

June 21

Today we went back to Kyanga for some shopping in the market and to play soccer with the local youth. It was great to see our old area and some of the children we had befriended. After shopping and before the game started, we decided to have a soda at the bar across the street from the community center. I'm not really sure what the significance of this was, but they opened a separate bar for us. It just made me wonder...would they have done this for anyone, or is it because we are "unique," as Mr. Deus would say. It made me feel guilty, because we would have been just as happy to sit on the curb to have our sodas. It just goes to show the hospitality of the Tanzanian people as a whole toward guests. It's hard for me to imagine a similar situation occurring in the States.

During the soccer game, a similar course of events occurred, just as they happened previously at the consecration. It seems that whenever there is a group of us gathered, a complete circle forms around us. Initially, this didn't bother me, but now it has started to rub me the wrong way. I guess at first the novelty of it all made me feel welcome, and I enjoyed the attention. But, now it makes me feel closed in and very uncomfortable. Culturally, it is acceptable for Tanzanians to stare; and they do not hesitate to do so, even when the person they have their gaze fixed on notices. However, in the States, if someone would notice you staring at them, you would generally look away quickly. Also, as a common analogy often used among the group, if you were to see a Masai walking in Oakland, many Americans would stare and look but would certainly not form a circle around him. Some would even cross the street to avoid making eye contact or having to come too close.

I have come to the realization that this is a cultural difference; and since I am living in their culture, I must learn to embrace Tanzanian practices and accept them for what they are.

June 23

On Sunday, we went to Bisheshe. We were warmly greeted by the entire congregation who had been waiting for two hours, since the end of their church service. The children all came sprinting toward us and were all smiles. The leaders seated us at the front of the crowd and even provided a program for us to follow the events. They even went so far as to provide translators who sat in between some of us so that we understood exactly what was being said. These sorts of gestures display the generosity of the hosts and also show they view us as important and perhaps "higher" people. I am still grappling with the idea of the Tanzanian social hierarchy and how we are magically at the top of it.

The visit to Bisheshe was quite possibly my favorite visit here. As an Anthropology major, I really enjoyed the song and dance. This was the first time I felt that true African dance was displayed. Their moves and the feeling of community I sensed made me completely energized, wanting to step up and get in the middle of all the action.

Tanzania Student Journal 2003

After sitting at the church service, we went to view the school and had some afternoon tea. We then sat down outside the school to watch another performance by the school children. It was great to watch that, too. It was amazing to see the discipline of the children and how well behaved they were. During the church part, they sat on the ground listening closely. At the school part, they did the same; and if they would misbehave, the one female teacher said something and the student quickly straightened up (as compared to the States, where many teachers have trouble maintaining command over their students). I think what it comes down to is an issue of respect. Young Tanzanian children are impressed with the idea that they must respect their elders as superiors. Many American children are just not brought up with the same ideals.

June 26

So, there is a lot of reflecting to be done tonight. First, I would like to start with the work site. While we were working, Emma, Josh and I pulled Johnstone aside to ask him about the whole “mzungu” issue that the whole group has been trying to tackle. He explained to us that it is simply an expression and is not meant in a hurtful or racist sense. One of the workers, who is also the watchman, is called “cazungu” because his skin was white as a child. It was relieving to know this because it calmed some anxieties for everyone about being labeled “mzungu.”

Many of these people we have come in contact with and with whom we have formed friendships are so excited that we are their American friends. I feel that the bonds that have been made are irreplaceable, and I feel honored to have Tanzanian friends. You could tell by the way they pulled us aside to get their picture taken with us. I loved their excitement and interest. It is utterly amazing to think about the friends I have made despite the obvious language barrier. Even with the workers, I was only able to share a smile, song, handshake, or sugarcane; but I feel like I have connected with them on some level by sharing a common experience. I can't wait to write letters and send pictures to share even more of my culture with them!

Tonight we ate dinner at the Bishop's home. It was a sort of farewell dinner and very informal compared to the other events we attended with him. After prayer, dinner was served buffet style. Dinner included the traditional dishes we are used to (rice, beans, potatoes and greens) along with Country Time lemonade and peanut butter (American classics that certainly disappeared quickly). After dinner, the Bishop told us how the Prime Minister was unaware that Americans were going to be in attendance at the consecration. Once he saw us sitting in the audience, he became very nervous and wished that he had been told we'd be there. I thought this was hilarious, especially since we had no clue what he was saying. This furthers the idea of their class system and the immediate thinking that we, as white Americans, are higher on the social scale. It's amazing to me that the Prime Minister, at the pinnacle of the Tanzanian hierarchy, would have written a better speech had he known that American college students would be there!

June 27

I do worry a lot about Peace, Betty and Lestuta. From what I understand, they get paid based upon their performance. I think that they did an absolutely stellar job and deserve full payment. However, from what I understand, the matron got involved a lot with their work; and to me that makes it seem as if they won't get paid all that they should. It's a very fine line that we all walked as far as asking for more or better service. If we asked for something, that typically meant that the matron would have a word with them (therefore, they would get paid less). However, if we would not ask for something, then that meant perhaps our needs were not being met. It was a cultural tango that we have yet to perfect!