

If I were to pick one word that was to summarize this past month, it would be the word "suitcases." It's not that our 17+ suitcases just helped us arrive in Brazil, for it has been out of these suitcases we have been living for the past month. But now, finally most of them are being unloaded for the last time, and put away for good (relatively speaking that is). Yes, we've finally arrived at our final destination and it feels pretty darn good! But, just so you don't feel lost on where we've been... let me catch you up.

We arrived back in Londrina on the 14th of January. Londrina is the city where we had been working, and where our mission is currently headquartered. We spent about three weeks getting our feet back on the ground and preparing for our move to Maringá. To tell the truth, it was kind of strange being back. In one sense, it was like we hadn't been gone at all. When we went to visit some of the people in the church where we had worked, it was like we had never been gone. As it is still summer break here, I saw many of the guys that I had spent so many hours playing soccer with around the neighborhood. And just like they did almost 2 years ago, most of them would greet me simply with a nod and "hey Micah." As I walked around the neighborhood, I saw so many of the teenagers that had been at our church sitting in front of their houses. I just pulled my bike up and sat there on the curb talking with them for at least a couple hours. Yeah in some ways, it feels as if we had never been gone.

But there have been some changes too in our neighborhood and in our church. Since we left, the main pastor has been transferred, and a lot of familiar faces weren't at church on Sundays. The teenagers have gotten taller and many of their voices have changed. One of the teenagers that we were working with is pregnant, and at least one of the dear families has separated. One of the best guys that I've played soccer with, who had come to church and accepted Christ, is now selling drugs. And many of the group that I disciplined had gone through a phase where they wanted to leave the church, or had even left the church. But praise God, most of those have come back. I praise God not because they are back worshiping in the same church, but because they came back because of God's promptings. Knowing that they've grown to be able to discern the voice of God in their own lives is a tremendous blessing for me.

There were completely new things as well. Stepping on the field as the leader was something new. Though I have been handling many of the situations for months via e-mail; it is something different to be here physically. To have a working office and to be seeing first hand some of the intricacies of the situations that we are facing. Wow, it has put me on my knees a lot more these days. Also, our family has changed. When we left we had a one and a half year old. And we are finding out that a one and a half year old takes a lot less energy than a three year old and a 11 month old who is into everything. We used to tuck Samara in for the night, and then have a couple hours just for Marla and I. But lately, as soon as we've put the girls to bed, we look at each other and ask "do you just want to go to bed too?"

Our time in Londrina was good. We felt like we were cheating actually driving a car and not having to ride our bikes everywhere only to arrive at our destination covered with sweat. It has also been a lot hotter here than it was in Oregon, and that has taken some getting used to. And then as always there were those stacks of suitcases staring at us, reminding us that our home in Londrina was only temporary.

I met the moving truck at Camp Shalom's big storage room just outside of Londrina at 8am on Monday morning. We took a giant plastic sheet off of the pile that constituted what had been our furniture and barrels that we had left in Brazil. Doing this revealed that much of the wooden furniture had a fine layer of mold on it. Our couch had spent at least a year being the home to some mice and smelled horribly of urine. It took us about 2 hours to load the truck and head into Londrina to pick up the rest of our things. Once at the guest apartment, we had almost free rein to take what ever was there that we wanted. Sooo, we took some sofas, and brought a different bed, nightstands, a fridge, a washing machine and on and on. I had never seen magic like the mover demonstrated to fit everything that we had into his truck. It was truly a show. Suitcases went inside of book cases, there was not an unused space, crevice or crack to be found. If the

truck had been one foot shorter we'd have had to leave something behind. We left Londrina at about 4:30pm, and arrived in Maringá by 6:30. The movers unloaded as carefully and as quickly as they could. Our new house has a large covered two car veranda. Sooo, while all the furniture went inside, all the boxes and things that would eventually fill the furniture stayed outside where it was covered by a roof and protected by a high gate and security system. The moving truck left at about 10pm, and needless to say we were tuckered out.

Fortunately, Samara and Noelle spent most of Monday, Monday night as well as Tuesday morning with Tia Gwen. Gwen is another missionary lady here, who graciously offered to look after the kids while we helped with the move. Samara was so excited she couldn't help but dance all morning until Gwen showed up. Tuesday through today has all looked the same. Wake up, unpack boxes, play with the girls, unpack more boxes.... Sometimes the unpacking is broken up by things like fixing the cupboard, installing a water filter or kicking the washing machine trying to get it working. We are having to wash almost everything that was stored during our time away, it all smells terrible from being stored at the camp. The boxes and suitcases are disappearing and giving way to more walking around room. Last night we went to the church where we'll be working to get to know it a little better, and the night before we had our "we've made it!" celebration. Next week I'll be working with the main pastor to define what my weekly schedule will look like as I try to balance a family, field leadership and local church work.

Though we are facing some challenging situations, we've had so many confirmations that we are exactly where God wants us right now. Even though we are tired, we are thankful. We are so Thankful to be a part of a much bigger ministry; a ministry that includes each of you. It has been your prayers that have carried us through, and your support that has even made this possible, and we don't take any of this for granted. Our hearts are full of gratitude and praise to our Father who has all things in His control. As the emails from home keep rolling in, they sometimes carry with them tough news. Be it cancer or heart problems, I want you to know that you are in our prayers as well. Almost every time Samara prays, she prays that Gran Fran would get better. You guys are prayed for down here, and don't forget to keep us posted how things are with you as well.

With tired bodies and full hearts,
Micah and Marla

p.s. the first couple of pictures were taken at a park in Londrina. The second picture is of the moving magician and. The fourth picture is what bath time looks like now, and the final picture was taken this morning.

*****Cliffnotes: Suitcases*****

This email briefly touched on how this past month has been going for us. We've spent most of it adjusting to life back in Brazil while waiting for the house to be ready in Maringá for us to make our move. Some things in Londrina have been the same, and many things have changed.

I titled this email "suitcases" because we've been living out of 'em for the past month. We've now made our move and are finally starting to unpack them for the last time (relatively speaking that is). Thanks for your prayers... they have helped bring all the details together
