TANZANIA CONNECTIONS

Lucy Winter, Lori Sweeney, Jeff Sweeney October 4, 2025



"Let's go with 'rustic,'" my sister noted in a text when I sent her pictures of our lodgings here in Manow, "like the Forest Service cabins we rent for a weekend in the wilderness." Even my travel agent said "You're brave" and I realized that everyone who lives here is brave.

The days begin before sunrise, with villagers scurrying to jobs or fields or school and end much after I'm in bed, with amplified music wafting through the African evening. Daily life is not just hard; the people are gracious and cheerful and kind as they go about their tasks and laugh when we struggle with the Swahili to buy a sambuusa. But nothing is easy, not the water flow or the washing or the walking to the market. We are enjoying the challenge at the same time we are missing consistent electricity and metal-piped plumbing, living in a first-world nation versus this more rudimentary life. But there's something simple in the sunrises, and the delivery of eggs (okay and the occasional Pepsi and Kiliminjaro beer) by the enthusiastic entrepreneur down the path.

The students make the effort all worth it—their sudden, Julia Roberts-like laugh and their utter disbelief that they have in fact spelled "curious" correctly. The TTF program has such a good reputation in the area that everyone greets us, helps us and delights in our being here. We bring a measure of economic support as well as the realization that education—in fact, learning English—can help a family rise out of poverty and impact their community, country and continent. The long legacy of TTF here means that we have "alumni" who help us at the market or greet us with chicken in hand from their motorcycle. We see families who make the great effort to get their children to our school before 7:30 am each day…despite a full day tending to their homes, fields, vocations and other children. It is inspiring to learn how others live, challenging to live it ourselves and so very good for the spirit to learn that we can all live together in this life so very different from our own.



Lori Sweeney

This fall I find myself in Tanzania with the task to teach English to a group of 12-year-olds.

The first week was a daunting experience. Armed with a small handful of Swahili words, I was very apprehensive about communicating in a small mountain village. The first week consisted of spotty electricity, a couple of days with no water and an invasion of ants. While you might think I would be ready to throw in the towel, it was just the opposite! The people in Tanzania have been so friendly and welcoming; it is truly amazing. The bilingual teachers at Manow Lutheran Junior Seminary taught us more Swahili in order to greet others, which we do every time we walk out the door. Locals helped us to shop in the nearby town (2 miles away!). Our faithful Ngwatika (who also does our laundry and cleaning) made dinner for us so we had something to eat upon our arrival. They were genuinely happy to see us arrive; it was heartwarming.

While my lack of Swahili may have been a detriment in the beginning, the Tanzanian children, particularly the preschoolers, have an easy-to-understand language of smiles and hugs. Two or three greet me by wrapping themselves around my legs, which makes me choke up every time. The children make it worthwhile, including my new friend Melk, pictured.



all

Jeff Sweeney

I'm back in Manow. I was last here in 2022 as a TTF volunteer and loved it so much I had to return. Seeing old friends, wandering the pathways I traveled before, getting used to the house and all its foibles, hearing the African Wood Owl hooting again outside my window have been a welcome treat. I must say the evening visit from the Siafu ants was not a treat!

One of the many reasons for my return was to see the 2022 class TTF again. Several of our students from that year are attending MLJS and I have been so fortunate to see them a couple times. Once, we went to a choir practice where 8 of our former students were singing. Stacy and I then visited the scholarship students in the computer lab where I saw Peacemaker, the student my husband Bill and I sponsor. They are thriving in their studies. I am so proud of them.

It is so interesting seeing Manow not with fresh eyes. I knew the landscape, the buildings, the roads, the paths and the beautiful fig and avocado trees in the area already, but there were changes I had to get used to. Sadly, from my perspective, some of the changes distressed me because it mostly revolved around fewer trees. And one of my favorite shady routes home from the market in Lwangwa was "improved" by widening, tree removal and becoming very dusty. However, it still fills me with joy to talk to the people along the way. When I say talk, I really mean stumbling with my extremely rudimentary Kiswalhili (the official language of Tanzania) and Nyakyusa, the local tribal language. The people here could not be nicer. They help us to use the one or two words we know correctly. As we walk along a road and encounter some locals, they typically look extremely sternly or suspiciously at us, but after exchanging greetings, their faces completely lit up with the most beautiful smiles!



Bariki, Isiah and Peacemaker in the computer lab.

But while I have seen many familiar things upon my arrival, the one new and wonderful part has been meeting our students for this session. What a group! We had our first interaction with them at the entrance exam, but we actually met our group Monday morning. The look on their sweet faces was charming. They seemed so scared to be with this strange group of Americans, but they were willing to get to work right off the bat. It is now Friday at the end of the first week and what a change in the kids. Several of them have turned into clowns! One challenge we have taken on is to make one of the girls smile! Her name is Jenifa and it has been a real struggle to raise the corners of her mouth. She actually did give me a real smile today. I hope this is just a first for our triumphs!

Lucy Winter

My summer was very busy with spending a month in Olympia and being the caretaker for my uncle; my friends all said at the end of summer you need to do some self-care. Returning to Manow this year feels a bit like the self-care I needed. I have the joy of



accompanying this year's volunteer team: Lucy Winter, Lori Sweeney, and Jeff Sweeney, three friends from the Pacific Northwest who have taken this leap of service together. We are all deeply grateful for their thoughtful, eager, and openhearted spirits and I can say with confidence that TTF, the community, and our students are lucky to have them.

From the moment we landed in Dar es Salaam, friends of TTF appeared everywhere. Jacob Aswile, a former MLJS teacher and former TTF board member, met us at the airport with his signature big smile. Later, we were joined for dinner by Tumpe Gideon, a TTF alum from the Class of 2016, who is graduating from the University of Dar es Salaam with a degree in economics. Her success is a testament to what education and the TTF community can do.

In Mbeya, Deacon April Trout, our Lower Susquehanna Synod (ELCA) liaison to the Konde Diocese, joined us for breakfast and shared updates from the region. Bishop Geoffrey Mwakihaba of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania, Konde Diocese, took time from his busy schedule to extend

a warm welcome through email and even sent greetings to our partner congregation at Gloria Dei Lutheran Church in Olympia. And, of course, our super dependable International Coordinator and TTF Board Member, Martin Mwakaje, guided us all the way to Manow.

When we arrived, the welcome continued. We were greeted by Christina and Precious, alumnae from last year's Pre-Form 1 class, and by Ngwatika, the ever-industrious entrepreneur who seems to do everything: run the preschool, sew uniforms, keep the volunteers' house in order, and now, dote on her six-month-old granddaughter. We also met the new headmaster, Mr. Daudi A. Kajigili, whose enthusiasm and vision for the school are contagious. And Edna, the headmaster's secretary, continues her patient mission to teach me Kiswahili; I'm now quite confident in my greetings: Habari za asubuhi! (Good morning!)

A 2km stroll into nearby Lwangwa brought even more friendly faces: Mama Baraka, our local guide through the bustling market stalls; Elieza Onesmo, TTF Class of 2009, who now owns an electronics shop and stopped to help the volunteers; and Madame Bupe, a shopkeeper who always insists we rest with a cold drink after our errands.



Then came the most exciting part, this year's Pre-Form 1 class selection. We received more than 80 applications, and 60 students and their parents attended the TTF Info Session. I even tried speaking Kiswahili during the session though judging by the laughter, I may have said something unintentionally funny! We formed a balanced class of 20 boys and 20 girls, with similar academic results.

Our volunteers now have a class of bright, curious students. Their task to deepen comprehension and communication skills is not an easy one, but I have no doubt they'll succeed.

I am filled with gratitude for our volunteers, our partners, our donors, and the Manow community that makes this work possible. Tanzania Teaching Foundation is thriving because of the shared belief that *education changes lives*. Each visit reminds me that this is not just about teaching English; it's about building bridges, nurturing potential, and planting seeds that grow into futures full of promise.

From all of us in Manow, asante sana (thank you very much) for your continued support and faith in this mission. The spirit of TTF is alive and well, and the best is yet to come.

Send us an email!

Have questions? Want to know more at TTF from the volunteer perspective? We would love to hear from you. We may not be able to respond as quickly as in the US, but we will get back to you.



If the newsletters inspired you to think about teaching in the program, please let Stacy know. Her email is director@tanzaniateachingfoundation.org