

July 6, 2010

Day 3

Tuesday

Day 0's adventure actually started the night before when the Lyon's van started making strange noises. Lawrence took it for a couple test drives, but just to be safe, he woke up early and took it to the shop for a check-up. We at the Lyon house all woke up with a nervous tension. I take that back; those of us who *did* wake up were tense. Stasia stayed asleep all morning. The van was the only vehicle that could seat all six of us. If we couldn't take the van, Sean and Stasia would have to stay home. While it wouldn't be the end of the world, we had all imagined saying goodbye together.

Lawrence came home with his head hung low. He approached Sean like an emergency room doctor bringing news of a failed surgery. Whatever was wrong with the van could blow out on the way to New York City. We couldn't risk driving it; any kind of breakdown along the way would certainly make us miss our flights.

Wendy, Sean, and I in unison refused to accept a trip without the whole family. Immediately, we were on the phone with car rental companies and auto dealerships in Dryden, Cortland, and Ithaca, looking for someplace that would rent a six-passenger vehicle for the day. Wendy pulled Stephanie and me aside and asked if we were willing to split the cost to rent a vehicle. We were in for sure. No amount of money would be able to stop us from staying together.

But circumstances seemed like they would. Agency after agency checked their inventory and had only sedans. I actually considered asking the neighbors across the street if we could borrow their vehicle because it looked like it might hold six. I lost my nerve along the way and ended up just walking down the street and praying.

My spiritual battles lately have been focused on accepting God's sovereignty, believing everyday that everything that happens is according to His will and for His glory. Along my walk, I had to admit that leaving behind Sean and Stasia *could* be part of plan. But I pleaded desperately with God that it wouldn't be. When I walked back up the driveway, Lawrence and Wendy were loading a seat into the back seat of the Jeep. We were going to make it work.

Reminiscent of many rides around Tanzania in John's Toyota Land Cruiser, we set off from Dryden with Lawrence and Wendy in the front seats; Steph, Stasia, and I crammed into the backseat; one hundred eighty pounds of luggage strapped to the roof of the Jeep; and the rest of

the bags sharing the trunk space with a very cramped-looking Sean. The Lyons always pray before every road trip, and as Lawrence asked us to bow our heads, I could only think of three words worth praying:

“God, you rock.”

The drive was a mix of joy and anxiety. Because we had spent so much time arranging the vehicle situation, we would be pushing the check-in deadline. Wendy’s flight was a domestic JFK-LAX, so even though it left an hour early, she had to be there about the same time as our international flight. We planned the best way to work everything out and prayed for minimal traffic. Stephanie also had fifty thank you cards to write along the way, so we were trying to be quiet and let her concentrate.

Anastasia and I spent most the time reading, and she fell asleep on my shoulder. When Wendy took a picture of us, Stephanie complained that taking pictures of sleeping people was silly. Sean and I promptly accused each other of taking her picture the week before when she had crashed on the couch following her graduation party. Sean and I had a great time during my visit talking about Stephanie when she wasn’t listening. During some other conversation, Wendy told Stephanie that she was paranoid about people talking about her.

I chimed in, “That’s right – everytime she sees Sean and I talking behind her back, she thinks that we’re talking about her.”

“That’s because you *are* talking about me!”

Despite slow traffic, we arrived at JFK just in time to drop Wendy off at her Delta gate. As soon as the car doors opened, so did the tear ducts. Wendy and Stephanie shared a long embrace with tears streaming down their faces. I turned away to help unload Wendy’s bags from the top of the Jeep. To be honest, it wasn’t as much to be a help as it was to keep from crying myself. Even so, when Wendy hugged me goodbye and I could see Stephanie still in tears, I almost lost it. Even just typing about it now is emotional...but I can’t get tears all over John’s keyboard, so once again, I have to hold back.

Everything from there on out went smoothly. Stephanie and I checked into our flight with no problems at all and without having to show half of the paperwork that the Egypt Air website claimed we would need to get on board. By the time we dropped our bags off at the security drop point, Lawrence, Sean, and Stasia had parked the car and joined us. The shops in the international terminal are outside of security, so the five of us walked around together,

looking for a good store to buy Stephanie a traveling alarm clock. We didn't find one, but we did find a TV showing the tie-breaking, post-overtime shootout of the Paraguay vs. Ghana World Cup match. Stephanie was a little distressed about getting through security on time, but clearly she should have been more distressed about Ghana missing three of their five penalty shots and losing Africa's last chance to win the World Cup.

Stephanie and I both kept our composure saying goodbye to the rest of the family, though I had trouble letting go of Anastasia when we hugged. After missing so much of her life already, I could hardly stand the thought of missing another year more. I completely avoided thinking about whether or not I'd get to see her frequently when I get back. Sean told me to take care of his sister, and we were off.

Security was normal, boarding was normal, but the flight was definitely abnormal. The last two years, I have flown on Emirates Airlines, which is the very definition of world-class: personal entertainment systems on every seat, three solid meals per flight, and a flight crew so helpful that it feels like there are far more on board than there really are. The Egypt Air plane had three screens in the front on the rows that played an hour of commercials before starting any actual entertainment.

But the most abnormal thing about the flight was that it felt like it could have been twice as long. Playing video games can get monotonous and watching movies can become tiresome, but Stephanie is the kind of friend that I can talk to for hours about anything and everything and never feel bored or uncomfortable. If she hadn't needed to get some sleep before we arrived in Cairo, I'm suspect we could have lasted the whole flight without so much as thinking about in-flight entertainment. When Stephanie did fall asleep (I was still wired and wide awake), I passed the time by deciding whether to watch *Alvin and the Chipmunks: The Squeakquel* in English or Arabic, listening to my mp3 player, rubbing my head against the window to stay cool, and getting in trouble for looking out at the landscape when people were trying to sleep. But, hey, I didn't spend nine hundred dollars to stare at a plastic window shade, right?

Toward the end of the flight, I went to get a drink of water and ended up using a bottle that only had a few sips left in it. I asked the flight attendants if I could take it, and they let me! I was so excited to have a bottle that could hold enough water to last us for our eleven hour layover. I also got to talk to a flight attendant about going to the pyramids. "Oh, yes," he said. "I know the pyramids stone by stone." He recommended that we take the city bus instead of a

taxi. This was a little disconcerting for me. Cairo was the one part of the trip that I was most worried about. While I've been a tourist in New York City and Washington, D.C., I've always been a tourist in the care of my much more knowledgeable and capable uncles. Being alone on tour for the first time was nerve-racking. Stephanie and I had come up with a plan of action for the trip, and we had been rehearsing for the last two days like we were robbing a bank. Buses were not part of the plan.

It turned out that a lot of things that happened weren't part of the plan, starting with a husband and wife in front of us who were trying to carry twin babies and about forty-three different bags. (Okay, it was only about seven bags, but for two people with one free hand each, that's a lot of bags.) Stephanie and I offered to help, and the dad, though obviously feeling a bit guilty, didn't have much choice but to accept. We rode along with them on the six or so moving sidewalks that stretched out to customs. There, we left them in order to get our own Visas and didn't see them again.

Next on the list of things unprepared for was a security guard with "itching fingers", if that's the right expression. I was a little unorganized when I got to his barricade, so I handed him my passport with the same hand that was holding our freshly exchanged cash. Each time he took my passport or boarding pass for inspection, he slipped a bill out of my hand. While it wasn't sneaky enough to escape my notice, it was actually pretty funny, so I let him keep what he took.

In the airport, we found out as much as we could about the bus, but were still pretty uncertain as we stepped out onto the curbside. At that moment, we were accosted by a resilient saleswoman setting up taxi rides. When I finally thought that she had understood that we would be taking the bus instead, she handed me her cell phone with a cab driver at the end of the line. And what was worse, his English was pretty good.

"Alright," I told Stephanie, "this guy can get us to the pyramids and back in time for the flight for three hundred pounds" (about sixty American dollars).

"Tell him two-fifty," Stephanie replied. Brilliant.

In the end, we settled for £270, but we also decided that we wouldn't pay until we were back safely at the airport. The taxi that picked us up was clean and new, and the driver was extremely friendly, though not very bilingual. As I anticipated from every tour guide of Cairo that I had read, the taxi driver brought us to his friend's tourist business. The salesman was a

convincing negotiator, but we had cleverly brought only enough money for the taxi ride. No matter how tempting the offer of riding a camel around the pyramids was, we couldn't pay. Finally, the salesman gave up and told us we could go to the roof and take pictures for free.

He should have charged us.

His rooftop view was the best anyone could hope for to get a picture with the three Great Pyramids and the Sphinx. One of house residents even came up and set up trick shots of Stephanie and me picking up the pyramids. With all our aspirations fulfilled by three o'clock, Stephanie and I decided to spend the rest of our time walking around the village. We did have to haggle our way out of the guide building, escaping the clutches of the salesman who insisted that now that we had seen the pyramids, we *must* have enough money to take the tour. Instead, we spent our time wandering along the wall of pyramids' park, getting a feel for the local culture that I suspect few tourists remember to see.

The alleyways and food stands and small shops were exactly like those of Dodoma and Dar es Salaam, save for the residents being a lighter shade. Even the people were similarly friendly to those of Tanzania. One man stopped to help us get our pictures with a camel and ended up inviting us over for tea. We accepted and spent the last part of our time in the area sipping mint tea and playing with his two small children.

Back at the airport with hours to spare before our flight, Stephanie and I ate at Burger King and watched Germany's soccer team trounce Argentina in World Cup action. We then tried to go through security so that we could get to our gate and collapse. The security guard looked at our boarding tickets and told us it was too early for our flight; we had to come back at nine o'clock.

"Oh, we were hoping to get in early and wait at the gate instead of out here."

"I see," the man replied. "You want to get in early, come back 8:50."

Oh, well.

We did finally get on the flight, and from there until Dodoma, I had only a brief span of consciousness to get my Visa in Dar, hire a taxi, and buy bus tickets. Other than that, I was pretty much asleep.

We pulled into a side of the Dodoma bus stand that I had never visited before, so I wasn't even sure it was the right place. Fortunately, another passenger saw how confused I looked and told us where we were. I had no idea where John might be waiting for us, so we hauled our bags

to the bus company's waiting room, and I started wandering around. I had reached the end of a row of buses and was deciding whether to go to the right or the left when I heard one of my favorite sounds of all time:

“Kreg’i!”

Two women in purple were running to me with arms wide open. It was God's perfect provision. One of the women was Salome Dabogo, whose husband translates for John on Sunday mornings at church. She told me that John was preaching in a distant village and wouldn't be back until late that evening. Not only that, but she and Joyce had two tickets for Makang'wa that they gave to Stephanie and me so that we could sit down for the ride.

We rattled off together on the bus, Salome and Joyce riding in the aisle nearby, and headed for Makang'wa. Whether from the pure excitement of being so near to our destination or the bouncing of the bus that nearly lifted us from our seats, I stayed awake for the entire ride. Or, at least, for the part of the ride that we made. About halfway to Makang'wa, the bus lurched to a stop, and all the passengers began looking around. After several minutes, a green bus that had been following us pulled around and passed us.

“Did we just stop to let that bus pass?” Stephanie asked me.

I racked my brains for an explanation. “I don't think bus drivers here are that nice. We must be broken down.”

By this point, Salome had gotten off the bus and was waving for us to join her. Outside, the green bus had parked just in front of us. Beyond that, listing precariously over the side of a small bridge, was our reason for delay: a black bus had gotten stuck in the middle of the road. No one seemed to be doing anything to fix the problem; there were just three bus loads of people waiting at the side of the road. But some of those people were kids.

One of my favorite games to play with Tanzanian children is one that I call “hide and peek.” I simply look at one of the children staring at me (there are usually quite a few) and smile at them. Embarrassed, they hide behind an adult, another child, or sometimes just their hands. After a few moments, they peek cautiously out, and if they see me still looking, they disappear again, often giggling. I played that game with a few of the girls nearby, including a second grader from Makang'wa who told Salome that she remembered me from last year.

After what seemed like hours, the green bus crept forward, and a group of men attached chains to the black bus. They tried to tow the bus backward off of the bridge, but the front

wheels were firmly planted in place. The sun was starting to sink at this point, and I wondered how on earth we were ever going to get home with this bus in the way. The answer turned out to be ridiculously simple. After all that waiting, the bus drivers simply drove off the road, around the bridge, and back onto the road. The green bus passengers and our own bus loaded back onto the buses and continued on. I'm not sure how the black bus riders got home. For all I know, that bus could still be in the road, forcing the daily traffic to circle around the bridge.

During the remaining ride, I tried to point out all the landmarks to Stephanie, showing her where Makulu was and how to know when we were getting close to Makang'wa. I practically shouted in excitement when I saw the cross, windmill, and hillside buildings of the Amani Center. We were so close. The bus pulled into the shopping area of Makang'wa, flipped around, and stopped to unload. I pushed my way through the aisle and out of the bus. A crowd of kids had gathered around as they do for the arrival of every bus, and one of them shouted in recognition. I ran over and hugged her, and there was a sudden buzz of excitement. I basked in the glow for a moment, but I had to leave the crowd to unload my bags from the other side of the bus.

As the bus pulled away, I heard a noise so high-pitched that I know of only two life forms on earth capable of making such a sound. As it turned out, the shriek had come from both of them: Monika and Carol. I looked up barely in time to catch their hug as my friends from choir leaped at me, having just sprinted across the road. We hugged and laughed, and then a whole pack of villagers joined us and began carrying our bags toward the Center. I tried to carry my sixty-three pound hockey bag myself, but the villagers insisted on carrying everything – from the heaviest bag to the smallest backpack. Even when they got tired from carrying the huge luggage, they didn't give us a turn but just swapped bags among themselves.

The Center is about a twenty minute walk from the village. The sun set before we were halfway there, and we got to walk along in beautiful dusk light. As we crossed the river bed (the last landmark before the Center gates), Carol shouted, "Imba!" ("Sing!")

Monika started singing one of last year's songs, and it was like I had only left yesterday. I remembered the tune and most of the words, and I was singing it as loudly as I ever had at choir practice. We continued to sing up the driveway (another ten minute walk) and arrived in parade fashion at the Amani Center house.

We're home.

July 6, 2010

Day 3

Tuesday

If pictures speak a thousand words, I would have to take hundreds of pictures to capture what being in the Utukufu Choir is like. I would have to capture every face, every dance move, every hug, and still come up feeling that I'd done an inadequate job. So faced with this dilemma, I decided instead to just leave my camera behind on our first day of practice and enjoy the moment without chronicling it. That being said, I don't want to leave out one of the most exciting parts of the trip.

The best part by far was seeing every person for the first time. This culture is not big on hugging, but I couldn't help but embrace everyone. While the guys of the choir seemed a little uncomfortable with it, the girls returned the hugs warmly. Pendo actually jumped at me, so I had to swing her around to keep from falling over backwards.

I can't even remember a particular time that we started practice. It was just like we were fellowshiping and enjoying each other's company, and later we were fellowshiping and enjoying each other's company through singing and dancing. Right off the bat, we started singing songs I knew, but we also sang some songs I had never heard before. I danced boldly to the old songs and awkwardly tried copying the motions of the new ones, belted out the words (though not the tune, as David could testify – I'm tone deaf) when I knew the songs and hummed along when I didn't. Did I feel like I had been gone for a year? Or like I'd never left?

Neither, really, and both. I have a strange mix of feelings of belonging and feelings of isolation. I think one reason I'm so mixed-up about my feelings is that I've lost all sense of time. I feel like I've been here for weeks, but when I titled the journal, it was only Day 3! I suspect the next few days and weeks will normalize my confused emotional state. But whatever I am feeling now, I keep trying to remember my first time with the choir. The memories don't quite cut it, though, so I had a better idea:

Craig asked me to write a journal entry for him because he didn't think that he could quite capture the enormity of yesterday's excitement. For my first full day in Makang'wa, Tanzania, it was quite an adventure! We started out with a pretty exhaustive tour of the most recent developments at the Amani Center and my eyes were opened to a whole new world of agriculture and education, beautiful and hardworking people, and the blessings of community.

Standing atop the highest rock at the Center, I saw the most beautiful sight my eyes have ever seen: the town of Mvumi Mission in the distance, the village of Makang'wa, the stark surrounding landscape, and a prosperous development center working for the good of the local people.

Later that day, I had no idea what to expect when we headed to choir practice at the church. When we were at the Cairo airport, Craig had already taught me some of the movements for the songs, so I thought I would be just fine and fit in with the others right from the start. Little did I know what adventures the evening held for me...

After a “warm-up” for the choir (that ended up being a vocal cord *workout* for me), we moved on to one of the songs Craig had tried to teach me. As soon as they started singing, I knew that it would take me a long time to get the correct words (let alone the correct dance moves!). They all laughed at me, but *with* me as well, because I also knew just how ridiculous I looked. I glanced back at Craig and felt even more alone, because he was dancing as well as they were! It was a wonderful time of fellowship and a great reminder to me that praising God is a universal language...I didn't need to understand every single word of Swahili that came out of their mouths to know that God is good and that they are grateful to Him for everything He has blessed them with. Laughter is the other universal language...I knew every time I did something “wrong” because I would hear the giggles of the village children who were watching and see the smiling eyes of the girls dancing next to me. Nevertheless, it felt good to be part of such a cultural and relational activity with my brothers and sisters in Christ.

We had come laden with a bag full of blankets and sweatshirts for the choir members and other people who needed them, so after choir, we headed out to the homes of some of the young choir members who slept on the ground and didn't have blankets. We were welcomed into the homes and graciously greeted by the parents, and in many cases, grandparents, of the girls. What a blessing it was for me to see this as one of my first impressions of Tanzania: warm, welcoming people, who were often content with what they had, knowing the gifts God had given them. It felt so good to watch and be with Craig as he gave out of his resources to these precious girls and their families.

This was certainly a day of learning; learning about God, about myself, and about the gracious people we will be serving this year. I can only hope that every day this year is as fruitful and blessed as this one.

July 7, 2010

Day 4

Wednesday

Let the games begin! And there are so many of them to write about.

The first game we played this morning was try-to-find-out-what's-going-on-when-no-one-around-you-speaks-English. This game actually turned out better than normal. Stephanie and I had planned to visit the nursery school that the Amani Center supports. We set off at about seven o'clock, and by 7:30, we had made it to the intersection in the road that I thought might possibly be the right one to get to the school. Along the way, we saw a couple kids, and I asked them a few questions about where they were coming from.

"Well," I told Stephanie, "the good news is that this is the right way to get to the school. The bad news is that that's where these kids are coming from."

It turns out that today is a holiday. We found this out because later on along the path, we met the school secretary and teachers who were also leaving the school. They kindly took us back to the empty school yard, and we sat in the empty office, looking out at empty classroom buildings. But I was able to find out from them what was going on. Because the date is 7/7/10, the holiday is called Saba-Saba (Seven-Seven). Nane-Nane (Eight-Eight) is also a holiday. I went ahead and asked if September 9<sup>th</sup> is also a holiday. They laughed...apparently it's not.

So we told the teachers that we'd be back tomorrow and headed for the primary school instead. Of course, the primary school was also on holiday, but one of the teachers lives next door. Caleb Dabogo is an excellent translator and (I imagine) an excellent teacher, so he seemed like the perfect person to talk to for Stephanie and I to get our feet in the door teaching at Makang'wa for the year. It may be surprising to many of our supporters that we came here without actually knowing what we would be doing. But because the need for English teachers is so great here in Tanzania, we assumed that we'd be able to do *what* we're planning on doing; now it's just a matter of finding out where. We have been hoping to teach in the local village because we wouldn't have to worry about transportation. The school is also big enough that we can have a positive impact on many, many lives but also small and rural enough that the teaching pool is pretty limited. Several of the teachers have never studied education before but are there to try and meet the community's need.

Caleb thought having us teach was a great idea, so we'll return to the school tomorrow and begin negotiating with the headmaster.

With the day's tasks finished and plenty of time left before choir, we decided to round up the girls and hang out at the Amani Center, listening to American music. The girls are a core group of singers in the church choir who are always up for anything, especially games. The game we played as we walked to and from the Center was called "Capture the Dudu." Bugs are called "dudu" in Swahili, and there were

plenty of them to catch. The large grasshoppers are an easy, slow-moving target, and Stephanie likes them because they have beautiful multi-colored wings. I like them because they're fun to throw at somebody after they're caught. I threw one that just missed Caroline's head but then circled back like a boomerang and almost got her again. I also found a large pokey bug that Stephanie was so disgusted by that she had to take a picture before I threw it back into the trees.

The best game of the day started when we returned to church before choir practice. Like the previous two years, I brought an American football, and the girls are avid players of ultimate football. It took us a minute to split up the teams into some resemblance of fairness (though my team always wins no matter what). Then we started a rousing match of Team Montana vs. Team TCU. I was captain of the Frogs team, and whenever Raheli, Pendo, and I scored, we broke into a horned frog dance of my own creation, which consists of flapping your hands on your forehead and high-stepping. Whenever Caroline's team scored, she yelled, "Montana!" and Stephanie and Nyemo echoed with "Grizzlies!" They didn't get to yell it often enough because my team was so good, so I let them add two players when Monika and Rosa showed up, and I only took Rehema.

TCU still dominated.

As an offshoot of the actual football game, we also developed a taunting contest. The girls were yelling something back and forth to each other each time someone scored and laughing really hard when they convinced Stephanie to yell it too. The frog dances became more ostentatious, and we even added in up-tops to cap our endzone celebration. Monika and I got in each other's' faces after touchdowns, and she ended up pouting all through choir practice because her team lost. (We don't actually keep score, but there was definitely more frog dancing than "Grizzlies!" shouts.) I grabbed Monika in a big hug after practice and asked her why she wasn't happy. She told me something I didn't understand, but quickly changed to conversation to the little plastic band on her finger.

"Oh, you're married?" I asked her.

Ndiyo." ("Yes.")

"Nani?" (Who?)

Monika looked around for inspiration.

"Carol."

Tonight's games at the Amani Center started with expanding "Capture the Dudu" to include bats. A bat has been fluttering around in the main house's supply closet since Stephanie and I arrived. Today it ventured out into the dining/living room area. I watched it buzz our heads a couple times but lost interest because it obviously was going to avoid hitting us. It wasn't until Stephanie told me that it had just flown down the hallway that I even remembered there was a bat around.

“Are you sure?” I asked because I thought I had seen it fly into the kitchen. Stephanie insisted, so when we walked back to our rooms before dinner, I kept an eye out. Nothing.

“See, I told you, Stephanie – it didn’t go down the hall. Oh, wait...my door’s open.”

Sure enough, the bat was camped out on the ceiling in the far corner of my room. I quickly grabbed my gloves, shut the door, and got myself psyched up for some after-dinner adventure. The bat was extremely hard to catch, and it didn’t help that the other residents were outside, watching me through the window. When I finally did get it, we took some pictures, then I walked it away from the house to release it.

At this point, our day of games saw the revival of Dinna and Craig’s rivalry. Last year, we harassed each other to no end, pulling any practical joke we could, which often degenerated into a wrestling match. I pulled the handle on the door when I returned from the bat release, and it didn’t budge. Locked from the inside.

“Dinni,” I said (she always calls me Craig-i, so I return the favor). “I need to get in.”

“No. What did you do to me last night?”

“All I did was put sugar in front of the door.”

“And why did you do that?”

“...because I couldn’t find the key to lock you out.”

“Aha!”

Fair is fair, I guess. But when I did get in, I took her outside and dropped her in a plastic tub, then threatened to pour water on her. Now I have to buy a new tub in Dodoma on Saturday because Dinna’s weight broke this one.

Today also included one not-so-fun incident involving a kid and my utter embarrassment. When we were waiting at one of the girls’ houses (in Tanzania it’s polite to wait at any house you visit before moving on), I decided to catch a baby goat for Stephanie because she had been fawning over herds of goats all day. I lunged out from the doorway and down toward the goat. I felt as much as heard a tremendous rip, and I turned back to Stephanie, horrified.

“I just ripped my pants.”

She hadn’t noticed, thankfully, and she just happened to have safety pins with her (super thankfully). I went into the outhouse to repair the damage. The shorts had torn all the way from the belt to the inseam, and I could tell right away that I had barely enough safety pins to close up the gap. I took the shorts off and squatted down to start working. As my weight came down, the floor below me caved in! The toilet was simply a hole in the ground, and apparently the dirt around the hole was loose. A criss-crossed network of supporting branches caught me, but I couldn’t shake the fact that I had almost fallen into a toilet pit with no pants on. \*cringe\*

July 11, 2010

Day 8

Sunday

The little moments are the hardest to capture in a weekly or even daily journal. But it's the little moments that make or break an experience. Really, any long narrative of our lives is really just little moments strung out and blended together.

For Stephanie, the greatest little moments have been those that she spends with babies. She has gotten to hold babies three times already this trip, and I can just see the remorse in her face when she has to give them back to their mothers. Babies scare me, so I don't hold them often, but I enjoy the peace that just radiates off Stephanie when she's with them.

For me, the greatest little moments are laughter. For this year's choir crusade, one of the topics we're required to sing about is malaria. The diocese (or whoever's in charge of the crusades) always picks a social issue to tackle with music. Last year, we sang about the problems that the albinos here in Tanzania were facing because of their skin color. David was talking about the new song to the choir, and all of them started laughing. I guess not all laughter falls into my greatest little moments category. When the choir is laughing and I don't know why, I feel very left out. David doesn't usually explain the jokes, but this time he did.

“This year, we are singing about the malaria. And it is too late tonight, so we start learning tomorrow. So I tell the choir, 'Tomorrow, come with malaria.'”

I got a good laugh out of that one, and the rest of the choir got a good laugh out of the way I laughed. There are so many different types of laughter to enjoy here – teasing laughter when Stephanie and I make fun of each other, nervous laughter from the kids when we're playing hide-and-peek, silly laughter when the choir girls and I are making faces at each other (when we're supposed to be dancing), hearty laughter as Albert and I share stories of the past years, and near-manic laughter pretty much whenever Dinna's around.

I am extremely glad that she's still living in the main house. Last year, I thought she was building her own house on Amani property. Either I misunderstood her or she didn't finish it because she's in the first bedroom of the main house. Dinna is by far the best person to have around for a couple Americans in a foreign land. She knows English, she loves God, and she is fun to be around. It is definitely a blessing to have her across the hall.

Stephanie is living in the main bedroom next to Dinna. Her room comes complete with a bathroom. The bathroom comes complete with a light that won't turn on and a sink that doesn't

work, but she doesn't mind. And I kind of enjoy trying to fix the broken stuff around here. I have been making some improvements to my room across the hall from Steph. The mosquito net draped over my bed so low that it was touching me while I slept. I put it up last night because I didn't think it could possibly be helping if the mosquitoes could touch the net and the net was touching my body. Thirty-some mosquito bites later, I came up with a different plan. Using some spare shoe string, I stretched the net over the head and foot of the bed so that it flows up from the mattress instead of across it. I'm currently working on putting stoppers on my curtain rods so they don't fall down when I try to open the drapes.

Choir has been going well. We have a good core group showing up for ultimate football games: Rehema, Raheli, Caroline, Nyemo, Pendo, Winifredi, and Monika, who were the core group last year; Susanna and Rosa, who are new choir members that took an instant liking to the game; and Eliza, a non-choir girl from the seventh grade who has played with us at school before. The mild taunting that I encouraged has blown itself out of proportion, and the girls even started keeping score. But we still have fun.

We've been learning one of the songs for the crusades, and I asked poor Nyemo to write the whole thing out for me. If she had known, she could have just written, "Wafilipi 2:14-15." The song comes straight from Philippians, but we didn't know until we looked at what Nyemo wrote and had Dinna translate. Now, we just open our Bibles when we need the lyrics. I hope she's not too heartbroken when she finds out.

Stephanie and I start our first day of teaching tomorrow. The first day of an entire year – the whole basis for our time here. I have been pretending not to be nervous to try to help Stephanie feel better about it. She is very uncertain about what we're going to be doing. I know what I want to be doing, but I'm scared of how effective it may or may not be. I'm especially concerned for the seventh graders because they take their secondary school entrance exams in September, and the teachers have asked us to teach them about tenses and grammar because those will be on the test. The problem is that they don't actually know how to communicate in English. They have been writing answers to questions about the language but never actually interacting with it. I hope to spend some time preparing them for the test, but I also want them to gain a real working knowledge of English.

From this point on, journals will either contain some exciting stories of our teaching success or some blatant avoidance of the topic.