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Bumwalukani, Mbale, Uganda  
Summer 2009

When I think back on my summer in Uganda, all I can do is smile. My summer was full of adventures across Uganda, as well as many people, both American and Ugandan, who truly changed my life forever in the ten weeks I knew them, right in the small trading center of Kiholo, Mbale, Uganda. A smile comes to my lips when I think of my summer of riding overcrowded *matatus* (taxi-like public transportation) and buses, urban *boda-ing* (motorcycle-like public transportation), experiencing Ugandan healthcare on many different levels, hiking in the beautiful Ugandan countryside (where “you are not too far now” really means “you still have hours to go”), playing soccer with children and adults alike (where anyone over age ten is way out of my league), and meeting so many amazing adults and children who are poor by our American standards but happy and thriving because they are lucky enough to have been kept away from the vanities that consume our lives.

As typical as it may sound, traveling to Africa to serve has always been a dream of mine. Ever since I was a young girl, and especially in high school, I have dreamt of working in Africa, serving those in need, embracing their culture, and learning a bit more about life itself. The Kellogg Institute at the University of Notre Dame provided me with this opportunity, and thus helped me complete my dream of serving in Africa. For that I will be eternally grateful.

My summer in Uganda was, with no exaggeration, the best summer of my life. I arrived in Uganda not really sure what to expect. When I stepped off the plane and was picked up by FIMRC’s wonderful driver Rashid, a big Ugandan man with a smile that was even bigger, I could tell that good things were to come. As I was not sure what to expect, my first drive through Uganda was quite the experience. On the drive from Kampala to Mbale, almost every

house and building was painted in bright colors, advertising everything from phone companies to food oil to Sleeping Baby, which to this day remains a mystery to me as to what it advertises. I arrived at the guest house after a journey of paved and dirt roads, where the stares of most people made me realize that the number of cars they will see on the roads is very few, while the number of visitors that look like me is even fewer.

On my first night at the guest house, I spoke a great deal with Mike, Field Operations Manager of Project Bumwalukani. We talked about Kiholo, the clinic, the guest house, the people of Bumwalukani, and the potential projects that I could be working on. There were many different options, from sustainability plans, to clinic protocol, to revamping the volunteer process. There already existed a Mission Binder, which contained many activities that volunteers could work on in their time in Kiholo. I was not aware of it at the time, since I had arrived with FIMRC on the internship route, not the volunteer route, but the volunteer process needed a lot of improvement. I decided that this would be an interesting project to start working on in my first few weeks of living in Kiholo. It would give me something tangible to be a part of and develop, but it would also be flexible so that I could work on immersing myself in the culture and experience as much as possible during my time there.

Needless to say, this project was a lot more involved than I had originally thought. I continued to find issues that could be worked on and problems that I could fix, and I saw how beneficial improvement in the volunteer program could ultimately be for the clinic itself. I started with rewriting the pre-departure packet, turning it from a collection of random information that was not completely accurate to a thirty page document, complete with Table of Contents, that contained all the information that volunteers would need both prior to departure as well as during their stay in Uganda. My boss Mike and I started a date book system for

volunteers, complete with a checklist of activities that they should complete in their first three days, suggestions, and ideas of what else they could work on.

My major project of the summer consisted of writing what Mike and I called the Mission Binder. This book, the Organizational Map of which I have included in the end of this document, will be the most important tool for volunteers for years to come. It is a compilation of the five major aspects of what a volunteer can work on while in Uganda; Clinical, Outreach, Major Health Challenges and Lesson Plans, other opportunities, and Trips and Excursions. The first three aspects are the most important, with the second and third continuing the major mission of FIMRC: to educate the community, and thereby create a community in which health education is sustainable. In other words, working with community members; teaching them about Outreach; giving them Lesson Plans, flip charts, and Waiting Room Curriculum topics; and having these locals educate their friends, family, and other community members. The Waiting Room Curriculum is twelve short lesson plans, each taking about ten minutes, which can be given in quick succession to patients waiting at the clinic. The Major Health Challenges section gives the volunteer information on approximately twenty different health challenges that face rural Africa, while giving Lesson Plans that will be used for longer Patient Education Lessons at the clinic, as well as home visits and community visits. I enjoyed this project because I did a lot of research in books such as *Where There Is No Doctor* and *Where Women Have No Doctor*, and learned about all of the different illnesses and health challenges that are present in Uganda. In writing these lesson plans, I also spent a lot of time out in the community, researching topics such as nutrition, the prevalence of malaria nets, and the hygiene and sanitation of many households. Thus, working with the Outreach program was my major project for the summer, and I would say that my work had a major impact on the community and was very successful.

Another project that I worked on during my summer in Bumwalukani was a sustainability plan for the Community Health Educators, a group started by the Peace Corps volunteer, Karine. As her term will be finished in October, it was very important to get a sustainability plan in place before she left. The Community Health Educators (CHE's) is a group of fifteen community members, handpicked, who had all been very involved in the community and in the clinic long before Karine's arrival. These volunteers were trained by doctors, nurses, and community educators on various health topics, and the idea is that they will run health groups, give patient education at the clinic, go on home visits and give patient education, and be the first line of medical advice to those in their village. This group, an amazing set of ordinary villagers who took it upon themselves to help others, is just one of the many aspects of Outreach that are at the Bumwalukani clinic.

While I worked at the clinic most days during the week, I also had the opportunity to do a lot of traveling. Bryant, my fellow intern, and I often traveled to hospitals and clinics both near and far, networking and setting up connections, bringing patients for surgery, buying medications, and doing whatever was needed by Mike and the clinic. I even got to scrub in on brain surgery! During the week, I would normally spend one day traveling. This was a welcome opportunity to have a change of pace and to further experience Uganda. I was also lucky enough to experience a bit of the touristy side of Uganda, going on a safari in Murchison National Park, rafting on the Nile, and bungee jumping over the Nile. I experienced the major cities of Kampala, Jinja, and Mbale, and was able to travel at my own will on the weekends, as long as I worked hard during the week and finished what I needed to. For me this was one of the best parts about my internship; I had the freedom to experience Africa while also having a great boss who worked with me to make some major accomplishments during my ten weeks in Uganda.

As an intern I had the opportunity to work on many different projects. My co-intern, Bryant, worked with the Micro-Health Insurance Program, an intern from last summer worked with the Men's Health Group, and a long-standing volunteer worked on a Water Purification Program. An internship with FIMRC is really what you make of it. It is best to arrive, find a project that you are interested in working on, and run with it. FIMRC gives you the flexibility to truly experience African life and healthcare, as long as you work hard when you are in the clinic and village, and make progress where progress can be made.

I believe that I was very successful in my summer in Bumwalukani. In my last few weeks, everything that I had worked on became an integral part of the volunteer process. As I watched volunteers use my volunteer resources and datebooks, Mission Binder, and pre-departure packet, and even peruse the sustainability plan, I realized that I had actually accomplished a lot in my ten weeks. I had made a difference in a number of ways. I formed relationships with all of the clinic workers and I became especially close with a few young people: one of whom played soccer with us every day, and another who came to the clinic every day during recess to see how my day was going. I also formed a special bond with our cook/cleaner, Jennipher, the funniest woman you will ever meet. I became close with Rashid, our boda driver, and James, who owned the refridgerator in Bumwalukani where we would go to buy drinks. Some of my favorite times were spent sitting down with villagers that I had met, trying to communicate and teach each other a few words, while mostly laughing at our inability to conquer the barrier of language. I also became especially close with my co-intern, Bryant, who shared a majority of these experiences with me.

Since I have returned from Africa, I can tell you that I have barely stopped smiling. If something goes wrong, I put it in perspective. Car troubles: many villagers who I met could not

afford a bike, much less firewood to boil their water. Crowded buses or taxis: my matatu once had thirty people, six chickens, and a dead cow split in two under my feet, in a van meant for a maximum of fourteen people. I cannot find an outfit to go out in: try having one shirt, one pair of ripped shorts, and no shoes, and then you can really experience some of the poverty that I witnessed. And through all of this, the Ugandans whom I met were the most welcoming, helpful, kind, and hardworking people that I have ever come in contact with. They would drop everything to show you around, to help you find the street you missed, to help you carry supplies up to the clinic. Many of the children whom I played soccer with did not speak a word of English, but, as I continued to go play a few times a week, their personalities started to really emerge. Jasper, who always wore the blue, dirty, button up shirt and ripped black shorts, loved to play midfield and was amazing at dribbling around all of the obstacles that presented themselves on our “field,” and he *always* had a huge smile on his face. Nimrod loved to play goalie. Godfrey was a short boy with the quickest feet I have ever seen, always clad in his red long-sleeved shirt, on which the words “Montreal Canadians” had been worn away from years of wearing the same shirt all day, every day. They would laugh at me when I fell in the mud or someone dribbled around me, and it was so fun to see them react when I scored a goal or made a good move. When we showed up with the soccer ball, their faces would light up, as otherwise they would be playing with a ball made of rocks and plastic bags.

Communication and personal bonds can cross the barriers of language, oceans, and cultures. I feel closer to many of these boys, and to many of the people that I met, than I do to some people I have known all of my life. Life is pure, it is simple, it is a daily gift. My summer in Bumwalukani was amazing. It was life changing, it was rewarding, and it was the best experience of my life. I will go back, I will work for a long time around Uganda and Africa, and

I will make a difference again. If you are ready for the best experience of your life with an amazing organization in a beautiful, lush village, go with FIMRC, journey to Uganda, and change the lives of those you meet. Just make sure you are open to having them change yours at the same time.