

From Our Point of View

the Ladies of Mission Vanuatu

A Journal Excerpt by Shawnda Brandell

Thursday, April 7th

Well, the crate came today to take our belongings to Vanuatu. It was so exciting to see that crate loaded with all of our things. I can't believe the day has finally come. It seems like we have been waiting for this day for so long. It is just so great to be one step closer to moving. Exciting and wonderful day! A little tiring, but wonderful nonetheless.

Saturday, April 9th

We had our going away party tonight – we shed a few tears and had a few laughs. It was a wonderful time to spend with friends and family. All of Eric and my family were there and Ben and Tara too (Ben and Tara are some of our best friends – they're from Oklahoma). Many from Bear Valley and Columbine came to wish us well and show us that they loved us. We were overwhelmed by the love that our Christian brothers and sisters showed us tonight. The people from Columbine all came to give us their love – we love them so much! It meant so much to us to have some special people from Bear Valley there too. Having the Korodajs and Brauers there to encourage us was nice. They are going through the same changes that we are and having them around to share in joys and frustrations too has been such a great blessing to us.

Many of the men spoke to us, giving us encouragement and wishing us well. We appreciated those who shared with us this evening. I'll remember some of those words that were spoken for as long as I live. I know I won't ever forget the sweet things that my husband said to me.

It was a great time of love, hugs, and tears. We sure will miss all of our family and loved ones, but it was nice to have so many gathered this evening to wish us well and send us off to the work with such an enormous show of love.

We were absolutely overwhelmed by the generosity of all of those who gave to the money tree at our going away party. We know that it will help cover some last minute costs and unexpected ones too. God continues to amaze us with His provision for us through the hands of His people.

Sunday, April 10th

What a surprise to wake up on our day of departure to find that not only had it snowed about 8 inches the night before, but that it was still snowing this morning! We had planned to leave early, but couldn't get the cars out of the driveway. The snow was coming down just as fast as the guys could get it shoveled off. They took turns clearing the snow, but it seemed almost futile. In addition to that, we had to get all the luggage loaded and make sure the house was cleared out. Needless to say, we didn't get away from the house until 8:30. It took us an hour and a half to drive to the church building!

When we arrived, we knew there wouldn't be many here, but it was good to see those who were able to make it. It was a special day nonetheless. We had a wonderful time of worship and sending off. The elders spoke to us about what they expected of us, what we could expect of them, and the great things they knew God would do through us in Vanuatu. They stressed how much they loved us and were 100% behind us. They talked about how the Columbine congregation was sending us with a commission. When George had the three men of the team come up while he gave them their charge, we all got a little teary eyed. He read 2 Timothy 4:1-5. This charge was given to Timothy and George read it as a charge to our team. "...Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching...But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry." At that, he asked each man if he accepted the charge. Eric accepted the charge for both of us but saying, "Absolutely yes!"

Eric, Aaron, and Mike were all asked to say something. Eric said, "I want you to know that Shawnda and I take this charge and responsibility very seriously – thank you for trusting us with this awesome task..." He read a scripture from Philippians 1:3-6. It has been amazing for me to watch him grow into the man of God that he is today. I am proud of him and know that God will use him in great ways. Mike read from Colossians 1:13-20 where it talks about who Jesus is – he said "This is who Jesus is, and this is what we are doing...we are taking this man to Vanuatu. We are teaching Jesus. This is why we must go. They may never know this man otherwise." Aaron spoke of his abundant thankfulness for the church at Columbine and all they have done for us. He spoke of our desire to take the gospel to Vanuatu and our love for the people there.

We were able to spend time after worship talking with everyone, hugging, laughing, and crying together. It was really hard to tell the church family and all of those we have come to love over the past few years, "goodbye."

The news was saying that the airport was closed, so we waited at the church building for some more information for about an hour. We finally decided to just go eat and go to the airport. The line was really long when we got there. When they finally got to the front of the line, they said Mike, Eric and I were on the flight, but that Aaron, Cindy, and Kaela would be on standby. It was really disappointing. But, we knew God was in control and that it would all work out. We were so appreciative of our family, Ben & Tara, and George & Brenda who waited patiently for us while we stood in line and tried to get things worked out. They have been so amazing this weekend, doing whatever we have needed and being 100% supportive.

Now it was time to say “goodbye” – this is the part none of us were looking forward to. It broke my heart to see our sweet family and precious friends crying. I get tears in my eyes just thinking of it now. We all shared several hugs and tears. I know that we are doing the right thing, it is just hard to leave such close friends and family.

After we said “goodbye,” we walked to our gate. We still had a few hours to wait for our plane to take off. We all prayed several times that the Bakers would be able to be on the flight with us, but that even if we weren’t, that we would be okay with whatever happened. When it came time to board the plane, we told the Bakers that we’d see them soon and that it would be okay. I know it was hard on Cindy, but she was being content with whatever happened. I am proud of the way she handled it. When we saw that they weren’t going to get on, we just prayed that things would work out. We were to take off at 9:15 but didn’t actually get in the air until about 11:50 – almost 3 hours later! We arrived in LA at about 1:15 am. Needless to say, we didn’t make our flight in LA (since it was scheduled to leave at 11:30). We got a hotel, took showers, and went to sleep.

Monday, April 11th

Eric called Fiji Travel and they said that they would get us on the flight that leaves on Tuesday – no problem. God sure worked all things out for us. We called the Bakers and they had been able to get on a flight to LA today! We went to the airport to pick them up at about 6:30 – I’ve never been so glad to see someone after only a day. We are excited about leaving tomorrow, especially since we are all able to leave together.

Tuesday, April 12th

Today is the day! We are all so excited. We boarded the plane with no problem and were able to all sit pretty close together. It seemed like the flight was shorter this time to me.) I did actually sleep for a few hours, but not very well. Thankfully Kaela slept almost the whole way. That was a relief for all of us. In some ways this will be hardest for her to adjust, but in others it will be easiest. She is happy as long as her mom and dad are with her. She doesn’t understand what is going on with the time changes and everything though.

Thursday, April 14th

We arrived in Fiji at about 5:30 am and were scheduled to leave at about 9:30. Eric went to the desk to check in and found out that the flight to Port Vila didn’t leave until 9:30 PM. (So it would be a 15 hour layover rather than the 3 hour one we were expecting). We didn’t want to spend the entire day at the airport (we’d had enough of that) so we called the Sandalwood hotel (where we stayed the last time we were in Fiji). They came and got us and we spent the day there. We did try to contact the brethren in Fiji, but were unable to find any of them. That was disappointing. I love the Fijian people in general, and enjoy being in Fiji, but I don’t enjoy it near as much when we aren’t able to see the Christians here.

With about 20 minutes until we were to board the plane we saw Randy English! It was so good to meet him. We had all been disappointed that he was going to be gone from Vanuatu by the time we arrived. He had spent a couple of weeks with the Christians in Vanuatu doing several studies each day out in a village on north Efate (the island where we will be living). Needless to say, we were all ecstatic that we saw Randy and that he was able to fill us in on what had been going on with the work in Vanuatu. Randy was very encouraging to us (as he has been from the first time we talked with him over a year ago). He told us that the Christians in Vanuatu were all excited about our arrival. He said that they are doing fine, but that they really needed someone to be there with them to encourage them and spur them on. This is why it is a good time for us to move to Vanuatu. It meant so much to us that Randy tracked us down and wanted to meet us.

Just seeing Randy and hearing what’s going on in Vanuatu was such a “booster” for us. We were all tired and I must admit I was getting a little cranky, but when we saw him we were all uplifted and encouraged. After a prayer together, we headed off to board the plane. I will never forget Randy standing at the gate waving until we were out of sight. The look on his face was saying, “Go. Do a good work for the Lord. It’ll be alright.”

The flight was short and smooth. As we landed in our new home of Vanuatu I was a bit nervous, but very excited. I stepped off the plane into the thick, wet air and as a tear welled up in my eye, I thought, “This is it, we’re here, we’re finally here.” What a great adventure awaits us!

Countdown to Departure by Cindy Baker

4-3-05 Sunday

Mom and Dad are here today. They have been in Denver since Tuesday and we have had a great visit with them. They especially enjoyed getting to see Kaela and how much she has grown since they last saw her in November. It is amazing how quickly time has gone by since they have been here. We never seem to have enough time to do all we want when we are together. With Mom and Dad being in town it gave them opportunity to get to know our team better. It is important to me that they know them well because when we are on the mission field they will be our family.

4-4-05 Monday

This morning Mom and Dad left to head back home. It was sad to see them go but, the fact remains that it is easier to be the one leaving than the one left behind. I didn't get much packing done with Mom and Dad here. There were too many other important things to do...like playing games! Now it is catch-up time! So much to do – so little time, is my motto. The problem with having so much to do this week before we leave is that it is also the time we are trying to squeeze in more time with our friends before we go. Today we had lunch with our friends, the Wilkie family. We had a great time with them, as usual. I ended up not getting a whole lot done as it took about 1.25 hours to get to their house. Add in about 3 hours for lunch and visiting and another 1.25 hours back home and our day was gone, but, it was worth it! What a fun family!

4-5-05 Tuesday

Every morning my parents get up at what I call “the crack of dawn”. 6am on every day they were here. I don't mind getting up at 6am every once and a while I am more of a 7:30-8:00-8:30 kind of girl with the occasional 9:00 tossed in for good measure. Needless to say, I was looking forward to this morning when I could sleep in at least until 8:30 since Mom and Dad were gone. Wrong! At 7:45 I am handed the phone. It was Dad. He forgot to call and let me know they got to Aunt Dot and Uncle Orlin's safely the night before. So he had to call this morning--at 7:45. I think he is bound and determined to wake me up with the chickens. So much for sleeping in. I was a little perturbed since I was interviewing for this great job when I was awakened to take the call. I guess I didn't get the job.

Getting up early does have its benefits, though. I got a lot done today. Including a particularly bothersome insurance list I had to work on, outlining all our possessions. Essentially, it was a headache on a piece of paper. We ended the day by having dinner with our friends, Caleb and Valerie O'Hara. Always a fun time! And then a trip to Wal-mart till 10:30pm. I highly recommend shopping at Wal-mart any time after 9:00pm. It has great benefits such as being gloriously quiet!

4-6-05 Wednesday

Today I spent nearly the entire day making preparations to ship our stuff. The movers come tomorrow and I am confident that I will feel more organized once I get rid of some of this stuff. That will be a great relief! This evening my sister, Jill, flew in from Oklahoma City. It is great to be with her again, even if it is during a hurried and crazy time! There is not as much to tell about today. Maybe because it was more of the same and maybe because my brain has officially shut down for the night.

4-7-05 Thursday

MOVING DAY!!! Today the shipping company came and loaded up almost all of our earthly possessions and hauled them away in a 20ft. corrugated steel crate. It was a strange feeling to watch all our household goods roll away on the back of a semi, knowing that for the next 2-3 months they will be transferred from warehouse to truck to warehouse to ship and spend a good month or so on that ship floating at the mercy of the waters and endless miles of ocean. That is the reality of moving to Vanuatu. \$11,000 and two months later, Lord willing, our possessions will arrive in Port Vila and in one piece!

When the movers first arrived they took one look at all we had and said the words we greatly dreaded hearing, “It will be a tight squeeze, it may not all fit.” 7 hours later, at the end of the day, there was room to spare and we began looking for items to fill that space. All in all, today was very successful and our team is thrilled (even if we are exhausted) to be one step closer to our new home in Port Vila, Vanuatu!

4-8-05 Friday

Today was kind of a wind-down day from all the excitement of yesterday. Jill, Shawnda and I ran errands and did some shopping in Denver. Then we came home and I worked on packing our suitcases for the plane. Will I ever be done packing?

4-9-05 Saturday

Words cannot describe the depth of love we feel from the Columbine congregation. Tonight was our going away party. The outpouring of love and encouragement was evident in the number of people who worked to put this together, as well as all of the people who came to wish us well in our mission work. I am so thankful to be part of such a loving group of people. Tonight, I was also reminded of all that God has done to bless our team by bringing us together. Over the past months we have endured difficulty together and grown closer than I would have ever imagined. And yet there is so much more growth we have to experience. I am truly blessed to be a part of a mission team that seeks to devote themselves to the Word of God and wants

so much to be successful in reaching out to the lost souls of Vanuatu. When we are on the field, thousands of miles away from our loved ones, they will not only be our best friends, they will be our family. I love each and every one of them so much and I pray I will be able to spend the next 5 years showing them how much I cherish their friendship.

4-10-05 Sunday

Sometimes life doesn't always turn out the way you think it will. I imagined our day of departure to be sunshine and blue skies. We would all leave Denver and board the plane together. Do the same in L.A. and make the 10 hour flight across the ocean and arrive in Vanuatu on Tuesday. But, that isn't really how it has worked out. Instead we were in the middle of a huge blizzard and wondering if we would leave at all! After standing in line for 3.5 hours, Aaron and I found out that some unknown airline employee bumped our names from the confirmed seat list to the stand by list under the assumption that we wouldn't show up for our flight. That added our names to the prestigious spots of #57 and #58 on the stand-by list for L.A. Obviously we were not alone. There were 80 people total on that list. The time came to board the plane. Eric, Shawnda and Mike all said their good-byes and did their best to encourage us. And while I greatly appreciated their words of encouragement, I thought my heart would break in two as we watched them walk down the ramp to the plane. Aaron and I waited another 45 min. but, our names were never called for the stand-by list. At midnight we arrived at Shawnda's sister's house and I have never been so absolutely relieved to crawl into a warm bed and fall asleep. It was an emotionally draining day, with saying our last good-byes to those we love and spending all day waiting at the airport. Thank the good Lord that tomorrow is a new day and will hold new possibilities of meeting up with our team once again.

4-11-05 Monday

This morning I woke up and the events of yesterday were still weighing heavy on my mind. I had myself a good cry because every girl needs one of those every once and a while, and then I was fine and ready to tackle the day. Just as I got up Aaron got a phone call and it was Eric. HALLELUJAH!!! There could only be one reason he was calling – they didn't make the flight to Fiji. My spirits were immediately lifted. We just might get to fly overseas with our team! Aaron got on the phone and kept trying to reach Frontier to re-book a flight to L.A. but, the line was constantly busy. A little while later Eric called again and he had been able to re-book our whole team on a flight out of L.A. to Fiji Tuesday night. Apparently, after Eric, Shawnda and Mike boarded the plane it sat on the runway until 11pm and they ended up missing their flight to Fiji by almost an hour and a half. They are now in a motel in L.A. Now Aaron, Kaela and I just have to get to L.A. We decided that since we couldn't get through on the phone or internet then our best bet was to go to the airport and try to book a flight in person. The line was longer but, was moving much faster than yesterday and we were at the ticket counter in a hour. We were thrilled and incredibly thankful to be blessed with a flight out that day in just over an hour. We were headed to L.A.!!! Aaron and I were so happy to see the Brandell's and Mike, it had only been a day but, it felt like a year! We all were very excited!

4-12-05 Tuesday

Aaron, Kaela and I got a good night's sleep and woke up to a beautiful California morning. We decided to enjoy the lack of humidity in L.A. while we had the chance because we wouldn't have that luxury in Vanuatu. Our team spent the morning re-packing our suitcases in hopes of not getting charged for them being over 70lbs. (which was a distinct possibility since I think I had a kitchen sink packed in mine). We arrived with about 4 hrs. to spare before our flight. Everything went smoothly though, and we boarded the plane and left for Fiji at 11:30pm.

4-14-05 Thursday

This feels like one of the longest days ever. We arrived in Nadi (pronounced Nandi), Fiji at about 5:30am. It was a beautiful Fijian day and fell in love all over again with the gorgeous flowers, trees and countryside of Fiji. when anyone comes to visit us in Vanuatu they should always try to spend a couple of days enjoying Fiji. The native Fijians are some of the most endearing and gentle people I have ever met and they're truly a beautiful people. We spent the day relaxing and resting and trying to recover from jet lag. We went to the airport at 6pm to meet our international flight to Vanuatu at 9:30pm. About 15 min. before the flight was to leave we were surprised by the presence of a fellow missionary from American Samoa, Randy English. Randy was originally going to meet us in Port Vila on Tuesday. However, with the changes in our flight schedule, we had thought we missed seeing each other. Our team had never met Randy until tonight although we have talked on the phone with him and exchanged several emails. I cannot tell you what an encouragement and blessing it was to spend time with him. It was just what our team needed to lift our spirits and get our hearts centered on the reason we came to Vanuatu. The reality of what we are doing, moving to Vanuatu, had not quite completely set in. The announcer at the airport called for us to board our flight to Port Vila. Randy paused what he was saying and said two simple, yet profound words, "That's home." And it's true. This is our new home. Whatever the challenges are – great or small, whatever the joys are, whatever experiences we encounter, Port Vila is our home. We won't just reside there but, we will make a life for ourselves there – in our new home in Vanuatu.