

April 2017

American-Caribbean Experience

Newsletter



I've been blessed to work as the Stateside Logistics Coordinator for ACE for nearly two years, come August. Until February, every trip I've made to Jamaica so far has been more work-related, not with a team from beginning to end, so I was grateful to have a chance to come to the Men and Women's Conference. There, the most extraordinary people came together to share four days of hard work, laughter and God's blessings.

I was especially impressed with the lone teenager who came with her mom, surrounding herself with a sea of adult strangers and never blinking an eye. She was my daughter's age, and, from the first day, I kicked myself for not having pulled my daughter out of school to experience this with me, knowing now that she would have had a friend. Every day that I watched this teen interact with school children or help on a task, I thought, "I wish my daughter were here." Still, there was work to be done and no time for regrets.

As we came together on Sunday at church, I was pleased to hear the pastor give a shout out to ACE, telling the congregation about our wonderful conference that was to start that evening. It was a great moment when he asked Paul Jones, a member of our team, to lead everyone in song. It was a song I had never heard before, and it touched me deeply. Hearing the crowd sing along with him in unison, I truly could feel the Spirit of the Lord in the room. That moment stayed with me all week. Even better, each night at the conference when Paul led the crowd in praise and worship, that song was requested and sung, so I heard it every day.

After four days of breaking out of my comfort zone, leading small groups of local Jamaican women in discussion and prayer, hugging tons of people, and working hard with the team, I came home around midnight, exhausted and filled with peace. I said a quick hello to my daughter, who had stayed up to greet me. I told

her she would have loved it, that I wished she'd had been there. She said, "I want to go next time! And you can tell me all about it tomorrow." It was too late to go into details, so I wished her good night.

The chaos of the next morning brought no time for stories, and she rushed out past me with a "Love you, Mom! Glad you're home! Gotta go!" on her way to school. Once she arrived, she texted me: "Sorry to rush out this morning. Talk later. By the way, I heard a song on Sunday that I loved! I thought you might like it, too. I've listened to it all week." She texted me a link to a video.

You guessed it — it was the same song Paul had sung to the congregation on Sunday, the same song I'd heard all week on my head and at the conference every evening. She had been connected all along. God made sure of that. I had to take a deep breath at the wonder of it all.

Now that might seem like the end of the story, but as you know, God connects us in more ways than one. Bear with me, there's more....

My mom had been sick and in a nursing home for the last seven years. Visits were often rushed, but I tried to slow down a bit and really have conversations with her about what's happening outside her four walls. Her side of the conversation was usually about how sick she felt and what she wanted me to bring her from the grocery. It had been a hard mother-daughter relationship, but it was ours, and we had that unspoken love for each other.

Shortly after I returned from the Men and Women's Conference, I visited her to tell her about my trip. I was especially excited to tell her about my God-wink (that is a term for coincidences guided by God) with my daughter and that song. She was amazed and smiled widely as I told her, and she immediately wanted to hear the song. I pulled up the link and, together, we watched the eight-minute video.

She didn't say a word the whole time; I wasn't sure she'd even watch the whole thing, but she did. She held my phone intently and let the song fill her room. When it was finished, she had tears

in her eyes. I felt compelled to grab her hands and say, “You know God is here with you. I know it’s been hard.” And we prayed together, mother and daughter, for the first time that I can remember. We prayed for healing and for peace. That was not a normal thing for us to do out loud, but it felt right to spend a moment with each other, in God’s grace, knowing that He was holding us both.

I only had one more visit with my mom after that. On Holy Thursday, two weeks ago, she passed away unexpectedly.

My experience with ACE, my time at the conference, my interaction with my daughter, my attachment to a song... that became my finest moment with my mother, when we could hold hands and let God connect it all together. I am grateful for each and every coincidence that happens, every God-wink that brings my life meaning. The Spirit of the Lord will always connect the dots for us if we let Him.



wasn’t dignified for me or anyone else watching. You see, I, too, get overwhelmed and tired and, well, just fleshy at some of the worst times. This was one of those times.

As I snapped out orders to these young excited adults, I realized too late how I had bruised their perception of me, this person God had put in charge of ACE. At the end of the day – and many people later – the entire day was a huge success for all of us. But not because of me.



That night, when I was invited to attend the group debrief, I sat and listened to what God was doing all week. And none of it was about me. Instead, it was about giving until it hurt, sharing until it felt comfortable, serving because no one else would do it. The impact went on and on. In fact, none of my bad behavior had tainted the acts that God had done during that day. His hand gently touched the hearts of each person in that meeting that week. Including mine.

I was reminded again that God doesn’t make mistakes, only His followers do. It’s not so much the mistakes you make in life but how quickly you recover from them that counts. That’s what I tell my interns and staff all the time, but I sometimes forget that myself. I was awed by the love this faithful group had expressed to me and by all that God is doing at ACE in Jamaica. It was that Grace card again. I felt very humbled and asked God to forgive me (again).

Thank you, God, for a great reminder that it’s not so much what comes out of us in way of production all the time but rather what flows through us daily – minute by minute – that reflects God’s kindness and mercy. Next time, I’ll be better because of You.

Marla’s Minute

“The Will of God will Never Take You Where the Grace of God Won’t Protect You”

Lately I’ve realized that it’s the relationships we’ve been given during our lifetime that really matter at the end of the day.

On the way home from a friends funeral, Allen and I watched a movie called Collateral Beauty with Will Smith. One of the lines in the movie was about a woman who never had any children of her own, but the words spoken to her from a coworker reminded me of a truth. “A person might not have come out of you, but many people have passed through you.” Wow, that sort of sounds like me and this ministry! I’ve been honored to have cultivated so many wonderful relationships over the years, and the number grows with each new team that comes down, but, sometimes, I forget the finer points of relationship-building.

This past month, as ACE volunteers experienced our first thrift sale of the year, many teenagers and adults saw Marla “blow a fuse”. It

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