



## Occupational Hazards- The Life of a Missionary Wife

**"The righteous cry out, and the Lord hears, and delivers them out of all their troubles. The Lord is near to those who have broken heart, and saves such as have a contrite spirit. Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the lord delivers him out of them all."**  
Psalm 34:17-19



"What is it like to live in Africa?" I hear this often and usually answer, "Come find out!" Africa- the land of the unexpected and incredible. Part of our job as missionaries is working with or around many of the obstacles, challenges, and "occupational hazards" of life outside civilization. African adventures come in many forms. We get to experience cultures and environments that many people don't even know exist. We go on trips into the "bush", help the desperately needy, see the Lord move amongst His people, and watch African wildlife up close. We get to see the handiwork of God and experience Him in people and nature in some truly awe-inspiring ways.

At the same time, working and living in Africa means regularly facing hardships and difficult situations. Sometimes we have electricity and water, sometimes we don't. There are no dentists or chiropractors, few doctors (and fewer good ones), and little infrastructure. Oppressive heat, corrupt governments, disease carrying mosquitoes, and poor medical facilities are all to be expected on what is still in many ways David Livingstone's "Dark Continent".

### Children at Risk

When Timothy and I started working in Africa as individuals, we barely considered the inherent risks and dangers. Our work was for the sake of those in desperate need and our own safety was secondary. Besides, every twenty-something firmly believes he's invincible. Having children brought home the many dangers that come with life in the third world. The diseases alone keep us busy: parasite and bacteria-laden water, malaria-infected mosquitoes, exotic flus, even diseases such as measles and polio that are almost extinct in the civilized world... it's enough to keep a mom both worrying and disinfecting all day long! Another serious concern is physical safety. Child trafficking for the purpose of rape and human sacrifice is prevalent throughout all of Africa. Young anglo girls are kidnapped and raped regularly for many reasons including the superstitious belief that such actions will remove AIDS from the perpetrator's body. This is both sick and, as the parent of a little girl, very scary. Then there is the food issue. Making sure we eat sanitary foods such as uncontaminated (not-rotted) meat, clean (manure free) milk, and vegetables that don't retain parasites (such as lettuce) is often more difficult than I might wish. And what about the spiders, snakes, crocs, and lions? Fortunately lions aren't a problem here in Kabwe, but we did have a black mamba on our porch recently. A baby one. Now I'm wondering where his family lives.

We take what precautions we can. While we were in the States on furlough, both children experienced dramatic improvements in health and unbelievable growth spurts. It was obvious that something was not right (read: clean) with our water in Zambia. When we returned to Zambia earlier this year, Timothy came ahead to set up a water system that would do a better job eliminating bacteria and parasites from the water. (Which meant I had to travel with Monica & Frederick on my own again!) But the extra stress in travel was a small price for having good, clean water ready for the kids. Additionally, we get the kids immunized against many of the diseases, although Frederick still got measles last year and Monica has had giardia twice. To protect them from outside danger we are renting a house that is surrounded by a high wall and there are big dogs to help protect the kids from intruders. And we pray. A lot. If there is one thing I've realized living in Africa, it's that I am not able to protect my children from everything at all times. I think this is true



**Above: The majestic elephant is one of the most dangerous of all the great African creatures. Nothing cute and cuddly about 6 tons of angry muscle**  
**Left: picturesque villages often hide disease and dangerous men, both a great risk for small children.**



everywhere in the world, but in Africa the dangers are more obvious and well, possibly more dangerous. We have to accept that God holds our children even more dearly than we do. There have been several instances in which nothing but God's grace protected our children from disaster. I thank God daily for His grace and protection over Monica and Frederick.

### **What's Eating You? (literally)**

One of the most problematic health concerns in Africa is all the microorganisms and insects that want to eat you. Amoebas, protozoa, bacteria, parasites, worms, lice, ticks, mites, mosquitoes, and fleas all take their turn trying to get a piece of the action (which is you). And no part of you is sacred; from your hair to your intestines to your toenails, there is something here that wants to eat some part of you. Maintaining a constant clean water source is extremely important to prevent terrible diseases and infections such as typhoid and giardia. However, a lot of the little monsters will hide out in laundry (like the putze fly whose larvae will burrow into your skin and leave an infectious abscess), in the food (typhoid, tape worms, and amoebas), in the air (virulent yeasts will infect your lungs), in the ground (worms and mites will burrow into your feet and legs), in the plants and animals (disease-bearing ticks and fleas)... you get the idea.

There are a few things that help reduce the risks such as spraying for bugs, hanging laundry in the hot sun, boiling the drinking water, avoiding certain vegetables, and cleaning, cleaning, cleaning. However, GI infections, amoebic stomach infections, abscesses, and sickness are just part of life here. Some infections are easy to treat with medications or other natural remedies. Sometimes the beasties are elusive and cause a lot of damage before they are diagnosed and treated or found and removed.

We've all had our turn with acute infections, but Timothy has really struggled with several chronic and painful problems. Over the last several years I became increasingly concerned as I watched his health and his ability to concentrate deteriorate. Working became a real struggle and pain became almost a daily part of his life.

When I first met Timothy in 2006, he had migraines 2 or 3 times each month and a few unexplained complaints, mostly GI and allergy related. This gradually increased (no thanks to a few more bouts of malaria) and by mid-2010 he was experiencing 3 or more



**Malaria is one of Africa's greatest killers. It passes through infected female mosquitos.**

migraines per week, unshakable GI infections, and a lack of energy and motivation that was genuinely scary. This was not the Tim we all know and love; this was someone being destroyed from the inside out. We boiled the drinking water; he took anti-parasitics regularly, and rested when he could. We even found that cloves and cayenne pepper taken orally would kill some of the worms causing his stomach pains (not the most palatable option, but effective nonetheless). While we were able to curb the progress of his health spiral, nothing seemed to actually heal his body.

When we came to the States on furlough, I dragged Timothy straight to the best Arizona had to offer in tropical and infectious disease specialists. After taking a long history and a summary examination, the doctor declared him "depressed". We insisted that he order labs and waited expectantly for the results. The doctor ordered the labs, but told us, "Quite frankly, I'm unwilling to explore further possibilities until your husband has been seen by a psychiatrist." Discouraged and demoralized, we prayed for guidance and grace. Timothy was clearly heading to a health crisis, and not only his future as a missionary to Africa, but his life was at stake.



**Many of the carnivorous little creatures out here will send you frequently to a place that, frankly, you don't want to frequent.**

Only a few weeks before our scheduled return to Africa, a friend in Phoenix recommended Dr. Bruce Shelton. 10 minutes. In 10 minutes he diagnosed Timothy with lead poisoning, as well as fungal and bacterial infections. He also pointed out that the labs the previous doctor had ordered showed that Tim's kidney function was down to 59% and his liver function was seriously suffering as well. Oh, and he had a nerve-related heart block too. He ordered Timothy's treatment to start immediately. The test for lead poisoning came back glaringly positive, as did the tests for fungal and bacterial infections. Even Lyme disease made the list.

At first we were hesitant to commit to the full treatment. By medical standards it wasn't a lot of money- but it was enough to intimidate us! However, given that we had tried every viable option, we trusted that the Lord had brought us to a diagnosis at this time for a reason. We trusted Him to provide the funds necessary to heal Timothy so that he could return to Africa.

Why do we doubt God's graciousness? Why do we always assume that He has bigger things to take care of than our little problems? I am still ashamed at how surprised I was when our friends and family showed overwhelming and constant support both in encouragement and financial assistance. The Lord brought His people together to heal Timothy. We couldn't be more grateful.

At this time Timothy has been undergoing treatment for almost 6 months. The doctor initially expected Timothy to need 20-50 weeks of iv treatments in the US. We committed to 10, feeling that we really wanted to return home sooner rather than later!



Warned from the beginning not to get our hopes up, we prayed and sought the prayers of our brothers and sisters in Christ for the Lord's hand over Tim's body. After 10 weeks the doctor ordered another lead toxicity test. With more than a little shock he informed us that Timothy's recovery was unprecedented, and we could start planning our return to Africa. Timothy is now able to continue his treatment in Africa.

The fight against Timothy's internal fungal infections will, unfortunately, be a lifelong battle. He has medications that will help and we've found that certain foods exacerbate the problem (fungi love sugar), but it's something he will always have in varying levels. Dr Shelton has helped incredibly with this issue and will even consult with us over the internet. We're so thankful for the wisdom God gave him in treating Timothy's multiple health problems.



**Timothy's (in)famous moment with a bomb in South Sudan**

### **Hazards in the Field**

Zambia is much safer than many African countries, but there is still a large Muslim population, and they aren't fond of Christians. Timothy's work takes him to countries like Sudan where the persecution is at times acute and unavoidable. There is also the risk as the lone white man in a village to be the target for theft, racial attacks, etc. Every day of our work here is a step of faith that God is walking alongside us. Of course, it's the same in the States. We still need to rely on God there. Maybe it's just easier to see our vulnerabilities and inadequacies while working in Africa.

### **Surviving**

There are days when I graciously handle all that the continent (and my two darling children) can hurl in my direction. I competently and contentedly move from laundry to ministry to toddler care with seamless transition and maintain a general peace

and godliness in our home. (At least I *think* I've had more than one of those days!)

On a more typical day you will find me dashing frantically from one project to the next, desperately trying to keep the house and ministry together and not let anything critical fall through the cracks. (I can't even leave the dirty dishes until later, unless I want to invite the neighborhood cockroaches and rats over for lunch.) Balancing the overwhelming spiritual and physical needs of the African people with the two young lives developing in our home can be enormously stressful. In the last two years I've learned how to make just about everything from scratch (I consider my most creative accomplishment that of creating cheese from milk and lemons... although Tim might vote for homemade chocolate sauce). I can treat malaria and most bacterial or parasitic infections without a doctor. I can wash laundry by hand (it actually comes out cleaner that way). I am learning to speak Bemba. I can negotiate for live chickens and clean them too (although I skip that part when I can). However, I'm NOT responsible for keeping my sanity together. The credit for that lies soundly with Timothy and our good Father in Heaven.

I think surviving out here takes a certain level of commitment. Not just to "the work", to ministry, but a commitment to both endurance and a flourishing family. I want to see my children grow up with a heart to serve God's people, but I also want them to be excited about life and the beauty God has created in so many things. I want them to learn that God is great in all things. He has sent us here to bring that message to His people in Africa. I am committed to serving Him even in my laundry basket and bread bowl (at least, theoretically, in the "fallen man" sense of "commitment").

Of course, such articulate confidence only goes so far. However much determination I have to accept, persevere, and thrive, there is only way to really *enjoy* life in wild Africa. That is to be content in the knowledge that life is not daily teetering on the brink of disaster, and trusting in the Lord's sovereignty and grace to help me overcome all things.

Living in Africa is not always exactly what I expected it to be. Raised on the typical American curriculum of National Geographic, public broadcasting nature shows, and (let's just admit it) Lion King, I thought I was adequately prepared for life in the bush. But no matter how long I live here, Africa never ceases to surprise me, pushing and stretching me in any area where I've become just a little too complacent.

Fortunately for me, I married a man to whom no challenge is too great and no African obstacle comes as a surprise. After 13 years of wrangling his way through every kind of government red tape, road conditions that would bring Marco Polo to tears, and sub-hygienic living conditions, Timothy can take on pretty much anything. When God made Timothy, He specially engineered him for life in Africa! I'm often grateful for the Lord's grace in using Tim both to further the Gospel in Africa and protect our family from the many dangers inherent to life in the third world.



**Baking with Monica in our tiny kitchen can drive me crazy! But she's learning quickly and becoming a good helper. And it's good for me too.**

## On the Road Again

We are preparing for several field trips in the coming months. Later this year Timothy will be returning to South Sudan for the first time since the peace agreement. A referendum was held in January that fell in favor of South Sudan seceding to form their own country. This means this largely Christian area has an opportunity to build a future independent of Muslim oppression. They have many challenges ahead of them, however, as North Sudan has begun seizing areas of natural resource, oil, and water. This is a critical time for the Sudanese to commit their lives and their nation to the Lord and His Word. Timothy will be spending a lot of time teaching the Sudanese church leaders, school teachers, and (Lord willing) political figures, how to lead their nation in a way that honors God. Please be praying for the Lord's guidance, grace, and protection over this trip.

We've also put together a lot of training material for a manual to help African teachers. Because the African teaching context and culture is so different from what you find in America, we've had trouble finding compatible materials. Even if we did find a book that would work, it would be expensive to purchase it for large scale distribution. The Teacher Training Manual that Timothy has been putting together will be inexpensively reproducible. It is written in a way that African teachers with little training can start making an immediate impact for Christ in their classrooms. We're excited about the draft of this nearing completion. The next stage, which we've already started locally, is actually using it with the teachers and "test driving" the material. We are always looking for volunteers to help in this endeavor. If you have experience in any form of teaching or leadership and would be interested in sharing your skills with African teachers, please get in contact with us!

We're happy to announce that we have our vehicle back! You may have followed our engine misadventures over the last year. After a great deal of hassle and red tape, we've finally been able to import an engine from Japan. It was a risk purchasing a second hand engine, but every other avenue was cut off. We are trusting God that the engine He provided will be the one to last, carrying us and our precious cargoes of supplies around Africa. Thank you for your prayers for our transportation situation. Living without a vehicle for so many months gave us the impetus to be creative in life and ministry. It was a good thing in its time. However, we are VERY grateful to once again have working transportation! God is good.

## Building

For the last couple years we've been renting a small apartment in Kabwe from some friends. Now that we're settled into the area and have decided that we'll be here for some time, we've started purchasing a small property of our own. We're trusting the Lord, in His time, to provide the funds to build a house. Fortunately, it's much, much cheaper to build here than it is in the States. We're looking at about \$24,000 for the house from start to finish. We were blessed recently with the funds to drill a proper well, build the wall around the property, and lay the house footers. Timothy is looking forward to having a quiet place to write and prepare for ministry, and I'm looking forward to having more than 3 square feet of kitchen counter space (try cooking, washing dishes, and making cheese with THAT!) For the time being we're content and grateful to have a clean house to rent and the best neighbors a person could ask for.



After we build our house, Monica will get her own garden plot, plus a goat and a few chickens.

Please pray...

- For fruitful ministry with African pastors, church leaders, and teachers
- For the safety and health of our family
- For Monica's developmental abilities and preschooling
- For productive field trips
- For the stability of our vehicle

## Progress

Most of the Bibles, teaching materials, and school supplies from the Container Project have been distributed. Timothy took them all over Zambia and sent many of them with pastors from surrounding African countries. Many of the theological materials went to Pro Christo Global Mission, where they are being used to train African missionaries. Thank you for your prayers over the two years, as we've carried out the Container Project. It was everything we dreamed it would be and more.

Sooo... we're planning to do another one in a year or so! If you hear of any Christian schools looking to offload old curriculum, churches replacing older Bibles, VBS groups looking for a fun project to sponsor, or just looking to unload your bookshelf of discipleship materials, please contact us and feel free to share our information with others! The container was such a productive and efficient means of procuring needed discipleship and training materials, not to mention Bibles. We're praying for a repeat opportunity.

Thank you so much for your prayers, for the letters of encouragement and packages we've received, for your support, and for your encouragement. The Lord has blessed us with such wonderful Brothers and Sisters in Christ. May He continue to use you for His purposes at home and abroad.

Pro Rege,



Timothy, Ashley, Monica, & Frederick Keller

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