
TANZANIA CONNECTIONS

Nancy Winters and Martin Werner

November 2015

Class Song

Our class is really into singing, and they're good! We've found that singing is a good way for them to vent energy and settle down for the next round of sentence writing, or whatever else is on the schedule. Their favorite song is "When the Saints Come Marching." Our version has 12 verses, so we have a rich menu to "pick and choose" from on any given day. Plus, it's a song that lends itself to easily making up extra original verses. For example, Nancy broke into a verse "Oh when the students, pass in their quiz." The kids joined in as though it was the most natural thing in the world, and then continued on with a few more verses. All silliness aside, it is really moving (literally, since they clap and dance) to hear and see them sing. We have a lot of visitors come through our classroom, and we often treat them to this song when they are ready to leave. We can see that they enjoy the singing too. *Marty*

Class Progress

Nancy and I were quite optimistic early on that we had a class advanced in English this year. Well, as it turns out, their progress hasn't been what we had hoped. There are a lot of unknowns and we are not sure we can explain why, but we think most students never got into the habit of studying at home. We had essentially no power during waking hours for the first five weeks of the course. If we had any power, it would be for 3 to 4 hour between 2am and 5am. We had several stretches where there was no power at all for 48 to 60 hours. (This was because of glitches in converting to natural gas produced power nationwide, and because dams which had produced power for this area are low due to drought.) Most of our kids have a long walk home and chores to do

during the daylight. It must have been very hard to study by candlelight.

Candlelight and headlamps are how we prepared and graded quizzes and tests. It was far less than ideal! We're almost always in bed by 8 pm.

Now, we have more consistent power, but we have not seen signs that the students are studying any harder. Bad habits are hard to break.

We are confident that they are getting a lot out of the course – particularly with sentence writing, vocabulary and grammar, which are the topics we focus on in class. But, they are not doing as well with topics like "healthy living," "first aid," and "sustainable farming."
Marty

And Then Came the Rains

As we were finishing up our "Sustainable Farm" unit in week seven, we had torrential rains. These are nothing like I have experienced anywhere else. We think it rained between 5 and 6 inches in less than 48 hours. And the rains continued for several days, although not as hard as the first two days. Rain at that intensity made teaching a real challenge because we could hardly be heard over the collisions between the drops and our classroom's metal roof. What was amazing is that all but four of our students braved the weather and showed up for class in the deluge. We were overwhelmed by the tenacity of the students.

The rains required constant mopping of the floor in our house. We awoke the first morning to a yard-wide swath that crossed the living room floor and flowed into the dining room. After mopping it several times, we created a dam at the front door out of cardboard box tops wrapped in plastic bags and placed upright in the crevice at the front door. That helped to reduce the number of times per day we were mopping.

The rains also brought an opportunity for a “teachable moment.” Between last year and this year the hill behind our house was cleared of trees and brush and a field of corn had been planted. After the rains it was a showcase for what not to do. The field was neither terraced nor contour ploughed. The valuable top soil careened down the hill (several cubic yards of it) into our back yard. And the soil completely filled our personal land fill to the top. The concept of erosion became very real when we brought the students over to witness the devastation.

Nancy

November Means MANGOES

On October 31 mangoes showed up at the local market. There are bags upon 100 pound bags of mangoes, and almost forty vendors selling them. Perfectly tree ripened mangoes that cost from \$0.05 to \$0.10 a piece, depending on size and variety (we bought 35 for \$0.50 at a road side stand). It is amazing! They come from 15 kilometers away and 1,500-foot lower elevation. That makes them the second most traveled food we eat here (rice comes the furthest – from maybe 30 kilometers away and 3,000 feet lower). There are no apples from New Zealand or grapes from Chile here. We eat locally, and we eat well. This is a very rich area for a wide variety of really good fruits and vegetables.

The area has rich volcanic soil, plenty of rain, a twelve-month growing season, and intense sun. All of that, and it is very mountainous. You don't have to go far at all to gain or lose thousands of feet of elevation. The elevation difference leads to multiple microclimates and I think that is a big reason for such a rich variety of foods. Cabbage, beans, peas, corn, bananas, avocados, “spinach”, potatoes, sweet potatoes, yams and tea grow well right here. From ten kilometers away and 1000 feet lower come tomatoes and peppers, and as you keep losing elevation you go through the mango and rice zones (not to mention all the other produce).

We just learned that whereas it takes 80 to 100 years in parts of the US for certain trees (like sweet gum in SE US) to reach a marketable size, it takes only 15 to 20 years here to reach

the same size. All this helps to explain why the land can support so many people.

Marty

Goodbye My Loves

Today we said goodbye to our beloved students. It was an early and unplanned farewell. We had returned the exams, celebrated completion with certificates, sung songs, listened to Marty's sixth and final chapter of “Jack and the Bean Tree,” did class evaluations, and wrote one last thank you note to Martin Mwakaje for all his help. We had gone down to the school's field and played a rousing soccer match of girls against boys - a complete coup since 2001, when girls were not allowed to play football. We had planned our annual hike up Mount Kyedjo tomorrow. And then the rains came – again making the trail too slick for the climb. We ran back to the classroom and holed up there until a slight let up. Goodbyes were all too brief and shouted to one another over the clatter on the roof. I will miss the smiling faces of our students, their silly antics, and most of all their willingness to allow us to pour English down their throats for 7.5 hours a day, all in good spirits. I pray that each of them will continue to study throughout their secondary school careers.

Nancy

Send email!!

We would love to hear from you about how things are going for you. It keeps us in touch with life in the US. Please limit the size of the email as the system is still very slow here and crashes easily. Our email addresses are:

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