



## Suddenly Significant Others: Romance on the Field

by Teri Bulicek and Linda Olson

Never before had Janice experienced such spiritual intimacy as she had with her teammate Tom. The beauty of Kenya along with the excitement of God's work in the Kenyan church seemed to help kindle a special warmth between them. After a few late-night conversations, they began to realize that a special relationship was developing. They seemed so perfect together. But they had agreed to the mission board's policy that they would not use this short-term experience to pursue any kind of dating relationship. What should they do?

Tom and Janice's experience is not a rare one. Short-term experiences seem to encourage intimate relationships. Among a team of short-term missionaries, friendships are often intensified by the pressure of culture shock, by the narrowed field of relational options, by the long and erratic schedule and by the bits of loneliness that everyone feels. Infatuation can strike with other missionaries and certainly with people of the host country.

Most mission agencies discourage dating relationships during a summer or year-long venture. Here's why:

- Romance ruins team life. The relationship is exclusive, leaving you cut off from the normal rhythm of team dynamics. Everyone suffers.
- A romantic relationship diverts you from the work. When you are distracted from what God has called you to do, the host church or team can't accomplish what it hoped to do.
- You're the loser in terms of the personal growth you might have experienced during your short term.
- Special relationships often wreck the witness of the entire mission to the community, Christian or otherwise. Most short-termers would be horrified to discover what assumptions are made in most other cultures about "small" public displays of affection.

The short-term experience is only that – short and intense, lacking a broad "homeside" experience needed for developing and proving a solid relationship. Although God could use a short-term experience to introduce you to a mate, in all likelihood it is the intensity of the experience which heightens the need for closeness and bonding. Keep in mind these guidelines:

- Avoid exclusive relationships. Build relationships in the context of your entire team.
- Know the cultural rules in male/female relationships. Steer clear from every potentially questionable situation with the opposite sex regardless of their nationality.

- Seek the counsel of a leader immediately if anything is developing. Talk about things honestly and frankly.
  - If, with the counsel of others, God seems to be directing your lives together, resolve to wait until you have fulfilled your commitment overseas to pursue the relationship at home.
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