WHEREVER THERE IS

By: LARA KROEKER

Over the years, many people have asked me about the two water projects that I worked on in Tanzania, and, through emails and blog posts I've told bits and pieces of an incomplete story, but I wanted to collect and share the whole thing—right from the beginning.

Not just for you, but for me—to help me understand how I got there—**wherever there is.**

So many people helped to make this project happen—from the Queen Victoria school community, Doug Sherrett from Strathcona elementary to CIDA (Government of Canada), Innovation Africa and their anonymous donor, Juma, the teachers in Iyoli, as well as Baraka, Miriam, Shadia, and Zanrua—and so many more.

Most importantly, I'd like to thank Moshi Changai and Perry Buchan who both gave this project its lifeblood. It would not have happened without either one of them, and they too have their own unique stories.

Here is my story.

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Edited by Josh Price

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Memories are strange.

Many people believe that the human brain has one hundred billion neurons that are constantly communicating to each other—sending and storing memories. Those invisible pieces of information are embedded in our bodies—part of our physical makeup—and when you recall them, they are rewritten based on every new experience.

Layer upon layer, our memories are changing as our story evolves.

This is just a theory and not all researchers believe that the process of remembering itself can alter memories, but I do. I believe that our memories are always changing so that they fit our story.

And we can pick and choose the memories that define our life and piece them together like a puzzle. They may not even be the truth—but an interpretation of the story so that all the little pieces fit together as best as possible, even if they don't.

The following takes place during my first journey to East Africa in 2005, the year after my mom, Diane, passed away. These memories—like the memories of my mother—are unique to me. While it may not be the same story others would have told, it's one I must tell.

CHAPTER 1

Kalagala High School
Uganda, Tanzania

Being in Kalagala was like living in another world. The soil was a deep and rusty red that stuck to our skin. The dust in the air always left a film on everything and no matter how hard we scrubbed, nothing came clean.

It was winter 2005 and we were near the equator where the days were so bright and sunny that our goal was to find a tree for shade to save us from the heat. Nights, on the other hand, became so dark that all we wanted to do was to find light. In the darkness, my family commonly heard bats, crickets, birds, and—if we were lucky—the distant sound of singing from the girl's dormitory.

With the intermittent electricity, we were lucky to get an hour of illumination, let alone power for anything else in the countryside. With no pre-packaged entertainment, we often passed the time with song or dance.

The date was February 29, 2004, a Sunday. My mom and dad were in Guatemala leading a tour group of thirty people while staying at a bed and breakfast hacienda. The owner of that establishment also had a cabin on the Pacific Ocean about an hour and a half away, so on that February day, they were going to be spending time at the beach.

When someone dies tragically, you grab onto anything that lets you remember who they were. I guess that's why there are so many benches in parks or plaques on buildings. Choosing to go to Uganda was almost random. A guy my dad knew, Maweji, was a Ugandan living in Winnipeg. Maweji had a school in his home village of Kalagala that he went back and forth to help. We learned that the school needed a music hall and a computer lab but it wasn't why my family and I went. We didn't go for a sense of "doing good," we were just looking for a place to go together, something to hold onto.

My mom was the last one onto a crowded van, so she sat on the floor behind the front passenger seat. My dad told me that she wouldn't stop showing off pictures of her three daughters. She was talking about us and telling funny stories, using tall tales of her daughter's escapades to keep the passengers entertained.

Before leaving Canada for Uganda, my partner Loc and my daughter Zoe, who was seven-years-old at the time spent a year collecting computers and money. We sold our car, rented out our house, and saved every penny so that we could spend some time here with the students, living with them in Kalagala. And so, makeshift plans made, my partner Loc, daughter Zoe, my father (Irv), as well as my two sisters (Kirsten and Rebecca), their partners (Wayne and Bryan), and my nephew (Justin), all packed our bags.

Their journey to the water was important because of the tragedy that was about to happen. It was difficult to go from the ocean to the village and back. By now, everyone had changed into swimwear back at the cabin. The waves were high. About an hour later, my mom walked along the shoreline with one of the passengers. They noticed the strength of the undertow and decided to warn the other passengers who were in two groups, a large one and a small one.

Plans for the computer lab continued, but there were some electrical issues at the school we needed to handle first. The last electrician had forgotten (or neglected) to hook up the ground wires, and there was a short circuit that needed fixing. So one day, we went into Mpigi, a fifteen-minute walk from the school, to meet with the local electrician at a restaurant. One of the teachers, Hassan, went with us, and on the way, we stopped to see his grandmother, who gave us some papaya and avocados from her trees. We left a while later to continue our journey into town.

One of my mom's friends headed the smaller group while she continued along the water's edge.

We arrived at the restaurant and waited half an hour for the electrician to show. When that didn't happen, Hassan suggested walking up the road to his shop. Someone there told us that he was actually in Kampala and gave a phone number. We left the shop and started to cross over to the local phone, but we were first distracted by a man selling grasshoppers. In the West, these insects are used to feed pet snakes, but here, the kids like to eat them fried. So we bought the entire bag for the school.

Finally, we made it to the phone. Hassan called the electrician, and they made plans to pick up the supplies and begin work the next day.

My mother came to a place where seven people were swimming in the water. She waved them out. As they came out of the water, one woman, Urma, screamed for help. She had lost her footing. For years, I blamed her. It's hard not to look for someone to blame.

On the way home, we stopped at the local bar for a beer before returning to the school. The grasshoppers, never ones to cooperate, were struggling to get out of the bag, so we tied it at the top, but since we didn't get back to the school for nearly four hours—and the African sun is hot—many of them suffocated, and we arrived with a bag of half dead grasshoppers, but since they were about to be fried anyway, that didn't matter too much. And we had news that the electrician would be there in the morning. Mission accomplished.

My mom waded in and stretched out her hand to help the woman in trouble, but in so doing, she also lost her footing, and the undertow pulled them into a stream of water, first back and forth along the shoreline, and then into a stream straight out into the ocean. By this time, the people on shore were frantic. A neighbor in the next cabin, a doctor—and two Spanish men—got into a boat and tried pushing it out, but the waves were big and it was difficult. Finally, they got beyond the waves' breaking point and headed out to where they could see two heads bobbing in the water.

We gave the grasshoppers to the cook and told her that we wanted to help prepare them. Hundreds of grasshoppers needed their legs, antennae, and wings plucked. Many were still alive and would wiggle between our fingers trying to escape, but the dead ones were much more cooperative. There was enough oil in their bellies that we just threw them into a pan and they fried in their own juices. When they were done, the cook came and put a big bowl in front of us. I closed my eyes and ate them, forgetting that they were insects. They tasted kind of like chips.

Time moved slowly.

Learning often happened at night when the lanterns were lit and there was nothing to do but sit around and chat, sing, and dance. The kids would often congregate to one spot and start singing one of their Ugandan songs, and then everybody would join in together. It was powerful and moving to hear thirty voices together. The girls loved to show off their dance moves and Zoe, who was seven at the time, joined right in.

My mom and Urma were holding onto each other with one arm while treading water with the other.

"There's the boat!" my mother shouted, and as it approached, Urma disentangled herself from my mother and swam to the boat to get in. She left her in the middle of the ocean—alone.

We had a recording party one evening after we had dealt with the electrical issues. The music echoed through the night like a kind of call, reassurance that we existed. One student in particular, Rogers, wrote

songs that spoke of his home and family. His parents died and he took care of himself and his brother by digging ditches when he was not in school. Another, Abdule, sang one of the songs by the famous Ugandan artist, Bobby Wine. Abdule's soft voice floated effortlessly through the air and still resonates with me years later.

When she was being pulled into the boat by the men, they looked for my mother and saw her lying face down in the water. They eased the boat closer but had a difficult time pulling her up. Once they did, they were unable to lay her flat to give her artificial respiration because of the bolted boat seats.

They headed for shore and landed. Several of the passengers were nurses, and they took turns trying to no avail to resuscitate my mother.





Eventually, we finished work on the computer lab and to celebrate, we had a party for its opening. Over 400 hundred people attended, including parents as well as other people from the village. Many of them came only for the food—which we provided a lot of—but the kids put together a great show. There was a play about child labor, a traditional circumcision dance, a poem, and lots and lots of drumming, singing, and dancing.

Wally Schmidt, my mom's boss, called for an ambulance from the village of Coatepeque about half an hour's drive away from our current village with the dock. When the ambulance arrived, two men took a stretcher and made the arduous journey to the cabin dock, up the hill past the cabin and down the other side where the people were gathered around my mother beside the water. They put her on the stretcher and went back the way they had come. Two passenger nurses went with my mom in the

ambulance. They said the ambulance bounced from side to side as it careened through groups of people on the way to Coatepeque.

If audience members liked what they saw, they would throw money or candy onto the stage. If a person wanted to give something to a specific performer, they stepped right onstage and handed it to them, and then they joined right in with the performance.

My mother, Diane Kroeker, was pronounced dead upon arrival at the Coatepeque hospital.

Together with my family, we placed a plaque on the building that said, "in memory of Diane Kroeker," and it felt good to see my mother's name. Seeing the hardship of some of the students made me feel less sorry for myself. My experiences in Kalagala helped me to see something more than my mother's drowning face whenever I thought of her.

And I will remember her.

CHAPTER 2

The **Safari**

Acacia trees dotted the landscape, and no matter where we pointed our cameras, we got amazing shots.

We traveled through small villages and game parks. Both people and animals only appeared sporadically, and the highways were so bad that we might as well have been driving through the bush. The roads that were actually paved had potholes deep enough to hide an adult male baboon. But despite how fast and bouncy our ride was, our driver, James, navigated the roads with an expertise that made us feel safe.

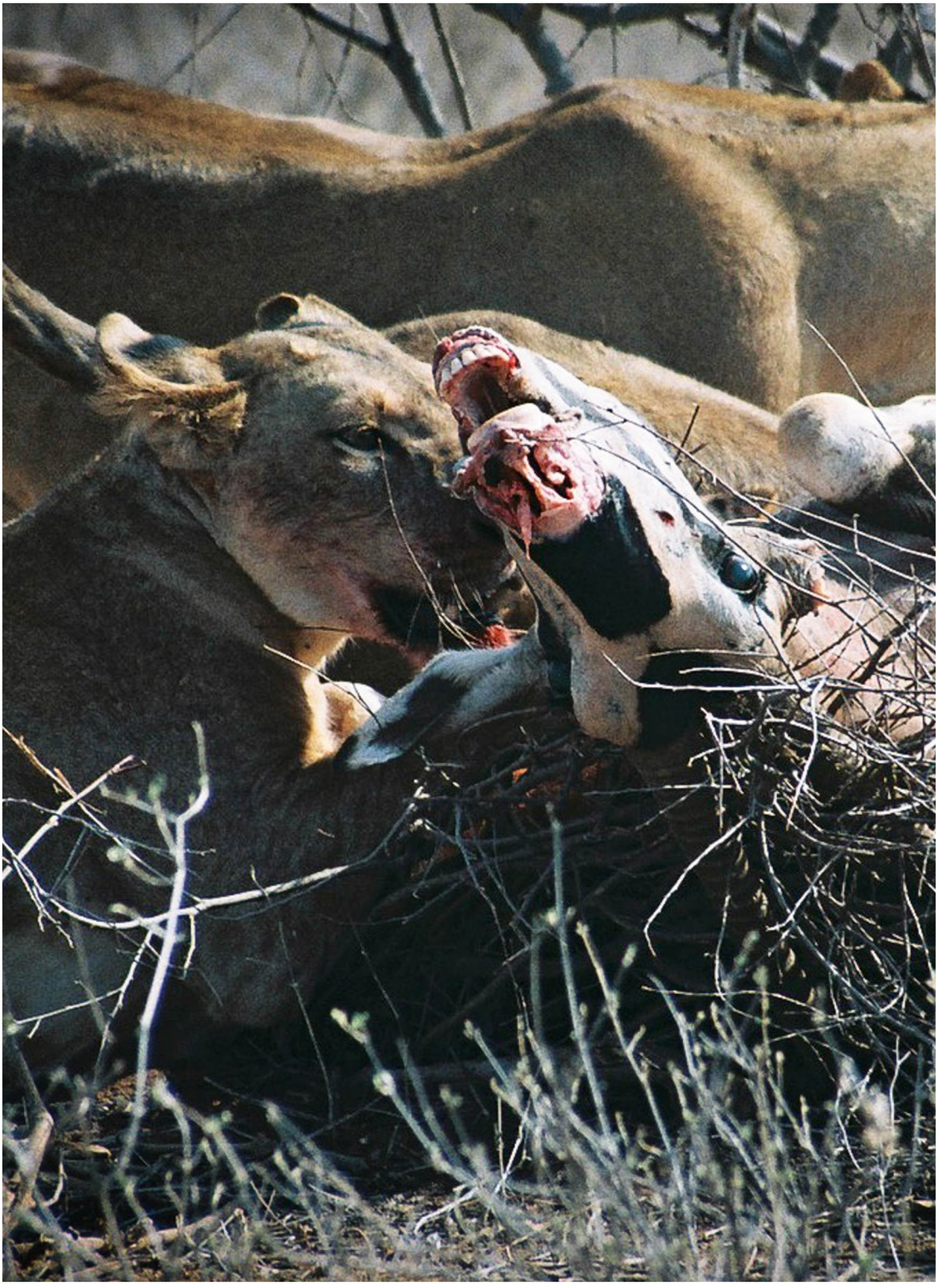
We spent a lot of time outdoors, camping in the wilderness. Some nights, we'd be surrounded by the darkened sky while growling echoed off in the distance. Late one afternoon, an elephant walked through our campsite. We had previously been told that if we saw an elephant, "we must run," but there was nowhere to run except deeper into the wilderness, so we just stood behind a line of laundry

that we had hung out to dry. It felt safe initially, but when the breeze blew our cover away, we went and stood with some park staff who didn't seem worried. Then, anticlimactically, the elephant left and we continued our day.

The time eventually came to leave Kalagala. My family had made plans to travel to Kenya to embark upon a safari that would show more of life in Africa.

One after another, we encountered small villages. They were as much a part of the landscape as the lions, giraffes, and elephants. The houses were made of cow dung and sticks. They were small, round, and stunk. The children would share a bed in the back, and the much-larger front part was home to the goats and calves so the lions didn't eat them.

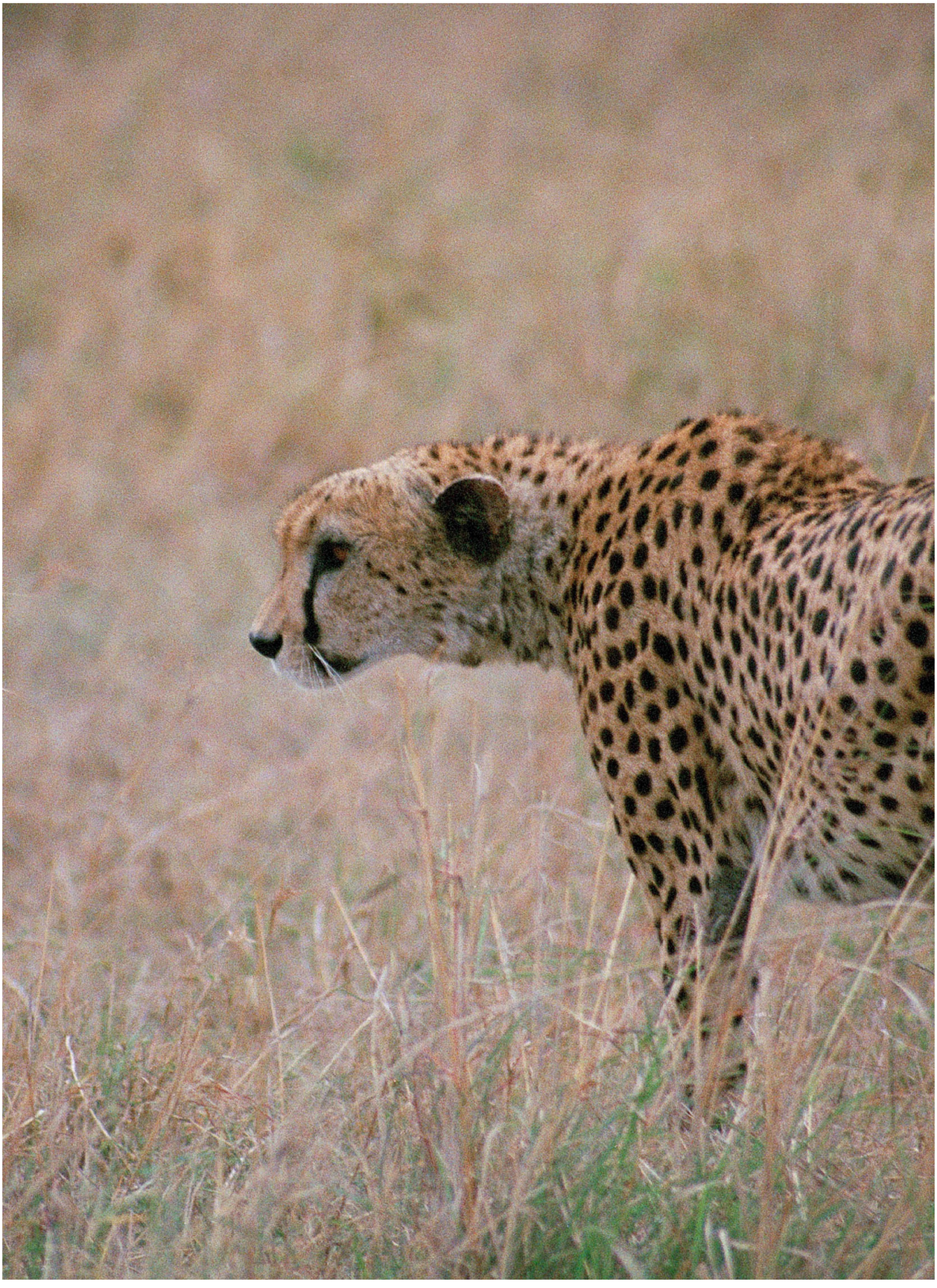
When the last morning in Samburu came, we woke early for a game drive. We were hoping to find more elephants, but instead we came across a family of over fifteen female lions. They crossed the road in front of our van and headed toward a herd of grazing zebra in the distance. The herd seemed rather agitated, as though they sensed that something was happening. We had just begun to anticipate what would happen next when, off in the distance, a herd of oryx appeared, and two



Suddenly, three lions stuck their heads up from the grass, and then the other groups closed in on the oryx. The kill happened so fast that all you could really see was dust, but when we moved to where the lions were attacking, you could hear the grunts and groans of the oryx as the lions held its mouth closed to suffocate it.

For over an hour, the lions ripped apart the meat while my family looked on. Afterward, the oryx more closely resembled the meat that hangs from an African butchery shop than something that was living just a little while ago.

One by one, the bloodied cats finished and went off in search of a place to sleep so that they could rest up and do this all again as the cycle repeated.




MARA 2005.
MARA 2005.

CHAPTER 3

Rugged and Wild **Tanzania**

My family went their separate ways, Rebecca and Wayne departed on their own adventure, Kirsten and Bryan, my dad, and Justin went home to Winnipeg. Zoe, Loc, and I hit the roads of Tanzania. It was raw and wild. If you moved outside of the paved roads of the northern safari circuit, you'll see the real Tanzania—thirsty but full of life.

It was in Tanzania where I met Moshi Changai.

Moshi was a guide that I met on the internet through the Lonely Planet website to take Loc, Zoe, and I to the Ngorongoro Crater, Tarangire, and Lake Manyara National Park in Tanzania. They are from the Irangi tribe and escaped the poverty of their tiny village through the tourism industry and know everything there is to know about African animals and the environment.

Moshi would end up becoming a big part of my life in the years that followed.

After visiting the typical Tanzania game parks, we headed to a small village called Sori, where Moshi and Chudi had grown up. On the way, we passed countless shanty towns where rickety old buildings looked as though they would fall down if someone sneezed. As we drove, I wondered about the people of these villages. We saw young boys crossing the road with a herd of cattle and women walking with bright yellow buckets on their heads. Children yelled "muzungu" at our car as we passed.

When we finally arrived, we were greeted by three of the village women. They smeared a green mixture of goat remains, spit, and bark on our foreheads. It was a gesture of peace they did for visitors or for someone who had been away for a long time. Their native language was Irangi, and the only words I could speak were, "Hello, nice to meet you." I kept repeating them over and over again until Zoe broke the ice by bouncing up and down while chasing a goat, which made the villagers laugh.

On the way to Sori, we had stopped at the Kondoa market to buy head coverings out of respect for the

predominantly Muslim villagers, but after thirty minutes of the heat, I couldn't bear it any longer, so I took the scarf off.

Afterward, Moshi introduced us to the woman who raised him and took us into the mud hut where he grew up. He sometimes had to share his sleeping area with newborn goats, but it was better than allowing them to be eaten by the lions, and the tiny window on the far walls let only a sliver of light through.

Loc and I then walked with the villagers to where they collected water from a well while Zoe rode on a donkey cart. The trip took over twenty minutes in the sweltering sun, and once we arrived, over fifty people were waiting in line. The loud diesel powered pump gave off unbearable fumes, Families visited this pump two or three times a day, and often, they send their daughters, who might be five or younger. These children would carry the buckets on their heads back home for another twenty minutes in the hot sun, but the well and pump made this village one of the luckier ones. In other areas, villagers have to travel over ten kilometers (about six miles) to collect water from what was basically a puddle. Reality of life without water is grueling, a fact that was all too common.

That image stayed with me.

Our time in Tanzania, and Sori in particular, matured Zoe and she grew to understand the value of a hot shower, a full meal, a soft bed, and good drinking water at only seven years old.

After Tanzania, we boarded a boat and journeyed to the island of Zanzibar.

CHAPTER 4

Sleepy **Zanzibar**

We made our way to Zanzibar island tired and dirty. On the way, we passed tiny dhow boats that looked as though they were going to sink under the weight of the fishermen and their passengers. Due to the centuries of Arab influence, most people on the island are Muslim, so Zanzibar has an interesting combination of African tribal and Arabic sensibilities.

It was a place to pause and reflect, and to write.

On our first day there, we took to the narrow stone streets and would have missed a music school had we not gotten lost and taken a few wrong turns. The music was what drew us in as it escaped onto the streets and found us as we wandered. On the top floor, overlooking the Indian Ocean, in an old stone palace, were students practicing the oud, the violin, the harp, and various other instruments.

I had been playing the violin for years, and wherever I went I tried to learn from other musicians—to explore other cultures. So I asked for lessons and met a local musician, Matona.

He played most of the instruments at the school but was an especially skilled violinist. He couldn't speak much English and my Swahili was laughable, but we communicated through the music and that kept us going for the afternoon. With the distant sound of waves lapping against the shore, I learned taarab scales and traditional songs. I returned the next day to meet his friends as they sat in a circle playing traditional music on the colourful handmade Berber carpets.

Our days followed the rhythm of the ocean tides. The salty breeze made our skin sticky, and the silky white sand cleaned our feet and stuck to our bodies like glue. Crabs scurried into their holes as we walked up the beach hunting for seashells. Local children shimmied up the trees collecting fresh coconuts to sell on the beach.

Christmas was soft and peaceful at the local inn on the eastern coast of the Indian ocean where we met up with my sister Rebecca and her partner, Wayne. People worked on the beach, and although you could swim, you had to wait until the tide came in and the women were finished harvesting the seaweed that they carried back on their heads into the village.

On a hot and sunny Christmas day, we woke up early. Zoe was happy that Santa had found his way to the island. She opened her present, a wreath made out of spices that she had spotted earlier in the week. We were so out of reach of commercials and had little pressure to buy useless things. We lingered over our coffee at breakfast and walked up the beach looking for crabs hiding inside the seashells.

That evening, a band arrived from one of the shanty towns to play music for a Ngoma. It's how women educate each other on "how to be a woman," which includes sexual education as well as other womanly aspects such as clothing, hygiene, make-up, cooking, and how to treat your husband's parents. It was rather shocking to see a woman covered from head to toe walking over to you, gyrating her hips, and tying a scarf around your butt so they can see you shake it better while yelling and singing songs. Some people there initiated us quite well to these real east afriocan hip rotations, and Zoe mastered the art.

So many years later, these moments feel like a dream and why I finally want to write them down.

Music is different here, and the role of a musician is to get the audience members to be active participants. Players are much more laid back and although they are earning money, they have fun. People are less inhibited, and it is infectious. To show appreciation for the band, you wave money around the performers while dancing and moving to the music.

After a good five minutes of waving your money around, you finally drop it into the bowl that is set out in front of them.

Later in the evening, many of the villagers came to join us, and Christmas night was spent dancing under the stars to the beat of the Ngoma drums.

There's a noticeable ease to island life. The sun is hot but there is always a soft breeze to cool you off. The locals harvest seaweed and go fishing in the ocean for parrot, tuna, barracuda, bream, red snapper, and pono to survive. The coconut and mango trees grow all over the island and yield fruit all year round. It's not hard to find food.

CHAPTER 5

Secrets of **Marrekesh**

The sound of Muslim prayers echoed from the speakers. The smell of smoke from the meat stands filled our apartment. Spices lined the streets. Fresh orange juice lingered on our tongues. Exotic smells became familiar. We were not ready to come home and rented a place in Marrakesh, Morocco after we left Zanzibar.

Winding streets led to a rusty, black iron door and into another universe. We were living in a riad with Bernard, a French painter, near the main square in Marrakesh. He lived here during the winter and worked at the consulate in Iran during the summer. The houses all looked inward and the simple concrete exteriors gave way to rich and colorful interiors.

The bottom half of our apartment had tiled walls, and its two floors circled around an open fountain in the center. There was no ceiling and birds flew in and out of the courtyard. Art hung from the red and pink and green and orange walls. Bernard painted in the studio on the second floor all winter because he liked the colors and the light in Marrakesh. We were using the room beside his studio. The main floor had a huge, red sitting room with over twenty carpets and long couches with many pillows. It was cold and drafty but exquisite, and my favourite spot to sit.

We spent most of our mornings exploring the side streets and getting to know the local shopkeepers. We'd spend afternoons in the apartment with Bernard. He set up an easel for Zoe, and they spent the afternoons painting together while Loc and I sifted through the images and sounds we collected during our journey.

It was hard not to feel inspired here.

We became friends with Soad, Bernard's housekeeper, and she taught us to speak and write some basic Arabic. She also showed us how to cook her lamb tagine, a slow-cooked stew, which we still make today. One evening, she invited me to the local hammam, and I, assuming it was a kind of local spa, agreed to go.

We paid eighty dirhams to a man sitting outside of a small white door that most people walking by probably didn't even notice. The room was dark and covered from ceiling to floor in white tiles. We took off our clothes and then walked through another wooden door past six other women sitting on a bench. These were the massage people.

There were three big, steam-clouded rooms and each led into the other while progressively getting hotter and hotter. We headed for the farthest and hottest room with our five big buckets of hot water. The rooms were packed, and we passed woman after woman as they scrubbed their children down while chatting and laughing. We found a spot near the wall and placed our buckets around us. As the initial shock of the place faded, I started dumping the buckets of warm water on myself. Zoe acted as though she had been here many times before and covered herself in some green smelly algae. She tried unsuccessfully to control her giggles as I dropped to the wet floor for my massage.

I was sanded like a piece of wood. The "masseuse" scrubbed until grains of black dirt appeared all over my body. Then she took bucket after bucket of hot water and rinsed East Africa away into the soil of Marrakesh.

I peered at the women around me. Some of them spent their days fully covered with only their eyes peering out from under their veils, but in the hammams, those same women were pouring hot water over their bare bodies. Soad said that women came to hammams once or twice a week because they still didn't have hot water, and it was a treat to be able to feel clean and hot and comfortable. But mostly it was a place where women and their children came to socialize and talk. Three hours later, we were finally finished and we walked back to the apartment, cheeks silky smooth and flushed from the hammam.

The hammams served another purpose, too. The fires in the back were used to cook a traditional moroccan dish, tangia marrakchia. It was common for people to congregate there in order to cook the dish. The man who stoked the fires was friends with Abderazak, the town barber. We found in him a great friend, and all it took was a haircut for Loc. Men would bring their tanjia pots to the butcher, who would fill it with prepared meat, then they would take this to the hammam fires where it would simmer slowly all day. One day, Abderazak invited us over to dinner to share in this meal. We visited his house, met his family, shared this delicious meal.

We learned to appreciate the simple things here, like drying off in a warm room after getting wet from the rain, drinking a glass of fresh orange juice from one of the Djemaa stands, feeling clean after the Hammam, sleeping late, listening to the birds flutter around our place, and escaping from the crowds of people.

We were there long enough to know the smells and learn the streets. We knew where to get a haircut and buy our bread. Things we thought were exciting when we first arrived eventually seemed commonplace, like donkeys that carried goods piled high on their cart down the street, the djellaba coats that the men wore, the women in the black veils with only a slit for their eyes and the snake charmers in the Djemaa el-Fnaa.

But the time eventually came for us to leave Marrakesh. We would soon be leaving to return to Canada, but first, though, we planned to visit the Sahara. We packed our bags and said goodbye to the people that we had said hello to each day as we passed them in the street.

We had rented a car earlier in the month and braved the mountain paths that took us through Berber villages to the Merzouga sand dunes. At the bottom of one of these villages, we met a stranded man whose car had broken down. The roads were empty, so we stopped to give him a lift. He said his name was Saiid and that he lived outside of Merzouga with his five brothers, his Berber father, and Touareg mother. He was proudly Berber, the nomads that had settled in Morocco about three thousand years ago. They had strong feelings about Arab occupation. It's funny, in the souks, a man said "don't worry, I

won't sell to you like the Berbers" and Saiid said "Don't trust Arabs, they lie." I never side with anyone over politics, but as it turned out, Saiid tried unsuccessfully to swindle us anyway. I still liked him, though. Plus, he took us to meet his family.

We finally arrived late and met up with Abdul, a man who would be leading us into the desert. He prepared the camels that would bring us on our sunset trip to a campsite in the sand dunes, and then we set off. The yellow light that washed over the land quickly turned into pitch blackness, and we had no clue where we were headed. Abdul stopped an hour into the trek so that he could do his nightly prayers. We were not sure of the etiquette of where to look when someone was kneeling on a mat praying on a sand dune—so we all just turned our backs. We resumed our trek under the stars, which, although spectacular, only dimly lit our way.

We finally arrived at the campsite in the oasis and climbed inside our Berber tent. Nobody had bothered to tell how just how cold it got in the desert during the winter, so all we had were our equatorial sleeping bags from hot and sunny Uganda. Fortunately, Abdul had brought spare blankets that weighed and smelled like they may as well have been sheep. But they were better than freezing, so we huddled underneath the heavy, smelly blankets, hoping that morning would come soon to reveal our whereabouts.

When we awoke, we climbed the highest sand dune, and from three hundred feet above the Sahara, we witnessed the sunrise.

Moroccan culture is split down the middle. Outside the medina walls there is a fairly modern city, but then you see a man pouring water from a water bottle onto his feet from in preparation of praying on the side of the road. The inside of the medina walls are seemingly traditional, but then you see a man walking down the street in his djellaba and bright yellow slippers talking on a cell phone. The culture is in transition and there are many foreigners buying the riads. Many of the people we met worked as housekeepers. One of Soad's friends received an American quarter as a tip, and she asked me how much it was worth. I was embarrassed to say. The owners gave their workers just enough to get by, but not enough to move anywhere else.

Satellite dishes littered the rooftops and received western media while, five times a day, the speakers on the mosques blared the traditional reminder of the call to prayer. It was a fight between the modern and the traditional, a love/hate relationship.

At night when I can't sleep I often sit in the colorful chair that Bernard has painted and think, mostly about my mother. I try to make sense of the past few years and I can't. The world is beautiful, sad, ugly and unfair all at the same time.

But mostly life is random and all I can do is live every day like it is my last, because it really could be.

PART 2: The Cheku
Water Project

CHAPTER 6

The Cheku Water Project

After spending so long in Africa, the time had come to return to Vancouver. In the fall of 2007, Zoe went back to Queen Victoria School on Vancouver's east side.

...and so it began.

Her teacher, Perry Buchan, heard bits and pieces about our trip from her seven-year-old perspective, which inspired him to integrate a section on water into the school's curriculum. It takes a special kind of person to imagine a project and then make it happen.

That is Perry.

And so, with Perry helming the efforts, the Cheku Water Project began. At first, helping an African village halfway around the world was a hard sell to many members of the community, but with Perry's help, the project eventually evolved into a school-wide initiative. The teachers at Queen Victoria developed curriculum about water related issues, both local and global. What resonated with them the most was the situation in developing countries like Tanzania.

The students wanted to know more about this world that was so far removed from life in Vancouver. With Moshi's help, they began writing letters to pen pals in Cheku, but soon, the students wanted to actually do something to help the village—that something turned into digging a well, but that required money, and the creation of a borehole.

Naively, we went straight into raising funds to build the well. The school hosted a walk for water so that the kids could feel, if only for a day, what it was like to have to carry water, which had a huge impact. One of the other things the school did to raise funds, and to help the community understand what the kids were doing, was to have them write and perform a play about water in general—and specifically how the children in the village of Cheku lived and dealt with their water issues. Artists-in-residence, staff and community members worked with the children to help develop an original script, original music, sets, props and costumes. In this way the learning of the children was transformed into a theatre piece that would create awareness and support for the project.

It took well over a year, but the small community eventually raised about $20,000. From there, plans started to come together quickly. With the help of an

engineer named Dominic, we formed a small water committee at the school. I had spoken to a woman from Engineers Without Borders, Erin, who had worked on a similar project in Tanzania, and she pointed us toward a few different companies, and we got their quotes. Then together with Moshi as project manager, we chose a driller who we all thought would do a good job. We conducted a few surveys and narrowed our chances of finding water down to three sites, and while the location we picked was our best bet, there was always the possibility of spending $20,000 and finding nothing.

On March 24th, 2009, nearly two years after we came back from Uganda, drilling began, but it was slow going with frequent obstacles. First, the rig's clutch plate had a problem, so it took a few days just to get the machine into the village. Then the gearbox transmission as well as the main hydraulic pumping system both had problems. Mr. Wilson and Mr. Toni, the lead drillers, went back to Dar es Salaam to fix it, but they ended up travelling to India to buy a new part (to this day, I still have no idea why they didn't just have it sent to Dar). While this was going on, I slept with my phone under my pillow waiting in case the project needed help.

During this time, Moshi sent frequent emails, edited for clarity, to keep us all up to date on what was happening.

Mr. Wilson and Mr. Toni left to Dar to try and fix a problem with the rig, and once that's done, I'm hoping that drilling will start, and that everyone will be happy. It worries me that we keep having problems with the rig since we are depending on it to make everyone's dream come true. I had Mr. Dominic (our engineer in Canada) ask Mr. Wilson to confirm that if we keep having trouble with this rig that he will send us another one and not continue fixing this one.

That rig did end up needing to be replaced with a less faulty one, and Moshi kept the pressure high until that happened, and as a matter of fact, the old one still sits rusting in Cheku.

Deeper and deeper they dug with the new rig in search of water.

The drilling went well. The villagers who visited were happy, and the drilling excited everyone. We ran out of fuel, but if we hadn't, we would have been able to drill down deeper.

In hindsight, as I read through these letters—with the water project behind us—I realize that work in Tanzania is crazy and inefficient. Companies will run out of gas and that's it; the project would stop for a few days. Thinking about it still stresses me out.

We successfully drilled again. With the borehole as deep as it was, Mr. Beda, Joseph, and I had a discussion about the PVC installation that needed to be applied.

The PVC piping was intended to keep the well from collapsing in on itself once it was dug. Many drillers actually cheated their clients and skipped this part of the process. Moshi put a lot of effort in keeping this project running and to make sure everything was done, and done well. He kept breathing down everyone's necks and watching their every move. He measured and double checked everything.

Mr. Bago (the water engineering consultant), is working in the Mbeya Region in the Southern Highlands of Tanzania. Although he wishes he could be here, it is not possible. I call him every day to talk, and he advised me to watch that the PVC installation is done properly.

Anytime Moshi needed Mr. Bago's expertise, he would call him and then direct the drillers. Also, remember that Moshi is from the small neighbouring village of Sori. He had no schooling and taught himself everything, and by the end, he knew as much as the engineers.

Today, we began cleaning the well now that the PVC had been successfully installed. The Cheku villagers who visited the site were happy because they witnessed the water with their own eyes. In dry seasons, like today, women and young children must wake up in the middle of the night and walk far to collect water, which sometimes they wouldn't even find. The community visited the project site and couldn't believe that there was water. Most of them

brought their cattle to drink and collected water for washing at home. They won't forget this.
Seven months later, on October 24th, 2009, the well was all but complete. We verified that the water was safe to drink without serious purification efforts, but we still needed to get the water to the surface, and that required a high-quality pump.

An electric pump, however, wasn't cheap, and by now, we were all but out of money. The drilling team left, and the daunting task remained of raising more funds, something that might not have been an issue if we had help from an organization that knew the complexity of building a well, but we were making up this project as we went along.

I had a falling out with Dominic (the Canadian engineer) because he wanted a hand pump, but it made no sense to put one in a deep borehole just so we could save money and say the project was done.

It would not have worked.

The villagers would've had to waste countless hours just to get the water to the surface. An electric pump was the only real solution to a borehole of that depth and we had to wait for the money.

As the weeks went on, the villagers had to suffer with a well that they couldn't even use while I woke up wondering how the hell we were going to find another $20,000. I Googled "pumps" and "solar" and called every single company that had anything to do with water.

Borehole specifications

Well casing size = 5"

Total well depth = 78m

Static Water Level = 25m

Refresh rate = 2000L/hr (8-9gpm)

Latitude: 05.09490-S

Longitude: 35.86630-E

"Hello. My name is Lara Kroeker, and I work for the Queen Victoria water project. We have a borehole that needs a solar pump. Engineer? No I am not an engineer (and I wanted to say that I was actually a designer and indie musician)."

CLICK.

I must have called over thirty different companies, and they all thought I was crazy, but the experience gave me a thick skin. I learned how to talk about the project with others and that a "no" simply meant that I needed to look harder.

Then, in January of 2011, we finally got a stroke of luck when the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) offered us one of

their very last grants. For over a year, the well wasn't even functional, and within just a month, we had a working, solar-powered well and water storage in the middle of a small village in Tanzania. All it takes is money.

To officially handover the project, Moshi held a formal village meeting in Cheku that established that everyone would be responsible for the water project. They agreed that they would create a local government specifically for water issues and charge an affordable amount for fetching water and bringing cattle to the well. The fees would go into a bank account and be used for future maintenance of the well. And so, for nearly two years after that, I drank my glass of water nightly while sitting on the porch with Loc, and I thought about that well. It wouldn't truly be real until I could stand in front of it and see it with my own two eyes.

Once again in 2013—over six years since our trip to Uganda—I took Zoe, who was now fifteen, out of school, and we traveled to Tanzania to see that well.

CHAPTER 7

Tanzania **with Zoe**

After spending nearly two days trapped on a plane, we arrived in the bustling city of Dar es Salaam. Within the past thirty years, Dar has grown from a sleepy Zaramo fishing village into a thriving tropical metropolis of over four million people and is East Africa's second-busiest port and Tanzania's commercial hub. It smelled muggy, hot, sweet, and dusty all at the same time. It had been six years, but once again Tanzania stood before us.

We left the airport and met up with Moshi. He was exactly as I remembered him: serious, kind, and a man on a mission. We had spent over a year back in 2009 corresponding about the Cheku Water Project almost daily, but this was the first time seeing him since we met so many years ago. After a heartfelt reunion, we headed to the bus station to drop off our extra bags for Cheku. By this point in Zoe's life, she was beginning to write more and more, and as any good mother would, I asked (sometimes bribed) her to keep a journal on this trip, so I'll let her tell some of the story through her teenage eyes:

In the taxi, me, the two big boxes of presents (for the kids in Cheku), and Moshi were all crammed into the back of the cab. We were headed to the bus depot to drop these things off so that they arrived ahead of us in Kondoa. Driving down the streets of Dar is so nerve-racking. People are being honked at from every direction, pedestrians are walking an inch away from the car, and motorcycles are going too fast. Here in Tanzania, people honk to warn others that they're coming, unlike Canada where we honk if we're mad.

The next day at the hotel, while Zoe worked on her mountain of homework, Moshi and I sat for hours talking about the issues that we encountered on this complicated water project. It seemed crazy to have gathered so much knowledge and not apply it again, but with how stressful the Cheku Water Project had been, we both agreed that we would never tackle anything of that magnitude again.

We would focus instead on adding an environmental arm to Moshi's already-established cultural tours.

Moshi grew up in the small village of Sori Tanzania, close to Cheku. His village was poor, and he left when he was sixteen to work in the nearby city of Arusha as a porter on Mount Kilimanjaro. Arusha was Tanzania's gateway to the northern circuit of safari parks. The city sits below Mount Meru on the eastern branch

of the Great Rift Valley. It's where most tourists land before either heading out for a safari or climbing mount Kilimanjaro. For a few years, he climbed up and down the mountain carrying the luggage of tourists.

He learned the ins and outs of the thriving tourism business because almost everyone who climbed the mountain also wanted to do a safari in the famous Tanzanian parks. However, work as a porter was hard, so he decided to transition into the safari business. He went to school and learned about Tanzanian wildlife, and then through his contacts, he started working as a safari guide for some of the bigger companies. He did this in Arusha for a few years and then started doing some smaller tours on his own. Someone had written positively about him in Lonely Planet, and that's how I found him. Over the years, he continued to work as a guide for different companies.

Later, after he got married and started a family of his own, he found that Arusha was a tough place to work, and he wanted to move his family back to a smaller community while still conducting tours, which is how his cultural tourism company came about. Kondoa was a good place for him to raise a family and tap into the handful of tourists that ventured into the region to see the UNESCO rock paintings. Plus—it was far less competitive. His cultural tours eventually evolved into a bigger initiative to bring the tourists in and around the area.

In hindsight, I imagine I wanted to be involved with his tours because it's how I grew up, and it felt natural

to build and grow projects. I often left school for a few weeks at a time to join my parents as they traveled around the world leading groups. In a way, having Zoe with me was like following in my parents' footsteps, although that thought didn't occur to me at the time.

Moshi and I talked all afternoon about ideas to develop his cultural tours that would integrate environmental projects and bring communities together. Plus, it was a way for Zoe and I to create our own adventure while we visited the different communities in the region.

That afternoon, Moshi left to do his own errands and Zoe and I decided to walk around. In Zoe's letters, she switches between calling me mom, mommy, and Lara. Maybe she wanted to feel older and more professional, but she did drift back into mom and mommy at points. I think it was when she was feeling vulnerable.

We wanted to go to a coffee shop but apparently, coffee shops aren't a regular thing here in Dar, so we were sent to a place that mostly served food. Me and Lara walked into this little blue open restaurant on the corner of the street called "A Tea Room". I wasn't that hungry and neither was Lara, but we went anyway. Inside, it had a bunch of scratched off no smoking signs and the tiny kitchen was decorated with fake flowers and trees. We got our food—which was pretty good—it was a deep fried samosas and pork. All the food I've eaten here so far has been completely deep fried, which is fine with me. Once we were done eating, we decided to get another drink, so Lara went to get it and came back with two cokes in her hand. We both realized after a few minutes that we're supposed to sit down and order, but instead Lara had actually gone right into their kitchen and taken the drinks and food right out of the restaurant's fridge! I was pretty embarrassed. We were these silly little tourists who were unaware and lost. After that incident, we decided to go back to the hotel and rest for a bit.

This was our first time being on our own, and being approached by people on the street caught me off guard. Even though they were only selling safaris, wares, and food, you have to be "on" here when you walk around. Simple things, like ordering at a restaurant or working a phone, are not obvious and routine tasks since everything is in Swahili, but we were humble and patient.

When Moshi returned, he was hungry and wanted to have dinner, and we didn't have the heart to tell him that we'd already eaten, so we set off to have dinner—again.

Walking down the streets is even scarier than driving. Cars are brushing your arm while people are trying to sell you things. There are so many distractions. The place for dinner was the best food I've had since I got on the plane! It took a while to order because me and Lara are really slow, but it was ok because the food was heavenly. We could smell it from a mile away because it was being smoked right on the street. There were all types of things, from lamb to beef to kebabs to chicken wings. We tried to order something that looked really cool and yummy but the guy actually told us it was cow fat on a stick, so we ordered the lamb kebab instead (this time we sat down first). It came with fries and chapati bread. Afterward, I was stuffed so we went back to the hotel with our bellies completely full.

The next day, we hopped on a bus destined for Arusha, which was about 600 km (373 miles) away from Dar. From there, we would be heading out to Kondoa. Our plan was to visit the Tangire National Park in Mto wa Mbu to see some animals then and meet up with Richard, a friend of Moshi's, who was also doing cultural tours and lived nearby. Richard was implementing environmental projects at the local village school, so Moshi wanted to stop by so that he could see some of his ideas and bring them back to villages in the Kondoa region.

Once we made it to Arusha, we met up with Abu, a close friend of Moshi's, and then rented a vehicle—as well as a driver. At eight in the morning, we headed out to do our own little makeshift safari, passing through several villages until we made it to the park. Wildlife like zebras, elephants, and mpalas was abundant.

Today, we took a safari to Tangire National Park, and it was beautiful. I really love animals and we saw probably thousands of them. When we were passing the villages, there were kids on the side of the road. These kids were covered in dirt with ripped clothes and were selling fruit and any type of anything. They were probably seven years old. There was one little boy in particular whom me and mommy bought fruit off of (not sure what type). He was probably five or six and was completely alone. His hands and face were dusty from the road, and his little stomach had gotten big because he didn't have enough food in his body. At that moment, I realized how lucky I am.

We made it to Richard's village, Mto wa Mbu, after the sun had gone down. It lies within the East African Valley, about 120km (75 miles) from Arusha and was home to more than 18,000 thousand people and 120 different tribes. We met Richard and went out to a little place in the village for dinner. Since there were no street lamps, everything was dark, and we couldn't really see much, but with flashlights in hand, we eventually found our way to the small restaurant.

We sat down under this little wooden patio that had five plastic chairs, a plastic table, a tablecloth, and a bright red lamp shining on top of us. The waitress came to the table with a bucket and a kettle. Me and Lara had no idea what she was doing, but Moshi explained to us that we had to wash our hands before we ate while she poured the water from the kettle on our hands. The chicken was local and was delicious but very chewy. The most exciting thing about the meal though was the ugali. We ate really late at night, so we couldn't really see it, but ugali is this cornmeal dough that you dip into a stew and eat. The villagers eat it because it's very filling, cheap, and easy to make. It came in a gigantic mound and we could not finish even half of it.

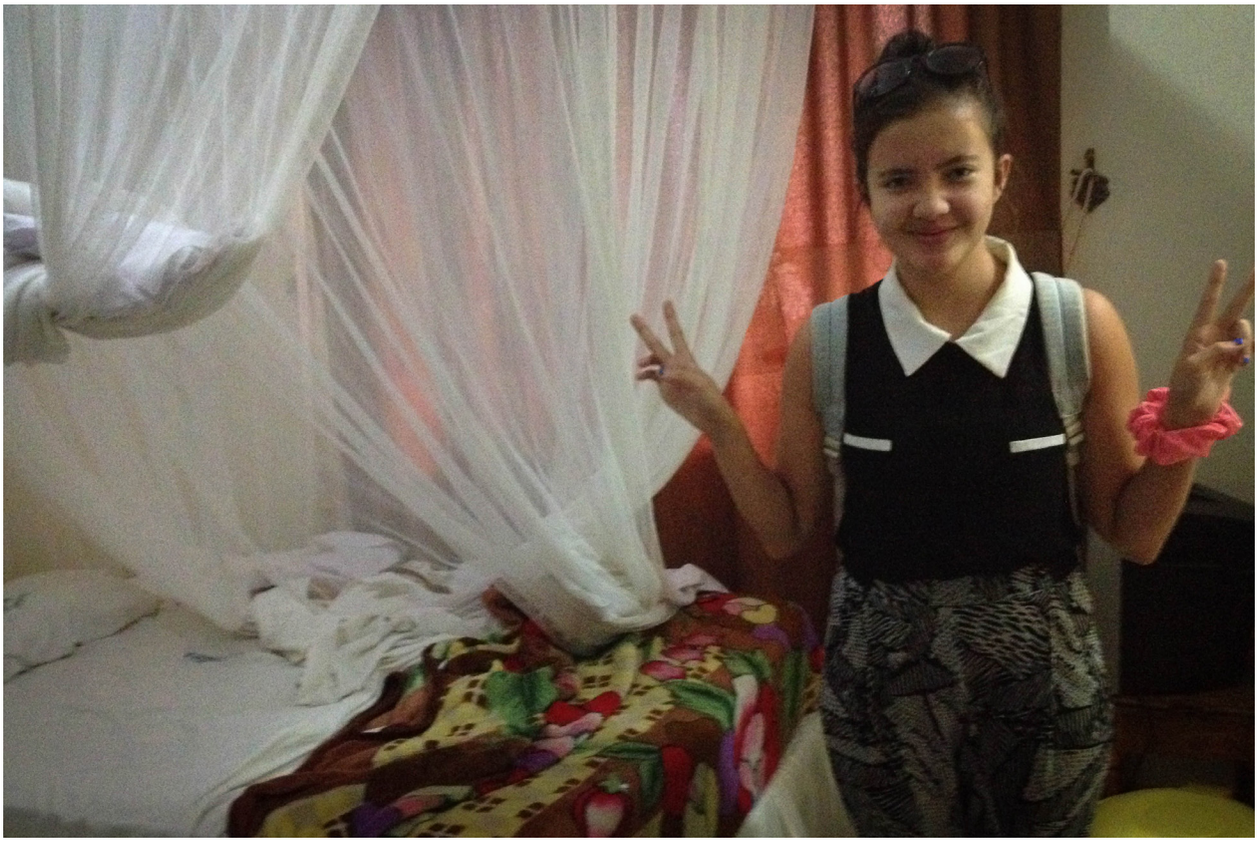
While getting our fingers gooey with ugali, we talked to Richard about his environmental work and his projects at the local school. We made plans to meet up the next morning, and then we went back to the hotel to get some sleep.

The hotel room is as small as my closet. There are two rickety and musty twin beds with furry, floral blankets on either side of the room. Outside, I can hear the bristles of a broom going back and forth along the sidewalk. The constant honks and chatter among the people create a soundscape. Here, everyone seems to be smiling. On the streets, there are rows and rows of people sitting with their plastic chairs and holding out the crazy assortment of things you can buy. There's everything from watches to bananas, to t-shirts and phone cards. The people come to you yelling and trying to persuade you to come and buy their things. They're so close you can feel their breath, and you can see the sweat dripping from their faces. The musty smell reminds me that I am not home.

We had breakfast with Richard, and then he took us to the elementary school where he taught. His main focus was replanting trees and teaching people how important they were to solving some of the water issues. He planted guava trees because they grew so quickly, and to make use of greywater, he planted sack gardens to grow vegetables.

The village that Richard worked in suffered due to its proximity to the safari parks. There was actually a large hotel just outside the village that used up most of the water for its guests, leaving the villagers with next to nothing. Even the reservoir tank at the elementary school was empty. The cost of the land had increased by so much that only bigger businesses were able to afford anything, so they scooped up the best pieces of land and took all the water.

In a week, we planned to meet Richard in Kondoa (the district where Cheku, Iyoli, and many other small villages were). He had agreed to speak with the elders of these villages about implementing some of the projects he had been working on in order to help with the water situation. With any luck, it wouldn't be too long before we were putting some of these projects into motion.



CHAPTER 8

Kondoa Town

Like sardines in a can, we crammed onto a bus bound for Kondoa. We found our seats as more and more people boarded, and then—just when I thought we were as full as can be—they let a few more people on.

We woke up to the sound of roosters and made our way to the bus station. A blue carpeted ceiling with little splatters of neon colours gave the bus a disco type of feeling. There were fake plastic green leaves hanging from the front that had begun to slowly fall off. The thick warm smell of gasoline filled your lungs as you squished around to find the right seat. I noticed more and more people coming into the bus one at a time. Lots of mothers with adorable little babies wrapped in african shawls as well as very old men who could barely make it up the stairs. The people just kept coming and coming. About 50-75 people were standing or sitting in the middle of the bus with no seat. They pushed and shoved their way through. In the background you could hear a few arguments in Swahili.

When the bus finally started moving with a loud start of the engine, people became antsy. Supposedly, it was a two-hour bus ride, but we all knew better. Half an hour passed when all of a sudden, all the people standing or sitting in the middle ran off the bus and hopped into a tiny yellow minivan. It was almost like a clown car because of how squished in they are. Moshi told us that they were doing this because up ahead there were traffic control cops. I guess they didn't check the smaller cars stuffed with people, only the big big busses. I was really glad that we were in a seat. I don't think I would be able to do that. We drove up past the traffic police and an exchange was made. A couple of miles later, the yellow van appeared and the people hopped right back in. I thought that it was pretty funny.

We sat like this for over three hours.

The bus ride was long and uncomfortable because there were no breaks. Near the end, it felt like all the babies were crying at the same time. You could feel the people becoming more and more impatient and so was I.

Our trip had taken slightly longer than anticipated because we had to stop at one of the villages to let Zoe use the restroom, but finally, we arrived in Kondoa.

Walking off the bus is always confusing. First it's like a huge blast of heat hitting you directly in the face, and second, there are people all around you trying to entice you to take their taxi. Moshi always knows the best people to pick, so we headed into the cab and to our new hotel.

Dar es Salaam may have been a foreign city, but it was also a tourist spot, so you could acclimate to the environment easily enough. Kondoa was different because you were closer to the real hustle and bustle of daily life. Imagine the sound of a church blasting prerecorded music, the muslim call to prayer, a TV at full volume, motorcycles passing by, women walking on the dusty roads with yellow buckets on their heads and roosters calling—all at the same time. These sounds converged, amplified by their newness, into a symphony of chaos.

Even eating was confusing.

We were at a restaurant and Moshi asked if I wanted chai tea. I thought I said "I'll have coffee," in English, and a few minutes later, the waiter came back with a cup of chai tea and then he emptied a packet of coffee into it. I just drank the bizarre tea/coffee combination thinking "yuck!" We were putting a lot of weird things into our bodies.

Dust had filled our pores, so we headed to our hotel for a much needed shower. Afterwards, we met up with Yasinta, who was going to be with us for the rest of the trip as our translator. We walked with her around the town and noticed babies in the arms of some young girls.

I used to want to grow up really fast, but now after being here, I've decided that I don't ever want to get older. Being a kid is way more fun. Here, girls can be married off by their parents at my age as a way of paying off debts. Yasinta told us that a wife can cost two cows or even in some tribes only 40 litres of beer. Personally I think that I'm worth more than 40 litres of beer.

She also told us about this man from the Masai tribe who had 45 wives. How could someone have 45 wives? I can't even get one boyfriend! It's the richer men who have more wives because they can support all of the families. Each wife has at least two children, so if you have four wives, that would be eight kids.

So, the man with 45 wives would have more than 100 kids! I sort of understand that someone could really love two people at the same time but 45?

Moshi himself had a wife named Isa, two kids, and a modest house—a simple room in the front with cement walls, a couch, a TV, and a fridge. There was another room in the back where the family slept. Most houses in any given village were made of clay, with cement being much rarer. Zoe and I would often be invited for dinner and eat on the floor with his family, but I always brought a few things from the market, and people at the market were always trying to get us to spend money.

Pretty much everything is sold outside on the street and people just walk around carrying the items on their heads and yelling to get your attention. There are no fixed prices. You have to barter. Communication is hard and people can be a little pushy but we figured out how to just ignore it.

Zoe was living a unique experience, but she was able to just watch and take it all in. I think she saw things that would forever change her view of the world. When she returned home, she had to sift through all that. We were able to laugh at ourselves and each other, and she hardly ever complained.

CHAPTER 9

Small Villages Big Dreams

The projects led us to many of the surrounding Irangi villages, and over a two week period, we visited Kalema, Kigali, Kolo, and Iyoli. Our ultimate destination was, of course, Cheku, but we were biding our time before heading there because we had sent the pump out for maintenance. Sand had gotten into it and it needed to be cleaned and then recalibrated.

In each village, we were introduced to the chief, the women's groups, and the larger community. The chief would greet us, and then we would walk, often to a small office in the center of the village, to sign the village guest book. This was typically an old notebook that had yellowed from the passage of time. I would often flip back through the pages to see who else had visited. There weren't many names, but you would see a smattering of countries, England especially. These were all the tourists that Moshi had brought into the villages as part of his cultural tours.

From there, we would go to a hut where the women and girls smeared a green mixture of goat remains, spit, and bark to our foreheads. They did this to all visitors—or someone who has been away for a long

time—as a greeting of peace. Then we were officially welcomed into the village and could begin talking about the reasons we came. This process often took over two hours.

In each village. For each project. Things moved slowly.

We were working on four separate projects: a tree project, a chicken project, a bee project, and sack gardens, which—much as the name implies—involves filling a sack with soil and growing plants that way. This a great way to allow families to grow food at home without the need of a full garden in the hard-packed earth.

In Kalema, the first village we visited, five women from the collective greeted us, and then we ate ugali and mashed okra on the floor with our fingers, the Tanzanian way.

Young and old women dressed in traditional muslim headdresses swarmed us and threw water and salt all around us. They even splashed it on the car. I found out later that they do this with all new visitors, and they are welcoming us and blessing us in their community. The women also put white necklaces around our necks that signified being safe and having a safe journey. After the greeting, we sat down and had lunch. The main thing people eat here is ugali, and all food is eaten with hands and you're meant to get really dirty. I like it because using my hands is so much more fun than utensils.

The women in Kalema had already started a small business of making clay pots and selling them at the local market.

After lunch, we sat down and the women taught us how to make pottery. It is crazy how hard it is for them. First, they have to find the clay from the mountains. Once they find enough and carry it all the way back home, they have to crush the soil into small enough pieces to grind. The grinding is the hardest part. First, you put the soil on a flat surface and cover it with dirt. Then you have to take a rock and push down with a lot of force. The next step is to add water to the paste and start moulding. Then you put the pots out to dry for a day, and finally, you put them under a hot fire until they turn a reddish brown colour. Me and Lara tried the grinding and moulding part, which was fun for a bit, but got boring and repetitive. Making clay pots is usually only done by women and the pots are generally used for cooking.

The women also wanted to start selling chickens at the local market. Most people already had chickens—they were everywhere—but those chickens were all meant for meals for special guests as a sign of respect. Moshi called them culture chickens, and they weren't sold—none of them. Moshi wanted to show them how they could earn money to put in a bank account. I loved the idea of a culture chicken but, as an entrepreneur, I could not wrap my head around such an obvious opportunity, but then again, capitalism doesn't exist as we know it around the world.

They had built a community coop in preparation, so I bought some chickens, and then made Zoe run around and catch them.

I tried to catch the chickens for the women's group. Chickens are actually really scary because they cluck loudly, flap their wings violently, and peck at you.

We spent a few days at different elementary schools demonstrating how sack gardens could be easily planted at home.

Richard went to the schools and taught the kids how to grow food using special techniques in this dry environment. One of the techniques was making a sack garden that used rocks in the centre, which makes water go right to the bottom. After the initial growing phase, it only takes a cup of water to grow.

Another village, Iyoli, was focusing on building a sustainable beehive project. Honey bee harvesting contributed to deforestation. To build a traditional hive that was only used once, people had to cut down a tree and use its wood and bark. We were introducing bee boxes that were made from a sustainable tree farm. These boxes could be used repeatedly across many years, and because they were built with multiple screens and deeper boxes, it could at least triple honey production.

We would be staying the night, but first, we ventured into the bush to find the old hives that had been put in the trees a year ago and were ready to be harvested. Honey harvesting happened in the dead of night because killer bees couldn't see well in the dark, and because we stood downwind, they couldn't smell us, either. Along with six other people, we walked with the light of the full moon to a giant old baobab tree.

Two guys tied a rock to one end of a rope and threw it over a branch so that they could shimmy up the tree and cut the hive down. It hit the ground, and they took a torch and smoked out the bees. Then they cut open the hive to get at the fresh honeycombs. During this entire process, the bees were stinging them, but their bodies had built up an immunity. While we watched, however, we could only hope that Moshi's confidence in our safety was true.

The men cut the honeycombs open and handed them to us, and we sucked the sweet liquid right out while the stars shined down on us and bees buzzed off in the distance.

Our bee adventure had been exhausting, so we—including our translator Yasinta—went back to our mud hut and slept on clay beds with a mosquito net covering our bodies.


Canon

We slept in one of the clay houses which was pitch black at night. I slept by the window so I heard all the different animal sounds throughout the night. At one point, I'm pretty sure a bird flew into my bed and landed on my head! Next morning, we surprisingly felt really good and brushed our teeth and washed our faces over a small bucket with homemade soap. Waking up to squat toilets and cold showers feels kind of normal now. We ate breakfast, which was deep fried bread and tea. After breakfast, we went out to the bush.

Ten of us piled into a minivan, and we headed out to visit one of Moshi's Barabaig friends in the bush. The Barabaig tribe are pastoralists, and they spend their days tending to their herds of cattle. They rely entirely on the environment for all their needs, including food, shelter, and medicine.

The driver decided that he could not go any further on the roads, so we all got out and started walking down the dried-up Babu riverbed. This river was seasonal, and even though it was the rainy season, it still had no water in it—not a drop. People were digging holes to try and gather water. These holes looked like polka dots that gradually disappeared as the wind blew. Maybe three times a year, the water stayed for a few days, but that was about it. Sometimes, it rained and there might be water up to your ankles for the duration of the storm, but the sand quickly globbed it up, and you were left having to dig down a foot or so to access the water table.

There is never a time when the water flows enough so that you can take a boat out and lazily dip your feet over the side and dangle a fishing rod in the water. Shifts in the climate have led to record droughts and weather pattern shifts in East Africa, and Canada is one of the biggest polluters in the world, so I couldn't help but feel somewhat responsible.

Calling it a river was like calling two pieces of bread a sandwich, or an empty cone ice cream. It was a river without water, and saying "rainy season" was a lie. In no season did this river have water.

In the distance, along the dry Babu river, we saw a few mud huts blending subtly into the landscape. It was home to a Barabaig family who would periodically travel to the villages to sell firewood or buy vegetables, which was how Moshi knew them.

We entered their compound of little mud huts and Moshi greeted the elder woman of the home. We stood chatting while we waited for her children to return from collecting husks to fix the roof. They were so happy to see visitors that they ducked away into one of the huts to put on their goatskin dresses.

We walked for what felt like forever until we reached this collection of houses surrounded by a prickly bush used as a fence. I guess it was there to block the animals from coming in because that territory has many lions and hyenas. There were only a few people of the tribe in this arrangement of houses because they keep themselves separate from the others. The houses are roughly three-hundred meters away from each other. They do this so they don't get their cows mixed up with their neighbours. This tribe was similar to the Masai tribe. They carry spears and sticks for fighting. The men wear a traditional plaid piece of cloth around their shoulders and on special occasions the women wear a cowhide dress that's cut into strips and beaded with yellow, blue, and white. The houses were very interesting, similar to the ones in the other villages we visited but one of the houses had no walls, just a roof. It was crazy how remote the place was. All you can see is dry land and dead plants. The earth is so dry that it can dry up entire rivers.

For the next week, Moshi, Zoe, Richard, Yastina, and I drifted in and out of villages with project ideas and plans for the future. It was fun but I was happy when we set off for our final destination, the village of Cheku. I'd soon be able to get a first-hand look at the well.

Richard showed the family a few sack garden techniques, which would hopefully provide them with their own homegrown vegetables in the future. Moshi's intention was to ask if they wanted to host visitors in the region as part of his tours in the future as another way for them to earn money.

I thought that it was pretty funny that all of a sudden Moshi got a phone call. We were in the middle of nowhere and there was phone reception. Once we were done, we had to trek all the way back up to the car. I collected sand and seeds on the way back.

We left and headed back to Kondoa town to rest.

CHAPTER 10

The Well in Cheku Village

As we finally drove up the long road dirt road to Cheku village, Moshi talked about the little things that happened during the project, like the rig getting stuck and the drillers having to turn back or the people from the village who came out to help make the bricks that were used to make the reservoir tank.

We got out of the car and the old man who had donated his land to the water project came to greet us. He wanted to designate the rest of the land that surrounded the well to the community so that they could plant and grow trees. I held his hand as we walked toward the site.

I could see the solar panels glimmering off in the distance.

When we arrived at the well, mommy was really happy, and I was too. After all this time, the well was real.

I have thought about this day many times over the last few years—and it was good. There are no words to describe that combination of relief, hard work, disbelief, and joy all at once. We stood at the site and smiled. There was water flowing out of two taps, and all it took was a bit of ingenuity—and of course about $40,000. However, since a village meeting was soon starting, we couldn't spend too long marveling at the well.

When we arrived at the meeting, the women from the village threw the salt and water all over, like usual. We sat down and around a hundred people sat before us. The village meeting was held under a tree, and we sat on plastic chairs in front of a small table. The village chairmen talked first and then Moshi. Everything was said in Irangi and thankfully Yasinta translated. Moshi talked about the well and the importance of maintenance and our long trip here.

I had prepared a greeting in the mother tongue (Irangi), and after I recited the words of respect for the elders and greetings to the community, I sat down and listened for a long time as everyone spoke.

To say that Moshi could talk a lot is an understatement. For over an hour, he spoke to the community about the well and all of the environmental projects that could be implemented. Yasinta whispered a translation into my ear, which I then relayed to Zoe as we sat—overwhelmed but content—on the little red plastic chairs.

I had also prepared a greeting in Irangi, and so I stood up to thank the elders and the chief in their official way. Then, with Yasinta standing beside me translating, I went on to talk about everything that went into creating the well. I told them about how instrumental Perry was to the project, as well as the students in Vancouver who went walking for water to earn money.

Afterward, Moshi asked Zoe to stand up and say a few last words to the people of Cheku.


Canon

All of a sudden, Moshi told me to say something. They were pretty much all adults and it scared me. I had to think fast, so I spoke while Moshi translated, about the kids at Queen Victoria School and then everyone clapped. It made me happy. After that meeting, we were completely exhausted and were so happy to go back to our hotel room.

And finally, after so many years, the well was officially handed over—in person—to the people of Cheku.

We spent the next few days with Richard, who led the tree planting effort, and Abu, who was helping out. Moshi called another village meeting to talk about the work that was going to take place over the next few days and ask for volunteers. He and and Richard talked to them about the importance of trees and that in the future they would be a way to make money, feed their children, and provide medicine for the sick. A singer from the village sang to energize us for the hard work that lay ahead. We all stood up and left the shade of the baobab tree. Then, to the beat of yellow buckets being used as drums by the women, we danced our way to the field where we would plant the trees. When we arrived, the singer continued to sing while the women walked back and forth to the well filling their buckets with water and pouring it into the holes being dug by the men.

As the sun beat down on the men, sweat fell to the ground in droplets as they tag-teamed the digging. One man would take a few big scoops and then hand the shovel off to another man. The dirt was as hard as a rock, and the digging sent puffs of dust drifting through the air.

The hole was big and lined with a mixture of straw and cow dung. The seeds were placed into the hole so that they sat in a basin and were able to retain every last drop of water. Zoe and I planted an avocado and a mango tree, respectively.


Stories
of the
Water
Project


Stories
of the
Water
Project

During this time, the school sent over the elementary students, and Zoe asked them to draw pictures for a school project.

I was in charge of the drawing project and told all the kids to get into groups and draw the things that represent their village and the environment they live in. There were around 100 kids from ages 6-12 looking at me and wondering what to do, which made me nervous and uncomfortable. They drew their homes and animals and even an airplane with the crayons and paper we brought. It took a long time but when we finished, we all went back to watch all the plants being planted. I planted an avocado tree, which really made me want an avocado.

Our time in Cheku ended, and we were both more than ready to go home.

CHAPTER 11

Home Sweet Home

Just before leaving, I was looking out the window at the Indian Ocean and thinking about the trip—about the beginning.

I loved travelling with my daughter. The makeup came off, and the clothes were simple and quite smelly. We began to laugh at the most bizarre things, and cried at injustice—or maybe just from pure exhaustion. That was when the walls came down—when utter exhaustion revealed everything and all flaws were shown. They were many, but you could see the beauty in them, too. The beauty in the fact that we were all just human.

I knew I would miss the dirt roads, the ugali, and seeing women carrying water and food, although I hoped that would not always be necessary. I would miss the colour and the noise, the hand shaking and the laughter of the people. I would miss the hot sun and chilly nights, the crowds of people, and the children who followed you everywhere. I would miss the women yelling and dancing and the food they cooked. I would miss seeing the water flow and working with my hands in the dirt. I would miss Abu, Yasinta, and Richard—and especially Moshi.

After this trip, I'm not so sure I've changed that much. I was definitely exposed to a lot of new and incredible things, like girls my age cradling their babies or toddlers begging. New experiences may not change you drastically or right away, but I think that over time this trip will teach me something valuable. I just don't know what yet.

I've learnt how to deal with high pressure situations and how to communicate without knowing the language. I don't think that I could've been any happier going on this adventure with anyone else but my mom. She made it fun and exciting and whenever I got overwhelmed, she would comfort me, and the best part is that she's always there to give me a big hug.

I miss my home and all the things I'm used to. I miss my dad and his yummy breakfasts and funny jokes. In a week, I'll probably miss Tanzania and will want to go back, but right now, I don't think that I can't handle any more new experiences.

Our time in Tanzania showed us its harshness, and its flaws, but between the cracks in the dry earth, we saw its intense beauty.

We were all connected, and even though Tanzania felt like a world away, what we do on our side of the planet affects the people here, so we left intent on treading more lightly for the people of Cheku.

PART 3
The Safari Company

It feels like this story should end here, right? Wrong. Moshi and I wanted to explore other ways to work together in the surrounding communities so we conjured up a plan to transition Moshi's cultural tours into a full-on safari company, integrating the environmental projects in the process.


MWAMUZI KUMLAUMIS

CHAPTER 12

The Safari Company

Our new team would be Moshi, a new business partner and investor named Ikaji, Abu the safari leader, Richard the environmental expert, and Yasinta would help translate.

We wanted these safaris not to just be great tours, but also beneficial to the local people and businesses. We planned to integrate much of what we learned during our first trip to Cheku into our selling proposition and would use that to build a sustainable and responsible tourism model.

As naive as it may sound, we believed that as a collective group of travellers, we could change the world.

In 2015, I decided to go back to help establish these safaris. The company was called Tanzania Cultural Tourism Enterprise to coincide with Moshi's already-established company name.

And so, with eyes set on nothing short of changing the world, I packed my bags once again for Tanzania. This time I was adventuring alone, and with a slight cold. But I wouldn't let that stop me.

My milk run to Tanzania started in Vancouver and went through Montreal, Toronto, and Istanbul before I finally arrived in Arusha where I met Moshi at the airport. Plans for this trip were a little different this time. I hadn't met our new business partner yet, so we had to make sure we had the same vision for the company. It's almost like dating. We were checking each other out for compatibility, trustworthiness, and integrity.

Before leaving, I packed a really kickass medical kit. I would be able to suck the poison out of a venomous snakebite, sling up a broken arm, provide a wide variety of Band-Aids, stop the bleeding from a spear or a wooden stake wound, or even staple a lion bite. But, I'll be damned, I had forgotten cold and flu medicine and jet lag hit me hard, which made my cold a little worse—but I wasn't going to let it slow me down.

I finally made it to the hotel in Dar Es Salaam, and it was only a few minutes before I was sound asleep. The first call to prayer, a little before sunrise, intermingled with singing from an Easter procession that ended up in the field across from my hotel. These sounds—a sonic reminder that I was in a new world—gently brought me out of my jet-lagged sleep.

It had started to pour rain in the late afternoon when I had met up with Moshi to plan our trip to Kondoa. The rainy season (or the "long rains" as they're called) lasted throughout March, April, and May, but the rains came late and, already grappling with a decline in rainfall, the cash crops that had been planted the year

prior had withered. Mother Nature was a tease, and although the earth desperately needed watering, these thirty-minute storms were too much at once and made the roads slippery. The ground gobbled up the water as quickly as it came, and a few hours later, it was as dry and hot as ever.

Our trip to Kondoa would have to wait for a full day of sunshine because the unpaved roads would potentially be too slippery and dangerous for the overcrowded buses. We decided to watch the weather and let that decide when we would leave Arusha for Kondoa. Once there, we would meet up with Ikaji and set up the office in Kolo near Kondoa town.

In the meantime, Moshi, as well as Abu and Beka (the safari guides), met in the Arusha office-to-be, which Ikaji had already rented in a really busy part of the city, and planned the safaris. Abu and Beka both went to college together, and every year, the two of them planned tours based on the migration patterns of the various African wildlife—something that changed yearly. Animals could sense when the rains were coming two weeks in advance, so they tended to go where the grass would be the most lush. Abu and Beka always knew where to find them; they were the people you wanted on a safari.

The next day was dry, just as the forecast had said, so we headed to Kondoa.

CHAPTER 13

Culture Clash

As I looked out the window on our overfilled bus bound for Kondoa, I saw field after field of dried up corn, more painful evidence of climate change.

The late rains had caused the crops to dry and prices to rise dramatically, making the corn—or maize—unaffordable for much of the population. Many families, including Moshi's, managed by borrowing from a friend, or if someone could spare, they would lend out the little bit of money they did have to someone who was worse off.

Moshi dropped me off at the Kondoa Climax Hotel and then went home to catch up with his wife and kids. I unpacked my bags and made the little pink room home. It had a double bed and a door that opened up onto a shared courtyard. I soon met three of the girls who worked at the hotel, Amina, Aisha, and Oliva, and I immediately liked them. I was the only guest, and because no one spoke English, they had plenty of time to teach me some simple Swahili.

Language is what connects us, but it's also what makes it nerve wracking to be in another country if you can't speak it, especially in a country with huge differences in dress, religion, and socio-economic

situations. Not being able to speak makes people seem scary, but the minute you share a laugh, you move from stranger to friend and it invites people to talk to you.

While learning Swahili, my favourite phrase was "pili pili ho ho," which means green pepper, but I thought it sounded more like a dance move—and the girls loved to dance. Sometimes one of them would flip over the yellow washing bucket and drum out a beat while saying these words and dancing. The girls were all in their early twenties and full of energy, so they laughed a lot—although sometimes I couldn't tell if they were laughing at me or with me, but either way, I was learning bit by bit and, sometimes I danced right along with them.

Moshi and I spent the next few days working hard to write tour itineraries for the company while sitting on the porch. One day, as we were working, the aunt of the owner came by and threw the familiar traditional blessing on the house. She flicked a white mixture at our feet and all along the length of the porch while chanting ululations—the same ones that Zoe and I had experienced during our previous trip. The time finally came for me to meet Ikaji. He was a smart guy who worked at the local hospital, but from the moment we met, something just didn't click, and I felt awkward and uncomfortable. He was wearing a suit and tie, and since I didn't think to dress up, I was wearing jeans and a long sleeve shirt. As he looked me over, I could feel the judgement in his eyes, but I wanted to make progress, so I just kept talking and making plans. Language barriers were difficult enough, but it hadn't occurred to me until this trip that cultural differences presented an entirely new set of challenges. In Vancouver, people liked my creativity, but in Kondoa, Ikaji had no idea how to read how I presented myself, and I had no idea how to read his shiny shoes and suit; I wasn't used to the business etiquette of Tanzania.

CHAPTER 14

Life at the Hotel

One day, I was having dinner with Amina and Aisha, and they brought me a plate of small, dried fish they had cooked.

I used Google Translate on my phone to figure out that they were probably anchovies (daga), but Google wasn't always accurate. Nevertheless, they were fish, and typically I have to leave the room whenever there's fish, or anything that smells like fish. Let it be a testament to how much I adored Aimina and Aisha because I not only stayed in the room, I also ate the heaping mountain of fish.

While we were eating, the girls showed me a picture of this huge, pumped-up guy on their phone. In my broken Swahili, I asked "anapenda mvulana kubwa," which I hoped meant something along the lines of, "you like big muscles?" But I'm not quite sure how they interpreted it. They did giggle, though, and start acting out an elaborate skit of pumping iron. They were both so young and fun and weren't really that much older than Zoe, but their lives had been anything but easy. Amina was twenty-one, and her son was six, so she probably had him when she was about fifteen. By many standards, fifteen was still a baby, and though it was illegal to marry someone under eighteen, it obviously still happened.

Life at the hotel grew familiar, and in the six days since my first meeting with Ikaji, I began to recognize the simple things, like the fact that I needed to cut my bangs because they kept getting into my eyes. I borrowed a pair of scissors, but they were dull, and the hack-job left my bangs uneven—I know, first world problems. I looked ridiculous but felt like I was exactly where I needed to be, so I just ignored it and ventured forth.

What I have figured out over time is that there are other ways to communicate with people outside of language. Many mornings, I woke up early and would sit out in the kitchen, which not only forced me to speak Swahili since no one spoke English, it also made me improvise in other ways. I'd often use hand gestures, and when I'd imitate an animal or bug, people would laugh at how silly I was being. They were laughing at me, but in a good way.

After my time in the kitchen, I would grab a cup of coffee and sit out on the porch. Usually, either Aisha, Oliva, or Amina would join me. Anyone who walked by often knew one of them and would say hello. One time, the woman next door came over and asked how many children I had ("Watoto wengi?"). It took me a while to figure out what she was saying, and after telling her I had one, I tried telling her Zoe's age and had to count up to seventeen. That took a long time and the numbers four and eight (nne and nane) always caused me to panic.

Greetings also made me panic. I think it's because they are almost an art form. An average of two to three question/answer exchanges is normal between strangers, and there are even more if you actually know the person. A casual greeting such as "Niaje" or "Vipi?" calls for an equally casual answer, and there are so many words to choose from. The respectful "Shikamoo? Marahaba" is a way to address an older person. A typical early morning greeting could be "Umeamkaje?" (How did you wake up?), and to that, you answer "Salama!" or "Vyema!"

One day, Moshi and I were sitting on the porch hotel working when an older man came up to me and said "How are you?" My brain went blank as I tried to respond in Swahili. I couldn't think of anything, so Moshi turned to me and said that I should say "I am fine," which I repeated back to the old man. Then the man turned to ask Moshi if I spoke any English at all. My confused and complicated brain didn't register that he was actually speaking to me IN ENGLISH, so I panicked as I do when I'm trying to speak Swahili and searching for a response.

The Wi-Fi at the hotel not only allowed me to easily stay in contact with Zoe and Loc back in Canada, it also let me look up words on my phone, which made it much easier to converse. On occasion, I'd pull up a translation on my phone and then pass it around. These situations allowed me to make statements that would otherwise be impossible, like "Canadians do not like being mistaken for Americans. We love each other but we have our own identity."

CHAPTER 15

Storytelling

Storytelling is a huge part of the Tanzanian culture, and when Moshi and I worked together, simple questions turned into long, drawn-out stories.

One day, I asked how many tourists came through Kondoa, and he told me about almost every person that has ever come through. Although that may have been a slight exaggeration, it made getting any work done almost impossible, which was unfortunate, because I'd soon be meeting with Ikaji again.

Storytelling culture extended to Tanzanian businesspeople as well, but it never really entered into my conversations with Ikaji, which probably started us off on the wrong foot. But I just didn't want to waste time, especially since I had so little to spare. On top of that, I also rejected traditional gender roles, and I didn't shy away from voicing my opinion. I was in no way pretending to be a corporate business woman; I was a creative entrepreneur and a woman. These things probably rubbed Ikaji the wrong way. Moshi and I had been working together for years at this point, and we understood all of each other's quirks. We had different opinions, but we respected and understood each other—something that couldn't be said for Ikaji and me.

I didn't want to think about our meetings.

Moshi and I kept moving forward with the tours. We were creating a brochure and needed to take pictures, so we headed for the small villages—Kolo, Ntomoko, and Haubi—surrounding Kondoa to snap a few shots.

We started the day early and rented a car and a driver, and grabbed one of Moshi's friends. Our destination was Ntomoko falls, and along the way, we passed one of the small villages during their market day. Market day was a big deal in these villages, and people came from all over to get supplies like sugarcane and produce and shoes and haircuts, or anything else you might need to run a household. You could also buy cows and chickens, and you might even find a snake charmer or two.

About a mile from the market, we encountered some deep, muddy tracks filled with water from a recent downpour. The driver revved the engine and tried to make it through. We made it about halfway to the

other side before getting stuck. It was market day, and there were hundreds of people in the area, so everyone stopped to help or at least to offer us some advice. Over an hour later, we finally got another truck to pull us out, but then he got stuck, so we helped him, which took even longer. We kept going, but in the back of my mind, I wondered how we were going to get back.

We stopped at the market to take a few pictures and get some snacks for the car, and then we headed to Ntomoko falls, the water source that served over 20,000 people in the region. The idea of this tour was to begin at the reservoirs, and then trek through the forest to the waterfall, so we met the watchman who took us to the big tank. Along the way, we had to cross a small bridge and I stepped off it accidentally. My foot landed in loose sand, almost like quicksand, and I started sinking. Moshi and the others grabbed my hand, and—much like the car—I had to be pulled out. And this sand pit was deep, so If no one had been around to help me, I would have been swallowed by the sand—forever. This moment was the closest I've ever knowingly come to dying, but dripping and wet, we kept moving.

After an hour, we had trekked through the forest to the top of the mountain. It was beautiful and overlooked a crater as well as a small stream of water that was cascading down the mountain—a waterfall. I was happy that we had made it but more happy we would be heading back. Instead, Moshi decided to go down the mountain so that we could see it from the bottom. I had to avoid the fiery bites of the red ants that periodically crawled up my leg on our long hike down. I hadn't planned for any of this, so I was still in my flip flops, and the entire trip down was about as unpleasant as possible. Just as we were almost at the bottom, I grabbed onto a tree and started crying. I was stuck. It wasn't dangerous or anything, but I just didn't

want to go any farther. Moshi convinced me to keep moving and only two minutes later, we were at the bottom, and it was stunning and I can't imagine having missed it. We sat and watched the waterfall and took pictures and breathed in the fresh air.

The pictures didn't capture it —you had to climb down to feel the beauty.

Being stuck only lasts a moment—sometimes a long moment—and at some point, you have to make a decision one way or another about what to do. Back when the car was stuck on the way out here, we kept digging and eventually called a truck, and finally we weren't stuck anymore. Or when we got the well dug in Cheku, but needed a pump so that people could actually use the water.

At that moment, I had no idea how we were going to ever get the money for a pump, but we found a way. I had a choice during the trek whether to remain clinging to a tree and waiting, or to continue down—and I chose to continue.

Being stuck can be fun, really, and when you wonder how you are going to get back, you always find a way. You find that little bit of extra inside of yourself and you just keep going, and then when it's over you feel more than alive.

CHAPTER 16

Ending before it Began

Moshi and I headed out early in the morning to buy trees for both Cheku and the village of Kolo.

It was a particularly sweltering day, but I wanted to revisit Cheku to check in on the trees we planted last year, as well as plant a few more. Kolo would also be a good spot for the tours with its close proximity to some historical rock paintings, so we wanted to forge some stronger relationships there.

We stopped at a nursery to buy the trees. Since negotiations were beyond me here, I just watched the proceedings. In the end, we bought $30 worth of seeds and trees. We would be dividing them between Kolo and the women's collective in Cheku.

Once we got to Cheku, I visited the guest book again, and went back to see Zoe's and my signature from our trip last year. The village had only received a handful of visitors since then, so our names didn't take long to find. Next, we stopped at the well and then walked to the field to see the trees that we planted last year. About 64 of the 100 trees that we planted last year had survived and were scattered around. The village had made a fence out of thorns to keep the animals out and had begun to cultivate the land in bits and pieces. The sun was strong and there were so few places to stand in the shade. At one point, I was so overwhelmed by the heat that I went to sit underneath the small avocado tree that Zoe had planted last year.

And I thought about the situation with Ikaji as the sun beat down on my head.

I realized that Ikaji was not a good fit for the company because I could not talk to him honestly, and—since he was really nothing more than an investor—he wasn't willing to provide much help while we were working hard on building the company programs. I felt uncomfortable with him, like I was being pulled in too many directions. I realized that the only way any of this was going to work was if I moved to Tanzania to help run the day-to-day business and website. That wasn't going to happen.

It was under that hot sun that I realized our company was not going to work.

CHAPTER 17

A Speck of Dust

Many mornings, I would wake up and think to myself, “What the hell am I doing here?”

I intended to join up with Moshi and Ikaji to start a safari company that would direct tourists to Kondoa and then ultimately get them involved in environmental projects. It made sense because the company would make a profit and everyone would benefit, but I pulled out. I got cold feet. I would have been a little anchovy swimming in a sea of sharks, and Ikaji was definitely a shark, and had no interest in the environmental work. As a group, we decided that working together would be a mistake. Moshi, although he wanted to work again on the safari circuit, agreed with the decision. Looking back, it was good that these plans fell apart since, a few years later, Ikaji was arrested for financial crimes.

Rather than trying to establish an entire safari company, Moshi and I decided to focus on the smaller cultural programs that paired village tours with environmental projects. We’d take a small group of people to see Cheku village for example, and then have them buy and plant a few trees with a teacher and group of students from the local elementary school.

I was way out of my league.

The travellers who embark upon small tours to visit the villages like Cheku don’t freak out when they use their last piece of toilet paper. They don’t mind a little dust in their eyes and feel comfortable being uncomfortable. This is a small niche of people, which was perfect, because if you brought too much tourism to some of these areas, they would be destroyed.

In our society, we base success on money, so, for me, if I think about it in those terms. The larger venture was unsuccessful, but when I took away the idea of money, focusing on smaller tours made total sense—but there would never be huge profits in them. That’s the problem with working on environmental projects: they serve another purpose that doesn’t feed the beast of Western capitalism.

Kondoa is just a little speck of dust on the planet. The people here are like Dr. Suess’s Whos in Whoville. An entire world was existing on a tiny piece of dust, and you had to really listen to hear what was going on. There was a beautiful, harsh, and sometimes even ugly reality that was happening simultaneously with our own.

I wanted to listen.

CHAPTER 18

The Party

One of the main reasons people venture out to Kondoa is to see the UNESCO heritage site in Kolo, which lies in the centre of one of the most impressive collections of ancient rock art on the African continent.

One of the offices for the tour company was going to be in Kolo, and Moshi would typically be working there, so we decided to have a party to help foster a community around the tours within the village. At the same time, we'd also be painting the office green to represent the environment. This would also allow us to tell people to head to the green office to see Moshi.

We started in Kondoa town and picked up 50kg of rice for the party, three cans of paint, two bags of cement, and the rest of the plants for the women's group in Kolo. Yasinta and Isa, Moshi's wife, decided to do the shopping without me because prices went up when a "muzungu" was around. We packed the car full of soda, groceries, painting supplies, and the two guys who were going to be doing the painting.

We arrived in Kolo and dropped off the two painters with directions on how to paint the office—avocado green for the outside and summer blue for the inside. Then we headed to the house where all the food was going to be prepared for the party. The people there greeted us with the traditional Irangi dancing and splattered the chalky mixture.

Our next stop was to talk to the teachers at Kolo's primary and secondary schools. Moshi was trying to build relationships with them because wanted to get the teachers on board to help the students learn about and maintain the rock paintings. We left them with trees and the two bags of cement because Moshi found out that the secondary school wasn't able to finish a science laboratory because they ran out of cement. Helping to preserve the historical sites of Kolo got their attention, but the cement sealed the deal. So often out here, projects stalled because people simply ran out of the materials needed for completion.

By now, the office was just about finished, so we headed back. As it turned out, the painters ran out of paint, so now we had one wall that was green, and another that was blue. I'm a designer and stress about details like colour and lines, but somehow this worked. We'd be fitting in with all the other unfinished projects.

I walked back to the house where food preparations were happening. They were skinning a slaughtered goat I had bought from one of the neighbors for a surprising little money, and the women were cleaning the rice and cutting bananas, cabbage, and garlic. The house was buzzing with activity, and I spent the afternoon getting to know the women. We laughed at my Swahili and held hands when we didn't know what else to say to each other. They often broke out into song and dance. That's what I loved the most.

The sun went down, and about 100 people came. I was expecting it to be like a dinner party I might have at my house, where you chat and casually take a bite of food, but people were pushing to get to the front of the line because they were scared that the food would run out before they had their turn to fill their plates. Moshi told me that the food we prepared was special for the villagers. Typically, they ate nothing more than ugali and a sticky spinach dish. I had bought this all for around $50.

Moshi's daughter sat on my lap, and I looked up at the stars to avoid looking at the chaos and hunger of the people. Sometimes I see things that I don't want to see.

There was more than enough food for everyone, and after people had eaten, a calmness washed over the house. Children sat quietly with their sodas, and the women cleaned up the mess that was left behind. As we headed back to the car, the women sang a song of peace and a safe journey.

We all sat in silence in a car crammed full of people as we drove over the bumpy roads back to Kondoa.

CHAPTER 19

The Dry Land

Honeybees are greatly affected by the annual rainfall and temperature of an area, and the dry season was brutal for the ones in Iyoli.

It's been growing increasingly drier over the past decade due to climate change, and the bees need water to dilute honey and cool the hive during hot weather. If water is nearby, they can spend more time gathering nectar and less time collecting water. There was no water and only six bee box hives had survived out of the twelve that Zoe and I saw in the previous year.

Last year, I took pictures of hundreds of people standing around filling their buckets from a well that was no longer providing water. Not a drop of water. Their backup water source was over 5km away at the Babu riverbed, and even that was dry.

The people asked that I not forget them, and I knew I couldn't just walk away.

The Iyoli well was built in 1973, and though it technically still had water, it had collapsed, probably because the casing had sunk. It wasn't until recently that digging teams placed casings all the way down a well, a fact that made me happy that Moshi was there to ensure that the Cheku well construction had gone so well. More importantly, these old casings were also made of metal and not PVC, so they were prone to rust, and they were weighed down by waterlogged rocks. Gradually, all of the casings that were placed between 1960 and 1990 had begun to collapse, leaving those wells unusable.

The well was providing no water and the bees needed water.

But life went on. Each evening, the men got together and drank black coffee. Even though coffee costs pennies, the villagers didn't always have enough, so when tourists came through, they would often sit together over a cup of coffee and talk—with the help of a translator. For less than $5, a tourist could pay for the entire group to have a cup. From beneath the stars, we talked about the drying fields and the disappearing bees while the cicadas sang

CHAPTER 20

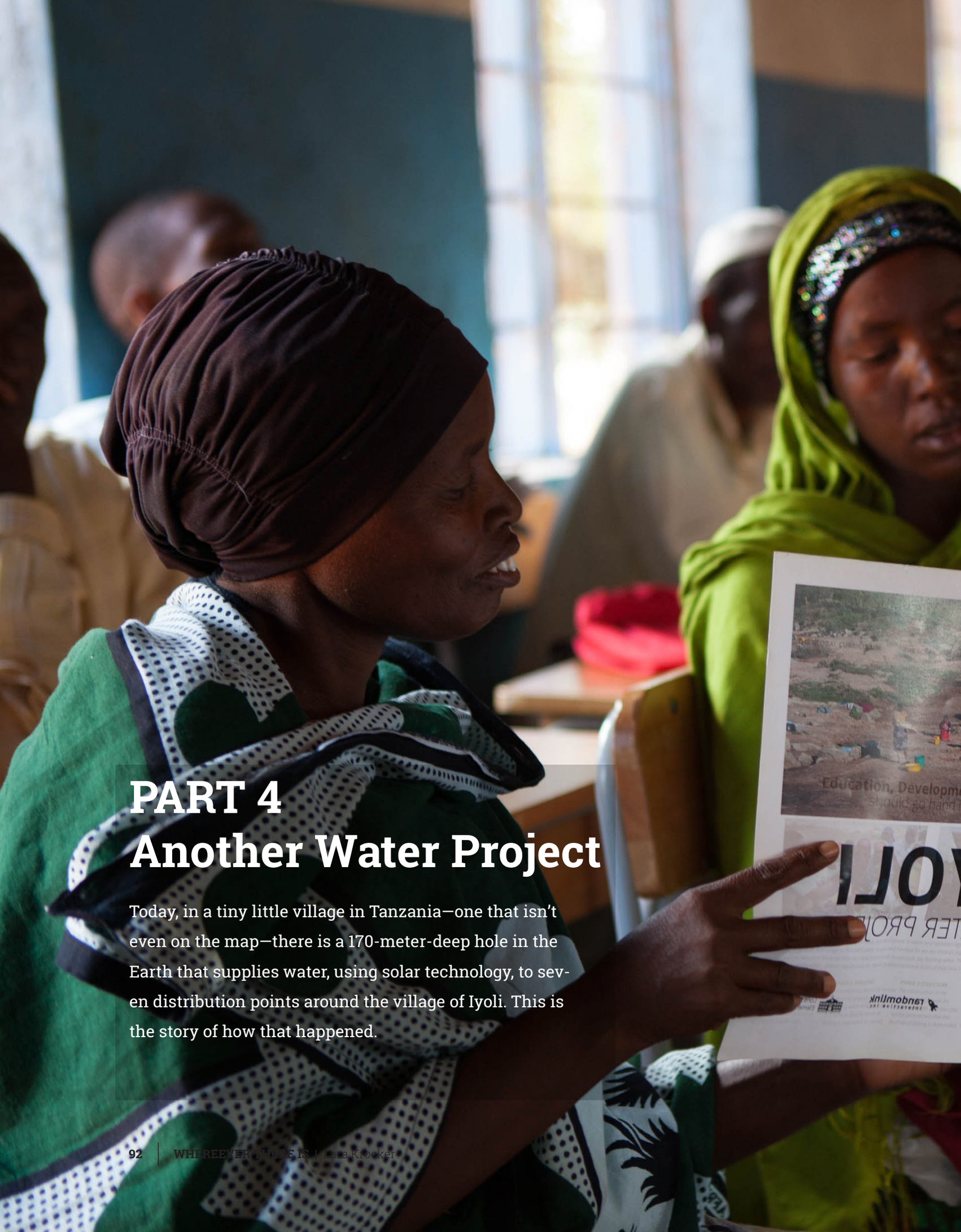
Another Water Project

This trip was winding to a close, but before I left, Moshi and took a final motorcycle ride on the bumpy roads thirty minutes outside of Kondoa to the tiny body of water called Lake Munguri. We'd heard that the fishermen typically had boats out on the tiny lake, and hoped to take a picture or two, but they were nowhere to be found. Instead, we stood and listened to the quiet of the morning.

As we drove back to Kondoa town over the bumpy roads I could feel the warm wind on my face, and I kept thinking that this was life, raw and unfiltered. I wanted to circle the town one last time to etch the scenes of everyday life into my head. I put my camera down and we just rode, past the cooking stoves that filled the air with fragrant smoke, past the women carrying water on their heads, past the men and woman leaning against the side of the small brick houses, past the crowds of women and children waiting to fill their buckets with water, past the children with their homemade toys, past the girls braiding each other's hair.

And I left with the daunting task of trying to find a way to bring water to Iyoli. With the experience we gained during the Cheku Water Project, I figured it wouldn't be all too challenging to take responsibility for Iyoli's water situation, too, and it would give me a sense of accomplishment after the tour safari project fell through.

I guess I had forgotten about the vow never to do another project like this again.



PART 4
Another Water Project

Today, in a tiny little village in Tanzania—one that isn't even on the map—there is a 170-meter-deep hole in the Earth that supplies water, using solar technology, to seven distribution points around the village of Iyoli. This is the story of how that happened.


OUR TEAM

CHAPTER 21

The Iyoli **Water Project**

With as much as Perry Buchan helped with the first water project, it made sense for him to be my first stop. It took less than a minute for him to say yes to being a part of the Iyoli Water Project—even though he had just retired.

The team's ultimate goal was to find an organization that would fund building the well. But first we had to get noticed, and our plan to do that was to create an exchange of cultures between two schools, one in Tanzania and the other Vancouver. It was similar to the penpal exchange a decade ago, but instead of pens and paper, it bundled technology and social media into a campaign called #H20pe.

We called it the Virtual CoLab. Perry developed a curriculum and recruited Doug Sherrett at Strathcona elementary school in Vancouver to implement it in his classroom of grade five and six students. Jackline Omondi, a Kenyan friend living in Vancouver, translated the program into Swahili, and a teacher in Tanzania followed the same curriculum. Once a week for four months, we brought a camera and different media technologies into the classroom and asked the kids to create stories for their counterparts in Iyoli. During that time, they made a book of stories about life at Strathcona with pictures, an original song and music video professionally recorded by Brent Cross (a recording engineer in Vancouver), and they filmed a virtual reality tour of their school with a Ricoh Theta camera.

But the exchange would be no exchange at all if we didn't have anything from the kids in Iyoli to show to the Vancouver students, and so the time came yet again to travel to Tanzania.

Once there, I would be filming stories that the kids from the storytelling club were working on, and then I would bring them back to the Strathcona kids for the virtual exchange.


Pacific

CHAPTER 22

Back Again

You know that feeling when you wake up a little confused and don't quite know where you are, and then you shake it off and everything is super normal again?

The dirt roads outside of the Kondoa Climax Annex Hotel and the call to prayer were anything but normal. Outside, women in colorful dresses—a few with water buckets on their heads—were walking down the dirt roads, and that dream state felt all the more real.

The annex hotel was similar to the hotel from the last trip and was technically part of the same complex. In fact, the same guy owned both. It had a few colourful rooms that encircled an area with tables and chairs that were great for sitting and working. Aisha was still there, but the rest of the staff had changed. Amina and Oliva were sorely missed, but the new girls were just as youthful, fun, and energetic.

Jet lag was still weighing on me, but that was nothing a little coffee couldn't fix.

Moshi came by the hotel, and as we sat drinking coffee, a young ten-year-old girl came up and started asking questions in nearly perfect English. The bumpy ride to Kondoa town had taken seven hours,

so in my tired state, my patience had worn thin, and I wanted to ignore her, but she persisted. Sometimes, it's easier to not to trust someone who may just turn out to be a grifter, however old they are, but she was a lovely and smart girl who just wanted to talk. Her name was Baraka.

We spent the next few hours chatting, and I asked her to help with my Swahili. I told Baraka that when speaking Swahili, my brain was like a little baby (watoto), so she corrected all my mistakes, and she knew any word that eluded me.

Baraka lived with her grandmother around the corner from the hotel, so we walked her home with the intention to ask that she be allowed to come with us to Iyoli as a translator. Baraka's mother worked in Arusha as a nurse and happened to be home for the weekend, but unfortunately her father had died earlier in the year. We were invited into their cement house and sat on the couch along the wall. We talked about the project and showed them the book from Strathcona, as well as the song and the videos. Everyone agreed that it would be a good learning opportunity for Baraka to come, but only if her teachers gave her permission to leave school. It was also nice having another female around to balance out all the men that this project would undoubtedly involve.

After leaving Baraka's home, we went to the market to buy coffee beans. Tanzania is one of the best producers of coffee in the world—some of it's even grown in Iyoli, but hotels all serve Nescafe instant coffee. I had been trying to explain that Nescafe is terrible and that people are willing to pay premium prices for a Tanzanian roast in Vancouver.

When I returned to the hotel, the girls agreed to roast and grind the coffee beans. When they brought me a cup of freshly brewed coffee, it was more of a meal than a drink with all the chewing involved, but rather than figuring out how to ask for a strainer, or insulting them by not drinking it at all, I just smiled and took big gulps.

Baraka, who was Muslim, attended a private catholic school with assistantance from a donor in Texas, and we stopped there before heading to Iyoli the next day. The school provided one of the best educations in the region, which is why she knew how to speak English so well. Much like other parts of Tanzania, proceedings at the school were quite formal, and obtaining permission took a while. We greeted the headmaster, signed in, and told her about the Iyoli Water Project. She then brought us to Baraka's teacher and we explained our project. Again.

The teacher raved about Baraka's marks and showed off all of her work. We spent over an hour at the school before they released her from class with a week's worth of homework in tow.

We arrived in Iyoli late in the afternoon with Moshi, Baraka, and Issa the driver. The purpose of our visit was to prepare the villagers for the water survey that was going to take place and talk about the school exchange. Moshi had been back and forth to the village a few times over the last two months, but it was good for the villagers to see me accompanying him this time. Village politics were tough to understand, but suffice it to say, it all boiled down to gossip and mutterings. For all they knew, the project wasn't real, but having me there helped to make it a reality for the villagers.

We were greeted by the village chairman, but there were only men at the meeting spot. Moshi was upset and had a long talk with the chairman, and then he stood up and spoke very loudly to the men. Baraka interpreted by saying, "Moshi is very mad that the woman are not here and he won't start the meeting until they come since they are the ones that collect the water." Then she turned to me and said, "Moshi is very brave"—commentary that only a child would make. I was nervous and uncomfortable, but fifteen minutes later, the women started to arrive, and the meeting began.

I didn't understand all of what Moshi was saying (my lovely interpreter got distracted drawing pictures of the trees and colouring her fingernails), but he brought people together and made them laugh. He said that we must all work together, and I could feel a sense of peacefulness in the faces of the villagers. Moshi may have called out the chief, but they talked as friends afterwards. By the time we left, it was already dark, but people were happy, and we had accomplished what we had set out to do.

CHAPTER 23

The Water Survey

Jafari was the regional hydrologist in Dodoma and had worked in the Kondoa region for a long time, and he agreed to put a team together to do water surveys for the Iyoli Water Project.

He was familiar with water policy rules, regulations, and the water act, so we were able to register the project properly with the regional office—details that we would have overlooked, details we did overlook during the Cheku project, but registering everything beforehand helped it all to go smoothly.

To help determine how deeply the hole needed to be dug, his team would be doing a magnetic survey that measured spatial variations in the Earth's magnetic field and vertical electrical tests that would send electrical currents into the ground. Basically, it was a way to pinpoint various locations for the borehole in Iyoli, and it also created a scientific document that I could send to organizations.

With ten people jammed into our vehicle, we followed the team of technicians to the first potential water point—the middle of a corn field. In addition to Baraka, we had brought along another translator, Habiba, who knew English really

well. She was the sister of one of the girls who worked at the Kondoa Climax Annex Hotel. Habiba was a lovely, young twenty-one-year-old who had just gotten divorced and moved to Kondoa.

We got out of the car and found a place to stand. The day was hot and I was constantly looking for shade because the sun was beating relentlessly down on my head.

The team stopped and asked us to move farther away so that cell phones and metal were not interfering with their sensitive magnetic survey equipment. We put some distance between us, and the men spent the time reading papers while the kids ran around and played.

We waited and watched.

The team returned and the growing crowd followed them to the next potential water point. They measured, calculated, recorded, and hammered under the hot sun. Work continued.

The sweat rolled off our skin, and we took a break to eat watermelon, which made our hands sticky. Then we lifted the measuring tape to let some cows pass. The air was still.

I walked away to sit with a nearby family so that I could borrow the shade from their tree. We ate peanuts from their garden. We laughed and watched. They talked and I listened.

The team finished and we piled into the car and returned to the village to eat food that the ladies had prepared. The sun was setting. The kids were playing. The ladies were talking. I looked

They talked and I listened.

CHAPTER 24

Iyoli Storytelling Club

A few days later, we made plans to head back into Iyoli, and with the help of our driver Issa, we packed the car with computer equipment, a generator, and people—Moshi, Baraka, Habiba, and now Evelyn.

She was friends with Moshi's wife and could speak English. Since her goal was to become a journalist, she was going to help film all of the interviews. We were a ragtag team of enthusiastic people ready to roll and screen the work that Starthcona had created for their sister school.

Moshi greeted the kids from the class, the elders, and the village chairman. They had all come to the school to be a part of the proceedings. He then spoke to the twenty kids from the storytelling club, thanking them for being a part of the program and saying how important it was to record these stories. Afterward, Baraka stood up and read three of the stories from the Strathcona book that had all been translated into Swahili.

After lunch, we finally watched the videos that the Strathcona kids had created with a projector that I'd brought along and set up.

The kids in the storytelling club watched the Canadian kids greet and introduce themselves, and

then, at the end of the song, one of the Strathcona kids wrote, "children of Iyoli, we love you," and they understood that there were kids on the other side of the world who cared.

At the end of the day, we set up the projector in the village center and invited everyone from the community to come and watch these videos in addition a Swahili movie that Moshi had picked out. I couldn't understand a word, and the projection was tilted and blurry, but it seemed to be about some grown man who kept getting into trouble and was repeatedly sent back to primary school.

As night fell, and the stars came out, Baraka fell asleep on my lap with her fingers twisted through my hair as the generator softly hummed in the distance.

On our way back to the hotel, I thought to myself that the night had been my idea of perfection.

Over the next week Moshi, Evelyn, Habiba, Baraka, and I went back and forth to Iyoli and helped to film the interviews with the kids in the storytelling club.

The students were shy at first, but Evelyn flexed her journalism muscles and helped to make them relaxed and silly. At one point, she asked me to leave because my presence made it more formal, but when it was just them and Evelyn, they were funny and more authentic. At the end of each day, she came to the hotel, and we would translate the interviews into English.

Issa was around while we were translating, and he was well aware of how much I loved coffee and how much I hated Nescafe, so he would constantly fill my tiny cup with the big thermos filled with Tanzanian coffee that he had brought from Kondoa town.

After they finished their interviews, the kids would break out into song, and I'd join them in my own silly way to try to make them all laugh. By the end of the week, we were all more comfortable around each other. Each interview made the kids more and more excited to be asked questions, and when they saw the videos of themselves being played back, they erupted into even more laughter. Everyone was having fun.

On the last day of filming, we went with the kids to collect water from a river bed. The red dust of Tanzania had settled onto my skin, and my hair was half-braided and full of sand because Baraka only had the chance to finish one side..

The river had dried up, and families, mostly women and girls—but boys and men too—had to dig holes to reach the underground water. As the dry season went on, the holes became deeper and deeper until there was no more water left to find. Then they had to walk farther to the larger Bubu river. When things got really bad, some families had to spend up to eight hours a day collecting water.

Many people have strong opinions about foreign aid and what should or shouldn't be done, but when you stand together with kids, and mothers, and fathers and cows and goats, it's not about politics and academia and theories, it's about friends and their survival. At the end of the day, these kids were just like any other kids in the world. They were playful, curious, and at times even a bit naughty. And if you took a step back and thought about the big picture, so many of the hardships that people on the other side of the world face were directly caused by changes in the climate driven by people in the West. So, really, we shouldn't have any strong opinions one way or another about lending foreign aid when appropriate. We should just do it when we're able.

One the way home, it finally started to rain. The dust settled and I could smell the fresh, clean air, and it reminded me just how important this was to Iyoli village.

CHAPTER 25

Party in a Cornfield

With a car full of just about everyone, we headed to Iyoli one last time before leaving, but this time it was for a party.

We packed the car full of rice and vegetables from the market and invited the kids from the story telling club, the water committee, the teachers, officials from the surrounding area, and the village chief.

In a cornfield at the back of a clay house, we started to make preparations for the party; two goats were slaughtered and butchered, rice was sifted and cleaned, cabbage and garlic was sliced, and green bananas were peeled in preparation for matoke.

Late in the afternoon, Moshi and his wife welcomed the guests. He introduced everyone and then talked about how he and I had met. He spoke of my mother and how she had tragically died in the ocean. Everyone stood up and took a moment of silence, and then—more than ten years after her death—in a party in a remote village, I felt her presence.

It was a perfect way to remember.

On the way back to the hotel, I told Moshi that most of the time, I have no idea what was going on, and he said, "Lara, I must be honest and truthful with you, neither do I." I returned to my tiny little room, exhausted but content.

CHAPTER 26

Vancouver

As I used my last square of toilet paper, I knew it was time to leave, and I felt like the signs in the Arusha hotel, the ones that said "Don't use the towels to wipe your shoes" and "NO laundry in the rooms," applied directly to me.

There also wasn't a single thing in my suitcase that wasn't covered in dust, and all I wanted to eat was a French fries omelette. Vancouver was calling my name.

But before I could leave, we had to decide on a location to dig the borehole. We saw Jafari, the regional hydrologist, in Dodoma. All three water points that we looked at had water at varying depths, but the first point had water closest to the surface, so that was the one we chose. We were going to need to drill down 120-150 metres to reach the water, but Jafari seemed to think that wouldn't be a problem and that it was just a matter of getting down there.

I spent my last evening in Tanzania curled up in a ball with all the lights on hoping that the cockroaches I'd just seen weren't going to crawl into my ear and eat my brain while I was watching "Sex and the City," which was looping on one of the channels. I spent three full episodes thinking about the daunting task ahead. I had to find a way to make this project happen, like Cheku. But to do it properly from the beginning, I needed to find and partner with an organization.

Little did I know that this process was going to take well over a year.

PART 5
The Iyoli Well

The Iyoli water project, the second well, had taken two years so far, and we were just now getting ready to start drilling. That's a lot of time waiting for something to happen, but it had been a similar experience in Cheku, too.

CHAPTER 27

Two and a Half Minutes

About six months after returning from Iyoli, my dad told me that he thought I had already finished this well and had started another which made me realize just how much I talked about the project.

After another six months, we finally found a partner to help with funding, Innovation: Africa, but before I could board a plane, the organization needed to acquire the actual money and it wasn't long before they found an anonymous donor who said yes, but that meant more waiting. The organization had to make sure that the right companies were working together and this, of course, took time. Every morning, I woke up wondering whether this would be the day that the contracts would be signed. Finally, after two more months, in March of 2018, I got the thumbs up, so I wasted no time in booking a flight.

It took two and a half minutes to walk off the plane into the Turkish airport and breathe the unfamiliar smells of a new place and watch the people walking by, who were the same—but different. Airports are a safe transition where the world still feels normal because you hear things that you recognize, like mothers hurrying their children and yelling at them to stop whining. Even if they're speaking another language, you can immediately recognize their tone of voice. Everyone has the same goal—to make it to their destination. No matter the airport, you see the same boring global shops, but subtly, little changes appear, like coffee shops that sell Turkish delight instead of a double cappuccino, and you realize that the world is slowly shifting beneath your feet.

I waited and dreamed and hoped as I sat in Turkey before the last leg of my trip to Tanzania, waiting to build a well in Iyoli.

I already knew that this trip was going to feel like two and a half seconds once it was done—which today, as I sit and write this, is true. Time has a tendency to fly like that. Zoe had just turned twenty, and just a few chapters ago, she was a child, and then a little bit later, she was a teenager. And now she's an adult. All of this occurred over the course of a few thousand words. It it was a similar feeling to that.
All the time I had spent raising a human being was only just a beautiful memory that went by way too fast. This, too, was going to feel like a blip in time, just like my previous trips. So I was going to jump in with both feet and embrace the challenges, the joy, and the frustration of working on a big project with a team of people.

On the ground. In Tanzania.

CHAPTER 28

Fade-In to a Movie

When I closed my eyes at three in the morning and reopened them the next day, it was like a fade-in into a movie, one that started with a reunion between two friends headed for an old familiar place—Kondoa.

Moshi met me in the morning at the hotel in Dar to leave for Kondoa, and it was late evening before we arrived. As soon as we stepped off the bus, it started to rain. These weren't small, soft drops, but big fat ones that felt like rubber bouncy balls hitting my head. Once again, I'd arrived in Kondoa during the rainy season. Moshi mentioned that this was the most rain the region had seen in fifteen years, a great thing for someplace so dry. We sought shelter at a neighbour's house as the rain played a rhythmic entrance song to Kondoa on the tin roof while waiting for our ride.

The drive with Moshi's friend to the Kondoa Annex Climax Hotel should have taken five minutes, but the windows wouldn't stop fogging up, so we had to keep pulling over to wipe them clean while ribbons of rivers streamed down the unpaved streets. The storm had knocked out the electricity at the hotel, which wasn't too uncommon, and forced me to unpack while wearing a headlamp to find the things I needed to get to sleep. You know how you can get so tired that the world starts spinning around you? That was me. Spinning.

In the morning, once again the streets were dry because the earth had greedily eaten the rain, except for a few puddles that dotted the roads, and it was as if none of the chaos from the night before had happened. It's crazy that one of the driest regions in the world can flood so drastically and then pretend like nothing happened. I was worried that this would negatively affect the drilling, but Moshi said that it would be good because the ground would be softer, which makes it easier to dig the trenches needed for the pipes.

I was happy to see that Aisha was still working at the hotel restaurant alongside two new workers, Nuru and Hussein, but I was most excited to see Baraka again. She was twelve now, and as smart and precocious as ever. Baraka brought two friends with her, Miriam, who was also twelve, and Shadia, who was six. The girls lived in a tiny cement room right next to the hotel and around the corner from Baraka. Miriam and Baraka went to the same school, so she was able to speak English just as well.

Since this trip involved a lot more manual labor, and it was exam time at school anyway, we weren't able to bring Baraka or the other kids along to Iyoli quite as often, but they were a common sight at the hotel. They greeted me in the mornings, and we had breakfast together before heading off, and then when I returned each evening, we would have dinner together. They were a small but enthusiastic hotel family.

We jumped into the digging process right away.

CHAPTER 29

Inch-by-Inch

The next two weeks went by slowly as the drillers dug inch-by-inch. The plan was for them to reach a depth of 100m, which was the estimation given to us by the surveys.

One minute, the sun beat down relentlessly on our heads, and the next, we were getting pummelled with rain. When it wasn't raining, the women walked back and forth 2km from the Bubu river to bring water to the drillers to pour over the drill to keep it from overheating.

The drilling turned rock to dust, and we watched the slow and mechanical process like it was a show.

The dust from the machine changed colour as they went deeper. Every ten feet, they added a long drill bit to extend the arm.

We waited and watched.

One day at the drilling site, the drillers had gone out to get more diesel, and while they were away, some of the younger boys showed up and started to fill a wagon attached to a motorcycle with sand from around the borehole site, which would then be used to make bricks. The drillers, however, were using the sand to make the cement that would be

used in the construction of the tower, so when they showed up and found a bunch of it missing, they were furious and forced the boys to bring the sand back.

With the sand returned and fuel replenished, drilling started again. At a depth of 90m, the dust was wet and dark and water trickled to the surface. The drillers guessed that at this depth, in the worst case scenario, the well might produce 5000 litres/hour at the agreed 100m. In an eight hour day, that would be about 40,000 litres of water, or around twenty litres per person. Going deeper would produce more but, of course, cost more, so we had to get approval from Innovation: Africa. It didn't take long for them to give us the go ahead to drill down another twenty meters. The drillers went another ten meters the next day and water shot straight into the sky from the hole.

That evening, after the sun went down, and we were near 120 meters, the water streamed steadily out of the hole, and under the stars in the middle of a small village in Tanzania, the lives of a small group of people got a lot easier. I looked up at the night sky. The cicadas sang their songs while the moonlight reflected off the drilling rig like it was smiling back at me.

We were at the final depth of 120m and there was water.

A lot of water.


BOX

CHAPTER 30

Our Hotel Family

With digging finished, the workers inserted a casing to prevent the walls of the well from collapsing, much like in Cheku, and then they flushed out the sand and silt.

They closed the hole and hired Ejuma, one of the village's most skilled archers, to guard the site to make sure nothing was stolen or vandalized.

There was still plenty of work to do. We had to test the water, build the tower for the water tank, dig 10km of trenches for the pipes, and set up a maintenance program within the community. Fortunately, we had a few days to rest before this next phase of work would begin, and I spent the break in Kondoa Town.

Most of my time was spent listening and watching. I listened to the sound of a man pushing a cart piled high with brooms and buckets and cups that he was trying to sell. He stopped to talk, and then he and his mobile shop slowly continued. Meanwhile, people walked down the streets in suit jackets that were once worn by businessmen in the West, ladies carried name brand purses that were once ridiculously expensive,

and young boys ran by wearing t-shirts with logos of big real estate companies, meaning and status removed and transformed.

One morning, as usual, I was eating breakfast with some of the hotel staff, including Aisha, Nuru, and Hussein. They mentioned having heard me singing from my room, so I brought out my ukulele and sang them a few songs. Baraka came by and joined us a little later with Miriam and Shadia. We lazily sat singing and drinking coffee all morning.

Moshi came by later in the afternoon, and since I was creating a video of the borehole's construction, Moshi, Baraka, and Miriam helped to translate the narration into Swahlili so the Iyoli school kids could learn, step-by-step, how their well was built.

I was looking forward to being busy again, but spending leisurely days at the hotel cleaning my camera, prepping for the next phase of work, and hanging out with the kids and staff always made me happy.


Just Camp It!

CHAPTER 31

The Tower

Tower construction began on market day and since the project site was right next to the market, the area was ripe with activity.

While workers were busy with the construction, people from the neighbouring villages were right beside them buying and selling cows, clothes, and wares. Baraka was with us for the day and spent her time watching the tower being built, listening to music on my phone, and taking pictures like a burgeoning photographer.

The next day, the market had come and gone, but construction continued while the engineers conducted pump tests that would help to determine how much water the borehole would yield. They connected a hose to a pump a few meters from the truck, and then ran the well for six hours while they measured and recorded the water's drawdown time.

When the tests started, only the team was present, but as news of running water travelled throughout the village, women and children came to fill their buckets. The water was running at full pressure all day, and for six hours, people came and went, transporting their buckets of water by bike and by foot to their homes. Instead of a useless borehole teasing the villages for a couple years while our community scrounged for money for a pump, like in Cheku, the Iyoli villagers were able to benefit from the water almost immediately.


tigo
tigo
tigo
tigo

CHAPTER 32

Infrastructure

The tower that would hold the two water tanks and solar panels went up as handmade bricks were handed one-by-one up a ladder.

While the men worked, young boys who were tending to their goats passed by, ladies offered us fresh hot milk from their cows with a spoonful of sugar, and children—on their way home after school—stood with us watching the structure go up.

Each day, the tower grew a little bit bigger.

Pipes also needed to be laid inside trenches that would bring water to seven distribution points across Iyoli village, which meant that 10km of trenches, 90cm high and 50cm wide, needed to be dug. People from all over Iyoli volunteered to help dig.

Multiple teams of five were dispersed around Iyoli village and together they dug. Young and old. Men and women—all were digging. From the primary and secondary school, to the village center, the market, and the medical center—teams dug. Through fields of corn and bush and trees—teams dug. Through homes and streets—teams dug. While children played and people watched, the teams continued to dig.

As the sun glared down on us, people grew more and more tired, and by the end of the day, there were still many kilometres, as well as weeks of work, left to go.

The tower for the water tank was still under construction, too, but once it was completed, gravity and pressure was going to be pushing water through the pipes hidden in these trenches, and eventually—once the ground had settled—no one would even know that they were there. Running water was going to feel like magic, but these teams that were currently tossing aside shovel after shovel full of earth would know that it was their hard work that made it all possible.

CHAPTER 33

Juma

One morning in Kondoa town, Juma, a friend of Moshi's, invited myself and his musician friend Hussein to play music at his house behind the hotel.

Hussein was from the Zigua tribe in the Tangua region of Tanzania and started playing guitar in 1968. Different villages hired him to play music during celebrations, and we sat all morning learning Hussein's songs about traveling, marriage, and love on a guitar that has been broken and fixed many times over the years. And so, while the chickens in his yard sang harmony, I was trying to learn a part on my violin, and Juma was writing down the words so I could try to learn them properly later.

Juma had a lot of chickens that he was breeding to sell, but he was most proud of his prized sandawe chicken, which he claimed laid three times as many eggs as the others. He also has a tap in his yard and people come from the community to fill their buckets, so there are people walking in and out all the time. I sat listening to Juma talk about his dream of building a brick fence around the yard to keep his chickens safe. When he reaches his goal of 100 chickens, he will be a happy man.

Moshi's dream is to move to Iyoli and grow an orchard of papaya, banana, and passion fruit trees. Then, he'd continue his tourism business and bring visitors to that orchard in Iyoli. He says that Juma can use a corner of his land to help grow his chicken business. He also wants to start an environmental group with the Iyoli community. He likes to say how he will be a rich man someday with so many trees. When things were tough, we just said the word papaya for motivation.

If we could all have such a beautiful dream, then there would be enough for all of us in this world.

My friendship with Juma and his wife grew, and he became a staple at the project site. He even helped me work through a few fights that I had with Moshi because of the stress of the project. He spoke English well and was liked by everyone in the village because he was also from the Irangi tribe.

CHAPTER 34

My Worst Fear

Throughout all my trips to Tanzania, my worst fear, and I'm embarrassed to say but I will anyway, was having to go pee in the bush and letting a snake or a hyena sneak up on me.

Moshi, however, told me that I need not worry, that they are more scared of me, but I couldn't help but fear the bush, so to avoid having to go pee at a bad time, I avoided drinking water all day and then gulped a litre of it when I returned home at night. I was putting up a serious fight with mother nature, and so far I had won. Until one fateful day, at least. While at the project site, I saw something move in the bushes. I calmly asked Moshi if it was a snake, and he and Juma looked over and jumped into action. This green mamba had fallen out of the tree with what was left of a chameleon that it had eaten (they found the rest of it later in its stomach). Moshi and Juma chased the snake, and it slithered into a termite hole in the bush right beside the water distribution point.

As I stood back, paralyzed by fear, I tried to remember the instructions on the snake bite kit in my medical bag: cut an X on the bite and try to suck out as much poison as possible. It just so happened that before leaving for this trip, Loc had given me a knife and jokingly said that it was to kill a snake, so I pulled it out of my bag and gave it to Juma.

More guys from the village arrived, and together they smoked the snake out of the hole, and then Juma, with expert precision (and complete disregard for the knife I had given him), hit it directly with his slingshot, and then all the guys whacked it to death with a stick. Normally, they wouldn't have killed it regardless of how deadly it was, but because it was nesting right beside the distribution point, they needed to remove it.

Things that might have made me queasy in Vancouver are easy now, like when I'm eating and a little bug crawls by. I just squish it with my left hand and continue eating with my right. Nothing about that was weird to me anymore. If someone had fried up the bug and then gave it to me to eat, I may have done that, too.

It was all relative. It was a luxury to me now squat in a village toilet, but of course, the alternative was to squat in the bushes—with snakes.

Even with all the snakes and bugs during dinner, we were still regularly driving into Iyoli village. Every day, we saw women at the dried-up river bed; the water still wasn't running, but the water distribution points were slowly being finished. It was crazy here, and things never happened as we expected them to, but all we could do was roll with it.

CHAPTER 35

The Team

Today, I met Bar from Innovation: Africa. Sivan, the organization's CEO, was one of the few people who responded to my emails about Iyoli, and she passed my name onto Bar, director of Africa programs. I talked to Bar a few times about the water situation in Iyoli. In retrospect, I realized that the organization must get so many requests to help communities in even more desperate situations. She could have easily brushed me off.

But she didn't.

The donors who funded this project could have easily decided to put their dollars into something else.

But they didn't.

Moshi could have walked away from the project when issues from the community came up, as they always do.

But he didn't.

And here we all were, Muslim, Christian, Jewish, and atheist, working together in a tiny little village that's not even on the map because we listened to that little voice whispering, Do it! This is for real. We could have all walked away at various points.

But we didn't.

Often, world news can be overwhelming because the focus is on chaotic differences that divide us, but in that tiny village, an unlikely group of people from different countries and cultures walked around the project site, ate two meals together (our lunch was double booked), and figured out project details during the last stretch to the finish line.

It's not that hard to find commonality, and it's a hell of a lot more fun.

However, all roads have bumps, and this project was no different.

CHAPTER 36

The Big Picture

I debated whether I even wanted to share this part of this story, but I will.

At one point, I came close to leaving before the project was even done, and while sticking to only the good parts would make it sound more like a fairy tale, this "bad part" showed how resilient and strong we can all be, or maybe it was just plain old persistence.

A few days before Bar and the Innovation: Africa team visited the project site, Moshi had noticed some additional trenches (more than we had originally planned to dig for the seven distribution points) going into people's houses. This basically meant that water would be funneled into individual homes. This might've been possible, but only after the water had flowed for a year and we had statistics on how much water was available. Once we got to that point, we would need to address it with the water committee to be voted on by the village. And to reiterate, this wasn't going to even be considered for at least another year, so it didn't make sense to us why and how this was happening.

After speaking to a few people, we started to suspect that the engineer was selling extra water lines to people who were willing to pay for them, which was putting the entire project, in addition to the well itself, in great jeopardy. We had our suspicions that he had run out of money for the project and was trying to fund the rest of it without anyone knowing.

One day, Bar arrived from Israel to visit the project site with her team, and we walked to each of the six houses (there were probably many more that were hidden) with additional trenches and pipes ready to be hooked up. Naturally, the engineer would have been there for this meeting, but he was nowhere to be found all day. His absence made no logical sense since this was an important opportunity for him to show how the project was developing. The entire situation reeked of suspicion.

Since this was ultimately also a village issue, and since those were very formal, we asked the village chief to note down all of the names of people who had extra trenches and if they had paid money to anyone. Unofficially, the villagers had said to Moshi that the engineer had charged them. They thought the trenches were sanctioned by the project since it was the engineer himself selling them, but later, when the village chief came around to get their official statements, no one would say his name. To this day, I still can't figure out why the engineer thought this was a good idea. He had to know he was putting the well in jeopardy, and I can't imagine he made much money, and nobody was telling the truth.

That evening, I had dinner with Bar and the IA team, and during this time, the engineer finally returned one of Bar's many calls and came to meet us. She asked him what was going on, and he denied everything and blamed it on the corruption of the people in the village.

She stopped all work on the water project until we could address the problem with the extra trenches, which were now being blamed entirely on the people of Iyoli and their stupidity and corruption.

Word spread throughout the village that the water project had stopped, and the next day, a village meeting was called, and I made sure with Bar that the engineer would be required to attend (the IA team had already left, so Moshi and I were left to figure this all out on our own). Our strategy was to unify the village so that we could all move forward with a fresh start, energized and without anger, to help the engineer complete his job. Every single person in the village knew the truth, and I was worried that everything would turn to chaos and the villagers would beat up the engineer (yes, that happens) since he lied to everyone. Basically, we were asking the people to forgive the engineer and each other and move on.

It took a great deal of time to explain to the villagers why any extra pipes would be a mistake. The well could only provide so much water, and the pump had been professionally calibrated for seven distribution points, and to try to send the water to any more than that would put too much pressure on the pump itself, and it would eventually wear itself out and break down.

We explained to them that this was a mistake that could never happen again. It put the sustainability of this well in jeopardy, and by the end of the meeting, the people in the village agreed. I stood up and asked for peace—even if someone had done wrong—and then Moshi closed the meeting by allowing questions. The only rule was that no one was allowed to make accusations (that was behind us), and no one did.

We left early so that the engineer could deal with paying back the villagers. We we just pretended that we did not know—even though everyone knew that we knew full well what happened.

Despite all this, the engineer had hired a successful company that drilled down 120m and found water. He actually started out great, and the tower was going up fast at first, but when he ran out of money, as we suspected, he scrambled to find enough to finish the project without Innovation: Africa knowing. The organization was planning to use this guy for other projects, so they didn't really want to see the truth; they were invested in his "company." However, in the end, we all just worked around this craziness and just kept going.

After one of the most exhausting days during all of my trips to Tanzania, I returned to my hotel and was greeted by Baraka, Miriam, Shadia, as well as a group of neighbourhood kids. They had with them letters and pictures for me to hang up in my room. I think that maybe it's the children who know how to handle things the best—with messages of love and pretty pictures. Their small act of kindness quickly outweighed the corruption of one man.

CHAPTER 37

Tomoke

A few days later, work resumed at the project site after I convinced Bar that we had explained to the village people why we couldn't have extra lines, and they all agreed.

It was too tiring to place blame—and doing so could put the entire project in jeopardy—so we just left it at that. The villagers learned why extra lines wouldn't be happening, the engineer kept his position, and we went back to work.

We went through the village and filled the trenches back in and had a few of the boys making sure that any we didn't see were also filled in, too. In a small village, everyone knows everything, so there would be no extra trenches since we had addressed it publicly, and the chief had let people know that extra trenches were now illegal.

Workers placed a door on the tower and covered the borehole. The pillar that would hold the solar panels was nearly complete, and the pipes were being laid inside the 10km of trenches.

As I was watching the work, I looked up in the tree and saw an animal hide and asked why it was there. Apparently, the entire village had come out the day before the village meeting and performed a ceremony called a Tomoke. They slaughtered a lamb and then threw the remains on the incomplete structures to bless them and pray for peace. Since nobody had beaten the engineer, it looked like their ceremony worked, but I asked if they could perform it again to make it double-double sure that this project remained good and strong (and so that I could be a part of it).

On the way back to Kondoa, we passed by the riverbed for what seemed like the hundredth time. I saw all of the school kids digging their holes, but this time, they were twice as deep as they were last week. The rain had stopped, and Moshi said that in a few more weeks, the holes would be so deep that the kids would have to climb in and scoop up the water and pass it to their friends who would then put in the bucket. I tried to fill a bucket for one of the kids, and although I was just having fun, I felt in my body how hard this was to do. Every single day.

This was the big picture.

CHAPTER 38

The Crane

Despite the recent setback, life continued—progress continued. It was the second day of Ramandan and most people in Iyoli were fasting, including Baraka and Miriam.

Nobody was eating or drinking water during the day, and then at sunset, all the families were going to share meals together. The mood was quiet and energy was low.

On the day water tower was to be placed at the top of the tower, he had brought along Baraka, Mariam, and Shadia. The extra trenches were still there, and when we arrived at the site, a few of the villagers volunteered to fill them in, without breakfast or water. When the dirt had filled the final trenches, the pipes were ready for hookups.

The engineer was cutting costs wherever possible, which was more evidence toward him being broke. He thought that people in the village could just hoist the tank up the side with their bare hands, a silly and dangerous notion, but we tried it anyway. Workers tied ropes around the big tanks, and then two guys at the top of the tower pulled while five guys at the bottom pushed from a makeshift bridge. Moshi and I were sure that with one wrong move, we would have a death on our hands, so we called it off.

What we really needed was a crane, and as luck would have it, as we were driving in, Moshi passed one of his friends working on the tarmac road leading into the village. This man just so happened to also be a crane operator, so Moshi called him and asked him to come to the site to get the sim tank up. The crane rolled in later that day, and half an hour later, the water tanks were on top of the tower.

The work on this project happened in a frenzy of activity over an hour or two, but then everything wound down and we had to wait for the next event, which meant spending hours sitting and watching and playing.

While we were waiting, Juma shot a tiny bird with his slingshot and then gave it to Miriam and said that it was for dinner. I thought it was a joke—but it wasn't. Miriam described exactly how she was going to pluck and roast it over a fire. She looked at me as though I were crazy not to take it for myself.

One of the women in the village cooked rice and beans for lunch for me and Shadia (who was only six and not required to fast). After we finished eating, with Miriam and Baraka watching, they got up and took our plates to clean. That's just what you did when you were a girl here—you cooked and cleaned and fetched water.

I helped them clean up too. Life was not easy, but these young girls managed to have fun and have truly stolen my heart.

The girls fell asleep on the ride home, tired and dirty, and I thought about how hard they worked in Kondoa town. It's the same everywhere in Tanzania.

Miriam carried that dead bird in her pocket all day and brought it home. That evening, after sundown, she was going to pluck it and share it with Shadia and her four other brothers and sisters for their big Ramadan dinner.

CHAPTER 39

The Changing Season

Things that were once green were starting to turn brown. Sunflowers had turned their heads toward the ground, grass was falling back into the Earth, and people were starting to harvest their crops and leave them out to dry in front of their houses.

The rain had stopped completely, and I could see the holes getting deeper.

"Msimu wa njaa" means the hunger season. This was the time after the harvest had finished and the sun was hot and relentless and food no longer grew. On the turnoff to Iyoli, we passed some fruit scattered called Matikiti Pori (direct translation is hunger lemon). These fruits were discarded because people were only willing to eat them during the hunger season. The Matikiti Pori was a subtle reminder that the season of hunger was fast approaching.

While there, one of my favourite people was Mbula, whose name means "the rainy season." The older people in Iyoli all have names that reference seasons. Ilala means "honey harvesting season," Lujii means "the season that the rivers flow," and Mwasu is "the sunny season." So, in the past, if there were 100 babies born in the rainy season, they would all be named

Mbula. This tradition is gradually disappearing, but it shows how much the seasons matter.

Every day, Mbula came to the project site with gifts of food, like pumpkins, corn, millet, and milk. We graciously accepted these gifts even though I knew that each time I took them, it meant less for her. I want to tell her to keep them so she had more, but I couldn't.

That day, as I was watching the structure for the solar panels grow, I thought about how the sun, an enemy in the dry season, was going to become the solution to power a pump that was going to bring water to the seven taps around the village.

I also thought about how easy it was to judge how long it took for work to happen, but these people were building this infrastructure with no onsite access to electricity or water, and they were using mostly hand tools because they had no other choice, and all the while, the sun was beating down on their heads. Brick-by-brick, truckload-by-truckload, this tower was going up with the help of people who had done this all before—many times over, but only we would know the secret story of sweat behind the solid walls of this structure.

I could only hope that this year's season of hunger would pass quickly. There was one more video that I still needed to shoot and edit—one showing the flowing water. My flight home was quickly approaching, and it seemed like I might have to leave before the water started to flow, but there was not a chance in hell that I was going to miss that. We have worked too hard, so I extended my ticket home.

CHAPTER 40

Breaking the Fast

In many ways, our engineer was crazy and messed up. He was still doing the job, but we had to breathe down his neck to keep him working.

Yesterday, on market day, he disappeared to go drink. The pressure on us was crazy to get this done, and Moshi forced him back to work, so he wasn't happy. Lerian, Innovation: Africa's project manager, had left to work on another project for them, so we stayed on-site to keep the engineer on task. I often brought my computer, and Moshi and I would sit under a tree near the borehole and record the narration for the infrastructure video. Then, I would spend a few hours editing while neighbours who were walking their goats stopped to say hello, school kids passed by saying my name in their singsong voices, and Juma shot targets with his slingshot while I warned him not to hurt and eat the birds. Then, together, we would look and laugh at the videos as they were developed.

One of the young girls here, Nasma, helped to keep me sane. She was silly, fun, and trying to teach me Swahili. It was easy to be around her. Her story was that of a poor girl with no mom or dad, like so many

other children here. I was teaching her to look into people's eyes properly (especially men) and to stand strong when she spoke. She was so smart, but this culture holds down women. I went to her house to greet her grandmother, and I told her that this girl was so smart, and that it was important for her to stay in school. When the men tried to talk over her, I didn't let them. I made sure that she and the other girls were always by my side so that I could set an example of how it felt to be respected and actually heard (although I rarely understood a word anyone was saying). I told them they could (and deserved to) ask for more. Who knew if they even understood; it was hard to illustrate respect with a picture drawn in the sand.

After so many stressful days, we decided to take a break to visit the Kondoa Irangi Rock Paintings, discovered by Dr. Mary Leaky. They're located in a series of caves carved into the side of a hill looking out over the steppe and are more than 1500 years old. The kids studied them in school but few had actually seen them, including Moshi's family. They were only an hour away, and Moshi brought visitors there are all the time, but I couldn't believe his family had never been.

We packed the car with chips, cookies, ice cream, and soda as treats for the day. Moshi's kids (Samia and Sajedia), his wife, Miriam, Baraka, Shadia, and Juma all dressed up for the little excursion. The kids dressed in their best clothes, but I had to send them back to put on proper shoes so that they could climb the side of a mountain. Shadia was in tears because she didn't have runners, so we sent Juma to the market to get her some, and Miriam borrowed mine, which were two sizes too big for her feet. Despite our efforts to get them to change, the children refused and stayed in their nice dresses. It was still Ramadan, but an exception was made for everyone to break the fast, except for Moshi who stuck to it. We climbed to the top of the mountain to see these ancient rock painting while Juma, acting as our official guide, showed the kids pictures they had only seen in books. This time, Moshi was the tourist getting to see the paintings with his family.

In addition to all of the junk food, we kept stopping the car to pick different fruits from the trees (the names of which I forget), and the kids found wild berries to eat on the hike up the mountain. We gave the girls souvenir bracelets as a reminder of our adventure.

We ended the day after sundown at a nice restaurant where we ate fried chicken, french fries, and drank soda. With greasy fingers and a full belly, we went to bed tired and happy.

I think Allah would approve.

CHAPTER 41

Onward

Moshi, Juma, and I were at the site every day to make sure that things were getting done, and little by little, they were slowly finishing.

Today, a small team was here to take pillar measurements, and tomorrow they were going to install the solar panels and get everything ready for pump hookups, the final piece of this project-puzzle. I was helping to manage the project because I knew that if there wasn't a push, it would go on forever. In reality, Lerian was gone, and maybe trying to get all this done, as quickly as I hoped, was being a bit unrealistic, but we kept going.

I asked Innovation: Africa to forward part of the final payment to the engineer because he did not have enough money for the pump, so I drafted a new contract and inserted that the project had to be completed within three weeks or the other part of the final payment would be forfeit.

One day, on the way back to Kondoa, Moshi and I had a big blow out (about nothing in particular) because the stress was so high. Nothing was Moshi's fault, but he was always the one who got yelled at by people in Iyoli and the on-site workers. That evening, Juma came by and calmed me down, but nevertheless, I asked him to help me get back to Dar so I could leave.

I'm grateful for Juma—he was the peacemaker and my one link to understanding what was going on. What I really wanted to do was get on a bus to Dar, and then sit in a hotel with a pool.

I went to sleep upset and mad and scared that I was stuck, but the next morning, Moshi and I had a little heart-to-heart. We acknowledged that we were doing all the work on this project with no credit or money but all the stress and expectations. We decided that our friendship after all these years was more important.

And then I started laughing.

I laughed because on our way to the village, we had to pick up the village chairman from jail. On market day, he had gone to help reconcile a fight between a husband and wife, and then they turned around and accused him of something (not clear on what), and the police never bothered to ask questions, so they took him in. I sat in the car laughing (while trying to be invisible) while Moshi and Juma went to the police station and negotiated with their friends for the chairman.

Then I found out that one of the guys working on the site (who I adore because he was the hardest worker) was named Ejuma, which means Friday. Why? He was born on Friday. Another guy was named Week. Why? Because he was born during the week. I asked Moshi that if a baby were born tomorrow, if they could they name it Water Project. He said sure yes, and then I continued laughing.

Moshi and Juma were having this crazy competition to kill birds (don't worry—they all get eaten), and so we were stopping the car every few feet so they could aim out the window with a slingshot and shoot. Juma had given me three birds. And Moshi? None. He was

aim out the window with a slingshot and shoot. Juma had given me three birds. And Moshi? None. He was so aggravated, but I was laughing and teasing him about it, and then—at the project site—I got ahold of the slingshot and accidentally shot a goat. For a brief moment, it was serious, as though I'd committed some heinous act, but then it was funny.

After that, Mbula's fourteen-year-old daughter (who was hanging out with me and Nasma) took Juma's slingshot and ran into the bush and shot a bird.

And then, the water pump started working and pumping water to the sim tank, which would take about a day to fill, and I continued to laugh and laugh and laugh. On the way home, Moshi jumped out of the car and shot and missed a dove by a few inches, which made me laugh even more.

Amidst all this laughter—running water.

All those videos with people jumping up and down singing and dancing when the water is turned on are lies. When the water started working, it was just the team and me and Moshi and Juma and a few other people. We just shook hands and went home to wait for the sim tanks to fill. I thought the entire scene was kind of odd but mostly funny—and that maybe I was going crazy.


MSC


Safi

CHAPTER 42

The Water Flows

It took until the next day for the sim tanks to fill (quietly and without any fanfare), and then the water began flowing to the different distribution points throughout Iyoli.

In the morning, we opened the taps and word spread throughout the village that they could come and fill their buckets.

I have dreamed about this day and wondered if it would ever happen. But it did, and I quietly moved around the village with my camera and took pictures of people gathering water from the distribution points.

And the emotional intensity from the challenges we faced dissolved in the water as it flowed.


KIBOKO
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WHITE

CHAPTER 43

This is My Story

This is my story. The stories I tell are the ones that hold me up, that keep me going, that feed me hope.

I look at the things that give me joy—like watching Mbula in the field at the project site while her goats graze, or sitting with Nasma drawing pictures in the sand, or watching two young boys collect garbage from the project site to make their toys.

I feel that the small acts of kindness—like Mama Fatouma making me lunch everyday even though she was fasting, or Juma washing the sand from my shoes or the school kids saying my name in their singsong voices, or the women coming by with pumpkins and peanuts (carenga) and corn. They're what kept me coming back.

I watched Moshi and Juma hunt for birds (snack food) and fight like brothers about who was the better shot. I sat with the guys who were peeling peanuts for me in between whittling their slingshots at the project site. Mbula's daughter taught me how to shoot a slingshot, and I played ball with the kids. I took oodles of pictures and videos. I had fun.

And I watched a water project grow and finish, brick-by-brick, with water running through seven different distribution points in the village.

It wasn't perfect, far from it.

Someone else might tell this story differently, but this one is mine; it's how I chose to see and interact with the world around me.

My last day in Iyoli ended the way it began—drinking coffee with friends and talking about water. We piled in the car with Miriam, Baraka, and Moshi's family along with the sound technician. We had loaded the vehicle with old equipment, and then we went into the village center to project videos and pictures that I had taken over the last two months onto the wall of a building. Together with the people from the village, we laughed and reminisced about the Iyoli water project under the stars. The videos and pictures were theirs—not mine. We drove back to Kondoa on the bumpy dirt road in Iyoli for the last time, tired and content.

This is my story.

CHAPTER 44

Epilogue

I'm not entirely sure why I stuck to this project for so long or what originally drew me to Tanzania.

Initially, I wanted to hide from the reality of my mother's death—to escape. But as I became more invested in each project, my mind traveled away from the tediousness of work, and it enriched my life.

Playing a large role in helping to bring water to two separate remote villages gave me purpose.

As I put the pieces of this story together, I'm not entirely sure how to process what it all means—and maybe it doesn't have to mean anything at all. We all deal with grief differently, but as the saying goes: it's the journey (cheesy, I know), and this journey was a long one.

Separate from—and perhaps more importantly than—any true meaning, these projects allowed me to forge lasting friendships, specifically with Perry and Moshi, but also with people from my community.

There are some stories that I haven't told, stories that other people, like Perry and Moshi, will have to one day tell. My story was only a part of something bigger. With all of the people who listened—even if it seemed like a bizarre obsession—not one single person told us to stop, and it motivated us to continue.

I realize now how deeply connected I am to my mother. She lived her life by doing, always driving herself forward, always showing the initiative. It was these same traits in me that helped to make all of these projects happen. And what once felt like simply an outside influence driving me forward has become a part of my body, and the stories are fused with the blood in my veins, providing oxygen to keep me going.

Every day.

Each night when I drink a glass of water on the porch, I often think of Moshi, and the memories wash over me. They now define me. They are the pieces that I have put together, and now they fit together as one complete image—my truth.

Someday, when Zoe reads this to her children—if that's her path—or reflects upon its words on her own years from now, she can add to this story, reshape it, reform it, and rewrite it, applying her own meaning to what was once just mine.

And then she will become the owner of this story,
and my memories will become hers.