

# From <sup>O</sup><sub>R</sub> Point <sup>O</sup><sub>F</sub> View

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## the Ladies of Mission Vanuatu

**By Shawnda Brandell**

**W**hen Cindy and I are actually in Vanuatu, we will be writing our monthly communications in the form of day-to-day journals. I guess, in a way, that is what we are doing now. Last month Cindy told you how we are packing and preparing for the move to Vanuatu (that's what we do day-to-day). I want to share what we have been doing, as women, to prepare not only our house for moving, but also our hearts and minds.

I am a very idealistic and optimistic person. So, when we began thinking about moving to Vanuatu I immediately began "dreaming" what it would be like. I must confess that at first my plans were "everything will be perfect" kind of thinking. That is, I just thought we'd pack quickly, throw our stuff on the moving crate and be on our way. Once we got there, I could see us setting up our house immediately and learning the language in a matter of weeks. I assumed that adjusting to the culture would be easy since we'd all been there before. I realize now that this is not realistic. However, that is definitely where I was in my thinking until about a year ago. It was then that I realized just how much I must prepare, not only physically (moving, fundraising) but also spiritually and emotionally.

Preparation is the key to succeeding at anything we attempt. Who in their right mind would show up at the Olympic trials and run a race without training and preparing? Who would think that they could deliver a Biblical sermon without first studying and preparing? Who would think that they could move to another country, with different customs, languages, dress, food, and culture (to name a few) without first preparing their heart and mind? I did. I had traveled internationally and had even visited Vanuatu, so I thought I could handle it. It wasn't until we met with a couple of missionary families that I began to realize just how essential preparation is to the success of this work.

In April of last year the entire team met with Kent and Nancy Hartman in Oklahoma City. They were missionaries in Australia for 18 years (and have been back in the states for about 3-4 years now). We asked them questions and they shared experiences that they had while living and working in the Pacific. One thing they said that I will always remember is that everyone experiences culture "shock" (or readjustment), and that it is those who do not prepare for it that usually have the biggest shock. Those who think that everything will be easy and "perfect" are usually the ones who have the hardest time adjusting. Right then and there I decided that I was going to be prepared. That wasn't going to be me.

What I didn't realize is that the preparation had already begun. All the time we had been traveling to raise support and waiting on paperwork had been time for me to be able to prepare spiritually. That may seem strange, but it is amazing what you learn when you are putting your complete trust in God to provide for you. He is in control, and during that time I learned to completely rely on Him. God really proved Himself over and over again. He showed us that He will use His people to provide for our needs. We are so grateful for His provision in this area. Learning how to rely on God has been the best spiritual preparation I could ask for.

Of course, to be spiritually prepared for moving to and working in Vanuatu we are also continuing to learn and grow in our understanding of God's word. Just like every Christian, we need to be prepared to confirm and defend the gospel. So, we are all spending time in the word daily. We will be teaching and training the beautiful people in Vanuatu from the Bible, so we need to make sure we are continually

learning and growing ourselves. Personally, I have been studying a few of Paul's letters and Acts. These books have been especially helpful in preparing for the mission work that lies ahead.

In addition to preparing spiritually, we also have to be prepared emotionally. Emotional preparation is essential, although it is not always easy. I don't think that we can ever be fully prepared for the emotional ride that we are about to undertake. It is hard leaving family and friends behind, but we know that the good that God will do through us in Vanuatu will be well worth the sacrifice. Knowing this allows us to be emotionally stable about the whole thing. I know the day we say "goodbye" will be an emotional day indeed. I'm not looking forward to the tears that will be shed, but I also know that those tears are a mixture of sorrow and joy. However, we know that the sadness that comes with leaving the family and friends that we love dearly will not keep us from the exciting work that lies ahead in Vanuatu.

Not only are we dealing with the emotions of leaving our family and friends, but we are also thinking ahead to the emotional adjustment that is sure to come once we get to Vanuatu. One thing that has really helped us in this preparation is meeting with experienced missionaries. They are able to confirm our fears and encourage us to be strong.

When the team met with the Hartmans last year, they helped us understand the importance of what we were about to undertake. They confirmed our decision to dedicate this time to helping teach and train the people in Vanuatu to follow God's word. Their encouragement will go with us. They really helped prepare us for the emotional times that lie ahead by giving us practical advice of how to adjust to the culture.

We also met with Robert and Mary Martin in December. They have been working in the South Pacific for the past 30+ years. Their experience has been a great asset to this team. Mary was especially helpful to Cindy and me. She spent time with us and we had many discussions concerning our fears (about living and raising children there, cyclones, fitting in, teaching the women, being hospitable, etc). She understands what we are going through because she has been there herself. One thing that she told Cindy and me was that we would never be just like the Ni-Vanuatu people, but that we can learn from their culture, be able to "fit in" and still be ourselves. That was important for us to hear. She kept telling us that we will be fine because we are Christians. No matter where you go, you can adjust because you have a relationship with God and that never changes. God's people are God's people no matter where you go. She will never know just how much she has helped us prepare emotionally.

Another way we have been preparing to live and work in another culture is by reading various books that we feel will help us adjust. One of the books that the Hartmans suggested we read is Sojourners. It was very helpful because it was written from a woman's perspective. Another book that helped me see into the life of a missionary wife is Brenda's Diaries. It is Brenda Rutherford's diary of her family's time in Zambia, Africa. That book helped me see that the day-to-day life of a missionary wife is the same as the day-to-day life of any Christian woman. She took care of her family, taught Bible classes, supported her husband, went grocery shopping, did laundry, etc. We also have various textbooks and other books about "culture shock" and adjusting to another culture. These books have been helpful to all of us.

The other way I have been preparing is by physically packing our belongings to send to Vanuatu. Just as Cindy explained in last month's article, it is a daunting task, but also surprisingly enjoyable. We are so looking forward to getting to Vanuatu that the task of packing, while overwhelming at times, is still moving us one step closer to actually being there.

So, as you can see, the preparation required for moving to another country is quite involved. I am still overly optimistic at times, but I am now realistic too. I know that the preparation that we are making now will pay off in the end. I know our time in Vanuatu will not be perfect – but it sure will be fun!