

Thank you

In July of 2008, I had the opportunity to go on a mission trip to Tanzania for four weeks, my first time outside of the United States. I spent the trip working with Rev. John Naumann and the Amani Development Center that he runs there. The Amani Project is a ministry that provides farming jobs to villagers in remote central Tanzania. It is a nonprofit organization, so the money made from raising crops goes toward developing schools and churches in the surrounding villages. When I left for my trip, I had no idea what I would be doing for Amani. I also didn't anticipate what Amani would be doing for me.

I spent the month working with local schools and spending time in the local church community. Even before my trip was over, I had a strong desire to return. I wrote these thirty short journals about my trip in order to share my experience over the summer. The donation you have given will go toward funding another trip to the Amani Center. I have plans to work more closely with the schools, using the talents God has blessed me with to provide for the educational needs of Tanzanian students. I cannot tell you how much I appreciate the donation you have made and the opportunity it will give me to return to Africa.

Thank you again. The grace and peace of Jesus Christ be with you.

Craig Smith

Soli Deo Gloria





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I reached into my military-style duffle bag and cringed. My hand hit a pocket of liquid, and from the smell I knew immediately that my sunscreen had burst open in the bag. After the initial shock, though, I felt relieved instead of disappointed. Cleaning the sunscreen was a hassle, but I was just relieved that my mom wasn't there to harass me for not packing the sunscreen in a plastic bag in the first place.

"How many times have I told you that there's a reason I do these things when I pack..." I could hear her say. (Mom, don't read this.) I started mopping up the spilled sunscreen with the T-shirt that I had worn on the plane trip (a tie-dye gift from Rae Tiner and the Gloria Day Lutheran Vacation Bible School). I hurried to get everything out of the bag so it could start airing out before I went down to dinner.

The hotel we were stayed in was (I was told) one of the nicer ones in Tanzania. It was more like an American dorm room than an American hotel, but I've lived in dorms before, so I didn't mind. I locked my hotel room door behind me and felt the breeze coming in through the window directly to my right. The night air was slightly cooler than the daytime air, and I was reminded of Hawaii – moist, tropical air that smelled heavily of plants. This made me a little worried about my coming trip because I had not much liked Hawaii the time I had been there.

I walked down the flight of stairs and noticed that the designs in the wall weren't purely for aesthetics – nor were they purely designs as I was used to. The wall had actually been carved through to the outside air, providing both a pleasant-looking wall and ventilation for the building. Rev. John was not yet in the restaurant (I didn't have to look hard because everyone else sitting down had dark skin and was speaking Swahili), so I waited for him in the stairwell. He came slowly down the stairs a few minutes later.

John Naumann is the retired Episcopal priest who runs the Amani Development Center. He came to my church last November to share about the developments at the Amani Center, and it was then that I asked about making this month-long trip to visit his ministry in Tanzania. John is a soft-spoken man, but he is a pleasure to talk to. He has a keen sense of humor, and at the same time, he is not hesitant to talk about important matters of the church and the Bible. Before leaving for my trip, members of my church shared stories with me of weekend retreats they had done with Rev. Naumann. Even three years after retiring to Tanzania, his influence on the lives he touched here in Montana was still strong.

At the moment, John looked far frailer than he really was. He was coming down the stairs at a pace that would be more fitting of a man twenty years his senior. He told me that his left eye was giving him trouble, and his depth perception had been thrown off. Especially in the dim light of the stairwell, he had trouble seeing where his next step was going to be. Fortunately, Rev. John has medical coverage in the United States and Australia when he visits in the fall, but his eye was a problem that plagued him during my month-long stay.

He and I sat down at the table in the restaurant and, after a cross-lingual, charade-like exchange, got menus from the waitress. Now my stomach really started to twist in knots. I had made it through international airports without a hitch. I had even managed to get half of my Tanzanian spending money swapped for the \$100 USD Visa fee that I didn't know I would have to pay (and all this without knowing any Swahili except "Asante" – "Thank you"). But now, I was at the part of my trip that I had received the most warnings about – African food. I looked warily through the menu. I was hoping to play it safe and order whatever Rev. John was having.

But he had me order first.



First Morning

In high school, my hockey team stayed at a hotel in Canada that, when we booked the rooms, advertised their free breakfast. I knew not to expect a lot from a free hotel breakfast, but this particular hotel made me appreciate every other hotel's breakfast just a little bit more. My teammates and I wandered down, bleary-eyed, to find two toasters, two bags of plain white bread, and a basket of miscellaneous condiments. The sign above the spread was brutally honest: instead of saying "Continental Breakfast," it read simply, "Toast Bar."

My first breakfast in Africa looked eerily similar.

I came into the restaurant that John and I had eaten dinner in the night before and grabbed a fresh 1.5 Litre water bottle. I had been delighted to see such huge water bottles at dinner the night before – both because I was very thirsty and because, after drinking the water, I had a container for my sunscreen that would no longer hold in the shattered bottles. Along the wall to my right was a table set out with bread, butter, and the brightest red jelly I had ever seen in my life. This jelly, called "Simba Chef Mixed Fruit Jam" turned out to be one of my favorite Tanzanian foods. I even brought a jar back to Butte to share with my family. They asked me which fruits it was made from. The label simply says "fruit pulp." The jam is sweet enough that I'm pretty sure one of those "fruits" is sugar cane.

But even though breakfast looked a little skimpy, after dinner last night, I wasn't worried. This restaurant had good food. Last night Rev. John and I had both ordered chicken and mashed potatoes. The restaurant had a special way of preparing the meals that made them taste especially delicious. That way was: slowly. We waited in the restaurant for an hour after ordering food before our dinner finally arrived. I had two suspicions as to why the meal took so long. My first thought was that we were the only non-Swahili speakers in the restaurant that night, and they knew we couldn't complain if we wanted to. My second thought was that we were the only customers who had ordered chicken in a long time, and they had to actually go find the chickens, butcher them that night, and *then* cook them. But whatever the cause of our wait was, the effect was that I didn't care what it tasted like: I was ready to eat!

On my plate was a good-sized portion of mashed potatoes and half of a chicken (Rev. John had the other half). At first I thought this was a large meal, but I found out that the chickens they raise in Tanzania don't get as big as our chickens. My half-chicken had about as much meat as a typical American breast piece. But the food was delicious and tasted like it could have come from any restaurant here in the U.S. Breakfast was also highly similar to American cuisine: in addition to the toast bar, I had my choice of a Denver or Spanish omelet. Unfortunately, I don't like eggs. But I was hungry, and I learned a life principle that I would become well-acquainted with a few more times during the trip: with enough pepper and tomato, anything is edible.

The restaurant had one TV in the corner of the room, and (as it had been the night before), it was showing a live broadcast from the Tanzanian Parliament. This was not due to a lack of better entertainment on the Tanzanian's part as much as it was an interest in the national government. Rev. John told me that the Tanzanians had been fighting hard to rid their government of corruption, and they were very interested in what happened in their Parliament. Being able to broadcast every session forced a measure of accountability on the government that the people took full advantage of.

We finished breakfast just in time for me to throw all my sunscreen-stained clothes back into my duffle bag before Rev. John's driver arrived to pick us up and take us to Amani Center.

