

Summer Enrichment Final Report

By: Seth Muller

What I did.

My goal in Zanzibar, Tanzania was to photographically portray the barriers that females face in getting an education. I did this by working through the social connections of a local scholarship program. This scholarship program, Students For Students International identifies the highest performing female students on the island and gives them full-ride scholarships for secondary school. By working on the Delegation Committee for this organization I was able to meet more than forty female students, many of whom were the best students in Tanzania. Through this avenue I earned access to their schools. Photographing in the schools offered many opportunities to visually portray the differences between male and female students. The commissioner of education told me there are now just as many girls in school as there are boys, but girls are still not performing at the same level as their male peers. This fact makes it difficult for a photographer to display a disparity. It is much more difficult to photograph an abstract concept like performance than a visually concrete truth like male-female ratios. That being said, I dived into the project and here is what I found.

It was fairly simple to show the barriers that all students face. For example I have some great photographs of students taking their government exams. The government exams are administered in English even though their native tongue is Kiswahili. Even though they may understand the concepts well, if they cannot articulate them in English

then they will not pass the exam and not move on to the next grade. Also there was not enough room for all the students in the examination room so some had to take their tests in the adjacent courtyard.

Although it was difficult in the classroom to portray the disparities between male and female performance, some good things came out of it. Oddly enough, the girls and boys generally sat segregated in the classroom. I have some good wide-angle shots of the distribution of students during class. Secondly, one school had their class listings posted on a blackboard along with separate columns for how many boys and girls were in each class. In the higher-level courses, there were far fewer girls than there were boys. This shows that girls are not performing at the same level as boys.

The most productive place for my project was the home. In these students' homes, I could see their everyday lives, and it helped illuminate the challenges they face. One morning I woke up at 4:00am and traveled far out into the country to meet one of the students at her home. I did a short photo-documentary chronicling her 2-hour ride to school. Not only does it take her two hours to get to-and-from school, it is also very expensive. Plus she runs the risk of getting kicked off the bus if there is not enough room for other passengers.

Another student agreed to let me follow her home and see her daily life after school. I was able to shoot some great portraits as she went about her daily chores. The whole time she was performing chores, her brother was in the background on his cellphone. This juxtaposition gives a good idea of the different expectations between the sexes. I shot 2,000 photos in that one evening; everything from washing dishes, cooking, sweeping, taking care of younger siblings, and finally studying.

By the end of the summer I had shot 10,000+ photos, which is the most I have ever taken in a summer. With the help of my photojournalism professors, I am now editing and consolidating my photos into photo essays as well as adding them to an online Dropbox database to be used by Students For Students International for any and all graphic publications.

What I learned.

Never, never, never, never—in nothing, great or small, large or petty—never give up
—Winston B. Churchill

Churchill's wisdom is something that every photojournalist needs to take to heart. There will be times in this profession where you will be sent into less than ideal circumstances, but your editor doesn't care about excuses. He just wants you to come back with a photograph that will blow him away, and blow the readers away. Zanzibar offered many of its own challenges; how about the fact that I was there doing a project on education and the schools shut down halfway through my visit, or the fact that I didn't speak the same language as my subjects, or more practically, that I didn't have a flash. After this trip, I've learned that even when there seems like there is no way to get a good shot, you can't account for the unpredictability of life. Something might arise, and you have to be there for it. Some of my best shots from this summer came from the most unexpected circumstances.

Secondly, I learned a lot from the southeast African culture. This was my first time living in another country for an extended period of time and by comparing their culture to American culture, it made me realize some universal truths about life. One, no

matter what culture you're in, mothers are mothers. They take care of their children and their home. And if you come into their home they will most likely take care of you too. Two, fathers are fathers. They will protect their children, provide for them, embarrass them occasionally, and help them through life. These are just two of many universal truths I learned.

I also learned that I do not want to work in Africa. I really enjoyed my time there. I learned a lot, but I realized some important facts in my stay. America's educational system has problems just like Tanzania's system has problems. Although America's educational problems might not be as severe as Tanzania's, I'm an American. I love my country and my primary interest is to help combat America's educational problems. You have to take care of yourself before you take care of others. And although traveling to inner city Chicago might not be as glamorous as traveling to Africa, it is better for me to ensure that my country is doing well before I look to other countries.

This summer has been one of the most life-changing moments of my life. I met the most incredible people, saw the most amazing sights, and learned the most necessary truths. Thank you so much for establishing the enrichment fund for the undergraduates. It has changed my life and it will assuredly change many others. I look forward to this year because I know after this trip I will be a more excellent photographer, student, citizen, and brother.