

Christ-like love from a chicken breast

By Service Adventure alum, Henry Jantzen



Henry was anxious about what he was getting himself into as he arrived in Philippi, West Virginia. What happened next relieved his tension and helped him to see that he had become part of a caring community.

Reflection

I developed an anaphylactic allergy to milk very early in life. Anaphylaxis means that multiple body systems are involved in a reaction, which then carries the risk of shock or death. For those of you who are wondering, I was a horrible baby, because most foods made me cranky and sick—so I was breastfed for a very long time, and never used formula. My poor mother. What a saint.

Unfortunately, that restriction means that eating outside the home can be complicated, whether in a restaurant or in someone else's home. I am forced to interrogate my host or cook: about ingredients—sometimes digging in the trash for discarded packaging—and about preparation techniques—whether they were careful to not contaminate the dishes being cooked with milk product residue. On some occasions, these lines of questioning have been met with confusion or apathy.

“Oh, so you're lactose intolerant?”

“You just don't like it then ...?”

“There's cheese on your salad? That's too bad.”

“Um, yeah, can we wrap up this discussion? I’ve got food burning on the grill.”

Imagine my horror when I heard that the very first week I moved into Philippi, West Virginia, we would be eating with a different family in the church every single day. I prepared myself to find and call each of them, and imagined having to slog through the same discussion over and over. The thought of it caused an unpleasant feeling in my gut ... none of these people had spoken to me in their lives, and I was introducing myself with a set of requirements in hand as a thanks for their invitation.

Well, no time to lose, right?

The first person answered the phone, I introduced myself, and the first words she said were something along the lines of, “Hi, I’m so glad you called! Your leaders have been talking about you in church the last few weeks, and everybody is really worried about how to cook for you. They don’t want to make you sick! The meal I’ve planned is basically grilled chicken, vegetables, and fruit because I don’t want to risk anything. By the way, you should probably call Donna, because she’s losing sleep over it.”

Wait! What?! I was totally floored. This was the polar opposite of what I had feared, and more than I had dared to hope for by any stretch. Obviously, I didn’t want anybody losing sleep over me, but that so many people would be concerned, and one of them would be concerned so much, was one of the most profoundly humbling things I have ever experienced. That church is unbelievably caring. All the food I ate that week was delicious.

Questions

- What do you think you have to offer the local hosting congregation?

- What do you hope to receive from the local hosting congregation?

- What is your greatest fear as you think about the year ahead?

Prayer

Lord, as you prepare me to serve in a new place, in a new church, and in a new community, calm my nerves. Help me to trust that you will provide all that I need. And, in turn, help me to be your hands and feet as you provide for my new community. Amen.



Photo by Susan Nisly

Johnstown Service Adventure unit gets ready to go out for Halloween.
Back row: Harleigh Gibson, Eric Yoder, Marie Irrgang, Marlene Knop, Julie Yoder.
Front row: Dane, Heath and Claire Yoder.