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## Introduction

"She is marked for elimination. She won't last long here." Those were the words said about me as two women my mom's age watched me walk away from our coffee shop meeting toward my car. I was new in Bali; they had been around for decades. What we had in common was PIONEERS (PI), the global missions agency that sends missionaries around the world. My family had been with PI for 7 years at that point, having had a great experience in Peru before moving to Indonesia. Kim had been in this region her entire missionary career, and as she told me later, managed to stay because she kept her mouth shut, existed below the radar, and did her best to stay out of leadership and the politics of the organization. Darla, on the other hand, speaks out. And that is what eventually led to her resignation from the organization ten years ago. In her efforts to speak truth, bring healthier dynamics, and stand against abusive authority, she endured ridiculous retaliatory behavior that eventually led her and her husband to leave PI for a different organization so that she could continue her ministry. For better or worse, I am much more like Darla than I am like Kim, and that is what Darla recognized in this first meeting. She knew how it would end. She had seen it before in her own story and in the stories of a handful of other outspoken (mostly female) change agents.

What I didn't know until three years later was that Kim and Darla made a plan that day. They saw in me a sharp discernment, vulnerability with my own story, and willingness to name things for what they were. And they had seen those very things lead many others down the path toward resignation from PI under less than friendly circumstances. So they strategized. Kim, who has become a close friend in the last few years, was to place herself near me relationally so that (as Darla told me later) "when the arrows started flying, she would be there to pick you up and tell you that you aren't crazy." It was unnerving to hear this account years later - eerie how easily they were able to name the words and actions of the leadership and community before it even happened. But I am incredibly grateful for Darla and for Kim. They have indeed made all the difference.

## On the Outside Looking In

We had pretty high expectations moving to Indonesia. Our experience in Peru had been incredibly positive, with a diverse community of different missions agencies working closely together. Though the missionary community certainly had the conservative evangelical flavor common in overseas missions, we never felt pressure to conform to any certain theology or methodology. We never felt anything less than affirmed and valued for our uniqueness. The community had people of all sorts from lots of backgrounds, and though there was some scattered conflict and personality clashes around, I rarely saw it become something that people couldn't move past. People worked through their issues, and teams figured out how to work together in consensus-style decision making even with very different opinions and personalities.

The Bali PI community felt strange to us from the beginning. We thought it was odd that it was all but disconnected from other organizations or missionaries. We thought it was even more odd how little people seemed to socialize. There were two other PI families who told us how isolated they felt there, and how rarely the PI community seemed to come together as a whole or reach out to those not

on their teams (especially those who were in Bali only for language school). One of these families had gone before we arrived, and the other left soon after we arrived. Being optimistic because of our experience in Peru, we assumed that people were just introverted or didn't know how fun and life-giving a larger community could be. We thought we could be a change for good in the community - bring fun and interaction and connection.

For the next year and a half, we hosted holidays, invited every family to our home for dinner at least a couple of times, hosted play-dates and birthday parties, and attempted a weekly Bible study/worship night. It did not seem to go anywhere, and though everyone was polite and seemed glad accept invitations, there weren't many returned. The lack of social reciprocity was hard, but for awhile we just figured it had more to do with the geographical distance between families and busyness and simple lack of a shared value of hospitality. But then there was the kids...

We have four sons, the youngest is currently five and the older three are nine (twins) and ten. It was exciting to us when we arrived to find out that there were four other PI families each with a boy the same ages as my older three. There were a handful of times that we met at a local playground, but for the most part we were confused by how rarely our children were invited over (actually it only happened once with one family that first year). Though initially we lived within minutes of some families and had initiated play-dates, the invitations were not returned. We again chalked it up to differences in personalities - my four energetic and outgoing kids ARE a lot for a quieter, less rowdy kid to handle. We also assumed that the closeness of the other boys' relationships had to do with the fact that the other families were on a team together and the fact that after the first few months we were living in the city while most of the other families lived a half hour away. However, in the next couple of years, two more families with boys moved in, neither of them on that team and one of them living in our neighborhood in the city. We watched both families seemingly connect more easily with the rest of the community and their children develop the relationships with one another that we had wanted so badly for our own children. On two different occasions there were birthday parties where every single boy from all the other Bali PI families were invited except for ours. Both times I made phone calls to address how hurtful this was and how upsetting it was for my children to realize that they had been excluded. Both times there were apologies and assurances that it had been an oversight.

For all the times that we felt we were excluded socially, there was always a reasonable excuse that we chose to believe. I still believe that there was no plot of malicious intentional exclusion. I don't think anyone was plotting to keep us from relationships. However, it was obvious to us that we were outsiders. The question we could never answer was why.

## **A Different Sort of Missionary**

I am the child of a stay-at-home mother - a missionary no less! My husband, Dan, also has a mom who didn't work outside of the home. We were both raised in a brand of conservative Christianity where that was fairly normal. In my experience as a missionary kid, most missionary mothers I was around focused exclusively on their families while their husbands focused on professional ministry. This is shifting some in international missions, especially with more educational options available for kids,

but the expectations for how a family can and should work still exists in missionary communities. And those expectations still fit these traditional gender roles.

Our marriage and our family structure are not typical at all in evangelical missions. With annoying regularity we find we have to untangle ourselves from assumptions and judgments. I've had another missionary woman (whom I have a good relationship with) ask me "how do your children handle not having their mother around and having her busy with ministry rather than focused on them?" I had to assure her that my kids are happy and well adjusted and the fact that I work outside the home hasn't ruined their childhood. This question came from someone I love and trust and who deeply cares for my family, so I wrote it off as just a different way of being. But it reveals how deeply rooted the concept of "right way" is here. I don't think she was speaking words that were only in her own mind. It's a question that I know has followed a couple of other missionary women who don't view their families as their "primary ministries" any more or less than their husband does. I've often wondered why Dan (or any other male missionary) is never asked that same question as if their roles as fathers matter so much less to their kids.

Part of our story of leaving Peru was the realization that living in traditional gender roles really did not fit our family well. Dan and I both knew that I was being pulled toward vocational ministry outside of the home, and what I really felt called to do didn't fit in with the tribal ministry we were a part of. By the time we landed in Bali, we knew that we would both be active in ministry. In our home, we share parenting and household duties 50/50 which is something that I have seldom seen in missionary communities. Generally the mother takes on the lion's share of the duties associated with keeping home and parenting. Even more rare in a conservative evangelical community is a marriage with genuine shared decision making, where the husband doesn't get the final say or some kind of Y chromosome trump card. For Dan and I, we muck it out as long as it takes to arrive at a consensus.

To make us even more strange, we both were comfortable with the reality that I am gifted for leadership and thrive in innovative, path-forging ministries. Dan is also a leader, but his is a more cautious style focused on mentoring and working alongside others. He'd call himself an early adopter. My style is a "no one has ever tried this, let's jump in head first and see what happens" kind of leadership that casts vision and blazes trails for others to follow. I joke that failure doesn't scare me - at least if I die on the trail, my dead body will serve as a bridge over that particular pothole so the next person doesn't fall into it. I tend to give things a try so that the early adopters can move forward if they work. It's no less likely to find me leading Dan in a project or ministry than it is for him to be leading me.

So with the theological questions of gender roles in church and family still unacknowledged, we recognized that we are different from what is normal in the community here. Then when you add in the reality that our theology is more progressive mainline Protestant and less conservative evangelical, you have a whole other host of differences to deal with. Politically, theologically, and methodologically Dan and I do not fit all the typical patterns and mindsets of PIONEERS missionaries in this region. We've certainly found exceptions both in our region and in our area, but it seems that those exceptions tend to quietly go about their business feeling odd but choosing to not rock the boat.

I've never met a boat in my life that I wasn't willing to rock.

## A Warning

Within just a few months of landing in Bali, Dan and I were appointed team leaders. We had three other singles on the way in to work on our team, and we had the most field experience. Initially Dan was approached to be the team leader, but immediately he asked for a co-appointment. We know that we work much better together, balance each other out, and bring different strengths to the table. The co-appointment was approved, and I became the only married female team leader (TL) in our area. There was one other (single) female team leader. And in the next level of leadership (Area Leaders) encompassing all of Indonesia, Australia, and the Philippines, there were no females at all.

Soon after my appointment, Kim called me to say she was taking me to coffee. I had met her a couple of times and agreed to go assuming she was simply being social. She had other motives. Without much introduction, Kim let me know that she wanted me to be aware of what I was "getting myself into" as a female team leader in this area. She named no names and told no specific stories, but she told me that this wasn't an area that was used to dealing with female leaders, especially strong, vocal ones.

I eventually learned that one very influential leader (and good recruiter) in our area's recent history was a part of a hyper-patriarchal theological perspective that believes that women are under the authority of their fathers until they marry and come under the authority of their husbands, and that a woman's entire identity is within their relationships to their fathers/husbands/sons. Women are seen primarily as daughters/wives/mothers, and their role is to care for the home and support the men in their lives. Functionally, this can mean that 45-year-old single women are to submit to the choices of their fathers and often remain living with their parents. Christian patriarchy is a theological belief heavily associated with authoritarianism. Not only are women and children under the authority of men, men assume a social hierarchy as well. As a religious community, the hierarchy is christened with "God's will" and often reinforced by spiritual abuse. Many who grow up in this brand of hyper-patriarchy eventually escape, but most are shunned in the process as "rebellious against God's divine order." I personally know several people who grew up in these kinds of environments, and all of them have strained or broken family relationships and describe their religious upbringing as toxic and/or abusive.

Anyhow, the PI mentor of this leader was also heavily influenced by patriarchal doctrine, and rather than recognizing that this extreme theological perspective is actually inconsistent with PIONEERS' handbook, encouraged him to lead. The effect on our area, I believe, was enormous. While most did/do not follow this extreme doctrine, the fact that their leader (who served for years) *did* (and is still a leader at the top levels of the organization) created an environment where what women were expected to do and be like was very specific. Female leadership was not only not encouraged, it was explicitly discouraged for many years. Women who did not conform to the submissive personality type expected of them were labeled divisive, aggressive, and even ungodly.

This was what Kim wanted me to know though she was careful not to share specific details. Over the next few years, it was not difficult to pick up bits and pieces from different missionaries and former

missionaries in the region as well as personal interactions with both of the previously mentioned leaders to see the whole of the picture. Kim wanted me to be careful and not stir up trouble for myself because she had seen what other women had gone through in the past. I thought she was paranoid and exaggerating, but as I continued my role as a team leader over the next few years. I began to see that her warning was well-founded.

## Advocacy Begins

For the first three years of living with Bali, I struggled with feeling like an outsider in the missionary community. My initial assumption was that the problem was personality differences and team alliances. However, as more people moved into the region and as I heard more stories from those who had left, I realized that there was more to it than that. It was hard to put a finger on it because missionaries are so *polite*, but small things alerted me to the shallowness of these polite social interactions. For example, when in the course of normal conversation, differences in perspective or belief were mentioned, there was an immediate backing away. There was a strange lack of conflict and a hushing of conversations about issues from the past. To me it spoke of an unhealthy community who skirted potential issues by pretending that everything was fine through superficial conformity rather than engaging more deeply with one another.

My own work is in anti-human trafficking, so I am used to interacting with big negative emotions regularly. Working with people who have endured unspeakable trauma (and the people that care for them) means that I have learned to acknowledge deep pain and grieve alongside others while not owning their trauma as my own. At the core, this same principle is necessary for any healthy community. I know that it's entirely possible to allow others their own experiences and accept their feelings while not being required to agree with all their interpretations or their proposed solutions.

Therefore, the *lack* of conflict in the Bali PI community seemed to me to be an indicator that there could be dysfunction in the community. In my experience, any healthy family, institution, or organization that is still developing positively should have some level of conflict. What makes conflict healthy and constructive is the willingness to engage with truth and with the feelings of others in a way that affirms individuality and seeks to find ways of being in community that doesn't demand conformity. What I saw in Bali was peacekeeping rather than peacemaking. It bothered me that the community seemed so monochromatic with an overall "normal" in family styles, theology, missiology, and values. For an organization that prides itself on having space for a big range of beliefs and methodological styles as well as a stated intention for diversification, it made no sense.

As I attempted to engage in relationships in the same way I do in every other sphere by being vulnerable with my thoughts and my experiences in a way consistent with my personality, I felt like I kept running into a polite wall with many people in PI. No one even bothered to disagree with me. They were simply quiet and never pursued a deeper conversation whether one on one or in a group setting. People would just start talking about something fairly trivial whenever anything potentially controversial was brought up. Eventually, I found that the only things that I felt I could talk about safely with much of the community were silly stories about my boys. With men I could talk some about my anti-trafficking

work, running a non-profit, and team leadership. But with women, even this felt awkward as if they felt like there was judgment coming from me because they weren't doing similar things (there wasn't). This was entirely different from what I experienced in Peru, and it was entirely different from how I experienced the anti-trafficking community and our Indonesian community. Despite language barriers and cultural barriers, it was far easier for me to befriend Indonesians than other PI missionaries in our area.

## Complaining to the Boss

As an advocate, I've learned that there are always multiple angles that one can employ to work on an issue. As I surveyed the PIONEERS community in our region, there were a number of issues that I thought needed addressing, but the biggest one for me was the lack of empowerment and respect for women. Women who focus on their families were paid no mind by ministry leaders - which is sad because some of these women are particularly bright and their voices would benefit our organization greatly. Women who were engaged in ministry outside of the home faced barrier after barrier that simply didn't exist for men. I believed that some of the personal relationship difficulties I faced and the strange social norms were rooted in sexism, and over time several PI women from other areas of the region told me that had been experiencing similar frustrations. It was not just for my own ministry that I chose to "go public" with my complaints of sexism in PIONEERS; I wanted to see other women - even the ones that seemed to be most irritated and intimidated by me, thrive. I heard from others, current and former PI members, that their own attempts to address the issue with leadership had not provoked real change, and many were either too exhausted with young children or too afraid of social reprisal to make waves.

So the issue of female empowerment and gender parity in leadership was the place that I decided to start advocating for change. I decided to start at the top to address it simply because I had seen ethnic diversification move forward only when the International Leadership Team (ILT) made it a priority. From access to mentoring to the "Billy Graham rule" that keeps women from interacting with male colleagues to sexist expectations about their priorities, female leaders were simply not being treated equally. And mothers in particular were sidelined and often neglected in their development.

In mid 2016, I sought the help of a seminary friend who had years of experience as a Vice President for another large evangelical missions organization. For six months I crafted a letter to the ILT with her help, and finally sent it off in October. The letter in its entirety reads:

4/10/2016

*Dear Members of the International Leadership Team,*

*Recently, a friend and fellow PI worker told me of her initial interview some 20 years ago. She entered a room with 6 men and 1 woman and remarked, "There are a lot of men in this room." She meant it only as a nervous observation, but was given several minutes of assurances that PIONEERS was "working on getting more women in leadership." Twenty-years later, I made the same observation at our leadership*

*conference in Thailand and was told the same. As I've surveyed women in our organization from multiple sending bases and in multiple roles, it seems that we've all noticed the lack of women in leadership and many of us have been told that it's a problem that is being remedied. Because I cannot see measurable change, it is difficult to believe that this is a priority. I know that PIONEERS has chosen to affirm that "All Members are eligible for leadership."<sup>1</sup> It seems, however, that male-headship theology overwhelms that affirmation when it comes to how PIONEERS runs in reality.*

*Historically speaking, women played deeply meaningful roles in the establishment of modern missions. In fact, there is ample evidence that many women were pioneering leaders in the mission field in past eras, until the wave of patriarchal philosophy that came as a response to secular feminism of the 1960s popularized unilateral male leadership both in the home and in the church.<sup>2</sup> The increasingly popular notion of male-only leadership directly impacted female missionaries, but even more significant was the cultural shift that would change the way that females perceive their roles in overseas ministry and also the expectations of them from their husbands, sending churches, and mission agencies.*

*Without debating the merits of male headship theology in the church and home, we must recognize that 1) PIONEERS has chosen to affirm that "All Members are eligible for leadership,"<sup>3</sup> which leaves all leadership positions open to women, and that 2) male-headship theology has bled into how PIONEERS runs in reality even if on paper that is not supposed to be the case. The reality on the field is that women are often limited in what they are allowed and expected to do and even what opportunities they have to use their gifts within our organization.*

*This is true for both married and single women. Too often, a married woman's identity and abilities are chiefly found in her husband, and her goals and ministry are defined for her by default based on the goals and ministry of her spouse. Currently, a married woman who is gifted for leadership will likely not be identified as a leader unless she is married to a man who also possesses these gifts. For many married women, there is a constant assumption that their ministry is to compliment and assist their husband's. This is not an evaluation of whether or not this is good or valid ministry option - for many women it is! The point is that married women often do not have opportunity to define for themselves what God has called them to do and gifted them for, nor are they regularly recognized as ministers and leaders in their own right, and that is a problem.*

*While a single woman is obviously not evaluated based on her husband's ministry and gifts, her flourishing depends heavily on her own leaders and especially how*

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<sup>1</sup> Section 3.1 of PIONEERS International Handbook

<sup>2</sup> Robert, Dana L. 2005. "What Happened to the Christian Home? The Missing Component of Mission Theory." *Missiology: An International Review* 33: 325-340. <http://mis.sagepub.com/naomi.fuller.edu:2048/content/33/3/325.full.pdf+html> (accessed May 12, 2014), 332.

<sup>3</sup> Section 3.1 of PIONEERS International Handbook



*her leaders see her role as a female on the team. If she joins a team with gendered restrictions and sexist expectations, it will be nearly impossible to change the team culture single-handedly. Furthermore, a single woman will not be identified as a potential leader unless she has a team leader who is able to build a close enough relationship with her so that her gifts, skills, and passions can be accurately understood. If her team leader is a man who, for whatever reason, refuses such a relationship, she is sidelined. The first question we must ask ourselves is whether women feel they are evaluated and empowered based on their own gifts and callings or if they feel they are more often seen as attachments to their husbands and assistant members to the men on our teams.*

*The second question we must ask is if we function in reality in the way that we intend to based on our written organizational rules. Our handbook states that "PI is committed to pursuing diversity in its leadership and actively encourages the development of leadership potential in all of its Members."<sup>4</sup> If very few women exist at the RL level or higher, and if there are many married male TLs without co-appointed wives while there are hardly any married female TLs without co-appointed husbands, the truth of this statement is questionable and a strategy for change would be in order. PIONEERS may be open to gender diversity in leadership, but it is not currently showing commitment to pursuing it. It may generally encourage the development of leadership potential in its members, but it hardly seems active in the case of women specifically.*

*To bring about gender parity in PIONEERS leadership requires intentionality. To go against the norm and to change the status quo will take deliberate effort with benchmarks and strategy, not unlike the internationalization process that has been a recent (and wonderful) priority of our organization. We need to know where we want to end up, and we need to know what the major milestones are on the way. We need to be taking intentional actions in order to reach those milestones.*

*What might committed, active development of female leaders look like in PIONEERS? One possible action step could be to quantify and qualify the real experiences and perception of those serving in PIONEERS. Engage a small task force, give them clear direction on their purpose, and empower them (with resources and authority) to conduct research over the course of 12-18 months. This might be modeled after a similar task force engaged by SIL International in recent years.*

*Because the identification of potential leaders and the development of those leaders always happens in the context of relationships, current male leaders will need to find ways to invite women into their spheres of influence. They may also need to grow in their understanding of the unique leadership qualities offered by many woman so as to be able to identify those women effectively. It is likely that the issue is not that there is a*

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<sup>4</sup> ibid

*lack of women leaders available, but that there is a broken system in indentifying, developing, and releasing those leaders into their skills and callings as such.*

*I want to encourage the ILT to consider putting the movement toward gender parity in leadership and the intentional development of female leaders as a core goal for the upcoming term. There is overwhelming evidence that balanced gendered leadership leads to organizational flourishing, but even without that fact, PIONEERS should be committed to flourishing of all of its individual members, with special attention paid to those who are the least likely to be able to speak up for themselves. The ILT should begin by making their intention for female leadership development and gender parity in leadership known to the entire PIONEERS community, creating a working group that can research and suggest proven helpful solutions to this problem, and systematically implementing those proposed solutions.*

*Will the ILT make the development of its women a priority, making a place for women to use their God-given gifts and skills for the flourishing of PIONEERS and the people they serve? Or will we still be "working on it" twenty years from now?*

*Thank you for your consideration,*

*Dalaina May, Team Leader of Bali Freedom Team*

In his reply to my letter, Eric Peters, the International Director of PIONEERS, noted that "Modeling a behavior is usually not enough to catalyze change. Obviously, it will take real intentionality to affect real change." I completely agreed, and I was excited to hear that my letter would be read at the upcoming ILT meeting in November.

I had very high hopes that change was coming, yet as months began to pass it seemed clear that "modeling" was all that the ILT was interested in. They seemed to think they were off the hook for publicly acknowledging the problem or vocalizing any intention to do anything differently because there were now a small handful of women in the ILT. Ever the one to assume the best, I thought that education was key and continued an email conversation with Eric and a few other leaders, passing on information about second generation bias, the need for cross gender mentoring, and how gender parity achieves mission. I thought the problem was that either they just did not understand how they could most effectively address the problem or that it was such a new thing on their radar that they hadn't gotten to it yet. I wanted to keep the fire lit and equip them to do what I assumed they wanted to do.

In the last few months, however, I've learned that mine was not the only letter of its type sent. There have been organized groups and individuals who have attempted to address women in leadership and gender parity in PIONEERS for well over a decade. The issue isn't lack of understanding; it's the lack of priority. In my opinion, the desire for peacekeeping over peacemaking has won again.

In the last conversation I had with a PI leader about sexism in PIONEERS, I made the following observation: If a white man was interested in a particular team, and if upon finding out that the team was led by a black man, the white man declared, "I don't have a problem with black people, but my theology leads me to believe that white people should never submit to the leadership of black people so I can't join his team... But I'll go join a team led by a white person," I believe we would rightly show him the door with no hesitation. That kind of devaluation of our members of color would absolutely not be tolerated. Likewise it would not be okay for that black leader to be expected to sit in a room with one whom he knew felt that way about him and act like everything was normal and okay. It would deeply affect his ability to lead and his ability to trust in the organization's integrity and ability to protect him from any kind of harm. If such a thing happened, it would be ridiculous to be upset with the black leader for voicing his anger and frustration that the organization had allowed such a thing. Yet, this is exactly what PIONEERS has asked its female leaders to tolerate.

As team leaders, we've interacted regularly with people that are interested in joining our team. We are always intentional about describing our team's values including the fact that it is a co-led team, and that we are affirming of women as ministry leaders as is also affirmed in our handbook. We have been explicitly told that being on a team with a female TL was a deal breaker for one particular family because they do not believe that a man should be led by a woman. This family now on another team in our region.

## **A Hint of What Was To Come**

When we became team leaders in Bali, our immediate supervisor (the area leader (AL)) was an Australian man named Aaron. His family was back home for the first six months of our time in Bali, and soon after they returned, they announced that they would be moving back to Australia. I always found Aaron easy to talk to and very respectful of women. He was someone that didn't seem to make much distinction between male and female leaders, and when he returned to Australia, I noticed that several of the leaders he appointed were women. I was sad to see him leave.

Concurrent with Aaron's departure and now empty AL role, the region split into two regions and the regional leader (RL) role opened as well. These are appointed positions, but the input of team leaders and field workers was sought. Dan and I were happy to offer our input. We affirmed that Greg and Karen White seemed like the best candidates for area leaders. Our limited past interactions with them had been positive, and they seemed kind and caring and "pastoral" in a way we thought would be good for the area. They had also been open with us about their lives and some of their struggles. Greg was appointed (Karen refusing a co-appointment). Nathan Herbert was made our RL, and we were very excited about that. We had only met him a couple of times at conferences, but had really liked him especially that he seemed particularly enthusiastic about internationalization and about developing women in leadership.

As Greg and Karen moved to Bali and settled into their new roles, I struggled with my interactions with Greg. One of our very first professional meetings included a run-in with the so-called "Billy Graham rule" which is simply that a man and a woman don't meet with one another alone. In this

situation, I missed part of a meeting because Greg was too uncomfortable to sit in my living room alone with me for a few minutes until Dan arrived home with our son. I understood that Greg and Karen had their own boundaries regarding their interactions with the opposite sex, but I also knew that my work is very sensitive and not something that I can always sit in public to discuss. I needed to know if I would have open access to Greg in the same way as the male TLs or if I was going to be limited to phone calls and/or need to count on Dan or Karen to chaperone our conversations. We had a phone chat, and I tried to explain my perspective. Greg admitted that this wasn't an issue he had really studied or even thought much about, and he seemed willing to have feedback and resources about it. I suggested he read a certain book about obstacles that women in ministry face, and I was hopeful things would improve going forward. (As of a year later, he admitted that he had never bothered to read it.)

Unfortunately, I continued to feel frustrated with nearly every interaction with Greg, and I felt my trust of him decreasing (my trust is something that you can lose but I tend to approach relationships very openly initially). I spoke to Dan and my counselor saying that I wondered if I have trust problems with men in Christian leadership. That is what made sense to me at the time given how much differently I felt about Greg after he became the AL compared to before. I didn't stop to consider fact that my feelings about Karen had also been shifting as I interacted with her or that my feelings about Aaron had been consistently positive throughout the two years that he was my area leader. It was only later that I came to believe that it was Greg and Karen who changed when he became the AL, and what I was picking up intuitively was eroding my trust. I think the change that I felt was the openness that Greg and Karen had when they were TLs was gone when they entered their new leadership role. They were closed off with the TLs about their own issues and struggles, and Greg's authoritarian and directive leadership style seemed devoid of reciprocal vulnerability which bothered me.

It seemed like Greg was increasingly frustrated with me as well, though he has yet to say that to me directly. One particular conflict we had was regarding a reply I made to an email that he sent out in July of 2017. In his email, he said he was seeking opinions from all the TLs about having a "guys event" and a "girls event" to build community in our area. I was on vacation in Australia with limited data and so quickly sent off the following email: *For the record, I hate the guys/girl split. I am weary of this division. This perpetuates so many of the problems I've been pointing out for a long time. When men and women don't interact socially, how are we going to lead together? Surely we can come up with something better? Dalaina.* I followed this email up a few days later with a more lengthy reply stating the reasons why I felt the proposal was not going to be helpful if our goals included a better working relationship between men and women and suggested some other possibilities for community building that didn't further the divide between sexes.

A week later, I received a phone call from Greg. It was a long call - over an hour, and the reason for it was because Greg was offended by the "tone" of my short email. To him, saying that I "hate" an idea was proof that I was angry. He felt like it was a direct attack on him, and it was aggressive. I responded that it was not remotely a personal attack on him, but a statement about my feelings about the idea. I also reminded him that because we have a relationship outside of email, I assumed that he knew from experience that I communicate directly and would be able to use the lens of our previous conversations to interpret the email more accurately. He again insisted that I needed to change the way

that I communicate and be more "pleasant" because my tone was off-putting and "made people defensive." Finally, he offered the "advice" that perhaps this was a character flaw that I needed to work on so that people would be more receptive of my message. He was just trying to help me.

I was very frustrated with the patronization of the conversation. I initially tried to explain to Greg that I was totally open to him sharing his personal reactions to my email and owning his own feelings that it generated. I told him that if he had said, "It made me feel attacked when I read that you hated my idea because it made me think you thought I was stupid." I would have been willing to listen and apologize for being unintentionally hurtful, and this would have given us the space to talk about how we would both like to be communicated with in the future to avoid these things. I added that what I was not okay with was that he made his own feelings normative for the unnamed "everyone else" and suggested that I was responsible for his emotions. I could appreciate if he communicated that a brusque or direct style was hard for him, but I did not accept that there was something inherently wrong or "character flaw" about it.

Coming from my recent ponderings about if I was reacting to Greg's role rather than to Greg himself, I wondered if perhaps I was being overly sensitive and not giving him a proper chance to understand where I was coming from. I decided to open up a bit about my past experiences with men in similar roles as his. I told him that I had a hard time trusting men in Christian leadership to use their power well because I have seen so much abuse of power, and so I was very sensitive when I felt like I was being silenced. The admission did seem to release some of the heat in the conversation, but as we hung up, I immediately regretted sharing that bit of my history. I knew it was a mistake. Not only had he not earned that level of trust, he had multiple times (kindly) berated me for simply being who I am. I was immediately worried that he would feel entitled to dismiss any strong feelings that I have or any attempts at advocating for myself or for women in the area as my own "wounds" resurfacing. I still wish I had said nothing about my past experiences, but rather insisted that trying to classify my emotions and their appropriateness for me (especially when he barely knows me) is not something that I will tolerate.

Looking back, I believe this was a major marker in my inevitable end with PIONEERS. I was not deferential to leadership and didn't back down with the scolding or accept that there was something flawed about me that must have led to the interaction.. I don't believe that Greg had any real interest in understanding me but rather was trying to put a box around what he saw as out-of-bounds personality type, communication style, and values. It was the first hint that a challenge to his authority would not go over well, and that rather than engaging with the content of challenge itself, my spirituality and maturity and the way in which I communicate would be the focus instead.

## **Changes on the Horizon**

Toward the end of 2016, we started feeling like our time in Bali might be coming to an end. One of the primary reasons we were considering moving back to California was to let our oldest son finish his education in America. Contrasting my own experience as a missionary kid and the feelings of rootlessness I have with Dan's experience of having been raised near family in one area for his whole

childhood made it clear for us both that giving our kids time to bond to a home matters to us. We decided that summer of 2020 would be the latest that we would stay in Bali.

In October, another event became a marker for our journey out of missions. I had a series of three dreams, the third on the night I was away on a spiritual retreat. As soon as I awoke, I knew the dreams were significant as they were full of familiar metaphors. Without going into the details, what seemed very clear to me was that God alone had been doing some work and he was bringing us (both of us but somehow it would be activated through me) into a season of peace and rest. It was a really wonderful image, and after a long season full of deep spiritual questions, peace sounded really good. I assumed that it was a spiritual peace, but now I am not so sure that all there was to it. Certainly the dream was helpful later as we asked ourselves if peace was even achievable if we stayed in our community.

A month after this, I flew to Bangkok for a regional anti-trafficking conference. The conference was fantastic, and I especially enjoyed the evenings out with different colleagues discussing a myriad of different things. On my last night, I headed to bed late and found myself in tears. I began praying about where all the emotion was coming from, and what soon surfaced was "I forgot what it felt like to be likable... In Bali, I just feel... tolerated." That thought brought a torrent of grief, and I cried as I realized that the last four years had whittled away at my self-worth and confidence in my own value as a friend. Before Bali, I had seldom had relational issues. I made and kept friends easily. People told me that they enjoyed me, and I certainly enjoyed many people from diverse backgrounds without feeling like either of us needed to change to be acceptable. In Bali, there were plenty of exceptions in teammates and Kim, and we got along well with people in our area outside of Bali and with people in the region and other parts of the world. But those many "reasonable exclusions" built up over time, and observing how new families were treated so differently than we had been was hurtful.

As an fairly intuitive person, I KNEW that my ministry intimidated other women, and when I talked about it, I could read the feelings of inadequacy on the others' faces which made me just want to stop sharing my life at all rather than make them feel badly. I knew that my different perspectives were landmines in relationships as I felt there was a growing list of things that I couldn't talk about with people without feeling that shutdown. And that giant list of unmentionables made me feel like the community found no value in knowing me at all. Though no one to that point had ever made direct comments about a lack of desire to know me or to be in relationships with my family, I felt the rejection and dislike strongly.

As I continued praying that night, I felt like God whispered, "You aren't a missionary anymore. These people at this conference - the anti-trafficking community - these are your people now." That felt sad, but it also felt like a relief. I tucked this message away and figured it would be a helpful thing to remember in the next couple of years before we moved back for my oldest to start high school. I didn't realize it was prophetic.

## WTL

Before Aaron left, he had asked Kim to organize some sort of women's group. I was so excited to see this development, especially because I knew Kim shared the same desire to equip and empower women and had no interest in having the group become just another ladies social gathering. I hoped that the regular contact with other women and a forum where deeper issues were discussed would build community for me as well. These meetings were scheduled for about every other month and were open to women team leaders (Ellen and me) and TL's wives. Most often it was the women of Bali who were there, though occasionally someone else from the area would be in town and would join us.

We typically had one woman facilitate a discussion about an article or book chapter that the others were supposed to have read before coming to the meeting. The facilitator had broad latitude to discuss whatever she wanted, and the idea was that everyone got a chance to talk. Sometimes the meetings stuck to the script of whatever topic we had that day, and other times we discussed leadership issues or asked for advice on dealing with a particular struggle on our teams. In concept it was great, in reality both Kim and I were consistently frustrated by how rarely people did the pre-reading and (therefore) how little some contributed to the conversation. It also felt like often the conversations stayed at the surface and there was a significant lack of vulnerability or personal applications with the material. I considered dropping out several times, but Kim always convinced me to stay saying that modeling vulnerability might be the only way to make it happen. So I stayed.

As time went on, the WTL meetings settled into a norm with 5 women (Stephanie Baker, Ellen Stowell, Karen (White), Kim, and I) forming the core. In 2017, after realizing that my letter to the ILT had gone nowhere and feeling like things had been moving in the wrong direction under Greg, I broached the subject of the role of women in our area. It was touchy with Greg's wife there, but I hoped that if she could see the experience of non-stay-at-home mothers perhaps she could play a part in progress.

The response was both good and bad. On one hand, it seemed like some were alerted to the issues that other women were experiencing, and we were able to discuss women's needs more openly and talk about how things are done differently in other places. At other times, it felt like "well I don't experience that therefore it's not real" seemed to dominate the conversation. It also seemed like any criticism of PIONEERS or any display of frustration made people recoil.

I remember one particular women's meeting in September 2017 where Ellen told us about the PI gathering in Thailand that she had just returned from which was about leadership development and setting the trajectory for it for the next few years. It was an ILT-led meeting with certain leaders hand selected to join them. Having had very recent conversations with Eric and two other members of the ILT regarding the development of women needing to be prioritized, I was anxious to hear how it had gone. When Ellen told us that the issue of developing women in particular had not come up at all until she herself spoke on the last day, I was incredulous. I was even more aghast that of the several resolutions PI had made, none had a thing to do with women. For me, that moment felt like confirmation of a complete failure of my goal to see PI's upper leadership actually live out what Eric Peters had said was necessary which was to do more than modeling. I expressed my anger and disappointment to Ellen, Kim, Karen, Bethany Fraser, and Stephanie. I told them that I thought it was completely maddening that the

development of women hadn't been mentioned other than in Ellen's own statement about our area. I was proud of Ellen for being the one to say something, but I was so bitterly disappointed. I felt deceived.

I could see that saying that I was angry with PIONEERS unsettled everyone but Kim and Bethany, and I really should have realized then that making a public statement against the organization or expressing disapproval of a leader isn't allowed. But I didn't. Months later when everything fell apart, Ellen emailed me and mentioned that meeting and how she felt like I thought her ideas were garbage. That made me sad because I felt like she had had more integrity than the leadership of that gathering. At least she actually said what she believed publicly and her desire for change. At the WTL, I disagreed with her that things would just somehow get better without intentionality, but what I failed to see is that making sure no one gets offended by how or what you've communicated is more important in our area than the validity of content of what is said.

At this meeting, the women decided to spend some time reading up on some specific things that Bethany and I provided about sexism. Our following meeting was one of the best ones that I thought we ever had where we discussed the reading and debated and compared experiences. Though Karen and Stephanie felt like they had no real experiences with feeling discriminated against, Ellen, Bethany, Kim, and I all felt that it was a topic that really needed to be addressed with all the TLs, not just the women on Bali. We felt that it was an issue that would gain no attention without the backing of the male TLs. The decision was made that one of us should approach Greg to ask if we could talk about it in an upcoming monthly all TL meeting (which took place over video conference). I suggested that Bethany give it a try, specifying that I felt like it would not be received well coming from me again.

Before she contacted him, Bethany sent me her rough draft of her email in which she said that on behalf of the WTL she wanted to "start a dialogue with the area to bring awareness to male teammates and have meaningful conversation about it." Greg's response to the email according to Bethany's later text was a desire to address "specific issues" rather than a broad conversation about the whole topic. We discussed some of the different things that she could talk about, but her conversation with Greg did not go as she had hoped. In a phone call between Ellen, Kim, Bethany, and I, she explained that Greg maintained that he only wanted to talk about specific examples from our own lives that we could address to try and fix. She felt that he had not understood the concept of systemic issues, and the most frustrating thing was that, according to Bethany, Greg had refused to bring it up as a topic for the TLs of the area to discuss because it would "cause disunity." In a private text to me she added that "he went on and on about how he wants everyone to feel heard, but then wants to control what we talk about."

To me these two statements are incredibly telling about the environment that we were in: We do not discuss uncomfortable things so that we can maintain the false veneer of unity. And while we say things about wanting openness and vulnerability, we must control the narrative and silence any voices that would upset the desired perceptions.



## The Beginning of the End

In early January of 2018, we went to a PIONEERS regional conference in Bali. We were excited to go as there were other PI missionaries coming in from all over Indonesia, and it is always fun to reconnect with people we rarely see. We were also excited about the speaker, Curt Thompson, who was speaking on the topic of shame and how it impacts our relationships and can devastate a community.

On the second evening of the conferences, the women of our area (Bali and four other islands) had a get together for a WTL meeting that was open for all the women. Stephanie was to lead, and she asked everyone to read some excerpts from a book called *The Search for Significance* which addressed certain fears that we have: fears of failure, rejection, punishment, and shame. The author proposes that each person carries one of these more than others, and after Stephanie's intro, the group began discussing how some of these things play out in our own lives. With a bigger group, it seemed a much more lively and open discussion.

I debated in my head about whether or not to say anything about my own feelings. I'd attempted to address them before in broader ways to individuals. I had shared some things with the WTL core group, and certainly I had shared all of my feelings with Kim. I decided to go for it. I wasn't feeling angry or upset, just sad and deeply longing for connection and to feel known. If we were going to talk about feeling rejected, well... okay.

As I spoke, I began to address Kim because I was so afraid to even look at the other women. I did not know what I would see there. I talked for a very long time - 20 minutes of monologue? I made three main points starting with my own feelings of rejection and ostracism and moving to the more systemic issues of the lack of healthy conflict in our area and the disempowerment of women that was true for the entire organization.

I began simply by sharing about experience in Bangkok. I told them how hard it has been to live here and feel rejected and excluded. I did not tell of specific stories or mention names or teams. I did not yell or name call or rage. I just... told my story of feeling isolated and misunderstood and rejected. I went on to say how I believe that my experience is not isolated. Over my time in Bali, I've observed that there is a tendency to isolate those who do not act/think/believe like the majority. My opinion is that much of this is due to fear of conflict. It is far easier to simply bypass or ignore others than to risk engaging with them and ending up on different sides of theological/political/methodological/values/worldviews lines and having to muck that out. For me personally, I explained how not fitting a stereotypical missionary mom's roles felt like it set me apart and few seemed willing or interested in attempting to know me. Referring to the material of that week's speaker, I said that I don't believe that this area in general models the idea of "staying in the room" in conflict, but rather we run away in shame and avoid making the repairs necessary to build a healthy relationship. Questions get left unanswered, differences get left unexplored, and challenges are pushed away as divisive rather than potentially constructive.

Finally, I talked about sexism. I shared some of my past as a child of missionaries which was deeply marked by sexism and the devastating misuse of power particularly by male Christian leaders. I

told them that I was so weary of being a woman trying to fix a man's issue. I was tired of having to point things out to the same people again and again with their promises that it would get better continue to be nothing but hot air. I admitted that sometimes for me, white American male missionaries/pastors were people whom I feel deep skepticism around because they seem so clueless about their own power and the incredibly different way that they experience the world compared to woman and minorities and non-Americans. I said that between all of these things: the isolation of the "other," the inability to address problems in our area because of systemic fear of conflict, and the ongoing lack of interest in addressing organizational sexism - I wanted to leave PIONEERS. I didn't know when, but I just wasn't sure how long I would stay. I felt spent.

About halfway through my monologue, Dan arrived to pick me up. I waved him off with a wife "look" and a verbal "go away" afraid he would plop down in the middle of the group. He waited downstairs for me, but I knew he was getting irritated and that our kids were home alone. So when I finished I stood to leave, brushing off an offer to pray for me saying that they could pray for me after I left but I had to go now. I felt bad knowing it was a bit of a bomb that I had dropped on them, and if there is one thing about that night that I would have changed, it would have been to have told Dan that I would take a taxi home instead so that we could finish the conversation then. But I left.

When I got home, feeling like there were a couple of things that hadn't been clear enough, I sent the following email:

*Hey All,*

*Sorry for keeping you all up with my long-winded monologue tonight. I can pretty much promise I'll have a nice vulnerability hangover tomorrow to pay for it.*

*I feel like there were two things that I didn't have time to clarify, and I want to make sure to do so:*

*First, when I talked about the white American pastor boogiemer, I was not speaking in terms of sexual abuse or things like that. Though I've seen a ton of that in my life with others, I've not been the victim of rape or sexual abuse. But I've seen the abuse of power from that demographic over and over and over again. I've seen the refusal to acknowledge privilege and the continued support of structures that damage and destroy over and over and over again. I've seen the deliberate initiation and leadership of ostracism for those who do not conform well. As a person very sensitive of the harm that power structures can cause and as a person who does not conform, my fear of these "boogiemen" is not that they will rape me or something, it is that they can destroy me and the people I care about with the neglect of or misuse of power.*

*Second, I want it to be clear that all that I said was not coming out of a place of brokenness or of spiritual angst, dysfunction, unhealthiness. There is obviously a lot of pain and regret there, but I think the process is actually the result of being in a really healthy, vibrant, joyful place both personally and spiritually. I feel more connected with God than I ever have and more content with myself than I ever have. I have no doubt that God is in whatever is happening. Ultimately*

*what it comes down to in my mind is should I stay in a community and organization that does not value me as I value myself or as much as God values me? At times it is right to choose to walk away from a group or organization that can't be okay with who you are or who has no interest in hearing your voice. Sometimes we can stay and change things, and sometimes we must go for the sake of our own integrity and self-respect.*

*Anyway, don't read this as a Dear John (Jane?) letter or something like that. I care about all of you, and, obviously, I still live here. I don't know what will change or when in terms of organizational stuff. Maybe the shift is more internal than practical at least for now. But I don't do fake very well, and I'm not going to pretend everything is fine when it isn't. I know that our area has a had a mostly unverbilized "don't bring up stuff that might cause conflict" rule, but we've already established that I don't play by the rules very well. And frankly, that is a crap rule that no one should follow. So I am bringing it up, and whether I am here for next steps or not, I genuinely and deeply hope that PI South ISEA and PI as a whole becomes more healthy because some problems got named. -- Dalaina*

Over the next couple of days, I made it a point to approach each of the women in the group or sit with them during meal times in order to make it clear that I really wasn't angry. By the end of the conference the majority of the women on Bali had approached me to ask if we could make a plan to talk again after the conference which I happily agreed to hopeful that maybe something would change either for me personally or for some of the area's conflict issues or for the organization's sexism issues. Trying to assume the best, I figured that most of the women just weren't even aware that these things were issues especially if they weren't in leadership.

One conversation that I found significant was with Andrea Torres, a woman who had only been in Bali for a week. She told me that she thought it was great that I was able to "tell my truth" in that way, and she mentioned that as a new person on the field, as a mom planning to be in full time ministry, and as a person probably most similar to me in values/theology/politics, it mattered a lot to see these things dealt with openly. She was encouraged that I felt like I could speak publicly about what I experienced and how I understood reality. I agreed with her, but there were some who very much did not.

## **A Summons**

The conference continued, and outside of a few awkward conversations and promises to talk later, things seemed to have moved on a little. I knew that most of the women in the group are self-proclaimed "slow processers," so I figured it was good to give them some time to think through things until they were ready to talk, if they were ready to talk. As far as I was concerned, I said some really hard things, some things very critical of the organization and even of the lack of real allies in most of the men which I attributed to ignorance more than malice. I was completely certain (and confirmed later by several of the women who were at the meeting) that what I had said was kind, and I knew that I had played by "fair fighting rules" using I-statements and sharing my own feelings and opinions without attacking anyone or naming names or telling on or off anyone else. I knew that it would be something

that I would need to follow up with Greg about it. Honestly, I just hoped that somehow it would be a catalyst to having the conversations that were so needed. On the last day of the conference, the reckoning came.

I had just dropped my kids off at childcare when I got a phone call from Greg. He told me that I needed to make my way to a conference room to talk about the women's meeting from a few nights before. I protested the timing saying that it was really important to me to stay for that morning's session because it would be the only one that our RL, Nathan Herbert, would speak at for the week. Since it was the first time he would be speaking to the entire region since taking the role, I wanted to hear what he would say. Greg told me that this was not possible, and that I had to miss the meeting. I tried again saying that I was totally happy to discuss the WTL meeting, but did not feel like it needed to be *right now*. I told him that I would be willing to miss any other session that day or talk over lunch or even make a plan to talk after the conference. Greg insisted. Wanting to make it clear how exactly the conversation was coming across, I said, "Are you "summoning" me to this meeting? Because I absolutely do not want to go right now. Are you saying I have no choice?"

"Yes, that is what I am saying."

I hung up with Greg and called Dan to let him know what had happened. Dan was as upset as I was about the way we were being brought in for the meeting, and he searched out Greg in the hallway. In a nearly equal conversation, Dan told Greg, "The only way I am missing the session this morning is if you command me as my boss." Greg replied that this was not what he wanted, but if that is the way it had to be, then okay.

While Dan was talking to Greg, I went to find my friend, Sarah Park. Sarah was an RL in an East Asian region of PIONEERS and was attending the conference to speak at a session just for women and to lead a couple of breakout groups on "challenges for women in PIONEERS." We had met each other at leadership a conference a couple of years before and connected over the desire to see PIONEERS grow in gender and ethnic diversity. I respect Sarah very much and appreciate how she combines strength with gentleness. I consider her someone who has informally mentored me in leadership via our random email communications. The night before we had had dinner together, and I had told her about the women's meeting. Because she knew the situation from my perspective and because of her role as an outsider of the region but a respected member of PIONEERS' leadership team, I felt like she would be a good person to ask to go with Dan and me into the meeting. I pulled her aside and told her about the conversation with Greg. "Can you go with me to this meeting? I don't know what's happening, but I don't have a good feeling about it." Sarah grabbed her purse, and we all met in the conference room.

Once in the room, Sarah checked with Greg to make sure that it was okay that she was there. He said it was fine and proceeded to start the meeting by explaining that they just wanted to know "how I was doing" after the women's meeting. Dan asked, "Why are we really here? Because if you wanted to know how Dalaina was doing, you could have done that anytime. Why are we here right now? What was it that needed to happen *right now* to make us miss the session?"

Greg began by saying, "No really. We just want to know how you are doing." Dan pushed again, and Greg moved on to talking about how my words at the WTL meeting a few nights before were really hard for some people to hear and how they were having a hard time processing it and maybe did not feel like they could talk to me about it directly. We could all see that he was hinting at a follow up meeting that afternoon, and Sarah (I believe in the unspoken realization of my preferences) asked if Greg would like her to mediate a meeting later in the day for the women of our area to finish the conversation. Greg seemed to jump on the idea, especially because it felt awkward for him to be a part of a women's meeting. They made a plan to arrange for a place for the women to gather after the final session that afternoon.

The conversation turned back to the topic of the WTL meeting. What was interesting is that the things that I said were not discussed. I was not asked what had led to my feelings of isolation in the community. I was not asked what I had observed that made me believe that conflict is not managed well in our area. The issue of gender parity or how PI was addressing the issue was never mentioned. When I tried to bring those topics up, I was told, "That is not what we are here for."

Instead, what we talked about was how I made other people feel by sharing my story and naming my observations about the community and organization. "But how do you think you made them *feel*?" Much of this conversation was centered around two things: first, if I should have said anything at all and second and most importantly, how I said it. Greg's opinion (which obviously he only gained secondhand) was that I had been angry, accusing, offensive, and divisive in what I had said.

Dan actually said very little in the entire meeting. Other than his initial "why are we really here," one of the few other things that he mentioned was that he thought it was important to note that Greg had a history of perceiving me as angry when I am not. He specifically mentioned the email exchange and phone call we had over it as an example. Greg argued with this point, stating that he did not think this was true. His perceptions of me were, in his opinion, accurate, which brought him to the point he was making: if people think I am angry, that is my responsibility regardless of the reality of my actual emotions and if people are upset about what or how I communicate, a good leader and a spiritually mature person would figure out another way of communicating or refrain from communicating at all.

About an hour and a half into the meeting, it seemed to be winding down. Other people had peeked in, and we all assumed that the next group needed the room. We stood to leave with Sarah walking through the door first. As she was walking down the hall, Dan and I got pulled back into the room for round two.

Round two was much more intense, though it felt like just another circle around everything that had been said before. The subject of the upcoming follow up meeting came up again. Karen was concerned that I would not listen well. She told me that it was not the time to talk about issues, but just let the other women "have their say." It was very important to her that during the meeting I not defend myself. I must not even clarify something that was misunderstood. "Just listen to them, Dalaina." In fact, Karen said that she would give me hand signals if she felt like I was stepping out of line or talking too much. The whole thing felt surreal to me, and rather than start a new argument about how ridiculous

and immature that was, I passively agreed to it. Mostly I was wondering what these women had told Karen that made her so certain that they had "some things" they needed to tell me - things that Karen indicated I would be upset and hurt by. I am not remotely afraid of conflict, but I am very very wary of gag orders and what they communicate about control and power. None of it seemed healthy or emotionally safe (for anyone) to me.

Dan finally made his last comment. "It sounds like you are setting Dalaina up for a public stoning." The Whites protested this, but it eventually circled back to "but how do you think you made people feel?" and consequently "you need to let the women say their piece now."

At around the 2.5 hour mark, Nathan Herbert (the RL) came in. Initially I was relieved to see him as I had always found him a good listener, and I knew him to be comfortable rather than intimidated in the presence of strong women. I attempted to bring the conversation back to my very first point from the women's meeting which was the exclusion of those different than us. I tried to explain that it was hard to cross that bridge because there was even a part of me that was sympathetic that maybe for some people, my theology and beliefs felt threatening to theirs because they feared that engaging me could bring their beliefs crumbling down. My point was to express empathy in what could be causing some of these community issues (fear of our own values and worldviews being challenged) because I had personally gone through major faith shifts in my life and had felt that way too at different times. Immediately I was shut down and told how arrogant it was to say those things because it made the assumption that I believe that my own beliefs were the measure of truth and everyone else was just ignorant. I in no way said or meant that, and in that moment, I knew that anything else I said to explain my point of view was liable to be twisted around. This was not a discussion. Lines were drawn, and I was marked as dangerous.

It became clear to me that Karen's version of the women's meeting was the narrative that everyone was going off of and there was no room for me to protest this version of the meeting. I believed (and still do) that she experienced that meeting as me flying off the handle and raging at the women despite the fact that multiple women have concurred with my own assessment that I had been both calm and kind. At any rate, I was rebuked for my "poor leadership decision" to say what I had and was told that leaders need to be really careful about when and how and what they say because it can cause angst in others. Nathan's final comment to me was, "Maybe this is a character flaw that the Holy Spirit is giving you a chance to address. I think you should take the time to think through the way you communicate to people so you can be a better leader." I paused for a few seconds thinking through what he was saying it and comparing it to my own self-perception and past experiences.

Finally, I said, "Nathan, I hear what you are saying. And on one hand that makes sense. But what I can't figure out is who to believe. This PI community is the only one which has ever given me such feedback. In other circles, even in the anti-trafficking community in Bali, I am regularly sought out for help in conflict resolution because it is not hard for me to separate ideas from people. I am constantly asked by people, both those I am close to and near strangers, to help them navigate difficult circumstances because they explicitly say they feel safe with me and know me to be a gentle and kind person even with those that I disagree with. What is interesting is that it is often the most fragile people

who tell me that it's because of my strength and ability to withstand high levels of aggression and negativity without resorting to the same that they want me in their corner. So I really don't know who to believe. Do I believe what you guys are telling me today or do I believe the overwhelming feedback from every other area of my life?"

Those questions were left hanging and the necessity of picking up our kids from childcare and getting them to lunch necessitated adjourning the meeting. As we stood to leave, I had one more thing to add. "Greg, you did not need to summon us to this meeting. Had you called and said 'Hey, I know it's really inconvenient to you to miss that session, but we are thinking we might want to have a follow up meeting for the women and want to get your input on it. Since it's the last day of the conference, we have to figure it out now if it's going to happen. Do you mind skipping the session this morning so we can figure it out?' I would have been bummed, but I would have come. Your pulling rank was altogether unnecessary and unhelpful."

"Noted." Greg replied. And we walked out. I thought the worst of that day was over, but we were in the eye of the storm.

## Boundaries

We picked up our kids and got them settled in for lunch. I ran into Sarah in the dining room, and she apologized for leaving. She had thought we were finished and didn't realize until she was down the hall that the door had closed behind her. I briefly filled her in on what Karen had said about the upcoming meeting, specifically that I needed to keep quiet and let the other women say whatever they needed to. I told her, "Sarah, I am not feeling good about this. This whole thing feels crazy, and I don't even want to do it."

"It *is* crazy. It's completely ridiculous, but I want you to do this. I want you to do this because you are good at standing your ground and staying in the room when it gets hot. You are good at conflict, and I want you to show Greg and Karen how it can be done and that it's okay to go through conflict in the community. I will be there, and I won't let it get out of hand. I won't let anyone throw stones at you."

I agreed, trusting that Sarah would live up to that promise. Dan, however, did not want me to go. As we picked at lunch, he said that he would prefer to get our kids and just go home. We could deal with the fallout later, but watching me sit through that meeting made him livid. He felt like it was one big sham, pretending to be interested in my perspectives and feelings as a veneer to communicate precisely that those things were unimportant if they initiated discomfort or exposed conflict in the community. I agreed with his assessment of the meeting, but I wanted to go to the follow up meeting. I felt like with Sarah (and Kim) there, I could take whatever hits might come. I'd do it precisely for the reasons Sarah laid out. If I was going to criticize a community for being unable to engage in conflict in a healthy way, as a leader, I needed to model what staying present in conflict rather than running away looked like.

We went to the next session which was a breakout group, but after only a couple of minutes Leslie Herbert called me over to tell me that Karen was waiting to talk to me in the hallway. I intentionally left my bag next to Dan in case I needed an excuse to come back and get him and went out to meet her.

"We have decided not to have Sarah in the women's meeting this afternoon." Karen told me.

"Excuse me? Why not. That's what we all agreed to."

"I know. It's just that as I was thinking about it, I decided that she is not really a neutral person," Karen explained. "People know that she is your friend. So I think it's better if we find someone else to facilitate the meeting... I just think that if you have a friend in the room, people will not feel free to share honestly and openly."

I was absolutely stunned and incredulous by this statement. I was livid at having spent all morning in a hellish meeting agreeing to another meeting I had no real choice about to begin with, being treated like a child who would need "hand signals" to play nice, and now this. "Whose idea was this?" I asked.

"Mine."

"This is bullshit, Karen. This is a terrible idea. I am not okay with this plan at all. I consented to this second meeting with the expectation that Sarah would be there too. I am not comfortable being in that meeting without her. After how you described it, it feels like an angry crowd of women is going to let me have it, and I want Sarah there so that I know it won't get out of hand."

"I wouldn't let it get out of hand." Karen protested.

"I don't trust you right now, Karen. I want Sarah there."

"I don't think it is a neutral space if Sarah is there. We were thinking it would be better if someone that you don't know was there instead... Maybe Carla Delaney?"

I laughed, "I had coffee with Carla yesterday -"

"Then someone else." Karen quickly replied.

"Karen, I am not at all comfortable with this. I really really really want Sarah there with me. That is what I agreed to. If you force me, I guess maybe Carla is okay. But I want Sarah there. She was in the meeting this morning. She understands my perspective of the women's meeting the other night. She is who I was told would be facilitating the meeting when I agreed to it." With this comment, I went back inside the room to the breakout group and motioned for Dan to bring my bag. I told him what Karen had said, and his immediate reaction was "No way" as he went out of the room to chase after Karen. I paused for a brief moment and decided that "no way" was in fact my answer as well.



We found Karen down the hall talking with Leslie. I was a step behind Dan and heard him say, "Either Sarah goes with Dalaina to that meeting or I go. I think you'd probably rather it be Sarah."

I simply said no. "Karen, no. I won't go into that meeting unless Sarah is there too. That is a boundary for me. I don't feel comfortable or safe given the way that you presented the need for the meeting, indicating that there are really angry women ready to give me a piece of their minds. I don't feel like I can do what you've asked and listen without defending or clarifying if I don't know that Sarah is there able to advocate for my position if need be. I don't feel like I can listen well without feeling defensive if I don't know that I can process through what was said later on. I need Sarah there to do what you've asked me to do. So if you want me there, Sarah has to be there too."

Karen argued back saying again that she wanted a "neutral space" and Sarah's presence as my friend might keep people from being open. And we went round again with me saying that Sarah's presence was what I needed to feel safe and that I would not go without her, and Karen insisting that I must anyway. Dan and I both asked if there was anyone who had told her that they would not feel safe with Sarah there, and she indicated that no one had said anything like that. "So if you have one person saying she doesn't feel safe without Sarah, and no one saying they don't feel safe with her... why is this even a conversation? It seems pretty clear what the right thing to do is." But we kept going around in circles. For forty-five minutes we stood in the hallway arguing about it. For forty-five minutes, I said no, it would violate my sense of safety to do this. And for forty-five minutes Karen said that I must.

I felt like I was in the twilight zone. Is this really happening? How is this okay? When a person says that your proposal makes them feel unsafe and that they aren't able to give their consent to it, the only appropriate option is to start working on another plan. It is never okay to insist that they ignore their own boundaries which are clearly and articulately expressed.

A couple of months later Greg would ask me why I had not just walked away from the conversation if it felt like such a violation. The simple answer is: power. Karen, while not officially my boss by title, is my boss's wife and in the missionary community that holds power. In this situation, she seemed to clearly be speaking on Greg's behalf as was acting like one who had the authority to insist that I do what I did not feel comfortable doing. To walk away from Karen would have been complete defiance of Greg's leadership, and I did not feel like I had the choice but to stand my ground or capitulate. If I had been arguing with another team leader or a team member, I would have felt able to just say "nope" and walk away. But this was a meeting called for and approved by my boss and my boss's boss. I did not have the organizational authority to just not show up and not expect some sort of consequences. It is this power differential that made all the difference in what choices I had (or didn't have) in this encounter. It is this power differential that made this situation spiritually abusive.

## Women's Meeting - Take Two

The conversation with Karen finally ended when Leslie suggested that we stop and pray about it. Leslie and Karen bowed their heads while Dan and I just exchanged baffled looks. *I don't need to pray about this. My answer is no.* I mouthed. When they finished praying, Karen seemed to have decided that

she would back down. I don't pretend to know what her reasons are for ultimately deciding to let me keep my boundary after forty-five minutes of trying to run over it. At any rate, it was nearly time for the closing session for the conference, and Sarah needed to be (re)informed of the plans. I had wanted to go with Karen to tell Sarah (mostly because I didn't trust her not to try to force Sarah into some sort of gag order during the meeting as well), but I was intercepted by another woman, Maria Styles.

Maria lives on a different island in our area, and we have always been friendly though we haven't had much interaction. I've always found her to be kind and interested in talking about all sorts of things. Maria sat me down and said that she had a confession to make. "I've avoided getting to know you the whole time you've lived here," she admitted. She went on to say that she felt embarrassed and afraid that I had pre-judged her since I had met their former teammates before meeting her, and since those teammates left because of a team conflict, she thought perhaps I thought badly of her. She went on to say that she felt inferior when she was around me. "It's not because of anything you've ever done," she rushed to say, "It's just that you are so involved in ministry stuff, and I am at home with three babies barely able to get anything else done outside of motherhood."

I knew exactly where she was coming from, and I told her that. I told her about being a young mom in Peru living in a village and hating every second of tribal life while living next door to a teammate whom I lovingly call a "freaking girl-scout." I knew what it was like to compare and feel like I came up short. I told Maria that we aren't the same people, nor do we have the same call, nor are we in the same stage of life (my kids are all school aged), nor do we live in the same place (I live in Bali with lots of conveniences that give Dan and me more time away from home.). What I didn't tell her was *I already knew*. I already knew that this was one of the reasons that some women did not want a relationship. I had felt it, and I had already named it to both Dan and Kim. But I appreciated that she brought it up so that we could acknowledge it and work through it, and move on. This was exactly the kind of conversation that I had hope my "speech" earlier that week would inspire because *this* was healing and reaching for deeper vulnerability and trust in community.

After our conversation and the closing session, the women of our area plus Sarah gathered in a meeting room. By this time I had a migraine bad enough that I was just trying not to vomit, so I do not remember most of what was said in the meeting. The two things that stuck out the most were when Nikki Northridge, a woman who had only been in Bali about a year and is a neighbor, expressed hurt by what I had said ("Were you saying that you think our relationship was fake?"). Other than her comment, I only remember Stephanie's words. Through tears, Stephanie spoke about how it was true that she was judgmental of me (and everyone else too, she added). She admitted that she only really wanted to discuss parenting with me because "we really don't have anything in common, and I don't talk about stuff that I don't have in common with people because I don't like conflict." Like with Maria, I wanted to say *I already knew*. This was exactly the frustration that I had with so many in the community in Bali. I felt the invisible "list" that kept me from real intimacy. I felt the loneliness that comes with being in a room full of people that have never really tried to know you and don't intend to. This was the very thing that I know keeps our community from deep intimacy.

Despite the assertions from my leaders that "maybe people don't feel safe around you," several people in our region have shared with me about theological positions, beliefs, or values that they have that they refuse to share publicly precisely because they are afraid of social costs in the PIONEERS community. The content of Stephanie's admission was exactly what I wanted to talk about because I believe this "don't talk about anything that we don't already agree with one another about" attitude is systemic and not located in just one person. However, trying to be true to my agreement with Karen, I thanked her for sharing and said nothing in reply.

Finally, it was over, and I left as quickly as I could. Andrea Torres followed me out wanting to talk. She was truly baffled by the entire thing. She had been positive about the initial women's meeting, but in her opinion the fact that our leadership even thought that that first meeting needed a second meeting was "creepy." It bothered her that they thought that what I had said in the first meeting should upset her or anyone else enough to make a big issue of it. To her it felt like an attempt to quiet dissent. She noted that it felt to her like I had spoken in what seemed like obviously general ways, but it seemed that many people took it as a personal attack against them. I understood her point, but we didn't stop to talk very long because we both had kids to take care of. I for one was just glad the day was finally over.

## Aftershocks

For the next couple of days, Dan and I walked around in a fog. We could not focus on anything, and we kept asking each other what had happened. I called Kim who was also wondering what had happened. All she knew was that I was nowhere to be seen all day, and then all of a sudden another women's meeting was being arranged (strange that she wasn't even consulted given that she had been the WTL leader). I called her on the phone and told her the details of the meeting and the confrontation with Karen in the hall. I remember vividly her surprised response. "Oh Dalaina, that was abusive! I would struggle to stay under leadership that did that to me." As soon as she said it, I knew it was true. Of course it was true. My work is with victims of sex trafficking, and I have done extensive research on abuse of all kinds and its impact on victims. Because of my personal history and advocacy for gender equality in Christian communities, I have studied spiritual abuse and its effects. When I got off the phone with Kim, I pulled out my reference books again.

Different experts define spiritual abuse with different nuances, but one seminal book on spiritual abuse called *The Subtle Power of Spiritual Abuse* defines it this way:

*Spiritual abuse can occur when a leader uses his or her spiritual position to control or dominate another person. It often involves overriding the feelings and opinions of another, without regard to what will result in the other person's state of living, emotions or spiritual well-being. In this application, power is used to bolster the position or needs of a leader over and above one who comes to them in need.*

Karen's actions in the context of her power over me given her role as the area leader's wife and the assumed authority she had in speaking for him in the moment is what makes what happened more than just a conflict between equals. The lack of regard for my needs and feelings and the use of her

positional authority to attempt to dominate was abusive. Given the reality of the spiritual dimension of the missionary community and the expectation for spiritual leadership for those in leadership roles is what earns that additional label of "spiritual" abuse.

However, I did not simply want to rely on my own knowledge or on a friend's reaction. I connected with an acquaintance named Ashley Easter whom I only know from some online interactions as we are both advocates, though her work is specifically in the area of abuse particularly within Christian environments. I reached out to her for her professional opinion about what happened. I was surprised by how decisive her response was. "I would call it manipulation, intimidation, shaming and spiritually abusive because of the spiritual leader dynamic," she wrote to me in a private message.

Dan and I pondered what to do about the situation. Greg had already contacted us for a follow up meeting, but we were not ready. We felt that the easiest thing to do would be to say nothing. In fact, we were convinced that if I apologized for what I said at the women's meeting and said that I hadn't intended for anyone's feelings to be hurt, if I took a slap on the hand for "making everyone feel bad," it would all go away. But we knew that this was not a really an option for us. To live in our integrity, we had to be authentic and honest about our perspective and experiences. We knew that it might cost us.

## Community Fallout

In the couple of weeks after the conference, we made good on the promises to speak with the people who wanted a longer conversation. The first of these conversations was with the other PIONEERS team on the island which consisted of two families, Justin and Serena Harper and David and Stephanie Baker, as well as a single woman, McKenna Young. We asked our teammate, Max Kotz, to join because it seemed that the issues that we needed to talk through had a lot to do with our team-to-team interactions.

Our conversation on January 12 lasted for five hours, and it covered a lot. The first topic that we covered was some of the issues of the past - the feelings of isolation and the exclusion that Dan and I and Max had experienced. The other team expressed that they felt limited in their social capacity, and also never felt particularly obligated to our team as their primary concern was with their Indonesian relationships. I brought up the occasions that our kids were excluded from birthday parties that all the other PI boys had been invited to, and I was surprised to hear that though I had communicated to the Bakers (the team's leaders) after the first occasion how hurtful this was, they had not actually talked to the team as a whole about it. Their team "rule" that attempts to avoid gossip required them to go to only the family who had hosted the party. They weren't allowed to bring up what I had said to the whole team. So it happened again, and Dan and I were even more offended the second time because we had not considered the possibility that when the Bakers said that they would "communicate it" to their teammates, that it would not actually be communicated to the whole team.

We felt better knowing that the second time had not been as deliberate as it had initially seemed to us, but we saw more proof that the so-called "no gossip" rule doesn't actually suppress gossip so much as it perpetuates the unhealthy atmosphere where people are afraid to ask the

community for wisdom or share community-impacting problems. We believe that this rule infantilizes adults giving them rules rather than asking them to think through their motives and own their own mistakes when they overstep. In many ways, we feel that the rule comes from good motivations (make sure you are talking to people directly if you have interpersonal problems), but has also contributed greatly to an environment of hiding and conflict-avoidance because if people do not feel that they CAN directly speak to someone about a problem, their only other option is to say nothing. Later on ( in a conversation between Dan and Justin Harper), we would learn that David Baker told his team after this meeting that if they wanted to talk more about the conversation with our team, they would need to do it with Nathan rather than with their teammates - no "gossiping." This became significant when one of the reasons that we were forced to resign was that several PI units had approached Nathan to talk about us. We wonder if some of these conversations were more about processing than complaining about us and could have and should have taken place among teammates. The "no-gossip" rule instead of protecting people has actually served to keep people from being able to discuss real issues within teams and makes issues feel bigger than they might actually be.

At any rate, after talking about some of the expectations that our team had had of the other team and ways that we had been disappointed by the lack of community, the conversation moved into more personal territory as we talked about how I had personally felt unwelcomed and lack of personal interaction between me and the members of the team.

Serena expressed that she had been worried about how I might judge her because I had stated strong opinions about certain authors and English translations of the Bible. "It makes me nervous to think about having you in my home because I think you might judge me negatively if you saw those authors and those translations on my shelf."

But the most intriguing and upsetting things came from the Bakers. Similar to her comments in the second women's meeting, Stephanie expressed that she had intentionally withheld herself from a relationship with me because she is so uncomfortable with conflict. Since we have so little in common in values and theology and politics, it was far more comfortable for her to avoid conversations of any depth with me. Stephanie just seemed sad, but David appeared strangely angry. Dan and Max and I were all surprised by his words and by how upset he sounded when he had said them. "Dalaina, I have never had a conversation of any substance with you. And I never intend to. I think that if we talked about something significant, and we came to opposite conclusions, you would judge me as a bad Christian and dismiss anything that I said as having no value."

I asked David if he had ever experienced me doing this to him or to anyone else before, and he admitted that he had not. But this was still his expectation and the reason that he had not bothered to engage in any real relationship with me. I told him that on one hand I very much respected his right to choose friends and that I believe that it is important to allow missionaries to not be obligated to be friends with every person they work with. On the other, it seemed awfully unfair to pre-judge my reactions without having ever given me a chance. All David could say was, "I don't want to give you a chance."

The other odd bit of conversation was when Stephanie asked to pause the conversation to clarify something with Dan. When he had come to get me at the first women's meeting during the conference, I knew that he was about to sit in the middle of the group and wait me out. Knowing this, I stopped speaking long enough to give him my "wife look" and say, "go away." Stephanie was upset by my words to Dan as she "would never talk to David that way." She asked Dan, "Are you okay? Was that okay?" Dan gave her a puzzled look and assured her that I had said the right thing in the right way because nothing else would have made him leave the room (which he believed was appropriate). He told her that while it may not be typical, we both communicate directly and forcefully with one another, and he was fine with what and how I said what I did. The conversation moved on, but he was very upset by Stephanie's question and what it implied. I think that was the moment he realized how much people struggled with the different way that we do our marriage and family, and that different is not considered valid or good for the most part. As we talked about it later and how he felt like Stephanie had implied that he was "hen-pecked," I told him at least he was the innocent victim. I was the bully.

The conversation ended with a discussion about how Dan and I see the disempowerment of women. Much of it was clarifying misperceptions. For example, Serena expressed that she was leery of the whole conversation because she feels specifically called to her family and does not want to be forced to work in ministry outside of her home. We explained to her that advocating for women means advocating *choice*. It means that we would advocate for her right to choose to stay home AND my right to lead and work in ministry full time. We would equally advocate for men to choose their family or ministry as their primary callings. The point has never been to put anyone in a box, but to embrace the individuality of our calls and make sure that each person and each family is able to live into those callings fully.

Another conversation that I had within days of the conference was with Nikki Northridge. She and her husband Tom were our neighbors, and Dan and I had been their team leaders for their first two months in Bali when we were passing on our leadership of the Launch Team to Ellen Stowell. Nikki had been hurt by my words at the women's meeting, and I was anxious to make sure that she understood that I was talking about much more general and systemic issues for the most part. And those personal things that I had shared were far older than her presence in Bali, and I did not feel that she had contributed to them personally. However, the difference in the way that her family had been embraced by the community was hard not to notice.

A few days after this first conversation which had to be cut short, Nikki invited me over for coffee to finish talking. Her invitation was, in my understanding at the time, an invitation to share my heart because she hadn't realized all that had been going on under the surface for me in the community and in PI. By this time, I had processed the events from the last day of the conference and was very angry. I sat at Nikki's table and let free a torrent of emotions, describing what had happened at the conference and how angry I felt. I communicated that I felt that though I did not think Karen was malicious, I viewed what had happened as spiritually abusive based on the definition above. I also shared what the Bakers had said in the meeting and how frustrating those comments were and how much they seemed to confirm what I had been feeling all along. At some point toward the end of the conversation, Andrea Torres and her husband Anthony (who were living with the Northridges for a

couple of weeks while searching for a house rental) came in. Since I had moved on mostly to the systemic sexism issue, I didn't stop the conversation because of their presence there. Nikki did not say much, and I regret not realizing how uncomfortable she was hearing what I was saying. I believe I was wrong to not ask her first if she was willing and able to hold these things with me. In my own pain and need to verbally process what had happened, I did not think about the awkward spot that put Nikki in as Karen's and Stephanie's friend too. One of my primary regrets in this entire saga is involving Nikki in it.

The Northridges were scheduled for a visit back home to Australia at the end of January, but when they returned, we planned to get together again to talk. This time with Tom and Dan there. We knew that they needed a chance to process everything, and we wanted to give them a chance to talk about their own perspective rather than just hearing ours. On February 8, we sat down with them to talk. It was a bit of a surprise to us when they said that they deeply believed that we should step down from leadership, and in fact, the only real problem they saw with PI leadership was that we had not already been removed as TLs. Tom told us that he believed me to be extremely arrogant and divisive, a gossip and a slanderer naming the conversation I had had with Nikki about what had happened to me as evidence. "If you hate PIONEERS so much, you should quit." "This community has been wonderful and accepting of us. It is you who is causing disunity."

Though Tom and Nikki did have strong feelings about me, they were likewise upset with Dan. Over the previous year, Dan had been wrestling with some deep faith questions, feeling like God was completely silent, and even wondering if God was real. It was a journey that he had been very open about, even sharing about it with Eric Peters and others in high level leadership. Months before at a leadership conference, Eric had encouraged Dan to keep wrestling and to keep doing it openly with our team and the PI community because he thought it was a healthy move toward vulnerable leadership. We agreed. Tom, however, felt that this disqualified Dan from leadership in a PIONEERS team.

The conversation was pretty shocking to us, but it was important that we listened to them and considered what they said as they had been good friends over the past year that we had known them. Tom later admitted that he was shocked by how we had just sat there and listened so well even though he had "never unloaded on anyone like that before." After the conversation, we talked with our teammate Max about some of the things that they had said. We talked about whether or not Dan and/or I should step down from our roles as team leaders. Max did not agree with many things that were said about our leadership, and we all felt that Tom's comments to Dan were simply not what we believed about vulnerability in leadership. However, I felt like I needed to take some time to consider the things that Tom and Nikki had said. In this whole process, I certainly did not want to be unexamined.

## Getting Feedback

It mattered to me what the Northridges had said. It mattered to me that the Bakers, even though admittedly a pre-judgment, did not feel comfortable even trying to get close to me. While I have no problem acknowledging that I do have areas of pride and that I do not like admitting that I am wrong, I have generally seen a difference between having a strong sense of self and being self-important. I believe confidence is not always the same as arrogance. What bothered me the most about what had

been said was that people did not "feel safe" with me, and that they were worried that I would not accept them in our differences. That criticism felt extremely odd to me because the experiences that I have had in other places and other communities is that people have sought me out specifically sometimes because they felt safer sharing with me than anyone else. In fact, only a few days before my conversation with Nikki and Tom I had been asked to lead a social media group because the larger group felt that I consistently navigated conflict well and was respectful of all sides in an argument. As I said to Nathan in the meeting on the last day of the conference, I did not know who to believe.

I sought out feedback from people that I believed would tell me the truth. I asked my teammate, Max, as well as several close friends and mentors. Though different people used different metaphors, the feedback was consistent. "Dalaina, you are strong, and your strength can intimidate people - especially if they don't know how tender you are. You don't move easily and can withstand a lot of opposition, but that is what makes you a good advocate for others. Vulnerable people feel safest with those who don't back down easily. But you are teachable. You consistently seek to identify your blind spots and address them. You apologize quickly when you realize you are wrong. You are kind."

Max and Kim provided very helpful feedback in regards to the community perception of me. As Max put it, "You are like a 100 mph train, and most people run at half that speed. There is nothing wrong with being a 100 mph train, but you don't always realize that it can be startling to encounter such a fast and powerful train. And it can be scary if you think you are going to crash into it... I don't think you realize how bad your poker face is. When you disagree with something, it's obvious even when you have chosen to say nothing about it and not make it an issue, and I think that can be scary for some people if they are afraid of conflict especially if they have seen in you 'advocate mode.' You don't turn that onto people when you disagree with them, but no one knows that until they have bothered to engage with you."

The same week Kim and I had an eight hour conversation in which she promised to give me her brutally honest feedback. The metaphor she used was a bit different, but the message was the same. "Dalaina, you are lion among zebras, and when you roar - even when you aren't roaring AT the zebras, they can get skittish. A few of us in the community are rhinos, and while we aren't lions like you, you aren't worrying to us. We've been able to move toward you and discover that you are very gentle up close, but I think a lot of the zebras are afraid to. You have no idea the level of energy that you put off. You have no idea the capacity and productivity that you have that is totally unattainable to many people. It is threatening, especially since you are a woman in an environment where women aren't supposed to be like that."

As I prayed about this feedback over a couple of weeks and tried to listen for any correction from God, I felt like God spoke very clearly through a biography I was reading about an American woman who had been a powerful advocate and minister to exploited women, particular prison inmates. Her biographer noted that she frequently did not get along very well with church leadership because of her tendency to speak prophetically. I laughed as I read it because the spiritual gifts that she had (discernment, prophecy, and exhortation) are the same ones that I have, and I think I have driven church leaders little nutty my entire life for the same reasons. In particular, I was struck by the biographer's



note that "The characteristics that endeared her to those marginalized by the church were the same ones that frustrated those in the church leadership positions concerned with tradition and status quo." As I pondered this, I realized that it has very much been true in my life as well. The ones that consistently come to me and feel most safe around me are the marginalized - the ones who have been harmed and abused whether by the world or by the church or other religious communities. Perhaps it is my inability to conform and my insistence on truth-telling that makes religious leaders feel uncomfortable and outsiders protected. All I know is that if I have to choose who I want to feel most safe with me, it is the marginalized. If the nature of my personality - the "lion" as Kim calls it, makes those with institutional power uncomfortable, I can be okay with that knowing that it does the opposite for those who seldom have an advocate.

All of this introspection was not without a lot of tears and words and journaling. It was excruciatingly painful, and for a time I upped my standing monthly counseling appointment to a weekly one. My counselor, herself a former missionary's kid and missionary in the Pacific islands, was critically helpful over the months of trying to unravel what had happened and why and what I should do about it. I remember at one point telling her that I was trying to find God's redemption in what was happening around me, "I just don't ever want anyone I lead to feel this kind of pain. I don't want to abuse my positional authority in the way I have experienced it abused against me. I want this experience to make me careful of how I wield my power."

Ultimately, based on the unanimous feedback from decades-long friends, former teammates, the Indonesian community, my anti-trafficking colleagues, mentors, and my counselor, I was left with the conclusion that there was a enormous difference between the way that the Bali PI community described me and the way that everyone else seemed to experience me. What it came down to was whether or not they believed that an intense, vocal woman was acceptable or innately sinful. For those that saw a good gift in the uniqueness of my personality, they found me approachable and as they approached, they discovered tenderness and respectful discourse and yes, safety in my passion. Those that saw inherent "wrongness" with the way that I communicate, simply never bothered. They didn't feel safe, but that feeling was untested. Like David Baker had communicated, they didn't want to give me a chance. That realization grieved me, but ultimately, I knew that I could not be responsible for the fear and insecurities of others had that kept them from engaging or accepting me.

## **Confrontation**

Three weeks after the conference, we finally felt ready to talk. We knew that the Whites were clueless about the impact of that interaction with Karen and that they were likely expecting to talk more about the two women's meetings. We debated about what to do. We deeply believed (and still do) that if I met with them, said nothing to them about what Karen had done in the hallway, and assured them that what I had said in the women's meeting had been a mistake and that I felt terrible for hurting everyone's feelings, the entire thing would be "forgiven." But we also knew that the points that I had made about the issues in our community would also be stuffed back under the rug. In our integrity, we knew that we couldn't pretend that what had happened with Karen was no big deal. And we did not want to stuff the issues that we had brought up back under the rug because they made people

uncomfortable. Other than the conversation we had had with the other team on Bali about women in ministry, no one had bothered to talk to us about whether or not my assertions were accurate. It was still all about whether or not I should have said what I said and how what I said made people feel, never about the validity of my assertions.

In a private message to Sarah Park, giving her an update on what was going on, I wrote,

*We want to keep the conversation just on what happened when Karen said she didn't want me to "have a friend in the room" even when I explicitly said that I didn't feel safe without you there. We want to communicate 3 things.*

*1) I agreed to a plan for the second meeting that included your participation as a moderator. It was disrespectful to everyone in that meeting to unilaterally change the plan without input and consent of the people who had agreed to the original plan.*

*2) Even if Karen's motives were good and even if she didn't like that I felt the way that I did, the moment she heard that her idea violated my sense of safety, the only appropriate thing is to come up with an acceptable alternative that doesn't violate anyone's boundaries. To have had to spend an hour having to defend mine should have never happened.*

*3) The experience of my expressed needs being ignored and my protests dismissed broke trust in our relationship in a significant way. The appropriate next step is to make a repair. For Dan and I, we need recognition by the Whites that Karen's actions were inappropriate and a commitment to learn and not repeat that kind of behavior.*

*If the Whites can acknowledge this, we've already forgiven so we can schedule follow up conversations about that first meeting, Karen's reaction to it being out of line with everyone's, the question of my feeling slandered, and finally the actual things I spoke about. However, we cannot be comfortable talking about anything else until this first thing has been addressed. I don't think it is productive nor wise to be vulnerable with someone who thinks doing what Karen did was appropriate.*

*The way I see it, either they respond well and we move on. Or they don't, and we will need to bring in Nathan or member care for mediation. What happened was abusive regardless of intent. I think it's possible we can deal with it just between them and us. Dan and I are willing to try even though it is uncomfortable. But if they can't listen or don't see a problem, it would feel like an ethical obligation to bring someone else in because I would never want another PI member to experience this from their leadership.*

We planned to meet at the White's home on January 29. We offered to meet them there not so much because we were trying to make it convenient for them since they have a baby, but because we thought it might be necessary to flee. It seemed like a smarter option to be able to leave if we

encountered another situation like the one we had experienced at the conference rather than to feel like we had to ask someone to leave our home. We did not think it would come to that, but we simply did not know what to expect. We parked our car in the driveway facing the road for a quick getaway. We had considered the possibility of asking them to allow us to have someone like Kim in the room with us, but based on the fact that the issue was because I had wanted a friend in the room for the second women's meeting, we thought it might actually escalate the conflict. So we decided to be brave and just go and see what happened.

As we suspected, the Whites were very surprised by the content of what we said. However, we were grateful that the conversation remained civil and even kind. We told Karen how we experienced the confrontation, and that based on our understanding of the definitions, it fit into the category of spiritual abuse. Karen also took a turn and essentially told the same story that we did. She said that she had no idea that it was so hurtful and was shocked to hear that that had been our perception. She expressed that her desire in the whole thing had just been to have a neutral space and was trying to figure out how to do that in the moment. Greg pulled out his tablet and began taking notes, making sure that what he wrote was what we meant. He wisely said that he was obviously not going to be able to mediate between us and his wife, and that it seemed like a good idea to get Nathan involved. We agreed and went home.

## Mediation

A couple of weeks passed between the time between our conversation with the Whites and our first conversation with Nathan (February 9). During this time, we were desperately trying to process what had happened at the women's meeting and what was said by members of the other Bali PI team. Our teammate, Max, was a constant friend as was Kim, and we told them the good and bad and ugly of our day to day processing and attempts to understand what had happened. Outside of Kim and Max, I had decided to share with Nikki (and through her, Tom) about the details - a regretful decision, as I have already explained. Outside of these three people, we did not communicate with anyone else in Bali. We finally spoke with Nathan, and he told us that he had consulted PI-USA's member care and had activated a protocol for a mediation. Charles Chalmers, a licensed counselor from New Zealand, and his wife Roselie would be coming to Bali to mediate between us and the Whites to see if we could come to some sort of relational reconciliation. We were amenable to try though I think it is worth noting that my counselor gently advised against it. In her vast experience working with missionaries, mediation had exclusively been a tool for demanding conformity rather than real healing in cases like mine where there had been an abuse of power. Ever (naively) optimistic, we hoped she was wrong.

On February 12, we had a follow up call with Nathan who specifically requested that we "don't use the word abuse. We've heard that you have used that word in the community, and Greg wants to have that not go around." This was unsettling to us for a couple of reasons. First, as an advocate, "gag orders" are very alarming as they are seldom protective of victims. It's a red flag to hear that someone isn't allowed to say what they experienced to the people that they deem trustworthy of hearing their story. Certainly there is a place for gag orders when there is litigation or if children are involved, and I absolutely agree that we are not given the rights to tell the stories of others even to support our own

without their consent. But that was not what this was. Secondly, I would have been sympathetic if I had been plastering my story publicly (though I do believe I retain the right to do so), but I had not. I had shared with only three people in Bali as I tried to process what had happened and figure out what I should do about it. That Greg had "heard through the grapevine" clearly meant that he had been contacted by Nikki and Tom because I knew that Kim and Max had kept my confidences (this was later confirmed by Tom who admitted that he had called both Greg and Nathan).

Dan and I were upset with the Northridges because it seemed like they had shared OUR story with the very people whom we shared that we were scheduled for a mediation with and felt abused by (ironic given the accusation of gossip they had leveled against me right before), but I also felt sympathetic for Greg and Karen who seemed to think I was telling anyone who would listen what had happened at the conference. My hope for the upcoming mediation was to deal with the specific confrontation between Karen and us, but I really hoped that it would pave the way for a healthier relationship between the four of us and maybe provide a path for us to address the things I had brought up in the first women's meeting and hopefully to address the tendencies for authoritarianism and lack of vulnerability we had experienced in Greg's leadership. I wanted Greg and Karen to know that we were not out to destroy them and that we were doing our best to walk through a strange and unsettling situation in a way that was authentic and also allowed us to access the support that we needed to process it. After a time of praying through how to or if to respond Nathan's request on their behalf (as we had had no contact with the Whites since the meeting a few weeks before), I wrote the following text (CCed to Nathan and Dan):

*Hi Greg and Karen. Just felt like this morning it would be good to reach out. I know we've got junk to work through, but I do want you to know that I am for you both and that I care about you and I care about this situation.*

*I am not out to get you, and I am trying to do my best to deal with my own pain and find the right support for myself regarding what happened and about 25 other things in an appropriate way (it's been hard because ideally we could come to our AL for these things, but you feel a bit "off limits" at the moment). I am 100% sure I haven't and probably won't do it perfectly. It's weird in a closed community where your friends are your colleagues and are in relationship with people on all sides.*

*If I was in your shoes I would be feel afraid for my reputation, and based on feedback from Nathan, it seems that is the case. In Bali, I have spoken to Kim and the Northridges and Max about what happened and defined for them my understanding of it. I used the exact same definition I read to you and did make it clear that I am separating an incident from intention and character. Basically what I told you the other night is exactly what I said to them.*

*I don't know if that's helpful, but I would feel better if I was you and knew exactly where I stood and what I've shared and with whom. I have decided to actually not talk to Tom*

*and Nikki about it anymore as they seemed more disgruntled and upset about my sharing than the content of what I shared. I don't think they can hold this with me which brings its own hurt. I will continue to talk to Kim about it as she is my closest friend on Bali and someone who has a long term view of the community. Max will get updates as my teammate and be a part of praying for it with us.*

*Bottom line is that I am optimistic about moving forward, and I have nothing but hope and goodwill for you both. You are not my adversaries and I am not out to get you. I really am trying to be as wise as I can be about who I can/should talk to in a community that feels very cold and maybe even somewhat hostile. It's a slog in the meantime, and it's hard for all of us.*

*I hope at the very least you can see my heart and my hopes and be gracious when I don't always quite know how to get my own needs met right now. You're trying, I (we) are trying. It's going to be okay.*

The text went unanswered, and in mediation Karen said it was also offensive and unappreciated.

We met with Nathan, Charles, and Rosalie on the evening of February 27. The purpose was for us to meet one another and set up some expectations and ground rules for the mediation scheduled for the next three days. We met with them for a couple of hours, and we were surprised and not terribly excited to realize that they were a part of PIONEERS as well. We were under the impression that they would be a neutral party and not affiliated with or representing the organization. It felt like PI counselors could potentially have the well-being of the organization as a priority rather than the people involved in the mediation, and we would have much preferred a non-internal mediation. However, at this point we felt committed and said nothing. We did express our concern that there would not be space for us to *not* reconcile with the Whites if we could not come to an agreement. We wanted to know if it would be possible for us to still work with Greg and Karen even if we could not be their friends because of what had happened if they were not able to understand why it had been such a violation of trust. We did not get much of an answer, but at least we had vocalized our concerns.

The next morning we met with Nathan, the Whites, and the Chalmers at a nearby hotel. The mediation began with a discussion about confidentiality. Dan and I were not surprised given what Nathan had communicated about the White's concerns that people in the community were aware of what was going on. Karen explicitly said that she would not continue the mediation process unless we agreed to say nothing about the mediation at all, ever, and we also stop talking about what had happened to us in the conference. We were very uncomfortable with those demands. Our perspective was that it was entirely appropriate for us to seek out support from those that we are close to, and we felt that it was incredibly unfair to limit us from speaking to our support system through and about the mediation process. We went back and forth for the first half of the first day trying to find a consensus to even start the mediation. Charles was leading the mediation, and he told us that it was "normal" for a

non-disclosure agreement to be made in these types of situations. It did not sit well with us, but we felt like there was not much of an option but to try to meet somewhere in the middle and press on with the mediation. In the end, while we were not required to sign anything, we did agree that we would avoid sharing about what was said in the mediation to anyone in our area in PIONEERS. We were also not supposed to share our experience of the conflict at the conference with anyone else. I pushed to have the right to talk to Kim and that was allowed so long as I was sharing only my feelings about the mediation and not any of the actual content.

The "confidentiality agreement" felt very strange, but Charles insisted that it was a very normal part of the mediation. That night, I called my counselor to debrief the meeting, and she was appalled by the boundaries of the confidentiality agreement. Her professional perspective was that confidentiality was something that Charles and Rosalie and Nathan were bound by. This was not their story, and they had no right to share with anyone that the parties involved at not approved. However, the Whites and we should feel completely free to share our experiences and our opinions and our feelings with whomever we like. Confidentiality does not mean a gag order on the person to whom the story belongs. I researched for myself, and I found that she was correct. In informal mediation, the confidentiality agreement is binding only to the mediator. The exception is when non-disclosure agreements are used in situations where litigation is likely or pending or when the outcome of the mediation is legally binding and substitutes for a judicial process.

At any rate, we have kept the details of the mediation from people in our area as requested up until (and if) this document ever gets publicized. Though I do not feel an ethical obligation to conceal my own experiences, I do hold the personal things that the Whites shared about their own feelings and lives very carefully and will not divulge those things even in this document. They are relevant, and in some ways I believe strengthen my case significantly, but they are not mine to share so I will refrain from writing about anything other than what was directly related to me about me.

Once we actually got started, the mediation process was supposed to be pretty simple. We would share our version of what had happened, and the Whites would share theirs. Then we were supposed to overlay them and come up with the story that we both believed was most accurate. Finally we would have a "so what" session to figure out any action steps. I filled about a half a notebook of notes, so I am comfortable that my recall of this process is an accurate reflection of what was said.

The first steps were actually very simple. Our stories matched fairly closely with only a few details in dispute. There was one important thing that Dan and I were unaware of in Karen's version, and that was an intentional deception that she admitted to. In the hallway when we specifically asked if there had been anyone who did not feel comfortable in the room with Sarah, Karen said that this was not the case. In the mediation, she admitted that in fact there were people who weren't comfortable with a second meeting and though they hadn't specified that it was because Sarah would be there, she thought that could be the case which impacted her decision to cut Sarah out of the conversation and made it hard for her to allow me my boundary for such a long time.

What was more interesting and telling to me was the off-handed comments made throughout the mediation. For example, at one point I was asked, "What was your role as someone under leadership?" implying that submission was the only thing called for in the confrontation with Karen. Karen and Greg were both very concerned with more than just the conflict in question. Karen said that her concern about the women's meeting and my follow up email was that "the tone was quite strong and loaded so it is impacting the area." And later, "What do we do about the tone of the sharing?" when referring to making a plan for the follow up meeting.

The most surprising thing of all was when Karen said that during the morning meeting we had had at the conference, "People in the hall thought there was yelling from Dan and Dalaina and they had concerns. I was surprised by this when I heard that." This point became significant later when the fact that someone had gone to get Nathan because we were "yelling" at the Whites was used as "proof" that we needed to leave Bali for intensive crisis counseling. Even though both the Whites and we did not think that there had been any yelling, and even though Sarah Park or Leslie Herbert had been in the room the entire time and could vouch for this fact as well, this bit of slander became a piece of (false) evidence used against us. Again, reality was not important. The perceptions that people had were all that mattered, even if they were inaccurate and unfair.

Later, Greg had a chance to share his perspective. He made it very clear that it bothered him very much that the word "abuse" had been used in the community to describe what happened. He and Karen believed that it was an inaccurate term because 1) there was no intention in causing harm and 2) ultimately I got what I wanted with Sarah coming to the second women's meeting. Greg felt that Dan and I could have "done something to diffuse the situation," in particular walking away from Karen and simply refusing to participate. He believed that we were "stonewalling" by continuing to stand there and tell Karen what our boundaries were and not disengage. His perspective was that Karen was actually responding to me rather than initiating the confrontation which meant that she wasn't in the position to have been abusive. Ultimately, what he was most concerned about was that "there will be work to do in the area" because the word "abuse" was used. Karen had a similar desire to "set things right after that had been spoken to other people in the area." It did not seem to matter so much that Dan and I felt abused. The primary (and only) concern was how we were going to do damage control.

On morning of the second day, I ended up leaving the room in a rush at the break to start dry heaving into a trash can in the hallway. I had called for a time out (per the mediation rules we had agreed to), but Charles had not paused or wrapped it up quickly for me. I got nauseated because every alarm bell in my brain was screaming at what I had been listening to over the previous hour. Charles had been sharing his perspective about mediation being based on mutual confession. He spoke about how "we are all sinners and none of us is better than the others" and both sides have contributed to the conflict. His final question we were all supposed to be asking ourselves was "am I committed to changing?"

We called Nathan over and ultimately spoke with him and Charles and Rosalie about our concerns that this methodology and Charles' words were grossly inappropriate for a situation where someone feels like they have been abused. There are never two sides to abuse. The abuser is always the

one responsible for his or her choice to harm, even if it was unintentional. There is no such thing as "provoking abuse," and the victim is never required to change in order to not be abused. Charles backed away from those comments and admitted that while I was technically correct, he had been invited to do a mediation process. "There is a protocol if you want to initiate an investigation into abuse. This mediation process is an attempt to avoid that, but if you want to stop this process now and launch that protocol, you have the option." We decided to press on because we did not want to have a formal investigation. We have seen internal PIONEERS investigations before, and they are exhausting and miserable for the entire community. Because we felt that Karen's abusive actions were likely isolated and done in ignorance and immature leadership, we wanted her to grow, not be punished. We also did not want to humiliate her and Greg or put the community through an investigation.

We pressed on, and eventually it was time to address what we both wanted out of the conversation. Dan and I wanted some clarification about Karen's role and authority in the organization. She had consistently maintained that she was not an AL, but in this situation seemed to clearly be acting with Greg's authority. That was never really discussed, and we figured that it was more a conversation that needed to happen between Nathan and the Whites so we dropped it. We mostly wanted recognition that what Karen had done was not acceptable, and we wanted her to learn from it and not repeat the behavior again. The White's main goal was to deal with the word "abuse" and figure out how to talk to the community about it. In the end, we decided that we couldn't and wouldn't come to an agreement on whether or not the word was accurate to describe what had happened, but we were all willing to let the other party have its opinion and move on.

During the final morning of the mediation, we were supposed to work on next steps. Nathan offered the idea that we would come under his leadership for awhile. The plan was to give us and the Whites time to work on our relationship without the added stress of a supervisory role. We both agreed that this seemed like a good plan. I also said that I wanted to be excused from area obligations. In particular, I did not want to participate in the women's meetings any longer. The rest of the morning left a bad taste in our mouths as it was mostly about how to tell people in the area as little as possible and still make this look good. It felt like a lot of concern for appearances and an attempt to gloss over what had happened and make the situation look as good as possible even to the point of being very nearly deceptive. At no point was there any mention of addressing what I had brought up in the women's meeting. It seemed that the focus was simply on making sure everyone felt good about our area and were assured that everything was fine, we're all fine. Dan and I did not believe we were fine.

## **Post-Mediation Reflections**

Part of our processing the events of early 2018 was done in the context of my final Fuller Theological Seminary (online) class before my graduation which Dan was auditing with me. The class was called Focused Lives and was a very self-reflective class using Bobby Clinton's Leadership Emergence Theory. We saw the class as a godsend because it gave us space and structure to process through how we understood our callings, our personalities, and the direction God was moving us toward. A few days after the mediation, I wrote the following in the section of the personal portfolio I was creating for the class:



*As I think about how far I have come in my journey and all the ways that I have changed since I first moved overseas, what is becoming more clear is that I am in a time of transition out of overseas missionary service. Transitions can be motivated by many things, and indeed they are often painful as we let go of aspects of identity and expectations about how our lives will unfold. This transition stage that I am in seems to be a result of two things. First, it is a reflection of personal transformation. I simply do not fit this world any longer. "... some transitions come about as a result of changes in our own hearts. In many cases this transition reflects the simple fact that we are growing older and wiser, and so perhaps have a better read on ourselves and what really matters to us" (Smith 2011, 13).*

*Second, I can no longer deny that the values that I have developed seem ill-fitted for the community that exists here, and in fact the values that I hold demand that I no longer remain in a situation that I would advocate for others to leave. While I truly do believe that PIONEERS is a great fit for many people, the nature of this particular part of the organization is limiting for women with my gifts and personality. Not only is it inhospitable, there are ways that it is combative and shaming. I wish that I was the kind of person that could stand longer and wait it out as I do believe change is coming. But I no longer can stay when I feel my own confidence and self-worth beginning to erode. I am afraid of speaking, of leading, of using my gifts because I am afraid of being perceived as intimidating or threatening to others.*

*Gordon Smith wrote "Another related way a misguided sense of duty undercuts our capacity to fulfill our vocations is when we act on the fear that someone will be threatened by us. We hesitate to act and embrace an opportunity and perhaps even our calling because we do not want to do anything that might make some other person feel diminished. It is really their problem, but we take it on as our burden: wives that do not want to threaten their husbands or friends who do not want to outshine their peers, or employees who do not want to threaten their supervisors. While it is imperative that we live with sensitivity to the emotional well-being of others, we cannot afford to be straight-jacketed by their emotional immaturity. We owe it to them, but ultimately we owe it to God and to ourselves to "fan into flame" the gift and opportunities God has given to us. We are accountable for our stewardship of those gifts. And ultimately, we are not really doing others a favor when we protect them from their own emotional insecurities. All we are doing is hurting ourselves" (ibid 139). I read this paragraph on the day that we met our leaders in a mediation process. Though the outcomes of that process were probably as positive as they could have been, I realized that the outcomes do not actually change the core issues of mismatched values and the unhelpful and unnecessary silencing I am experiencing in the community. It is time to leave.*

I think this was the moment that I really left PIONEERS emotionally. At one point in my career, I pictured Dan and myself operating on the ILT. I knew that we had the strategic leadership skills to do it,

and I think we would have made positive contributions to the organization's growth and development especially in the areas of diversity and contextualization. We had been with PIONEERS for twelve years, and we cared about it a lot. But the mediation made it clear to both Dan and I that that our time in PIONEERS would be drawing to a close in the next few years and that we would be leaving the field. We just did not realize how soon it would be or how little choice we would have in how and when we left.

## Forced Resignation

During the month of February before the mediation began, Dan and I had been wrestling with the question of when we should move on. Our children's education, Dan's desire to move away from vocational ministry, and my growing feelings that PIONEERS simply did not share my values of gender equality, vulnerability, and flat leadership structures were on the forefront of our minds. However, there were a couple of very specific things that we felt were keeping us where we were for awhile longer. First, we had 2 units on the way to work with Dark Bali (our anti-trafficking ministry). Anthony and Andrea Torres were already in Bali in language school, and another woman was on her way in July. There was another couple who were coming for language school and very interested in our team, though not yet committed. The three women were all very committed to anti-trafficking, and I knew that my coaching and networks would be important to their success working in anti-trafficking in Bali.

The second and most important thing keeping us in Bali longer was a project that I had been asked to lead by a coalition partner. Essentially the project would have seconded me to a secular anti-trafficking organization to facilitate the opening a trauma center that provides intake, evaluation, and monitoring for kids that come in either through government social services or through different NGOs due to sexual abuse or sex trafficking. The center would also serve as a location for a child victim-centered method of obtaining evidence for criminal investigations. I was honored to be asked to serve on this team by Dark Bali's (the anti-trafficking organization I started and run) coalition members who were very enthusiastic about the idea and who felt that I was the only one in the community with the language, education, and experience to take the role. As I sought prayers and counsel from our supporters, Indonesian colleagues, and other anti-trafficking leaders over the course of about four weeks, I was overwhelmed by the encouragement that I received. There were so many who prayed and said that they believed that this project was part of why God had us in Indonesia. It was one of those "for such a time as this" moments. For this reason alone, Dan and I determined that we should stay in Bali for at least a year and a half and possibly two and a half years when our oldest would be entering high school. This would also give us the time to get the new members of our team situated and connected with our Indonesian ministry partners and ready to take over much of the on-the-ground work of Dark Bali.

Though we felt that the mediation had gone better than we had feared, we knew that we would be leaving PIONEERS and Bali in the next few years. We talked about whether or not we should switch organizations in the meantime, but that seemed to be a lot of trouble to go through for just a couple years more. It seemed that with Nathan becoming our direct supervisor rather than Greg perhaps we could just keep our heads down and do our job. We knew that the community issues that we had tried to address - feeling ostracized and observing terrible conflict resolution, had actually become even

bigger issues as we felt even more ostracized than before with unresolved conflict. But we had a good team and a good Indonesian community and good relationships within the Dark Bali coalition, so we figured we could focus on work. Even still we struggled with the decision because we knew it was likely going to be so difficult to endure. We prayed for clarity - to stay and do the project and get the new team settled or to go.

We had scheduled a follow up call with Nathan a week after the mediation (March 9), and in the meantime I sent him the details of the project I was planning to take on, how we anticipated it impacting our family and team, and the feedback from supporters and our professional community. It felt like more of a formality than anything because in our experience in anti-trafficking, PIONEERS seemed to stay pretty far out of it as they have no real experience or expertise in the issue. Because we are under an Indonesian partner organization for our visas, we have tended to consult our Indonesian boss over PIONEERS leadership since he is directly involved and knowledgeable about the stakeholders in our particular realm of ministry. This leader had signed off on the project with enthusiasm.

When Nathan got on the phone, we only spent a couple of minutes in small talk before he said, "I don't really know how to say this but to do it directly. I am not going to allow you to take on that project. In fact, I want you guys to move your family for a time to California to get intensive counseling to work on Dalaina's communication and leadership style."

We were dumbfounded. There had been nothing remotely hinting at this, and we had not been asked how moving back to the USA would affect our kids, our team, our finances, our ministry, or our lives. No alternatives were offered like accessing counseling in Asia r remotely. There had been no conversation about the assertion that our "communication and leadership style" needed this kind of therapy. To our knowledge, the only people who had contacted Nathan to complain about us were the very people who were in the middle of the community issues that we had named, and there had been no attempt to contact people close to us who might have a different experience with our communication style (and at the date of this writing, this remains true). Our teammates weren't asked about their experiences under our care nor was our previous PI team/leaders in Peru consulted. It certainly did not seem like an effort to find truth. It felt very much like punishment for refusing to back down from confronting what we saw as unacceptable behavior of our leaders, for pointing out problems in the community, and for being non-conformist in personality.

First we asked if it was possible for me to leave the organization, keep my distance from the team, and just focus on the new role in the new organization that wanted to hire me. "In that case," Nathan said, "I would want Dan and the boys to go for counseling." This line confirmed to us the punitive nature of the decision. It was about me until I was removed from the equation, then more was added: our family would suffer one way or the other.

We essentially had four options:

Option 1: Accept Nathan's decision and spend several months and thousands of dollars in "intensive counseling" that we did not believe we needed and which we believed would negatively impact our children and their schooling and relationships (their school is year-round).

Option 2: Appeal Nathan's decision to Eric Peters or to member care. This was tempting, but we've been around PIONEERS long enough to have seen repeatedly that the ILT and the home office defers to the RLs decisions and the RLs nearly always defer to the ALs decisions. If Nathan thought that we needed counseling (and we suspected that Greg would absolutely agree if he hadn't already weighed in on the decision), there was no possibility that Eric would do anything but trust the decision of our leaders.

Option 3: Leave the region. This was not a real option for us because we had no interest in working elsewhere. We also had moved regions before and knew that any new AL would contact our previous leaders and wouldn't accept a transfer given the reasons we were leaving.

Option 4: Resign.

We put Nathan on hold while we talked it over, and Dan said, "The biggest reasons we were going to stay for a little longer were to get the new team settled and to do the project. To relocate to the USA, even if it was a reasonable request, would prevent us from doing either. Is there any good reason to stay and submit to this "counseling" thing?" There wasn't. We were backed into a corner. Really the only choices we had were to move our entire family across the world creating significant financial burdens, disrupting our children's schooling, and removing them from their community while working through alleged problems that we do not believe actually exist. There was not real choice.

We resigned.

Nathan asked us to spend a week thinking about it in hopes that we would change our mind and go to California. But as the week went by, we were certain that there was no way that we could in good faith submit to the counseling given that it had not been something that was previously discussed and especially that the mandate had come without due diligence to its necessity. We challenged Nathan repeatedly to talk to Max, Kim, our teammates from Peru, our Indonesian colleagues, and people we had led during the Launch team, but he maintained that he "wasn't doing an investigation." So at the end of the week, we confirmed that we were resigning and received a commitment that we could remain in Bali in PIONEERS until our children finished the school year in July. Nathan sent the following email to the Whites, Eric Peters, Trey Barns (member care) and us:

*Dear Greg and Karen, Trey, and Eric (cc- Dan and Dalaina)*

*This morning I spoke with Dan and Dalaina over Skype about what I believe to be the best way forward. I mentioned some of my concerns with them and told them that I believed that they had a lot of leadership gifts and abilities. I told them that my concerns have led me to a decision to have them attend LinkCare or AlongSide or some other kind of intensive counseling to help them deal with some unhealthy patterns of communication that I have observed as well as some things that I have been made aware of. They were both very gracious in their listening. At this point they are not open to either LinkCare or AlongSide or another similar option. Dalaina is currently meeting with a counselor and though she is aware of growth areas, she feels like she is on the right track. I told them*

*that, as their direct leader, an intensive counseling option which would require a relocation was the only way forward. I've asked them to take a day or two to consider it before making a decision to leave PI.*

*After finishing the conversation, I called them back to let them know that we have an appeal process, and should they want to pursue that it was within their right and PI scope of care. I told Dan that if they wanted to appeal that they could start by talking with either Trey or Eric.*

*We plan to talk again on Friday morning at 0900 Jakarta time, to hear if anything has changed in terms of their willingness to get the counseling that I'm requiring. They did mention that they have been struggling for quite some time with their place in the "M" community and they are wondering if God may be calling them out of it, and whether this isn't the time for them to step away from PI. They will prayerfully consider their next steps.*

*I told them that after a decision was made we'd need to involve member care and their sending fellowship. They've asked to be copied on any communications with their home fellowship, and they've asked for those communications to wait until we've spoken again on Friday.*

*Please keep them in your prayers.*

## **Aftershocks**

I wish I could say that things got easier after we resigned, that we seamlessly settled into our new reality. But that isn't what happened. In many ways, things got more confusing and isolating and hard. On March 9, I sat down with the Nikki and Tom at their house to try to work things out. We had not communicated much more than navigating school carpooling details since they had communicated that they thought we should be removed from leadership. Dan was still very angry and hurt because of the calls they had made to Nathan and Greg, but I felt like I couldn't not at least move toward them even though I too felt pretty betrayed and hurt by it all. It was a hard conversation that lasted a couple of hours, but it was good. We did not talk about what had happened at the conference or our mediation process, focusing only on some of what they had said in our previous meeting. One important thing for me was to apologize for putting Nikki into the middle of things and for making her feel like she was pulled between me and Karen and Stephanie in particular. At the end of our conversation, we affirmed that even though Dan was not interested in a relationship at the moment and was really angry with them, I felt willing to try again with a different set of expectations and boundaries in our relationship. I appreciated that they expressed that they had noticed how in the area when people have conflict, they stopped talking to one another and felt that was quite ridiculous. I said, "Yes! Absolutely. This is part of what I was referring to in the women's meeting. We have to do better with conflict. We have to stay in the room with one another."

When I went home, I told Dan what they had said and some of their reasons for having called Nathan and Greg. I told him that I thought there was space for him to reconcile with them as well. He wanted to think about it, but was inclined to contact Tom soon to see if they could talk.

The next afternoon I received a text from the Northridges saying that they no longer wanted to carpool with us and "wanted space" from both of us. I was very surprised and asked if something had happened between our conversation the day before and then. They said they had had some time to process and were bothered by how upset Dan was and decided to "check out." Dan went ahead and texted Tom, to let him know that he had been planning to talk to him if made any difference, and he apologized for not coming with me to talk and expressed that he hoped to restore the relationship. Tom replied that they would take a couple of weeks of space, and they set a time to talk.

On March 28, Dan met up with Tom. The long and the short of it was that Tom and Nikki had decided to break contact with us completely. While there were a few issues that they felt contributed to their decision (things they had never before talked to us about), Tom said that their primary reason was that they were so upset by what had happened in the last few months and in particular what I had said at the conference and what we had "done" to the Whites by forcing them through a mediation. They appreciated the conversation that they had had with me, but ultimately they disagreed so strongly with our recent decisions that they did not see any way to continue to be our friends. And also... they did want our children to play in their home anymore. Dan was upset by this in particular especially because our five-year-old, Micah, was best pals with their youngest daughter. The two of them played together regularly at one house or the other. Dan made it clear that though he understood that they no longer wanted to see us, it was not necessary to drag our children into the middle of their parents' conflict. Tom and Nikki did not see it that way, and Tom maintained that they would not allow their children to associate with ours any longer.

We dealt with this as best we could. We were upset by their decision, especially because of its impact on our kids. They had already been asking why they hadn't seen the Northridge family recently and why they had stopped carpooling. For awhile we had been evading the question, but we finally sat them down to say that we had had a conflict (having nothing to do with them) with Tom and Nikki that we continued to disagree about, and that, in the end, they had chosen to stop speaking to our family - a decision that we thought was completely inappropriate and unfair to them. Our boys were reasonably very confused and hurt. Micah had already been acting off for a few weeks and this increased with nightmares and random sobbing and bouts of rage. He acted like a child who had suddenly lost a friend to an unexpected death. The older boys were able to talk about their feelings. Ben wanted to know how he could trust people if they could just walk away like that after expressing care before. The other two talked about how awful they felt to be punished for something that they hadn't done.

After sitting with our kids pain, we approached both Nathan and Ellen Stowell (their team leader) to see if there was any way to start a conversation about it. We respected their boundaries about not being contacted by us. However, having a barrier between our children and theirs because they were upset with us isn't a boundary, in our opinion. Our children didn't make the Northridges feel "unsafe" and in need of distance from them, and it was frustrating that no one had bothered to challenge

them on this mentality. We believe that it is always inappropriate to needlessly hurt children or involve them in adult conflicts. We wanted to know if there was space for Tom and Nikki to realize the impact of their choices on our kids, whom they had previously had significant relationships with, and change their minds to allow them to just come over to play a few times in the last few months that we were in Bali. We were happy to stay completely away from their home and to keep the play dates at their home since they did not want their children around us. Ellen and Nathan both felt that it would not be appropriate to even ask the question, so our children continued to suffer, in our opinion, because of the community's inability to do healthy conflict and fear of "making people feel bad" (as Ellen cited as a reason to not even bring up the topic with Tom and Nikki). It was simply more symptoms of the same thing that we had been trying to identify for months.

In addition to this particular relationship, we were uninvited to participate with the orientation we had previously committed to helping with on the Launch Team. When Ellen uninvited us, her reason was that "it is too awkward" to have us working with the new Launch Team members when we had had a conflict with the area's leaders. Additionally, we experienced more ostracism and exclusion in the community. But at this point, we understood ourselves to be the living examples of the issues we had raised.

## Reality Check

Though there were some very hard things about the months following our resignation before we left Bali, a few things happened that gave us perspective. We had done a fair bit of work before the mediation trying to assess the criticisms we had received, and it was quite inconsistent with what Nathan was telling us in vague terms in our weekly email calls. It felt like he was trying to convince us that our "leadership and communication style" really did need work, but when we finally asked him directly at the end of April to give us specific examples of what we said or did that made him come to this belief, he did not have any examples to offer. He told us that 9 different units had come to him about us in the past few months to talk about our "emotional volatility," but he did not seem to have any specifics from them either. The one thing that he offered was that someone had come to get him during our meeting with the Whites at the conference because we were "yelling" at them. We challenged the accuracy of this, even sending him a photo of the notes I took during the mediation to remind him that Karen herself said that it was surprising to hear that someone had said that. Our perspective was that the people that were upset with us were the people with whom we either had previous problems with (like the Whites or the Northridges) or they were people that we had little contact with and had recently criticized (the other team on Bali). It did not seem fair to us that he based his opinion of us and mandated intensive therapy across the world without consulting others who would have offered an alternative point of view. It seemed ludicrous to judge our leadership without consulting all the people we've led over the last few years. It felt like a desperate attempt to choose a narrative and allow no space for conflicting information. Realizing Nathan had so little (no) actual examples to offer us about our supposed deficiencies, we felt little obligation to continue trying to consider the legitimacy of his claims.

A few days later we had a surprise visit from Jake and Lillian Miller whom we had led on the Launch Team a couple years before and currently lived on another island and hadn't been at the conference. They had come to Bali for a dental appointment and stayed with us for two nights. They had heard that we were leaving and were very surprised by the news and wanted to know what had happened. We told them about a lot of what had gone on over the last few months, and Jake's response was like instant healing to our souls. "We disagree on just about everything, but it's never kept us from a friendship. You've always been respectful of our beliefs. And leadership... our favorite team meeting ever was that time there was a conflict on the Launch Team, and you brought it up and made us deal with it head on. It was done so beautifully... You guys were wonderful leaders. Why didn't anyone ask us? We would have told them that." It was an injection of reality, and we knew the truth of it. I joke with Jake that other than loving Jesus, we have nothing in common. We are different genders and different nationalities and he is older than my own father. Our theology is very very different - including our views on women in church leadership. And though we've even had some minor conflicts about values and theology clashes, none of these things have kept us from considering them dear friends and even substitute grandparents for our boys. We also appreciated their feedback about being under our leadership, and their point about having never been asked was well-founded. When they left to go back home, we felt like a burden had been lifted. Whatever was going on, it simply wasn't justified. It was lopsided and inaccurate and due diligence had not been done before making such a sweeping judgment and forcing a life-impacting decision for our family without our consent.

## Systemic Issues

After we were forced to resign from PIONEERS, Kim mentioned her friend Darla might be a good person to talk to. I had met Darla, and I knew that she had been in PIONEERS years before. I knew that she was particularly passionate about women in ministry leadership. I also had several people tell me that I reminded them of her. I had long suspected that her leaving PI had something to do with being a strong female leader and advocate, but I had never talked to her about it. After a random encounter with a PI member from Darla's island who recommended that I talk to her as a person who was really wise and who had experienced a difficult exit from PIONEERS, I emailed Darla to see if she was willing to talk.

We spent three hours on the phone on March 23. The conversation was incredibly helpful and affirming. Darla told me how glad she was that we had turned down the counseling option. I asked her why and she proceeded to tell me nearly point by point what had been said about me and what the PI leadership had made of it. She described the mediation process. It was eerie because she had very little knowledge of our story, certainly not the specifics. But she had seen this before more than a couple of times in our region, and in her opinion, there was a script that was followed.

I told her about the things that I had said at the women's meeting, and she noted two things. First, she assured me that none of these points had not been made before. I was not the first to notice or to try to confront them. Second, she explained that she was not surprised by the response of the leaders and the community to what I said. "You put them in a corner. They had only two options. They could engage with what you were asserting or they could discredit you and avoid having to do so." I



believe that Darla was correct, and that the narrative shaping and even the counseling mandate was a deflection from the actual issues. We eventually heard that the Whites (who as of this writing have not communicated with us in any way since the mediation) were making rounds around the area letting people know that our resigning had nothing to do with the conflict between them and us - a blatantly false narrative, in our opinion. We were also told that they had asked other team leaders to communicate this to their teams as well. Only one team leader bothered to clarify if this was our understanding of our own story, and we assured them that no, indeed, our leaving could not be divorced from the conflict with the Whites or the things that I had said in the women's meeting. It seemed to us that this false narrative was just easier for most people in the community to believe. Our opinion is that we were scapegoated as the cause of the community problems rather than the ones revealing the problems that were already there. And according to Darla and others, we were not the first.

I will not tell Darla's story or the stories of others who have experienced similar circumstances, but I am certain that this region in PIONEERS has a history of shushing the voices of women who do not conform to the expected and acceptable "communication style." I am certain that PIONEERS' organizational leadership has been challenged repeatedly to take the needs of women in the organization seriously and has failed to act. I am certain that confronting the inappropriate behavior of one's leaders has led to the forced resignation of others. I am certain that "intensive counseling" has been used more than a few times to silence a confrontation and remove people from the field. I am certain that a false narrative has been used in other situations to dismiss dissenting voices.

## **Closing Comments**

Martin Luther King Jr. once said, "In your struggle for justice, let your oppressor know that you are not attempting to defeat or humiliate him, or even to pay him back for injustices that he has heaped upon you. Let him know that you are merely seeking justice for him as well as yourself." I do not write about my experiences here because I want to have the last word or because I want to pay PIONEERS back for the way that the organization has harmed my family. I am working diligently to believe that God will redeem this experience even as I grieve the loss of a ministry that I care deeply about and the loss of a home that I loved. I feel grieved for PIONEERS as an organization and our region in particular because if I am correct and these issues go back decades and have been repeatedly and unsuccessfully confronted, PIONEERS lacks the integrity fitting an organization of members claiming to follow the example of Jesus. I do not want PIONEERS destroyed; I want it healed.

## **Surprise Ending: You're Fired!**

After we resigned in March 2018, we began wrapping up our life in Bali. There were projects to finish, ongoing work to pass on, and friends to say goodbye to. All of that was hard, but it was compounded by the hurt that we continued to experience in the missionary community. After the mediation, we were invited to no more community events, and everyone in our area stopped speaking

to us with only a couple of exceptions. We accepted the silence of the community as the reality that it was and focused on getting ourselves and our kids back to the USA in one piece.

I reached out to PIONEERS human resources about helping us afford the cost of a debrief in Colorado for ourselves and our kids. Usually we would go to PI's office for debriefing (which was offered to us), but there was no way that we felt like we could debrief PI to PI. Our human resources director acknowledged that we would have to raise additional funds in order to attend a debriefing outside of the organization. We struggled with knowing how to approach our situation with our support team, but we also had a 13 year history with them that included a lot of transparency even in our hardest times dealing with depression, marital problems, and transitions out of Peru and into Indonesia. Put simply, we felt we owed our supporters an explanation of why we were leaving Indonesia and an invitation to continue being the incredible team that they had always been by helping us get the debriefing we felt we needed.

On June 4, we included this paragraph in our monthly newsletter:

*To be completely transparent, the past 5 months have been some of the longest and hardest we've ever faced in ministry as we have struggled to address organizational dysfunction inside of PIONEERS and its impact on us as a family and on our team. We are SO grateful for our Indonesian partners, the anti-trafficking community, our team, and a small group of friends who have been supportive and encouraging the whole way. As we've tried to navigate deep and ugly problems in the organization and speak life and truth in the best way we can, we have both been wounded deeply and permanently by many things that have happened here. So have our children. As I was sharing with my counselor a week ago, I am so angry to the point that I don't even feel like I can grieve leaving Bali. While I truly do see God's hand in redeeming what has happened for the good of the anti-trafficking community and for our family, it feels like a deep loss to leave when and how we are. My very wise counselor said, "You are not safe there. It is not emotionally, spiritually, or psychologically safe for you there and it won't be until you get home. You cannot heal until you are out of trauma." And I think this is true for all 6 of us. On the advice of many friends and mentors, we have signed our family up for a week long debriefing and counseling in October at the Missionary Training Institute in Colorado. It specializes in caring for missionary kids, and their re-entry program for kids is said to be top-notch. We decided that no matter the cost, it was imperative for us and the kids to attend.*

Soon after this, we began hearing whispers of things happening within PIONEERS around us. We were contacted by our sending church's missions pastor who informed us that PIONEERS HR department had contacted them about our leaving the field. One of the things that was mentioned was that "there is a possibility that the Mays will be filing a claim against PIONEERS when they leave the organization."

On June 18, Nathan traveled to Bali and met with Kim and her husband as well as Max. We were scheduled to meet with him the next day. When I called Kim to ask her how the meeting went, she warned me that Nathan was "looking for information" on us and that he mentioned that PI was worried about a lawsuit coming from us. He had a lot of questions about what Dan and I had said to others about our situation or about the leadership (Kim and her husband declined to answer). Kim also told me a

story that I hadn't heard before. She said that immediately after the second women's meeting at the conference in January, her family had dinner with Nathan's family. At dinner, Nathan told her that whatever the conflicts are, he felt his only role was to support the Area Leader. This was consistent with her experience in PIONEERS where she has never seen a lower ranking leader not leave the organization after being in conflict with a higher ranking leader. As she put it, "It's like an accident between a bus and a motorcycle... even if the motorcycle did everything right, they will get creamed."

Max's conversation with Nathan was about Dark Bali. Nathan told him that they did not want to have PIONEERS members working with Dark Bali so long as Dan or I would be involved. Particularly, they did not want any PIONEERS members under my authority. According to Max, "Nathan heavily implied it was the refusal to do counseling that made him want no one under ya'll authority."

With the knowledge of these conversations, we went into our meeting with Nathan on June 19 expecting to be told that PIONEERS would no longer work with Dark Bali. That is what happened... but it was not the only thing we were told. After a few minutes of small talk, Nathan pulled out termination documents and had us read them.

The letter, dated June 18, 2018 says:

*Dear Dan and Dalaina,*

*In response to the serious allegations you raised in your April 3rd email [to HR], we initiated an internal review of the practices of your field leadership in Indonesia and Member Development. At your request and because you did not want to file a more specific appeal or complain, this review did not include talking with other field members and was limited to only field leadership.*

#### *Internal Review Findings*

*We have found no abuse of power by your Area Leader or Regional Leader and saw no evidence for "constructive dismissal" or "sanctioned ungodly behavior". It is the opinion of Human Resources that your leaders operated within the boundary of their roles as Area and Regional Leaders. We also found that our Regional Leader took appropriate measures and exercised extreme grace in his response to your statement of "spiritual abuse". His actions to arrange the meeting in February, that included a mutually agreed upon member care person that Pioneers flew in from New Zealand, as well as having you report directly to him, showed that he took your concerns seriously and reflected his deep concern for your well-being.*

*It is our determination that the field leadership requirements that preceded your decision to resign were not unreasonable and included provisions of paid leave and permitted the use of business funds. These requirements were intended to strengthen your ability to lead and improve your communication style with the hope you would continue to do so within Pioneers.*

*Following your notice of resignation on March 9th, field leadership showed flexibility and much grace. They accepted your request to remain on the field for an extended period of time primarily so your children could finish school and you could host expected guests. Member Development also went out of*

*their way to offer services that you declined including providing some extensive debriefing services for our entire family in Orlando or to fly to you in California.*

#### *Termination of Employment*

*Your ongoing employment with Pioneers including any transition time on the field or in the US, is dependent on your ability to work according to our mission and comply with our stated policies and structures. The Pioneers US Mobilization Base is in agreement with field leadership and Member Development that your employment with Pioneers should be terminated effective June 19, 2018.*

*\* Your refusal while on paid leave to interact with other field members in the way described in section 4.7.1 of the US Field Handbook which states that "Each Field Member is expected to contribute positively to the ministry objectives and unity of the team. Field Members will seek to live, work, and relate to one another in a spirit of love and humility as outlined in Scripture."*

*\* Your repeated refusal to provide sufficient details to enable us to properly look into and address the broad allegations you have made directly to your field leader, before a large group at a regional conference, in an April 3rd email to HR and now in a more public manner in your June 4th Newsletter.*

*\* Your public statements inferring that Pioneers has caused your child "deep and permanent" harm after you affirmed to us there was no abuse and no violation of our child safety policy. (The Child Safety Officer was notified after your recent newsletter was received.)*

*\* Your refusal to follow our policy of Positive Dispute Resolution or Our Process of Appeal as defined in section 4.10 of our US Field Handbook and section 5.5. of the International Handbook. By not following these practices which are based on scripture and also widely accepted best practices, you showed your disrespect for our community on field and your disregard for our services, practices and the grace extended to you when we offered you more than seven months of paid leave and transition time.*

*You are eligible to receive up to three months of severance pay at the maximum US Level. This amount will be paid out of and cannot exceed the balance of the funds in the Pioneers ministry account associated with your ministry. Donations will continue to be received into this account through June 25, 2018 and added to the existing balance of around \$13,000 which is still below the maximum US Level. This severance pay will be sent to you on June 30, 2018. Your coverage with Pioneers health and life insurance will terminate on June 30, 2018. You have the right to continue your medical coverage and any voluntary dental coverage in which you were enrolled for up to 18 months following your separation from Pioneers, paying the US group rate premiums. A letter explaining your rights under COBRA and instructions on how to enroll for continuing coverage will be mailed to you within 10 days.*

*In Pioneers we openly welcome candor and feedback when done in a godly manner. We take all concerns raised seriously and therefore welcome any details you may want to provide related to the allegations you have made after you resigned. It was our hope throughout the process to serve any way we could to help you transition well and grow in your ability to minister. This remains our prayer for you.*

*Sincerely, Mike Jochum, Pioneers HR Coordinator for Field Members  
(copied to our missions pastors)*

After Nathan gave us this letter, we asked him if he could tell us why. What had we done? What had happened between the last time we talked and now? What were the ways that we had been hurting the community (which is what he had focused on)? Because from our point of view, no one was speaking to us for us to have had the chance to cause the problems we were accused of. Nathan said that he would not be answering any questions at all.

We got up to leave, but Nathan said that he wanted to talk about Dark Bali. He said that because we had not submitted ourselves to the leadership's requirement for us to get counseling and because we were terminated employees, no PIONEERS member would be allowed to work with Dark Bali as long as we were involved in leading it. And that was that.

An hour later, the following message came to our inbox.  
*Dear Brothers and Sisters in the South Islands Area,*

*As you may know Dan & Dalaina May resigned back in March. They came to this decision because they were not in agreement with some requirements field leadership thought would improve their ability to lead within our organization. At that time their request to stay on the field with PI through the end of July was granted, but on paid transitional leave. Once they returned to the US, PI was planning to give them the standard three months of transition time. However, this morning in consultation with Orlando, the Mays employment with PI was terminated effective June 19th.*

*Earlier this year the Mays made some very serious allegations against our organization. They were asked to follow guidelines our community has outlined in the International Handbook & the US Field Handbook regarding resolving conflict and filing complaints & appeals which they refused to do.*

*Despite the fact the Mays refused to follow these guidelines, and because of the serious nature of these allegations, Orlando initiated an internal review of field leadership and member development. This review was limited in scope due in part to the request of the Mays. That internal review found no grounds for the allegations made by the Mays.*

*Earlier this month, the Mays sent out a newsletter that once again made some very broad and serious allegations against our organization. They also have made a number of statements to other members that show they do not desire to interact with our community in a healthy way that prioritizes unity.*

*The decision to end the Mays transition time early was not taken lightly. A great deal of input was received from Member Development and the Human Resource team in Orlando. The Mays will be given the standard severance package to help them with their transition and had already begun to tell their donors of a way to transition their giving from PI to Dark Bali.*

*Dark Bali, which the Mays set up and plan to continue to lead, engages in an amazing ministry to a very neglected and abused group of people. While we do not want to do anything that inhibits the ability of this ministry to continue, Pioneers will be severing our working relationship with Dark Bali as long as Dan & Dalaina remain in leadership, and the concerns of field leadership remain unaddressed. The Mays and those at Dark Bali are still precious brothers and sisters in Christ, and we pray that members of our area will continue to interact with them in a way that honors Christ.*

*If you have any concerns about what I have written above or our ongoing relationship with Dark Bali, then please feel free to contact Greg or me. If you have concerns with the way PI or its leadership operates on the field please contact Mike Jochum (HR Coordinator of Field Members) in Orlando. PI remains committed to looking into all concerns and allegations, and is committed to do all it can to protect members against any form of retaliation.*

*May God accomplish His purposes in and through our lives in the South Islands Area,  
Nathan Herbert*

We walked home in shock. It was 3 weeks before our departure date and a "you can't quit, you're fired!" was the last thing we expected. We felt abandoned, betrayed, and afraid. We knew that going back in the USA without employment or insurance or job prospects and without the 3 months of transitional pay we were expecting was going to be (and was) a financial disaster.

As we sorted through the termination letter and the email to our colleagues, we grew angry. The amount of deception and distortion was crazy-making... and there was nothing we could do to set the record straight. For example,

- 1) It seems that the allegation of abuse is consistently conflated with our complaints about leadership, the culture of PIONEERS, and sexism within the organization. This is a pretty important distinction. The allegation of spiritual abuse, we've kept private outside of our own support system. The community issues, I brought to the community in the context of sharing how they have affected me personally. Later on, I shared how I was doing and how I felt the leadership still hasn't taken those things into consideration. We've barely spoken of the spiritual abuse since the mediation because what else is there to say? We have still been hoping to see the community problems dealt with and have urged friends and colleagues to really consider the merit of what we have raised in regards to sexism, ostracism, and conflict avoidance.
- 2) An "internal review" of leadership where only the leadership is spoken to is absurd and a complete mockery of the term.
- 3) The member care person who did the mediation was NOT mutually agreed upon because we were under the impression that they were independent of PIONEERS not a part of the organization. We would not have agreed on their leading the mediation if we had been fully informed before they arrived that they were with PIONEERS.

4) It's so interesting how their first point is that we have not sought to *"to live, work, and relate to one another in a spirit of love and humility as outlined in Scripture."* At no point have we refused to talk to people or connect when connection has been offered. In fact, multiple times we sought out a chance to work things out or even just say goodbye and were rebuffed. I wonder why so many others in the community were able to completely ignore us and that was not a problem.

5) The second point of termination baffles me. Our communication with the HR director was very clear that we were willing to share our story when we left PIONEERS because we didn't feel like we could endure an investigation while we were still in Bali. At no point did we say "no." All we had communicated was "not yet because we need to make sure our kids have our full attention until we get home."

6) It seems as though the real issue was the June 4th newsletter... discrediting us by terminating us was probably a good move on their part.

7) The point about our kids is ignorant. Child abuse is not the only way that children can be harmed deeply and permanently. In my message to Mike, I made it clear that there was no abuse or violation of the child protection policy, but their experience being rejected by the Northridges has been very traumatizing for them. The fact that this is even included bothers me. The fact that the child protection officer was alerted yet never contacted us means that they did not follow protocol and they activated a protocol that they know is ridiculous simply in order to use it in our termination. This seems like they are saying either we did not report a child protection policy violation or we are lying. Neither is true. There was no CPP violation, but our kids HAVE been deeply damaged by their experience in the community in Bali.

8) We did not have 7 months of paid leave. We were supposed to have 3 upon returning to the USA. We worked full time up until we left the island.

The area communication was also problematic:

1) *"They were asked to follow guidelines our community has outlined in the International Handbook & the US Field Handbook regarding resolving conflict and filing complaints & appeals which they refused to do."* This never happened. When we brought up our issue with the Whites (which I assume is what this is referring to), we followed the procedures that Greg and later Nathan led us through.

2) Same points about "internal review." A review that only interviewed the leaders WHEN THE PROBLEM WAS WITH THE LEADERS is irrational. Secondly, we weren't non-compliant - we said we wanted to wait until we left the field and specifically asked that the review wait until then.

3) *"They also have made a number of statements to other members that show they do not desire to interact with our community in a healthy way that prioritizes unity."* Nathan never really talked to us about these things, so we aren't really sure what this is supposed to be referring to. However, we had very little interaction with the community at all in 2018. When we did have a few isolated

conversations, we maintained that we have problems with the leadership and we are leaving because we believe they have badly mishandled our case and have hurt us badly. Maintaining this rather than saying nothing or pretending that everything is fine is being labeled as not prioritizing unity. We insist that real unity is actually embracing people who are different and moving toward them not alienating them.

4) *"The Mays sent out a newsletter that once again made some very broad and serious allegations against our organization."* Yes, it was broad. We needed to communicate that we needed to do our debrief and seek support for it. We had no other option but were careful to not name names or give specifics exactly because our purpose was to seek help for ourselves not to air the organization's dirty laundry.

## **Final Thoughts a Year Later**

The night before we were fired I had a dream in which we were fleeing Bali because we knew that a bomb was about to go off. It went off, and I awoke in a panic digging my family out of rubble. I was badly injured, and I wasn't sure that they had survived the blast. It seems we are still digging through the wreckage of our lives.

We kept it together until we returned to the USA in July, when both Dan and I immediately fell apart. The worst of it was not the organizational pieces written here; it was the constant chipping away of our peace through interactions with people we had once loved and considered friends. It was the ghosting. It was living with the knowledge that people found us so dangerous and unacceptable that they had done everything they could do to rid themselves of us. It was being told to stay away from new missionaries like we were infected. It was having our words and intentions twisted until even we began to wonder if we were monsters. It was watching our children's hearts break and being powerless to stop it. It was sitting at a hotel on our last night in Bali waiting for the community to come say goodbye as we had invited them to do and ticking the hours as no one bothered to show up. It was receiving several emails from PIONEERS members in Indonesia and across the world who were disturbed by what had happened but were not brave enough to stand with us and speak out publicly (with the notable exceptions of Max who left the organization not long after we did and Bethany and Mark Fraser who stepped down from leadership in protest the day after we were fired and soon left Indonesia).

The price was steep. Dan developed PTSD and found himself having panic attacks especially triggered by church or reminders of people in Bali. I became withdrawn and deeply fearful of anyone who was not already a close friend. Sometimes I have the experience of being outside of myself particularly in social situations. Once upon a time, I was the social butterfly, planning all the parties and enjoying interacting with everyone I met. Now I watch myself sitting silently in groups unwilling to know or be known. Finally about a year after we returned, we sought the help of trauma counselors and found some relief through EMDR and a long week of intense trauma therapy. Two of our children have also ended up in counseling because of their own struggles processing the difficulty of that last year in Bali.

I desperately want to write a story of redemption, of how we overcame and things worked out beautifully for our family. Maybe someday I will be able to. Today I can't. That's not where we are. I



don't see redemption in my story. I see trauma and loss. I see betrayal and cruelty. I see powerlessness and a loss of voice and control. It seems like there is no part of my life that was not bruised by what happened in Bali.

Perhaps the deepest loss is that of faith itself. Most days I still believe that God exists and that Jesus is the embodiment of the divine, but it doesn't seem to matter anymore. Faith community is terrifying to me, and I have tried and left three different churches since being back in the USA. I am not interested in trying again. That is one loss. The other is that God feels too far away to be relevant.

I read a quote recently that says, "Perhaps the most difficult identity crisis for spiritual abuse survivors is the loss of theological identity. The survivor has to question his/her identity in relation to God. It can feel very much like God no longer has any regard for the survivor." That sums it up for me. I can't *feel* God anymore. Perhaps it is simply that he didn't show up when I needed him to and I had to take care of myself and my family alone so I don't trust him. Perhaps it is that people who claim to follow him act so little like him that I am not sure he can be real at all. Perhaps my mind has an association between God and suffering so that I shut down when spiritual things come up and I've blocked him out (my trauma counselor's theory). I have no idea.

So I wait. Like Mary at Jesus' tomb staring at the place his body was supposed to be. All she knew was that he was dead. All she could do was grieve and remember, confused by all that had happened. All I can do is hope that at some point he shows up resurrected and calling my name.