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Never in my life did I expect to travel to Africa as a college student and volunteer in Tanzania. However, my experience with Cross-Cultural Solutions through the support of Saint Mary's Center for Women's Intercultural Leadership enabled me to make the best decision I believe I have ever made in my young life. This opportunity allowed me to experience a culture incredibly different from my own and challenge myself on this journey. I feel so privileged to have experienced this opportunity and look forward to sharing the knowledge I have gained with others.

Alexandra Fuller describes her childhood growing up in Africa in *Don't Let's Go to the Dogs Tonight* and after reading her depiction of the country I completely connected with her illustration. She states, "the incongruous, lawless, joyful, violent, upside-down, illogical certainty of Africa." I relate to her statement because throughout the four weeks that I spent in Tanzania I felt as if I was on an emotional roller coaster. Tanzania gave me a sense of comfort but at the same time apprehension. I felt courageous and fearful. Tanzania is filled with happiness, despite the hardships and sadness that surround the country. It is a life unlike any I could have imagined; yet when I look back I know I could easily call it home. However, through it all I was challenged and that was the goal of my experience.

I lived in a town called Moshi in the Kilimanjaro region of Tanzania. My four weeks were spent teaching primary school children. I began volunteering at the Korongoni Unit for the Intellectually Impaired and was met with many obstacles. I was unable to communicate with the students because they only spoke Swahili and this created great difficulty. I tried to learn simple vocabulary and create visual aids to use during my lessons. However, school was not in session

for the following two weeks so I began teaching at Valley View English Medium School. I loved my experience here, teaching computers and English to the students. I was able to communicate with less difficulty, but still found myself challenged as I have never taught and was of course the minority. It was a unique experience being singled out each day as the 'white person.' Many of the children had never seen a Caucasian and wanted to touch my hair and feel my skin. They were so excited to learn and thrilled to experience someone different from their regular teachers.

The teaching methods were very different and physical punishments were witnessed on a daily basis. This became emotionally challenging for me because it was very hard to teach in an environment that supported such behavior. I think it was beneficial to the students that they were able to experience a teacher without expecting to receive a punishment. I often explained to the teachers the discipline methods we use in America, not to say their way was wrong, but to show them there are other options.

During my stay with Cross-Cultural Solutions, we had regular Swahili lessons to gain a general knowledge of the language in order to prosper during our time in Moshi. I also attended numerous cultural orientation sessions provided through the program with guest speakers on AIDS, religious beliefs, family practices, and education. I learned an enormous amount of information and feel my experience was much more successful because of the immersion I was able to take.

The program provided a family-like atmosphere, where we ate our meals with the staff members daily, went on outings to local historical sites, and visited their homes. I think some of the best learning experiences throughout my stay was simply the many casual conversations I had with the staff about their lives and the country. It was interesting to be a

woman from America in Tanzania. I feel very lucky to come from a country that provides me with many opportunities men are given and an environment that encourages women to reach their potential and seek leadership roles. Tanzania places women a foot behind men. They are typically expected to maintain the role of wife and mother, while carrying out difficult farming duties. Even as a requirement in the school I taught, women are not allowed to wear pants. Many men I engaged in conversation with were shocked to know that I had no plans of marriage in the near future, avoid skirts as much as possible, and I couldn't cook. I explained to them that women could have families and careers and most do in America.

This program was an excellent choice because I was able to learn an extensive amount of information about the culture through the sessions they provided, use my skills to help provide service to others in the school setting, and I was given free time to explore the country on my own. I hope that I brought something to the community that openly welcomed me. I gained so much from them and I am sure they are not even aware of the impact this experience has had on my life. I value the global sharing of cultures and feel so connected with the goal of the program and the values of the CWIL department. I gained great independence and personal strength. I think this experience not only helped some of the Tanzanians realize the leadership abilities of women like myself to create positive change, but also for women in my community at home and at Saint Mary's. Women must recognize the opportunities the world has to offer and the roles they can take to create change and share in learning. I feel Tanzania and this experience will always be a part of me and I hope that I can use the knowledge I have gained as I find my place in the career world.