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There is something both incredibly profound and incredibly humbling in stepping off of a plane halfway across the world and realizing that you are, like Dorothy, no longer in Kansas. The minute my ruby red slippers (purple Birkenstocks) set foot on Rwandan soil, I was confident that I would return from this summer profoundly changed both personally and spiritually. Like Dorothy, I met a range of people with different worldviews and life experiences along my journey in the not-so-Kansas village of Nsinda, Rwanda. These children and adults not only challenged me to grow and to expand my own worldview, but also blessed me with the wonderful gift of understanding the often-elusive axiom "shared humanity" through committing myself to living each day through the rubric of love. In sharing of the little village of Nsinda and beyond, I learned lessons that helped me to transform into a person more deeply committed to an anthropologically grounded process for the development of Africa.

While teaching young, energetic students can be thrilling because they possess seemingly endless curiosity, it can also be a frustrating and daunting task because of their restlessness and short attention spans. In my classes, I came to find that some of my students were very easy to love and some were difficult, constantly testing my patience. Through struggling to pacify my frustration, I came to learn that the ability to love the difficult-to-love children is the test of the empathy and compassion of an individual.

In the beginning, the second category of children frustrated me; how could a student be so ungrateful for the opportunity to be educated and to have a brighter future? Over time I realized that each individual is the product of his past; his character and disposition are dependent on his experiences and the lessons that he has been taught, whether good or bad. Some

of these students come from families scarred by the devastation of genocide, loss, and suffering. Others are from families whose main concern each day is the origin of the food that will adorn the table at dinner. Growing up and being nurtured in a world where the everyday experience is a chaotic scramble to make ends meet and to reconcile the brokenness that has ruptured the family's structure, the student is taught that a long-term mindset is not the primary goal but rather it is meeting the short-term, day-to-day needs. Education, then, is placed at the bottom of the priority list for the parents, a list which is absorbed by the student, as his young mind knows not how to develop his own list of priorities.

In dealing with students whose familial culture has taught them that education is not meant to be at the top of their priority list, I came to learn that it is as important, if not more important, to love the misbehaved, disengaged student as it is the energetic, excited-to-learn student because in loving the former I had the power to penetrate his elastic mind and to reshape how he sees his future – not as an unimportant, nebulous idea that will come to be however time allows, but as something important in which his time should be invested. In battling to overcome the barriers to education through empathy, compassion, and understanding, I felt empowered to help this child to rewrite his priority list and to see education not as an unnecessary waste of time and resources, but as the most important tool for a brighter and better future. I see this lesson not only as a challenge but also as a reward: while I struggled to understand the perspective from which these children viewed the world, I was provoked to exercise a spirit of patience – a trait that I had formerly lacked.

Fortunately the research component of my time in Rwanda engaged me in myriad dialogues regarding the positives and negatives of Rwandan cultural practices. Through conversation and interview, I began to explore and to understand the complicated experience of

the Rwandan schoolgirl. I was informed that in their culture, women are expected to be submissive and silent; they are not permitted to have an opinion unless it agrees with and is asked for by a male. Through the ingraining of this culture of submission, young girls learn that they are voiceless and powerless against male authority and force. As girls get older, this complicates their experience as young Rwandans: they have been taught not to speak out and thus cannot object to sexual assault or abuse, arranged marriage, or domestic violence. In addition, female sexuality and body development are taboo topics that often lead girls to experience shame and disgust when they go through extremely ordinary body changes at puberty. In uncovering some of these gender-based structural violence issues, I began to understand that the causes of gender inequality in Rwanda are strongly rooted in culturally constructed worldviews. As an aspiring anthropologist, I hope that future research permits me to understand the role of anthropology in evaluating UNDP and NGO efforts to break these culturally framed worldviews by assuring that young women and their families respond positively to these cultural changes. To me, real development cannot occur if the recipients of development efforts do not perceive them to be effective. When there is a chasm between the NGO efforts and recipients, development transforms into a power struggle where projects are imposed on communities by wealthy, omnipotent donors who believe their hailing from a "more developed" country legitimates their perception of needs in a given country or region, ignoring the community's desires within its cultural context.

My time in Rwanda was one of incredible personal and spiritual growth; I experienced difficulties and successes, natural beauty and man-made ugliness, pure joy and deep sorrow, and an overwhelming appreciation for the wonderful world that God had created for us to inhabit and, even better, to share with one another. I am confident that through all of these challenges,

rewards, and learning experiences, I have come to not only better understand Rwanda and its culture, but to love the country and its people deeply and genuinely. I am forever grateful for having the opportunity to be embraced by a community halfway across the world – I cannot imagine my life without the wonderful children and families that welcomed me as their own into the not-so-Kansas village of Nsinda, Rwanda.