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Local Family of 12 Relocates To Africa with Possible TV Show Deal

By Hayley Gable
for the Severna Park Voice

While most parents are busy preparing their children for the start of another school year, Paul and Ann Rachel Hamelryck are packing up themselves in preparation for a 7,000-mile move to the African country of Zambia. What makes the



Hamelrycks' move so unique is that they will be taking along their ten children – Gabby, 18, Page, 16, Harrison, 14, Cole, 13, Patrick, 12, Nola 10, Shane, 9, Martin, 7, Israel, 5, and Wachipi, 4.

Paul Hamelryck first visited Zambia in 1987 and has since returned to visit two times. His first trip to Africa was sparked by interest to visit his father's birth place in the Belgium Congo. At that time, however, the Congo was closed and would not allow him to enter the country. Because Zambia was the next closest place, he decided that's where he would travel.

“When I was a single guy in ‘87, I traveled through the bush country of Zambia and loved it; I didn't have one bad day out of the 4 months I was there. It kind of solidified for me that this is where I was supposed to be,” he said. “I tell the Africans that when the African sun hits my skin, it makes me feel at home. My grandfather died in

Africa and my dad was born in the Belgium Congo, so there are a lot of neat family connections.”



It wasn't until Paul's trip to Zambia in October 2008 that he made the decision to relocate his family. "Originally my goal was to take each kid every few years," he remarked. However, during that trip - with which Paul brought his eldest daughter Gabrielle, the Missions Board approached Paul and asked him to consider staying to assist with the development of "The Villages of Hope", a special community for Zambian AIDS orphans to be built on large farm areas. "I was blown away when they asked us to come. And we wrote back home in October, half-joking to Ann Rachel telling her to pack the house up because we found a new, great place to build a home," he said.

When Paul and Gabrielle returned to the U.S., they began thinking of how this idea could work. Their house, cars, furniture, pets and other belongings would all need to go, and support from family, friends and the community would have to be gained.

Around last Christmas, the Hamelryck family committed to staying four years in Zambia to assist with the development and construction of schools, medical clinics and markets with a non-profit group called AKCLI – All Kids Can Learn International.

Having never been to Zambia before, Ann Rachel visited for 2 weeks this past February to see how she would like it and begin organizing their family's living arrangements. "I fell in love with the kids over there, and thought it was just awesome," said Ann Rachel.

To the Hamelryck children, the opportunity is something they are ecstatic about. “I think it’s going to be an adventure and we’ll learn a lot from being over there,” remarked 18 year-old Gabrielle Hamelryck.

“At first they were overwhelmingly excited,” said Paul. “It’s an adult decision and we’re all making it together. I really haven’t had any resistance from any of them, they’re all very mature about it and totally for it,” he explained.

Recently, producers from The Discovery Channel contacted the Hamelrycks about the possibility of filming a documentary or reality television series. In mid-July, a camera crew visited their busy Severna Park home to record footage of the family packing up their lives and preparing for the move. If the preliminary footage is approved by Discovery Channel executive producers, a camera crew will then follow Paul, Ann Rachel and their children to document their new life in Zambia.

When it comes to what the Hamelryck children will miss the most, all ten are quick to agree that they wish they were not leaving their friends behind. Hot water, Trader Joe’s food and their home church at Broadneck Evangelical Presbyterian also top the list of what will be missed.

With the recent donation of twelve plane tickets for the 20-hour flight, the family’s move has been finalized. “This is the final trophy of the work that everyone has put into making this happen. Getting these plane tickets is surreal,” remarked Paul.