

Be Still

Kami (kah-mee)
God

Lorna

My most difficult time in Japan was not early in our stay, although there were cultural challenges as well as adjustments and frustrations during that period. Even two major crises with my mother's health, though traumatic, were overcome without too much agony. However, the events of late summer 2000 were quite an ordeal for me.

On Wednesday, August 16, 2000, I received a long-distance call from my old boss in California. He was creating a new position with the company and wondered how much longer my stay in Japan would last. He had designed the slot with me in mind.

I told him I was scheduled to complete my assignment on the 29th of December, but I might consider leaving earlier. He said he would prepare the formal offer and fax it to me the following week. At the end of the conversation, I was ecstatic!

The next day, Larry had an appointment to meet with his boss at 4:30 and asked me to wait in my office until he was finished. I expected the conversation to take about half-an-hour, but 5:00 came and went. So did 5:30 and 6:00. This seemed strange since my meeting with my boss had taken all of fifteen minutes. But I assumed they had probably started late.

Finally, around 6:30, Larry came into the office. I could tell by the look on his face something was wrong.

"Okay, what is it?" I asked

He didn't try to soften the blow. "I've been extended until at least the end of February," he said quietly.

"WHAT?" I shrieked. "Why?" (Had I been rational at this moment, it would have been easy to figure it out. But I was too shocked to think straight.)

"You know I'm the only electrical engineer in the group," he said with a sigh. "Well, most of the remaining issues have to do with the control systems, and that's my specialty. Also," he added, "I'm the water expert here. There are still some critical issues to be ironed out with all the lagoons."

"But what about my job?" By this time I was close to tears.

"I don't know, Hon. If you still want to leave early, I'll support you. I know how hard this is for you. Let's get out of here and we can talk more about it."

The drive home that night, however, was one of the few made in total silence. I was still processing the news, and he was allowing me space to do so.

When we finally got in our door, he put his arms around me and held me. Then the tears started.

"I realize how great a sacrifice it was for you to leave your job in California and come here. And I know you had to deal with most of the early issues after we arrived. It's not fair to ask you to give up something as important to you as this job again, especially when I know how perfect it is for you. So I won't. I'll support whatever decision you make. In fact, I think you should take the position."

If he hadn't been encouraging or had demanded I stay, I probably wouldn't have. But he was so reasonable and comforting it made my decision even harder.

With the issue still unresolved, we went to bed. I was too upset to sleep. After tossing and turning for an hour or so, I finally got up quietly and went to the living room.

I knew what my answer would be. Three months of separation had barely been acceptable, but we were now talking about five and a half — or longer. This was not even worth considering. I would stay.

The realization hit hard. I allowed myself a good old fashioned temper tantrum. I punched the sofa pillows and sobbed. My grief was overwhelming. After what seemed like a long time, I finally wore myself out.

Now I am a person of faith, and one thing I believe in most is prayer. Unfortunately, it wasn't the first thing I thought of when getting this news. But now that the storm was ebbing, it occurred that perhaps I should pray about the matter. My one-sided conversation sounded a lot like this:

"Okay, God. I did what you asked. I moved to this country where I have felt out-of-step. I have had to deal with not speaking the language, not wanting to drive for fear of dropping into one of those scary ditches, living in a Japanese neighborhood where communication with most of the neighbors was impossible, being stared at everywhere I've gone, being far away from friends and family, missing important occasions. Then you gave me this perfect job. The timing seemed ideal, and I haven't been as happy since we got here.

"What did I do to deserve having all that promise snatched away? Why are you doing this? How could you?..." On and on it went. I scolded. I pleaded. I begged. I complained.

I finally ran out of steam in this direction too. Then it occurred to me to perhaps just listen. After all, prayer is supposed to be two-sided. It was hard to settle down, but by now I was pretty emotionally exhausted. Finally, in the quiet I heard, "*Be still and know that I am God.*"¹

However, at that precise moment it felt a great deal more like, "*Sit down. Shut up. Pay attention. I have been in charge all this time and I still am. Keep trusting me. I know what I'm doing.*"

I guess I should have pulled myself together, dried my tears, stiffened my upper lip and accepted my situation. I didn't. I was still grieving, hurt and angry. But I did go back to bed and got a little sleep before work the next day.

In the morning, I told Larry I had decided to turn down the job. Talking about it still hurt. We made our way to work where I sent an email to my boss in California informing him of what had occurred.

Just before noon, the mail arrived. There was a CD² I had ordered a couple of months earlier. It had been backordered, so its appearance that day was a surprise. I had bought the disc because of one song and had never heard the rest of the music.

Larry arrived for lunch, and I showed him the new album. I wasn't really in the mood for socializing (unusual for me) and suggested we grab something quick and return to my office to listen to it. He agreed.

I was amazed when we finally played it. In addition to the song I had wanted (David Friedman's "We Live on Borrowed Time"), one of the other songs ("Trust the Wind") had the line "There's a place you're meant to be, and you're already there..." Another was called "We're Not Lost, We're Here." Still another was called, "Help is on the Way." Actually, it felt as though the entire album had been written specifically to address my situation.

¹ Psalm 46:10

² *Lifelong Friends* by the Turtle Creek Chorale

As each song began, we listened to the lyrics and laughed and then cried. It was as if I were being reminded we were, indeed, where we belonged. The verse from the previous night kept running through my head, "*Be still. Be still.*"

In the afternoon I had a chance to talk to Larry's boss, "Bowtie" Dave, who was stunned to learn how unhappy I was about the situation.

"I know exactly why you decided to keep Larry on. In fact, in your place I'd have made the same decision. But I still don't think it's fair," I whined. "After all, we've been here the longest. We deserve to go home. And I just turned down a great job offer."

"I thought you, more than anyone on the project, were really enjoying Japan. I assumed you'd be happy to have a couple of extra months here." He was genuinely surprised at my reaction. "I'll see what I can do about changing things, but I've already turned in the schedule," he offered.

"No, I've told them I won't be coming home. And Larry is the only one here who's qualified to finish the control and water systems," I conceded.

All day Saturday I consoled myself by listening to the album.

On Sunday we went to church. We were surprised to find Marty Nystrom and his group from the US setting up in the sanctuary. It seems they had called a few days earlier and offered to perform for us since they were in town.

It was a meaningful service with lots of music. Marty wrote the contemporary Christian song "As the Deer," one of the most popular in contemporary circles throughout America. He explained how he came to compose it. He was in a place similar to where I was — doubting and confused. The words of another Psalm seemed to speak directly to him.

Near the end of the service, Marty quoted one, and only one, additional piece of scripture: Psalm 46:10, "*Be still and know that I am God.*" Close by, I could hear the Japanese translator whispering into the microphone as an echo, "*Watashi-wa Kami-ga desu...*" (I am God.)

I was proud of Larry. He didn't burst out laughing or poke me in the ribs, but he did turn to me and raise an eyebrow as if to say, "Are you listening?" I actually chuckled a little. It seemed like strange timing. God was nagging, but it was only the start.

A couple of weeks later I returned to California to hire a caregiver for my mother. The next morning I attended services at our home church in San Juan Capistrano. To my delight, a friend was the guest speaker. Unbeknownst to her, a professional singing group, whose members attend our church, had planned a piece of special music as a gift for her. When they began, I started to weep. The piece they chose for that morning was a setting of Psalm 46:10, "Be Still and Know."

When God is trying to get my attention He is relentless!

I discovered the same day that our women's retreat, originally scheduled for the weekend I was returning to *Osaka*, had been moved ahead a week meaning I would be able to attend. I was especially pleased as the leader was a very dear friend, Sr. Kathy. I was not only anticipating being with the other gals, but seeing her as well.

The following week was filled with discouraging phone calls. Most agencies specializing in caregivers did not serve our area in the south part of Orange County. The cost for many was prohibitive. The options became fewer and fewer.

On Friday afternoon, Kim and I headed for the retreat. There were tears as I collected hugs from friends I had missed over the previous months. And my depression

over the extension added to the bitter-sweetness of our time together, knowing our next parting would be even longer than originally planned.

That evening I had some time alone with Sr. Kathy and shared my grief with her. She listened sympathetically. I had taken a copy of the CD as a gift for her. We looked at the lyrics, and a couple of the songs matched her theme for the weekend.

A year later when I spoke with her about that weekend, she said she remembered the exact moment when I surrendered and accepted my situation. I don't remember the precise second, but I know it happened during those three days.

The following week I was finally able to locate a lady to come to the house to care for Mom. I returned to *Osaka* ready to face whatever came next.

It seemed as though wherever I turned in the next few months, the same piece of scripture haunted me. Another dear friend and singer, René Bondi, released a new album. Guess what one of the songs was? "Be Still and Hear My Voice."

My job with USJ ended on December 29 as scheduled. We couldn't return to California for Christmas that year because of the work schedule. It was very hard not being with family on my favorite holiday, but we invited several friends to our place for dinner, including *Misayo-san* and *Kazue*, and celebrated together.

On December 30th, we flew home and held a belated Christmas celebration. Then, after one week in Dana Point, Larry returned to *Osaka* while I stayed an additional week to interview contractors for work to be done on our house. Then I rejoined Larry for our last couple of months in Japan.

Looking back on those last few months in Japan, I found the time to be some of the most meaningful of our entire stay. Many team members had departed before the end of the year, and those who left on December 29 as scheduled put in a full day at work leaving the wrapping up of their responsibilities to others, then immediately drove to the airport and flew home. Most had no sense of closure and a few later returned to *Osaka* to see the park completed and say good-bye to their Japanese friends.

I was able to wind up my tasks and finish Japanese language classes. The lessons were given in one of the buildings inside the park, so after class I ate lunch with Larry, then walked around the streets enjoying what we had accomplished. During those last few weeks, I saw USJ completed.

I went to lunch with neighbors and friends, took my time cleaning out the *mansion* (apartment) in preparation for moving, and visited the last of the places I had wanted to see.

And even during this period, occasional reminders of "Be Still" arrived. Some were in email and some were in song and some were from friends. Once I let go and trusted, all the good things began to come.

Even now, several years later, just when I need to be reminded, I hear "Be Still" and remember the depth of my despair and the blessings that followed.