
TANZANIA CONNECTIONS

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Thoughts on Returning to the US (Hannah)

The other day someone pointed out that we'd been home for about three months. It's hard to believe. The time has flown by since we said goodbye to our friends and neighbors and returned from Manow. On our last day we were running all over, saying goodbye to everyone until the sun went down. The next morning we left early with a last-minute ride from our friend Klaus. It felt very strange to watch the road to Lwangwa go by for the last time from behind a car window.



The last week in Tanzania was exciting but blurry. Vacationing almost felt more stressful than the comfortable rhythm we'd found while teaching. I was still adjusting to the idea that I wouldn't be returning to Manow as well as anticipating the excitement of coming home.

We arrived in New York in the afternoon on December 17th. Suddenly it was Christmas time! Although we'd heard a few carols playing on the streets of Dar es Salaam the day, before it was nothing compared to the energy of New York at Christmas time, not to mention the excited welcome of our families. The first few days back I felt very quiet. It felt like I was just stepping back into my life, as if the last three, very special months hadn't happened.

During our time in Manow I had thought about what it would be like to return and how difficult it would be to describe and convey my experiences. Trying to

relay and process the significance of the previous months in the midst of the holidays was difficult. Everyone wanted to hear stories but I was still processing how to fit my experiences into the life I'd just returned to.

I've traveled overseas before, and experienced minor culture shock, but walking into a grocery store after returning from Manow was an entirely new experience. I was so confused to find pre-chopped red onions in little plastic containers for sale in the produce section. Why would that ever be necessary? The abundance of food, images, sounds, people, cars, and clothing in our culture was shocking and overwhelming. I felt quiet next to all of the noise around me.

Now, three months later, I've adjusted to being back. Sometimes my time in Manow feels like a dream. My memories from Manow drift further away and I suddenly find myself engaged in busy thoughts of finishing college.

Still, in the confusion of being back I remember the friendships we made with people of Manow, especially our students and how important those relationships are to me. I miss the excitement and eagerness of our students and I miss sitting quietly with Mama Mwasamwaja while we both weave our mkeka (mats).



I realize now that our culture depends on the ability to be in constant contact with anyone with whom we've ever crossed paths. I feel this is especially true within my generation. The internet and different social media networks enable us to never lose touch. Perhaps this is one reason these memories of Tanzania begin to feel dream-like; the relationships that support them aren't being maintained with the same constancy that shapes my other relationships.

It's sad to feel like I've lost contact with some of the most important people I've ever met but it also makes them unique. The relationships I made in Manow remain in Manow and I know I will be there again someday. I've enjoyed sharing stories about our class, program, and friendships as well as acknowledging their impact on me as I move forward.

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- Visit our website:
<http://tanzaniateachingfoundation.org/>