

Remembering back to those days in elementary school P.E. class, I can specifically recall the days of the “Presidential Physical Fitness Tests.” I suppose they were a series of physical tests given for the government to know how physically fit the nation’s kids were. But what I remember most was the promise of a signed certificate if you scored high enough. There were tests like how many pull ups you could do (if you were a boy), how many sit ups you could do in a minute, flexibility tests (the test I hated the most), and the standing long jump.

Now, it has been a long time since I last remembered back to those particular tests, but just the other day, God brought to mind those tests and in particular the standing long jump, as a good picture of the process of just how Marla and I can do this whole “transition” thing successfully. So I want to spend a few minutes now, breaking this test down into its steps, and then seeing how these steps apply to us as we are getting ready to “jump” into a different culture.

Step one: THE PREPARATION

The first thing of significance to notice is that in order to do well in the standing long jump, one had to stop doing other things. As a kid I had to stop running around the gym, stop talking to the other kids around me, put me feet together, and look in direction that I was about to jump. This has immediate practical applications for Marla and I right now as we are now preparing to jump back into Brazilian culture. To do this successfully, we’ll have to stop doing other things. As the date draws nearer, we have to stop looking in other directions and concentrate on where we are going.

Step two: THE SQUAT

When further breaking down the one fluid motion of the standing long jump, the first thing that you’ll notice is that those about to jump begin to concentrate their strength downward into the core of their body. The knees bend down, the back bends forward, the arms swing down. The jumper becomes like a giant compressed spring. All other activities have stopped, and for a split second jumper is poised ready to exert the entire force of their body into one single action. To sneeze, laugh, cough or giggle at this point would ruin the entire effort.

In the application of our “jump” this step has several implications. In this step, it is not enough to simply stop doing other things, we must begin to gather and concentrate our strength. The bending down of the body, I see as the body of our family drawing together into itself. Trying to mentally prepare each other, trying encourage each other, and trying to prepare each other for what is to come. Practical things like packing and getting full nights of sleep are also part of this squatting down step. Packing bags because it can be a huge task that nobody else can really help with; and getting full nights as a means of conserving our health and strength for the explosion ahead.

Step three: THE EXPLOSION

This is where all the potential energy in the compressed muscles is suddenly released in one motion. It is fast. It is furious. The teeth grit, and sometimes the jumper groans. Can anybody say “airport?” Can anybody say “airport with 12 checked bags, 4 carry-ons, 4 personal items, two car seats and one double stroller?” There will certainly be times when this jumper will grit his teeth and I may even groan now and then.

Step four: THE FLIGHT

The flight in the case of the standing long jump is a result of the preparation, the squat, and the explosion. It is quiet, and it goes by quickly. The effort is still focused in only one direction... with one goal. Much like the flight of the jumper, the flight of the travelers will be a result of our preparation, squatting and explosion. Once we are on the airplane we won’t able to do one more physical thing to prepare for our trip. Gone away will be doubts of “what else do I need to pack?” and “who else do we need to see?” It will be quiet (as quiet as two squirmy little girls can be =). And we’ll be preparing for our landing.

Step five: THE LANDING

This is when total effects of the jumper’s previous actions take their toll on the jumpers body. The ground comes racing up to meet the jumper’s feet. His knees buckle under the impact and his hands go down to catch himself. But his focus must remain forward. If he looks back at this point, if he doesn’t take all of his momentum and fall in the direction of his jump, he’ll get a bad mark, and it won’t be a good jump. In the same way as we land, as we get our bags from baggage claim, as our bodies are fatigued from our previous actions and we collapse upon arrival: we must still remain focused on the reason why we left in the first place.

Step six: STANDING BACK UP

Though the jumper probably fell after his jump, he does not remain in the sand. He stands back up, and brushes himself off. Only then should he look back at the distance that he has covered, the friends that are behind him cheering him on. And for us, there will be a time when things calm down again, when things become quiet once more, when activities surrounding the making of this jump are finished and we’ll once again be rested. Only then can we look back if we are to be successful in this “JUMP.”

Step seven: LEAVING THE PIT

Transition is by definition: temporary. It is the time between two very different things, places or activities. We know that though it may be difficult, this time of transition will not last forever; and eventually we’ll be back on our feet continuing to walk this path God has opened for us.

We really do covet your prayers as we about to make this “jump.”

For the only Cause that matters,
Micah and Marla

Ps. The attached picture was taken at the Oregon coast a few days ago with Marla’s parents as on their recent visit.

*****Cliffnotes: The Standing Long Jump*****

In this brief email, I compared the transition that our family is going through to one of the physical fitness tests that I remember doing in PE class as an elementary school kid
