



The Emotional Rollercoaster Of Furlough

By Erika Cisler

For a long while leading up to our first furlough, I was so excited to go back to the States. At one point, I even had to wrestle with the Lord over the fact that my thoughts were consumed with the upcoming trip rather than with Him and the task to which He had called me. Yet, as the days grew nearer, I was surprised by an unexpected sentiment—dread. I found myself thinking, “It was so hard to leave the first time. I do not know if I want to go through that again!” I also struggled with the realization that no matter how much time I had, it would never feel like enough. Thus began the emotional rollercoaster I would ride for the next eight months.

When we reached the States, I faced the predictable sensory overload. The sheer volume of people, cars, and STUFF is overwhelming. Even a small grocery store could cause inner turmoil! So many choices made my head spin. Yet, I was still excited to be back.

Suddenly, the rollercoaster turned and I was confronted with the sensation of “no one understands.” I had such a desire to involve my friends and family in my life, yet in the back of

my mind I struggled with the knowledge that they could never truly relate. I was bursting with stories and emotions I longed to share with them, yet there seemed to be an invisible barrier between us that I knew I could not tear down.

At this point, I moved on down the track to “taking it all in.” I remember sitting in my home church, one of my favorite places to be, and just wanting to sit back and absorb every sight, every sound, every moment. I did not want to leave the church! I wanted to stay and immerse myself in *fellowship*, to drink it in deeply and savor it. I just wondered if everyone else around me felt the same appreciation, if they understood how truly blessed they were.

As the ride continued, I reached a point of acceptance. This was simply a nice *vacation*, so I would just purpose to make memories. We visited many neat places, took a LOT of pictures, and tried to enjoy as much as we could. After a while, I even started to miss the simplicity of life in Uruguay, whereas I had missed the *variety* of the States. The grass is always greener on the other side!

The next twist in the track brought me to the big hill right before the giant fall. I found myself taking things for granted. As strange as it sounds, this was actually a good thing! I had finally stopped focusing so much on mentally preparing for the impending departure. Having formed some kind of routine, I was comfortable. I was just living day to day in what was my current state of “normal” (visiting churches, schooling, family time, etc.).

A month and a half out from our departure came the first farewells. The descent down the giant hill on the rollercoaster was upon me. I had faced this feeling before and I knew it by name—Grief. On one of the last Sundays at my home church, I sat alone in my pew. At least that was how I felt. I was surrounded by people, yet felt like no one knew the pain I was struggling with, as though there was an elephant on my back that no one could see. It was a bittersweet time. I was trying to take it all in, savor every moment, but I was overwhelmed with the thought of it coming to an end. For some reason, the pain seemed more unbearable this second time around. I think we all had a new understanding of just how *long* four years can feel and just how *hard* it is to be apart for that long.



As we arrived back in Uruguay, getting back into our daily routines, I kept waiting to reach the bottom of the hill, for that “sigh of relief” to come. In my mind, I thought that when I reached Uruguay, I would feel a sense of relief. Yes, it was hard to leave, but now I would be back in my own house, ready to get back into a stable routine of life. Instead, it was as though that “sigh of relief” was a long, deep breath that I was exhaling ever so slowly over a matter of weeks.

Just as a rollercoaster ride is filled with various emotions from every hill and turn, so is the emotional rollercoaster ride of furlough. We experience excitement and anticipation, joy and laughter, fear and sadness, ups and downs, and twists and turns. Sometimes it is hard to know if we love it or hate it, if we want to go around again or simply want to get off and walk away. Yet when the time comes, we will gladly climb aboard the rollercoaster once more, knowing that our *labour is not in vain in the Lord* (1 Corinthians 15:58). 

