

Sharing Light and Life With Your
Neighbors and the Nations

The cover features a collage of three images separated by torn paper edges. The top image shows a close-up of a globe with various geographical labels like 'ANTIC' and 'AMERICA'. The middle image shows a person's face being held and supported by another person's hands. The bottom image shows a large, dense crowd of people from a high angle.

Unseen

People

DeAnna Lynn Sanders



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

DEANNA'S WRITING STYLE HAS BEEN DESCRIBED AS EASY, CALMING, GENTLE, UNOBTRUSIVE, AND CHRIST-LIKE. JUST LIKE HER. YET, THROUGH HER CHALLENGING WORDS AND INSPIRING STORIES, SHE GETS TO THE POINT QUICKLY ABOUT THE NEED TO HELP BROKEN PEOPLE WHEREVER THEY ARE.

DEANNA ANSWERED THE CALL TO WRITE IN HIGH SCHOOL AND SHE HASN'T STOPPED MANY, MANY YEARS LATER. SHE HAS WRITTEN IN JOURNALS AND NOTEBOOKS, ON TYPEWRITERS AND CLUNKY DESKTOP COMPUTERS, AND ON SLEEK SILVER LAPTOPS AND APPS ON HER PHONE. SHE WRITES BLOGS AND NEWSLETTERS AND SHE CRAFTS COMMUNICATION PIECES FOR NONPROFITS. SHE FILLS HER BLOG, NEWSLETTER, A GOOD WORD WEDNESDAY, WITH BITE-SIZED SLICES OF LIFE FROM HER OWN EXPERIENCES AND FROM THOSE SHE HAS MET AROUND THE WORLD.

SHE HAS SERVED HER CHURCH AS A MISSIONS MINISTER AND WORKED IN A GLOBAL NONPROFIT AS INDONESIAN COUNTRY DIRECTOR AND AS DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS. SHE HAS COMMUNICATION DEGREES FROM OUACHITA BAPTIST UNIVERSITY AND SOUTHWESTERN BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY.

UNSEEN PEOPLE -- INTRODUCTION

What are your three words?

If you were introducing yourself to a new person, how would you describe yourself?

I would say I am:

1. An Introvert. (I love my home and get my energy from solitude.)

After we chatted for a few minutes, we would learn more about each other. You would learn that:



2. I'm a writer of blogs, newsletters and sometimes social media. I love to help faith-based nonprofits because I worked for one for almost 10 years, She Is Safe (see info in Appendix), helping women and girls escape and recover from human trafficking and abuse. I've been around the world multiple times, to mostly unseen locations to hear the stories of unseen people. That's what I do now. I'm a storyteller.

3. I'm a coffee snob. I love coffee, the good kind, usually black but sometimes a skinny latte. Or even better, a cold brew skinny latte.

You would learn through our conversation that I'm a dog lover and a bird watcher. I like to walk and read. (Not at the same time!)

But hopefully, you would learn that I'm a follower of Jesus. That is the most important item on the list.

You may not learn all of that from me in the first conversation. It takes time to get to know a person, doesn't it? But where do you start? With a name. And a smile, and a listening ear. Those are actions you may do naturally but some of us need a few reminders. It doesn't matter where you are, city, suburbs, small town or on a rural route, I encourage you to call people by their names. Who knows? That one small step could be the beginning, the first layer of a friendship. An opportunity to share the love of Christ with them. You don't have to feel like you need to change the world today. Just learn someone's name.

Our name sets us apart. When someone says our name out loud, we feel seen. And we are reminded that God saw us first. “But now thus says the Lord, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: “Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine.” Isaiah 43:1

Of course, God values our entire being, not just our names. Sadly, many people don't know of their worth, that they are priceless. We are all seen. Treasured. Loved. That's who we are. You could even use those three words as your identifying descriptors. Seen. Treasured. Loved.

To understand the depth of God's great love for us, read Psalm 139:1-18. Take time to read it now slowly. Let the wonder of it sink in. I will wait for you while you read.

What did you discover? The scripture says He knows us intimately. Fully. Always with us. Tragically, people don't know they are seen and loved by God. It starts with you showing them that love. To see them. To say their name.

I love stories in scripture where God sees people. Do you remember the story of Sarah's servant woman, Hagar, in Genesis 16? Hagar proclaims in that dramatic encounter with God that He is the God who sees.

Throughout the Gospels, we have stories describing how Jesus sees women in the midst of their pain, as in the story of Mary Magdalene, the woman caught in adultery, the bleeding woman, and so many others. Take time soon to spend time in scripture to see how often God the Father and God the Son call previously unseen people by their names and in the midst of their troubles.

Who are the people in your neighborhood, at your kid's school, or at your workplace who need to be seen, heard and shown God's love? How about the cashier at your local supermarket? What is her name? Accept the challenge to see them, know them, and call them by name.

God calls us to see people starting in our homes, in our neighborhoods and onward to the nations.

My parents instilled in me a love for all people of the world. From my Daddy as he preached about the Great Commission and from Momma as she shared about missionaries around the world in her women's group that often met in our home.

I first felt a call to missions as a freshman at Ouachita Baptist University. God placed in me the desire to go into all the world and also to write. When I said “yes” to God's call, I didn't know it would involve being in a small boat in a big ocean speeding around the islands of Indonesia off the coast of Northern Sumatra.



I don't like water. Well, I actually like to be near water. Who doesn't like the smell of sea salt and the rhythmic sound of the ocean waves licking the shore? I just don't want to be immersed in the water. I like to think I have enough swimming skills that I could save myself if the alternative was death by drowning. But I'm not sure I could and have no desire to test my theory.

So, when I found myself in uncharted waters gripping a small lifejacket, I would ask myself, why did I want to go here?

People often ask me that question about my travels. For many years, I was either prepping for a trip, returning from a trip, or planning another one. In the past 30 years, it has meant going to places like Central Mexico, Bolivia, South Africa, Bangladesh, India, and Indonesia. I can see the question forming in their eyes. Sometimes they even say it out loud, "Why do you want to go there?"



I know what they're asking. If you save all that money for travel, wouldn't you like to go somewhere fun? Except for trips that had a mission focus but were still notable travel destinations like Rome and London, most people just don't understand why I would go to challenging, unheard-of places.

But I did want to go there. I wanted to meet the people. To hear their stories. To understand their culture. To visit them in their homes, sit on their floors and drink their strong coffee. It was all fascinating to me.

I've had several family members say to me, "It scares me when you travel to _____ (insert a destination listed above). I'm always glad to hear when you've made it back home safely." And they will ask, "Don't you feel scared? Are you ever in danger?"

Yes. And, yes.

Easy travel? No. Pushed beyond my limits? Absolutely. Every time. But it was what I was supposed to do. Where I was supposed to be.

In fact, I've struggled more with staying home. My comfortable life is very... well... it's warm and cozy. I say that now as I write from my cushy chair with my fancy laptop. Nice and comfy. Not that comfort is bad, but sometimes when I'm enjoying my life, I think about the throngs of people pressing in all around our car in sweltering, throbbing, Dhaka, Bangladesh. I think about the mothers on one of the small, obscure outer islands in Indonesia. Very few people even know she's there. Or even know her island exists. I think about the tribe in South Africa that is a mixture of races. They are even rejected by people in their own country.

I wanted to go to let them know they were seen and that they mattered. And to show them God's love through the ministry of presence.

The same people who question my going halfway around the world and back again are the same people who say, "But people here need to know about Jesus too."

And I say – Yes! Absolutely. Are you telling them? What I want to say is, "You stay here and do that and I will happily pack my bags and go to the other side of the world."

It was harder for me to see the needs of lonely people in the grocery store near my home, or my neighbors right next-door living lives of loneliness and despair, or homeless people wandering the streets in my own small Oklahoma town. I've learned that being on mission is just geography. The needs of people know no boundaries. One is no more important than the other. The need is both-and. Not either-or.

So, why did I go to those places? Why did I go from my neighborhood to the nations? Why do you want to go? Are you ready?



As we weave through the stories together, we will sip lattes on my deck while the cardinals chirp and hummingbirds buzz overhead. You are invited to walk with me next door and meet my neighbors or wonder who is behind the door in the third house on the left down the street. Or join me in the small boat on a big ocean off the shores of Indonesia. Thanks for joining me. But be warned – it's not always comfortable to see what has been hidden in plain sight from your view. Corrected vision promises both pain and beauty to unfocused eyes. But trust me. The view is worth the wait.





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I INSPIRE MISSION-DRIVEN
CHRIST-FOLLOWERS TO
SHARPEN THEIR FOCUS ON
UNDervalUED, UNSEEN PEOPLE.
LOCALLY AND GLOBALLY.
LEAD THEM TO MEET THOSE
PEOPLE AT THE POINT OF THEIR
PAIN
AND OFFER THEM A HOPE-FILLED
FUTURE.



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