

“Challenges to Building Democracy in Uganda”

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Summer 2006

In Sum...

I studied abroad in Uganda during the fall of 2005 and received a grant to go back to Kampala, the country's capital, during the summer of 2006. Between July 10th and August 7th I worked with the Africa Leadership Institute, an indigenous think-tank which tackles governance and security issues. I interviewed over 30 politicians, aid workers, taxi drivers, teachers and others in my quest to find out more about the political situation in the country. The research I was able to do with the help of the Kellogg Institute will be an invaluable part of my senior project for my capstone Peace Studies seminar. To give a better picture of how I spent my time in Uganda, I have included several of my blog entries below.

Thursday, July 20th, 2006

Research Whirlwind

I'm quickly discovering that my research goals for the next two weeks are ambitious to a fault. I've had some great interviews and tackled huge chunks of my research question already, but I've got a lot more to learn before I can go home satisfied. Essentially this has meant I've been spending eight to ten hours a days doing some sort of research – interviews, background reading, going through newspaper archives, setting up more interviews – before returning to my apartment exhausted. By a stroke of good luck, Meredith [from my fall study abroad program] is back in Uganda too, and we are sharing the apartment again before moving into a hostel down the road next week. In many ways it feels like nothing has changed since I left, except that the electricity crisis has gotten so

bad that load-shedding now means having power on for 24 hrs and then off for 24 hours. At least it's more predictable than the power outages I endured in Cape Town during their power crisis in February.

My mom seems worried that I won't allow myself any time to relax and have fun, so I'm officially giving myself Sundays off of all research-related endeavors. Plus I want to be able to hang out with my old host family on Sundays. Apparently Latifah is sick again with malaria, so I think I better go check in on her and make sure she can get some medicine. For now, I have another interview to get to – with an amusing ex-member of parliament – let's see if I can keep him on-topic and away from his usual conspiracy theories this time around! Oh Ugandan politicians.

Tuesday, August 1st, 2006

Cultural experience du jour

Smashed between two large African women on a matatu taxi ride into town yesterday, the Graduation Song by Vitamin C came on the radio. This cheesy, overplayed song triggered a wave of nostalgia for my own high school graduation and I had to exercise serious self control to stop from laughing out loud. Could I have ever guessed, back then, that I would be riding around on Ugandan public transit as a 20 year old?

My interviews are almost done, and I've only had one that has gone badly. Considering my past experiences attempting to extract opinions and information from assorted Ugandans, I'd say that's quite an achievement. I'm happy. This country has been burned into my soul.

Thursday, August 3rd, 2006

Latifah's birthday

I kept the afternoon free of interviews so I could go visit Kanyanya and bring my little Latifah a birthday cake for her fifth birthday. 12% of Ugandan kids die before they reach five; her birthday is particularly significant since she has had two serious bouts of malaria in this year.

On the walk to the matatu stage (bus stop) I passed a woman selling roses so I picked some of those up as well; at \$1.25 for a dozen roses I couldn't pass them up. I was quite a muzungu spectacle walking up the hill to my old homestay family's house with a cake and flowers in hand. Latifah and Ramlah ran out to greet me with huge grins on their faces and Mrs. Busulwa thanked me for bringing the cake. She was robbed last week and would otherwise have had nothing to give Tifah for her special day. We all sang happy birthday, ate cake and played with bouncy balls I had brought for the girls before Tifah asked me to read them a story. I read and sang to them until they both fell asleep. All the excitement, I suppose, had worn them out. Happy, and full of cake, I walked back to the road and got a matutu back to town for one of my final interviews. I only have three left! This has been an amazing summer, and I owe it all to the Kellogg Institute. Without this research, my senior project for my Peace Studies major would have missed so many issues that people have raised in the past three weeks.