



## Returning Home—The Sorrow and The Joy

Some insights into the mixed emotions surrounding the process of leaving the field

A group of friends gathered at the Spice Island Airport to say farewell to us. I wasn't looking forward to those final moments. We had managed to keep our emotions at bay throughout the weeks of preparation for our return to Canada. Now the time had come to say goodbye.

### THE SORROW

A heartbreaking thought pierced my mind—"Would this be the last time I would see these people?" We had served a very resistant people group in Asia for seven-and-a-half years. Now we would transition to Home Assignment in Canada.

Our national team members held onto us tightly. We had experienced many challenges together. Their lives had often been threatened, but they had stood strong. We had grieved deeply with them when their beautiful baby boy died at birth. They loved the people so much but their dedicated lives were constantly under attack. How we would miss these dear servants of the Lord.

Our team members had walked together with us through so much. Would they be safe? Would they be able to endure all the challenges of living among a resistant people group? The most difficult question that confronted us was: how do we say goodbye to friends who had not yet

### Caring for Returning International Workers

Canadian Alliance International Workers (IWs) return to Canada on a regular basis (usually every four years) for Home Assignment to share their stories among Canadian churches and help raise funds for their ministry.

It is a time for personal refreshment, renewing home ties, reporting on how the Lord is building his Church overseas, retooling and preparing for further cross-cultural service.

For many IWs, especially those with young children, returning to Canada for this one-year assignment can be a challenging experience. All kinds of changes have occurred in their home church and home town. They have also changed, having absorbed a new culture and now seeing things from a different perspective than most Canadians.

Some of our workers are confronted by difficult family situations—aging parents, ill health, and education for their

children. Some may struggle with finding accommodations or vehicles and they may wonder how to squeeze so many visits into their year. And Third Culture Kids are often apprehensive about relocating—some of them having never lived in Canada or gone to school here.

These workers attend a Home Ministries Seminar, hosted each year by our Global Ministries Department, which provides them with debriefing and counsel on re-entry to Canada. Alliance church members can also help make the transition easier by giving a warm welcome so these IWs feel accepted and appreciated.

By loving and caring for your International Worker, Home Assignment can be a time of rich friendship and learning together. Enhancing personal relationships between the *sender* and the *sent* is essential if we are to maintain our focus on world evangelization into the next generation.



WELCOME

become followers of Jesus? The pain grew deeper as we saw their tears when we parted.

We mounted the plane with heavy hearts. We had been looking forward to our return to Canada, but amidst all the joy, there was also a deep sense of sorrow. I quietly lifted my thoughts to Jesus. He was my Comforter and would prove to be faithful again. I must trust him to look after all these people whom we loved.

Little pricks of fear began to gnaw at my mind concerning our re-entry to Canada. Would we be able to share effectively with our friends back home? Would they be interested in hearing about a people group so remote from their world? Most important, would the church feel the burden to pray?

### THE JOY

We finally landed safely after a 33-hour flight. We felt so blessed to be back in Canada. No more rumbling earthquakes every month or two, no more electrical shortages multiple times a week, and no fear of malaria, dengue fever or typhoid. We could now speak openly about loving Jesus and going to church.

There was a joyful freedom that filled our hearts. We rejoiced in the wonderful privilege of serving our

Lord in this far-off country. Now we could share with our family and friends about God's awesome deeds and many answers to prayer.

How good it was to reunite with our children and grandchildren. We had missed them deeply. Our

hearts were overwhelmed with gratitude.

Another marvel, our friends still remembered us and kindly welcomed us home. People we barely knew said they had prayed for us weekly, some daily. Many pastors and mission groups invited us to speak at their various church functions. We could finally share our burdens with others.

A beautiful 92-year-old lady who had ministered to me so deeply just before we returned to the field, had faithfully prayed and sought God for us. She had taken the time to write, to call us to faithfulness, to listen to God for his comforting words, and to weep on the phone as she shared her love for us.

We had finished well because we had a strong group of intercessors standing in the gap for us and for the people of our island. This had been a work of God, and we stood in awe. In our weakness, he had been strong. In our time of sickness and spiritual attack, he had stood by our side. Through the tears and the joy, he had been faithful. God's people could greatly rejoice. ☪

*Written anonymously by an International Worker who served in the Asian Spice Region*

## Making Re-Entry Easier

Here are some practical ways to show you care:

- ✔ Several months in advance, find out if your workers need help in locating suitable housing. Church members may have an in-law suite or a vacation home available. Check with your Seamless Link Advisor (formerly known as District Missions Consultant) who may have access to helpful information.
- ✔ Help them obtain a dependable vehicle.
- ✔ Give them a quiet transition time. Before coming home, they have had to complete many projects, turn over responsibilities to coworkers, prepare presentation materials, set up itineraries for their time in Canada, and pack. They will arrive here physically, emotionally and sometimes spiritually drained. Encourage them to take time to rest during their first few weeks back.
- ✔ Stock their pantry upon their arrival.
- ✔ Treat them to special activities such as a spa experience or massage. Take them to a sporting event or something else they may be interested in. Give the woman a gift certificate and a day of shopping with a woman from the church who can take her to the best places for bargains and help with current styles.
- ✔ Treat their children to special church activities such as Vacation Bible School, youth retreats or a church camp.
- ✔ Have the pastor or a counselor from the church listen to them and their personal needs. Encourage them and pray for them.
- ✔ Help them make their time home as productive as possible. Help them explore college options for their children; help them with health-related appointments. Assist them in finding suitable living arrangements for elderly parents. Encourage them in their educational pursuits.
- ✔ Foster personal ties by matching them with a small group coming from the same stage of life.
- ✔ Discover their spiritual gifts and use them to enrich your local ministry. Use their expertise in reaching out to immigrants in the area. Consider them to be an integral part of the pastoral team.
- ✔ Develop friendships with them. Encourage members of your congregation to really get to know them. Hold a picnic or backyard barbecue so members can meet them in a relaxed atmosphere.

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