

What do Africa, Amanda Freitag and Twitter have in common? To the average observer one might argue that “Africa” and “Amanda” both start with A, while one could also deduce that Amanda Freitag has Twitter thus connecting all three. For me, those three powerful things have launched a life changing week in what would otherwise have been a typical summer. This past week I spent volunteering as a van assistant with God’s Love We Deliver. Many people have asked how it is that I found myself intertwined with this charity. I’m a published writer, painfully sarcastic middle school teacher and world traveler – so where exactly did God’s Love fit into my summer plans? The answer is simple: Africa, Amanda Freitag and Twitter. Without even knowing it I was doing God’s Love-ish sort of work for two and a half years in Africa, I was then inspired by Amanda Freitag, (via my Chopped addiction) to feed all who needed feeding, and then was instantly welcomed into the God’s Love family via Twitter.

Six years ago I moved to South Africa for a two and a half year gig with the Peace Corps. I was in Kuruman, a small farming town in the middle of the Kalahari Desert. I went there expecting to just teach. While I did spend my weekdays in the classroom, another passion-turned-project would come to dominate my time there. I essentially got hooked on season 2 of “The Next Iron Chef.” My dial up internet would allow me to wait seven hours to download the three minute weekly recap of each episode. I watched Amanda Freitag (who by this point had become my culinary hero) elevate and transform random ingredients into five star meals. The next few years became a hilarious pursuit of culinary perfection. I was determined to turn whatever random local ingredients I could find into delicious meals.

Many of my African counterparts laughed as I hunted in vain for anything that tasted like basil. I would often pretend I was hosting my own third world cooking show. I would talk out loud, as I cooked, in my broken Afrikaans, “Add a touch of that green plant from the front yard, a little cornmeal and water from the pump and – voila! – basil flatbread!” Then it hit me. I was living in an impoverished and AIDS ravaged country – and yet I was flippantly cooking through recipes as if food came in an endless supply. I decided that I needed to find a productive way to tackle my culinary adventures. Sadly, in my community, many people living with AIDS not only didn’t have access to the medication they needed, but they also lacked basic nutritional knowledge.

I began by simply telling people about the great and wonderful food pyramid (which apparently has undergone some changes since I was in kindergarten!). Then, I attempted to transform what few ingredients we had in the Kalahari Desert into healthy meals that people wanted to eat. I played around with ratios of cornmeal and pureed spinach to create bread dough. I introduced broccoli to garlic. I would cook *with* my community. I wanted everyone to have a hand in the food they were going to eat, and I wanted to create something sustainable. After cooking, we were then able to see to it that the people who needed food, were brought food.

Flash forward nearly six years, and I was back home in NY, in the comforts of my own air-conditioned home watching *Chopped Champions* while scarfing down food that I didn’t have hunt for, myself. The juxtaposition of my two worlds could not have been more apparent. I rooted very emphatically for Amanda Freitag, who I personally find to be an inspiration, to win *Chopped*, and then she suddenly started talking about the charity she was playing for: God’s Love We Deliver. She said something that continued to stick with me long after the episode aired. She said that, as a chef, it’s your job to make sure that people who need food, get food. She honestly had me at her lusty lemon chicken, but now, she had me inspired me far beyond the kitchen. While I’m not a chef, I am a perfectly capable person, with a teacher’s-built-in-vacation, and I knew right then and there that I needed to get involved.

I’d done this sort of work in Africa, so now it was time to do it in my own city. I am a teacher, and while I am madly in love with my job, I am also madly in love with June, July and August. With all that time off, volunteering was a no-brainer. So now that I’ve solved the mystery of how Africa and Amanda Freitag have played a role in my God’s Love Safari, we need to address the issue of Twitter. I sent a tweet to God’s Love and within minutes I got a tweet and an email back from Emmett. It was serendipitous. When I first reached out, I thought that this big charity would be inaccessible and hard to infiltrate. But it was quite the opposite. Emmett immediately made me feel like part of the God’s Love community, and by the end of that week, I was booked for a week in July.

As I now finish my week as a van assistant, I come away feeling even more inspired. I’ve seen parts of my own city that I never knew existed. In five days, I worked in all five boroughs and even New Jersey. The people to whom I delivered greeted me with smiles, and my excitement grew knowing that someone is getting a meal because of God’s Love. I met hundreds of people from all walks of life right in my own backyard. Words cannot express the blessing of experiencing my city in a whole new way. Delivering food is hard work. It’s a lot of running up and down stairs, ringing doorbells and remembering to smile, even when it’s a million degrees outside. I feel so blessed to know that I was part of something much bigger than myself. If I were to offer parting words it would be this: God’s Love offers a simple opportunity to do something bigger than oneself. It is unconscionable that there are people in this country that don’t have access to food. God’s Love alleviates that burden for thousands of people, and they do so with help from people who make the choice to give of themselves for the

benefit of others.

Just as Africa will always be with me, so will my week with God's Love. I hope to continue volunteering as time permits. I also have made it my mission to let everyone know about this phenomenal, life-affirming organization. You can be sure I'll stay in touch via Twitter, Facebook and Instagram – all great sources for keeping up to date on what God's Love is up to!

(From God's Love: Follow Stefanie on [Twitter](#) and find her on [Facebook](#)!)