

1981 Kilimanjaro journal excerpts #1 (January-April)



The following are excerpts from a journal kept from January-September 1981 when I was teaching English in a girls' secondary school on the southwestern slope of Mount Kilimanjaro, 7 miles from the town of Moshi, Tanzania.

I had a small flat on the extensive fenced-in compound where resided the students, other teachers, workers and 2 residences of nuns. Names of more readily identifiable persons have been fictionalized.

January 16

There was a little surprise today in slicing a razor blade across what was presumed to be an itchy callus on the outside toe of my right foot. Beneath the callus was a blister. When it was lanced, there popped forth the wiggling white head of a worm.

A thorough dousing with rubbing alcohol, hopefully dispatched it along with any eggs it may have been nesting...

Hard to say when the critter had burrowed in. It could be a hitchhiker from the manure that squished up into my sandals during the visit to the Maasai *boma* two weeks ago. Yet it could just as easily have been picked up in the backyard. Parasites flourish in this humid-sticky season...

In the heavy air before the rains, bread molds within 24 hours. Still, I cut off the blue bits before eating— just as casually as I pluck drowned cockroaches from the milk pitcher...

All evidence of healthy adjustment to this clime?



January 18

I took the late morning local bus to Moshi. Soured by the familiar shortages: no oil, no toilet paper, no candles—I left town empty handed. I might have gone into one of the Asian shops and asked what might be available under the table. Of course, without the bundles of shillings which only the corrupt locals possess— nothing in the *magenda* [black market] is affordable anyway.

Still, needing more local currency for fresh produce available at the market, I tried to exchange a 50 Deutschmark note with Old Bharj, the one-eyed Indian who runs the photo shop. Last year, Bharj was delighted to change a 10-pound sterling note.

“It's no accident the people we meet,” he had said holding the bill up to the light. “We never know who— or what— fate has in store for us!”

Yet today when I opened my wallet at his counter, Bharj looked nervously into the street. This time, he apparently felt exchange was too risky.

After he disappeared back into his darkroom and I stepped back into the street, I was touched on the sleeve by his cleaning girl. While sweeping in the corner of the shop while I was at the counter, she must have gathered what I was after.

“You give *me* money, money, money?” she asked in English, tugging at her dress.

Ignoring her, I walked quickly to the Kibo Coffee House where I sat at a corner table considering my options before catching a lift back to *Mila Sita* from my fruitless shopping trip. While there, I saw a lone European blonde backpacker girl, who looked a little lost. She may well have welcomed an invitation to visit the school and even stay for lunch— but I declined the opportunity to even strike up a chat.

I spent the evening alone, tuned to the *Voice of America*, following the US hostage in Iran release cliff-hanger.

January 19

The new house helper, an almond-eyed girl called Mariana (recommended by Monica, the Assumption Sisters' house girl) started work today. She was glum about her pay—expecting more than just a few shillings above the going rate paid by the Tanzanian teachers. I stuttered my excuses— but she knew I felt guilty.

It is a moral dilemma as to whether I should accept that as a *mzungu* [white], I ought to pay for a lot more for services than do my Tanzanian colleagues. After all, I earn no more than they do...



Just before 6:00 PM, when I was about to munch into my avocado sandwich supper, *Mwalimu* Mwauri dropped by. Looking over my bookshelf, she described her visit last year to Denmark, sponsored by the Lutheran church:

"I pity those Danes really," she sighed, "in spite of all their wealth. They're so self-centered. They love dogs and cats more than their fellow human beings. I met this one lady who is very active in my church— a Mrs. Beylund. She is a 35-year-old spinster. She lived alone in a flat decorated only with photos of her pet poodle. Really, the Danes have no real religion except money. No wonder they commit so much suicide. I think most Tanzanians are 70 times happier than the whites of Denmark!"

She then turned, smiling broadly. "O, you have so many novels, Mr. F.— and so many nice pens, too! Could you spare an extra?"

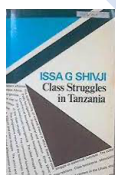
I did not want Mwauri to think I was hoarding the Bics that I brought from Canada. But they certainly do write far more reliably than do the Chinese ball-points which are the local standard, when available. Yet I was reluctant to hand one over given that in every visit she has made some wheedling request (Last time it was for flashlight batteries)...

I thought of the report in the '*Kilimanjaro Notes and Records*' of the first meeting between Rebmann, the German explorer, and the Chagga chief, Mandara.

Mandara is alleged to have looked over Rebmann from head to foot and then asked. "What nice boots you are wearing... Do you have any my size?"

The report does not detail whether or not Mandara got the boots... As for Mwauri— with my entire stock on display— I could not deny her a Bic...

January 23



Buoyed by a brisk early morning walk across the Weru-Weru River towards Daraja Mbili, I was back in the living room by mid-morning, intending to catch up on notetaking. Instead, I took up '*Class Struggles in Tanzania*', a stilted text that robbed me of the rest of the morning. Although it was the cheapest of the paltry offerings at the Moshi Bookshop, I might well have just picked up another '*Soviet Military Review*' from the street... That magazine, at a fraction of the cost, would have at least offered illustrations along with the similarly dreary rhetoric...

Limp in the humidity of late afternoon, I walked slowly down to the staffroom to check the mail. At his desk, diligently marking scribbles on a Saturday afternoon was geography teacher and CCM party stalwart, *Baba* Msole.

When I told him of having been pick-pocketed before Christmas in Kigoma, he offered a perfunctory "*pole-pole*" [sorry] followed by a lengthy comment. The increase of petty crime, he explained, was directly attributable to the economic hardship that was itself a result of the heavy

cost of liberating Uganda from Idi Amin which Tanzania had to unjustly assume without assistance...

When history teacher, *Ngugu* Msanja, came by (also to check the mail), the conversation shifted to the inauguration of the war-mongering Reagan.

“Isn’t it so that Reagan,” Msanja asked, “like every other American presidential candidate— had to be vetted by the Mafia?”

“*And why to hell not?*” I was tempted to respond.

January 29

When Mariana informed of her intention to quit after only a week of cleaning up for the *mzungu* (she said she found a factory job in Tanga) — I submitted to her request to bring on her last day, a friend who needed a job.

I knew instantly that I did not want Mariana’s friend Rosie to work for me. With her gruff manner and the cold sores on her lip, it was difficult even to feel pity. Still, instead of telling her that I intended to keep looking for someone, I told her I would make a decision late in the afternoon...

In the meantime, I ‘interviewed’ Ester, the lady recommended by Prudencia, the house girl of the Our Lady of Kilimanjaro sisters. Ester in contrast with Rosie, was neat in appearance and had a pleasant manner. Even though Rosie spoke a little English, I liked the fact that Ester didn’t know any. The opportunity to practice Kiswahili at home is welcome. So without reservation, I hired Ester..

I should have known that Rosie would show up again. Sure enough, just before dusk, I heard her gruff ‘*hodi*’ [greeting] at the door.

When I told her that I had hired someone who “lived closer”, she pleaded to work for 15 schillings less a month than my original offer.

It was hard to look her in the eye and tell her that it not about the money. Of course, it was ironic that someone should be so uncomfortable with a face that was no less sour than his own...

She stood there silently for a few moments at the open door before bidding *kwaheri* [goodbye]...

In closing the door, I imagined Rosie walking back up the mountain path to Kibosho, dreading to tell her family that she was wasn’t hired by the ‘*mzungu*’...

I still knew I had made the right choice to hire Ester— with her warm smile. It was a little lesson for my own future job applications.

January 30

In growing alienation from governing polities—both local and national— along with worries about shrinking time, I began to consider leaving before the end of the year.



With the Head Mistress attending an education conference in Norway, the beginning of term staff meeting was chaired by her deputy, Sister Mosha. Among the new staff introduced were a 40ish Danish couple. Both the nervously grinning Mr. Pramming and his chubby blonde wife will be teaching English. With the school now overstaffed with ‘wazungu’ English teachers, I am increasingly tempted to plan for an early departure.

It is hard to estimate the number of expats who worked here over the years. Much more valuable than their teaching skills of course, is the potential conduit for financial aid from foreign governments, NGOs or even from churches. By contrast, my Canadian NGO offers only the loan of a scrawny body for a couple of years...

It is no surprise that within weeks of my arrival, a few teachers (including Miss Mwauri) asked for “first preference” when I come unload my belongings. A year from now, the legacy of my having passed through will be a few pieces of cutlery, some worn shirts and cassette tapes flogged for a few shillings before my departure...

Still, there need be no worries of being remembered as a poor representative of my homeland. The reputation of Canada here has already been tainted by the Arusha Wheat Project— a spectacular failure.



Set up by CIDA (Canadian International Development Agency) the agricultural ‘experts’ tried to plant Canadian strains of wheat which proved unsuitable for the climate. When a harvest was eventually yielded, the wheat was too hard to be ground by the local mills. When Canadian machinery was installed, it broke down due to poor operational training and lack of spare parts... Thus, another development aid fiasco to keep beavies of experts lucratively studying for years...

Maybe I should aim for an end of June departure. That would give me just 5 months, to get my ass in gear. Well knowing the rough landing to be expected in Canada after lengthy sojourns away— this time I’d better have a couple of prospects. If there is any option for a return to school, I need to start my inquiries and applications now. I need no more nightmares of isolation to recognize the dread of turning 30 here!

February 1

Ester, the new domestic helper, started today. She likes working only half time (4 hours a day, Monday to Friday). She says that is just the right schedule for her mother to take care of her 2-year-old baby while she's working. She seems satisfied with the salary—which is about 30% better than what the Tanzanian teachers are paying for the equivalent help. Apart from accidentally plugging the sink with tea leaves, her first day went well.

After she left, Pozharov, kindly helped me unplug the outside drain. While he poked away with a broom handle, we chatted about models of socialism—only one of which he believed was authentic.

“It is logical,” he said, “that all the nations of the world who aspire to socialism, should want to learn from the Soviet experience.”

As he wiped his hands, I did not challenge him on the fact that not a single ‘revolutionary’ in the 3rd world, looks to the USSR as the model of development... Yet I know better than to insult a next-door neighbour who fixes the plumbing with a smile and leaves a space for my food in his freezer.

February 7



The cover story of the ‘*Newsweek*’, bought in Moshi yesterday featured the Reagan inauguration. A photo of the inaugural ball was captioned: ‘*hitting the ground dancing*’. Throwing it to the bedroom floor at 9:00 PM, I fell asleep with the precious light bulb burning.

It was no surprise that Ronnie and Nancy should then make a dreamtime visit to a seedy Vancouver bedsitting room where I resided in some bleak future... At first affable, Ronnie morphed into a sinister presence. He was peering rat-eyed from an Arab burnoose, growling obscenities, when I woke in the stuffy dark.

After drifting back to sleep, I received a dreamtime warning to get back to my icy homeland: “*If you stay here too long in rural Africa,*” proclaimed a sententious voice, “*You will only be trading your native provincialism for an even narrower version!*”

This time in waking, I jerked up to a skittering noise. Feeling for the flashlight on the floor, I slid out from under my dusty mosquito net and clambered towards the toilet cubicle.

The flickering orange beam revealed two huge cockroaches copulating on the side of the toilet bowl. I grabbed the old Dar es Salaam ‘*Daily News*’ from the top of the tank and viciously swatted. Before flushing them down, I was struck by a horrific childhood memory of a psychopath who raped his six-year-old niece in an outhouse and tried to push her down the seat hole...



February 9

Back from her conference in Oslo, at this morning's staff meeting Her Royal Head Mistress, Mamma K., gave a starry-eyed report of her being feted before the eager Scandinavians. We all duly applauded the news of her Cinderella appointment to an international planning and advisory committee for educational policy...

Meanwhile, the newly posted Danes offered slaving support of her future junkets: promising to prepare a slide show of the school projects to be featured for fund-raising in Denmark. Not to be outdone, Pozharov brought boxes of Soviet leaflets and picture books designed to dazzle.

It is telling that in socialist solidarity, Pozharov is addressed in the honorific *Ndugu* [comrade] while the eager Danes—despite the largess they bring—are still only “mister and missus” Pramming...

February 14



I shared a jug of *mbege* [banana beer] this evening with *Mwalimu* Kimenyi. Passing the plastic basin between us, our *mazungumzo* [conversation] flowed warm and easy. A Tutsi refugee from Rwanda and teacher of French, *Mwalimu* Kimenyi loves talking about literature and linguistics. I even more greatly appreciate the insight he offers into local politics.

Tonight he, spoke of how Tanzanians are currently being encouraged to model the discipline of the North Koreans. With the Chinese seemingly transitioning away from pure socialism, *Mwalimu* Nyerere, has recently declared that Kim Il Sung is a leader worthy of emulation...

Meanwhile, my suspicions of the Tanzanians' general distrust of *wageni* [foreigners] are confirmed. According to Kimenyi, unfriendly neighbours can sometimes be government informers and any foreigner can be suspected of spying.

“Really?” I faltered. “Do you think that might even be true of some staff members here?”

Monsieur Kimenyi, gave a nervous laugh. Although he caught himself before blurting too much—a “she” had already slipped out. Although I trust his confidence, I dared not pursue it further.

With several months left to go in this “community”, I mustn't succumb to paranoia. At the same time, I look forward to sharing more *mbege* with this gentle Rwandan. I must be careful not to ask ‘dangerous’ questions...

February 18

This afternoon I met colleagues Miss Kiwia and Miss Mduma in the Asian tea shop in Moshi. Since they kindly hosted me for a night in their flat in Moshi during the Christmas break, I have been getting the impression that Miss Kiwia is playing ‘matchmaker’ between her friend, Mduma, and I. Meanwhile, Kiwia is herself very pregnant— and husbandless...

I am amused that Kiwia thinks I could be interested. Could a more unlikely compatibility be imagined than that between a non-believing *mzungu* and a ‘*ameokoa*’ [literally ‘rescued’] Tanzanian Pentecostal? Oddly enough, Mduma reminds me of another born-again daughter of a Pentecostal preacher who took a momentary shine to me in grade six. Like Maduma, that little girl seemed unconsciously itchy...

“If you like children, Mr. F.,” said Miss Kiwia, patting her pink maternity dress, “you better get married soon and get your own!”

Beside her, Mduma picked at a thread in her sleeve.

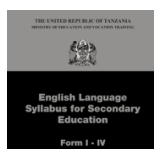
A little later, outside the teashop, I took leave of my two friendly colleagues. When I shook Miss Mduma’s hand, she stuffed a handkerchief into her bra.

“A life alone is so lonely,” she said looking morosely into the distance, “It’s better to be two. You can just comfort one another. Even if there’s no food in the house, you can just romance!”

Undeniably, she was well-proportioned... Yet not for the first time, I couldn’t help noticing the stains in her front teeth...

Image of the day: In the crowded van plying back to *Mila Sita* from Moshi, there was the child’s hand reaching across the back of the forward seat to brush the arm of the brawny passenger beside me. Sitting stonily erect, he neither resisted nor responded to the baby’s touch.

February 19



In requesting to teach the new students of Form One this term, I hoped for an opportunity to utilize an ESL beginner bag of tricks, learned in Vancouver in the fall of '79. Too late, I found out about the ‘Brick Program’— the rigid curriculum for Form One English mandated by the Ministry of Education.

In first leafing through the core Brick textbook last month, my heart sank. The seemingly random sequencing of grammar and vocabulary was clearly at odds with a linguistic approach to teaching basic English. The design of the text seemed intended to reinforce the principles concurrently taught in the ‘*siasa*’ [politics] classes. I could not see how I could incorporate such a text let alone follow it lock-step...

So I took the risky step of appealing directly to the Headmistress Herself. I asked Mama Kuhn if I could assign the Brick exercises as homework and take my own approach to teaching the basic oral skills. I showed her a few sample worksheets which I brought from Canada and explained how I would create more relevant materials.

As I'd hoped, her worldliness in education inclined her to support my "experiment." Still, she left me with a proviso:

"Well, the other Form One teachers might not like the fact that you are not conforming to the syllabus," she said. "I don't know what reactions you will get. You'll have to be very careful in justifying your approach."

Ever since undertaking my "experiment", I am reminded of her warning.

This morning, the staffroom fell into an unsettling silence upon my entry. Wary glances darted between the sly Mwauri and Mrs. Limo, both of whom also teach Form One English. Across the quadrangle of desks, even Kimenyi ducked his head, looking a little embarrassed.

"Hummm, what should I teach my class tomorrow, Mr. F.," said Mwauri with a sarcastic curl of her lip. "I have Form One all day. Can you suggest something really creative?"

"*Wewe ni mtaalam wa kufundisha Kiingereza, ndio?*" ["You are an expert in English teaching, right?"] I said, sliding into my desk.

"O, Mr. F., you really speak Kiswahili now!" gushed Mwauri in her patronizing fashion.

"*Kidogo, kidogo,*" [just a little] I smiled, opening my official record of workbook.



Perhaps Kimenyi, over a tub of '*mbege*'—could provide hints about how treacherous a resistance to Brick is thought to be. In the meantime, '*The Trial*' by Kafka, read over the last few nights has hardly been the best guide to handling this hot 'Brick'.

February 26

I was trekking up to the school gate from *Mila Sita* with 2 kilos of tomatoes (cheap this morning at the Moshi market) when I saw Kimenyi waving from in front of his house.

"You have a *mgeni* [guest] Mr. F.—*Monsieur* Gerard!"

Under the avocado tree near my front door leaning against his car was fellow Canuck, Gerard M.

I assumed that stir-craziness had once again drawn him down from the remote Minga Secondary School on the other side of the mountain. Even a *maudit anglaise* was still a fellow *mzungu* and a sounding board. As a former monk, he was agonizing over whether to return to Quebec after a

14-year absence along with a Tanzanian wife 20 years his junior. Today he looked particularly nervous.

“Welcome,” I said lowering the knapsack and extending hand. “Where’s Fortunata?”

“She’s in KMC hospital,” he said, reaching in his grey shirt pocket for a cigarette. “She’s having labour pains— but it’s 2 months early.”

“*Pole, Pole,*” [sorry] I said. “I’m sure she’ll be OK.”

“I just don’t know,” he said, blowing out a long drag. “You’re got a spare room, right?”

As much as I would have preferred retiring early with a book— as a fellow CUSO cooperant, I accompanied him to Moshi for a long evening. At the ABC Cinema, we watched the ‘*Rise and Fall of Idi Amin*’, a lurid Indian-made movie that has obviously been a blockbuster hit since its opening in Tanzania a few weeks ago. After the movie, we had a couple of tepid Ndovu lagers at the ABC grill— each bottle the equivalent of a month’s supply of *mbege*.

Gerald, plainly desperate for *mzungu* company, spoke of wasting the flower of his early manhood as a missionary near the Rwandan border. He seemed no less bitter about the paucity of practical support offered by our Canadian NGO. He had signed up expecting that at least his wife’s medical expenses would be covered, however minuscule our dollar stipend to the meagre salary in Tanzanian shillings. He claimed that he was poorer as a CUSO cooperant than he had been as a monk. While struggling to stay awake, I managed to provide appropriate nods of agreement and sympathy...

At one point, I lamely asked if has any options apart from a return to Quebec with Fortunata and the child, soon to be born.

“I dunno,” he stuck his forehead. It’s so hard to decide. I’m 42, ya know. This is the first time I ever felt like this.”

Such unsolicited candour would have been uncomfortable— had I not been so tired...



February 27

Monsieur Gerard, staying over for second night while his wife is in the hospital, agreed to pick up a box for Pozharov this afternoon, on his way back from Moshi. I had thought it no inconvenience for Gerard to stop by Moshi Technical School where Povharov’s *Ngugu* [comrade] Mikalov was holding his box of groceries from the Russian embassy in Dar. I had assumed that a small neighbourly gesture would help ease the usual suspicions of non-sanctioned visitors to the Weru-Weru cloister. But then Bella K. had already asked Gerard to pick up a basket of potatoes from her friend’s place in Moshi.

Later in the afternoon, I was in lying down reading when I heard the slam of his car door. A moment later, I stepped outside to see Gerard's Renault parked as usual under the avocado tree. On the hood was Bella K.'s basket of potatoes. Gerard was standing with his face turned towards the wire fence where the peak of Kibo was partially visible above the cumulus.

"So how's Fortunata?" I asked coming forward from the front steps.

As Gerard wheeled round, Pozharov comes jogging up from his side of our duplex.

"Did you pick up the box? Did you get the box?" asked Pozharov eagerly.

"That bloody box?" Gerard growled, clenching his fist. Before opening the back door to retrieve the Russian care package, he barely restrained punching his back window. "Jesus, I'm hungry. I need a glass of whisky or something. Something's going funny!"

Pozharov, took the box with a curt thanks and abruptly walked away, shaking his head...

There was no whiskey but fortunately, there was a little rice and chickpeas left over from lunch.

While he gobbled it at the table, I tried to tell him what I thought he wanted to hear:

"14 years in this country is too long. Soon as Fortunata's is back in health—you can make a trip down to Dar and get things organized. Don't feel the slightest regret for breaking the CUSO contract. You'll feel a lot better as soon as the baby comes."

"Sure," he muttered, 'this is just a stage I'm going through.'

February 28

I took up the invitation of Doktor Kuhn, husband of the headmistress, and dropped by their Ponderosa ranch house under construction just a kilometer away from the school. The estate which he says will be his "retirement home" will include a multihectare *shamba* [farm]— a tempering of opulence with the Tanzanian spirit of agricultural self-reliance.

I briefly sat on a lawn chair on the north side beside a middle-aged German couple dressed in safari tourist khaki. They were friends of the Kuhns visiting from the Rhineland. Behind us, a grey-uniformed worker planted flowers near the massive doorway of what Doktor Kuhn described as an "African chalet-style" house. His plan in to move in from their place on the Weru-Weru compound by the end of the year. *Doktor* Kuhn introduced me in English to his German friends then withdrew to talk with one of the workers.

With their very limited English (and me, without German), the couple smiled, then lapsed into silence. Together we looked up at the pillar of black cloud spreading ominously southward from the mountain. In the breeze was a sharp tang of cow dung. The woman wrinkled her nose and closed her eyes.

In that moment, I too, was almost lost in reverie. Instead of the vista of Kibo peak, obscured by storm clouds, my imagined view was from my cot into the cluttered bed-setting room in

Vancouver, where I lived for the last few months before coming to Tanzania. Is a similar room—perhaps one even fustier—awaiting my return?

In the next breath, I thought of careless remarks delivered the last time I talked with Doktor Kuhn, who was picking up a paper on anesthesia (written in English) that he has asked me to proofread. I had made some awkward remarks about ‘expatriate culture.’

“You should be a professor,” said the Head Mistress’s consort.

However patronizing his comment, it tweaked my restlessness. Can a 30-year-old, more than 7 years out of formal study still find a little niche in academia? Can 3-4 years of post-grad work be funded while an undergraduate student loan is still in the reckoning? One thing seemed perfectly clear—I had to start planning immediately...

I snapped back to the here and now in the appearance of 2 of the Kuhn children. Blonde Georgie, 8 years old, along with his little brother, had run up from behind the house. The stout *Deutscher* and his wife watched fondly as the boys tumbled on the grass in front of us.

Yes, I reflected, I will certainly miss the kids here. Like the little girls who line up with bottles for ladles of milk at the school kitchen every afternoon. Their shy smiles and the way they lean forward against one another without pushing—so endearing! In seeing some whiny little Aryan in a supermarket aisle a few months from now—I will surely think of them...



March 3

Both Eugene Pozharov and his comrade from Moshi tech, Nikolai Mikalov, hunched with rolled sleeves over the school projector. Just at the start of the Soviet Union travelogue film for the students assembled in the dining hall, the machine had shuddered to a stop.

Without a second of surrender, the Russians set to with busy fingers and methodical trial and error in an odd mix of Russian and English (“*Surprisenik! Problem!*”)

When I asked whether a screwdriver might be needed to pry loose the jammed filmstrip, comrade Eugene waved the suggestion away and improvised with a math set protractor. Thus, while the other *wazungu*—2 Danes, a young German guest of the Kuhns and I sat passively—the spunky Russians worked with flourish. They snipped away at the broken filmstrip and wiggled the loose tubes back into life.

When the sound blared up and the Leningrad Hermitage shivered up on the screen—the girls clapped and whistled in loud appreciation of the Russian can-do spirit...

As the projector clanked way, I observed that Pozharov seemed unusually nervous in the company of his Chaplin-mustached comrade. I remembered Mr. Pramming’s comment that

Russians abroad are expected to keep an eye on one another. Might Mikalov, with his supercilious manner, be my next-door neighbour's official minder?

In any case, Pozharov could not hide his disappointment in not being able to join me in accompanying the graduating class on the trek up Kilimanjaro next week.

"I smoke too much," he said, tapping his chest. "It could be dangerous for me at the high altitude."

Of course, he would not dare admit that his embassy had not given him permission...



March 5

In the staffroom at teatime this morning, Sister Chua told an anecdote that corroborated the rumours about how rampant crime is becoming of late. She said a thief recently broke into a convent in Tabora making off with a set of nuns' habits...

Unlike most criminals who flout the law with impunity—the *mwezi* [thief] was caught. Yet as the brother-in-law of the chief of police, he almost escaped punishment. That was until angry nuns descended on the police station armed with hoe handles...

He actually begged to remain in his cell," said the sister lifting her teacup. "*Ukweli!*" [for sure!]

The following are notes of a climb to the summit of Kilimanjaro, accompanying a student group. Some rough notes were made during the trek and fleshed out a little in the days afterwards.

March 9 (Marangu gate to Mandara hut)



If I had made it to Uhuru peak last year, I probably wouldn't have again volunteered to again accompany the Form Four graduating class on their rite-of-passage Kilimanjaro climb. Yet on the first climb, the girls did not want to continue across the ice from Gillman's point. Also, just as last year, none of the Tanzanian teachers volunteered. They had either done the grueling trek once already or didn't believe they were up to it.

As for the expat teachers, it was a chance to do a trek for which regular tourists pay hundreds of dollars. Pozharov had his excuse of angina and the Prammings said they'd prefer waiting until next year. That left me to go again...

This time I tried to be better prepared. Over the last month, I have regularly jogged down to the Weru-Weru bridge. I have a better hat and have proper boots kindly sent from Canada by loyal old friend, JL. I have more film— including a roll of East German slide film bought from Pozharov.

Most fortunate, this time I did not come down with a cold— such as happened on the day before the previous departure.

In early morning our group boarded the school bus after a prayer, led by Mama Kuhn. At the last minute we were joined by a young German, the son of a friend of *Doktor* Kuhn. Dropped off an hour later at the Marangu park gate, we waited to be joined by our porters. Once again before starting up the trail head, the students elected to pray. As usual, I perfunctorily ducked my head.

It was past 10:00 AM before the students in orange shamba dresses started *pole-pole* [slowly] up the trail...



At 7:30 PM, sitting in my bunk in the male dormitory at Mandara hut, set amid mossy mountain rain forest, I made the following notes:

After the tin plate of *mchele y mboga* [rice and vegetable stew] at a crowded table of the dining hall, the girls quietly talked among themselves.

Already, I am curious about the new cast of tourists— those who have paid so handsomely (at least \$1000 a head, including guides and porters) for this ‘once in a lifetime experience.’

After the girls bunked down, I stayed in the dining hall for an hour and took the first opportunity to chat in the kerosene lamplight with a few fellow *wazungu*:

It was a middle-aged doctor from New York who made a comment about the new President Reagan: “Everybody could see what food stamps and welfare has accomplished. It was time for a radical change.”

Then came the retort from an aging Seattle hippie on the other side of the table: “Is America now going to be run by the Joint Chiefs of Staff?”

Apart from these revealing political insights from the world I will soon reenter, hopefully there will be flashes of beauty in the grunting slog ahead. Hopefully, there will also be insightful reflection in the hours of staring at the heels of the girl in front amid the conga line struggling upwards along the grubby trail...

March 10 (*On the mountain: Mandara to Horombo hut*)



We trekked 9 hours today in the weary rhythm of planting one dusty foot in front of the other— glancing up at the snaking line of students ahead in orange shifts bearing on their heads, bundles wrapped in pink cloth.

I was sometimes lost in thought and sometimes empty-headed in the rhythm of the body-machine... Desultory thoughts often returned to the group mantra: “*pole, pole, tutafika*” [“slowly, slowly you will make it”].

I did feel fitter on the second day of the climb than I had in last year’s ascent. The straps of the Russian knapsack borrowed again from Pozharov bit a little less savagely than they had on the last climb. The boots (a size too small) still pinched, but the legs felt strong. Most encouragingly, I could breathe the bone-dry air through unplugged sinuses.

The hums, squawks and screeches (colobus monkeys, unseen) of the early morning climb through moss-shaggy rain forest gradually faded away. When at midday we broke into tussocky grassland, there was silence except for the rush of wind. Amid the alpine grasses was a profusion of flowers: papier-mâché-like gorses and lupine... While much of the climb was sweaty and monotonous—such flashes of colour were exhilarating...

The students clucked with surprise as the guides drew their attention to features in the alien landscape. Their stamina bearing the heavy bundles on their heads was amazing. While the tourists grunted and sweated—the girls hummed along and twitched bums to the Swahili beat on the porter's transistor radio...

As much as I tried to keep my attention dutifully focused on the students, when we squatted sipping water, I chatted with the other tourists. On one of our breaks at the side of the trail, an American lady asked whether she could take pictures of the girls “carrying things on their heads.” I suggested that she direct her question to the students themselves.

“Ask for a copy!” I whispered to the girls.

As the word went round to a few others that the Canadian “chaperone” had given permission, an American Jesuit (in an Ontario Place sweatshirt) was delegated to make a request. A half dozen hikers thereupon scrambled for vantage points on the rocks to snap wildly. Even a German in red jogging suit who had been dolefully lugging a heavy movie camera, eagerly crouched to film our orange and pink parade snaking upward...



March 11 (*On the mountain: Horombo to Kibo Hut*)

Among the fellow *wazungu* trekkers chatted with this morning was an American teacher who had been a former Peace Corps volunteer in Togo in the mid-1960s. She asked incisive questions about Tanzanian politics. (e.g. “Is there any evidence of discontent with Nyerere’s policies?”). Her husband, a bearded physicist, talked about American politics even as he turned on the side of the trail and casually pissed into the dust—ignoring the girls passing behind his back...

Then there was Joe, mid-30s American hippie and travel bum, his balding ponytail and Peruvian poncho incongruous to the clean-cut cool of the new Reagan era.

In response to his constant “WOW man!” Seraphim, his guide, winked and snickered: “You smokin’ marijuana, Joe?”

Perhaps it was the thinning air that made such banter seem hilarious. As we climbed above Horombo hut, the moor-like landscape dotted with cacti-like groundsels gave way to sparse terrain. When Johannes, the young German houseguest of the Kuhns reported *schwindel* [dizziness] pointing to the back of his *skutel* [skull] the sound of his German words evoked an almost Bruegelian medieval imagery. Indeed, the altitude did seem to have an effect quite like that of cannabis.

By mid-afternoon, we reached the saddle between the craggy Mawenzi, the higher of the 2 volcanic plugs, dwarfed by the glacial-capped majesty of Kibo, 7.5 miles to the west. Buffeted by chilly gusts, our dusty caravan crossed the saddle between Mawenzi and Kibo—a desert as primordially lifeless as that of the moon.



March 12 (*On the mountain: Kibo Hut to Uhuru Peak*)

In mid-afternoon, we reached Kibo hut—standing nearly 5000 metres altitude at the foot of the Kibo summit. Some of the girls sat outside trying warm up in the sinking sun, while others took straight to the bunkhouse. Several held their heads or stomachs in distress... We had about 9 hours to acclimatize before the final ascent.

A few girls were well enough to help the porters prepare *ugali* [maize porridge]. It was humbling to realize that the firewood, the food—along with every drop of water—had been borne to that height on the backs of porters, balanced by forehead straps.



Soon after 6:00 PM, we bunked down fitfully in the equatorial dusk. In the thin air, it was difficult to attain any more than a couple of hours of nauseous semi-consciousness.

At 1:30 AM, we were roused by the guides. Temples pounding in the 5,000-metre bone dry air, we stomachached a few spoonfuls of maize gruel in the lantern light. Donning the provided parka jackets and gloves, we assembled outside the hut in the sub-zero night. Only 2 girls, too sick to

go higher, stayed behind in bunks until our expected late morning return. Following our 3 guides waving flashlights, the rest of our group started the steep ascent.

For the following 5 ½ hours, I planted my *fimbo* [walking stick] in the scree and shuffled forward (Chuk! Chuk!). Oddly looping in my brain was Roy Buchanan's guitar solo in his eerie: '*The Messiah Shall Come Again*'...



Following the dim flashlight beams, we snaked up the steep incline, almost in slow motion, as guided.

To keep up blood circulation in the numbing cold, we took only one rest stop at the Hans Meyer cave. The rock overhang shelter was named after the German presumed to be the first to 'conquer' the Kibo summit. With the half-moon gleaming on the scree, the eerie whistle of wind through the boulders and the gothic shadow of Mawenzi peak looming to the east— it felt like an eternal moment.

Before we started up again, our guide Augustine told me that in order to get all the way back to Horombo hut by last afternoon, we would have to start back down from Gillman's Point no later than 10:00 AM. Yet Gillman's point at the eastern edge of the summit (reached in last year's climb) was still a hour shy of Uhuru peak, the actual summit. At the rate we were moving, he said we would not have time to make it all the way across the relatively flat dome to Uhuru peak... With that information, I made a decision to split the students into faster and slower groups.

One of our guides agreed to stay with the slower group. Even Johannes, the young German, decided to stay back. While they took a longer rest at the Hans Meyer, the faster group— accompanied by 2 guides and I— set off again. Augustine assured me we would reach Gillman's Point in time to continue across the glacier to Uhuru Peak. At that critical moment, it did not occur that the spitting of the students into 'weaker' /'stronger' groups might be taken as a violation of spirit of *ujamaa* [oneness— the national ethos]...

Finally, dawn came smudging up behind Mawenzi. With the tropical sun soon blazing up behind the diadem of stone pinnacles, I stopped to fumble with my camera. Just coming into view above us were the flags of Gillman's Point. Also, visible was the orange line of the slower students, far below.



Probably due to the thin oxygen, the following hour and half is fuzzy:

I recall taking the obligatory photos at Gillman's point and remembered asking the girls if they wanted to continue to Uhuru peak. There would be no more steep climbing since most of the way would be across ice. While I hoped that a few would want to go, they all decided to wait for the other group.



Augustine said he was willing to take me alone. Jolted by a surge of adrenalin, I trekked behind him along the ice trail. Camera in bare hand, I snapped pictures of the gargantuan wall of caked blue ice—the glacier viewed from below. After about 45 minutes we reached the cluster of flags on a small cairn, identifying Uhuru peak—the highest point in Africa. I took a few photos.

Augustine obligingly took a couple of me. Surprisingly, we were the first of many trekkers (passed on the way down) to reach Uhuru peak this day. Before heading back from the summit, we edged down to the lip of the caldera. My Olympus Trip camera could not do justice to the stunning views of glacier gleaming in equatorial morning sunlight.



Within 15 minutes, we were scrambling back across the ice to Gillman's point. We arrived there just as the last of the slower group were struggling up over the edge. Several of the 'faster' group accompanied by one of the guides were already on the way down. Having Augustine staying with the girls who just summited, I felt no need to wait. Suddenly near exhaustion, I wanted to make a quick descent. After a few words to the 2 guides who remained with the girls, I started down alone.

The descent was almost like a dream of skiing—slow-motion strides and leaps—with long stretches of sliding down the scree. Gradually, the increase in oxygen seemed to sharpen a sense that I was derelict in my duty... I remembered Mama Kuhn's exhortations to the students before

they boarded the bus. She had told them to “persevere and encourage one another”... How will she react when she hears that the students did not summit together?

Stopping up midway down to Kibo hut, I looked back over my shoulder at the tiny orange jacketed figures, just starting down from beneath Gilman's point. There came a rush of shame:

‘Did I not thoughtlessly behave like any tourist desperate to get to the top and click some ‘trophy’ photos? How dare I forget I am here for the students!’

I did not have the energy to climb back up the scree to meet the last students on the way down. Still, the jolting of conscience did keep me behind in in the temple-throbbing hypoxemia zone of Kibo hut for a few more hours.

Only in early afternoon after a rest were the “slowest” students— mostly due to the blisters from ill-fitting boots—ready to start back down towards Horombo Hut.

We set off together along the moon-scape saddle, just as a line of bobbing orange dots nearly 7 miles away, were disappearing below Mawenzi ridge. Our little group of 5 was the last of now 3 groups...

Only near dusk, did we descend from the desert into the boggy alpine mountainscape. Growing evermore anxious in cold drizzle, the 4 students began to fear we had lost the path. In deepening twilight, mercifully, the Horombo chalets emerged from the fog.

“*Tumefika*”, [we have arrived] I shouted waving forward the girls. Feverishly relieved, we were the last of the day’s trekkers—student or *wazungu* tourists— to emerge from the high mountain Erebus.



March 13 (*On the mountain: Horombo back to Marangu gate*)

Too nauseous to stomach the plate of rice prepared by the students, I crawled sunburned, sore, and filthy into my sleeping bag. Through that last restless night on the mountain, I castigated myself for submitting to this ordeal a second time round. For five days I'd needlessly punished my body—drained vitality which might otherwise have been creatively channelled. Might I have otherwise spent 5 days writing non-stop? Instead of producing an essay or even a novella—I was left with a few blurry snapshots.

“What a fucking masochist I am!” I muttered loud enough to startle Johannes, rolling in the bunk across.



The final leg of the trek back down from Horombo to Mandara went faster than expected. We did not even stop at Mandara but continued through the final 5 miles to Marangu gate. Bringing up the rear again, my little group stumbled into the park entrance around 3:30 PM. The school bus was waiting, already with the other students inside— all thankfully accounted for and uninjured.

One park warden rode with us back to Marangu village. Sitting across from me, we briefly chatted. On departing he shook my hand and proclaimed: “*wewe ninguvu kama simba*” [You are like a lion].

He was congratulating me, of course, for making Uhuru peak on my second try. Feeling patronized, I was tempted to give the reply of the ‘John’ of bad jokes: “*Bet you say that to all your customers!*”

By 5:00 PM, our crowded bus swung round the corner of *Mila Sita*. In the last few minutes, the weary students roused themselves for a chorus of ‘*Hallelujah, Bwana*’ [praise the lord]. As we passed through the school gate, shrieking fellow students crushed in from all sides nearly mobbing the Kilimanjaro conquerors. Mama Kuhn was not among the greeters.

Watching the grinning girls, I felt deeply grateful to have done the climb with them. They braved alien conditions they’d never before even remotely experienced— including sub-zero temperatures.

As for myself, I had no illusion that summiting Kilimanjaro was anything akin to real mountaineering. It was essentially a long grueling uphill walk. The climb was well within the ability of any reasonably fit person with the capacity to tolerate long stretches of monotony...

I resolved to give the Headmistress a full report on the climb. In the meantime, I just needed a bath and some sleep.



March 21



Monsieur Gerard unexpectedly popped in around 4:30 PM with news that Fortunata is finally in labour at KCMC hospital in Moshi.

Along with Chobya and Bella K., I accompanied the nervous father-in-waiting to a movie and then and back to the hospital. We had waited less than an hour when Gerard came back from the nurses' station, giddy with the news that the baby had arrived—a son.

Along with back slaps and corny quips (“A big part of the divine plan is unfolding for you tonight!”) we toasted with warmish Kilimanjaro beer.

Later viewing baby-Gerard in the hospital nursery, Bella K., standing tightly beside me, touched a finger to the bassinette:

"How does it seem to you, Mr. F?" she asked sweetly.

Before leaving, I looked into the window near the rear the nursery, where there were infants in wire cribs. Their faces all looked older than their tiny bodies. One repetitively twisted— but issued no cries. Another stared at the ceiling with vacant eyes... While the baby-Gerards were cooed over, there were no visitors to that back area of the nursery.

On passing the nurse's station on the way out, we saw chalked on a board: *‘number of new orphans today: 3’*.

March 23

Beauty at the duka la shule:



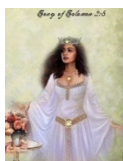
Julia, the Form IV girl who clerks in the *duka la shule* [school shop], performs her duties with an uncommon grace... She is especially radiant when she ladles out milk still warm from the dairy barn. In filling the pitchers or saucepans, she has a sweet smile for every customer.

This afternoon, when Neo (Miss Mkoni's 8-year-old daughter) edged to the front of the queue, Julia gently patted her head. For her part, little Neo turned and giggled at the dwarf lady behind her in the queue...

When my turn to pay for the litre of milk, Julia leaned forward from the counter innocently pushing out her chest. At that moment, I thought of a line recently read in Doris Lessing's "*Golden Notebook*" which described breasts "lifting and stinging..."

Also, not for the first time in the *duka la shule* lineup, I thought of Hans Christian Anderson's '*Little Mermaid*'. The mermaid of the melancholy fairy tale so yearned to be with her human lover that she made a pact with the sea witch to appear in human form. All the while her lover was entranced by the grace of her movement, the mermaid's human legs stabbed like white-hot swords.

Unless she is walking, no one would notice Julia's twisted feet. Yet upon her deformed feet, turned terribly inward, she is able to move with disarming grace...



Once in seeing her walk between classrooms with an armload of books I was reminded of verses from '*The Song of Solomon*': "*I am black, but comely, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, as the tents of Kedar, as the curtains of Solomon...*"

But for her very human feet, the biblical king could not have exalted in greater beauty than that of young Julia's...

March 25

Another Soviet film show:



Tonight the projector worked flawlessly in execution of the Russian film show. Teachers and students alike were wowed by the marvels of Moscow. Most impressive was the Black Sea jamboree of Young Pioneers—a veritable socialist Woodstock!

Yet the Nazi Goebbels could not have better excelled in the portrayal of magnificent builders: expressways jammed with automobiles, immense condo blocks and phalanxes of factory smokestacks.

When a blonde young pioneer guided the hands of an African student of the Peoples' Friendship University in launching a toy rocket, the students clucked in delight. The scene of an old Soviet couple clasping hands and solemnly gazing up at a Lenin statue in stern profile moved a few students to tears... At the end, all heartily applauded.

As the sole dissident in the audience, I wondered how the girls would respond to a US Information Service screening of a travelogue on Disneyland...



Grim prediction: On walking back to my duplex in the chirping dark, I speculated on the possible outcome of a hot confrontation between the USA and the Soviet Union. It occurred that that most likely segment of humanity to survive a nuclear war (if any) would probably be in the least radiation-poisoned landmass, *i.e.* Africa... Perhaps there would be cosmic justice that the cradle of our species would also serve as the sole refuge for its remnants....

March 31



The headline story in the BBC World Service news this morning was the Reagan assassination attempt. In the staffroom, the rotund Baba Msole left no doubt of his reaction to the shooting:

"Anyone should be shot— not just a little wounded— but shot *dead* for selling weapons to South Africa." With a tsk, he slapped his open plan book. "I don't care who it is— even the Pope— they deserve to be shot for supporting apartheid. My only question is: why didn't they use poison bullets?"

Sister Mosha, standing in the doorway, nodded vigorously.

April 1

Les Miserables:

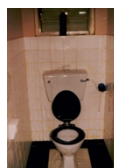
I was jolted awake by splashing in the toilet. Fearing an intruder, I felt on the floor for my metal flashlight. Switching it on, I slid out of bed and jiggled the beam into the open door of the toilet cubicle. Something alive, I realized, must have fallen into the toilet.

Inside the door, I tilted the beam into the bowl. Therein was a sleek black rat. It was desperately trying to claw up the side of the slippery porcelain but repeatedly falling back down... I had to kill it.

I rushed into the kitchen and took a spoon from the drawer and from under the sink, the can of cleaning lye... Back over the toilet, I pried open the lid and sprinkled granules of lye into the bowl. For a few shameless moments, I held the flashlight beam on the miserable creature. A bald patch from the burning lye began spreading on its back. Sickened, I grabbed up the toilet brush and tried to push the rat to the very bottom of the bowl. Submerged, it still thrashed. I flushed— but was too big to do down. It took 2 more flushes before the struggling ceased ...

For another few moments, I held the flashlight beam on the loathsome dark thing, half submerged... With no stomach to remove it in the middle of the night, I dropped the toilet cover and flushed again...

I turned off the flashlight and crawled back under the mosquito net. For the indeterminable time until falling back asleep, a rasping of tiny claws on porcelain was as real as the meowing of the tortured and murdered black cat in the Edgar Allen Poe horror tale...



April 3

Mob 'justice':

The commotion broke out just as I was just updating my record of workbook after the last period of the day. The half dozen teachers still in the staffroom turned to the back window. A small crowd was gathering just beyond the school fence.

"They must have caught a thief," said Baba Msole.

Meanwhile, students were running towards the fence. Along with the others, I closed my book and went out to see the action...

By the time we got across the *bichi* [beach] lawn behind the school office, it seemed that more than half the students, staff and labourers on our compound were pressing against the fence wire. A couple of students moved aside to allow Baba Msole, Mr. Tondo and myself to squeeze in...

Still, it was difficult to see above the bobbing heads and the cloud of dust rising above the crowd gathering outside the fence. Local villagers seemed to be pressing inward, while pushing along towards the *Mila Sita* road junction. Amid the melee, a switch was suddenly held up.

"*Mwezi! Mwezi!*" [thief! thief!] Suddenly, a cry was taken up almost like a football chant.

The switch was teasingly twirled a few times. After a few teasing flicks, it came down sharply—again and again.

A roar of approval went up from the mob joined by squeals of delight from our side of the fence: "*Kumpiga! Kumpiga zaidi!*" ['Beat him harder!']

Finally, the poor wretch receiving the blows briefly came into view, having been kicked to his feet. His open shirt was bloodied.

Pushed along by a tall man with a long stick and followed by jeering women and children, the accused thief staggered a few steps up the road. Every few seconds the procession stopped for the tall man to resume the switching. Their target dropped out of view, assailed by kicks, blows and curses... Yet he was dragged up again— cursed, spat upon and then pushed forward. An adolescent boy especially pleased the crowd with karate chops and scissor kicks.

Suddenly the KIDECO bus came grinding around the corner and halted uncertainly in the midst of the mob.

"They better push him on— get the bastard to the police station— before the crowd tears him apart!" said Baba Msole.

A moment later the victim, clutching his head, was rammed up to the bus door and onto the steps. Yet before he was pushed fully inside, a woman in a yellow *kanga* with a babe swaddled on her back lunged forward and jabbed something at his neck. She got an even bigger cheer than the Bruce Lee imitator. Finally, the conductor dragged the accused inside and signalled with 3 sharp raps on the door. The bus roared away.

The spectators, still murmuring, drifted away... As we walked back towards the staffroom, *Mwalimu* Tondo remarked:

"These thieves, it's good to see them getting a lesson. This one's lucky he wasn't beaten to death. The police, you know, might just let him go. The people take instant justice. That's what he deserves!"

Back in my living room chair, I shuddered in the image of the victim in bloodied shirt clutching his head... It was afterwards revealed that he was a local drunkard, caught in the act of stealing a few shirts...

The people are all too ready to scapegoat a petty thief while the real thieves— corrupt officials and bloodsucking traders— will always escape “the peoples’ justice.” Meanwhile, the taste for mob justice is hardly limited to the Chagga of Kilimanjaro.

I thought of the chilling mob beating of a petty thief witnessed in northern Nigeria, 2 years ago. I was informed afterwards that that such brutal vengeance was as common in Christian or animist communities of the south as in the Islamic north of the country... Despite all the ignorance in the west about the achievements of African civilization — how can it be denied that this common social behaviour is plainly barbaric?

Yet suddenly, I realized that I was hardly qualified to judge what was ‘primitive’ as opposed to ‘civilized’ behaviour. Probably no one among the mob outside the fence would have conceived of pouring acid on a trapped rat...



April 8

Anonymous complaint:

After a quick trip to the Moshi market in late afternoon, I caught a lift back to *Mila Sita* from a 504 driven by a government parastatal official in the standard grey Kaunda-suit. We drove for the first few moments in an uncomfortable silence. Then in making conversation, I casually mentioned that I had managed to get split peas and garlic at the market— but no vegetable oil to cook them with...

Surprisingly, my little *mazumgumzo* [conversation] gambit unleashed a tirade about the severe shortages:

“You heard that there are cases of cholera in Dar es Salaam?” He asked. “It is because the city water supply is contaminated. The driver curled his lip contemptuously. “A plane which takes a single politician to a conference in Addis Ababa could easily be dispatched to Nairobi to pick up a supply of aluminum sulphate to clean up the water. It’s inexcusable!”

Through the following 10 minutes to *Mila Sita*, the anonymous official continued a diatribe against bloated bureaucracy and corruption. Then in the last minute, he collapsed back into silence. It seemed he had caught himself in the treacherous act of complaining about the government before *mzungu* ears. When I pressed the 10-shilling note into his hand as payment for the lift, he did not look at me.

His tires squealed in the mud as he lurched away anonymously towards Arusha.

April 12



Late this afternoon when I passed by the neighbouring residence of the Sisters of the Assumption, Sister Immaculata greeted me with her radiant smile. She was on hands and knees tending to her flower patch which she does almost every afternoon. However inconveniently, she works in her purple and white habit without benefit of a gardener's smock.

While I briefly stopped to compliment her flowers, she rose for a moment's break and gave me fascinating information that I somehow missed in high school science:

Apparently, the palette of a flower garden varies according to the hues of the individual flowers responding to surrounding colors. A flower which may be of a paler shade when surrounded by other pale flowers becomes brighter when surrounded by other brighter flowers...

"Don't you think people are like that, too?" she asked. "When we are joyful don't you think that affects others around us?"

Not for the first time, I appreciated a smile that seemed much more that of a beautiful woman than of a bride of Christ...

April 18

Making it official:

It was in the lame chatter over mugs of *mbege* with the (first time) visiting Len L., CUSO Field Staff Officer, that I found a segue to drop my little bomb:

"I've been thinking about this for several months now— but I think I'd like to leave here at the end of June instead of in December."

Ndugu Len stroked his beard silently as I recited my rehearsed excuse of planning to get into graduate studies.

"I'm almost thirty," I faltered. "My qualifications for work are slender."

In previous encounters, I found his ideological staunchness as dreary as the winters of his native Manitoba. His response this afternoon was predictably in character.

“Thirty’s not old,” he said gravely. “You have lots of time. Have you ever thought how always worrying about qualifications can be a trap? Everyone thinks they need more education. It’s more of everything— a bigger car, a bigger house.”

He went on to ask whether I would consider transferring for the remainder of my contract to a “non-elitist and nonreligious” school like Minja Secondary. Gerard M. was soon to leave and the school would welcome a Canuck replacement. It was telling that at that moment he would glance out the window and slightly smirk. Across the pathway, Sister Immaculata was kneeling in her flower bed.

Finding myself in the unusual position of defending the school, I said that only a handful of students were from elite families and that the student body was selected for tribal balance. I also mentioned the quota for disadvantaged students.

“It’s really not disaffection with the school,” I concluded.

Realizing that my mind was made up, *Ndugu* Len brusquely told me to write a formal letter to the Head Mistress informing her of my reasons for wanting an early departure along with the intended date. I was to c/c carbon copies for both the Ministry of Education and the CUSO office in Dar.

No doubt Len was disappointed. Two other cooperants had departed early in the last few months (one an emergency medical evacuation from Singida) and Gerard would be leaving at the end of June. Then there was the Canadian nurse in Zanzibar (we’d never met) who died last December of cerebral malaria... Meanwhile, *Ndugu* Len is himself finishing the FSO assignment in May. In his Ottawa debriefing, he might well be asked whether there is a crisis of morale in the Tanzania field.

Still, I made something of a compromise. Instead of leaving at the end of June as first considered, I decided to stay on until the beginning of September. By that time, time I should be finished the basic oral skills program with my Form One classes... Whoever takes over for the remaining 8 weeks of the term can work with the ‘teacher-proof’ Brick curriculum...

After the FSO drove away, I stared out the window for a few minutes, still sipping *mbege*. Later, in flutters of remorse, I picked up my blues harp and trilled along with a cassette of Bob Dylan’s ‘*Desire*.’

April 28

Following upon the rumour that the MDC Supermarket in Moshi had received a shipment of cooking fat, the lineup started halfway down the block. I stood for nearly 10 minutes in spattering rain, with the line scarcely moving towards the turnstile. Meanwhile, a few grey-suited party officials and police officers were calmly led to the front of the queue. As the clerk distributed the precious tins, the stack of boxes soon depleted to a single tier. I was ready to turn away in frustration when a girl in the MDC red smock nodded towards me. She quipped to the man beside who appeared to be a manager:

"Tunaweza kumsaidia misionari?" [Can we help the missionary?]

I could not guess how a *mzungu* in ragged blue jean jacket might be taken for a missionary— but was not about to argue...

The manager wheeled around, scratching his head. Meanwhile the girl smilingly handed me a tin and motioned me to towards the check out. I edged in behind a cop.

Perhaps I should have said “*akubariki*” [bless you] as I scurried away in the rain with the precious can of ghee in hand.



A half hour later at the Agip filling station, I pleaded with the female attendant in gas jockey denim that this was the 5th time in the last week I'd come in vain to Moshi for a tin of kerosene for my cooker. I told her that I was a teacher without his own transport who needed to get back to class.

“*Naomba, naomba!* [please please!]” I begged.

She cocked her head and regarded me severely. Satisfied that I had sufficiently grovelled, she motioned for my container and money. A moment later she returned with my kerosene and change for 100 shillings. I shook her hand— but did not offer a tip.

So, I effectively queue-jumped twice within an hour. Just what *are* the limits of my shamelessness in coping with a few shortages?

Continued in part #2...
