



# lockdown abroad



“DO YOU WANT TO live in Shrivvenham, White Waltham, Didcot or Medmenham?”

This was my husband’s question to me, from a flat in Surbiton, where he was living with our daughter, whilst I was stuck at home in the Middle East with our boys.

Two months earlier, Jack had gone to collect our daughter from her UK boarding as the spread of Covid created mounting speculation over the closure of schools and international travel. A suspension on all flights in and out of Saudi was announced as he was flying to London, splitting our family indefinitely. We were due to be posted from Saudi to Benson over the summer and, as time ticked away, it seemed sensible to return to the UK early but there was nowhere big enough for us to live together.

“I don’t want to live in any of those places. I want to live at Benson, where we are supposed to be moving and where I’ve applied for schools,” I replied.

The problem was the new freeze on postings: there was no longer a quarter available at Benson. Our plans were null and void. With Jack deploying overseas for 6 months at the end of the summer, we could now be housed anywhere.

With Covid changing so many things for so many people, the location of our next home wasn’t the worst change by a long way but it was unsettling to have to abandon carefully-laid plans that had soothed me during the turmoil of a major move.

I cried a lot that night. I wasn’t very nice. It was true for the whole of the first week when we were first separated. The anger and frustration were all-consuming. The

‘what ifs’ loomed large. ‘What if’ Jack had left sooner, even by a day?

We deliberated endlessly about when the boys and I should leave Saudi, eventually deciding to wait until we got another quarter rather than sofa surf. That was the one promise that brought peace-knowing we could move straight into our own home.

Soon afterwards, the offer of a quarter in Didcot in a month’s time made my school application irrelevant. As we waited, we tried to plan our return, attempting to anticipate changing airline and government policy and repatriation flights. When the embassy announced a flight that would deliver us to the UK before the removal company boxed up our belongings in Saudi, before we could march into our new quarter, forcing 5 of us to live, work and home-school in a relative’s two-bed flat, I politely declined.

But bizarrely, with only 24 hours left to pack our bags, the initially-frightful prospect inexplicably felt right. I asked Jack to try and book us on the flight. As he rang the airline, I felt confident there would be seats left. There were. It was a scramble and tiring but all day long I felt a peace. I didn’t panic. I didn’t feel overwhelmed, although I did wonder if I could physically do it. I was flagging; it had been a tiring two months with roommates who wouldn’t be left alone after Daddy disappeared.

Kind people helped me. An awesome man, to whom I will always be grateful, told me not to worry. He booked a car to the airport for us, organised travel documents, offered to oversee the packers, even take down my pictures. On the morning of the flight, I woke five minutes before my alarm. The boys excitedly ate choc ices on the trampoline

for breakfast. We had time to spare before our lift to the airport and, despite the new Covid travel measures, the flight was straightforward. We arrived, masked up, into the hugs of the other half of our family.

Since then, our eldest son has decided he wants to go to his sister’s boarding school, which is a short drive from Didcot. He was accepted within 2 days of us applying. Our youngest son has started at our first-choice school - it turns out we can reach it from our new quarter, it’s just a longer drive.

As I reflect on the past few months, I wonder why I haven’t been able to dig deeper into my faith during this latest challenge. I have fallen into bad habits; I haven’t often prayed and I have been almost unable to read the Bible. It’s gone blurry in front of my eyes, where the news and FB, weirdly, haven’t. I haven’t lost faith but it’s been hard to access.

I haven’t been strong in any of this, but the Bible says that ‘when I am weak, then I am strong’ (2 Corinthians 12.10). When we run out of our own strength, it leaves a gap for God to demonstrate His strength. This time of challenge hasn’t been a test to see if I would break. It’s been a season enabling God to show me how strong and how faithful He is.

As if to remind me, as we marched into our new quarter, reunited once again, we were greeted by a rainbow.

• **Katie Kyle is married to Jack, an RAF Chinook helicopter pilot.**

**You can read more from Katie on her blog: [www.eagletswings.co.uk](http://www.eagletswings.co.uk)**