

the bleecker times:

Hello Again!

Greetings from Pennsylvania! As many of you know, I've been working on my Masters of Engineering (Structures Option) in Architectural Engineering here at Penn State. I will graduate this Dec. after finishing my 1.5 year program, and people have already been asking me what I'm doing next. There were many options to consider, like moving back to Michigan to find a job, staying here in Pennsylvania, going back to Buffalo where I worked last summer at an Architectural Engineering firm, all which seemed like good options, but I want more than just any job. I want God's full blessing in my life.

The Clarence Update

First, a short re-cap on the last 1.5 years (which is about the time that I stopped sending mass e-mails). Many of you know that I found a summer internship in New Jersey, working for an engineered wood product supplier and moved down there in May 2004. After living there a week, I was rear-ended on the free-way which pushed my car into a telephone pole and totaled my car. By the grace of God alone, there wasn't a scratch on me, even though my neck was a little sore for a few weeks. So I was alone in a new town, a new state, a new job, and didn't have a car. But God is faithful, and he provided rides to work for me until I was able to get another car. I also met another intern at work (Andy) who was going to Penn State, was in my program, and was also going to be the TA for one of my classes. Andy, along with his soon-to-be wife Nicole, introduced me to Antioch Int. Church and helped me find a place to live in the fall with other Christian women. I have been blessed many times over by the friendships that I have made here at Penn State and at Antioch, and I can't imagine my life here without them as I tried to make my way through big scary Penn State (of over 40,000 students vs. 3,000 at Hope College). As I look back to that first week in New Jersey, when things from the outside might have looked hopeless, I am reminded of the promise that God made – that he would never leave or forsake me (Duet 31:6) and I know that I am blessed. Thank you to the many people who helped me find my way when I first arrived at PSU.☺

What's next?

So that brings me back to the big question. Well, for those of you that remember getting updates from India, it probably won't be a surprise to you that I've decided to do another internship with EMI, but this time in Kampala, Uganda. I will be gone for 6 months, from Jan 14th to July 12th, 2006. For those of you who aren't familiar with EMI, allow me to give you a little background info. Engineering Ministries International (EMI) is a non-profit Christian organization that provides free architectural and engineering design work for third world ministries that are helping the poor and spreading the good news of Christ. The types of structures they typically do include hospitals, churches, schools, orphanages, and water systems. As a structural engineer in Uganda, I would be participating in week-long project trips where we would meet with a local ministry, survey their land and talk to them about their vision for reaching God's people, and then try to put their vision on paper through building designs and water systems. Then we would travel back to our office and create the construction documents that would be used to turn their vision into a reality. If you would like more information about EMI, please see their website (www.emiusa.org).

Why go overseas again?

This is what my mother keeps asking me. Even though she supports my decision to go, she loves to remind me that people need buildings here in America too, where it's a bit safer and she can get a hold of me whenever she wants. But I can't forget the things I learned in India. Like when I would brush my teeth every morning using a water bottle instead of the bathroom tap water, or when I walked outside and saw mountains instead of flat Michigan, I was reminded where I was, and why God wanted me there. It's incredible how differently you see your plans for the day when you start it off like that. As I was sitting in church a few months ago, listening to my pastor talk about poverty in America, and the Hurricane Katrina Disaster, I couldn't stop thinking about all of those children in India.

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They had warned us not to give the street children money unless we were prepared to give to them all. They warned us because then the children would see begging as a source of income, and their parents would keep them out of school in order to beg and make money for the family, sometimes even mutilating their own children so that they would draw more compassion from tourists. They advised us to give food instead of money, because then the children could keep their gift instead of passing a portion of it on to the mafia-like bullies who force beggars to pay a fee for the privilege of begging in their territory. It all seemed to make sense in theory – but when they are standing there before you – staring into your eyes, sucking their little stomachs in to show you their ribs and their hunger, how can you stand there and just offer them a banana? I use to cry about this – because it seemed so hopeless. Who will give them a banana tomorrow? How would they live next week? What future could they possibly have with beginnings like this one? Why does anyone bother at all?

But then I am reminded of organizations like the ones I was able to help with EMI. The churches, and other Christian organizations that bring these children into orphanages and provide a home for those without one, into schools that will teach them to hope for more than the life they can see, and into vocational centers that will teach them a trade and give them the skills to follow their dreams, all of which teaches them about the God who cares about them and has a plan for their future. This is why their situation isn't hopeless. This is why it's okay for our hearts to break for them – because God's plan is perfect and he is awakening us to our role in His plan. These churches and Christian organizations need buildings for their schools, orphanages, hospitals, and training centers. And they need engineers and architects to design those buildings to function according to their needs. This is what I can do to help those children.

When I left India, I knew that I still needed more training, and for the last year I have been working on my masters at Penn State so that I can serve these children better than just giving them a banana. I want to see their lives changed. To see hope in their eyes instead of hunger.

It's hard knowing that this is exactly the type of work that I want to be doing, but also knowing that I still need more training. I have so much more to learn about designing buildings and I want to get my professional engineering (PE) license and pay off all my school loans before joining any ministry full-time. After much prayer and seeking guidance, I feel like I need to go and keep my heart fresh to His plan before undertaking the next 3-5 years working in the secular world as I pursue my PE. Why Uganda? Why not? As my global perception of what God is doing around the world expands – so does my understanding of how I can serve Him. I am also excited to see Africa. The more books I read about it, the more I want to go and see for myself if it's really all they say it is.

How can you help?

First of all, prayer is always needed and appreciated. I will be sending out (hopefully monthly) updates to let you know about specific prayer requests, but in the mean time, just pray as the spirit leads for guidance as I prepare to go, for upcoming project trips, and for the East Africa office as they prepare for another batch of interns.

Secondly, as some of you know, all EMI staff and interns raise their own support. I need to raise about \$6500 for all my travel costs and living expenses during my 6-month internship. It sometimes seems like an unreachable amount, but I know that God is Jehovah Jireh, my provider, and if He wants me to go, then He will provide a way.

If you would like an opportunity to support me and EMI, all gifts are tax deductible within the US and you will receive a receipt. I have enclosed a response card and a return envelope for mailing donations, but there is a way to also give online through EMI (<https://secure.emiusa.org/donate.html>). If you decide to give in this way, under the designation please include my name and EMI account number (2449). One time donations are asked to be returned before I leave on Jan. 14th, but monthly pledges are also welcome. If you would like a hard copy of this letter and EMI support cards, just e-mail me or call my parents' house (989-773-4051).

Thank you, for all your help,

Kellie