

May 6, 2007

Boots, Blankets, and Trains

The cows on the hillside across the river are mooing in the sunset, Adam's in his hammock, Phoebe's building a super-reindeer by wrapping a tent bag around a toy's neck, Zeke's reading a book in his boots, I'm at the keyboard, and all is well.

It's fall here, with a few orange and red trees scattered on the mountainsides and cool nights, good for loads of blankets. No heater in our home yet (we might buy an electric one this week), so we keep blankets at easy reach all across the house for the evening and morning hours. Mid day it's still blazing, so we go through a funny routine of layers-on-layers-off-layers-on all day long.

It's Sunday, and the kids took a long nap while Adam and I listened to soothing music and read and sat around and thought and drank tea all afternoon. Times like these everything in life seems to fit in place and you couldn't possibly complain about anything.

I read a Garrison Keiller book I found in the small-town library here. It's a strange library—about half the books are in Africans, and the rest are mostly either once-long-ago-Best-Seller romances and spy novels, or gardening and cookbooks. There is one Shakespeare play not much on an English major's reading list. So I was surprised to find something from my Mid-west roots, of this radio-show guy I used to listen to as a kid, expounding on the quiet beauty of potlucks and county fairs. Somehow it was the perfect thing.

Work hasn't been anything special lately. Some people take out loans and better their lives, and some people are afraid of people laughing at them and don't, and sit at home letting life and the South African welfare system push them along. It's hard to motivate people who don't want to be motivated. But you gotta try anyway.

Yesterday we invited over a load of foreign volunteers who do various good stuff in this area. After a long morning walk and a lazy afternoon nap-time, we ate a huge potluck, made a campfire, and kept our kids from stealing each other's Legos. We've decided Saturdays should always include long chunks of social time like this. All us do-gooders need to remember we're human sometimes and quit trying so hard.

Today Zeke is walking around in his winter hat which he wears morning to night (not because he's cold, just because he's a goofy child with his own opinions of how life should run), and building lopsided cars out of Legos, and pleading "Mama come play!" It's good to know I'm not called to save the world and change a minimum 10,000 people's lives before I die. I'm just here to live and love. Today I'll help Zeke put his train back together when he runs it off a table. Tomorrow I'll make sure people make their three dollar loan payments on time. No need to consider one more noble than the other, if both are what I'm made to do.

Lawn Mower

In other news, we bought a lawn mower. It was an endless saga since we moved into our new home months ago—first our neighbors were going to lend us their mower, then it was in the shop, then they lent us a weed whacker that didn't work, then our landlord seemed to offer to mow, then he told us he absolutely would not, then the other neighbors said they didn't want to lend out their mower after all. It was a strange blow of neighborly unhelpfulness. Come on guys, do we really need to spend \$300 for something we could share?

But, as I often teach Phoebe, if somebody doesn't offer to share their toys, you can't make them. I'm sure they have their reasons.

Thankfully, our budget includes money for household expenses like lawn mowers. Funny, most donors probably think their money goes to more glorious causes. I sure appreciate, though, seeing my flower beds again, and knowing snakes (probably) aren't lurking in our yard. And our landlord is happy.

So we pushed and shoved that new electric mower back and forth through foot-tall grass and tried not to mow over the cord. It gave us a sense of adulthood. Here we are, mowing our own lawn with our own mower. We're big people now. Sometimes the most mundane gifts are the nicest.