

Village Tanzania

34 million people, five million of them here in Dar, and Tanzania is still…well, a village. Here is what I mean:

We went up to Sadani last weekend, a ten bungalow hotel three hours up the coast at the mouth of the Wami river. Here think hippos, think crocs, the place is teeming with them. The river guide shouted at Luke to take his hand out of the water when he dipped it in per his parent’s instruction to get some gunk off – and it wasn’t in for a split second…I mean truly the kid would rather eat broccoli than wash. Think crocs enough to take your hand off that fast.

Truly, one of my favorite object is that ‘croc head under glass’ we had in the living room back home…monster croc, came from the croc farm outside Antananarivo where it lived until it died – you know the one I mean. Eight feet and something inches and over 1000 lbs. Not a croc to smile at, let’s at least agree on that. So the owner of the Sadani Safari Lodge where we are staying – and here I am getting waaaay off track – says, ‘I found this crocodile head’ the way you might say ‘I had a farm in Africa’ – so I say, yeah, great, croc heads…my turf…bring it on! Next thing you know he is actually saying, ‘well I bet my croc head is bigger than yours,’ and I’m saying, ‘is not,’ and he’s saying, ‘is so.’ And guess what? His is bigger than mine. I mean – and I’m not one to exaggerate and I am truly not exaggerating here…his is waaaay bigger, maybe twice my size. Think hippos...and think crocs...and think croc that eat hippos, I kid you not, crocs about a hippo’s size.

That brings to mind an awful tragedy that was in yesterday’s paper. A young man and women were married in the women’s village and then rode together on the same bicycle over to the man’s village where the reception was being held. On the way, as they passed beneath a tree, a cobra reached down from a branch and bit the new bride on the head. She was dead before they made it to the reception.

Of course there is not one single person in all of Tanzania who thinks for one second that was real a snake. That was Bad Bad Magic – we all know that (including me). An awful thing, and I feel a bit bad for repeating it here...the poor families. But in that terrible vain, it also reminds me of that wedding one of our friends attended which was being officiated by the father of the bride, who was a big deal local minister. He kneeled over with a heart attack before he finished pronouncing the vows…

Well I have really drawn us off track, and I apologize for that. This was supposed to be a story about the Village Tanzania …and now it is too late for that…oh well, maybe one tiny thought will suffice. In the Village Tanzania, life for thirty of the thirty four million people living here hasn’t changed in a thousand years (or maybe not even all that much in the full ten million since the Birth of Man). To illustrate this point to Kate and Luke as we are rolling through this very very rural area on very very muddy roads, I said, ‘the people out here in these villages have to make virtually everything they use,

themselves. They have to grow, or kill, what they eat - using tools they make from materials available right at hand. Nothing else. Imagine a life in which you have to do everything yourself...construct your house from materials you find, make your own toys, build your own furniture, even weave and sew your own clothes.';

So, being normal kids, they immediately set out to prove me wrong. And this is what they came up with over the next couple of hours driving: 3 bicycles, five hats, and the clothes on people's backs (the cloth, that is, as most of the clothes they themselves had sown). Everything else, everything else we saw, the villagers had cut, or killed, or woven, or cobbled - had created - all by them very own selves. And they call Dar 'Bongo', a slang term that means 'brains', because it supposed to take brains to live here. I guess that mean you can't - you know - just, well, create everything you need. Who are the real Bongos, is what I want to know? And so, for now, we end another chapter in the life of the Village Bongo.