

Wake-up call

Adventures abroad open social, cultural horizons



I think it was the damn roosters. My first day in Tanzania would be punctuated by a total failure to catch up on nine hours of jet lag, which was preceded by two days of straight parties and preparations before I left London.

6:08 a.m., the crack of dawn. This is how it would be every day, I was told. Most of the Tanzanians came straight from the shamba (farm), and for them, the local roaming roosters and their punctual-mechanical wake-up call was all part of their daily routine, which apparently didn't include ignoring the sun (or the killing, kicking, chasing or yelling at the inconsiderate livestock roaming an otherwise modernized society).

Half an hour of cocka-doodle-doo later, I conceded the first of many defeats to an insurmountable and omnipresent East African culture. Yet the rudest awakening was to come.

As I stumbled to the shower, I was astounded to see that not only was there no water, but that the water we were expected to get from the nearby well was icy cold. Are you getting the picture of agitation I'm trying to paint?

It's 6:40 a.m., about 11 p.m. on my internal chronometer, and I'm fetching my first bucket of ice water

to shower with.

Correction, the showers weren't working; my first bucket bath (ah... huh ahuh, ahuh). Picture a big, sadistically inclined grin on my face, a dry chuckle.

The grin turned into a frosty daunting of chill as one ice-cold bucket spawned my first African dancing lesson to the rhythm of artificial raindrops.

The process of re-enculturation had begun. I had proven myself worthy in the shower, now I had to prove myself worthy in the breakfast cafeteria.

I began by assertively approaching the first line I saw that appeared to be producing a plate of food as a result of being in it.

By the time I was certain that I was in the right line, I realized:

A) Everybody was ordering their food in Swahili, and

B) I was surrounded by a slender guardrail, which I couldn't duck out of. My first inter-cultural adventure, locked, loaded and ready to go.

As I got to the front of the line, I smiled and looked at the lady. She smiled back and said, "Vipi nawe, unataka kula nini?"

Yeah, exactly. It sounded like gibberish then to me, too. Even then I could guess that the proper response was not, "Uh, yes ma'am," although that's what I said.

More staring, more anxiety followed by confused laughing and impatient pushing. Finally, I pointed at someone's plate to the amusement of everybody in the line, and I received my tea, white bread and scrambled eggs with a side of sea salt sufficient to raise the blood pressure of a camel.

My daily eating adventures were

greatly expanded every time I ordered something different or ate at a different place.

Likewise, the quality of my food varied according to my relative communication success. It's quite an original type of speech anxiety, learning what you said based on what kind of food is given to you. I don't recommend it.

One day, I was with some street friends of mine, and I decided to buy them lunch.

Seizing the opportunity presented here by the naive tourist, they took it upon themselves to order the most delicious delicacy reserved for this oh so special day; beef tongue soup and a side of roasted fat (ah...huh ahuh, ahuh).

Now, picture me again with a big, sadistically inclined grin on my face soon to be animated by animal lard dripping off my cheeks and fresh beef tongue stuck in my teeth. (Go ahead. There's a picture of me in the upper-left corner of the article: Draw it in if you like.)

But not all of my eating experiences were so difficult or disgusting; in fact, most of them were delicious and even enchanting.

In my opinion, the most successful cross-cultural interaction and the tastiest, safest food was always found eating in my friends' homes, especially my girlfriend's.

Spending time learning and adapting to the setting while immersed in a family atmosphere is the best way to obtain cross-cultural communication skills.

The tempo of the language calms.

Without as many external social intrusions, family and cultural values are freed to resonate in action and

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discussion, if you are prepared to listen.

It's these intra-personal settings (at the dinner table, cooking and cleaning together) in which close bonds are gradually formed.

The amalgamation of world views is most efficiently coalesced when cooking together over a big pot of stew followed by a few beers.

I can't begin to share with you the knowledge that I gained as a process of this self-motivated, Afrocentric indoctrination.

What I will say is that, as a result, I gained self-knowledge followed by a world knowledge that I didn't even know I needed to know.

Indoctrinating myself in such a drastically alien language and culture has expanded and distinguished every sense of my being: spiritual, mental and emotional.

After such an awakening, I can't think of a more paradoxical place to return to than Lincoln, Nebraska.

Perhaps in clashing so much with the racial, political and cultural xenophobia of the state, I might be enough of an eyesore — or maybe an entry point for non-traditional thinking.

Although I'm as powerful as the "Big Red" machine (certainly a euphemism of ideology and propa-

ganda for the state), it's inevitable that I will have some impact on campus.

I've already sent one young lady on the same study abroad program I was on, and I am working on a few more (Study Abroad Extravaganza, Union — 7 p.m. Sept. 28th).

One by one, we adventurous liberals are stealing the unsatiated droppings of marginalized underclassmen and sending them overseas. As we return, we add diversity, which builds cultural strength and social harmony — ultimately playing a crucial role in the endurance of humanity.

Next time I'm going to give you, the reader, the "how to" speech on traveling and studying abroad.

I'll include some relevant information on traveling in Third World countries, including how to adjust to it mentally and physically.

After that, I'll have a couple of adventure stories to tell somewhat in the oeuvre of Mark Twain.

Now, which one should I pick: the three-week land trip across Africa or the Indian shoe thief on the train?

Well, tune in same Baker time, same Baker channel in two weeks.

Until then, start plotting and planning your own adventures. There are still plenty out there.

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Under fire

Shedding light on women's studies program leads to backlash



Sunny Side Up

with Jessica Flanagan

The women's studies program. Whacked-out feminists? Maniacal lesbians? If that's what came to mind, don't despair. You're not over-reacting, nor are you guilty of vicious stereotyping. It seems to me you're right on the mark.

So, the women's studies department at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln not only seeks to advance a lesbian agenda, it's intolerant of any opinions that don't mesh with the liberal rhetoric of the academe.

In fact, as a former student of the program, I would suggest not taking any of its classes. Under any circumstances.

In my experience, you will be attacked outright. For evidence of this, please visit the UNL women's studies Web site: www.unl.edu/womensp/wshome/html.

Click on the icon "Women's Studies Students Speak Out in Response to Campus Attacks (New!!!!)"

What was the campus attack you ask? A smear campaign? A string of assaults? What?

Lil' ol' me. That's what.

You see, I wrote a column during the spring semester suggesting that the program was marginalizing itself by putting too much focus on lesbianism,

rather than taking a fresh look at the collective experiences of women.

Well, the entire department became hysterical, as you can see by your computer screen.

But what I said is in fact true. The women's studies department focuses on lesbianism and rejects alternative points of view — like say, for instance, a biblical one.

And their response to my assertion that the program should be audited for content confirms my worst fears.

Let me explain. I think it's incredibly important that a university have programs like women's studies, African-American studies, American Indian studies, etc.

I was all about women's studies. And even now I'm concerned with the undercurrents of oppression that plague women in pop culture and the work place.

So, you would think that women's studies would be the study of women, not the study of lesbians. After all, most women aren't lesbians.

You would think all women would not only be welcome in the program but encouraged to define themselves as feminists.

Well, not me. It seems the instructors and students in the program thought I was anti-women's studies.

Quite the contrary. I was in the program because I happen to believe it's a valid field of study. The study of women, that is. The study of lesbians... well, maybe some other day.

The stated purpose of the department is to have a program that "explores the contributions of women to all aspects of society, and integrates a new and broader understanding of

women and gender into traditional academic fields."

Groovy, I say.

But that's really not the case in these classes — at least not in my experience or any experiences others have recounted to me. In fact, in one class this semester a friend of mine spent the entire first period of class chanting the word "lesbian" just to get comfortable with it.

Just what do you think they'll be studying this semester? Lesbians, I would wager.

So, the Web page was an in-class project overseen by one of my former instructors. And it would seem the course work entailed railing on my colleague.

I'm somewhat flattered that my opinions are so widely regarded. I just didn't realize the process of debunking them was 400 level academic work.

Wow. Good job to me, I guess.

I find it interesting that instead of refuting my ideas and illustrating how they think I'm mistaken, they just took pot shots at me because I don't share their opinions. This is precisely why I encourage you to keep your distance — lest you encounter a bunch of caricatures of angry, whacked-out, irrational, butch women.

Now come on, do you really believe students in this program are all angry, irrational or butch? That's ludicrous.

So were their assertions about me.

I don't know what in the blazes to do. So here I woke up one morning to discover that the women's studies department was after me. The DN printed a "guest column" signed by a dozen or so graduate students directly attacking me.

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Then virtually every student, and a good number of instructors, wrote into the DN hailing me as the spawn of the devil.

Another professor alerted me that the department has reprinted my column on the Internet and posted direct intellectual and character attacks against me.

I later learn they expanded their attack and called it a "discussion" and an effort to "create a working definition" of themselves. Blah, blah, blah.

They say they are pursuing double majors. Me, too. They say they are high achieving. Me, too. They are members of the Honors Program and receive academic awards and scholarships. Me, too. They are activists. Hey, Me, too.

So you would think I'd be allowed to join the party. No.

They call me an outsider. An outside attacker, no less.

I'm not an outsider. For crying out loud, I was in the program. I took their classes. How exactly does that work?

Oh yeah, they don't want any of my kind (read: Christian conservatives) challenging them.

So they go on to "contextualize" their point by railing on everything else I write. They suggest I support a

patriarchal society. They call me misogynistic. That means they think I hate women. They say I misrepresent statistical data and am an irresponsible journalist.

Well, pooh-pooh on them, I say. If they can't practice what they preach, which is embracing diversity and welcoming different perspectives, well, they can just cry about it.

And they did. I tried to talk to the department chairwoman about it, tried to make her see the unequal balance of power when an entire department lashes out against the opinions of a student who merely questioned the curriculum. But she dismissed me.

So here we are, and I'm still wondering how the university can justify departments on the fringe, which are not currently pursuing any real academic achievement and instead pick on undergrads.

And I guess I just wanted to warn students to keep their distance. This goes double if you're male, heterosexual, Christian, conservative or capitalist. You're the enemy, and you must be squashed quickly.

And if you choose to participate in the program, either buy into their jargon quickly or be afraid. Be very afraid.

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