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Bare Necessities

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Bare Necessities

BY JENNIFER CALHOUN

From the comforts of my West Virginia home, signing up for a mission trip to Fiji sounded like a fantastic idea. Visions of palm trees, coconuts and crystal clear water floated through my mind as I imagined myself sunning on a postcard perfect beach of pristine white sand. Of course, the sunbathing would come after I had put in three or four hours of hard labor in the morning—this was a mission trip, after all.

Somehow during my pre-trip planning, I missed the memo that listed “becoming a jungle woman” as one of the possible outcomes. The next two weeks served as a crash course on the finer points of life in the Fijian jungle. The experience also redefined my concept of mission work and taught me that “service” and “adventure” can be synonyms. Here are a few of the lessons I brought home.

To survive life in the Fijian jungle you must know how to:

Wield a machete. There are many practical uses for this tool; it is sharp enough to fell banana trees, crack open coconuts and clear jungle brush, yet delicate enough to be used as a kitchen utensil.

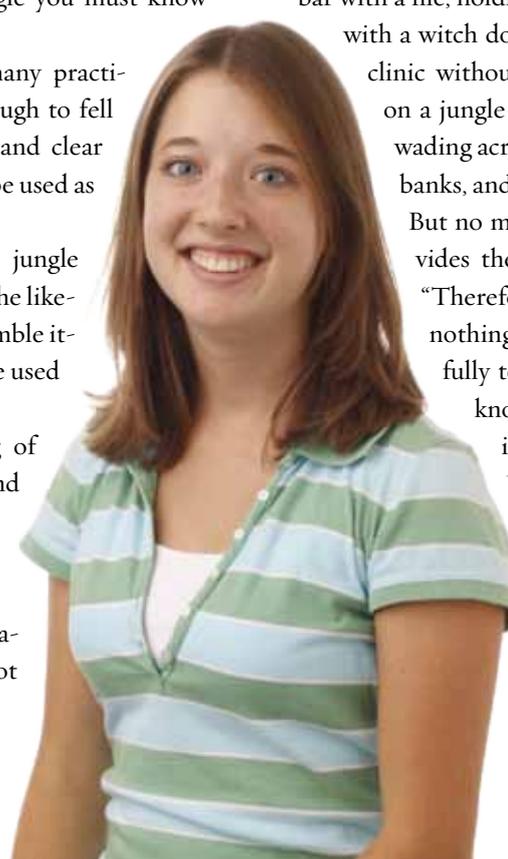
Build a raft. Banana trees and jungle vines work quite nicely; however, in the likely event that your raft should disassemble itself mid-stream, ripe coconuts can be used as flotation devices.

Mix cement. Combine one bag of cement powder, five shovelfuls of sand plus eight-and-a-half bottles of water in a wheelbarrow. Mix thoroughly, dump and repeat as necessary.

Treat medical emergencies. Machete wounds, skin infections, foot

fungi, fish bites, jellyfish stings, wild boar attacks, and the occasional baby delivery or open heart surgery are all possibilities. Keep a first aid kit handy and know how to turn banana leaves into bandages.

Stand firm. Little did I know, as I sat at home dreaming of beaches and palm trees, that this mission trip would find me digging six-foot holes with coffee cans, cutting rebar with a file, holding Vacation Bible School in a village with a witch doctor, working in a primitive medical clinic without electricity, following a blood trail on a jungle hike, dodging poison frogs at night, wading across rivers and climbing up steep mud banks, and becoming so ill I could not stand up. But no matter the obstacles, God always provides the strength to accomplish His work: “Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain” (1 Corinthians 15:58 NIV).



Jennifer Calhoun is a freshman nursing major at Andrews University. Her interests include travel, missions and writing. Jennifer looks forward to “Christ’s Second Coming when we won’t need nurses or missionaries anymore!” Photo reprinted with permission of Andrews University.