

March 2013

In Swahili there is a saying, “Mwanzo Ni Magumu”—Beginning is Hard. And it was.

Our team of students arrived on March 7, 2013, at 11:00 PM. From outside the airport we could see three single women and two families with kids ferrying carts of luggage through customs, till finally they were with us. One single woman got diverted and arrived the next day; one wallet got lost; two bags were delayed. Our Tanzanian family waited back at the guesthouse. It was a mad excited time of talking and changing money and loading luggage into the vehicles and taking them to the guesthouses for the night. The next day our last student and the bags arrived, and we all caravanned to a town where a conference center had been reserved for a week of orientation.

The facilities were rustic to say the least, and no one had considered the fact that single women who did not know one another might not want to sleep two to a bed, or families might find Asian toilets difficult. Colin and I struggled to help the students feel comfortable and attend the orientation meetings. One family had a particularly hard time.

Still, as rustic as the conditions were, they were about to get even more rustic. The next week we drove into Cana with two Land Cruisers and a van piled to the top with luggage and people. It rained heavily. I quickly cooked a spaghetti dinner for the crowd of twelve adults and eight kids, and Colin took each team member to their home to drop off luggage, except for the small bags and mosquito nets they would keep with them for the next four days as they stayed with their village hosts. Then, after lunch, he took each of them for their local “homestay.” After he dropped off the last family, his car got stuck in the mud on the road, and he had to walk home in the dark, accompanied by a drunk man who talked to him in broken English about George Washington.

Four local families were delighted to host our teammates, but one host lady said, as Colin arrived with two single ladies, “Oh, I can’t possibly host these girls NOW. My roof is leaking and we have to fix it tomorrow, which means taking the roof off.” As they all stood in the dripping yard in dismay, a neighbor came across the street and volunteered to host the ladies, so they went with Mama David instead. “Do you know what the purpose of their homestay is?” Colin asked her. He shouldn’t have worried. In the next four days, Mama David taught the ladies to kill and cook a chicken, grate a coconut, and cook cornmeal mush. “I wish they didn’t have to leave,” she sighed as they left. “I’m going to feel lonely.”

Colin and I visited each team member and made sure they were all right during their homestays, especially the family that was having the most difficult time. Thursday night they all were able to sleep in their own houses, and Friday we gathered for our first team meeting at our house in the open-air classroom. There was relief in being back together with the whole group. We read the Bible and prayed together. They

discussed a chapter from a textbook. Were given a first assignment in language learning: "Think each day of a word, phrase or sentence you might need next. Then find someone to teach it to you. Then practice it over and over with people you meet all day." Prayed for each other's needs. Set up a schedule for one-on-one meetings each week. Colin disciplined the men, I met with the women.

By week two of living in Cana we noticed that each household had its unique challenges and personal successes. We prayed fervently that each person would willingly submit to Jesus and trust Him even while battling dirt, bugs, laundry by hand, foreign language, and food that took hours to prepare. Watching each one adjust and learn was a reminder to me of how lovingly and eagerly Jesus hovers over each of us, supporting us each moment by prayer with grace and mercy to help in time of need. We felt we were "hovering" a lot over them.

Colin and I had a test of faith as he was called into the immigration office in Bethany to explain why our residency permits said that we were missionaries with the Africa Inland Church but we said that we were a group of students learning language and culture. Colin patiently explained that our students were in an academic training program to help them learn to be missionaries. "Learning language and studying the culture is absolutely necessary to training for this work," he said. The man frowned. "If you tell your government officials in Cana that your students will one day be missionaries, they will kick you out of that town," he challenged.

So Colin met with the sheriff and mayor to discuss it. We had already explained the Christian nature of our group. "Has your plan or program changed?" they puzzled. "No? Then don't be afraid of those guys at immigration. They are just doing their job. You'll be fine. But don't buy any property here or build a church building. *That* we definitely don't want in Cana." Since we had no intention of building a church building but rather had planned to meet in people's homes, we felt very relieved.

Rainy season in Cana meant it took laundry 48 hours to dry, sudden showers could hold us hostage at a friend's house, and we never knew which day of the week would be dry enough for us to take a town trip to Bethany. On Easter Sunday as we gathered for worship and lunch, feeling weary and struggling, we continued asking the Lord to establish us in that place, and bring people to Christ through us. That possibility seemed very far away. Beginning, we all felt, is hard.



Top: Orientation week

Bottom: In Cana during our first week together

Below Top: Driving through the hills and valleys to get to Cana

Bottom: Open air classroom at teatime.

