

I have a crazy amount of schoolwork to do, so naturally I decided to take time and write a really long e-mail to my friends and family! Thank you for allowing me to use you as a source of my procrastination. As always, feel free to ignore it or forward it to whomever you think is interested. I have posted new pictures at:
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/9184416@N04/?saved=1>.

Baptisms in the Bush: Most of my experience of Tanzania has been in Dar, but only 15% of the people in Tanzania live in cities, so I was concerned I was not getting the full Tanzanian experience. I was encouraged to contact Pastor Herb Haefermann, a pastor who has lived and worked in Tanzania for 45 years. He has been a bishop of the Tanzanian church, has helped establish a Lutheran secondary school and language school, and has helped train evangelists (church personnel who have not gone to seminary) and pastors. He speaks fluent Swahili and is considered Tanzanian now, and much accepted into the Massai community. Pastor Herb kindly allowed me to follow him around one weekend.

The first day we went to a Massai village in the bush. This community of primarily four extended families had decided they wanted to become Christian, but were much offended by the local Pentecostal church that told them they were all sinners doomed to hell and that they had to quit wearing their traditional clothes and turn to God. The Massai tribe is known for holding on to traditional dress and lifestyles more so than other Tanzanian tribes. The Pentecostal church was causing so much disturbance, in fact, that the militia were called in to settle them down! The elders of this village called Pastor Haefermann and his team in, who pointed out that God is about love, not hate and judgment. The entire village wanted to be baptized.

We took a 4x4 vehicle with 10 people stacked in it to this village – including me. The village was literally in the middle of nowhere and the road ended before we got there! The car just wove around trees and bushes and cattle and goats until we found one particular tree and unloaded. The women were already there starting a fire for the tea. We walked around to admire the cattle. Massai raise cattle for milk and sale, but rarely eat its meat. Cattle are considered sacred, so admiring them makes for good diplomacy! I met the goat that was butchered in our honor, and visited a boma – the traditional homes of the Massai made out of sticks and mud.

We returned to the tree, where a large mat was laid out. Grandmothers and babies gathered on the mat, while the women helped with the cooking and the children played nearby. The evangelists began gathering the families to register them for baptism. I sat on the mat and tried to speak with the grandmothers, but they do not know Swahili. They speak KiMassai – the Massai tribal language. However, I got to hold the babies (no diapers so a bit of a risk!) and the children touched and combed my hair. They were particularly fascinated with the bottoms of my feet (they are very white and soft), the hair on my arms (they do not have hair on their arms and legs) and my glasses. The Lutheran baptismal documents are considered official records of birth and age by the government because so many people are born outside of a hospital. Those that fill them out are careful to make them accurate, but this is difficult given the fact that many tribes do not recognize or celebrate birthdays. Most people do not know their age exactly. So, there is much debate among the family when the documents are filled out. Herb told me if a woman does not know her age, he asks if she was married at the traditional age (16). Then he asks if she got pregnant quickly. If so, he asks the age of the child and adds 16 years to that age. Older and

younger siblings are then arranged accordingly. Older men and women are more difficult. The names are a bit of a challenge too – and many want a new name that is Christian, which also causes some debate. In addition to the basic facts – the pastor also checks to make sure that the person understands the meaning of baptism and communion. The evangelists have done this previously, but it is essential for them to understand the commitment. Polygamy is legal in TZ and common among the Massai. So common, in fact, that the churches have developed rules for those becoming Christian – once you are baptized you cannot have any additional wives, nor may you arrange for multiple wives for your sons. However, you may keep all of the wives you currently have. One of the evangelists told me, however, that many Massai are moving towards one wife because they are beginning to understand the importance of having fewer children – and sending those children to school. Only one person in this village could read.

Slowly the community gathered – dressed in their best. The men wore their traditional robes, sandals, and carried their warrior knives and clubs. The women changed into their traditional purple and blue clothes and added additional necklaces, earrings, bracelets, and ankle rings. Massai women are known for their jewelry and beadwork. At a young age their ears are pierced and the hole is slowly expanded until – by adulthood – you could fit a silver dollar through the hole and the woman can wear many earrings at once.

While all this was going on, one of the evangelists gathered some of the girls and formed a choir, while another one gathered the men and did the same. The service was held under a tree. The women sat on a mat and the men crouched together in a circle. Benches and a few chairs materialized for the guests and the pastors. We began the service with a song from the choirs.

The service was magical – gathered under a tree in the middle of Tanzania. Yet it felt more like a church than many of the cathedrals I have visited. The choirs sang – and then the choir members were baptized. Forty-four (44) men, women and children were baptized that day using a bowl and a bucket. I tried to take as many pictures as I could, but because the two pastors were baptizing simultaneously (a Massai pastor came along too), I could not catch them all. After the baptisms, Pastor gave a sermon on the meaning of baptism – that they have been marked by God. You do not change your marks anymore than you change the marks on your cattle. That they are now part of a holy family.

The evangelists carried out cushions and we all had communion. Pastor explained again what it meant. And maybe the concept of communion is not so difficult to grasp for the Massai. One of their major food sources is blood from their most honored cattle. Then we sang. Everyone gathered in a circle and the Massai danced and added their guttural sounds (the men) or their high-pitched undulations (the women). We prayed and then – like all good Christians – we ate!

It was getting dark, and we had to rush through the meal. (No daylight plus no road means lost in the bush!) The women traditionally eat separate from the men, but I was made an honorary man since there were no other women guests and guests are served first. Roasted goat, rice with sauce (not sure what was in the sauce – hopefully no blood) and a soda – as the sun set over the bush. Most ate with their hands, but since I have tried, but not mastered that skill, some spoons materialized. Then we piled back into the car and headed back over the bush. Pastor believes a church will be built one day under that tree, but I think one already exists.

Death is Near: The life expectancy of Tanzanians is 43. It used to be 46, but the AIDS epidemic is taking its toll on the country. Death – particularly early death – is very common here. It is not unusual for four or five of my students in every class to legitimately miss a test or the due date of an assignment due to a death in the family. In particular, if the student is the oldest son in the family, they are expected to represent the family at all extended family events – including funerals. Another volunteer missionary is a retired hospital administrator who is helping open a new hospital. I asked him what was different about Tanzanian hospitals from those in the states and he said that in Tanzania the hospitals are filled with young people (mostly AIDS patients), while the hospitals in the US are primarily occupied by the elderly. You would think that with so many births and so much death in a country that life would be devalued, but it is not. Relationships are treasured above everything and every day of health and life is a gift. One common greeting is "Mzima?", which means, "Are you healthy?" I was told that you should always answer "yes" regardless of how you are feeling or they would take you to the hospital immediately!

Cold Countries vs. Warm Countries: It is not uncommon for the Mzungu here to grumble about how long it takes to get anything done. A trip to the post office could take a day. Friends spent three days getting a driver's license. Heaven help you if you need to go to the immigration office. Court cases take 10 years.

One guy I spoke with had read a book about warm and cold countries, which had an interesting theory. All of us whose ancestors came from countries where it snows and ices and freezes are planners and always in a hurry. We are genetically programmed to be this way. If you did not start chopping wood in May, you would freeze to death in January. If you did not plant the crops in the spring, you would starve in the winter. We were always saving up and looking forward just to stay alive.

But in countries near the equator, such planning was not necessary. Food grows year-round and even at its coldest (except on Mt. Kili) you cannot freeze to death. In fact, if you rush around too much in the hot sun, you will make yourself sick. So, people in warm countries are programmed to take it slow. In fact, Tanzanians have a saying, "Haracka, Haracka Heina Baraka" which means "Hurry, Hurry, no Blessings." To go slowly and steadily is encouraged.

Going to the Fundi: I have collected a number of kangas and pieces of fabric since I have come here, but never had any time to have anything made. However, the combination of harsh water and sun are slowly deteriorating my clothes. Kathleen finally took me to her fundi. The word "fundi" is a generic name for any specialized worker, so a fundi fixes your car, or sharpens your knives, or builds your walls, or makes your clothes. His store is in a shop in the neighborhood made out of a shipping container. Those big metal rectangles that are loaded onto ships are frequently used in construction in Tanzania. Unfortunately, because African countries import more than they export, there are plenty of them available at cheap prices. His shop is only a fourth of the size of the container – smaller than my mother's closet! Yet this is how he makes his livelihood – selling and stitching fabric with his foot-operated sewing machine. There are no patterns. You simply draw him a picture. He measures you, sketches out a design for you to approve, and you come back a few weeks later. He is very good and I have enjoyed his creations for me. He is also cheap. I had three skirts, one pair of pants and a shirt sewed for 15,000 Tsh (less than \$15).

Malaria – The Sequel: As further verification that I am merely comic relief for God, I got sick out of the window of my classroom during class the other day. I was feeling fine, and then it just hit me and I ran for the window. Some students offered to take me to the hospital, to carry my bag, to get me some water, etc. But I was fine. What is a little humiliation to a mzungu in her first year in the country? As I walked home from my night class, the sliver of a moon was smiling at me and I knew God was laughing! (I am fine now Mom!)

A Gold Medal in the Tanzanian Olympics: I have shared with you the crowded dala dala (minibus) rides I have taken, and how some people actually jump through the windows to ensure that they will obtain a seat during rush hour. I do not believe I am physically capable of doing this, nor will I shove aside the weak to obtain a seat – which means the wait can be quite long. However, one day I traveled into town and when the car stopped, there was such a rush to get on the dala dala, I did not see how I could be strong enough to push my way out. I was sitting by a window in the back – and after a little contemplation, hiked up my skirt and successfully jumped out! A 10 point landing, I might add – no broken bones.

I hope this finds you and your family happy and healthy. Please stay out of the way of all the floods and tornados and have a good summer for me!

Love, Susan