

PIAF FELLOWS' FLYER

News and views for and by current Princeton in Africa Fellows

June 2008



2008-2009 PIAF FELLOWS

25 Fellows will work with 13 organizations in 16 countries

ORGANIZATIONS

African Leadership Academy
 Africare
 BMS/Baylor Pediatric AIDS Initiative
 Endeavor
 International Rescue Committee
 Komku Trust
 Lurdes Mutola Foundation
 Lutheran World Federation
 mothers2mothers
 Mpala Wildlife Foundation
 Straight Talk Foundation
 Tanganyika Christian Refugee Service
 UN World Food Program



COUNTRIES

Botswana
 Burkina Faso
 Burundi
 DRC
 Ethiopia
 Ghana
 Kenya
 Lesotho
 Malawi
 Mauritania
 Mozambique
 Senegal
 Sierra Leone
 South Africa
 Tanzania
 Uganda

DEPARTING FOR AFRICA THIS MONTH:

4 full-year Fellows and 2 summer interns

From top left:

Carl Owens '08, African Leadership Academy, South Africa

Carolina Danspeckgruber '08, mothers2mothers, South Africa

Katherine Anderson '08, Tanganyika Christian Refugee Service, Tanzania

Mike Scharff '08, International Rescue Committee, Uganda

Shivani Radhakrishnan '11, Edirisa, Uganda

Jenny Zhang '09, Feedback Madagascar, Madagascar

Elizabeth Jemison '08, mothers2mothers, South Africa



HAPPY BIRTHDAY

June 10
Ritu Kamal

June 18
Sabina Sequeira

June 29
Stuart Malcolm

June 30
Emily Stehr



NOTES FROM THE FIELD

by Jessie Cronan, '07-'08 Fellow at the Tanzanian Children's Fund in Tanzania



Above: Jessie with two of "her" kids

Recently, while out for a run, I found myself face to face with a less-than-friendly baboon. After initiating eye contact, the large monkey began to move towards me. Using all of the life skills four years at Princeton instilled in me, I ran like a bat out of hell until I reached the nearest village. I enlisted the aid of a (much braver than me) young man, who, armed with rocks, escorted me back past the menacing monkey.

After living for nine months on the rim of the Ngorongoro Crater, in northern Tanzania, such close encounters with wildlife have become almost routine. Elephants tromp through our yard at night, and hyenas wander just outside our gates. I've had run-ins with killer bees and woken up to find leopard footprints on our back porch. The daily contact with animals I had previously seen only on "Planet Earth" serves as a tangible reminder that the world I live in now, the place I have begun to think of as home, may as well be on a different planet from the world in which we all grew up.

I live in the middle of rolling coffee plantations, in one of the most fertile and idyllic spots on the globe. In many ways, it is a place untouched by the passage of time. The villagers here still live in the crumbling brick houses built for them by the owners of

the coffee plantations on which they work. Now, however, housing designed for fifty holds nearly three hundred, and less than 20% of the population in the area is employed outside of the picking season. A two-hour walk from the nearest paved road, and a four hour walk from the nearest city, for many people life on the plantations is all they will ever know.

The poverty here, at first glance, is Sally Struthers-esque. Five-year-olds play games of soccer with a ball made of discarded trash and babies tied to their own tiny backs. Women use giant sticks to grind corn into the paste that forms the staple of their diet, while the few men who have not fled to the cities sit in front of their houses smoking cigarettes. Everywhere you look there are children. Bare-foot and muddy, with runny noses and tattered clothes, they outnumber adults five to one.

While the scene is bleak, the children are laughing, the women singing, and the men talking earnestly together. Life is hard and, as the astonishingly high rate of fetal alcohol syndrome illustrates, for many people alcoholism becomes the only escape. Life here is not, however, without its moments of joy. The plantation where I live and work is a vibrant community, where everyone is engaged and invested in the lives of their neighbors. The idea that you would pass someone on a road and not stop to greet them, ask them about their family, and commiserate with them about the work they are doing, is simply unfathomable. No one has enough—enough to feed their families, clothe their babies, and educate their children. Yet it is a world in which people give freely.

The organization I work for, the Tanzanian Children's Fund, has created a remarkable haven in the midst of this often overwhelming poverty. The 41 children who live with us at the Rift Valley Children's Village, along with the nearly 20 who attend primary or secondary boarding school and spend their vacations with us, are all orphans when they arrive. The moment they step through the gate, however, our children become permanent members of our family. They are fed and clothed, but more importantly, they are protected and loved. We read stories before bedtime, play rousing games of kickball, and go on "nature hikes" up some of the steepest hills (in my opinion) in the universe.

I could go on forever about "my kids," the 11 children with whom I am lucky enough to share a house. Ranging in age from 13-year-old Benja to four-year-old Rehema, we are a motley crew. Routinely the last out the door in the morning, the dirtiest at bath time, and the rowdiest in the evening, my kids and I are constantly explaining away our many mishaps to the other houses. (There are currently four houses with approximately a dozen children each at the Children's Village where we live, and another three houses will be built in the coming year.) Our day begins at 6:15, when, after waking up the kids, I begin making two dozen peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. Forty-five minutes later, the seven school-age children and I head across the field to Gyteghi primary school, which they attend and where I teach.

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NOTES FROM THE FIELD

by Krista Nottage '07-'08 Fellow at BroadReach Health Care in South Africa

Sanibonani. Groete uit Kaapstad! Greetings from the breathtaking beauty of South Africa.

I have been living and working in Cape Town for the last nine months. During the first few months of my time here I traveled frequently to visit hospitals in three of the country's nine provinces. The diversity of South Africa's landscape is extraordinary. On a visit to KwaZulu-Natal our drive takes us along beaches through rolling hills and sugar cane fields. En route to the Eastern Cape, we drive through the flat and expansive farmlands of the Free State along the Orange River and into the mountainous Eastern Cape area. And finally there is Mpumalanga, whose name—literally “where the sunshine comes from”—is testament to its beauty. I have been lucky to see so much of the country through my travels with BroadReach Health Care. Of late I have been predominantly office-based working from either our Cape Town or Johannesburg offices. Beginning in January, I joined a newly-formed community mobilization team focused on extending service support and outreach beyond the hospital's ARV clinics into the communities.

My first trip to Johannesburg, or 'Jozi' as it is affectionately called, introduced me to a faster-paced city life contrasting with Cape Town's laidback approach. The city has a vibrant pulse and its streets are packed with cars stuck in the notorious traffic and sidewalks teeming with people buying and selling goods or rushing from one point to another. I have taken it all in, from the luxury of Sandton on the outskirts to the notorious Hillbrow neighborhood in the city center, where you can find the same volume of people walking the streets at 12pm and 12am.

The security measures both in Cape Town and Johannesburg were definitely a point of adjustment. Jozi is the more severe. Our lodging had a wall so high it was impossible to know what might be behind it. Those high walls are topped by barbed wires, topped in turn by an electric fence. Once inside, the manager reminded me to take care moving about after 10pm since the laser sensor system turns on around the property. It can feel like going into “lockdown” each time you return home.

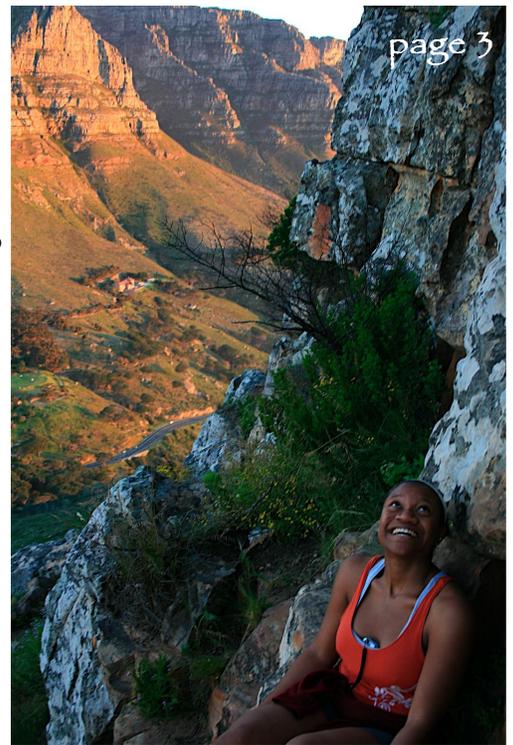
Crime aside, I have marveled at how far South Africa has come in the last 14 years. The diversity in our offices alone speaks to that fact; the banter can begin in Afrikaans and roll through Sotho, Zulu, English, and Xhosa before its end. The rainbow of identities and experiences is something I've always felt is cherished here. So the recent eruption of violence took me by surprise. As I sit in my living room, anti-violence and anti-xenophobia messages pour out of the TV speakers. Local celebrities repeat the words “stop the violence” and “stop xenophobia,” but I question whether their messages will make it far enough. The shooting, beating and burning between neighbors is shocking and harrowing. In truth, the townships—the epicenters of the attacks—are overcrowded and steadily getting more so with the influx of refugees from all over Africa and most recently Zimbabwe. It is the people living in the shacks there who feel the strain of a drooping economy the most; they feel it in its literal, physical sense and they lash out. Foreigners or *makwerekwere*, may be the scapegoats but certainly have become the focus of frustration. I remember my South African counterparts telling me of the country's constitution, which is revolutionary in its attention to and protection of human rights, in a discussion we had around routine HIV testing. And now those rights are being violated every day in South Africa's communities.

Recently, I attended a kind of “call to action” meeting with a Congolese friend of mine who has refugee status here, a number of Congolese pastors, and representatives from the South African Human Rights Commission. They discussed the recent attacks and brainstormed the best ways to help at the Soetwater refugee camp, not far from Cape Town proper. As we discussed the segregation and cultural clashes that have ensued within the camp between the different nationality groups, I remember one of the pastors stressing to his colleagues, “We are not just Congolese pastors, we are African pastors.”

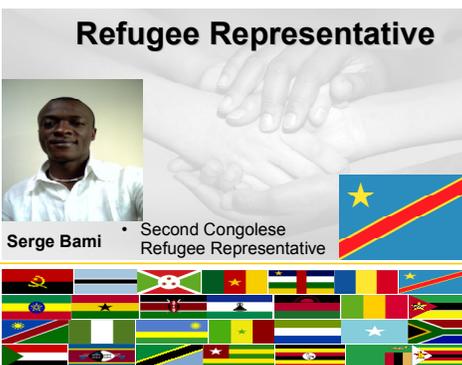
After the meeting I wanted to know how I could help. We had discussed the confusion and chaos at the camp and the need for designated leaders for each group represented there. This would help when officials came to visit or aid was delivered, providing a handful of point people to meet with rather than the huge crowds. I designed an ID badge for the refugee representatives, and my friend went to the camp that evening to take their photographs. We have already made a few and hope to have them all finished in the coming days.

Despite the current turmoil, I continue to enjoy my time here in South Africa. I hope that there can be a swift and peaceful end to these attacks so that the beauty and not the violence of this country can be foremost in our thoughts again.

Salani kahle, Totsiens, 'Bye!



Above: Krista climbing Lion's Head



Above left: an ID badge Krista designed for refugee representatives; left: a jacaranda tree blossoming in the South African countryside

Jessie's Notes from the Field (continued from page 2)

If the Children's Village is an oasis from the poverty that surrounds us, the school is one of the places where it is most evident. Kiran coffee plantation, one of the three plantations that feeds into the school, was listed in a 2001 United Nations report as one of the worst places for child labor around the globe. I teach Standard Seven, which along with being the final grade in primary school, is the final year of education the vast majority of my students will ever receive. My students walk up to 1½ hours each way to school (a more impressive feat for the kindergartners). They share desks, and often pens and pencils, with two or three of their classmates. The classrooms are dark, especially in the rainy season, when the crumbling cement floors turn to mud. Still, these kids come out early every day and stay late, taking extra classes before and after school. They come in on Saturday, and they spend every day of vacation in the classroom. They make efforts which seem extraordinary because, as these teenagers are all too aware, education is the only ticket they have to a different life.

They often arrive barefoot and in ripped uniforms, yet most of my students walk in laughing. They are not martyrs, nor are they saints. I've had to break up more than one fight between 15-year-old boys, and I've comforted sobbing girls who have fought with their best friends. Spending the day with 15-, 16-, and 17-year-olds, what is most clear is not the poverty they live in, or the lengths they will go to to change their lives. Instead, I am struck by how similar the dynamics in my classroom, with its dirt floor and peeling paint, are to the small high school I attended in Massachusetts. We have our class clown, the smart girls who sit in the front row and raise their hands before I've finished asking a question, and the boys in the back who spend more time whispering to each other than they do writing in their notebooks.

When the school day ends, and I have put in the requisite time chatting (in my less than perfect Swahili) with the teachers, I return home to "my kids." I leave a world of dirt floors and enter one with whitewashed walls, indoor plumbing, and, on occasion, solar electricity. While my students walk the hour or more home from school, my kids take baths, eat a snack of freshly baked bread, and snuggle down in front of a movie. Laughter, and occasionally bickering, abounds as we all wind down from the day.

I spent the first few months that I lived in Tanzania bemoaning the discrepancy between the two worlds in which I live—that of the coffee plantation and that of the Children's Village. Why should our children have so much, and the villagers so little? Yet, as the months went on, the two worlds I live in became increasingly intertwined. The Children's Village is in the unique position of being able to affect two types of change simultaneously. The lives of our children are dramatically transformed the moment they become a part of our family. They are given clothing, food, and shelter, but more than that, they are given the intangible advantages many of us take for granted. They have regular bedtimes and people to put band-aids on scraped knees and wipe away tears. They are more than just taken care of, they are loved. Our children will have every opportunity to succeed. And, as our assistant director is quick to point out, "from whom much is given, much is expected." The goal is to raise our children to be thoughtful, compassionate, and engaged leaders in the Tanzania of tomorrow.

While the change we create in the lives of our children is dramatic and immediate, it is the avenues for change that the organization creates within the community that are, in my opinion, the most exciting. Nearly 50 people are employed at the Children's Village, and thus able to support entire networks of extended family. New teachers have been hired at Gytoghi, a sports program has gotten girls out onto the soccer field, and the first round of microfinance loans was given out by our brand new microfinance program last month. (Note: PiAf alumnus Andy Bryant is currently Microfinance Director for Tanzanian Children's Fund!) This coming year, we expect to have 50 children pass the national exam and qualify for secondary school. Ten years ago, only three children passed, and as recently as three years ago, the number was barely 30. Slowly but surely the Children's Village is changing the landscape in which we live.

Poverty, the kind of poverty I am surrounded by every day, is neither tragic nor romantic. It is not something we can judge from afar, or even something I can begin to understand living in its midst. It is a lot like the animals who blunder into our yard. Leopards are majestic creatures, but when they eat your goats, they are also a serious problem. And while elephants are undeniably cool, stepping in elephant poop is not. I am lucky enough to work for an organization which appreciates the complexities of the world in which we live, and which is working to create sustainable change.



RECENT PIAF EVENTS

Many thanks to all who attended and helped to make these events possible!

New Fellows' Orientation

May 17-18

PiAf Alumni Reception

May 31

Princeton & Africa Panel

May 30

Reception for New Fellows and their Families

June 2