St. James' Church

We had nine people packed into the Landcruiser. I was rearranging people in my head on the drive to church. We could have easily fit two more. Well, maybe not "easily," but for the drive to Mvumi Misheni, we would have been just fine. Joining our usual church crew were the Amani watchman, a college student that Amani Center was sponsoring, and one of the workers who had gotten in trouble for stealing (coming to church was part of the restitution process).

Mvumi Misheni was one of three villages in the vicinity of the Amani Center. It was the largest and most developed of the villages: set on the top of a hill, it was the perfect place to set up the five cell phone towers that Tigo Wireless used to service the area. In addition, Mvumi Misheni was the only village nearby that had electricity or a hospital.

Having heard these things, I expected St. James' Church in Mvumi Misheni to be a little more upscale than St. Andrew's. Of all the things that happened that Sunday, that was one of the few expectations that was accurate. We arrived at the church a little early for the 10 o'clock service. The pastor invited us into his home to sit down for a little while before church. I've never much enjoyed social situations like that, so I wasn't surprised when I felt like the time was dragging on and *on*. I was surprised when we finally went over to the church and it turned out that time really had dragged on: we had been in the pastor's house for almost an hour.

The walk over to the church looked like a ministers' convention: Rev. John, his translator Caleb, the pastor from St. James', two deacons from St. James', and a guest pastor from a local seminary school all strode over to the church in their long robes. I enjoyed the scene until I remembered that I would have to follow them up to the front, take the seat of honor, and introduce myself to the congregation. I really wanted to sit in the congregation with everybody else.

Even before we got to the door, I could hear the music of electric guitars and keyboards. I immediately missed the music of the St. Andrew's choir. Listening to the electronic music was almost painful compared to the beautiful simplicity of last week's

choir. I did not even see a single traditional drum – the rhythm was supplied entirely from the keyboard's preset beat box.

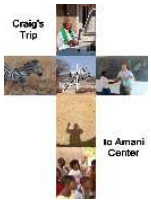
Rev. John gave the sermon. It seemed unusually long because every sentence had to be translated into Swahili after he spoke it. When he had finished preaching, the visiting seminary student did an impromptu summary of *everything* Rev. John said. This seemed to take even longer because I couldn't even understand half of it. When he had finished, one of the St. James' deacons had a letter to read to the congregation. Fortunately, I didn't have my watch with me, so I had no idea how long the service lasted. But the day wasn't over when we left the church. The pastor and his wife had also planned lunch for us. After the service, we returned to his house to eat…eventually. Like the church service, lunch at St. James' involved a lot of prerequisite waiting. Fortunately, I found little kids to chase.

While I was chasing them, I pretended to run into things: trees, roof overhangs, the Landcruiser. I was a little disappointed because the kids didn't seem to notice when I did it (they were too busy running away). But later, when I came back to the car, Bibi told me that I needed to be more careful when I was playing with the kids.

"It's pretty safe," I said. It certainly wasn't in the middle of construction like the Ingadola school playground, where there was a lot more running around.

"No, it isn't – you keep running into things; you're going to get hurt."

I hadn't even realized that the other adults were watching. But *they* hadn't realized that I was only pretending. Fooling the adults was almost as much fun as fooling the kids.



Lizarding, ii

Almost a week and a half after making my lizarding stick, I got the opportunity to test it. A pair of scarlet-heads was sitting on some rocks near Rev. John's office. I stopped my photography lesson and ran back to my room, exchanging the camera for the lizarding stick. When the lizards saw me, they ran up the wall toward the hole in the roof. It was perfect! I slid the stick in front of them to block off their escape. The first one scrambled around the corner of the building, but I snapped the stick over in time to block the second one. Several times, he darted between the hole and the corner, but I intercepted him each time with a quick swing. When the lizard settled down, I checked the floss loop to make sure it was ready to go around his head. The loop was a little thin, but I didn't want to bring the end of the stick all the way back to my hand because the lizard would make a run for it.

Flicking my focus between the lizard and the loop, I leaned the tip of the stick toward the wall and pushed the loop back to a broader, more circular shape. Now I went for the neck.. Having already been cut off from the hole and the corner, he tried to run back down the wall. If he had known how intimidating a foot-long red and green lizard is to someone who had never even caught a frog as a child, that lizard would have just ran at me (he would have probably escaped and had a good story to tell his lizard buddies). But I looked more intimidating to him than he did to me. After a couple steps down the wall, he froze again, trapped.

I tried to slip the loop around him a couple more times, but the lizard was still on edge. Having lost all his options to run, he spun in tight circles at every tap of the stick. Chunks of plaster flew down at me, scraped off by the lizard's frantic feet. I moved the stick in again. The lizard had tired out and let the floss get closer and closer. I moved slowly, carefully, ready for the lizard to make a last, desperate dash for the hole in the roof. But by the time the lizard realized what was happening, it was too late.

My stick jerked forward. The lizard had run, tightening the slip knot around his neck. I tugged the stick away from the wall and let the lizard

hang in the air. Or, more accurately, I let the lizard flail wildly in the air. This scarlet-head was not nearly as passive as its smaller, darker counterpart had been. Teeth bared and throat hissing, the lizard thrashed back and forth several times before deciding it was a hopeless struggle. At this point, I was worried that I was strangling the poor reptile, so I reached up to hold him and take the pressure off his neck.

He started flailing again. This was just great…he wasn't even going to let me "rescue" him from the trap I'd put him in. I waited for the lizard to calm down again until he was drifting slightly, like a scaly green pendulum. This time, I grabbed the tail, where the lizard couldn't see my hand coming. He twitched a little bit but was less hostile. Slowly, I shifted my grip up his spine until I was holding him loosely enough to lift him free of the pressure. As soon as I did (and, in fact, every time I changed my grip), the lizard struggled a little bit to get free. It was quite an ordeal cutting him loose and letting him go.

But it was a good thing I had. Two days later, Young John came to ask for my help. A scarlet-head had gotten itself tangled up in a net meant to keep out the monkeys. I (apparently) had more lizarding experience than anyone else at the Center, so I spent several tense minutes trying to unwrap the poor creature. In the end, I had to just cut him free. And as I was getting near the end, the lizard could sense he was closer to freedom and began thrashing. Even knowing what to expect, it startled me so much that I almost dropped him. When I finally did get him out, I felt like I should be the star of the next Animal Planet documentary…or maybe just a commercial.

An African Wedding, i

There was an incident in high school that convicted me not to play around with cars. While no cars or people were damaged in the incident (about which I will plead the Fifth), it nagged me afterward how easily someone could have been injured and how lucky we had been. I still forget every once in a while and drive 12 mph down Browns Gulch road when my friends are following me or sit on the hood of a car backing out of the parking lot. But for the most part, I've formed good habits of avoiding car games.

The habits I didn't have until the end of this particular Saturday was to think of bicycles as cars while I was in Africa.

"Come on, we can catch them!" I shouted over my shoulder to Daudi as we biked at full speed. The flatbed truck had just crossed the road in front of us, with all sixty of the passengers crammed into the raised bed had called out when they passed – some in anticipation of the wedding coming up and some in the excitement of seeing a Mzungu.

Daudi had knocked on my door early that morning…well, it might have been after 10:00. But seeing as how I was still asleep at the time, I thought it was early.

"Hey, K'regi!" he called through the closed door. "You awaki?" (I'm convinced that every word in the Swahili language has an optional "ee" ending, because Daudi would add and subtract that from the end of English words at will. He was once describing the English translation for <a shop of medicine> to me, and I said, "Oh, it's a pharmacy." "Yes," Daudi replied, "Pharmas." I had to restrain myself from saying, "Noo…'farmahs' are people in Boston who grow crops. A pharmacy is where you get medicine." It's just as well I stayed quiet. I'm not sure most of my American friends would get the joke.)

"I guess," I called back to Daudi. "Kind of."

"Oh, are you doing anything today?"

I cringed. "No." I knew I was in trouble.

"Oh, it would be big honor for them to have a Mzungu come to the wedding. They say it make them very happy if you come."

How could I say no to that?

"Give me ten minutes…" I closed the door and searched around my room for some appropriate wedding clothes. An hour later, we were racing our bikes after the

"wedding mobile." At least *I* was racing on the bike that Albert had let me borrow for the day. Neither of the gear shifts worked, so I hand-adjusted the chain into a higher gear to go a little faster. After I found out that only one of the brakes worked, I wondered if that was a good idea…

"Oh, the tires – they no work in the sand!"

Daudi was calling to me from the far end of the sand pit I had just ridden across. He had thin touring tires on his archaic-looking, single-gear *Phoenix* bicycle. I thought that if anything, his trouble in the sand had more to do with his lack of gears than his narrow tires. But mostly, I just thought he was being a wimp. Having played hockey since I was six, I felt that I could power through anything. And I tried. I rode through every patch of sand I could find (Daudi rode around them, so we ended up going about the same speed).

As the wedding-mobile disappeared around the next turn (it turned out that we couldn't catch it), two more bicycles came at us from the opposite direction. It was Edward and Moses from choir. They said that the church was back the way we had just come. I looked down the road at the flatbed truck then back where they were pointing.

"Okay…" I said. It was Africa – what did I know?

An African Wedding, ii

I foolishly sat with the choir. Sure, the church was crowded. Sure, that was really the only seat available. And sure, I didn't know anyone else and would have made me and a stranger pretty uncomfortable if I sat next to them. But I should have known better than to sit with the choir.

The church looked only slightly larger than the back of the flatbed that everyone had ridden here in and felt equally crowded. When the youth dancers started down the aisle to music played from a 1970s-era portable radio, I had to snap pictures over my shoulder without looking because it was too crowded to turn around for a good shot. After that, the wedding ran similarly to an American wedding service. There was a sermon, the exchange of vows…and music.

"Ohh, K'regi, it time to sing."

I tried to protest, but it was no good. I was already sitting with the choir, so staying seated while they stood up and danced would have looked just as bad as trying to dance along with them. And I had practiced with them…

"You sounded good," Henry said after the service.

"Oh, thanks," I said, then mumbled, "That's because I was lip-synching."

On the way home, Daudi, Moses, Edward, and I all rode together. I continued to ride Albert's bike through the sand pits (much to the astonishment of the others), and when we came to a wide stretch of road, I shot ahead of the other three and rode as fast as I could. I could only make it to the next intersection because I had no idea how to get back to the village. It didn't help that every intersection in Makang'wa looked exactly the same.

I was having a great time riding around the dirt roads of Tanzania. We didn't wear helmets; I'm not even sure I saw them for sale. It was still safe because there were so few cars and no paved roads. I actually need to apologize to anyone who saw me ride my bike around Butte the first week I was home. I was so used to riding in Africa that I

forgot to put a helmet on when I got home. I didn't even notice until I passed another cyclist who *was* wearing a helmet.

I continued to have a great time until the left pedal fell off the bike. We had just stopped at a small shop so Moses could pick up a 20lb. bag of peanuts. I took a couple of hard pedals to get moving quickly again, and suddenly, there was nothing to push against. Daudi and the others stopped to help and thankfully found all the pieces lying a few feet back. We took the bike back to the little shop to get it fixed, but they didn't have a wrench the right size. Moses offered to trade bikes with me because Albert's was still ridable, but it would be a little tricky to keep inward pressure on it while riding. I was fine with that, but because Moses had the 20lb. bag of peanuts, Edward insisted that I trade bikes with him instead. We rode back into the village and the better-equipped bicycle shop, and they didn't have the right tools, either. We finally just put the bolt on by hand so that I could ride it back to the Center.

It was during this long ride, while I was thinking about what I was going to say to Albert, that I realized how important his bicycle was to him. It was his ride to school every morning, his ride down to soccer games in the village, and the only way he could get anywhere faster than by foot. It isn't like living here in America where if our car breaks down, we can call a friend and carpool for a few days. Plenty of other people had bikes, but trying to fit a passenger on one was no easy task. Albert also went to school in Makulu, and there were few people making that commute everyday. Fortunately, the pliers on the Leatherman I had brought was able to reach around the nut on Albert's pedal and tighten it. Afterwards, I decided not to play around with bikes in Tanzania.