

Student Voices: Readjustment, from Hills of Kabale to Humidity of New Orleans

|
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It's reaching the end of June, half a year since I hopped on Nasur's motorcycle and left Southwestern Uganda. As I rode away from Kabale with tears in my eyes, I wondered when I would be back. I was leaving friendships and memories, two years of experiences, and a way of life I'd have trouble explaining.

I loved Uganda. Though waves of nostalgia have washed over challenges, Kabale formed who I'm meant to be. As I write, I am sitting on a couch. I am drinking iced coffee while watching my roommate's cat walk through our quirky Mid-City home. We have Hulu, a hot shower, a dishwasher, laundry machines, ice, and consistent electricity. No one visits unannounced. No one shares suppers or checks on me if I'm gone for 24 hours. Students don't knock on my door at 8 AM. My produce doesn't come from a market lady. I never use latrines or plan laundry around rain storms. My once dusty sandals are rarely dirty, and my hands have lost handwashing calluses. It's nice to live a life of excess, but it's often somehow empty.

There's a chapter of my life that's invisible. Liliiane, the woman who called to say goodnight and taught me how to cook over charcoal, is half-a-world away. Master Rurihoona, my neighbor and friend, is listening to Rukiga music, practicing with his dance troupe, and sitting on our balcony without his muzungu (foreign) neighbor. The students have a new Peace Corps volunteer to teach them. Headmaster Isaac eats pilau on Eid while I dream of its greasy perfection during weekend hostess shifts.

Our lives, they all continue, and yet, my Ugandan one is distant. When I walk down the street, I sometimes crave fresh jackfruit. I think of my neighbors, the sound of evening prayers, and the cows that blocked my road. I wonder if Nasur is at his motorcycle stage waiting for customers needing rides. Is Eddy drinking coffee at the café? Has Edwin made new friends at the post office? Are the



pineapple guys still waiting by their bikes? Is Kabale still the same as six months ago? I can ask through Facebook messages, but that's just not the same. My language skills are rusty, Rukiga words slip my mind, and my Peace Corps service drifts further into memory.

The Peace Corps mission is to help people in host countries meet their need for trained women and men while fostering cultural exchange, friendship, and world peace. I'm not sure if students still roll beads for our income generating necklace project. I don't know if they've retained the phonics we studied. Who knows if any training will sustain past my service, but the friendships I gained, the love I received, and the person I've become will not disappear. Did I change the world? No. Did I save the planet? Certainly not. Is international development good or bad? That's a long conversation. But Peace Corps, you were exactly what I needed. Kabale, you are my home and my community. You taught me love through lessons impossible without experience. I may not have changed anything, but you, Kabale, changed me. Until next time, Oraregye (goodnight). I love you and miss you forever.

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