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# Greetings from Uganda

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## BACK IN THE HABIT

I've been back in Uganda for two months now and chugging along smoothly. I'm consistently reminded of the things I love about this life: amazing weather, passionate people, daily discoveries, and the ever-present potential of making an impact.

Not to say life over here is easy. City-wide "load sharing" means power goes off most days. The cost of food and travel has gone up. Inflation is growing steadily. This life is definitely not the one I knew for 23 years previously.

It's definitely tough being away from friends and family, especially missing babies, weddings, and big life changes, but I know this is the best place for me right now. It can be draining and I miss everyone like crazy, but it would be crazier to miss out on all the amazing things happening over here.

## SEEKING JUSTICE

There have been a lot of highs and lows in our cases these last few months. Back in July, just after I returned, I joined one of our Aftercare specialists as she visited a client dying of AIDS. She was the sickest I've ever seen someone, but told her daughters "I'm going to be OK. I feel it in my heart." I choked back a lot of tears that day, but I'm happy to report that this woman is much healthier now and is back home with her family.

In early August, I joined our legal team at the judgment hearing for a case where a client had been violently assaulted by her brother-in-law. This trial was tedious, grueling, frustrating – all of those and more – but finally, after sixteen months in and out of a courtroom, our client was granted justice and her abuser received one of IJM Uganda's toughest sentences ever. It was so, so, so awesome.

I met a client earlier this month who was the first woman in her family ever to stand up for her property rights. The entire family was completely unaware that girls could inherit or own land, so generations of women were victims of property grabbing and stolen inheritance. To see our client – and her newly-enlightened sisters – look over the land IJM restored to them, filled with pride, was a huge blessing.



## WISE WORDS

"Without charity external work is of no value, but anything done in charity, be it ever so small and trivial, is entirely fruitful inasmuch as God weighs the love with which a man acts rather than the deed itself."

*Thomas a Kempis, The Imitation of Christ*

"No, life cannot be understood flat on a page. It has to be lived; a person has to get out of his head, has to fall in love, has to memorize poems, has to jump off bridges into rivers, has to stand in an empty desert and whisper sonnets under his breath... We get one story, you and I, and one story alone. It would be a crime not to venture out, wouldn't it?"

*Donald Miller, Through Painted Deserts*



## SEEKING ABSURDITY

At the beginning of this month, I joined a group of friends at the annual Royal Ascot Goat Races, which is... exactly as it sounds: several rounds of creatively-named goats wandering confused around a race-track, until one would edge out the others for the triumphant top spot. Local businesses sponsored VIP tents and packed them full of attendees in full Kentucky Derby gear. It was absurd, of course, but a ton of fun.

## SEEKING CULTURE

This past weekend, I was stoked to attend the traditional introduction ceremony for my coworker, Gerry. This customary gathering is like an engagement party and wedding all rolled into one. Donning our new local dress (long white kanzus for the men; colorful sari-like mushananas for the ladies), the other interns and I watched as Gerry and Martin's fathers negotiated over the bride price (just a cultural thing) then brought out a dozen eligible girls from whom Martin would identify the one he wanted (Gerry).

There was lots of traditional dancing and music, a big Ugandan dinner, and quite a few inquisitive stares thrown our way. Gerry and Martin will have a traditional church wedding later, but this was a cool way to acknowledge their cultural heritage and entertain their white friends for an afternoon.

## Prayer Requests:

1 After months of brainstorming and building up inspiration, I'm making my final suggestions on our office's branding campaign over the next few months. Pray that I do the absolute best and help to create a really great product.

2 Continue to pray for my cultural adjustment. The last two months have been a roller coaster of feeling completely natural and then being reminded that I stick out like a sore thumb.

3 Pray that I can develop strong, lasting relationships with my coworkers and other NGO friends while I'm here this year.

One of the really weird things I miss about living in Uganda is tangible culture. Here, there aren't many buildings older than the 1970s; there aren't museums or galleries to browse on rainy afternoons.

But the hidden benefit to this absence is that so much of the culture here is interpersonal, drawn out through conversation. Events like the introduction ceremony launch stimulating discussions with my Ugandan coworkers. *What was your traditional wedding like? How does that tribe do it? What's the formal dress like in your home village?*

It's been really interesting to tap into the wealth of culture each Ugandan carries around. We have more than ten tribes represented in our office, so I hope I can have more of these conversations throughout the year.

Other cultural things I've learned:

- When a guy wants to marry a girl in Karamoja (north eastern Uganda), he must physically chase the girl and catch her. Karamajong women are notoriously fierce and put up quite a fight, so you have to really, really like a girl to keep up.
- My Ugandan name, Mutebi, which was given to me by one of our staff drivers, comes from the Buganda tribe and the Mamba clan. Our clan totem (respected animal) is the lungfish, which means we never eat them. Fine by me.



Thanks again to everyone for their financial support and commitments. The more I talk to other donation-reliant friends, the more I realize how amazing my supporters from home really are. I hope I'm making you proud!

All the best and God Bless,

*Scott*

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