

Tanzania Journal

July 20, 2007

So here I am, sitting in Amsterdam, awaiting my departure to the Kilimanjaro airport. Why am I here? I have no idea... one of those decisions you make months in advance, hoping that by the time you leave you will be ready to go. A small part of me just wants to go home, that familiar pull in my chest...making it a little hard to breath and the want to cry a little stronger. It is only five weeks, yet the changes I am about to go through will most likely be immeasurable. I wonder what I will write five weeks from now in this same airport...awaiting my flight to go home. Will I have a new determination and hope? Will I have clearer ideas for my life? Or will I feel like I do now... a little lost, a need to do more in the word, but scared about what that means about the lifestyle I will have to chose. I'll be 21 at the end of the month. How old I feel! Yet I know I am still so young, just a baby in the life I am starting to live for myself.

Too many times in my life I am so scared at the beginning that I miss out. This time I refuse to. It is 35 days, and I will live each one to the fullest. I will not waste my time with sorrowful dreams of home. Miss it...yes, but I will not let it hold me back. I will channel fear into energy and let it drive me through.

They brought up the shades on the bay windows, looking out onto the tarmac. It is amazing how a little sunlight can make your world feel better. I fly out on KLM airlines, which, according to Dad, was one of the ones Grandpa Kenneth always flew on. Mom said Grandma was here with me, perhaps he is too. In a way, I connect this trip to Grandma Glenna... I hope she feels that I am here, experiencing a continent that always enthralled her. I'm exhausted and hungry...with two more hours until my next flight I keep wanting to grab my computer and connect to home. But its 3 in the morning there, and it would do me no good. I need to become comfortable with this separation.

July 21, 2007

I have to keep reminding myself that all of this will be funny when I get home. How 9:45 is 10 past 9 somehow? I have yet to see two cocks match, I haven't eaten or drank water in hours and I have a toilet that won't flush. The view from my window overlooks part of Moshi. I can't wait to come back with a group. This would all be so much easier with just one person. But in reality I'm doing fine. I'm not great, but I'll be okay. God knows when I should go down and

wait for my ride. I'll just sit there and read. The sun is starting to come out a little more here. Again, amazing how much it can make you feel a little better.

Finally! Safe in my mosquito net! Today was amazing, got to the home base and instantly felt better. Went to an orphanage this afternoon, and was amazed at their faces..so bright and smiling. How is it that we mope and whine when we have so much, and they laugh and enjoy every minute of life while they have so little? But I guess who defines "little"? They are loved, they have a place to live, they learn, they eat, and they have clothes (though they are torn and often dirty)> But if what we had were measured not by material but by our ability to love and trust, by our laughter and willingness to enjoy life, those children have more than we could ever imagine.

Spent so much time talking to people today. Found some people I am going to enjoy, and some others who won't necessarily be my best friends at the end of this. But in front of them I must remember to remain true to myself. This is my experience, not theirs. They don't care what I do or say, it is all in my own head. Starting to get a little nervous about the length of my stay. A lot of people are only staying for three weeks, so I guess we will see how that all goes.

July 22, 2007

The days are going slowly... it is only Sunday. I am excited to just get things moving, and I hope I do okay when they do! My placement doesn't seem too hard, but I am definitely going to need to be creative with teaching tools I think.

Nothing really new to write, just feel a little stalemated at the moment. We are going on Safari this weekend... so stoked. I forget exactly where we are going but we get to spend some time visiting the Masaai, so that should be pretty sweet.

One thing that is funny is I think we are all pretty liberal/progressive here, but views are still so different. Dinner time!

July 24, 2007

First day of placement! It was a little more overwhelming than I thought it was going to be. Even though there are resources in the classroom, they don't seem to be using them. With so many children it would be hard to use them effectively. I'm supposed to teach English tomorrow, a little nervous but not really thinking about it... which isn't very good. I can't concentrate at the moment; I'll try and write later.

July 25, 2007

I still don't have the concentration to write for some reason. I want to write about placement but there isn't much to say. Everyone is sweet, but with so many kids I'm just not sure what to do. Just try and work with the chaos I guess.

A little girl at the orphanage yesterday taught me the names of my fingers in Swahili. I struggled a lot, but she was so happy when I finally got it right. ☺

July 29, 2007

Wow, just got back from Safari and not quite sure where to start. The animals we saw were absolutely amazing- zebras, hippos, elephants, giraffes, warthogs, weird deer things, *tons* of monkeys, and even some lions! The landscapes were beautiful: the Ngorogoro crater was immense, and driving up over the ridge was just so majestic. I wonder what Grandma Glenna was attracted to about this continent... the trees that don't even seem that tall but are just so thick and twisted together, their trunks all knotted. They were so sturdy. The animals didn't even seem real. Elephants so wrinkly they looked prehistoric. Their eyelashes were beautiful. The giraffes moved so gracefully...a 25 foot animal gliding across the grass. They just stare right back at you. I wonder what they think of it all. We also stopped in on a Masai village but it was a little disturbing. On the way in, we didn't realize but there was a little shop with flush toilets right outside of the entrance to their homes. They live in mud and stick houses with one room. One house per wife who were all married to one man. It was just so awkward, as people were posing for pictures with these people as if they were artifacts. And do they do that voluntarily? Or do they have to do it... and is it necessarily wrong? It is just so hard to think about "culture" in a world that is always changing. But it has always changed... culture and life will never be stagnant, yet we try so hard to keep it the same, and to hold onto our place in the world.

Just tried to call the parents – no one there. Surprise. It is a little sad to get excited about something and then it not follow through. I think I just miss the family. Amazing how fast the first week went, but I am still here a month. I hope I handle it well. I'm not saying I'm ready to go home yet, I think I just miss being in one place and having some consistency.

July 30, 2007

Tomorrow is my birthday... can't believe I am 21. I feel so old, but still so young. We're going out to dinner and to grab a few drinks. My first birthday without at

least one person from my family. Weird. I'm sure it will be just as fun. I think I am a little homesick, although I hate to admit it. I am looking forward to buying books and getting settled into classes next semester. It should be interesting to look at old e-mails to the research team. My own words as proof that I have changed. Have I grown? I'm sure I have, just not quite sure how much or in what ways yet.

I'm scared of not fulfilling my time here, scared of the last two weeks with no new found friends, scared of it being over, of starting the next new adventure.

August 4, 2007

Wow! Wow! Wow! Sitting around a charcoal fire part way up Mt. Kilimanjaro, laughing with new friends, remembering favorite moments from the past two weeks. Does it get better than this? This morning we woke up in the clouds, mist surrounded the huts we stayed in, dripping off the roof, collecting on the greenest leaves I have ever seen. It smelled so fresh and crisp, like the morning after the first snow fall when it is so quiet you can almost hear the silence. The view from my seat is breathtaking. The trees cover the ground below, spreading out and out until Mt. Meru and Moshi Town. There is beauty here that is indescribable. Hiking through mud and slush, under the canopy of trees whose trunks are just covered in moss and other life. The green is so brilliant and unwavering, broken by pink flowers and the red of the dirt. The most fertile land is on my shoes. There should be more to write, more to remember, but it is all so hard to explain, even to myself. The van ride here was just so intense. Definitely thought we were going to die when they tires began to slide. It was weird how we laughed and laughed, as though we were actually going a little crazy. I hope always live my life in such a way that if I were to die unexpectedly, those I love, those who have taught me, those I have laughed and cried with... I hope they know how eternally grateful I am for their existence. I will leave this changed, how I still don't know, but I know who and what will change me. The community here is what I want my family and community to someday mimic... full of love, care, and dedication to each other, not stepping up until we check on those who may have fallen behind. The children with their endless laughter. Victor, please let me not forget Victor! How he protects me... a little 7-year-old, dedicated to my safe journey back to our home base. The other people who have traveled here during these weeks... so many lessons learned from each of them. Nights filled with endless laughter with Chelena, Bekah, and Kelly. What amazing people! Even learning lessons from those I least expect. I had a huge discussion with Oly the other day about giving/donations; what can be

damaging and what can be helpful rides on such a thin line and any small amount of assumptions, emotions, quick decisions, can push you to the opposite side. From talking to him, I realized how important it is to look at every side of every argument (even when I think I am sure that I am right!). I don't agree with what he is doing, "building" the school... just handing over the money to do it, but I do understand and respect that need to do something. I struggle with the want to do a project, to raise money for the school... but what is more helpful... getting them a pencil sharpener or just hugging and hugging and hugging them until they're sick with love? I need to go to the orphanage more, those kids are just so beautiful with happiness.

Holy shit! I am in Tanzania! Never a year and a half ago would I have known this is where I was going to be today. Where will I be five months from now? Studying abroad? Back in San Francisco? I think I want to be away for a while again, but somewhere else I've never been. SF is attractive, but it wouldn't be the same, and I think I would be going because I know it is comfortable. I need to take these years to grow as much as possible, stretch my arms and catch as much as I possibly can. I just want to keep writing, and I know there is so much to put down but I'm struggling to get it out. Sometimes I wish I could share this someone... but I must remember that even in the loneliest times, I am... I am sharing this with myself.

August 5, 2007

Ugh, what a disappointing end to what could have been a beautiful weekend. Last night, we all went to bed and I guess Gabby, one of our coordinators went into one of the girls' cabins and started saying weird shit about ghosts or something to try and freak them out. Long story short, this morning made a big deal out of it and we are going home early. I guess I understand being freaked out, but to make all of us pack up and go home early? I don't know, it just all seems a little dramatic, like little rich girls who didn't get their way so we have to make a fuss. I guess I just feel bad for the staff here... they have been so welcoming and warm and we're taking it out on them. We could have easily just ignored Gabby and reported it to his boss when we got back home. I think this has opened a can of worms within the group. Why must we all be so destructive? I'm just a little sick of our "taking" kind of attitude. I'm starting to miss my family. I think I am realizing how close we are, well, I guess I have known but I want to be closer with them. Make more of an effort to get close to the boys and stay in touch with Danny. I'll put my time and energy out and hopefully it will return. We all talk about our families here, and they are all so different. I'm grateful for my parents' support. Unwavering support, I should say.

Everything is so damp here, waiting for the fateful vans to take us back down the mountain. My bones are cold...brrr. The other night, my birthday actually, there was an earthquake a little ways away. We felt it at the home base and I don't know why but it started this wave of fear that slowly swept over me. A fear of the unknown, of dying so far from what I know. I had to get out of bed and cuddle with the mamas (two older women who are volunteering here as well). It made me feel better, but I wish I knew that the fear was really about. I thought I was going to be sick, and I couldn't hold back the tears. There is no point in fearing what we do not know, but I just couldn't hold it back in that moment.

August 6, 2007

I hope I never doubt the power and strength that lies in compassion, as much as it can be hard, and as much as people don't want us to, I hope I always forgive people. Dad is supposed to call in a bit, should be good to talk to him and just check in a bit. It is already the start of the third week here, crazy! Yet I still have a while to enjoy my time here. It is going to be weird when the next group comes in... supposed to be about 27 people I think. It will be nice to get new people in and switch it up a bit, but I'm also nervous about it being me separated from the new big group. The 4th week will most likely be touch and the 5th week will be bittersweet... story of my life!

August 10, 2007

Peoples three weeks are coming to an end, it doesn't even seem possible! I'm nervous to start this whole process again. To have to meet new people... and this time get into it from the "outside" in a way. A group of therapists are coming to do art therapy with the people here. I'm frightened that they are coming here with their own agenda. How are they going to do therapy for three weeks with people and a culture you don't know in a language you can't speak? I guess we'll just see what happens, I shouldn't be negative about something I don't even know. A small part of me is ready to go now... pack up with everyone else and get back to what I know. I say that like I don't know what I've been doing... but I did. California was such an amazing experience; I still haven't really gotten the chance to look back on it. Life is so surreal right now, as if time were standing still while simultaneously speeding by. What did I learn in California? No idea. It is going to be so helpful to look back at the e-mails that were written, its hard to even remember all that happened, all the people I built my life around there.

I'm not ready to say goodbye to Chelena, Kelly, Bekah, and the Mamas. They are seriously some of the greatest people I have ever met. I hope I stay in contact with them all, especially Chelena. She is such a free and caring spirit. Definitely traits I could and have learned from. At the same time, I can't want to get back and see the girls at school.

August 14, 2007

The group I came in with has pretty much left, and the next group has come in. The home base has such a new atmosphere; it is not as welcoming here anymore. Not as much laughter. I almost wish I had just gone home after three weeks and not seen this group coming in. They are mostly art therapists, coming to introduce their field to the people in this area. I really don't think you can come into a situation like this with expectations and your own aims. They aren't opening up to the community at all, sticking to themselves and their plan. I really miss the old group. I doubt that community soccer games and school concerts will come from this group. I hope, for the community's sake, and their own, that they open their minds to the endless possibilities that surround them. I hope I don't let their personalities and agenda ruin my time here, but honestly, it is proving to be difficult. One of the professor's grandchild is here and he comes to my placement. He caused havoc today with the other kids and I got attitude from his grandpa for scolding him. Whatever, I hate being this negative and all I really want to do is sleep, a sure sign that I am feeling under the weather.

August 19, 2007

Just sitting around on a lazy Sunday morning, waiting for lunch. Only a week left here, and I can't believe time here has gone this fast. This week my afternoons should be pretty busy, and I foresee it going by pretty quickly after today.

I used to be so content with staying home. What the hell happened to that? Honestly, sometimes I think it is part of Hannah that has been ingrained on me somehow. I want to see it all, but at some point, while I be ready to come home and stay for a while? I don't want to wander forever. I am still so young in the grand scheme of things, still so much time to explore.

The group got back from a weekend trip today and people are settling in nicely. There are definitely some good people here, and I am sorry I overlooked them so

quickly. I shouldn't be so quick to judge people.. let me learn to try and be more open minded. This is how I want the world to be, so I should reflect it. I hope I continue to live my life in away that could be a benefit to others. I hope I live that way now.

There is so much I want to do when I get home. I'm excited to move into school, I want to get my books. I am excited to road trip back home fro a few days and see my family.

August 24, 2007

I fly out of Tanzania tomorrow. I honestly can't believe it. Where did the past five weeks go? I don't really know what to feel or what to do. Just wait to get on the plane and say my goodbyes. I've nervous to go back home. It isn't going to be the same at school and I think it is going to take a while to settle back in.

August 26, 2007

Well it is for real... on the last leg of my journey back to Boston. Shed a few tears at the airport and told everyone I would be back to Tanzania. Is that the truth? Will I return to Moshi and drive down the bumpy streets of Rau? Only time will tel I guess, but I hope I do return again or at least see some people I met there again. Sitting at the Kilimanjaro airport, Maliah form co-op in San Francisco walked by... so funny how small the world is. I remember sitting down at the airport and actually thinking "wouldn't it be funny if I saw someone I knew?" And half an hour later, there she was! So strange, but also really comforting.

What do I want to remember from Tanzania years from now? I want to remember the smiles of the community, Simbo picking me up from the airport, pub nights, walking home with Victor, laughing with the teachers at school, Dada Gertrude, Mt Kili hovering above the clouds as if it were the throne of the Gods, not all the way to the sky but not touching the ground. I want to remember trips with the girls in the first three weeks, the kindness of the Mamas, MacDaddy's laugh, Farahani, Kileo, Amani... their helpfulness and humor, van rides and the drivers, Luka... wow there was just so much on this trip. I'll never write it all down, but I hope the happiness and warmth it all showed me stays with me forever.

I'm honestly scared to go home and face the differences. Will my friends have changed a lot? How will I react differently to situations?