

Peace Corps Uganda

NOTES AND
MUSINGS FROM
AMODING

Days spent in Uganda: 452
Homesick level (scale 1-5): 2.5



Girls from St. Francis Secondary School for the Blind gather for a laugh. Left to right: Adyai Winnie, Acam Mary, Aguti Harriet, Aceko Caroline and Akulo Christine. Aguti is an albino with sensitive eyesight. St. Francis offers her a more supportive experience than other schools. A stellar runner in the 100, 200 and 400m, Christine has qualified for the 2012 Paralympic Games in London. I will be accompanying her as an official Uganda Paralympic Committee delegate.

You are most welcome! How to become a "dear visitor" in 10 steps.

The year is 2051. Your ship has encountered an aberration in the space-time continuum. Before you can reverse the polarity, adjust the telemetry and synergize the backward overflow, you find that you have journey back 40 years to a rural, halcyon homestead in eastern Uganda. Yee gats! Here are 10 steps to keep in mind to help you keep your mind.

Step #1: Before you step over the threshold into a hut or compound, you say "Kodi!" Then they reply "Karibu!" Now you are welcome to enter. Everyone usually congregates outside the huts or house. The stifling heat searing through tin roofs and grass thatch forces everyone outside during the day. You only go inside to sleep at night. Everything else is done in the open air.

Step #2: Offer them a traditional gift of either abagoya (bananas) or emaido (ground nuts).

Step #3: Sign their visitors book. Every house (as well as office, school, NGO, etc.) has one. I've signed dozens by now. And I still think that throwback to colonial British formality is hilarious.

Step #4: Sit down on their best chair, which is about as comfortable as being tied to stakes in the Kalahari desert while fire ants attack your naked, honey-coated body.

Step #5: You are handed a warm soda or local brew and start fielding questions about America. A young, pant-less child is dragged in front of you and forced to greet you. He immediately begins to cry because he is "fearing the Amusugut (white lady)". Then he pees on the floor.

Step #6: The conversation is enjoyable and lively but waiting 3+ hours for a gobbet of food begins to erode most of that joy. Then, remembering that every able-bodied woman within a 2 km radius has been

toiling over the fire to prepare your meal, you quickly readjust your attitude...and your belt buckle. You're gonna eat a lot.

Step #7: Finally, after another 2 hours, the meal is ready. Before you sit down to a kingly feast, the house girl kneels at your side with a basin, pitcher of warm water and hand soap so you can clean your hands. Your hands are your utensils.

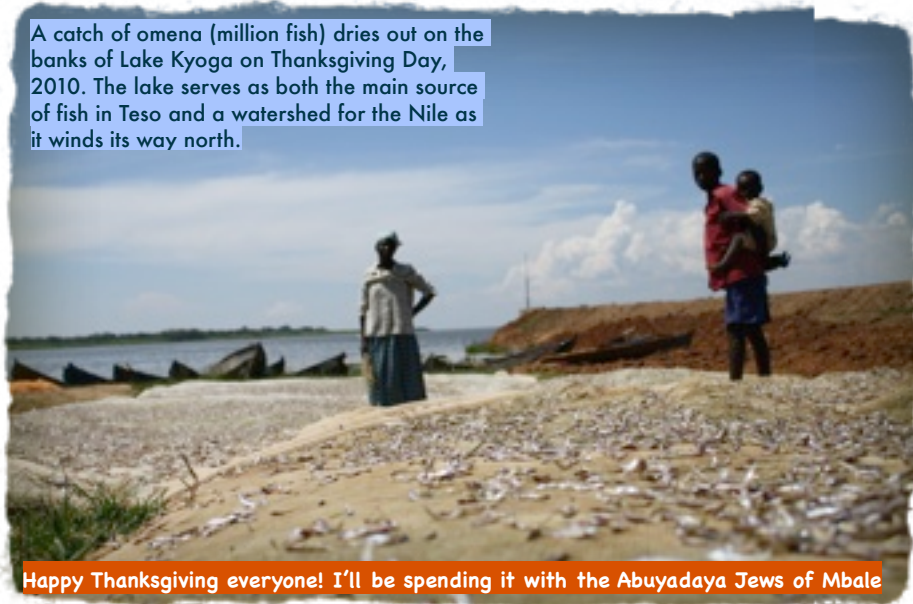
Step #8: Using your newly disinfected paws, you dig into a fine spread that includes chicken (which they killed for you 2 hours earlier), goat stew, ebo (greens), echadoi (greens), boiled cabbage, atap (sticky, gelatinous, breadly goop made of millet and cassava flour), boiled cassava, posho (ground maize cooked into yet another sticky, gelatinous goop), rice and g-nut sauce.

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THE IMPORTANCE OF GREETING

Ugandans place great emphasis on proper greetings. You must ask them about their work, home and health before you engage in deeper conversation. It's not just empty pleasantries for them. Greeting enriches the interaction by showing respect, sincerity and attentiveness. A typical interlude can last anywhere from 10 seconds to 2 minutes. I find it funny when I go to greet someone on the path and before I can get a word out, they eagerly rush to say "I'm fine".

A catch of omena (million fish) dries out on the banks of Lake Kyoga on Thanksgiving Day, 2010. The lake serves as both the main source of fish in Teso and a watershed for the Nile as it winds its way north.



Happy Thanksgiving everyone! I'll be spending it with the Abuyadaya Jews of Mbale

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Dessert is non-existent. If it did exist, it would be a piece of stale ginger cake covered in so much icing you would need an insulin injection on the side.

Step #9: After you've imbibed your daily apportionment of calories, you may be given a glass of V&A Ugandan sherry to aid digestion.

Step #10: When it's time to depart, you are nearly lifted away on a litter by a cadre of chanting children and forlorn faces. You're torn between two emotions at this point: melancholy for the slice of cultural exchange coming to an end and panic amid the pressing urgency to get home before the heavy meal explodes out of you like a shuttle from Cape Canaveral.

And that, space explorers and readers, is what it's like to be an invited guest in an Iteso home. ■

Never Have I Ever

(before I came to Uganda)

- Slept under a mosquito net every night
- Killed a chicken
- Been to country where there is no McDonalds and Starbucks
- Been a millionaire (in Ugandan shillings)
- Had a dress custom made by a tailor
- Had to wash mud off my feet at the end of every day, often mistaking the brown film for an actual tan
- Gone w/o electricity for several days
- Eaten grasshoppers and flying ants
- So confidently spoken another language

The RAIN in Teso...a poem

(something I cooked up on a dark, rainy night)

Inhale. The dry air is pregnant with a heavy, electric vapor. The feverish, hot earth stretches under temperamental clouds. Grasses release a sweetness. Tress open up their limbs. Livestock peck at the ground in imperiled ignorance.

Amumu obua.

"It is threatening", the locals say. Gunmetal-hued walls of clouds march toward the village. The crackle of thunder is a courier of the storm's amassing menace. Plump, precocious drops of rain, poised on the precipice.

Trickle. Etepi edou.

People hide under scraps of metal or tarp. Their shouts dissolve into the grey mist.

Opike ne. Breath held. Moment of anticipation. The earth and sky negotiate.

Burst.

Merciless pelt. Caterwauling spray. Slugs of watery ammunition dent the roof. *Ekume.*

Cinnamon dust turns into chocolate rivers. The glut of water volleys the vegetation. Can we survive this spate?

Work ceases. Roads impassable. *Erot erono.* Crops watered. Rain tanks filled.

Pause.

Splint of light. *Elai.* Rain lifts. Clouds break. Chores resume. Molecules of air hold a particle of loam. A souvenir of brief bedlam.

The light is brighter than before.

Aipuc.

The interruption of life yields a balance restored. Exhale.

Upcoming Projects

Mid-November

Complete installation of educational signage and message boards around campus

1 December

Socks N' Sacks: Condom Education and Sack Garden Demonstration for World AIDS Day. Partnering with The AIDS Support Organization to offer free HIV testing, counseling, sack garden kits and condoms to 400 people.

Jan-Feb 2012

Water sanitation grant to equip the school with new rain water tanks and hand washing stations.

Jan-April 2012

Construction of turkey house out of recycled plastic water bottles to generate income for the school.

Ugandan English = Uganglish

- Mosquito = pronounced moz-kwi-toe
- Ok please = that's fine
- I'm around = you'll have a hard time finding me
- Other side = some location you'll never find
- Well done = heard on a Monday morning after you did nothing all weekend
- Mountainous = pronounced moun-tainey-ous
- Greet them = tell everyone hello for me
- Take beers = drink beers
- Raise me = call me later
- Sue sue = urinate

quick facts about uganda

Capital: Kampala
Population: 34 million
Area: same size as Oregon
Famous for: half the world's population of mountain gorillas, source of the Nile, coffee and the tyrannical reign of Idi Amin
Language: English official; over 56 spoken indigenously
Religion: 85% Christian, 11% Islam
President: Yoweri Museveni

Community Member Profile

Olaki Simon Peter

Simon (pictured below, right) is an English literature teacher at St. Francis Secondary School for the Blind. He was born in rural Katakwi District and has a wife and 4 daughters. A graduate of our school, and totally blind himself, Simon serves as a role model for everyone. His sharp intellect and sense of humor have

made him one of my best Ugandan friends. He hopes to pursue a Masters in Inclusive and Special Education at Roehampton University in the UK. I am helping him complete his application. In exchange, he taught me to read and write in Braille (pictured below, left). A few times a month, I accompany him to the local ajon circle to sip warm millet beer thru long reeds, eat pork and suss out the scuttlebutt in Soroti.



From the annals of the
Peace Corps/Uganda
Cookbook

Spicy Pumpkin Soup

(helps relieve my longing for autumn in America)

Directions: In large pot, saute onions and garlic in butter. Add pumpkin and mash, slowing adding broth. Add

spices and milk. Bring to boiling, reduce heat and simmer till spices are well blended with pumpkin mixture. Last, add brown and cream, making sure both fully dissolve. You should have a pretty smooth, creamy soup at this point. Adjust seasoning to taste. Serves 8-10.

Ingredients:

4 tbs butter
2 onions, chopped
2 cloves garlic, minced
1/4 tsp chili powder
2 tbs curry powder
1/2 tsp ground coriander
6 cups chopped, steamed pumpkin
5 cups vegetable broth
2 cups milk
1/2 cup brown sugar
1/2 cup cream

Myth Debunked

Student: "Teacher, over there in your place of America, is it true they eat humans?"

Me (under my breath):
"Only the ugly ones"

"The best time to plant a tree is 20 years ago."

— African Proverb

Bizarre News Story

A few months ago, a man in the southeastern Ugandan district of Mayuge was walking down the street dressed in jeans, jacket and ball cap. Strangely, each item of apparel was purposefully donned on backwards; jeans, jacket and ball cap all facing and fastened along his backside. From behind, he looked like a faceless and bass-ackward dude. A group of men spotted his appearance and were duly stupefied by this trendy malfeasance. So, they jumped him and pinned him to the ground. Then, they forcefully tried to rotate his head so it would be aligned with his improperly positioned outfit. Alas, the twisting action broke his neck and he died.

I wish I had....

- Bric-a-brac to give the nuns/students/teachers/villagers. Art supplies. Stickers. Games. Sports balls. Photos of your home, work, weather like snow. They love anything from America and they love Obama! And good vegetable peelers!
- Educational videos for the middle-school and high-school age. Anything that has a good message and is easy to understand will do.
- Powdered drink mixes (i.e. Crystal Lite, Chai tea, Margarita mix)
- Anything from Trader Joe's and Whole Foods
- Quinoa
- Dried berries, walnuts, pecans and almonds
- Herbal and/or flavored tea (loose or bagged)

- Seasoning mixes (Mexican, Ranch Cajun, Asian)
- Almond M&Ms, other hard/gummy candies that don't melt
- Zip-lock baggies. Small and medium size
- Colgate Whispers (small disposable toothbrushes that also freshen breath)
- Seeds that will grow in a hot climate like tomato, eggplant, collards, cucumber, beans, peppers, melons...I'm also starting an herb garden so I would love cilantro, basil, rosemary, mint, etc.
- Magazines: NYTimes, Economist, People, etc
- Ikea or other furniture catalog pages. My carpenter craves inspiration!

Mailing Address:

Teacher Amoding
St. Francis School for the Blind
P.O. Box 603
Soroti, Uganda

To deter tampering:
Please write only "educational materials for the blind" on the customs form. Write "par avion" on the outside and cover with Christian symbols.