

July 29, 2010

Day 26

Thursday

I think I may have made a new psychological discovery: proximal schizophrenia. My faithful journal followers may remember stories about a little boy named Israeli who was scared to death of me. Tonight on the way to choir, I was passing by his parents' shop, and he was outside riding his bicycle. Somebody stopped me and pointed out that Israeli was there and wasn't crying. I greeted him with the cool, friendly greeting that older kids use to greet each other: "Mambo?" ("Things?")

Israeli cracked a big smile and replied, "Poa" ("Cool").

We smiled at each other for a moment...until an older boy pushed his bicycle toward me. At ten feet, he was smiling. At nine and a half feet, he immediately started screaming. He jumped off the bike, wrenched himself from the other boy's arms, and ran through the shop and into his house – crying. Proximal schizophrenia.

Besides making ground-breaking advances in social science, I've spent most of the week being thrown into new experiences at school. Monday was a day of firsts in that it was both Sarah "My New Secretary" Ezekiel's first day on the job and Stephanie's first day off the job. Steph had gotten sick Saturday night and had to miss church on Sunday. She wasn't feeling any better that night, so I prescribed a day off of work.

Teaching without Stephanie actually worked much better than expected. In fact, she missed witnessing the very first day that the seventh and sixth graders answered questions correctly. Every day, we write a chart on the board that says what we did yesterday, what we're doing today, and what we will do tomorrow. Before filling in each section, we ask the students the date and day of the week, as well as what we did yesterday and what we are doing today. Lately, the students have been getting close on the dates but haven't quite grasped ordinal numbers. On Monday, I asked the sixth grade the date, and the student I called on answered so quietly that I couldn't hear him (this happens with almost every student almost every time). But during not hearing him, I thought I might have possibly caught a "th" at the end of the number. A smile appeared on my face as I walked closer.

"What is today's date?"

"Today is the twenty-sixth of July, 2010."

I let out a Coach-Green-style whoop. "WHAT A DAY, WHAT A DAY!! I LOVE IT! I NEED IT! WHOO!!!!"

The same thing happened in the seventh grade. Stephanie was actually glad she missed those particular celebrations. She found that out yesterday when the fifth graders answered a question correctly. She (with the rest of the class) jumped at the sudden surge of vocalocity. But even though the teaching worked out better than expected, overall the day was terrible. As I mentioned earlier, it was Sarah's first day of work. She arrived in the teachers' office, I spent a little while training her as best as I could through the language barrier, and we started our days. The next time I was back in the office, I saw every teacher in the entire school sitting at desks, filling out stacks of paperwork. It was the perfect day for a new school secretary!

So I thought...but I was the only one who thought so.

I offered Sarah's services to help fill out the forms. They were the applications for the seventh graders to get into secondary school this fall. I was told promptly and firmly that the forms were too important and Sarah couldn't help. I could understand that the forms were important, but I was also watching the teachers. They were reading information from a school report card and copying it onto the secondary school applications. That's a perfect secretary job! I had Michael show me how to do it, and it took me ten minutes to learn. It's not like Sarah can't

read and write! Then I really got irate when I found out that every student application needed three duplicates of the form. *Every* teacher was writing *every* form three times! If they didn't trust Sarah to actually *fill out* the form, they could at least give her the first copy and let her make the next two.

C'mon, teachers – YOU'RE KILLING ME!

Anyway, none of the students had a single teacher that day except for the three grades I taught (and only when I taught them). When I went into seventh grade, I was even more miserable because I had promised to teach tenses, which meant that all I would be doing all period was writing words on the board that I knew they wouldn't understand. The information is good, but they need to hear the same information in Swahili to be able to use it in English. Stephanie and I don't speak Swahili in class because we're teaching them very basic things. But the students aren't ready to understand anything complex in English. Stephanie and I really just need to be prepping the material for grammar and handing it over to a Swahili speaker. We need to stick with the basics. So the whole time I was trying to explain what I'd written, I was talking half-heartedly about tenses and confiding in the class how miserable I was about the day. Even given that they collectively only understand 13-20 words of English, they were entirely unsympathetic.

But somewhere along the line, I refused to have a bad day. After I finished my three-classroom round, I went to find Anna, who had already escaped to lunch. I give Anna a hug everyday at school. Sometimes I feel bad because she's completely embarrassed, but it's totally worth it. That's the price she has to pay for being my favoritest. When we're not in school, I hug and kiss her and sometimes spin her around and tell her that she's my favorite. I had to search all across the school grounds and ask other students where she was, but I finally found her. I gave her an extra-long hug.

"I'm having a bad day; I wasn't about to let it get worse by not seeing you."

She was slightly sympathetic.

Then I went back to the seventh grade classroom, and by golly, I learned every single one of those kids' names...ish. I can't handle Barakas and Emmanuels. Somehow, they all look the same to me. I had to pull three of them up to the front of the classroom to do an intensive review: "Stand here. Baraka, Emmanuel, Baraka. Change places. Emmanuel, Baraka, Baraka. Go outside then come back in. No, come back in. Guys?"

Nothing. I looked out the classroom door; they were nowhere to be seen. I was so confused. They came back five minutes later and had switched clothes to try to confuse me. Sneaky little guys. I still got it right.

Tomorrow, I will have a talk with the teachers about Sarah.

I also discovered, as I was learning how to fill out the VII's applications that six of the kids are getting D's in math. Craig to the rescue! I love math, and as soon as I can speak Swahili, I plan on teaching math and English in the primary school. I also plan on taking over the ministry of education, starting my own school system, and revolutionizing the way Tanzanian students are taught.

But I'll start with tutoring those six kids in math. They just took their practice national exams, so I can take them through the problems they missed and write similar problems for them to practice. I wonder if the school keeps past practice exams that I can review. I could ask the school secretary, BUT THEY WON'T LET HER DO ANYTHING!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Not that I'm bitter.

July 30, 2010

Day 27

Friday

“There is now a level zero.”

I had been telling Stephanie about how great our new jar of peanut butter was going to be. It was going to last so much longer because the tub is huge, and it's not as sweet as the other brand, so people don't eat as much of it. As I struggled to pry it open, I made mental note to tell her that another additional deterrent was how hard the tub was to open – people would only be eating peanut butter when they *really* wanted it. Fifteen seconds later, the lid popped off, and I spilled a week's worth of peanut butter into my lap. Another day's worth ended up on the table cloth, and I spent the rest of the morning trying to clean everything up.

July 31, 2010

Day 28

Saturday

**In his heart, a man plans his course, but the Lord determines his steps.”
Proverbs 16:9**

I just barely pulled off a win in Craig vs. Peanut Butter, Round II. It was slopping all over the place at breakfast this morning, but I somehow managed to keep I all on the plate. I probably would have fared better if it hadn't been 5:30am.

Stephanie and I woke up early to walk to Mvumi Mission and visit the Compassion center there. I love Compassion centers because they are the epitome of what I try to do in Africa. People in wealthy countries give out of their abundance to give life and hope to kids who have next to nothing.

Stephanie and I had planned on going to the Compassion center in Makang'wa last week before Mary got sick. That changed our Saturday plans, so this is our first Compassion visit this trip – Stephanie's first center ever. The standard format is: wait in the office, go to the mini church service, watch the kids' choir dance, pretend to be able to hear the kids' choir sing over the blaringly obnoxious synthesizer-ridden sound system, wait in the office again, drink chai, get bored and leave. Fortunately, I learned last year when I visited here with John that if I snuck out during chai, I could drink uji (porridge), and hang out with the kids. The porridge here is at least 3.14159265 times better than Makang'wa's uji, so I have been hoping to get more ever since last year's visit.

After the church service, I performed evasive maneuvers to escape an invitation to the office: first, I stayed outside on the pretense of watching the kids' morning drills. Then Stephanie and I slipped inside with the kids instead of the adults. We shared a 54" school bench with three little girls while the class clapped and sang songs. There is always a child leading the songs who sings verses that the rest of the class either repeats or replies. After each song leader, the class sings a little song to choose the next singer. The leader sings about calling a new person, and the class sings, “Who? Who? Who?” The third or fourth singer answered, “Stephanie!”

I looked over at Steph, and she was happily looking around the classroom. It wasn't until I nudged her with my elbow that she registered what had just been said. She tried to protest, but after I shoved her off the edge of the bench, she didn't have anywhere to hide. The kids tried to help her sing an English song, but she sort of flopped it. (Don't tell her I said that.) I was

actually kind of disappointed that they didn't call me up because I know of two Swahili songs from the Makang'wa Compassion center that I really like.

At that moment, the enemy scout team radioed back to command, who parachuted into our camp and fired off round of invitations. I was so sad: the class was already filing out to get their uji, and I had been captured moments too soon. The director led us out of the classroom like prisoners of war, across the compound, and through the hall that led to the office – the hallway that just happened to be the staging area for uji!

Sweet! I swiped a cup of porridge off the table as we walked past and got to enjoy it *and* jipati. What a morning.

I had been planning on buying bus tickets after our visit, but God works things out in the strangest ways. For one thing, Dinna had insisted that there was no way to buy bus tickets more than one day in advance. Even though we were bringing twelve people along, we had to wait until the day before and hope that there were enough seats left. Ridiculous. She said the same thing about the hotels in Dodoma, assuring me that there was no such thing as a reservation and that there would be plenty of rooms open the night of Nane-Nane. I decided to buy the bus tickets today because I know that Dinna is a dirty, rotten liar (see “Day 21”). Stephanie and I had just made it across the shortcut to Mvumi Mission when we heard a familiar voice shouting to us. It was Wilfred Michaelanzi, one of the foremen at the Amani Center. I have no idea why he was running to Mvumi instead of walking, but it was the first of a series of “coincidences” that God used today to show me that he likes working big things in little ways. We walked the rest of the way to the Compassion center together (he was heading to the grain mill beyond), and I can't even remember how our conversation steered itself in this direction, but we started talking about our plans for the rest of the day, and I mentioned the bus tickets. It just so happened that his cousin was the operator of the eight o'clock bus, and he could guarantee us tickets. On top of that stroke of “fate,” we left the Compassion Center, and I asked Stephanie if we could circle around the village to look for a craftsman to carve animal figures. We turned a corner and walked right into the Amani Land Cruiser. Juma had brought it up there to be cleaned, and he was ecstatic to be able to send it back with us because he wanted to stay in Mvumi for the weekend. He also happened to know which wood carver I was talking about and offered to track him down for me.

When we got home, there were monkeys everywhere. John's last sentence counted the monkey population at twenty-five, but when they're running around, it seems like quite a bit more. And when I got out the can of peanuts that the Amani Center workers feed them, they were running around an awful lot. Stephanie and I spent about half an hour feeding them, taking pictures, and seeing how brave they would be to get the peanuts. Some monkeys took peanuts off my head when I sat low enough for them to reach, but none of them were willing to climb my back to get them.

When we were done feeding the monkeys, Sarah was supposed to have arrived so that I could teach her how to type. We need the class rosters alphabetized so that it doesn't take her twenty minutes to find all the names, and Excel is my best friend for that. (Sometimes, Excel is my best friend in general.) Two hours later, she was late even for Africa time, and I went looking for her. I made it halfway down the length of the garden on my way to look for Sarah when she called to me from the shortcut. I parked her bike on the patio, took her into the office, and started teaching her how to type. It was actually really fun to teach, although there were some complexities of running Excel that I really couldn't teach and had to just fix for her if she

made a mistake. Between the two of us, we got almost two classes typed – a feat, considering the size of classes there.

I offered to escort Sarah home, and Hayleth, the cook, was also headed home. So the three of us set off together. Seeing as how it was already dark, the girls were sure I would be afraid to go back alone. I told them I wasn't scared. They didn't believe it and asked how I could not be afraid. I told them that I'm not afraid because if I die, I'll go to Jesus. Hayleth agreed, but said that she hoped it would be a long time before I get to meet Him. In truth, I'm not scared of walking back in the dark not because I'm faithful but because I'm cocky. I assume that I won't be attacked by a hyena or a snake. If I ever where, then I would indeed be scared of dying. But beyond that fear *is* a deeper knowledge that if I die, I will go with Jesus. But I can't imagine not being scared about the trip.

We got to the fork in the road where Sarah's and Hayleth's paths diverged. I didn't want either of them to walk by themselves, so I told them that all three of us would go to Sarah's, Hayleth and I would go to her house, and I would walk back by myself. This choice turned out to dwarf meeting Michaelanzi and the car as the greatest proof of God working big things in little ways.

When we got to Sarah's house, I thought I sensed some tension. My spider senses were correct. Sarah's mom met us at the door of the house as we were leaving and immediately began a tirade. It was the strangest argument I've ever seen: Sarah's mom started yelling *at Sarah to Hayleth about me*. She and Hayleth were the ones exchanging words, but it was clear who Sarah's mom was mad at and why. She had the courtesy to yell in Swahili, which is a bigger favor than most people do around here (I had scolded Hayleth and Sarah just ten minutes earlier for speaking Gogo). I caught a few of the words of the heated conversation. Sarah was in big trouble. But by the end of the conversation, Sarah's mom had calmed down a little. I apologized to Sarah before we left and told her that we wouldn't meet on Saturdays anymore.

Hayleth and I continued on to her house, and she could tell that I was distressed. She held my hand and told me that things at Sarah's house were going to be okay. I asked if Sarah would be able to keep working as the school secretary, and it sounded like she would. I was too scared of the answer to ask if her parents were going to beat her for getting home so late. But Hayleth just kept talking to me and comforting me and holding my hand until I felt better.

Apparently Hayleth lives very far away because we stopped at Caleb Dobogo's house as the halfway point of our trip. Hayleth asked Caleb to accompany us the rest of the way so that I wouldn't get lost coming back. When I walked past the kitchen, Gradisey (the younger of Caleb's twin girls) was inside cooking. I greeted her, and she came out to say hi. I extended my hand expecting the typical handshake, and she brushed it aside and gave me a big hug. It was so sweet. Earlier this week, she asked me to work on her in math, not because she needs help but because she likes it. I gave her the seventh grade end-of-term exam, and she, as sixth grader, got most of them right!

Anyway, Caleb walked with us to Hayleth's. Along the way, I greeted several shadowy figures who walked past. None of them replied. I assume they were people, I don't know – maybe they were really short giraffes. But Caleb said that at night, many people don't want to be recognized.

"That is why," he said, "here in Tanzania, we fear people more than animals at night."

That weighed pretty heavily on my heart. Caleb is often very solemn. I realized that in some ways he reminds me of my dad...like he's carrying a burden that's not meant for him. His first-born son was killed when he was eight years old because someone gave him poisoned him.

I don't know if it was intentional or not. But when we stopped by the house again on my way back to the Center, I realized something about Gradisey. I had always thought she looked like her mom. But that's because she's usually smiling. When I've seen her concentrate or look serious, she looks more like Caleb.

I asked Caleb not to escort me home because one of us would have to walk alone in the dark anyway, and I didn't mind it too much. When I walk by myself, I get to sing. After visiting Caleb's, I'm almost always singing "Oh, Happiness" by David Crowder because his older twin daughter is named Happiness. I was feeling unusually energetic, so I started dancing goofily down the path (it's the only way I know how to dance).

I realized as I was swaying back and forth across the path that if I continued to do that through hyena territory, I would be asking for trouble. Hyenas are more likely to attack something that's injured, and my dancing was a pretty close approximation. Of course, if I continued singing, it would probably think I was dying.

My singing's not actually that bad, but I may have misled some of my readers, when I told them I'm in a choir, into thinking that I can sing. Not so. I am almost never in the right key, and I would have no idea if I was – a fact that David often reminds me of during choir practice. It's awfully discouraging. I do okay when there are other guys there and I can lip-synch, but when I'm the lone male and feel like I *have* to be singing. *shudder*

August 1, 2010

Day 29

Sunday

*"You said it was semi-serious."
"Well, it just got a violent shove into serious."*

Three things stopped me from muttering a string of unwholesome language as I walked into the office. The first was a conversation that Stephanie's family and I had had after one of our Bible studies about how, when unwholesome talk was prevalent, we could control our tongues and keep from speaking the same way. The second was the verse itself that discourages such language (Ephesians 4:19). The third was John's parting words to me as he left for Australia: "Keep a fatherly eye on things here."

I'm not ready to be a father. But I suppose no one really is. The only teacher is experience, and tonight was full of it. I was upset for two reasons: the first was that Ndilito asked to borrow the car. Well, asking didn't upset me. Clearly, I didn't have a problem with it because I handed over the keys and wished him safari njema (good travels). What upset me was that an hour after he took it, Dinna informed me that he wasn't allowed to take the car. Juma could take him wherever he needed to go on Center business, but after Center hours, the car was to stay put. It seems likely that Ndilito knew that when he asked and knew that I didn't know.

The second thing that upset me was that after I found out he wasn't supposed to have the car, I also found out that he wasn't doing what he told me he was doing. The hour-long trip to the village to fix his car turned into an excursion that lasted until 10pm and (I'm told) took him to Mvumi Mission. The welder he supposedly was bringing down to help him with the car showed up at the Center and hadn't seen Ndilito all day.

I suppose it would probably be helpful for readers to know who Ndilito is. He was one of the original group of people who got together to work toward the Amani Development Center being developed. He's a student my age, who has been going to college (I think through John's

sponsorship), but is here at the Center for the summer. He is John's assistant right now, sharing his responsibilities when John is here and overseeing those responsibilities during John's absence. But whatever work of his parallels John's, his character doesn't seem to. Taking the Center vehicle, lying about where he was going...

What would a father do?

August 7, 2010

Day 35

Saturday

The best moments in life don't have pictures. They happen so spontaneously and are so exciting that even if I had a camera at the right moment at the right place, it would only be a distraction. Jumping across rain trenches on the walk to our Dodoma hotel, deciding which of the model houses each of the girls and I were going to live in when we grew up, splashing Rehema when I told the girls I just wanted to feel the water of a fountain, meeting old friends by pure chance at the "state fair," watching Nyemo and Albert talk to the New Holland salesperson as if they were seriously interested in buying a tractor, seeing the girls eat their first bites of real ice cream by passing around my spoon, having Monika wrench my hand away from my mouth and feed herself with it because the grape vendor offered me samples and not her, riding on the trailer hitch of a tractor in order to catch a bus, my and Stephanie's conversation immediately beforehand...

Dinna had told us that we needed to leave the house at 6:20am to catch the seven o'clock bus to Nane-Nane. At 6:30, we asked her if she was ready, and she told us that of course she wasn't, she was changing Jenny's foot wrap.

"Dinna, it's 6:30."

"Yu-i!"

Dinna ran out of Jenny's, past us, and into her own room. I asked her if we should go ahead of her and let her catch the bus on the tail end of its loop. She said of course not. Albert asked her five minutes later, and she said of course we should.

So Albert, Stephanie, and I left the house and headed down the 45½ kilometer driveway. Someday, I'll pay attention to how long it actually is. Halfway down the driveway, we saw Dinna coming down the driveway on the blue Amani Center tractor. It occurs to me now just how hilarious it would have been if Dinna had been driving the tractor instead of riding on it.

But Stephanie and I had a good laugh because of it anyway. It reminded us of a note in our Swahili phrasebook that instructed readers to extend their hand and flap it like a whale's tail in order to hail a cab. In my favorite comedian Brian Regan's voice, I asked, "Could you imagine a more ridiculous way to hail a cab?"

click

Stephanie and I immediately began scrolling through different animal's tails that would look even more ridiculous on display on the side of the road. Right before the tractor got to us, Stephanie stuck her arm out in front of her and spun it around in tight circles because she'd seen hippos move their tails like that. I told her that hippos had much shorter tails, so we tucked our arms into our sleeves up to the elbow and began making quick, tiny circles. It must have worked because our blue taxi arrived and stopped for us.

Amani Centerers catch the bus before it actually gets to the bus stop because there's an intersection closer to the Center, and the drivers are nice enough to let us on there. We boarded and rode to the village, where I'm pretty sure everyone I know was waiting to get on. I don't

even want to pretend to *imagine* thinking about how many people we squeezed onto that bus. But among the mass Entrodus were my girls. I read off their seat numbers as they boarded.

“Rehema...B2, Raheli...A1, Monika...C3, Pendo...C4, Nyemo...B1, Carol...A3, Moleni...you're in the back – H2, Mwajabu...let's see...Z58.”

When we got to Dodoma, we had to split up because (surprise, surprise) all the hotels in Dodoma were full, and we needed a place to stay for the night. Stephanie went out on the hunt with Mary and Dinna, and the rest of us went with Wilfred to Nane-Nane. I did a quick head count, and we had 13 people. *Oh, that's almost enough to fill half a bus*, I thought. Not quite. We got 34 people in. Granted, two of us were children, but one of us was pregnant and another was significantly overweight. We got to Nane-Nane without any trouble, and I couldn't believe how short of a drive it was when we didn't break down along the way like we had last year.

Stephanie has pointed out before that even though we walk constantly, we walk at a relaxed pace and aren't really getting exercise out of it. I told her that when she needs to walk for exercise, she just needs to spend a couple days with Wilfred. He's a speedy little guy! Albert and I kept losing track of him, which was a big problem because he was the only one in our group who had a cell phone to call Dinna when we needed to meet back up.

We zipped to the grape area, zipped through the zoo, zipped to the tractor area, and zipped back out to the entrance to wait for Dinna, Steph, and Mary. When they arrived, Steph wanted to see the animals, so we immediately split up again into the same groups, minus Wilfred, who wanted to get back to Makang'wa tonight.

Albert and I led our own, less-frantically-paced expedition with the girls. Nothing very exciting...for me anyway. The girls were entranced by a couple of dancers. It was ridiculous – just guys dancing in front of a building to the conventional synthesizer music. After a while, we met back up with Dinna's party in time for lunch. While we were waiting at the tables, I took a couple toothpicks and tried to skewer flies with them. Initially, I did it to amuse everyone else, but I became very focused on it. No success.

But I did successfully eat rice. I've had a lot of trouble choking it down since the end of last year's trip. I thought it would go away after a year off of rice-eating, but my first rice dinner this was just as bad as my last rice dinner last year. Fortunately, I am a brilliant psychologist. I didn't order rice. When everyone else had finished eating, I gobbled down the remainder of their portions. Stephanie reminded me that I don't even like rice.

“No...but I *love* leftovers.”

After lunch, we wandered around some more, picked up pamphlets, went for a swim. hehehe. I was the only one who went swimming because none of us were wearing swimsuits, there was no pool, and I'm ridiculous. We walked by a little pool with a fish fountain coming out the top and frog statues around the edge. I felt the water and splashed the girls, and they dared me to walk in. I took off my shoes and pretended to. The supervisor of the fountain saw me and immediately told me that I could indeed swim. I asked him several times, asked the girls if I was understanding him correctly, and still went in very timidly, waiting to get yelled at. I love Africa. I never could have gotten away with that in America. But I waded across the frog's backs, splashed my face in the fish fountain, and fell in the pool.

I was trying to wade my way around the pool, but the rocks I tried to step on were deeper than I thought. I went in up to chest level, and when I came out, we found the water-pressed contents of my pockets that I had forgotten to empty out. The only tragedy was a notebook. The notebook I'm writing in, actually. So if you'd like a more authentic journal experience, print this page off, color it pink (the cover bled through), and leave it under a sprinkler.

After my swim was when we went to see a replica of the ideal village water system. Raheli and I walked around and decided where everyone is going to live. Carol will be the headmistress of the school and live there, Raheli and I live under the water tower on a butte looking over the rest of the village, Rehema lives in the six-story bank, and Albert lives under a bridge. His bathroom is on the other side of town, so he has to commute.

More walking, more fun, more pictures, and here we are at the hotel, ready to not go to bed. Stephanie and I brought games and Skittles.

August 9, 2010

Day 37

Monday

♯ Jesus, I've forgotten the words that you have spoken. Promises that burned within my heart have now grown dim. With a doubting heart I've followed the paths of earthly wisdom. Forgive me for my unbelief, renew the fire again.

Lord, have mercy. Christ, have mercy. Lord, have mercy on me. Lord, have mercy. Christ, have mercy. Lord, have mercy on me.

I have built an altar where I worship things of man. I have taken journeys that have drawn me far from you. Now I am returning to your mercies ever flowing. Pardon my transgressions, help me love you again.

Lord, have mercy. Christ, have mercy. Lord, have mercy on me. Lord, have mercy. Christ, have mercy. Lord, have mercy on me.

I have longed to know you and your tender mercies like a river of forgiveness ever flowing without end. I bound my heart before you in the goodness of your presence, your grace forever shining like a beacon in the night.

Lord, have mercy. Christ, have mercy. Lord, have mercy on me. Lord, have mercy. Christ, have mercy. Lord, have mercy on me. Lord, have mercy. Christ, have mercy. Lord, have mercy on me. ♯

“Mercy” in Swahili is “rehema.” “Rehema” in Swahili is one of the young girls in my choir. One of the young girls who made a very serious, sinful mistake. I don't feel compelled to share what that mistake was, but I found out about it late last night. I was sitting out on the patio burning things when Stephanie came out. It was the end of our big weekend long trip, Stephanie and I were both tired and ready to go to bed, we had to get up for school this morning, and despite all that, something was weighing so heavily on Stephanie's heart that she couldn't wait another minute. During dinner, she had asked what a person should do if they're told something then told not to share it with another person who probably deserved to know. She had been told this particular something over the weekend, when she and Mary were looking for hotel rooms apart from the rest of the group. I gave her the best advice I could, pretty sure that the person who deserved to know the secret was me. Stephanie told me that when she had first heard the story, she had almost stopped breathing. When she told me, I almost vomited.

In fact, since I woke up this morning I've been *wanting* to vomit, to have some sort of true physical pain to match the spiritual and emotional pain that I felt inside. Three times today, I was crying at school. When people asked what was wrong, I told them that I was sick. I was walking from school to church with Stephanie, Rehema, Raheli, and a couple other seventh grade girls who live in that direction, and Rehema, of all people, happened to be the first one to ask what part of me was sick.

“Moyo.”

The girls laughed a little bit about that – the usual answer to “What part of you is sick?” is “headache” or “stomachache.” I guess they had never heard about heartache before and thought it was funny. I actually *tried* to vomit then to prove that something was truly wrong.

Even so, I feel that if I had heard this same news even just a few months ago, it would have broken me. I would have collapsed emotionally, maybe even physically – stayed in bed for days lamenting over the loss of innocence, the loss of hope, the loss of touch with reality. I warned Stephanie on the way over to Tanzania that I really didn't know anybody, even the ones who can speak English. I've only spent four months in this village, and I can't understand anything that's communicated verbally. I told her that for certain, I knew that for certain, but deep down I didn't believe it. I wanted to trust that my friends here were who I thought they were. And I was heartbroken when they weren't.

But God has done something in me – maybe is still doing it. When I heard the story, I went into fight mode. I may not know my girls, but I refuse to stop caring about them. I tried to remember everything I could from the Bible about how to confront sin in the church. When Rehema started to pull away from the group walking home and head to her own house, I held her back and took her into the church. Stephanie and Raheli followed us in. Stephanie knew what was going on, but Raheli didn't. She came over to the corner of the building I took Rehema to. She didn't even have to ask to know that it was between me and Rehema. Raheli went back to sit with Stephanie, who was already busy praying for me.

I said the six Swahili words that I had been rehearsing all day, and both of us started crying. I told her I needed to know what happened, and she, without protest, took my notebook and pen and started writing. Afterward, I told Stephanie that I need to stay home from school tomorrow because I don't want to see Rehema again until I've translated her letter and written a (translated) reply.

August 11, 2010

Day 39

Wednesday

I got made fun of for crying when I thought Mary was dying. I got scolded for crying when nobody was dying.

The trigger event happened today at school. Stephanie and I were decommissioned. I guess what happened could more realistically be called an internal transfer, but it felt just like being fired. It was so simple too, so heart-breakingly simple. Caleb Dobogo walked into the office and said, “I think it will be good for you to stop teaching Standard VII.”

The national exams are coming up, they want all the students to do well on them, and they know Stephanie and I aren't teaching to or for the exam. So they're going to take over all the instruction. I shouldn't be surprised. Even from the first day of school, I knew we didn't have time to reach the VII's. But I refused to accept it. It's the class with my choir girls, with the other girls I've been playing football with for two years, with the boys I've been hanging out with and having math contests with after school. They're the only grade that I actually know their names (although I am a little iffy on the Emmanuel's and Barakas).

And I know that every time I walk past the room and the kids are sitting there without a teacher, I won't be able to stop myself from thinking that *I* could be in there teaching. I know that when they score poorly on the national exam, I'll be angry. If their way of teaching doesn't work anyway, why can't I teach them something that matters? But how do I argue that when I'm just a visitor who's supposed to be helping the school instead of opposing it?

But that broke me. The fighting me that was willing to confront Rehema, the relentless me that was willing to share the Gospel with Mwajabu everyday until she believes, the me that could sing “Hero” by Skillet all day every day, is gone.

I lasted until choir. I lasted through the first song. As soon as we started singing the second one, I had to go around the side of the church. I'm not even sure why I lost it then instead of earlier in the day. Maybe it was just the reality of seeing the girls sing and dance and knowing that it would seem like such a short time before they go off to secondary school, just like it was such a short time that I got to teach the VIIIs. Anyway, around the side of the church, I prayed and cried a couple tears and just hit my head against the wall. (Don't worry - I hit it lightly and was wearing a bandana that cushioned my head.)

I only allowed myself a minute or two there before I decided to pull myself together and think about the positive things that will come out of this situation. Stephanie and I are going to start teaching Standard IV to keep our workload at three classes. We already know plenty of Standard IV kids who come watch choir practices. I could definitely make the most of this opportunity. Back to choir I went.

By the end of the next song, I was around the other side of the church sobbing. I didn't even try to stand up, but curled up on the ground at the base of the church wall. I had about three minutes by myself before a flock of kids showed up. They watched me, curious at first then giggling a bit. But when I kept crying, they went and got help.

David was the first one to come over. He asked what was wrong, and just having to say what I was thinking made the tears start flowing with renewed intensity. He told me I could just stay there and cool down. But when I hadn't cooled down after a few minutes, Mary came over to me. She also asked what was wrong, but after I told her, she told me to stop crying. She said that I was going to make the other kids cry, and that I just needed to come back and sing. She told me that last year too, when I had a similar breakdown at our crusade in Idifu village. It's like seeing me cry is as much a shock to their culture as seeing them laugh in the hospital emergency room was for me.

At that point, everything from the past week came crashing down, and everything that I had dealt with jumped right back into the out-of-control sphere of my life. I asked Mary why she had never told me about Rehema. I wondered what else Mary hadn't told me about the other girls in choir, why no one thought I deserved to know what was happening with the people I care about the most, what I actually expected to do when I did know...

Mary didn't understand; I'm not even sure I was making sense because I was so upset. But Mary promised that she and David and I would talk about it tomorrow. But what can she do – storm into the head teacher's office and demand that he reinstate me in the VII classroom because I was crying? Can she go back in time and remake her decision not to tell me? Would I want her to if she could?

Still, the hope of tomorrow's conversation was enough to bring me back to choir. I was still on the verge of tears, but I filed everything in the back of my mind and just kept singing. I don't know for sure, but I think that I actually sang on pitch because I was about to cry. I'd better not tell anyone that, or they'll be trying to find ways to hurt my feelings.

August 14, 2010

Day 42

Saturday

I don't know what it takes to be a world-class photographer, but I do know what it takes to be a world-class idiot: climbing twenty-six feet up an ubuyu tree that I just saw a snake in to find out if I would be able to get a good picture of the Freedom Torch from that vantage point.

The Freedom Torch seems to be as big of a deal in Tanzania as the Olympic Torch would be in America. I'm not sure how often it comes to Makang'wa, but I remember Mary helping organize something for it during one of my previous trips. This is the first time it has ever stopped at the Amani Center. Many people are talking about how it will "put Amani Center on the map." Maybe they're right. Whatever the case, John asked me to take pictures of the event to share with him.

I was getting very nervous about climbing the tree again because I wasn't sure how I had made it the first time without falling. I told Stephanie that I was nervous, and she told me not to climb it. But I needed to. I don't know why, but I couldn't back down from climbing the ubuyu tree again just because I was scared. Maybe I should have had a healthy respect for that fear. What does a twenty-six foot fall do to a person?

The Freedom Torch planners saved me. They didn't want anyone taking aerial photos from the tree or the water tower that I had also climbed up (much more safely because it had a ladder that was built for climbing it). They had one specific place they wanted us to take pictures from, and they didn't want us anywhere else, especially because we weren't Tanzanians. It was the first time I'd ever been looked *down* on because I'm from America. Usually, I get celebrity status because of it. It made me really appreciate the size and simplicity of the small village of Makang'wa. It also reminded me that I don't particularly like the scale and impersonal nature of national government. It will good to be aware of that natural dislike so that I can keep it in check when I'm applying for a passport extension.

When the torch arrived in a blaze of vehicles, it was clear that this was a pretty big deal for the country. A cluster of guards surrounded the torch, shielding it so that people could barely see the torch, let alone touch it.

But for all the talk and show, Stephanie and I did indeed get celebrity status. As soon as the torch left the crowd, one of the security guards pulled Stephanie and me along, took us to the transport truck, and even let us touch the torch.

August 18, 2010

Day 46

Wednesday

I couldn't decide which of the many lines I've thought of today to open with. But since I also can't think of anything to write after the opening lines, today's entire journal will consist of a variety of opening lines. Enjoy.

I'd better be careful. If I keep having this much success at bottom-down teaching, I'll end up in administration.

Apparently, I broke my toe before I came to Africa. I also, apparently, thought it hurt.

I jump once for every minute I teach.

Football season starts September 4th, in America *and* Tanzania.

For someone with moderate to high pyrophobia, I have far too many irons in the fire.

“He’s getting beat like he stole something.”

I’m thinking about firing my secretary and planning on giving her an eight-week pay advance.

You know you’re starting to pick up a foreign language when you can throw a pity party for yourself. You know you’ve really picked it up when you can trash talk during ultimate football.

I generally don’t like corporations. For corporations that make two-liter bottles of water, I make an exception. If that same company also makes ice cream, I support it like a charity.

We’re getting our first school holidays this week. And when I say “we,” I mean “Stephanie.”

I’ve heard of eating disorders, but I think I might have an eating disability.

*♪ You turned away when I looked you in the eye and hesitated when I asked if you were alright.
Seems like you’re fighting for your life, but why, oh why? Wide awake in the middle of your
nightmare – you saw it coming, but it hit you out of nowhere. And there’s always scars when you
fall that far.*

*We lose our way, we get back up again. It’s never too late to get back up again. And one day,
you gonna shine again; you may be knocked down, but not out forever. We lose our way, we get
back up again. It’s never too late to get back up again, so get up, get up – you gonna shine
again. You may be knocked down, but not out forever.*

*This is love calling, love calling, out to the broken. This is love calling. This is love calling, love
calling, I am so broken. This is love calling.*

*We lose our way, we get back up again. It’s never too late; you may be knocked down but not
out forever. ♪*

Mosquito Defense Plan 2.0 seems to be as big a failure as MDP 1.0, 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, and 1.4.

I need two shirts made for when I’m in Africa: one that says “NEVER SERIOUS” and another that says. “HIGHLY DISTRACTABLE”.

Africa seems to inspire me to write titles to books that I don’t anticipate ever having time to write.

The longer I wait to check email, the longer I want to wait to check email.

I’m teaching a school full of Canadians.

*“We’re gonna change the way we run. We’re gonna change the way we block. We’re gonna
change the way we tackle.”*

Swahili Dance Party, Take I

For someone obsessed with truth, I wasn't as honest as I wanted to be with Mary.

August 21, 2010

Day 49

Saturday

The other day, the only thought I had as we walked to school was, “Wow, if I didn't know better, I would say that it's going to rain today.” (The night before, Craig and I had asked someone if it EVER rained during the dry season. Interpreting the extended laughter and head shaking and “No...” as a negative response, I was fairly convinced that we wouldn't be seeing any rain until later in the year when the “rainy season” begins.) When we arrived at school, the day started moving at its usual pace and I totally forgot about the condition of the skies and the heavy air. I got caught up in checking student notebooks and trying to figure out how to write “Why don't you write ANYTHING I tell you to write?!!” in Swahili. I started getting discouraged and thought that the day was going to just go downhill from there...

...until Craig motioned to me from across the school yard and started emphatically mouthing the words “It's raining! It's raining!” I laughed and shook my head and glanced back down at my work. Out of the corner of my eye, I could see him still looking my direction. I finally looked back up and he mouthed the words “I'm SERIOUS!” I thought he was just joking around with me, knowing that I LOVE RAIN and thinking it would cheer me up...he was certainly correct in thinking it would cheer me up, but he certainly *wasn't* joking! I jumped up and ran out the door, hands in the air to feel the drops, just to make sure that he wasn't pulling my leg. To my surprise (and utter delight), I felt the rain falling. It wasn't a lot and definitely couldn't be considered a downpour, but the little sprinkling rain drops were enough for me. There was no way my day could be bad now! Although I am not looking forward to having rain *every* day and adding humidity to our heat, this bit of rain was exhilarating, invigorating, and very exciting! I went through the rest of the day with a spring in my step and feeling like there wasn't anything that could happen to bring me down.

A couple days later, I was reminded of one of the reasons I'm going to be able to live here for a year. While it will be tough, it will be wonderful—especially if I can find things to laugh about. I was sitting in the church with some of the girls from choir while Craig was in a meeting next door. I was trying to remember that even these moments together of building relationship and trust were important, but it was hard not to zone out and think about wanting to head home. Then, Raheli (one of my favorites, if that's allowed [from Craig: clearly, Steph hasn't read my journals about Anna. It's allowed]) asked me

a very earnest question; serious concentration was written all over her face. “Stephanie,” she asked in Swahili, “are there black people in America?” She was very relieved and delighted to hear that there indeed were, and she even did a little dance after letting out a loud shriek of joy. I giggled but had to reflect on it for a while to realize just how hilarious it actually was.

And I didn’t stop smiling for the rest of the evening.



Stephanie and I at Cairo’s most famous landmark.



Stephanie and I at Cairo’s second most famous landmark.



A typical walk home after choir.



Stephanie and I using our Mzungu status to hold Tanzania’s torch.