

## Tanzania traveler shares beauty of arrival

By: Stephanie Lyon

Stephanie Lyon, 17, is a recent Dryden High School graduate spending one year in Tanzania, working and living at the Amani Development Center in the village of Makang'wa, teaching primary school English and volunteering at the medical clinic (during school holidays).



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It was, hands down, the most beautiful sight that had ever met my eyes. From high atop a rock at the Amani Development Center, I could see Makang'wa, the surrounding villages, and a thriving community development program (most specifically the prospering grape crop in the agricultural section). The mountains beyond framed it all in a hazy blue and the stark landscape was truly breathtaking ... Welcome to Tanzania!

At sunrise the day before, Craig (a friend of mine and current travel buddy) and I had arrived in Dar es Salaam, a coastal city of Tanzania. After a grueling day of travel on crowded, smelly buses, the village of Makang'wa finally came into sight. We had arrived safely and were almost there ... what a relief it was to see those kind faces and earthen homes! And what a welcome we received. A large group of children ran toward us, some giving hugs, and all satisfying us with wide grins. They warmly greeted us and insisted on carrying our bags. It was about a 45-minute walk up to the development center, but it passed quickly with the enthusiasm for being back in Africa giving bounce to each step. The sun had set and the sky was quickly growing dark, but the joy in our hearts lit the path ahead. Craig knew some of the children from previous visits to Makang'wa and through a sponsorship program, so they walked along happily, conversing in broken and not-so-broken Swahili. Although I didn't understand a single word being spoken, the universal language of laughter told me all I needed to know ... we were home!

The following week was full of adventure: new tastes, new people to meet and many new words. In just a few short days, I gained the ability to give basic greetings in both Swahili and Kigogo, the local tribal language. This was rewarding for me, who came with a very limited vocabulary, and also for the local people. It made my day to see the faces of the villagers light up when I called out "Mihanyenyi!" and they returned the greeting with "Misaa!" They know that their language is not widely spoken, so they were overjoyed to see that even the "mzungu" (white people) knew how to say hello. The week included setting up details of our volunteer teaching job at the village school, a visit to the Amani Development Center-sponsored preschool, and daily time with the youth choir, learning songs and dances. We are set to start out teaching this week, and will be instructing three different grade levels of English.

It is hard to believe that we have only been here for one week, as it already feels like home. I am currently perfecting my sunburn, and already feeling uncomfortable in anything but a long dress. I am quickly getting accustomed to the diet (mainly white starches and fruits) and my legs are no longer sore after walking back and forth to the village twice a day (at almost 5 miles each trip). The culture is welcoming and I have not yet met someone who isn't happy to have us here. Although it is difficult to see the need of so many, it is inspiring to know that the work we do as part of the ministry of the Amani Development Center is making a huge difference in the lives of thousands of people. What a year this will be!

More to come soon ..... Stephanie Lyon

## **Skunked while hyena hunting**

Despite some disagreement with other teachers at the Makang'wa Primary School about English-teaching styles and necessary material to be covered, Craig (a friend of mine and current travel buddy) and I found ourselves with 220 eager students and one big job ahead. We were very excited to get started teaching last Monday morning and arrived at the school equipped with chalk, extra pens for students who didn't have anything to write with, cards with the names of each student in each class, and willing hearts. We were ready to work our tails off (having fun while doing it!) and get creative in order to help these middle-school aged kids learn conversational English.

One of our main goals was to simply help them be more comfortable when speaking English. They are very insecure in their ability to communicate in English, so it can be really difficult to get anywhere teaching them if they won't practice. This meant that if we could make them comfortable enough with making mistakes, learning (and using!) new words, and trying out phrases they haven't used before, our job would be halfway done. As I saw throughout the week, this will all take a lot of time, effort and patience, but improvement will be certain. This first week of teaching alone, I saw young students realize that, for the first time, they could speak English if they only tried. The progress was slow, but sure, and we are tremendously excited to see how far we can get this year; not only do we want to see the students expand their ability to speak English, but we want to see that they grasp our love and God's love for them. By the end of the week, it felt as if we had already been here for months. This will be a long, but extremely rewarding, year!

Having completed (and survived) our first week teaching, Craig and I decided to find some "real" adventure. This meant that Saturday, a day with no teaching obligation, was filled with rock climbing in the area around the Amani Development Center and scouting out the possible camp-out spots for hyena hunting in the evening and through the night. "Hunting," in this case, is composed of setting out a food lure, sitting on a high rock silently, and waiting for a hyena to come along to observe. We had no weapons and were relying on the theory that hyenas would be more afraid of us than we were of them ... I wasn't so sure about that; those hyenas would have to be very afraid of me for that to be true!

We hiked out to and camped out on the rock, bringing only a bottle of water, two granola bars and a couple of bed sheets to wrap up in when it got cold. It was a long, frigid night, with the "winter" wind of Tanzania howling past us. We heard some strange sounds and had a few adrenaline-pumping moments with movements in the dark brush around us, but we didn't see a single hyena in the entire 11 hours we sat on that rock. After some of the events around the center the past few nights, we realized that it would have been more likely for us to see a hyena if we had stayed back at the main house than if we had camped out all night in the bush ... oh, well. It ended up being a wonderful experience anyway, sitting under the vast skies and gazing at the endless masses of stars, identifying brand new constellations, and laughing over funny stories. We had good conversation and learned that even if OUR plans fall through, something good can always still happen.

So was it actually more of an adventure to go "hyena hunting" than it was to teach 220 primary school kids English? I'll let you decide for yourself.

More to come soon, Stephanie

## **Learning to keep culture shock in perspective in Tanzania**

Cultural differences: They're what make travel interesting and what help me gain perspective while overseas. Boy, have I had some experiences the past couple weeks that shed a whole new light on life here in Tanzania!

The first one I'll tell you about happened while dining in the home of one of our students, Mwajabu, per her invitation. We had just finished teaching and hadn't gotten a chance to eat lunch, so she graciously invited us over to join her for a humble lunch of ugali (maize flour boiled in water) and cabbage. Neither Craig nor I specifically enjoy ugali, but we weren't going to turn down her generous gesture of lunch, so we did our best. The meal went fine and we were satisfied that nothing had gone egregiously wrong ... until she walked in with our last course. Mwajabu handed us each a nice, tall glass of milk.

At first, we thought, "Oh, wow, we haven't had milk in weeks! How wonderful!" But then we took a closer look, a little sniff, and a small taste ... this was unlike any milk we had ever drunk. Not only did it smell sour, but it tasted sour, was a little warm, and had large, gloopy chunks in it! What to do? We couldn't just hand it back and say "Oh, we appreciate this, but no thank you." Of course we were going [to try] to drink it. We sipped, and sipped ... and sipped some more. Trying to keep the chunks out, not breathe through our noses, and stop the gag reflex proved to be the challenge of a lifetime!

At one point, I started laughing at Craig's attempts to not throw up, but it was more to try to cover up the fact that I was doing all I could to keep everything we had just eaten inside my body ... thankfully, Mwajabu laughed as well and we felt a little better about our difficulties. She eventually told us (via Swahili and comic hand gestures) that we didn't have to finish it if we didn't want to ... her younger siblings gladly took it off of our hands and drank it with vigor and excitement. To them, it was a treat! Apparently, when we asked whether it was "fresh" or not, her response that it WAS fresh meant that it wasn't made from powder, but that it had indeed come from a cow. Good to know.

Having survived that cultural and intestinal experience, we were able to look back on it and laugh. That's just the way things go when you're living overseas ... foods, drinks and everything in-between (was that milk a food or drink?!!) can be new and different. But the next cultural experience was a very unfortunate one and a much more serious realization for me.

One of our dear friends here in Tanzania, Mary, is one of the irrigation workers in the farming section of the Amani Development Center. We got a call late on Friday night that "Mary is sick. We need to go to the hospital at Mvumi Mission." That was it. We headed out in the darkness in the Land Rover to find her house, get her (and about six relatives and friends), and speed over the bumpy roads to the nearest hospital.

She was having serious abdominal pain and writhing in my arms the whole way to the hospital. When you're out in the middle of nowhere like that, what more could I do than hold her hand and comfort her? We finally arrived and took her inside and this was where I got my first dose of reality: no emergency department to receive the patient quickly and effectively, just an abandoned nurses' station and an empty exam room. We gently put her in the "examination room" (consisting of a hard bed/table, a bench, a desk, and a sink) and waited ... not-so-patiently, in my case. It was hard for me to see the nurses moving like molasses and the lack of fast medical attention when my friend was in so much pain. Finally, after a long wait and a lot of prayer, pain medication was given, a doctor came in loudly (bringing another patient into the room with him), and some blood was taken. They had ideas of what her problem might be, but the lab was closed for the night and

they couldn't do anything until morning. This bothered me to no end; there was nothing we could do but wait.

There were some documents that her family members needed from home, so we left Mary and her good friend at the hospital overnight and headed back to Makang'wa. Everything eventually turned out alright (after a long, stressful night) with her returning home the next morning, diagnosis of a urinary tract infection and medication to treat it in hand. But this whole ordeal represented a lot to me, as I saw that things are handled differently around the world and what I think should be done and what should be done realistically can also be very different. What works in America doesn't necessarily work in rural Tanzania, and the other way around. Medical culture, along with food culture, education culture, and everything-else-culture, can be hugely different in each country around the world.

Even though one was very uncomfortable and the other very scary, I am glad to have had both of these experiences. I grew personally through both, learning about my outlook on culture and gaining much perspective on my life in America and the resources I have available to me. That's a big part of what this year will do for me ... apart from what I can give these people and the service I can be to them this year, they will end up giving me so much in experiences and perspective. Looking back at my home in America, I feel very blessed. I guess we all should.

More to come soon, Stephanie

## **Getting clean and beautiful in Tanzania, the hard way**

Apparently, my cultural experiences are nowhere near over.

Teaching at the local primary school every day, every week, it's been fun finding things to break up the monotony of daily life. Our ministry in the school is going well and Craig and I have been seeking out opportunities to reach individuals in the village who we might not otherwise spend time with.

It's been quite an eye-opening experience for me to build relationships with the people here, as I am realizing that many of them go through difficulties similar to those we experience in America, handled much differently. I have been surprised at some of the things that remind me of home and am almost glad that there are certain issues of the human heart that are constant all the world through.

It has been both a comfort to me and a reminder of why I'm here in the first place: to reach the people here with a message of God's love for them and the freedom in Him. I'm excited to see the progression in my relationships with the teenagers here, especially, as they are the ones I am spending the most time with.

I guess there's a lot that's happened recently that has both surprised me and delighted me. First of all, we are evidently very welcome here: Craig and I were given a chicken by one of the other teachers in appreciation for our teaching English in the school for a year. This is a custom used to say "Thank you!" and "Welcome!" (especially with foreigners). It's apparently not the only way to communicate these sentiments, though, because Craig was given a goat last year. Chickens seem to be lower-maintenance animals, so this is fine with me!

Secondly, I got the message that I wasn't very good at doing laundry African-style (in a couple of buckets) when I was interrupted by a two of women as I was doing wash the other day. They started giggling and then came over to me, standing there clucking their tongues and shaking their heads. Apart from this being a bit disconcerting (because, at first, I had no idea what they were disappointed in), it was a little bit discouraging: I've been trying so hard to do it right!

One of the women reached over and grabbed all of the clothing I had just finished washing -- and was about to rinse -- and threw it back into the bucket. She added more soap and new water and starting to scrub them all over again! I was a little offended at first (because I was taught how to do it once and thought I had it down pat), but then I realized that the clothes were going to end up a lot cleaner than they would have otherwise, so I should be grateful that they were taking pity on me and my "machine wash warm" mindset!

They showed me over and over again, expecting me to pick up the next piece of laundry and do it just as they had showed me; why were they surprised when I couldn't do it as well as they could? I think it's a skill that will take me a while to figure out well -- after all, they've been doing it since they were little girls, learning from their mothers who learned from their mothers, etc. No matter how long it does take me to get it, I can be sure about one thing -- my clothes are smelling pretty good right about now!

Lastly, I subjected myself to some serious pain and a two-day headache when I agreed to let one of the women braid my hair as she was doing with some of the other girls who live and work at the Amani Development Center. Of course, they have been having their hair braided like this since they were babies and are immune to the pain it causes to the scalp! They encouraged me to go ahead and do it and, temporarily forgetting my excruciating hair-braiding experience last year in Sierra Leone, I agreed. Whoops! They proceeded to cause some of the most uncomfortable sensations on my scalp that I have ever felt, saying "Ume pendeza!" ("You look beautiful!") the whole time -- little consolation THAT was.

I'm still not sure if the new hairdo was worth all that pain, but the look on Craig's face when HE saw it definitely was! He gave me the look that said "Not only did it feel like you just got scalped, but it looks like you did, too!" The mix of surprise and shock and amusement that flashed across his face told me that every moment of pain I had just felt was totally worth it, just for the surprise it was to him.

One of the girls, when trying to convince me to get my hair done, said "Craigi sema 'Ume pendeza, Stephanie!'" ("Craig will say you look beautiful!"). I responded "Hapana! Craigi sema 'Si pendi!' na anakimbia!" ("No! Craig will say 'I hate it' and run away!"). She laughed and somehow still managed to persuade me.

I was amazed by the difference between the American way of "getting my hair done" and the African way. Here, I sat on the cement ground for two hours, having my head pushed this way and that way and my hair yanked on ... with nothing but a mere "Pole sana!" ("Sorry!") every once in a while. Take your pick.

We made plans to go to the Nane-Nane (literally "Eight-Eight" -- for Aug. 8) agricultural festival in the capital city (about an hour away) with some of the teenage girls that we have become good friends with. THAT will surely be something to write about next time!

More to come soon, Stephanie



**There's nothing like going to a "state fair" to lift your spirits ... especially when the "state" is the entire African country of Tanzania.**

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Craig and I decided to take some of the teenage girls from the village that we spend a lot of time with to the Nane-Nane Agricultural and Cultural Festival in Dodoma a couple weeks ago. "Nane-Nane" literally means "Eight-Eight" and is held every year on the weekend of Aug. 8. It represents basically every advancement being made agriculturally, politically and culturally in Tanzania and is attended by thousands of people.

We woke up early and made our way down to the village "intersection" (not much more than a couple of paths meeting at the main road) to catch the bus that daily rumbles through the rural villages surrounding greater Dodoma.

We met up with our girls who were at the stop in central Makang'wa with just about every other person we knew from the village. The sun was just then rising, but apparently we weren't the only ones interested in going to Nane-Nane this year. The bus was filled to overflowing and we slowly made our way to the capital city. After a long and somewhat uncomfortable ride, we finally arrived. The pure excitement and wonder on the faces of the girls (the majority of whom had not had many previous experiences in the city) was enough to make the entire trip worth it to me.

We split up the group, with Craig heading off to the festival (about half an hour away by minibus) with the girls and a couple other people we had invited along as "chaperones." I was sent off in the much smaller group, walking what felt like every square inch of Dodoma with a couple of the ladies to try to find a guesthouse with enough rooms. Trying to find a guesthouse with any vacancies proved to be a challenge; it seemed that a place with five empty rooms would be next to impossible. Although we could hardly believe it, we finally found a little place (fairly far removed from central Dodoma) that "only had space for a maximum of 12 people."

I shouldn't have been surprised that that was the exact number of people in our group and that this place happened to be cheaper than any of the others we had come across. The only way I can explain it is that God worked a miracle and provided everything we needed.

When my party arrived to meet the others at the "fairgrounds," I could not have felt less prepared for what I saw. Coming into the weekend, I had no idea what to expect, but this was insane. There were booths, tents, buildings and people as far as the eye could see. It was so different and far removed from what I had been used to in Makang'wa for a month; if a picture is worth a thousand words, this would require many, many pictures to describe. I was amazed.

Cultural festivities abounded and the crowds pushed and shoved and generally emanated excitement. Among the tents and displays was a place to see the "animals of Tanzania" (including a lion, a hyena, many snakes, various birds, massive tortoises and a leopard), many of which I had already seen (often accidentally) in their true habitats since our arrival.

There were spots for people to register to vote and also many campaign tents for the president of Tanzania. I was even offered information on how to register to vote. There were many grape growing areas and advice booths. Food was bountiful and we enjoyed seeing a more "urban" aspect of the country we are living in. There was dancing and music, often with drums and costumes and traditional steps. Above all, though, there was relationship building and trust being developed between the teenage girls we had brought and ourselves. This was the main goal of our excursion into the city, and it was certainly attained. Even after the fair when we were at the guesthouse, we played games and ate American candy

we had brought for them and continued to get to know them. The memories we made with those young ladies are treasures and, looking back at those two days reminds me again of why we are here: to develop friendships and make an impact on the lives of the people here with the love of God. We blessed others and we certainly were blessed ourselves. What a weekend!

More to come soon, Stephanie

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### **Tanzania Traveler: Enjoying an opulent graduation**

I was recently invited to experience the African version of an eighth-grade graduation, and I was happy to participate because the graduates were my former students at the primary school here in Makang'wa.

There were a few similarities to what I experienced in America, but many more differences. It was a time of great celebration, but there were twinges of sadness as I realized that these precious students (and friends) of mine will soon be moving from Makang'wa to secondary school in another village, or possibly even in the nearest city, Dodoma.

While graduation from primary school is exciting for them, I also realize that many will not be able to afford secondary school and will be ending their education at this level. For that reason, I am trying to find some people back home who will be willing to help me sponsor some of these young students who would otherwise not be able to attend high school.

Food was a big part of the event ... is there any time that food isn't part of an event here? Any friends or family members who attended the graduation would be given dinner and, because it was such a special occasion, goat meat was prepared to accompany the rice dish. Lots of goat meat. Although I would rather see the goats in a pot than in a pen being offered to me as part of a marriage proposal (I know this from experience!), it was quite a sight to take in.

During the graduation ceremony, something interesting occurred. In accordance with what I have noticed to be a common cultural practice, a huge portion of the time was dedicated to showering the graduates with lei-type necklaces and decorations and gifts wrapped in colorful paper.

My first thought was, "Where did all this come from?" It seemed to be the sort of luxury that few were accustomed to, and I was surprised at the shiny, sparkly, opulent-looking gifts. No wonder the graduation event was such an extraordinary event for the students: This was probably the biggest event in their honor in all their lives. Even birthdays are often either ignored or minimized in terms of gifting; this was special indeed.

There was one key difference that initially was a shock, but quickly turned to delight. As I walked into the village to help the other teachers prepare for the event, I saw many of the students at the village center, sweeping, carrying chairs and benches and doing everything they were told in regard to the setup of the graduation event. I was very surprised to see this; on the day of their graduation, shouldn't they be home celebrating and preparing themselves and being treated as the honored people of the day?

My shock soon turned into admiration as I realized that, in a culture in which hard work is so much part of everyday life, these students get to work on their graduation day. Not only did they accept their responsibilities happily, but they didn't even blink an eye -- it was assumed that they would work for their own event. It gave them a feeling of ownership, because they had to work for it.

It was one last chance for them to be examples to the younger students by serving their school and community. I was very impressed by the humility and perseverance of these young men and women and honored to be part of their education and graduation. I guess there's a lot for me to learn from these students. What a humbling experience.

It was a wonderful time of celebration, much more so for the students and parents than for me. No matter how much money or how little money their families have, the richness of receiving the opportunity to learn was what really mattered to them. It certainly gave me a lot to think about!

More to come soon,

Stephanie

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### **In My Words Tanzania Traveler: Wedding lets visitors share major life moment with village**

Weddings have always been some of my favorite events to experience and participate in.

As one of my African friends told me, "A wedding is the middle of the three important ceremonies in your life, which are birth, wedding and death. It's a big deal to us."

Well put! I believe they mark a huge commitment between two people, and are a joyous and blessed occasion to take part in. When I was recently invited to the wedding of the son of a friend of mine here in Tanzania, I wasn't quite sure what to expect ... would it be anything like the weddings I have attended in America? I prepared myself and decided to jump right in.

My friend Dinna and I barely arrived on time after a last-minute trip to another village. We thought we had completely missed it. The wedding that was set to start at 10 a.m., however, was just starting when we got to the church at 11:30!

We ran inside and I was shocked to see how many people had managed to fit inside the small building. Here, the wedding ceremony isn't a by-invitation-only event, and anyone can attend ... and just about everyone had! The atmosphere of joy and celebration was refreshing and I enjoyed sitting back and taking it all in.

The ceremony was actually quite westernized, and they said their vows (which, in my limited -- but increasing daily -- knowledge of Swahili, resembled some of the phrases used in America) and put the rings on each other's fingers, but the participation level of the "audience" was the biggest shock and difference to me.

Youth choirs from area churches sang for them, older women of the church sang a chant dedicated to the bride and groom, and friends of the couple would just run up to the front with little yells and shouts of congratulation and joy, waving colorful cloth. No silent crowd observing the event in a slightly detached way, but, rather, constant involvement and a very relaxed atmosphere -- except for the couple themselves; I don't think I saw them smile once! For them, it was supposed to be a solemn affair, but was quite a celebration for the community.

The service lasted two hours, with introductions from all extended family (as well as teachers, pastors and friends) and a long sermon. We sang and danced and eventually all spilled out into the sunshine to head to the "party."

And what a party it was.

It had been a long day and Dinna said we could head home "right after we get some food." Sounded fine to me! What we thought would be a few minutes' wait, though, turned into a two-hour wait for the rest of the party to arrive. And once everyone had gathered, there were more speeches and dancing and all sorts of gift-giving. I was very impressed -- people here certainly know how to put on a celebration! The couple received many gifts, including a goat and yards and yards of beautiful kanga (cloth for wrapping in or getting clothes made out of).

We danced and listened to music, congratulated the couple, and finally, ate some food. I will never cease to be amazed by how much food can be prepared for this kind of gathering. Very large cooking pots filled with rice and sauces and meat and potatoes (every "special event" food here) are brought out and plates are piled high. We ate, drank [(oke), and made merry!

The atmosphere of pure excitement and joy, the little girls in their brand-new dresses, and the din of music, animated Swahili, and laughter made me sit back and realize just how beautiful a wedding celebration is. Each and every wedding, in its own special way, causes me to thank God for His faithfulness to me and for the delight of living and loving with friends and family.