

Farewell to the United Nations

This Blog is an excerpt of a blog post from September 12th, 2018, on another website.

Back in Dominica after the hurricane.

When I moved in with Lifeline Ministries, the NGO where I work as a volunteer, on December 11th, 2017, I never imagined sharing a house with so many different people for four months. The upstairs has three spacious bedrooms; one master with a private bathroom, and the two other rooms share a bathroom. There are a sizable kitchen and a living room with a large balcony.

On the day I arrived, I met a Canadian who worked for Digicel (one of the telecom providers), restoring their network after the hurricane. When I came, the broken windows had not yet been replaced, and tarps were still on the roof. There was no internet, no Wi-Fi, and only cold water for showering. The house has electricity via a long extension cord from downstairs.

He moved out shortly after my arrival, and a nurse from the UK took his place. She also moved back to her home a few weeks later. Following this, a lady from Uganda moved in. She worked for UNFPA and stayed until March 14th.

After the nurse moved out; another Brit came in, this time from All Hands & Hearts. A relief aid organization that helps with rebuilding our island. He only stayed 1.5 weeks, as he went to Mexico to lead a project after their major earthquake in 2017. Thus, the room was empty again.

Yet not for long, a young man from Kenya made his way to our house. He works for CDAC, an organization that teaches how to use ham (amateur) radio after a (natural) disaster. He ended up staying until April 12th.

In the end, I shared the house for over three months with neighbors from Canada to Kenya. We called ourselves 'a mini version of the United Nations', just for fun!

Change

A lot has changed in those months since I first moved in. Because it rained for weeks in a row, it meant mopping, strategically placing buckets around, and sometimes laying down towels - because we did not have enough containers. And every morning, the first order of the day was to clean the floor, empty buckets, and wring out towels. All the while, the new roof was downstairs in the living room - waiting for the rain to stop!

Somewhere near the end of January, the rain finally decided to call it quits, and the roofers started, which resulted in new challenges. Because the tarpaulins were not always appropriately repositioned, the wind and rain created new leaks. Every so often, I would wake up feeling water dripping on my face or my toes at night, so I had to move my bed. It often felt like the wind would rip the tarps from the roof. One Sunday morning, we woke up to a flooded living room and spent over 1.5 hours cleaning it all up.

Hurricane-like experience

It seemed as though I experienced a tiny bit of how it must have felt during and immediately after the hurricane. Even though not nearly comparable, all my clothes, shoes, etc., have all disappeared in the storm; I lost almost all my possessions.

Together with my two newest housemates, it was a wonderful time; lots of laughter, in-depth conversations, and we even had a Friday night tradition. Only a 5-minute walk away, you could get the most delicious BBQ chicken in a little place nearby called 'Popeye.' Soon, it became our Friday night meal - and often we got more pieces of chicken than what we had ordered!

One of my housemates was expecting and gave birth to a healthy baby girl on March 14th. All of a sudden, there was a brand new, very tiny person in the house. It took some getting used to, as I do not

have any children of my own. At the same time, it was impossible not to fall in love with this beautiful little girl; so innocent, so sweet - and so lovely to see all those mini clothes on the clothesline!

Living in shelters

Eventually, the windows were put back in, and the roof moved from the living room to where it belongs. For Christmas, we got internet and Wi-Fi, which was a long-awaited gift. And since last week, we finally have hot water - through a solar water heater on the roof. It felt like such a luxury to have hot water to shower again after four months! I could have easily stayed in there for an hour.

Unfortunately, this is not a luxury afforded to everyone here. Sadly, people continue to live in shelters or tents, and many houses still do not have a real roof, only tarps. Therefore, I feel truly blessed.

The next phase: from ideas to a plan

It was a sad time when I had to say goodbye to people who started as strangers and later became friends. There were promises to stay in touch, and some even may return as volunteers at the [Breadfruit House](#).

The house is a lot quieter, and that feels strange. I am looking for a place of my own now - a new chapter for me, too. I have put the wheels in motion to start working on temporary or part-time projects again soon.

I am still gathering ideas for the Breadfruit House. Step by step, that becomes a plan - a place, a creative and inspiring center for children.

With love,
Marieke



Saying goodbye to IMC



Our mini United Nations