

ATTERIDGEVILLE TIMES

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WHERE THE JACARANDA TREE GROWS

Dumelang and welcome back to my newsletter! So much has happened since the last one I don't really know where to begin, so I thought I'd start with something that's been on my mind lately. The picture above is of a jacaranda tree. They bloom here in South Africa from late September to mid November, and depending on where you are in the Pretoria area you can still see a few of the signature purple blossoms hanging on. (Of course I'm not very forward thinking or photographically inclined, so the picture above is just from Google, not my own.)

As September moved into October and then November, as the days got warmer instead of cooler, as I began to miss home even more, I found this phrase stuck in my head – where the jacaranda tree grows. As much as I miss the view of the Catoctin mountains and the rainbow of fall leaves in Maryland I find myself appreciating Atteridgeville in small ways every day. The jacaranda blooms are hard to miss in the Pretoria area, and I found myself smiling every time I saw one of these beautiful trees cloaked in my favorite color. Though the homesickness is undoubtedly here, I've found that the beauty of Atteridgeville has snuck into my heart.

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How Do You Say It In Atteridgeville?

You may notice I've changed the title of this section a little bit – I'm no language expert, and a quick google search of Northern Sotho will show you that dialects and relationships to other languages like Pedi and Tswana abound, so I'm sticking with what I hear in Atteridgeville, whatever language it is! **Lerato – Love (the noun), and also my name!**

Moruti – Pastor

Music

What a Fellowship, What a Joy Divine

As'phelelanga by Vusi Nova

Amazulu by Amanda Black

Books

Just Finished

The Problem of Pain by C.S. Lewis

The Power by Naomi Alderman

Current

Between the World and Me by

Ta-Nehisi Coates

Astrophysics for People in a Hurry by Neil DeGrasse Tyson

Next

Americanah by Chimamanda

Ngozi Adichie

Things Fall Apart by Chinua Achebe



Imagine my surprise when I finally googled the jacaranda and found that they are not, in fact, native to South Africa! They are actually native to Central and Southern America and the Bahamas. The name jacaranda comes from the indigenous Guarani language, one of the official languages of Paraguay. Even though they are technically an invasive species, the jacaranda is celebrated here. The oldest trees were brought to Pretoria in the early 1800's, and today there are thousands across the city and the surrounding areas.

Perhaps they stuck with me because they remind me that we all make new homes wherever we travel. Here in Atteridgeville, or across the world; in Jerusalem, or Buenos Aires, or Kampuchea, home becomes the people and places you put your heart into. If the jacaranda tree is doing OK here, then I can to.

A DAY IN THE LIFE

One of the questions I keep answering is what I do each day here in Atteridgeville. Each day is different and manages to surprise me, challenge me, and delight me. Most days start like this; the sun wakes me up around half past 6,

shining bright and hot through the window above my bed. I get up to shower, and greet my host sister Ingrid and her son Boikanyo (he just turned 1 in September and is adorable and naughty). I head downstairs and eat breakfast- sometimes oatmeal with raisins, sometimes pap (a staple in South Africa made of ground maize meal) with leftovers from dinner the night before. I head out to work, sometimes around 8:15, sometimes around 9:30. I walk from my house on Manyorela Street past the place that sells kota (the most amazing food you will ever eat; give it a google because its impossible to explain in just one newsletter), past the Atteridgeville clinic. I walk on cleanly swept streets- Atteridgeville was named the cleanest township in South Africa by the government and people take it very seriously! I walk past the construction place around the corner and through the park. Every morning it seems like someone new greets me by name, "Dumela Lerato!". It's a strange feeling to have everyone know your name and you don't know theirs, but its also reassuring, like the neighborhood welcomes me. I slide open the gate to the church and greet the children at the creche (a preschool run by the church), and head over to the administration offices. Some days I help do finances on Excel or type up reports to go to the Department of Social Development, which partially funds the Diaconate Center. On Mondays I've started teaching the choir hymns from home with an old songbook (the blue With One Voice hymnal for those familiar). Tuesdays are meetings with the MAR Khosa Senior Citizens club members, and once a month a clinic where members can get their vital health signs checked- blood pressure, weight, glucose, etc. Wednesdays are bible study with Moruti Munzhelele. Thursdays are my Sheila's day, or my day off, because the senior citizens don't meet then, so I hang out at home with Ingrid, or we go shopping.

My beautiful host family (L-R) Ingrid, Keke, me, Boikanyo, and Paul. My host neice/sister (Ingrid's daughter) and I are wearing traditional Zulu garb for National Heritage Day. Paul, my host dad (Ingrid's father) is a jazz aficionado, and loves to blast some music through the house when he is home. Ingrid and I often watch movies together, or commiserate over how much trouble Boikanyo gets into now that he can climb stairs. Keke and I work on her homework together and she tries to teach me more seSotho!

I am so grateful to have them!



Fridays can be a mixed bag- sometimes I sit with the craft committee and crochet a granny square blanket (pictures to come in the next newsletter!), sometimes we go out for walks around the neighborhood, or do exercises in the church hall. Saturdays we might visit family or stick around the house and watch some movies. It feels like just about every Sunday there's a special service- last Sunday was the Annual General Meeting of the JM Masipa Parish. (The congregation the worships here is also called the JM Masipa Congregation- just a few months ago they became their own parish because they are so large; around 300 people are members if I recall correctly.) There were visitors from other parishes, a graduation ceremony from the creche, a brass band, and I got to conduct the choir in singing "What a Fellowship, What a Joy Divine"!

All in all my weeks are pretty full. When I first got here I found it difficult to have patience with the timelines; South African time is a real thing, and coming from the intense pressure of the American college environment I felt like I was doing nothing. In time I've adjusted; although deadlines are met and meetings are held, the relationships you have with people take precedence over the clock. Being late to work because I was conversing with a neighbor is no big deal. I've learned to love the moments of slowness, of stillness with others- it's a new way of being for me.



Koko Joyce and I celebrating National Heritage Day in style! PC: Koko Mags

Word of God

"For I am convinced neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."
(Romans 8:38-39)

God is a Grandmother

Before you get your theological pants in a twist, I will disclaim that I have no formal seminary or theological education, and I certainly don't claim to know the mystery that is the Living God. What I do know, though, is that I see God every single day I get to be with the Bakoko of the senior citizens club. (There are of course some men in the club, but they are vastly outnumbered by the women!) It began when I first arrived in Pretoria.

After a tearful goodbye to my cohort and a bus ride from Johannesburg to the Pretoria bus station, the first person I met was Koko Joyce, and the first thing she did was give me the loving grandmotherly hug that I desperately needed. Ever since I have been blessed to work with Koko Joyce (she is the general manager of the Diaconate Center after her already amazing work as a social worker, not to mention holding a doctorates of social work!)

Every day I come into work a granny greets me, asks how I am, laughs with me at my terrible seSotho, encourages me to bring more hymns and work on my crochet. I feel so loved and welcomed, so accepted and valued, just by these amazing women saying each day that they care about me.

When I came up with the title for this, I was thinking about the ways I know and struggle to know God in my life so far. Sometimes it feels impossible to have faith in a loving and merciful God when all I see and hear is the pain and brokenness of the world. Fires in California, mass shootings, natural disasters, civil wars, famine and illness. Wherever you look, if you are willing to face it, is the collective sin and pain of the world, and it is in these moments of overwhelming sadness that I reminded that though I may not understand, God works love and forgiveness and mercy through all things. God is a grandmother that loves unconditionally, that smacks your hand when it sneaks in the cookie jar because you'll ruin your dinner. God is the grandmother that comforts you in all your scraped knee woes, that teaches you crafts and baking, that lets you "help" hang the laundry on the line to dry. God is in all my memories of my own grandmothers (and great grandmother), and all the grannies I am honored to serve here.

Every time I get fed up, disillusioned, hopeless, every time I shake my fist at God and shout "Why?!", I get reminded that neither life nor death can separate us from the love of God, and that's enough to get me through to the next day.

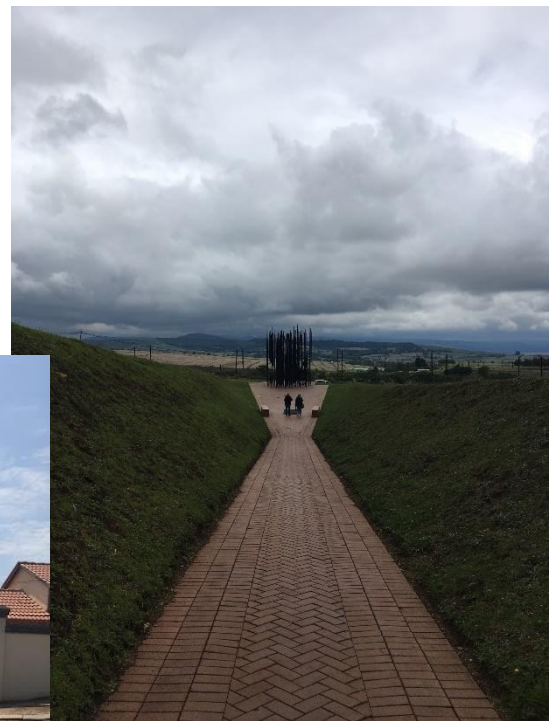
PICTURES



Celebrating my 22nd birthday with a beautiful skirt from the Marabastad Market! PC: My host cousin Tshepo!



The view from the park of the J.S. Mminele Diaconate Center and the J.M. Masipa Church! PC: Yours Truly



Visiting the Nelson Mandela Capture site again with my host family on our way to Durban. Though it's hard to see here, the black poles are a sculpture that was placed in honor of the 50 year anniversary of Nelson Mandela's capture. Created by Marco Cianfanelli, the 50 columns slowly form Mandela's face as you walk down the path. (Google the sculpture, it's worth it!) PC: Yours Truly

Want to hear more about the books I'm reading or the songs I'm listening to? Want to hear more stories from my time in Atteridgeville, or just want to chat?

Send me an email at toriyagmsa@gmail.com or drop by my blog at www.toriinsouthafrica.wordpress.com. You can sign up for updates for my blog or let me know if you want to get these newsletters when they come out!



Stay Well!
and
May the Peace of Christ Go With You
-Tori-

