

Daudi

In the wake of my failure at kindergarten, I felt pretty depressed. I took the next day off from teaching at Igondola. I realize now that it was probably part of God's purpose in having me teach the kindergarten class: so that I would be at the Center on Friday.

Every Friday was payday. At about 12:30, workers began congregating around Rev. John's office in anticipation for their paychecks. (I'm fairly certain they weren't supposed to be there until the workday ended at 2 o'clock.) I was sitting outside my apartment doorway, scanning over the previous weeks of journals and Swahili/English translations. Seeing me alone (and probably looking pretty miserable), one of the workers named Daudi (daw-oo'-dee) approached me. I had first met Daudi on the ride home from Dar es Salaam. He had been able to ride with Rev. John, and on that trip, he had seen his older sister for the first time in 17 years.

Daudi began talking to me and asked what I was doing. I showed him a page of English phrases that I was going to ask Albert to translate for me later. "Oh," Daudi said. He read carefully over the words I had written then asked for a pencil. "Let'eh me help you." Daudi began translating the phrases for me. When I saw something that didn't make sense with what I knew about Swahili, I asked Daudi about it. To my amazement, he was able to explain it to me! He didn't speak perfect English, but it was easier to talk to him than anyone else I had met so far (excluding Rev. John and the Australians...well, maybe just Rev. John).

"I wish you had been at school with me yesterday," I told Daudi.

"Oh, you have hard time at school?"

I explained what happened at the school and how I often had nightmares about that same feeling of losing control in the classroom. It occurred to me to ask Daudi how he had learned English. He must have had far better teachers than me when he was in nursery school.

Daudi began to tell me about his life story. It turned out that he had moved away from Makang'wa before finishing sixth grade in order to find work. (This was the last time he had seen his older sister until he met with her in Dar es Salaam.) He had spent a few years traveling from place to place and ended up in Uganda for a number of years.

Like Tanzania, Ugandans are a very tribally diverse people with many different languages spoken across the country. Unlike Tanzania, they had chosen English as their national language. Daudi, having grown up speaking Swahili and Gogo (the local tribal language) had to live and work in an entirely English-speaking environment. He ended up learning more English working in Uganda than many of his classmates learned finishing high school in Tanzania.

Daudi then talked about what had brought him back to Makang'wa – helping his mother rebuild her house after it had collapsed in a storm. He talked about what it was like to move back home after being gone for so long, and I sympathized with him: he was describing the exact feelings I had when I moved back to Butte after attending college in New York state.

While we were talking, many of Daudi's coworkers came up to us and asked me, "Jina lako nani?" ("What is your name?"). I answered their question only to be met with blank stares and nervous glances between me and Daudi. "Craig" is not a very common Swahili name...imagine that. Even when I tried to write it down for them, the few that were brave enough to attempt reading it did not get very far. I scratched out the C-r-a-i-g and thought carefully about what Swahili letters would make the right sounds. I tried "Kreg" next, but even this was a little troublesome for the average Tanzanian. They did not blend their consonant sounds like we do in English. I tried again: K'reg.

"Ahh, Claig-y!" they said. Good enough.



Daudi and me at the Center



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Finding Choir, i

If you ever want to know what it feels like to be a celebrity, just show up in a rural African village with white skin, driving a Toyota Landcruiser. And you probably wouldn't even need the Toyota.

Kids appeared out of every house that we drove by, some waving excitedly, some staring in awe.

"Well, here we are," said Rev. John, pulling the Landcruiser up next to the pile of bricks that were going to be put on the new St. Andrew's church. "You're sure you got the time right?"

Rev. John and I had already talked about the time earlier. When I first asked him if I could go to choir practice, he said that would be fine. When I told him I didn't know how to get there and would need a ride, he said that would probably be fine. When I told him that practice was at 10:30 at night, he said that would not be fine. He pointed out that the sun set in Makang'wa after six, and it was dark by seven. I hadn't thought much about it because I go to college classes and youth groups meetings and any number of other events in Butte after it gets dark outside. But Butte has electricity; Makang'wa did not.

"That's what David said," I had offered helplessly (David is Daudi's name in English). Rev. John had looked at me like I was making stuff up. I had looked back at him like I was making stuff up. The possibility that St. Andrew's choir practiced outside next to a bonfire seemed *pretty* unlikely. My hopes of watching an African choir practice had started shrinking. While talking to Daudi outside my door, I had remembered seeing him in St. Andrew's choir on Sunday. When I had asked him if I could come watch practice, he had said that I was more than welcome to come. But apparently I would have to find it first.

"Oh, wait," Rev. John had broken the silence. "Is that Swahili time? It's different."

I had to go find Daudi and ask him again. It turns out that Swahili time is six hours different from ours. It wasn't quite 4:30 yet, so I told Rev. John I could just wait around until practice started. Rev. John was a little skeptical about my information (I'm

sure the past Sunday's experience at St. John's hadn't helped). I was a little skeptical too, considering that I had almost shown up in the middle of the night.

"I can wait here; it's okay." I looked again at the empty church, hoping that it would be. If nothing else, I had paid attention on the way so that I could walk back to the Center.



"Well, I'm sure there will be kids showing up before long."

He was right. Shortly after Rev. John drove off, kids started appearing. The only problem was that they weren't choir kids. They mostly approached from the direction that the Landcruiser had come to church, and I wondered how many of them had followed the car. I got out my journal and started writing. Every time I looked up, there would be a few more kids than before. They were all looking at me. Some of them were giggling; others were whispering to each other: "Mzungu" ("white person").

Slowly, they would take a few steps closer to me. I kept writing, but I looked up frequently to check on their progress. When I was looking around, they all stood still and either stared or giggled. It wasn't until I looked back at my journal that they inched forward again. I tried to hide my smirk. This was going to be fun.

I let them get about ten yards away before I jumped up and roared at them. A dozen little voices screamed, and children went darting away in every direction, laughing. Even when I found out there was no choir that night (I happened to see Deacon Henry and asked him), I wasn't disappointed with the night.



Finding Choir, ii



Daudi had taught me to adjust for Swahili time. What he couldn't teach me to adjust for was what Rev, John, Bibi, and Gordon affectionately called "African time." Well, perhaps not-so-affectionately.

I was sitting on the brick pile again. This time, Daudi had *promised* that there was choir practice. It was Saturday, and even if people hadn't come to choir all week, they came on Saturday because they had to get ready for Sunday's performance. I tried to ignore my watch. I had learned enough about African time to know that things rarely ever started when they were scheduled.

It was about 4:40 when the first people showed up (practice started at 4:30). Daudi introduced me to Moses and Edward, the other two people that had come with him. I found out that they had come "early" so I wouldn't be waiting for them.

I didn't mind much because even though I had walked to the church that day, an equally large group of kids showed up to be chased. The child psychologist in me was fascinated by the interactions that were occurring between the kids and me without any verbal communication. The big brother in me was more interested in keeping the kids entertained, and they loved to be chased. I did on two occasions make the unfortunate mistake of actually *catching* a child, at which point the hysterical laughter turned immediately into hysteric sobbing.

When enough of the choir showed up, we went inside and started practicing. (As is typical with African time, the last person to come to practice straggled in at about 5:07.) I can't say enough about how beautiful their music was. It was pure and simple – just voices and a single drum. And while I couldn't understand the words, just knowing that they were worshipping Jesus made it sound that much better. I took a few pictures and videos of the choir, not wanting to distract the singers too much but not wanting to pass up this opportunity either.

At the end of practice, Edward (who was the choirmaster) stood up and gave a Bible lesson. Then, Daudi brought me up to the front of the choir and had me introduce myself (I had to do this at every church service I went to as well, which I did not enjoy). The choir members also told me a little bit about the choir. It was the St. Andrew's youth choir, and the members ranged in age from 11 to 28. Moses stood up to say something. I'm pretty sure that if Moses was an American, he would have a career as a stand-up comedian. Even without knowing what he was saying, I thought he was funny. He asked me a couple of questions about America then asked if I could find a wife for him when I went home. (Daudi had to translate this for me because Moses doesn't speak English.)

“Does she have to speak Swahili?”

He said that would be preferable, but not necessary. In exchange, he would find an African wife for me.

“Okay...but I actually want to speak to my future wife...English is necessary.” I have a feeling neither of us will succeed.

Before I sat back down, several of the choir members were telling things to Daudi. He turned to me and said, “Oh, some of the-eh choir people, they no like having someone watch them. They say, ‘This is strange to have someone watch-ee us, we no like it.’”

I was glad that I took the pictures and videos that I did; it looked like I wouldn't get a chance to come back.

Daudi continued, “They say-eh that if-ee you come to watch, you need to sing with us.”

I looked at Mary, the choir mistress, with an incredulous expression. She laughed.

