



September 2022

We Left, and We Came Back.

Saying “see you later” is always hard. When the amount of time in between remains uncertain, it is even harder. We’ve learned from others, though, the importance of closure, especially for our kids. So, we tried to be intentional.

We said goodbye at church. We said goodbye at school. We said goodbye to the neighbors on our street. Even so, with limited time, we missed saying goodbye to many close friends and family.

The “farewells” took emotional energy. Preparing our home for renters required physical energy. Our tradition of staying up all night packing claimed more energy. But... we made it! It was a close call, but we did not miss our 7 a.m. flight!

A BIG “thank you” to my mom and my sister Kristen for helping watch the kids and clean the house. Heartfelt thanks to Nate and Rosanna Johnson for showing up in the dark hours of the morning to give us a ride to the airport and to Paige Jones for helping us with last-minute paperwork. It was a team effort, with many important players. Thank you to everyone who helped send us off J

Our trip started in Charleston, stopped in New York, then on to Nairobi, Kenya. In Kenya, eight-year-old Addie stepped into the sunshine and stated, “We are finally back in Africa, and it is really hot... and I am really happy.”

Next, we flew to Uganda. At that point, the 24 hours of travel and the seven-hour time-zone difference sunk in. The meltdowns began. “I want to go home!” came words expressed through tears. “I want to go home and get in my bed! This is ridiculous! Why are we here?” shouted one of our children as we stood in line at the airport.



The kids say “see you later” and “thank you!” to their Sunday school teacher, Ms. Roshonta Walker, at St. James Presbyterian Church in Charleston, South Carolina.



We took our trunks out of storage, cleaned them out, and packed them all up. A big task, yet a familiar one :-)

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Once at the hotel, everyone felt better.

The next morning, a real estate agent took us to look at homes to rent. Later, we walked to the mall for dinner. As we greeted folks on the road, five-year-old Nicole exclaimed: “Mommy, mommy, mommy, there are more black people than white people here!” As time goes on, I look forward to hearing her process the differences and similarities she observes in her new community.

Due to insecurity in South Sudan, our partner organization, RECONCILE International, asked us to live in Uganda. From 2017-2019, we lived in Arua, Uganda, a small town not far from the refugee camps. This time, though, we are in a suburb of Kampala, the bustling capital city.



Taking in the view of the hilly, big city of Kampala, our new home in Uganda.

As I write, our children have already started their classes at an international school in Kampala. The school’s International Baccalaureate curriculum is designed to help students easily transition to schools in other countries. As a result, students from about 50 nations currently attend.

Our children’s opportunity to have an excellent international school education elicits a feeling of gratitude, while simultaneously causing internal unrest. It is the same tension I felt sending my children to a small, Christian, bilingual school in North Charleston for two years while Stateside. I dropped my children off at a well-resourced, effective school while passing by lower-income children walking to “struggling” schools.

My turmoil over disparities in resources and opportunities persists whether we live in the U.S. or East Africa. There are hungry children, failing schools, and divisions among people in both places. Which brings us back to the earlier question, “why are we here?”

To answer: “we feel called by God to be here,” makes the decision appear easier than it was to make. To say: “I am not entirely sure why we are here, yet I trust we will find out more each day,” seems irresponsible based on the logistical challenge and expense to send our family overseas. The reality, though, is in both responses.

Poverty and generational oppression exist all over the world. As Christians, we benefit from understanding these tragedies at home and abroad, so we are better equipped to address them. Towards that end, if I can play a small role in creating a clearer understanding between people and groups on different continents, then my living here makes sense to me.

Shelvis desires to finish the research he started. He wants to draw from what he has learned at Oxford to help create a curriculum for peacebuilders, lifting up the role of the South Sudanese church in grassroots reconciliation efforts. While based in Kampala, he plans to travel back and forth into South Sudan and to the refugee camps to gather the perspective, insight, and expertise of South Sudanese.

We both realize that what we learn from peacebuilders here better prepares us for reconciliation ministry back in the U.S. In addition, we believe the experience of living in Uganda will further prepare our children to be bridge builders. In a world teeming with cultures and perspectives, we hope they develop the confidence and humility required to have a loving impact.

RCA Global Mission does not receive denominational assessments or covenant shares. We depend on the faithful generosity of churches and individuals.

Still, there are reasons for our being in Uganda that we do not yet know completely. With our family's willingness to be fully present here and your willingness to send us, we will discover these together. We look forward to walking this road with you.

Nancy and Shelvis Smith-Mather