

Letter 1
10-4-2005

Rachel & Travis,

I am currently sitting at my desk in Chuluni Girls Secondary school. This is where for the next 6 weeks I will be practice teaching. A couple weeks (3) after, that if I haven't gotten the boot, I will have the swearing in Ceremony on December 2nd, and from there go to site. This being the 2nd week, and due to the rural locale, I have not found anywhere to upload photos, there is a place in town to log on the net, internet is pretty slow there though, and unreliable so I haven't logged on yet.

Rachel your reliance on bottled water would go well here, that is all we are supposed to drink away from our homestay families, who boil our water. On the subject of our Homestay families. All volunteers, who are in training (there are 43) stay with a Kenyan (in this case rural) family, to increase our immersion in both the culture and the language. From some of the stories my fellow trainees are telling me my family is pretty tame. They are not especially nosy, demanding or hard to get along with. The only problem, which is universal among Peace Corps, is the food. Here it isn't even the type of food, none of it is actually what I would call

bad, it is more the quantity. We are guests, who are here to help, and the families are given small sums of money to support a extra person, so it is felt we need to have 2nd's and 3rd's. Myself and many of the volunteers were planning on skipping lunches to save room and money. Unfortunately while we are only tested on language, how we interact with the locals, how we handle the food, and our interactions among fellow volunteers all have an impact on how we are assigned sites. So everyone is grudgingly eating. You would probably be pleased to know that Avocados are about 4¢ a piece and twice as big as at home.

I have already sent Mom & Dad a Aerogram. I think the return address on theirs was wrong, either way the address e-mailed, and the one on the envelope is correct.

If you guys feel so inclined feel free to post this letter and any other letter you receive or others receive, minus anything, if I ever, bother to mark personal or private. If you have access you could even post this on my Blog.

The other volunteers are all really great people. There are of course the random personalities that eventually start to grate the wrong way, I am sure mine is among them, but overall even the hard personalities

still have more bright points than most, There are 11 education volunteers running the range of 21 to 30. Most of us are recent graduates, actually thinking about it. I believe all the education volunteers are recent graduates either BS or MS programs. There are another 15 Small Entrepreneurial Development/Internet Technology Volunteers, they are supposed to teach skills to small Business Owners. They run the age range of 20ish to 60+. Then there are 6 Kenyan Sign Language Education Volunteers, who are supposed to teach, you guessed it, Kenyan Sign Language. Finally there are 11 Behavioral Adjustment Volunteers. They are supposed to teach the Deaf and their families about AIDS and other health risks.

My homestay family has 4 cows, 1 pregnant goat, 2 dogs, 2 cats, and 4 chickens, (We used to have 5, I ate the 5th ones Gizzard), you all would love the weather here, it is like a warm September day. Sunny all the time, few clouds, and at night you can see every Star in the Southern Hemispheres Night Sky. Yesterday through film negatives we watched a solar eclipse. Also you can see either Venus or Mars, there is some debate over which one, I am thinking its Venus cause its a Whitish Blue light, and I always thought Mars shone

Reddish, who knows, I am no astrologer, There is no moon at night so it is very dark. Even if, especially if, we were in one of the big cities, it is not wise to venture far at night. Not only are we in a new country, but even though everyone we live with and around within 50 miles knows us and are(s) helpful, every (what few they might be) trouble maker in 100 miles knows there are Americans in the area. I have had no trouble, of course as always I follow the rules, but it is hard because the sun sets at 6:30 every night on the dot, and it's pitch black by 7. That and we must walk everywhere makes it so hard to visit other volunteers. We don't get done with training till 4 which for me gives me just enough time to huff it home. While I understand and am glad to do it, the idea of spending as much time as possible with Kenyans, it is always fun to catch up with the other volunteers, and hear the stories about what it was like to kill a chicken, take a bucket bath, or the most excited Malaria Medicine based hallucination was.

I guess the scenery is like what the American Southwest, or Mexico is like. Sunny, dusty, sparse shrubbery. The dogs would probably make you guys cry. They are smaller on average than

Max, and on most you can see the ribs. They love Americans, probably Western folk in general from what our African trainers tell us, for the sheer fact that we don't hit them. The concept of man's best friend never took root herein Kenya. One of the fellow volunteer's Dad's, Homestay Dad that is, likes to chase his dogs with a rope. Once you get over the initial reaction it is quiet comedic watching him going after the dogs who escape pretty fast. PETA would definitely have a collective stroke here, but I am not trying to be judgemental, everyone does things differently. The roosters, who are highly coveted in Kenya, are generally the target of ire for most Volunteers because they go off at 4:30, 5:00, 5:30, so on and so forth all morning long.

Back over the summer once or twice while I went to the Gym I picked up the trash I saw, and at WSU I would all the time between classes. Here due to the lack of trash dumps, let alone the money to drive a fleet of trash trucks, there is trash everywhere. Once again after a week you stop noticing, but it is a quandary whenever I have a handful of trash and I don't want to just drop it. A lot of families

now burn their trash, but that still is a question for the plastic. Oh well.

A Observation another volunteer made was that just with the amount of money we each brought with us from the U.S. we could almost double some of our Homestay families incomes for the time we are staying with them, or at least disposable income. It is a very bad precedent to set, especially for future volunteers. But it is always at the edge of your thinking.

All of the volunteers are always being struck speechless when we are asked to describe someone. Apparently to the Kenyans I have met most White Americans all look the same at 1st glance, because on average our skin color is too close, which is the major way that the Kenyans tell people apart at 1st glance. The terms Black, Brown, chocolate, Dusty, Tan, Black-Brown, so on and so forth are often asked of me when I am trying to describe someone to my homestay family. Another term, though I am not particularly surprised at it's use is "Red Indian", a term I haven't heard since watching Hidalgo.

The 1st time it rained here I thought I was going to be swimming to Swahili classes. My homestay Dad told me though it was

Just a little drizzle. The ground was all bone dry when I left that day, I guess the corrugated tin roof just made it sound like the sky was pouring a small ocean on me. The rainy season is coming in a month though, it is the short rainy season, meaning it rains for short sprints daily, so I might be busting out my Peace Corps issue life vest and speed boat for class some day.

I will see you guys in awhile, hopefully be sending photos. And I will write when I can.

Sincerely,
Seth

Nina itwa Seth

Nina toka Amerika, jimbo la Kansas

Mimi ni Mwalima

My name is Seth.

I am from America, the state of Kansas.

I am a teacher.