

# PIAF FELLOWS' FLYER

News and views for and by current Princeton in Africa Fellows.

May 2008



## UPCOMING EVENTS

### **New Fellows' Orientation**

*May 17-18*

### **Princeton & Africa Panel**

*May 30, 2:00 PM in Guyot 10*

This panel will discuss Princeton research, education, and outreach in Africa, the challenges faced, and future directions. The discussion will be introduced by Professor Dan Rubenstein, PiAf Board Member and Chair of Princeton's Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology. Sponsored by PiAf, EEB, and African Studies. BBQ dinner to follow!

### **PiAf Alumni Reception**

*May 31, 10:00-11:30 AM in McCosh 62*

All members of the PiAf family are invited to catch up with one another and the program. We'll share recent highlights and newly returned Fellows will be present to discuss their experiences.

### **New Fellows' Reception**

*June 2, 2:00-4:00 PM in Bobst Center Living Room*

A special Class Day reception for 2008-2009 PiAf Fellows and their families! All members of the PiAf family are invited.



## NEW EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR!

**Cordelia Persen** joined PiAf as Executive Director April 30th. Cordelia combines years of experience at small non-profits with a passion for travel and Africa in particular. Her last job was executive director of the New York Flower Market Association where she dealt with local economic development issues. She is excited to help PiAf grow and is eager to learn more about Africa through the PiAf family. Cordelia can be reached at [cpersen@princeton.edu](mailto:cpersen@princeton.edu).

## HAPPY BDAY

May 12  
Erin Blake  
Aliya Sanders

May 17  
Shelly Slemp

May 14  
Alyson Zureick

May 22  
Will Reinhardt

# NOTES FROM THE FIELD

by Marilyn Michelow, '07-'08 Fellow at UN WFP in Namibia

When I was first asked if I was interested in a PiAf position as a programme officer with the World Food Programme (WFP) in Namibia, I wasn't even sure I could place Namibia on a map. I mentioned the posting to some friends. "Oh, you mean *Nambia*," one said. "Well, good luck in *Libya*," someone else told me. Despite the fact that nobody I knew had ever heard of Namibia, I packed my bags and moved to Windhoek, the capital of this young, remote, under-populated desert nation in Southwest Africa.

Although I could not have known it at the time, Namibia has turned out to be a fascinating country in which to work for WFP. I am lucky to work in a small office, where I am exposed to much of what we do and have real opportunities to learn and lead initiatives. Although the center of Windhoek itself more closely resembles a sleepy midwestern U.S. town than an African capital, Namibia is one of the most socioeconomically unequal countries in the world, which means that outside of the capital city there is almost no development and much work to be done. I'll admit I was initially very skeptical of the use of food aid here—

there is no emergency situation that threatens to starve the population. However, WFP is trying a different kind of project in Namibia, perhaps an indication of the future of food aid across the world, using food distribution as a tool to provide Namibians with access to government social protection schemes. I am excited that I have had the chance to be a part of it.

In Namibia, WFP has two projects, the orphan and vulnerable child (OVC) social protection scheme I mentioned, and an operation to provide the food for the Osire refugee camp in central Namibia. I regularly visit the refugee camp during the food distributions, and in February had the opportunity to participate in a UNHCR/WFP Evaluation Mission to the camp where we investigated all aspects of camp life and jointly planned for the future of assistance to the Angolan and Congolese refugees who live in Osire. While I've found that my thesis in molecular biology didn't prepare me very well to understand refugee livelihood options, I've truly enjoyed the work. It seems obvious to me now, but issues surrounding refugees and camps are so much more nuanced and complicated than any inkling one can get from even a close reading of the news media in America.

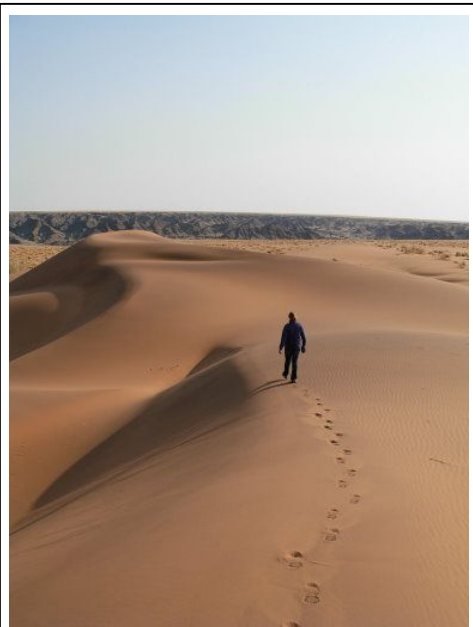
Aside from the refugees, the much larger project which I devote most of my time to is our OVC initiative. The idea of this larger project is to use food support for OVCs as a way to help families care for these children, while at the same time encouraging the children on our food lists to apply for Child Welfare Grants which are provided monthly to orphaned children by the Namibian government. Access to a social grant for a child means that the relatives supporting him or her can pay for basics like food and school fees, and this is a social protection which will last long after WFP has left Namibia. In the two years of our program, nearly 15,000 children who previously did not have access to the government grants are now receiving monthly support.

Aside from work, living in Namibia has been an incredible experience for me. My parents were originally from South Africa (of which Namibia was a colony until 1990), although they left the country long before I was born and never returned. PiAf has provided me with my first experience in Southern Africa, and although I didn't grow up here, there are aspects to my life in Windhoek that resonate on a deep level. I've grappled with the issue of race, an all-important dividing line in almost every part of life here; trying to rationalize my place in society, especially with the legacy of parents who grew up, white, in Apartheid South Africa. I've loved the opportunities for travel that I've had— Namibia is a beautiful and unique country, with stunning red sand deserts, desolate coastline, and fantastic wildlife. I've also enjoyed witnessing...

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Above: Marilyn at a food distribution



Above: Namibia's stunning red sand deserts



Above left: Downtown Windhoek; above right: Marilyn (right) on a camping trip with a friend at Spitzkoppe, in central Namibia

# NOTES FROM THE FIELD

by David Cape '07-'08 Fellow at Baylor/Bristol-Myers Squibb Children's Clinic in Lesotho



Lumela!

That's Sesotho, the language of the Basotho of Lesotho (pronounced "Le-Su-Tu"), for hello. Since August I've been the PiAf Fellow at the Baylor Clinic in Maseru, the capital. It's the largest provider of pediatric HIV care in Lesotho... 2,000 patients enrolled and counting! Lesotho has an HIV infection rate of around 25%, and despite the availability of free treatment HIV/AIDS is still the number one killer in the country.

My projects have been varied, but most fall under the category of outreach: I've organized several adolescent HIV testing events, directed a radio advertisement for our clinic (hilariously dramatized by our data managers), and linked some local orphanages to our services. Along with Sentebale, Prince Harry's charity in Lesotho, and Hole in the Wall Camps, based in New Haven, I worked on a summer camp for our HIV+ teenage patients, as well as a "Teen Club" support group at the clinic. My latest and, sadly, last project involves a mass campaign to test the children of Lesotho's female factory workers, a huge and high-risk demo-

graphic. I've also had plenty of opportunities to shadow our pediatricians and to visit our outreach clinics in the mountains, whose patients are known to ride four hours on horseback to make their appointments.

On the weekends, there's plenty to do in Lesotho...it's the hiking capital of Southern Africa, and the ski resort in the Drakensberg Range opens in early June. (Did I mention it's freezing here in the winter? Am I the only PiAf Fellow who sleeps with an electric blanket?) Sometimes I also head to South Africa for game drives, beach weekends, or nights on the town in nearby Bloemfontein.

Lesotho is a small country, but I can't fit it all into this entry. See below for a few facts about Lesotho, the Basotho, and Sesotho.

## Lesotho Facts

- Lesotho, the "Kingdom in the Sky," has the highest low-point of any country in the world. Maseru, the lowland capital, is a mile above sea level.
- The highest mountain in Southern Africa is in Lesotho... Thabana Ntlenyana, which translates as "Nice Little Mountain." (Basotho are famous in Southern Africa for their sarcasm and sense of humor).
- Lesotho is one of the only countries in the world to be landlocked by a single country.
- If you hear a siren in downtown Maseru, it's probably not an ambulance (Lesotho has no emergency services to speak of) or the police (if you call them for help they will ask for a lift to the crime scene). Nine times out of ten, it's the king! King Letsie III, the direct descendant of the founder of the Basotho nation and one of Africa's two reigning monarchs, can frequently be seen jetting around Maseru, with MP escort, or working out at the gym. He's very friendly and popular, and a patron of our clinic.

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*Above left:* Baylor/Bristol-Myers Squibb Children's Clinic in Maseru; *left:* kids posing in front of the helicopter that brought Prince Harry and Prince Seeiso to an HIV testing event; *below left:* wild horses on Thaba Bosiu, the flat-topped mountain near Maseru that is considered the birthplace of the nation; *below:* an individual testing tent at an HIV testing event



Today is April 7, 2008.

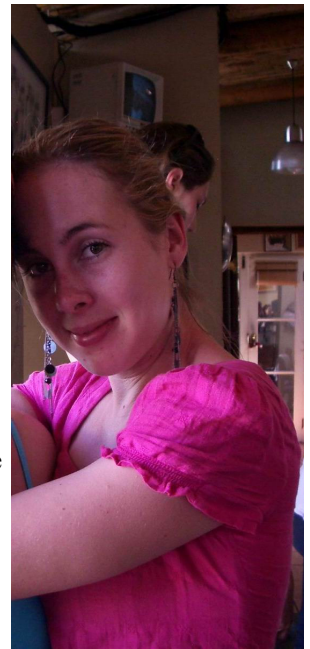
I wake up in Kibuye this morning to silence and a penetrating sun. Kibuye is located on Lake Kivu near the border with Congo. I am here to celebrate my recent promotion to children's rights and youth empowerment program coordinator for the coming year at Plan International (a development agency working to improve the lives of children) in Rwanda. I am also here to escape the fact that this promotion means that I am in way over my head. So much to learn...fast. Today, for those of you that are unfamiliar with Rwandese history, also marks the anniversary of the beginning of the genocide fourteen years ago. With two friends I go to a church overlooking the lake where 11,400 people were slaughtered by their neighbors. The stained glass windows soften the light inside. Someone must have repaired them since. We are the only people here. Fourteen years later. Outside the view is stunning, the sparkling water framed by flowers. A fisherman is singing.

We return to our hotel and I cram in a few more hours of work to develop a program outline for a rights training project with our youth/children partner. I'll give it to them tomorrow and they'll come back to me with their feedback. At the meeting last Sunday the children were full of excitement about the coming visit of Tom Miller, Plan's Chief Executive Officer. For weeks they have been practicing their skits and poems and making paintings and drawings to show him. I love this group because, when this country and this job seem like too much, they always regale me with their ideas and enthusiasm. Working with them feels good.

After a quick lunch we hitch a ride back with the country director of Catholic Relief Services. On the way we discuss his development career all over Africa and Latin America and the challenges of development in Rwanda. He tells me a story about a development project in Guatemala that posted the nutrition scores of village children in public in order to encourage men to get involved in their children's health. No man wanted his child to be last on the list. Innovative or just understanding the culture? Does it matter if it worked? We pass genocidaire prisoners (those that are accused or convicted of having participated in the genocide) in their baby pink uniforms and survivors in their purple scarves. Today is a day that brings out the miracle and the insanity of this country.

At home in Kigali, I settle in for a few more hours with Plan's Field Operations Book. I'm attempting to master the art of budgets and program outlines. These things are sink or swim if I want to deserve the position I just got. After awhile it might as well be Kinyarwanda. But like a good Princetonian I reread several times, studiously writing questions to review with our finance director.

But I am distracted listening to the silence on my usually bustling street. Two of the houseboys of my neighbor are usually performing Swahili hip hop with their radio at this hour. I have tried to join but, as indicated by their squeals of laughter, my dance moves are not up to par. How do I commemorate this day? I have come to love this country but I wasn't here during 1994. Real grief would feel disingenuous. All I can do really, is keep working. My commemoration is, in its miniscule way, my work. Children and youth will carry this country away from 1994. They are its only chance. I am a drop in an enormous ocean...full of all the people that care about Rwanda and Africa. If Sunday morning children's rights trainings and program design are what I can do, then break out the budgets and count me in. So, if I'm writing about what my life is here, this is what I have to say. Every day is full of professional experience, Rwandan history, and trying to think about a better future.



## Marilyn's Notes from the Field *continued from page 2*

... the growing pains of this young country, as it deals with its first real challenges to freedom of speech, and with the slow transformation to a true multi-party political system. Certainly some of my time here has been frustrating—Windhoek is a sleepy city not known for its buzzing culture or nightlife scene—but even this has given me an opportunity to read and reflect in ways I never seemed to have the time for before. This year has flown by incredibly fast and I can hardly imagine the culture shock that I'm going to be faced with in New York City in just a few months. I return to the States a different person from the one who left, with a much better sense of who I am and where I'd like to go.

*Below:* A community volunteer explains the importance of applying for government social grants at a food distribution for orphans and vulnerable children in northern Namibia



## David's Brief Guide to Sesotho *continued from page 3*

- *Ntate* literally means "sir" or "father" and is used as an epithet for grown men (technically those who are married, although in a professional setting someone might call me *Ntate* David). It's a very versatile word. Depending on how you inflect it, *Ntate* can mean "I don't understand" (*Ntate?* [said really quickly]), "I agree" (*Nnnnnntaate!!!*), or "hello there" (*Nnntate*).
- *Hae!* This is an exclamation of frustration which as far as I've seen covers a wide range of disasters, from spilling one's drink to rolling one's 18-wheeler into a ditch.
- *Helelele!* A form of the above, used exclusively by women; also an expression of outrage, often directed at me for a) not being married and having several children or b) coming to work with poorly pressed pants.
- *Senqaqana Seseng Le Seseng Sea Iqhomela*, which translates as "Frogs, one at a time, jump into the water." Conversational Sesotho is rich in proverbs and riddles that tend to confuse the foreigner. This example is supposed to encourage teamwork.
- *Khotso*. Literally "Peace," it's a common Sesotho greeting. *Khotso, Pula, Nala* (Peace, Rain, Prosperity) is the motto of Lesotho. The Basotho are very proud of their peaceful kingdom, which their founder Moshoeshoe I built with careful diplomacy in the face of the Zulu, Boer, and British onslaught of the mid-nineteenth century.