninth grade for the 3rd time.

These students are others are the ones I ask you to lift up in prayer. I also praise and rejoice for the students who inspire me, make me laugh, and amaze me with their young faith. Thank you God!

NEXT YEAR, CONTINUED...

seriousness of the decision. Instead of jumping into this headfirst, we've decided to go back to step one: consulting our maker.

So we're at a crossroads in Kenya. We decided to try to stay on in December. Now it's very much possible! But it's not as easy of a decision as we would have hoped. We've been struggling through the idea of what it looks like to be living out God will for us. I love the idea of God being behind me, saying "This is the way, walk in it" like in Isaiah. But we're not at a point where we are hearing such a specific answer from God on the matter. But I also don't want to put so much pressure on figuring out God's will for this one decision that I devalue God's confidence in us to make decisions. One thing I keep hearing from a lot of people is that there probably isn't a "right or wrong" answer in this situa-

tion, but it's more important to be honoring God wherever we're at in the journey. Like my friend Dave said, Jesus' system is empowering us and giving us grace when we fail.

Another big challenge for us is that Amanda's mom has recently been diagnosed with cancer in her bladder and kidney. That's been really tough, and has left us reevaluating if we even want to stay in Kenya. Also, can we afford it?? Inflation in Kenya is up 25%, and the US dollar has devalued about 10% since we've been here.

So we've really been trying to pursue God in this, which has involved a lot of learning for us. We would be staying on for another 21 months, and we would be would be raising most of our monthly income from support (which would involve a crazy summer of fundraising at

home). **At this point, after to talking to some of our closest friends and mentors, we feel like the best thing for us to do is to stay committed to our decision in December, to step forward to towards returning to Kenya in August, to see how God opens or closes doors here, and to try to honor God wherever we're at.**

Please pray for us as we try to seek out what God wants. Please pray that if God wants us here that he would bless these baby steps forward that we are taking. And we definitely welcome any input or insights in any form - emails, letters, phone calls, blog comments, etc.

We'll keep you updated as we step forward and seek out our maker!

PARKS' PRAISES

Praise God Sam got the position he wanted working with World Concern next year!

Praise God we had a great spring break with Sam's mom, Melanie. It was such a blessing to have family out here!

Praise God Amanda and Sam have both joined small Bible Studies with all Kenyan Men and Women! We are really excited to seek after God with the people of Kenya.

Praise God for providing a good doctor for Amanda's mom to see and that her first surgeries went well.

Praise God for providing for our unexpected medical expenses..

Praise God for the students at West Nairobi School that are earnestly seeking after the Lord.

"... Your Teacher will not hide himself anymore, but your eyes shall see your Teacher. And your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, "This is the way, walk in it," when you turn to the right or when you turn to the left."

Isaiah 30:20-21

K A R I B U K E N Y A

S A M ' S M O M G I V E S H E R R E V I E W



Melanie in all her African glory kissing a giraffe!

By Melanie Parks:

I had an amazing trip to Kenya to see Sam and Amanda. They are perfect hosts and tour guides for the entire Kenyan cultural experience! However, here are some lessons I learned firsthand:

1. If anyone tells you that you can't believe how bad the roads are in Kenya, BELIEVE IT!
2. If they tell you that traffic in Kenya is the most chaotic and disorganized as you can imagine, BELIEVE IT!
3. If a Kenyan gives you directions and says it is "right up the road," it may be - but up the road 10-20 miles to the next town!

4. Have I mentioned the roads? They go from paved to dirt to mud holes to full of craters in seconds!

5. And what is on the roads? Trucks, busses, and matatus (another whole story in itself) all emitting horrid black smoke, as well as people walking everywhere, donkey carts, sheep herds, cattle, goats, monkeys, and street vendors knocking on your windows selling yogurt, newspapers, movies, pineapples, and cell phone minutes.

6. If they tell you Kenyans love visitors, BELIEVE IT! They are extremely friendly, want to shake your hand and want to know who's Mama you are. Then when they find out you ARE a Mama, they give you a huge bear hug.

7. If they tell you safari is amazing, BELIEVE IT! The beauty of the big game in Nakuru was breathtaking. Lion! Zebra! Rhinos! And my favorite, the giraffe with day old babies! Gazelles, buffalo, baboons, the famous Nakuru flamingos, pelicans, dick-dick. Although we searched for the leopard, he hid from us. Believe this - I actually got kissed by a giraffe!

8. If they say the road to Maasai-land past Narok is bad -UNDERSTATEMENT! Many times I thought Samantha's little Toyota Starlet would be in 1,000 little pieces. But the trip was worth it. We worshipped in Olepolos with the Maasai on Easter Sunday. Amazing, wonderful people. I now have a Maasai name, Karsis, which is the blessing of wealth. They treated us to goat and chapatti for lunch. Yumm.

I could go on and on but you will have to call me if you want to hear more of my adventure. As for Sam and Amanda, they are doing great. I visited both their mission workplaces, West Nairobi School and World Concern, and met both their bosses who assure me they are doing fantastic work. Continue to pray for them, because, well, have I told you about the roads?????

- Melanie (*Sam's Mama*)

P.S. If they tell you on the plane to move your legs around to avoid blood clots, BELIEVE IT! I got an extra week's vacation!

P A R K S ' P R A Y E R S

Our big prayer this month is for health. As some of you may know, Amanda's mother, Lynn, was diagnosed with bladder surgery a few weeks ago. She is now seeing a bladder cancer specialist at Cleveland Clinic to decide on her course of treatment. Regardless, she has a lot of procedures ahead of her so pray for healing and strength. Pray that she will have the Lord's supernatural peace and that He will use this circumstance to glorify Himself.

Also, pray for Amanda, as it is difficult for her to be so far from home when her family is struggling.

We thought we should share with you a way that God showed us his perfect plan through this situation already. Two weeks before Lynn was diagnosed with cancer, Amanda's dad, Rich lost his job. It was a total shock at the time, but it gave him the inspiration and freedom to start his own business, which is already off the ground!

At the time, we thought the job loss was a tragedy, but now Rich is able to be at home with Lynn and take her to all of her doctor appointments. Thank you God for showing us that we can trust you in all circumstances!

Other Prayer Requests

Pray for us as we make these huge decisions for next year. Pray that either direction he leads us, God would provide for us. Raising support will be a challenge, as inflation is up 25% in Kenya and the US dollar is tumbling.

Pray for Amanda's health again. She is still struggling with allergies and migraines. She also had a tough experience with a dentist that we are still trying to sort out. Medical care in Kenya is just not the same quality in the U.S., so it is a BIG frustration.