

Correspondences from the field

May 13, 2006

Dumelang

I thought I'd take some time to send off another mass e-mail before the group heads off to Shakawe (Northern Bots) and I won't have internet access for the next two weeks.

So I've been learning how to function here. *Hello's* and *how are you's* are very important here and if they are not said one is considered rude. So I must say I've been coming off as very rude and many people have told me that my occasional silences are interpreted as a sign of offense. I am definitely learning... but slowly!

This week has been mainly orientation in Gabarone (the capital city) with presentations and the like. A lot of the speakers have been from NGO's but we also have had talks from Miss HIV Stigma Free 2006 (who was a lovely woman) and a local doctor who debunked any myths that we had (such as AIDS coming from a monkey). We got to visit a diamond mine a few days ago. I think it was called the Jwaneng mine but it is the only one in the world where diamonds with a green tint can be mined. The security was pretty tight at the place and apparently all the workers must go through strip searches before ending their shift. However, it is a diamond mine and they are very cautious about people taking rocks or the like home. The air here in the city has the constant smell of burning bush and garbage as many homes have burning pits which certainly doesn't help my sore throat but it smells almost like a campfire.

Tomorrow we head to Shakawe where the Seminar group will be going on a 3 day cultural walk through a number of San and other indigenous groups villages. This is a relatively new form of income generating project that is being developed for tourism. At each village there will be nightly entertainment through traditional dances but we must bring our own food as some areas don't have access to constant food supplies and some people will only eat a meal or two every other day. I'm sure it's going to be a lot different from what I've seen so far in Gabarone. Many of the girls are concerned because there will be no toilets during this time but I think the farm has prepared me for the bugs and whatever else we'll have to deal with. It takes about two days by bus to get to that part of Botswana but after that we will be headed to D'Kar where we will meet up with our student counterparts (they'll be done exams). There we will be helping a local organization build an outdoor gym and working on a game reserve counting animals and whatever else that may entail :-). Then I'll be headed to Serowe with Gaolape (pronounced like Haolape) where we'll be working with a local organization that conducts follow-up monitoring in surrounding communities and re-mobilizes youth affected by HIV/AIDS.

Well I think that may be all I can think to tell people now but I'll keep you all updated when I can get internet access. Be sure to keep me updated on what you are all doing for the summer because I love receiving the e-mails!

Go well,

Alison

May 28, 2006

Hello everyone,

It's time for another update! I'm leaving for Serowe in about 30 mins so this will have to be brief. The last two weeks were amazing! The cultural walk was definitely

challenging as we walked about 40-50 km through deep sand but we got to walk through various villages of different ethnic groups and really got to see the more rural areas of Botswana. Talking with some of the guides walking with us told me a lot about the local people. Also surprisingly enough, there was a social anthropologist on the walk from Norway who was doing her masters on the San. On the last night we got to camp out underneath the stars on the Okavango Delta and I could hear hippos grunting all night. After that we went to D'kar/Ghanzi where we helped build an outdoor gym (which turns out was more directed to older males and body building) and participated in a game count on a game farm. There was a physical anthropologist at the farm who knew a lot about the artifacts and such from the area. I guess this goes to show the universality of Anthropology! Everyone got lost during that experience but it was great to wander around the bush and see some wildebeest and kudu. The last night the local San people performed some traditional dances and we all got to participate in some of the dances. I also got to clap along with the local ladies to the rhythm which was great because I certainly appreciated what they were doing for the group. Well I've got to go because I'm late but I'll e-mail when I can! I miss you all!

Alison

June 14, 2006

Dumelang!

Well I finally made it back from my two week stay in Serowe working with a NGO called Thlopha Botshelo. It was definitely an experience. Thlopha Botshelo is a group of three people run by a Sister Zora with two fieldworkers called Jerry and Gale. Its main objective is to provide humanitarian and development aid to various Basarwa villages on the outskirts of Serowe. Some of these villages are very marginalized areas. However, some are showing progress towards self determination and taking initiatives in building community support structures and organizing local responses to the issue of HIV/AIDS. I was a little skeptical at first at the religious affiliations of Thlopha Botshelo but it proved to value humanitarian aid over strict religious principals.

Everyday Gaolape and I would be involved in a variety of activities which included delivering food to ARV patients because they commonly share their governmental food rations with their family and relatives. We would facilitate community meetings with the field workers to set up community support structures, such as forming groups to remind each other of medical dates and appointments. This was difficult when there were only one or two people who knew how to read but the people really seemed to like the idea. We also helped build and plant gardens in two communities: Makolojwane and Metsimasweu. There were also a number of smaller things we did like help people deal with hospital visits and encouraging kids to go to school. Two weeks was certainly not long enough and I wish we could have stayed there longer because the people were just starting to get to know us when we have to return to Gabarone.

While in Serowe, Gao and I were staying with a local lady called Angela Monageng who was a very active blind lady. She helped run a disabilities clinic by her house. She is a truly amazing woman and she and her niece make the best food. Her scones were especially good and I certainly gained weight from them. I even got to learn from Gao how to cook phane (a caterpillar) and pap along with a variety of soups and vegetables.

Well it's my last few days in Botswana and this has involved a lot of report writing and spending time with the friends that I've met. The group for this year was

incredibly supportive and I'm certainly going to miss everyone! I hope everything is going well with you.

Alison