

the Carlson



Chronicles
December 2016

"How do coffee and the Gospel work together?" My uncle asked as we ate ice cream in rural Nebraska. Chantal, one of our twenty-six Coffee Scouts, helps to answer this question. Kristy and I took the drive across log bridges and dirt roads to Ninga Hill to meet her and to witness the impact she was making on her neighbors. Ninga is so rural that not even bottles of Coke reach it. To reach these hard working farmers with the news of best farming practices and the Gospel, we knew we needed an insider. The Coffee Scout program was birthed in 2014 and quickly become our open door into the lives of the farmers we work with. These young Coffee Scouts teach, train and share the Good News while creating an environment of hope. Chantal demonstrates just how real this is. She is a local, from Ninga hill. She has been married for three years to Olivier, a local secondary teacher, and has a three-year-old son Guycezar. As we walked through neighbor farmer fields with Chantal we heard story after story from families encouraged by the work she is doing on their hill. Chantal began by listening to farmers and then by implementing solutions to problems alongside them. What emerged were nurseries of shade trees and use of waste and organic material to grow better coffee and food crops. Chantal is being trained by our lead agronomist Epapharus who is a soft-spoken man of God. What once was an unreachable hill is slowly becoming a thriving community of hope and light.

A Giving Opportunity

We have a need that we would like you to consider helping with. After a dramatic 2015 and an intense 2016 in Burundi, we need to strengthen our monthly support. As the crisis in Burundi has intensified, inflation has escalated, pushing our cost of living steadily up. The company is still in its infancy stages and has not (as yet) been in a position to provide for our monthly needs. We are committed to Burundi and to impacting the rural poor of Burundi with the Gospel and we can not do it without your help. We strongly believe that coffee can be an amazing vehicle for Him to bring change and hope to the Burundi coffee hills.

We need an additional \$1,000 in monthly support and would like you to consider helping us meet that need. Would you help with a year-end gift or consider a monthly commitment? Use the enclosed card or give directly online using details on the card.

www.donations.navigators.org * Ben and Kristy Carlson * Nav ID # 21910211 * Have questions? bjkcarlson@gmail.com



Chantal with her family on Ninga hill.

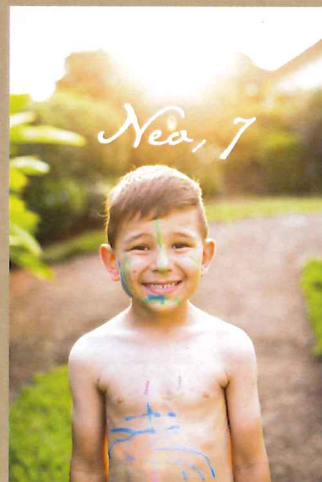
Kid's Corner

Our kids continue to surprise us with their resilience in the face of lots of changes. Thank you for praying for them as they transitioned in and out of three schools and two countries in 2015-16.

Neo faces some substantial learning challenges, which is why we are so grateful that God has provided an Occupational Therapist (OT) to work with him for the month of January. While she is here she will train a permanent classroom aide for Neo. Please pray for the right person for the aide job!

Ari often cracks our family up when we are tired or tense, she brings us so much joy and fun.

Myles is a fun kid. He is everyone's friend and a sensitive soul. Please pray that he would grow to trust Jesus more.



thoughts from Kristy on "home" this Christmas...

Last Christmas we celebrated our Savior's birth in Durban, South Africa. We were in the little house that God had provided for us there, a few blocks from Myles' school in a great part of town. I called it our "pop up house." Ben and I sat on a couch that a neighbor had given us. We had four-month old Ari propped between us. The boys lounged on a bare mattress that they had dragged near the tree. It was easy for them to move the mattress around the house whenever they wanted to because it was made of lightweight foam and had no base to rest on. The boys had been sleeping on the floor for over seven months as we hoped for the violence in Burundi to pass. They liked it because we had convinced them it was like camping. We even played the crackling sound of a campfire on an iPad for them all night long. On Christmas morning, as soon as the manger story was told and the paper swept away, I started to pack. In two days we were moving out of the pop up house and back to Burundi. In Burundi, a pile of boxes also waited for us.

A few months earlier during our October visit to Burundi, when Ari was just six weeks old, we had been told we needed to move houses. The owners of our house in Burundi wanted to move back into it and retire. As 450,000 Burundians fled the country in the face of violence, our landlord wanted to move back. I could not believe it. "God, why?" escaped my lips several times as I packed up the house we loved, not sure where we would be moving to.

One night during that October visit, we moved the kids into a safe room because bullets began to fly close to their bedroom windows. We were all tucked in like sausages but I lay awake listening to the sound of gunfire. Was this a sign that we should leave Burundi permanently? Was peace ever going to return? Were we just being "stubborn" and keeping our kids in danger unnecessarily? Despite my questions and true to His goodness, God provided a new house the very next day. Even with this amazing provision, I was angry. Nothing in me wanted to pack any more boxes. A few days later we moved, and without even sleeping in the new house once, we headed back to our pop up house in Durban.



All three kids on the bed we used as a couch in our "pop up house" in Durban, South Africa.

Back in Durban, we made plans to close down our time there and return to Burundi after Christmas. Fifteen days before our scheduled move, a new wave of violence struck Burundi. Again, I asked God "Are we making the right choice? Should we change course, again?" I felt God asking me to identify my biggest fear. As the answer came to me, tears welled up in my eyes, "I'm afraid that we are making the wrong choice for our kids. I'm afraid they'll end up hurt and I could never live with myself if they were." I felt God gently say, "Give them to me. I've got them. In fact, they've always been mine." This was not a guarantee of their safety but a reminder of their belonging. With this reminder, I was finally at peace about returning to our tumultuous home.

As we approach Christmas this year in Burundi, I am reminded that our ultimate home is tucked away with Jesus. In some ways I'm grateful that we've lived in so many houses in the last five years, because each home has represented a unique season in our lives. Last Christmas, we were in a season of big decisions and looming unknowns and it's a joy now to look back on all that God has done since then. Whatever you face this Christmas season I'd like to remind you that just like God has our kids, He's also got you and me. He's always had you. In fact, you've always been His.

*But now, God's Message,
the God who made you in the first place, Jacob,
the One who got you started, Israel:
"Don't be afraid, I've redeemed you.
I've called your name. You're mine.
When you're in over your head, I'll be there with you.
When you're in rough waters, you will not go down.
When you're between a rock and a hard place,
it won't be a dead end—
Because I am God, your personal God,
The Holy of Israel, your Savior.
I paid a huge price for you:
all of Egypt, with rich Cush and Seba thrown in!
That's how much you mean to me!
That's how much I love you!
I'd sell off the whole world to get you back,
trade the creation just for you.
So don't be afraid: I'm with you.
Isaiah 43:1-5 MSG*