The Drum Family

March 2016



My Friend, the Undertaker

Antonio* was the first friend we had when we moved to Antequera. We had met a couple of other people in those first few days, but Antonio was the guy who just enveloped us in happiness and hugs. He embraced us, quite literally with his giant bear hugs, and with his easy and quick friendship. We had been told, "Spaniards are a tough lot. You'll never get close to them. You might become friendly acquaintances, but never true friends." But we were having a tough time believing that with Antonio in our lives. Antonio is this big teddy bear of a guy, a walking talking Santa Claus-type. Always smiling and joking around. Best friend to the world.

Billy quickly fell right in with Antonio. They met several times a week for coffee or to do things in town. Antonio invited Billy in to his home (another thing we were told would never occur in Spain) to share stories and to help each other with language. Antonio became Billy's language helper for Spanish, and Billy helped Antonio learn some English. Antonio has been a huge help to us in cultural matters – he is a trusted friend who will always tell us the truth, always tell us when we might be stepping in too deep, or alert us to cultural landmines that we could never have known without guidance. He introduces us to people, he invites us to picnics and cookouts, and he helps us get connected to opportunities to serve in our town.

In our disciple group, Antonio is very attentive to the stories about Jesus' treatment of the marginalized. He is highly participatory in our story discussions when it comes to lepers and the unclean and the unjust treatment of others. I have always been touched by his keen sense of understanding and compassion, and I have loved him for his tender heart during these studies.

One week, as we studied another story about the unclean, specifically as it pertained to death, Antonio reminded the group of the modern day treatment in Spain of undertakers. Because our class is almost exclusively native Spaniards, this story was commonplace for them. They all knowingly shook their heads like it was just another story. But for me, it was new knowledge that rocked my world.

Undertakers or morticians are considered unclean, still in this day and age. Those who deal with death are marginalized. When the undertaker goes in to a restaurant or café, there is a specific place for him to sit. He has a special set of dishes that are set aside for only his use. Because this is a small town, everyone knows the undertaker. When he arrives, he knows where to sit and the staff know to go and get the dishes that are reserved for only him. Even his glass and his silverware is set apart from the general public.

This is 2016! This is a European nation, a 'first world' country! This was a huge shock to me. I kept my 'learner face' on and stayed in my cultural anthropological stance, but I was just dying inside. How could this be true today, in 2016? This is the kind of treatment that I know happens in developing nations and '3rd world countries'… but this is SPAIN!

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...My Friend, the Undertaker

I worried on this story for a few weeks. I just couldn't get over it. And my heart broke for Antonio… you see, my friend Antonio is an undertaker. For years, he has been the one who arrives at the hospital or at private homes to pick up the deceased and care for the body. He has been the one who has compassion in the darkest moments. He has been the one who goes to the funeral home, who does all that needs to be done in those hours between death and burial, and who sees to the final moments before loved ones say their last goodbyes. It is a tough job on even the best of days. Sadly, Antonio has been out of work since just before we moved here - a downsizing of funeral home staff in the middle of a major economic crisis put Antonio on the unemployment rolls, where he has been for 3 years now. It seems that it's also difficult for a former undertaker to find a new job. Antonio never talks about that. He just continues to look for work.

This past week, I asked Antonio if he would revisit that story with me – the story about the dishes and the marginalization of undertakers. Although he had not told the story in first person, I wondered. I asked him if that had applied to him, if he had lived that reality.

"Yes. Yes, that story is my story," he said. "That is the reality for undertakers."

A new wave of pain and compassion came over me. This is my friend, we are talking about. This is a part of his story that had never dawned on me. I could never have known to ask about it because it is so far from my culture and understanding that I would never have thought of it.

I pushed on, "Antonio, what does that do to your heart?"

A deep breath, then he softened and his body changed. He smiled a little, the smile of realizing that someone just saw through to your soul. He answered, "You have to make your heart hard. Hard so it won't hurt." His eyes brimmed with tears.



"Obviously, it hurts, Antonio. Your heart is not hard."

"Yes, sometimes it hurts. People make jokes about me, off-handed things that are funny to them. Even friends tell jokes about me. I laugh and try to let it roll off. I try. But my wife – it is terrible for her. It hurts her deeply. She has never recovered from hearing people's jokes and how people treat me." Antonio's wife has suffered years of debilitating clinical depression. Many days, she cannot leave the house. Antonio, too, suffers from depression and several related health issues. I'm seeing a much bigger picture of my friend and his heart.

He goes on to tell me about other indignities of being the undertaker. Gas station attendants refused to wait on him or pump the gas at the full service pumps. They wouldn't go near the hearse. The public shunned him and turned away when he was with the car.

Even the dead merit more dignity than the living, breathing man who attends to them.

My heart is so heavy for my friend. Jovial, peaceful, compassionate Antonio. To know the pain that he has felt, that he still feels. To now understand, to be able to see the mask that he wears with the world. To know that this precious man has been marginalized. Now I know why he is passionate about the Jesus who reached out to the unclean, the Jesus who touched lepers and had compassion for those who were shunned and cast out. Antonio is intimately and passionately in love with the Jesus who entered in to death, who had compassion for Lazarus, who touched the dead, who Himself was dead and experienced the tomb… and is now Alive. I'm honored to call the undertaker my friend.

**Antonio's name has been changed*

Prayer Requests -

- **Pray for the global regions of Europe, the Middle East, and the Balkans**… we work as Care Coordinators for workers in these regions. Pray for the work that each of those cross-cultural workers is doing in their areas. Pray for political issues in each region. Pray for the refugee and immigrant situation that continues to move vast numbers of people across the continent. Pray for people who suddenly find themselves with no home, no job, no family connections, and no options. Pray that our workers can be a light in the darkness and love all people well as we continue to live out Jesus' love in our own lives.

- **Pray for Spain.** Prayers for God to raise up workers who are willing to go and live and work in the 7000+ towns in Spain that have no believing witness for Jesus. Pray for the healing of centuries of religious oppression and struggle. Pray for a new light in dark places.

- **Pray for Relationships**: Our deepest and most meaningful work revolves around building close relationships with those in our local area. Pray for us as we continue to walk alongside people in their daily lives - that we can shine light and Christ's love in all that we do, and that we are always aware of those everyday teachable moments when we can share a story about His goodness and compassion.

- **Pray for our Family**: Being a family separated by 5000 miles and an ocean is not easy. Being counselors and care-givers to others in crisis is tough on us and it is sometimes hard to shake that off and wind down for family time. Raising a daughter in a cross-cultural setting - a daughter whose primary language and thought process is not our own, but that of the cultures she has lived in the most - is challenging. Being a husband and wife team who work together 24/7 has its own special set of dynamics. Pray for us to have strength and peace and joy for all that it takes to be a missionary family serving Christ in the world.

What do they do???

We serve in several roles in ministry, and each of those holds a variety of ways that we work and serve others. Our roles as ***Care Coordinators for Europe and the Middle East / Balkans*** *and as* ***local Cross-Cultural Workers to Spain*** *include coaching and counseling, teaching and mentoring, leading and equipping—and a LOT of loving others! This column will be dedicated to sharing parts of that work with you each month.*

One of the ways we minister in Spain is via teaching. In Texas, we were teachers. It has always been our passion. While we held other roles through the years, worked in various fields, and even spent a while as small business entrepreneurs, the first love was and always will be teaching. I (Laurie) have always said that it was, in many ways, more difficult to leave my career and my classroom than it was to sell my cherished Victorian farmhouse and possessions and say goodbye to Texas. In fact, to this day, I still grieve the loss of that part of my life… my classroom and my students and my passion for learning and leading.

What do you do when your passion is for education? What do you do when it is part of your very soul? When every test you take regarding personality and strengths and spiritual gifts comes back with the same answer… "you are a teacher and your passion is for learning and helping others grow in to their potential"? No surprise to me! But I'm a Care Coordinator, a counselor, a coach, and a mission worker to Spain… what do I do with that?


Teaching in one of the adult inductive study groups.

I use every available possibility to teach and to learn.

In Spain, we work with a small local congregation of believers. We teach an adult class of Inductive Bible Study each week. We teach the youth Sunday School class. We are the Sunday School Coordinators, which means that we teach and train teachers in best practices for Christian education and child development. We each have several cell groups that we teach and facilitate in bible study and discipleship. We help immigrants and Spaniards to learn about cultural differences and how to see and value the worldview of others. We teach and train other CCWs (cross-cultural workers) in coaching skills and cross-cultural ministry practices. We teach marriage enrichment classes. We even turn visits in to teachable moments… people who come to Spain for retreat or vacation or even short-term teams end up learning about Spanish history and culture.

We can't help ourselves… we just see most everything as an opportunity to teach! You can take the teacher out of Texas, but the WORLD is her classroom!



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The Mission Society

- Sharing the Love of Christ with the least, the lost, and the left out… immigrants, displaced peoples, the lonely, the abandoned, those who need a friend.
- Nurturing and developing people to be healthy spiritually, physically, emotionally, and relationally - because "care" is not just an emotional feeling word, "care" is a verb - an action. That's who we are… the care-givers!



Teaching youth Sunday School



Baking cookies with Nely and Rosa



Thursday a.m. Inductive Study group



Filling cookie bags for Nueva Vida



Men's Disciple Group—Campillos