

How this story began....

There I was traveling by a local bus from Dar Se Salaam to Dodoma Tanzania. By myself on a not so comfortable Scandia bus filled with passengers from villages along the highway to the capital of Tanzania. I was leaving the breezes of the coastal three million plus city to a region of Tanzania that was dry, arid and windy. As an African American female, not fluent in the KiSwahili language, I tried to keep my nose in a book and at times looking at the scenery passing by, which changed with every stop for new passengers. About two hours into the trip the bus attendant passed out biscuits and pop, which was free to all passengers. The ride was not the most comfortable and seemed to hit every bump in the road. This is not good when there was only one rest stop between Dodoma and Dar. The driver and attendant were in control of the bus and the rest stops, as well as who could ride on the bus.

As we neared our one and only rest stop, everyone, me included headed for the restrooms. I kept thinking about what would I find. All I can say is that if you allow your self to get caught up in the poor conditions along the road, you might pack up and go back home. A peace core worker and I were talking once at a bus station and he said if you allow the uncommon events to spoil your travel that is all you'll take home with you. Lesson learned for all travel off the beaten path.

How did I get going on this side trip to Dodoma Tanzania? Well it started during my stay with Leah, a Kilimanjaro friend, in Arusha who introduced me to one of her friends. Leah's friend Francine worked as an accountant for a safari company and told me about her mother's project and dream. We talked and if this was a worthy project I could tell others once I returned to the states. This was good enough, however I wished I could see what Mrs. Bahati was doing in Dodoma. Francine didn't have many details about the project. Be careful of wishing as the saying goes, next thing I knew the Bahati's were inviting me to visit as their guest. I replied that if I could, once settled in Dar se Salaam, I would come for a couple of days. Here I was in a country I was only now becoming familiar with and thinking about visiting people I didn't know from Adam. Co-workers at the TGNP, just said be careful as many people often want to take advantage of visitors. This didn't seem to be the case in Dodoma.

As the bus pulled into Dodoma's bus station I could see a couple standing near a post lamp. They were intensely looking for a passenger hopefully peering back at them through the windows of the bus. Mrs. Bahati had a traditional fabric dress on and Theo Bahati had a wonderful colorful shirt that stood out from the regular white and blue business attire. They along with the crowd began to step forward as the bus attendant opened the bus door. The crowd pushed towards as passengers stepped off. Because I was not being sure of what the Bahati's looked like I thought it was best to secure my luggage first. Mr. and Mrs. Bahati knew that I was an African American female and approached me saying, "welcome to Dodoma". As I looked at them, two welcoming and kind faces, they took my luggage and red backpack and we headed down the dirt road to their home and Rainbow kindergarten school. As we walked down the dusty road, we talked about who we were to further introduce ourselves, and about my travels in Tanzania.

The Bahati's talked about their children, Dodoma and the school project. Once at their home, they fed me a wonderful and filling meal and we toured the kindergarten. I took photos of the school and children sitting at their desks. Next one of the parents came by to support the Bahati's new school project and how it was needed in this region of Tanzania. The visiting parent drove us to the site of the new school where concrete foundations had already been started. The Bahati's don't have a personal car. They had an old van that was used to pick up students when possible.

Mrs. Bahati and her husband were trained educators and had taught for almost fifty years in the Tanzania. Mary Bahati had experienced many educational settings from the very private international school to the public schools. After a bout with cancer she decided that she needed to see if she would make her dream come true. With their personal funds she built the kindergarten. The school filled up fast because parents wanted a better education for their children and the Bahati's have an excellent reputation as educators. Dodoma, which is the capital of Tanzania, was experiencing new growth, promoted by the government, along with a growing middle class population. The middle class audience is mainly employed by the government, which had developed track housing for them to live in. Education, especially with emphases on English, is important in a global market and this training is lacking in many public schools along with certified teachers.

With a high demand for the school, Mrs. Bahati started building a first through third grade section to the school. The local government decided to help by offering land if she would build a bigger school. She still had to come up with the money for the buildings. From the school fees and a donor in Southern Minnesota she was able to get started on the new school. This was in 2002. During my visit to Tanzania in 2005 I scheduled five days with the Bahati's and found two buildings up and filled with students even though they were in the middle of a school holiday. Again I took photos to document their progress.

Because Mrs. Bahati has to charge a fee to parents that can pay for their children to be at the school the school is not eligible for some book programs from the United States. The fees support the certified teachers, daily operations of the school, lunches, and supplies at the school. Theo Bahati planted a garden to help with the lunches, which you found him in everyday during the school break. He was planning on retiring from his secondary teaching position during the next school year. He had been a social studies teacher and was excited about the books I had brought on American history.

During my first visit the Bahati's housed me in a sort of motel called the Kilimanjaro Inn. On my second trip they reserved a room in the local Catholic convent. The convent offered a single room with a bathroom, with hot water if requested. Our summers are their winters, sort of. The days were dry and arid with temperatures into the 80's. In the evenings you always reach for a wrap or jacket as temps dropped into the low 60's and upper 50's. Several evening we'd walk back to the convent along neighborhood paths only recognizable during the day. I knew they would not allow me to pay for anything during my stay so I brought school supplies and books for the school. It is their way that is generous and open.

I guess with Tanzanian's living near the Rift Valley region, birth place of humans, the Bahati's have been for me, as close as anyone could get to a real Adam and Eve. There is a need for a library and great books, and a computer lab for children so willing to learn. This was a blessed visit. -CRC