



*When I sat on the airplane, coasting over the unknown continent that would become my temporary home, I could never fully imagine what my upcoming experiences as a CIDA intern in Mwanza, Tanzania would be like or where they would lead me...*

Life in Mwanza is full of raw emotion and intense encounters. As I begin to understand the culture, the language, and the context of development here, I realize that with everyday, I'm only just starting to scratch at the surface of this complex living environment.

Even on the simplest day, I experience moments of frustration

coupled with periods of pure happiness. I have had to throw away my Western concepts of time management and personal privacy and embrace a life of unreliable electricity and running water. At the same time, I am greeted with warmth and hospitality by all whom I encounter. I pinch myself as I bare witness to the beautiful natural environment that surrounds the lake region in which Mwanza is situated.

Since arriving here, I have equipped myself with a heightened awareness of my senses, to absorb all that is possible. In a single moment, I see women working hard to carry their wares on their head with their babies slung across their backs; I hear the customary exchange of greetings between local folks on their way to and from town; I smell the confluence of sewage, sunlight and dust at every turn; I touch the hands of children screaming *mzungu* (European) with excitement and I taste the fried fish and rice smothered in sauce that makes up my daily lunch.

And when I arrive to work, at Kuleana Center for Children's Rights, I settle into my purpose here in Africa. My main role has been to assist in research analysis on corporal punishment in local communities. In addition, I am preparing youth workshops for school children, educating them on their rights and promoting the idea of school clubs to do the same. When I want a break from my desk, I meander down to the Street Children's Center a few kilometers from my office to spend time with the kids and try to gain some insight into their reality. They work industriously on their cardboard truck creations with bottle caps for wheels. They pull these around the centre from the playground to their informal education classes. The positive attitudes and constant smiles of these children always make me feel welcome at the centre and cause me to wonder what experiences they hide beneath their veil of happiness.

At the work day's end, I wonder up to the pool at the international school to soak up the African sun and to reflect on all that I've seen and experienced that day. The pool is my needed sanctuary and provides me with solace and comfort in an environment so distant from my own. Upon reflection, I think about my good fortune of being here in Mwanza – the beautiful people who invite me into their lives and the countless smiles I receive from strangers on any given day. I remind myself of this amazing opportunity and the privilege I have to get a taste of African life. Then I blink and another day has come to a close as the sun hides beneath the boulders surrounding Lake Victoria.