

The Red Hippo Arts Project

Noelle Retson's Web Log

Hello world...here I am!

Jul 11, 2008 in Preparation

"July what? 11th you say? Ah! We're going to Uganda in three weeks!!" This is the conversation I had this morning and everyday the concept becomes more real yet surreal all in the same breath.

People keep asking if I'm excited, and I'm sure I am somewhere deep inside. The reality of planning a trip for over a year, from the theoretical framework to buying the tickets, is that the excitement seems to continuously arise and subside throughout.

Part of the reason that I'm probably not outwardly jumping up and down and frolicking through the streets of Montreal is that I'm trying not to! Through past experiences I've learned not to depart with any expectations or assumptions. (Although I probably do have tons of excitement floating around in my subconscious that will hit me on the plane). In past experiences the first portion of trips have been ruined by battling off the "what I thought" and through that I have learnt to try to not presume too much before take off. Culture shock is bound to happen regardless of my thoughts leading up to this trip, but may it not be enhanced by any preconceptions. I guess excitement gets lost in there somewhere....

What is just unbelievable is how supportive everyone has been. A BIG SHOUT OUT to those who have contributed to us and this project financially, through kindness, encouragement, generosity, thoughtfulness and prayer. You all know who you are and are just as much a part of this project as we are, as it simply would not have been possible without you.

My fabulous husband Micah and I said at the beginning of this project: "We'll try until we hit a brick wall, and once we hit it we'll know it's not to be in our path." Now, with the Lonely Planet guide on the bedside table, our packs out of the closet and our shots in our arms (can we say OW to yellow fever?!) we haven't so much as stumbled over a pebble in the planning of this trip to Namuwongo, Uganda.

Please feel free to comment and ask any questions in the comments section. Stay Tuned!

Love,

Noelle

3 Replies

1. Leah

Jul 11th, 2008 at 6:08 pm

that's so true what you said about having expectations Noelle! very good advice. I am also going to try my best to go to Uganda completely open-hearted without pre-conceived expectations.

can't wait to see you & Micah there!

:) Leah

2. Kelly

Jul 11th, 2008 at 7:20 pm

Hey Noelle!

We are so amazed by you and Micah. You are incredible young adults and we are so proud of what you will be doing.

Love you very much.

3. Edith

Aug 6th, 2008 at 5:44 pm

Noelle and Micah:

Am following your comments with awe. Your attitude towards befriending others is most commendable. I am honoured to know you both. All the best as you continue with your most important work.

Lots of love.

6 days and counting...

Jul 25, 2008 in Preparation

Here I am just finishing up my second to last shift at maman, bébé et café and things are on the move!

Micah and I have our shots, our ibuprofen, immodium, bug spray etc is bought, and we have nothing in Montreal right now but our beloved dog Bosco and the clothes we're taking to Namuwongo, Uganda next Thursday, July 31st.

Next week's plan is to spend time with family, friends and in meditation preparing to part our separate ways. This trip differs from others that we've taken in that we're not coming back home to live. Micah and I have been scurrying around in preparation not only for Uganda but also to move to British Columbia upon our return. To Africa and then driving across Canada all in one summer-if you know us well, you'll know that we're totally stoked!

To continue with thoughts from my last blog, the excitement is becoming harder to suppress. I'm becoming excited to meet the children, and the women of the village. I'm excited to be lost in translation. I'm excited to witness the landscape. I'm excited to learn. Long story short- I'm excited! (but still trying not to arrive with unrealistic expectations or assumptions.)

To answer some FAQ's...I'll be updating my blog at least weekly, but I'd like to shoot for bi-weekly while we're there. We leave the 31st of July and are back the 27th of August. Next week I'll be in preparation mode, bringing project ends together so please if you have any advice or suggestions (especially that I could put into a Games manual) my mind is always open!

'Till next time,

Noelle

-Big love xo

3 Replies

1. Mom

Aug 1st, 2008 at 10:30 pm

Hi Bud !

I am so excited for you !!!!

You've been gone only 1 day and I miss you oodles and spend many idle moments wondering how it's going - can't wait to hear ! Good luck with all your projects. My, it's hard for me to imagine that my little girl is on such a big adventure !!!

I love you more than you can imagine. You will all make a difference in the lives that you touch...now that's exciting !!!

2. nretson

Aug 2nd, 2008 at 11:02 am

Thanks to my number one fan! XOXO

3. Naomi

Aug 4th, 2008 at 9:32 pm

So glad you have arrived safe and sound and the dream is finally your reality for the next 4 weeks. It sounds very exotic and exciting. I look forward to the detail about the work you'll be doing and the people you'll be meeting. I am proudly wearing my necklace and missing you a lot (especially since I'm doing the work schedule:-)..enjoy and soak it all in..I'll be following you over the next month for sure..

*As for the cafe, rest assured that the carrot cake is back to fluffy, the muffins overflowing, barney birthday a success and singing with jennifer selling like hotcakes!
watch out for the tse tse flies:-)
All my luv and admiration xo N*

Arrived...safe and sound!

Aug 2, 2008 in Arrived

Hi guys! So here we are in amazing Uganda. Our flights were long, but very well catered. If you ever have a chance to fly KLM, go for it...best flight, service/take off and landing (completely unnoticable) ever. We hung out in the Amsterdam airport for a few hours before we embarked on our 8 1/2 hour flight to Entebbe. It was a little strange that the plane was full of white humanitarian aid workers/ tourists....didn't make our project feel so special anymore. We were kindly greeted here by Anny (who runs In NEED HOME), who brought us to our hotel just outside Kampala...and after a few words we crashed into our beds...and we crashed hard!

Today, we had breakfast and took care of all logistical things (currency exchange, buying water, etc) and then met with Anny for a good chat. The project suddenly felt very important again. This afternoon we went on a long walk to Victoria Lake. I hope to see more of it later, I'm sure we will.

The people are great, smiles all around and a very welcoming experience.

Mom- please don't worry, we're good! If you need to get a hold of us we're staying in a hotel called Chez Johnson.. Just outside of Kampala....

Marc- good luck! Miss you. We'll take a trip together one day!

Erin- This place is awesome. I'm finally living one of those dreams you heard for so long now! Wish you were here! This'll be the longest we've never talked!

Love you all!

Noelle

3 Replies

1. kogger

Aug 3rd, 2008 at 7:59 pm

Hey Noelle.

Glad to hear you guys arrived safely. Love having the blog for updates. I bet you can't wait to roll up your sleeves and get started with the project.

Miss you lots!

2. Sharon & Eric and the stinkettes!!

Aug 3rd, 2008 at 11:23 pm

Hey Noelle!

Miss you already! The girls miss you too. Sarah wants you to know that she has colored a picture for you. :)

I am happy to hear everything is working out for you over there...way over there. Sounds exciting and fun. A life changing experience that you will keep with you forever.

Hope to read more - take care of yourselves!

Sharon & Eric and the stinkettes!
3. Jay Devine

Aug 4th, 2008 at 10:14 am

Hey Noelle,

Well done. This project sounds great! Congratulations and I hope everything works out really well. Safe travels!

Jay

The Friendship Trip

Aug 5, 2008 in Uncategorized

I watched this short documentation about a Brazilian pastor's notion of Friendship Trips before we left home (you can find it on youtube). The concept generates the idea that we should take friendship trips instead of mission trips; where missions are more generally perceived as active evangelism and maintaining buildings vs. friendship trips where the goal of the trip is to make friends, form global community and maintain those friendships.

Micah and my friendship trip seemed to start the moment after we left the discussion that took place after the short movie. We walked down the street and peeked in at a new restaurant that we'd never noticed before. The general manager invited us to sit down and actually very quickly gave us both a beer on the house. We accepted and began chatting with the young gent. He quickly disclosed info about his life, that led us into a good vs. bad type of person conversation and sent us on our merry way (45 minutes later). It didn't stop there, in fact at this point I don't believe either of us had even clued into what had just happened in relation to the movie or what was about to happen. As we walked to the metro, we were stopped by what seemed to be someone asking for change. When we told him we had none, he asked if he could play us a song on his guitar we accepted and sat on the stoop. Paul was in fact living on the street with a beautiful voice, a great smile and an hard-to-knock addiction. Before we knew it two hours flew by after talking and singing with Paul, he asked for a hug but never again for any money. He asked if we would be his friends, and nothing but his friends as what he needed the most was a support team and someone to be accountable to, someone to call when all of his street friends don't care about him but only about their next fix. Done deal, we'll contact him when we get back.

All this to say, with that type of departure from Montreal, you can understand our mentality upon arrival in Uganda. We did not come to evangelize but to make friends, to make community as one people created by God and to keep that friendship rolling. It really hasn't been hard since Ugandans have to be some of the absolute friendliest people I've ever met (even nicer than Nova Scotians!).

60 Friends and Counting...

Aug 5, 2008 in Uncategorized

We've made AT LEAST 60 new friends since we arrived four days ago! Allow me to explain: Sunday, after we went to church (no gospel, gonna try for more lively next time), we headed over to the NESCO (Nsambya Ex Street Kids Community Organization). What a story! These are a few guys who took themselves off the streets to try and live an honest life and eventually started taking in others. Right now, they are 26 in one house, and 10 who sleep in the office. They only have 6 girls with them, who were once abandoned or a sister of someone they took in and are as cute as can be. They don't have much but have made an organization for themselves. They had all 9 of us over to lunch, and fed us to the brim! They couldn't have fed us anymore! We gave all the extras to the kids who could go back for endless helpings if you let them. The youngest of these kids is Maria, 6. Following lunch they put on a dance show for us as well as a crazy-good acrobatics act. (This is how they fundraise but were just fooling around for us...it was a blast! Lots of laughs!) Today, Monday, we went over to the In Need Home (where the school is located). As we arrived at the gate we proceeded to receive the warmest, loudest, most enthusiastic, excited welcome ever! It's truly indescribable but one I'll never forget. These children were instantly my new best friends, regardless of any differences. They automatically loved us and believe me- the feeling is mutual! We talked and sang a little with them, and then had a planning meeting with Anny. Lilianne (also from the In Need Home) who is lovely, took us on a walk through the slum where the children who go to the school are from. Let me just say, when we get home there is no way the pictures or video will ever describe what we saw, ever. But, again, those from the slum area, living in extreme poverty welcomed us into their village, said hello as we passed, smiled and put forward their best English. And I tell you- they expect nothing in return, but a smile and a "Olioty" back. Tell me, what mid-class place have you been to lately where strangers walk past you and welcome you? Uh huh, that's what I thought. (OK, Brookfield, maybe...). Sewage running throughout, children and babies just hanging out on their own and being fine with it, laundry hanging in ever which direction, extreme poverty with happiness and a 'welcome home' feel is the only way I can describe it.

I love you all and hope that everything is just as happy at home. Don't forget to smile at a stranger today, it will make you both feel good.

Love always,

Noelle

P.S. The Peanut Butter here is phenomenal! Did you know that everything here is naturally organic and they have to pay extreme prices for canned goods, sprayed veggies, etc while we do the opposite. How backwards is this world anyway?

2 Replies

1. Mom

Aug 5th, 2008 at 9:46 pm

Hi kiddo !

I'm so excited just reading your blog. It sounds like you are really finding out what life is all about. I am soooo proud of you. Take care and be careful always. I miss you lots and am so happy to hear from you often.

It makes me feel like we're not that far apart. Love you and praying for you always !

Mom

XOXOXO....

2. Sarah

Aug 7th, 2008 at 10:20 am

Hi Noelle!

It sounds like you are having an amazing time! I wish I could be there with you guys, I am sure its proving to be a once in a lifetime experience. Bosco is doing great.....we had a little incident with a skunk last Friday, (right in the kisser!) but aside from that everything is going well and he and Dixie are having a blast! Hope the rest of you time there goes as good as it has been so far. Miss you lots and enjoy the next 3 weeks!

*Lots of love,
Sarah*

Week One Completed!

Aug 10, 2008 in Uncategorized

What an awesome first week of our project. It went incredibly well, the dancing, singing, laughing and arts all came together in good company. On Tuesday and Thursday I worked with a group of women who currently live in the slum of Namuwongo. (The pictures will not do it justice). After visiting the town where they live on Monday, I was eager to sit and chat with them, and share my ideas. These women make beads out of rolled paper, and eventually put together necklaces. They have found themselves between a rock and a hard place in that these necklaces are just not selling like they used to, therefore dwindling what little income they have. This is where I come in. After researching different ideas and concepts while still in Montreal, I have brought them examples of what else they could be making that A) they have the resources for and B) that no one else is selling around these parts.

On Tuesday we packed into a small office room as it was raining, and I began to explain a different way to roll paper. As I began and continued women just kept pouring in. We were all sitting on top of each other rolling paper by the end of the session. It is an interesting phenomenon, you see, where all I was showing them was to roll paper in a different way than they had been used to in order to make different shapes. Since they knew the necklaces would sell they never spent time trying anything new or being creative, they just kept rolling paper the way they were once shown with high hopes that maybe they could sell one necklace in a day. The women became better and better at what I was showing them which proved to me that they were excited and eager to learn. I introduced them to the hot glue gun and we had a good laugh. By the end of the session on Tuesday we made a place mat together out of the rolled paper that everyone had done and everyone seemed thankful.

On Wednesday, I met with Anny and Lilian to discuss what consumed my thoughts all night Tuesday. Why didn't they ever try anything on their own? Where was the creative thought within such creative beings? What was the story here? After the meeting, I realized that I had another mission; to instill a creative confidence within these women. The trick is to do this within three weeks- whew!- I'll keep you posted.

On Thursday I had another day with the ladies. I brought them different shapes and examples I had made all by rolling paper. I brought them, coasters, two different place mats, a wall-hanging cross and different sized beads made from the same type of rolling. Then I introduced the wire earrings. Some of you at home may have seen these earrings stuffed away in my jewelry box or have received them as a Christmas gift a couple years back. (Mom, I still owe you an ear piercing!) Their faces were excited. When I gave them a brief introduction to the earrings on Tuesday, one woman loved them so much she put three pairs in her ears! I made them all an example to follow on Thursday and it went incredibly well. They picked it up faster than a lot of people would and worked with such diligence, patience and joy. After they pleaded with me, I gave them some extra wire to take home and practice with. The running joke between all of the women right now is "No more sleeping!" because they want to practice and perfect what I have shown them. I have to say that I am very happy to have met these women and very fortunate that two of them (the organizers of the group) do speak English and have helped out when translation is needed.

I told the women that they are getting original designs (thanks Kate Turner for the inspiration for the earrings), and if I wasn't as broke as I was two Christmas' ago and hadn't decided to have a

"Home Made Christmas" than this would have never been able to be shared. Interesting if you think about it- my poorness at home as contributed to enriching the lives of those who are even poorer. Hmmm.

4 Replies

1. *Chris Moran*

Aug 10th, 2008 at 1:32 pm

Nice writing style. Looking forward to reading more from you.

Chris Moran

2. *Edith*

Aug 10th, 2008 at 7:11 pm

Hi Noelle & Micah:

Just finished reading your reports on week one completed. All sounds so interesting and awesome. It is so difficult to think of you two in such a remote area of the world, but to know you are doing so much good to help is wonderful. Keep up the good work, as I know you will, and take care of yourselves.

Love always, Edith

3. *Donna*

Aug 13th, 2008 at 12:13 pm

Hey Noelle- great story! can you post some pictures of this jewellery and the women making them? Am so curious!

Thinking about you all and praying for you

Donna A.

4. *Kelly*

Aug 13th, 2008 at 3:19 pm

AMAZING NOELLE!

What a wonderful thing you have done and are continuing to do. I love reading your blogs and finding about the next stage in your journey. I am so very proud of you.

Love you lots

Kelly

Feeling the Love

Aug 10, 2008 in Uncategorized

So I've explained what I'm doing with the women, but haven't touched base with what else had been going on and it is so very much. On Friday, Sensa (one of the NESCO leaders/boys and now one of my very good friends) had invited us to go visit the boys spiritual adviser. The school was closed in commemoration of a volunteer teacher's death last year (car accident). Therefore we had a meeting at the school with the teacher's in the morning to see how the week went and headed out with some of the NESCO boys in the afternoon. We had NO idea what to expect at the adviser's house. After an hour bus ride through the country side, we arrived in a very very remote village. And we thought the poverty was bad in Kampala. This was a whole different can of worms. (Think Montreal vs. Chatauguay Valley times 100.) When we got off the bus, we were treated like kings and queens. As they sat on the ground and us in our royal thrones, they culturally danced for us and fed us more than I could ever eat. This was a home owned by the adviser, but housed people who did not have a place to live, mostly being orphaned children in rags. We had an open, translated discussion of the state of everything and tried to instill that they, as one village, need to be creative and come together little by little to improve things. You see, the mentality here is often that the white person can help. Can make everything better. But as most of you know I am far from having a lot of money (especially with these student loans) and if I did have \$ I'd want to help financially and make everything better in one magic Poof! But that's not the reality of things. I can pray and I can help with my hands and I can share their story with others (and I let them know that)- but for the time being that's all I can do. It was an important discussion and I hope empowering on their behalf. When we left, there were so many pictures taken you might as well call Micah and I Angelina and Brad. It was insane. I actually had to end it by saying no and pushing through the crowd that was blocking my way to the bus. This is a day I don't think I'll ever forget. The bus ride home was awesome. We were singing, laughing and having so much fun squeezed in there together with some of those from our NESCO family. It was awesome!

Yesterday, Saturday, some of the girls took a little trip to Jinja to see the Bujagali Falls and the source of the Nile. Yes my dear friends, my feet have now been in the ancient River Nile, how cool is that? The falls we pretty awesome too, very relaxing to the ear and eye. I saw a witch doctor come down to worship the water. He's about 80 years of age and his name is Bujagali, hence the name of the falls. He looked exactly what you'd think a witch doctor looks like and splashed water on his followers to bless them I guess?!?! Not so sure...but interesting to see. Oh!!! And I went on a boda-boda how could I forget? These are motorbikes that zip around all over the place like little taxis, but cheaper and faster and so totally awesome. It fills you with laughter and adrenaline. Sarah and I hopped on together (that makes 3 of us) and had a blast! Those of you who know me well know that I now want a boda-boda for myself!

Today, we going up to Anny's home for lunch. Should be fun- she's an incredible woman! I hope everything is great at home, that everyone is happy and healthy. All is well here, and I now feel as though I have family and a second home in Uganda, East Africa. In fact, we've been told that we do. It's funny, and Erin you know this the best, that I've always had a place in my heart for Africa without ever being here. I've been called/pulled in this direction for at least the last ten years. Now that I'm here, it feels like home, like I belong, like I fit in, like I've been here before. It's a strange and fabulous realization. But don't worry I'm still coming home on the 28th.

2 Replies

1. Pippa Brady

Aug 10th, 2008 at 9:47 pm

Oh Noelle, sounds like you are having a life changing time. I am so happy that you are able to live this dream out. Missing and praying for you, love Pips, Paul, and Chi

2. Janin

Aug 11th, 2008 at 3:54 am

Glad to see you've taking to it so well. Hope Micah is having as much fun as you are!

It's nice that you take the time to let us know in detail what's going on. Everyone should live through the culture shock you're going through at least once in their life.

Here's hoping you stay safe, healthy, and in the great mood you seem to be.

xox

A short hello

Aug 15, 2008 in Uncategorized

Everything is still on the up and up! Camp this week went amazingly well. The women have begun to gain confidence in their creativity, as shown on Tuesday when I requested them to make their own earring designs. Thursday they learned how to make bracelets with beads and safety pins and once again proved themselves as very quick learners!

The kid's smile illuminate a room, the women's thankfulness warms one's heart and the boys (and six small and fabulous girls) from Nesco have shown a deep level of unconditional friendship.

I'll write more in detail when I have more time and money!

Big Love,

Noelle (aka. Zuena...I'll explain in my next blog!)

One Reply

1. Audrey O' Braham

Aug 15th, 2008 at 11:07 am

hi Noelle,

it's interesting to see how the women are growing in confidence. I wouldn't have thought they were lacking so much of it. Sounds like you're doing great, too! Thanks for sharing.

Audrey

Pictures of the ladies work to come...

Aug 20, 2008 in Uncategorized

The pictures are coming! You see....being on a trip like this with two amazing photographers and a hot videographer I close to never take pictures. Ever. That said, I'll try and get some from Sam and Leah to put on my page, so for those who have asked...I'm on it now!

Will write soon,

Noelle

Zuena Zuena

Aug 22, 2008 in Uncategorized

We're assimilating quite well here. Well, more than quite well. I love it. On Monday a few of us went over to the Nesco boys/girls home. Here you'll find 26 ex-street children in a three room home. And really I just mean three rooms with a curtain over the doors. Bathroom is outside. Uncle, the founder of Nesco, also an ex-street has made it his mission to form a family from those who have been abandoned and are living on the streets. This project now has 36 members, and although they hate to turn away newcomers, they can only afford to sustain this number right now. As I may have mentioned in a previous blog, many of the group members train and perform acrobatics as a source of income. Hence their philosophy of being able to earn a living through talent and innovation. Over the years, a few girls have joined the group. Right now there are 6 girls living with 30 boys. The group does have a counselor, Josephine, who takes care of any girl problems they may have. Sue and I thought it would be fun to single them out for a change and do a project with them. So on Monday the 11th, Micah and Sam set off to play a match of football (soccer) with the boys, while Sue and I made purple people dolls with the girls. This day was amazing. I connected with those girls so much and left them with a smile and tons of hugs. If I had a chance I would spend every evening with them, talking, singing and giggling. This said, I look very forward to next Monday where we planned to go back and finish the dolls with them.

My name here is not too hard to pronounce but definitely unheard of. There is a very popular song here called Zuena (by Radio and Weasle) that I have quite frankly become addicted to. It haunts my dreams, lulls me to sleep and wakes me in the morning. It's about a girl who the singer is heartbroken over. Your typical pop. song. People around me have heard me singing it so many times, that the Nesco boys now refer to me as Zuena. Easier to say, followed by appropriate joking/teasing!

The time is going by too fast here, but yet the relationships that have been built feel like they've existed for much longer. This combined, it forms a strange interpretation of time. I'm just trying to take it day by day, and not look at the whole picture.

Wednesday went well, as I played games with the kids at school. We had a lot of fun playing soccer and being silly most of the afternoon. I'm not a very professional teacher, more of an animator. And I've now learned this about myself. Teaching was always a back up plan of mine, but not so much anymore. I'd love to work in the school setting, outside of the classroom. With every experience we get to know ourselves more, and this experience has been quite the doosie in terms of personal growth.

I'm off to play more games today (Friday)- maybe some dodge ball, volley ball, stella ella ola, etc. Will be in touch soon.

Yours,

Zuena

All in a week's work

Aug 22, 2008 in Uncategorized

I haven't been writing as much for 2 reasons. I'm more comfortable here and feel less of a need to contact home and we're busy busy (in a great way!) Let me give you the run through of last week since I've last written.

Sunday- The entire Red Hippo group was picked up at Chez Johnson's hotel (our residence of the month) by a man named John that Sam contacted through the internet while we were back in Canada. John is from Washington state, but spends most of his time around these parts. John took us to a school called Alpha and Omega Boarding School. Like In Need Home, this school takes in those who otherwise would not have any chance at education. Some of the stories were unconceivable. Take Thomas' story for example. Thomas was born in Northern Uganda, where it is still unstable. One day, his mother said to him and his siblings "Children, I don't want to see you die here, you must leave." She sent them out, all in different directions to find hope. Thomas is only now about 8, so imagine a young child wondering for food, scared out of his mind. Someone, somewhere picked Thomas up from the streets and brought him to an organization where he eventually landed at the boarding school. He still has nightmares at night and stutters during the day. The school is doing wonders for this kid. So, why were we there? Well, part of their lessons are in music. It was absolutely phenomenal! They played bow-harps, thumb pianos, flutes, enormous drums. They were a children's African orchestra to best describe it. We have video footage, so please remind me to show you when I get home!

Monday- I ran around with Sensa, Sarah and Drew preparing for the NESCO fundraiser, which is quickly approaching. I got the flyers printed, Sensa and Drew ran around asking for donations and Sarah and I totally owned Kampala on our own, bargaining and orienting ourselves- it was awesome. In the afternoon, Sensa and Drew picked me up and we went back up to the NESCO home in the pouring pouring rain. We all snuggled in cozily during the storm, with all the kids, playing cards and laughing. It was a really good day, finishing with a cup of Gelato at the end.

Tuesday Morning I spent working on a banner that I was preparing for the NESCO fundraiser. The fundraiser consists of a family day, with games, face painting, etc. and then a show at the end. The day will benefit the NESCO kids in food and counseling. This has been a well promoted event on TV 3 times, the radio and is posted all over town. We're all very excited to be a part of it and help out in anyway that we can. It hard not to be extremely proud of these kids/men. In the afternoon I went to hang out with the women and craft in the afternoon, there was a really good turn out with many new ladies.

Wednesday morning, after walking Sarah to the school, I noticed that some of the kids recently shaved heads, and then seemed to have white blotches all over- some worse than others. After inquiring to Anny and some teachers- I came to find that most of the kids have worms and fungal growths on their heads due to the use of dirty razors. Then after some banking, I walked up to meet Drew and Ronald (a NESCO boy) to the venue where they will have the fundraiser- Wacky Woodhouse to hang the banner. I felt quite adventurous out there on my own, taking short cuts through shantis and under clothes lines and finding my own way. The Ugandan people are so nice and helpful, I had no concerns. Wacky Woodhouse is the Ugandan version of Maman, Bebe et cafe. That's right folks, the concept has made it to Uganda! (Although it has been here longer).

The play space is outside, and you are charged to use it. There is a cafe/restaurant and programs that go on during the day. Nao- I asked the manager for her programs (that she took out of her display for me) just so you could see how similar it really is. There is a project that operates behind the outdoor/indoor space called In Movement and they put on exercise and dance classes for both the privileged and under privileged. I felt right at home! That day, I walked A LOT and had fun exploring on my own- it felt good!

Thursday- I learned from one of the women that I've been working with, how to make Chapatis (Sabina- We'll have to have a chapati making party when we pass through!) Red Hippo has bought all the children de-worming medication and anti-fungal cream. I guess the lesson here is: never be afraid to ask. I've actually been like question-kid here, learning so much about different organizations, people and cultures every day. Then, in the afternoon, the ladies and I organized an In Need Home market where the Red Hippo volunteers had the opportunity to buy some of the ladies new and old crafts/jewelry. As they put it, 'twas a good market day!

The next two days are hectic so I probably won't write too much. Today we're having a show for the guardians of the children at the school- demonstrating what they've learned and done. Saturday morning we'll be going down to In Need Home for a luncheon donated by Barclays Bank for everyone who has passed through In Need Home: the women, the NESCO boys, The Literacy School children, the staff and us. Around lunch time we'll head up to Wacky Woodhouse to help set up for the fundraiser, run games and enjoy the show. Please keep us in your prayers as we part with our new and loved friends, you know how I am with goodbyes...

Love,

Noelle

I scream, you scream....

Aug 29, 2008 in Uncategorized

Our last day at In Need Home was on Wednesday. The kids were happy, singing the songs we taught them, playing with the parachute etc. They were all explained the our visit had come to an end for now but not a complete stop. Our visit was like a comma, not a period. A comma allows for a pause where a period finishes something in full. The kids all made sure we had our passports, and luggage and were ready to go bak to Canada. Sophia and Jane (some of my ladies) came by to hang out, which was nice and appreciated. Jovita kindly sewed up my ripped pants and handed me a necklace to remember her by. The teachers and all around were overwhelmed by mixed emotions of something good being there but also by how much we knew we would miss one another.

As one last hurrah, we gave them a bit of ice cream. 4 out of the 30 kids had seené tried ice cream before. This novelty, gave some pretty funny reactions, ice cream headaches and smiles. I scream, you scream, we all scream for ice cream! And then tears as they kids wondered on back to slum....looking back with eyes and smiles that said "please don't forget me teecha, because I won't forget you.."

Home Bitter-Sweet Home

Aug 29, 2008 in Uncategorized

We have arrived safely and were warmly welcomed in Montreal, after 28 hours of travelling by a lost bag and an extra search through our bags...you know cause humanitarian workers are oh so threatening. No, it wasn't so bad once we saw the smiling faces of Mom, Nicolas, Erin and Jen.

Happy to be home? Sure. Sad to be away from those I so quickly grew to love? Most definitely. It's hard not to be able to see their smiling faces, hear their happy song, and enjoy the relaxed culture. This to say, my heart is still there. I can't sleep or wake without my friends and their situation in my head. I hope to go back one day to visit but until then I plan to continue putting my little drop of hope in the vast ocean from here.....

I thank you all for your love, support and encouragement in this project. Your words and prayer don't go unnoticed or unappreciated.

Love,

Zuena