

# *Wondering On 30*



## WONDERING ON 30

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### 30 Word Auto-Bio

Born broken, tried to fix it. Jesus loves me, I love Jesus. Homeschooled to college: learning never ends. Touch one more that wasn't before. Said goodbye to say hello again.

### 30 Favorite Blogs I wrote on Xanga

I started posting June 23, 2005, but I began by posting my prayer letter e-mails that began in January 2005.

#### 1. My first entry (edited)

I am looking down at my pink slippers with their green flowers in deep satisfaction. Because Bugg gave them to me for Christmas. My sister and I packed in the car and headed to the U.P. for New Years. By 3:00am, I was popping hot fries and Nerds to keep my eyes open, but we made it in one piece.

Some people in this world just inspire you. I came together with people of like mind who wanted to have deep conversations about the greatness of God and tell how He was writing their lives. I needed it. Because sometimes you only live your life by others' expectations. And as long as those expectations are low, your life is easy. Their purity of life revealed not only my sloppiness, but also that it is not about keeping up with others, it is about following the Highest Standard--Jesus Christ.

We reopened the youth center on January 3rd, although it was not finished. There was so much rain that the office was flooded and we had to walk across the gang planks laid out as the youth center area was turned into a mote and covered in water. Everyone was stuck inside because of the rain and had a ton of nervous energy, which meant basketballs were being bounced off my head \*literally.\*

Mr. James (who just had a baby boy tonight) is the new director. He is big on visitation, so twice last week I got to go out and see some kids. We were trying to find this family that moved--Shenequa and Micalya, because they had more Christmas presents given to them. I banged on quite a few houses and got strangers looking at me like I was selling something.

Donald wanted to buy some bread, so when we went into the store; I stuck out like a snowflake in the rain. Donald kept shushing me, so I pinched him. Donald turned a nice pink (for him) and then grumbled all the way home how I was so embarrassing and how he would never take me any place again: "Imagine me, having a white girl beatin up on me."

Here is my verse for this year: John 15:16 *"Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain; that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name He may give it to you."*

#### 2. July 2005, my second trip to Brazil

My suitcase arrived, late. I started unpacking...and no chocolate. I had brought a box with 36 Hershey bars. It is hard to miss. I get to the bottom of the suitcase, and no chocolate. Grr. You should have seen David: *"That is horrible! Someone needs to give us our chocolate! How corrupt can they be—taking chocolate? I am going to call them right now!"* And he did, but it has not gotten anywhere yet.

The bug bites are up to 50 and as I was religiously itching them I was trying to talk in Portuguese and said something about the horrible *"moo-sa-kas."* Well, apparently that is NOT the word for mosquitoes. David and Silvio could not stop laughing at me. They have determined to call the bugs *"moo-sa-kas"* from now on. David says it like on Lion King when the hyenas say *"Mufasa."*

I am part of the mime team—playing a little devil. The problem is that I am just not very good at aggression. Karine was like *"think of someone you hate—oh, wait, you don't hate anyone do you? Come on Rachel—be mean—think evil!"* My homework is to look in the mirror and find a way to make my face express evil and deception. They kept laughing at me because the harder I tried; the more bouncy I got instead of more evil.

I tried to make some more goose-goo, and this time there was salt, but the problem was that when Ricardo showed me, he did not measure anything. I ended up putting in four times the proper amount of salt in. David, like that trooper he is, still ate it. Gilson came in, took a mouthful and then painfully swallowed and showed me the

proper amount of salt to put it. For something only requiring two ingredients, I sure am having a hard time of it. What will happen when I move on to making rice and beans?

Every afternoon I played futebol barefoot, and now the bottom of my feet are permanently black. I have scrubbed and scrubbed, but...nope. I got a bruise on my cheek from running into Sonja, a bruise on my shin from running into Ricardo's heel, and my big toe feels sore anytime I touch it. But I know a bit more of what I am doing now, and even hit the ball with my head (so what if it went out of bounds).

I am convinced that Brazilians are forced to think before they speak just because of the grammar. I was trying to learn articles. I mean, how hard can "a" and "the" be in a different language? You never know a question is dumb until you answer it: there are four different ways to say "the-" a, o, as, and os. Depending on feminine, masculine, singular, and plural form of the noun you are going to say. So when I try to say "The light is on" before I can say "the" I have to know the Portuguese word for light, recognize if it is feminine or masculine (most of the time you can tell by the end of the word "a" or "o", but sometimes you can't--like Luz- is z masculine or feminine? it turns out that Luz, meaning light, is masculine...did you know that?). So here I am, standing in front of someone, trying to say the simplest sentence, and it takes me three blank looks and a lot of "ums" just to say the correct word "the." by this time I am exhausted and ready to forget about moving on to the rest of the sentence.

I went shopping with Edjane and Kattia today. I think the world is against me and my goal of trying to cook. There was no baking powder in the whole supermarket...and this was the largest supermarket in Carpina! And besides that, I did not know the word for it...try acting out "baking powder" without any English. It's a lot harder than most words in charades. It turns out their flour already has baking powder in it?

### 3. November 6, 2005

*"I envy the person I could be but choose not to be."* I want to be so much more. When you surrender things you don't have to stress about them. When you start stressing again it is a sign you took them off the altar of surrender. Ivy is dancing around the house. Her futebol team just scored another goal. Josue is getting grumpy. It is against his team.

I now know enough Portuguese to have theological discussions. Unfortunately, I have forgotten the five points of Calvinism and so I cannot remember what I believe and what I don't. When you hug a person, you are supposed to put your head one direction and they the other direction. I always manage to smash my face by going the wrong way. Oh well. Hugs are dangerous anyways.

Karine (or a ghost) enjoys turning off the hot water every time I get in the shower. This is an evil way of messing with my mind. Wednesday was the "Day of the Dead" in Brazil. We played futebol instead.

I now have had dreams in Portuguese. I woke up long enough to remember the proper conjugation of the verb. Those are called nightmares. I tried "Guarana do Amazonas" juice from the Amazon and it tastes like peanut butter and jelly in a glass. It looks like it too. To hide from myself I have to hide from God—and that is just too stinkin hard.

The secret to being satisfied is not being selfish. The secret to not being selfish is to be too busy serving others and having other passions consume you—namely knowing God and making Him known. We hope for what we trust in. oh yeah. That is an original "Rachel" quote. I think.

*"I never knew the dusk could break my heart. So much longing folding in. I'd give years away to have you here. To know I can't lose you again."* –Fernando Ortega. I called my family and my brother said "Oh Rachel I miss you. But I am glad you are in Brazil so you can tell those kids about Jesus." I could only choke out a "oh Johnny, I am glad I am here too." He is gonna change the world someday, and I am gonna watch him and smile.

I find it funny how I am always so surprised when I ask a question—and God answers.

### 4. May 16, 2006

I know the feeling. Wanting to be alone. To be somewhere where no one knows, and, for the moment, no one cares or realizes. I would not want it to stay that way. I like being noticed. But for now, obscurity looks inviting. To watch without being seen. To listen without being heard. To make a sudden change of decisions just because the idea suddenly passed through my head. To untie yourself from all that normally holds you and have space to move and breathe and trip on the sidewalk without anyone pointing and laughing. To think the thoughts you've had to push aside all week. To forget about how you look or do and just rest. Refuse to look at your watch. Take pleasure in the passing time. Watch the shadows move, the fly alighting on your leg. This is you. This is who you've forgotten to be. This is a moment with no expectations. With no callings. Where is God? Is he with the birds

singing? In the person passing by? The warmth of the sunshine on your skin? The gentle wind brushing past your face? Is He beside you, pointing out the beauty, in front of you watching your beauty? Is He resting, with His head in your lap? What is He saying? What does He want you to hear and know before you break the moment. Before you stand up and walk back to the struggle, to the job, to the smiling because it is the right thing to do. Will they wonder where you were? Will they ask you what happened and not really listen when you tell them? Would you even be able to explain why—why you were not satisfied to say, to continue on, to leave your heart locked up and to accomplish just a little more business...a little more work. Maybe they won't understand. And that is alright. Because you've been there. You've practiced His presence. Let the beauty hurt and ache and burn your soul. Let the silence speak and shout and rage at the injustice of this world. Let the burden of pain and grief and accumulation of little things slide off your heart. Alone. Naked. Empty. Present yourself anew. A living sacrifice.

5. February 22, 2007

You live a better life when you still believe that there are secret doors to other worlds if only you could find them  
You live a better life when you can cry and weep and wipe the snot from your nose unashamedly  
You live a better life when you realize that you are not the center of the universe, but that the universe was made for you  
You live a better life when you let it bleed, you don't scratch it, and you give it time.

6. February 13, 2007

We all just want to know we are irreplaceable. That we are special enough to have a space just for us that no one else can fill. That it is worth getting up in the morning. That sweating and running and grinning and looking people in the eye and going the extra mile and doing things right when no one is looking...adds up to something. We all long for someone we respect and look up to, to stop and notice us and put their hand on our shoulder and say, "you did good. I saw that. It made a difference. Keep going."

I met this guy named Chad. We were both sitting at the computers at the hostel in the everglades. After a couple sentences he asked me, "are you a Christian?" which led to sharing "God stories" for the next while. It was good. Connection of two people with the same dad. So the night before I left he asked if I had anything good to read on the plane. I didn't, so he said he had a book for me. What a book.

I sat alone in Costa Rica, tears running down my face, looking at the world and being overwhelmed with the beautiful and the pain and the wretchedness. "The Irresistible Revolution" by Shane Claiborne. MUST READ. Karine took me to a special place today after school. A field in the middle of nowhere. Where the wind blows and you can see the "lonely tree" and the hills and the cows and...lovely. I'd read Karine some excerpts from the book and we would sit inspired.

Karine: *I want to roll down the hill, but the grass is sharp and will cut me and there is cow dung everywhere.*

Me: *but if you really wanted to you could. What is stopping you? What really is stopping you? I bet the author of that book would roll down it—scratches and dung and all.*

That's the kind of book it is. And it hurt me that I didn't roll down the hill. What stops us? What REALLY holds us back?

(In an old comic strip) "Two guys talking to each other, and one of them says he has questions for God. He wants to ask why God allows all of this poverty and war and suffering to exist in the world. And his friend says, "Well, why don't you ask Him?" The fellow shakes his head and says he is scared. When his friend asks why, he mutters, "I am scared God will ask me the same question."

Let me bleed. Let me feel guilty. Let me do something. Let me roll down the hill through the scratchy grass and cow dung.

"One friend was asked by a skeptic, "You all are just a little group of radical idealists. What makes you think you can actually change the world?" and she said "Sir, if you will take a closer look at history you will see, that's the only way it has ever been done."

"Once, there was a small group of kids who decided to go to a park in the middle of the city, and dance and play, laugh and twirl. As they played in the park, they thought that maybe another child would pass by and see them. Maybe that child would think it looked fun and even decide to join them. Then maybe another one would. Then maybe a businessman would hear them from his skyscraper. Maybe he would look out the window. Maybe he would see them playing and lay down his papers and come down. Maybe they could teach him to dance. Then

maybe another businessman would walk by, a nostalgic man, and he would take off his tie and toss aside his briefcase and dance and play. Maybe the whole city would join the dance. Maybe even the world. Maybe...Regardless, they decided to enjoy the dance."

"Ask the poor. They will tell you who the Christians are" –Gandhi

"So live real good, and get beat up real bad. Dance until they kill you, and then we'll dance some more. That's how this thing seems to work."

"Bored? God forgive us for all those we have lost because we made the gospel boring...it's because we don't dare them, not because we don't entertain them. It's because we make the gospel too easy, not because we make it too difficult. Kids want to do something heroic with their lives."

"True revolution is when...the oppressed are freed from being oppressed and the oppressors are freed from being oppressors." –Bishop Desmond Tutu

#### 7. March 5, 2007

I bought a coconut. And sipped my coconut while walking around town. But I didn't look all "native" because no one in Brazil does that. Because walking around with a coconut is rather heavy. I've learned that I am looking for a place. That is quiet. Beautiful. Alone, empty. Where I can't hurt anyone and no one can hurt me. A place where I can go when I am tired. A place of rest. I am looking for home.

I've learned I am looking for a person. Someone who wants to sit down and listen to my day. Whose face lights up when I come in the room. Who sees the little extra things I do and says, "Hey girl, that's good." Who sees my mistakes and hugs me and says, "Hey girl, that's okay."

I am learning that that person is God. The place is somewhere with Him (until heaven). He's enough. So I am learning again. And again. And I will still be learning tomorrow. I've been staring at the stars a lot lately. There was a lunar eclipse the other day.

Last week I decided to teach the kids the alphabet. I didn't realize that kids in Brazil learn how to write cursive, most of them don't know printing at all. So what I planned for as teaching 26 things turned into teaching them the whole mechanics of writing and so on and so forth...what is funny is that they will never forget the letter "x". Because of x-men. They mumble through the whole alphabet and then come to x and all the guys get excited and say "X!" in their power positions, imagining they are wolverine or something. My goal for this month is to talk to more strangers. Yep.

#### 8. May 16, 2007

Don't ask questions if you don't want an answer. So many questions are not really questions at all--they are polite fronts. And most of the rest of questions...the person does not want to hear an answer anyway. It is rather a lose/lose situation for the one being questioned. It is a horrible thing to wake up one morning and realize you can't remember the last time you prayed for anyone besides yourself or having to do with your situations.

Why is it so easy to be self-centered? Burn the midnight oil. But I am scared to make the sacrifice of not sleeping. I need sleep. I like sleep. *Sobre o abrigo pasam, lentamente, os sonhos que nem se ousam sonhar. "Looking towards heaven can be seen the dreams that simple people dare not have."*

Someone asked, "what if you love Brazil just because it is all you have ever known?" They pointed out how they had loved milk chocolate until they met dark chocolate and now realized it was really the dark chocolate that they had loved all along...If you stop at the first thing you enjoy, how do you know it is the best? How do you know you won't like something better?

You don't. You make a choice. Some things you just know. What if I am only a Christian because it is the first thing I ever tried? Good then. Because it is what I want, what fills me. Some people think this is a little box.

Maybe I will go to another country. Maybe someday I might even like dark chocolate. But Brazil is where God has me now. And I believe that. I believe in this ministry and what God is doing. When you have that feeling...somehow the need to go out an experience everything else fades and loses its power over you.

There is something beautiful about being happy where you are. In other things, it is just a beautiful to have a hunger and drive to see and try all things new--to explore and discover and learn. Oh! To learn the art of moderation. Not of excess or of elimination.

#### 9. June 5, 2007

Sprinklers watering your lawn while it rains and other such irony.

I asked John what he wanted to be when he grew up.

*J: A father. (Serious sigh) I want to be a good parent.*

*R: Who told you to say all that?*

*J: No one.*

Shall we believe him? I took John to swimming lessons. He looks so little watching him from the bleachers. Every time I look at him he is wiping his nose. We need to talk about that.

I am back at the youth center. Played at the park with the little kids. They love me and think I am the fastest thing alive. My feet were so dirty that they said I was finally turning black. Yesssssss. I found this in my journal from January and thought it relevant:

I am gonna miss this psycho version of what is called the ghetto. I'll probably have weird random dreams in Brazil about driving the van "butt fulla kids" or someone getting shot (happened twice last year). Maybe having the SWAT team come in because the neighbor went crazy from some bad drugs...maybe about being joaned on. I got called "Steve Nash with a haircut" the other day. Maybe I'll dream about life and love and tears and sharing and "How are you and God?" Maybe I'll hear about people leaving and coming and changing and growing and running away. Sometimes I won't miss the ghetto. The expectation. The "I deserve this and more" the "Give me something free" the "No, that isn't good enough" instead of a thank you. The stuckness--"I want to do the right thing, but I just can't." The waiting. The sick jokes. Sometimes, I really don't want to know what you are thinking. The meanness--or plain lack of kindness--being nice or kind is "weak." You are part of the group when they are mean to you. Sometimes I'd rather not be part of the group. Those little lines of "Everyone hates you Ms. Rachel, why don't you go home" replay a thousand times over. They dig my soul. They take away something soft and innocent that I value very much. The chip on their shoulder. They feel bad if they do something wrong--but don't you dare go and point it out. Don't you dare say they are wrong--it is always someone else's fault. "Yeah, I just picked up that girl and slammed her on the ground--but you play favorites and never did nothing when she..." and then the "So yeah, I will feel bad about this tomorrow, but I don't know how to apologize so I never will...but for now, I will disrespect you and make you feel like the most insignificant person on the planet..."

And then there are the hugs and "Ms. Rachel, watch me" like if I am watching I give them superpowers--they can fly only if they are noticed. There are the "How was your day?" and genuine "You look like you are gonna cry—I got your back--tell me a name and I will beat them up for you." They are so proud to be taller than me now. Old kids stop by every once in a while to show us they are alive and remember that at least one thing in their childhood was real and it is still true. It is the best of life--laughing and playing hard and not hiding--and the worst of it--pain and ugliness and protecting yourself by destroying another. I love it. I hate it.

10. August 26, 2007

I started internet classes. Creative writing and Psychology. As if I am not already confused. English class was covering body and clothes vocabulary. This led to many interesting conversations, and kids are just not shy and find any discussion on body parts funny. You know what makes me smile? Pastor Assuario walking down the hall singing, "You must not know 'bout me."

I had a mid-life crisis during my second grade class. I always ask the kids questions like "How old are you?" but I switched things up and asked Neto, "How old is your mother?" he said 25. Since she couldn't be 25, I repeated the question in Portuguese, thinking he misunderstood me. Nope. His mother is 25. So is his father. I am as old as my second grader's parents.

I got scared again. I told Tele that my documents had arrived and he was ready to send them off that day to get my VISA. I had two years flash in my face and freaked over the commitment. Half way to 50 sounds bad enough...almost 30 sounds even worse. I was talking with God...He said wherever I went there would always be something beautiful. For the moment, that answers works perfectly.

People asking me how I am is normally my cue to ask them how they are. But 3/4s of the time I get so glad that they asked that I start one of my stories of me and then never have time to even get to them. Most problems are really rather simple, it just takes us getting to the end of our rope to be honest with ourselves and others and realize what we need to do.

I am learning about love. The kind of love that I know seems to make me choose one and reject the other. Like I am a fairy that can only hold one emotion at a time. I choose to love one person and then anyone who hurts them I hate. Sounds natural. But that isn't how it works. I am supposed to love that person too. It is easy to love the raped woman, but what about loving the rapist? I am called to love. To love both. My love does not go that far. To love

the unborn baby I hate the abortionist. To love my country and freedom, I hate Iraq and terrorists. To love the ghetto I hate suburbia. Maybe hate is too strong a word...despise, look down upon, be apathetic towards...but whatever it is, it isn't love. And if I am not loving everyone, am I really loving anyone? How does one love so that someone else can feel it?

11. October 1, 2007

A memory: I love that church. I had just gotten home from Brazil where all I had learned and seen was jumbled up inside me. We walked into the big church and my heart began to bulk at the religiousness and affluence. Then a man walked up to me, my little brother squirming in my arms. He reached into his pocket and presented a stuffed animal to my brother. A quick smile and he walked up the podium and began to preach. In that moment, I realized it was not about what people had or did not have, it was about those who GAVE.

A poem: In fourth grade they laughed  
and said I was not their best friend anymore  
In sixth grade they taunted  
and called me four eyes  
In eighth grade they left me alone  
only conscience of themselves  
In tenth grade they glanced around  
and said maybe I would be some fun  
In twelfth grade I flew away  
and realized I was enough



12. November 11, 2007

The first thing I noticed was the soft toilet paper. I guess US-ians think that is important. My second thought was that there cannot be everything bad about a culture that has things like vanilla chai.

I was rather bitter at this point because I was freezing because of the AIR CONDITIONING in Miami. The weather itself was fine, lovely, beautiful. I traveled all day, via Sao Paulo and Panama City and got to Miami at Midnight...but the baggage holder place was closed, so catching a bus with two trunks did not sound appetizing. I slept in the COLD airport with my stuff and warmed up with vanilla chai. Dunkin Donuts is always open. The world seems to wake up at 5:00am. The airport at least, and then I dumped my bags and made a run for the beach in time for the sunrise. Via Detroit, I made it to Indy in time for dinner Wednesday night. I managed to take this trip without one intelligent conversation. Two people asked me if I was old enough to travel alone. This is not intelligent conversation. Especially at 2:00am when I forgot how old I was.

I snuck out of Brazil. The meaning of a red eye flight. Everyone thinks they are going to tell you good bye the next morning, but when they wake up, you are already gone. Maybe then they cried. Maybe not. It doesn't really matter because you are not there to see it. So it doesn't count. You stare down at the morning sky and wonder at their tears. Or lack thereof. And wonder at your own. Maybe just stress. Maybe the romance of being somewhere between two worlds. Somewhere between leaving and arriving.

There is nothing romantic about leaving. It sounds romantic, and then you build up and plan and get ready and say goodbyes--I guess there is some romance in all that. Maybe in tears...but then you leave, and it is all black and white. It's the headache and nagging tug that says you forgot something. It is the fear you might not come back because all your plans are overruled by the words, "*Nothing is sound*" by Switchfoot yelling in your inner ear. It is the unresolved note at the end because you cannot tie up your relationships and let them wait in the corner. And then you are alone. Dreadfully alone. Maybe someone wanted to wait with you, maybe no one did. But it does not matter now because you are gone.

And now I am back. Do I forget all that I have learned when I come back? I woke up in this bed and wondered how much of it has just been a dream. John crawled into bed with me this morning and started talking about albatrosses and hot air and whales and sonar. My intelligent reply to my seven year old brother was something like, "*Albatrosses...they are something like seagulls, right?*"

I went job hunting Thursday and Friday. Was overly efficient and ended up getting three jobs. As you know, highest bidder wins. Swing dancing on Friday--the milkshakes were better than attempting to learn yet once again.

Randomly, I like hair short enough to let the wind take it where it wants. It is amazing how you can get used to an



idea--any idea, if you think about it for long enough. The good news? All those bad people out there--yeah, there is hope for them. The bad news? All those good people...aren't really good.

13. November 22, 2007

I met two gypsies at work. Real ones that travel and everything. Unfortunately, they also steal. They have stolen before so I was sent to give them "good customer service" until they left my department. The guy who makes sure people don't steal (I am sure he has some title) came by my department and picked up my receipts. And read them (I write on receipts when bored). They started out something like "*Hey God, how are you this morning?*" So he says, "*You are pretty religious?*" I cringed and said, "*Well, I like to think of it as more of a relationship kind of thing.*" He said, "*That might be pretty hard on your boyfriend.*" Hitting on me or not...I had never thought about it like that. It is the common terms now to say "*oh, not religion—relationship.*" But if you actually think about it from a nonchurchy view...pretty hard on your boyfriend.

Anyone with a real heavy accent or that speaks another language; I automatically reply in Portuguese. Without even thinking. The lady at the Chinese food place looked at me strangely when I said "*Obrigada*" and I didn't even notice until I was out the door with my food.

When I say "*I don't know*" it doesn't normally mean I don't know, it means wait a minute, I have to think about it... I like the US. I like my car. I like my family's church. I could get used to this...but I want Brazil. Most of the time you only know what you have. I know 2 worlds. And I have my choice of them. How lucky is that! Except not. Because I always know and feel what I am missing now. In hard times I wish for the other. In good times I wonder "*what if?*" and I feel this huge responsibility to "*DON'T MESS UP RACHEL*" because I am the only one to blame for a wrong choice. I am the one who has to live with my life. So where does God fit into all of that? Or working at Carson's? I mean...what do I do during the day...how is the fact that I am a Christian make my life, my job, my day, different? I understand Dad now. Coming home and sitting on the couch and just being tired. The sore shoulders that sag a little lower every hour until it is time to leave. The feet that ache until you move them and then they throb. You don't want to do anything, but you don't want time to pass because then it will be closer to the time you have to go back to work again. Plans are made for those illusive times called "weekends" or "vacations."

I own a space in a parking garage. I've rented a piece of suburbia. Not many people pay in cash. I get a little buzz when the cash drawer opens and I get to use actual money. Some people drop hundreds like bagels. Sometimes I just have to hug someone. Sometimes I just have to sing. Like in the wind or sunshine. Maybe just because I can't hug God.

Sometimes I can't do anything but stare at the person. Like my eyes are greedy and starving and my only food and salvation is seeing that person...this only has happened to me twice--both when I realized I was losing someone. When I realized I couldn't hold on to them...and that was okay--but dang I was going to live now and right now I was with them. I could think of no better way to pass the time then being as close as possible to them and just staring at them. I bet it was quite unnerving. And somewhere in those moments, I lost myself and began to love. You can't go living life with God without soon realizing that there is something very big, very scary and very much more important than you going on. Like "V for Vendetta" there is no such thing as a coincidence. I am filled with a certain dread when I see little decisions I made in the past affect a whole world of people. At the same time, I see little obediences that add up to a million good things and I bubble over in awe. I am a part of this, and belong--for all the good, bad, ugly, and breathtakingly beautiful.

He calls me forward, to places I cannot see, to a journey of sifting sand where I am promised no companion but an invisible hand. A hand connected to this Power, Force, King--and yet my Lover, Consoler, and Friend. He calls me deeper, to treasure troves of untainted gold, and I am claustrophobic, clawing for the end of the tunnel, and am then led to a place where I see the inside is bigger than the outside. He calls me to Himself, where like a new crush, all I want to do is ask what He thinks about life and toothpaste and women preachers. Where fascination draws me to his eyes and I cannot look away. His words take on new meaning, and monotone is turned into music. Those words aren't for the crowd anymore--they are for me.

I want the feeling of my wet tears sliding out of my eyes and gathering on the rim of my glasses to last. Of being tangled up in two blankets and my brother and still being cold as he wiggles around and jumps up every time the movie gets exciting. Of watching the "Little Prince" and my heart hurting and pounding out for someone to tame me. Of hugging the little boy beside me and being glad I can hold him for just a little bit longer. Of being glad of being surrounded by simple, innocent things that seem so far away from a long harsh day of work and world and reality. Of talking with old friends and seeing that some things never change. But changes within those non-

changes shake and rattle until it takes something away we never knew we had.

I am going to have to forget, aren't I? I had a dream somewhere between when I woke up and when my alarm was supposed to go off. I went to a wonderful place within a place, and felt things and learned things and overcame my fear of murky water. Everyone else was asleep, and would not remember this place when they woke up. I knew I had to go to sleep too. So I looked at my friends and said "I am going to have to forget, aren't I." And then a nod and a dream and I wake up in a cold room, trying not to move because I know as soon as I do it will all fade away. Why do I always have to forget? Why can't I stay awake?

14. January 28, 2008

Dear Mom...

I read your recipe book and things are a little different here. We don't have pop 'n fresh. How do you make it from scratch? The meat is not the same. Not ground up and in a package...it is hanging from a rack in big slabs. Chicken isn't frozen in nice pieces to put in the George Foreman machine...it is sold live. And they look sick. How do you make popcorn without a microwave? How do you make relish without pickles? There is no celery here. No whip cream. No maple syrup. No Arby's horsey sauce. How do you make horseradish sauce? How do you make ranch dressing...or anything to dip carrots into? Eating carrots alone is not fun. They have things that resemble lettuce, but no dressing. How do you make granola? The fish they sell is looking at me. How do you get the bones out when it is still looking at you? Can you eat the skin? The cheese is squeaky when you chew it. And they have all these weird kinds, not cheddar. Salsa doesn't come in a can, everything is cut by hand. No slicing/dicing/chopping machines. How important is it to have a beater? Can you just whip things by hand...what about meringue? What can I use in the place of cream cheese? And don't say cottage cheese, they don't have that either. How do you make deviled eggs again? Please send spinach seeds. I shall just grow my own.

15. February 16, 2008

Raining during the sunshine is called "*the wedding of the widow*" in Portuguese  
happiness is sand so clean that it squeaks. Eating random things. Like leaves and fish with pointy noses. It is spending a whole afternoon in water. Eating mangos in the ocean. Eating popsicles in the ocean. Eating peanuts and cheese puffs in the ocean. Eating darn well anything in the ocean.  
Happiness is seeing the bottom of the ocean when you are neck deep in water--so clear the only dark spot is your own shadow. Driving in the back of a pickup truck, and stopping when you see mangos. (Nando climbed the tree and shook it until it rained mangos) Happiness is filling the pickup with mangos. Sticky, yellow fingers.  
Happiness is waves that pull you in and raise you up and then gently put you back down on the soft sand. Taking pictures of "*banho de lama*" (literally, the bath of earth) and doing dust donuts in a pickup. It is reading poetry on the beach. Star gazing: three shooting stars. A picnic of rice and beans and more mangos.  
Happiness is finding a tan line from my ankle bracelet. Somewhere, I do have some melanin. It is long shower after a day of salt water. How can I account for the time that passes so naturally...like it was meant to be lived, and not recorded? I got sunburnt until my eyebrows stung and my wrists were stiff. The salty water busted my lip and it is still growing. My friend asked me...what would happen if you got really sick? And I thought about it...I guess they would buy a ticket for me and send me back to the US. To my family. Thinking about that made me miss my family. Deep saudades stirred inside me. Because they are there, so present in my life. ALWAYS. And it also hurt, and ached...will I ever really be at home here?

16. April 13, 2008

I feel like something is growing in me. Sometimes I wonder if it is a lukewarm plague because it is so calm. But really...it is something of...seeing that God is here. Before I ask. While I am asking. Learning that I don't need to ask Him to come, but I want to and do anyway. And He likes that. He is so close that sometimes to ask Him to hold my hand is irrelevant. I am learning a trust that I do not have to hear "I love you" to know He loves me.  
For a long time my relationship with God was more of a "needy girlfriend/tough guy" thing. I did the dos and not the don'ts because I was going to make our relationship work. I was going to make it happen. I read the Bible every morning. Went to every church service. If someone said this was how you got closer to God, I put it on my schedule to do. I constantly came before God, tugging on His robe and asking "*Is this what you want? Please tell me you love me. Please tell me I am doing right. Please give me the warm fuzzy feeling.*" And it was a good time in life. Because I went after it, and God was always there. When I asked, He answered.

But then I started asking other questions. And sometimes He didn't answer. Sometimes He said I didn't need to know. Sometimes He said that He, and He alone, was enough of an answer for me. I struggled with that. I felt like these questions...the ones that did not fit in my box, were the most important ones. And that it wasn't fair. I was tired of all the work I had to do to make "being a Christian" feel right.

Then...somewhere along the way, I began to see that God was God no matter what. That He does not need me to stand up for Him. He does not need me to read my Bible and pray and go to church. He does not need me to make this relationship work. It is not my responsibility to make it work. But something inside me wanted to see if this was for real. I wanted to test it. I put my Bible on the shelf. I hid in my room and did not go to church. I pushed the boundaries and looked at Him with all the rebellion I could muster up and said "*I dare you to walk away. To punish me with silence. To get mad and say you do not love me anymore. To give up on me.*" Something in me was so scared that He would. I wanted to make it happen fast to get it over with so I could shut down everything and never be hurt again. But God didn't leave. He didn't give me the silent treatment or make me do penance. During those times were some of the sweetest moments...after I had yelled at God, the words of hate rolling around my tongue. And that made me even more scared. Because then I loved Him even more and it would hurt even more if He left me someday.

I don't know how I came to see that that day was never going to come. It wasn't something I can put my finger on, but it happened. If I do not read my Bible, it is not to feel guilty. He is not going to glare at me. Now I want to read it because I want Him. I am hungry. I pick it up like I open the refrigerator door--not because I am maintaining a relationship. I am not reading until I fill a deadline, I am reading until I am filled up. Same thing with church: I go because something has "dinged" in me and said "*hey, remember that 'fellowship with others' thing? You need that because something is empty in here.*"

Somewhere, I think I finally understand that He loves me before I ask. Not because of what I do, but just because He chose me. It is a no-strings attached deal. I cannot pin Him down. I cannot control Him or make things go my way. Yet he makes these promises to me: "*I won't leave. I won't change. I love you and always have and always will.*" And these promises are bigger than me. They come to me--I didn't ask for them. It is the ultimate friendship that won't wake up one morning and not feel like calling me. I don't worry about His issues or if He will be grumpy or I will say something and have to make it all better. It is the ultimate relationship--I never have to worry about rolling over in bed and finding that He is not there, or that pit stomach feeling when He is struggling or hurting and I cannot help him or do anything to solve it. It is not my responsibility to cheer him up or have an answer. Some days I wake up and realize it has been a couple days since I have had intimacy...a real conversation with God. But it isn't guilt that crushes me...I turn over and say "*Hey stranger...how is it going?*" we talk and catch up. I smile and sigh because I have missed the closeness and I tell myself not to let it happen again because THIS IS THE LIFE. But it does happen again and life becomes like a fog until I wake up and wonder where I was...because I sure wasn't living. I forget like this a lot. I live in the fog. Maybe living is just learning how to remember. That God is here. That He loves me. That He isn't leaving. That He is mine and I am His and that is a commitment in itself. A commitment bigger than me. A commitment that won't break even if I do.

17. August 9, 2008

I crossed over "middle earth" or whatever you would call the part of your life spent being transported and airport life--self-flushing toilets, self-running faucets, self-squirting soap, and being permanently attached to your baggage. Question: what do people do who do not have a Dad who looks them in the eye and says, "*You made the right choice.*"

I arrived at the international school with a big hug from Daniel (4th grade), who then lead me to the other classes and I was pushed into a corner by waves and waves of children flowing out of their classrooms and chanting, "*Rachel! Rachel!*" You think I am exaggerating. I am not.

Returning to Brazil was not magical. It was familiar. Just as I notice a chance when I go to the US of everyone being black or white, so returning to Brazil I notice everyone turned back to a nice mixed brown again. What was not familiar or magical was returning to the cold morning shower. I have a sudden urge to become French.

I have so much STUFF. I always forget that until I have to unpack it all. Because I try to bring the USA to Brazil and that is impossible. I went to college last night. First time for me and for them: I am the first American to attend there, and neither one of us is sure what to do with me. I have lost some of my Portuguese. About 25% of the lecture went over my head. Another 25% was lost because I am taking the education major, and for some reason, all the guys are scared away. There is only one guy in the class. And I think they will scare him away too--because

they are rather loud and chatty. But the 50% of sociology class was good. Then she talked about tests, and I am getting nervous.

18. January 6, 2009

I am just here. Just here. Empty. I can't feel anything. It is all gone. All of me. All I want, don't want, desire. I know what is right, and I know every old decision like the back of my hand. So I guess I will live off of them until I find myself again. I am stumbling through. Not half bad, but not all there. And only I know me enough to know it is missing. No one else knows me well enough to know I am not here. Not here really. And not there.

I alternate between thoughts of how can I return and how could I have ever left. And neither one sticks to me. They all flake off and float down on the floor around me. Nothing is real. Nothing stays. What is mine? Allow me a moment more to think only of myself, to be surrounded by the music and tilt my head back to receive it all. Just receive and be filled.

I am so empty.

Oh God. I feel far away. I feel like it has been awhile since we've had a good talk. How have you been? I ache to make you more human, to put flesh on you and have you hold me. I want to be held by someone who isn't scared to get my snot on their shoulder. Someone who I feel no barriers with, just blind trust and open arms. Someone who I know the answer is yes. And then what? Oh God, and then what? Part of me wants everything, but I know it is only because I want nothing that I can have.

I can almost imagine myself washing the dishes outside the kitchen. Singing some random song. With the wrong words. "Don't break anything now!" comes a call from somewhere, between cell phone calls. A kiss on the cheek. A good hug and "Minha Linda!"

\*

Anna was the one asking Johnny the questions. I was just giggling on the sidelines.

A: *Where do babies come from?*

J: *The egg comes from the mommy and meets with the sperm from the man. Then it grows and becomes a baby.*

A: *Where does this happen?*

J: *that part is kind of gross.*

A: *Really?*

J: *yeah, it is where you go number one.*

A: *and where does the baby come out?*

J: *that is where you go number two.*

A: *can you have a baby without a mommy and a daddy?*

J: *no.*

A: *are you sure? Why not?*

J: *well, maybe you can, but I don't know how that works.*

\*



It started snowing. The nice fluffy snow. But it is still cold. cold cold. My little brother and I got in the car and I started it up...gathering my courage to get out and wipe off all the snow on the car so I could see. "Please please please can I do it?" he asks with a hopeful smile.

"I think so." I reply, a little more disinterested than I should have been. And he puffs around the car, stretching his eight year old arms as far as possible to get the windshield cleared...then goes to the other side, still leaving a strip of white in the middle that little legs cannot raise up to.

And I wish...I wasn't old enough to know it isn't fun to wipe the snow off the car.

19. February 14, 2009

1 Corinthians 13, Rachel version

If I get the best education, 4.0 GPA, and have not love, I am worthless. If I run into a lot of money, or speak and have it donated, or work hard and give it--but have not love, I am nothing.

If all the Brazilian children are fed and clothed and given a good education and make professions of faith, but I have not love, I gain nothing.

If I write something that moves people to change, inspires them to grow and benefits those without a voice of their own, but have not love, I am just an irritation that will soon go away.

Love keeps on. It is patient and waits. It is nice and just WANTS to be nice. Love does not want something you have and it doesn't. It doesn't think it should have been the one to have gotten it. It is not jealous, or reading into situations. It is not full of itself, too busy to listen to others.

Love does not fish for compliments or put itself out there to be praised. It is not over-confident, thinking that it does not need help and has all the answers on its own. It does not forget what others have done to help it get to where it is at today. It is not proud or too busy to be kind and mannerly. It never tries to show-off. Love is meek, not insisting on its own way, but thinking of others. It does not get angry easily; it does not worry about things or try to control situations or people. It is not bitter, but forgives, and forgives completely; not keeping a list and bringing it back up the next time something happens.

Love doesn't make dirty jokes or gains from something that hurts someone else. Love always stands up for the one who cannot stand up for themselves. It stands up for what is right, and is happy when the right thing happens, even if it is hard on them.

Love is in it for the long haul, not just the good times. It has made a commitment. It does not listen to gossip, and makes sure that the truth is found out. Love always hopes and will never stop hoping because it wants the best for them, no matter what personal sacrifice that requires. Love never dies.

Love keeps on keeping on, no matter what you do to try to stop it. Knowledge, college, learning, philosophy--even wisdom --will be used and then become useless.

Our little brains just can't get it all. It was never meant to be squished into that small of a space. So get over yourself, because you just aren't going to know it all. Ever.

But don't worry, because when Jesus comes, it won't matter anyways. Because it was never about you or me.

I liked being a child. I wish I could still be one sometimes. Sometimes I still think I am. But no, I am stuck in 26. At least to everyone around me. And I am finding out that it isn't so bad. Becoming an adult and taking responsibility for yourself is important. And then learning how to put yourself aside and serve others--that is even more important.

I am trying hard, but I can only understand so little of what there is to know. And even what I understand is a struggle and it seems I am always having to relearn it. But when Jesus comes, I will be able to look at reality in the face and laugh and kiss it. I will have that big sigh of relief and peace when everything is reconciled. But even better, I will finally understand that I am known, and loved in spite, and because, of who I am.

And so I believe God is who He says He is, and I live in expectation that all He says will happen will happen, and I love because He first loved me. But the most important part of this is...I love.

20. March 19, 2009

Secondhand Lions. You know that part where the old uncle got out of the hospital and those four rebellious guys need to be taught a lesson? He stands up and says this line that gives me Goosebumps. *"I'm Hub McCann. I've fought in two World Wars and countless smaller ones on three continents. I led thousands of men into battle with everything from horses and swords to artillery and tanks. I've seen the headwaters of the Nile, and tribes of natives no white man had ever seen before. I've won and lost a dozen fortunes, KILLED MANY MEN and loved only one woman with a passion a FLEA like you could never begin to understand. That's who I am. NOW, GO HOME, BOY!"* So I wrote my own.

"I have lived in two countries and claimed them as my own. I have watched those I love die and those I hate live. I have fought for many causes and won many arguments. I have worked to end the suffering of those who do not have. I have striven to make the world a better place by sharing the love God spills into me. I have loved two men with all I had in me. I have dreamed of doing greater things than I could and have lost many presumptions and expectations along the way. I have laughed when I should have cried and cried when I should have laughed. I have failed more often than not--but haven't kept count. I have heard words that cause our hearts to live and die. I have tried to live each day as if it were my last. I have spoken two languages and dreamed with them both. I have seen beauty that hurt to look at, and had pain that released me to live. I have read books that said what I couldn't, and have written words I couldn't speak."

21. June 15, 2009

Maybe we should walk...It doesn't seem right somehow, to be able to change environments and life and situations so quickly. My body hasn't caught up yet. We drove through Iowa. Ok. Iowa wasn't that thrilling. But it was nice. And it was an excuse for Anna and I to sing all the songs from "The Music Man." And finding a park with a polka

band...and then dancing something that might have been polka-ish was fun.

Then South Dakota. There is just so much happening outside my window. I can't keep up with it. Flat plains. Then green lumpy spaces. Then you turn and fall into the Bad Lands. Then rocky-ness. Then lots of flags and patriotism and looking up George Washington's nose at Mt. Rushmore. Then the Wild West. Capitalized. I would gaze out the window and try to wrap my brain around what I was seeing. But I couldn't manage. Not before everything was changing and different and I had to start all over again.

Wyoming seems lonely, yet inviting. Open, open, open. The idea of OWNING land just seems silly. At least when you are on a road in the middle of ALL of it staring back at you. John began the trip by counting all the McDonald's that we passed. By South Dakota, we started stopping at WHATEVER was available, because McDonald's had disappeared. Along with everything else man made.

And then Colorado. Mountains. How can you wrap your head around mountains like these? Two miles above sea level, shivering in the snow (because I didn't bring pants), and feeling overwhelmed. Lost. Afraid. Because there is so much world, and you can only love so many things without being splintered into a million pieces.

I think what I like most about traveling is seeing how other people live. Seeing how many other ways--besides mine--that there are to live. And sometimes you smile. Sometimes you frown--quietly. Sometimes you are awed by brilliance, and sometimes you just wish you could shake the bloomin' daylights outta them to make them DO SOMETHING.

22. January 20, 2010

Why did I put on red socks today? And other questions that cannot be answered after a long day of academic excellence. Welcome to the world of being a senior in college. Consisting of not being able to find a parking place, wishing you would have brought your scarf, and weighing out the pros and cons of eating broccoli in class. Yes I did. Eat broccoli.

Get up and hit snooze until you can't hit it anymore. Shower and eat and pack your backpack too full and pray for parking spaces. Fiction writing with a teacher who judges boxing matches. Philosophy with a typical golf-sock wearing professor (where I eat broccoli), and a little snoozing while multitasking in Abnormal Psychology. The other days are Editing and holding my breath that I don't get called on because my books are not in yet, and professional writing with a teacher that might just be a pushover. And then I go to the youth center. And run the tutorial program. And play air hockey.

*"You've gotta be mixed, mz. Rachel...you sound so black."* and other such things that get said to me daily. Flashback to 2006 and I wonder if I have grown any older...back at the same center, but it isn't the same me. And the things that are different...were not in the places I thought they would be. Sledding and snowballs, mostly in a skirt, sculpting snow, capture the flag, foosball tournaments, writing contests...

All my old kids are not kids anymore. Most of them are mommies and daddies. Or just about to be and I am invited to the baby shower. I still love girl's Bible studies. More than ever. We were talking about who God is, and I read a verse about how God doesn't abandon us. Diamond, due in April, asked if it was a sin to give your baby up for adoption. Or abortion. I wonder what kind of pressure she (at 16) is getting. We changed what we were talking about for the rest of that Bible study...

So I have filled my life up to the brim again. Homework claims the rest of my nonexistent social life. Oh, and just got a second scholarship to help with IUPUI costs. And a nagging question tugs me: am I overcompensating for feeling empty? Or the idea that if I left it empty, there would be nothing to fill it?

*"What a wee little part of a person's life are his acts and words! His real life is led in his head, and is known to none but himself. All day long, and every day, the mill of his brain is grinding, and his thoughts, not those other things, are his history."* --Mark Twain

23. August 1, 2010

Sometimes it really stinks to be conscious. To be aware. To be trained just enough to open your eyes and see how things COULD be. Sometimes it feels evil to get a taste of such a good thing when the rest is just out of reach. A horridly good place.

A place where I am challenged and pushed. A place where sometimes I want to dig my heels in and say no--where is my sofa and coffee instead? A place that supports me and never forces me, but looks me in the eye and says what we both know: *"You will regret it if you don't go for it."*

A place that celebrates my efforts and successes, but more than that, a place that has stopped to listen to the real me, and celebrates who I am. And from this place, I can face my questions openly: "*Who am I? Why am I here? Where am I going? Can I do this?*" They surround me with the most powerful word in the English language, until their chant echoes inside my heart: *YES*.

Sometimes it really stinks to be conscious. I am able to see the person I want to be--the teacher I know I can be. With the vision fresh in my face, it tauntingly dances near and then far. And I make a list of progress yet to be made. I go to bed tired, muscles sore--but tomorrow I will wake up to greatness, standing inside and outside of my door.

24. August 11, 2010

Everyone has a story about their tattoo. Even the guy who had a stick figure fire dragon on his leg who said he didn't plan it—just went in and got it done. That told me a lot about him. A tattoo can be planned out for certain reasons, and then change. It is all about what you attach to it. Certain stories stick, and others don't.

I've always loved the Star of David. Since I was a little girl, celebrating Purim with a Jewish friend, since I had a Sunday school crush on David—who even the Bible says was cute. The past couple of years have grown my fascination, and consequential study of Judaism and determination to someday visit Israel. After all, I am in love with this Jewish guy. I should know a little about His background, culture, family...I envied my friend who was part Jewish...she must be closer to God somehow. Funny how I am the one mistaken as being Jewish now—I am marked.

I flirted with the idea of getting a tattoo long before it happened. God and I talked about it. And many times I came close, but didn't. Would it be worth it if it offended someone who then might be turned off to something important I had to say? I didn't want it to be a rebellious thing—I talked with my parents, godly counsel...

But part of me did it for selfish reasons. I felt that many people I knew only cared about me because I fit in their plan, their system. I didn't rock the boat; I was the "good girl" who didn't cause controversy. I wanted to see if they would still care, even if I didn't fit or agree with them: could they see past the outside to the inside?

Just about to turn 26, walking down the hot Brazilian streets of Recife, my friend got a butterfly on her back. Since my mom's request was to NOT get a tattoo on a side street, I paid a bit extra and got a very sanitary place in the mall. Ten minutes and voila! A Star of David, with a cross outside it if you look, just behind my left ear.

But that is not the story I tell when people ask about my tattoo, or if I am Jewish. Because that is not the story that stuck.

One month earlier in Indianapolis, I drove from the youth center to Daisy's house (name changed for privacy). I had just learned that Daisy, 15, was pregnant. Stories of preggos come fast and furious at the center, so I went to ask myself. I knew the father, and I heard there was a catch: Daisy was telling everyone that it was rape.

I knocked at Daisy's door, the big Doberman barking me away. Daisy came out. Yes, it was true, she was pregnant. Her mom came out to talk as well, spitting threats about the boy and how this was a demon child. Daisy said she was getting an abortion. "Please," I said, "please let me adopt the baby."

The words surprised us both, and tears came to our eyes, but only Daisy let them spill." I don't know, Ms. Rachel," she said, "I don't know. "

I left her my phone number and left, awkwardly. There was nothing romantic or wonderful about it, TV blaring in the background. I was single and about to leave the country, but the moment the words left my mouth I knew they were true. I wanted that baby. And in that time, that baby had become my baby. Explain that however you want to in your head.

Daisy went back and forth in the next visits I made. I made different suggestions, different ideas—letting her know there were other options. I had an unbelievable amount of love and support by everyone who knew what was going on. She was not alone—I was not alone.

Daisy's mother insisted this baby was going to be aborted. I broke down and cried that this baby get a chance to live. "No, no no. Ms. Rachel! You can talk and beg here all day, but my daughter is not having that baby."

Daisy didn't want to be 15, pregnant, in school. She said she wasn't ready to be a mother. I agreed...which is why I would adopt the baby. But if she had the baby, then she would want to keep it. Why? I asked. "Because I made it." She said as she wiped her tears. We talked about God and love and hope and forgiveness, while her little brother popped his face through the screen door, telling me about his superpowers.

She decided against the abortion. She decided for it. In Brazil, my English class prayed for her. Hugo said "Ms. Rachel, I prayed that God would be with this baby. That He would save it and let it be with us, or that He would

hold it in His arms." Two days later I found out she had decided not to get the abortion, giving me hope—and then, a couple days after I got my tattoo, she decided to get the abortion.

Today a star was born

And left us here on earth

To wander in the small light

Of silver mornings

And golden nights

The beauty with a sword

That kills us willingly

I had learned to love someone I could not see. Someone I did not know the gender, the intelligence of, the athletic ability. Someone that meant leaving the place I loved and being "tied down," future unknown, with visions of long nights and drool. It wasn't just any baby—it was my baby. Now I had a star in heaven, and every time I catch a glimpse of my tattoo, I remember my baby. But stars in heaven don't mend holes in your heart.

Daisy is now 17 with a beautiful baby girl. Her mother answered the door when I picked her up, to celebrate Daisy's birthday. We smiled shyly at each other and said little of the past. Daisy and I keep the conversation light and laugh as much as we can. I wonder if she will ask me about my tattoo. I wonder what I will say.

25. September 15, 2010

Rachel babysits Rowan, version 1.2. This is my second official babysitting. The first time that it included being at Anna's house which included eating her ice cream. He drooled a lot. Then he leaked and wet my pants. I couldn't get his shirt off and he gave me the "*You are worse at this than I thought*" look. Then he started crying and I almost started crying because I don't know how I managed for him to be almost half a year old without changing his diaper. And there was poop. It has been a long time since I changed a diaper. Some of the kids whose diapers I used to change are now in college. But I did change Rowan's diaper. And we both decided that he preferred to stay naked after that. Clothes are overrated. Then we went outside and talked about things.

Now he is playing in the trash. He is trying to swallow his fingers. I bet bulimics got the idea from babies. He found my soft spot. Erica knows my soft spot too, but don't ask her to tell. That is cheating. If Rowan laughs, I will do whatever it takes to make it happen again. While I won't go all the way and say that babies are cute, I must say truthfully that babies do cute things. There wasn't anything I can think of cuter than when Rowan looked up from crawling around in the grass and smiled with a face full of leaves.

Fun fact about Rachel: I like rolling over leaves. I like stepping on them and hearing the crunch sound, but I like it even better on a bike. Crunch crunch. Happens faster. But beware of leaf-looking rocks. They are out there. They don't go crunch. They make you go crunch. Today, it was a leaf-looking piece of pizza. It didn't crunch; it just made me laugh because I had rolled over a piece of pizza.

The teacher in health class asked how many drinks it took to get me tipsy. Most everyone said three, so I said two. I don't know. I've never been tipsy. But I am sure it wouldn't take much. I am better at abstinence than moderation.

There are three left handers in fencing class. We have to special left-handed equipment. I was the only left-hander that showed up today. I make the righties nervous. I make myself nervous. Not only did I get in the minority left handed group of life, I also got into the "*I am in college and can't tell my right from my left*" group. Do they have that group on Facebook? I should join. I still have to make my hand into the "L" shape...not on my forehead.

26. February 15, 2011

Remember the adventures. The ones that don't have to be, they just have to feel like it. Like when the cows chased us—or maybe they just could have. Or running away—or maybe just taking a walk. Or buying everything you wanted in the whole mall—because you realize you don't want a bit of it.

The shadows you mistake for something else. The stolen moments you can't explain. Writing by candlelight. Let the pen move fast as time crouches down on you, telling you there'll be no more adventures. Adventures? Yes. Even in the middle of the work week—especially when I am busy. Adventures where I open my eyes and see the beautiful architecture of the city I have lived in all my life.

The sound of rain on a hot tin roof and sizzle as it cools. These adventures are free but they capture your soul at the price of mediocrity—you can never go back—your dissatisfaction will slowly kill you. Adventures are hearing God's voice or seeing God's beauty or feeling God's presence wrap around you finger by finger.



A moment, she cries, I would give you anything for a moment!

Louder, louder, it grows, and my skin cannot stay still. It is beauty, in all of its forms, calling me—and I ache. How have I stayed away—how have I turned away from adventures? The price of the world to save my soul.

Why can't you paint in shadows and fleeting moments? I would have the perfect picture. Raindrops pour through candlelight. I've missed you, lonely part of my soul. I am glad you are here to say hello. The loudly quiet echo has done me good. I carry some of you back to the land of the living. It does them good to see a pale horse.

I've sat here long enough. Enough to say "I love you" to anyone, and mean it. To see adventures in every corner, for they come with me.

27. August 2, 2011

It is amazing how discombobulating it is to have cars driving on the other side of the road. Riding in a bus makes me cringe because I am always sure we will hit something when we turn. Crossing the street is just disastrous. I have never been good at that, even when I do know which way the cars are coming. It makes you feel like something is just a little off--that you have transported into some other world that moves to the left. And you realize that it works their way too...and you wonder what else can be done differently and still be a valid option. Blow my mind.

I took a cable car to the big Buddha. It was a beautiful view, with a glass bottom. There is something amazing about islands and ocean and mountains covered in green. And about going over them. I kept looking at the Buddha and wondering why him...why did he get to be so famous and all statued-up? From the simple studying I have done, he always seemed like a great guy with a lot of good ideas, but I always get the idea that he would probably be surprised at all the statues of himself as well. The big statue looks like it is waving as you leave. I waved back. Their efficiency seems to include compactness. Even their dogs are smaller, compact pugs. At 5'3", I don't feel short. Their toilets are even smaller. Apparently, women are used to standing on the seat, because there are signs in every stall that say "Please do not stand on the seat" in English and Cantonese.

I have flown around the world in much less than 80 days. Counting Detroit as my hub—I went from Detroit to Hong Kong via the Arctic Circle, Russia, and China: 27 hours (15 in the air, 12 changing time zones). Continuing, I flew 4 hours to Japan (1 hour was time zone change). Now I am flying up over Alaska and then back down to Detroit, actually landing 2 hours before I left: 29 hours. Or something like that. Time zones confuse me.

I went to the art museum in Hong Kong. No American art to be seen. Made me laugh that I was expecting it. They have their whole history without us. How did it become an us/them thing? When did everyone non-Asian suddenly look familiar when I passed them on the street? I am ashamed of myself. I didn't learn any Chinese. My attempts at "Thank you" were politely accepted, but not correct. I got used to seeing everything bilingual until the Chinese symbols became almost invisible to me, like a pretty doodle or underline to the English words.

28. November 12, 2011

I'm catching the wings of the sunset, the clouds passing below me. The brilliant fire bursts with smoke tales of burning sugar cane fields remind me that I am still in Brazil, and not leaving this time—enjoying. Blue to green to yellow to orange, the red horizon line will soon be gone. They will offer me a beverage, but I'd rather hold on to the beauty. How can I have forgotten myself already?

I've found the first star of the evening. I'm sure my little prince has returned there. The clouds line up like mountain ranges I wish I could climb. The sliver of moon appears as we travel alongside the horizon, not into it. I want this forever, but keep looking down to write rather than enjoy. I'm trying to transcribe experience to paper. They announce dinner and I am surprised how hungry I am. I am flying and starving. Fill my belly with something other than air.

It's been so long since I've written like this. Like me. Where have I been and why did I go? Was I simply looking for beauty? I feel so close to the little prince on planes. With the dark wing silhouetted against the sunset a second star appears, but it is no rival to the first. Why don't I have a place to lay down and watch the stars come out? I think my life would be better if I did.

The red grows more brilliant as the blue closes in. I see every color of the rainbow, shining under the moon and wishing star. I breathe in haggardly, for the beauty kills me slowly. That is why it cannot last—I couldn't stand it. The rustle of sandwiches behind me makes my tummy ache. But I dare not look away. Must life be recorded to be validated?

Orange, yellow, and green are being squished to a sliver. Purple is looming. The colors grow bolder, but the stars stay shy. I don't know if I can watch any longer, distractions are calling me from this most lovely evening. I wish for him once more, my little prince who has returned to his rose, with his pet sheep safely in its box. I was born to feel things, but once I do they flee so quickly. The sky begins to relax and we pass the small lights of a city below, twinkling like a spider web in morning dew. We are flying, and not even the screaming baby can take away how amazing that is. Don't lose the wonder.

#### 29. February 8, 2012

After three and a half years of saying "no" to meat, I have a couple of things to say:

1. I am a vegetarian without any morals. You can kill the cute little animals. It is not my battle. It was a childhood dream to become a veterinarian, but then I realized that I only had one life and didn't have time to help everyone—so I decided kids were more important. No eating kids, ok?
2. I am a vegetarian by accident. It was a month long experiment with Carina—let's try not eating meat. I liked it. It worked for me. I always say I will stop when I REALLY feel like eating meat. Once I came really close—sausage never smelled so good—but I was like "Really? Quit for SAUSAGE?" And went on with veggies.
3. I am not a thorough vegetarian. I still want my biscuits and gravy. Sometimes I miss some of the sausage chunks. I am not saying no to Lasagna. Sometimes the little hamburger bits might slide through. I am going for the principle of it.
4. I am a vegetarian because of my lack of self-discipline. I figured out that abstinence is easier than moderation. Saying no to all the meat is so much easier than saying "eat healthy." Balance is tough stuff! So my hat goes off to those of you with a consistently healthy diet, with meat in moderation.
5. I live in Brazil—no way I am a true vegetarian. Not because I am sneaking meat. Nope, never done that. But do you know how many ants are in Brazil? Those little ones that eat the glue out of your computer keyboard and the binding from your books—YOU CANNOT GET AWAY FROM THEM. Or realistically think you've never eaten them. They are everywhere, including in my belly. The veggie thing works for me. But there's a secret no one tells you—well, no one told me: when you start eating healthy stuff, your body starts to like it. After I became a vegetarian, I started to like mushrooms and zucchini and eggplant and all those weird things you gag on as a kid. I never forced anything. I never look longingly at meat and think "a whole lifetime without you?" I choose fruits and vegetables NOT because I want to brag about the "v" word, or write cool articles like this, but because it is actually my first choice. Someone told me it is your blood type—that some types need meat more than others. Maybe. I don't know. But that sounds right. It works for some and not for others. So just use the blood type excuse when people want to argue. And be happy if you have friends who are vegetarians like me: it means free double meat at Subway because I will give you mine.

#### 30. December 2012

It is that time again. When nostalgia creeps up on us and I, for one, stand with mouth open and looking out many windows, trying to find where my year went. I've just gotten used to writing 2012, now I will have to change again? What are the lessons I have learned this year?

January: You can't really leave until you have someone to say goodbye to. If nothing holds you, you are only going, not leaving. But I am overly blessed: I find myself continually coming home, always a goodbye and a hello.

Rio: Sitting in a shop corner next to the Sugar Loaf Mountains. Acai na Tigela is heaven in a bowl. The heat gathers that little pool of sweat in the small of my back. My feet ache in sandals. They've grown wimpy from constant socks and shoes in winter weather. I want to paint a picture of the little boy flying his kite from the roof of his favela. There is no sauce on my pizza. That is why Brazilians use ketchup. I am Brazilian today. What did I do to get life this good, and how can I make it last forever? The woman from Rio told me to pray "*God give me patience because if you give me strength I will kill them.*" Perfect motto for people who work with children.

February: I am a vegetarian without any morals—you can kill all the cute little animals. And I have eaten many of those little ants that fall into your food on accident. I know they are there.

Valentine's Day: *Mariana: do you have a boyfriend? Me: no. Mariana: oh! Is that why you are so rich? "The way to love anything is to realize that it might be lost."* --G.K. Chesterton

March Carnival: One spoon in the whole kitchen. We get up to cook breakfast for 80 people with one spoon and one working oven burner. We manage. Because this is Brazil. And somehow, the things that need to get done get

done. With just one spoon. I am getting the "camp-y" feeling. A soft heart that wants God like the first time I got excited about it and knew it was the only way for me. No, I hadn't tried other religions, but I knew it, like you know you love him, even though there are so many guys you have never met.

Motorcycles: I love the sound of wind brushing past my ears with no apologies. Flying through nature: the green that only tropics have, the blue that belongs to Brazil. The 4:30pm sun that doesn't burn, leaves a haze over the sugarcane fields. The stones make my teeth chatter, the view makes my heart hurt. "I'm the lucky one" I whisper to myself, and hope the feeling will never grow old. I look down at my foot with the black line of dirt where my sandal was, my nose burnt even with SPF 30, and I wish I could put it on paper--the way it really is—instead of random lines of words that I try to tie together into a sentence.

Kony rant: Anytime you give to something that you are not currently at (in location and in heart), you will be, for the most part, "blundering blindly forward." Giving to missions in general is a great step of faith--because no matter how many reports they give you--you still have to trust, and there is so much you don't know and don't understand. And yes, mistakes will happen even with the best intentions: think about trying to help your own family and how that gets tangled. But that doesn't mean you stop--which is the only other option given in these criticisms. Don't tell me what is wrong until you give me an option to make it right.

April problem: Once you know one child, and learn to love them, you begin to find them everywhere. The boy on the kombi, working a man's job. He should be in school. 12, 13 years old. He looks like one of mine. He could be one of mine. Is he one of mine? Why do I feel responsible? It is such a heavy thing to be responsible. Isn't it supposed to be fun? Oh it is, with Milena playing her fingers across my arm, wiggling every direction but up, asking me to hold her tighter.

*"The secret to Christianity is the life of Christ in you. Allowing his life to become your life. His revolution is not self-transformation, but his transformation of us, from the inside out, as we receive his life and allow him to live through us. Vine, branch. Anything else is madness. If you are not drawing your life from Jesus, it means you are trying to draw it from some other source. I'll guarantee you that it's not working. I have spent most of my adult years trying to find those keys that would enable people to become whole. The epiphany I have come to is this: Jesus had no intention of letting you become whole apart from his moment-to-moment presence and life within you."*—John Eldredge "Beautiful Outlaw"

Easter: painted rocks for eggs, celebrated Passover, learned how to have Sabbath and sacred: *"If one allows, Sacred will choreograph and lead a life into the arms of exquisite beauty, extraordinary joy, and blissful closeness with Jesus Christ. Sacred asks for our entire life. She asks us to trust that in God's perfect timing she will remove the sweet smelling product of her labors from out of the heavenly oven, hand us a fork, and say, "Enjoy!"* —Eric Ludy, "Meet Mr. Smith"

May: Can I look you in the face and say *"I need you to be a better person in this situation?"* I can hear all day that God has only the best for me, but when it comes down to it, I still don't feel like I can ask for it. Because asking is putting my desire out there, vulnerable. And when you ask, you give the other person the power to respond. To deny or ignore. To look at you and say your fear: *"No, you don't deserve that—you are not enough."* And I know what that looks like: it looks very lonely.

Six word memoirs: Jesus loves me: I love Jesus. Cut my hair: It grew back. Said goodbye to say hello again. Divided in half to become more.

Mother's day: *"Believing in the miracle of metamorphosis is the sum total of a mother's job. The theological term for that is faith. To have faith that the baby in arms will become the toddler toilet trained before 18, and that kid who can never find his shoes or matching socks or math homework will be able to find a girlfriend, job and Jesus. It's always the mothers, preachers and prophets who doggedly believed that leopards can lose spots and grace and angels can make pigs fly. Mothers were made to have faith. I don't want to imagine if you hadn't. Mothers give up much and never give up."* —Ann Voskamp

Dorothy Day: *"I wanted, though I did not know it then, a synthesis. I wanted life and I wanted the abundant life, I wanted it for others too. I did not want just the few, the missionary-minded people like the Salvation Army, to be kind to the poor, as the poor. I wanted everyone to be kind. I wanted every home to be open to the lame, the halt, and the blind."*

Airports: I have discovered another world between the worlds, and it is a cold place with gleaming floors and doors. Each door leads to a new place. Everything looks sanitized, even the people, staring up at informational screens with their mouths half-open.

June divides: Brazil, Indiana, rich, poor...irreconcilable circles moving in opposite directions. I pull together, bringing in all the disagreements and making them mine--making them me. I shouldn't expect this to be easy. It is good to be home.

July Supercamp: I like the word YES. It oozes positivity. But I often forget that for every YES it means a NO for so many other things. Someone said "*You can do anything you want to in life, but you can't do everything you want to do.*" You make choices and stick by them. Yes to Supercamp meant no to other things...like extra sleep. Like me time. It is a beautiful sacrifice, but it takes all of you.

August: I've learned enough to know I don't need answers, I just need peace. Funny girl, you are almost 30. But your soul will never believe that.

September: We walk down the road to Paulo's house. A trail of children follow, wherever I go there is a processional. With one kid on either side, and Flavio telling me we are late. I run into people everywhere. I've infiltrated this whole community, I realize. For better or worse—you are responsible for what you have tamed.

Joelson on marriage: "*Rachel, it is one thing to live life having your own goals and reaching them. But when you open your life to someone else, have a goal with them, and then manage to reach it and see how it affects not only you, but also them...well, that is joy exponential. And that is marriage.*"

Rice and Beans Experiment: One month of rice and beans (September 13-October 12, 2012). First week: Just rice and beans. Breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Like 1.4 billion people who live off of \$1.25 or less a day. Three weeks: Rice and beans as the staple, but can add other things. Like the 3.5 billion people who live off of \$2.50 or less a day.

*"See that I am God. See that I am in everything. See that I do everything. See that I have never stopped ordering my works, nor ever shall, eternally. See that I lead everything on to the conclusion I ordained for it before time began, by the same power, wisdom, and love with which I made it. How can anything be amiss?"*—God to Julian of Norwich

October: My difficulty with the rice and beans experiment is not the lack of variety, or even getting tired of it: what makes it hard is time and motivation. When I put limits on myself (only food with rice and beans), it is harder to put together a tasty meal. Can it be done? Yes. Will I do it? About 40% of the time. Time + Resources + Motivation + Creativity = Tasty Meal. How often do those four things line up for someone in poverty?

I danced with a girl wearing a torn, thrown-in-the-trash princess dress with a gaping hole in the side. But she was the princess and I sang and twirled her non-the-less. They giggled, because I sang all the Disney songs in English. But they knew the movies, so it didn't matter. I picked up a little girl to make sure she was out of the way of the passing car, and she winced. She lifted up her dirty shirt to show me a belly full of infected bug bites. Everywhere I touched her hurt.

Poverty does not look like rice and beans: it looks like rice and/or maize. Beans (the nutritious part of rice and beans) are too expensive for the world's poor.

*"In the past thirty years, extreme poverty has been cut in half. In 1981, 52% of the world's population lived in extreme poverty (defined by the U.N. as living on less than \$1.25 per day). But by 2006, that number was 26%."*

<http://www.live58.org/about/what-is-58>

*"Sometimes you have to watch someone love something before you can love it yourself. It is as if they are showing you the way."*—Blue Like Jazz (Movie) Perhaps...that is one of the most powerful things I can do in Brazil. Love these kids to show others how they are lovely.

Doing this experiment was just a little layer of experiencing and understanding poverty. It is easier not knowing. It is much easier to just go into a community, "put a Band-Aid" on it, and then go away with the afterglow of doing good, rather than actually be in relationship with them. Relationship changes everything. Everything that used to be black and white turns grey and things get a lot more confusing. It was never about rice and beans: it was about sacrifice, limitations, small frustrations, and the patience and creativity to overcome.

November: I have been in Brazil for four and a half years, beginning in 2004, but I am still only doing "Band-Aid" help in so many areas. It is hard to take the steps to invest your life. It is also hard to know what that looks like: there is no manual—it is simply living life with God.

I am a seller of dreams. Of ideas, of myself. Being a missionary—or in ministry—you are presenting yourself to people. Your sacred dreams of changing the world. And saying "*Please—please trust me—believe in me—and support me financially.*" The truth is, I've been working with children in poverty for 15 years and still don't understand it. As I sat and watched the kids at the dump, I asked myself: what they do when they poop. Leaves, I guess? Are there certain kinds of leaves to use? What about for babies? What do girls do when they are on their

period? Do they really never floss? And so on. I want more than just “Band-Aids.” I am learning. And it is an incredible responsibility to KNOW.

It takes extra grace to go back and forth between the world of HAVE and HAVE NOT. Staying at one or the other requires less of me. All the moving around just makes me feel like I am trying to please everyone and failing miserably.

I feel like I am losing grace and getting mad more easily at overly expensive cars, as I wait for the bus on the side of the road. Extremes are so blatant in Brazil. And to see them zooming by in what they don't need, purposefully not caring about those around them...I cannot excuse them. There is no excuse.

I feel the bitterness growing inside of me...cars too fancy for their own good. People too rich for their own good. The “*It's not fair*” echoes in my head. And I have a car; I have chosen this life. Imagine someone who didn't. Seeing the “Haves” all day. Pass by without even knowing. I think it is the not knowing that irritates the most. How can they continue to be so ignorant to the needs around them?

Where is grace? Where have I let it go? And this is being a responsible adult: having 50 things on your plate to do and learning to do every single one of them with grace.

Bottom line: the hard part about being poor is, everything takes extra grace. But the amazing thing about it is that the grace you need is always there—the exact amount you need. I guess that is what makes us all equal in all of the inequalities: the grace we need is always there.

Behind every locked door is some kind of broken trust, and every time I turn to lock it, I am reminded of that. And honestly, I'd rather lose another cell phone than have to remember that. Trust is such a beautiful thing. Why then, when you are stolen from, does it make trust look so naïve and stupid?

December: After living in community with the people I am serving, I realize I need to reevaluate my definition of success. In ten years, when I see these children, what do I want to see? That they know and love God. That they can read and write, and do basic math and are able to provide for their family. That they know how to be faithful and love as a spouse and a parent. I have to let the rest go.

In her book “One Thousand Gifts,” Ann Voskamp writes three things she is grateful for every day, discovered many things along the way, including two simple sentences that marked me profoundly: “*Thanksgiving creates abundance*” and “*Thanks is what builds trust.*” Could it be that the abundance the children I work with need—that I need—in all areas is found through thanksgiving? Through being and teaching gratitude? Thanking God for everything, even the pain, the lack, the ugly, is what builds trust. In all of my relationships, they can only be transformed to beauty through gratitude. And it starts with simple “Thank yous” in the little things you begin to see when you practice.

*“To love. To be loved. To never forget your own insignificance. To never get used to the unspeakable violence and the vulgar disparity of life around you. To seek joy in the saddest places. To pursue beauty to its lair. To never simplify what is complicated or complicate what is simple. To respect strength, never power. Above all, to watch. To try and understand. To never look away. And never, never, to forget.”* —Arundhati Roy

### 30 best poems

#### 1. First poem—1998

All alone  
On my own  
In a crowd of people

All pass by  
Don't see that I  
Am so depressed

No one cares  
No one shares  
In a crowd of people

I cry



Not knowing why  
No one has hurt me

But can't they see  
That I'm not me  
In a crowd of people?

Won't they stop  
Before I drop  
Listen and ask why

Why can't I  
Just explain the way  
I feel

It is stuck inside  
And like the tide  
Will it come out

Someday  
Someway  
In a crowd of people?

If I tried  
Could I be satisfied  
In a crowd of people?

God I know You're there  
Why can't I  
Remember?

I know You're near  
Ready to hear  
In a crowd of people

When I'm down  
I'll turn to you  
You're my crowd of people

2. Silence  
As I struggle to put  
Thoughts to words  
And words to paper

To explain how much  
I want to help  
How much I care

I see the problem  
I know the answer  
But I am scared and afraid  
Will you listen?



I stare out into space  
My own problems  
Rushing in my face  
Who am I  
To tell you anything?

Is it my place to say something  
Or keep silent  
Will you see the hypocrite in me  
And reject any truth I might have?

Lord, teach when to speak  
Teach me how to talk  
Let each word be formed by Your will  
Help me see  
When they are ready

Give me the strength to stand alone  
The grace to walk forward  
The mercy not to trip  
And the boldness to  
Hold my head up

### 3. Digging

Dig a little deeper  
For me  
I am lost and alone  
Keep searching for me

I am under the bush  
Pushed in the corner  
Kicked casually away  
By another

I tried yelling out  
Lost my voice  
Along with my hope

Here I stay  
Until found  
Dig a little deeper  
For me

Please do not give up  
I am right beyond  
Your reach  
Waiting for you

To dig a little deeper  
Take a bit more time  
Keep holding on  
I am coming



4. Beloved

Your wounds  
Are mine  
To earn  
Your stripes  
Are mine  
To gain

Your way  
Is mine  
To learn

Your words  
Mine to make  
Plain

Precious in  
Possession

I am Yours  
And You  
Are mine



5. Problems

I want to close my eyes  
And make all the problems go away  
I want to tell everyone  
That now is just not the time  
I am too full of issues to deal with more  
Wait in line  
And take a number

They are hurting  
Smiling while draining  
Laughing while dying  
I have my own problems  
And feel bad to notice them  
With so much more around

6. Agitator

Music calls out  
Feelings I cannot  
Express  
Stirs them  
Agitates them  
And then leaves me  
In silence  
To deal with them  
Alone

7. Motorcycles

Riding a moto  
Vibrating



Across the cobblestones  
Windy black night  
Punctured  
With white stars

Holding a shoulder  
Warm  
With security  
Dangling a foot  
Loose  
With abandon

Slowing for lombadas  
Sporadically  
Placed  
Watching him pass  
Contemplating  
Mysteries

Racing to a place  
Filled  
With belonging

8. 2<sup>nd</sup> place

The rain darkening my shirt  
The soft petals drifting down  
I am silent  
But grass is moving around  
The people passing  
Do not see me  
Please press against me  
To see if I am real

They don't even know  
That I have no place to go  
I am lost  
With fear hiding in  
My placid face

They don't even know  
That I have no place to go  
Home is far  
And rest is lying  
Farther still

9. Daily  
When I say  
"I love you"  
It means that is  
Never going to change

I am never giving up  
I will never leave



I will never replace you

When I say  
"You are enough"  
It means I accept you  
As you are  
That you please me and  
Thrill my heart  
Even with seeing all  
Your faults

I will cheer  
Every victory you have  
But they will not earn  
My love  
You already have it

When I say  
"You are beautiful"  
It means there is  
Something I see when I look at you  
That delights me in a way  
No one else can

I don't want to look away  
I don't compare you to anyone else  
I don't want you to  
Change a thing

When I say  
"I forgive you"  
It means I've taken the pain  
You caused  
And paid the price  
Of your choices

You are free  
With the power to forgive  
Yourself and others  
I won't use your past against you  
To shame you into doing right

When I say  
"I am proud of you"  
It means I boast about you  
To others  
Because you make me smile

I know you are going  
To do something amazing  
Each day you open  
Your eyes



When I say  
"I believe in you"  
It means that even if  
It looks like you've fallen and  
Won't get up  
I look at you and see  
A miracle of what will be  
I connect my name with yours  
And you represent me to others

When I say  
"I have a plan for you"  
It means I not only took time  
To know you  
Completely  
But I found the thing that will  
Complete you  
More than any other  
And planned it for you

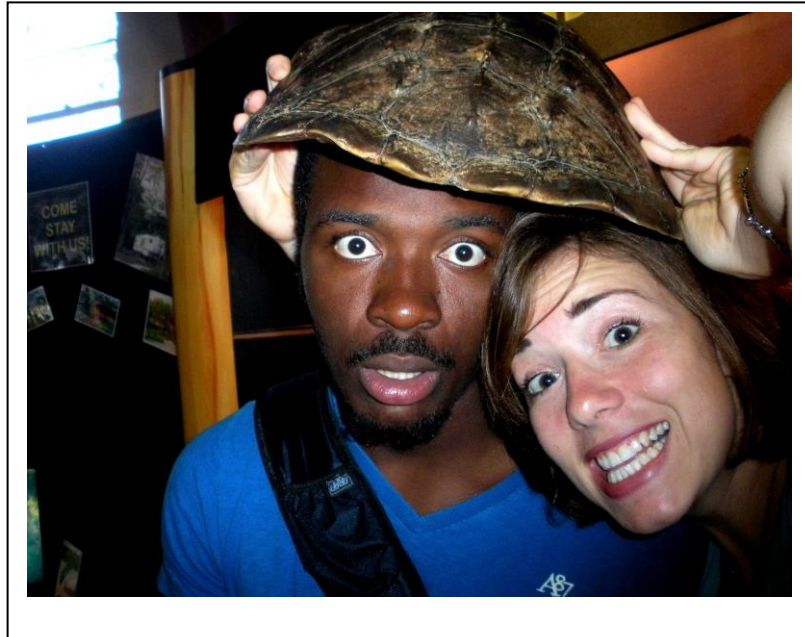
I tell you these words  
Because I mean them

10. Control  
I like things open  
Where I can feel it  
As I live it

I like pickup trucks  
Being one with the journey  
Brick roads  
Feeling every break and beginning  
Oceans  
Uncontrollable  
Dirt  
Where it is undiluted yet  
Windows  
Letting in sunlight and rain

I don't like  
Air conditioning  
Caged in and everyone else locked out  
Umbrellas  
Trying to hide from what comes down  
Headphones  
Ending conversations before they start  
Cell phones  
Interrupting  
As civilization congratulates itself  
On forgetting how to enjoy  
What cannot be controlled

11. Stranded



The warm shallow water  
Where we sit and stare  
At the bits of sand  
That used to be proud rocks  
And say the things  
Buried in the corners of our hearts  
Finding the shells  
Half hidden and caught  
In the brilliance of the sun  
Holding our missing selves  
In our fingers loosely

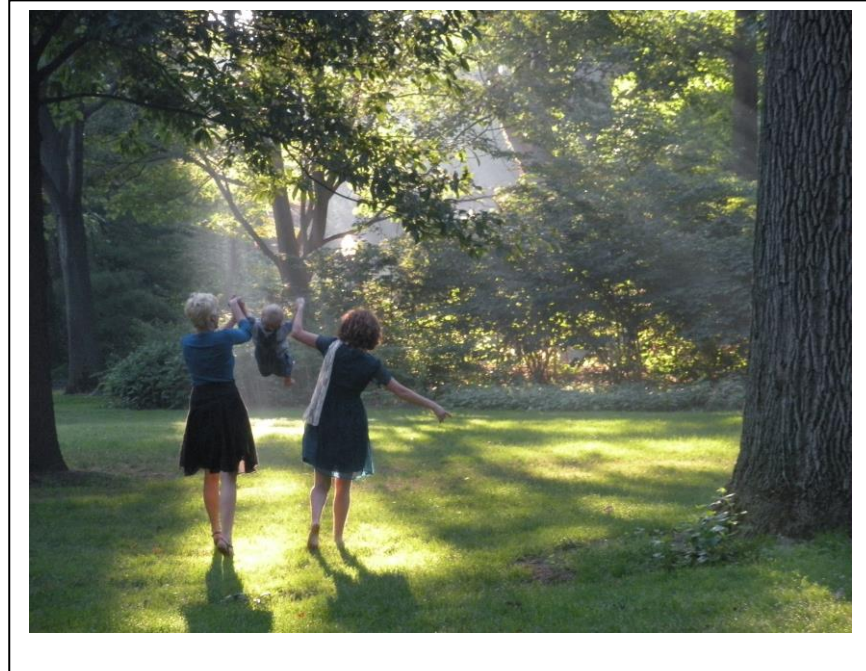
12. A Slice of Space  
To wedge my frame in  
Leaving a wake  
On the dusty road  
Stepping over shoes that  
Pinch their toes  
Knees knocking  
A friendly excuse  
Butt cheeks balanced  
By the bodies of others  
Lurching Kombi  
Turns my stomach  
Learning forward  
I rest my elbows  
Wind from cracked window  
Blows through the hair  
Of the wrinkled lady  
And the wicked grin  
Of the boy next to me  
My nose stings  
From the dark perspiration  
On dingy clothes

Sometimes it is good to know  
You are human  
Surrounded by living beings  
Butt cheeks balanced  
By the bodies of others

13. Details  
Where have you been?  
Open your eyes  
The sun is going down  
And you never saw it rise

Open to the pain  
Let it cut you deep  
Knowing what you missed  
While you were asleep

I need you now



I needed you then  
Rise to the challenge  
Let the day begin

Step into the role  
Empty until you arrive  
The world awaits  
The glory of man alive

#### 14. Box

Bombarded by brilliance  
Take it in slowly  
Dazed and daunted  
No longer thinking  
I have anything worthwhile  
To offer

Wish wish wish  
For one little spot  
A corner of creativity  
But I can't invent the wheel

Where is the box?  
I want to smash it  
But I can't find it  
I hid it in my subconscious  
The day I was scared

#### 15. Balloon

You say  
So many pretty things  
But I  
Have forgotten how to believe them

Imagining  
You coming after me  
Shaking me  
Telling me  
It was only me  
But you never show

No one gets what we were  
Or are  
And now  
I have forgotten as well

I don't know how  
To believe you anymore  
I used to be so secure  
In your love

Now I fill a balloon  
With your name on it



And really  
Let  
Go

16. Open

The doorway opens again  
The writing on my hand is faded  
The wind blows only in rotation

The melody pushes me farther  
But the voices inhibit  
I return to solid ground  
Damn

I will not wait for permission  
I force my foot in the door  
I will not be her anymore

No looking back, pillar of salt  
If I shut the door quietly  
Can we pretend to begin again?



Don't trust me, I have yet to trust myself  
Both of us are too heavy to carry  
I cannot win walking backward

But look into my eyes tonight  
For the door is open and I want to go  
Just one more straw to tip

17. No Helmet

He always makes me wear one. It boxes my head in  
Separated from the beauty and life around me  
My head bobbles  
The strap cuts my chin  
Knocking against the corners of my head  
That do not fit the contours

Open the flap, let in some breeze  
The sweat has gathered  
Snap it shut again  
When the dust is stirred  
On the highway  
It gives the illusion of protection  
Even though I know one slip from the driver and I am dead  
I imagine my leg in a tree  
Like he said he saw after an accident

But on the back roads  
When there is no helmet to be had  
Freedom  
I play the cowgirl as I swing my leg over the seat  
The engine roars before I have a firm grasp on his shoulder

I love the sound of wind  
Brushing past my ears  
Flying through nature  
The green that only tropics have  
The blue that belongs to Brazil  
The 4:30pm sun that doesn't burn  
Leaves a haze over the sugarcane fields

The stones make my teeth chatter  
The view makes my heart hurt  
"I'm the lucky one"  
I whisper to myself  
And hope the feeling will never grow old  
I turn my head and squeeze my eyes  
To hide from the dust blowing  
The red dirt paints my skin  
My foot black dirt where my sandal was  
My nose burnt with SPF 30

I wish I could put it on paper  
The way it really is  
Instead of random lines of words  
That I tie together into a sentence

#### 18. Harder

Why do I feel  
Like something beautiful  
In my life died

Why does it make  
Getting up in the morning  
Harder

Can continuing to love  
Be as beautiful as  
The love itself?

Is it an opportunity  
To dance in the moonlight  
Is it a beautiful thing  
To live life with You

When did I stop  
Looking at the stars  
When did the beauty  
Make my face turn away

When did the rain  
Feel like balm to my soul  
Expressing emotions  
That I refuse to let loose

Continuing to love



Is as beautiful as  
The love itself

It is an opportunity  
To dance in the moonlight  
It is a beautiful thing  
To live life with You

19. Lost Notebook

A blank page  
Like a starless sky  
Waiting for light  
To streak across it

A full heart  
Like a river  
Rising with  
The spring rain

A quiet moment  
Like the sunrise  
After the thunderstorm  
Late in the night

A question  
Like a single note  
That crescendos  
Until it occupies  
all my senses

20. Haiku

Surprisingly clear  
past love, doubt, hate, fear and lies  
I know I am right

21. Doors

As I watch  
My image  
Crumble before  
My eyes

Sometimes bit by bit  
Sometimes wall by wall  
They fall

The restlessness  
Inside me grows  
To build a new place  
To build a new me

Faced with a challenge  
I cannot ignore  
Looking down both paths





And wondering which door

Break me again  
I've forgotten already  
Now that I know  
What I am in for

You have taken  
Away the darkness  
And now it's deathly bright  
No place to get away

Waiting to grasp one thread  
When it breaks  
I'll go  
Tomorrow  
Is not good enough

Faced with a challenge  
I cannot ignore  
Looking down both paths  
And wondering which door

22. Not Good Enough  
A house without windows  
A hope without love  
A girl without a mother  
Forgotten

How can it be  
In our world of pretty lights  
That one should be missing  
And no one notice

I can't take it  
I don't want to handle it  
I will scream if one more person  
Tries to hide it under a rug

Cry  
Drop tears  
Let your nose run  
But do not ignore it

Life is hard  
Life is unfair  
Some things will never  
Be able to reconcile

Do not let this be  
The only heaven  
You will have



Because for some  
This is the best  
It is going to get

It is not good enough  
For me

23. Maybe  
Maybe it is not  
Where I get  
But how I get there

Maybe it is not  
The point I have  
But how I say it

Maybe It is not  
What happens to me  
But what I do about it

Maybe I make choices  
Not on how it affects me  
But how it affects others

Maybe I resist temptation  
Not for my success  
But to make a path for those following

Maybe I push a little harder  
Not to win  
But to lead

Maybe I keep my mouth closed  
Not to abstain  
But to preserve

Maybe I laugh louder and cry harder  
Not to get it out  
But to keep it going

Maybe I live  
Not just because I have the chance  
But to give a chance to others

Maybe the choice  
Is no longer mine

24. Advice  
Love me first  
Love me consistently  
Come into my life  
Slowly



Don't try to rush me  
I am not listening  
Even if it is the right thing  
To say

Don't stop  
Just slow down  
I am sorry  
I am giving you a hard time

There is much  
That was lost

Inside I am  
Rooting for you  
Hoping you'll keep going  
Wishing it will never end

But outside  
I cannot voice it  
Because I have been  
Too hurt by the past

I don't want it  
To be easy for you  
I am not ready  
To give you free reign

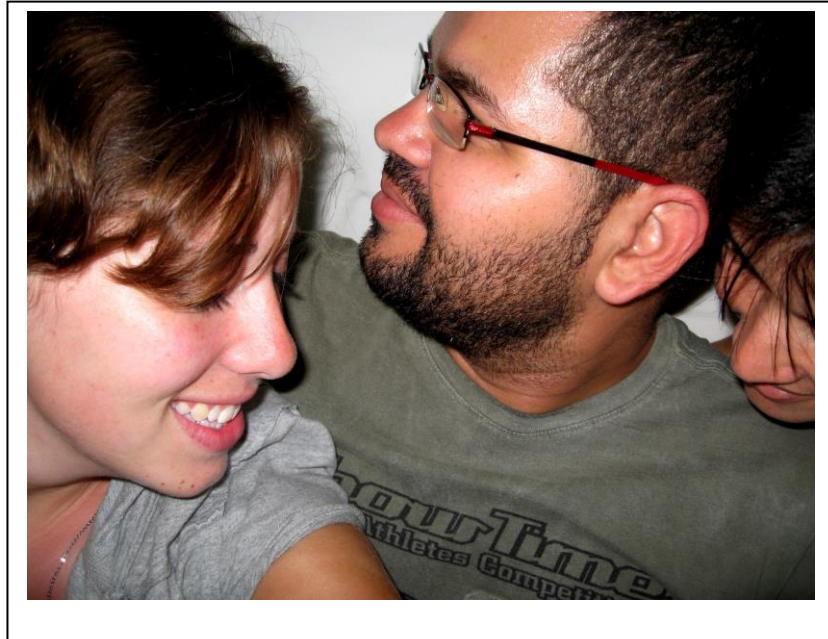
I want you to understand  
The value of what you threw away  
But don't let that discourage you  
Please keep going

25. Remember  
Draw me in from the rain  
I am shaking with fear  
Pull me close to your heart  
Let me feel the beat

Wrap me in warm clothes  
As your fingers trace my tears  
I want to remember you  
I want to remember truth

You are God  
You are good  
And when things change  
You never do

You are love  
You are pure  
You have never left  
You never will



Pain loosens my memory  
Struggles turn my thoughts  
To me

So in Your mercy  
Come once more  
In Your grace  
Call to me

Woo me after I've turned  
To other lovers  
Don't scold me for  
My glaring inadequacy

Only love me  
Because  
You can do no less

Only love me  
Because  
It is who You are  
And I remember You

26. Listen  
Speak less harshly  
You have so much more to learn  
Be quicker to listen  
There is so much more to hear  
Your world is so small  
And what you understand  
Is even smaller

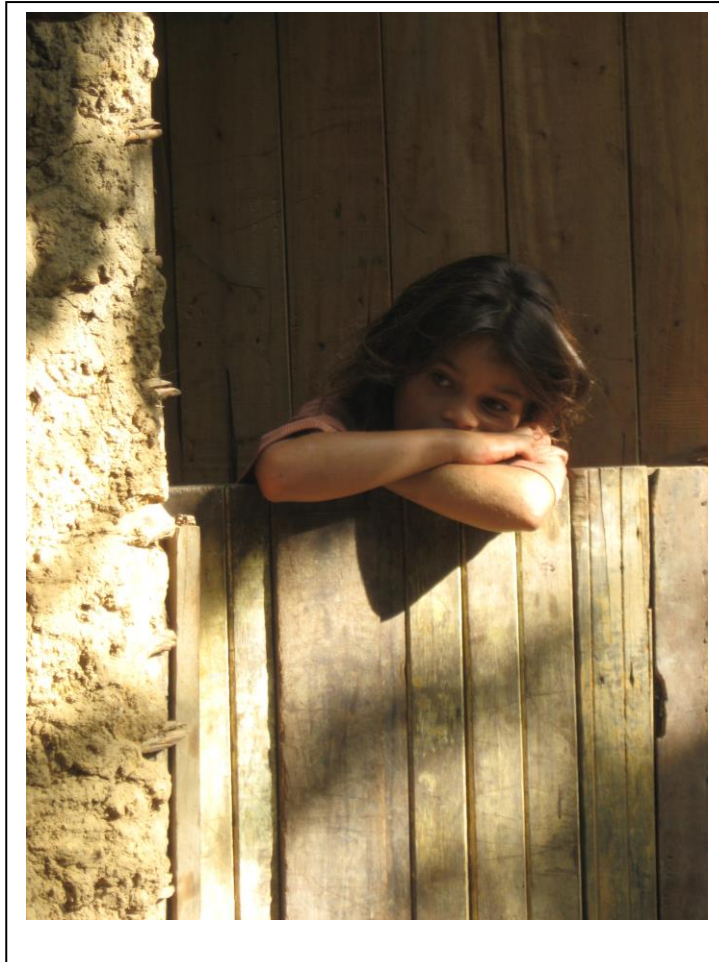
Give the benefit of the doubt  
And maybe  
There is more to the story  
There is someone hurting  
There is a need  
That only you can meet

And only if you  
Shut up and listen

#### 27. Tinkerbelle

The little girl that dances in the breeze  
The little girl that wants to climb in trees  
Little one that looks around with delight  
Little one you must protect from her fright

She is so small  
But she knows so much  
Sitting there waiting



For one magic touch  
To open the doors  
And let her in  
To where her life  
Will magically begin

28. Fear

I know my greatest fear  
For it eats me alive  
It is the fear  
Of hurting those I love

I know my second greatest fear  
For it strikes when I cannot prepare  
It is the fear  
Of watching those I love get hurt  
And not being able to help

It is a fearful thing to love

29. Better

You are out there  
In the darkness  
Where I want to be alone  
Together

I feel you there  
In front of my fingers  
The you I want  
In stillness  
In silence

The you I know I  
Can't have  
The beautiful longing  
It creates

It hangs in brilliance  
By a thread of hope  
That refuses to die

Telling me that dreams  
Are better than  
Half-lived realities

30. True Love

I found myself  
Yelling at you  
Burning inside  
Because I am tied  
And helpless to do  
Anything about it



I guess that is what  
True love is

Looking at the real you  
Full in the face  
Without hiding anything  
Without anything beautiful

And finding that  
I love you even more

Overwhelmed at the complexity  
Of life  
And knowing the road is full  
Of pain  
Of being hurt and hurting back  
You step back and wonder  
If it is all even worth it

I guess that is what  
True love is

All illusions gone  
And being flooded with  
The knowledge that  
No matter what the cost  
No matter what the pain  
There is nothing else I want

And finding that  
I love you even more



### 30 Best Papers

#### 1. Conversation

The content of the conversation is not of consequence--they were words I loved, I believed. I spoke of how the world should be, how life should work, and how I was determined to live.

Releasing slowly, I had power. My soul was alive, my eyes sparkled, my face glowed. I was pink. I had something beautiful and it made me beautiful. He looked at me with eyes of wonder.

He wanted those words. He wanted to leave the world that was and join the world that could be. If I looked deep enough: he wanted me. My bright eyes and golden plethoras. But the moment was lost in distraction. When his eyes returned to mine it was gone. And we both knew it. My words could not survive the trip into reality.

I wanted to take him with me, traveling down these words and ideals. I wanted someone else to see them and validate their existence. Someone who believed in them, even more than in me. "You are not enough," lay unspoken between us. "Live long enough, and you will see your ideals for the fairytales they are."

I cried, right there in front of him. Embarrassed, he didn't know what to do. He was stirred, but said nothing. I couldn't see him anymore. I saw a road and I was standing on it. The path was made up of all the words I had tried to speak. They were alive, they were real, and I wanted nothing less. So firm, so sure, so true. It was the way of truth. But I was alone.

## 2. Run Away

I ran away. It does me good every once in a while. I fear one day, I won't be able to run anymore and that day, I will die. Most days I don't have to run away, I just have to *think* that I can. Having the idea is enough because I like my life. I have a good life. I have never been able to explain or understand why I should have it so good.

But I ran away today. Today is Monday, but I didn't want to do all that is "Monday." I ran away because I need to ask the question "*Why*." Why is "Monday" the way Monday is? Are there better ways of doing what I am doing? I ran away because if I don't, I will forget how. How to use my brain, to enjoy the part of me that nags and says, "*Why are you doing this?*" To awaken something inside me that says I am special, unique, and have something to offer those around me—something that isn't already there.

I didn't run away from responsibility, I ran to it. To the responsibility of knowing myself. Being responsible for my actions, and the one life I have to live. To back away from the clutter of the familiar, and seek the face of Jesus and ask Him if He likes how things are. To turn around the situations in my life and look at them from different perspectives. And tomorrow will be "Tuesday."

*"You must stay inside the gates."*

*"Why?"*

*"Inside the gates you are safe."*

*"Safe but not alive."*

*"Why can't you have your runs for freedom during respectable hours?"*

*"That would ruin the whole idea."*

*"What is the whole idea anyway?"*

*"Something I can only find outside the gates."*

## 3. Saudades

Learning another language opens doors. One of which is my fascination with words that I didn't grow up with. Being bi-lingual, sometimes when talking in one language, to complete my thought—exactly how I thought it—is impossible without switching into another language.

Every language has a personality; like people. Language is fluid, being changed and molded by the culture around it: it is not stagnant. You can put the words in a book and call it a dictionary, but you will constantly be writing new editions, and they won't keep up with the word on the street.

In Portuguese, the main word that continually comes up in my vocabulary that doesn't work in English is Saudades. I normally go into a paragraph-long rant about a "*desire, longing, missing, yearning feeling*" and by that time, whoever I was talking to is confused enough to miss the point. The point was I was feeling Saudades.

An official definition of Saudades is "*A Portuguese word that describes a deep emotional state of nostalgic longing for an absent something or someone that one loves. It often carries a repressed knowledge that the object of longing might never return. It's related to the feelings of longing, yearning...The love that remains after someone is gone, the recollection of feelings, experiences, places or events that once brought excitement, pleasure, well-being, which now triggers the senses and makes one live again. An emptiness, like someone or something should be there in a particular moment is missing. a bittersweet, existential yearning and hopefulness towards something over which one has no control.*" (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saudade>)

*"Some specialists say the word may have originated during the Great Portuguese Discoveries, giving meaning to the sadness felt about those who departed on journeys to unknown seas and disappeared in shipwrecks, died in battle, or simply never returned. Those who stayed behind—mostly women and children—suffered deeply in their absence...The state of mind has subsequently become a "Portuguese way of life": a constant feeling of absence, the sadness of something that's missing, wishful longing for completeness or wholeness and the yearning for the return of that now gone."*

My fascination with Saudades grew after I read an article about 20 untranslatable words (<http://matadornetwork.com/abroad/20-awesomely-untranslatable-words-from-around-the-world/>) and four of them (one listed in the comments)—five if you include Saudades (which made the list) are basically about the same thing, but in different languages:

- Hiraeth. A Welsh word that *“Attempts to translate it is homesickness tinged with grief or sadness over the lost or departed. It is a mix of longing, yearning, nostalgia, wistfulness, and the earnest desire for the Wales of the past.”*
- Toska. A Russian word that *“No single word in English renders all the shades of toska. At its deepest and most painful, it is a sensation of great spiritual anguish, often without any specific cause. At less morbid levels it is a dull ache of the soul, a longing with nothing to long for, a sick pining, a vague restlessness, mental throes, yearning. In particular cases it may be the desire for somebody of something specific, nostalgia, love-sickness. At the lowest level it grades into ennui, boredom.”*
- Litost. A Czech word that *“As for the meaning of this word, I have looked in vain in other languages for an equivalent, though I find it difficult to imagine how anyone can understand the human soul without it.” The closest definition is a state of agony and torment created by the sudden sight of one’s own misery.”*
- Depaysement. A French word of *“that feeling that comes from not being in one’s home country.”* Wikipedia added many more words that relate to Saudades in other languages: (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saudade> )
- Sevda. A Turkish word that is also translated "black bile." *“In Bosnian language, the term sevdah represents pain and longing for a loved one. Sevdah is also a genre of traditional music originating from Bosnia and Herzegovina. Sevdah songs are very elaborate, emotionally charged and are traditionally sung with passion and fervor.”*
- Extranar. A Spanish word that *“one feels a missing part of oneself, which can never be completely filled by the thing you cannot have or get back.”*
- Mall. An Albanian word that *“encompasses feelings of passionate longing, sadness, and at the same time an undefined laughter from the same source.”*
- Wehmut. A German word that is *“a fuzzy form of nostalgia. Or Weltschmerz, which is the general pain caused by an imperfect state of being or state of the world.”* (Another place I read about “Sehnsucht” which is a *“quasi mystical word that melds ardent inner longing/yearning with obsession/addition and deep, driven, inconsolable longing for something of monumental importance.”* –Mary A. Kassian)
- Dor. A Romanian word *“for love or “desire” having a derivation in the noun dorință and the verb dori, both of them being translated usually by wish and to wish. However, although the word dor has a complex meaning, it still does not encompass the full meaning of saudade. Dor is derived from the Latin dolus (“pain”), the same root as the Portuguese word dor, also meaning pain.”*
- Koprnenje. A Slovenian word that *“embraces the fatalistic undertones of saudade.”*
- Kaiho. A Finnish word that *“means a state of involuntary solitude in which the subject feels incompleteness and yearns for something unattainable or extremely difficult and tedious to attain.”*
- Keurium. A Korean word (그리움), that *“reflects a yearning for anything that has left a deep impression in the heart—a memory, a place, a person, etc.”*
- Natsukashii. A Japanese word that *“is used to express a longing for the past. It connotes both happiness for the fondness of that memory and goodness of that time, as well as sadness that it is no longer. It can also mean “sentimental,” and is a wistful emotion. The character used to write natsukashii can also be read as futokoro 懐 [ふとこゝろ] and means “bosom,” referring to the depth and intensity of this emotion that can even be experienced as a physical feeling or pang in one’s chest—a broken heart, or a heart feeling moved.”*
- Wajd. An Arabic word (وجد) that *“means a state of transparent sadness caused by the memory of a loved one who is not near, it’s widely used in ancient Arabic poetry to describe the state of the lover’s heart as he or she remembers the long gone love. It’s a mixed emotion of sadness for the loss, and happiness for having loved that person.”*
- Ergah. A Hebrew word (ערגה) that *“means yearning/longing/desire coupled with deep sadness.”*
- Epipotheó. A Greek word meaning *“to yearn affectionately, to long for, strain after, desire greatly. To intensely crave possession (lawfully or wrongfully), and (earnestly) desire (greatly), (greatly) long (after), lust.”* (<http://concordances.org/greek/1971.htm>) | 2 Corinthians 5:2, 9:14 *“For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven.”* *“...(We) long for you because of the exceeding grace of God in you.”*



It is nice to know I am not alone in this feeling. My life is in two pieces, where I will always have Saudades for one (Brazil and everyone there, or the USA and everyone there) while I am in the other. It is a wonderful life, with two families, two communities, two sets of problems, two sets of joys and successes. Then there is the place where I am alone in the middle, trying to connect myself or the two or simply the irreconcilable things of this world.

Those times I can't feel anything. It is all gone. I know what is right, and I know every old decision like the back of my hand. I live off of them until I find myself again. I alternate between thoughts of how can I return and how could I have left. Neither one sticks. They flake off and float down on the floor.

People ask how I fit. Transition. Acclimate. It is easy: one foot and then the other, a plane, a train, and there you are. You arrive, keep your eyes open, give lots of hugs, and listen to stories. You wait for them to ask the questions, and then you answer. Your body does everything automatically. You fall into habit. Into social order. Into the path of least resistance. And it is good. But every once in a while I peek out of somewhere and wonder where I am, how I got here, and what happens next.

Most of this probably doesn't even have to do with Brazil/USA/Rachel drama. It is a holy longing. There is a buried me that hasn't adjusted and probably never will. I was made for heaven, and part of me somewhere still remembers that. But most of the time it stays buried. I have learned to hide it.

#### 4. Hair

My mother's hair shined in long, deep brown waves. It stuck to her forehead in thick chunks when she spent 30 hours delivering me. When I was little, I wrapped it around my finger, stroking it like a teddy bear, and claimed it as my security blanket. She cut her hair when I learned to walk, after I grew accustomed to latching onto her hair, pulling myself up like the prince trying to reach Rapunzel.

As I grew, so did my mother's muscle problems. Her hair was one part of her I could touch without causing her pain. I added barrettes, covering her with multicolored plastic animals facing every direction. I saw her curly hair surrounding her like thick thunderclouds, as she lay in bed, too sick to finish our home schooling classes. I closed the door, took my books to the next room, and watched my own straight hair fall forward as I leaned over to finish my lesson as she slept.

I peeking over the crib, my short six-year old legs on tiptoe could just see her. My little sister was an angel, with golden ringlets framing her chubby face. I gave her a lollypop while she sat on my mother's lap, to make her stop crying. It was always a fight to get a comb through her hair. I held her hand tight, as strangers in the supermarket stopped to tell me how cute she was. I know it, I said as I thrust out my chin.

At 11, I was still short enough to have to stand on my tiptoes to see into the mirror at my grandparent's butterfly brown bathroom. With one long, cold snip, the hairs slipped to the carpeted floor and I stooped to pick them up before anyone saw them. But they noticed well enough when I rolled back the door—my bangs were only a half inch long. It would grow back, along with the tingling hope that one time I would cut it and my reflection would look just like one of those girls in the magazine.

I tentatively reached out to touch one perfect white curl, but couldn't do it. I returned to my seat next to the rest of my grieving family as they closed the casket. I would never again see my laughing grandmother's eyes, or feel her soft hair as she leaned in to give me a hug. Hair grows even after you're dead, or at least it looks like it does. He sat on the couch with scissors next to him. His lower lip protruding in defiance and his face hard. "*I want my hair this way.*" He said, as I stared at him and the random patches of hair were missing. At six, he knew what he wanted. I wish I did. When my brother was asked what he wanted to be when he grew up, he said a daddy, because they take care of things. I told him that was a very admirable goal, and then I buzzed the rest of his hair off.

It didn't help that I was pasty white, with skin that rejected melanin. That I liked boy's flip-flops instead of high heels, and my basketball shorts and t-shirts yelled "*I am American.*" Short hair seemed sensible for a summer in the tropics. I woke up drowsy from layovers to find many eyes staring at me in a new country. Eyes that belonged to girls with bronze skin, revealing tank tops, and stunning shoes. Girls that tossed their long hair and walked away before I could see their condemnation. My hair was not long enough to hide behind.

I heard him before I saw him. All grown up, I hadn't been home in months, but my father's voice still made me laugh and come running. Stopping in mid-step, I controlled my expression, asking, "*What happened to your face?*" Months of scraggly whiskers moved to reply, "I was waiting for you to come home and trim my beard." I had become the family hair-cutter, after a weekend of training years ago. I quickly stepped back into my responsibilities.

## 5. Basketball

I lost 7 teeth due to playing ball. The first one was actually a kickball—we were playing pass at church and the ball missed my hands and landed on my face. I didn't realize the tooth fell out until the blood was everywhere. It took a while to find the tooth, but I had to figure out the whole tooth fairy thing, so it was important.

The other 6 teeth were due to basketball. I was my father's first son. From our kitchen window, you can see two houses over to where the Jones' basketball court is. If you look hard enough, you can see when someone is playing ball. As soon as I saw signs of activity, I would run down the alley to their house. The Jones' had five children: heaven when you are an only child (which I was until I was six years old, and even then she was just a baby, so didn't count).

There was always someone to play with: Cathy, the oldest—just enough older than me to be VERY cool, Josh and David, like older brothers to me, except for the phase where David would chase me around the swing set, threatening to kiss me (he never caught me. I was fast), Becky, who was (and still is) one of my bestest friends, and Rachel, who we called "Little Rachel" to differentiate from me (who was "Big Rachel," even though I was small for my age).

Josh and David were typical Hoosier boys, who grow up playing basketball. I joined them. Sometimes I could convince Cathy or Becky to join me, but most often I was on my own, hence the 6 teeth I lost. I still remember finally being big enough to shoot correctly, instead of doing the "granny shot" (heaving the ball up underhand and hoping it would get somewhere near the hoop).

When we were lucky, Mr. Jones and my dad would come and join us, and we'd get a real game going. I still remember the resentment growing in me during the games they wanted to get "serious" and play two on two (with Josh and David). I would sit on the sidelines, grumpily thinking it wasn't fair to be a girl, and a miniature one at that.

During the long summer days, we would walk to the park—a big group of us, making our way down the alley and through the little trail that led to the "Red Barn" park (the red barn was torn down years ago, but name stuck for a long time). There, most of the time only the boys got to play and the girls were told to go swing on the swings. But every once in a while they would be one short—and I would gladly jump in.

After a couple of "fun" games, the younger boys would get kicked out, and we would all sit on the ground, watching the big boys play. I watched my father dislocate every one of his fingers over the summers we spent at the park. He would come home and my mom would breathe in sharply and say, "*Again??*"

When I was 12, I decided that enough was enough, and rounded up all the girls in the neighborhood. We created a girl's basketball team called the "Pacer-ettes." It didn't last too long, and mostly just consisted of making matching shirts and hair ribbons. After that, the other's lost interest, and we didn't have anyone to play against anyways. The boys just laughed at the hair ribbons.

At 14, all the playing with boys paid off, and I practiced with a school team where Mr. Jones was coaching. My daily outfit was a tee-shirt, basketball shorts, white socks up to my knees, and slide sandals. I was never far from my backpack with my Nike's. While I never got to play in an official game because I was homeschooled, I practiced every day, and did stats for all of the team's games.

After that life happened, and basketball moved to a back burner. Dad and I would go out and "shoot some hoops," but it became less and less frequent. My skills were put to good use at the youth center, where I could do a nice lay-up in a skirt, but I was mostly needed off court. Somewhere in my 20s I realized that it wasn't basketball that I liked as much as the memories and the time I had with my father. Basketball was a bond between us. It was summer memories of simple times where I lost another tooth and held it up proudly. It was walking home, hand in hand, from the park with my dad.

In Brazil, futebol (soccer) reigns in the place of basketball. Not many hoops are available, and girls do not wear basketball shorts. Ever. But every once in a while...I still get a chance. Every once in a while when I am back in Indiana, I get a game going with some of the kids from the youth center. And they laugh that a white girl can jump.

## 6. Youth Center

Does Christianity work in the ghetto? God works in the ghetto, that is all. Give all you want, they say they deserve it. Teach all you want, they say you are crazy. The only thing that that works is God in their heart. Seeing God through you. Seeing Christianity alive. Go ask if turning the other cheek works: get smacked in both of yours, and

they will respond according to the answer you give them. They want Christianity to work, begging without words for you to show them that there is hope in all this talk. They know talk is just a cover up, and that is all they think Christianity is until they see God.

A bus picked up 75 kids from the streets of Indianapolis and took them to a two week camp. No one had a clue what we were in for. I remember bed wetting, airing out sleeping bags, death threats, cold pool water with weaves floating in it, and duckweed. That was how it began for me in 2002 at Good News Ministries Youth Center.

After camp, Carrie, the female staff, pulled me aside and said, *"If you are just looking for a short term job, then this isn't for you. These kids are used to everyone coming and going in their lives, and if you are just going to be one more, then don't even try."*

It took a year before I finally formed a friendship—a relationship that would last. A year is a long time of investing before you see any results. Especially with the older girls. Younger kids will sell you their soul for a game of tag, and guys will joke around in a game of basketball, but those girls? They scared the heck out of me.

I broke up my first fight. I got hit in the jaw for it. Time passed quickly as the "Girls director," and I was happy to roll around the hood in my station wagon, affectionately known as the "pimp-mobile." I had to earn the right to hear their stories, to ask *"So how are you and God?"*

The friendships grew, but I watched some of my closest girls walk away: choosing drugs or bad relationships over the center—over me. My first experiences counseling pregnant girls and boys who would be daddies. The first time I received a death threat—and many apologies afterwards. Visiting my boys in boy's school. Going to family funerals.

Something changed in 2005. I call it the three year mark. After three years, something was different. Not that I was "one of the gang," but...I was welcome. When I dropped kids off, they said, *"Lock the doors, be safe Mz. Rachel!"* They asked if I wanted to come in. Their parents knew me, and called me Mz. Rachel as well, to my surprise. They came to me with problems, instead of me prying it out of them. They even replied back with, *"Well, how are you and God doing?"* I put in the time, and was reaping the rewards.

Brazil happened. The kids and I got used to Brazil being a part of my life, asking, *"How long this time?"* each time I came or went. I kept coming and going. I'd visit the center a couple days after I got into the country, volunteering when I could. In 2009, it was a huge blow on everyone when Daniel, 15, was shot and killed. I watched the faces of my kids as they walked past his casket and realized it had happened—they were not kids anymore.

Last year gave me a new chance with new kids, but I always held on to my original kids—and their kids. I held babies and went to baby showers. I found out some of our 12-year-old kids were drug runners. I busted my knee trying to break up five guys as they jumped a kid—inside the youth center. I filed a police report for a black eye and strangulation. Complete with pictures.

I earned the title "Educational director," running the tutorial program. I was called a thug and a beast. I was told I must be mixed, because I talk too black to be white. I was loved and hated, by the same kids, on the same days. While Brazil has officially taken over my focus, the youth center and the friendships I have made will last forever. For nine years I have seen kids come, get saved, really try, laugh and play hard turn into girls who get knocked up, boys who get drugged up, and many who fall out of the dreams/goals that they had for themselves. I have watched most of them become their parents.

Did the youth center make a difference? Was it worth the hours, days, years I invested? Yes. Even if the only result I see is me. I am a better person for my time at the center. They taught me tough love. How to say something and stand on it, though hell tries to blow me over. I have learned that there is always more to the story than I know, and that love wins more than rules. I have some of the best memories and friends to take with me through the rest of my life because of it.

The point was that we were there. Those kids, and those who are now adults, know we are there, and that we care. Sometimes I still get a phone call. Or someone walking through those purple doors. They know what the center represents. And when they walk through those doors, it means they are open and looking: even if they are not aware of it themselves. It is a picture of something bigger. Of Christ's pierced hands always open, always reaching, always there. No matter what.

No, I haven't seen all the successful lives and changes that I would have liked to have seen. There are some bright stars that inspire me over and over again, but I have seen so many fall and fall again. I have seen things so ugly that I wanted to heave. I have heard words so hateful that I have crawled inside myself and not come out for a long time. Statistics are bleak.

I asked my friend how he was going to change the world for Christ. He said he wasn't. He was going to live life with God in his own little world—the one God had placed him in with people, places, situations—and when the time was right, when something happened and someone found that how they were doing things didn't work, he would step inside that small doorway of opportunity and share the answer he had found: God. That is what it is to work at the youth center.

## 7. Food

I don't like chocolate. To the women in my family, this is cause to question my being switched at birth. I blame my father. As the story goes, mom was off shopping, and when she got home, my dad was feeding me chocolate cake and braunschweiger. I was six months old. I haven't liked either since.

My Dad likes unusual food. Like Limburger cheese. You cannot go near it before realizing it is not supposed to be ingested: the smell is horrible. I don't remember how it got started, but it ended with a bunch of kids hiding in the bathroom, because dad was chasing us with Limburger cheese. Somewhere in the middle was a chase around the neighborhood. From the graphic memories that I have, I think the Limburger cheese won.

My dad grew up on a farm. He decided that Anna and I should have the farm experience, even if we lived in the suburbs. He brought home cute little fluffy chicks. Anna and I took care of them: feeding them, corralling them, catching them when they got loose, and even though we were warned not to—naming them. Six weeks later, dad set up "the block." It was a thick piece of wood that had two nails in it, with just enough space between them to slide the neck of a chicken.

Mom was chosen to hold the chicken while dad positioned the neck and sliced. Anna and I ran inside and cried, so I didn't get to see what happened next. Mom wasn't much of a country girl herself, screaming and apologizing to the chicken after it went running around headless. As the story goes, when my dad went to reach into the chicken to clean it out, the air suction created a noise and my mom *swore* it was talking.

Every summer my dad sees to it that we have an amazing garden. I used to slip out of my diaper and run striking out the back door to the raspberry patch. Makes sense to me. Raspberries are still my favorite fruit. Anyone who has grown tomatoes knows it is impossible to keep up with them. After a while, some just get wasted. Well, not our tomato patch. The next door neighbor boy and I had the most fantastic rotten tomato fight. Epic. I think that should be a part of everyone's childhood.

My mom always makes my dad's lunch for him to take to work. I remember "helping" her, standing on a chair to help spread the mustard on the sandwich. But the special part was always the napkin. I would get to help write a secret message on it: a secret like *I love you*. Even now when I return home, I hear mom moving around the kitchen, making dad's lunch. It is just a part of how things work.

We didn't have a lot of money when I was little. It was the best thing ever, except for the instant milk and pulpy orange juice. At the time, it was cheaper, so that is what we got. When I turned eight, for my birthday I asked my mom for REAL milk, please. Every day, Mom would put a glass of instant milk and pulpy orange juice on the table and tell me to drink it before lunch.

I was sneaky, and mom suffered from health problems, so it wasn't hard to find ways around digesting the horrible liquids. I tried pouring the milk and juice down the kitchen drain, but I was too short. I tried pouring it down the toilet, but it looked suspicious carrying a glass of milk into the bathroom. But then I found it. The heating and cooling duct. Right there in the kitchen floor—a hole where things magically disappeared.

Fast forward 10 years, sitting around the table telling old stories and laughing. Someone brought up instant milk. I brought up how I hated it and found ways around actually drinking it. It was then that two and two were put together: the mysterious sticky duct leak, and Rachel not complaining about drinking her milk and juice anymore. Mystery solved.

Cod liver oil was even worse than Limburger cheese because we weren't allowed to run away from it—we had to drink it. It was an old bottle of green slime and come cold season, my whole family lined up and got a spoonful. No sugar. My father thinks it is educational to try new foods. Liver, tongue, and sauerkraut were my worse memories, trying to chew without breathing and thinking, "*Why can't I just be in a normal family?*"

\*

Apple pie is on my shoulder. Why is there apple pie on my shoulder? I look at my sister next to me. Apple pie is on her window. The plate and fork are in her hands, but the apple pie is everywhere. She gasps for air, the seat belt burnt into her skin.

Panic. But not yet. Maybe no one will notice if I drive off. But the car won't start. With a sigh of resignation, I check the damage. Distractedly jumping out of the car, I slam my finger in the door. Visions of the police showing up to arrest me with my finger stuck haunt me enough to yank it out.

No, the car isn't going anywhere. Neither is the little blue Geo Metro, fatally parked in the spot my car now possessed. Luck is not on my side, even if apple pie is. Lights go on in houses. People come running. My forehead's bleeding—sit down on the curb, they motion. Word is sent two blocks down, where our little white church sits full of people eating their apple pie.

My sister is still breathing hard. "No," she says indignantly, "*I did not throw up apple pie.*" Emergency room or jail, I am not sure where they will take me. I am the one stupid enough to look down while driving, turning the steering wheel in the process. Do they take you to jail for that?

Bright lights and an ambulance. No, I am not getting in there: I am going home. But Sister Parran will have her way, as she drives me to the hospital. Sister Parran always gets her way—that is how the world works, I think sullenly. But she does make good apple pie.

\*

Sitting in the Chinese buffet, between sauce covered broccoli and fortune cookies I realized it. I had the family I had always wanted. Growing up, you have this idea in your head of the perfect family. I thought I'd met them when I was eight, but then found out they had to go to bed at 7:00pm. That was NOT the perfect family. The more I got to know other families, the more I realized mine wasn't as bad as I thought. And then I became an adult. I grew up and left home. And came back home and left again. We have issues. We have problems. I told my first boyfriend to run away from us, very, very fast. But we are a family and we love each other. And sitting there together, not caring if we laughed too loud or ate too many noodles, I knew those people would always be there for me, and I for them. And if I could choose anyone in the world to be my family, it would be them.

## 8. Poverty Experiment

Poverty Experiment: one month, \$2.50 a day, and me.

Fact #1: One billion people live off of the buying power of \$1.25 a day

Fact #2: Three billion people (roughly half the population) live off of the buying power of \$2.50 a day

These are statistics on paper. I shouldn't call it the poverty experiment, I should call it the reality experiment, because half the world lives like this. If the 27,000 children who die every day because of poverty--preventable causes--are important, then I need to do something about it.

*The experiment became real when I was riding my bike with a backpack load of food and a box of oats balanced on the handlebars. Bike--no car--how could I afford a car on \$2.50 a day? I made a list and carefully calculated, and it still was \$19.21--so that food needs to last for 8 days. Eggs and cheese, rice and beans, some vegetables, oats and tortillas, and peanuts. That's what I got. And only that.*

*It takes 30 minutes to ride my bike to work, but then 15 minutes to change into the right clothes, and 15 more to stop sweating. Suddenly, the weather is really important. it makes the difference of a happy Rachel, or a wet, sopping Rachel who has mud splatters up her back and has to wash her legs in the sink of the employee bathroom.*

Everything takes longer without the money we pay for convenience. I have to know what I need to do for the day, and plan backwards to make sure I have time to do it.

Things I take for granted and make this experiment unrealistic (but not invalid): Free lodging and accessories: all that \$2.50 goes to food. Ideal situations: I picked a month of (hopefully) good weather, where biking is possible.

Opportunities: I am already established and have a great education and training for life. Community: I have a family, and great friends who support me, and would never let me starve. Choice: I have the choice to do this...and when to stop—choices that those living on \$2.50 a day do not have.

Many people I know in Brazil live off of minimum wage, which is \$300 a month; \$10 a day. If a guy works and has a wife and two kids at home, they are living like this...\$2.50 a day. They are the statistic. In the United States I make in one hour what they make in a day. It was \$14.74 for groceries my second week. Besides having some leftover food from last week, I was able to get applesauce, sour cream, and noodles.

*"In order to contribute, I would have to know myself better and be clearer about my goals. I would have to be ready to take (Africa) on its own terms, not mine, and learn my limits and present myself not as a do-gooder with a big heart, but as someone with something to give and gain by being there. Compassion wasn't enough." --"The Blue Sweater"*

Top 10 reasons why NOT to listen when Jesus says "Sell your possessions and give the money to the poor." ( By Ash Barker in "Make Poverty Personal")

- But then who would support the missionaries?
- God has called me to minister to the rich.
- It is on my to do list...I just have to finish (fill in the blank)...
- Jesus only asked him because he had a problem with possessions.
- Jesus only asked him because he didn't have a family.
- Actually, you can get the camel through the gate--if he gets on his knees.
- But Jesus wants me to have the best.
- I would do it, if Jesus made it clear He WANTED me to.
- I give 10%...He wants MORE?
- Giving money to the poor is bad stewardship--they would use it for booze.

*\$16.69 for week three groceries. In addition to what I needed, I was able to get apples and kiwi. I slept outside last night, trying to imagine what it would be like to do that every night. I was able to make lunch for my family. I was so happy to have enough extra this week to be able to share. Sharing made me feel...empowered. I could give something after all.*

*The novelty wears off. The extra pushes of the pedal on my bike makes my legs ache. I get home after work and see all this beautiful food on the table and I want to eat it. I don't WANT rice and beans anymore. And I don't feel like cooking anything else. It grates against you. "Why can't you just be normal?" and "What's the point of giving up all these things?" and "It is not like you will ever really feel what it's like to be impoverished." Because I won't. My family will never let me starve. This little doing without things is like gnats. They don't hurt, they just irritate you. Bitter. Seeing everyone else HAVE while I HAVE NOT. Why? Is this fair? I put myself in their shoes: I work as hard for my \$2 a day as they are working for their \$20 an hour. In fact, HARDER than most of them. All of this--just because of where I was born? Because of who my parents are? What does that have to do with me?*

*"Money won't solve the problem." My friend said, when I read that it would take 13 billion dollars a year to end hunger for the worlds poorest: and over 18 billion a year is spent in pet food. But if money won't, what will? Tell me what will solve it. Each person doing their part? What is their part? I believe God wrote a calling/way of helping on the heart of each person. One thing that gets them--it grabs their heart and won't let go. It is the job of each person to find this thing and then go after it.*

*12 Steps to solving poverty (By Paul Polack "Out of Poverty")*

- *Go where the action is (stop pitying poor people)*
- *Talk to the people who have the problem and listen to what they say*
- *Learn everything you can about the problem's specific content (learn about the poor around you, as well as global poverty and what can be done)*
- *Think big and act big*
- *Think like a child*
- *See and do the obvious (when you know the people, you know the problem, and sometimes a solution)*
- *If somebody already invented it, you don't need to do it again (help whatever is already going on)*
- *Make sure it has positive measurable impact that can be brought to scale, reaching a million people and make their lives measurably better.*
- *Design to specific cost and price targets*
- *Follow practical three year plans*
- *Continue to learn from your customers*
- *Stay positive: don't be distracted by what others think*

*30 days = \$60.39. I found out that sometimes you just want SOMETHING ELSE, ANYTHING ELSE to eat. Drinking another glass of water doesn't cut it. I found a lot of books of a lot of great people doing a lot of great things in the world. I received a lot of encouragement from a lot of good people and had conversations with strangers and friends and family that would have never come up otherwise. I found that I take more time to do the little things, and the little things bring me more happiness than whatever else I used to be doing. I found time to enjoy sunsets. I found that my choices were more limited, but my ideas became unlimited.*

*I found that I felt strangled when I had nothing to give or share with others. When you are able to give, you feel empowered. I found that I will never really know the hopelessness and helplessness that those in true poverty feel. That this is just a little baby step toward something I am not sure of yet. "It is poverty to decide that a child must die so that you may live as you wish." --Mother Teresa*

#### 9. Ramadan

Ramadan, the great Wikipedia says, *"is the ninth month of the Islamic calendar. Muslims refrain from eating, drinking, smoking, and indulging in anything that is in excess or ill-natured; from dawn until sunset."* They have five pillars of faith, and this is one of them. I wonder how many Christians have given up things for God like that. I wonder if I can. I need this, and I have a fresh new journal to fill with a new project.

No more eating (and other things) from 5:05am on. until 5:53pm. It comes down to the minute. The sun goes down and food, glorious food. At 5:30pm Alyssa asked me to help with the cookies. Cookie dough on my fingers, with the warm, gooey smell taking over the kitchen. But 5:53pm it was.

Part of this is, and always will be, a set up: figuring out how to get around things. Waking up at 4:30am to eat breakfast. But it isn't about food; it is about using that time in prayer. About remembering why your stomach is growling and connecting it to the thought of *"Oh yeah, it isn't about me."* Muslims stop five times a day to physically bow down and pray. That is harder than it seems.

It is difficult sitting at the table while they eat and I drink water. Even if I wasn't hungry, would still feel left out by not eating with them. The other choice is isolation: ignore the food altogether—but then you ignore the people as well.

I choose life, and it fills me. Life is doing the dishes. It is sitting on the cool white tile floor at 10:42pm eating fried cheese and molasses with best friends, laughing as it drips down your chin. Life is sitting in the middle of 40 children who have one set of clothes but are playing like they owned the world.

I stood at the door of the church and hugged my kids goodbye. We had to send them into the streets to find some food to fill empty bellies. No food arrived for the program this week. I chose to be hungry—they did not. It feels like food is everything, as if life has no pleasure without it. I find myself back with Maslow, on the bottom level of the hierarchy of needs. Food. Food. Food. It pulses in my brain and clouds out everything else. No wonder hungry kids find it hard to concentrate.

Amazing how your body can adjust to a schedule, even one like Ramadan. It feels almost normal to not be eating. My stomach is shrinking. When I finally eat, I try to stuff in as much as I can until I fill up, then sit around, waiting to get unfull, so I can eat some more.

Ramadan reveals hoarders. I dream all day of what I will eat, but it often disappears during the day from those who are allowed to eat during the daylight hours. Water and I have become close. Really close. Because all day, every day, it is all I get. What do I do when I am done with Ramadan? Options rush me, but all I want to do is walk in the sunshine with a popsicle. Coconut popsicle. Life is better with popsicle dripping down your hand.

#### 10. Rice and Beans Experiment

First week: Just rice and beans. Breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Like 1.4 billion people who live off of \$1.25 or less a day. Three weeks: Rice and beans as the staple, but can add other things. Like the 3.5 billion people who live off of \$2.50 or less a day.

Week 1: I don't even know how to cook rice and beans. Eating what we want is a simple pleasure: being poor takes that away. The secret is to be busy with things other than food. Is it possible to overeat on rice and beans? Poverty does not look like rice and beans: it looks like rice and/or maize. Beans (the nutritious part of rice and beans) are too expensive for the world's poor. Trying to understand what creates/perpetuates poverty make my head hurt. [www.live58.org](http://www.live58.org) says we can end extreme poverty, and has a plan: *"In the past thirty years, extreme poverty has been cut in half. In 1981, 52% of the world's population lived in extreme poverty (defined by the U.N. as living on less than \$1.25 per day). But by 2006, that number was 26%."*

I've been eating crunchy or burnt beans until day 6. Soak them and they are much harder to mess up.

*"Thanksgiving creates abundance."* —Ann Voskamp. Is this the secret to my rice and beans quest? To working with children in poverty? Is it all about learning to be thankful?

Week 2: I am American: I want a life with food on the side. It takes time to make rice and beans yummy. God and I had a conversation about how unfair poverty was. God won. Matthew 6:25: *"Hey Rachel! Don't worry about your life, about food, or about clothes."*

Me: "But God—there are so many of them—them that don't have! My kids that are hungry, that don't have proper clothes, that can't read or have any opportunities in life!" Matthew 6:32: "Don't you know I (God) already know that? That I know what you need, what they need? You are acting like someone who doesn't know me."

Me: "But I am just being realistic. What I see is LACK. What I see is that You are NOT providing and they are going hungry, they are living empty lives." Matthew 6:30, 26-27: "You of little faith. Look at the little things—you will SEE. Look at the birds: and I love you more than them—I love your kids more than them. Look at the flowers: and each one of those children is much more precious than anything in nature. I WILL take care of them. When has worry ever helped you? Hum? That is what I thought."

Me: "So what am I supposed to do?" Matthew 6:33: "Work to find me (God) in everything, and put me first. Learn to see me working in families that have no food, no kitchen, no bathroom, no education. And everything else will be taken care of—I (God) will take care of these children, whom I love even more than you do."

Me: "But it is hard. I still struggle." Matthew 6:34: "So quit worrying about the future—because you can't even handle today. Just work on finding ME in everything today." (All Scripture was paraphrased by Rachel if you couldn't tell). Further reading: What the Bible says about the poor: <http://www.zompist.com/meetthepoor.html>  
Week 3: Half way there! It is hard to be creative. I only make yummy food about 40% of the time. Fact: Time + Resources + Motivation + Creativity = Tasty Meal. How often do those four things line up for someone in poverty? Go to Ted.com and watch everything about rethinking poverty. You will learn much. "The trouble with being poor is that it takes up all your time" — Willem de Kooning

Week 4: Weekends and experiments don't go together well. Everything I want to do involves food other than rice and beans. This experiment was just a little layer of experiencing and understanding poverty. It is easier not knowing. It was never about rice and beans: it was about sacrifice, limitations, small frustrations, and the patience and creativity to overcome. I hope this is not the end of this experiment.

One kilo (2.2 pounds) of rice and a kilo of beans every week for a month: \$20. Three weeks of adding things to rice and beans to make them more tasty: \$40. Total cost of eating: \$2 a day.

## 11. Coming or Going

"Who are YOU?" Said the Caterpillar.

This was not an encouraging opening for a conversation. Alice replied, rather shyly, "I--I hardly know, sir, just at present-- at least I know who I WAS when I got up this morning, but I think I must have been changed several times since then."

"What do you mean by that?" Said the Caterpillar sternly. "Explain yourself!"

"I can't explain MYSELF, I'm afraid, sir" said Alice, "because I'm not myself, you see." —Lewis Carroll

"Voce quer frutas?" The winkled hand of the elderly woman held a pineapple towards me. I smiled and moved on quickly, as unsure of what I wanted as I was of what she had said. "Smile and nod" I thought to myself, "smile and nod." Finding yourself in a new place can be scary. The anxiety and feelings that you encounter has been labeled "Culture shock," with three phases: honeymoon, negotiation, and adjustment.

Sitting on the cool tile floor eating fresh pineapple, I waved my hands energetically and sprayed pineapple juice on Emanuel: "I just cannot get over the beauty. I can't get over the feeling that each day is an adventure because I have no clue what is going on. I have this idea that I will learn something new every minute if only my brain could contain it."

The honeymoon stage is everything from pre-experience excitement to delight with novelty. Differences are seen in a romantic light, exotic and fascinating. "You speake Engliss?" asked a dark, curly haired stranger as he leaned in to kiss me on my left cheek and then my right. "Y-yes" I replied shyly, unsure of what was culturally correct to do next. Some friends I made in Brazil asked me to teach them English. My credentials? I was a native speaker. Thirty people showed up, most of whom I had never seen before. I cleared my throat, pulled my sweaty palms out of my pockets, and began: "My name is Rachel, what is your name?"

"Toto, I've a feeling we're not in Kansas anymore" —Dorothy, Wizard of Oz

I sighed, and waited. What could I do? The only one home was the maid, who didn't speak English. I rested against the tile wall and tried to figure out the best solution. There was no toilet paper, I didn't know the word for "Toilet paper" in Portuguese, and I needed toilet paper. I could try yelling "papel of toilet!" and hope the maid would get the idea.



In the negotiation stage, things that used to be beautiful are now irritating. All you want is (fill in the blank), and it always stays just out of reach. This stage can have mood swings and can lead to depression or withdrawal from the new culture. The Brazilian wind whipped through my hair as I held down the paper and wrote quickly, "I am so far away from American culture and thinking, surrounded by different everything—it makes me wonder who I am. I have no expectations to live up to. No one here knows who I am, what I stand for, and what I believe. It is like a blank piece of paper, and I have no idea what I want to write on it."

But I adjusted. "*What was it like?*" Emanuel asked, as we dug into the meat filled pancakes. "It was hard because coming here I was the extra person added to the mix, instead of making up part of the mix. I had to learn to be like icing on the cake: the icing has to form to the mold of the cake, trying to fill in the cracks and help out where it can."

By the time of adjustment, you have developed new routines, and things, in a different sense, feel "normal." You begin to either understand the new culture, or understand that you don't understand it yet, and that is okay. "*Not all who wander are lost*" J. R. R. Tolkien

"It is so weird, Emanuel—it is like nothing is real. Being back, my thoughts flake off and float down to the floor. What is mine? What is me? I am stumbling through life. Not half bad, but not all there. And no one else knows me well enough to know I am not here. Not here really. I am living outside myself."

Emanuel finished his shake and nodded, understandingly. The same three stages can be seen in returning home after being gone. In some, it is noticed even stronger than while in another country. Reverse culture shock is worse for many people because they are not expecting it. They expect things to be different in a new place, but not where they grew up. All your old "normals" feel strange.

Emanuel stops as I unlock my car door. "*Brazilians have a word for it that you do not: "Saudades." You can't explain it—you have to feel it. It is the longing, melancholy feeling that never fully leaves you, even when you are happy. You feel saudades when you want to be with the ones you love, but you can't. It is when you long for something that is out of your hands, out of your control. This word, saudades, is what you have carried with you back to America.*"

I stare down the row of soy sauces at Kroger, the glass bottles blurring and my head pounding. I sink down to the dingy linoleum floor and rest my back against the aisle of cereal boxes. "Just pick up some soy sauce. Just pick it up and go." My brain tells me, but my body refuses to comply. So many choices and so much stuff. I miss the *feira* in Brazil with fresh fruit and vegetables. I miss the two aisles that make up the entire grocery store in the rural town. I am overloaded with everything around me, all the advertisements competing for my attention. "It isn't fair. It is not right." I complain to my mom as I hand her the soy sauce. "We have so much, and we don't even know it." "*I went a little farther,*" he said. "*Then still a little farther—till I had gone so far that I don't know how I'll ever get back.*" —Paul Scott

It is often hard to remember that things have changed while you have been away, or that your ideal of home (while gone) is not reality. Many times people don't want to hear about your trip—and even if they do, they just don't seem to "get it." This can lead to the same kind of frustration as you had in the original negotiation stage. "I returned and felt like everything had changed." I share with Emanuel. "Before my friends and I were all triangles. While there, I became a square—with even more angles—while my friends were all rounded off into circles. Now I am constantly bumping corners."

*"The whole object of travel is not to set foot on foreign land; it is to at last to set foot on one's own country as a foreign land."* —G.K. Chesterton

I pause as I put on my coat to go to the art museum, and turn Emanuel reflectively, "There are some things that I can only learn in Brazil, and others I can only learn in America." Having spent three of the past seven years in Brazil, (continuing to teach English, but now focusing on working with street children), I can now talk with Emanuel in Portuguese—but we always return to English.

"*When are you coming back to Brazil?*" Emanuel asks me. "I am not sure yet," I tell him truthfully, "But I will go back. I have been through so many times of going back and forth between countries that I feel blurred sometimes, but I would not change anything. I have become my own person, a blend of two lives in two countries. Brazil and America make up who I am and are a part of me, but I am still a whole me on my own. It has taken a long time to be able to say that."

*"And the end of all our exploring*

*Will be to arrive where we started*

*And know the place for the first time."* —T.S. Eliot

## 12. Where Hope Grows on Trees

Sometimes I feel like I am lying when I write different statistics about Brazil, or post pictures. Yes, they can be impressive and/or depressing, and they sure would make me reach for my wallet if I were you--but life here is so much more than statistics. The stories you hear or the faces you see are only one pose captured to represent something bigger.

Brazilians are incredibly resilient people. Truth is, if Living Stones doesn't provide for the children, they will learn to find some other way to get what they need (although, probably not a healthy way). They can survive on nothing, and then throw a party on less than nothing--and everyone has more fun than most wealthy people I know. Daily life is often the "Stone Soup," where everyone puts in a little to make it work. Community and family hold a deeper meaning than I ever knew growing up, for here they are keys to survival.

In the United States, hope seems to be buried in the next job/career that I will find. I know things have gotten harder since the recession, but America is still the land of opportunities--the place where hard work will pull you up by your bootstraps.

Poverty in Brazil is a different flavor. Eric Jensen's "Teaching With Poverty in Mind" lists six different kinds of poverty: Situational poverty (from a crisis or situation, like in Japan), Urban and Rural poverty (each have their different aspects, as I am learning from Cajueiro Claro), Generational poverty (it is in the family for a while, and they are not equipped to move out of their poverty), Absolute poverty (day-to-day survival), and Relative poverty (can't meet the society's average standard of living).

America most often has relative poverty (while generational poverty is sadly growing as well), while Brazil is dealing much more with absolute and generational poverty. When you walk around a rural Northeast Brazilian town, you can almost feel the lack of opportunities around you. The few jobs that are available are almost always minimum wage (a little over a dollar an hour) or less.

Brazil's hope is rooted in something different. You hope because it is better than not hoping. Even without seeing the opportunities. It reminds me of the fruit trees that are planted everywhere, for anyone to pick. You eat its sweet fruit and remember that the best things in life are free. In Brazil, hope grows on trees.

The Brazilian people are not the statistics I list for you. They are not the smiling brown children in the pictures I post. They are people, with the potential of saint and sinner just like you. They are not more "worthy" because they do not have, but they are also not forgettable just because they were born on a different spot on the globe than you. Their value comes from the same place as yours--created in the image of God--and so each one is worth saving and loving. And that is why I am here.

## 13. How to Relocate your Heart

My first encounter of the dump was driving past a pile of trash and having a flock of white Ibis fly off it. The contrast of beauty and putrid struck my heart, as did the overwhelming sense of helplessness at "discovering" a people group called *catadores*, or waste pickers, and seeing their daily lives and needs.

Official statistics say that a quarter of a million Brazilians engage in waste picking<sup>1</sup>, and are responsible for the high rates of recycling (at least aluminum and cardboard) in Brazil. These untrained, self-appointed workers are doing more to save the world than any other program currently working in Brazil<sup>2</sup>. This is true for most third world countries around the world.

Twenty minutes after I put out the trash, I left my apartment for the day. I see my trash bag torn open, with bits of paper flying down the street, floating behind the waste picker who is now wearing my broken hat. I sigh, bemused that any secrets I wrote on those papers were in a language he couldn't read.

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<sup>1</sup> "Waste Pickers and Solid Waste Management." Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing. Web. 16 Mar. 2013. <http://wiego.org/informal-economy/waste-pickers-solid-waste-management>

<sup>2</sup> "Waste Pickers and Solid Waste Management." Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing. Web. 16 Mar. 2013. <http://wiego.org/informal-economy/waste-pickers-solid-waste-management>

Millions of governmental dollars are saved through these individuals<sup>3</sup>. “In effect, waste pickers subsidize formal solid waste systems. Their recycling efforts also provide raw materials at low prices to recycling industries. Further, the waste pickers conserve resources, reduce air and water pollution thus contributing to public health and sanitation, and reduce greenhouse gas emissions thus mitigating climate change.”<sup>4</sup>

We passed out cups and soda and snacks for all the children. One small girl let her cookie wrapper slip from her fingers to the ground. “Eduarda!” I chided, “Don’t litter!” She blankly replied, “But this is the dump.” I looked around hopelessly. Why shouldn’t she litter? This was where the rest of world sent their litter. But this was her home.

These unlikely heroes are often starving and living in inhumane conditions<sup>5</sup>. The local governments are happy to receive their free services, some even feeling proud of “providing jobs” for their community. This can unfortunately lead to exploitation and general ignorance of the problems and possible solutions involved. Andreia and Washington, the couple leading Massa Humana, head up the program for children (with Living Stones) in the trash dump. They left their number with some of the ladies in case of emergency. One came from Maria Jose, who’s respiratory infection had gotten so bad that she had to be rushed to the hospital. The doctor said she would have died an hour later, and that she could not continue living in her house made of trash—it was causing/worsening her infection. The church, with Massa Humana, began to build Maria Jose a simple brick home. It is smaller than the average American living room, but the stuff that dreams are made of in the trash dump. In 2010, Brazil ended 20 years of arguing on its National Solid Waste Policy, and signed it into being. It is trying to make sure private sectors pay for proper disposal of their products, and has a “special provisions for accommodating waste pickers, who have traditionally played a central role in the waste sorting and disposal system in Brazil. Community outreach and retraining are part of efforts to shift to more municipal solid waste landfills.”<sup>6</sup>

I walked down the street to the corner, which long ago had been declared the place where the neighborhood dumped their trash. I went slowly, because the two horses and sickly dog were busy eating whatever edible unidentifiable items they could. I threw in the trash bags and ran when the horse started moving towards me. The Federal law means that current trash dumps will be closed, and more sanitary landfills created. The documentary “Wasteland” talks about this from a personal perspective at one of the largest dumps in Rio de Janeiro<sup>7</sup>. While the Federal government has set aside funds to “local governments to help improve recycling and training, including social inclusion programs for waste picking communities,”<sup>8</sup> many fear the actuality of this happening<sup>9</sup>. Many are even questioning the environmental benefits of these changes<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> “Waste Pickers and Solid Waste Management.” Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing. Web. 16 Mar. 2013. <http://wiego.org/informal-economy/waste-pickers-solid-waste-management>

<sup>4</sup> “Waste Pickers and Solid Waste Management.” Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing. Web. 16 Mar. 2013. <http://wiego.org/informal-economy/waste-pickers-solid-waste-management>

<sup>5</sup> “Waste Pickers” Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing. Web. 16 Mar. 2013. <http://wiego.org/informal-economy/occupational-groups/waste-pickers>

<sup>6</sup> “Brazilian National Solid Waste Policy.” U.S.-Brazil Joint Initiative on Urban Sustainability. Web. 16 Mar.2013. [http://www.epa.gov/jius/policy/brazil/brazilian\\_national\\_solid\\_waste\\_policy.html](http://www.epa.gov/jius/policy/brazil/brazilian_national_solid_waste_policy.html)

<sup>7</sup> “Hollywood: Documentary Explores Latin America’s Largest Garbage Dump.” Global Post. Web. 16 Mar. 2013. <http://www.globalpost.com/dispatch/news/regions/americas/brazil/110224/waste-land-academy-awards-documentary>

<sup>8</sup> “Brazilian National Solid Waste Policy.” U.S.-Brazil Joint Initiative on Urban Sustainability. Web. 16 Mar.2013. [http://www.epa.gov/jius/policy/brazil/brazilian\\_national\\_solid\\_waste\\_policy.html](http://www.epa.gov/jius/policy/brazil/brazilian_national_solid_waste_policy.html)

<sup>9</sup> “Hollywood: Documentary Explores Latin America’s Largest Garbage Dump.” Global Post. Web. 16 Mar. 2013. <http://www.globalpost.com/dispatch/news/regions/americas/brazil/110224/waste-land-academy-awards-documentary>

"Here is another bag of clothes for those poor children at the dump." She says, handing me a huge plastic sack. I thank her politely, but my lip curls in disgust once I begin to sort through the clothes. They are old, torn, stained, and dirty. Why do we only give our leftovers? Do they deserve nothing better?

Thousands of questions are being raised around HOW this law will be enacted, which is to be completed by 2014, according to federal regulation. In Carpina, the trash dump community was a hot topic in the last elections, with many promises made. In January, they announced action—the whole community would be moved to a different part of town, where 70 new homes would be built for the waste pickers.

"I think it is a beautiful thing that we are giving these people new homes." Says Daniel, one of many Brazilians who are happy see progress. I, on the other hand, am weary, having seen the speed of most government promises. Washington pragmatically tells me that he is hopeful that the houses will be built, and relatively soon, since the local government is being pressured, and they can make a goodwill "show" out of providing homes for the homeless.

What worries me is the training and re-education that is also to be involved. That is a long and tedious process that cannot be "shown off" or receive instant gratification. Professional analysis about it says, "The existence of a body of legislation for inclusivity is not a guarantee that solid waste management in most cities are abiding to the law but it indicates that *catadores* (waste pickers) have sufficient public visibility and recognition. The implementation of legislation depends a great deal on the level of social mobilization of organizations of *catadores* and their supporting NGOs."<sup>11</sup> In other words, it is up to us.

I haven't been able to find much information on the success rates of Brazilian "transplant" programs, but know that in the USA, they never turn out as helpful as they sound, mostly due to weak follow through. All these people have known is trash, and trash is their culture. That doesn't change in a new house. How many of them are emotionally ready for a change this big?

We sit on the ground and color, bringing soup on the weekends, as promises fill the air. It isn't how life should be, and yet it is. People and governments are trying to change it, but here it is still. And Jesus says go. Love. I can't find anywhere where He suggests waiting until the government or rich donors finally complete their promises.

What does all this legislation mean to the children of the waste pickers? Nothing. The adults pause, holding their breath to see if the papers signed will come through. The house we were building for Maria Jose and her family? Stopped, because the area will be bulldozed. The land given so we could build a community center/church? It will lay empty and life goes on.

And so we work in the dirt once again. My legs turn black streaks and I flick disease-ridden flies off my face and shudder when they land on my lips. I carefully hold little girls who moan when I accidentally brush against their multiple bug bites or various skin diseases. I brush back lice-ridden hair with my fingers. I see open wounds fill with dirt as they sit down to color a picture with me.

#### 14. Travel

It started at my grandparents' farm. Or maybe earlier. I would walk down the railroad tracks and keep walking. West. The sun would set and I knew I had to turn back—but I didn't want to. It hurt. Something in me ached so badly I felt like I was killing it when I turned around. Feeling so limited. My body can only run so far before it is out of breath. And I can't fly. That has always been a sore spot with me.

Since then it has gotten worse. Roads call to me with a taunting, "*You don't know what's at the end.*" Every sunrise calls me East to follow the new day, and every sunset I am called West, trying to catch the colors more brilliantly—maybe if I were just a bit closer I could. Whenever it is cold I am called South and whenever it is warm I want to move around until I feel the wind in my hair.

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<sup>10</sup> "How Will a New Waste Management Law Affect Brazil?" Waste-to-Energy Resource and Technology Counsel. Web. 16 Mar. 2013. <http://www.wtert.eu/default.asp?Menu=31&ShowNews=35>

<sup>11</sup> "Brazil Legal Framework for Social Inclusion of Waste." Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing. Web. 16 Mar. 2013. [http://wiego.org/sites/wiego.org/files/publications/files/Dias\\_Brazil\\_Legal\\_framework\\_social\\_inclusion\\_waste\\_0.pdf](http://wiego.org/sites/wiego.org/files/publications/files/Dias_Brazil_Legal_framework_social_inclusion_waste_0.pdf)

I own the open road. Not the closed road. The road next to the home. The familiar road. The comfortable road. No—the open road. With the feeling of not knowing. A little bit of dizzy heights, a little bit of insecurity with determination of courage, a lot of anticipation, and even more assurance that at the end of the day...it has been a good one.

I own the open road. The road that stretches to the place you must reach or die. West. Always west, into the sun. The road that makes you put away your camera--not take it out. Because capturing it in a small box is beyond impossible. The open road is some place familiar touching unfamiliar, calling you deeper and telling you that one day it will be even better. Even truer. Even realer. The open road is the place you travel to reach rather than use to travel.

I don't understand how I can be comfortable both here and there: the cold, hard silence of the metro speeding to the center of Chicago to the chattered, sweaty breath of a Kombi in the Centro of Carpina. Yet I am equally myself in both.

Brazil, you are so far away. Yet I can feel my legs walking underneath me, up the cobblestone hill to your house. It is the 5:00pm sun, warm and soft, telling me to get ready for darkness. The feeling that I'm almost there, and then I can take off my shoes, sit on the cool tile floor, and watch. Watch the world as it should be. The love I have for Brazil feels dangerously close to loving a man. How could I have a love affair with a country? And that is how it is. Tonight it came out under the porch light, as it lights up the numbers of my house. I shuddered in the car, the radio singing me a lullaby. The hard, stone chimney stood in the shadow, and the banister cast zebra stripes down the lawn. I was other. I wasn't there and wasn't here. I clung to my car as some kind of magic, transporting me from one place to another. Still wearing my seatbelt, keys jingle and tears fall, my questions unanswered. I am other. I am scared to go because there is so much I want here. I will lose familiarity. I will lose all the rites of passage and comfort of doing things how I am used to them being done. But I want Brazil. I want the simplicity. I want my spot in this world where I can make a difference, and see it. But I want my family as well. I want to have a family. And I feel like to go is to give up my chance. But to stay is to atrophy and turn into everyone else. I am other.

I have finally figured it out. After all the times of people asking me about Brazil and why I go...it is love. I normally list a couple of superficial reasons like palm trees and Maracuja, but I know it isn't that. It is like when you love someone and people ask why. You may say because he makes me smile or because he flosses his teeth, but those aren't really why you love him. You can't explain why you do. It seems unscientific and sometimes very stupid. But you do and that is enough. I love Brazil. I just know, that's why. It is part of me that was made to fit there and nowhere else. It calls me and I go--with the smile of God.

#### 15. Poor and Needy

A good language teacher doesn't correct, they rephrase. "*I writted this paper!*" receives the reply, "*Oh! You wrote the paper?*" to which the student responds, "*Yes, I wrote the paper.*" Brazilians have done this naturally, consciously and unconsciously for the past nine years that I have been learning Portuguese.

One of the first times they did this was when I told them I worked with impoverished children. Underprivileged. My vocabulary simplified to just *criancas pobre*, poor children. Their replies were, "*Oh! Crianças carentes.*" Hum, said my brain, *carentes* is the word I use here. So filed away in the recesses of my mind became the idea that "*Pobre equals poor, carente equals needy. Needy is the proper term.*"

Fast forward some years, to when I had a deeper conversation with a Brazilian friend about what I do. When speaking Portuguese, my brain still trips over my mouth, trying to move faster than it is able. I use whatever vocabulary is close to whatever point I am trying to make, and sometimes I grab the wrong word. I used *pobre* to describe one of the children.

My friend stopped me: "*You don't mean that. To a Brazilian, who has nothing, he is working his whole life to gain something—to make it just a little bit better. Life is already against him and to call him 'poor' is throwing in his face that he isn't going anywhere. We say 'needy,' because who doesn't need something sometime?*"

It reminded me of all I was trying to learn between the verbs "*Ser*" and "*Estar*," which always returned me to the age old difference of "I am joyful" (the permanent "To be" that describes things that don't change) because of Jesus and the "I am happy" (the fluctuating "To be" that floats as far as your whims). *Pobre* is to *Ser* what *Carente* is to *Estar*. Because who doesn't need something sometime?

My friend continued, "*You may think this is something little, but it isn't. You've been taught your whole life you can do anything you put your mind to. That is the label you were given, and you believed it. Those who are needy in*

*Brazil, they haven't been taught that, they've never been believed in. And to then label them poor is to kill any hope that might have been born in them."*

Words are powerful. Even the ones we say, ignorant of the hundreds of years of culture behind them. Fast forward to today, when I open my Bible to Matthew 5:3 ("Blessed are the poor in spirit"). Inquisitive, I wonder which word will be used. There it is: "Bem-aventurados os pobres em espirito." *Pobre*. Not *Carente*. Because who doesn't need something sometime? But my job is to learn I need everything at all times. From God.

I hope that becomes my label: *Pobre*. Because I want the promise in the rest of the Matthew 5:3. Because I want to become more like Jesus. Because I realize I don't know one iota of anything there is to know, but I know that I can trust God, and He does know. Because I've experienced that nothing is worth it without Him.

#### 16. Quadro

At the quadro the kids start flying kites. They are tissue paper and sticks, with cut up trash bag tails. The problem is there is not enough string. They argue and divide and share the string, wrapped around tin cans. I drop my backpack and join a game of futebol. It starts raining, and our bare feet slip across the slick quadro. After a good game or two the kids give a round of hugs. Some of the little ones call back to us, peering through the crossbars of the bridge with their dirty hands and faces. Their "*Tia! Tia! Tia!*" cries continue until they are like kitten's meowing for their mother and we walk on.

It feels like home. The belonging feeling. Flying kites with no string. Running with pounding feet, trying to catch a flat, broken ball. Laughing when I fall. Guarding a little kid who shows me up and then grins with a "*Heh, aren't I amazing?*" look. Passing out cookies. Receiving hugs and hands that just want to touch me, just want something that is real. All that I love and miss at the youth center and those summer days at the park...things really are not so different in the world.

\*

I bought Band-Aids and visa photos at the pharmacy. My idea of first aid (after my mother's high hopes of me becoming a doctor) is antibiotic ointment and Band-Aids. I brought my Band-Aids to Brazil, South America, where I was learning about Living Stones, a church community center for street and working children. I would fix boo-boos. The first casualty came quickly--Anderson's thumb. I brought out the Band-Aids and out popped all the eyeballs. The kids had ever seen Band-Aids before.

"*What is that? What does it do?*" And the big question for the antibiotic ointment: "*Does it sting?*" The crowd asked for their own Band-Aid as well. I told them I had to see blood first. bad choice of words. I was worried they would get hurt just to receive one.

It hits you in the little things. It makes you ask what kind of life they must live—a life without Band-Aids. Without beds, dressers, toilet paper, showers, food. Patricia wonders why I am surprised at these things: "Didn't you know about *pobreza* before?" I did. I thought I did. I've been working in the inner city since high school. I wanted to save the world. I've read books, studied poverty, lived with the ghetto. But it is different *being* here. It is another country—it is another world.

I am here to meet these children. To play with them and love them. To learn about this program and help raise funds. I think I am the first one to ask them their favorite color, animal and food. They sit and contemplate it like they've never thought about it before. Pink? No...Green. Most everyone likes dogs. They've seen dogs. And food? They shrug and look blankly. Favorites don't matter when you have nothing. This is day to day survival. We laugh hard and play dodge ball all afternoon, and I forget that I will go home to a meal, a refrigerator, a computer, a bed. They will return to a cement square with a dirt floor.

Of course these children can't afford a luxury like Band-Aids. I just had never followed the thought through that far. You don't normally travel your thoughts down to reality until you see it. You see it on faces that have never seen Band-Aids.

#### 17. Band-Aid Help

I have been in Brazil since 2004, but I am still only doing "Band-Aid" help in so many areas. Come in, put a band aid on the gaping wound, and hope it makes everything better. It is hard to take the steps to invest your life, not just some time and energy, into serving others. It is also hard to know what a sold-out life looks like: there is no manual—it is simply living life with God.

In ministry at the youth center, the first year I was giving my mind: knowledge that I had about God, life, helping, having my first real job. Slowly I began open up and understand more. Slowly I began friendships. Slowly I opened

my heart to the kids, and a little slower, they opened back to me. By the second year, I had finally formed real relationships with the kids—investing my heart. And then I noticed a change after 3 years: I was beginning to learn how to invest my life. To know that I was called to give everything. And that is when I really began to see fruit. In Brazil, it took the first year to wrap my head around a new culture and learn a new language. It took another year before I really could begin to help in a ministry, and one more for me to learn how to do that ministry in the culture I was in, instead of my own culture. It was only after the third year that I was able to begin leading/training in this ministry. True ministry takes time.

I am a seller of dreams. Of ideas, of myself. Being a missionary—or in ministry—you are presenting yourself to people. Your sacred dreams of changing the world. And saying “Please—please trust me—believe in me—and support me financially.” The truth is, I’ve been working with children in poverty for 15 years and still don’t understand it. As I sat and watched the kids at the dump, I asked myself: what they do when they poop. Leaves, I guess? Are there certain kinds of leaves to use? What about for babies? What do girls do when they are on their period? Do they really never floss? And so on. I want more than just “Band-Aids.” I am learning. And it is an incredible responsibility to KNOW.

It takes extra grace to go back and forth between the world of HAVE and HAVE NOT. I feel like I am losing grace and getting mad more easily at overly expensive cars, as I wait for the bus on the side of the road. Extremes are so blatant in Brazil. And to see them zooming by in what they don’t need, purposefully not caring about those around them...I cannot excuse them. There is no excuse.

I feel the bitterness growing inside of me...cars too fancy for their own good. People too rich for their own good. The “It’s not fair” echoes in my head. And I have a car; I have chosen this life. Imagine someone who didn’t. Seeing the “Haves” all day. Pass by without even knowing. I think it is the not knowing that irritates the most. How can they continue to be so ignorant to the needs around them?

Where is grace? Where have I let it go? And this is being a responsible adult: having 50 things on your plate to do and learning to do every single one of them with grace. The hard part about being poor is, everything takes extra grace. But the amazing thing about it is that the grace you need is always there—the exact amount you need. I guess that is what makes us all equal in all of the inequalities: the grace we need is always there.

After living in community with the people I am serving, I realize I need to reevaluate my definition of success. In ten years, when I see these children, what do I want to see? That they know and love God. That they can read and write, and do basic math and are able to provide for their family. That they know how to be faithful and love as a spouse and a parent. I have to let the rest go.

In her book “One Thousand Gifts,” Ann Voskamp writes three things she is grateful for every day, discovered many things along the way, including two simple sentences that marked me profoundly: “*Thanksgiving creates abundance*” and “*Thanks is what builds trust.*” Could it be that the abundance the children I work with need—that I need—in all areas is found through thanksgiving? Through being and teaching gratitude? Thanking God for everything, even the pain, the lack, the ugly, is what builds trust. In all of my relationships, they can only be transformed to beauty through gratitude. And it starts with simple “Thank yous” in the little things you begin to see when you practice.

I am compelled. And I wish I wasn’t. I am not a saint, marching on in bright colors: I am girl with her head down in shame, feeling overwhelmed by guilt in having so much when so many have so little. And soon this feeling will let me go, where I can forget and sit down and watch TV like most everyone else. I don’t know what all the next steps will be—I just know the one in front of me. I want more than Band-Aids.

## 18. Religion

*“Religion is responsibility or it is nothing at all.” –Jacques Derrida*

*“Yale professor Harold Bloom observed that Karl Marx had it only partly right when he said that religion is the opiate of the people. More broadly speaking, it is the poetry of the people, both the good and the bad, for better and worse. According to Bloom, trying to attack or conquer such a massive target is almost as useless as blindly celebrating it. But religion can, and should be, objected to, questioned, and talked about. Devastating criticism of religion is always part of religion. The religiously faithful aren’t just permitted to critique and complain and reform; they’re bound to do it by religion. Without it, there is no faithfulness. When religion won’t tolerate questions...it has an unfortunate habit of producing some of the most hateful people ever to walk the earth.” –David Dark*

In my quest to understand religion I will begin with myself, since I know none quite so well: I grew up in a Christian home. Conjure up stereotypical ideas or memories of “that Christian family” you knew. It may be close to my life. I

accepted the existence of God as firmly as the peas on my plate, and the Bible as His revealed will for us was as real as my running bath water.

It took a long time to realize that not everyone believed the same thing. That was confusing. God and religion were a set of rules that I felt happy when I followed and guilty when I didn't. They made me a moral person, but not a good person. Somewhere along the way something changed. I met God. I found something bigger than myself to live for, and I am in for the long haul. *"In the end, it is the reality of personal relationships that saves everything."* – Thomas Merton

Church—denominations? I still haven't figured that out. Community church, Baptist church...they felt the same, and that was what was important to me. They felt like home. There was doctrine, but I don't remember spending a lot of time arguing about it. You believed it or you didn't. You got out of it what you were ready to receive.

At the Missionary Baptist church, to keep from politically correct or incorrect terms, we simply referred to race as food: I was a "strawberry," while my best friend Deandra was "chocolate." I was the whitest thing there, next to the choir robes. I can still hear the music—tight harmonies, rhythm, and passion. There was an overabundance of generosity, personal involvement, and food—no one had a better BBQ. I wasn't just home, I was family.

To continue my over-simplistic generalizations of different denominations, my uncle is a Lutheran pastor, which seems to involve a lot of tradition, but then again, my aunt is a pastor as well which isn't so traditional. One set of grandparents were Methodists, and I remember services in a big, old building that seemed stuffy, even with the high ceiling, but perfect for the bell choir. The other set were Apostolic Christian, meaning the men sat on one side and the women sat on the other. They sang with just voices, and I found something refreshing in the simplicity. I had a friend who told me he was Presbyterian. I asked him what that meant and he said it meant that doctrine was important and that he needed to study it more. I visited Pentecostal churches, which were very emotional. I kept looking around, wondering if they were for real, or just faking it. I kept waiting to see if I would "get" whatever they had. I didn't. Church in Brazil is charismatic and colorful, as are the Brazilians themselves. They sit for longer sermons, often dance, and begin and end whatever hour the people are there. Brazil is Catholic like America is Christian, but Evangelicalism is growing.

Why Christianity? He chose me. We pattern our choice of religion after what we admire. Many of my friends grew up Christian but then saw only hypocrites and nothing to admire, and left. That is the power we have on one another. I admired God himself and a personal relationship. The rest got thrown in and like family—"love 'em and hate 'em and can't get away from 'em."

*"There's a whisper of revolution whenever people really speak to one another and really listen."* –David Dark  
*"Baha'i are people who believe in God,"* A friend told me, *"Who believe they have a soul that needs nourishment and care, and that other people in the world also need that. It teaches that religion is progressive, that it goes in a cycle, and Baha'u'llah (which means Glory of God) is the latest messenger in the successive line of Messengers from God. We believe in all the major prophets like Moses, Buddha, Christ, Krishna, Zoroaster, Mohammed, etc. These messengers have brought a lot of the same teachings, and at their cores, they all basically teach the same things, only they got more progressive as time went on."*

I told him I thought this was the easy way out—accepting everything. That Baha'i was a religion of knowledge—all the religious books are sacred and have things we need and must use in our lives. My friend pointed out that this was not easier, but harder, in that he felt so small in the vastness of all that needed to be learned. We agreed on many things, like seeking God, knowing God, and walking in His presence. We disagreed about Jesus being God's only way to heaven. We agreed to cheer the other on in their search.

*"If I am a good listener, I don't interrupt the other or plan my own next speech while pretending to be listening. I am not in a hurry, for there is no pre-appointed destination for the conversation. There is no need to get there, for we are already here; if I am a good listener, what we have in common will be more than what we have in conflict."* –Merold Westphal

"Aunt" Brenda had short curly red hair, a dog named Moppet, and diabetes. She used a scooter and let me honk the horn. Aunt Brenda was Jewish, and like everything else about Aunt Brenda, it was very pronounced. I remember going to a Jewish community center for Purim, my favorite celebration with poppy seed triangle cookies, where I got to dress up like Esther. Esther was in my Bible too, so I didn't think we were different at all. But Aunt Brenda seemed to think so.

My mom said it would be better for me not to talk about certain things around Aunt Brenda.



Certain things like Jesus. Aunt Brenda liked me just fine, so we got along. I was in slight awe of her, being from a place talked about in the Old Testament. I wondered if she was any closer to God, since she was one of God's chosen people. But Aunt Brenda didn't seem to think she was very chosen.

My mother enjoyed saying "Chutzpah" and using a Jewish accent now and then, but mostly she loved Passover. We read books about the symbolism of Jesus foretold in the Jewish traditions. We had an old record of Jewish music that I would dance to as a little girl, but the best part was Matza, the unleavened bread. If you want to make me happy, give me Matza. During the Passover, they would take three Matzos, break the middle one, and hide half of it. All the children would hunt, and the finder would receive a prize.

The Jewish people are still waiting for their Messiah, while I believe that he has already come. I am awed at the price paid for this difference of belief. I read a book called "Girl Meets God" by Lauren Winner. She converted to orthodox Jewish, but became a Christian after college. She relates changing religions to getting a divorce and remarriage. Not easy. By the end she was able to not just look at the differences and what she left behind, but in the similarities, and what she brought with her.

Catholics went to big buildings that had stain glass windows, lots of pictures of a bleeding Jesus, and prayed to Mary. They had a pope and fish on Friday. That was all I knew. When I was little, I went to a nursing home and talked with an old man who told me he was Catholic. I decided to convert him. I asked if he believed that Jesus died for his sins, and he said yes. That Jesus was God's Son and yet God as well? Yes, he believed that too. I went through every doctrine my young brain could explain and he agreed with all of it. I pronounced him a Christian and went on with my life, a little more confused about what it meant to be Catholic.

History was full of Catholics and Protestants killing each other. That couldn't all be about praying to Mary, could it? As I got to know some people who were Catholic, I learned that they came in all different shapes and sizes. Some seemed to be following a religion of symbols, statues, and traditions—while others seemed to be on the same page as I was—we both loved Jesus. I find it difficult to keep grudges with someone who really loves Jesus.

I have been challenged by Henri Nouwen, Dorothy Day, Mother Teresa, and a nameless girl who blogs about her life and Catholic faith. But in Brazil Catholicism seems to be a different breed. Being 85% Catholic, each town has a saint and they celebrate its holiday with fervor. The Brazilian Catholics I have met feel empty. The big, old, beautiful buildings make me ache, cry, and want to fill them with something: relationship. For so many, all of the things meant to bring them closer to God have just become relics that stand between them and God.

I mix up Buddhism and Hinduism. My way of differentiating was that Buddha was the fat god who wasn't really a god, and the Hindus had all the gods with arms. Hinduism was the religion of so many gods you could not remember them all, a caste system, and Gandhi. Buddhism had no god, nothingness (nirvana), and the Dalai Lama. If age gets brownie points, Hinduism wins as the world's oldest religion. It is the uniting of a lot of thoughts over a lot of time, but most often comes together under the Vedas, their sacred writings. They have 33 million gods, but really it is one god, with many names, and all is god (pantheism). There are four castes, and then there are the untouchables. You are born, live, and die in your caste: that is your lot in life. There are four ends of life with the main one being Dharma, the pursuit of the doctrine and duty of each caste system. Dharma reminds me of the TV show "Lost."

Buddhism began when Buddha broke off from Hinduism, and decided that no god was needed—you need to follow your own path to enlightenment. His Dharma is based on the four noble truths: there is suffering in life, suffering always has causes, the end to suffering is possible by ending the causes, and the Noble Eightfold Path is the way to end suffering. You should look up the Eightfold path for yourself. You do all this to become free from desiring anything. That is your goal. But *"Having is not so pleasing a thing as wanting. This is not logical, but it is often true."*—Spock from *Star Trek*

"Islam" means "surrender." There is one God, and Muhammad was his prophet. The five pillars of Islam are declaration of faith, prayer, fasting (Ramadan), almsgiving, and pilgrimage. The Qur'an is their holy book, where Jesus was a prophet, but Muhammad was the last one, and more important. When I was young, I learned that Muhammad had multiple wives, including one that was nine years old. I never forgave him for it. You can't have Islam without Muhammad, and I don't like him. I know there are many great men with many personal problems who do many great things...but this is my bias, and I admit it.

Religion: of strangers, friends, family, and myself. I have found things I agree and disagree with. I have asked myself why I feel that way about it, and sometimes I have answers and sometimes I don't. I have asked what I am supposed to DO about what I know, and sometimes I have answers and sometimes I don't.

*“God is not made angry and insecure by an archaeological dig, a scientific discovery...or by people with honest doubts concerning His existence. God is not counting on us to keep ourselves stupid, closed off to the complexity of the world we’re in...I’m not required to cut off my questions or try to uncritically place my faith in particular doctrines. The call to worshipfulness is a call to employ my imagination and therefore the whole of my practice—a mindfulness that requires an engagement.”* –David Dark

I wonder if I only want to know what is right and what I believe so I can go out and start yelling it. I can be sure of it. I can protest and do something and dare them to say I am wrong. Instead, I find that the center of religion, belief, and myself is relationship with God. And what flows from that relationship is love to all people. Those with the same beliefs and those with different beliefs. And that is what I needed to know.

#### 19. Verse Stories

I leaned over the sink to wash the snot off my face. I had only been in Brazil for two weeks. I was only 16. I’d been home for three months. Why didn’t the feelings go away? The emptiness. The “something isn’t quite right” feeling. I turned on the water faucet and heard it. “Brazil is yours.” What? Was that you God? Talking to me? Or was it a feeling in words. Or something...bigger than me? What did that mean—Brazil is mine?

Five years later I sat on the tile floor of Nazare Da Mata, Northeast Brazil, with my Bible open to Matthew 5. I read it again. Who hasn’t read the Sermon on the Mount. This time it stopped. Verse five took me back to the sink in the bathroom five years ago. *“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.”* Inherit the earth? The earth was pretty big. My part was Brazil. Brazil was mine. But I wasn’t sure about the meek part. A good definition of meekness is “Strength under control.” Control. I wanted control. I didn’t want to give it up. Even to inherit a country.

Since 2004, my life has been more of weakness under control, than strength. There is nothing like daily life in a third world rural town to show you that you have no control. Over anything. And that you might as well give the illusion of control you have left to God. He takes care of it better. Sometimes God puts us places where meekness is not an option, to give us things bigger than we ever imagined.

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I don’t know where they hide the dirt in America. Under grass and asphalt, I guess. In Brazil I walk down the street and all the dirt finds my feet. Sweeping the floor is a multi-daily task. It never stays clean. I thought being a missionary was about telling people about Jesus. I am spending more time washing the dishes and sweeping the floor. I came to help and teach and share what I know and then I arrived. And I found that things were taken care of. That God is already here and alive and working...and life goes on with or without me. In fact, what I can do best, and is the biggest help is often just that: washing the dishes and sweeping the floor.

Luke 16:10-11 *“He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much...If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches?”*

Me: Please God, can I go now? What can I do?

God: The dishes.

Me: The dishes? Why the dishes?

God: Because that is where you are now.

Me: The dishes. Forever?

God: No, not forever. Today the dishes, tomorrow the world. Or maybe the dishes again.

Me: Again...why dishes?

God: Because you need the dishes.

Me: When will I need something else?

God: When you are fine with just the dishes.

\*

I met Mika at camp, spending her first two weeks out of the inner city. She was not born with mental problems, but due to lack of training and care, at 14 she had trouble reading, concentrating, and doing simple tasks. She also had a problem wetting the bed. Every night. At one chapel service, Mika came forward to talk to me. She asked if I could save her. I said that wasn’t possible, but I knew Someone who would. Mika gave her life to Jesus that night. It was a long two weeks. She shouted before she thought, she erupted before she understood, and she fought before she listened. To get her attention I would hold on to her shoulders and turn her to look at me. We talked about things. “Is this what Jesus wants for you?” I asked. “No.” she would sorrowfully reply. “Let’s pray then,” I suggested. Silence prevailed. “I never know what to say.” She confessed.

The only verse I could remember...and not even a whole verse, was Psalms 12:1 *"Help, Lord..."* and so that is what we prayed. "I have a verse for you Mika—a prayer—"Help, Lord." And He will. He will help you remember. He will help you listen. He will help you forgive and will forgive you."

We had a lot of "Help, Lord" prayers those weeks. Soon after, school started and I lost track of Mika. A year later someone mentioned that she had been in a house fire and was in the hospital. After I visited her, we closed our eyes to pray. "Ms. Rachel, I remember..." Help Lord!"

This verse stayed with Mika, and with me. God is mighty, great over all—but He is also simple enough to fit into where we are. Into two words. To come near when we fall so short and can go no more. "Help, Lord." And He will say the rest.

\*

(As told by my friend Aninha.) The doctor told my mom to come back in three days. Her blood has serious problems clotting, and more tests needed to be done. "Let's not take the bus just yet. I want to talk to God about this." We walked the couple blocks to the beach and took off our sandals while Angela told God all about it. She stopped and looked down, the waves stopping just before her toes. "You *shut up the sea with doors*," she said, "You said it could come, and go no further," Quoting Job 38:8,11. "If You can do that, then You can take care of my blood."

And that was the end of my mother's prayer. We took the bus home and waited for the next series of tests. In the office, the doctor took longer than usual. I took this to be a bad sign, but tried not to show it. She came in and said "Dona Angela, you have a lot of faith in God, don't you?" "Yes, I do." Mom replied. "Because God is doing miracles for you," The doctor said, "You are free to go home, your blood is as healthy as mine."

\*

(As told by my friend Daniel) *"Fret not thyself because of evildoers..."* (Psalms 37:1) It was easier said than done. My father was a Spiritist, and demonically involved. I could see it in his eyes when it wasn't him looking back at me—when it was something else. He would have super-human strength, and you would never know what he would do. *"Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him: fret not thyself because of him who prospers in his way, because of the man who brings wicked devices to pass."* (Psalms 37:7) I was meditating on Scripture, but it was hard when my father came into the room and grabbed me. I said nothing, but looked into his eyes and thought *"For the arms of the wicked shall be broken: but the Lord upholdeth the righteous."* (Psalms 37:17) and my dad instantly let go. He grabbed a knife and started to tear up things around the house, but wouldn't come near me. I continued meditating on the Psalm until the last verse *"And the Lord shall help them, and deliver them: He shall deliver them from the wicked, and save them, because they trust in Him."* My father looked around, as if seeing things we could not see—spiritual things. He cried out "Stop! Stop! Don't call the angels on me!"

I hadn't said one word out loud. I dropped down and cried. It was as if God touched me and said, "See? I am real! I am here with You!" That day, the Bible was no longer a book to me, it was living and alive and NOW. Those words were mine.

## 20. Fear

There are three types of fearing God: doing right out of the fear of punishment, out of the fear of losing reward, and out of the fear of broken relationship. The closer you are to God, the less you will do right out of the motivation of the fear punishment or of loss of reward. When what you value most is the relationship, the more you will seek to do right out of the fear of breaking that relationship because of sin.

Fear of Punishment: "Dear God, don't let me go there. Amen."

Fire insurance. That is what being a Christian was for me at age 8. I liked Jesus, God, and all of the stories, but the push over the edge was hell. I will be honest: I lay in bed, scared out of my wits that I didn't do it right. I re-prayed the sinner's prayer every night, just in case I didn't wake up. Because it didn't hurt to make sure. And it would hurt if I'd messed up.

*"No one likes the idea of hell."* My pastor said, *"I mean, who sits around going 'hell—yeah, that is my kind of idea!' Maybe some sickos, but that is something else. If it were about picking and choosing what we wanted from the Bible, we wouldn't throw out "God loves you" and keep the idea of hell. I wouldn't."*

Most of my theological discussions, including those about hell, involve references to the *Narnia* book series or something C.S. Lewis wrote, like "The Great Divorce." He doesn't say it is truth, he just says it is a story of how it might be. Of how he is trying to wrap his head around things. And I want it. I want it to be right so badly. *"I don't*

*think it is true.* My sister told me, *“They are beautiful ideas and it made me, for the first time, stop and really think that maybe everything could be ok. But I don’t think that is what the Bible is talking about.”*

To which I politely thought “Shit.” And I don’t think dirty words often. I don’t like them. Out loud I said “That is really honest. I don’t think I am ready to be that honest yet.” I didn’t want to travel my thoughts about hell down the rabbit hole. Because it is dark down there. I like forgetting how much I don’t know about everything. Because once I think about it I come to some conclusion and you are accountable for your conclusions.

A current theological hot spot is what you think about hell, and how that fits in with a loving God. Rob Bell brought the discussion out of the closet with his book “Love Wins.” I don’t think he got everything right. I don’t think C. S. Lewis did either. And I know I don’t have it all right. But we are looking. I can’t explain away all the references to hell the way Rob Bell did, just like I couldn’t with homosexuality. Trust me, I tried. And while I think very differently about homosexuality today than I did in the past, I still know that it is wrong. I just don’t have all the answers. And that doesn’t make me happy.

Fear of Loss of Reward: Is it worth it?

Growing up, I realized if Christianity was just about heaven and hell it wasn’t enough. I wasn’t feeling suicidal, so I still had this life to deal with. If Christianity didn’t work now, I wasn’t ready to step out and believe it would work after death. On the garage, A friend and I graffited the question “Is there life before death?” I am a child of my generation with an uncanny ability to piece together what makes sense into a web of semi-solid information that I feel comfortable living with, but is that enough when it comes to eternity?

*“Our eschatology shapes our ethics. Eschatology is about last things. Ethics are about how you live. What you believe about the future shapes, informs, and determines how you live now...so when people ask: “What will we do in heaven?” one possible answer is to simply ask: “What do you love to do now that will go on in the world to come?” What makes you think “I could do this forever?” What is it that makes you think, “I was made for this?” Imagine being a racist in heaven-on-earth, sitting down at the great feast and realizing that you’re sitting next to THEM. THOSE people. The ones you’ve despised for years. Your racist attitude would simply not survive...Paul makes it very clear that we will have our true selves revealed and that once the sins and habits and bigotry and pride and petty jealousies are prohibited and removed, for some there simply won’t be much left. Jesus is interested in our hearts being transformed, so that we can actually handle heaven.”* –Rob Bell

Some people use hell to scare people. They must not think church is worth it without the fire and brimstone. Some people use the idea of no hell to think they can do whatever they want. That is no better. Trying to evade responsibility isn’t going to help you in this life or the next, whether you add the label “Christian” or not. I know life is better with Jesus, now and forever. I know this because of my own life. So I want everyone I love to know Jesus. Because I want them to have a better life, with a hope and a future. Not because of hell.

Fear of Breaking Relationship: *“Your love is better than life.”* Psalm 63:3

Rob Bell discusses when someone commented that Gandhi was in hell: *“Somebody knows this? Without a doubt? And that somebody decided to take on the responsibility of letting the rest of us know?”* Were his questions. Is Gandhi in hell? I don’t know. I don’t know Gandhi. What sends someone to hell? What sends someone to heaven? Are there certain words that need to be prayed to be saved? How do you know they meant it for real? That they believed it?

What about a chance to accept Jesus after people die? Like in *The Last Battle* and they enter through the door and look Aslan in the face? Great idea, I think. True? I don’t know. It doesn’t say it in the Bible. What about more than one chance? Like in *The Great Divorce* where they could go at any time to heaven from hell, riding a bus? Great idea, I think. True? I don’t know. It doesn’t say it in the Bible.

Once I asked God why he wouldn’t show me more than six months of my life at a time. He said because then I wouldn’t have to trust him. He is right. I wouldn’t. I would get started on my life like a “To do” post-it note list. Maybe all of these things about the afterlife aren’t written in the Bible because God knew that then we wouldn’t find how great He was while we were here on earth. I don’t know. For some reason, He left out A LOT of stuff. Stuff that worries me. Stuff that makes me trust Him instead of being able to write out my beliefs in bullet point form.

*“Religions should not surprise us. We crave meaning and order and explanation. We’re desperate for connection with something or somebody greater than ourselves. This has not caught Jesus off guard. Jesus insisted in the midst of this massive array of belief and practice that God was doing something new in human history, something through him, something that involved everybody (John 14:6).”* –Rob Bell

Christendom has given me a vague but general outline of what it means to be saved. Believing in Jesus, accepting Christ, giving God your life...those are some of the words I try to describe it as. But really—most of it I have never found words for. In the end I mostly shrug my shoulders and say it is a personal relationship with Jesus. Which, when you think about it, sounds absolutely ridiculous. You know Jesus? God? Creator? HIM? How? When did you talk to Him? What did he sound like? What did He say? Do you laugh together? Argue? I give another shrug, and a “yes.”

Boil down the issue of hell and you come face to face with God. Who is He? Do I have the right God? Have I warped my image of Him with the same manipulation that I do in other areas of my life? Is my Jesus just an idol hodge-podge of what is convenient to me? Of what sounds right? Of what feels right? Can I trust Him?

Yes. God is big enough not to let me screw it all up. I'll keep learning. And probably rewrite this in ten years. When I finally got up the courage to question God, I hurled all my questions to a big black starless sky. I yelled really loudly. I scared the neighbors. He didn't answer a single one. But at the end of the night, I knew He loved me. I sat inside my bedroom, curled up behind the door with tears falling. A close friend had just committed suicide. Why? I asked God. No answer, but I knew He was crying too. He loved her more than I did. And from those and other experiences, I figured I didn't know the answers, but if God loved me, and if He loved everyone else as much as He loved me, then the rest could be figured out later.

I believe there is a hell. I wish I didn't. I believe there is a lot about hell I don't know. I also know that God is just. And each person will be judged, punished, and rewarded. Justly. Perfectly. The exact right amount. The exact right amount of time. Yeah, that is scary. And not just for people who don't call themselves Christians. For all of us. I want the people I love—and that should be everyone—to be happy. It is my default position. And I know the way they can be happiest is with Jesus. So I tell them about Jesus. Because it works. Now. Later. In between.

## 21. Frankenstein

*“Don't reinvent the wheel, just realign it.”* –Anthony D'Angelo

Great thinkers throughout time have put forth a lot of effort to produce their utopias. I take the Frankenstein approach—a little from here, a little from there—to create my new monster.

For a utopia, outwardly, everyone's needs must be met, and inwardly, it must be realized that those needs are being met. Repression (dealing with the balance of freedom and equality) and human nature (so the inner change can be realized and actualized) are important parts of making this change or leap into utopia. It only takes one thing out of place or in disharmony, and utopia has turned into dystopia. Either people are somehow transformed to not be able to be imperfect (or create dystopia), or they continue in imperfection, and the disharmony/imperfection is somehow repressed/controlled.

I don't think we will ever achieve the “desire-less” human nature, so my utopia would have a unifying drive in human nature (a positive objective), and use repression as a personal, sacrificial decision made to balance freedom and equality. A willingness to repress some of my own individuality may be needed to maintain the change toward utopia. Since each person's utopia looks different, if my utopia involves working because it brings me pleasure, and for John Doe it does not involve work because work is enslavement, a collective utopia would, in some form, involve repression to some extent, since our ideas are incompatible. This “giving in” of some of my personal freedom is what creates the balance of freedom and common good for all.

We should never underestimate the creativity of human nature: when one set of problems are removed, we are sure to find another. Utopia is a continual work. Where we should be moving up Maslow's hierarchy of needs, we instead create a new bottom level once we have climbed up the previous one. My utopia builds upon what is learned from the real life example of the utopian project of the Kibbutz.

Spiro points out three things that happened to create something different (collectivism) that led to the beginning of the kibbutz and utopian living: distance from the past, powerful unifying experiences, and a strong belief system.

My utopia is distanced through time (set in the future, not too close yet not too far), and is a non-violent progression. Not all rebellions or revolutions need to involve violence: perhaps just a (violent) change in consciousness. Marcuse's idea (1967) was that to break with present realities and move toward utopia requires “the simple refusal to take part in the blessings of the “affluent society.”

Refusing the affluence that could easily be theirs led to positive change. Looking at great men and women who made a difference in history, there is a commonality among them: they turned down, or repressed their personal

desires for many other things. They were focused, driven, and would not be distracted by other options to complete their goals. This is what it would take to create my utopia.

*"If it is the future you seek, then I tell you that you must come to it with empty hands. You must come to it alone, and naked, as a child comes into the world, into his future, without any past, without any property, wholly dependent on other people for his life. You cannot take what you have not given, and you must give yourself. You cannot buy the revolution. You cannot make the revolution. You can only be the revolution. It is in your spirit, or it is nowhere."* (LeGuin, 1974, p.301)

The second point made in the study of the Kibbutzim was that they were united by experiences together. It is very rare for more than one generation to have the same driving force (as circumstances change, and the people themselves change) which is why very few utopias can last more than one generation.

I do not expect my utopia to continue, for their children will need to take into their own hands their future and the kind of utopia it becomes. By definition, an education in a utopia must create this. By letting go, I release them to have the power to succeed or fail, while hoping to God they fare well, and learn from any mistakes along the way. While fear is a very powerful uniting experience, and useful in creating utopias (for example, the graphic novel, *Watchman*), it is not the basis that I want driving my utopia. Suffering is also a powerful unifying experience, bringing us together in a much deeper unity than fear—fear is grasping at straws, whereas suffering together creates a brotherhood that is difficult to break. But I would not wish suffering on anyone for a utopia, even if it brings about good results.

*"It is our suffering that brings us together. It is not love. Love does not obey the mind, and turns to hate when forced. The bond that binds us is beyond choice. We are brothers. In pain, which each of us must suffer alone, in hunger, in poverty, I hope, we know our brotherhood. You have nothing, you possess nothing, you own nothing. You are free. All you have is what you are and what you give."* (LeGuin, 2003, p. 300)

Suffering as a motive is very closely related to brotherhood, a "twin" of what will be my utopia's driving force. Brotherhood is the most well-known and common driving force for utopias—it was foundational in the beginning of our own nation. It is the picture of moving forward, hand-in-hand, toward a utopia.

In the article on the Kibbutz, it describes brotherhood as passion for community, or "Communitas." *Communitas* produces this passion, and is "an emotionally powerful social experience consisting of primordial and reciprocal identifications among the members of a small social group...A family-type community, between twelve and seventeen young men and women would sit together every evening after work...and exchange impressions and opinions...longing of each for his neighbor, a desire to sit together until late at night." (Spiro, 2004, p. 564-5) This is what I want in my utopia.

But brotherhood alone often forgets the personal sacrifice required to make any community, let alone a utopia, work. Therefore, in my utopia, the "twin" of brotherhood is motherhood. The picture for this driving force is of a mother carrying her child into utopia. The suffering component comes in the sacrifice that is given for the betterment of the next generation.

This final part noted in the Kibbutz article is the "how" of the day-to-day running a utopia.

<http://www.lovolution.net/MainPages/artWorks/DesignUtopia/DesignUtopia.htm> has a great list of questions to ask if you would like to create your own utopia, including the basic structure, goals and values, education, politics, relationships, religion, and jails.

While smaller utopias are easier, for it to be a true utopia, I believe it has to be for everyone. My utopia would be global, for how can you call someone your brother if you allow for one to receive benefits, and the next one not to. The basic physical structure of my utopia is similar to the garden-like state of Herland, which was carefully cultivated with lots of fruit trees and nuts growing everywhere, making the best use of the space. They were vegetarian because it made the best use of what they had, but I will not force my ideas on everyone, anyone is free to have meat—as long as they raise it themselves, taking complete responsibility from start to finish.

The duty of each member within this utopia is to pull their own share. This does not mean that each person is required to produce the same amount, but that each gives the full amount of effort. This takes the pressure off performance and doing and allows one to focus on character and being. *"The worker is not a citizen because he works, but works because he is a citizen."* (Bellamy, 2003, p.122).

The goal is utopia—the perfect place for everyone. Hopefully everyone has bought into this goal. If not, and it gets really bad, you can skip to the "jail" section to see what happens. The values already noted are motherhood and brotherhood, but specifically, integrity (being real and trustworthy), commitment (diligent, consistent, finishing what you start), kindness (compassion, putting others first, helping, friendly), excellence (doing your best no

matter who is looking or how “small” the job), being passionate (know what you want and go after it), curiosity (desire to learn and know more), and generosity (using money/ time wisely to give it away wisely).

The amount of children a family had would not be limited by rules in my utopia, because (hopefully) through the education each individual would take responsibility for the children they bore. Children would go into the woods and learn naturally, at home they would “*See books lying about, manage to read by the time they are four years old*” (Morris, 2004, p.25), and pick up languages naturally from their foreign peers. This is idealistic, but I like the more natural approach.

I also liked the idea of education divided into ages, by Robert Owen in “The Book of the New Moral World.” He has 0-5 year olds getting good food and “training to think, speak, and act rationally,” 5-10 year olds in “exercises that consist in that which will be permanently useful...characters formed physically, intellectually, morally, and practically.” From 10-15, 10-12 year olds are helping the younger class, and 13-15 year olds are “engaged in acquiring a knowledge of principles and practices of the more advanced useful arts of life...to produce, prepare, and execute whatever society requires.”

By 15-20, they can tell what each person is best at/likes to do, and so it is “training and educating to have all his faculties and powers cultivated.” From 20-25, is “the highest and most experienced class of producers and instructors.” After 25 years of age, they only work if they want to. From 25-30 they are basically just preserving the work, and then doing what they find enjoyable to do.

From ages 30-40, they “govern the home department, and 40-60 year olds are in charge of external or foreign arrangements...attending to visitors from other establishments...circumscribe the world in their travels.” (Utopia Reader, 1999, p. 207-219) Owen tried out his experiment in the New Harmony community in Indiana. This is lifelong learning and responsibility, which are two very important pieces of my utopia.

One utopia I read had a progression from capitalism into socialism. Socialism in history has not worked, often because it does not reward responsibility or character, and those lessons from history must be dually noted and brought into the equation, but I like the idea in general.

In Looking Backward, the work is done by whoever wants to do it. If there is a job that no one wants to do, then fewer hours are needed. They make all jobs equally attractive by increasing/decreasing the hours and benefits. For example, if everyone wanted to be a doctor, then the normal doctor working day would be 8 hours. But if no one wanted to be a lawyer, then you would only need to work 4 hours a day at the lawyer job, making it more desirable.

Jobs are like serving in the military: everyone does it from 21-45. From 21-24 they do the “common labor,” first of all, to get the experience, and second of all, because someone has to do it. This teaches them discipline, and then between 24-30 they can specialize if they would like to, finishing up when they are 45, and then only working if they chose to, or for the good of the community.

Technology makes sure to consider environment and lasting effects of the decisions made in science and technology. For example, Red Mars has the situation where the longevity “treatment” is available, but only to a few. Any technology must be beneficial and available for all. If the utopian world cannot sustain everyone having it, then they should not introduce it, for it creates disunity. This would be a question of the “few” repressing, or sacrificing their ability/freedom for the sake of equality and community.

Most utopias are anti-marriage because marriage is exclusive and into the realm of “mine” and “not mine.” Part of what makes love as powerful as it is, is the exclusivity that it holds. Hopefully the value of commitment would hold together relationships during difficulties where it often seems easier to just leave, rather than having a complex set of rules.

Religion in the utopia is what pragmatically works, and thus freely chosen. There is still the question of what to do with those who just won’t listen—the real proof in any utopia is in how they treat the resisters. Instead of jail, In my utopia, the focus is rehabilitation balanced with restitution, where they need to make right what they did wrong, working with the community to come to the conclusion of rehabilitation naturally. Taking personal responsibility is part of the education of anyone, criminal or not. This takes a lot more work, but brings about the most amount of closure. If this help is refused, then isolation for the protection of the general populous might be a last resort. How depressing to include that in an utopia.

Utopia requires an outward and inward change from the present—happening simultaneously—balancing personal freedom and equality as they distance themselves from the past, are united in motherhood/brotherhood, and find pragmatic solutions. Like Frankenstein, this utopia is unpolished and contains many gaps, but is full of heart,

desire, and hope for something better. *“But I, being poor, have only my dreams; I have spread my dreams under your feet; tread softly because you tread on my dreams.”* –W.B.Yeats

## 22. God-Sized Whole

You have a God-hole inside you. This capacity that is so beautiful and deep that it makes me cry to think it isn't being used. I shouldn't play favorites, but I have. And you are mine. Many of my arguments with God have been about you. Why couldn't He touch you and make everything fit? And I was mad at you too. Why can't you just turn and look on His beautiful face? Lay it all down and walk away. Walk away and into the Greatness.

I don't know what is going on in your life. But I know that when things click with you and God, everyone will see it. The blast will shoot out in all directions and people will stop and look at the light and wonder. And I will see you glow in His brilliance and in His glory. I will see His face shine out from your eyes. I don't know how this will happen, but I know it won't be because of me. And though I would gladly spend my whole life trying, there are some places that only you and God can tread, and I am left behind.

I made many deals with God...that I would never question Him as long as He promised that one day you see. But God doesn't make deals. Sometimes He is the most silent on the things that are closest to our hearts. But I know that one day, I will hear from a friend of a friend a story about you. And I will know it has happened. And I will be happy.

I asked God how He could let me love you so deeply, when He knew we couldn't be together. He said that love was never wasted. Maybe all of my love for you was nothing more than to show you a little bit of how much God loves you. I haven't been a very faithful reflection of God's love, but I know you have seen pieces of Him through me, and I pray you will see more and more of Him until the memory of me is shattered and all that is left is Him and His consuming love for you.

## 23. Homosexuality

I was 12 years old, sitting in the back of the church van when I overheard the conversation: *“Well, you know they are gay—and I don't mean happy.”* Something hit my heart and I realized there was a world that I didn't know existed. My knowledge of homosexuality grew over the next couple of years, mostly through conversations overheard, and mean-spirited jokes. Then the rumor that a neighbor was gay. A friend of a friend. Then my friend. I was thrown into confusion. What should I do? What was my responsibility? How could I help? I just wanted to give him a hug and let him let it out. While I listened to a friend share her struggle, thoughts scrambled around my head: *“How could this be? How did she allow this to get like it is? It is wrong—I need to say it is wrong! But she know, she knows.”* But as I sat and listened, those thoughts got more distant.

I struggled in myself. I saw the pain so strongly. I saw the attempts to do better and the condemning failure and guilt that permanently crippled. I wrestled with questions like *“When does the person go from being tempted with homosexual thoughts, to being gay? When does the liar stop being a liar? When he stops lying? So do you stop being gay when you stop gay-ing? Or what about the prostitute? Is she no longer a prostitute when her shift ends? Or when she gets a new job?”*

I studied all the Bible verses. I tried to explain them away. I fought with God. In the people I knew, homosexuality was not something they chose. They did not sit down and say *“I want to be attracted to the same sex.”* On the contrary. It was something they constantly fought and tried to get away from. One friend finally stopped fighting. Then I had more questions *“If you say you are gay, does that mean you have given up? You are not going to struggle anymore? You are embracing your sin and saying that that is who you are? Your identity?”*

That friend looked me in the eye and said *“Do you think I want this? This...thing that that makes me hide who I am from those I love the most? Do you think I would choose something everyone hates—for the heck of it? No, I am doing the best I can with what I have been given.”*

It came down to the question of do I believe that God permits temptations/sins that cannot be overcome? Can I look someone in the face, someone who says they are gay and has gone through more pain and trouble and confusion and struggle than I can imagine, and say that God won't allow sin that cannot be defeated? I don't know. But I can tell them they can be forgiven and made new. Clean. And for that moment, that is enough. Really, I was asking God *“Who are you?”* I wanted to know Him and I wanted to know that He was good. And that no one is doomed. That somewhere, there is always a chance. That there is always an option not to sin. Somewhere. At one church service I finally heard something that helped. And the pastor didn't quote Judges. Or



Exodus, or 1 Corinthians. He simply said *“Jesus wasn’t afraid to forgive the prostitute. He also wasn’t afraid to tell her to go and sin no more.”* That’s where it’s at.

My friends know what is right and wrong. It doesn’t need to be stated again. But what needs to be remembered is that hope is there, because forgiveness is always there, and is always beautiful. And Someone willing to forgive all the time also gains the power to say what is wrong and needs to be forgiven.

And it doesn’t make the struggle go away. Maybe one day it will, but maybe it won’t. And maybe one day I will understand it more, and maybe I won’t. But I am learning. And I love my friends—gay and straight. All of them. I have my struggles and they have theirs. And we still love each other. Because the Bible tells me so.

I don’t want my little brother to learn about homosexuality through crass jokes made by the boys behind the church. I don’t want him to be one of those making the jokes. I want him to be the one who reaches out to the new boy with the pink shirt. And the one who reaches out to the one with the blue shirt. I want him to know that God forgives, and God loves. I want him to know that *“Jesus wasn’t afraid to forgive the prostitute. He also wasn’t afraid to tell her to go and sin no more.”*

I want him to know that it is okay to not have all the answers and to not understand everything, but to trust that God is still good. I want him to have gay friends and straight friends and lying friends and stealing friends and friends that sleep around—because that is life, and you cannot hide from it. But I also want him to know God and be broken by the sin and the pain, in his own life and in those around him and desire to be clean and forgiven and to be transformed into the image of Christ. I want him to know that Jesus is the only answer for him, those struggling with homosexuality, and for the world.

#### 24. 67% Normal

*“You are 67% normal”* says the Facebook test. Apparently, not everyone agrees with me that life as we know it would be better with ice cream. I laugh when I say this now, but it wasn’t always like that. I used to want to score 100. There was a way that things were supposed to be done, and I was going to follow that plan. And then God laughed.

Most of us have heard of “the plan:” Go to school. Get good grades. Turn 18. Go to college and four years later graduate and feel really good about it being over. It didn’t work that way for me. In fact, it didn’t work that way for most of us. Life happens. You learn things. The plan changes. Whoopi Goldberg said, *“Normal is nothing more than a cycle on the washing machine.”*

After nine years, five different colleges in two different countries, with various credits in various subjects all over the board, I went to IUPUI to finish. To write a new definition of normal that fit me. A finisher. An achiever of my objectives. A definition that says it is normal for me to attain my goals and celebrate a job well done.

Like all good lessons in life, they are meant to be applied liberally and eaten with ice cream. My journey required learning that being 67% normal was just a number, and that I was in charge of writing my own definition of normal. The challenge for us all is to take the definitions we have written about ourselves, about what our normal is, and bring it into the world with us.

Someone told me that if it is worth doing, it is worth celebrating. We have done it, and so now let us celebrate. Life doesn’t always give us opportunities to stop and enjoy what we have done—it is a decision we have to make to take the time to do. But right now we have our moment with Pomp and Circumstance. Remember it, treasure it, repeat it. Often.

#### 25. Colors

I am getting used to life in Brazil with a boyfriend in the USA. It isn’t like I’ve ever tried to portray myself as a desperate single girl, but you should see the way most of the people I know congratulate me. You would think I won the lottery rather than got a boyfriend from their smiles, hugs, and words. It is sweet. Ish.

It is interesting to see how the kids respond. For as much as Brazil says it isn’t racist, there is still some thoughts and feelings there. I can feel them. But they haven’t learned how to hide anything in Cajueiro Claro. When I showed them his picture today, someone said, *“Why is he so black?”* to which the other kid said, *“He is the same color as you.”*

Eivaldo, the darkest boy, didn’t say anything but gave me an extra hug when we were done. It said something. Something like *“hmmm, maybe you really do love us.”* Funny how sometimes I feel they still doubt it sometimes. Funny the things that prove my love. Something like *“You picked him when you could have picked any color you wanted. Maybe you really do love my color too.”* I do.

How is color such a big deal? Take away the right and wrong of it, and just wonder...how? I understand how beauty and ugly is. Even though I still feel guilty when I notice myself pulling towards the beautiful and away from the ugly. Karine said, "*Rachel, if he were fat and white you wouldn't have dated him.*" And this. Is. Probably. true.

\*

When did we start calling people colors instead of Nationalities? I am "Proud to be an American," and I know many people have worked long and hard to be called that, but isn't it just lazy? What about where you came from before (except Native Americans)?

Call me German, not white. And if you must call me a color, get a paint swatch to figure out what color I am because I've seen white paper, white shirts, white shoes...and I am not white.

We have forgotten how to be creative. Or maybe, we have forgotten to figure out who we are. I don't relate to being German: beer, chocolate, snow, WW1 and WW2--no thank you please. I don't know much more about Germany than that. And that is a shame. I haven't tried.

I was watching "Lincoln" with my black boyfriend, thinking, "*Man, this is so applicable to us.*" But he isn't black--he is Jamaican. He was born in Jamaica. For him, it was a conscious choice: he came to America when he was 6 and the children laughed at his accent. So he lost it, and embraced all that was called being American. He cried when his sisters told him he was still Jamaican. He turned to me in the movie and said, "*This is our history.*"

He identifies with American culture--he chose it--whereas I have always looked for a way out. I never have culture shock leaving the country: but always have counter-culture shock when returning. So the American-trying-not-to-be and the non-American-trying-to-be find a middle ground and begin to create their own culture. And don't call it gray.

\*

I am white, middle class, conservative.

I live in Brazil, the beautiful land of brown skin. I haven't read much about Trayvon, except on Facebook. Facebook, where my wall is in four languages: English, Portuguese, Chinese, and those statuses that I have to sound out to understand because the spelling is so creative. Because I have been blessed with friends all over the world, and all over the page of culture. There are people I love in America, Brazil, and Asia, from the good side of the tracks and the other side.

I've always been different. Growing up, it was a nagging feeling that something was wrong with me. When I was 16 and realized I felt more at home teaching at an alternative inner city school than in my suburban church, I had the thought that maybe the problem wasn't ME.

I believe you choose your culture, just as much as it chooses you. And somewhere, I chose "non-normal-American." Oh, I am proud of our country. Even more so, now that I have lived outside of it for five years. I can see every inch of blessing that I receive from being a citizen there: rights and privileges I gained from birth, not from work. But it doesn't change that:

I am white, middle class, conservative.

The man I love is black. And one day, I hope to have Cheerio commercial children. And there will be stares and looks and talks. And hopefully, conversations and laughter and love. More and more I realize that racism is only overcome through relationship. I hope to have many more relationships.

When I was 6, my best friend was black. I met her at a party at my grandparent's house and I loved her as only a 6 year old girl can. And after that I never saw her again, because I went home, six hours away. There weren't girls like that at my church. And I didn't know how to ask why not. Now I do.

I am white, middle class, conservative.

I have been living or working in beautifully mixed communities for half my life. My Facebook pictures are rainbows of color. And that is how I like it. That is my choice: intentionally. Because that is the normal I have created for me. And when I read this article about Trayvon, (<http://www.relevantmagazine.com/current/race-trayvon-martin-and-our-national-wake-call>), it hits me more than all the (white) "quit bashing Zimmerman" statuses I see or the (black) "you killed my brother" statuses. Because it talks about relationship. And that I understand.

I understand the woman who fears for her husband and son, jogging at night. Not because of Trayvon, but because

that is how life is. Still. I've seen it.

I've seen it when I visited a friend in boy's school, and the guard questioned my safety. I've seen it when the policeman stopped my car, asked me to get out, and asked if I was "safe" with my (mixed) boyfriend. I've seen it when the manager asked me and my friends to be "quiet" in a restaurant, when in the next section, a white group of boys were hollering.

I am an American who wants to make a difference.

And I say it needs to stop.

Those that are saying Trayvon was just a freak accident, it needs to stop. Maybe, in his case, it was. But you are denying truth--that these things HAPPEN. And they happen A LOT. And if you can't see that, you need to meet more people. People who don't look like you.

Those that are saying Zimmerman needs to die to pacify a million injustices you have felt, it needs to stop.

Crucifying him isn't going to solve anything. relationships will. And if you can't see that, you need to meet more people. People who don't look like you.

## 26. Silence

*"He who doesn't understand your silence will probably never understand your words."* Elbert Hubbard

Two hours of silence. As the time inched closer to begin my experiment, my ears felt they had to consume as much music as possible. Every song sounded sweeter, as I passed the restaurant, the live music made me pause. It is like a hunger, before I've even started.

My roommate asked me why I didn't leave for my experiment. Because I wanted to eat, I told her, and that would require talking, communicating. And people just don't get my...ideas when I explained them. No music, no movies, no interactions, no texting. Why are you doing this again? My boyfriend asks. Because it was on my bucket list. Because every once in a while, I still envy those nuns and monks away in their towers who have mastered silence. Because I want to know I can.

Thirty hours of silence, one of my goals to do when I am 30. Two hours into it and I laugh (silently) because I don't feel like I've stopped talking—I sure haven't stopped in my head. Song after song is being sung up there. I wonder how many hours until I am really silent? Is it even possible? I talk to myself a lot. And sing to myself even more. Now I am whispering/mouthing words as I write. Does that count? Silence is for listening. I am not listening yet. Wikipedia says *"Silence is the lack of audible sound, the word silence can also refer to any absence of communication. Silence is also used as total communication, in reference to non-verbal communication and spiritual connection."*

I make noise when I wake up, rolling over and stretching. Noise is startling. I am hungry for noise. In three separate dreams, I spoke and felt the failure: in one was I was sleeping in the trash dump with the children and watching the worms climb back into my matrices, another was getting ready to return to Brazil and needing to say goodbye, and lastly, shopping and having lost my wallet.

I am beginning to wonder if the voices in my head will ever quit. I'm creative enough, full enough to keep feeding them for years, without new material. How long until they wind down? Silence and accomplishment don't go together. I lay in my bed doing nothing, hoping my thoughts will dry out and leave me alone. I want silence within. How long has it been?

Silence is emptying of sound, thought, activity. Going through your brain and sorting everything into its place until you stop and say—good, it is time to rest. Silence is a part of simplicity, a cleansing return to basics, child-likeness. And I yearn for it. I know my great need for silence, as does God. He made all these rules for the Sabbath. He led by example by resting on the 7<sup>th</sup> day—one day of not creating.

I make lists so I can make peace with the nagging voices in my head that say I am going to forget something, I am going to let someone down, I am going to screw something up. I work hard to be organized to give myself space for the silence of simplicity. But often I get stopped on my way. I forget the end result and get tied up in the project. I get overwhelmed without space for silence.

I think a true silent retreat requires leaving, someplace alone and simple. And includes fasting: empty of people, food, things. I once put myself into solitary confinement. It was a point where I was broken, physically, mentally, emotionally. I just didn't want to go on until I'd heard from God. It was a small room with a bed, chair, and bathroom. I brought paper, pencil, Bible, and change of clothes. I was left completely alone.

First I just slept until I could sleep no more. Time crept by, only noted by the big window that I sat next to and watched because it was the only thing to see. I fell into a routine of sitting, reading, writing, sleeping, praying, and showering. Whenever I got tired of one thing, I'd do another. It was healing. And I was starving. After a little less than 3 full days, I went out for food and returned to life. Sometimes you just need to know when you are broken and need to stop.

Sixteen hours of silence (including a good night's sleep) and I am starting to feel it. My mind slowing down. Enjoying the silence. Feeling less anxious and forgetting all the things I should be doing and just being. Silence and simplicity kiss and the whole world is right again.

*"Silence is full of noise...but we have become deaf to this thundering silence. But still more difficult than getting rid of that surrounding din is the achievement of inner silence, a silence of the heart which goes beyond every man. It makes you wonder if the diversion we look for in the many things outside us might not be an attempt to avoid a confrontation with what is inside."*

*"But whenever you do come upon this silence, it seems as though you have received a gift. The promise of this silence is that new life can be born. Then you realize you can do many things, but it isn't necessary. It is the silence of the "poor in spirit" where you learn to see your life in its proper perspectives."*

*"Deep silence leads us to suspect that, in the first place, prayer is acceptance. A man who prays is a man standing with his hands open to the world. He trusts that the world holds God's secret within it, and he expects that secret to be shown to him. Praying means being constantly ready to let go of your certainty and to move on further than where you now are. This is why praying demands poverty, that is, the readiness to live a life in which you have nothing to lose so that you always begin afresh."* Henri Nouwen

I am going to sleep after 27 hours of silence. When I wake up, I will get dressed and begin my day as if silence never ruled. The awkward hanging up because I can't answer my phone. The time I thought something funny and stopped mid-laugh. But I learned what I wanted to know: I can do silence. I can be comfortable in my own skin. And it takes a while to detox, but then things seem clearer and more focused, and I appreciate that. And somehow, silence always seems a little closer to God.

*"He who does not know to be silent will not know how to speak."* Ausonius

## 27. Peter

He came every year, just as he said. They all said he was forgetful, unmindful, and childish. So full of himself that he couldn't remember anyone else. What they said about fairies was true, but not just for fairies. It was true for people as well, especially the ones who don't believe in fairies: You can only hold one emotion at a time. At least if you wanted to fly.

However he managed to remember, and for whatever reason, he came. And every year he asked her the same question: Are you ready Wendy? And she always was, because nothing could ever take the spot that was reserved for the highest, bestest, and most complete that she knew. Or at least nothing had come yet.

It sounded simple: think happy thoughts. The results were beyond measure: flying and adventure. But so were the costs: Everything. Go and leave. Forget. Learn to remember. Happy thoughts. What does it truly take to think happy thoughts? More than you know.

All year she waited, living from day to day. Knowing of the existence of Neverland, but not able to reach it. She felt the wind in her hair, but when she raised her arms, was not lifted. She saw the common place routine, with no one questioning it, no one ever desiring a pirate's hook. She looked in the mirror, and saw her face look back, slowly growing older. Would he return? He never promised. Would she forget how? She was never sure.

Happy thoughts come from carefree habits of lazy days and not having to think too hard. They come from someone you love working hard to not let the pressure of the world fall upon you alone. They come from making the choice of what is life worth living for. But most of all, happy thoughts come from knowing what you want, and seeing it in every moment.

Wendy had only the last, but it was enough. She wanted him. Whether it was really him, or what he represented, she didn't follow through to an answer. He was youth, he was brave. He was mindless and heedless and impetuous, but when he was yours, he was all yours. You had to wait your turn. You could not complain of being neglected or overlooked. But in the end, he would always make it worth your while.

He was what she wanted to be, while still being "other" enough to keep her from quite settling into being sure about anything. A wildness that asked to be joined, but then ran ahead without waiting to see if she followed. Who could resist?

She saw him in the milkman's eyes, when he lined up the milk jugs on the step. She saw him when the teacher added a flourish to the writing on the chalkboard. He was next to the boy dipping the girl's pigtail in paint, and under the table when the dog ran after the cat. She knew what she wanted, and she saw it every moment. "What is your happy thought?" he asked this year. To which she crinkled up her nose and wiggled her mouth from side to side. He would forget the question if she beat him out the window and past the neighbor's roof. What would spring cleaning require this year? Should she sweep like mother? Mother who'd been sick this year...Wendy dipped down lower in the sky. Remember to forget. Learn to remember. The delicate balance of what is required right now. The only thing that is now: my happy thought. "My little pinky is faster than you" he taunted as he passed her by. He never saw her change, and he never changed for her to see. He looked at what he remembered, and she saw what she needed. She knew adults never went to Neverland, so an adult she would never be. A half-life she lived, never taking full responsibility, never opening a box she could not close. But she never missed it, for her happy thought filled all the cracks and corners to overflowing. She stretched out in bed and rolled over. The window, always open, cast the morning glow across her shoulder. She saw her shadow wiggle and smiled at the thought of him.

#### 28. What the Bible Doesn't Say

Great artists know that isn't just about what you create, but what you leave out. The blank space on the page, the conclusion left unstated. Today I read the Bible and think of all the things it doesn't say. It caught my eye in Luke 4:1 "He was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, where he was tempted by the devil for forty days." We don't get to hear those temptations—just the last 3, after Jesus got good and hungry. What were those other temptations? Sex? Drugs? Gambling? Homosexuality? Curious-er and curious-er.

What about what Jesus wrote in the sand with the adulteress? What was that thorn in Paul's flesh? Why are there so many things specifically NOT said that I want to know? Why doesn't the Bible say anything specifically about masturbation? Why do so many things need to be explained by cultural context that are lost in the pages of history? Polygamy and war? Old Testament God, sometimes I curl my lip up at You.

I like to think that someday, I will get these answers. I am working on reconciling myself to this "someday" being in heaven. The Bible is a pretty big book as it is—normally takes me a year and a half to "Read through the Bible in a Year." I haven't understood or worked through all I have read, let alone all I wish I could read. Breathe, Rachel, and deal with that first.

And the rest? Trust. If God is as big as you believe, then He knew what you (and all humans) would need revealed for this life on earth. And He put it in that Bible of yours. He made sure it got there—over time and people and places—to your bedroom dresser. It is sufficient because He is sufficient. What a relief. I'll just write down the rest of my questions to make for an interesting blog conversation.

#### 29. Love

My roommate said love was choosing to do the things listed in 1 Corinthians 13...patient, kind...loving her students, for example. It might not have any emotion attached to it—sometimes there was, sometimes it followed. But it was choosing to validate someone else and say they were worth it, worth loving. She also told me to quit asking hard questions. My neighbor said love was sacrifice, trust, and respect.

"Love" and "in love" can be two different words. I am thinking about "love" because I feel "in love." I once made a list of how I knew I was "in love," like listening to love songs that told my story. Like wanting him to show up and see what a good job I am doing, or carrying on conversations with him in my head. Wanting to share everything with him, and whenever I am out, subconsciously looking for him.

Five things I have learned about love:

1. Everyone thinks of something different when they hear the word "Love." We are constantly growing into and from our definition of love.
2. You can't kill, force, or control love. You can submit it. give it back or let it go. Love always involves letting go of your expectations. Letting go of the person. Letting go of your personal rights and desires.
3. Love is never wasted. It transforms the average into the best.
4. Love is something that both happens to you and you choose. the mixture of which is which that is changing, fluid, and fluctuates.

5. Love is not attached to actions. I don't love BECAUSE of what you do. If I did, then you could do something I didn't like and I could stop loving you. But at the same time, love will lead to actions, because that is what love is. (This nice little paradox is sort of like faith and works in the book of James.)

As soon as I switch my thoughts from being "in love" to "love" I realize what a selfish beast I am. How I make it all about me. "Life is Beautiful" was the best movie portrayal of love I've ever seen. After watching it I realized I've never really loved. Not really. I asked another friend what love was and he said "sacrifice and altruism."

Philosophers like Ayn Rand have an egoism theory—that in reality, all we do is some way related to getting something out of it. That there is no such thing as altruism. Even jumping in a lake and saving someone is egocentric because we would have felt bad if we had let them drown, and we wanted to feel good about saving them. Most of my life is lived that way. I think there are 3 times in my life where I did something self-lessly, and I analyzed them so much that it ruined that. My motives are always infected with me-ness.

*"The rule for all of us is perfectly simple. Do not waste time bothering whether you 'love' your neighbor; act as if you did. As soon as we do this we find one of the great secrets. When you are behaving as if you loved someone, you will presently come to love him. If you injure someone you dislike, you will find yourself disliking him more."* – C.S.Lewis

Moving from emotion to action. Love is doing what is best for the other. Not expecting them to fill me or make me feel special. Not putting them in a place that only God should fill. This is a whole new way to live.

How can one be sure it is love? Perhaps it isn't. Perhaps I have never really known love. But if I am wrong, it is only because of ignorance of a greater love. I believe it is love because it is patient. I don't have to tell you about it. And you don't have to love me back. It doesn't have expectations, and it doesn't call attention to itself. It is always present, but it doesn't yell. It doesn't go away, and everything else fades in its presence. It makes other parts of my life beautiful. It is not in a rush—it knows that if this is the real thing, I have a lifetime to discover it. And it doesn't need to be fed. It feeds me and fills me to satisfaction.

### 30. Abundance

Life is too short to spend it fighting *against* things. I don't want to survive, I want to thrive. I want the life more abundantly that Jesus died to give me. Life is too big for me if I only know what I am not—I want to know what I am. I am not anti-poverty. I am pro-abundance. I am not working to end scarcity, I am dancing to prove beauty and plenty.

The poor will always be with us, so let's introduce ourselves and pull up a chair to listen. Because stories are going to be told and no one will go home the same. For everyone who needs a piece of bread, there is someone who needs to be able to give that piece of bread to them. There is a great big God out there, and He is reflected in a thousand different ways by the thousand different people. Let me see His image in you.

### 30 things I believe

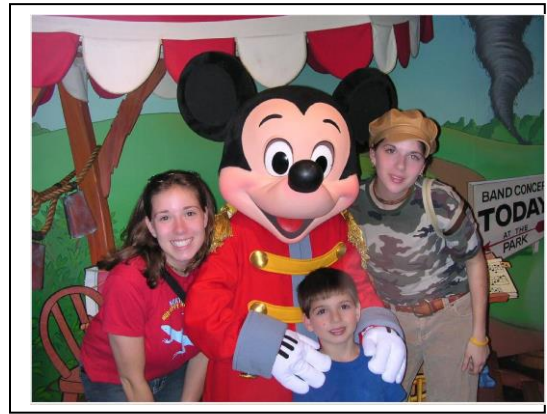
1. I believe the Bible is true, the Word of God revealed to us, and has all I need to know for living this life.
2. I believe that God loved me before the world began and sent His Son, who is God, to die for me, which he did gladly, going to hell for me before I even knew Him. He then came back to life, defeating death, and returned to heaven, making a home for me.
3. I believe that I was born with a sin nature, broken, and could/can only be fixed through the power of Christ's blood and a personal relationship with Him. And while I am on earth, I will still always struggle and be in need of God's grace.
4. I believe that through salvation I have been given a new heart with true, pure desires—but must choose momentarily to not return to substitutes, but to walk in the communion and presence of the His Holy Spirit who was given to me as a seal of my family credentials.
5. I believe that through Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection is the only way to heaven, and God is just and right in this. I don't understand/know how this works, but those who do not choose Him will be separated from Him in hell.
6. I believe that every person is invaluable because they are made by God, and life begins at conception. God loves everyone the same and doesn't give up on any of them so neither can I. I will work to love each life as my own.
7. I believe that each person was made for a reason and has a part in this life that only they can fulfill.

8. I believe that every day is a gift from God and should be lived to the fullest for Him, living with eternity in mind, and not knowing if it will be your last.
9. I believe that God knows me and has a plan for me, and that everything that happens is still under His control and will, in the end, be for my good and to bring Him glory.
10. I believe that Satan is real and spiritual warfare happens and we are called to fight and be intercessors. I also know that God is stronger and wins, so I don't have to blow that out of proportion.
11. I believe that being a Christian means I am not my own, I am a temple of the Holy Spirit, and that my goal is to be conformed into the image of Christ.
12. I believe that when I confess my sins, I am forgiven and made clean and restored, as God sees not me, but the perfect blood of Christ that covers me.
13. I believe that there is nothing I can do to get out of His hands (undo salvation). I am adopted and my name is written in the book of life. God is just and I will be punished if I disobey, but never disowned.
14. I believe that it is vital to have a daily time with God, reading the Bible and praying and sharing. Without this I will wither away spiritually.
15. I believe my clothes, words, music, entertainment, and activities must be pleasing to God and not make anyone else stumble—or it is sin.
16. I believe God gave me a burden for Brazil (“Brazil is yours.”) and it has been His will for me every time I have gone there, and will always be a part of my life.
17. I believe that Living Stones, and working with local churches to expand their ministries to the poorest children in their communities is where my ministry heart is.
18. I believe that God gave me the family and close friends that He did, and I will work to be there for them/serve them as much as I can.
19. I believe that if/when I get married, my calling is to love and serve my husband and children. If I can say I did that well at the end of my life, then it has been a good life.
20. First and foremost, my calling is to follow, serve, love, know, worship God, living life with Him whatever that looks like, wherever that is.
21. I believe God loves children, and the poor, in a special way, and I have a calling to work with them.
22. I believe prevention, early intervention, and personal relationship are the only ways to end generational poverty. (And this is why I am working with impoverished children.)
23. I believe God chose to work through the local church and discipleship to change the world, and that takes being in community with the people you are serving (And this is why I am working with churches/Alcance.)
24. I believe the proper self-esteem to succeed in life is found through your identity in Christ
25. I believe it is vital for children/people to know that God made them and has a plan for their life. That God sees them. (And this is why I do the \$10 FOR THEM birthday parties)
26. I believe that reading and education open up a world of opportunities, and that every child should be given the opportunity to read God's Word for themselves. (this is why we have the LITERACY FOR LIVING STONES program)
27. I believe that basic physical needs (food, shelter) must be met before/while sharing about Jesus. (And this is why we make sure the children are receiving basic nutrition/care through the \$5 FOR 5 program)
28. I believe that life is better with Jesus—now and forever. (And this is why I am giving my life to telling other about Him, currently through Living Stones.)
29. I believe that for every person who needs to receive in this world, there is someone who needs to give; just as much
30. I believe that God loves these kids more than I do, and so somehow, He will provide for them. (And this is why I unashamedly ASK. Ask you to be a part of Living Stones. Ask you to give of your time, money, and energy for these children. Because I know it will bless you, and it will bless them: and it will make a difference.)

### **30 Lies/Fears I've Believed**

1. All you need is love
2. “I am sorry” will fix it
3. If it is God's will, it will go smoothly
4. My would will be perfect if (insert something) just happened

5. Ignore it and it will go away
6. Don't be vulnerable, they will take advantage
7. Changing my mind is betraying all I once stood for
8. I have to be thin and pretty to be liked
9. If you love someone they will love you back
10. Always speak your mind
11. Being closer to someone just means getting hurt more
12. My mistakes messed up God's plan for my life
13. I am not pretty because no one notices me
14. I am not enough as just me
15. I will be forgotten because I am not worth remembering
16. One day I will find out everyone was only faking it
17. I am weak and when something scary/big happens I will be found to be a coward/failure
18. I am not worth anything unless I am working hard to serve others or look pretty
19. One day, God is going to get tired of forgiving me and give up on me
20. If you really knew me, you wouldn't like me anymore
21. My gut instinct is always wrong
22. I am just a hypocrite fooling myself
23. I am going to disappoint everyone I love the most
24. My dreams are silly and my standards are too high, I need a reality check
25. No one will ever really understand me
26. I can't trust my heart and am just making up this whole 'relationship with God' stuff
27. I am inadequate for the job I am being asked to do
28. As long as I am a good girl people will like me—just try harder
29. Be quiet, because if you are loud you will just mess up
30. I am not pretty enough to be popular, and if people do like me, I must constantly live up to their expectations or they won't like me anymore
31. If I were only prettier/nicer/funnier/better/normal...I would have everything I wanted  
(For me, this was a healing exercise—to identify each of these lies, and then write out the truths beside them)



### 30 Things About Self-Esteem

1. Self-esteem, as often termed, is often a bunch of bogus. Make sure to know what you are talking about
2. That said, finding your self-worth, through Christ, is crucial and must be faced and dealt with
3. Culture, and the church, has told women (especially) that their value is through what they do (service), or how they look, not who they are
4. In my life, this led to constant guilt/shame if I felt I was not giving/serving enough, because that meant that I wasn't enough as a person. I thought it was selfish/wrong to look good/invest in myself
5. I am something special because God created me, and made me for something unique. I am made in God's image, and He loves me. He loves me like THAT
6. There is nothing I can do to make God love me more than He already does
7. It isn't wrong/selfish to take care of yourself, to invest in yourself, and to look good. It is important and should be valued
8. I need to be the best me God can make me because I have only one life to live, and there are people/children that need to see Jesus in me
9. I take care of me so that I can be there to fully give myself
10. When I say I am not worth it, I am calling God and those who love me a liar
11. When I say I am ugly, I am telling God He messed up
12. When I say I can't do something, I am saying God isn't big enough
13. When I am "downing" on myself, I am taking the focus off of God and onto myself. That is true selfishness
14. There will always be people prettier/better than I am, and also people uglier/worse than I am. Comparison never helped



15. It is important to know myself. Take the time to do it/self-reflect (some questions to ask myself are: How is my heart? What do I need to take care of my heart? What are my talents (natural ability) and skills (learned ability)? What has made me what I am? What are my strengths and weaknesses? What makes me feel fulfilled? What is my definition of success? Am I doing it?)
16. Knowing/saying that I deserve better in a situation isn't pride, it is knowing limits and boundaries
17. Proper self-worth requires being honest with yourself—about your weaknesses AND strengths
18. It is important to surround yourself with people who are honest and encouraging
19. Trying new things, even if you fail, grows your comfort zone and your self-worth
20. Negative talk about/to yourself is just as bad as if you do it about/to others. Don't
21. When you understand your value, you are free to see the value of others
22. In the end, you are the only you. You are the one who will wake up every morning to deal with the decisions you make. So take responsibility and be you
23. Other people always have something to say. Listen, pray, and then let go. They do not know everything, and they don't know what it is to be you
24. Take responsibility for your life because life is going to happen with or without you
25. There is always another way. Refuse to be stuck in the box
26. Learn basic self-confident skills: speaking in public, standing strong, using silence. Acting confident leads to being confident
27. Don't keep apologizing. Make the changes you need to change and let go of the things you can't control
28. Laugh at yourself. You and life are funny
29. Accept compliments. The person saw something and commented—say thank you
30. Proper self-worth is having hope and being positive about your dreams/plans for the future. And dreaming big

### **30 Lessons I have Learned**

1. The best things in life are free, but the hardest to keep
2. Anything can become normal if given enough time. I want to create an amazing normal
3. Learning to let go is a lifestyle
4. Nothing is sound. Everything changes except for God and I am not Him
5. Life is better with Jesus. Now and later
6. Innocent until proven guilty is a big deal, politically and in my own life
7. Trust is a choice, and I will keep choosing it
8. No matter how hard I try, life still gets filtered through my own perceptions
9. The basis of life is tragic and broken and that how it will be until heaven
10. Doubting something doesn't make it not true. It is okay to ask questions
11. The things that were the hardest to learn and do are the ones I value the most
12. Abstinence is easier than moderation
13. "Everything will be okay in the end. If it's not okay, it's not the end" —my refrigerator magnet
14. Rest is not an option, it is a necessity, so do it on purpose
15. "Euthanasia" is one word, not three
16. "They don't care how much you know until they know how much you care." —some sermon
17. "Wherever you are, be all there" —unknown, but wasn't me
18. I don't have time to care what everyone thinks, only those who really matter to me, so choose them wisely
19. Hold on to the good ones
20. "Only two things last forever—the Word of God and the souls of men—invest wisely" —some sermon, paraphrased by me

21. I've got one life to live, I am going to do it dang well
22. Don't tell people how to live, tell them how they are alive (paraphrase of a comic)
23. "Don't let your struggle become your identity" someone on Pinterest
24. "We never really grow up, we just learn how to act in public."
25. When all else fails: take a shower or a nap
26. Stop, look, listen: find the story in everyone and everything
27. Alone doesn't equal lonely, and lonely doesn't equal something bad
28. "Perfect love castes out fear." –God
29. Love is never wasted. It turns the average into the best
30. The word not yet spoken, the lesson not yet learned...

### **30 Things that Make my Life Better**

1. Time with God
2. Connecting with Caid
3. Being in nature
4. Silence
5. Flossing
6. Good, deep conversations
7. Having a Sabbath
8. Climbing trees
9. Good books
10. TED talks
11. Dancing to fun music
12. Watching water (particularly the beach)
13. Exercising
14. A good run
15. Writing and knowing it was exactly what I wanted to
16. Doing something I have never done before
17. Talking to strangers
18. Showers, especially after being hot and sweaty
19. Libraries
20. Traveling
21. My 15 people. Yes, I have a list for that too
22. Popsicles on a hot day, tea on a cold one
23. Fresh fruit
24. Smiling. At others and at myself
25. Hugs from children I know I am making a difference in their lives
26. Making/eating from scratch
27. Investing in others. On purpose
28. Singing. Everywhere
29. Living Simply to give more
30. Giving thanks in everything



### **30 Steps to a Dream (Based on "The Dream Giver" by Bruce Wilkinson)**

1. You start off as an ordinary, normal person living a familiar life
2. Then begins the holy discontent: a nagging feeling something is missing
3. You have a big dream to meet a big need in the big world
4. You tell someone and they doubt you, so you keep it to yourself
5. It builds up and you will burst if you don't share it—you realize you were born for this

6. You decide to do whatever it takes to go after your dream
7. You tell everyone about your dream
8. You make sacrifices and changes for this dream, leaving your comfort zone
9. To do what you love most, you have to do what you fear most
10. You hit a wall of fear
11. In God's strength, you pass the fears and enter into freedom
12. You run into obstacles: people who want to protect you, people who don't believe in you, people who don't want you to rock the boat, people who want to stop/destroy you
13. You meet kindred spirits: people who dream with you and help you understand truth and kill doubt
14. You enter a time when you cannot see your dream and things go on and on and you can't see God. You feel alone
15. You become angry with God—where are His promises?
16. God gives you faith to go one step at a time without seeing/feeling more
17. You begin to see how God was working all along and you feel Him close
18. You walk in the light and God reveals impurities and washes you clean: you feel one with God
19. God asks you to give back your dream to Him: your dream or God
20. You struggle and walk away from the dream knowing God is enough
21. God gives you back the dream in a new and real way
22. You face more problems and obstacles before you are ready for your dream
23. God gives the Holy Spirit and His Word (truth) as your weapons as you begin the spiritual battles
24. You have fellowship with other Christians who are fighting alongside you
25. You learn to fight or others and take on their giants in Christ
26. You feel a certain need and begin to try to help—it hits your heart and you can't ignore it
27. You realize THIS was the big dream you had all along
28. You work hard and are fulfilled doing what you love to do the most
29. You are joined by other dreamers and teach others how to dream
30. You are called away by God to begin the whole process again...leaving everything familiar and digging deeper, finding a new facet to this amazing dream/life God has given you

### 30 Heroes of Mine

1. Grandma Coombs: no explanation needed
2. Grandpa Winzeler: learned gentleness, learned to cook
3. Enoch: walked with God, never died
4. Esther: courageously sharp
5. Eric Liddell: beauty of doing what you are called to do
6. Mother Teresa: a life dedicated, no matter what
7. C. S. Lewis: creative genius
8. My mom: doesn't complain, wouldn't let me go to bed angry
9. My dad: most generous person I know
10. Caid: has a pure heart
11. Erica: strongest woman I know
12. Becky: makes being a mom look like the coolest thing ever
13. Donovan: shows me what God does in a life
14. Karianne: reminds me where the beauty is
15. Jasmine: my loving, blond sister



16. Anna: cuts the crap and sets me straight
17. Carina: calls the bright out of me
18. Aninha: has the sweet touch of grace
19. Eukias: puts himself completely into what he is doing
20. Aunt Carol: she knows how to pray
21. Mrs.Jones: shows me what dedication looks like
22. Phil Jackson: made a difference in my life
23. Flavio: is more of an optimist than I am
24. Tele: gives a vision, plants a dream
25. Karine: shows me what loyalty looks like
26. Chicka: learns to share knowledge
27. Jackson: makes moments worth living
28. Mr.Dan: scary, gruff man I admire
29. Katie Davis (Kisses from Katie): shows me I can do more
30. Cassie and Mary Grabow: getting older can be amazing

### **30 Date/Awesome Friend Ideas**

1. Make lil boats and race them down a river, creek, created body of water
2. Make a kite/paper airplane and fly it
3. Feed the birds/ducks/small creatures in a park
4. Cook something new together (homemade ice cream, decorate cupcakes, make your own pizza)
5. Go out and chalk draw on random sidewalks random messages/art
6. Picnics. Everywhere. Enough said
7. Go climb a tree, take walks everywhere
8. Roast marshmallows over a candle, fire, stove, lighter
9. Read a book together, out loud or quiet
10. Glow sticks/sparklers/Frisbee in the park. Or anywhere
11. Art museum/zoo/children's museum
12. Stargaze. Each bring a story of one of the constellations
13. Carve a pumpkin. Any season. Use all the parts
14. Sock puppet show
15. Laser tag/Paintball
16. Sledding or rolling down hills
17. Clothes-pinning people without them knowing it
18. Dropping money and watching who/how people pick it up
19. City museum, St. Louis. Enough said.
20. Get up early and see a sunrise
21. Get a roll of pennies and make wishes in a fountain—need to say them out loud
22. Dance in the rain
23. Finger paint/play dough create together
24. Go berry picking
25. Play sports together/ get sweaty
26. Rollerblading/roller skating/bike riding/jogging
27. Water balloon fight
28. Poker tournament with pennies
29. Have an un-birthday party
30. Write a book/story together
31. Dollar date: who can get the best for a dollar (or some amount)
32. Volunteer together, get together and do something for someone else
33. Wash your/others cars

34. Candles, always good
35. Make a sky lantern: <http://www.solar-balloons.com/candleballoon.html>

### 30 Things Prince Charming Will be/do (written when I was 19)

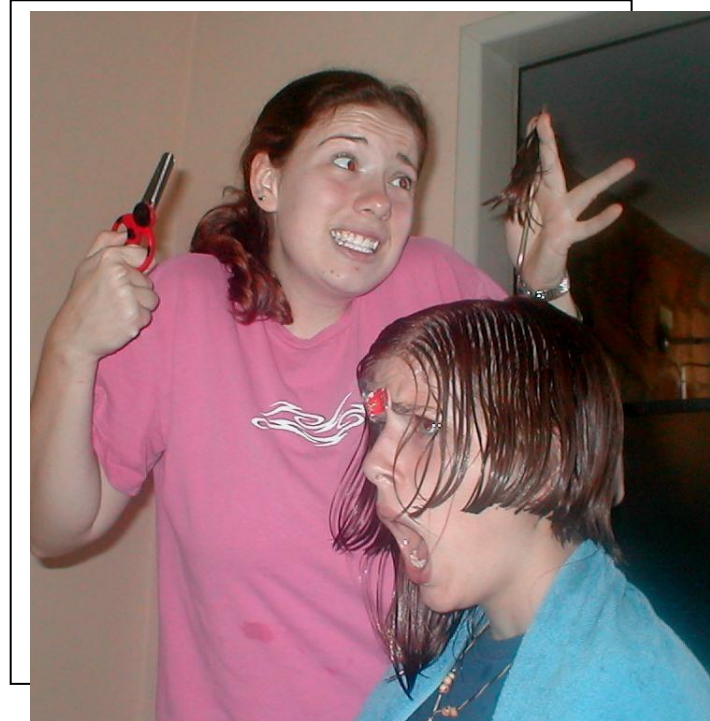
1. Saved and totally surrendered to the Lord
2. Ask for my advice
3. Stimulate my brain, be a “deep thinker”
4. Think I am nearly perfect and want to make me totally perfect
5. Live a life of purity, living up to the highest
6. Not be lazy—a hard worker
7. Feel free to talk to me about anything and I him
8. Always have time for me
9. Know what they want in life and stick to it
10. Be a spiritual leader
11. Be a gentleman
12. Love his mom and sisters and have great relationships with them
13. Have godly men that keep him accountable and do “guy stuff” with
14. Want lots of kids everywhere all the time
15. Be filled with the Holy Spirit and always wanting to share his insights
16. Not be a complainer
17. Be more in love with God and want to be with Him more than with me
18. Be involved with a ministry that reaches out and serves people
19. Keeps me accountable for my walk with God
20. Have nothing in their past that holds back the present or the future
21. Be generous with their money, but also wise, giving it all to God first
22. Talk to my father about me
23. Give me time and space to make my own decisions
24. Agree with my mom in politics
25. Be honest and open even when it requires sacrifice
26. Be a man of prayer
27. Not a pushover when it comes to discipline
28. We both “fit in” to the other’s families
29. We agree on doctrine and entertainment
30. I need to be attracted to him

### 30 Discipleship Lessons

1. Has Christ as the center of their life
2. Assurance of Salvation
3. Made God Lord of their life (dedication)
4. How to pray
5. Separated from past life:
6. Friends (from a Biblical standpoint)
7. Entertainment (music, movies, internet...)
8. Opposite sex/purity and proper relationships
9. Clothes
10. Words/attitude



11. Being baptized and church: what and why
12. Finding your worth/identity in Christ
13. Give God your future
14. Know God's purpose for your life
15. Give God your money (tithe and offering)
16. Give God your time (church, service)
17. Have your own devotions/time with God
18. Know how to study the Bible
19. Memorize scripture
20. Meditate on scripture
21. Obedience to God—yielding rights
22. Obedience to parents—Biblical family values
23. Obedience to authority in government/school
24. Have a clear conscience/victory over sin
25. Know how to stand alone rather than give in
26. Know your spiritual gift
27. Know your testimony and share with others
28. Know how to share the gospel/lead someone to Christ
29. Know how to disciple someone else
30. Know how to lead a Bible study/have a ministry



### 30 Ways to Find God's Will/Calling/Purpose For Your Life

1. Quit making lists. Just go out there and live life with God
2. You often find God's will for your life through elimination: go do something, and you might find it is NOT your calling, but at least you are a step closer
3. Understand what a calling/purpose is. Study it and ask others how they found theirs
4. Whatever your calling, the ultimate goal is to bring glory to God. So if it doesn't do that, it isn't for you
5. It involves your deepest, truest desires—figure out what those are
6. It will bring you fulfillment and peace, but not an easy life: know that it will cost you everything
7. It fills some kind of need/void in the world that only you can fill: what are the needs/problems out there that make you the maddest, saddest, happiest when you can help?
8. It evolves and takes shape, becoming clearer in steps—you must take a step before you see the next one, so do what you know you need to do now, even if you don't know the next step yet
9. Just because you are called one place or to a specific people for a time doesn't mean it won't change: but your life calling/purpose will always have the same basic motivation
10. Ask these questions:
  - a. Who am I?
  - b. What do I do (or want to do) with my life?
  - c. For whom?
  - d. What need/problem does that solve? What is the result of that?
11. Romans 12:1-2. Study, learn, do it
12. The goal of your life purpose/calling is to become like Christ (1 Thess. 4:3, Romans 8:29), so start working on that now
13. Your life purpose/calling is the specific area/people group that God has called you to minister to. It is about others, not you, so get out there and start serving
14. Ask yourself these questions:
  - a. Have I died to myself and am living to God?

- b. Am I doing everything I know I am to be doing now?
  - c. Am I looking to pray for others and meet their needs?
  - d. Am I bringing God glory in my life?
15. Desire to know God's will more than anything else
  16. Decide to do whatever God shows you, no matter the cost
  17. Search your heart to see if there is any sin/thing you are holding back from God
  18. Remember that God wants you to hear Him even more than you want to hear Him
  19. Know that God answers "yes, no, and wait" but always says "Trust me"
  20. Learn how to listen/hear God speak
  21. God speaks through your conscience, circumstances, authorities, and time
  22. Be saturated with the Word of God since that is His main way of speaking to us
  23. Why did God create you? To serve? To help? To assist? To influence? To impact? To encourage? To give? To train? To comfort? Find some good verbs that describe your desire to make a difference
  24. Who do you feel called to work with/serve (whatever verbs above you chose)? Families? Fathers? Mothers? Children? Teens? Babies? Parents? Adults? Singles? Couples? Elderly? Specific country or people group? Poor people? Rich people? Middle class? Foreigners? Sick people? Handicapped people? Homeless? Runaways? Unserved people? Lukewarm Christians? Urban? Rural? Anything else you can think of
  25. Doing what with those people (that you chose above)? Sports? Music? Art? Entertainment? Designing? Photography? Writing? Teaching? Tutoring? Counseling? Preaching? Technology skills? Law? Business? Medicine? Cosmetology?
  26. What do you want to see as the result of your life being lived?
  27. What is your definition of success?
  28. This template may show you something: "My life purpose/calling is to (fill in with verbs from #23) to (fill in with people groups from #24) through (fill in with #25 answers) for the reason of (fill in with answers from #26 and 27)." But templates aren't miracle workers.
  29. "Don't ask yourself what the world needs. Ask yourself what makes you come alive, because what the world needs is people who have come alive."

### **30 God and I ideas to grow closer**

1. Pray. Like talking to a real person. Pull up an empty chair and imagine Him there
2. Be honest with God. He already knows. Tell Him when things suck or you messed up
3. Begin a prayer journal—write it down
4. Ask Him the hard questions you don't get. Not asking doesn't make it go away
5. Learn how to listen to God—through silence, through reading the Bible...
6. Write down three things you are grateful for every day (and read "One Thousand Gifts" by Ann Voskamp)
7. When you read the Bible, read to get something out of it
8. Read through the Bible in a year (those Bibles that are divided up into daily readings REALLY help)
9. When you see God answer a prayer, or some kind of "God thing" happens, write about it. Talk about it. Share it. Multiple times.
10. When a Bible verse really hits/speaks to you (like a rhema), memorize it. Write it down. Review it. Don't let it go.
11. Fast with a specific purpose, using the time without food to focus on time with God
12. Have a Sabbath: a day (or two part days) that you rest and specifically seek time with God (and away from other normal pursuits)

13. Find some amazing Christians that you look up to: real people in your daily life
14. Find some amazing Christians that you look up to: missionaries are often a good place to find them (Amy Carmichael, Katie—[www.kissesfromkatie.blogspot.com](http://www.kissesfromkatie.blogspot.com))
15. Find some books that really encourage you spiritually (John Eldredge, the Ludys, Donald Miller)
16. Hang out with people who love talking about what God is doing in the world. Call it church. Have food involved.
17. Find your calling: the place/people/way God created for you to minister to others. Start by volunteering for something near you—working with children, cooking a meal for someone, leading the worship team—if it isn't a perfect fit, at least you will learn what you aren't called to do
18. Get connected and involved in a local church
19. Get clean: confess any sins, let them go, and ask God to reveal anything else that needs to change in your life
20. Do a Bible study on getting to know God more, who God is ("Knowledge of the Holy" by Tozer)
21. Ask someone you respect as a Christian how they grow closer to God
22. Have a Christian accountability partner that you can talk to about practical sin issues and keeping you on track with your spiritual goals
23. Spend time worshipping God—with others, and alone. Music and candles works nicely
24. Dedicate your talents to the Lord to be used however He would
25. Be willing to leave everything: honestly ask God what he has for your life
26. Go on a missions trip
27. Write your own tract with your own God story in it
28. Do whatever it takes to really understand that God loves you, that God forgives you
29. Be disciplined by someone, and disciple someone
30. Teach a Sunday school class

### **30 Verses to Memorize**

1. 1 Corinthians 13:12 "For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known."
2. 1 John 3:1 "Behold what manner of love the Father has given unto us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not."
3. 1 Peter 5:7 "Casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you."
4. 1 Thessalonians 5:18 "In everything give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you."
5. 2 Corinthians 1:4 "Who consoles and comforts and encourages us in every trouble, so that we may also be able to console those who are in any kind of trouble or distress, with the consolation with which we ourselves are consoled and comforted and encouraged by God."
6. 2 Corinthians 5:17 "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."
7. Ephesians 6: 10-18 "Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take until you the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace. Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit,



which is the word of God: praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints.”

8. Galatians 2:20 “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.”
9. Isaiah 40:31 “But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.”
10. Isaiah 53:5 “But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.”
11. John 10:10 “The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.”
12. John 15:16 “Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you.”
13. Lamentations 3:22-23 “It is of the Lord’s mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness.”
14. Luke 10:27 “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind, and thy neighbor as thyself.”
15. Matthew 11:28 – 30 “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”
16. Matthew 5: 1-12 “And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain: and when he was set, his disciples came until him: and opened his mouth and taught them saying, Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God. Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.”
17. Matthew 6:9-13 “Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.”
18. Matthew 7:7 “Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.”
19. Philippians 3:10 “That I may know Him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable until his death.”
20. Philippians 4:6 -7 “Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”
21. Proverbs 3:5-6 “Trust in the LORD with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths.”
22. Psalm 121:1-2 “I lift my eyes to the hills—from whence comes my help? My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.”

23. Psalm 34:8 "O taste and see that the LORD is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him."
24. Psalm 37:4 "Delight thyself also in the LORD; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart."
25. Psalm 46:10 "Be still, and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth."
26. Psalm 51:10 "Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me."
27. Psalms 139: 1,2, 13, 14, 23, 24 "O Lord, thou hast searched me, and known me. Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my though afar off. For thou hast possessed my reins: thou hast covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise thee: for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvelous are thy works, and that my soul knoweth right well. Search me o God, and know my heart: try me and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."
28. Psalms 19:14 "Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, o Lord, my strength, and my redeemer."
29. Romans 12:1-2 "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God."
30. Titus 2:13-14 "Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ: who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify until himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works."

### 30 Best Calvin and Hobbs

1. "Reality continues to ruin my life"
2. "Sometimes when I'm talking, my words can't keep up with my thoughts. I wonder why we think faster than we speak. Probably so we can think twice."
3. "You know, Hobbes, some days even my lucky rocket ship underpants don't help."
4. "There's no problem so awful, that you can't add some guilt to it and make it even worse."
5. "I've been thinking Hobbes"  
"On a weekend?"  
"Well, it wasn't on purpose"
6. "Look! A trickle of water running through some dirt! I'd say our afternoon just got booked solid!"
7. "Mom's not feeling well. So I'm making her a get well card."  
"That's thoughtful of you."  
"See, on the front it says, 'Get Well Soon' ... and on the inside it says, 'Because my bed isn't made, my clothes need to be put away and I'm hungry. Love Calvin.' Want to sign it?"  
"Sure, I'm hungry too"
8. "A day can really slip by when you're deliberately avoiding what you're supposed to do."
9. "I wonder where we go when we die?"  
"...Pittsburgh?"  
"You mean if we're good or if we're bad?"
10. "Everybody seeks happiness! Not me, though! That's the difference between me and the rest of the world. Happiness isn't good enough for me! I demand euphoria!"
11. "As you can see, I have memorized this utterly useless piece of information long enough to pass a test question. I now intend to forget it forever. You've taught me nothing except how to cynically manipulate the system. Congratulations."

12. "They say the world is a stage. But obviously the play is unrehearsed and everybody is ad-libbing his lines."  
"Maybe that's why it's hard to tell if we're living in a tragedy or a farce."  
"We need more special effects and dance numbers."
13. "So the secret to good self-esteem is to lower your expectations to the point where they're already met?"
14. "God put me on this earth to accomplish a certain number of things. Right now I am so far behind that I will never die."
15. "In my opinion, we don't devote nearly enough scientific research to finding a cure for jerks."
16. "Life's disappointments are harder to take when you don't know any swear words."
17. "I have a hammer! I can put things together! I can knock things apart! I can alter my environment at will and make an incredible din all the while! Ah, it's great to be male!"
18. "What state do you live in?"  
"Denial."
19. "Wow, look at the grass stains on my skin. I say, if your knees aren't green by the end of the day, you ought to seriously re-examine your life."
20. "If you can't win with reason, go for volume."
21. "What fun is it being 'cool' if you can't wear a sombrero?"
22. "I've got plenty of common sense! I just choose to ignore it."
23. "As far as I'm concerned, if something is so complicated that you can't explain it in 10 seconds, it's probably not worth knowing anyway."
24. "When a kid grows up, he has to be something. He can't just stay the way he is. But a tiger grows up and stays a tiger why is that?" Hobbes replies, "No room for improvement. Calvin, "Of all the luck, my parents had to be humans." Hobbes, "Don't take it too hard. Humans provide some very important protein."
25. "It's not summer if your tongue isn't purple."
26. "I 'm not a vegetarian! I'm a dessertarian."
27. "Obviously my body doesn't believe a word my brain is saying."
28. "I propose we leave math to the machines and go play outside."
29. "You can present the material, but you can't make me care."
30. "People pay more attention to you when they think you're up to something."

### **30 Things to do for 30 days Each**

So looks like someone had my idea before me: <http://www.highexistence.com/30-challenges-for-30-days/>, but I promise, I thought of it myself. And who knew #19? I just did them because there was no hot water...Everything is said better on a TED: [http://www.ted.com/talks/matt\\_cutts\\_try\\_something\\_new\\_for\\_30\\_days.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/matt_cutts_try_something_new_for_30_days.html)

1. Cook a new meal/recipe every day
2. Read a chapter (of the Bible, of a book) every day
3. Do one Pinterest idea/craft you pinned ages ago every day
4. Draw a picture every day
5. Take a picture every day
6. Learn a chord (guitar) or practice an instrument every day
7. Learn 10 new vocabulary words (in your own language or another) every day
8. Memorize a Bible verse every day
9. Celebrate Ramadan (fasting from sunup to sundown for a month)
10. Eat only rice and beans every day
11. Live off of \$2 a day, like half the world, every day

12. Try vegetarianism/veganism
13. Eat only raw foods/the Daniel diet
14. Pray for/study a different country every day
15. Learn/memorize a constellation (and its story) every day
16. Write 500 words (10 minutes fast writing) every day
17. Nanowrimo (Write 50,000 words in a month)
18. Post a blog every day
19. Learn a new song every day
20. Train for a mini/marathon
21. Watch a TED every day
22. Call up a different old friend every day
23. Write 3 things you are grateful for every day
24. Write a letter to someone every day
25. Write down a deep question you've had every day
26. One hour of silence every day
27. Talk to a new stranger every day
28. Walk/go somewhere you've never been in your own city every day
29. Don't lie/be completely honest in all you do every day
30. Write one thing you want to do/want for your life every day

### **30 Ways to Change the World**

1. Support a child through Living Stones: [www.wribrazil.com/foundationbuilder](http://www.wribrazil.com/foundationbuilder)
2. [Give a child a birthday party who wouldn't get one otherwise: www.wribrazil.com/10forthem](http://www.wribrazil.com/10forthem)
3. [Make sure children are getting enough to eat: www.wribrazil.com/5for5](http://www.wribrazil.com/5for5)
4. [Help a child learn to read: www.wribrazil.com/literacy](http://www.wribrazil.com/literacy)
5. Smile and make eye contact. Smile at everyone, no matter who they are or what they do
6. Write thank you notes regularly and randomly
7. Complement strangers, get to know your neighbors intentionally
8. Donate blood. Check the box to donate organs when you die
9. Volunteer. Somewhere. Often
10. Put some change in an expired parking meter.
11. On a hot day, buy someone something cold to drink. On a cold day, get them something warm.
12. Repeat something nice you heard about someone else. Never repeat or say anything negative about people
13. Learn how to memorize people's names and use them when you see them
14. Speak the truth. Live honestly. Stop lying
15. Pay for the person in line behind you
16. Grow your hair out, donate it to Locks of Love
17. Redirect gifts. Instead of having people give you birthday and holiday gifts, ask them to donate gifts or money to a good cause
18. Stop to help.
19. Take the time to teach someone a skill you know.
20. Become a mentor or tutor.
21. Be a voice for someone who doesn't have a voice. Stand up for someone who needs it. Don't let evil prosper

22. Come to the rescue. If you realize someone is sick, bring them some hot tea, etc.
23. Stand up for your beliefs without flaunting them.
24. Plant a garden and eat what you grow (and pass on the extra)
25. Know and use at least one joke, story, and game when things get boring, in any situation
26. Read aloud (using all the voices) to whoever will listen
27. Get rid of your TV
28. Buy and invest locally
29. Adopt
30. Get to know Jesus

Some ideas stolen from: <http://www.marcondangel.com/2011/09/04/140-ways-to-change-the-world/>

### **30 Things to do Before you get Married**

1. Live a life surrendered and in love with Jesus
2. Know and understand that Jesus loves you
3. Learn how to forgive and receive forgiveness
4. Learn to let go and to live with no regrets
5. Figure out how you want to make a difference in the world
6. Have successful relationships
7. Learn a second language
8. Travel alone
9. Live outside of your own country for at least a couple months
10. Live on your own for at least a couple months
11. Know basic cooking and cleaning skills
12. Baby-sit/take care of a couple kids, alone, for extended amounts of time
13. Work, be able to provide for yourself
14. Read the whole Bible
15. Graduate from College
16. Learn to set goals for yourself
17. Figure out skills you want to learn, and set out to do them practically, such as drawing, writing, or taking pictures every day for a year
18. Speak out against evil and oppression
19. Find a person worth investing the rest of your life in and work towards marrying them
20. Fall in love. All the way
21. In any dating relationship, make sure the other person is better because of it
22. Be able to spend a whole weekend in silence
23. Learn some kind of instrument/singing
24. Fast for extended periods of time, seeking God's will
25. Achieve and maintain your ideal weight
26. Come to understand and appreciate your body the way it is
27. Invent something
28. Go on a pilgrimage
29. Write a book/publish something
30. Be willing to try new foods/things

### **30 Things to do Before you die**

1. The list of things to do before you get married
2. Get married/rock out the single life

3. Live debt free
4. Go on a honeymoon
5. Have a place to bring people home to/own a home
6. Invite strangers over to eat. Regularly
7. Write a will
8. Have kids
9. Adopt
10. Swim with dolphins/ whale watching
11. Learn to sail/surf/scuba dive
12. Design and plant your own garden. And eat it
13. Organize a neighborhood parade/carnival
14. Become an aunt/godmother/grandmother or uncle/godfather/grandfather
15. Learn basic counseling skills
16. Work to be there for your family and close friends. Hold on to the good ones
17. Create memories. Take pictures
18. Give your children roots and wings
19. Donate blood
20. Never retire. Not really
21. Write an autobiography for your family to remember you
22. Learn how to repair basic appliances
23. Learn how to break bad habits
24. Watch more sunrises and sets. Rest.
25. Run for some kind of government position
26. Run a marathon/mini
27. Memorize and tell many jokes, poems, and stories, well
28. Learn how to save/invest money wisely
29. Find a ministry/charity/work you believe in and represent them
30. Know that if nothing else, when you die it was said of you that loved God and your family well

### **30 Places/ways to go**

1. Bike across a state
2. Travel Greece (Santorin, Islands) to (around the Mediterranean sea/Jordan) Cairo (pyramids) , especially Israel (dead sea)
3. A Disney cruise, with kids
4. Hike/camp carrying all your own gear for an extended time
5. See the Northern lights
6. Build an igloo and sleep in it while staying warm
7. Fernando de Noronha
8. Visit Africa and see a giraffe in the wild/safari
9. Go on a personal pilgrimage/walk the Santiago de Compostila
10. Go Wwoofing
11. Teach English in another country
12. Work/go to Supercamp
13. Swim in the Amazon
14. Road trip across the USA (Route 66)
15. See a play on Broadway/Ice skating in Central Park
16. Go to as many art museums as possible, especially Chicago, St. Louis, and San Diego (Balboa Park) and Europe, of course
17. Eat picnics in interesting/new places—sleep under the stars
18. Sleep at the bottom of Grand Canyon
19. Eat pumpkin ice cream at the Covered Bridge Festival
20. Wyoming (Grand Tetons, Yellowstone) and Montana ( Glacier NP, into Canada)

21. Any National park in general. They are worth it
22. Ride in a hot air balloon/paragliding
23. Famous castles in Europe
24. Travel up Route 1
25. Ride the trains through India
26. Climb a big mountain
27. Go couch surfing
28. Stay at various hostels all over (I recommend the one in the Everglades, FL)
29. Great wall of China
30. Sleep in a hammock along the beach

### **30 Things to do in Brazil**

1. Acerolandia—best juice in the world!
2. Vicencia—hang glide or just hike up
3. Timbauba and the church there
4. Nazare da Mata—obelisk
5. Paudalho—the river, visit the kids in Belem, and the church there
6. Picnic at Lago Orar with the family of girls
7. Eat a tapioca popsicle, a corn popsicle
8. Try Caldo de Cana (sugar cane juice)
9. Drink a cold coconut, then cut it open and eat the inside
10. Go to the Carpina feira
11. Eat at Osamas—bean soup, try feijoada and fuba
12. Try all the different fruit juices at Amazonias Mix
13. Take some Living Stones kids for their first milkshake at Mr. Mix
14. Lagoa De Itaenga and the church there
15. Play basketball with the kids at the church in Carpina
16. Teach an English class at the International school
17. Have a donut at the bakery on the corner, fresh French/sweet bread
18. Acai Na Tigela at the good place in Carpina or on the beach
19. Tracunaem and the church there
20. Guadalajara and the church there
21. Amexias and the church there
22. Porto de Galinhas—boat tour, scuba diving
23. The view from Rio Mar, eat at a churrascaria
24. Old Recife—the boat ride, old synagogue, museums, Marco Zero, bookstore
25. Mercado Sao Jose—jewelry store, Casa de Cultura
26. Olinda—try tapioca
27. The castle museum
28. Bring fun games to the trash dump in Carpina
29. Living Stones in Cajueiro Claro—go jogging
30. Living Stones in Mussurepe—visit homes, learn Vovo Bel's story

### **30 Things to do when Bored/Broke**

1. Go through magazines and draw underwear on the natives and mustaches on the pretty ladies
2. Learn Morse Code and have conversations with friends in public using just “beeps” and “bips”
3. Stomp on ketchup packets, have jelly packet eating contests
4. Make up a flash mob dance and do it. Alone or with others. I suggest “Thriller”
5. Memorize a couple constellations and then find them at night

6. Make a movie/skit/how-to YouTube video
7. Create art out of articles you find/nature
8. Make up a treasure hunt/scavenger hunt for someone else. Hope they will make one for you
9. See how many licks it takes to get to the center of the lollypop
10. Invent a recipe that actually tastes good/learn to bake fresh bread
11. Get someone to let you cut their hair/cut your own hair
12. Design the tattoo you may (never) get
13. Read poetry/play guitar/standup comedy/sing/dance/juggle/blow bubbles on a public corner
14. Learn to juggle/knit/origami/crochet/sew/magic tricks
15. Learn to make duct tape roses. Pass them out to strangers
16. Roll down any hills you find
17. Make and bury a time capsule
18. Picnics. Everywhere. Anywhere.
19. Write a letter to yourself in five years/future children and seal it
20. Decorate a tree with popcorn strings. It doesn't have to be your own tree
21. Climb trees
22. Decorate the sidewalk with sidewalk chalk. Add inspiring quotes
23. Go around the store and paint every fingernail a different color
24. Connect straws and drink from someone else's cup at the next table
25. Put on a neighborhood play and sell tickets
26. Discover podcasts (<http://www.thisamericanlife.org/>)
27. Learn to change oil and then do it for free for people who don't know how
28. Write a bucket list
29. Go to the library and study one topic until you unreasonable knowledgeable in that subject
30. Build a giant fort

### 30 Favorite Songs

1. "Let Us Love" **Need to Breathe**, 2. "Keep Your Eyes Open" 3. "Shine On"
2. "It's Time" **Imagine Dragons**, 2. "Demons" 3. "On Top of the World"
3. "Restless" **Switchfoot**, 2. "Learning to Breathe" 3. "Dare You to Move"
4. "On the Radio" **Regina Spector**, 2. "Fidelity" 3. "Samson"
5. "I'm Still Here" **Goo Goo Dolls**, 2. "Iris" 3. "Better Days"
6. "Walk on Water" **Brit Nicole**, 2. "The Sun is Rising" 3. "All This Time"
7. "Hey Mama" **Mat Kearney** 2. "Straight Away" 3. "Breathe In, Breathe Out"
8. "Give Me Jesus" **Chris Rice**, 2. "Come to Jesus" 3. "Welcome to Our World"
9. "Lose My Soul" **Toby Mac**, 2. "Made to Love" 3. "City on Our Knees"
10. "Never Let Go" **David Crowder Band**, 2. "Let me Feel You Shine" 3. "Forever and Ever"
11. "Mr. Medicine" **Eliza Doolittle**, 2. "Roller Blades" 3. "Moneybox"
12. "You and I" **Ingrid Michelson**, 2. "Be OK" 3. "The Chain"
13. "Closer to You" **Mark Schultz** 2. "Remember Me" 3. "He's my Son"
14. "Wavin' Flag" **K'Naan** 2. "Fatima" 3. "Waka Waka (the other song from the world cup)"
15. "Far Away" **Nickelback**, 2. "Photographs" 3. "Save Me"
16. "Banana Pancakes" **Jack Johnson** 2. "Better Together" 3. "Train"
17. "Joyful, Joyful" **Lauryn Hill** 2. "Can't Take My Eyes Off of You" 3. "Killing Me Softly"
18. "Man in the Mirror" **Michael Jackson**, 2. "Black or White" 3. "Thriller"
19. "These Words" **Natasha Bedingfield**, 2. "A Little Too Much" 3. "Strip Me"
20. "Spotlight" **Patrick Stump**, 2. "This City"
21. "I'm Gonna Be (500 Miles)" **Proclaimers** and "Oh Love" **Nevertheless**



22. "All You Need is Love" **Sara Groves**, 2. "Ester" 3. "Undone"
23. "Confess" **Shawn McDonald**, 2. "Captivated" 3. "Closer"
24. "Yours to Hold" **Skillet**, 2. "Rest" 3. "Whispers in the Dark"
25. "Open Your Eyes" **Snow Patrol**, 2. "The Finish Line" 3. "Chocolate"
26. "Let it Roll" **Superchick** 2. "Stand in the Rain" 3. "We Live"
27. "By Your Side" **Tenth Avenue North**, 2. "Love is Here"
28. "Hey Soul Sister" **Train**, 2. "Shake up Christmas" 3. "Marry Me"
29. "Refine Me" **Jennifer Knapp**, 2. "Faithful to Me" 3. "Light and Salvation"
30. "1000 Ships" **Rachel Platten**, 2. "Little Light" 3. "Nothing Ever Happens"

### 30 Favorite One(ish) Liners

1. "Be who you are and say what you feel because those who mind don't matter and those who matter don't mind." –Dr.Seuss
2. "If I can't dance, then it's not my revolution." –Emma Goldman
3. "All you have to do is write one true sentence. Write the truest sentence you know." Ernest Hemingway
4. "I don't want to die without any scars." — [Chuck Palahniuk](#)
5. "So live real good, and get beat up real bad. Dance until they kill you, and then we'll dance some more. That's how this thing seems to work." ---Shane Claiborne
6. "Where someone...with a beautiful belief in answers is still asking questions." –Tony Hoagland
7. "Love is a harsh and dreadful thing to ask of us, but it is the only answer." –Dorothy Day
8. "There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal." –C.S. Lewis
9. "We can be the generation that no longer accepts that an accident of latitude determines whether a child lives or dies." –Bono
10. "Religion is responsibility or it is nothing at all" –Jacques Derrida
11. ""What do you want?" It's all I ever asked, and the only thing she never knew." –Anna Winzeler
12. "I did not ask for success. I asked for wonder." A. Heschel
13. "Wherever you are, be all there."
14. "Here is the world. Beautiful and terrible things will happen. Do not be afraid."
15. "Yesterday I was clever so I wanted to change the world. Today I am wise and so I am changing myself."
16. "Don't let your struggle become your identity."
17. "I hope you live a life you are proud of. If you find you're not, I hope you have the courage to start all over again."
18. "Love me when I least deserve it, because that is when I need it the most." –Swedish proverb
19. "You either like me or you don't it took me 20 something years of my life to learn to love myself. I don't have that time to convince someone else."
20. "People will stare. Make it worth their while." –Harry Winston
21. "When I saw you, I fell in love, and you smiled because you knew." –Shakespeare
22. "True religion confronts earth with heaven and brings eternity to bear upon time." –Tozer
23. "It is poverty to decide that a child must die so that you may live as you wish." Mother Teresa
24. "We become like the things we love. Love makes lovers equal." –St. Francis
25. "What could he say in a single word, a few words, that would sear all their faces and wake them up?"
26. "So I'm gonna buy a gun and start a war, if you can tell me something worth fighting for."
27. "Not all who wander are lost." –Tolkien
28. "Don't tell me how to live, tell me how I am alive" –Huge MacLeod
29. "Quit picking fights and go make something" –Austin Kleon
30. "The best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago. The second best time is now." –Chinese Proverb
31. "It takes courage to grow up and turn out to be who you really are." –E.E. Cummings
32. "Don't ask yourself what the world needs, ask yourself what makes you come alive, and do that. Because what the world needs is people who are alive." –Howard Thurman
33. "Great minds discuss ideas; average minds discuss events; small minds discuss people."--Eleanor Roosevelt

### 30 Favorite Quotes

1. When I was 5 years old, my mom always told me that happiness was the key to life. When I went to school, they asked me what I wanted to be when I grew up. I wrote down "happy." They told me I didn't understand the assignment and I told them they didn't understand life." —John Lennon
2. "The trick to finding ideas is to convince yourself that everyone and everything has a story to tell...good writing does not succeed or fail on the strength of its ability to persuade not the kind of writing that you'll find in this book, anyway. It succeeds or fails on the strength of its ability to engage you, to make you think, to give you a glimpse into someone else's head—even if in the end you conclude that someone else's head is not a place you'd really like to be. I've called these pieces adventures, because that is what they are intended to be. Enjoy yourself."—Malcolm Gladwell
3. "It doesn't interest me what you do for a living. I want to know what you ache for, and if you dare to dream of meeting your heart's longing...I want to know if you will risk looking like a fool for love, for your dream, for the adventure of being alive...I want to know if you have touched the center of your own sorrow, if you have been opened by life's betrayals or have become shriveled and closed from fear of further pain. I want to know if you can sit with pain, mine or your own, without moving to hide it or fix it...I want to know if you can disappoint another to be true to yourself." —Oriah Mountain Dreamer
4. "The complaint was the answer. To have heard myself making it was to be answered. Lightly men talk of saying what they mean. To say the very thing you mean, the whole of it, nothing more or less or other than what you really mean; that's the whole art and joy of words. When the time comes to you at which you will be forced at last to utter the speech which has lain at the center of your soul for years, which you have, all that time, idiot-like, been saying over and over, you'll not talk about joy of words. I saw well why the gods do not speak to us, openly, nor let us answer. Till that word can be dug out of us, why should they hear the babble that we think we mean? How can they meet us face to face till we have faces?" —C. S. Lewis
5. "You are not at all like my rose. As yet you are nothing. No one has tamed you, and you have tamed no one. You are beautiful, but you are empty. One could not die for you. To be sure, an ordinary passerby would think that my rose looked just like you—the rose that belongs to me. But in herself alone she is more important than all the hundreds of you other roses: because it is she that I have watered; because it is she that I have put under the glass globe; because it is she that I have sheltered behind the screen; because it is she that I have listened to, when she grumbled, or boasted, or even sometimes when she said nothing. Because she is my rose." —The Little Prince
6. "Once, there was a small group of kids who decided to go to a park in the middle of the city, and dance and play, laugh and twirl. As they played in the park, they thought that maybe another child would pass by and see them. Maybe that child would think it looked fun and even decide to join them. Then maybe another one would. Then maybe a businessman would hear them from his skyscraper. Maybe he would look out the window. Maybe he would see them playing and lay down his papers and come down. Maybe they could teach him to dance. Then maybe another businessman would walk by, a nostalgic man, and he would take off his tie and toss aside his briefcase and dance and play. Maybe the whole city would join the dance. Maybe even the world. Maybe...Regardless, they decided to enjoy the dance." —Shane Claiborne
7. "Life is too short to spend it fighting against things. I don't want to survive, I want to thrive. Life is too big for me if I only know what I am not—I want to know what I am. I am not anti-poverty. I am pro-abundance. I am not working to end scarcity, I am dancing to prove beauty and plenty." —Rachel Winzeler
8. "Yale professor Harold Bloom observed that Karl Marx had it only partly right when he said that religion is the opiate of the people. More broadly speaking, it is the poetry of the people, both the good and the bad, for better and worse. Religion can, and should be, objected to, questioned, and talked about. Devastating criticism of religion is always part of religion. The religiously faithful aren't just permitted to critique and complain and reform; they're bound to do it by religion. When religion won't tolerate questions...it has an unfortunate habit of producing some of the most hateful people ever to walk the earth." —David Dark
9. "It is our light not our darkness that most frightens us. Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate—our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure...We were born to make manifest the glory of

God that is within us. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same.” —Marianne Williamson

10. "We live in a fog most of the time. Twenty clear days a year. You are not what you think you are. There is a glory to your life that the enemy fears, and he is hell bent on destroying that glory before you act upon it. It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us. The deeper reason we fear our own glory is because once we let others see it, they will have seen the truest us, and that is nakedness indeed. We can repent of sin. We can work on "issues," but there is nothing to be "done" about our glory. It is an awkward thing to shimmer when everyone else around you is not." --John Eldredge, "Waking the Dead"
11. "When you are desperate or even angry, there is at least a shred of hope that things might be different. A holy discontent. But despair is what happens when you are tired of being desperate." --The New Friars by Scott Bessenecker
12. "Us girls—we change for guys. We want to please them and we change for love. Guys—they determinedly don't change. They wait and see if we will love and accept them just as they are. Then, when you aren't looking, they go and change." —Karine Moraes
13. "Missions is less about the transport of God from one place to another and more about the identification of a God who is already there. It is almost as if being a good missionary means having really good eyesight. Or maybe it means teaching people to use their eyes to see things that have always been there; they just didn't realize it. You see God where others don't, and then you point Him out. Perhaps we ought to replace the word "missionary" with "tour guide" because we cannot show people something we haven't seen...and if you do see yourself as carrying God to places, it can be exhausting. God is really heavy." —Rob Bell
14. "There are things you cannot understand, and you must learn to live with this. You must learn to enjoy this...at the end of the day, when I am lying on my bed and I know the chances of any of our theology being exactly right are a million to one, I need to know that God has things figured out that if my math is wrong we are still going to be ok. And wonder is that feeling we get when we let go of our silly answers, our mapped out rules that we want God to follow. I don't think there is any better worship than wonder." —Donald Miller
15. "Take wrong turns. Talk to strangers. Open unmarked doors. And if you see a group of people in a field, go find out what they are doing. Do things without always knowing how they will turn out. You're curious and smart and bored, and all you see is the choice of working hard or slacking off. There are many adventures that you miss because you're waiting to think of a plan. To find them, look for tiny interesting choices. And remember that you are always making up the future as you go."
16. "People are often unreasonable, irrational, and self-centered. Forgive them anyway. If you are kind, people may accuse you of selfish, ulterior motives. Be kind anyway. If you are successful, you will win some unfaithful friends and some genuine enemies. Succeed anyway. If you are honest and sincere people may deceive you. Be honest and sincere anyway. What you spend years creating, others could destroy overnight. Create anyway. If you find serenity and happiness, some may be jealous. Be happy anyway. The good you do today, will often be forgotten. Do good anyway. Give the best you have, and it will never be enough. Give your best anyway. In the final analysis, it is between you and God. It was never between you and them anyway." —Mother Teresa
17. "It helps, now and then, to step back and take a long view. The Kingdom is not only beyond our efforts, it is even beyond our vision. We accomplish in our lifetime only a tiny fraction of the magnificent enterprise that is God's work. Nothing we do is complete, which is a way of saying that the Kingdom always lies beyond us. We plant the seeds that one day will grow. We water seeds already planted, knowing that they hold future promise. We lay foundations that will need further development. We provide yeast that produces effects far beyond our capabilities. We cannot do everything, and there is a sense of liberation in realizing that. This enables us to do something, and to do it very well. It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way, an opportunity for the Lord's grace to enter and do the rest. We may never see the end results, but that is the difference between the master builder and the worker. We are workers, not master builders; ministers, not messiahs. We are prophets of a future that is not our own. Amen." —Oscar Romero

18. "The only people for me are the mad ones. The ones who are mad to live, mad to talk, mad to be saved, desirous of everything at the same time, the ones who never yawn or say a commonplace thing, but burn, burn, burn, like fabulous yellow Roman candles exploding like spiders across the stars..." —Jack Kerouac
19. "I hate a Roman named Status Quo!" he said to me. "Stuff your eyes with wonder," he said, "Live as if you'd drop dead in ten seconds. See the world. It's more fantastic than any dream made or paid for in factories. Ask no guarantees, ask for no security, there never was such an animal." —Ray Bradbury
20. "They're not that different from you, are they? Same haircuts. Full of hormones, just like you. Invincible, just like you feel. The world is their oyster. They believe they are destined for great things, just like many of you, their eyes are full of hope, just like you. Did they wait until it was too late to make from their lives even one iota of what they were capable? Because, you see gentlemen, these boys are now fertilizing daffodils. But if you listen real close, you can hear them whisper their legacy to you. Go on, lean in. listen, you hear it? Carpe—hear it?—Carpe, carpe diem, seize the day boys, make your lives extraordinary." — "Dead Poet's Society"
21. "I have come to the realization that I am somewhat of a nomad on this earth. I am learning to be okay with that. Human beings long for a place to call home. I have many and none. My heart lives in so many places. With so many people. But God whispers to me that I really have only one home, and that is with Him. I will never be content on this earth. I will always be a nomad. It was meant to be that way. And I will continue bouncing from one home to another, loving with everything I have in whatever location I currently reside, excitedly awaiting the day when I am called heavenward and He says to me, "Welcome home." —Katie Davis
22. "Choose what to leave out. In this age of information abundance and overload, those who get ahead will be the folks who figure out what to leave out, so they can concentrate on what's really important to them. Nothing is more paralyzing than the idea of limitless possibilities. The idea that you can do anything is absolutely terrifying." —Austin Kleon
23. "Don't surrender your loneliness so quickly. Let it cut more deep. Let it ferment and season you as few human ingredients can. Something missing in my heart tonight has made my eyes so soft, my voice so tender, my need of God absolutely clear." —Rumi
24. "Watch your thoughts; they become words. Watch your words; they become actions. Watch your actions; they become habits. Watch your habits; they become character. Watch your character; it becomes your destiny." —Lao-Tze
25. "See that I am God. See that I am in everything. See that I do everything. See that I lead everything on to the conclusion I ordained for it before time began, by the same power, wisdom and love with which I made it. How can anything be amiss?" —Julian of Norwich
26. "Friendships with people who are poor or vulnerable can challenge our arrogance in thinking we know how to fix their circumstances. Our sweeping critiques of multinational corporations become more nuanced when friends are grateful for their jobs and proud of their products. Friendships undermine our tendency to locate the problem "out there" and try to fix it at a distance. And friendships give an urgency to our work for justice, to our search for ways to affect the decisions of multinationals and governments. Friends who are poor challenge our lifestyles of consumption when they build generous and gracious lives out of very few material resources. When we get to know people who are vulnerable, we are challenged to take more seriously the power and opportunities we have. A wise friend once observed that we are most likely to worry about the people we see first thing in the morning. If we live in comfortable circumstances, we need to make decisions to plant one foot in another world. Only then will we keep friends in mind as we make our choices each day." —Chris Heuertz
27. "If you don't know your purpose, discover it, now. The core of your life is your purpose. Everything in your life, from your diet to your career, must be aligned with your purpose if you are to act with coherence and integrity in the world. If you know your purpose, your deepest desire, then the secret of success is to discipline your life so that you support your deepest purpose and minimize distractions and detours." — David Deida
28. "Twenty years from now you will be more disappointed by the things that you didn't do than by the ones you did do. So throw off the bowlines. Sail away from the safe harbor. Catch the trade winds in your sails. Explore. Dream. Discover." — Mark Twain

29. "I've seen too much hate to want to hate, myself, and every time I see it, I say to myself, hate is too great a burden to bear. Somehow we must be able to stand up against our most bitter opponents and say: We shall match your capacity to inflict suffering by our capacity to endure suffering. We will meet your physical force with soul force. Do to us what you will and we will still love you.... But be assured that we'll wear you down by our capacity to suffer, and one day we will win our freedom. We will not only win freedom for ourselves; we will appeal to your heart and conscience that we will win you in the process, and our victory will be a double victory." –Martin Luther King Jr.
30. "Here's to the crazy ones. The misfits. The rebels. The troublemakers. The round pegs in the square holes. The ones who see things differently. They're not fond of rules. And they have no respect for the status quo. You can quote them, disagree with them, glorify or vilify them. About the only thing you can't do is ignore them. Because they change things. They push the human race forward. And while some may see them as the crazy ones, we see genius. Because the people who are crazy enough to think they can change the world, are the ones who do." –Steve Jobs

### 30 Favorite Movies

1. Peter Pan (with real people, but all the versions are good)
2. Pride and Prejudice (with Keira Knightly, but all the versions work)
3. Little Women
4. The Great Race
5. Newsies
6. Fiddler on the Roof
7. Dead Poets Society
8. Singing in the Rain
9. Becoming Jane
10. Pirates of the Caribbean (all)
11. Lord of the Rings/Hobbit (all)
12. Batman (all)
13. Anne of Green Gables
14. My Fair Lady
15. Hello Dolly
16. Little Prince
17. Phantom of the Opera
18. Princess Bride
19. Blue Like Jazz
20. V for Vendetta
21. Rigoletto
22. Ever After
23. Life is Beautiful
24. Hook
25. Remember the Titans
26. Man of La Mancha
27. Narnia (all)
28. Second Hand Lions
29. Amelie
30. Fight Club
31. Sherlock Homes (all)



### 30 Favorite TED talks

1. Derek Sivers. How to start a movement: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V74AxCqOTvg>
2. Natalie Warne. Being young and making an impact: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FszSc7Fb8ss>
3. Jessica Jackley. Poverty, Money and Love: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cqj0sgrNL10>
4. Andrew Stanton. Clues to a great story: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KxDwieKpawg>
5. Nancy Duarte. The secret structure of great talks: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1nYFpuc2Umk>
6. Hans Rosling. New insights on poverty: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YpKbO6O3O3M> (you gotta see lots of his videos!!)
7. Sarah Kay. How many lives can you live: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7lv2nZnZOrM> (you gotta see lots of her videos!!)
8. Imogem Heap. Wait it out: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vvndzh78nf0>
9. Phil Kaye. Why we tell stories: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s7fWagDQyvq>
10. Taika Waititi. The Art of Creativity: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pL71KhNmnl5>
11. Bryan Franklin - The Most Dangerous Question On Earth: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tCIHDEoje6Y>
12. Steve Jobs. How to live before you die: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UF8uR6Z6KLC>
13. Brene Brown. Vulnerability: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iCvmsMzIF7o>
14. Cameron Russell. Looks aren't everything: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KM4Xe6DlpOY>
15. Jenna McCarthy. What you don't know about marriage: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y8u42OjH0ss>
16. Helen Fisher. Why we love, why we cheat: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x-ewvCNguug>
17. Esther Perel. The secret to desire in a long-term relationship: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sa0RUmGTCYY>
18. Malcolm Gladwell. Spaghetti sauce: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iliAAhUeR6Y>
19. Sir Ken Robinson. Do schools kill creativity? <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iG9CE55wbtY>
20. David Gallo. Underwater astonishments: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YVvn8dpSAto>
21. Simon Sinek. How great leaders inspire action: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qp0HIF3SfI4>
22. Meg Jay. Why 30 is not the new 20: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vhhgl4tSMwc>
23. Amanda Palmer. The art of asking: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xMj\\_P\\_6H69g](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xMj_P_6H69g)
24. Dan Pink. The puzzle of motivation: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rrkrvAUbU9Y>
25. Rick Warren. A life of purpose: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=640BQNxB5mc>
26. Shane Koyzan. To this day: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ltun92DfnPY>
27. Gary Wilson. The great porn experiment: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DdW93DDELf4>
28. Seth Godin. How to get your ideas to spread: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xBIVIM435Zg>
29. Adam Leipzig. How to know your life purpose in five minutes: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vVsXO9brK7M>
30. Rachel Winzeler. The TED talk I will do someday

### 30 Favorite Books/Authors

1. John Eldredge (Waking the Dead, Wild at Heart, Captivating, Sacred Romance...)
2. Randy Alcorn (Heaven, Deadline, If God is good...)
3. Eric and Leslie Ludy (Bravehearted Gospel, Meet Mr. Smith, Authentic Beauty...)
4. C.S. Lewis (Narnia series, Till We Have Faces, The Great Divorce...)
5. Oswald Chambers (My Utmost for His Highest)
6. Donald Miller (Blue Like Jazz, Searching for God knows What...)
7. Rob Bell (Velvet Elvis...some of his writing is controversial, so read with caution)
8. Shane Claiborne (Irresistible Revolution)
9. Henri Nouwen (The Genesis Diary, Clowning in Rome...)
10. Ann Kiemel (I Love The Word Impossible...fun from the 80s)
11. David Wilkerson (Cross and the Switchblade...)
12. Scott Bessenecker (New Friars...)
13. Andrew Marin (Love is an Orientation)
14. Christopher Heuertz (Simple Spirituality, Friendship in the Margins...)

15. John Piper (Desiring God...)
16. Karen Mains (Tales of the Kingdom...)
17. Max Lucado (Tell me the Story, Tell me the Secret...all his children's books)
18. Victor Hugo (Les Miserables...read the abridged version)
19. Katie Davis (Kisses From Katie, kissesfromkatie.blogspot.com)
20. Ann Voskamp (1000 Gifts, aholyexperience.com )
21. Shel Silverstine (The Giving Tree, The Missing Piece, The Missing Piece meets the Big O...)
22. J.M. Barry (Peter Pan and Wendy)
23. Sabrina Ward Harrison (Spilling Open, My Messy Life...)
24. Malcolm Gladwell (Tipping Point, Blink...)
25. L.M. Montgomery (Anne of Green Gables series, Story Girl, The Blue Castle...)
26. L.M. Alcott (Little Women, Eight Cousins, Old Fashioned Girl...)
27. Gilbreths (Cheaper by the Dozen)
28. Maira Kalman (The Principles of Uncertainty)
29. David Benioff (City of Thieves)
30. Austin Kleon (Steal Like an Artist)

### 30 Six Word Memoires

1. Made a mess. Cleaned it up. Amy Anderson
2. She walked barefoot in wet cement. Michelle Pinchev
3. It was worth it, I think. Annette Laitinen
4. Came, saw, conquered, had second thoughts. Harold Ramis
5. ABCs, MTV, SAT, THC, IRA, NPR. Jancee Dunn
6. Always working on the next chapter. Milan Pham
7. If there's more, I want it. Alex Hart
8. I told you I was crazy. Michaline Babich
9. More than yesterday, less than tomorrow. Nichiren Palombo
10. Maybe you had to be there. Roy Blount
11. Tell your story. That's my story. Andy Goodman
12. Ripped open, sewn back up, healing. Traci V.
13. Living my dream; please send money. Brittney L.
14. It is very very very complicated. Kika M.
15. Can't find home. Won't stop looking. Kelsey G.
16. Fell down, got up, kept dreaming. Megan k.
17. Views on life, love, universe: TBA. Charlotte T.
18. We are banned from Wal-Mart forever. Kristin S.
19. Some days sucked. Sun still rose. Mary H.
20. In the beginning I showered daily. Deena Drewis
21. Loved. Lost. Cried. Raged. Chocolate. Next. Jackie Childress
22. I just hope there is a sequel. Lila Nawrocki
23. I turned eleven. No Hogwarts letter. Laura Murray
24. Looked up. Saw sky. Bird pooped. Robert Johnson
25. Author of so many unwritten books. Kirstin Meeachern
26. My six words haven't happened yet. Erica Ray

Mine:

27. Born broken, tried to fix it
28. Jesus loves me: I love Jesus
29. I can't. God can. Through Jesus.
30. Horrible speller. Became an English teacher

31. Cut my hair. It grew back
32. Said goodbye to say hello again
33. Let go to begin to live
34. (Living Stones) Love, educate, nourish impoverished Brazilian children
35. Touch one more that wasn't before

### **30 Holiday ideas**

1. Ask what old traditional food people remember having for that holiday and make some of it
2. Cookie making contest. No recipes allowed. All from your head.
3. Hang donuts from something and then have fun eating them with no hands
4. Make jolly rancher lollypops—stick three on a pan together, put a stick on it and melt
5. Are there any traditional songs for this holiday? Learn a new one.
6. Make holiday cards/cookies and give them away to neighbors
7. Read a book about the holiday (or just a good book) aloud
8. Fire in the fire place (if cold), fire outside (if hot)
9. Call people you won't see on the holiday to connect. YEA SKYPE!
10. Choose/create one "traditional" holiday movie to watch together, and do it every year
11. Play gestures/charades
12. Take time to reflect and write a letter to your past self (5 years ago) and future self (5 years in the future) of your ideas, what you like, don't like, want...
13. Share best memories/lessons learned of the year
14. Share favorite memories of past holidays you've had
15. Make a fort/sleep on the floor together
16. Listen to radio theater
17. Do a "black out poetry" contest where you write a poem circling words and black out the rest
18. Sparklers! For any and all holidays
19. Secret Stalker (pick names from a hat to leave love notes/messages for them all day without revealing who you are)
20. Make a movie/video/skit something
21. White elephant gift exchange
22. Light a buncha candles
23. No internet/video games/news watching! More family/real people time
24. Spend 10 minutes on Pinterest or Google, getting good holiday ideas to do
25. Joke telling contest
26. Talent contest—everyone must do something!
27. Brainstorm what family traditions you want to create for that holiday in the future
28. Break out the board games
29. Find a way to serve/include/bless others on that holiday
30. Don't waste this day being normal

### **30 Pieces of Advice for Short Term Mission Trippers**

1. Things are going to change. A lot.
2. Forget what you planned, but always have a plan to make the most of the moment.
3. Take initiative. Tell us what you need. No one can tell what is inside your head.
4. Make sure to take care of you. Make your needs known, but don't complain—this isn't about you.
5. What do you do in another country? Basically the same things you do in your own country. But it is just different enough to throw everything off.
6. You, your personality, your likes and dislikes will not magically change now that you are in a different country. That is ok.



7. It is ok to be tired and to say no.
8. Come to serve and be served. Let yourself receive as well.
9. You won't understand most of what is going on, or the deep layers of culture around you. That is ok.
10. You won't understand half the things you learned until after you go back home and have time and space to sort out your brain. That is ok.
11. You can't control your health or the weather. It is what it is, so let it be.
12. You are not going to change the world.
13. You are going to make lasting impressions on the people around you (mostly when you think they are not looking) about who Christians are, who Americans are, and if Jesus is worth it.
14. You do not know more than the people you are working with.
15. You do not know more than the missionaries who have been living there for years.
16. You can mess up the local ministries permanently by your misbehavior. Those who live there have to pick up your mess.
17. Don't make promises to the people you meet that you cannot personally keep.
18. Dream big and let go.
19. Read this honestly: <http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/tgc/2012/06/18/why-you-should-consider-cancelling-your-short-term-mission-trips/> and then pray about your motives and reasons.
20. Read this honestly: <http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/tgc/2012/06/27/toward-better-short-term-missions/> and pray about what you can change.
21. Realize that this trip is much more about you and what God wants to do in your life more than anything you could do for others. Be humbled and open.
22. Understand that you are worth the investment. Yes, you could send the money you spent to go to another country for many "better" things—but this is permanent construction in your own life and being open for whatever God decides to do with that.
23. Food really is a big deal. It will be different than you expect. You will need to be flexible, and at times, hold your breath and swallow.
24. DO study the language before you go—audio, with as close of an accent to your area as possible. It will never be "enough," but you will be grateful for the small bit you know—and the people appreciate when you try.
25. Always carry around a water bottle, sunscreen, and sunglasses. You are seven degrees from the equator.
26. Have clothes ready for 90 degree plus weather. Or rain. Or normal. You never know.
27. Wear a name tag. Sorta goofy, but a really great way to get to know people.
28. The bigger your prayer/support circle is back home, the easier the trip/transitions will be. Invest in those people, and asking them to be a part of your team. To properly go, you need to be *sent*.
29. Study culture shock and reverse culture shock: it hits you both directions. Be prepared.
30. Go through these questions below with God. Have time alone with Him and be honest.
  - Name the top three reasons for this trip:
  - What do you want to accomplish on/because of this trip?
  - What has God done in your life that is worth telling the world (Your testimony)?
  - What will this trip cost you (don't just think about money)?
  - What are your concerns/worries about this trip?  
(During the trip)
  - Are you giving every moment your all? Why/why not?
  - What are you doing with your free time/when no one is watching?
  - What are three ways you can show love today?

- How does God “recharge” you when you are tired/at your limit? (Find a way to do that today)
- When people ask, what will you tell them that you learned from this time? (After the trip)
- How are you living out what you learned on the trip?
- What was/happened that was better/worse/harder than you thought it would be?
- What do you wish you could have done differently/changed?
- What are 5 things you are glad/proud of that were accomplished during this trip?
- How do you want to be different because of this trip (now, in a year, in 5 years...)?

### 30 Things about Poverty

1. There is a difference between USA poverty and third-world poverty: <http://visual.ly/all-poverty-not-created-equal> Poverty level in the USA is roughly \$11,000 a year, adding \$4,000 per person in the household: <http://www.vhcf.org/looking-for-help/>. Minimum wage (a decent living) in Brazil is \$4,000, let alone those living in poverty. The official world poverty line is \$2 a day or \$750 a year: <http://data.worldbank.org/topic/poverty>
2. There are different kinds of poverty: Eric Jensen’s “Teaching With Poverty in Mind” lists: a. Situational poverty (from a crisis or disaster), b. Urban and Rural poverty (Each have their different needs), c. Generational poverty (in the family for a while, not equipped to move out of poverty), d. Absolute poverty (day-to-day survival), and e. Relative poverty (not meeting society’s average standard of living.)
3. Some poverty is relative, as is wealth, as an internal measurement compared to those around you
4. The solutions for each kind of poverty are different, and cannot be lumped together.
5. For those in deep poverty, the main reasons are a. Decreasing national/local prosperity b. Health/death shocks and natural disasters c. Failure of initiative (agriculture) d. Family problems/expenses e. Asset depletion: <http://www.oxfamblogs.org/fp2p/?p=195>
6. The main reasons for poverty in the USA are: a. Divorce/separation b. Out-of-wedlock child c. Earnings Fail: <http://theruggedindividualist.wordpress.com/2012/04/25/revisiting-poor-in-america-a-graphic-essay/>
7. Poverty is often transient. Most people are in and out of poverty, or kinds of poverty, depending on circumstances, rather than it being a permanent place of destitution <http://www.oxfamblogs.org/fp2p/?p=195>
8. There are often mind-sets that go along with the level of money you perceive yourself to be in. Those in poverty often value relationships and entertainment first. Those in middle class value work, achievement, and material security. Those who are wealthy value security, privacy, and maintaining their wealth: [http://www.ahaprocess.com/store/more/excerpts/book\\_CrossingtheTracks.pdf](http://www.ahaprocess.com/store/more/excerpts/book_CrossingtheTracks.pdf) and [http://www.ahaprocess.com/store/more/excerpts/book\\_Framework.pdf](http://www.ahaprocess.com/store/more/excerpts/book_Framework.pdf)

| Poverty mind set                | Middle class mind set        | Wealthy mind set                         |
|---------------------------------|------------------------------|--|
| People are the objective        | Things are the objective     | Legacies and pedigrees are the objective |
| Money is to be used and spent   | Money is to be managed       | Money is to be conserved and invested    |
| Sense of humor is highly valued | Achievement is highly valued | Connections are highly valued            |

|  |   |   |
|--|---|---|
| Emphasis is on social inclusion of people they like            | Emphasis on self-governance and sufficiency               | Emphasis on social exclusion  |
| Food is about having enough: quantity                          | Food is about liking it: quality                          | Food is about presentation  |
| Clothes are valued for individual style and expression         | Clothes are valued for quality and acceptance: good label | Clothes are valued for artistic sense and expression: good designer |
| The present time is most important                             | The future is most important                              | The past, traditions and history is the most important              |
| Decisions are made in the moment based on feelings or survival | Decisions are made on future ramifications                | Decisions are made on basis of tradition and decorum                |
| Education is valued but not reality                            | Education is crucial for climbing ladder of success       | Education is a necessary tradition for maintaining connections      |
| Language is for survival                                       | Language is for negotiations                              | Language is for networking  |
| Family tends to be matriarchal                                 | Family tends to be patriarchal                            | Family depends on who had the money                                 |
| Sees the world in a local setting                              | Sees the world in a national setting                      | Sees the world from an international perspective                    |
| Love is based on whether the person is liked                   | Love is based on achievement                              | Love is based on social standing and connections                    |

9. The graph above is a generalization, and each person may be a mixture of groups, but everyone has their own rules and values from how they were raised, and they often hinder success
10. To move from poverty to middle class or middle class to wealthy "mind set," an individual must give up relationships for achievement (at least for some period of time)
- [http://www.ahaprocess.com/store/more/excerpts/book\\_Framework.pdf](http://www.ahaprocess.com/store/more/excerpts/book_Framework.pdf)

11. In changing a mindset:

|  |  |
|--|--|
| Rich people                                | Poor people                                  |
| "I can create my life"                     | "Life happens to me"                         |
| Think big                                  | Think small                                  |
| Focus on opportunities                     | Focus on obstacles                           |
| Associate with positive, successful people | Associate with negative, unsuccessful people |
| Are excellent receivers                    | Are poor receivers                           |

|                               |                                   |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Constantly learn and grow     | Think they already know           |
| Think long-term               | Think short-term                  |
| Talk about ideas              | Talk about things and people      |
| Embrace change                | Are threatened by change          |
| Take calculated risks         | Are afraid to take risks          |
| Continually learn and grow    | Think learning ends with school   |
| Believe they must be generous | Believe they can't afford to give |
| Work for profits              | Work for wages                    |

<http://www.getrichslowly.org/blog/2011/11/01/what-are-the-differences-between-the-rich-and-the-poor/>

12. There are four common ways that people move out of poverty: a. An insight, goal, and determination to change b. A particular talent or skill c. A relationship with someone who guides and supports d. The pain of living in poverty:  
[http://www.connectionsaustin.org/pihaustin/Poverty%20Issues\\_files/The%20hidden%20rules%20of%20class.pdf](http://www.connectionsaustin.org/pihaustin/Poverty%20Issues_files/The%20hidden%20rules%20of%20class.pdf)
13. To help those in generational poverty, child sponsorship has been proven to work (like through Compassion, World Vision, Living Stones) because "It expands children's views about their own possibilities. We help them realize that they are each given special gifts from God to benefit their communities, and we try to help them develop aspirations for their future." –Wess Stafford, Compassion Int.
14. "Band-Aid" help (go in, fix/build/change something, get out) doesn't help in the long run, although is necessary in certain situations, especially situational poverty/health issues. It reinforces the idea that they can't do it alone
15. Here is an interesting look on being poor (in the USA): <http://whatever.scalzi.com/2005/09/03/being-poor/>
16. Understand, overall, how blessed you are. If the world were shrunk to 100 people, 7 would have a college degree, 17 couldn't read. 48 people would be living off of \$2 a day or less. 22 would not have electricity, 13 would not have safe drinking water: <http://larryferlazzo.edublogs.org/2010/04/27/the-best-sites-that-show-statistics-by-reducing-the-world-the-u-s-to-100-people/>
17. Understand and enjoy statistics: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jbkSRLYSojo> Hans Rosling makes it fun☺
18. Do you really want to know a little about poverty? Take the rice and beans or \$2 a day challenge for a week or a month
19. You will (probably) never really know what poverty truly feels like. You can read this list, and have the resources to access it and understand it. That means you have been given at least a basic education, skills, and resources in the world. You can go out and "experience" poverty, but you always know that if it came down to it, someone or somehow you could provide for yourself. Those in deep poverty do not have that assurance.

20. [www.live58.org](http://www.live58.org) says we can end extreme poverty, and has a plan: “In the past thirty years, extreme poverty has been cut in half. In 1981, 52% of the world’s population lived in extreme poverty, but by 2006, that number was 26%”
21. Top 10 reasons why NOT to listen when Jesus says “Sell your possessions and give the money to the poor:” (by Ash Barker in “Make Poverty Personal”)
  - a. But then who would support the missionaries?
  - b. God has called me to minister to the rich
  - c. It is on my to do list, I just have to finish (fill in the blank)
  - d. Jesus only asked him because he had a problem with possessions
  - e. Jesus only asked him because he didn’t have a family
  - f. Actually, you can get the camel through the gate—if he gets on his knees
  - g. But Jesus wants me to have the best
  - h. I would do it, if Jesus made it clear he WANTED me to
  - i. I give 10%, He wants MORE?
  - j. Giving money to the poor is bad stewardship—they would use it for booze
22. 12 Steps to solving poverty (By Paul Polack "Out of Poverty")
  - a. Go where the action is (stop pitying poor people)
  - b. Talk to the people who have the problem and listen to what they say
  - c. Learn everything you can about the problem's specific content (learn about the poor around you, as well as global poverty and what can be done)
  - d. Think big and act big
  - e. Think like a child
  - f. See and do the obvious (when you know the people, you know the problem, and sometimes a solution)
  - g. If somebody already invented it, you don't need to do it again (help whatever is already going on)
  - h. Make sure it has positive measurable impact that can be brought to scale, reaching a million people and make their lives measurably better.
  - i. Design to specific cost and price targets
  - j. Follow practical three year plans
  - k. Continue to learn from your customers
  - l. Stay positive: don't be distracted by what others think
23. Go and learn about groups/people/organizations that are working to end poverty. Might I suggest Living Stones? [www.buildinglivingstones.blogspot.com](http://www.buildinglivingstones.blogspot.com)
24. Read “Half the Sky” to get stories and statistics of what is really happening with the women of the world: “Because men typically control the purse strings, it appears that the poorest families in the world typically spend approximately ten times as much (20% of their income on average) on a combination of alcohol, prostitutes, candy, sugary drinks, and lavish feasts as they do on educating their children...perhaps it seems culturally insensitive to scold the poor for indulging in festivals, alcohol, or sweets that make life more fun. Yet when resources are scarce, priorities are essential...and the simplest solution is to reallocate spending.” Which is why most social and government services are now going through the women, because the money is more likely to get to the children.
25. At the end of “Half the Sky,” they call for three pragmatic steps: \$10 billion for educating girls, \$19 million to give iodized salt to pregnant women (which would raise IQ at least ten points in impoverished children born), and a \$1.6 billion plan to eradicate obstetric fistula (which normally happens from harsh rape or when a baby gets stuck during birth and permanently cripples if not treated—but is treatable).  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MRfDzznfEOU>

26. People are doing things to end poverty. It can be done—this guy put a price tag on it. Here is a philosophical and intelligent view of things: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=onsldBanynY>
27. “Overcoming poverty is not a gesture of charity. It is an act of Justice” –Nelson Mandela
28. “It is poverty to decide that a child must die so that you may live as you wish” –Mother Teresa
29. “Let us be the ones to say we are not satisfied that your place of birth determines your right to life. Let us be outraged, let us be loud, let us be bold.” –Brad Pitt
30. “It is not just the kids that are here, needy and needing. It is the whole family. And even if you don’t help us, do something. Anything. God is always showing us something we can do for someone else. Take the step in front of you, and see where it takes you...but don’t stand still. We are working with those who are considered and treated as the trash of the world. The unwanted. The child that is dirty and strikes his hand in your face and asks for money, making you feel uncomfortable...those everyone else has thrown out—of mind and heart. It is not about money, it is about action. Doing what you can where you are Do whatever comes to your mind when you ask God honestly, What would you have me do?” –Patricia, one of the Living Stones workers

### 30 Rules to Live By

1. Be me
2. Let it go
3. Do it now
4. Enjoy the process
5. Identify the problem
6. Lighten up
7. Talk to strangers
8. Stay in touch
9. Go outside
10. Give thanks
11. Create something that wasn’t there before
12. Be the kind of woman I want my daughters to be
13. This too shall pass
14. Expect a miracle
15. What do I really, really want?
16. Be specific about my needs
17. Only connect
18. Do good, feel good
19. No deposit, no return
20. My body matters
21. Exercise every day
22. Say yes
23. Choose the bigger life
24. Don’t compare
25. Make peace
26. Smile
27. Sleep is worth it
28. Ask questions
29. Tell the truth
30. Live with arms wide open



### 30 Ways to Say "I Love You"

1. Learn their Love Language (<http://www.helloquizzy.com/tests/the-5-love-languages-test>) and focus on loving them that way

2. Spend time with them. Be available. Be there when they need it
3. Know what they like/don't like. Love what they love
4. Admire them openly—you pursue what you admire
5. Make a list of specific things you love about them. Share those reasons with them liberally
6. Show up unexpectedly where they are. Call at random times to just say Hello.
7. Complement them. You remind yourself why they are great when you tell them so
8. Spread good gossip about them
9. Impress and be kind to their family. Always
10. Become an expert on them...ask about everything. And then listen. And remember
11. Be completely honest with them. Share secrets
12. Take their side
13. Make them top priority. Invest in them
14. Plan something special to do with them. Then do it
15. Trust them. Believe in who they are and what they do
16. Write them a really good love letter
17. Do this literally: "I love you" in other languages:<http://www.yourtango.com/experts/singles-warehouse/100-ways-say-i-love-you>
18. The traditional way: with flowers or chocolate
19. Share five minutes of uninterrupted eye contact  
(<http://www.relevantmagazine.com/life/relationship/features/28147-29-creative-ways-to-say-qi-love-youq>)
20. Write it in nature: carve it in a tree, on the beach, outlined with leaves...
21. Make them a homemade meal. Candles are good too
22. Give them a massage
23. Give a meaningful (homemade) present
24. Dedicate/write a song for/to them
25. Be their #1 fan
26. Do something for them that they were stressing about
27. Surprises
28. Let them win
29. Plan a really fun/sweet voice message to leave on their phone
30. Make a coupon book of things you'll do for them
31. Ummm... <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qXo3NFqkaRM>

### **30 tips for working with/teaching kids**

1. You have to know it yourself before you can pass it on to someone else
2. Anything worth knowing is worth sharing with (teaching) someone else
3. Use props. They help you and the kids stay focused
4. Teaching is discovery. The teacher and student finding answers together
5. Being a teacher is so much more than just being a teacher. It is wearing all the hats needed to provide what is needed for the student
6. "They don't care what you know until they know that you care."
7. Teaching takes dedication and perseverance, without instant reward. They probably will never thank you—many of them don't know how to put their gratitude into words yet
8. Teaching is a lifestyle. You can't fake it for long
9. Teaching is mutual—a two way street. Be humble about giving and receiving
10. Teaching is an ART. Get trained and keep learning how to do it better (best training ever: Supercamp)
11. From Supercamp: a. Everything speaks b. Everything is on purpose c. Experience before label d. Acknowledge every effort and e. If it is worth doing, it is worth celebrating

12. Also from Supercamp: lesson plan should be include EEL DR C: enroll, experience, label demonstrate, review, celebrate
13. Learn to use silence, to control your state, and the state of the room
14. Always remember: attention spans are basically one minute per year old (up to about 15-20). So if you have a room of 6 year olds, divide the content into 6 minute chunks and have state changes in between each chunk.
15. You, as the teacher, need to know the student well enough to connect learning content with their previous knowledge and schema, not leaving any gaps
16. Use music as much as possible, as a state change, as a dance break, as a come in/leave...
17. See the "10" in every child, even if they show up as a 2—you see potential
18. Make every child feel glad they came and that you care. You do not know what else is going on in their lives or if you will ever get the chance to teach them again
19. Know your objective for what you are teaching: what is the outcome you want, and how can you get there? Be direct
20. In the first 2 minutes, let the students know a. what you are going to share and b. why it is worth it for them to listen
21. I have something valuable to share, and I know it will make a difference in your life: that is why I am a teacher
22. Teacher rewards: that 2 minute (or so) window where the kids are actually looking at you and listening and you can see the wheels turning in their heads as they truly "get it."
23. Sleep enough and take care of yourself. If Teacher ain't happy, nobody (in the class) is happy
24. Be humble: if you mess up, apologize right there in front of the class. Vulnerability breeds vulnerability. If you don't know the answer to something they ask—great! Then you get to find the answer together
25. Laugh a lot: learning is fun, remember?
26. "Give a man a fish, and you feed him for a day; show him how to catch fish, and you feed him for a lifetime."
27. You get what you invest: be prepared, and include interesting things to keep yourself interested as well
28. Look for the little victories and praise them: God is always working somewhere
29. When they fail don't think it is final and when they succeed don't think your job is done
30. Be real. They know the difference

### **30 Stories of Children**

1. Cesar (January 7) At home, Cesar is known as "Satan" or "little devil." Most nights he sleeps on the streets because the small cement block house with a dirt floor is closed to him—his mother prefers his brother. Most people had given up on Cesar, labeling him a troublemaker, but not Living Stones. They worked with him until he learned what it meant to take responsibility. With Jesus' help, Cesar is learning what it means to be loved.
2. Flavio (January 20) Flavio grew up without a father, stealing mangos from neighbor's trees and general mishap. But in his teens he met Christ and started going to a church that asked him to teach guitar to street children. That program was called Living Stones. Today, Flavio is the pastor at Cajueiro Claro, working with three different Living Stones programs and transforming the lives of other boys and girls that grew up like he did.
3. Viviane (January 21) Viviane walks over a mile in the hot Brazilian sun to go to Living Stones in her rural town. It is one of her favorite parts of her week. She is a vivacious girl with big plans to be a veterinarian someday. One of her favorite things to do is to read the Bible at Living Stones. She is the first one in her



family to be able to read. As she writes a card for her mother, she explains that she will have to read it to her, but she doesn't mind.

4. Lucicleide (February 25) Luci was in first grade for five years because she wouldn't talk in class. When she started coming to Living Stones, she wouldn't look anyone in the eye, and when it was time to eat, she would slink away from the table to cower in a corner, hiding her food. Her dad is an alcoholic, and she lives with extended family in a small, crumbling house you have to crouch to get into. Luci learned to write her name at Living Stones. She is learning to talk and laugh and not be afraid to look you in the eye.
5. Leandra (March 12) Leandra, the oldest of eight, had a little brother on her hip and was leading a couple other siblings around. God is not only working in her life, putting a bright smile on her face, but also in the lives of her whole family. Through the ministry of Living Stones, her mother is learning how to take care of her children and run a home, and her father was able to get a steady job. They went from a one room home with a dirty mattress in the corner to proudly inviting people in to sit on their couch.
6. Josefa (March 21) Josefa didn't know how old she was. Her mother didn't know either, because she couldn't read her birth certificate. At the Living Stones program, they learned when Josefa's birthday was, and have begun to celebrate this special girl, one of eight daughters. They lived in a dirt house with a pet pigeon, near the dump where their father worked, but have been able to move to a basic brick home with a cement floor since. Josefa now knows how to sing "Happy Birthday."
7. Camila (March 24) Camila loves to learn. She lives across the way from the church where Living Stones is, and is always first in line for everything. Camila was adopted by her aunt, since her mother did not have the resources to take care of her. She is a good reader, and always the first to use the Living Stones "Library," where you can borrow one book and then return it for another, since she does not have many books at home.
8. Rafael Jose (March) "Tia," Said Jose, with tears in his eyes, "How can you go places like this with me? Aren't you ashamed to be seen with me?" He had been told so many times that he was something less than everyone else that he had begun to believe it. Because of Living Stones, Jose is now standing tall as a child of Jesus. He attends school, and even has a part time job to help his family. He is an example for the other children in the community.
9. Arthur (April 18) Arthur lives with his grandmother because when his mother went to live her boyfriend, he didn't want her children. The first month Arthur came to Living Stones he refused to smile, and had a lot of difficulty in school as well. But once he realized how much those at Living Stones cared about him, he changed. He gives hugs to all the workers when he comes and leaves, he is doing better in school, and when we celebrated his birthday (for the first time), he was the first one to say "thank you" when everything was done.
10. Paulo S (April 20) Paulo, known as "Chimbinha," proudly brings his new Bible to church. While he enjoys coming to Living Stones, church is his favorite time of the week. He sings the loudest, smiles the biggest, and hugs the hardest. He has recently become a Christian, and is figuring out exactly what that means. He looked on shamefully while another child told a worker, "I heard him cussing—does that mean he isn't a Christian anymore?" Together, the children at Living Stones are learning about forgiveness and love.
11. Cloves (April 24) Cloves is a happy, intelligent child who lives with his mother, but it hasn't always been like this. His father was a murderer and used to beat his wife, going in and out of jail. Through people involved with Living Stones, his mother was able to get a job in another city, with Cloves, and stay away from the situation until she was strong enough to stand on her own. Soon after, Clove's father was killed and they were able to return home and begin a new life through the Love of Jesus.
12. Isac (May 1) Isac lives in a three bedroom house that holds four families. He is a soccer manic, playing every day. All of the younger boys look up to him for his skill and his gentle leadership. All of his older brothers have grown up and gone to Recife, the big city, and have gotten lost in the world of drugs. Isac is

determined to be the first to be different. He has started training to join a professional soccer team as soon as he is old enough, and is using the money to support his family.

13. Eliza (May 11) Eliza moved to Northeast Brazil from down south, and has brought all of her big ideas of a big world with her. The other children find her interesting, this outgoing girl from the big city of places they've never seen. She is our official "reader" when we do Bible studies, and the first one to raise her hand for any question (often before the question is asked). She has big plans to be a lawyer when she grows up.
14. Eduarda (May 24) Eduarda has been coming to Living Stones most of her life. Her mother, young and alone, started bringing her to the program so that she would have something to do, since there were no jobs in the small rural community, and she couldn't leave her baby at home. Living Stones introduced her to Jesus and it has given her hope. Now Anginha (Eduarda's mother) is a strong leader in the church and found a job for her and her daughter to survive—cooking and cleaning at Living Stones.
15. Mariana (June 8) Mariana lives in a dirt house across the way from the church. Anytime she sees anyone from Living Stones, she runs over to give hugs and play. She is always friendly and lighthearted, and when she grows up, she wants to sell clothes in a big store. They have no steady income for the family of 6, so she and her mother get old cloth and shred it by hand to make fabric rags used to wash cars. They do whatever they can to make ends meet.
16. Daniella (June 22) Daniella refused to talk to anyone at Glory Sports/Living Stones. She wanted to come and play basketball, but would not open up or do anything else. After a couple months, she went up to one of the workers and asked their name. Since then, she went to a Word of Life day camp and gave her life to Jesus. She has been coming to church and bringing her family, a testimony to how God can change a life.
17. Feliciano (June 24) Maybe his name isn't Feliciano, but that is how he wants to be called, this wild boy that lives and works at the trash dump with his family. Other children laugh when we call him Feliciano, but he has opened his heart, talking and sharing, whereas before he would come to Living Stones just to hit and kick the other children. The name he chose for himself means "Happiness," which is just what God wants to bring to his life.
18. Paulo M (July 11) Paulo's brother, at 22, died of throat cancer. Living in the middle of nowhere, he had chosen to not seek medical attention, and it ended quickly. Paulo came to Living Stones, seeking answers. He found them in the love of Jesus, turning to Him with his whole heart. You can find Paulo running down the street, calling out to the Living Stone's workers as they arrive, and giving them a big hug. Paulo is learning how to be a light to his family, bringing his mother to church.
19. Poliana (July 30) Poliana is six in a family of eight children. Her favorite food is cake. She loves to come to Living Stones, quietly grabbing our box of toys and playing in a corner for hours, something she can't do at home.
20. Gustavo (August 10) Gustavo was not expected to live. He had a brain infection with pus coming out, and after being in the hospital for over a month, his family had all but given up hope. We prayed for him at Living Stones, and one of the workers, Grandma Isabel, went to go visit him. Gustavo is a shy boy that finds it hard to look people in the face, but he shines when he tells what happens next: "And then I got better!" Gustavo is back, playing soccer with the boys at Living Stones now.
21. Manuela (August 27) Manuela lived with her grandmother after her mother abandoned her and her stepmom didn't want her. But her grandmother died in 2012, so she is now with her aunt. Their small mud/stick house is basic, but clean. Manuela has been through a lot, but she doesn't let that hold her down. She loves to draw, and wants to be an artist someday.
22. Ivanilson (September 13) Ivanilson's father beats his mother. This is very common, especially in rural Brazil. His sad, thin face often reveals when things are going badly at home. At Living Stones, Ivanilson is

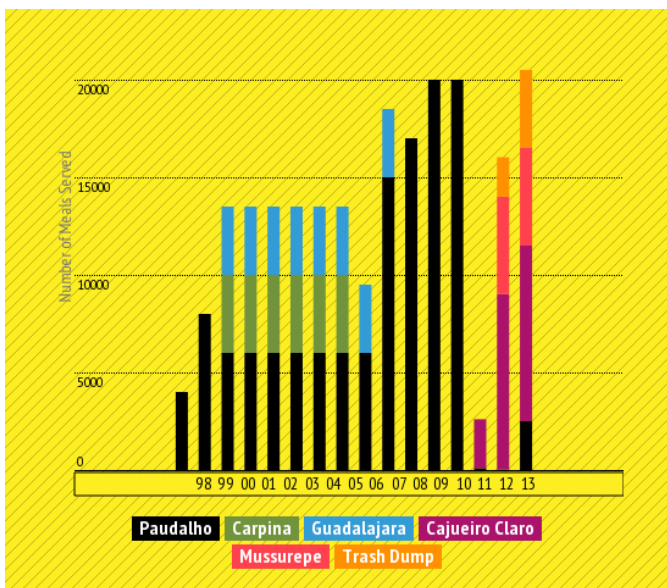
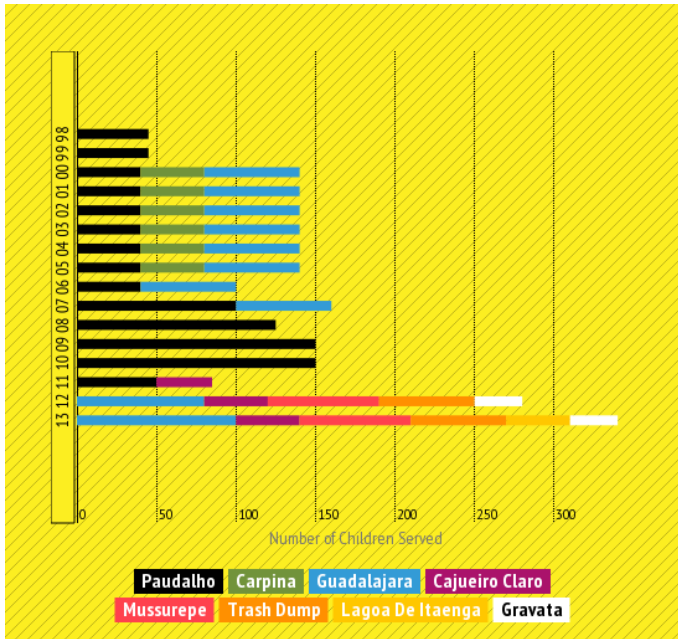
learning about a love that doesn't hit. He is always the first to volunteer to read the Bible verse, even though his reading skills are very low. His face shines when he prays, asking God to bless the Living Stones program, workers, children, and his mother and father.

23. Diane (September 18) Diane stays with her grandmother who lives in a house half the size of a normal living room with 12 other people. She is in charge of her two younger brothers, and when they do see their mother, it is because she takes them out to the streets to beg and then give her the money. Living Stones is a place where Diane can be a kid again, and play dodge ball like the child she is. She loves hearing the Bible stories, and offers to pray before lunchtime.
24. Alexandra (September 20) Alexandra was not as lucky as her sister Vera, who was adopted by their aunt. Vera was a part of Living Stones, and so Alexandra would show up to visit her, wearing a dirty old baseball cap. She refused to take it off because her head was so infected with lice that she had open sores all over her scalp. Living in an abandoned house, Alexandra fend for herself, giving out sexual favors for bubble gum. Living Stones gives her a place to shower and learn proper hygiene. She is slowly learning that there are people who love her, and a Savior who came to die for her.
25. Princess (September 25) When Princess first came to Living Stones, she was so dirty you couldn't tell if she was a girl or a boy. She shook her curls, refusing to say her name. When the other children were asked, they just shook their head. Finally, one said "Fagina. Her name is Fagina." Without a pause, one of the Living Stones workers said "Princess. We will call her Princess." And so we have and so she has grown.
26. Marcone (October 12) Marcone doesn't talk, he grunts and yells. He doesn't touch, he hits. He doesn't listen: he is deaf. Marcone has never been to school, he doesn't know sign language, and he can't write his own name. Marcone doesn't like to be touched, but if you are patient enough he may come sit a little closer. Marcone has found a safe place at Living Stones where he cannot hear about the love of Jesus, but he can feel it.
27. Caio (October 20) Caio loves animals. He is the youngest and most stubborn in his family. His mother walks over a mile every day to pick up soup at Living Stones to make sure their family has enough to eat. She has given her life to Jesus, but her husband is suspicious and often follows her to make sure she is not lying to him when she says she is going to church. Caio enjoys Living Stones and says that when he grows up, he would like to become a turtle.
28. Gustavo (October 22) Gustavo's house is falling apart. Built out of mud and sticks and covered with a blue tarp, during the rainy season the walls have begun to deteriorate. Gustavo's father was killed selling drugs, and his mother works cleaning houses to provide for his family. Gustavo was kicked out of school and labeled a liar and thief. Through the daily love received at Living Stones, Gustavo is learning that he does not have to act out to receive attention. He has accepted Christ as his Savior, and wants to be a pastor when he grows up.
29. Marcinho (September 23) Marcos, nicknamed Marcinho, lives with his mother and younger brother. His older brother is living with their grandmother because his single mother cannot provide for all three children. They live in a small mud house, and his mother makes ends meet by washing other people's clothes by hand by the river. Marcinho loves to be the center of attention and his favorite part at Living Stones is getting to pray for the food. He brought his mother to church, and she gave her life to Jesus. Marcinho wants to drive a motorcycle taxi when he grows up.
30. Daniele (November 6) Daniele lives with both of her parents in a loving home. They do not have a lot, but they are happy and love Jesus. Her father works harvesting sugar cane, a hard job working six days a week, 12 hour days, to earn minimum wage (about \$320 monthly). Their small mud/stick house is basic, but clean. Daniele loves coming to Living Stones, and is always a sweet girl to the others. It is so good to see a happy home.

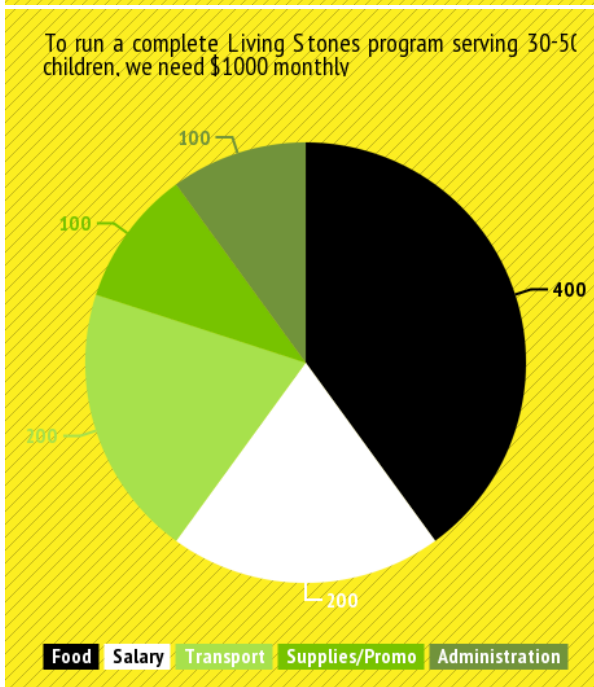
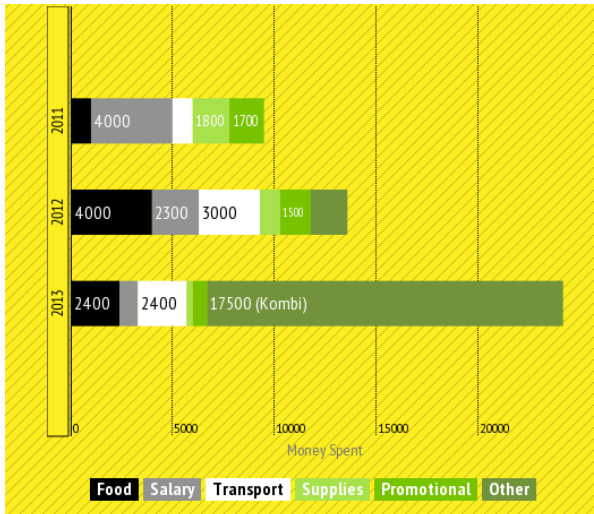
## 30 Things about Living Stones

1. Our Missions Statement: Working with local churches to enable them to love, educate, give nutrition and direction to the poorest children in the community.
2. Our Foundation:
  - a. Every person/child is invaluable because they are made by God, and true life is found in Jesus (Mt. 19:14, 1 Pet. 2:5)
  - b. Basic physical needs (food, shelter) must be met before/while sharing about Jesus (Jam.2:14-17, 1 Jo. 3:17)
  - c. God has chosen to work through the local church and discipleship to change the world (Mt. 16:18, 28:19)
  - d. Every child should be given the opportunity to read God's word for themselves (2 Tim. 3:16-17, Rom. 15:4, Ps. 119:18)
  - e. Lasting ministry is done through local community (Rom. 10:15, Acts 1:8)
3. Our Objectives/Vision: LEND
  - a. A growing church plant (if there was no previous church) and community outreach
  - b. Sharing and receiving the **love** and saving power of Jesus
  - c. Providing a safe place to learn and be **educated** spiritually, mentally, and physically
  - d. Children and families receiving the **nutritional** health and hygiene that they need
  - e. Training and **direction** for families to become self-sustainable, breaking the cycle of poverty and making and becoming leaders in the community
4. Our Challenge: 10 Living Stone s in 10 towns in 10 years
5. Our Passion: coming along side our brothers and sisters in Brazil to enable them to make a lasting difference in their communities through the power and love of Jesus Christ.
6. Our Process:
  - a. World Renewal Brazil identifies a location to plant a new church or identifies an existing church with a community need.
  - b. *If it is a new church plant*, the church planter (from the World Renewal Brazil seminary) will
    1. start open air services/programs to get to know the community
    2. begin small group Bible studies
    3. When a suitable building is found and support is raised the planter is able to start a Living Stones project/church
  - c. *If there is an existing church*, 30 of the neediest children in the community are invited (door to door) to participate in the program, providing love, education, nutrition, and direction.
  - d. Monday through Friday the church is used as a base for the Living Stones Project; on Sunday children from the project are invited to join the church for a Sunday service (some churches choose to have a service on Friday or Saturday instead).
7. Our Curriculum:
  - a. *Mentally*: Teaching reading and writing is the focus for the younger children. Reinforcement of basic subjects for middle aged children, and older children receive training in skills useful in life and for a trade.
  - b. *Physically*: There are medical check-ups, hygiene, clean living, fitness, and nutrition training. Some Living Stones programs are connected to a *Glory Sports* ministry that teaches character traits side-by-side with the sports ministry.
  - c. *Environmentally*: Children are taught the advantages of reusing and recycling, maintaining a clean community, and gardening.

- d. *Socially*: Living Stones is involved within the community and culture with music, art and community sports. Cultural celebrations, manners, communication skills, and active citizenship are an important part of the program. Resilience in difficult situations is reinforced through self-efficacy, self-esteem, problem solving, and autonomy.
  - e. *Spiritually/Emotionally*: Each week there are Bible stories, lessons, and songs that amplify/give examples that teach a specific character quality. The students are given practical ways and activities to live out that quality. *The objective is for each child to know and have a personal relationship with Jesus as their Savior and Lord, to become His disciple, and to go and make disciples.*
8. Our Past: Started by Pastor Assuario in 1998, in 15 years, Living Stones has shared the gospel with thousands of children, worked faithfully with over 800 children through the local church, and served over 200,000 meals to needy families.



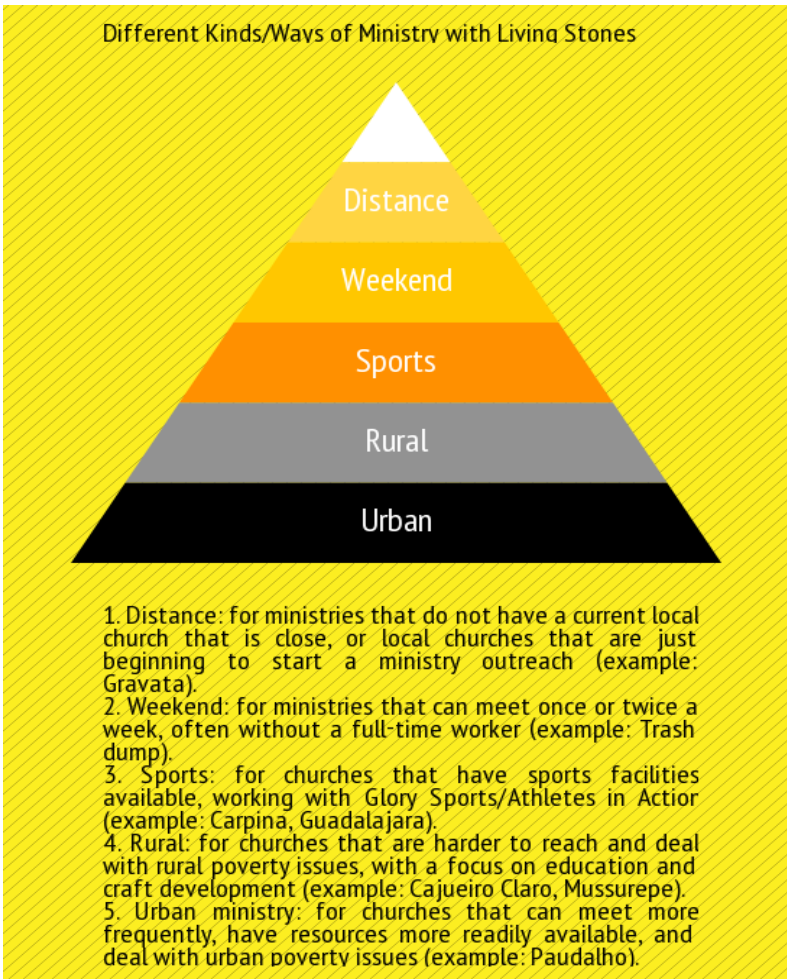
9. Our Finances: We work on a small budget and God does miracles



10. Our Sustainability:
  - a. Phase 1 - beginning and establishing the project - through local and outside sponsorship, through individuals, churches, families and foundations
  - b. Phase 2 - Through funding provided by the skills taught in the program, such as carpentry, cooking and handicrafts; as well as local community businesses and partners.
  - c. Phase 3 - Through assistance provided by the local church founded by the project (Phases 2 and 3 might occur at the same time or vary from place to place)
11. Our Team: to begin a Living Stones program, we need lots of prayer and a dedicated team



12. Our Projects: Living Stones looks different in every local church it is in:



13. Our Project: Overview: (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tRA5tzRcyTA> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j3wrB4oo5H0&list=UU61RtkF6QXTP1qxNIDa66kQ>)



## **Northeast Brazil**

A place of poverty, political corruption, and a great need for a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.



## **41%**

Live in deep poverty, which means living off of the buying power of \$2.50 or less a day.



## **Pastor Assuario**

In 1998, Pastor Assuario saw the great need in his community and opened the doors of the church to provide love, education, nutrition, and direction to the poorest children.



## **Living Stones**

Based on 1 Pet. 2:5, children are the future, the Living Stones that build tomorrow.



## **10 Dreams**

Our challenge is to have 10 Living Stones programs in 10 towns in 10 years.



## **Local churches**

Unique from other child sponsorship programs, we focus on working through local churches, as an outreach and church planting ministry.



## **In 15 Years**

Living Stones has shared the gospel with thousands of children, worked faithfully with over 800 children through the local church, and served over 200,000 meals to needy families



## **LEND**

Love (through sharing Jesus and the 10 FOR THEM program), Education (through tutoring and our LITERACY program), Nutrition (through meals, soup ministry, and 5 FOR 5 program), and Direction (through relationship, discipleship, and our FOUNDATION BUILDER child sponsorship program).



## **Birthdays**

Many of the children do not know when their birthdays are. we work to celebrate them and remind them of their value as a child of God through our 10 For Them program: [wribrazil.com/10forthem](http://wribrazil.com/10forthem), you can give them a birthday party/holiday present



## **Literacy**

One in three children are illiterate or greatly behind their reading level. You can provide them with a book and a tutor at [wribrazil.com/literacy](http://wribrazil.com/literacy)



## **Food**

How can you listen to stories about Jesus when you are too hungry to concentrate? We work to meet the physical needs of the families as well. You can provide a meal for around \$1 each at: [wribrazil.com/5for5](http://wribrazil.com/5for5)



## **Lasting Change**

To faithfully serve, we need faithful supporters. Our child sponsorship is not just helping a child, but changing a community and planting a church: [wribrazil.com/foundationbuilder](http://wribrazil.com/foundationbuilder)



## **Getting There**

We work in rural, hard to reach areas where the needs are the greatest. Help us get there: [wribrazil.com/trek](http://wribrazil.com/trek)



14. Our Project: Paudalho (<http://livingstonespaudalho.blogspot.com.br/>)



**30,000 People**  
Live in this rural city in Northeast Brazil that doesn't have a lot of opportunities, but has a lot of poverty, violence, and alcohol.

**Pastor Assuerio**  
Started a community church in 1998 and saw the children on the street with nowhere to go. So they began Living Stones, inviting the children into the church during the week to receive love, education, nutrition, and direction.

**150 Children**  
Involved in the Living Stones program on a regular basis, when the church partnered with PETI, the government program to end working children.

**2010**  
When Living Stones had to close down, due to corruption within the government partnership.

**44 Birthday Parties**  
In order to stay in contact with some of the Living Stones children, workers do home visitations and celebrate birthdays.

**2,500 meals**  
Provided from the soup program and passed out at the church in 2013.

15. Our Project: Carpina (<http://livingstonescarpina.blogspot.com.br/>)



**100,000 People**  
Live in this city in Northeast Brazil that is growing fast economically, and the largest city in the area.

**Pastor Tele Moraes**  
Started the first Brazilian community church in 1993, meeting in homes until funds were raised for a building. This was the beginning of World Renewal Brazil.

**40 Children**  
Involved in the Living Stones program on a regular basis, part of the time connected with PETI, the government program to end working children.

**2005**  
When Living Stones had to close down, due to lack of funding.

**Glory Sports**  
Working with Athletes in Action, providing training in basketball, soccer, and karate, as well as learning about Jesus.

**300 Children**  
Involved with Glory Sports since 2012.

16. Our Project: Guadalajara (<http://livingstonesguadalajara.blogspot.com.br/>)



**👤 Part of Paudalho**  
Guadalajara is still considered part of Paudalho, but is a smaller area with much more poverty.

**👤 Pastor Ricardo Silva**  
Ricardo, the first one saved through the ministry under Tele Moraes, began preaching under a lamp post in Guadalajara, until small Bible study groups were formed, and a church began.

**👤 60 Children**  
Involved in the Living Stones program on a regular basis from 2000-2007

**🏀 Glory Sports**  
Working with Athletes in Action, providing training in basketball and learning about the love of Jesus.

**★ 100 Children**  
Involved with Glory Sports since 2012.

17. Our Project: Cajueiro Claro (<http://livingstonescajueiroclaro.blogspot.com.br/> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=glT-A9fVOr4&list=UU61RtkF6QXTP1qxNIDa66kQ>)





**👤 1000 People**  
Live in this rural 'town' in Northeast Brazil that has no school, no stores, no opportunities, but plenty of poverty, violence, and alcohol.

**▼ 2 Miles or 4 Kilometers**  
Off the main road, down one hill and up another, to get to Cajueiro Claro, where most transportation is by foot or motorcycle.

**👤 18 Years and 1 Member**  
Other ministries tried to help and plant a church, but the community was hard and closed.

**▲ 400 or more Times**  
Living Stones workers walked the 4k to be able to minister to the children and show God's love through relationship, before transportation was provided.

**★ Friday Night**  
When we have church, since most of the families work six days a week and have one day to go to the market.

**👤 40 Children**  
Involved in the Living Stones program on a regular basis, receiving LEND: Love, Education, Nutrition, and Direction. One by one they are inviting their parents to church to hear the gospel.

18. Our Project: Mussurepe (<http://livingstonesmussurepe.blogspot.com.br/> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O1UXdjG-G4Y&list=UU61RtkF6QXTP1qxNIDa66kQ>)



**2700 People close, 5000 All together**  
Live in this rural 'town' in Northeast Brazil that has a school until 4th grade, one store, and plenty of poverty, violence, and alcohol.

**▼ 4 Miles or 7 Kilometers**  
Off the main road to get to Mussurepe, with one entrance bridge over a river with no railings. The town was built around a factory that went out of business, leaving the community devastated.

**👤 Grandma Isabel**  
Bought a farm in this community and wanted a way to reach out to the families. When she heard about Living Stones, she opened her farm, resources, and cooking skills to make it happen.

**● 30 Minutes**  
Amount of time each home gets running, drinkable water every other day, when it works. All other water is from the polluted river.

**★ One Sunday a month**  
When we have church, since most of the families work six days a week and have one day to go to the market.

**👤 70 Children**  
Involved in the Living Stones program on a regular basis, receiving LEND: Love, Education, Nutrition, and Direction. One by one they are inviting their parents to church to hear the gospel.

19. Our Project: Trash Dump (<http://livingstonestrashdump.blogspot.com.br/> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JqiqY8OwL80&list=UU61RtkF6QXTP1qxNIDa66kQ>)



**👤 Outside the city**  
Every city has a dump where many poor families work as 'catadores,' trash collectors/organizers, to make a living.

**▼ Lepers of Society**  
Most of this community has been living there for generations; all they know is trash. Their culture is trash, their work is trash, their home often made of trash, and they are often treated as trash.

**👤 42 Families**  
Children often work side by side with their parents without proper gloves, boots, or protection from the open city dump, which includes dead animals and rampant diseases.

**● Relocation**  
Federal law states that sanitary land-fills must be in place by 2014, and all the catadores trained to work there. Relocation is planned, but government promises are weak and the community is afraid to trust.

**★ Massa Humana**  
A group from a Baptist church started ministering to the trash dump community, and are working with Living Stones every weekend to be God's hands to these people.

**👤 70 Children**  
Regularly participate, coming to a Bible club on Saturdays, and going to church on Sundays. Both days, the soup ministry is provided for the children and their families.

## 20. Our Project: Gravata

 **150,000 Population**  
Two hours from Carpina, Gravata is a growing city with a big drug problem.

 **Pastor Flavio Travassos**  
In 2011, Flavio felt led by the Lord to serve in Gravata. He used the Living Stones program to begin working with children in this new community.

 **Sports ministry**  
Once a month, Flavio and an outreach team had a sports ministry for older boys involved with drugs. Due to safety concerns, they had to change focus (until more volunteers are available).

 **Beggars vs. Non-beggars**  
Overlooking the city is a tourist spot, where many poor children come and beg. They were constantly fighting with the non-begging children playing at the playground, who teased them.

 **Working Together**  
A government program began on the weekends, for the children who didn't beg. But when they saw Living Stones working with the beggars, they slowly began changing their minds, and now involve all of the children.

 **30 Children**  
Come on the weekends to play games and receive a snack. Living Stones comes alongside once a month, sharing the love of Jesus and care for everyone, even those who beg.

 **Church Connection**  
Pastor Flavio has a piece of land picked out, by faith, for a future church and ministry in Gravata. He is also partnering with some people from a local Presbyterian church.

## 21. Our Project: Lagoa De Itaenga

 **35,000 Population**  
This small town about 20 minutes from Carpina has a high rate of poverty and drug violence. Most of the people work in the surrounding sugar cane fields.

 **Pastor Ricardo Silva**  
While pastoring in Guadalajara, the youth at his church began outreaches to Lagoa de Itaenga, which grew into small Bible studies, which grew into a church by 2005. Ricardo was then sent to minister there by his church.

 **Ministry**  
The church in Lagoa de Itaenga has always had a special heart for children, through Bible clubs, street ministries, and teaching English. There are great needs in the community.

 **Building Projects**  
Completing the church building in 2008, they have been working to build classrooms and a gym to be able to serve the community through Living Stones.

 **40 Children**  
In 2013, while still finishing construction, Ricardo began working with with children, offering music and English classes four times a week.

22. Our Staff: Connecting Brazil and the United States, **Rachel Winzeler** helps plan, train, and assist the Brazilian workers. Her goal is to have 10 Living Stones in 10 towns in 10 years. She also maintains the Living Stones blog ([buildinglivingstones.blogspot.com](http://buildinglivingstones.blogspot.com)), raising awareness and support. She has been working with at-risk children since 1998, and with Living Stones since 2008. Rachel has degrees in Child and Youth Character Development and Early Childhood Education, and is working on her post-grad in Educational Psychology.
- Pastor at Cajueiro Claro, and responsible for the Living Stones programs there and in Mussurepe, as well as the soup ministry, is **Flavio Travassos**. His goal is to plant 20 churches in Northeast Brazil, working with and through Living Stones. He has a Portuguese blog at [nrrestauracao.blogspot.com](http://nrrestauracao.blogspot.com). Flavio is finishing his degree at Northeast Bible seminary, as well as his degree in Social Services
23. Our Self-Evaluation: True evaluation of relationships and their lasting impact on people is impossible, but for project accountability, evaluation and consideration will come through the following questions:
- How many people are attending church as a direct result of Living Stones?
  - How many children are attending Living Stones (who would not receive these services otherwise)?
  - Are the children receiving all the nutritional health and hygiene assistance necessary? In what ways were those services provided?
  - Are the families of these children invited/attending church?
  - Are the children attending school more regularly and/or receiving better grades? In what ways were those services provided?
  - Are the children receiving life skills training to become more equipped for their future? In what ways were those services provided?
24. Opportunities to get involved:
25. Love: 10 For Them (<http://wribrazil.com/10forthem/> and <http://livingstonesbirthdays.blogspot.com.br/> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wJvfzikvLmA>)
26. Education: Literacy for Living Stones (<http://wribrazil.com/literacy/>)
27. Nutrition: 5 For 5 (<http://wribrazil.com/5for5/> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=52flgwWmcwA> and [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qv44\\_UYjDgc&list=UU61RtkF6QXTP1qxNIDa66kQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qv44_UYjDgc&list=UU61RtkF6QXTP1qxNIDa66kQ))
28. Direction: Foundation Builder (child sponsorship program)  
<http://wribrazil.com/foundationbuilder/index.html>
29. Special Projects: Trek for Transportation (<http://wribrazil.com/trek/> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bHfZv8-DW7U> and [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tbw2K\\_F0oIE&feature=c4-overview&list=UU61RtkF6QXTP1qxNIDa66kQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tbw2K_F0oIE&feature=c4-overview&list=UU61RtkF6QXTP1qxNIDa66kQ))
30. Our kids:
- Alexandra from Paudalho  
(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z5YR2yvtk6s&list=UU61RtkF6QXTP1qxNIDa66kQ>)
  - Viviane from Mussurepe  
(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SwtcNufUHmU&list=UU61RtkF6QXTP1qxNIDa66kQ>)
  - Josefa from Paudalho  
(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0myB009Uvcs&list=UU61RtkF6QXTP1qxNIDa66kQ> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KqwAuIH3e9E&list=UU61RtkF6QXTP1qxNIDa66kQ>)
  - Gustavo from Mussurepe  
(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EG8Tgq13hUI&list=UU61RtkF6QXTP1qxNIDa66kQ>) More stories of the children at <http://www.rachelsnewday.blogspot.com.br/2013/07/30-stories-of-children.html> and <http://livingstoneschildren.blogspot.com.br/>

## On Being 30

*"Thirty was so strange for me. I've really had to come to terms with the fact that I am now a walking and talking adult."* -C.S. Lewis

When I was little, I remember my mother blowing out the candles on her cake and telling me she was 29. I wondered why the other people laughed: what was funny about being 29? I didn't understand re-occurring 29<sup>th</sup> birthdays until later in life, when I was indoctrinated into the idea that getting older was bad.

I didn't mind getting older. I had a baby face that gave me the child's menu when I was 16, and was told I wasn't old enough to drive at 26. But it wasn't until the eve of turning 30 that it hit me my turn had come. It was a stark thought, cutting through: if I said I was "29," which year of my life would I be denying?

What year have I regretted living, and wish I could take back? Which lessons and experiences would I erase? I only had one clear answer: I was turning 30 and I was proud of it. I regret none of those years and have been blessed beyond measure. And if what life brings me is getting old, then I am going to do it darn well.

This year I have thought a lot about life, lived and living. If "We never really grow up, we just learn how to act in public," (Bryan White) then I've been acting well. I have come to the conclusion that growing up is having 50 things to do right now and learning to do every one of them with grace. I am still working on that.

"The famous 12th century commentator Rashbam explains that at age 30 one is "worthy of leadership." Interestingly, the minimum age to run for U.S. Congress is also 30. The Torah goes out of its way to tell us that Joseph was 30 years old when he began to rule over Egypt (Genesis 41:46)."

"It would seem that the Torah understands age 30 as a "moment of truth" when certain realities of life firmly take hold, and it is only through the acquisition of these realities that one can be a leader -- whether in public life or in prayer. The Talmud (Pirkei Avot 5:26) declares: "At age 30, one receives strength."

<http://www.aish.com/ci/s/48917052.html>

And then I remember Jesus was 30 when he started his ministry. Looks like things are going to be just fine.





“All you have to do is write one true sentence. Write the truest sentence you know.”  
-Ernest Hemingway