

Bus Ride to Dodoma, iii

If it had been a little less sporadic, the bus company could have charged extra for the massage. Of course, the seats would have had to been a little more comfortable...and a lot more roomy. As it was, the bus driving over the uneven dirt road resembled anything but a massage.

Daudi and I were on the bus home after our day in Dodoma. Buying tickets had gone much more smoothly than I had anticipated. Daudi had talked about having to negotiate for the resident price instead of the Mzungu price. Salespeople had a tendency to tack on a few thousand shillings when their customers couldn't speak Swahili. But we got to the bus station, and the standard ticket price was posted, a measure of accountability that was novel to most Tanzanian businesses. We bought our tickets without a hitch and even helped the four British boys get their bus tickets for the following week when they would fly home.

After buying our Sunday bus tickets to Dar and our afternoon return tickets to Mvumi we left the crowded bus quarter of the city and headed to the heart of the city. (Buying tickets early gave us the luxury of guaranteed seats...a luxury I wasn't convinced was any better than standing when I had to listen to the rattle of the window for forty minutes). It was my last weekend in Africa, so I wanted to buy a few gifts – some to take home and some to leave with the St. Andrew's choir.

Daudi and I began our search in the central part of the city. Nyerere Square was the one landmark I recognized, and I could navigate to a few shops that were close by. Julius Nyerere was Tanzania's first president after they became independent in 1962, and there is a bronze statue to memorialize him in the heart of Dodoma. Jakaya Mrisho Kikwete, the current president, is only the fourth to be elected in Tanzania. Being in a country so young in its national history was exciting and made me imagine what it must have been like for Americans in the decades following the Revolutionary War. Tanzania's second president, Ali Hassan Mwinyi, is still alive and (if he pays with the right coin) uses currency with his own portrait on it.

After looking through the shops I was familiar with, Daudi led me to a less familiar part of town. Several times, I caught myself looking the wrong way before

crossing the street. I tried so hard to remember what side of the road people drove on in Tanzania, but by the time I left, that was one part of African life that seemed absolutely alien to me. It didn't help that we tended to walk down the wrong side of the road. In a narrow street in America, I would have always walked down the left side of the street so that I could see oncoming traffic. In Dodoma, where the streets were narrower, Daudi would always walk on the left side, either oblivious to or apathetic about the vehicles that might be driving up behind us.

During our wanderings, Daudi and I ended up in two shops that astounded me by their size. The first was an enormous grocery store. And while it wasn't up to American standards as far as sanitation was concerned (I saw a man hang a sign from the ceiling by building a step ladder out of potatoes), there was more food in that market than I had ever seen in a single American store. Shoe World, as I called it, was the same. There was an entire city block filled with merchants selling every kind of shoe imaginable. We walked through shop after shop after shop of what seemed like never-ending shoes. I mistakenly associated this enormous collection of shoes with wealth. But the fact was that it was poverty that fashioned this Shoe World. Individual merchants were so poor that the only way for them to afford a roof over their head was to conglomerate together, which also forced them to sit side-by-side with their competition, sometimes with barely a mesh wall to signal where one shop ended and the next one began.



for more stories of Africa and Amani Center,
contact Craig Smith • watchman.65@gmail.com

My Last Sunday

My last Sunday in Africa was by far the best. I spent about seven hours in church services that day. Rev. John, Gordon, Bibi, Albert, Gideon, young John, and I began the day with a trip to the Mvumi Misheni Secondary School Chapel. The secondary school in Mvumi is run by a British headmaster, so the chapel is one of the few churches in the area that did not run on African time. The service was short, but eventful. Firstly, when we entered the building, there was an entire pew taken up by Mzungus. I remembered Ben had said during the bus ride that several girls from England had arrived at the school.

At the end of the Chapel service, I found Neema and wished her luck on the rest of her semester. She was pretty embarrassed, but I'm sure not as badly as the last time I had seen her, when Janet was asking me if I had come to Tanzania to find a wife. Bibi stopped to talk to the British girls. I felt bad for thinking it, but I really didn't care about making new friends just then. I only had one day left in Makang'wa, and I wanted to spend it with the friends that I had gotten to know at St. Andrew's. I did my best to contain my anxiousness. I'm glad I did, too, because when I got to St. Andrew's, I was the first one there (typical African time). Edward got there next, and I helped set up the altar and pews with him. Then, while I was waiting for everyone else to arrive, I went across the path to Lucy's house and spent a few minutes chasing kids around.

The service at St. Andrew's was awesome, even though I didn't know what they were saying. During the readings, I followed along in my Swahili Bible to practice the pronunciations. Unlike the wedding, I had anticipated singing with the choir. I remembered most of the movements and even a few of the words. At the end of the service, when I was regretting having to say good-bye again, Henry asked me if I could come back to the evening service so that the congregation could present me with a gift. I wanted to come back very much, but I had hardly spent any time at the Center and didn't want to neglect Rev. John and Gordon and Bibi on my last day there. So I checked with Daudi to see if it was okay to come late. It turned out that I didn't need to. At four o'clock, when the second service was starting, Rev. John was busy with administrative work, and Gordon and Bibi were in Mvumi Misheni for the afternoon. I showed up later than I ever had for a church event at St. Andrew's: I was the fourth person there instead of the first.



The gift that the congregation had bought me was a traditional Maasai cloak. I really enjoyed it and had my picture taken with the congregation while I was wearing the cloak. But what I enjoyed even more was the gift that they found for me after the service: fresh sugar cane. Daudi taught me how to peel the stalk with my teeth, and I watched him take a bite. Based on all the cane fibers he had to spit out afterward, it seemed like it could hardly be worth eating the stuff.

I was wrong. Sugar flowed out of the cane with every bite. It was like chewing on an enormous popsicle without the fruit flavoring to interfere with the pure sweetness. I'm glad I didn't discover this Tanzanian treat until my last day in Makang'wa. Otherwise, I would have put on quite a few sugarcane pounds while I was there.

Several of the younger kids from choir walked me back to the Center to say good-bye to me. When I left them behind at the gate, I was very sad. Even without speaking Swahili, I could tell they were making fun of me for being so sad. So I said good-bye by chasing them away one last time. One girl ran right out of her shoes and left them behind.



Going Home

Dar es Salaam has a population of about 2.4 million people, which is about 2.38 million more people than I care to be around at one time. But unless I wanted to walk and swim home, I didn't have much of a choice. Rev. John had given me money so that Daudi and I could stay in a hotel, but every shilling I saved would be a shilling I could give to Daudi at the end of the trip. He had friends and relatives in Dar, so I suggested that we spend the night at one of their houses and avoid the hotel room costs. We also forwent taxis and rode the city bus around Dar to save a little money. (Rev. John – pretend you didn't just read that.) There was only one point during our trip that I regretted all these money-saving decisions.

“You're kidding, right?” I asked Daudi.

Whether because of the language barrier or because he knew how upset I would be if he admitted it, his answer was very unclear.

“Oh, no. I-uhh-ee, I know-ee how to get there. But-ee I want you to show me the street.”

“David, I don't know which street it is. I don't even know which direction we came from last night.”

Daudi and I were standing in front of the pub that we and his friends had eaten at the night before. I had memorized what the house we were staying in looked like, thinking I might want to leave the pub early and go home. But after two turns at intersections that both looked identical to me, I had given up trying to figure out where we were going. It never occurred to me that I would need to help Daudi find the way home (and this was just an hour before I wanted to be at the airport to check in). When Daudi had asked me what I thought of this part of Dar es Salaam, I told him that it was a typical college town. Even thousands of miles and a broad cultural spectrum apart, there was something about this area of town that was distinctly similar to the area around Cornell where I went to college for a few years. And while the streets in Ithaca were slightly less narrow and slightly more distinct, being lost in a college town was also an all-too-familiar feeling.

“We aski.”

We had to “aski” several people before Daudi picked a side street to go down. Even then, *I* was the one who spotted Lucas’s house.

“No, where is the toilet? I no see it.”

“That’s because this is the front of the house, David.” I dragged him around to the back where the two-stalled outhouse was (one stall was for showers only). It was a good thing we’d found it too, but that was right where I headed. After being lost in the city for the last fifteen minutes, it didn’t even concern me that the bathroom I was using was a hole in the dirt floor with two-inch long cockroaches living in it; I was just glad it was ours.

In the relief of finding the house, I became much less tense than I had been all morning. Daudi and I walked to the bus to take to the airport, stopping to buy a jar of Simba Chef Mixed Fruit Jam. I said goodbye to Daudi at the airport and gave him the leftover money from our trip. I’m not sure I understood him correctly, but it sounded like he was going to give most of it to Lucas, who had let us crash at his house for the night.

When the plane took off over Dar es Salaam, I could honestly say that I would not miss that city in the slightest. But as some of the rural African countryside came into view, my thoughts turned back to Makang’wa and the month that I had spent there. With those thoughts came the question that has been on my mind since before I even left the village:

When would I be able to come back?



a last look at Dar es Salaam



for more stories of Africa and Amani Center,
contact Craig Smith • watchman.65@gmail.com