

Dear friends,

June 17, 2021

I have heard some people say that this year just flew by while others have said that it's dragging on even slower than 2020. Mine had been about average in velocity, but subpar in the list of events to report. Until now.

In looking back at the first half of this year, grief with bureaucracy was memorable and ongoing. Having been instructed that I need to receive my PCR test no more than 72 hours prior to my flight, I took the test 4 days before the flight to allow enough time for the results to come out. Would you believe the result came out that same night, meaning that it exceeded the 72-hour window?! It took good 20-minutes to explain this at LAX and I was only allowed to board after fully accepting the possibility that I could very well be turned away at the Korean customs. I cannot tell you how relieved I was when they barely glanced at it at Incheon Airport. Were it not for this worry hanging over me, I could have really enjoyed having the whole row on that flight. A good lesson on prayers and having the faith to rest in him afterwards. People who had to 2-week quarantine had given me all sorts of advice before I left for Korea, but I weathered it eerily well. It must be because all those years in PY, in hindsight, resembled one long quarantine. My Korean residence renewal went smoothly and instantly when they stamped it on the spot. I went to Korea intending to stay until I went to Taiwan, but so much documentation needed to be done in the US that I thought it made sense to just return to the US.

I arrived in the US on 3/31, after sleeping as I never had on an airplane thanks to the gift of having the entire row. The next day, thanks to the US having zero required quarantine or even any limitation for those flying in from other countries, I dropped by a nearby Rite Aid and was completely taken aback when the pharmacist said that they happened to have a no-show just then and administered my first Moderna shot. My family was off to Georgia the next day to my sister's place to see our new nephew whom we have not been able to see until then due to covid. I pride myself in being objective when it comes to little kids, but this kid is just unnecessarily adorable and excessively fun! I thoroughly enjoyed my month with them. It was extra special because I got to celebrate my birthday on the actual day with every single member of my family. I think the last time that happened was in 1992. After returning to my parents', I officially began the visa application process and the bureaucratic roadblock is simply outrageous. Apparently, you can't authenticate documents to prepare for visa application when Taiwan is in covid quarantine. And did I mention that these offices are in the US?

In the midst of continued uncertainty of my m-work, there appeared a glimmer of hope. More like a torch, really, and it all happened very suddenly. A GP m who had worked in Afghanistan in the past developed relationships with some refugees who had heard the gospel through another American m who works as a relief worker last year. As they receive little education there, if at all, she was seeking English teachers. So, I began teaching this small group of Afghans at the refugee camp on the Greek isle of Lesbos. My only reference of Lesbos was Sappho and her poems from college, but after some research, I learned that on this island of 115,000, there were 12,000 refugees from Syria, Afghanistan, etc. The number dropped to 6,000 after an incident of arson and resulting animosity from the local residents. Here is one news clip of the situation there, and this is before the arson!

<https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-europe-50814521>

Initially, the class time was set for 8AM(6PM, Athens time), a challenge for an anti-morning person like me. After the second class, when the students asked if we could move it to 7AM because one student had a schedule conflict, I panicked. There is a line from "Terms of Endearment", some of you weren't even born yet, that I never forgot and it goes something like, "Your greatest strength had always been knowing your weakness. Don't lose that now". And my unmistakable weakness is that I don't get rehumanized until 9AM. After further discussion, we settled on 7:30AM, but I was still worried. A lot. Well, not only did I managed to start class at 7:27 this week, but they were AWESOME! These students have stolen my heart after just 2 weeks. I proposed to have 10-minute one-on-one tutorials after each class since there are just 5 of them, but that went well into 40 minutes when one student

shared a summary of his life as a refugee. Another student was gushing with gratitude because he asked to join the English lessons offered at the camp, 5 times, but was rejected because the cut-off age is 15, and he is 17. The condition is less than ideal as students are having to zoom using their tiny smartphone screens, and some of them have children who run around and make noise while class is in session. I even had a student who was on the bus while taking part in my class. Most not having received formal education, note-taking only occurred to them when I suggested that it would help to jot down what I taught. I am neither a technophobe nor technophile. I learn and utilize what I need to but do not go out of my way to purchase or learn about the latest gadget or shortcuts. However, this being my first virtual teaching, I did consider getting some more advanced equipment until I realized just how tiny their screens are, and decided to stay loyal to my faithful old friend, whiteboard. One student said that he preferred the whiteboard because it made him happy to feel like he was in a real school with a real teacher. We are thinking of ways to reward perfect attendance & homework, perhaps with a tablet and headphones with a mic at the end of the term, so that they could study a bit more efficiently. Oh, how I would love to be the Santa that delivers. We will see.

Oh, in case all of that does not sound breathtaking, here is the jackpot – I get to teach teach them the Bible along with English! When I first began drafting this update 2 weeks ago, it was one of lament and petition as I was feeling helpless with these Taiwan visa people. But the return mails from them this week with untouched documents hardly registered in my annoyance radar because of my precious students. I make a decent editor but I am no proofreader as you might have noticed from past updates, but I can't even bother with editing right now so eager I am to share all of this with you.

Please do pray for me to be not just wake up on time, but be fully charged for my classes and just drench them with love and knowledge of God; for my students and their overall well-being as the conditions at the camp are quite miserable; but above all, that God would use this miraculous opportunity to equip these men and women to be his ambassador among the refugees.

Man, it does one good to be truly happy and alive again!

*Hannah*