



Amazing Grace

Manda Lewis

Just when I thought nothing more could happen in 2012... I feel tongue-tied in describing the past four months.

Returning to college after the Sept-Oct holidays saw the fast-paced race to the college finish line, but not without its fun and adventures amidst the study.

My family celebrated Dad's 60th birthday at Rouse Hill's 'Mezza Me' restaurant on 14th Oct, and the following weekend Shez and I were able to escape the college 'bubble' to see the annual Sculptures by the Sea.

The stress of college took me to my wits end as I finished the last of my assignments, including my project on the Roma people of Romania. And without the chance to breathe, I found myself cramming for my final exams and then, all too soon, I was done.

21 months, 16 Degree subjects, 14 Certificate in Biblical Studies subjects, 31 assignments and 11 exams saw the completion of my Associate Degree of Theology. Praise God that He saw me through and that even amongst the trials, I managed to pass all my subjects.

Our post-exam fun began without

hesitation as five of us ran away to The Entrance for two nights. The rest of the week followed with a Graduates' retreat, project fair (presentation for those of us who had completed projects that year), duties day (clean-up of the college), end of year dinner, and other happenings.

Graduation on 1st Dec saw many friends graduate as we heard how God was working in and leading each of our lives for His service. It was made more special as Mum and Dad were able to celebrate with me at the end of two years of hard work and certainly a memory I will now treasure.

An early morning start saw Shez and I enjoy a last breakfast together in Croydon before she and her parents left for the drive back to Toowoomba. I'm forever thankful to God for all my college friends and the way He has always blessed me with the right people in my life through each and every season.

After being back at Mum and Dad's for just one day, I then headed to Blackheath, where I was blessed with a house for a week. It was a well needed rest and prayer retreat as I considered the journey ahead.

Again, no sooner was I home, than

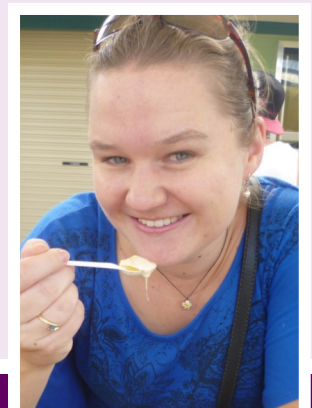
Please Pray...

» **Praise** God for the way he has brought me through the past two years of college and **Praise** that I passed all my subjects.

» **Praise** God for his provision of a new job and the flexibility this provides as I both seek to raise support and make plans to return to Romania.

» **Pray** that I would know how to prioritise my commitments whilst balancing time to spend with family and friends.

» **Pray** for my family and I as we continue to grieve after Dad's passing, and **Pray** for us as we adjust to life without him here.



Sharing the love of God through International Teams

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Kez arrived for the week, however, this turned out to be anything but our planned rest. On 16th Dec, we both joined our families for an early family Christmas and it was definitely a special time and the last time my whole family was to spend together. The next few days saw me enjoy a Christmas lunch with International Teams and Kez and I adventuring to 'Color-me-mine' to enjoy some ceramic painting.

On the 20th Dec, not long after we had all gone to bed, Mum, Kez and I were woken by the biggest scare of our lives. Though everything humanly possible was done, we were none-the-less devastated by Dad's sudden passing due to heart failure. Heart Disease is sadly something that is still in need of much more research, though organisations like The Heart Foundation are continuing to look into its causes and any possible preventions.

Though our family continues to grieve, God has certainly shown His mercies through this difficult time and even in the sequence of events leading up to Dad's death. As Pastor Marcus reminded us at the funeral, it's circumstances like this, when we walk through 'the valley of the shadow of death' (Psalm 23), that provides the opportunity to reflect on our own fragility and fleeting lives. It is an important reminder of our powerlessness against death and that our 'goodness' is irrelevant if we don't believe and follow the Good Shepherd, that is, Jesus. I'm so thankful that even during my time of weakness, God continues to be my strength and even when I can't pray, Jesus intercedes for me.

As I look at the way the last few months have evolved, I can see God's faithful hand preparing the way forward for the coming year. During my prayer retreat I felt very strongly the need to stay in Australia for 2013, and whilst I was confused as to why, I now have great peace about this decision after what has happened.

Furthermore, before I finished college I was asked to consider accepting a job in the International Teams office for as long as is required whilst I raise my support and plan toward leaving again for a new part of Romania in 2014. Well, I can now express my joy through God's provision in accepting this job as Executive Assistant, which will be four days a week, starting 21st Feb.

Whilst my budget for the journey ahead is yet to be worked out, I would like to invite you to pray about whether God may be placing it on your heart to partner with me in this ministry, which includes my work in the office, a Vision Trip to Europe in August, and my long-term ministry in Romania. Please contact me or International Teams if you want to know further details.

I want to thank each of you for your continued love, support and particularly your prayers during my time at college, during this time of grief and into the years ahead, for which I wouldn't be able to get through each day.

In His hands, Manda.

Photos: (Front page) The Entrance; (Above) Dad's 60th; Single-Residential Girls and College Street Party; Graduation; My painting of Shez, Lou and I @ The Entrance; Ice-Cream @ Shelley Beach; Family Christmas

UPCOMING EVENTS

New Job @ IT Begins
21st Feb

Holiday to Queensland
15th- 24th March

**Romania Vision Trip &
IT-Europe Conference**
-August (TBC)