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Subject: a very long email with very little practical value
Date: Tue, 10 Jul 2007 13:51:31 -0400
To: sahowe@wbt.org

Hello!

I have, as we speak, a clean towel and a functioning bathroom light.

*** Begin long story *****

Let's say a week ago, we thought exchanging sheets and towels might be possible. So we asked (and there's a whole language barrier so you never know). We were told leave the dirty linens in the large basket in the hall before you go to work in the morning and when you return, pick up clean linens from the cart. I envisioned giving away my sheets and towels and having none. My teammate Lydia feels more confident because she said she's seen clean sheets and towels in the laundry area and we know how to get in there. So Lydia (confidently) and I (less confidently) leave my one set of sheets and one of my two towels in the basket. We go off to work. Return and as feared, no cart with clean anything. So we go to the laundry area. No clean anything there either.

So we wander around (at this point in our stay we're no longer following the signs that mark areas as "private" --- just wander around until you find someone). So we locate someone who may or may not understand what we're after. She directs us to someone who tells us, we think, to go upstairs and find a cart. We've been upstairs. There's no cart. But in the rare event that a cart has appeared while we were downstairs traipsing through all of the private sections of the convent, we go back upstairs and verify there is no cart. Back downstairs. Find a third person who definitely seems to understand what we want. She also mentions the cart. But we're wiser. We take her with us back upstairs to show her there is no cart. Then she leaves. Clean sheets are not looking possible when from behind some mystery door person #2 who first sent us upstairs rolls out a cart with sheets. But towels alas are not dry she says (or we think she says) and we can get towels tomorrow. I'm feeling good about my decision to part with only one towel and keep the other...

So when the lightbulb in my bathroom burned out, I, knowing the communication issue, removed the burned out bulb and took it with me on my journey through private sections to find someone who could help replace the lightbulb. It was so much easier than the towel thing (having the visual aid). Not entirely easy. It still took two days because she said she'd leave one outside my door and then she didn't and so I had to go again, but still...

Here's my culturally insensitive comment: lightbulbs here are ridiculous. They don't screw in (securing them to the fixture); they have two little pointy things that you would think would have a corresponding slot in the fixture except there's not. So I got the lightbulb in the fixture. Turned it on. It worked. And then when I attempted to put the globe part back on, I just barely knocked the lightbulb. It fell and smashed. Lightbulb shrapnel all over my bathroom. Cleaned that up. Went back downstairs. Managed to communicate/pantomime how the lightbulb fell and broke. Got another lightbulb. Now I'm more careful, thinking I can get it in the socket more securely. At this point my teammates came back from wherever they were. So I enlist them to help. Nobody can figure it out. Back downstairs (with lightbulb) to explain we can't figure it out. Someone comes back with me. She tries. Gets the bulb in but it falls out of its socket when she puts the globe back on (because it's ridiculous. There's nothing holding it in). She tries again unsuccessfully. She says an electrician is coming tomorrow. He will look at it.

So I'm more or less resigned to having no bathroom light.

And then Sunday --- hot water is hit or miss... so Sunday, there wasn't hot water in my sink. So I planned to skip the cold shower on a cold morning (it's winter here). And then I remembered the other day I had hot water in my sink and not in my shower so maybe my sink not having hot water doesn't mean my shower won't have hot water.

I had the shower curtain pushed back to use the rod for drying laundry (which I did in my sink with the cold water --- because I've learned, it's really hard to do a bunch of laundry by hand. Don't let it pile up, just do a small bit every day --- hand washing/wringing out clothes is exhausting). Okay, so the plan is to turn on the hot water, go read for a bit and come back and maybe there will be hot water (it sometimes takes up to 15 minutes to get hot). So I leave the laundry where it is (no need to move it unless I'm taking a shower which is dependant on hot water today), turn on the water from the spigot thing, not realizing this would spray out and make the whole bathroom tile floor wet/slippery. And since there's no light (bulb burned out) and I don't have a bathmat (gave that to laundry), this is just an accident waiting to happen when I walked back in to check about the hot water and slipped and luckily didn't break anything but it did hurt.

So today, I went downstairs with my one remaining towel (not planning to hand it over because I want it as a bathmat) to attempt to acquire a clean towel. This involved more wandering through more private areas because they're replacing the tiles on the roof and so it's not possible to walk through the courtyard (public area) so I had to take shortcuts to avoid dangerous courtyard with roof stuff raining down... I found someone who understood what I wanted but she said she'd bring a towel to my room (that never happened with the lightbulb so I was pleasantly surprised when the towel showed up).

And then I had this brilliant idea that I could tear up the cardboard box the lightbulb came in, use the cardboard to wedge in the lightbulb. So now, sure, there's a potential fire hazard, but I have light and a bathmat (my old towel). From a safety standpoint, I think I'm in better shape than I was...

*** End long story *****

In ministry news, things are going well. I taught a surprise Bible study with two translators: Kiswahili and Dinka. It was: I say a phrase, wait while the Swahili person translates it for the Kenyans and then for the Dinka translation for the Sudanese. I was so astounded I didn't lose my train of thought too awfully. I'll be teaching again this Thursday (this time with advance notice). I'd appreciate prayer.

And pray for the last two weeks, that I'd finish well, not cry at all (either when I'm sad to leave or when I'm listening to someone's horrific story ... I was doing better but this week twice I almost cried at work --- it's legitimate crying, people have horrible stories but it's not helpful to them for me to cry...)

Thanks

Sheryl