



**Makang'wa Primary School, i**

“This looks so suspicious,” I told the girls. They nodded and said, “Yes.” This was one of the few times that the answer would have been “yes” if they actually *had* understood the question.

I had woken up late Thursday morning, still feeling disappointed about yesterday's safari. I had hoped I would have returned to the Center last night to hear that Caleb had stopped by with news from his school. I had asked him on Tuesday about coming to observe at the Makang'wa Primary School. John hadn't mentioned anything when we got back from safari, so I thought I'd wander down around lunch time to ask Caleb what the school administrators had said...maybe. I didn't feel like doing much of anything after yesterday's disappointment. I got dressed slowly and went to the guest house for breakfast. Everyone else had already eaten and started their day. Bibi was still getting things together before leaving for Ingadola.

“What are your plans for today?” she asked me.

“I think I'm going to go down to the Makang'wa Primary School and see if it's okay to teach with Caleb today.”

“Oh, isn't he expecting you?” Bibi asked. I explained to her that I had talked to him on Tuesday but was still waiting to hear back from him. “He's already given his answer,” Bibi said, a little surprised. “Didn't John tell you? He stopped by last night and said they would be expecting you down at the school today.”

I immediately got a burst of energy. Eating a quick breakfast and grabbing a few things I would need for the day, I hurried toward the village.

About halfway along the walk from Amani Center to Makang'wa Primary School, the path crosses over a little ridge. From the top of the ridge, the village center comes into view for the first time. At the far side of the ridge, there is a large watering hole where many of the villagers get their water. On this particular morning, that watering

hole was teeming with the young girls in their white and blue school uniforms, filling up their plastic jugs. Many of them recognized me from the times I spent waiting outside St. Andrew's for choir practice, and they all knew about the football that I carried.

“Rushia, rushia!” they called (“Throw, throw!”).

I tossed the ball back and forth with them for a little while then waved goodbye because I wanted to get to school. I started walking and heard a chorus of feet behind me. I looked back. The girls that had already filled up their jugs were walking right behind me. The others were scrambling into the pond to fill up their jugs quickly and catch up with the rest of the group.

“Mnakwenda wapi?” I asked, already feeling nervous.

“Tunaenda schule,” one girl replied. (“We’re going to school.”)

Great...I found out (after several attempts) that this was the entire class of sixth grade girls from the primary school. They were getting water to bring back to the classroom, so they followed me the whole way back. I had not seen many police officers in Tanzania, but I was waiting for some of them to appear and arrest me right there. *That* would have been fun to try to explain in Swahili.

When I got to the school, I found Caleb so I would have someone who could understand me. We talked to the Head Teacher at the school, and he said it would be fine for me to go to classes with Caleb. We walked to the seventh grade classroom (Tanzanian primary school is grades 1-7), and Caleb informed me that I would be teaching English today.

“What?!”



## Makang'wa Primary School, ii



my friend Ndlito's first time with a digital camera

With how grateful all the teachers were, I can't imagine how ecstatic they would be if I had *actually* taught something. I suppose that I really had taught quite a bit to the various classes that I had visited in the last two days, but it was structured so differently from our school system here in America that I wasn't convinced any of it would really stick with them.

There are definitely curriculums in Tanzania (I saw one with my own eyes), and there are apparently even government organizations that check on village schools to make sure they are teaching what needs to be taught. But the curriculums were not followed with nearly the same rigidity with which they are followed here. The teachers seemed to decide on lessons between class periods after looking through a stack of out-dated, thoroughly-used textbooks (the school could not afford anything else). I don't disagree with that system, particularly if the teacher keeps track of what has been taught. But the problem with not having anything specific to teach on a specific day was that they were very *laissez-faire* about what I was supposed to be teaching.

"You teach them English," Caleb told me. It took me quite a bit of questioning to narrow that down to a topic that I could actually teach in one hour.

During my two days at the school, I taught seventh grade English, fifth grade English, sixth grade Social Studies, and seventh grade English a second time. I also got to observe a few classes (which was what I had been planning to do for the entirety of the two days; as at Albert's school, my time turned out to be very little like what I expected).

I was at once astonished and impressed by the Tanzanian school system. Each grade had about seventy students, and each grade had only a single 20x32 ft. classroom. The older students had desks to sit in, but for fourth grade and younger, all seventy

students sat on the concrete floor and took notes off of the single chalkboard. One of the classes for the students was to go outside and learn how to beat millet. This corn-like plant had to be beaten with long sticks until the grains fell off. A circle of thirty or more third and fourth grade students would sing and pound their sticks in perfect rhythm for fifteen or twenty minutes. Later, the older students would come out and use nothing but bowls and the wind to sift the grain from the chaff.

I also got the chance to teach one of my favorite subjects at Makang'wa Primary – Ultimate Football. The math teacher asked me, during one of the recesses, to show the students how to play with an American football. I figured trying to instruct them in our traditional 11-man game would be beyond impossible (there are plenty of English-speaking people who don't understand it), so I taught them how to play Ultimate.

Even as young as nursery school, athletics in Tanzania are done almost exclusively by boys. When the Ingadola children would play organized games at recess, the teachers would only call boys to play while the girls (and the boys who were waiting for a turn) stood in a circle to form the playing field. I wasn't terribly distraught by this because I knew that I was in a different culture. But at the same time, I wanted to share a little bit of our American culture with Tanzania.

On the second day of recess, I specifically picked girls to learn and try the American game. They actually did a little better than the boys because they listened to the rules.



At the end of my second day, the teachers held a special luncheon to say goodbye to me. Again, after having been there such a short time and having done so very little, I wondered why they were so grateful. But it made me realize how big of an impact I could have in the Tanzanian school system. Having a well-educated, English-speaking teacher is a tremendous asset to the schools and would give their students a distinct advantage when applying to secondary schools and (later) to colleges.



## **Bus Ride to Dodoma, i**

“He not believe me,” Daudi laughed, handing the two-year old boy back to his mother. “He only believe mother.” Actually, Israel didn’t really believe his mother either. Even after she told him I was safe and nice, he didn’t take his eyes off me. They were as big a golf balls and full of sheer terror. There were actually several babies in Africa who had “Mzungu-phobia.” But most of them didn’t have to wait in line for a bus this close to one.

Daudi and I had left before daylight that morning. There was a bus that ran from Mvumi Misheni to Dodoma every morning. Daudi, his brother Lucas, and I had walked to The Corner to catch the 6am bus to Dodoma. It was Friday, and I was flying out of Dar es Salaam the following Tuesday. Daudi and I needed to buy bus tickets from Dodoma to Dar, and his brother was going to catch a bus that day to Dar to return to work. Israel and his mother arrived a few minutes later on a motorbike that Israel’s father was borrowing. They had woken up a little late and needed to get to the bus in a hurry to make sure they had time for the day’s errands in “the city.” At 6:20 we were still waiting for the bus (typical of African time).

I had thought ahead and pulled out a bag of Mama Happy’s homemade rolls. Although they weren’t sure they could eat them without tea, Daudi, Lucas, and Israel’s mother accepted the small breakfast. Israel wasn’t so sure. He stared at the bread nervously as if it might be poisoned. Then (after he had watched his mother live through a bite), he cautiously tried a piece. He wasn’t about to turn down food, but between every bite, his eyes turned warily to me. If his mother rocked to the side, he would move his head around to peer over her right shoulder at me. If she rocked back, he leaned over to her left side so he could keep me in sight. I’m used to kids liking me, so if we get off to a bad start, I’m never sure what to do. For a while, I tried to just ignore him, thinking he would relax if he thought I was paying attention to something else. But in my peripheral vision, I could see the enormous whites of his eyes locked onto my every move.

“You think I’m scary,” I asked, giving up on trying to ignore him. “You haven’t blinked for ten minutes.”



This isn't Israel, but a prime example of Mzungu-phobia nonetheless.

The bus pulled up shortly afterward, and we climbed onboard. We filed to the back of the already full bus, and my eyes lit up with surprise. “Mzungus!” I shouted. (I finally understood why the village kids were always so excited to see me – it wasn’t often that anybody comes across a white person in rural Tanzania.) On this trip, I was fortunate enough to come across four of them: high school boys from England and Sweden who were in Mvumi Misheni for a month, teaching at the secondary school. Now, don’t misunderstand me: I have no problem with people who have different colored skin, and I would gladly spend several years of my life in Africa. I was excited to see white people in the hopes that they spoke English! It turned out to be thickly-accented British English, but after a few sentences, I understood that just fine, and we had a good conversation. One of the things I asked them about was if their students understood English any better than mine did.

“No,” Ben replied, “all we ever get is the smile and ‘yes.’”

The boys started acting out a typical interchange between themselves and the students:

“You don’t understand, do you?” Ben asked Philip.

Philip smiled and nodded. “Yes!”

We ran out of things to talk about when the bus was about half-way to Dodoma. But the excitement of English conversation was quickly replaced by the excitement of a Tanzanian traffic check.



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## **Bus Ride to Dodoma, ii**

The ticket-taker on the bus stood up from his seat behind the driver and started calling something in Swahili. He seemed a little frantic and was waving his arms. Daudi and I and the other eighteen people standing in the aisle of the bus exchanged skeptical glances. Even I could tell that the man suddenly wanted us all to sit down. Well, he must have let us on the bus knowing there were no seats available for us to possibly sit in. But he continued to wave and shout at us.

A few of the mothers with infants had already given their children to another woman who was sitting down. I was amazed at the generosity of the seated women to accept the babies and save their mothers the discomfort of having to hold them the whole way. And most of the mothers handed off their children with absolute trust, not even remotely worried about putting their children on the laps of the strangers. These women responded to the yelling bus employee by sitting down in the aisles between the seats. Daudi tapped my shoulder, and we just sat down on the armrests next to us, in only a slightly different position than we had been standing in before.

The bus crept to a stop on the side of the dirt road next to nothing that I could recognize. In fact, Daudi had just finished saying that he couldn't figure out how people lived in the houses of this valley without a stream or lake nearby. The bus driver opened his window and exchanged a few words with someone out of my view. The conversation was short, and the bus lurched forward as the conversation ended. As we drove off, I saw a man on the side of the road peering in through the windows. He was dressed in what might have been a uniform, but I wasn't entirely sure. He was standing next to a motorcycle and wearing a helmet that was definitely reminiscent of our police officers.

“What was that?” I asked Daudi.

“Oh, traffic check. The polisi ask the bus driver, ‘Oh, there is no one standing in here?’ and the bus driver say, ‘No, everyone sitting.’”

Sure enough, as soon as the police officer was behind us, everyone in the bus stood up again. *Of all the pointless things to do*, I thought. That officer had to have known we were lying about all having seats on the bus. And even though we were all sitting down, seats on the armrests and in the aisles couldn't be what the government had intended when it made a rule that everyone riding a bus needed to have a seat.

I thought about this for most of the rest of the ride to Dodoma. I was reminded of all the corruption that the people were working to weed out of the Tanzanian government. I could easily believe that traffic officer made his wages by fining buses that were breaking the seating regulations. If that was the case, had we gotten by without a fine because it was too large of a bussing company for the officer to want to tangle with? Or had the company already paid a sum under the table to make sure their busses got through? But it might have been something else. The traffic officer could have been from a rural village himself. He let us pass by with our half-hearted attempt to follow the regulations because he knew that that was just a fact of life in Tanzania. There weren't enough buses for everyone to have a seat. I wonder, if I return to Africa, if I will ever find the underlying forces behind that traffic check.

One thing was certain though: I had made my first step out of the comfortable world of luxury that I shared with Rev. John at the Amani Center. My two other trips to Dodoma had not opened my eyes as this one had. Before, I had been looking at Tanzanian life from an American tourist's perspective. With Daudi's help, I started to see the world through African eyes.



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