

My Story: Howdy yall!!! If only you could have heard that with my Texas drawl. You can take me out of Texas, but you can't take Texas out of me. Maybe that is one of my reasons for my problems with learning the language here in the Philippines. We can talk about that more later though. I guess you'd like to know a little bit more about me first, and how I got to be on the mission field.

I was born and raised in Houston, Texas almost 36 yrs ago. My parents were not Christians at the time of my birth, but thank God for His faithfulness and patience in seeing my family come to Christ soon afterwards. My parents started to attend a local BMA church, and we have been BMA ever since. Because I am BMA bred, the GMA program was a deeply ingrained part of life for me. Even in those times that I thought I didn't want to do GMA's anymore, my Mom kept pushing me to follow it through to the very end. She was a great coach, and it didn't help that she was my GMA counselor also. It was near the end of my GMA years that I felt God calling me to the ministry. At the time, I loved to sing, but wasn't sure what that would lead to. Except God knew.....and He knew that because of the music scholarship that I received from JBC, I was going to meet a certain young man there that would change my life forever!

From the first moment I laid eyes on Robert Murphy, I knew he was the one. There is an old saying that most girls go to JBC to get their "MRS." Degree, but this wasn't my intention. I was the first in our family to even go to college, so I truly was there to learn. And boy did I learn! I learned that God had a plan, which included Robert and our life together. It just so happened that he had surrendered to ministry as well at around the same age as me. After graduating JBC, Robert and I married and began to work with students over a span of 11 years. We were blessed to be a part of the ministries at 1) First, Providence, Livingston, 2) New Harmony, 3)First, Jacksonville, 4) First, Livingston.

While we were serving at First Baptist Church in Livingston, with Bro. Lee Poe as pastor, God gave us two very special gifts, Jamin and Jesse Murphy. During our 4th year in Livingston, Robert was invited, along with several other youth ministers, by Bro. James Speer to attend a youth camp in the Philippines. When Robert asked me what I thought about it, it honestly scared me to death. One, I hadn't been away from him for that long-it was a 16 day trip. Two, I mean...the Philippines? Why not go on a mission trip here in the good ol' U.S. of A.!!! At that moment, it was if God said, "Connie, this is your next place of service." I wanted to say no to Robert, that he couldn't go, but I knew that my heart and attitude wouldn't be right. I never did tell Robert about what I was feeling. I didn't want it to happen. You see, with each move from one church to another, God always spoke to me and gave me a peace about it. And this is what he was doing again, but my stubbornness didn't want to hear it. I was happy in Livingston. The boys loved being there, it was all they had ever known. I kept quiet, and tried to be excited for Robert as he prepared for his trip there.

Guess who fell in love with the Philippines and her people? The first step out of the plane, God spoke to Robert, and said, "Welcome home!" He didn't call me for 5 days after he left the Houston airport, and I think some of it was because he didn't know how I would feel about us moving there. I'm a city girl, and he knew I was happy where I was. When he called, and gave me the news that God told him that we were to be there next, it was as if my heart stopped. I couldn't be stubborn. I couldn't say no. With tears flowing down my face, I told him what God had already told me. I can honestly say that my calling was

not one for missions specifically, but was for me to follow my husband in ministry, wherever God called him, and to support him 100%. And ministry was leading us to the 7, 107 islands of the Philippines. When Robert got home from his trip, he told Bro. Lee, who God had already prepared for the news, and who was equally excited for us. We told our parents next. One set of our parents was excited; the other set took awhile. They didn't want to lose their grandkids. Robert's parents knew from when he was a young boy that he was going to be a missionary. Of course they never told him that, until he sat in front of them at the kitchen table as we told them about our plans....or God's plans as it was. We look back at all of our experiences in youth ministry, and the people that we were affected by in each of the churches, and saw that we needed to go through all of it to help prepare us for the mission field.

My first impression of the Philippines: The Missions Office recommended that I visit the Philippines before we actually moved there. Having only been on a plane once in my entire life, I was more nervous about the 30 hours of being on a plane than actually being in the Philippines. When I stepped out of the Manila airport the humidity is the first thing I remembered. Along with that, the smell of dirty garbage, car fumes, honking of horns and the taxi ride from Hades. Manila taxi drivers are known to be the worst drivers. I sweat on that trip like I had never sweat before. Everything was different: smells, foods, transportation. It was quite overwhelming. I didn't let that scar me though. I remember asking God to help me love this place, and to look beyond myself and my selfishness. Thankfully when we left, I knew that I would be ok, there was that peace that only God could give. This city girl could survive!

Transition time: Leaving our families at the airport in Houston was one of the hardest things I think we have ever had to do. When it was time to say goodbye, I held my composure with all of my family until I came to my Dad. He was fine until we hugged....then the tears flowed, and so did the rest of the family. The boys didn't understand what was going on. They were thinking that we were going on vacation and would be back soon, even though we had told them we were moving.

Jamin and Jesse didn't have much problems at all transitioning, except it took forever for us to make the boys stop using the tap water for drinking water. That is a no-no here! One can get amoebic dysentery from the water (which Jesse found out soon). To them, just to be with Mom and Dad made them happy, no matter where we were living. I'm so thankful that they were young when we left. It might have been a different story if they were both teens when God moved us. They are troopers, and take every day as an adventure. They love being here! My youngest told me today, "Mom....I can't imagine being anywhere else but here in the Philippines!" Of course Robert was having the time of his life. He was soaking everything in. This was his new challenge, and he couldn't wait to start working as soon as he could.

For me, it took the first full year to get used to living here. There were many days of crying. Everything took longer to do here. Learning the language was hard. Trying to use English in some places and hitting a brick wall when they didn't understand was frustrating. Paying bills or buying groceries took all day because of the traffic and the crowds. There is no mailing of checks, everything here is done on a cash (peso) basis, so getting money out of the ATM (with a daily minimum) was time consuming and a pain. The heat and humidity here affected the way things were cooked. I couldn't get my house to look American enough. Things would fall apart, and take forever to get fixed. I was a germ freak in a place

where dirt was everywhere. Besides hand sanitizer, toilet paper was something you put in your purse because you wouldn't find it in the restrooms. Thank goodness for little boys instead of little girls when it came to restrooms!

I know, pity party alert!!! I was going through a huge transformation within myself through all of this. As most women are, we want everything to be just so, all in its place, everything in control, and I was living in a country that was out of control. I wanted the comforts of home, and inside (and maybe sometimes outside) I was kicking and screaming like a two year old because I couldn't have my way. It took me awhile to learn that I didn't have to have everything in control. God can do that for me. It's hard for a control freak like me to let God just take care of everything. As time went on, just like Mrs. Linda Moore told me, it would get better, and easier, and it has. Things are still out of control, but I have tried (sometimes unsuccessfully) to just let things happen the way they happen. There are moments that I actually love being here, even though holiday times are the hardest. It has helped to have other missionary gal pals to hang with from time to time, to help and encourage me through those rough spots.

The Country: The country of the Philippines is made up of all islands, divided into three major areas: Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao. If looking at a map, this country is east of China, south of Japan, north of Malaysia. Our family lives in the middle of the Philippines (Visayas region) in a city called Lapu Lapu City, on a little island called Mactan. Mactan Island is a small island to the right of Cebu Island. We usually tell people we are from Cebu instead of Mactan. It's like saying you are from Tyler if you actually live out in New Harmony. Lapu Lapu City has a population of about 205,000 people.

The Language: The main language in the Visayas area is called Cebuano (se-bwah-noe). We were not told by the Missions Office that we had to learn the language, but this is just something that Robert felt like we needed to do. The first year here was spent in learning that language. For me, with my Texas twang, it was harder to speak it. We both took a full year of class, but Robert picked it up so much better than I did. He sounds like he was born here. Of course, his humility would kick in and he would say that he hasn't grasped it, but I beg to differ. Learning the language has been the most effective tool in reaching those that don't know much English here. We could have gotten by and just spoken English, but we would have only affected a small minority of Filipinos.

The Weather: Ever hear the saying, "It's hotter than blue blazes"? Imagine summer heat, all year long. There are two seasons here: rainy and dry, which split up half the year each. There are about 2-3 weeks in January that get down to about 75 F, which is soup weather for us ☺. But all the other days average in the 80's-90's, year around. We do get plenty of typhoons (hurricanes) that come towards the Philippines, but most travel north of us.

I can't say that I miss the winters of East Texas, even though they were crazy at times (hot one day/cold the next), but I do enjoy not having to wear layers of clothes, or having to deal with defrosting car windshields and all the things that come with cold weather. Ok, so I take that back....I do miss being at home with our families, in front of a crackling fire, with the sound of football in the background, along with the aroma of a good ol' pot of Texas Chili ready to be devoured. I need to stop reminiscing or I

might get homesick! By the way it's hard to make soup/chili/etc here when you are sweating to death while you cook and eat it. I don't want you to pity me, but I don't like to sweat. Going to Camp Gary was a week of torture for me. However, with living here, I have had to learn to be content 'in all things', even when burning calories while I cook.

The Scenery: If you envision beautiful tropical plants, coconut and palm trees, and pristine beaches, that is what you will see if you come to see us. There are many mountains here, along with active volcanoes as well. I wouldn't say that this place is as beautiful as the Hawaiian islands, but I would put some of the areas here in 2nd place. If you were to visit, you would also see why the Philippines is known as a third world country. You would notice houses made of whatever they can find, beggars at the corners of the streets, little naked children, dirt and lack of sanitation, crazy driving and really bad traffic. It is a pretty close comparison to Mexico. When we first got here, the economic situation just made me want to cry. I didn't grow up in a rich family, having everything I ever wanted, but I didn't suffer either. In the Visayas region, where Cebu/Mactan belong, there is a 90% day-to-day uncertainty of where the next meal will come from.

The People: The Filipino people are a sweet people....usually smiling, and very curious. Anytime we go out to a store or especially if we hop a jeepney, or take any public transportation, we are the entertainment. And of course, Jamin and Jesse love to put on one great show for them, much to the chagrin of their Mom. When we first arrived, many of the women would want to touch them, and talk to them. Being in the states, we had always taught our boys to not talk to strangers, so it was weird to have to re-program their little minds that it was ok to talk to these people, and it wouldn't hurt them if the little ladies would touch them, or pat them on the head. It took a while to get the boys use to this. It also took awhile for me, as their Mom, to get used to others always wanting to touch them. As they have gotten older, they aren't 'touched' as much, but people still want to talk to them saying, "Hello baby, what's your name?" Jesse would look at me and say, "Please tell them I am not a baby!!!"

The Food: If you like Chinese style food, and lots of rice, then you would like Filipino food. Filipinos eat rice as their staple, and then if they have any extra money, they would add vegetables or meat to the meal. Rice for breakfast, rice for lunch and rice for dinner. We have a good friend that helps us out here, her name is Ruthie. Once she came over to eat her first Tex-Mex meal (from scratch) at our house. She really enjoyed the meal, but asked if it was ok if she went to the store to purchase some rice. We thought that was pretty comical, but being American, we can live without rice, they can't. We, ourselves, have grown to love rice, but we don't eat it for every meal. Fresh seafoods are readily available here also. Chicken and pork are big sellers in the market (open air meat markets). Everything on those animals is eaten, even down to the chicken feet, which taste like....feet. ☺ By the way, I personally shop in a grocery store that is much like the ones in the states.

If you were to eat at our house, you would see more American style meals.....pizza, spaghetti, tacos, chicken fried steak, chicken and dumplings, etc. Every once in awhile, I will fix a meal with a Filipino flare, but I haven't mastered many recipes that are native. I would rather go to a restaurant here and buy a Filipino meal than to try it on my own. Oh yeah, we do have a McDonald's, Starbucks, KFC, Pizza Hut and a Sbarro....that is about it when it comes to American places. The food in those places are very

similar to the states, but not exact. Our McDonald's serves fried chicken and spaghetti, along with the traditional cheeseburger, fish sandwich, Big Mac. And the best part is that they deliver!!! They have delivered so much to our house that at times, they call us and ask if we would like for them to come. Isn't that a hoot?

I have had to learn how to cook from scratch, or learn how to substitute items that we can't get here. We are fortunate to live near a really nice import store, so we can get a few items from the states (like cake mixes, spaghettios/ravioli's, baking goods), however we pay almost double and sometimes triple the cost of what we would spend at Wal-Mart. When teams come this way to visit, that is when I stock up on goodies that we can't get here. If I want to shop for clothes, I go to a clothing store. If I want medicine, I go to a pharmacy. If I want groceries, I go to a grocery store. They are all separate stores. I miss Wal-Mart!!! ☺.

Housing and our safety: We are very blessed to have found a nice rent house inside a guarded subdivision (around 80 homes) here in Mactan. Most of our neighbors are Filipino businessmen with families, or foreigners married to Filipinas/with families. We have two guards at the front of the subdivision that keep our boys in, and keep out anyone that doesn't belong because of the clientele of people who live here.

In the area of the Philippines that we reside, it is fairly safe. My grandmother asked me one day, "If it's so safe, than why do you have the need for two guards at your gate?" I didn't really have an answer for her except to say that the guards aren't actually at our gate. You will find guards here everywhere....at the door of every establishment. I don't ever feel like we are in danger here. There are Muslim groups here in Cebu, but they are not part of the radical extremist groups that you hear about in the Philippines. Those are groups found more in the south, in Mindanao. Now of course, I still have to watch out for pick pockets and purse snatchers, just like any place in the states. So please don't worry about us. And if you ever hear about any bombings in the Philippines, it is usually in Manila (the capital and far from us) or in Mindanao.

In our neighborhood, Jamin and Jesse are the only American boys. Their friends that they love to hang out with are Filipino, Japanese and Korean....quite an international group. The boys love to play outside with these kids, along with riding bikes, skateboards, swimming and playing at the park here in the subdivision. Our home is like most Filipino homes, made of all concrete, no carpet (all tile), no hot water (except for our showers), and no air conditioning (except our bedrooms). With our windows open downstairs, to let in the breeze, we do have to deal with things getting dirtier....which means constant sweeping, dusting, mopping, etc. Screens are a necessity on our windows because the mosquitoes love to attack both Jesse and I.

From time to time, and we really never know when, our electric company cuts off the electricity to save money. These are called 'brown outs'. They are like black outs, but I guess because it's in the Philippines, it's brown. It could be 5 minutes (which makes no sense to me), or we have even had them as long as 12 hours. Those are times when we head to the mall and hang out all day. Did your ears perk up when I mentioned the mall? We do have two very nice sized malls. Unless you shop at an American store

(Guess, Hushpuppies, Levi's), most of the other shopping is fairly cheap. We have a bowling alley, movie theaters, and places for the kids to hang out and play video games as long as they want. I guess you aren't feeling too bad for us now, huh? When you thought of me in the Philippines, did you envision grass huts, no running water, and me cooking over a hot fire? Haha. There may be a day that God calls me to do that, but so far, he has blessed me with these necessities! I am so thankful!!! Speaking of other necessities that we are thankful for: the internet. The internet is a huge thing here. Even if you don't have the money for a computer, there is an internet café every so many kilometers (everything is metric here). You would pay anywhere from p30-p50 an hour to use the internet (that's \$.75-1.20). When we first arrived almost 6 years ago, all that was available was dial-up, which is sooooo slow compared to our dsl broadband right now.

Travel/Transportation: Most people rely on public transportation here: jeepneys, tricicabs, mini-buses, bicycles, motorcycles, etc. The fare to ride public transportation is so much cheaper than owning your own vehicle. The average working class Filipino makes about p200 a day, a little less than \$5. If you are privileged enough to own your own vehicle, the gas still runs \$4.50-\$5.00 a gallon. To travel from island to island, one would do so by either bus, boat (ferry for small distances), or plane. It really depends on where we go as to what mode of transportation we take. The boys and I don't travel as much with Robert because of school, however we have all been on every mode of transportation that you can imagine here. A few times we have been on an overnight ferry boat, which are quite interesting. The bathrooms are pretty much danger zone areas so one has to refrain from using if at all possible. The beds are set up like bunk beds with plastic covered foam to sleep on, and that is if you can sleep while rocking back and forth, back and forth. Did I make you start to get seasick? Because I do every time I ride those boats. Whenever we have teams come, we usually make the boat experience a part of their itinerary while they are here.

Our family does have our own vehicle. Our van is not like anything that you would imagine...it's kinda boxed shape, maroon and gray (Gig 'Em Aggies) and holds about 8 Americans. However we have had, on one wet baptismal occasion, Robert, 38 Filipinos, plus a wet dog in our van. We were trying to make one less trip home from the beach, so we crammed 31 in the van, and 8 on top. I kick myself every time I tell this "true" story because I don't have video or photo proof of it. Robert can still remember the smell of that day. I have been blessed to have a vehicle of my own as well. I never thought I would want to drive here, seeing that it is crazy on the road. You are literally putting yourself in danger when you drive here. No one looks out for you. They cut into you, and you are supposed to be watching for them. There are lines on the road, but no one stays within those lines (in Cebu). If you, as an American (or any foreigner) get in a wreck, you will be the one responsible for paying for ALL damages. It's not a written rule, just an expected one. So it took me 5 years before I wanted to brave the streets. Now I feel like a free woman! No longer reliant on taxis (which always made Jesse and I car sick), and we could come and go as we chose. Robert is gone quite often because of his trips to different islands. Before we got a vehicle for me, the boys and I felt trapped at home, and only got out when we just couldn't stand the cabin fever, and decided we would brave the taxi ride. But not anymore, thank goodness!

Schooling: I had come to the Philippines with a full year of Abeka curriculum for Jamin's Kindergarten year, but had planned on looking for private schools to place him in the next year. Public schools here

are only for Filipinos. We came across a few private schools that we liked, but then because of the traffic, we would spend 4-5 hours on the road, daily. We didn't feel like we had time to spend that amount of time in travel, so we have been doing Abeka ever since. I am not a teacher; I mean my spiritual gift is truly not teaching. Thank goodness Abeka gives you everything you need to do that. I never intended on homeschooling the kids, but at this point, even though we are currently nearing our school year and so ready to be out of school, I wouldn't trade it for anything in the world. I get a chance to teach our boys, from a Christian perspective, everything they need to know. It also allows a lot of Mom and son bonding time which I wouldn't want to trade either. Overall, it has been a really good experience. I ask God for patience all the time, and he provides many opportunities for me to be patient. I'm still working on that part.

Daily life: During the school year, we are consumed in studies until 2-3pm. After that, the boys go running off to play with their friends, or stick around the house. They go through different stages of their favorite thing to do: computer games, PS2 or Nintendo DS. While they are doing this, I tend to veg in my room until it's time for supper. Mom needs some alone time. This is the time I get caught up on emails, work on our website www.cebuanomissions.org or the boys blog: www.lifeaccordingtojaminandjesse.blogspot.com and if anyone is online, I spend it chatting with friends.

Robert and I try to have a date at least once a week. Our friend, Ruthie, watches the boys while we do this. It normally ends up being an 'errand' day, but it is still good to be able to get away, just the two of us. And then sometimes we just all go out as a family. If there is ever a good family movie released, we will go and watch it together. We can go to the movies for \$15 total.....add popcorn and drinks and it is probably closer to a \$20 experience. It's still not cheap, but cheaper than what we pay in the states. We also take the boys to a beach resort every so often. We used to do it all the time, because the beach and the resort are just 10 minutes down the road. But after living here for almost 6 years, it loses its appeal.

Other activities that we like to do: baseball (they have a small league here), rock climbing, bowling and snorkeling. I would love to have more educational type of things here, but we don't have any of that. For example: libraries, museums, zoos, etc. If we lived in Manila, we would at least get to visit a zoo or museum. However, we try to make up for that when we go home on furloughs.

From time to time we have teams come through. Some teams may just be 1 person; some may be up to 12 or more. We have a team from Fulton, Mississippi coming this May 27th-June 4th. We will be taking them to a Mission church in Leyte (one island to the northeast of Cebu), and then they will also do 2 childrens' outreaches here in Cebu, and one in Bohol (island southeast of Cebu). We try to keep teams pretty busy when they come through. Robert has several different Bible studies throughout the week that keep him busy also, along with other responsibilities that he has (that I will discuss in the ministry section).

The Religion: The main religion is Catholicism (86%). Talking about anything religious or even mentioning the name of Jesus is not taboo here, like in other Asian countries around. It has been easier to openly talk to people about their relationship with God. Sad to say, most Catholics don't really know what they believe in. The priests have told them that if they read the Bible, it will make them go crazy.

Many are getting tired of the Catholic ways of life, and are open to having Bible studies in their homes, which has helped tremendously in our ministry. They are hungry for 'The Word'!!!

Ministry: We take part in two diverse kinds of ministry. We came here to mainly do church planting, so that is the reason we learned the language. Because of the openness of wanting us to come in their homes, we have started many bible study groups this way. We call them "Simbalay" which means 'house of praise'. After several weeks of meeting with the first group, several people outside this group expressed interests in studying the Bible also. There for awhile, it seemed that Robert couldn't keep up with all the different Bible studies that he was teaching. Then we started praying for God to supply men who would feel led to help lead these Bible studies, and as you guessed it, God supplied. We started with one small group almost 5 years ago, and have now grown to 30+. God has been faithful in supplying enough leadership for these groups. The people are solely learning the Bible. We start off with lessons on evangelism, and then move on to discipleship as we see each group mature. We have seen many come to know Jesus for the first time, even though they have heard of Him their entire lives. We have seen drunks, prostitutes, drug dealers, etc., come to know Christ, and turn from what they were doing. Because of God moving in this ministry, we have seen broken families come together, and men become the real fathers/leaders of the family that they were meant to be. It's truly been a remarkable thing to watch, quite overwhelming at times, too.

Along with these Simbalay groups, Robert is also encouraging/equipping established BMA churches in the Visayas/Mindanao area that were started before we came. These are churches that were started under Bro. Don Newsom, Bro. Melvin Meade and Bro. Doyle Moore's ministries. We were requested to begin to oversee these works as the Cebuano church planter coordinator. The churches in these areas are similar to churches in the states, if you compare programs. Most of these churches have Sunday school, worship time, and preaching. There may be one church that has four concrete walls and a metal roof, where another church might just be a thatched roof church with cracked bamboo woven walls. Filipinos love to sing, so several congregations participate in choirs, and special singing as well. We have seen the same two styles of music (traditional/sacred music and contemporary/praise music) in these churches. They also love to get together once a year and have a time of thanksgiving (not our Thanksgiving holiday though), more like an anniversary service. If you visit our website, you may see many pictures of Robert at a church like those described above where he has been invited to speak or preach at their anniversary services. Because of expense for the family to travel, the boys and I only visit nearby BMA churches. We have yet to visit any of the pastors and work in the Mindanao area (see map of Philippines).

Not only does Robert travel around from island to island here in the Philippines, but he also has been travelling to China, Taiwan and Japan. Because we are closer geographically to these countries than the Missions Office, he gets the privilege to encourage these men to keep on running the race, and to keep going with their work in those areas. Yes, he is gone a lot, but I'm so glad that he gets to do what he really loves to do: teach/equip/encourage.

Families back home: Our families back home are very supportive. Thank goodness for internet (again). I have heard many stories from veteran missionaries that had to walk miles to go to a phone, only to talk

to family for a few minutes, and this was every other month or so. I can't imagine the loneliness they must have gone through at times. I am so thankful for the technology to be able to talk to family. There are even ways to talk to family for free. We try to make it back to the states every 2 years for furlough, which puts our next furlough the fall of 2009. Our parents/families don't like it being that long in between times, but they deal with it the best they can. The technology helps bridge that gap. Robert's parents have gotten to come to the Philippines. It really helped them see what they were all 'hearing' about, and to know without any doubt that we truly were 'safe' here. We could tell them all day long, but until they came and experienced it themselves, they wouldn't really know. They had a really nice time, and it opened their eyes to the world beyond Lufkin, Texas.

I hope that I have shared enough insight into my world. At times I try to compare myself to other missionary wives, but that is not fair. I have to realize, I am not Darlene Carey, or Linda Moore. I am just Connie Murphy. I am a mother teaching her children. I am a wife supportive of her husband, and a help mate for him. I am not anything special or someone to be put on a pedestal; however I do know that I am a child of God. I am just like you. It doesn't take a special person to be called. It just takes a willing person. Who knows where/what God may be calling you to do/go? It doesn't have to be overseas; it could be something just down the road, or someone next door. We can all do God's will, we just have to be willing and follow that call. God bless each and every one of you ladies as you follow God's calling for your lives.

If you have any more questions, or curious about other cultural things about the Philippines, please don't hesitate to write:

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