**About Me – Amber Joubert**

I was born in 1977, the middle child of two brothers, to a loving Christian family. My father was a helicopter pilot, an officer in the Marine Corps and so we moved around every few years. I became a Christian at a very young age and my world was relatively stable and safe until I was 14 and my father passed away after a 3 year battle with cancer. In order to protect myself from the enormous grief and loss I started to build a wall around myself and my feelings which only put me into a deep depression because in order to lock out the pain, joy and happiness also disappeared. Once my father passed, everything that was familiar began to change, my family moved back to Virginia, we were no longer part of the military family or military way of life, and we had to deal with the new dynamics of our family with my mom now being a single parent. I regret that I did not make life any easier for her during that time because as a result of all my pain, I became depressed, suicidal, rebellious, and even ended up in a youth psychiatric ward for a time. I began to question all that I had been taught growing up in the church – “did God really love me, did He even know I existed or could He care about “a looser” like me?“

Thankfully through the grace of God and prayers of many people, God began to heal me and provide tangible love and support to me and my family through the hands of various individuals. I began to see God in a new light and develop a new level of trust in Him, His care for me, and His love. I got trained as an EMT at 16 years of age and enjoyed volunteering at the local rescue squad near my home. My junior year I was given the opportunity to go on my first overseas missions trip to Mozambique for two months. I absolutely fell in love with it and decided that God was calling me into missions.

After graduation high school, my family and I moved to Tampa, Florida where I attended the University of South Florida. Because of my love for the medical work I did at the rescue squad, I joined the local volunteer fire department there and decided to major in premed. Unfortunately no matter how hard I studied my grades in the science classes were not up to standard. I was really confused because I couldn’t understand that if God was wanting me to be a medical missionary, why wasn’t I getting the grades that I needed in order to make that happen. After a lot of prayer I decided to look into other fields of study and happened upon Social work. Once I took my first few courses in it I knew that was where I was supposed to be- not only did the other people in the classes have a heart to help others but I saw how it could be used to help people anywhere, even on the mission’s field.

I eventually went on to get my BSW (Bachelors of Social Work) with a minor in criminology and then my MSW. Along the way I interned for a semester at the Department of Juvenile Justice as a case manager, interned a year and a half at The Childrens Home as a play therapist/family therapist/sibling therapist, and after graduating was hired to work as a daily caregiver in one of the children’s cottages. Also, while in college I became heavily involved with Intervarsity, a Christian organization on campus and along with being involved in and leading campus Bible studies, I was afforded the opportunity to go on several different mission trips with them to Peru, Haiti and Mexico. One summer I lead a team of teenagers to India for two months with Teen Missions. Although I thoroughly enjoyed serving in all of these countries, no place held my heart like Africa did.

Once the time came for me to graduate, I felt like God was still calling me into the missions field but I didn’t know where or when exactly. I didn’t have any objects to serving God while single but I always pictured myself being married first. Then at Urbana 2000 (a huge missions conference for college students) I found what I thought was God’s answer- a missions organization that dealt with children in crisis (my passion) and who needed social workers with experience in play therapy to work in Africa! So I began the application process. However, since it had been 8 year since I had last been in Africa, when I heard that my church was planning a short mission to Zambia, I knew I had to go – one last short trip, to get my Africa dose in so that I could be patient with the rest of the training and application process.

I had no idea that that trip would change everything…..

**How we met**

It was on that trip that Jako and I first met. Jako was with the organization that we were going to serve with, Johan Beukman and The Jesus Loves You Project. Being from different cultures, countries, and knowing that our focus was to serve God during this short 2 week trip, neither of us were looking to “get involved” with anyone. We were part of a team and committed to the task at hand but before too long, team members, ministers, and even team leaders started to joke and comment on us being together. It was funny because we weren’t spending extra time with one another or excluding others but the more time passed the more it seemed like God might be doing something. Near the end of the trip, we took some of the local pastor’s wives home and on the way back from doing that, finally had the chance to talk, share our hearts, and learn a bit more about each other. What we learned really surprised us – we each had similar views on dating (both of us wanted something to happen but weren’t going to go out to look for it since we knew God was calling us into missions and we could never pick someone who was called to the same thing). We also had similar hearts for where we felt God was calling us and how he was calling us to serve. That talk really got us thinking and our hearts began to join. After that trip the team had a few days of sightseeing in Livingstone where the two of us were able to talk and get to know one another more and by the end of our time there, with the blessing and prayers of all of the team members, leaders, and ministers, we felt like God was doing something and calling us to be together, but we didn’t know when and how.

I (Amber) was already committed to start the candidate program at the other organization a few days after getting back to the States and there were other details that would need to work out if God was really calling us to be together so at the airport we said goodbye and promised to stay in prayer and see what God would do. I went to the candidate training program, was honest about the most recent “happenings” with the trip to Zambia and told them how I didn’t know how that would affect things with them. They agreed to give me a few weeks with them to think and pray about things but when the time came for me to give them my decision, Jako was on another outreach in Zambia where we were not able to be in communication. I felt like God was calling me to join Jako in ministry in Zambia but had to go out in faith to state that, not knowing if he even felt the same. In the special way that God works, God was also revealing things to Jako on that outreach and when he got home and called me, the first thing he asked was “Will you marry me?” Of course I said yes! The organization was great to let me finish out the month there with them, getting great exposure to their training material and having access to a huge body of missions’ personnel (many on furlough or retiring after spending their best years on the field). Five months later we were married in South Africa (after our plans for getting married in the States fell through) and we have been in love, actively serving with this mission ever since.