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When I first arrived in Uganda after two consecutive overnight flights, I was exhausted but anxious to start working right away. I knew that my internship with the Ford Program would involve teaching at a rural secondary school, but I had no idea what to teach or how to go about doing it. I wanted to know, in more detail, what the summer would entail so that I could start making progress. Within days, though, I knew I had to drop this mentality of brisk efficiency, and my experience was the better for it. I learned more, and I think I was able to give more, by letting go of my preconceived notions and letting Uganda set the rhythm of my summer.

Before my departure, I'd read the previous interns' reports. They emphasized the fact that in any sort of development work, you can't expect to make a lasting impact in eight weeks. If you go in with romanticized notions of banishing poverty and spreading justice, you will leave jaded and exhausted. It made sense to me; I knew from the outset that I would probably gain more from the experience than I could possibly give. Even so, it was impossible not to dream about teaching successful lessons, organizing after-school activities, and starting a library for the students. In the end, I did accomplish small bits of each activity, but the sum impact of my work is much more difficult to gage. I was not ever able to convey the exact purpose of a simile, but I did get a lot of kids begging me not to leave on my last day. And I didn't want to leave either. That's how I know the summer was a successful one.

Before I hugged my students for the last time, though, there was a long and demanding road to traverse. Nearly the entire first week in Uganda was spent waiting and adjusting. I moved into my dorm room at Uganda Martyrs University (UMU), met my fellow interns as they trickled in from the US and other parts of Uganda, and started sitting in on the local election meetings

that Ford and UMU were facilitating. I was learning a lot about the culture, but I was itching to dive into the work that I saw others performing around me. Immediate immersion, however, proved impossible. Our first visit to St. Francis Secondary School showed that while the administration was excited about our presence, they had not planned for the logistics of gaining several temporary teachers. My area of interest, English, was already covered; the Headmaster, though accommodating, was rarely in his office, making it difficult to plan a schedule; there were no lesson plans and no real curriculum. I began by sitting in on classes taught by the current English teacher, Jude. While he seemed comfortable and capable, I was dismayed at the format of his classes. Jude copied notes directly from an exercise book onto the blackboard, explained them verbatim, and moved on to a new, unrelated topic. There was no sort of structure to the lesson, and very little opportunity for the students to practice the grammar rules they were learning. This regimented teaching style turned out not to be so much a flaw of Jude, but of the entire Ugandan education system. Since most schools cannot afford textbooks for students, the teacher relays information from the sole copy. Studying (which Ugandan students do with a passion) consists of rote memorization of the notes taken in class. The inefficiency of this system shocked me, but it is the way all classes ran. Take notes, memorize, take test, revise test. That was the interminable pattern.

During that first week especially, I felt frustrated and useless. I tried to remind myself what I'd learned about not having an agenda. Soon enough, the situation changed abruptly. Jude left without warning to take a spot at graduate school, and in addition to his classes, I also gained another subject called "moral education," a new government-mandated class that had never been taught. I asked several teachers what, exactly, this class should encompass, and I got every answer from Aristotle to sexual education to personal hygiene. The thought of teaching 200

young people how to be better in every aspect of their lives was daunting, so I approached it (in what was rapidly becoming a pattern) without expectations. I gathered the older girls outside, had them sit in a circle in the grass, and tried to make them share their worries, from the trivial to the serious. Sometimes they talked; mostly they didn't. Often, they asked questions about me and about America. I didn't manage to tie in any Aquinas, but I did get to know the students on a more personal level, and I think it made them feel much more comfortable with me. "Moral education" ended up being like a group counseling session, which was probably more beneficial than another academic class would have been. Ugandan teens, especially girls, do not feel comfortable talking with their parents about issues like dating and sex, so it was good to be able to open up the subject and encourage them to talk with me and with each other. I hope the discussions will continue and that the school is able to obtain a full-time counselor.

Even though I learned to adapt to unexpected situations at school, the lack of a cohesive schedule was a crippling problem. Often, random events interrupted the school day and forced the headmaster to cancel class: a teacher who didn't show up for work, a rogue priest calling an extra choir practice, and mandatory HIV testing, to name just a few. At least once a week, students who hadn't paid government-ordered fees were sent home, to the dismay of teachers and students alike. This bit of bureaucratic inflexibility disrupts the school day and leaves teachers with mostly-empty classrooms, as most students do not have the money to pay the fees. It was very difficult to get to school right as most of my students were leaving reluctantly, asking if I could pay their fees so they could stay.

Accepting the general poverty of my students was a struggle that I was never able to overcome. The school provided a simple lunch for the teachers and the students who boarded, but most either brought their own or bought food from a nearby vendor. Unfortunately, many

couldn't afford even a cheap snack. They often asked me to buy them food, and I had to decline because, cheap as it would have been, the next day they'd be hungry again, and then the day after that, and so on. The headmaster was adamant that I eat lunch in the staff room every day, handing me a big bowl of *posho* (a corn flour mixture) and beans. When I related my distress over eating when the children could not, he looked at me regretfully and said that's just the way things were; they'd eat when they went home or borrow money from friends, but I couldn't reject my own lunch when it was provided for me. Accepting gifts from people with so little proved to be another pervading challenge. In Uganda, there is no faux pas so grave as declining a plate of food offered out of hospitality, so I had to temporarily banish my discomfort when someone offered me a delicacy that I would have rather given to one of my students.

Another obstacle to my teaching duties was the sheer lack of resources at St. Francis, a problem shared by many rural Ugandan schools. I had chalk, the notes I'd prepared, and my own brain; they had notebooks, pens, and the occasional dictionary. Sometimes I printed out copies of short stories or exercises at UMU and brought them to class, but this was impossible to do on a daily basis for every class I taught. On the one hand, I realized that much of the modern technology in American classrooms is largely unnecessary; on the other, I dreamed about the difference a set of textbooks and a few computers would make. I attempted to start a library in one of the school's extra rooms, but this too proved a challenge. The school had received a donation of novels from a charitable foundation but most of these were not at the appropriate reading level for my students, and were meant for audiences with entirely different cultural backgrounds. The literary version of the television show *Lost*, for example, would not have resounded with Ugandan teens who had never heard of the show, much less of the cultural

references that the books entailed. What was more, most of these donated books had been damaged by the bats and termites that infested the school and I was forced to throw them away.

Personal interactions proved to be both the greatest reward and most intense point of stress of my experience. I came to truly love my students, who were friendly, hard working, and wise beyond belief. Even on the days when they wouldn't quiet down, my frustration was quelled when they thanked me at the end of the day or asked me how my family was doing. I learned so much about Ugandan culture from the students and teachers at St. Francis, who welcomed me sincerely into their lives. Through their generosity, I was startled to realize how familiar their culture seemed after all. Despite differences in custom, cuisine, and dress, we understood each other at a fundamental level, and that was a groundbreaking realization. On the other hand, it was sometimes exhausting being surrounded by people who understood things I didn't, and who didn't understand things I took for granted. Teachers and students, for instance, would sometimes ask me to "sponsor" them with monetary donations. I never really found a graceful way to deflect these requests. Several also had the troubling idea that America is simply a better place than Uganda, that its people are smarter and more honest. I denied these assumptions emphatically and tried rationally to show that Ugandans and Americans are exactly equal in intelligence and morality, and that Ugandans, if anything, have the upper hand in satisfaction with life, but the words of my colleagues continue to haunt me. I felt personally guilty whenever someone treated me with deference because I was white, an occurrence that happened not infrequently.

I can't begin to describe all of the ways in which I benefitted from this experience. I learned about a new culture and about myself; I discovered a love for teaching; I made good friends; I learned how to adapt and to appreciate small blessings. In Uganda, I finally found a

place where I truly felt comfortable with myself, without any false constructs to enhance my image. And while I do maintain (with a sense of guilt) that I gained more than I gave, I think I was able to add something valuable to St. Francis and to the Ford Program. The reason I admire the organization so much is that it does not simply throw money and resources at the villages, but inserts itself into the community and works together with UMU and the local residents. From my experiences at village meetings, the projects so far have been successful, and the village leaders are enthusiastic about what they can accomplish next. In previous years, Ford's projects in Nnindye focused community development projects to improve agriculture and water supply. This summer, though, Ford began to explore the education sector, focusing its attention on an entirely new group of people. Before, it was mainly the village leaders who worked directly with Ford officials; now, through the teaching internship, all secondary students and their families have been included as well. My position allowed me to interact with villagers every day, and since I was a familiar presence by the end of the summer, they felt comfortable talking with me on a personal level. Through jobs like this one, Ford gains even more credibility in the community as an organization that has the interest of the people at heart. This will make it easier to collaborate with the community on future projects.

Looking at what I accomplished this summer from the perspective I had before I left for Uganda, I might have been disappointed with the results. Now that I understand the challenges and unexpected rewards of the internship, however, I think it was a successful experience for both parties. The students need more practice writing compositions, and I wish I could be there to see that process through. At the same time, they now have some new ideas from an outsider, which I hope will encourage them to think more creatively; not just about writing, but about their lives in general. It is a small, yet noticeable change. The challenges are many and cannot be

quickly surmounted. But the process of positive change is in motion, and everyone involved has the strength and passion to see it through.