

June 2009 - Out in the bush of Central Uganda, East Africa

Something has changed; as if waking from a nightmare. My story is shifting, moving beyond. Story has become essential; agonizing in fully understanding just how much responsibility I have in writing my own story, delightful in drinking deeply, slurping up the juicy fruit of living life deliberately, no matter the cost.



Jesca and Betty with the Guesthouse in bloom

Working through Dan Allender's book, To Be Told; his books bring life to my heart, helps me see Jesus more clearly. I bought this book when it came out in 2005, the year I was preparing to move to Africa forever and ever. I found it tedious. I was overwhelmed with my story, the living it, the constant demand of telling it, the uncertainty of it. The last four years have felt more like a freak show, a stomach churning, can't catch my breath roller coaster ride that would never end. Yet today, with wobbly knees, looking for the nearest toilet in case I do vomit, the ride has ended; I am safely on solid ground and feel like I am starting a new chapter. What is going to happen next? Suddenly, Dan's book is speaking to me about the story I am living.



New FAHI from Central Baptist Church, Georgia,

I pray every year for my Abba to give me a word or a thought to focus upon. For many years it was 'Be Still'. Another year, it was 'Welcome home, my love'. This year is the thought that God wants to 'take my breath away'. My first thought, "Lord, does that mean I am going to die?" Which would really be OK with me, I am so ready. My story has felt unending. But, then again, I don't wake up anymore with my first thought being 'a wish to die' – and it does seem like I do still work that needs to be done in this little forsaken corner of the world. So I am thinking maybe, He meant that this year He would 'take my breath away' – that this year my story would blow me away, having me fall down 'as if' dead like the prophets of old when He fully revealed himself to them.

Cool. I'm waiting for this awesome vision. And something else, since we established our own non-profit and created our own bookkeeping systems, I have free time. Very cool. Well, it's not really free time, but it is time to pause, reflect, and take a good look around. I began to imagine having time to paint again, maybe garden or just sit on my porch. Instead the economy in the States falls apart at the same time prices soar in Africa. Teams cancel their trips. Sustainability becomes a rather silly concept. And, as I pause, reflect and look around – I realize the staff got 'it', but the students are not. After 18 months of vocational training they are still struggling with the basics. It's been terrifying. I had to step into that 'boss' role, tear apart everything the staff had created at the school and start all over. The staff was ready to mutiny; tough way to start a year – vision, mission, values, my way or the highway.

I do feel grateful for the life I am living right now. It is such a better story than I could ever have imagined. But God's people wear me out; the characters in my story are annoying and tend to suck the life out of me. On those bleak days it is easy to believe that 'transformation', 'gratitude', 'sacred service' mean absolutely nothing to staff and students, nothing, blank, nadda, please pass the salt, what does she want now, these middle age white women are so demanding; Is it lunch time yet?

Sarcasm: the literal meaning is 'the ripping apart of flesh'. For someone who never gets angry, I find myself furious. I am so furious that I have resorted to violence, power, force, control ... with words. "No one is qualified to graduate". "Perhaps there are just too many of us on staff, so many, that we are making stupid mistakes. If this continues I will have to lay people off".

Brutal, threatening words.



Fantastic FAHI = Restore International - We love you Bob Goff!
It was great to see Gregg Munro again and meet new friends.

It is so easy to fire someone in America. There are no options here, either they succeed or they are most likely doomed to return to the bush digging roots to keep from starving. They really are hungry and the work here is back breaking, often demeaning. We Americans call their homes 'humble', but the truth is that they live in humiliating and severe conditions and they really don't earn enough money to care for themselves - paying them a livable wage could destabilize the economy in Africa.



International Women's Organization, Kampala Luncheon to celebrate their gifts of bikes and cooker to AHI.

My anger turns to shame. True, the level of corruption and hypocrisy in Africa is overwhelming in that it is considered acceptable; corruption, hypocrisy – themes of my childhood, easy buttons to push. Am I really angry at ingratitude or lack of skill and professionalism or am I angry because this means I have to give more of myself to the staff and students? Am I angry because I want them to get 'it' without expecting more from me – more teaching, more structure, more time, more involvement, more interaction. Can't the school run without me, so I can paint and play? It's great to get all the credit without ever having to get dirty.

Corruption, hypocrisy – am I really any different?

Truth hits, the AHI staff is working in a vacuum, an empty bubble that is filled just with the pictures I have painted of working in a Western Hotel and restaurant. They have no previous experience, for most this is their first job and have only eaten once in a restaurant in Kampala that I took them to. Few of the students have ever left the bush. None of us have had vocational training much less prepared to teach it.



I have had to grapple [what a cool word] with why am I here? Perhaps my premise for coming to Africa is all wrong. It was a very small reason at first. I felt broken, useless, just wanted to cook, clean and support the building of the Kingdom, like an old horse being put out to pasture. It has changed as God has invited [pushed, actually] me into a bigger vision and a greater purpose. I have been thinking lately, that I can encourage or awaken those I work with to a closer walk with God, transforming lives of poverty into abundance and freedom, blah, blah, blah. I don't seem to be having the impact I expected on the Africans. Expectations are interesting. Motives, even more so. What were my motives for coming to Africa? Very selfish I've thought, though I am showing myself now just how selfish I was. Noble selfishness I reason, as if that is possible. Why did I come? And what did I expect to happen?



More FAHI: Brian Powell's team with Ignite Global, New Jersey

Rethinking my story. My story. It still feels like I am telling someone else's story. Will it ever be my story? But that then is another story all together. Ok focus, my story, I wanted it to have a good ending. Not demanding happy, not demanding fame or fortune, but a good ending at least. A good ending would have my story impact others, inspire others to want more out of life, to be more, to encourage = to in 'courage' others to abandon themselves to a wild and unpredictable God, a passionately loving God that surprises and delights in

redemption, taking the evil done to us to bring blessing to others.

I like to dream about community. I like to read about community. I am inspired by other communities. I just don't like to live community. It is draining, exhausting, heartbreaking and annoying. Alone is so much safer, predictable, comfortable. And, I seem to need so much 'alone' time. I function so much better when I have alone time ... and I don't dare not function well. Or do I?



Kampala Friends up for a weekend of rest and laughter

Last month we were busy. Sustainability reared its lovely head again. I stormed through it, ranting over every mistake, raising the level of excellence demanded from all who work with AHI. The visitors left, claiming this to be their best 'mission trip' and AHI being the highlight of many other mission visitors. Next month will be busy as well. We are talking about last month as we prepare for next. What happened and why? Not to blame but to learn and grow from. We are gathering together and recommitting ourselves as a community clothed in gratitude and forgiveness. AHI is a gracious refuge for me in spite of all my blunders.



Table preparation for University of San Francisco team of 20. David Batstone, author of "Not for Sale", had them stop by for lunch. We hope to serve as a destination spot /intern opportunity for their students studying in the Hospitality Department next summer.

And, I have pulled my paints out and drawn the outlines of 3 portraits I want to paint. I am learning that I just need to live life more deliberately – to make each moment count and find time to paint. I am learning that to not be involved in the day to day grit and soil of AHI is to lose too much. I spent the last 2 days talking one on one with each student crafting a plan to ensure their graduation ... and future employment.

Each one of them, fearful of my response had the same questions though voiced in different words – Who am I? What do you see? Would you help me write my own story? Out loud, one by one, I prayed a blessing of promise and life upon each of them.

"Master, we worked hard all night trying to catch fish and caught nothing. But you say I should put the nets into the water, so I will..... and both boats were filled with so many fish they were almost sinking..... Go away from me Lord, I am a sinful man." Luke 5:5 "When I saw Him I fell down at his feet like a dead man." Revelations 1:17 "Woe is me for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips and I live among a



people of unclean lips. For my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts." Isaiah 6:5.

My wild, unpredictable, passionate God is not allowing me to write a story of safe and comfortable. He continues to bid me to step out into the unknown of the next blank page, frightened and helpless. He continues to call me to write a story of abandon to his mercy and grace, of trust in his sick sense of humor that is only funny in retrospect. I weary and marvel at my God who refuses to give up on me, refuses to let me live a lie and desires to 'take my breath away' in story. I am my Beloved and he is mine. Lord Jesus, have mercy upon me. Abba, I belong to you.



We love you! Thank you for your prayers. See you in August!!