

Jambo from Kenya

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Greetings from Kenya. I have returned from my first field component and I don't have worms, tuberculosis, or malaria -- so that is good. A week ago we travelled to a village about six hours away called Meru. It is located at the base of Mt. Kenya in a very lush area. The people of Meru live off the land and harvest coffee and tea. Every family owns a shamba (farm where they grow crops to sustain themselves.) When they ask about the food in America, I explain that we do not grow our own food instead we buy it from the supermarket where it has been imported from other countries or from large scale farms. Their response was "oh, here everyone is a farmer, there you only have a few." This seemed very odd to them. When I showed them pictures of my home they were amazed by snow! Trying to explain this concept was somewhat challenging.

They asked what happens to all of our crops, apparently they didn't understand that we have many climates in America where crops can be grown and transported. I didn't even attempt to explain fast food or the fact that most Americans are completely unaware of where their food comes from.

I lived with a family in a fairly decent sized home (not a hut) and was given my own room - which was an honor compared to some students who shared beds with siblings. I had seven brothers. Two are no longer living at home, one is waiting to get into college, which proves to be a challenging thing in Kenya. Usually you have to wait two years before you can apply. The application fee alone is more than most people can afford and you are not assured acceptance. There are four universities that can accommodate 10,000 students total and 40,000 apply per year (and I thought it was difficult to get into college.) Two of my brothers are in high school and two are in primary school. It is common in Kenya to have hired help. Our family had a ten year old girl who cooked and a twelve year old boy who tended to the cows. Most of my days were spent visiting family friends. I felt like I was on display all week. Most of the children I met had never seen a white person. They were scared and shy but once they got used to me they all wanted to touch my hair.

I insisted that my family have me do what they do in a typical day. The next morning I was woken up at 6:00 a.m. to milk the cow, afterwards I helped collect wood for the fire, breakfast was then made, which took about an hour. Water was collected in jerry cans to wash the dishes. After the

chores were completed I was brought to the shamba about a kilometer away where my family grows coffee, maize, beans, peas, spinach, tomatoes, and has about ten different fruit trees on their property.

We tilled the fields for most of the morning and then headed home to make lunch. At home, I'm used to making a chicken salad sandwich - in Meru if chicken is served for lunch it's slaughtered first. The first day I was there I witnessed the chicken being slaughtered and its feathers plucked. It was hard watching but not as bad as a friend who had their chicken jump out of the pot after being decapitated.

If you have not heard, Kenya is experiencing a major drought right now and the water supply is very limited. My family has not seen rain in six months and their crops are severely suffering. I was constantly asked to give them advice about their current situation, agriculturally, economically, and politically. I tried to explain that I am a student who has come to observe their culture and I don't have the answers to Kenya's problems. This was hard to be in a position where I was considered these people's only help. By the end of the week I was emotionally and physically worn out. It is good to be back on the compound sharing stories of our experiences and enjoying the simple luxuries we have here, like running water and electricity (some of the time). I must say this week has certainly made me aware of how lucky we are in America. However these people live such simple lives.

They have everything they need. Their village is very peaceful and surrounded by incredible landscape. Unfortunately they have seen on TVs and books how Americans live and they consider themselves poor. I tried to tell them that they are rich in tradition and simplicity and that America is a very busy country where people have little time to appreciate the simple things in life, like where an avocado comes from. They just laughed and encouraged me to help them come to America.

We took a hike through a dried up river bed nearby. We saw a group of eight zebras. Soon after trying to get closer to them we realized we were in a game reserve and a man with a rangers uniform and gun informed us there were lions and rhinos here. We quickly turned back in the other direction.

Classes began on Monday. We travel into Nairobi (30 minutes) to a YMCA where our classes are held. Today, we were informed not to leave for lunch because there was a riot going on. Besides this incident I have felt completely safe in this country and am having an amazing experience. I hope this message finds you all healthy and happy.

Written September 30, 2000

Hamjambo - Mimi Nzuri Sana! I have just returned from Tanzania. My experience was amazing! We travelled with a safari company called Dorobo. Three brothers who grew up in Tanzania while their parents were missionaries started this company years ago. They know the land and the people very well. We began in Arusha (second largest city in Tanzania) where the Peterson brothers live and base their company out of. We headed out from there on September 17 for the Oldonyo Sambu wilderness. We travelled in two large trucks from WWII; these things could bomb through anything! However, our first day we broke down four times, so travelling was slow. Our first three nights were spent in the Oldonyo wilderness which is undeveloped property owned by the Massai. We stopped in the village near our campsite and picked up LaMaria, a Massai Warrior who was acting as the representative of the village. He carried nothing with him but a spear (which he once used to kill a lion). He was dressed in Massai garb, red blanket, tire sandals, and beaded bracelets. The area we stayed in was beautiful. We were at the base of a rock outcropping over looking the plains and the mountain called Oldonyo Sambu (meaning mountain of many stripes) due to the erosion. Just after setting up camp we witness the most incredible sunset!! The next morning we climbed Oldonyo Sambu. Our guide Daudi, carried nothing but a gun, and wore tire sandals. At the top we had a geological and geographic lesson about the area, while spotting a giraffe in the plains below. That is my idea of class.

The next day we travelled to Simanjiro Animal Health Learning Center. Basically an animal husbandry school located in the Massai village. Students attend the school for four years learning how to raise, manage, and cure livestock. The students gave us a tour of the different animal pens and dormitories, not quite like colleges in America. They then performed a modern dance for us - where they hopped around the room rapping to some American hip hop artist. It was a little embarrassing to see how the worst of our culture has filtered into a small village in Tanzania. After this the director of the school explained that they were learning from our culture and now we shall learn from theirs, by seeing traditional Massai dancing. This was such a thrill. They do this dance where they stand in a circle chanting and one student goes in the middle and jumps straight up in the air. It is incredible how high they get! Their colorful red blankets and glistening beads are quite a spectacle! Afterwards we played soccer (or rather football - as they call it).

Not only did we lose but we all walked away covered in thrushes, with mouths full of dust and severe dehydration. After the game we brought some of the students and two goats back to our camp. We slaughtered, skinned and gutted the goats. This was possibly one of the most eye opening experiences. Not only have I never prepared my own meat, but I have never learned so much about the anatomy of an animal. I even opted to eat the kidney, a delicacy in Massai culture. That night the hyenas were out in full force eating the scraps we left from the goat, which happened to be right next to my tent.

We next traveled to Tarangire National Park where we witnessed every large African animal there is to see. Elephants, giraffes, zebras, lions, baboons, monkeys, antelope, ostrich, imaplas, gazelles, a leopard and many more. That night we had a guest lecturer. Charles is a biologist who studies the effect poaching has had on elephant populations and community dynamics on Mt. Kilimanjaro, and now in Tarangire NP. His lecture definitely inspired me to pursue field biology. What a great life; observing and playing with elephants all day. We next travelled to the outskirts of Ngora Ngora Crater at the base of the Gregory escarpment. There was a waterfall near our campsite which we all took a swim in. I was fully enjoying my feeling of cleanliness when I realized my camera was gone. It was a very uncomfortable feeling. There were many village children watching as 30 Americans come crashing into their area with cameras and watches. It must have been overwhelming and unfortunately a young boy took the camera and ran into the woods. The village was hoping to get a donation from Dorobo to build a new school and the village chief assured me everything was being done to get the camera back. We left early that morning to climb up and over the Gregory escarpment where the truck was waiting. Several hours later as we were playing frisbee on the plains of the Serangetti, a truck pulled up waving a camera. Apparently as the safari

vehicle drove by, the entire village came running after it in hopes that they were travelling to the same area as us. I was overwhelmed and relieved, but had a strong feeling of guilt and hope that the young boy who took it did not suffer any repercussions.

The next couple of days we stayed in a Hadza Community. These people hunt with bow and arrows, and sustain themselves mostly on nuts, fruits, tubers, roots and honey. I didn't think these communities still existed (except in National Geographic). We traveled in small groups to different clans. Due to the drought the community breaks up into clans made up of about 13-15 members. We were lucky to be invited to participate in their daily chores. When we arrived, the women were grinding baobab nuts with stones and mixing them with water to make a porridge. We then went with them to collect roots and tubers. The men were collecting honey from nearby trees. It was so fascinating to see people live like this. We roasted the tubers over a fire started by rubbing a stick against a rock. The following morning at 5:00 a.m., we traveled, again in small groups, with the men to go hunting. Within the first ten minutes we spotted a group of zebra. We all got down while our Hadza Man took off his shirt and shoes and began stalking the zebra. As we sat there watching the sun was beginning to rise over the mountains shining down on the baobab and acacia trees, the whole scenario felt like it was out of a movie! Unfortunately, our Hadza's arrow was not successful. That night we had a pow wow on the rock outcrop adjacent to our campsite. Daudi (our guide) translated questions we had for the Hadza into their native language (a combination of Maa and clicks). We asked what they thought of Westerners and our traditions as compared to theirs. They responded that we are Americans and they are Hadza. We live our lives, they live theirs - Fanya Hevio an expression meaning do it up.

They explained to us that there is no hierarchy in there.

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