

Just a Girl from Camden, Arkansas that went to Johannesburg, South Africa

I recently had the opportunity to travel to Johannesburg, South Africa this past year. For some that may not be a big deal, but for me it was a once in a lifetime opportunity. This is coming from someone who can remember growing up traveling to Texarkana was a big deal and someone had a doctor's appointment if you went to Little Rock.

A call went out by the 12th District Supervisor, Mrs. Cordelia Mitchell, of the Women's Missionary Society asking for women 18-39 to write a letter stating why we should be chosen to attend the YAM (Young Adult Missionary) Summit in Johannesburg...did I mention they were going to pay for airfare, lodging and registration? I initially did not think twice about responding. In fact, I wasn't going to respond. I have the tendency to sit back and watch everyone else accomplish their dreams. A couple days after the initial email, I received an email from a Life Member of my local Women's Missionary Society (H.E. Carolina Society) telling me that I should apply. Of course, I said "yeah right," but God spoke to me. He reminded me that at the beginning of the year, when I was creating my vision board, we declared 2017 to be my year of traveling, stepping out the box and being Monica. So many times when we ask something from God, we want it to happen, we just don't know how to handle it when it does...or when it does, we ignore. Have you ever passed up on multiple promotions because you didn't think it was the "right" time or stayed stagnant even after multiple signs came your way to move around? That is something that I am working on for myself. My faith is not something that I have ever had to question, not saying that it hasn't been tested before though. We are all still human and it is our human instincts that make us want to visually see something. Fast forward, I received news that I would be making my first international flight!

My experience was great. The flight from Atlanta to Johannesburg was 15 hours, but I slept and watched movies most of the time. I was able to share this experience with four other young women. Most of us had only had casual conversations, so this experience was going to be "different." We attended some wonderful sessions during the Summit. The experiences outside of the Summit will forever change my outlook on life. There are too many to discuss now, but I would like to share one of them. We visited a local orphanage that homes hundreds of children. While at the orphanage I was moved by something that may be small to so many of us. In some of the rooms, they lacked pillow cases on the pillows. Now most of us may either throw our pillows out once they get flat or start to turn brown; however, we typically have a pillowcase on the pillows. I was more inspired that the children at the orphanage were just excited to have a second chance at life and weren't bothered by the lack of something so small. This was a subtle reminder that my "circumstance" is not as bad as others are. While most of Johannesburg reminded me of the United States, I was thoroughly impressed with their attention to detail in many of their infrastructures. Now don't get me wrong, there were still places that were poverty stricken. A lot like in our own communities. The pillows were not the worse that I saw. People are going without and some are struggling to make it even after working two jobs; however, some are living life without a care in the world. My mother instilled in my sister and I a long time ago the importance of giving. We have always had a will to want to help others who are less fortunate. It's not always about your financial contributions. Your time and talents are other ways to give back to someone else. A sincere

smile never hurt anyone! We need each other on this journey called life. Africa was such a humbling experience, it made me think of actions I can take to be a better missionary in my community.

We met some hospitable people while in Africa. Our driver took us to so many historical sites: The Top of Africa, Mandela House, Nelson Mandela's last home (well the wall...since you can't actually see the home) and the Hector Peterson Memorial and Museum. I even had the opportunity to meet Dr. Makaziwe Mandela; she is the oldest living daughter of Nelson Mandela. During my trip, I was reminded of how we should be when someone comes to our home, whether it is our actual home, church or in our presence. People should be able to see Christ in us and not have to wonder if we are Christians.

Since returning from Africa, I am more at peace with stepping out of my comfort zone. I would encourage any woman to step out of your comfort zone, do something that you have never done before. Each month I try something that I have never done. Whether it be a food item, activity or simply traveling a different way to get to work or home. I'm no longer afraid of taking chances and living life. Africa was the most memorable experience for me by far. I'm excited to see what will happen in my next 33 years of living.

I've learned to ask myself these few questions, especially more in these troubling days.

Do I know my purpose?

If you answered yes, are you serving in your purpose?

If you answered no, try praying for God to reveal your purpose to you...just try not to ignore His signs.

Are people able to see Christ through me?

I want every encounter with others to be one of peace. My actions should speak for themselves.

Have I made a difference in someone's life today?

This does not have to be one that makes people praise you. Sometimes I take a few articles of clothing down to the local Salvation Army and pass out to those who are less fortunate. It's a small representation of my relationship with Christ. I'm reminded what one of my new favorite scriptures, **Matthew 5:16** says, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven."

I challenge every person reading this article to "pay it forward" to someone before the end of the month. The world could definitely use a little of this. So what should you do? Simply pay for someone's meal, buy a student some school supplies, volunteer at your local nursing home or countless other acts of doing good for someone else.

Be you.

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