



KAITLIN HOULDITCH-FAIR
Class of 2009
Shelby, NC

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“There is nothing you can do to prepare yourself for Africa before you get there,” a friend of mine told me on the phone the night before I flew to Tanzania. There I was, a young, white American woman standing on the brink of what would be the most profound experience of my life without a clue of what I was getting myself into. I had called my friend expecting words of comfort and practical advice. But the words I got turned out to be wiser and truer than I ever could have imagined.

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Moshi, Tanzania



ACROBATICS, SEX EDUCATION, AND ALTERED EXPECTATIONS IN TANZANIA

I went to Moshi, a town at the base of Mt. Kilimanjaro, with the intention of being an assistant acrobatics teacher at the TunaHAKI Centre for Street Children and starting a dance program at a secondary school, the Second Chance Education Center. It didn't take long to see that these expectations were somewhat naïve.

While I did teach acrobatics and learn some dance moves, the most profound aspect of my experience was realizing I had the power and desire to do more; to teach lessons and skills along with the arts to empower and encourage the incredible students with whom I had the privilege of working with



TunaHAKI, an extremely small center in rural Moshi, houses approximately 23 children, some orphaned, some abandoned. I went into the experience thinking I would be there for hours every day, doing hardcore acrobatics, like one would in an arts conservatory. However, I didn't know until I arrived that during July the children were in school until nearly 4:00 everyday. This greatly affected how much time I was able to spend with them, as it would get dark around 6:30, making every day a race with the equatorial sun to arrive home before thieves went to work. Upon their return home from school each day, the children were often too wiped out to do hardcore acrobatics. Thus, my role manifested. I taught lessons in geography, English, music and art, along with some acrobatics and stretching here and there. Over the weeks the children began to unfold, putting their heads on my lap, letting me hold them. My mind was on fire some days, brimming

with excitement at the thought of spending time with these children. In the end, simply spending time with them was the most important thing I could have done. Being their rafiki was more important to me than anything.

Second Chance Education Center, another center in rural Moshi, provides a small group of teenagers with the opportunity to continue their education despite the fact that they failed national primary exams. I quickly realized starting a dance program was not the most viable option. I went on weekly grocery shops with the other teachers and helped find funding for them. I also taught lessons on geography, English and sex education, and with the help of a translator was able to give lessons on the menstrual cycle, pregnancy, and STDs. One day a student asked, “Teacha Kate, can you.....bring...condom?” The class burst into laughter. “Of course I can,” I replied, and the next day I bought 50 condoms at the Duka la Dawa (drugstore) along with a carrot. That day in class was one of the most memorable experiences of my life, watching each one of my students giggle as they rolled a condom onto the carrot. During that hour, it truly hit me: Who cares if I'm not teaching dance?

On my last day at SCEC, they threw a surprise party for me. There were



emotional hugs, many tears, but more smiles than anything as I told the students that even if I never saw them again, they would always be in my heart.

The saving grace of my entire trip was the hostel I lived in, Hostel Hoff. It was built a few years ago by an Irish volunteer who noticed the increasing number of international volunteers in Moshi and took it upon herself to create



a home for them. This place was indeed my home and my hostel-mates became my family. We all had different projects and huge days filled with teaching English, surveying households in rural areas, and holding workshops for victims of sexual abuse. Having people who genuinely understood the frustrations and the joys of independent volunteering made this overwhelming experience even more valuable. I learned so much about myself through my days with the children and the nights at the hostel, debriefing with a friend and trying to make sense of it all.

Upon my return home, I thought of the advice I received the night before I left and couldn't help but laugh. My friend had been completely right. I will never forget the friends I made and the lessons I learned during this incredible summer. In the end I decided that

the best lesson I ever learned reared its strangely beautiful head during this experience: You can plan your life all you want, but more often than not life has its own plans for you. I sincerely thank Mr. Burch for making this experience possible and for continuing to graciously share his passion for the world with UNC.

