

This isn't how it was meant to be

Debbie Simpson, *November 2005*

Of course I expected it to be difficult back in 1998 when I first went to Madagascar. I didn't know anyone, I had never experienced life in another culture, and I couldn't even pronounce the name of the town I was going to! However, that was then — this is now. Six years of preparation later, to be exact. I thought I had equipped myself quite well this time.

I studied Biomedical Science at Glasgow, which qualified me to be a laboratory scientist. During my studies, I met some really down-to-earth people who were not doctors, nurses, pastors, or teachers, and yet they'd been involved in a short-term overseas mission. This dispelled all of my previous notions as to what 'made' a missionary and what types of jobs missionaries could fulfil.



Realising that, yes, God can use laboratory scientists too, I began to feel the challenge of short-term mission. This led me to the Good News Hospital, Mandritsara, Madagascar, in 1998. There I discovered that it was not my 'sacrifice' of 9 months that God wanted. He wanted my life. So when I left, it was with an unexplainable certainty of my return.

'Operation Preparation' began! Finally, in January 2005 I was on my way to Mandritsara, just over 6 years after I first left for Madagascar.

The fact that I had previously been in Mandritsara helped a lot, and prevented the initial culture shock that new missionaries often feel. However, the initial excitement of meeting old friends and settling into a 'home' after what had felt like years in transit, soon gave way to a 'So what's going on here?' feeling in the pit of my stomach. Things were not going as I had planned. In fact, all of my preparations seemed to have been in vain.

Haematology in Edinburgh involved sifting through 'normal' results to find an abnormality; haematology in Mandritsara involves sifting through the abnormalities in an attempt to find a 'normal'. I see parasites down my microscope that were only in textbooks back in the UK.

Bible college was great. However, putting what I learned into practice while on the mission field is definitely easier said than done. Accepting that I was the missionary and the one living 5,000 miles from home hasn't been easy.

Language learning! What language learning? People who live in and around the Mandritsara area speak neither French nor the official Malagasy that I studied, but the Tsimihety dialect. When I speak in Malagasy, the people usually understand me, but when they reply, I am completely lost.

I had not expected that and it was, and is, frustrating to say the least. I thought I had prepared myself quite well this time. This isn't how it was meant to be. And yet, somewhere deep down, I know that this is exactly how it was meant to be!

You see, while I was in the throes of preparing myself, God was the One making all of the really necessary preparations in my life. He knew the difficulties I would face, and so gave me a stubborn determination to keep going, despite the frustrations. He knew that there would be times when I would resent being the 'missionary' far from friends and family, so he prepared my heart with a love for the Malagasy people so that it would not be hard to develop good friendships with them. He knew that at times I would feel useless and incapable of doing anything worthwhile, so he planted in me an assuredness of my call and of his plan for me. I am certain, without a doubt, that part of that plan for me, is right here in Mandritsara.

This is exactly how it was meant to be.

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Urgent Prayer Need

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