

Sleeping beauties, awakened:

The digital scanning of all my old photo negatives and slides is nearly complete. Much sorting remains—and years of potential photo-shopping— but that work will be much less tedious than sorting through the shoeboxes of thousands of negatives for manual scanning...

Still, the tedium was often broken in the discovery of hundreds of new pictures without matching prints. One of the most delightful surprises was the rediscovery of a roll of black and white negatives that had never been printed. The pictures were taken at Weru-Weru Secondary, the girls' boarding school outside of Moshi Tanzania, where I was teaching in 1980-1981.

At that time Weru-Weru, a former Catholic school, had a reputation not only for academic excellence but also as a working laboratory for *Ujamaa*, Tanzanian socialism, as promulgated in the gospel of then President Julius Nyerere. Under the guidance of principal *Mama Kamm*, who was herself a friend and acolyte of *Mwalimu* [teacher] Nyerere, young women from every region of Tanzania worked on a self-managed farm while undertaking academic studies.

The school was in a breathtaking setting under Mount Kilimanjaro. Few can be more fortunate than to have heard at daily assemblies, scores of voices harmonizing in '*Mungu Ibaribi Afrika*' [God bless Africa] as the morning mists lifted from the highest peak of Africa, looming directly behind...

While the students wore uniforms of spotless white blouses with blue skirts to class and red shifts for their work in the *shamba* [field], on Sunday afternoons they were allowed to dress up. For these special hours, the girls would gather on the *bechi*, [the beach] the grassy strip on the edge of the compound perimeter fence. There they could receive visiting "brothers and sisters"— albeit discretely chaperoned by the resident nuns on the teaching staff.

Dressed in Sunday clothes and with neatly plaited hair, the girls would often ask me to take their photos. As one of their *walimu* [teacher], I was trusted to be respectful of the pictures I took. I was certainly not regarded as one of *wazungu* tourists who, as a Tanzanian colleague caustically put it: "like to show their friends back home photos of 'uncivilized' people they consider part of the African wildlife."

I would try to give the students copies of the photos I received from Canada where I'd sent the film for processing. I soon ran out of the colour film I had brought with me. Along with a myriad of far more essential commodities, film was unobtainable in Tanzania at the time. When down to the last few rolls of black and white film, I was still able to get them developed in Moshi town by a one-eyed East Indian, called Mr. Bharj.

In every visit to the kiosk of old Bharj, I would politely listen to his bitter tirades against the collapsing economy under Nyerere ("*The termites have already eaten away at the foundation. It's rotten to the core!*") Eventually, Bharj ran out of photo paper and was only able to make negatives.

So it was that one roll of film taken of Weru-Weru students never got printed. It remained untouched in a plastic film container until found in a shoebox a few weeks ago. Several were out of focus or in bad lighting (settings in my old Olympus Trip were not automatic) but a few turned out rather well.

Bringing these old negatives to light in an utterly different time and place felt a bit like recovering bodies from centuries embedded in ice...

In some photos, the girls of Weru-Weru (*circa* 1980) are shown in the classroom or posed in extracurricular duties. Other photos show the girls in their day of rest from upholding the lofty ideals of their school. In most there is exuberance— even impish joy in the teenage faces...

In that world *Mwalimu* ruled, the cold war raged, Reagan was yet to be elected and John Lennon was not yet assassinated. The dome of Kilimanjaro was still covered by a massive glacier that has since receded into broken patches.

In first viewing the faces of these sleeping beauties awakened—for just an instant— light years seemed to melt away...

Many of the young women who passed through Weru-Weru have gone on to become leaders throughout Africa. A recent Googling revealed that many alumni of that school have become internationally prominent researchers in science and medicine. Others had made a mark in their national politics. One became a Deputy Secretary of the United Nations.

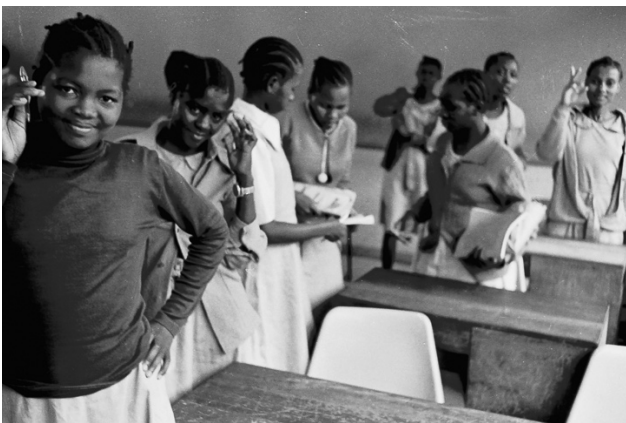
While those eminent former students were not among the cohort who attended the school in the early 1980s, there is every likelihood that several students in my photos have had illustrious careers. Whether they are today professionals, businesswomen, mothers or grandmothers— they no doubt attribute a measure their success to their experience at Weru-Weru.

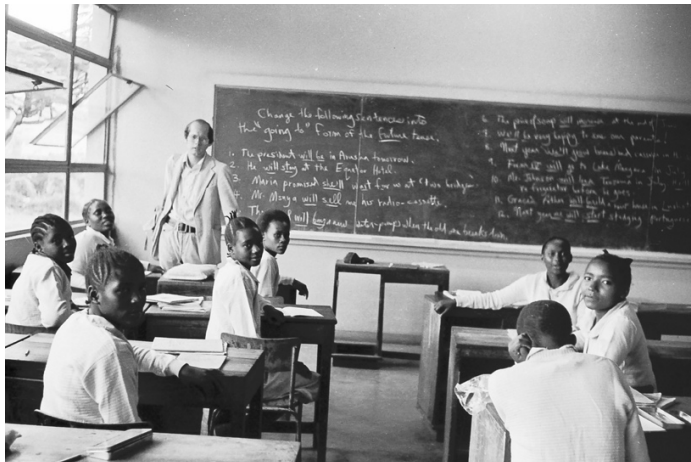
Whatever their calling— wherever they are— may they know that I would never share their old photos without the utmost respect.

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