

Meet Your Missionary

JoAnn Neal

Serving with The Rafiki Foundation in Moshi, Tanzania

Birthplace: Riverside, California

Birthday: Sept. 9

Hobbies/Interests: photography, travel, reading

Children: Eric Neal (wife Kristine; children Becca and Rachel)
Bryan Neal (wife Debbie; children Brandon and Mackenzie)
Ken Neal (wife Jennifer; children Ben, Emily, and Alexandra)

Favorite verse: 1 Peter 5:7 “casting all your anxiety upon Him, because He cares for you.”

Salvation age: 12

Education: Pacific University, Forest Grove, Oregon BA in English. Various graduate courses at Portland State, UC Davis.



Testimony

My mother and father were not Christian, but they were more than happy to let me go to a local church a block away when I was six years old. There I learned about Jesus Christ, while also memorizing the Books of the Old Testament, the 23rd Psalm and various Bible verses. When I was seven years old, we moved and I attended a Congregational Church that was near us. When I was 12 years old, I took the membership classes and was accepted into the church at a Maundy Thursday evening service. I was also baptized at that time and received my first Bible. My sister says she remembers my taking her and my small brother to Sunday school every Sunday while we were growing up. Looking back on my childhood experiences of faithfully attending church and thirsting to know more about Jesus despite not growing up in a Christian home, my only explanation is that God chose me. I did not choose Him; He chose me. Amazing grace!

After completing the university, I married Gary, a boy I had known in high school and who had been in the church youth group. He was in the third year of medical school when we married. During the first part of our marriage my husband did two residencies and then served at a thoracic surgeon in the Army. When Gary got out of the service and we moved to Vacaville, California, my family and I began to attend Community Presbyterian Church in Vacaville. The pastor was a mentor and a friend. During the next ten years, I became involved in several ministries at the church. My sons went through Catechism, accepted Jesus as Lord and Savior, and were baptized there. Much of our social life revolved around our small group. I studied the Bible in both small group study and through the Teacher's Bethel Bible study with our pastor. When my husband died suddenly on November 22, 1989, through my shock and devastation, my pastor came and spent the afternoon with me, calling my sons who were at college and helping me through all the long hours until evening came. I knew that Gary had left me, but God had not.

Over the next decade, I lived and worked in Spain for three years, then spent a year in Germany with my oldest son and his wife and children, and finally went to live in France, “house-sitting” for GEM missionaries who were home on furlough. (The first people I “house-sat” for were Leroy and Debbie Zumack.) I became involved with the GEM missionaries and also started attending Bible Study Fellowship in Paris with one of the wives. It was at BSF where I first heard about the ministry of the Rafiki Foundation in Africa. The Lord really laid this ministry on my heart. I knew that I was the worst of sinners, but after praying for three days and crying out for forgiveness, I filled out the application and sent it to Rafiki to do a short-term mission with them. That was in 2001. I returned to the United States to raise support to become a full-time missionary with Rafiki. In May of 2003 Rafiki sent me to Madagascar to minister to teen-aged girls. I was there for eight months, and then was transferred to Uganda to teach in the Girls' Center and later in the secondary school. In 2008 Rafiki once more asked me to move – this time to Tanzania. I have been here ever since. I am no longer teaching, but I have the great privilege to be the Child Care Director now for the Rafiki Tanzania Village. And here I plan to remain as long as the Lord can use me for His glory.

History of Rafiki Ministry

- 2000 I attended Bible Study Fellowship in Paris, France, where I learned about the Rafiki Foundation.
- 2001 I did a short-term mission with Rafiki to Madagascar and decided that I wanted to be a full-time missionary with Rafiki
- 2002 I returned to the United States to raise support for my mission.
- 2003 In May Rafiki sent me to Madagascar to work in a Girls' Center as a teacher and vocational arts director.
- 2004 I was transferred to Uganda. I was a teacher and the vocational arts director at the Girls' Center and later a teacher in the secondary school.
- 2008 I was transferred to Tanzania. I taught in the pre-primary school and the kindergarten. I was also interim Education Director for 6 months while our Education Director was in the U.S. on medical leave. When she returned, I moved into Child Care as the Assistant Director. Last April I became the Child Care Director for the resident children who live on our property. We currently have 31 children. My prayer is to have 35 children here before the end of 2011.

Mission Contact

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