

The Red Hippo Arts Project

Chara Le Marquand's Web Log

Aug 6, 2008 in Uncategorized

Now that I've finally gotten a chance to write, I feel like too much has happened to be brief. We've only been here 6 days, but it feels like months. The people we've met—both at In Need Home and Nesco—have welcomed us like family, with tons of delicious food, in typical African style.

On Saturday we met the NESCO boys (Nsambya Ex-Street Children Organization), who Drew has been working with. After being served a huge meal which, as Kenyans would say “defeated us,” we were taken to the NESCO office and treated to a performance. One of the goals of the NESCO boys is to teach the younger children whom they take off the streets to survive by their talents and not by crime. And they are indeed talented. Many are skilled acrobats—very impressive if not a bit nerve-wracking to watch. Others danced or sang for us. Charlotte and Noelle were even coerced into trying some juggling and dancing. Afterwards the younger kids amused themselves by taking photos with our digital cameras and then checking out the results.

On Sunday we heard Bishop Zac Niringiye speak in Kisugu. He spoke eloquently of the need for Christians to be “in the world, not of the world, but for the world.” I thought this was fitting, as it's a sentiment that seems to be popping up a lot in my life lately. Unfortunately we left before we could meet him—maybe another time.

On Monday we finally got to meet the kids at In Need Home. When they saw us turn the corner to the school all 30 kids started screaming with excitement. A moment later they all came rushing through the gates to hug us, many not wanting to let go long enough for us to get inside. It was certainly a welcome to remember.

The kids are amazingly well behaved, and seem to be picking up English fast, considering the relatively short time they've been at In Need Home. They love to sing and dance, and are totally confused, perhaps even amused at my complete inability to do the calypso.

After introductions Anny gave us the history of In Need Home. During the past two decades of war, many Acholi have come to seek refuge with friends and family in Kampala. After some time most were turned away because friends can't support them as well as their own families. Without any means to support themselves, without even being able to speak the language of the region, hundreds of Acholi moved down by the tracks (typical, no?) to try to survive by any means possible. This was never meant to be a long term solution, but this war, like so many African wars seems to be dragging on with no end in sight. Meanwhile Namuwongo continues to grow.

One of the teachers, Lilian, took us on a walk through Namuwongo, so that we would see first hand how these children live. As we walked through the slum we attracted ever increasing numbers of small children. One little boy even grabbed Sarah's hand and walked with us until we started worrying he wouldn't find his way back again. The tracks of Namuwongo function like the main street, with women selling food, vendors, men molding mud bricks, and lots of women and children carrying buckets of water from the one tap of Namuwongo. As we got deeper into the slum, the poverty got worse and worse. Lilian led us through small winding paths which snake around the houses in a seemingly random way. Eventually we reached a river into which all the sewage of Kampala is dumped. It runs right beside Namuwongo, and is released into Lake Victoria. As Sensa, the leader of the NESCO boys was telling us, there is no infrastructure here, and no one to think of paying for and maintaining any sort of water filtration system.

After our tour we spent the rest of the afternoon in downtown Kampala. Anny took us to a wonderful little coffee shop. The coffee here (which is delicious) is always freshly picked and ground. Anny wouldn't even let Charlotte and I buy any because she wants us to wait until the

end of the month, so the coffee would be as fresh as possible for our family and friends back home.

The rest of the day was spent in the taxi park. This was probably the most claustrophobic I've ever felt, and the only time I've felt truly uncomfortable in Uganda so far. It's basically hundreds and hundreds of pushy merchants crammed into a very small space, trying to grab at you from all sides. The merchants surround the taxis, which are all haphazardly parked, or else starting up and nearly driving into you. I think I was grazed by more than one taxi as I tried to navigate our way through the park. By taxi I don't mean the sort of taxi we have at home, I mean a crammed mini van with broken seats, no seat belts and a reckless driver.

Tuesday our program finally began. Charlotte and I planned out a few map making activities for the kids, starting with a map of the world and then zooming into Namuwongo. The kids were especially amused by a direction game we played where they got to direct "teacher Chara" around the classroom, but with a limited understanding of English had me bashing into all sorts of things. Eventually they got the hang of directional words (left, right, etc). When we then had them draw what they see on the way to school, Charlotte and I were impressed by the quality of the drawing. Neither of us had seen kids at this age at home draw with such thoughtfulness. Most drawings contained goats or chickens, taxis and boda-bodas, people cooking, and (surprisingly) airplanes. Later we discovered that there's a hospital nearby which brings patients in by helicopter over Namuwongo.

There was a cute moment with the kids after I pulled out a simple drawing of the school I'd done on a large piece of paper, for them to glue their drawings around. They all started to exclaim how beautiful they thought it was, one boy (Ivaans) saying, "Ah, very beautiful, very beautiful! Beautiful like a woman!"

I've dragged on for far too long already, and I haven't even gotten to today yet. It's late though, and the internet cafe closes soon, so it'll have to wait until tomorrow. I promise not to get so backlogged again.

5 Replies

1. Grant LeMarquand

Aug 6th, 2008 at 8:14 pm

Hi Chara,

I'm glad that you've started blogging now - sounds like you're having an awesome time. We are praying for you, the team and the children.

Dad

2. Nikki

Aug 6th, 2008 at 11:29 pm

Chara, I'm so proud of you! This all sounds so powerful and amazing. I can't wait to hear about more of your experiences! Love you,

-Nikki

3. Nick Brotherwood

Aug 7th, 2008 at 10:03 am

Way to go Chara!

Keep blogging, this is great stuff. Emilie, Joan, Ondrej & a friend of Emilie's Catherine T-G, watched "War Dance" last night and loved it. Your blogs help us to feel part of the project. We'll put them up on the screen next Sunday at emerge.

Nick
4. Karalee

Aug 10th, 2008 at 2:34 am

I'm so proud of you too Chara! It sounds like your adventure is off to an amazing start. I am thinking of you and sending you lots of love.

5. Audrey O' Braham

Aug 15th, 2008 at 10:32 am

hi chara,

Sounds like the direction game was amusing indeed. would love to see the maps that you made with the children. I also read the entry about the little boy that hangs around the In Need Home. Give him a smile for me, too and a hug, if you can.

Keep up the great work and good spirit.

Audrey

Aug 10, 2008 in Uncategorized

There is a boy who stands outside of In Need Home all day. He clutches to the outside of the fence and stares longingly while others like him sing, play, learn. He watches while others like him are loved and cherished. He stays hungry while others receive food. He breaks my heart. I want so much to run out and hug him, to tell him Jesus loves him, even if the world is cold.

2 Replies

1. Grant LeMarquand

Aug 10th, 2008 at 1:56 pm

Real hearts (breakable kind) are the only ones that can speak thorough the eyes and speak love to this little guy as you smile at him.

Please give him a smile for me.

xxx love and prayers for you, for him, and for all those you CAN hug and love and teach, xxx mum

2. Nikki

Aug 15th, 2008 at 5:15 pm

Love you Chara. I know you're showing these children Christ's love, and in turn you're showing this boy his love too.

Take care..

Aug 21, 2008 in Uncategorized

Charlotte and I were worried that the kids might have trouble doing the twirled paper animals in 45 minutes. Fortunately we were wrong. Children in North America are prone to twirling their paper too loosely and messily. We hadn't taken into consideration that the mothers (or guardians) of these kids twirl paper beads for a living; perhaps the kids have helped. Instead of twirling their paper too large, we have to tell the kids to loosen them before gluing the ends. Even so, the butterflies they made were tiny because of their perfectly tight coils. Granted a few of the kids seemed a bit lost with the activity, but others worked quickly and skillfully, helping their neighbors when they finished a step.

Our time here has been full of visiting. We were invited to a meal out in the village of NESCO's adviser Medi. The entire village came out to greet us with singing and dancing. After a large meal Medi, who owns an orphanage begged us for advice. There's such a hunger for knowledge here. In the end, all we really had to offer was our friendship.

Saturday a group of us went to Jinja to see the source of the Nile. This was the first quiet spot we found on the trip, making the long hot taxi ride and touristyness of it all worthwhile. We sat with our feet in the water, with colourful little dragonflies coming to rest on us. I finally did some sketching—the only moment I've had to do so.

Disclaimer: Dads may want to skip this paragraph for fewer gray hairs. Next we saw Bugagali falls. The only way to really get from the source to Bugagali was by boda-boda. So, despite my better judgement I hopped on the back of a motorcycle helmet-less. I've since discovered that bodas are cheaply rented from India, and that 90% of Ugandan boda-boda drivers don't have licenses. With many silent pleas to God we all made it in one piece. I did, however, burn my leg quite badly on the huge exhaust pipe, conveniently located where ones leg should go.

Sunday we spent the afternoon at Anny's gorgeous hilltop home. As with many homes in Kampala, Anny's roof is red tile, her walls white with tall archways. From her balcony is the most beautiful view. On one side is lake Victoria, on the other is all of Kampala stretched out before you. Namwongo is just a thin strip of mud and tin in the distance.

On Tuesday, after a few scheduling and communication mishaps, we realized—5 minutes before our workshop—that we'd need to reschedule Charlotte's model community activity. Instead I taught them rubbings and a bit of colour theory. They were all awed that I could make a perfect leaf appear on the page simply by placing the leaf under it and rubbing with a crayon. They then all rushed into the yard to find textures for themselves, some so enthusiastic their crayons ripped right through the page.

I assumed that most of the kids would know their primaries, at the very least. Not one of them knew what I was talking about. They were pretty excited about secondaries though; at one point we had to stop them from chanting "purple, green, orange! Purple, green, orange!"

Two seemingly basic ideas—rubbings and primary colours—were completely new to them. Primaries are such an important base in art; I'm glad we got to fit them in. They're so second nature to me that it didn't even cross my mind that they may never have been taught about red, yellow, and blue.

When it came time for the younger group to do twirled animals they made the most adorable little googly-eyed caterpillars. Some worked so quickly and efficiently I'm sure they roll beads for their mothers.

On Thursday some of us went downtown with Ronah to look at fabrics. In Kampala there are streets and streets dedicated to fabric. It's certainly a sight to see, but can get overwhelming quickly when you start scanning ceiling-high shelves for fabric. With so many vibrant colours and

intricate patterns it's hard to know where to begin. When finally I'd settled on a blue and orange fabric I stayed in the background while Ronah bargained for me, to avoid Muzungu prices. She got the price to 12,000 shillings, which is about 7 dollars for 6 yards of fabric. When we'd all secured fabric, Ronah took us to see a cousin of hers to fit us for dresses. We all sketched out designs and were told all four dresses (for Leah, Sarah, Charlotte, and I) would be ready in a week.

Sorry, that's the end.

One Reply

1. Grant LeMarquand

Aug 24th, 2008 at 9:55 pm

I can almost see the kids with their twisted butterflies and caterpillars! I hope you have some photos - or a sketch?? What a privilege to share in the joy of discovery - purple, green and orange!!! How we LOVE to learn - and what a JOY to share learning!

I'm afraid Dad's allergy to motorcycles did add one or two further gray hairs - the disclaimer helped - so did your accompanying angels. Hoping and praying the burn is healing.

Looking forward to seeing you on the 29th!

Hope you will be able to wear your African dress while in Africa, as typical to those generous hearts, the people will be honored that you chose to wear an African dress as you stand and walk with them, and as you love them- (take a picture?!).

xxx Mum

Aug 27, 2008 in Uncategorized

I'll spare you a recap of the past week and a half. I'll only say it was full and wonderful. I spent a large bit of it preparing for the mural, which was tiring but worth it. It also gave me an excuse to do lots of drawing for the first time on the trip.

The kids painted beautifully with lots of vibrant colours.

Friday was bittersweet. I've fallen completely in love with these children, and now it's time to say goodbye. In the morning Charlotte and I did our final project. It was originally to be a model community, but we adapted it to be constructing important things from their community—tying in with the drawings from the very first day. We asked each child to find five objects the night before, and we supplied some extras.

Barbara made a taxi out of a Ceres juice box and some bottle caps.

Florence made a table out of a soap box, with a flower centerpiece on some aluminum plates.

Ivan cut strips to the center of a Safi cup, stuck a straw through the middle, and had a fan which spun as he ran up and down the yard.

Lillian made a cake out of film negatives, with real flowers as icing.

Bosco-John put together a mega phone out of a water bottle and a toilet paper roll.

Jairus, who is quite good in photography, made a camera out of a soap box and bottle caps.

There were many other vehicles, airplanes, etc.

Perhaps my favourite invention was little Winnie's. She made food. In a little plastic bottle cap she mashed up a leaf with white glue, and stuck in one of those ice cream taste-testing spoons. It was adorable, and it suited her character perfectly.

The teachers were pleased that the kids were thinking creatively about everyday objects from their environment. The kids had fun; so did we.

The afternoon was the closing of the project. All the mothers (or guardians, as only 5 of the children live with biological mothers) were invited to the school to see what their children have been up to for the past month. As the mamas slowly filtered in (they run on Africa time, of course) Sue performed three dances with the kids: one with only the girls, one with the boys, and one with ribbons. The girls all wore skirts and had baskets on their heads that they'd made. At one point they used coloured bits of fabric to pretend that they were washing clothes, which the mothers found highly amusing. The boys then did their dance with masks they'd made and decorated. I almost cried. Twice.

After the dances we showed the mothers the gallery we'd set up in the large classroom. We handed out the photo albums the kids made for them to take home. They got to see their children's favourite photos hanging on the walls, signed and framed, next to a lovely portrait of each. They liked the large mural that each child had a part of. They were delighted by the little hanging caterpillars and butterflies their children had so carefully twirled. They were also amused by the found object inventions of that morning.

It was amazing to see women who lack any semblance of self confidence have pride in their children. They were amazed at what their children had been able to do. Anny later told us that they were shocked that people would travel halfway across the world to spend time in Namuwongo.

On Saturday Barclays bank visited In Need Home. Apparently the bank has set up a fund for community based projects. They showed up with sacks of maize and flour, charcoal, and clothes. They adorned the kids in blue and white Barclays bandanas.

Anny sent them to Namuwongo, much like she did us on our first day. A small group of us accompanied the 10 or 15 young well-to-do Ugandans into the slum. Some lived as close as a few roads up, but didn't even know Namuwongo existed. One came in high heels, another in white leather boots. They were horrified. They had no idea that such poverty existed in their own country.

As we walked through we saw the new toilet facilities that someone had installed in Namuwongo. We'd read about it in the paper. What the paper didn't say, however, was that it cost 100 shillings per use. Now I'm wondering, how are people that are unemployed, have no land and no way to feed themselves going to spend 100 shillings to use the toilet?

It was a very hot day in Namuwongo and the stench was worse than usual. Most of the Bank reps wouldn't even approach the water, and none stayed longer than a brief glance.

For me my second trip through Namuwongo was harder than the first. On the first trip I was prepared, having seen slums in Kenya. The second trip hit closer to home. Even though I know that the kids go home to the slum every night, it can be easy to distance yourself from that place—to not think about what it must mean to go home to Namuwongo. To walk through and be shown the homes of kids I love was hard. To walk through and see kids who will never have an In Need Home in their lives was also hard.

I'll have to end there because the trip is just about over, and I'm late for a debriefing meeting. See you all very soon.

No Comments