

Camera tricks

*Flash causes trouble
on train ride to Zambia*



After spending three months at the University of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania, I was beginning to feel comfortable in my new setting.

The initial lessons in cultural adaptation were well memorized. Daily we were quizzed on them.

What do you do when class is canceled? Answer: go to the beach. What do you do when the power is out? Answer: light some candles and sing. What do you do when there is music playing? Answer: drink some beer and dance ndombolo.

Our first major exam was much more extensive. However, I still passed with flying colors. The question was: what do you do when class is canceled for three weeks because of faculty protests and student riots? Answer (and I assure you this is the answer on every version of the test): take a three-week trip across Africa by land. And how do you do it? Answer: you make it up as you go along.

Actually, the idea wasn't mine. It was another hot, humid morning defined by roaring roosters and wake up calls throughout the dormitories when Ted (my new friend from Baltimore) barged through my door with the good news. Class had been canceled for at least three weeks, leaving us free from our scholarly duties.

Ted said he was leaving on a train to Zambia and asked if I wanted to go. It took some lobbying with my girlfriend, a quick trip to the bank, half an hour of packing and then we were off.

Because we were so late in buying our tickets, we were left with third-class seats. The train ride to Lusaka, Zambia was two days.

For those of you who haven't made the Dar to Lusaka trip on the TAZARA coach in third class seating, let me describe it to you. There are no beds, no plumbing and little electricity. There are few windows, many thieves and pickpockets and plenty of monstrous bugs. I didn't sleep much those two days.

Before we crossed the border in Zambia, Ted and I befriended a young, cordial Zambian woman who began to casually guide us on our expedition.

She warned us that in the first border town after we cross into Zambia, we should close all the windows we could and secure our belongings as best as possible.

As we crossed the border and the train slowed for the stop, I was surprised to see a herd of passengers anticipating the arrival of our train.

I was stunned and flabbergasted, and actually physically overwhelmed as the 300 or 400 persons waiting bum-rushed the train, completely

oblivious to their need to buy a ticket before securing a seat.

In a matter of less than three minutes, and before the train even slowed to jogging speed, third class went from about one-fourth capacity to over 300 percent full as people ran, jumped and dove through the remaining open windows.

The women, carrying suckling children, 50 pounds of bananas and responsible for the several children following behind, were at quite a disadvantage. By the time they actually made it on the train via the real entrance, the bands of carefree thugs had already stolen the remaining seats.

Needless to say, Ted and I were in a state of semi-shock, not so much from the events described, but from a mistake I now share with you. As the peasants flew through the windows in this rioting hysteria, I dared to capture it on film despite the warnings from our Zambian escort.

I had to get a single picture at least. So, I raised my hand and snapped the shutter just as quickly as possible, hoping people would think I was jerkily stretching. Much to my dismay, the flash was on.

All movement in this ruptured antihill of congestion stopped, and all eyes were frozen on me for two seconds, then back to loading.

At one table of youngsters, a man whom our Zambian friend informed us was the main hustler/town thug, pointed at me and began talking aloud. I stared ahead and played dumb.

He notified a soldier on the train platform who brandished a well-polished AK-47.

Our guide said the thug had told the soldier I was taking a picture of government property and that I didn't have a permit (and he was right). The soldier ran to me, screaming, pointing his gun through the window, into my face.

Excrement flows from my shorts. What do I do...? Do I lose my \$400 camera and take no pictures the rest of the trip or hope he's bluffing?

The clumps of crowded women saved my day! The soldier, realizing that I wasn't just going to give him my camera, tried to board the train. Luckily for me, the entrance was so jam-packed with toddlers, potatoes, bulky farmwomen and firewood that he couldn't get on.

I waited some more. The train began moving again, and as it gained speed and the soldier ran with me, I finally turned to him, made eye contact and swallowed in disbelief.

But my situation with the thugs hadn't improved. One stepped right in front of me and tried to rip my bag straight from my hand. Others began shouting at me and asking me to give them things. So I did.

Five minutes of intensive harassment and pulsating fear was silenced when I gave some of the young men mangoes. The sullen, stern stares and frowns I was getting literally and instantly turned upside down after that meager gesture.

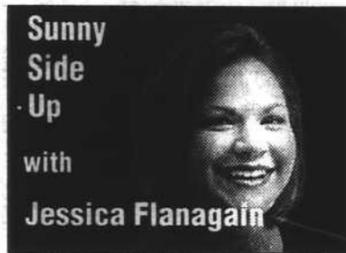
Apparently, I wasn't a "white devil" after all and had a heart that understood some of their suffering. A few mangoes might have saved my life!

Look for highlights of the rest of the trip next Thursday. See you then.

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Hurting by helping

*Affirmative action programs cause
racism they seek to end*



I know this may send some people reeling, but we have not achieved racial equality in America.

I have spent a lot of time pondering why, exactly, this is. I've had a number of courses here at UNL, most notably Blacks in the American Political Process and Black Women Authors, which have provided insight into the complexity of race relations.

I'm still pondering.

I came across an interesting book on the subject this summer, "Good Racism-Bad Racism, An Essay on Racism in America." The book was written by Glenn Freeman, a Nebraska resident, and I had the pleasure of hearing him speak on campus about his book and his experiences as a black man in America.

Glenn Freeman joined the Air Force in 1955 and served three tours in Vietnam.

He retired, highly decorated, from the service in 1985 as a chief master sergeant (highest enlisted grade) after serving his country for 30 years.

In 1989, he was appointed by Gov. Kay Orr as commissioner of the State Equal Opportunity Commission. Currently he serves on the Human Relations Board, as well as the Civil Rights Hearing Board for Omaha and is a senior advisor for U.S. Sen. Chuck Hagel.

Why am I giving you his biography?

Because I want you to understand that this is a man who is not only dedicated to his country and his community but who has worked hard to achieve his goals. And because I want to recount something he shared with a group of UNL students - and I want it to hit you the way it hit me.

He was explaining what it was like to be black in America. He used the examples of people moving to the other side of the street at night out of fear or hatred.

While this experience is both illustrative and absurd, it just didn't do what I imagine it was intended to do.

Now, just as I don't think a man can ever fully understand what it's like to walk into a large meeting and be the only woman present or understand the anger that results from having to be afraid after dark, I don't suppose that I can fully understand what it is like to be black.

However, one personal illustration of Freeman's hit me like a brick. Do you know what his experience as a black in America has

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been? He has repeatedly been mistaken for "the driver" during his political career - and for no other reason than the color of his skin.

In his book, Freeman contends that "all acts of racism, good and bad, derive from the fundamental premise that blacks are genetically inferior." He defines "good racism" as acts intended to benefit blacks, such as affirmative action - and "bad racism" as acts of outright hate and discrimination, like racial slurs and hate crimes.

Freeman is equating affirmative action with hate crimes, and I think he's right to do so. Hate crimes are obvious acts of hatred bubbling above the surface. They are acted out by people who consider blacks to be somehow less than whites.

Likewise, any educational institution that adds points to entrance exams is assuming that without that extra boost, the black student would be unable to achieve. It's the same fundamental principle of inequality that drives these government-mandated equality programs.

Sure, the argument can be made that affirmative action merely levels the playing field in a nation where discrimination runs rampant both outright and as an undercurrent. But the mere fact that a government mandate is the leveling tool for the problem is evidence that Americans lack the confidence in themselves to change their own racial attitudes.

As a concerned American citizen, this cover-up of America's racism makes me uncomfortable. As a conservative, trying to find solutions to the ramifications of this age-old problem rather than addressing head-on its mistakes makes me furious. I'm tired of the denial that racism exists when we can see it all around us. And I'm sick of fundamentally flawed programs that operate on the refusal of white America to come to terms with its own racist views.

Freeman asks black America, "Are we satisfied when political paternalism consistently supports programs that serve only to increase blacks' need for further help rather than aid blacks in becoming independent?"

I hope the answer to his question is no. There is no doubt that black America has a lot of ground to cover, and much of that will have to be covered with its own sweat and tears.

Blacks will have to stand up and be willing to address the challenges they are faced with in their communities and families.

And I believe blacks can rise above their current situations.

But only if white America has the courage to confront its own prejudice. Only if white America has the decency to actually work toward racial equality instead of offering ill-conceived solutions.

Until then, our society will remain a mere reflection of our own racial prejudice.

Exploiting emotions to make a buck

Stamp set is beyond the bounds of good taste



(85 percent of which practice the religion of Islam and speak French) issues a set of stamps of an American "legend" who is best known simply by who his dad was.

Even more depressing is the advertisement for the stamps, which appeared in a recent issue of Newsweek.

"The World Honors John-John!" the headline read. Then, with a newspaper-style report, it went on: "The stunning news of the tragic death of John F. Kennedy Jr. has inspired the world to pay homage to the beloved heir of Camelot. Now collectors are suddenly scrambling to obtain the new Limited Edition Set of 9 Official Postage Stamps commemorating his life. . . Gotta have 'em? They're available for a short time at \$9.95 (plus \$3 p&h)." I'll be perfectly honest by saying that I thought news coverage for John F. Kennedy Jr.'s disappearance and death

was complete overkill to the point that you couldn't turn on the Weather Channel without hearing about how the weather conditions would be for the people searching for JFK Jr.'s body.

Don't get me wrong - I'm not cold. Cold would be my refrigerator, which somehow always turns my milk into an icy white rock. I think John F. Kennedy Jr.'s death deserves coverage but not enough to drown viewers and readers.

I think decency was thrown out the window for sheer speculation, rumors

and, above all else, ratings and money. At the paper I worked at this summer, I overheard the editor telling the copy desk chief to make the next day's front page Kennedy headline "really big" because "we sold 65,000 newspapers yesterday, and we haven't sold that many in a while."

The philosophy behind this latest stamp set is no different than that editor's philosophy. It's dollar signs that matter . . . so blow things up bigger than they really are.

People are probably buying them, licking them and using them, all the while thinking: "Who is this guy with the nice hair? Is he one of the Duke boys?"

And I highly doubt these stamps are being advertised widely in Guinea as emotional keepsakes. People are probably buying them, licking them and using them, all the while thinking: "Who is this guy with the nice hair? Is he one of the Duke boys?"

As long as there's a buck to make, someone will always rely on the frailty of human emotions to make it.

If practices like this anger you, do what I do: First, tell people just how stupid the money play is and second - above all else - DON'T BUY IT.

If people actually honored dead celebrities with their hearts and memories instead of cheap souvenirs, then Guinea might have to rely on agriculture again to make money.

So don't be surprised if you see a George C. Scott stamp set in the future for \$9.95 (plus \$3 p&h). Just don't be surprised enough to buy it.

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