

July 12, 2010

Day 9

Monday

‘I’ll tell you one thing’s for sure: ‘til we make the decision, we’ll never take this world unless we make a head on collision...’

Today was a sweet day for collisions. The girls and I were playing our third ultimate football game of the day (two at school and this one at choir). I saw Caroline open behind Nyemo and Rehema, and I tried to split the defenders with a quick pass. Nyemo and Rehema both jumped up, and one of them knocked the ball away. A split second later, the girls’ momentum carried them right into each other. Nyemo’s shoulder hit Rehema in the side, toppling her sideways so that she cartwheeled in the air and landed flat on her face. If I were an ESPN correspondent, it would have made today’s Top Ten.

The other collision was of an entirely different nature, and the only thing that made it sweet was viewing it in a Biblical perspective: “Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance” (James 1:2-3). The collision happened at school, right after Stephanie and I had taught our first class. It had gone pretty well, we taught the seventh graders their basic directions: right, left, up, down, forward, and backwards. They had been slow to pick up on it, but pretty solid by the end of class. As we met in the teacher’s office to plan our next class, Caleb Dabogo and Benson Matonya both talked to us about the importance of following the curriculum and getting the seventh graders prepared for their national examination. They showed us the curriculum, told us the areas of grammar the seventh graders were weakest in, and also noted what the sixth graders were struggling with and would need to know when we taught them the next period.

The problem is that I’ve seen the English curriculum at work. The students write and read and write and read and can (sometimes) answer grammar questions correctly. But having a conversation with them consists of the following:

“What is your name?”

long pause “Your name is Eliza.”

The plain fact of the matter is that their curriculum doesn’t prepare them for anything useful. No English-speaking person is going to come into a community and try to meet that community’s needs based on a grammar test. If they want to function in an English speaking environment, they have to be able to communicate. None of them can.

It’s not that Stephanie and I don’t have sympathy for the schools that need their students to pass the exams or for the students who want to get good grades, but we both refused to limit our teaching to what amounts to very little good for the students when they move on from school. We may have a fight on our hands.

July 16, 2010

Day 13

Friday

I was reminded tonight why I love it so much here in Tanzania. The regional seventh graders had a national exam pretest in the next town to the south (the same town where graduates of Makang'wa Primary School attend secondary school). Of our choir, this included Rehema, Raheli, Carol, and Suzanna, who (apparently) goes by "Moleni." They were so cute last night because when they told us they had a test, they asked if we would pray for them. Stephanie, David, and I laid hands on them and prayed right there, and Stephanie and I continued praying for them during school today.

Rehema and Raheli arrived back at the church first, carrying extra copies of the tests they had taken. They gave me their copy of the English exam and sat down with me to review it. They hung on every word I said, probably only understanding half of them, because they were so eager to learn. Each time I circled a correct answer that matched their, they would dance in their seats to celebrate. When we finished English, they handed me their Kiswahili exam, and they coached me through it. I really only learned one thing; the rest of the time I was just guessing until I got it right. Still, it was fun to sit there and listen to them try to explain things to me.

But as much as I was reminded of the joy of teaching, I was also reminded of the importance of it. The English test had several mistakes in it, both in grammar and in typing, and some of them were serious enough to make the question impossible to answer correctly. The other ones just made it more difficult. Not only are these students being asked to answer questions about a foreign language, but they are also being forced to know the language well enough to correct other people's mistakes if they hope to get a good grade. Someday, I would like to work with the high levels of the Education Ministry here in Tanzania to fix some of the problems, but for now, I'm fighting from the bottom up.

Seeing the test and the girls' joy at succeeding has also given me a new fire for working the necessary test topics into our teaching. As of now, I don't even think the students could understand what we explained, so we are going to continue building the basic language skills that they lack, but we're building them in the direction of being able to explain grammar to them a little better.

A bit later tonight, I was reminded of another aspect that I love about Africa: the excitement. Stephanie, Dinna, Jenni, and I were in Dinna's room. Dinna was walking us through our most recently learned choir song, helping us figure out what it was about. Ndilito and John were somewhere – probably in their rooms – and Albert has been out of town for a few days. (Allow me a moment to rant. Before leaving for days, Albert "borrowed" my gloves so that he could use them to play goalie during his next soccer game. Well, Albert, it's not borrowing if you *don't give it back!* Quit stealing my stuff!)

There was a big noise from the kitchen, and Jenni went to see who had come in so chaotically. She came back into the room saying something in Swahili. I caught that no one had come inside at all

and realized the noise must have come from outside the kitchen door. Dinna asked something (still in Swahili).

Jenni replied, “Naogope” (“I’m scared”).

Dinna and I both jumped up and went outside. I swear that I heard and almost saw something in the bushes right next to the house. I called out to it in case it was a person, but didn’t get a response.

“Hyena,” Dinna said. It made sense.

“Stephanie, go get your flashlight. Jenni, get me a big knife.”

Well, that wasn’t exactly what I said. I tried talking to Jenni in Swahili, so I actually asked her for an intention...but Dinna knew what I meant. While Steph and Jenni went in to grab the flashlight and knife, Dinna noticed that the washtub under the faucet was missing. She and I started searching together. I have been so excited to see a hyena, but in the back of my mind, I was hoping to see it from a bit of a distance. The thought of meeting one face-to-face was disconcerting, and I was trying to imagine how I would actually use the knife if I were attacked. Clearly, I would have to protect my hands first *since I didn’t have my gloves!!* (Not that I’m bitter.)

We didn’t catch a glimpse of the hyena, but we found the washtub in front of Ndilito’s room. I circled around the next building, sweeping my flashlight around for a pair of eyes reflecting back at me. Nothing. Until I made it to the front of the building.

I jumped before the pain even registered. I swung my flashlight down and saw a line of ants marching across the sidewalk. One of them was still latched onto my toe. I brushed the ant off, but the sting of pain was terrible. I limped back to the kitchen, and had Stephanie look for some kind of barb that I thought must be in there. Dinna told me there wouldn’t be – she’d seen plenty of ant bites to know. I tried to take it easy for a little while, but before too long, Jenni noticed that two of the cooking pots were gone. Dinna and I set out again.

It seemed pretty unlikely that the hyena had stuck around, but I wasn’t sure enough to not look for him in the bushes as we circled around the other side of our house. Because I was looking in the bushes, I almost walked right into a six foot pit that has been dug for a water storage tank. I’m not sure if that would have hurt more or less than the ants.

We found the pots laying in the opposite direction of where the washtub had been. I’ve been trying to figure out exactly what happened, whether there was one hyena or two and which direction it/they went while we were out looking for them. I kind of think it was one hyena that carried the washtub away when we heard the first noise, came back and took the pots and was still nearby when we first came out. Then he headed off in the other direction toward the path that leads to where we think the den is and dropped the pots along the way.

We’re still missing a spoon.

July 17, 2010

Day 14

Saturday

“You’re worse than Beaver on bath day.”

“Worst day of the year.”

Laundry day. I couldn’t deny that it was time for one – I have two shirts, one pair of shorts, and innumerable socks that are all caked in dirt. But last year, I would get made fun of a lot for doing laundry. Usually in the form of: “Craig, you need a wife.” But I found out something about washing laundry by hand. It’s much easier when I have bug bites on my fingers. The clothing is supposed to be rubbed together to get all the dirt out, which can be very monotonous. But since my fingers were itching, it was the perfect solution. I cleaned my clothes better than ever because it felt good to scratch the itch. Of course, this only worked until the skin broke, at which point it became miserable again.

New goal in life: make it three weeks before having to do laundry again.

But over all, it was a good day for laundry. Most of my clothes ended up cleaner than when they started, though I was a little concerned with how much dirt ended up in the tub during the final rinse. And being in an equatorial region, we don’t have to find north or south facing bushes to hang clothes on to dry; the sun gets them anywhere. I also took some pictures of Stephanie washing her clothes because the first time it’s an occasion instead of a chore.

Among my clothes was a package that David had given me after choir last night. He and I had spent two nights at his friend’s house in Dar es Salaam last year. He told me last week that I had forgotten a bag of clothes. I had actually suspected this as soon as I returned to America, but when I found what I had thought was in the bag, I dismissed the idea. Prematurely, it seems. I had indeed left a bag of laundry at David’s friend’s house, and David had saved it for a year.

I opened the bag while Stephanie and I were walking home last night. There was one of my shirts. Stephanie was amazed that David had done such a thing for me.

“So was it just a shirt he was saving for you?”

I thought back. “No, there’s probably also a pair of underwear that hasn’t been washed in a year.”

I opened up the bag, and sure enough, there it was. I found out during laundry today that Stephanie had thought I meant a *clean* pair of underwear that hadn’t been washed in a year.

Silly Stephanie.

July 20, 2010

Day 17

Wednesday

I am Tom Sawyer. I'm not sure I've ever actually read that particular Mark Twain novel, but I remember reading a short excerpt about how Tom was ordered to paint an enormous fence that would take most of the day. Tom in turn used a series of tricks and deceivery to get his schoolmates paint it for him while he spent a leisurely afternoon by the creek. I managed to sharpen pencils in much the same way.

Stephanie and I had brought a gross of pencils on the trip to share with the school we are teaching at. Though we expected the pencils to go a long way, we counted our single sixth grade class as one hundred ten students, and several are absent everyday. So Stephanie and I decided to give the pencils to the sixth grade class. Unfortunately, we opened the boxes to find 144 perfectly flat, unsharpened pencils. We set to work with the two pencil sharpeners we brought with us, but halfway through my first box of twenty-four, my brain was numb and my hands were cramping. Outside the door of the teachers' office (as there is everyday because they only seem to have a single period in which a teacher actually shows up) was a pack of kids.

I looked at the kids then at the pencils, got out of my chair and took the box and the sharpener outside. I found a nice chunk of sidewalk to sit down on and quietly resumed sharpening the pencils. When a large ring of kids had gathered around me, I looked at one of the nearer ones and asked, "Unataka kujaribu?" ("Would you like to try?"). The seven- or eight-year-old boy gladly accepted the pencil and sharpener and set to work. As soon as he finished, the kid next to him grabbed the sharpener and another pencil. Around and around the job went until, about an hour later, I had sharpened my entire share of pencils without doing a thing. The greatest part was that I wasn't taking advantage of the kids. They were actually enjoying the work, and whatever kind of sharpening job I got, I accepted.

Also, if I remember correctly that Tom Sawyer is a bit of a miscreant, I followed in his footsteps again during choir. Instead of singing, we started by sitting around and talking. Ten minutes later, we were still sitting around talking, so I went outside to blow my nose. On the way back in, I noticed that my football was still outside, and there was a group of eager kids waiting around it. I started to play catch with them on the condition that they remain very quiet. They did a surprisingly good job of it for a long time, and when they did finally start making noise, I sneaked back into church. They were still talking, so Stephanie and I waited a few more minutes then went home.

On the way home from choir, I stopped by the house of a girl Stephanie and I know who constantly makes faces at me through the teachers' office door. I dunked her head in a tub of water and moved on.

July 21, 2010

Day 18

Thursday

I would like to preface this journal by saying that I can neither confirm nor deny whether I may or may not have spent a night on top of a rock at the Amani Center in hopes of seeing a hyena. Though if, theoretically, I had done that and (theoretically) not seen a hyena, I'm sure I would have been very disappointed (theoretically).

Hyena!

I hear sounds all the time at night that I think might be hyenas. The problem is that because I've never heard a hyena, the sounds I'm hearing could well be coming from something else, and I would never know the difference. But this morning, the barking I heard passing along the outside of the kitchen was undoubtedly a dog. I know a dog's bark when I hear it, and my only thought was, *I wonder where he's trying to get to so quickly.* Then Dinna came running into the house.

"Hyena! Come look!"

Well, the sound had indeed been a dog, but it was a dog that was being chased by a hyena. When the dog circled the house, the hyena shied off into the bushes, but it was still close enough that we could see it from the patio. I've wanted to see a hyena for two summers, and there it finally was. It was fairly large, but nothing compared to the striped hyena I had seen at Nane-Nane last year. I'd actually like to do some research about hyenas to see if this is an unusually small one or if all spotted hyenas are smaller. It stared at us for a few minutes then slunk back into the overgrowth and disappeared. Unfortunately, Stephanie was taking a shower, so she didn't get to see it. I stayed at the kitchen window most of the rest of the morning, hoping the hyena would circle around and Stephanie would get a chance. No such luck.

After that, it was a fairly regular day of walking to school, teaching a class, and taking morning break. The morning class was a very fun one. We wanted to review the parts of the body with the sixth grade, and we decided to do it by teaching them a new verb: draw. Stephanie and I demonstrated our exceptional artistic ability by drawing stick figure self-portraits. Then the students drew themselves part by part. Some of the boys made the mistake of copying Stephanie's head instead of mine.

"Oh, you have long hair?" I asked.

In reality, I could have asked all the girls that too because every student in Tanzania has matching buzz cut style hair. But I know that the girls at least *want* long hair, and I enjoyed teasing the boys about it. At the end of class, when all the little stick figure students were completed, I walked around and checked their notebooks. I would smile at the boys and tell them that they looked very nice. It was an epiphany for me. Just by smiling at the boys, they sat up straighter and a sense of fulfillment practically radiated off of them. I realized that the students don't receive enough positive feedback, and I made a mental note to add more into my teaching. I also told all the girls that they looked very pretty. Well, all

but one of the girls. I know one of the (probably six) sixth-grade Esters because she volunteered at the Compassion children's center last year when I was visiting. She's got a bit of an attitude...not a bad one necessarily, but one that's a little more sassy and typical of an American student instead of a Tanzanian one. At the same time, she's still pretty embarrassed when she gets attention, and she is a funny mix of confidence and shyness. When I looked down at her self portrait, I saw a pair of ears like a desert fox protruding upward from her head.

“Well, Ester, you look ...well...pretty...much like a monster. Sorry.”

Even without understanding English, I think she knew what I meant. I suppose my failure to control my laughter may have tipped her off.

At break, Stephanie and I were outside talking to Michael (one of the math teachers), and we tried to find a place to get out of the smoke from the kitchen fires that are used to prepare the students' meals. We found the perfect spot – a little cement structure in the shade of a tree. As soon as we got there, the wind changed directions, so we never really did get out of the smoke. But what we did do was just as fascinating.

We had to move a few kids aside to make room for us on the cement block, and when they moved, we found a small 5x5 rectangular grid draw onto the surface with charcoal. After Michael asked the kids a few questions, he determined that it was a local game called Sembi. We asked how to play, and a couple kids jumped in to show us. The game is a lot like Sorry, where the pieces move around the board to get from home to finish. But instead of dice, they “roll” two sided pieces of wood or old bottle caps and count the lighter side as the number of moves. But there is no zero, so if you roll all dark sides, you get to move eight. You also get to roll again for rolling eight or four, which seems a little unfair, and you get to roll again if you knock a piece back to home.

I wish I had gone back to the Sembi board at lunch break because what I actually did was so unpleasant. We ate lunch with the girls from seventh grade, which was great company, but the food is terrible. Students get ugali and bean slop. If I haven't written about it before, ugali is the local staple: maize flour boiled until firm. I have a lot of trouble stomaching ugali – trouble almost to the point of triggering my gag reflex. My one saving grace was that I was sharing a plate with Rehema and could let her eat a much larger portion. Still, before lunch was over, I was sculpting the ugali into animal shapes so that I could delay eating it.

Speaking of lunch, two of my choir girls were sent home on Monday because they hadn't paid their lunch money fees. It seemed strange to make them miss a day of school instead of just a day of lunch, but that is the school's policy. I paid their fees for them so that they could keep coming to school. I also decided that the school would greatly benefit from a secretary because the lunch money (and all

other records I've seen, for that matter), are taken care of by the regular classroom teachers. On record-keeping days, it's no wonder the teachers never make it out of the office. (All the other days...well...)

I also tried to donate a notebook to a seventh grade boy who didn't have one. I called him into the office, showed him the notebook, and showed him where I would leave it at the end of the school day so that he could come get it without being embarrassed in front of his friends for receiving charity. When we left school, the notebook was still sitting there, and he was walking the opposite direction. Oh, well – on to Plan B...which doesn't exist quite yet, but it will. The notebooks are Kifaru brand, which is the Swahili word for rhinoceros. I couldn't for the life of me memorize that word until I kept looking at it printed on the notebook underneath a rhino picture.

Then while we were leaving the school grounds, Mwajabu, a seventh grade girl who is also a shopkeeper, asked for a pen. I made her answer questions in English before I would give it to her.

“What are you doing?”

“I am a home.”

I tried to explain to her in Swahili what she had just said, but it was lost in translation. Five minutes later, she earned her pen, and Stephanie and I went to Caroline's house with Rehema, Raheli, and Nyemo. I often go to one of the girls' houses between school and choir so that I don't have to spend an hour waiting at the church by myself or a half hour walking to the Center just in time to eat a roll and walk back the other half hour. This particular day, Caroline's dad was having a party in the entry room with some kind of alcoholic drink. He invited Stephanie and me to sit down, but the girls were able to escape to their bedrooms. I could tell how incredibly uncomfortable Stephanie was around the men drinking, and I didn't blame her a bit. After a bit of pondering over the situation, I used some false pretenses as an excuse to go talk to the girls. When I talked to them, I told them to invite Stephanie back to hang out with them so that she wouldn't have to hang out at the drunk party.

It worked perfectly. Stephanie escaped into the girls' room, and the whole rest of the time there, I could hear them laughing and talking and having a good time. I didn't mind hanging out at the drunk party after that because I knew that Stephanie wasn't there feeling uncomfortable. I actually had a decently good time refusing liquor and trying to make sure the older man there didn't steal my hat. Not a bad visit at all...so I thought.

A little while later, the girls invited me back as well for a special surprise: they had cooked an after-school snack for us. And it was ugali. *groan*

I suffered my way through a few helpings of it, then refused any more by saying that I'd had enough. I didn't use the expression for “I am full” because that would have been a lie, but saying I had had enough ugali was honest beyond a doubt.

After choir practice, Stephanie and I went to Rehema's house. Her father was at school yesterday (paying hot lunch fees) and invited us over, but we didn't get out of choir until quarter to dark, so we postponed it for one day. I've been to Rehema's house several times before but never made it past the entry room. This time, I had her show me around the whole house. Rehema is the youngest of ten children, two of which still live at home with her, though they've finished school. She showed me the corner of the kitchen/dining/storage/bed room where her sisters' bed was and the little patch of floor next to it where she slept. Like most rooms in Makang'wa, it was dirt floor with mud brick walls and a ceiling so low I kept hitting my head on it. She kept having to pound it on her hand to get it to turn back on. Her parents' room was on the other side of the entry room, as was a pretty small room where four young children sleep. They are Rehema's nieces and nephews from one of her older brothers (but two different wives) who are being raised by their grandparents while the parents are off working in Dar es Salaam.

In the same housing complex ("complex" here meaning three mud brick houses built next to each other to form a courtyard, in which is enclosed and branch-and-thorn fence for keeping cattle at night), there were two other buildings. One of them was the home of Rehema's sister-in-law Pendo, and her two adorable kids, Salome and Ayubu. Salome was a big help to me last year when I was distributing candy at the crusade. She told me which kids had gotten candy already so that I could send them to the back of the crowd and give the candy to the ones who hadn't gotten any yet. Like Rehema's other nieces and nephews, Salome and Ayubu's father is working in Dar.

I didn't see the other house, but I suspect it was more of the same. Instead, Rehema took me down the road a little way to her brother Daniel's house. He has a small, four-bedroom home – one for himself, one for the chickens, one for his wife – which doubles as a kitchen, and one for their six children, the youngest of whom is still nursing.

It is so strange to come from America and see how little people actually need to survive. Sometimes I pray that families like Rehema's will find nicer, fancier housing. Other times, I pray that the rest of us will find more humble ones.

Stephanie and I arrived home well into the darkness of the night (which begins at 7 pm), and went to bed pretty quickly after dinner. When I came into my room, though, which looks out onto the patio, I heard plastic scraping across the concrete. I looked out the window. There, holding the blue washtub in its mouth (the same one it had grabbed when Dinna and I went looking for him the other night), was the hyena.

I called Stephanie into my room, and she caught a glimpse of it at the top of the stairs before it disappeared. It dropped the blue tub right away so we didn't have to look hard for it. We still don't know where the spoon is. But two hyena sightings in one day – that was so cool!

July 22, 2010

Day 19

Friday

The more things change, the more they stay the same.

That saying doesn't actually have anything to do with today's journal, but maybe it will some other day.

Mary invited us over to her house for lunch. Stephanie and I rushed to finish our classes before 1pm and set out on our walk. Along the path, we heard some kids behind us. One of them was Anna, Mary's daughter and my favoritest kid in the whole world. The other four were sixth grade girls, running toward us because they were almost certainly skipping class to meet us and had to get back in a hurry.

One of the girls asked if she could have a notebook. I took a look at her bulging backpack and told her she already had plenty. She said that she needed a new one because all of hers were full.

Uh-huh...

I took the girl's backpack and opened up the first notebook. Full. I handed it to the girl. Next notebook. Half-full. I handed that one back to her...after slapping her with it. (Don't worry – notebooks her are all paper with no hard covers or metal binding.) I continued to check notebooks, hand them to her when they were full, and slap her with them when they were not. Hopefully, word will get around that I'm not interested in helping people who *want* things, but those who *need* them.

The girls ran back to school, and we walked along with Anna. She asked if she could come with me to Nane-Nane. Last year, I started a tradition of taking a group of choir girls to the local Nane-Nane agricultural festival, which I suppose must be somewhat similar to a state fair. I told Anna that she couldn't come, but that she didn't need to because I'm going to take her whole family to Lake Tanganyika for New Year's.

“Lakini, Monika anakwenda” (“But Monika is going”).

Monika is Anna's cousin who lives with Mary and works as their family's housekeeper. Monika will almost certainly be coming with us to Lake Tanganyika because she has some family trouble that I don't want to leave her behind in the midst of. I had to tell Anna that she was just too young, and I might be able to take her when she was fourteen or fifteen. As I said it, it occurred to me as it sometimes does that I don't know if I'll be around when she's fourteen or fifteen. God has been gracious in providing for my trips so far, but if he has other plans for me...at some point when I leave, I may never see Makang'wa again.

Monika was at Mary's house to serve us lunch. Mary wasn't back from work yet, so after lunch, we made a tour of the Mgusi residence. Mary's three children and Monika sleep down the road at Mary's mother-in-law's. Their grandfather lives down the road in the other direction with one of his other four wives. It was much the same as Rehema's house. I was less affected by it this trip because I am starting

to realize that it's still a gift that God has given these people. One of the main things that Stephanie's previous mission trips have debriefed her on is that no one chooses where they were born. God puts us all in specific places at specific times for specific reasons. It's all part of his plan, and no matter how bad it looks to us, He has promised to redeem us from it. At the same time, I can't help feeling like even though we can't choose where we're born, we can choose what to do with it. Strangely enough, one of my big fears at this point in life is that God will call me to stay in America and earn money enough to support more projects instead of moving to Tanzania and becoming like the people here.

When we got back, Mary and David had both come over from work (they work together at Amani Center) and were enjoying the food that we had left behind. Kids came in and out, as they had done the whole time we were touring the residence. Older people came in and out (and ate gigantic portions! – I couldn't believe how much one great-grandfatherly old man was served and that he finished it all; it made me very curious about what Tanzanians would think of our Senior Citizens' menus back home). One mom with a baby came in, and Stephanie didn't let her go out. Stephanie loves holding babies and does it any chance she gets. Mary seems to be the same way. In fact, she found some other baby to hold while we were at choir practice, and we saw her after choir practice at Mwajabu's shop holding a completely different baby than the two from earlier today.

I didn't want to interrupt Steph's baby-holding, so I grabbed Monika and dragged her along to church to play ultimate football. We hadn't played since last Saturday, and I was really anxious to start up again. But when we got to the church, the football was MIA. Pendo, Monika, Rehema's niece Salome, and I were sitting around until I remembered Sembi from the day before and wanted to try it. We didn't have any place to draw a board, so I looked around with my creative goggles on. St. Andrew's church is being reconstructed, and there are two rooms full of bricks that have yet to be added to the walls. I dragged out twenty-five of them, put them side by side, and announced that we had a Sembi board. For playing pieces, we used whatever we could find – Pendo was dried up corn stalks, Monika was gourd shells, Salome was rocks, and I was peanuts. The peanuts were a gift from the Chilulumo (Rehema's) family the day before. They offered us a tray-sized basket full of peanuts, but we didn't have a bag with us to carry them in. Daniel cupped his hands into a funnel and started pouring them into my pocket. I couldn't believe how many he fit in before my pocket was full. Then he shook my pocket around to settle the peanuts better and poured in the rest of the basket. I was impressed and grateful – a pocket full of peanuts comes in handy for long walks home.

For dice, I pulled out four nickels (leftover from lunch money fees the day before) and made the Rhinoceros's move one and the former President's head zero. This turned out to be a slightly dangerous move because all the girls (and Mary, come to think of it), wanted to keep the dice after the game. I insisted that I needed them for future Sembi games.

We finished the game just as the football arrived, and I jumped at the chance to not only play an active game but also have a chance of not being crushed in competition (Monika won Sembi before I got one piece all the way home). I did well for a while until Daudi joined the other team. He is a great player, but he doesn't play with us very often, so I always forget how good he is. Rehema couldn't play tonight because she had stepped on a broken glass bottle earlier that day, and had missed school to get it looked at and wrapped up at the doctor. I had Stephanie examine it after practice because she's a pre-nurse, but she said an infection wouldn't show right away. Rehema is going back to the doctor tomorrow, so I'm hoping it will be okay. I told her to find out how much the doctor's bill is so that I can pay it for her.

Tonight, I was also feeling pretty antsy after dinner, so I asked Stephanie if she would play double solitaire with me to help relax my mind. She's always a little hesitant to play because she hates losing and doesn't stand much of a chance against me. But she agreed to a half game (50 points) before bed.

I tromped her in the first round by I don't know how many points. The next round was a little better for her, but we both scored very high. As I counted my cards to myself, I came out with fifty-two points.

Stephanie announced her score then asked me what I had gotten. I really wasn't ready to stop playing.

"49."

We played again. This one was a faster round, and Stephanie went out first, so I ended up having to subtract a few points before I could start adding. Even then, it was a better round than I realized. Starting from forty-nine, I now had sixty-two.

"Forty-five," Stephanie announced. "What do you have?"

I'd like to say her just how much I love double solitaire. I always used to play it with my aunts and cousins during summer vacations in Michigan. To me, the game has become synonymous with relaxation, companionship, and just plain good times.

"49."

Stephanie totally believed me. We had dealt out the fourth round when she suddenly realized that she had to type a journal for her newspaper back home before she could go to bed. I told her that we didn't have to play again.

"No," she insisted, "I told you I'd finish a half game."

"It's fine. It's late, we both need sleep," I told her; then to myself: *And I already won twice.*

The greatest thing is that Stephanie isn't on my email list for journal updates, so she'll never find out about this particular bit of deceivery.

July 23, 2010

Day 20

Friday

*’Tis so sweet to trust in Jesus, Just to take Him at His Word, Just to rest upon His promise And
to know "thus saith the Lord."*

*You're my shelter in the storm, You're the dearest friend I know. Oh, Light of the world, carry
me home...Oh, for grace to trust Him more.*

*Jesus, Jesus how I trust Him, How I proved Him o'er and o'er. Jesus, Jesus, precious Jesus –
Oh, for grace to trust Him more.*

*You're my shelter in the storm, You're the dearest friend I know. Oh, Light of the world, carry
me home...Oh, for grace to trust Him more.*

*Yes, 'tis sweet to trust in Jesus, Just from sin and self to cease, Just from Jesus simply taking Life
and rest and joy and peace.*

*You're my shelter in the storm, You're the dearest friend I know. Oh, Light of the world, carry
me home...Oh, for grace to trust Him more.*

*Jesus, Jesus, how I trust You...How I've proved You o'er and o'er. Jesus, Jesus, precious Jesus
– Oh, for grace to trust you more.*

*You're my shelter in the storm, You're the dearest friend I know. Oh, Light of the world, carry
me home...Oh, for grace to trust Him more. Give me strength to trust You more.[♯]*

It's hard not to hate the medical professional here. I flew across the road to Mvumi Mission Hospital, putting the Land Cruiser through gears it didn't even know it had, nearly shouting obscenities at a truck that wouldn't pull over to let us pass, and wondering how on earth ambulance drivers can keep their calm when they have a patient moaning in the back as if they're in the throes of death.

The patient in the back of my Toyota ambulance was Mary Mgusi, choir mistress of our church and mother of my favoritest kid in the whole world – Anna. It was her house that we visited just yesterday. She had been at choir practice this afternoon, being her usual bubbling-with-joy self: harassing Daudi and ordering the choir around with the few, strung-together English words that she knows:

“No, please, sit now here moving.”

In light of the afternoon, it was hard to believe that Mary could be very sick. Even when Dinna came into the living room and told me we had to take her to the hospital, there was no sense of urgency from her. Dinna took a few minutes to get dressed and get out the door. Stephanie and I grabbed the pot full of dinner (french fries) because we hadn't eaten yet.

But as hard as it was to believe that Mary could be very sick, when we arrived at the house, there was no doubt that she was. People here don't quite look pale, but Mary looked as close to is as anyone with her skin color would. She was being supported by three women who all piled into the back seat with Stephanie and carried Mary on their laps the whole ride. Several men hopped in the back, and I took off.

The reason it is so hard not to hate the medical professionals is because after all the effort to get Mary to the hospital, including practically carrying her from the car to the emergency building, there was almost no response. Nurses walked calmly through the halls, rarely in the direction of Mary's room – a room with stark concrete walls, an uncomfortable bed on which Mary was writhing, and medical equipment consisting of a sphygmomometer without a cuff or tube and an X-ray light that may or may not have ever seen X-rays before. It was at least a half hour before a doctor arrived, and when he did finally come in, he was particularly nonchalant about Mary's condition. He ordered a blood test, helped another woman who came in with a mildly sick baby, and asked whether we wanted to keep Mary at the hospital or at home for the night. They couldn't do anything for her until the lab results came back. And the lab results wouldn't come back until morning because that is when the lab opens back up.

Stephanie was even more upset by all this than I was because as a nursing student, she's seen how healthcare is supposed to be run.

The whole time we were waiting for the doctor (and even at the end of the frantic drive), I had "Tis So Sweet" playing in my head. For a while, I went in to pray over Mary. I prayed over and over that God would heal her, but I also had to accept that God might not let her live. Not only that, but that if he *did* let her die, it was a good part of his sovereign plan for all of us. It is so hard for me to see beyond pain, but I know that is exactly what God was (and maybe still is) asking me to do.

Mama Isaka stayed overnight with Mary, and Stephanie and I left her our pot full of fries. The rest of us came wearily home. I wanted to stay and pray with Anna and Monika, but it was already so late and so exhausting that I just went back home.

July 24, 2010

Day 21

Saturday

It's funny how "price" and "worth" are essentially synonyms, but "priceless" and "worthless" are essentially antonyms. And if you want to talk about how inexpensive something is, neither word quite describes it. So further extrapolating the synonym chain, I would have to say that Mary's medication was practically costless. For all the fear and uncertainty of the night before, Mary's cure consisted of a \$1.50 pack of pills.

Stephanie and I were among the party that went to pick her up from the hospital. When we arrived, Mary was out in the courtyard, waiting for the lab to open. She looked drastically better than last night – tired and a little cold, but otherwise fine. I stayed with her for a little while, then saw that the pot of fries was sitting over on the other bench. I opened it up, and it was still half-full! Between Mary being alive and me getting to eat, it seemed like the perfect day.

Stephanie and I got made fun of for crying last night. It was so strange for me to try to figure out the local people's mentality – it was almost like they thought that once she was in the hospital, her safety was guaranteed, and we shouldn't be crying. I, on the other hand, think that more people die *in* the hospital because by the time they get there, it's too late. But even last night, the doctor was joking and laughing with the nurses and even Dinna. I can't understand why they would laugh at such a scary time.

Is it because they have to? Is there so much sickness and possible death that they have to laugh to keep the emotional weight from crushing them? Is it because they want to? Are they afraid of feeling afraid and try to change their moods? Is it because they can? If I could have trusted God enough to be able to laugh last night, it would be an incredible step of faith. Are these people that much more faithful, or did God just create their culture to be able to find joy in the midst of sadness?

Whatever the case, Mary made it home today, and is already doing significantly better. After we dropped her off, Stephanie and I met up with Rehema and Raheli to spend a day at the Center. Stephanie painted their nails, we showed them where we slept to watch for the hyena (which may or may not have actually happened, neither of which I can either confirm nor deny), and they tried to eat bread for lunch. That was hilarious.

Unfortunately, our day of R&R (which stands for rest & relaxation as well as Rehema & Raheli, which I often find to be synonymous) was marred when I found out that Dinna is a dirty, rotten liar. I've been asking her for a year now if she has a boyfriend, and she keeps telling me that she doesn't...or at least, she's been saying things that make it seem like she doesn't – joking about how her boyfriend is a model in a magazine she's reading or that she's going to her boyfriend's house when I know she's really going to visit her sister-in-law. But today, she pointed to a man sitting outside John's office and said that not only was it her boyfriend, but that they're going to be getting married in a few months. I didn't know what to believe. I asked Jenny, but as Dinna's friend, she might have been in on the joke. It wasn't until Dinna pointed out a big framed picture of the guy hanging on her wall that I finally believed it. Stephanie told me that I had actually gone pale.

By the time we got to choir, I had mostly recovered from my shock. Johanna was hanging up a tarp to provide shade for tomorrow's service, so Albert and I had fun climbing onto benches and into unfinished window frames. I started enjoying it slightly less when I lost my balance and cracked my head on the brick wooden frame...but only slightly less.

The walk home from choir was great. Albert is always fun to walk with. He's got a good sense of humor and a really funny giggle. We usually joke about getting lost and being eaten by hyenas. Tonight, it evolved into me having a hyena wife and little monkey babies. We also made a short stop on the way home to talk to Sarah Ezekiel. Sarah was in choir my first year, went away to secondary school, got pregnant and dropped out before I came back the second year. Caroline calls her baby Craig Mdogo (Lil' Craig). Aside from being Tanzanian, I suppose he does look just like me. *eyeroll* Anyway, I stopped to offer Sarah the secretary job at the school. I have decided that I want to hire a secretary, not only to help the teachers with records, but also to make a few records of my own that I hope can highlight and help improve some of the problems there. Sarah accepted the job, so I will be seeing her again on Monday.

When we got back to the Center, I had a good talk with John. But it was also kind of a scary talk. I don't know why, but sometimes when I talk with him, I think about how he won't be here forever, and I wonder if I'll still be able to come back when he's gone. That same fear of losing my connection to the Amani Center is part of why hearing about Dinna's fiancé was such a shock. What if she gets married, leaves the Center, and the whole operation just collapses for want of her work here? I want to live like the people here, but I'm so scared to...