

**Katherine Wiley**

**First Report: Rotary Ambassadorial Scholarship**

October 29, 2006

University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania

**Current Contact Information:**

Katherine Wiley

University of Dar es Salaam

c/o Mrs. Kaaya – LINKS

Box 35091

Dar es Salaam, TANZANIA

Phone: 011-255-786-094-443

Email: katwiley101 @ yahoo.com

I arrived in Tanzania on July 13 to begin my year as a Rotary Ambassadorial Scholar. I spent my first five weeks in Zanzibar studying Kiswahili and then moved to Dar es Salaam to begin my coursework in African Studies at the University of Dar es Salaam. Though not without its challenges, so far this has been an exceptional experience; I am learning so much both inside and outside of the classroom and am especially enjoying being involved with Rotary and with Dar es Salaam's larger community.

My time on the island of Zanzibar was a wonderful experience, not only for the way in which I was able to improve my Kiswahili, but also because it is such an interesting place culturally. I studied Kiswahili at the Institute of Kiswahili and Foreign Languages five days a week; I had begun studying this language at home before I left which was extremely helpful as I was able to immediately enroll in an intermediate class. Although my classes at the University are in English and most students' English is quite good, having a base of Kiswahili has been helpful since, as soon as I leave the University, many people do not speak English. Speaking Kiswahili has therefore given me insights into parts of Tanzanian life that I might not have been exposed to otherwise.

Zanzibar is a fascinating place as, unlike Dar es Salaam which is mostly Christian, its population is primarily Muslim. I was particularly interested in this aspect because, as I had previously lived in Mauritania, a Muslim country in West Africa, it was interesting to compare the two places. While in Zanzibar, I lived with a host family which not only helped me to improve my language skills, but also taught me much about Zanzibari culture (and food!). I was also lucky to be on the island during its ten-day long international film festival that brings films from primarily Africa, India, and the Middle East to Zanzibar; it was a wonderful cultural event.

I then moved to Dar es Salaam to begin my studies at the University. The first month was especially challenging as the University's system is very different from that to which I was used to in the States. Registering for classes, for example, took weeks as you had to get permission from each department to enroll in one of its classes and often the people who I needed to speak with were absent. Most classes also actually began a few weeks before they were scheduled to start. Resources are extremely limited at the University – the bookstore has few books and most of the books in the library are quite old. Likewise, Tanzania is undergoing a power crisis so electricity is shut off for twelve

hours most days (everywhere in the country) which makes accessing computers difficult if not impossible.

However, now into my third month in Dar, I have a better understanding of how to operate under these conditions; this has made life much more pleasant. For example, I now photocopy the readings that I need for classes (as other students do) and have begun handwriting papers. Likewise, I have learned how to make do with sources for papers that may not be the most up-to-date, but might be valuable for the historical perspectives that they provide.

Overall, my time at the University and in Dar has been extremely stimulating. It is wonderful sitting in my classes and hearing African perspectives on topics that have always interested me such as colonialism, feminism, and socialism. I am especially enjoying my Medical Anthropology class which has a mixture of Tanzanian, American, and Norwegian students which adds an exciting cross-cultural component to discussions. I am also taking another Sociology class (Race, Class and Ethnicity), a course on Women African Writers, and Kiswahili.

I am living with a host family in Dar which has also been a very good experience. I enjoy speaking Kiswahili with them and learning more about what family life is like here (more great food as well!). They are very serious Christians which is also interesting to see in contrast with the Muslim African culture that I am used to. They have been very welcoming including having me witness a demon expulsion! The mother works at the University with the foreign students which has also been nice as she has a good sense of what foreigners are like (i.e. that we many spend more time alone than most Tanzanians might). It is a good feeling to return to a home each day and to discuss issues like politics, religion, and foreign relations with them.

I feel that my sponsor Rotarians prepared me well for this experience abroad. My sponsor counselor, Lionel Arlan, was very helpful throughout the application process and taught me everything that I needed to know about Rotary. This knowledge has been helpful here as many people ask me about Rotary when I tell them about my scholarship. Before I left for Tanzania, my sponsor club, the Rotary Club of Saranac Lake, always welcomed me at their meetings and also gave me opportunities to speak which not only enabled me to share about the experience that I was about to embark on, but also gave me practice in public speaking. This has helped me to feel more comfortable as I fulfill my speaking requirements here.

My host counselor, Anne Saels, has been extremely welcoming, even inviting me to spend a weekend with her at her home. It has been very reassuring to know that, if I have a problem, I can contact her. My host club, the Rotary Club of Bahari Dar es Salaam, has also been wonderful, making me feel welcome at meetings and Rotary events beyond these.

I have been lucky to be involved in Rotary since arriving in country. My fellow Ambassadorial Scholar, Jessica Glynn, and I have spoken at the Bahari Rotary Club here, and I was also able to speak at the Zanzibar Club. We also spoke at the Rotaract Club of Kwanza that meets at the University. I attend this club's meetings regularly, which was been a nice way to be involved in Rotary and to meet more University students.

I believe that one of the most important aspects of Rotary is its emphasis on "Service Above Self" and I have tried to remember this throughout my time here. I am happy to be volunteering at two organizations: the Good Samaritan Center and HealthScope. The Good Samaritan Center is a school for orphans and vulnerable

children in a neighborhood not far from where I live. I spend a morning a week there teaching English to its class of six to seven year-olds (who have not formally started school). The school does not have many resources, but the staff is very dedicated and committed to giving these students a head start so that they can succeed as they continue their schooling. Beyond teaching there, I am advising the staff on grant preparation and am considering asking my family and friends back home to donate to the Center at Christmas to help them buy much needed supplies or perhaps to fund a feeding program where each child could receive porridge or juice everyday. It is difficult, of course, to learn if you are hungry.

HealthScope is a non-profit organization that does consulting projects that primarily focus on HIV/AIDS. Currently, for example, they are applying for a grant to oversee the coordination of AIDS education by all government ministries. At HealthScope, I edit grant proposals and other documents which I enjoy as I have experience in this work from my previous job at the International Training and Education Center on HIV in Seattle. We also are planning to conduct an analysis of how the Tanzanian media has portrayed HIV/AIDS over the past year and may also evaluate the ways in which government ministries are incorporating education about this disease into their work. Currently, I volunteer here one day a week and add hours as time allows. I know that I am going to learn so much at both of these organizations and it is wonderful to participate in life in Dar outside of the University.

I am also helping to coordinate a project between the Rotaract Club and my sponsor club; the Rotaract Club has a long relationship with the Chakuwama orphanage here and has sent a request to my home club that they fund a project to purchase much needed beds and repair one of its floors. So far, both clubs seem enthusiastic about this project which could make a great difference for the orphans; there are currently 56 children living there and only 20 beds. The sharing of beds is not only uncomfortable, but also contributes to the spread of disease.

I am also helping to liaise between the Rotaract Community Service Committee, of which I am a member, and the Bahari Rotary Club in Dar es Salaam as the Bahari Club is also considering funding a project at Chakuwama. Likewise, I am also helping the Bahari Club to explore the possibility of donating much-needed books to the library at the University.

My first impressions of Dar es Salaam and Tanzania are varied. I have been impressed with how friendly and welcoming most Tanzanians are; often if you ask someone for directions they will walk you to where you need to go. Dar es Salaam is a big, sprawling city, and I am often a bit overwhelmed and saddened by how difficult life can be for people here. The lack of electricity (off from 6:30 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. each day) is really crippling small business people who can not afford generators and, for those who can, the high costs of petrol is making them all increase their prices which affects everyone. Likewise, the government recently forced people who sell products on the streets (thousands and thousands of people here) to stop their selling so now many of these people are without work. Both the city and the University have grown at a much faster rate than that of their infrastructures so often traffic is terrible and resources are lacking. Most of this does not affect me, of course, as the scholarship more than adequately covers any of my needs, but it is sad to see many people around me suffering. It is also true, however, that Tanzanians seem to be extremely stoic people. It is extremely rare to hear people complain.

Tanzania is an extremely diverse, interesting country. It has over 120 ethnic groups, which seemingly live quite peacefully together, and its population is divided fairly evenly between Christians, Muslims, and those who practice traditional religions (all of which also seem to get along fairly well). The country is definitely shaped by its socialist past (it was socialist immediately following independence) and people speak very positively of this time. It has been easy to meet Tanzanians at the University although I am finding, as I think would be the case anywhere, that it definitely takes a lot of time to make good friends. One of the wonderful things for me about living abroad is that I feel like I get access to a much broader range of people than I normally would in my home country. For example, my friends here include: MilYa, a Maasai man who sells jewelry on Zanzibar; Grace, a university student who hopes to work for a non-profit; Imelda, a girl who cooks for my host family and dreams of becoming a tailor; Ali, who runs a restaurant in town and who has visited Mecca four times, and a wide range of Rotarians and ex-pats.

There has been no shortage of opportunities to share about American culture – people ask me questions about where I come from everyday, primarily on the streets, but often professors in my classes as well. I believe that, more than speeches, it is exchanges like these that help people to increase their understandings of another part of the world. It is exciting to share aspects of my own culture and often the questions make me think about it in different ways: why do most Americans only have one or two children? Why do poor people in America have so much as compared to poor Tanzanians (i.e. cars)? Why does America care so much about Iraq?

Likewise, my favorite way to spend my time here is talking to Tanzanians about their cultures and country. I find that I am learning the most from this be it about witches on Zanzibar (of which there are many although they reportedly don't steal foreigners as they don't know how to catch us!) or malaria in Dar es Salaam (every member of my host family has been diagnosed with this at least once in the two months that I have lived with them and one member has had it four times!). Life is stimulating everyday. I have also been lucky to be able to visit Bagamoyo North of Dar, a former major trading center and capital of German East Africa and also just returned to Zanzibar last weekend to celebrate the end of Ramadan with Muslim friends there. This was an unforgettable experience: after a day of eating and visiting friends and family, it seemed that the entire island's population turned up to central gathering places to enjoy food, music, and games all dressed up in their finest.

I am looking forward to my remaining months in Tanzania and want to thank the Rotary Foundation for this wonderful experience; a day does not go by that I am not grateful for this gift. I am currently applying to schools in the States to start a PhD in Anthropology upon my return and very much hope that I can couple the knowledge of other cultures that I develop this year with that that I gain in these further studies to continue to help others understand countries that are different from their own. I truly believe that this sort of understanding is a viable path to world peace. I also want to thank my host and sponsor districts for all of their support; both have helped to make my stay here infinitely more pleasant than it would have been without them. The more I learn about Rotary the more impressed I am; it has been rewarding and exciting to see the positive impact that this very international organization has, both on my life and beyond.