Dear friends and family,

Hola again from Colombia! It’s been awhile, so I would like to give you an update of what I’ve been up to lately. God has truly been blessing me this year, and it’s been a crazy adventure!

**What I’ve been up to these last five months**

Since October 11\(^{\text{th}}\), 2018, I’ve traveled to a new town or city every 2-4 days (not counting Christmas break). I’ve taught in 31 different churches throughout the Urabá and Córdoba regions of Colombia, near the Panama Border, with over 52 congregations represented! Sometimes multiple congregations come together for the class.

I’ve traveled from village to village to town on the back of a motorcycle, driven by a pastor or church elder I’ve only just met, piled with my duffle bag, backpack, sometimes guitar, myself and my dog, down twisty mountain dirt paths (well, sometimes we took two motorcycles)... I’ve seen unmatched generosity and hospitality from people with very little worldly goods to offer, just because I came in the name of their Jesus and am therefore family, and treated as such...

I’ve seen people drink brown water out of dirty water tanks that are filled from a pond the whole community uses to collect rain water, because they don’t have any other options available to them, while praying for rain because the pond is drying up...

I’ve been welcomed into a church and had my class attended faithfully by over 40 people even though they had no electricity or cell service and didn’t receive word about the class until the night before I arrived (even though the email had been sent out three months earlier)... I’ve ridden in rickety, old fashioned, seemingly indestructible, way over packed jeeps (AT LEAST fourteen people in a nine seater... usually more, and with people sitting on the roof too!) down dusty, rocky, teeth-jarring roads, with an occasional woman in labor squished in the middle, or a few live chickens dangling by their feet from the roof out the window...

Between classes, I’ve gotten to pick young coconuts with a long pole with a hook on the end, and eat them, as well as so many other tropical fruits that grow so abundantly around here, simply because they were growing in the back yard and we were hungry for them!

I’ve jumped into a smelly mud volcano with a church pastor and youth group, because they all grew up nearby but never actually visited it. Since I was a foreigner, taking me there was a good excuse to finally go! (My skin and hair were softer and healthier than ever for the next week, by the way.)...
I’ve been given fresh wild limes and wild honey – the honey collected in empty pop bottles. I was later told the honey was taken from broken tree branches filled with bees, by teenage boys strapped up with nylon ropes (giving their moms heart attacks) because, “The missionary has a cough, and needs fresh honey and limes to get better!” and I got better! By far the sweetest and most valuable gift I’ve ever received!

I’ve had a giant six foot long poisonous snake come into my dirt floor bedroom, and watched the heroic pastor save me and all the baby chickens outside my door by slamming it on the head with a pole! Keep in mind that he lives there all year round, with his wife and young children...

In the beginning of March I had to escape a roadblock, set up against the government by a military guerrilla group and some indigenous tribes, in a dugout canoe across the river! The leaders of the country church I was teaching at were afraid I would be captured and used as leverage against the Colombian government if the guerrillas found out I was there. It was quite an adventure!

Thank you for your prayers!

I’ve seen countless people cry and come on fire for Jesus after my short, three day classes, because God spoke His words through me and didn’t let me interrupt... I’ve heard people talk about recent dreams God has given them that taught them and their church something that I’ve been teaching in my class. These were people who wouldn’t have a chance to take my class!...

I’ve met hundreds of my brothers and sisters in Christ in little country and city churches who have made commitments to live out their faith through their ministry from now on, after participating in classes I’ve been teaching!...

I’ve seen God use my spiritual gifts to bless and encourage and wake up these churches to what He is calling them to do now, and it’s crazy to think that He’s using little ol’ me!

**Thank you** all sooo much for your prayers, support, encouragement, and counsel during this time! I know that I wouldn’t have been able to do this without your back up. Sometimes I can physically feel your prayers of protection and health, safety, strength and blessing over me! God has provided financially, emotionally, physically, spiritually, and in every area of need in miraculous ways! This past year has been crazy and hard, but it has also been amazing and exciting and blessed beyond anything I ever could have imagined! Sometimes when I’m going through a particularly hard time, one of you messages me and reminds me that you’re praying for me... you can’t imagine how encouraging that is and how much those little messages of encouragement mean to me!

On the lonely days, when I’ve had to say goodbye to everyone I’ve only just met, and go to a new place, to stay in a new bed, with a dirt floor and muddy shower water, and a new family I don’t know, and I miss everyone I love, and just don’t want to have to say goodbye anymore... on those days you remind me that I’m not alone, that I have a whole team of prayer warriors and financial supporters and friends and family backing me up at all times! I know that I have gotten through this adventure safe and blessed, and been able to be a blessing, because of you. I can’t thank you enough!

**What I will be doing this year**

This year is going to be a little different... I finished my current adventure of traveling around alone teaching in the little country and city churches on March 14th. Then I spent a couple days writing a report of the needs and struggles, strengths and blessings that I encountered on my travels, before flying back to Bogotá on March 18th.
I will continue working with Avancemos, translating teaching information whenever I’m in Bogotá, and traveling with the team to various training workshops that we will be presenting in new regions in Colombia starting the end of April, 2019. I will continue to work with Avancemos through the end of this year 2019 with translation work, giving classes during training workshops, and working on making the children’s ministry training program stronger based on what I have learned on my travels.

At the end of the year, my Colombian visa will expire... and for the first time in seven years, I won’t be renewing it! Because....

**What I’m planning for 2020... Peru!! What!?!!!!**

On January 13, 2019, my handsome best friend, Papo, asked me to marry him!!!

We’ve been friends for years, and had been dating for a year, and I knew without a shadow of a doubt that this was God’s direction for our lives.

So... I said yes!

When I joined Avancemos, I knew that I would be giving them a two year commitment, and I wondered what God had for me at the end of those two years. As Papo and I grew in our relationship, we prayed every day for God to give us a clear direction in our relationship, and that He would give us a ministry we would be able to do together for His glory. **God has led us to a mission church plant in Peru that needs a local missionary pastor to take over the leadership.**

Papo is currently the worship leader at this mission church plant, as well as a teacher at a nearby Christian school. He will be taking seminary classes this year to prepare for being a local Peruvian missionary pastor and taking on the leadership of this ministry.

As I work with Avancemos this year, I will also be slowly packing up my things and closing out my time in Colombia as I prepare to move to a new country, a new culture, a new ministry, and a new life as someone’s wife!!! And on **January 11th, 2020, in Lima, Peru, (yes, Papo is Peruvian!!)** I will say “I do” to the greatest adventure yet... a new life and ministry with my best friend, Papo Jaulis Pascual.

As you can imagine, leaving Colombia after seven years isn’t going to be easy! A piece of my heart will always be here, and saying goodbye to my friends and church family here will be heartbreaking! Leaving behind this beautiful ministry with Avancemos will also be hard. But God has confirmed our decision over and over, and continues to do so. So, I’m over the top excited for this new adventure: again getting to jump off a cliff into the arms of my loving Heavenly Father!

**Please pray** for both Papo and me, as these next two years of transition, planning, and growing together in our love and service to God and to each other will be challenging and hard! And also pray for wisdom and understanding as we prepare for our wedding and, more importantly, our marriage. And please be praying for us as we determine what our needs will be as we move into this new ministry. We will still need prayer and guidance and financial support to take on the mission church plant. But we are not afraid, because we know that God is with us, that He is our firm foundation, and that He will always provide for all our needs.

**Thank you** again for partnering with me in this ministry. Please continue to keep us in your prayers!

**As always, keep your eyes up my friends! Keep growing in your relationship with God, and keep shining His light! God bless!**

In Him, Jill N. Riley

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