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Honors Thesis

To the Edge and Back Again: Tanzania as a People and a Place

Kylene N. Cave

2 April, 2012

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Abstract

Every two years as part of the May Express program at Andrews University a small group of teachers and administrators take students to Tanzania, Africa on an educational tour. I attended this tour in both 2009 and 2011 and was able to use the knowledge provided by the course work as well as the personal experiences that I encountered in order to shape my own perceptions of Tanzania and its people, and the relationships that exists between their cultural practices and my own. *To the Edge and Back Again: Tanzania as a People and a Place* attempts to gather these newfound, and still developing, perceptions into a collection of creative non-fiction essays centered on Tanzania's fascination language, economy, wildlife, people, and cultural practices.

Table of Contents

Prologue.....	1
New Beginnings.....	15
A Third World Country, A First Rate Experience.....	20
The Wrong Side of the Fence.....	25
Buffalo Savings.....	31
Truck Mixers.....	38
Stalking the Killer.....	44
Homesick.....	50
Coda.....	56
Bibliography.....	58

Prologue

Tour Overview

Every two years as part of the May Express program at Andrews University a small group of professors and administrators take students to Tanzania, Africa on an educational tour. The goal of these tours is to provide a heightened sense of learning in the areas of religion, cultural psychology, literature, service, and the arts through intense interaction with both the people and the places encountered while in Tanzania. In 2009 following my Freshman year at Andrews University I attended the tour, and I participated in it once again following my Junior year in 2011. Together, the two tours equaled approximately six weeks in Tanzania, Africa and around 3 weeks of intensive coursework at the University prior to leaving for the tour. Learning experiences and classes also took place while in Tanzania and during several months following the completion of the two trips.

In preparation for the tours I had taken the following courses in order to broaden my understanding about the region, its people, and its cultural practices: BHSC 440 Cultural Psychology, RELG 360 World Religions, ENGL 225 Studies in African Literature, BHSC 496 Topics in Service, ENGL 430 Travel Writing, ART 350 Watercolor Painting, and ENGL 495 Travel Literature. Taking these courses and continuing my own personal study helped to cultivate a more enlightened awareness of Tanzania as a people and a culture and to grasp a better understanding of the unique aspects of the region. The courses also aided in forcing me to pay close attention to the intricate details that make up the day-to-day lives of the people that I encountered during my travel experience. In regards to my project, these classes not only helped to inform

me about the people, places, and cultural practices of Tanzania, but they also catered specifically to my interests in forming my research project by lending insight and education on the genre of travel writing and fine-tuning my writing abilities within this specific genre.

Tanzania, a country located in Eastern Africa and lying just beneath the equator is a fertile place home to a booming coffee growing industry, indigenous tribes, and some of the world's most unique and sought-after wildlife in the world. Our tour to Tanzania took place in the North Eastern corner of the country bordering Kenya. We landed at Mount Kilimanjaro Airport in Arusha, Tanzania and spent several days of our trip on the outskirts of this large city where we visited the Adventist Missions headquarters, the secluded Poli Village, and completed a few mission projects at a nearby primary school. From Arusha we traveled across to the Ngorongoro Crater where we started our two-week safari, made our way to the Serengeti National Park where we encountered the Masai tribe, and finished our tour back in Arusha for a few last educational experiences at a cultural center and with several of the locals.

Because I was able to attend the tours on two separate occasions, one issue that I have attempted to tackle in my project is to distinguish the differences between the two trips and how the first tour impacted the second one. In many ways, the excitement and amazement of the first trip was fueled by the complete lack of expectations and the fact that each experience was new and vastly different from anything I had ever met in my life thus far. The group dynamics of the two tours coupled with my own personal maturity were also key factors in understanding what makes these experiences radically different. The tour in 2009 was in many ways a new experience for students, professors, and

administrators alike in that it was being changed and molded to accompany both a larger group and a broader spectrum of educational experiences. The previous tours to Tanzania had largely been centered on providing a unique photo experience for photography majors and had not included the wide range of other classes such as studies in Psychology, Religion, or English. Besides being available to students from a wide range of academic disciplines, the tour was also opened to a select number of students from Southern Adventist University through a special connection with the tour administrator. It is also important to note that the tour took place following my Freshman year of college so many of the students were much older than myself, whereas the second tour preceded my Senior year where I found myself at the top of the age range of attendees.

The second tour in 2011 although adhering to many of the same activities and agenda as the first tour was starkly different mainly due to the expectations that I held about the tour from my first experience. Another crucial factor in determining the differences between the two tours is the Honors Thesis Project that Emily Knott presented the year preceding the second tour; her project inspired my own ideas of molding my Tanzania experiences into a unique project. For this reason, during the second tour I was much more deliberate in my planning and actions in formulating a project that would chronicle my own personal experience. Because I had already taken many of the courses offered during the 2009 trip, I was also able to work with my professors in shaping courses that catered specifically to my project by providing further education on the region but especially in the travel writing genre. I also found that by experiencing Tanzania for a second time I was able to spend less time behind a camera

lens or merely looking at the surface details but to pay close attention to the small details that make up the every-day lives of the people and to record my findings and observations in a daily journal. By entering into the second trip with deliberate motives and specific goals that I wanted to achieve, I found that I was able to experience Tanzania in a more mindful way than I had during the first tour.

Goals of the Thesis

In regards to my thesis, much of the inspiration was sparked by Emily Knott's project recounting her time spent in Peru as a student missionary. Seeing a unique experience that could be paralleled to my own, I was able to use her project as a springboard for the formation of my own. Early on in the evolution of my project I made a set of goals that I wanted to achieve through the completion of my project. From these two tours I was able to use the knowledge provided by the coursework as well as the personal experiences that I encountered in order to shape my own perceptions of Tanzania and its people, and the relationship that exists between their cultural practices and my own. *To the Edge and Back Again: Tanzania as a People and a Place* attempts to gather these newfound, and still developing, perceptions into a collection of creative non-fiction essays centered on Tanzania's fascinating language, economy, wildlife, people, and cultural practices. A key feature of the Tanzania study tours is the unique opportunity not only to learn about a more obscure place of the world, but also to be able to connect that learning to personal experience and interaction with the place of study. For this reason, one of my main goals for this project is to shape my collection of essays in such a way as to describe Tanzania as a people, place, and a set of cultural practices

unique to the rest of the world. Interconnected with this goal is the aim to uncover new ways of thinking within the context of this Tanzanian setting and culture. Using these newly discovered ideals, my project strives to build a compilation of essays that not only relays my experience but also draws direct ties to the ways in which they have helped to shape my own concepts of selfhood. Given the unique opportunity to make this trip on two separate occasions, the aim of comparing and contrasting the two trips has also emerged in order to analyze their main variances and the ways in which the first trip impacted the second tour as a whole by means of expectations. Also, these essays attempt to consider specific, and often surprising distinctions between American and Tanzanian culture. Lastly, it is my goal that through this collection of non-fiction essays I will be able to present an accurate re-telling of my adventures in a thought-provoking and intriguing way to my readers.

Research in Travel Writing

Much of the research aspect of this thesis project is rooted in the necessary process of using both primary and secondary source material in order to shape a better understanding of the travel writing genre. From this knowledge then comes the task of applying the tools and concepts present in the source material to my own collection of essays in such a way that each piece can be appropriately seen as part of the travel writing genre. The following list of both primary and secondary source material helped to provide a broader understanding of the genre as well as to create a foundation by which to judge my own collection: Isak Dinesen's *Out of Africa*, William Least-Heat Moon's *Blue Highways: A Journey into America*, Linda Hunt's *Bold Spirit: Helga*

Etsby's Forgotten Walk Across Victorian America, Julian Smith's *Crossing the Heart of Africa: An Odyssey of Love and Adventure*, Paul Theroux's *Dark Star Safari: Overland from Cairo to Cape Town*, Paul Theroux's *Fresh Air Fiend: Travel Writings 1982-2000*, Jessamyn West's *Double Discovery: A Journey*, Neil Peart's *Ghost Rider: Travelers on the Healing Road*, and Seth Stevenson's *Grounded: A Down to Earth Journey Around the World*. Each of these sources helped to create and inspire a mode and style of writing that I aimed to imitate in my own collection of essays and aided in providing what I found to be both exemplary and unsatisfactory examples of travel writing.

Through the diligent study and observance of the source material used for this thesis project I was able to use several specific examples taken from different passages in order to construct what I consider to be criteria for effective travel writing. Of the primary sources, a few texts stood out to me as exceptional examples within their genre and helped to cement a few key criteria for my developing list. Isak Dinesen's *Out of Africa* was especially helpful in presenting a unique way of talking about the landscape that was encountered on her journey. An example of her skill in re-creating a scene for her readers comes from the first few pages when she writes:

The colours were dry and burnt, like the colours of pottery. The trees had a light delicate foliage, the structure of which was different from that of the trees in Europe; it did not grow in bows or cupolas, but in horizontal layers, and the formation gave to the tall solitary trees a likeness to the palms, or a heroic and romantic air like fullrigged ships with their sails clewed up, and to the edge of a wood strange appearances as if the whole wood were faintly vibrating (3,4).

In this passage Dinesen is very specific in her description of the landscape surrounding her coffee plantation in Africa. She gives her reader the sense of the colors and layout of the scene as well as presenting them with familiar images from back home in an attempt to paint a more familiar and realistic mental image. She also elegantly incorporates the use of motion in the passage by intriguing her readers with strong verbs that help to give life and movement to the scene she is describing.

Another aspect of travel writing that I found to be effective was the use of shocking imagery coupled with familiar points of reference. William Least-Heat Moon, in his book *Blue Highways: A Journey into America* employs these tactics several times throughout the text in order to grab the reader's attention and keep them engaged with the text. One example in his book comes from an incident he has while driving behind a truck with unusual cargo. He recounts, "I followed a pickup with four bloodied sharks laid out in the bed; it looked like a tin of evil sardines packed in ketchup" (369). Least-Heat Moon skillfully uses this passage by presenting his reader with an unusual image that not many people in America might have the chance to capture in everyday life, and uses it in a way that adds to the intrigue of his own travels. Like Dinesen, he is also able to tie in a very familiar object from the real world in order to describe the scene and make it more relatable to the reader's own life. Throughout his book, Least-Heat Moon skillfully uses his unique points of view and startling imagery to draw the reader back into the realm of his story and keep them interested in his adventure.

Because the travel writing genre tends to focus on the personal experience and reflection of the author, another necessary tool that is needed to create effective travel writing pieces is the ability to craft a story that shows personal reflection and

vulnerability while not losing the interest of the reader. Jessamyn West's book *Double Discovery: A Journey* lends a good example of presenting the reader with the internal struggles that happen during travel when she writes:

What gives value to travel is fear. It breaks down a kind of inner décor in us. We can't cheat anymore—hide ourselves behind the hours in the office or at the plant...Far from our own people, our own language, wrenched away from all support, deprived of our masks, we are completely on the surface" (33).

Exposing her own vulnerability and fear, West is able to make a connection with the reader on a deeper level by using a universal emotion that her readers can relate to and use to engage in the story. Another useful example comes from Neil Peart's *Ghost Rider: Travelers on the Healing Road* as he writes about his existence in comparison to the universe:

I would rather be ashes than dust! I would rather that my spark should burn in a brilliant blaze than it should be stifled by dryrot. I would rather be a superb meteor, every atom of me in magnificent glow, than a sleepy and permanent planet. The proper function of man is to live, not to exist. I shall not waste my days in trying to prolong them. I shall use my time (170).

In this passage, Peart gives an example of a way that the author's personal reflections and feelings can be incorporated into the text in a way that is both meaningful and inventive. By using striking language and comparing his feelings towards life to burning meteors

and planets, he is able to portray his deepest emotions to the reader without boring them or causing them to feel uncomfortable.

Another crucial element of creating effective travel writing pieces is the use of dialogue, facts, and quoting from other respectable sources in order to build the credibility of the author. Because the author is oftentimes telling tales of their own personal experiences and travels, it is important that the reader be able to trust that the information relayed is truthful and reliable. Julian Smith in his book *Crossing the Heart of Africa: An Odyssey of Love and Adventure* builds this credibility by presenting his readers with several facts throughout the text that he has gathered from various sources. One example of this is presented when he explains that, “ ‘To travel’ originally meant to ‘suffer’. A thousand years ago, life was dangerous, but leaving home was worse. The word itself comes from the Old French *travailler*, meaning to toil, as in ‘travail’ (201). By adding these tidbits of information throughout his book, Smith is able to give a history of the places he visits and the people he encounters, as well as to add credibility to his own personal experience. He also presents the reader with a new perspective on travel that is much different than what many might call a *vacation*.

When sorting out effective criteria for this genre, it is also important to look for negative examples in order to learn from the author’s mistake. One negative aspect that is always good to avoid when writing about foreign lands, peoples, and cultures is making sweeping generalizations or oversimplifications. Paul Theroux in his book *Dark Star Safari: Overland from Cairo to Cape Town* makes this mistake when he exclaims that, “After a spell of being familiar and promising, Africa has slipped into a stereotype of itself: starving people in a blighted land governed by tyrants, rumors of unspeakable

atrocities, despair and darkness” (17). By making these harsh claims, Theroux reinforces a long-standing stereotype and makes it exceedingly difficult for his readers to overcome these views. Another negative example also comes from Theroux when he explains tipping the workers saying, “It is bad enough that people expect something extra for just doing their jobs; it is a more dismal thought that every smile has a price” (46). In this passage Theroux’s negative tone and judgmental nature shed a distasteful light on the natives of the lands he is visiting. By doing this, Theroux presents a misrepresentation to his audience and prevents them from creating their own point of view. Both in his language usage and tone, he discourages his readers about the regions that he visits and casts a very negative light on peoples and cultures that might be unfamiliar to the reader.

Criteria for Effective Travel Writing

From the research and the knowledge that I gained by familiarizing myself with the travel writing genre through the primary and secondary source material, I was then able to create a list of what I see as effective travel writing criteria. Essential in the process of drafting and revising my collection of essays, this list provides the basis on which I judge my own pieces of travel writing. It is once an essay has achieved these goals and adheres to these criteria that it is seen as finished. Below is the list of what I consider to be criteria for effective travel writing:

1. Keeping a journal or detailed account of people, places, events, etc.
2. Telling a deeply personal story in such a way that it has universal meaning to others
3. Adding facts, history, and dialogue to build credibility.

4. Being detailed and descriptive while still maintaining the natural flow of events.
5. Focusing on a central theme or moral.
6. Writing in an evocative way that encourages reader-response.
7. Styling a story in an interesting and thought-provoking way.
8. Adding personal style to make the story unique and distinct from other works.

This list serves as a useful tool not only during the drafting process, but also during the revision process as well. Once each essay has reached a completed first draft, this list is used as a standard to judge each essay in order to see whether or not these criteria have been met and the essay can be passed as an effective piece of travel literature in my eyes.

The Writing Process

Examples of this kind of drafting and revising process can be seen in an excerpt taken from one of my essays entitled *The Other Side of the Fence*, which tells of the orphanage that we visited on the tour and the children that we encountered during our time there. A passage taken from the first draft reads as follows:

The sun was high in the sky by this time and rather than being kind and gentle, it beat down on us through the open top with all of its fury.

Looking through my sunglasses, everything had a unique tint and seemed dream-like. The fields of corn and sunflowers stood on each side of the road and carried us slowly to our destination. Finally, the dirty and run-down road signs indicated that we were almost there.

This passage from the first draft is flat and lacking important details that help make the story both interesting and relatable. The language is stagnant and lacks the fluidity and movement needed to properly portray the true sense of beauty and motion happening during this particular moment. The second draft of the passage, however, reads:

The sun was higher in the sky now and rather than emitting colors of orange and pink, it was beating down through the open top in direct beams of white fury, browning our skin. Looking through my aviators at the scenery, everything had a nostalgic brown tint like an old movie. The fields of maize and sunflowers seemed to split and divide in the distance, allowing a muddy brown road to carry us to our destination. Finally, dilapidated road signs began to point towards civilization and the orphanage.

In this second draft a drastic change can immediately be seen in the first sentence with the addition of more descriptive words in order to give the reader a sense of the colors of the scene. Also, by inserting the phrase, “browning our skin,” the reader’s senses are engaged and he/she is invited further into the story and encouraged to feel the warm heat of the African sun. The second and third sentences of the passage also include more specific details that help to paint a more realistic picture for the reader and draw them into the scene effectively. The same passage from the third and final draft lends the best example:

The sun was higher in the sky than when we left the lodge and rather than emitting soft, gentle rays of orange and pink, it beat down through the open top in blindingly direct fury, browning our skin. Looking through

my aviators at the scenery, the lens of the glasses cast a nostalgic brown tint on everything like an old movie passing before my eyes. The fields of maize and sunflowers seemed to come to life and split and divide in the distance, allowing a muddy brown road to carry us to our destination. Finally, dilapidated road signs began to point towards civilization and the orphanage.

In this last draft, it is important to note the fluidity and motion that is presented by the addition of a starting and ending point for the journey. From the passage the reader is able to clearly see that we are traveling from the lodge in the first sentence and ending up at the orphanage in the last sentence. These two simple additions help to give the reader a sense of direction as well as to portray a more realistic sense of passing time throughout the journey. This sense of motion is also present in the second sentence that depicts the scenery passing by like an old movie. The third sentence aims to bring the scenery to life and recreate in the mind's eye of the reader the same stretch of muddy road that I drove on. Hand-in-hand with the importance of multiple revisions to a text, is the crucial role that professor, family, and peer review have played in the development of my collection of essays. A valuable part of achieving a finished product that meets all of the effective travel writing criteria is to allow others to read and critique your work in order to gauge what aspects of the story are effective at engaging your audience and whether or not the stories and morals that I am trying to portray are successfully being received and can be applied to the larger scale of humanity.

Conclusion

This collection of essays, beginning with the background of the two separate tours, journeys through a sequence of exciting events that chronicle personal growth, interaction with natives and wildlife, and attempts to bridge the gaps that exist between American and Tanzanian culture. Because this collection retells a deeply personal experience meant to be shared with others, it also explores the concept of selfhood and what it means to be a young adult traveling through a new and strange land. It also explores how this idea of selfhood morphs and changes both across the time period and through the experiences encountered while in Tanzania. Lastly, this collection aims to portray the specific identity that grows out of the responsibility as a writer to express what knowledge has been gained, what experiences have had the most impact, what life goals have been altered, and what outlooks on life have changed through interaction with another culture. Through this collection of seven non-fiction essays, I hope to portray Tanzania as a people, place, and set of cultural practices as seen through my eyes. I also strive to achieve the goal of telling a relatable story that is able to bridge differing backgrounds and cultures in a way that brings people closer together on the common grounds of love, kindness, and respect.

New Beginnings

Sun block, shorts, swimsuit, hat. Guidebook, camera, binoculars, flashlight. Scurrying around the house frantically stuffing the last few items into my oversized suitcase, I squeezed through the door and jumped into the car. I go over the mental packing list one more time just in case. With a bag this big I couldn't have forgotten anything, right? Hours later, on a stuffy jumbo jet floating through an expanse of white clouds above the Atlantic, I'm still going over the packing list. I shouldn't be obsessing over some small thing I might have forgotten but with the way the trip started off two years ago, I have learned that it is important to be as prepared as possible.

Our bus had left Andrews University exactly two years ago from today and made the relatively short trek to the Chicago airport with forty students and six faculty members buzzing with excitement to hop the pond and start their exotic African adventure. As part of a unique study tour at my university, I was on my way to what I believed would be my most exciting journey yet. The opportunity to get a full semester's worth of credits for flying to Tanzania, Africa and spending time with the natives and on safari almost seemed too good to be true but here I was lugging a huge suitcase of vacation essentials into O'Hare Airport and practically getting a grade for it. Our loud and boisterous group funneled in through the large revolving doors and tramped a noisy path across the airport terminal to stand in line and get checked in. Less than a week after completing my Freshman year at Andrews University I was amongst the youngest of the students attending the trip and a bit intimidated by the older, more mature students. The six fearless leaders of our convoy: Professor Don May, Dr. Jeronicic, Dr. Jones (the female), Dr. Helm, and Mrs. And Dr. Jones (the male) herded us from line to line and

eagerly chatted with us while we waited to be called to the ticket counter. Nearly two hours drudged by as passports were inspected, luggage was checked, and tickets were passed out. Most of the students and faculty were already refreshing themselves at the food court or frolicking at the magazine stands reading the latest entertainment gossip. All but eight of us.

Despite waiting in line for two hours and having our passports repeatedly checked and expectant glances being exchanged between students and ticket agents, the fatal blow was finally delivered. We weren't in the system. Somehow the travel agency had made a mistake and six students and two faculty members were mysteriously erased from the plane manifesto. Time was ticking and our plane was set to leave in less than thirty minutes. Don May, the head administrator and orchestrator of the Tanzania tour at Andrews, was on the phone with the travel agency frantically trying to get our names added in time for us to board the plane, but our seats had been booked to other customers and we were fresh out of luck. Needless to say, the plane took off that day with thirty-eight people on it as the eight of us desperately waved it goodbye.

In the end, everything worked out and after a night of Chicago restaurants and hotels we were finally boarding a plane headed to Tanzania the next morning. Landing almost a full day later, the wheels of the jumbo jet came to a rest on a lonely landing strip and I rose from my upgraded first class seat eager to start my adventure. I still remember the shock of stepping off the plane onto the dark Tanzanian runway with only the moon and a few caution lights from our plane to light the way to the small airport building in the distance. I remember the hot African air engulfing my body and the tension that caused me to cling tightly to my backpack as I wondered if there might be a lion lurking

somewhere in the distance. Don May was there to greet us and give us a quick rundown of the day's events that we had missed. I remember staring out of the Land Cruiser window as we pulled out of the airport parking lot and immediately realizing how dark it was outside. There were no city or even house lights to be seen for miles in the distance. It seemed as though the whole of Tanzania had shut down for the night and surrendered to the expanse of radiating stars that fiercely shone in the night sky above. With the darkest land I had ever seen came the brightest heavens.

After jostling around the countryside for some time a few yellow lights etched a row on the horizon and our truck made a mad dash towards them. Finally, reaching our lodge in Arusha we spilled out of the truck and were met by smiling staff members offering mango juice and hot and cold towels to wash away the dust and grime of a long day's travel. From that moment on the trip got progressively more interesting and adventurous. Arriving a day late and missing the announcement about brushing your teeth with the water bottles provided in your bungalows, I found out the next morning with stabbing stomach pains that we were not supposed to use the sink water no matter how clean it looked or how nice the lodge appeared. Over the course of the next three weeks the group acclimated to each other and formed bonds that still hold strong today. We visited orphanages; sang and danced with indigenous tribe members; played soccer with the natives; scouted lions, elephants, and cheetahs in the Serengeti dessert; did a traditional washing in front of hundreds of onlookers in order to enter a mosque; and learned more about others and ourselves in the process.

Now, as I sit in an economy class seat with a different group of students headed towards the same destination, I'm frantically going over my mental packing list trying to

be as efficient and prepared as possible. A lot has changed since the last tour. I'm no longer the intimidated freshman making up the youngest travelers of the group, but the confident Senior to whom the freshmen pose their questions. I'm no longer the stressed out Science major either, worrying about the report card that will be sent in the mail while I'm on Safari in Tanzania, but the well-versed English major spouting out bigger words and carrying a journal around with me at all times to record any observations or bursts of emotional responses. I'm a much different person now than I was two years ago. I've learned some difficult lessons and been let down by life and forced to pick myself up and move on.

Two years ago I was optimistic about the life goals I had set up for myself. Determined to be a doctor, I enrolled in all the necessary pre-med classes and suffered mercilessly through each of them. Long nights of fruitless studying began to be a norm and frustration and discouragement became familiar companions in everyday life. Slowly, the optimism began to give way to reality and crumble under the weight of my own expectations. My priorities began to change as well. I began asking myself whether the educational and career goals I had set for myself early on would interfere with the other things I wanted to achieve in life, and the answers were beginning to look grim. I also considered myself to be a good student that excelled in everything I did, but my grades in some of these science classes were proving otherwise. Finally, the day had come for me to face the facts and realize that the pre-med track was not for me.

Through a series of difficult decisions and the encouragement and support of family and friends I made the switch to English. During that transitional year a lot of changes took place in my life and I found myself morphing into a new person. It took a

long time to convince myself that I had made the right decision, and there are still days when I wonder where I would be if I had not made those changes. It's a difficult thing to admit to yourself that you're simply not good at something, but there are great rewards that come from embracing your strengths and acknowledging your weaknesses. Now, sitting in a cramped airplane seat going over the packing list again, I realize that I'm in a much different state of mind this trip than two years ago. Whereas the first tour was just another academic stepping stone and a chance to escape the madness of the scientific realm, this tour is more about embracing the experience and learning more about myself and others. It is a chance to see and experience things in a new way and to share them with others through my newfound strengths. It is an opportunity to embrace and exercise a talent that I kept at bay for far too long. It's a chance to embrace the woman I'm becoming.

I know a little better this time what to expect when we land. I look forward to the gust of hot air and the dark and mysterious runway where wild animals could be lurking. I look forward to taking solace in the darkest nights and the brightest stars, and retracing many of my same footsteps from two years ago with a newly energized gusto. This tour, although familiar in many ways, comes to me from a new point of view and a different place in my life. This time, I'm as prepared as possible but still expecting to be surprised.

A Third World Country, A First Rate Experience

Underdeveloped, uneducated, unhealthy. Needing money, needing food, needing a future. A country full of starving people, dirty water, and decades behind technologically. A third world country. These are the things that people imagine when they hear about a place like Tanzania, Africa. But I prefer to see Tanzania for what it is rather than what it is not: beautiful, bountiful, baffling. Providing peace, providing perspective, providing an undisturbed appreciation. A country full of hospitable people, breathtaking landscapes, and a closer connection with God. A country largely unexplored by the outside world.

Many people see Tanzania for everything that it is not, but I prefer to see it for what it is: a place of magical landscapes. From Ngorongoro Crater to Mount Kilimanjaro, the land shifts and morphs to produce thick forests, dusty deserts, treacherous mountains, and expansive craters. Each morning, the sun rises and splits the African sky to spill forth an elaborate scheme of colors, painting the land below in shades of red, green, yellow, and brown. Mountains scratch out the horizon while prickly Acacia trees dot the dry and cracking Serengeti flatlands. A sparkling blue lake reflects the tropical pink from a flock of flamingos in the distance and dances along with the rest of the colors of the Ngorongoro Crater floor. And while jostling down a treacherous clay road, thousands of orange and yellow sunflowers on either side lift their petals to the sky to be drenched in the noonday sun. Amidst a country wanting for much, lays a land that withholds nothing from those who search. A land unscathed by the repercussions of man, and still nurtured and loved by its people. Tanzania is a land that provides for its wildlife, is clothed in mystery, and open for discovery. A country where the night sky

glitters so bright that the heavens threaten to burst through and reveal itself to those gazing from below. A land that flows with vast rivers, cascading waterfalls, and bubbling streams. A place people dream about seeing and long to return to.

Outsiders see Tanzania for what it is not, but I prefer to see it for what it is: an endless cycle of breath-taking sunrises and sunsets. Nowhere in the world have I seen the sun command as much attention as in this place. Each morning it wakes from its slumber and banishes the darkness to the other side of the world. It spills its rays into the darkest corners, deepest valleys, and highest mountains. The sky explodes with excitement as it rises and celebrates by pouring forth an array of colors: gold, pink, purple, yellow, orange. And for one moment, as the sun peeks over the horizon, the other colors of the landscape pay their respects to the sun and shimmer in a uniform gold. Witnesses to this phenomenon are breathless, caught-up in the spectacle and paralyzed by the beauty they have just seen. The only rival, of course, to these African sunrises is the African sunset. After a long day's work of illuminating the earth below, the sun becomes dark and moody and casts a shadow on its subjects. Shooting its last rays of light, the sun lights the Acacias on fire with shades of fierce orange and yellow, leaving the rest of the land in shadows until its return the next morning. Many people cast an impenetrable darkness over Tanzania, but I see it as a place that begins and ends each of its days with such an extraordinary display of light that all darkness is chased away.

People who haven't experienced Tanzania see it for everything that it is not, but I prefer to see it for everything that it is: a place of protean mystery. A place where the animals, people, roads, and landscape are always changing, forcing man to reconsider everything they once thought they had figured out. A place so heavily cursed by

outsiders that it has gone untouched and undiscovered by many. A place waiting to share its secrets with those willing to stop and listen.

One of Tanzania's mysteries lies within the legend of the Shifting Sands. A towering sand dune picked up and carried by the fierce Serengeti winds across the open desert plains to different locations each year. Identified by crumbling brick markers with the date and height of the mound, the hill of black sand slowly makes its way through the Serengeti never fully coming upon a good place to rest for the remainder of its days. No one knows where the fine black sand, so uncharacteristic of the sands in this area, originated from but many surmise that it comes from a distant volcano. The natives in the area believe the Shifting Sands have magical healing powers and come once a year to bury their most precious pieces of jewelry deep within the dune and pray to their ancestors for their sick and dying or for their crops and herds. They believe that if they come back to the sands and their jewelry is nowhere to be found, their prayers have been heard. For these people, the Shifting Sands are a sacred place, but for tourists this takes deliberate effort.

My own experience with this strange natural phenomenon was both strongly spiritual and irreverent. The first tour in 2009 had been a rambunctious group with students scurrying to the top of the dune and hurling themselves off the edge, spraying the sacred sand in every direction and causing looks of disbelief and horror from the few native women standing around with their jewelry in hand. Others from the group were picking up greedy fistfuls of sand and throwing them at each other or posing for pictures of themselves buried in it. There were even those digging in the sacred mound searching for the villagers' jewelry left behind from their last desperate visits. The second tour in

2011 was much different, however, as the tour guides spent time explaining the significance of the spot and the spiritual relevance that it held in the lives of the nearby tribes. This time, when the women and young girls came to the mound with their jewelry, the students stood around quietly observing and greeting them with kind smiles and looks of understanding. No one flung themselves from the top of the mound or tossed handfuls of sand. The atmosphere had completely changed from one tour to the next.

As both an observer and a participant of the same activity on two very different occasions, it slowly became apparent how people can miss out on everything that Tanzania has to offer and bypass it as a third world country. The group of students on the first tour, through their horseplay and irreverence, missed out on the opportunity to see the experience for the sacred ritual that it represented in the lives of the natives. They had given into their biased and largely ignorant notions of what Africa appears to be from the outside and were unable to experience it in a more authentic sense. The second group, however, set these assumptions aside and allowed a revision to take place in their minds. Although experiencing a culture and set of religious practices starkly different from their own, they were still able to experience spiritual growth through the inspiration of devotion and faith that was witnessed there at the Shifting Sands.

Some people see Tanzania, Africa as a place full of people begging for their next meal or writhing in sickness, but I see Tanzania as a place where the people are kind and patient and are still until their prayers are met. Some see this country as a land that won't make it on its own and needs our charity, but I see it as a country that longs for its chance to show its importance and relevance in the modern world. Outsiders view Tanzania as a

place riddled with pagan savages, but I see it as a place full of hard-working and spiritually devoted individuals diligent in their beliefs and searching for answers like the rest of the world. For those willing to set aside the assumptions that they have carried with them their whole lives about Africa and who are ready to open their lives to new experiences and ways of thinking, stereotypes can be broken and lasting impressions made on the mind. By opening our eyes to the lifestyles and cultural practices of others we can grow in our own understanding of the world around us and the role that we play in it. As the black sand rose and twirled through the air in a cloud of ancient cinder, the fierce Serengeti wind howled and for those still enough to listen, she whispered another secret to her many mysteries. For some Tanzania is a third-world country, but to me it's nothing but first-rate.

The Wrong Side of the Fence

Going to an orphanage is never an easy task, especially in a country that has had its population ravaged by the AIDS epidemic. When the printed itinerary was handed out a few weeks before leaving the States announcing that we would be visiting one, my heart fell a little. It's difficult to visit a place where you are inevitably overwhelmed with horror and amazement at the sight of children of all ages going through life without their parents. On the other hand, there is nothing quite like the experience of being able to bring a few minutes of laughter and joy through a simple visit. For this reason, several of us had mixed feelings about the event.

Finally, the trip across the great ocean came and we anxiously made our way through the first few days of the tour by getting acquainted with our drivers, taking in the country's beauty, and acclimating ourselves to the heat and unparalleled hospitality. The closer the orphanage visit came, the more excitement seemed to build in the group. Despite the apprehension that a few held towards the looming visit, the day finally came. The morning seemed to echo the mixed feelings of many as a battle raged between the thick hazy fog caused by the night's rain, and the bright rays of light that insisted on bursting through. The walk to the dining hall from my bungalow-style room was an eerie one as I forged my way through the alternating patches of fog and sunlight on the pathway.

Breakfast was simple and hurried: eggs, a croissant, and a cup of Milo. The professors looked well-rested and prepared, the ladies of the group chatted and laughed, and the guys stared at their plates with glassy-eyes and hair matted to the sides of their heads. Don signaled go time and as if on cue, an orchestra of scraping chairs and

clanking dishes erupted across the dinning area as people shoveled the last few spoonfuls of food into their mouths and headed to the Land Cruisers. Like every other morning, the trucks were lined up in the parking lot like an army of giant green and tan Legos on wheels. Michael, the driver of *Roll-Tide Five Alive*, as our truck was lovingly referred to, stood at the door of the monstrous Lego and greeted us with a broken-toothed smile and the Swahili greeting, “Jambo!”

The drive to the orphanage could not have been more than a half an hour, but with all destinations that are both greatly anticipated or dreaded, it seemed to take much longer. The road tossed the Cruiser up and down and occasionally, when the ruts in the road were deep enough for a small child to crawl down into, the truck ripped from side to side and caused a few of the more sluggish boys in the back to hit their heads against the window with a sharp crack. The sun was higher in the sky than when we left the lodge and rather than emitting soft, gentle rays of orange and pink, it beat down through the open top in blindingly direct fury, browning our skin. Looking through my aviators at the scenery, the lens of the glasses cast a nostalgic brown tint on everything like an old movie passing before my eyes. The fields of maize and sunflowers seemed to come to life and split and divide in the distance, allowing a muddy brown road to carry us to our destination. Finally, dilapidated road signs began to point towards civilization and the orphanage.

After having wound our way up a narrow dirt road through a variety of mountains, fields, villages, the Adventist University campus, and even a lively camp meeting with boisterous singing, we climbed the last stretch to our destination. The canopy of trees gave way and our truck broke through to the top of Mount Meru into an

open area of land. A sea of little faces buzzing with delight stared from behind a tall, iron-black gate supported by a vibrant blue wall a few feet from our convoy. Climbing down from the trucks with cameras in hand, many of us were not sure what to do next. Unable to contain their glee any longer, tiny black hands began to jut from the gate grasping for our hands, legs, cameras, and attention. A few tired looking adults tried with little success to herd the children to the back yard in order to give us room enough to enter in through the gate. Despite their efforts, a few courageous boys broke through the lines of control and burst towards some of the bigger guys in the group.

The orphanage's plot of land sat amidst the mountain and overlooked a beautiful sloping landscape. The plot itself was carefully kept and manicured with shrubs meticulously placed in front of each of the yellow dormitories and other administration buildings. For a place many would expect to be brimming with chaos, the dormitories were spotless and organized; with two rows of neatly placed shoes by the door as the first indication. The beds, arranged in clusters of two or three bunk beds per room were made up with various patterned bedspreads and pillows, allowing the kids to have their own individual space. The dorms were also each equipped with electricity, laundry facilities, and indoor bathrooms, a luxury for many places in that area. The couple that ran the orphanage talked to the group about the facility, donors, and the day-to-day life of the adults and the children. All the while, we could hear laughter and shrill screams of excitement as some of the adults distracted the kids so we could finish our tour.

Once the tour ended it was time to go out to the backyard and play with the kids. As we rounded the corner of the building we were met with an array of colorfully bright balls raining from the air, hula-hoops dancing around in blurred neon color around

waists, little bodies bobbing up and down on a teeter-totter, and a mass of excitement and unnatural energy surging across the grass. Just as quickly as each student could step onto the playground children were swooping them up, grabbing hands, throwing balls, and tugging at cameras. I stepped nervously forward onto the playground, not too sure what to expect, when a small boy in a striped green shirt approached me and gave me the stare down. A stare down, for those who don't know, is when you lock eyes with someone and try to see who will blink first. This kid was going for the world record. Finally, when I was about to give in, he set his hand on my camera and blurted out, "Hi! Thanks for coming. Can I have your camera?"

A little apprehensive about handing over an expensive rental camera I tried to change the subject, "Hi! I'm Kylene. What's your name?"

Hand still on camera and eyes fully expectant, he answered, "Simon," and then continued to dart his eyes from my face to my camera.

Clearly, this kid was not interested in playing ball or running around in a game of tag. He wanted my camera and his toothy smile and deep brown eyes were making it very difficult for me to resist. Loosening the camera's security strap from my neck I handed the camera to Simon and watched as he took off in a blaze of clicking shutter noises and flashes. He took pictures of trees, his friends, the orphanage's dog, and even close-ups of women's hair. Eventually his excitement wore down enough where he actually let me look at his pictures on the smooth black screen before he sped off once again towards the fence lining the back of the property. Afraid to leave him alone with the camera to disappear into the sea of other children carrying student's cameras around,

I focused my eyes on that green striped shirt and watched as he darted across the playground, around a tree, and even under a pair of grown-up legs.

Simon finally came to a stop at the barbed wire fence and stood across from four children on the other side. My first reaction was to wonder why the orphanage needed a barbed-wire fence. Was it because they were trying to keep people from coming in or from going out? The boys standing across from Simon were nothing like him. All of the children at the orphanage, including Simon, were clean and recently bathed. They wore clean clothes free of holes and a nice pair of shoes. The boys on the other side of the fence wore tattered maroon sweaters and slacks that were either dirty or ripped. Their shoes consisted of dingy worn out tennis shoes, or sandals made from old blown out tires. Simon said a few words in Swahili and raised the camera to take a picture of the boys. At this, they turned their backs to Simon, hiding their faces, and one even ran away. When the boys were certain that the camera was at Simon's side they came to the fence and peered over in interest. Simon spoke to the boys once again, and although I didn't know what he was saying, I could tell that his tone was much sweeter and even comforting. Raising the camera once again, a few of the boys bore a smile full of rotten teeth while the others stood looking scared, but not turning away. Simon clicked a few pictures and then turned the camera's screen to show the boys. They pushed each other as they huddled together looking at their picture in amazement and curiosity. A roll of laughter followed. At this point, the boys were practically striking poses for Simon as he clicked away at the shutter and continued to take and show them their pictures. The boys continued this until our visit expired and Simon reluctantly handed my camera back to

me with two hundred more pictures on it than before. His eyes were sad, but he smiled and said, “Goodbye, Kylene. Come back again and next time bring me my own camera!”

Simon is an AIDS orphan. When both of his parents died from AIDS he went to stay with his grandmother until she also fell so ill and was forced to personally take Simon to the orphanage and beg for his admittance. Later, Simon’s grandmother died and left him with no family. Somehow his grandmother knew that this orphanage would help him to thrive in life, get an education, have the chance to eat three meals a day, and hopefully even be adopted by another family that would love him just as much as his own had. Although Simon has not yet been adopted, he has been given all of those other things.

Maybe, that day when Simon took my camera and went to the boys on the other side of the fence he knew that he was on the right side of the fence. Who would have ever imagined that living in an orphanage would be considered to be the better option? Maybe he understood that although these boys might still have their families, they lived a much tougher life than his. Something in his compassionate and comforting words to the boys caused me to wonder if this small boy who had seemed to have lost it all, understood that life is difficult and that sometimes the love and kindness that we show another person might be the brightest part of their day. Through the simple act of taking a picture, Simon had transformed those boys days and given them a surprise in what could have been another day of hardship and suffering. With his simple gift of love and companionship, Simon helped the boys feel like for once, they weren’t on the wrong side of the fence.

Buffalo Savings

Whether Africa receives you as a first-time visitor or a seasoned traveler, it is hard to return home without taking some personal memento, or souvenir for a loved one from this mysterious continent. Part of the African experience comes from being able to bring these mementos home and set them on a shelf to admire and serve as a reminder of the time you spent and the people you encountered in the dusty expanses on one of one of the world's most talked-about continents. Unlike the baseball caps, mugs, refrigerator magnets, and key chains of other world hot spots, Africa's souvenir choices truly cater to the wants and needs of every man. Wooden or marble carved statues, daunting tribal masks, unique paintings, and the mesmerizing sparkle of Tanzanite draw crowds of eager khaki-laden tourists and help to bring in a much needed revenue to the people of Tanzania. This is what fueled our eagerness as we stepped out of the Land Cruisers, pockets ringing with coins like tiny sleigh bells as we shuffled into the compound full of African treasures.

This place was different from all the other souvenir venues we had encountered. It was the Wal*Mart of African culture. We had, of course, had other opportunities to buy the knick-knacks and specialty items of our choice at roadside markets, village gatherings, and even a remote Masai village, but nothing could quite prepare us for this shopping excursion. Although the building itself was nothing to write home about with its simple cement walls, tourists were immediately distracted by the array of bright colored Masai blankets and wrappers that hung in front of the shop. This display gave the storefront the appearance of a giant quilted blanket. While some brave souls flocked to the blankets in hopes of beating out all the rest for the most brilliantly colored and

masterfully stitched pattern, the rest of us filed in through the narrow, single entry of the building.

Upon entering, the blinding sunlight was immediately blotted out and replaced by a dark room ventilated by dust particles and the smell of wood and musty basement. Despite its lack of initial showmanship, the compound made up for lost respect by presenting its wall-to-wall shelves packed full of some of the most unique masterpieces in the world. Even the drivers from our convoy, natives of the land, browsed the shop with looks of intrigue. Scuffling my feet across the dirty cement foundation, I slowly made my way down the first aisle. After a few feet of African nativity and Last Supper sets I found myself staring into the hollowed-out eyes of monstrous tribal masks with wild expressions and animal hairs spurting from their eye sockets and ear-holes.

Reaching the end of the aisle and doubling back by way of the next one, I was met by shelf after shelf of marble and wooden carved animal statues both large and small. The lions stalked the shelves low to the ground and with their manes blowing in the imaginary wind, while the elephants lumbered along frozen in their enormous steps, trunks raised in the air in triumphant jubilee. All the animals, from zebras to giraffes, paraded themselves in a large communal stampede down the aisle staring up at their potential buyers, pleading to be bought and taken away from this place. Rescuing a small white, marble buffalo from amidst a pack of lions, I looked up to see a pair of yellowed eyes looking at me over the shelf from the aisle across from mine. Snapping my eyes awkwardly back to the line of carved figurines, I wandered a little further down the row with the buffalo in hand until I felt it was safe to look back into the direction of the eyes. They were no longer there but just as quickly as they had disappeared, a dark skeleton of

a man came slinking around the corner of the shelves wearing the pair of yellowed eyes and an even more yellow set of teeth. I waited for the man to approach me and start haggling prices with me but he never did. He must have been trained in the ways of telepathy and could sense that I was not quite finished gathering my spoils. Although he never approached me, he did creep behind me four or five feet for several aisles like a cheetah on the hunt until he figured that I was a customer not quite fattened up enough with merchandise and decided to abandon my trail for that of a more defenseless student shopper.

At this point the entire shop was buzzing with Andrews students and faculty, our drivers, and eager merchants drooling with excitement over the promise of an abundance of sales. A single man sat behind a large table looking more distinguished than the other salesmen with a heightened sense of authority and thick Swahili-accented English. With the moneybox securely placed under his supervision, a few brave students had already decided on a few items and were easily being bargained out of their money. Some became so frustrated and intimidated that they eventually snagged a nearby driver to help drive down the prices both with the use of swift Swahili and long-practiced bartering skills. At the table next to this, a sight of pure amazement occurred as packaging paper, tape, bailing twine, and bags streamed and flew about in one motion in order to carefully wrap each student's purchases. Looks of amazement, confusion, and intimidation danced across a few people's faces as they stood in line to have their merchandise analyzed, paid for, and wrapped.

Continuing down the length of the back wall of the compound, I noticed my long-time friend Michael standing amidst the rows of carved wooden keepsake boxes with his

head in his hands and a collection of goods splayed on the floor around his feet. I didn't need to ask him what was wrong because I already knew. The thing about the Wal*Mart of African culture is that it inevitably places its shoppers in one of two dilemmas. Either there is so much merchandise that you are unable to find exactly what you are looking for, or your brain starts to hurt thinking about the great things you keep picking up off the shelf and the insufficient amount of money you have to pay for them all. Judging by the knives, spears, masks, figurines, and now the delicately carved jewelry box in his hand, I was willing to bet that he was struggling with the second issue.

A group of freshman girls were packed against one of the walls scouring over the beaded necklaces, bracelets, and earrings looking for the best deals and most trendy buys. A few aisles over was the weaponry section of the store where a group of guys stood picking out the sharpest spears and knives, and even occasionally pretending to wound each other with them to get the full African experience. At this point, most of the people in the shop were carrying baskets full of carvings and bracelets with huge smiles on their faces. Although immersed in African culture for nearly two weeks, the souvenir shop brought out the true Americans in all of us.

Finally, when I felt as though I had seen all the shop had to offer, I switched my demeanor from intensely interested in the items on the shelves to happily content and quickly found another set of eyes hot on my trail. I knew that this was the hardest part of the shopping experience and I instantly saw a vision of myself standing at the table with the gruff chairmen of sales practically handing over my entire purse before the bartering even began. Just then, the man interrupted my vision by flashing me a yellowed smile

and motioning to the marble buffalo in my hands as he began nodding his head with an impressive amount of conviction.

“Dat is berry nize. I give it to you fur only fifteen dollars!”

I smiled and decided to play the game with all my might replying, “That’s a little much don’t you think? I’ll give you five.”

“No, no, no dat is berry rare. No less den ten dollars for you.”

“Seven,” I answered with a hint of both confidence and questioning.

“Now listen,” he began, but I already knew what was about to come next. I had been accosted enough by street side vendors to know what was about to follow. The man haggled with me for several minutes and was so persistent that I pay more than what the carving was worth, that I thought about simply walking away.

After a few minutes of going back and forth and me turning away and faking him out with a play to put back the figurine rather than pay the high price, he looked at me wild-eyed and declared, “Ok! I give to you fur seven dollars but you give me a dollar just for me.”

I couldn’t argue with that so we finalized the deal and with a whirlwind of wrapping paper and tape I was out of the door with my purchase in hand. Glad to be out of the stale air and darkness, I decided to walk through the display of canvass paintings situated in a lot beside the building in a haphazard manner. Some were torn from the desert wind, but all were colorful and eye-catching. A few paintings of Mount Kilimanjaro seemed to be the most popular buys, but the most striking paintings were those of the Masai warriors standing in a row armed with spears and clubs. Making my

way through the garden of paintings, I came to a small shack at the back of the property that lacked walls and had a ceiling made of trash bags and mud.

“They line the roof with trash bags to keep the rain from coming in,” said a familiar voice. It was Fuey, the head driver of the convoy and a friend from my previous visit to Tanzania. He must have caught me looking up at the roof with a strange face.

“It’s interesting and inventive.”

“Many people here are so poor that they have to find a way to be inventive in order to keep business going and families fed. Intensity and passion are needed to be a worker here in Africa because jobs are few and if you aren’t good at the job you have you might lose it.”

With these words, sitting under a shelter made of trash bags outside a souvenir shop, I realized that Africa, the dark continent, is a place of intrigue and excitement partly because of its mixed reputation. We were buying souvenirs to prove we had made it to Africa and had seen the worst of the worst, had encountered the poverty and savagery, and were helping to boost both their moral and their economy by buying ornaments that would sit on a shelf at home in our air-conditioned living rooms collecting dust. I even felt ashamed for the way that I had been annoyed with the salesman and bartered my price down. He was only performing his job with the same persistence and passion that allowed him to still have a job and feed his family. I realized then, with my packaged buffalo in hand, that although this shopping experience for many of us may not have been much more than buying a key chain or T-shirt from Disney World, to the people we were bartering with it was a way of life and a means of income. So as the Land Rovers pulled out of the compound and sped down the road, leaving the shop in a billow of thick red

dust, I thought about how my carved buffalo had just helped pay for someone's evening rice.

Truck Mixers

What is the best way to get to know someone? Some people throw parties to get better acquainted with people in their neighborhoods, others strike up conversations with random people on trains and airplanes, and in more recent times, people use Facebook and Twitter to stalk prospective friends by looking at their pictures and status updates. For me, there is no better way to become acquainted with someone than to be locked in a Land Cruiser riding across Africa with him or her. This is, after all, how I became friends with Arianna, Theron, Johnny, Dr. Petersen, and Ghadi.

The truck mixers began long before the trucks were even in the picture. In the week before the tour during classes, everyone began the silent job of sizing one another up. Who gets along the best? Do you really want to be stuck in a vehicle with your sibling? Is an all guys truck full of belching and super hero talk going to be a possibility? These and more were the types of questions we all started asking ourselves before we took off from O'Hare airport in Chicago, headed towards Tanzania, Africa.

After arriving in Tanzania and having traveled around locally in Arusha for truck rides no longer than thirty minutes at a time, the reality began to set in that in a few short days we would be spending long periods of time and even most hours of the day in our vehicles. This is when the search for the perfect vehicle started to get frenzied. A game of musical trucks started up and people began buzzing from one truck to the next with each thirty-minute trip. At this point, I had situated myself in a truck captained by Michael and packed full of eight other students like sardines in a camouflaged tin can. Every once in a while, Michael would peel back the lid from this can of a truck and sixteen arm and sometimes even legs could be seen flailing in the dusty African wind. In

this truck we had two different problems: the first being that there were only seven available seats and one extra person. We quickly solved this problem, however, by making the latest person sit on the cooler. Unfortunately, this method usually landed three of the bigger guys cramped in the back seat. Our second problem was that due to our overpopulated vehicle, the dreaded *hot seat* was occupied. The *hot seat*, as the students referred to it, was the front seat of the Land Cruiser. It didn't matter how cool your driver was because eventually, whoever sat in that seat would end up isolated by the rest of the group and forced to listen to the flow of Swahili streaming over the two-way radio. Therefore, with these two dilemmas, we had two people in undesirable seats and potentially eight people shoving each other around on safari in hopes of getting the perfect lion shot. Something had to change and someone had to go.

Doomsday arrived and more people than ever rushed from truck to truck searching for the perfect seat. Being the older and more *mature* ones in our vehicle, Michael and I got the boot and joined the game of music trucks. Suddenly, the music of the rumbling engines began, and we each made last minute dashes to available seats. I landed myself in a car of Honors students. But that wasn't all. Coming from a college student on a trip half way across the world, most of us did not expect to be hawked and fussed over as long as we stayed in line. An unspoken agreement seemed to spark up between the professors and students, and just as if one truck seemed to be promising complimentary glasses of prune juice and early bedtimes, the professors made their way to one Land Cruiser. As I climbed up into my new truck, however, a spurt of fiery red hair shot from over the top of the back seat, and a smiling Dr. Petersen greeted me with a

friendly but heavily accented, “Hello.” With this, we began our long trek over the countryside of Tanzania and into the vast escapes of the Serengeti.

Driving for hours at a time forces conversation even out of the most silent types. Without it, I am quite sure that we all would have gone insane both by the quiet and the unnerving rambling that our brains took from the constant jostling of the truck. With the exception of Dr. Petersen and Ghadi, I was already acquaintances with Arianna and Theron through the Honors program at school and had become good friends with Johnny because of our long study hours the previous year in Foundations of Biology. The conversation came slowly at first, like an awkward first date. We talked about the weather: hot and dusty; career goals: imaginative and inspiring; and Jeronic’s Thinking Theologically class: difficult and intimidating. Eventually, however, we became more daring and bold and asked each other what were our favorite things in life, what had enticed us about the Tanzania study tour, and our likes and dislikes thus far. Slowly, people began feeling more comfortable and more open with each other. With each bone-cracking lurch of the truck another small chip was made in the iceberg separating us from the realms of acquaintances and friends. Eventually, we found ourselves chatting about relationships and personal life goals and experiences and were pleasantly surprised when even Dr. Petersen and Ghadi joined in.

Arianna, or black beauty, as she was lovingly referred to, was the singer of the group. At the beginning of the trip when the silences outnumbered the talking sessions, Arianna would burst out in song, which inevitably sparked Theron to join in with a boisterous duet. I quickly learned that no matter how hot it was outside, or how relentlessly the sun insisted on firing its rays on us, Arianna was set against getting darker

or burned. She claimed that she had never been burned until the last few days here in Africa and that it was so painful she wasn't willing to risk it again. Despite the climbing temperatures hot enough to make you contemplate running out towards the lions, she insisted on wearing long black pants and a rain jacket with hood securely in place.

Theron, was the math whiz of the truck and as Johnny and I shot numbers and figures his way, he made calculations at light speed in his head and gave us the answers faster than we could enter them into the calculator. Unlike Arianna, Theron was set on getting a tan and insisted on stripping his shirt off with Johnny from sunrise to sunset. Considering that his nickname in the truck was white rabbit, he got burned to a crisp. I learned that Theron likes to lip sync and dance to music on his headphones when he thinks that no one is looking; he has always dreamt about starting a flash mob at school outside of PMC after chapel, and that he used to blackmail his little brother when they were young for candy.

Johnny was the truck's Asian sensation. Insisting that we call him by his African name: Mabu-Mabanjeebu, he provided the comic relief. The youngest of us all, Johnny decided that we were all much more learned in the ways of life and that we must be milked for our wisdom. Therefore, every day he would pose questions about being successful in school, dating, and fashion sense as we wound through mist covered mountains. I also learned that he eats like a starving bum on the street, and can't turn down anything that has rice in, on, or around it. Although I had already known him fairly well before Tanzania, being locked in a vehicle with him for ten days helped me to learn things about him I never would have found out given other circumstances. This was true for all four of us students in the truck. We learned more about each other's quirks,

ambitions, fears, and way of thinking. We grew closer both as travel companions and friends.

As for our rogue professor, Dr. Petersen, he contributed more to our vehicle than any of us could have ever expected. I learned that Dr. Petersen goes through nearly a bottle of sunscreen a day when traveling through Africa, that he religiously believes in a small carabineer contraption attached to his belt loop to keep the mosquitoes and bugs away, and that he occasionally likes to burst out in hymns in either English or Danish from time to time. He shared his secrets to a successful marriage with us and told us stories of living in Denmark as a mischievous child. In addition to his singing talents, I also gleaned that Dr. Petersen loves to tell corny jokes that somehow are made funny by his accent, and that he liked to listen to conversations and interject even when we thought he was deep asleep in the backseat.

The leader of our fearless convoy, Ghadi, was by far the quietest of the group for the longest period of time, but eventually we broke him down and learned more not only about his country, but also about his life. Together, we learned that Ghadi isn't easily irritated, because despite four Lady Gaga songs and a slaughtered rendition of an African classic, he still kept a sturdy smile on his face. We learned that he loves boiled eggs, enjoys teaching us the words to his national anthem and other popular songs in Tanzania, and only gets slightly irritated when other African drivers accidentally slam into his truck twice in one day.

By the end of the trip we found ourselves not only enduring the scorching sun and clouds of thick red dust from the roads together, but also eating dinners in each other's company, watching movies in each other's rooms, and spending time chatting outside of

the truck. Although some people view the Facebook stalking and neighborhood grill parties to be highly effective in the art of getting to know people, I would argue that all it takes is a little truck mixer to truly get to know someone. I started the trip with surface knowledge about the others in my truck but with each passing day I started to learn more of what makes each of them the beautiful people they are. I learned that these five people are kind, intelligent, and willing to put their own lives on pause in order to help someone else. Together, the experiences we encountered helped us grow closer together and bond on a deeper level. We laughed together, got sunburns together, ate crummy box lunches together, and eventually learned that being together wasn't just tolerable, it was enjoyable.

Stalking the Killer

Patience is a virtue. Africa helps to try to instill this virtue in her visitors. From waiting for the power to be switched back on, to waiting to reach a bathroom after hours of riding in a safari vehicle, this mysterious continent always keeps her visitors at arms length, yearning to know more or to be more informed. Because of its third world status, however, everything takes a little longer in Africa and moves at a slower and more relaxed pace. For this reason, anyone lacking patience quickly learns to change and adapt.

One of the greatest lessons in this particular virtue came one heat squelched day in the middle of the Serengeti grasslands. Miles away from civilization, seven Land Cruisers tore through the open land leaving a cloud of thick dust trailing behind. The landscape was barren except for the occasional Acacia tree and the distant outline of a giraffe on the horizon. Even zebras, Africa's squirrels and raccoons, were sparse and hard to find in this layout. It was the typical African scene: dusty, dry, muddy watering holes, and an expanse of nothingness as far as the eye could see.

Deciding that it was more likely to find some wildlife action by splitting up the convoy, the drivers took off in different directions. It was a hot day with no hope of any accumulating clouds to come and blot out the sun for a few precious minutes. The top was down in the truck but no one stood, both out of exhaustion caused by the heat and the dense blanket of dust that both followed and entered the truck. In fact, the dust was so thick that a coat of brownish red film had begun to build up on the inside walls of the vehicle, our clothes, and even our teeth. A few of us in the truck gave up on showering the mornings of these afternoon game drives because we knew that we would come back

dirty no matter what. Somehow, the dirt managed to get to you even with the top closed and the windows barely cracked.

After driving on our own for a while we all started to get frustrated and cranky. The only wildlife we were seeing were a few bright blue birds that flew occasionally from dried bush to bush. When we found that it was nearly impossible to capture a good picture of these flying beauties, the frustration deepened and we poured on more sunscreen to protect from the sun and allow us to be even more caked in the earth's grime. The drivers must have been able to sense the building irritation and boredom in their trucks because they were frantically communicating with each other in Swahili over the radios to see if anyone had come across anything interesting. Nothing seemed to be happening in this corner of Africa today. Suddenly, an overly excited voice came on over the radio and blurted out some news. Despite not knowing any Swahili, we had learned to recognize when the drivers had found something interesting and we snapped our attention to Ghadi and the raspy radio transmissions. Once everything had been accurately corresponded and the correct directions given to our destination, Ghadi looked into his mirror at us and smiled a broad, white smile as he whispered, "Cheetahs!"

At this, everyone began scrambling through the dust and debris of candy and cookie wrappers to grab their cameras and carefully wipe the lenses clear of any unwanted particles. Braving the intense heat and dust we all popped our shoes off and sprang atop our seats as we drove full speed into the sun. Hair whipping, eyes squinting, and smiles shimmering with brown dirt speckles, we stood poised and ready for the Godspeed of the world's fastest land animal.

Looking around into the distance we could see the pillars of dust lifting from the earth, indicating that the others had received the same message and were on their way to the hot spot. Pulling up to the place where a few of the early arriving trucks were parked, we weaved in and out through the vehicles to try to get the best possible view. People were springing up and down from their truck roofs like jack in the boxes, coming up each time with a camera or a pair of binoculars. Maneuvering around our last obstacle, we caught our first glimpse of the cheetahs. Dressed in their majestic spotted coats, and dark Cleopatra-like lining around their eyes, stood three cheetah brothers. Two of the brothers lay in the dirt flipping their tails at the afternoon flies, while the third one sat on his hind legs and surveyed the growing mass of trucks beginning to encircle them. After a few minutes of gaping and picture taking, whether out of suspicion or boredom, the brothers raised themselves from their lazy positions in the sun and began walking.

At this point, some students had noticed a herd of buffalo far in the distance and had convinced themselves that the cheetahs were on the hunt for some baby buffalo meat. Given that the herd was almost a mile away from the cheetahs most of us didn't even think that they knew there was a herd. When they started walking away from our convoy, however, they made their way towards the nearly invisible buffalo, slinking low to the ground with each step. With this move, a surge of excitement and silent air high-fives between people in different vehicles began to break out amongst the group. We were stalking the killers.

For the next hour we slowly crept up to the cheetahs, getting closer with each attempt both to the striking cats and the buffalo herd. Just at the point when the herd seemed within range, the cheetahs decided to change their positions and start walking in

random directions. The brothers even split up at one point and walked in different directions from each other. With these random movements whispers began erupting throughout the group, trying to explain why it was that they were going in different directions from each other and their potential dinner. Some people believed that they were circling around and sneaking up on the herd from different angles in order to arrange a sneak attack. As the sun and dust became an issue again, however, others turned to complaining and giving up hopes of ever seeing a kill.

Cheetahs are mysterious animals. According to our driver, it is unusual to see them in packs of twos and threes because they oftentimes travel alone or in a pack of all females and one male. When packs like the one we encountered are sighted, however, these are usually the out casted males that have stuck together. These brothers will travel and hunt in each other's company for the rest of their lives or until they find other packs where they can drive off the dominate male. Cheetahs also like to hunt in packs because despite being the fastest land animals in the world, they can only run for short sprints. Therefore, the plan of attack and the precision of choosing the perfect victim are crucial. Also, if one is unable to catch the victim during its sprint time, the others in the pack can help to tire out and attack the animal as well. For cheetahs, teamwork is pivotal to their survival.

After stalking the cats for nearly two hours the crackling Swahili voices came on over the radio once again and a few engines started back up. We had waited and watched, hoping for some action and to get to see the cheetahs race across the dry plain toward the throat of an unsuspecting buffalo calf. Reluctantly, many of the trucks slowly backed up and made wide U-turns towards the direction of the lodge. A few straggling

trucks held back for a few more minutes to see if they might luck out, but eventually everyone ended up back at the lodge with low spirits and sunburned faces. Later that night, on the evening game drive, those who went came back with the news that they once again found the cheetah brothers and that they had made their move on the buffalo herd. Some of the group believed that the brothers were too suspicious of our surrounding trucks to hunt, while others from the group chose to believe that if we would have had more patience we might have been able to see the kill.

Slowly, and sometimes painfully, our group learned that nature is something that cannot be rushed into action. Coming from a country where life is fast-moving, and everything from drive-thrus to Netflixes give you what you want or need in a fraction of the time, waiting was something that we were not accustomed to. With each game drive we learned not to be as loud, and that waiting and being curious could give us chances to see things that we might not have noticed had we not have been diligently looking for them. I also learned in coming back to Tanzania for a second time that there is beauty in the small details. While your heart pounds and your camera is poised and ready to snap the perfect picture of a cheetah kill, there is still so much more about Africa and its land, wildlife, people, and culture that goes unnoticed while people are looking for the usual things. I noticed the hillsides and how they rippled together like disturbed water in the distance and the fields of yellow sunflowers that turned their heads to the warm sunshine. I took notice of the canopy of trees and the unusual coat that twisted up each of them, wrapping them in a protective layer of thick bark or even long deadly thorns. I experienced the smells and tastes that Tanzania had to offer and experienced first-hand the hospitality and kindness of the people and the way that they live their day-to-day

lives. In the end, I realized that Africa had slowly built upon my patience and helped me to truly experience every aspect of the culture that became available. It turns out that stalking the killers wasn't really a waste of time at all, but a chance to make a more memorable experience.

Homesick

It was an unusual experience, one that not many people get to be a part of, and probably one that not many tourists really care to take part in. Unique Safaris set us up with wonderful drivers for two years now and as the trip wound down to an end, it became apparent to the students and faculty that the drivers were one of the highlights of our experience. Of the original group of drivers two years ago, only Fuey had returned to see our group through the African Serengeti and the vast Tanzanian countryside. He had been promoted to the leader of the convoy, and rightfully so, because although the front seat of his Land Cruiser was piled high with guide books, all of his knowledge came straight from his memory and experience with his native land. Amidst his knowledge of the various plants and wildlife, a passion for his country and people was evident. Fuey also enjoyed sharing this wisdom with his tourist groups and giving them each a dose of African hospitality and kindness through the way that he interacted with each of the students and teachers. For this reason, when the rare opportunity to visit the drivers' homes and families became available, I decided that Fuey's home would be my first choice.

The sun was dipping lower in the sky and the intense African heat waned as dinner at the lodge finished and the students sat around socializing and anticipating what their visits might bring. Many had held back at dinnertime in hopes of getting a real authentic taste of Tanzanian cuisine. Some students sat around diligently working on their watercolor paintings, trying to slosh in the last few strokes before Don came to announce it was time to load up. Finally, we scattered to our various vehicles, scrambling inside and talking excitedly. I made my way to the Chief Chancellor's Land

Cruiser, as it was affectionately called by the other students, and climbed aboard with the chaperones of the trip. Dr. and Mrs. Jones were settled in the backseat, Dr. Jones already beginning to doze against the windowpane, while Don and Dr. Woodland occupied the middle seats, and I sat in the front with Fuey.

Fuey lived in the nearby town of Arusha, nestled back in a maze of dirt roads buzzing with the traffic of cars, bikes, and pedestrians. Occasionally, Fuey would wave and yell a greeting to passersby, indicating to us that we were getting closer to his home and these were his neighbors. Turning on the last dirt road, Fuey motioned to a small house on the right side of the road and we pulled into the short driveway. The house was small but much nicer than the average homes in the area. Fuey told us that it had taken him eight years to build the house and that when his wife had been transferred to teach at a closer school, the family made the permanent move into the new home. Like many of the houses in Africa, this one was built in installments, finishing what little could be done at a time as the funds became available. The house, squarely shaped with rigid angles did not have much decorative grandeur, but it was brightly colored, tidy, and surrounded by an immaculately kept yard.

As we piled out of the truck, a family emerged through the front door onto the small porch wearing expectant smiles. All women, Fuey was a minority in his own home. Vickie, Fuey's wife, stood shyly with her arm around Waridi, a cousin, and Rosie, Fuey's eleven-year-old daughter. Bounding from the steps and springing herself into Fuey's arms came Miriam, the three-year-old. Rosie was tall and thin for her age and shy like her mother, but Miriam was shorter and plump with a smile and personality like her dad's. The family invited us in and served us beverages as we sat in the living

room to socialize and get to know each other better. Fuey's face danced with expressions of love and pride in his daughters and wife, and the girls looked excited to have their father home with these strange new white visitors. Anticipating our visit, the teachers had brought with them coloring books, writing utensils, paper, and toys for the girls both to help them in their studies and to have a little extra fun. The best gift, however, was the little mooing cow key chain that Mariam insisted on playing over and over until we left her hours later that night.

As we visited, we learned that Fuey was not always able to be home with his family due to his job at Unique Safaris and the immense amount of driving and tours that he led throughout the year. Even our tour had just taken him away from them for nearly ten days into the Serengeti. After a few minutes of socializing and plastic cow mooing, Vickie announced that dinner was ready and showed us to the small family dining table situated in a nook of the house next to the living room. Fuey sat at the head of the table while we filed around to the other available chairs, and the rest of the family, with the exception of little Miriam, sat in the kitchen to eat. Fuey explained that Tanzanian culture allowed for the guests to sit around the table with the head of the household while the women and children of the family sat in the kitchen to eat and clean up afterwards.

A variety of delicious foods ranging from avocado slices and bright orange Clementines, to stir-fried rice and chicken covered the table. We ate and ate until we were full, and then because leftovers indicated rudeness, we ate more. At the end of dinner, as in many other cultures, Vickie brought out coffee and tea for us and we continued to sit around the dinner table and learn more about Fuey's home and family.

When dinner was over and the table had been neatly cleared, we all went out into the front yard. While the adults socialized and asked questions about each other's lives, I decided to play ball with the three girls. Varying in age and size, we threw and whipped the ball around, sometimes so hard that it would fly into the bushes or across the street. Even Miriam enjoyed these games although she was small and inexperienced in playing them. As we played, I began to notice the same sparkle in her eyes that my little sister gets when she is included in playing with the older girls. I was glad to be able to satisfy this small part of her longing. When the ball throwing and kicking became boring to Miriam I picked her up and twirled her around several times. Finally, we were both so dizzy that we collapsed on the ground, mesmerized by swimming images of trees and grass, and erupting with giggles amidst the orange and banana trees in the front lawn.

Rather than ending the evening there in the yard, Fuey decided to take us down the road to his mother's house so that we could meet her. Tossing Miriam on my back, we walked the five minutes down the road to Bibi-Fuey's home as Fuey explained that in most towns and villages family members live either in the same compound together or fairly close to each other. This way everyone can help the elders with daily chores and the children always have someone around to watch over them when the other adults are away at work or the market. Walking up a slightly longer driveway past a neatly kept vegetable garden and bushes with big purple flowers blooming on them, we found Bibi's home, which was similar in style and structure to that of Fuey's. Bibi came out to the porch and greeted each of us with a handshake or a hug and invited us into her home.

Bibi was a young looking grandma with the only signs of aging being the few wrinkles stretched across her dark forehead and cheeks. Looking into Bibi's face, Fuey's

same eyes and smile stared back at you, mirroring the same kindness and hospitality. We sat on the plastic-covered furniture; a trend apparently not only adopted by American grandmas, and found that unlike many older people in Tanzania, Bibi's English was clear and easy to understand. After giving us a short tour of the house and receiving several compliments about her son, Bibi asked us to join her in the back yard to take a look at what she called her chicken project. We made our way to the back of the house and stepped out onto a patio area where the floor was decorated with broken tile, glass, and pottery pieces in a colorful mosaic. Behind the house stood an old shed filled with what appeared to be at least a hundred stinky chickens. To this day, I still have no idea what kind of project Bibi was running with those chickens, whether it was selling them to a local restaurant or breeding them. Nonetheless, we all filed in two at a time to look at the chickens and shake our heads in approval and amazement and then file back out to catch a breath of fresh air again.

When the sun had disappeared under the horizon and left only a few streamers of pink light jetting towards the sky, we climbed back into the Land Cruiser with Vickie and Miriam in tow and headed back to the lodge. Miriam climbed on my lap, diligently pressing her plastic cow again and allowing it to moo away, cutting through the chatty conversation in the vehicle. As the last natural light of the sky slipped away and was replaced by the nightlights of the city, a wedding procession blared music that filled the streets with the sounds of trumpets and drums. More people emerged from their homes and businesses and socialized in the streets, laughing and strolling arm in arm. The road jostled the truck from side to side and began the process of rocking Miriam to sleep in my arms. When the plastic mooing finally ceased and the small body fell limp, I knew the

road had accomplished its challenge. The wind whistled in through the open windows and a sweet peace fell over me as well. I felt blessed to be a part of this warm summer evening in Arusha with a family that showed me the same kindness and wisdom as my own. Suddenly, I felt the same way I imagine Fuey feels while on long tours into the countryside. There, in the midst of a busy street and a bumpy road, I was homesick.

Coda

“Once you have traveled, the voyage never ends, but is played out over and over again in the quietest chambers. The mind can never break off from the journey.” -Pat Conroy

When I started this collection of essays, I set out with the goal of sharing my experiences with others and showing them Tanzania’s people, wildlife, and cultural practices through the eyes of a humble observer. In the process, however, I have found that the experiences that I encountered during both tours have helped to shape me into the woman I am today. I have felt the kindness and hospitality of the Tanzanian people, been awestruck by the beauty and grandeur of the country, and embraced the differences in culture in ways that have deeply impacted my outlook on life. As a student, I have been able to experience first-hand the knowledge I have read about in my textbooks; and as a writer, I have been able to bring to life a culmination of extraordinary experiences in order to share with others.

I am blessed to be able to take such a meaningful experience in my life and to mold it into a research project that reflects hard work and meditation. Through my study of travel writing and the time that I was able to spend immersed in another culture, I have learned how to better understand and communicate with people who are vastly different from myself. I have been forced to fight through stereotypes, overcome prejudices, set aside apprehension and truly embrace a culture vastly different from my own.

After my first trip to Tanzania, I was unable to chase the wonderful people that I met from my mind, and soon enough the call to return became so great that I could not resist. I will never forget the people that I have met, or the opportunities that I have had to broaden my ways of thinking and my views of other cultures. Tanzania and its people have had a lasting impression on both my mind and my heart and I can only hope that a

mere glimmer of its radiance has shone through in this collection. My mind will forever revisit my time spent in Tanzania until it drives me, once again, to return.

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