



Walking Home



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Smile. Nod. Glance across the table of vegetables and point to the ones I want. The woman across from me tells me a number. I can't quite decipher if she's saying "ten Baht" or a word in Thai that I don't recognize. Grab the groceries, pay, smile, nod (because I've already forgotten the Thai phrase for "Thank You"). Feel a little bit of remorse for being the rudest missionary ever because I don't even know how to say "Thank You".

Welcome to Month Six in Thailand.

As I'm walking out of the market, carrying my bag of raw vegetables home to cook with noodles for dinner, my brain is processing a lot. Sometimes, the Race feels like it's moving so fast, I don't have time to take everything in. Walks help, but they're not too frequent.

This month, my team is working at a Language School in Songkhla, a town in the southernmost tip of Thailand. My afternoon had been spent making lesson plans with my teammates for the next two weeks, working on a couple of personal projects, and off-and-on daydreaming about life after the Race. It's only month six, but the finish line feels like it's in sight.

People said that the World Race starts to get hardest around this month, but I wondered if I would really feel that. My last five months had been far easier and more wonderful than I had ever imagined. I didn't feel tired, nor did I feel I desired a break. And besides, how could I ever grow tired of a life of adventure?

But maybe because life is slow here. Maybe it's because I'm dealing with a really tough language barrier. Or maybe it's because I'm so used to this Race lifestyle, of constant traveling and leaving and adjusting and processing, that I'm starting to grow numb to it. Anyway, whatever the reason, I'm starting to feel it. The wear-down.



I'm walking down the side of the road, passing a couple more food stands on my way home. I stop to look at some crepe-looking things, wondering if they're similar to the Roti Chanai that I had fallen in love with in Malaysia (they weren't, by the way). The woman gestured to me for my order, but I lifted up my hand as if to say "no thank you". I'm getting pretty good at this whole speaking through gestures thing.

It's hard to believe it's March now. I remember my misty ideas of Thailand from the view of Month One. That life in Costa Rica seems like a distant memory now, even though I look back at that time with the rose-colored glasses I once wore looking forward to this life. Sometimes, I can imagine that this moment, this seemingly insignificant passage of time walking home from the market, will one day be the very thing I romanticize in my head from a cold, gray office cubicle. But if this simple moment, one that I most likely will forget by next week, is going to be a golden moment a year from now, should I be able to enjoy it now in the same way I will in the future?

Home has been on my mind a lot. I think about my friends in New York and what their lives must be like right now. I remember fondly the charming coffee shops, the quaint

neighborhoods of the Upper West Side, the charm of Central Park, and the energy that hums from Times Square. I think about my family in Georgia, imagining how simple life will be come August when I can sleep in my bed, eat familiar foods, and drive down long highway roads alone with the windows down. I miss my old life dearly, and sometimes I feel my mind is so invested in my life back home, it's like I'm still in America and not all the way across the world in Southeast Asia.

Will life always be like this? Where I constantly crave what I don't have, without being able to enjoy what I have in the moment? I remember sitting at my reception desk in New York a year ago, Googling pictures of Thailand and fantasizing about a life with bright blue seas, gorgeous temples, stunning mountain ranges, and lots and lots of wild monkeys. Of walking down dusty roads through small villages, filled with the radiance of God's love, and smiling at curious children along the way. Of riding long hours on a bus and watching a part of the world go by that I've never seen before. By the time I finished my job in New York City, I was ready to leave on an airplane and never come back. But now, I'm sitting here on the other side of the world, fantasizing about the life I left behind.



I've made it out of the market now, and I'm passing by a small park with a couple of small Buddhist temples. I don't think too much of them, mostly because I got my pictures of them a couple days before, but my eye always wanders to the giant red one with dragons racing down the banisters. I stare at it, wondering how something so ornate could be found somewhere so ordinary like on the side of the road. I marvel at its intricate details, noticing the curvature of the roof and how the ends of the roof point upward. I wonder how something so stunning could seem so normal to me now. I could blame Epcot, but really, it's just because I've seen this temple several times before. Still, the way the red roof glowed in the auburn sunlight made me notice it in a different way than it had the other day, so I take a quick picture before continuing my walk home.

I chuckle to myself. My teammates tease me because they think I take a lot of photos. That's probably an understatement. I take an *exorbitant* amount of photos. Really, I have no chill when it comes to picture taking (I even caught myself last month taking pictures in my sleep). I could say it's because I have an appreciation for beauty around me, but I think it's really because I value memory. I like to think of life as a collection of memories; more than just the big moments, but also the small ones. A beautiful sunset is perfect, but I also want to remember the little palm tree on the beach that stood out to me, or the vibrant green of a grassy field in the afternoon sun, or the atmosphere of the small shack selling little golden Buddha statues. I like to think that if life were an accumulation of memories, then the width of the spectrum of colors and smells and feelings and images I take in must determine its worth. And so, I take photo after photo, sometimes dozens of the same picture, in hopes of nailing memories into my timeline so they don't slip away.



There's one surprising thing I've learned on my adventures around the world, and it's this: a sunset is always more beautiful after the sun goes down. Most people sit on the beach watching the little red ball fall into the ocean before walking on to their dinner plans, but I watch what the sky does afterwards. Sometimes, the whole sky turns purple, and for a couple of minutes, it feels like you're walking in a lilac cloud. Other times, the clouds soak up the leftover radiance of the departed sun and swirl colors together like a painter with his palate. And then there are some times when the sky is so filled with color and light, you realize just how big the sky always was, and how small you've always been standing under it.

I always take photos of sunsets, but sunsets are hard to capture. There's only so much you can take in on a simple iPhone camera. You can't seem to take in both the sunset and the soft orange glow it casts on you at the same time. And it's virtually impossible to capture the full grandeur of the canvas that is a full sunset sky.

I wonder if memory is like that. Do these simple, unimportant moments in my life become more beautiful after they've expired? Or like a sunset, is there more to appreciate in the moment than a memory can ever hold?

Is it possible that our memories are often better than real life?



The sun is going down as I'm nearing home, and a wistful melancholy has settled on the town as the events of the day fade into memory. By this point, a few stray dogs have noticed my bags of food and have been walking behind me for a couple of yards before retreating when they discover I only have vegetables. Home is in sight.

I wonder if this is just how the rest of the trip will be for me. I see another gorgeous temple, another lush mountainside, another radiant sunset, and yet the awe that once inspired me to stare out the bus window for hours upon hours basking in the adventure of this life is seemingly dormant. I imagine I'll continue to take thousands of photos, but I wonder how many of those will be of moments where I really felt present. Is it possible to reawaken the exuberance for life that I had at the beginning of this trip? Is it possible that before this trip is over, I can collect memories of times where I truly enjoyed every detail of the moment?

My thoughts circle around in my head as I begin to make steps towards my front door, but something stops me. The sky. I pause, noticing how still everything in this moment is. I feel

the twilight air around me – a soft lilac cloud, as warm as a smile from God. The sky is full of different hues, some colors complimentary and some shining alone. The road beside me is quiet, with only a few motorbikes passing. In the distance, I can see the charming sloped roof of a Thai pagoda.

And maybe, just maybe, in that moment I felt God hand me those rose-colored glasses, to wear for just a couple of seconds. And maybe, just maybe, I enjoyed the view.



At the end of the year, I'm going to do something with these memories. I don't know what yet. Maybe I'll make a photo book, or I'll frame my best pictures, or I'll make a video slideshow that highlights the best moments. Maybe I'll write more blogs, or share my stories in church classes, or sit in a dozen different coffee shops recapping my year with good friends. Or maybe one day, even a year from now, I'll sit on my computer in a cold, gray cubicle, staring at the pictures of sunsets and waterfalls and mountains and smiling children and mundane tasks like walking to the market, and I'll think: "Wow. What I would give to leave this boring life and just go back."

And maybe I will forget about all the thing I wanted then, like my bed or my family or my food or my friends.

Maybe, in that moment, I will finally appreciate the simple joy of walking home from the market.

"So I commend the enjoyment of life, because there is nothing better for a person under the sun than to eat and drink and be glad. Then joy will accompany them in their toil all the days of the life God has given them under the sun." Ecclesiastes 8:15



Check out highlights from Team Parkour's first week of ministry in Songkhla, Thailand!

