TANZANIA CONNECTIONS

Lucy Winter, Lori Sweeney, Jeff Sweeney October 30, 2025



We're just starting our 5th week of class, and we will soon begin the more difficult part of the course. All the students are showing their progress in such different ways. Some of them have always "gotten it" and continue to improve. Others make progress in fits and starts, sometimes two steps forward, one step back. Even though a couple of kids are really struggling, it is fun and interesting to watch. We teachers observe this progress (or lack thereof) and try to use it to fine-tune our teaching so we are best able to help most of them…as much as we can.

Another interesting factor for this mid-session time is how nice it is to watch how the kids have bonded with each other. Not so much the boys with the girls, or vice versa (probably a bit too early for that!), but the boys with the boys and girls with girls. It really looks like some nice, hopefully long-term friendships are developing. We weren't sure how many of them knew each other before this class, but they certainly know each other now. I've been impressed with how this shows up with their play at tea. The boys are silly with their soccer playing; bunching up and simply kicking the ball as high as possible, but unlike 3 years ago when I was here, they do not steal the ball from the girls. We do still have to keep them from kicking the ball into either the church or the classroom! We certainly do not want to have any broken windows! The girls either play their form of soccer or do some really impressive jump roping. They run in and out of the jump rope, and sometimes jump with 4 of them in a row! It's pretty impressive.

I find it interesting to watch the changes over this 5-week timeframe. Speaking for myself, even though I did this 3 years ago, in so many ways, this is a brand new experience. What is not different is how appreciative everyone is that we are teaching here. I remember this from before, but I try to tell them that we also benefit from this experience. I feel like I really experienced some personal growth both times I have done this teaching. It is more familiar this time, but also every day is a new day!

Lucy Winter

As with most "bold adventures," as I'm calling these three months in Tanzania, you come to an appreciation of what you missed along life's way. Like the fact that teachers deserve every accolade, grace, and commendation possible. Just for showing up. Figuring out how to present complex concepts like subject pronouns and irregular past tense verbs.



And for somehow finding a way toward the hard-to-reach kids and those that don't even hazard a smile.

I've been humbled into this recognition and grateful to every teacher out there. The Tanzanians do three boisterous claps of appreciation, and so, **CLAP, CLAP, CLAP.**

Here in Manow, we three teachers arrive at the classroom a short walk away just after 7 am (there are church bells that ring for longer than necessary at 6:30, so oversleeping is impossible) and leave in a

cloud of classroom and chalk dust after 3 o'clock in the middle of a hot afternoon. We've had 5 trips up to the dispensary with sick kids, and two others we had to nurse through constipation (just imagine that with Google Translate). There are trips back for missed supplies or to purchase *sambuusas* (or to pee in the sit-down toilet), but otherwise, we are full on with the students most of the day. On a cement floor. Wooden chairs. Remarkably breakable chalk.

And it's a challenge, I'm not going to kid you. I'm going to bed at 7:30 pm and am asleep by 8:30. But the kids. The kids greet us after walking 2 miles (like



my grandfather did, but only no snow) and help carry supplies and intone "*Good morning, Mama Lori*," which almost brings me to tears some mornings, realizing 'I'm in *Africa*, maybe, just *maybe*, changing a kid's future.' But then I have to teach plural nouns and realize how frustratingly dumb it is that mouse becomes mice in English. Don't even get me started on fish. Somehow, these kids figure it out. They diligently write in their exercise books (the more avid are on their second pencils), including my spelling mistakes (today's winner: nosees). We raise our arms so often for **QUIET** that I am sure my rotator cuff shall be healthy into my 80s. We deal with so many blank stares of incomprehension, I am almost glad for the 29+ years of training I've had from hard-of-hearing Jeff.

But somehow, we've found a way with these kids. One, Jenifa (this has to be a J Lo wannabe name, Tanzania-style!), lanky and older, arrived in class with a scowl. Our teacher's goal for the first week was to get her to show her teeth and smile. I forgot who won; maybe no one did. I try hard to embolden the girls to shed their shyness and giggles and be "loud and proud" when they answer questions, and still, Jenifa slouched and didn't want to reply.

But yesterday, in the middle of "This is the way we brush our teeth…" to cap off our healthy living module, I pointed to her and she actually said "This is the way…we wash our *bottom*…" and she joined the whole class in cracking up. (We learned 'bottom' with the other body parts 2 weeks ago.) Her scores have improved, she makes notes in her exercise book the moment she opens it, and she talks to other girls at tea now. And she smiles and, gasp, even laughs out loud now and again. Maybe, just maybe, she'll build up enough confidence to strike up a conversation with the next visiting American. And ask for something in English.

CLAP, CLAP, CLAP.

Lori Sweeney

We're five weeks in. There have been frustrations along the way, but more than that, there has been growth. While not every student will go on to complete the program, most of them will, and all of them have grown in more ways than one. Gone is the shyness and timidity of the first week. The students are eager to raise their hands, eager to answer questions. They are no longer scared of giving an incorrect answer, and their confidence has grown exponentially. They are eager to learn; most of them are at the school early, waiting for the door to open. The students are understanding instructions better. Their pronunciation is

improving. And while their sentence structure still needs work, their writing is coming along.

Not only are the kids growing, but in some ways, I think that they are helping me to grow as well. I have always been a bit of a perfectionist, even though I would not have admitted it! I've wanted to do things the right way the first time. The students are able to make do with very little. I am beginning to realize that a lot of us could do with a little bit less with little to no effect on our lives. Things don't always have to be perfect.



I have been blessed in life, and these kids and this experience are a part of those blessings.

Jeff Sweeney

Message from the Board President

I want to thank everyone for your ongoing interest and support of our non-profit organization! The volunteer's stories remind us of the incredible changes that happen in 10 short weeks of teaching the local children. Back home, the Board of Directors are working hard to make TTF stronger than ever in its mission to support education in Tanzania. Look for The President's Corner in each future newsletter. With gratitude.

Laurie Schaetzel-Hill
TTF Board President

Send us an email!

Have questions? Want to know more about 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

Until next time…

