
TANZANIA CONNECTIONS

Jani Gilbert and Nancy Winters

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Installation of a Pastor

Recently the pastor of our local congregation was installed with much pageantry and ritual. Mwaikuka, the pastor, had presided here since last year, so I wondered why it took over a year for the actual installation. But it was worth the wait. While the Konde Diocese Bishop was not able to make it, eight other pastors including the district pastor who presided graced our tiny village in dazzling white robes and brilliant red shawls. They formed a long processional line entering during the opening hymn.

The pastors were followed by seven different choirs. Each choir had a distinctive, richly colored, matching outfit (uniform). The choir with red satin dresses and shirts with wide white collars, was followed by the full length dresses with extreme puffed sleeves in cobalt blue with very large white poka dots. My favorite choir was dressed in red, blue or yellow color outfits with contrasting two-inch buttons. My choir was completely under dressed in black skirts and red plaid shirts. And yet the outfits were a minor prelude to the amazing music of the service, which extended a full four hours.

Because of the number of choirs and visitors from distance churches, the church was more densely packed than any of our candle light services on Christmas Eve. In my eight foot long pew, we squeezed in six women, three of whom were at least twice my size. (Women are expected to be large here as a demonstration of good health and good child-bearing capability.) I spent the entire service on one hip squished, or in the local vernacular to be squished is “*kubanana*” rather like bananas growing in a tight bunch. Even with my less than comfortable seat,

realized that we seldom, if ever, get to experience this level of pageantry in the U.S. Maybe we are missing something.

Nancy

Nancy and Jani Gone Bad

Walking around the Manow/Ndembo area you may have occasion to see a small, shack-type edifice with a straw roof. Many of them have a sign on the door that says, “Saloon.” The shacks’ walls are made from halved bamboo stalks. Out of these shacks come the voices of men, especially after a day of farm work.

We were invited one day to accompany the school’s headmaster, Juma, to just such an establishment where we might talk and perhaps imbibe in a beverage of the fermented grain variety. Who were we to turn down the headmaster? We darkened the saloon door on a Friday, sat down on a less-than luxurious couch-type hunk of wood and sipped from our warm Kilimanjaro beers.



Mwasamola's Saloon

The tables and stools were wooden and few. The floor was hard packed dirt. On the walls were two calendars from previous years with pictures of cartoon children.

We spoke of the newly settled American presidential election which included some one-sided, heated reactions from us, while the men there just laughed and laughed, whether they understood or not. Everyone spoke in Swenglish (oh, about 2/3rd Swahili and 1/3rd English).

I'd like to go back, but our reputations in Manow would likely be harmed irreparably.

Jani

Mumps

In the second week of school, one of our students came down with the mumps. Martin Mwakaje told us "Mumps are not a big deal in Tanzania. Kids come to school with them all the time." Jani and I worried first because we know how contagious they are. We were concerned that other students would soon show symptoms. Secondly, we were concerned that one of us might get the mumps as neither one of us had any recollection of having them. Sure enough between two and three weeks later, four more girls came to school with the mumps. The only outward sign was their wrapped heads that looked like characters in the cartoons with toothaches. In the eight years of this program, we have never had a single case of anything other than stomach aches, headaches, and malaria. This was new.



Ndinagwe extremely swollen with mumps

By the seventh week the mumps had just completed its circuit, when a case of the chicken pox appeared. We sent Prisca home that day, but she returned the next day saying that she could come to class because the "doctor" had given her medicine. I wondered what medicine could be used to treat a virus. Luckily, Martin said we should send her home. But we are afraid that as finals approach we will have half of the class out with chicken pox.

Nancy

First Aid

In week eight, when the students have a relatively reasonable grasp of English, we teach First Aid. We focus on injuries/illnesses they are both likely to encounter and that they can help with. (We do not teach CPR because there are no ambulances, paramedics, and certainly no 911 to call.) This is a difficult subject matter despite our demonstrations, games, and student skits simulating various injuries and treatments. The difficulty comes from learning new vocabulary and concepts simultaneously. And this is most of the students' third language. The purpose of this unit is to give the students skills that can improve their lives or those of their families, regardless of their educational pathways.

It's Friday of week eight and instead of the weekly exam, the students are re-writing the symptoms and treatment for about 20 injuries from broken bones, to burns, to heat stroke. This subject will be re-enforced in secondary school. In the meantime, they may help save the life of a child with diarrhea by knowing simple re-hydration techniques. More importantly they will be able to know when to seek medical attention, which is usually reserved only for the terminal stages of any disease.

Nancy

Eating in Rural Tanzania

We walk 5 miles round trip to Luangwa every Saturday to buy food from vendors in the market. We used to lug heavy loads home on our backs and shoulders until we discovered that piki pikis (motorcycles) could be hired to carry our groceries home and put

them outside the front door. Wow! What a luxury! Instead of cursing the piki pikis for picking up dust we were suddenly grateful and I stopped crying.

In our backpacks and bags are mchicha (like spinach), Chinese cabbage, carrots, Irish and sweet potatoes, tomatoes, little bread rolls, bananas and a hunk of beef from the butcher who slaughters the cow first thing Saturday morning. Dinners are a mixture of many of these ingredients. Breakfast for us is peanut butter that we can only get in Tukuyu.

Part of the need for the help of a piki piki was the advent of mango season in early November when the street is lined with people selling from enormous baskets full of all kinds of mangos. They sell yellow mangos, green mangos, big mangos, and small mangos.

At school, the Tanzania Teaching Foundation pays for the students and the teachers (us) to have one chapatti (Africa's answer to the tortilla) and one mandazi every day at tea time. Now, mandazi is no light, healthy snack, mind you. It is a big ball of lightly sweetened, deep fried dough. I can actually feel a mandazi poke out of my stomach after ingesting one. They sort of re-form into a heavy ball after digestion.

So, you can see, we are not short of food, and I can feel with some certainty that I'll have big mandazi balls sticking out of my skin when we disembark at SeaTac in a month.

Jani

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. Jani's email address is janigilbert1@gmail.com. My correct email is wintersnl@comcast.net