

March 2005

Tanzania

I'm a lucky guy. Anzie has a Peace Corps conference scheduled in Tanzania, East Africa, and I get to go along. Not only did I get to visit exotic-sounding places like Dar Es Salaam and Zanzibar, but we went on safari through the Serengeti, got up close and intimate with all of the Big Five animals but one, learned a lot about spices and birds, and had many tremendous people experiences.

First of all, a bit of background. Tanzania is situated on the East Coast of Africa, on the Indian Ocean. If you had asked me in what country Mt. Kilimanjaro is located, I would've answered: Kenya. I'm not the only one who would have been wrong. Many foreigners make the same mistake, according to Shaibu, our safari guide. "They stole our mountain!" he exclaimed. Likewise, most people think the Serengeti is part of Kenya, whereas the majority lies in Tanzania. The Olduvai Gorge, the site made famous by the Leakey family for their discovery of human remains that date back 3.5 million years? Also in Tanzania. Zanzibar, formerly known as the Spice Island, lies a 20-minute plane ride off the coast.

As a boy I collected stamps. I remember owning several stamps from Tanganyika. The country was ruled by Germany, then became a British protectorate before declaring independence in the 1960's. The country was renamed when Tanganyika and Zanzibar agreed to unite.

Julius Nyerere, the first president of the independent nation, is considered the father of the country. Called Mwalimu (teacher in Swahili), he successfully instituted a strong educational system. The literacy rate is high compared to other African countries. Virtually every child goes to school for eight years.

His efforts to improve the nation's economy were much less successful. He tried to nationalize the economy with three successive plans, all of which failed. They were based on a socialist model using the African village as the base unit. But with droughts and poor soil, the experiment failed. He sought help from Communist China, who helped him build a railroad. The country didn't have the money to maintain it, so it went bust. As with so many African countries corruption recently has been the biggest impediment to progress. Tanzania was one of the poorest of the East African countries. In the North, the Masai were unable to raise cattle because of the tsetse fly that carries the dreaded "sleeping sickness".

Things have changed for the better over the past 5-10 years. Substantial deposits of gold were discovered. Mining companies from South Africa, Australia, Canada, all over the world, are making substantial investment into gold mines. Tanzanite, the "blue diamond" found only in Tanzania, has become the jewel du jour. Tourism is expanding exponentially. Neither the country nor its

people look poor. Gone are the days when Tanzania's sole exports were sisal (for making rope), cloves and coffee. A program to eradicate the tsetse fly has enabled the Masai to expand their grazing lands and, consequently, their cattle herds. The countries of Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania have attempted an economic union in the past. It failed. It is now in the process of rebirth.

We hear of tribal rivalries which have had disastrous consequences in many African countries – most notably Rwanda and Kenya. Although there are more than 100 tribal groups in Tanzania, very little friction exists between them. Swahili and English are the official languages. “Hakuna matata” – No problem. “Jambo” – Hello.

The two main religions are Islam and Christianity, with Hindus accounting for 25%. I was surprised at the number of Christian names like Faith, Hope and Charity. Again, all live in peaceful harmony.

Meet the Tingitanas: Antonia and Fulgence

Anzie went to school with Antonia at the Center for International Education (CIE) at U. Mass – Amherst. Antonia also worked at Peace Corps for several years, as well as the UN, CARE and a few other NGO's (Non-Governmental Organizations). While working on a project in Tanzania in the 1980's, Anzie first met Antonia at a reception. She had heard of Mrs. Tingitana, and pictured her as a big African mama. As you can see from our photos, Antonia is anything but. Tall, attractive, high cheekbones, svelte, she could be a fashion model.

Fulgence has a handsome, open face. Age 58, with his salt-and-pepper short-cropped hair and beard, he resembles a jazz musician. He possesses degrees in Mechanical and Aeronautical Engineering. He worked for several years for Air Tanzania, a government-owned airline. He found the atmosphere stifling for anyone with imagination and ambition.

He finally moved the family to Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia to manage a finance company. Antonia worked there, too. Finding that they thrived in the private sector, they returned to Tanzania to start a telecommunications company in Dar Es Salaam.

Their company installed public telephones throughout the city and its suburbs. The original phones were operated with phone cards – the type that can be purchased at any convenience store for \$5 or \$10. They soon discovered that the majority of their target market – those who didn't own phones – couldn't afford the cards. So they converted the phones to coin operation.

They sold the company last year. “We did pretty well,” said Antonia, her body language conveying a sense that this was an understatement.

So now they are, as Fulgence puts it, “Somewhat under-employed.” Antonia is writing children’s stories, several of which are published.

Fulgence is writing a history of their village. Although their permanent residence is in Dar, they still visit their ancestral village, now Moshi, every year. They maintain a home there, also. Moshi, now a town with a population of 18,000 is the closest town to the Kilimanjaro airport. Located at the base of the famous mountain, the airport is a popular arrival/departure point for safaris to the Serengeti and climbs up the mountain. It lies north of Dar about ten hours by car.

When asked why he wanted to write this history, Fulgence explained, “Because nobody has ever done it before. I’m just gathering loads of oral history – some of it contradictory – from many sources. For the past 500 years the village chiefs have all come from my family. The book begins with some pre-history going back a couple of thousand years. Some of it is based on facts that I’ve dug up in research. Some of it is fiction based on these facts.... sort of like what Michener did.”

“You can really trace your family back 500 years? Our family can trace back only to the early 1800’s,” I queried.

Antonia interjected, “That’s because nobody moves in Tanzania. Everybody stays fairly close to where they were born. We’re the first generation of our families to leave Moshi. Everybody is related.”

Fulgence continues, “Even those of us who leave our village maintain close ties with it. Most émigrés in Dar belong to a village association. Their monthly dues go back to the village to fund special projects – schools, water systems, dispensaries and such.”

We had noted the same custom in Senegal with our friend, Mamadou Kane. Mamadou can trace his family back to 1006 A.D., the year his ancestral village was founded. A Kane was the first village chief. A member of the Kane clan has been chief ever since. Similarly, Antonia’s village has been ruled by the Tingitana clan for 500 years.

Our conversation gave me pause. Perhaps a major reason why our family tree is so short is that we, like most American families, are so mobile. Our mobility causes us to lose track of our roots. Likewise my mother’s family can only be traced back to a time when they moved from Canada to settle in Michigan in the late 1800’s. (From Anzie – whereas the Dodges can be traced back to 1628 in Mass.)

But, I digress. The Tingitanas have a daughter who is about to graduate from Marymount College, Tarrytown, NY (Katy, take note) with a degree in Fine Arts. She plans to go into Filmmaking, along with her boyfriend of several years.

Judging from her background, she stands a great chance of success. She and her boyfriend started a TV station in Dar when she was 17 and he was 25.

Life at Sea Cliffs

During Anne's conference we stayed at the upscale Sea Cliffs Hotel in Oyster Bay, the "high rent" suburb of Dar. Overlooking the Indian Ocean, the Hotel offers three good restaurants, a bar, gym, pool and a bowling alley. The doormen are genuine Masai in full dress (see photos). A brand new shopping center lies adjacent. It contains a supermarket and several restaurants – Indian, Turkish (great food!), Seafood, Tex-Mex (called Spurs) and a Subway.

I vegged for five days. I awoke with Anne at 7:00 to join her and her colleagues for a delicious English breakfast buffet. Then off to the gym for a strenuous workout with Joe, the trainer. I then collapsed by the pool, stirring only to take a swim, read or write.

I met some interesting people at the pool:

- Birgitt, a Danish lady who's here to start up a dried fish processing plant. The fish – sardines – are shipped to Denmark and sold as cat food. "It's a good market," she explains, "There are just about as many cats as there are people in Denmark."
- Mary arrived from Australia just two weeks before. She joins her husband who is managing gold mining operations for Placer, a Canadian company. Several gold deposits have been discovered over recent years, bringing mining experts from all over the world.

Eating Ethiopian

Some of you may have already eaten Ethiopian. It was a new experience for me. Marilee, the Peace Corps Country Director in Tanzania, took us out to "Addis in Dar", an Ethiopian restaurant. Everyone sits around a table that resembles a large round basket with a conical top. The top is removed to reveal a large, round tray. The food is served in another tray that fits perfectly into the first one. Only, this tray has what appears to be a round table cloth that drapes over its sides. This "table cloth" is actually a soft, thin, fermented bread onto which is dumped a variety of dishes that Marilee helped us to select.

We are served a plate of the same bread, which is neatly rolled up into individual "napkins". One tears off a rectangular piece and uses it like a napkin to pick up a portion of food. The dishes are based on various meats or vegetables with a variety of spices, much like Indian cuisine.

Washed down with a bottle of Kilimanjaro lager, it's a delight – a veritable party for your mouth!

Zanzibar – The Spice Island

Five of us -- Barbara (Anzie's boss from DC), Brownie (her colleague from the West Coast of Africa), Linda (an Education specialist from PC DC), Anzie and I -- took the 20-minute flight to Zanzibar. Abdoulaye, a driver known to Peace Corps, drove us into **Stonetown**. I was struck immediately by the difference from the mainland. Zanzibar is replete with Arabic influence. The sultan of Oman ruled the place until 1890, when it became a British protectorate. The island declared independence only in 1973, when it united with the mainland. Relations are still shaky between the two entities.

Our five-story **Hotel International** was built by a sultan to house his second wife. There has to be a story there. The population is 95% Muslim, as opposed to 42% on the mainland. The mosques are more populous than Starbucks in Seattle. At sunset call-to-prayer the air is filled with electronically amplified voices of chanting imams vying with each other for mastery of the air waves. It creates a pleasant symphony. The women all dress in black with only their faces showing. I found the Arab/African mix very sexy.

Though historically significant for its classic Zanzibarian architecture, Hotel International isn't fancy. But it's quite adequate. The rooms are air-conditioned. The hosts are congenial and helpful. Located in Stonetown, next to the market and away from the tourist quarter, it maintains an old-world ambience. It's a bargain at \$45./night for two, including full breakfast. The only drawback is the staircase – so steep it's almost like climbing a ladder. The sultan's second wife, and her servants, must have been blessed with good legs.

We noted the huge wooden entrance doors to the hotel. They were decorated with several pointed brass projections that resembled the business end of an artillery shell. We had noticed similar doors throughout Stonetown. The hotel manager explained that these projections were to prevent war elephants from ramming in the doors. History or fable? You decide.

Our first night we all dined at **Emerson and Greene's**, a rooftop restaurant up five long flights of stairs atop the Emerson House hotel. The place is in such demand that one must make reservations in advance, then go to the hotel the day of the reservation and lay down a cash deposit. We ate a delicious five-course meal, which was followed by music and dancing. The PC ladies not only surprised me by paying for my dinner, but they presented me with a birthday cake (It was the day before my birthday). This we shared with our fellow diners.

The original old city of Stonetown is a maze of narrow, winding streets that are negotiable only by foot or motorbike. We became lost winding on our way back to the hotel. A couple of Stonetownians (or is it Zanzibarians?) were kind enough to lead us back to the hotel. Despite what the guidebooks state, we found that the people were all friendly and helpful.

Spice Tour

Our airport driver, Abdoulaye, met us early the next morning to take us on a tour. He circled Stonetown pointing out the sights, stopping in front of various museums. Since some of us were leaving Zanzibar that afternoon, none of us wanted to waste time in a museum.

We did stop at the **Old Slave Market**. A guide took us down into the basement of what was a guest house for the adjacent Christ Church to show us the cavern-like chambers where slaves were incarcerated. A concrete trench divides the rooms between raised concrete platforms where the slaves laid. The slave used the trench as a latrine. At high tide seawater cleansed the trench.

Other than that, the story is much the same as that of Goree Island, off the coast of Dakar. Goree slaves were shipped to the West; whereas Zanzibar slaves went to the East – Arabia and India. Many of the male slaves were castrated so that they could be sold to Sultans to serve as servants and guards in the Harems. The other distinct difference from Goree is that the slave trade here didn't cease until early part of the 20th Century. Although the British had slavery formally outlawed in 1873, the Arab traders kept the slaves hidden in caves along the coast. They would bring their boats ashore under the cover of darkness and put the slaves aboard.

Livingstone, the renowned explorer of Stanley/Livingstone fame, lived just outside of Stonetown. His house still stands. He was instrumental in the ban of slavery. He also brought the first missionaries to the country. He requested that, upon his death, his heart be buried in the country. True to his wish, his heart was buried under a baobab tree inland; while his body was returned to England for burial.. When Christ Church cathedral was built atop the abolished slave market, a part of that tree was installed in the church in Livingstone's memory. A stone on the alter floor marks where the slave whipping post had been.

We left Stonetown heading for a spice farm. Another stop along the way at the ruins (and I mean ruins!) of a Sultan's palace. Men were hovering around our van waiting to take us on a guided tour. Our consensus was that it didn't look worth it. Abdoulaye shrugged his shoulders, turned the van around and left our prospective guides in the dust.

Another 20 miles on dirt roads past several spice farms and we finally arrived at The Spice Farm, owned by the government. Personally I wasn't expecting much. I mean, how excited can one get over a bunch of clove trees? This tour far exceeded all of our expectations! Our guide, Kharit, introduced himself. He's an interesting young man. Only 19, Kharit knows a lot about spices. He also speaks four languages. Plus, he's a natural-born teacher. Anzie asked him what he wants to be when he grows up. His reply: "A guide". Considering the rate of unemployment on the island, it wasn't a bad answer.

Kharit took us to an orchard where he cut a green “fruit” off a tree. “What spice is this?” he asked. We all smelled it. Our puzzled looks told the story. He cut it in half to reveal a red nut with black stripes. We still didn’t know. Then we smelled it. “Nutmeg” was the immediate response. “Muslim women use this as an aphrodisiac”, he informed us. “Forbidden to drink alcohol, they make a drink from ground nutmeg which gives them a high, and lets them dance more freely at parties”. I filed this info in the back of my brain. Hey, ya never know when knowledge of herbal aphrodisiacs might come in handy. I tried Viagra once. I couldn’t swallow it. All I got was a stiff neck!

We then journeyed down the hill to the main farm, where Kharit repeated the same Q & A drill on turmeric (a root), cardamon, cinnamon (three different spices come from to leaf the berry and the bark), pepper (black when it’s dried, green, when very fresh, white while drying and red when it’s ripe, all from the same tree), breadfruit, jackfruit, five-star fruit, vanilla, lemongrass and, finally, cloves. Unfortunately the clove market has tanked. The price per kilo has plummeted 50%. We watched as a boy climbed 30 ft. up a clove tree to harvest a cluster of cloves for us. Not an easy task, harvesting cloves. I’d rather grow vanilla beans. The vines grow around other trees. The hard work involves pollinating the bean flowers. It has to be done within one day of when the flowers first sprout, and is a time-consuming process. However, many clove farmers are switching over to vanilla because the revenue is worth the effort.

We sampled some exotic fruits. Besides mango, we tasted breadfruit, jackfruit, five-star fruit and seville oranges(sour!) – used for making marmalade.

We had tramped around the plantation for two and one-half hours, and our feet were tired. “One more stop”, said Kharit, “I want to introduce you to Mr. Butterfly!” We walked another half mile through the jungle until we reached a cluster of thatched-roof huts. Mr. Butterfly was sitting underneath a baobab tree clothed in nothing but a loin cloth. After we were introduced, Mr. Butterfly picked up a machete and led us another 100 yards to a clump of palm trees. He stood at the bottom of a 100-ft. coconut palm, stuck his machete behind his back into his loin cloth. He then inserted his feet into a coil of hemp rope, leaving a 10” gap between his feet. He hopped onto the tree. Using the rope for traction he proceeded to hop up the tree with amazing ease. Mr. Butterfly was a real showman. About half way up he stopped and broke into song. Since he sang in dialect we couldn’t get the meaning. But he began to wiggle his butt suggestively, so maybe it was a love song? At any rate M. Butterfly continued to the top of the tree. He used his machete to cut down three nuts, which he dropped to the ground with a resounding thud. He chopped off two more, which he carried down, stopping again on the way to serenade us.

Mr. B. then used his machete to chop open a coconut for each of us. After three hours of walking that coconut absolutely hit the spot! Mr. B. and his assistants then fashioned a variety of accessories for us out of coconut fronds: bracelets for the ladies; a tie, hat and sunglasses for me.

Kharit walked us back to our van. Anzie bought a few small bags of spices. We bid a fond farewell to Kharit and his helpers, along with a tip for a job well done. Abdoulaye drove a bunch of tired puppies back to the Hotel.

After a nap, we met Linda and walked over to **Africa House**. It's a tradition in Stonetown to watch the sunset from the terrace bar of this hotel. Although the place was jammed, our waiter from the previous evening found us front row seats (couches, actually), and we celebrated another great day over several gin & tonics and Kilimanjaros (beer). Nobody saw the green flash!

A la prochaine,

Chuck