



**The Christian life is a journey.**  
*TrailNotes speaks to forward movement, paying attention to the "landscape" we are passing through in this trail-laced wooded hillside and valley, not to mention the world beyond. TrailNotes is an unfolding, ongoing journal of the people who share the trail with us and the things we're learning and doing.*

**ElderTalk**      **How did it happen?**      *JON VEGA*

*"The Lord your God has blessed you in all the work of your hands. He has watched over your journey through this vast wilderness."* Deut. 2:7

Next time you see me, you'll be looking at my hands. They have a few scars that tell some stories, they have a strong grip, and...they shake. It's a family trait that I started to notice in grade school. It also gets worse when I'm tired or stressed—not a superstar trait for the medical field.

My aspirations of being a medevac flight nurse evaporated on my first flight due to major motion sickness. So how did a middle-aged man with shaky hands, serious motion sickness and asthma end up on a medical in the middle of sub-saharan Africa?



*No "shaky hands" here! This is "Dr." Jon Vega, RN, at a "closing."*

**1994:** I was at the Pontiac Silverdome in the cheap seats surrounded by 50,000 other teens and I was not paying attention. Then I heard the speaker say, "Bow your head. Lord, some of these young folks are being called to ministry... If it is Your will for them to serve, give them a sign. Amen."

At that minute I felt a certainty. I felt a calling. I felt the Holy Spirit affirm what the speaker had asked. So I tested the Lord by asking for a miracle. My "fleece" was to win a drawing that included every student in the conference—a 0.002% chance of success. I wanted to see how serious God was about including me in His plans. And yes, I won the grand prize!

*The LORD makes firm the steps of the one who delights in Him; though he might stumble, he will not fall, for the LORD upholds him with His hand.* Ps. 27:23-24

After high school, I spent eleven years switching in and out of different colleges and programs. I spent an additional eleven years at three different hospitals getting my nursing degree and then honing my skills in various acute care units. I thought I was ready! I raised a family, gained weight, and waited...and waited.

By 2016 I was out of clinical practice. I was at a desk job and I was getting tired of waiting. What was taking so long? I was sure the Lord had passed me by for missions. I felt left out. I felt like a failure. All my own attempts to get into the wider world for medical missions never materialized. On **January 25 2019 @ 12:06 pm**, I got an email from Dr. Tim Bartholomew: "Hey! You always ask if we need help when we're in town. We are out of options and we need a nurse on short notice! You said this was your calling. Can you do it?" So I prayed for another miracle, but I knew I was going. I called Tim back and said yes.

*(continued on page 2)*

**Gems**

**From**  
**Judy**  
*JUDY NICHOLS*



**LOVE**

This month we celebrate Valentine's Day. Stores are full of heart-shaped candies wrapped in red or pink, and greeting cards picturing hearts and flowers. Television commercials and sale flyers urge us to demonstrate our love by buying anything from perfume to diamonds, to give to the ones we love.

As we consider Jesus, the One Who loves us the most, and Whom we love above all others, candy, and cards, and flowers, and even diamonds seem shallow expressions of that kind of love.



The Scripture says, "God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." (Romans 5:8) And Jesus told His disciples, "Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends." (John 15:13) Love that sacrifices itself for the good of another is true love indeed.

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## How did it happen? *(continued)*

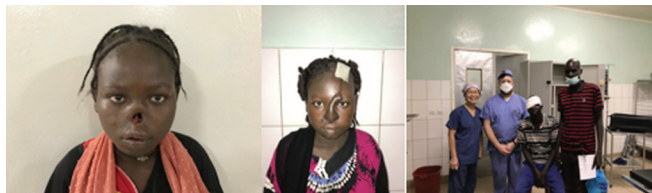


Although the 2019 trip was a success, the gaps in my training, and my physical endurance were humbling. I came home ready to learn more, but no one seemed to want an out-of-practice nurse. I left my desk, took an outpatient job, and prayed. Then 2020 rolled onto the calendar.

*“Humble yourselves before the Lord, and He will lift you up.”* James 4:10

My outpatient unit was soon closed. I was looking for anything and finding nothing. The lockdown began and I was running out of options. Yet, in the midst of the chaos, a call went out for all available nurses with any experience to help on the hospital floors. They assigned me to the ICU as a helper, an aide who could also give medications and learn the ropes while working hand-in-hand with experienced critical care nurses. My shaky hands were back with a steady handed guide to ease me back into a higher level of clinical practice.

*“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose.”* Romans 8:2



Almost two years later, I got another email from Dr. Tim: “Are you available and ready to leave in three months? We need a third member for the medical team. Remember, you said this was your calling.” With less time, more hoops to maneuver through, a generous church family, an ever-supportive wife, an understanding boss, the expert hands of their travel agent, and a man in DC named Patrick...I barely made it on the plane, but I was on the plane and headed back to Africa. Ten days and three COVID tests later, I was escorted back home safely after another successful trip.

So, how did a middle-aged man with shaky hands, serious motion sickness and asthma end up on a medical team in the middle of sub-saharan Africa? Much prayer through many hands (shaky and steady) to a God who watches over our life’s journey...even when our feet seem lost in the wilderness of life.

## Love *(continued)*

How do we reciprocate a love like this? What can we possibly give to God as an expression of our love for Him? What could He receive from us that would please Him the way expressions of love from other people please us?

Hebrews 11:6 says, “Without faith it is impossible to please Him,” so truly trusting God is a way we can demonstrate our love for Him. Abraham received a promise from God that he would have a son and Abraham believed God. He then waited twenty-five long years, during which he “did not waver in unbelief.” (Romans 4:20) At the age of one hundred years old, Abraham and Sarah finally had their son of promise, yet not nearly all the great saints of old received their promises.



Hebrews 11 goes on to say, “All these died in faith, without receiving the promises (11:13) yet they are celebrated as those who pleased God. I believe that when we steadfastly trust in Jesus regardless of our circumstances, God is pleased with us. Peter reminds his readers, “If, when you do what is right and suffer for it, you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God.” (I Peter 2:20). God does not take pleasure in seeing us suffer, but is pleased when we trust Him in the midst of it.

Spending time with someone is another way of demonstrating love. Psalm 22:3 says that God is enthroned upon the praises of His people. Imagine God settling into His favorite, most comfortable chair—our praises—and enjoying our company. Then we talk to Him in prayer, which the Scripture likens to the fragrant aroma of incense. (Psalm 141:2, Revelation 5:8) And because we love Him, we desire to obey the things He tells us. Jesus said, “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word, and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him.” (John 14:23)

Valentine’s Day celebrates romantic love with trifles and tokens. We celebrate the God who loves (I John 4:8) with the building blocks of holy intimacy—faithful trust, worshipful fellowship, prayerful communication, and willing obedience.



### FEBRUARY 2022

- 5 Women of Grace meeting 10:30 am to 12 noon.
- 6 Pastor Eric Byrom preaching on I Cor. 11:2 -16.
- 13 Pastor Eric preaching on I Cor. 11:17-34. 
- 18-20 Mid-year Teen Conference (D.T.I.).
- 19 Kingdom Men’s Breakfast at McDonald’s, 9 am.
- 20 Pastor Eric preaching on I Cor. 12:1-31a.
- 27 Elder Jadaé Fox preaching on I Cor.12:31b -13:13. 

## Andy Brubaker: News from Japan

### 日本からのニュース

Greetings from Japan and Happy New Year. Thank you for taking the time to read the latest edition of my newsletter!

As always, I hope this will be informative. I will be sharing the experiences of living in a foreign country, encouraging you in your own walk with Christ, and keeping you up to date when you wonder how Andy is doing.

#### 2021 Overall: 2021年全体

The time in Japan the past year has not been much different from what was found as the new normal in 2020. Everybody (students and teachers) had to wear masks at all times, wash hands or use sanitizer before entering buildings (schools or stores) and social distance. At this point for me, it is now normal to go out of my apartment with a mask on rather than without one. This is more easily accepted in Japanese culture as mask wearing was very common during the flu season for years prior to current times.

Through our employer, we were given the opportunity during the summer to receive the vaccine, which I personally said yes to receiving. Japan as a whole was hesitant at first, but now collectively is willingly receiving the vaccine. Cases have also been relatively low in the nation with spikes occurring during the Tokyo Olympics and recently for New Years. Overall, the cooperation of the Japanese people via masks and social distancing, while not agreed with entirely, have helped to keep things maintainable.

However, this has limited the opportunities to travel outside our prefecture and to serve outside of our workplace. Recently the restrict-



ions requested by our employer have been lifted. That said, most of the time during the past year was focused on my students, working as hard as I could as a foreign language teacher through the Wakakusa program.

#### Teaching English: 英語を教える

The children have been wonderful as always. Certainly there are days that are harder than others, but overall I am truly thankful to have the opportunity to be the teacher of these students.

A praise for the year: both of my sixth graders last spring and my high school one-on-one student last fall passed their English examinations! While the students did the work, I praise God that I had the privilege of being their teacher during the season of their major English accomplishments.

The first grade class I had gained in June of 2021 is quite a challenge. For one, there are more students in a class than there ever has been before, so I am greatly outnumbered. (18-1). They are all unique personalities that can make each class unpredictable. It is not uncommon to have at least one student sleeping in class (or more!) while other kids are continually out of their seats to talk to someone across the room. But overall they are hilarious and not only surprisingly witty, but also smart in English. They are also very affectionate, as they constantly want

to be hugged, play hide and seek, or ride on my neck/back like a “koala” —their word!



I also inherited both fourth grade classes, a grade I had not taught at all the previous two years. I have come to learn that fourth grade is the time when students really start to rock the boat in terms of classroom behavior. It is all a part of growing up for them, but it certainly has its challenges in willingness to learn and participation in activities. With the assistance from my Japanese coworkers, which I truly appreciate having, I am able to take on this new experience to learn and grow as a better English teacher.

#### Music Returns: 音楽のリターン



In order to better minister to the Japanese people, I bought a guitar last October. During the Christmas season, I took my guitar to my classes  
*(Continued on page 4)*

## Japanese Newsletter *(continued)*

### 日本のニュースレター 続く

to play “We wish you a merry Christmas.” The looks on their faces and responses made it all worth it.

**What's Next? 次は何ですか?** Many people have been wondering if I will be returning to the States. The short answer is: not yet. Since last April, during the start of the third school year, God had made it apparent to me that this was my last year at this program. But where will I go next? The answer became clearer that another part of Japan had fallen on my heart: Kobe.

Kobe is a port city near the former capital of Japan. Many foreigners reside there. I made friends with many other foreigners my age living in Japan through the Young Adult Ministry group of the Kobe Union Church on Zoom. Thus I was made aware of the opportunities to serve and connect in other parts of Japan.

Currently I am searching for my next job as an English teacher. Change is coming, and I am ready to step up to it.

**Final Thoughts: 最終的な考え** It has certainly been a challenging year in many ways for everyone. I am thankful that through the hardships, it has helped me to build up my character and sharpen my conviction as to why I am here in Japan in the first place. With this transition to another city, not knowing where I will work, whom I will meet, and what God will do with me when there, is terrifying to say the least. But at the same time, as the day approaches that I leave where I am, I can once again get out of where I have been comfortable and put my faith in God and not my own control. This is the biggest lesson I am learning now.

In reflection, I can thankfully say I have acquired some skills in teaching English as a foreign language, Japanese language usage, and guitar through my time in Tamur City. I believe in my heart that this is something God has set a purpose for in the future for me. I have to fine-tune the skills as best as I can, but more importantly, keep myself dependent on God and the vision He has for this life and opportunity I have been given in Japan.

Thanks for your continued prayers. I hope to keep you posted again soon with the coming transition.

### Prayer Requests: 祈りのリクエスト

1. Continue to pray for the hearts of the residents of Japan to be receptive to God's love.

2. Pray that I have the faith and financial support to adjust to make the transition to Kobe or wherever the Lord wants me to serve next.

3 . Pray that I continue to strive to be a better teacher for each of my students in these last few months and for the students I hope to teach afterwards in Kobe.

4. Pray that I continue to commit to the Lord on improving my skills with the guitar, Japanese language, and effective but fun English teaching.

5. Pray for strength for the Team, churches, and ministries in Japan as we continue to serve on the front-lines of the mission fields of Japan.

6. Pray for continued safety for our families back home, students and their families, coworkers, and ourselves.



### Ed.'s note:

*Are you sensing an interest in teaching in Japan? Rebekah Stefaniuk is the person to contact. Kay Berry can provide her email address at: [gracefellowship01@gmail.com](mailto:gracefellowship01@gmail.com) In addition to God's direction, A college bachelor's degree is one requirement.*



Rebekah Stefaniuk  
(Coordinator for the Wakakusa English Program)

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Eric Byrom	Presiding Elder / Pastor
Jadaé Fox	Elder
Andy Heining	Elder
Jon Vega	Elder
Rick Widener	Treasurer
Kay Berry & Karen Gates	Women
Lori Barker	Missions
Andy Heining	Worship
Judy Nichols	Prayer Chain
Kay Berry & Jadaé Fox	Office
Kathy Barth, Manfred & Janet Adalem	Communion
Andy Anschutz	Sound/Power Point
John and Donna Kurtz	TrailNotes