

LIVING THE LIFE OF RBC AND RMM

Hans and Courtney Shenk, CMC power couple

By Vicki Sairs



Rosedale Bible College welcomed Hans Shenk as our new director of enrollment services in January 2016. As the occupant of the office next door to his, I can testify that Hans hit the ground running and hasn't slowed down yet. He brings a potent blend of marketing savvy and slightly haywire energy to the job. And I mean that in a good way.

He also brings a touch of interagency collaboration to the table, given that he's married to Courtney Miller Shenk, who is the assistant director of SEND at Rosedale Mennonite Missions. Both Hans and Courtney are RBC alums, and before he accepted the new job at RBC, Hans worked for RMM in communications.

"As a family," says Hans, "we're living the life of both RMM and RBC." He has relationships from his time at RMM, and sometimes takes part in REACH activities at the Rosedale International Center (RIC).

Courtney, he says, "is invested in the future of Rosedale Bible College," and their unique working partnership "contributes to cooperative efforts between the agencies."

For her part, Courtney has always appreciated the way that education and missions have complemented each other in her life, informing each other and providing a more well-rounded worldview. "I believe in the importance of what both RBC and RMM do," she says, "and I really want them both to succeed."

Hans' decision to move from RMM to RBC was not an easy one. "There was a huge question of God's leading—I was doing a job I loved, working with a fantastic team, and using my gifts for the kingdom." Plus, he says, change is always scary. "I also felt a bit as though I was betraying my coworkers in the communication department at RMM. We'd worked hard together, and they'd been patient about getting me up to speed, and here I was, leaving. It was important for me to feel like they supported the move."

On the other hand, he was excited about working at RBC and the challenges involved in the job. "Enrollment has been unsteady throughout higher education," he says, and this is

especially true of private, Christian colleges. Yet he believes in the college: "The importance, value and relevance of a place like RBC rises in a secularizing culture."

Finally, he says, "I probably owe more of my development as a person to RBC than any other institution, and the opportunity to give back to RBC and be a part of that blessing for others was a huge driving factor."

We asked Hans and Courtney to talk about their experiences with RBC.

HANS (came to RBC right after high school and graduated in 2010): My experience at Rosedale was incredibly formative. I discovered a new world of my own strengths and weaknesses, and did it in a safe place where there was grace for my many, enthusiastic mistakes. I also found a richness and complexity to faith that I barely grasped before Rosedale.

I was already a person who was known among my friends for knowing what I believed. Yet Rosedale revolutionized the depth of my faith and the richness of my real-world experience.

We sell ourselves short when we deny that rigorous, college-level study of scripture, ethics, Christian history and belief have value beyond the semi-formal teaching in churches and classes in Christian high schools. Am I saying that because I work in recruitment for Rosedale? No. I took the job partially because of how strongly I believe that.

Spiritually, I was challenged to think about how spiritual disciplines play out in my life, how my theology affects my daily walk, and how I interact with other people. [I saw] brilliant examples of quiet, unassuming faithfulness that gave me a model for where I want to go as a follower of Jesus. Intellectually, I ran up against hard questions and started to put together a much more rigorous set of critical-thinking skills. I figured out the roots of my passions academically and picked the two majors I pursued at Ohio State, philosophy and communications, largely because of classes I took at Rosedale.

COURTNEY (came to RBC after three years' involvement in REACH, including staff time at RMM and going out on two teams, once as team leader; graduated in 2013): I look back on my time at RBC with some mixed emotions. It was a perfect transition place for me after REACH because I could still be a part of a great community, but it was also more like regular life than being in the REACH context.

I was very ready to spend time figuring out what I really believed about things like the head covering and nonresistance, so the academic side of my time at RBC was rich and strengthening for me. But socially, I felt like a huge bummer. I didn't know how to not be on a team anymore.

I was so serious, my identity was really confused about who to be in this new context, and I think I may have been slightly depressed. While I made some really good friendships during my two years at RBC, I often look back and wish I wouldn't have taken myself so seriously. I often chuckle at the juxtaposition of Hans' and my experiences—he the club-starter and party instigator, me the serious and inwardly stormy student—so opposite. Even with feeling socially weird, though, nowhere else would have been a better place for me than with that very gracious, loving, patient faculty and student body. If any of them thought I was being a bummer, they never let on.

Talk a little bit about how REACH and RBC worked together for you.

COURTNEY: I loved following up my time in REACH

with RBC because the classes really came alive for me. I wasn't just simply studying world religions. Hinduism was something I had experienced and lived in, but the class helped inform that experience. I could put names to worldviews that I had seen lived out, but didn't know how to talk about. Class discussions about modesty were now more complex for me because not every people group sees modesty the same way. So now I'm left to also consider how people in a village in the Himalayas would see this issue as well.

Simply having been able to see different ways to do church, or practice hospitality, brought a whole new light to the books

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of the Bible we studied in class. Essentially, the professors helped me to continue to unpack and process my time in REACH. I was even allowed to give a speech about why my classmates should give money to support a struggling school my team had worked with in the Himalayas—and they did! It's not in every college that something like that could happen.

HANS: I did a year of REACH after I graduated from Rosedale. I was able to use classes I'd taken at Rosedale in real time—they helped me think about and analyze the

things I was hearing during training sessions, they influenced how I interacted with others when I was called upon to share in public, they gave me much improved skills at how I read, interpreted and explained the Bible. They even gave me better critical thinking skills for understanding my own experiences, the cross-cultural interactions, and the expanded horizon and new breadth of experience I got in REACH.

To be honest, before I did REACH, I felt a bit



Hans takes a selfie with Josiah Zimmerman (left) and RBC students at last year's RBC Talent Show, where Hans served as emcee.

snobby, as though my time at Rosedale—the concentrated two-year devotion to study and growth—was more important, and a wiser decision, than going into REACH. After having been through both programs, I think they complement each other incredibly well, and that time spent studying at Rosedale and learning to serve in REACH is never a waste. Of course, I probably have to think that, having done it. But all three years were well-spent, in my mind.

You both have challenging jobs. What's exciting about your work? Why do you love your job?

HANS: What's exciting about my work is the idea that—in many ways—we're starting over from scratch, and rebuilding a system for how Rosedale goes about recruiting. So far, it requires a lot of patience and a strange mixture of hard-headed diligence and a light touch. My job is to present the opportunities and advantages of Rosedale openly and honestly to as many young people as I can, and to process how it might fit into their lives.

I love my job because it's challenging and exhausting, but I get to do all manner of different things and work at solving problems creatively, and I get to make a positive impact on young people's lives. That's something special.

COURTNEY: I love my job because it gives me the opportunity to work with people. I get to speak truth to people, encourage them, offer a different perspective, help them problem solve and sort through relational issues—I really thrive on that stuff. I'm often challenged myself in those same conversations by the way I see people really pursuing God with their whole hearts.

What are your goals for the SEND department/enrollment services?

COURTNEY:

I think one thing I hope for is a way to make our jobs (those of the people in the SEND department) more sustainable. It's been really easy to get burned out, so I would love to find more life-giving and healthy ways to do what we do, and still do it well.

HANS: Long(ish) answer—I want to build a system that's easily understood and easily modified, one that allows Rosedale to effectively communicate our vision and the advantages of the Rosedale experience first to everyone in CMC (I mean everyone, not just prospective students or parents), and to an increasing range of people outside CMC. I'd like to see enrollment continue to climb until it reaches a point of measurable, predictable consistency. Short answer—I want to make sure young people who can benefit from the Rosedale experience don't miss out.

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