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Port St. Johns Theater Project

Arielle Lever

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Port St. Johns Theater Project

A Capstone Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements of the
Renée Crown University Honors Program at Syracuse University

Arielle Lever

Candidate for B.F.A. Degree
and Renée Crown University Honors

April/2010

Honors Capstone Project in Acting

Capstone Project Advisor: Steve Cross

Honors Reader: Lisa Nicholas

Honors Director: Samuel Gorovitz

Date: _____

For my Capstone Project, I chose to teach drama in Port St. Johns, a rural village in South Africa. My original intent was to develop a drama curriculum to implement at the Sisonke School, a local primary school and the Eluxoweni Boys Home, a nearby orphanage for boys. I spent the summer researching Augusto Boal's work and ultimately developed the curriculum based on my research, past teaching experience, and material I had learned as a student here in the drama department. My original goal was to have some sort of final production, to give the children the empowering tool of putting on a production solely based on their creativity; on their mind, body, voice, and imagination. While we did accomplish this goal, I could never have anticipated the many happy accidents that occurred during my time in South Africa, which ultimately led to the jumpstart of several theater projects in the community. My work over the month included conducting 5-7 hours worth of drama classes per week at the school, a final production, dramatherapy workshops at the orphanage, maskwork, street theater, interactive educational skits, and teacher training workshops. I also developed a method to use drama as a form of conflict mediation and resolution. Although I was not able to fulfill the sustainability model of creating a program that could function without my facilitation, I did learn the importance of using theater as a vehicle to help others help themselves.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Advice to Future Honors Students.....	i
2. Acknowledgements.....	ii-iii
3. Reflective Essay.....	1-32
A. Chapter One: Pre Africa.....	1-8
1. The Development.....	1-4
a. Why this Project.....	1-2
b. Why South Africa.....	2-3
c. Why this Organization.....	3-4
2. The Preparation and Curriculum.....	4-9
a. The Goals.....	4-5
b. The Research.....	6-7
c. The Masks	7-8
d. The Fundraising.....	8-9
B. Chapter Two: Africa.....	10-27
1. The Structure.....	10
2. Sisonke School.....	10-14
a. Classwork and Production.....	10-13
b. Workshops and Co-Curricular Activities.....	13-14
c. Conflict Mediation and Teacher Training.....	14-17
3. Eluxoweni Boys Home.....	17-20
a. Dramatherapy and Maskwork.....	17-19
b. Street Theater.....	19-20
4. Community Work.....	20-21
5. Life in Port St. Johns.....	21-27
a. The Issues.....	21-22
b. The Solutions.....	22-25
c. The People.....	25-27
C. Chapter Three: Post Africa.....	28-38
1. What I Learned.....	28-31
a. On Living.....	28-29
b. On Teaching.....	30
c. On Theater.....	31
2. The Future.....	31-32
4. Written Summary.....	33-38
4. Supplemental Materials.....	39-77
1. My Blog.....	39-74
2. Student Generated Work.....	75
3. Proposal.....	76-77
4. Research and Curriculum.....	notebook included
5. Presentation.....	DVD included

My capstone project has undergone several massive changes since it's beginning days. In fact, as of a year ago, I had proposed to do a different project entirely. I had planned to do a one woman show. Several factors contributed to my project changes, but when my script disappeared into the ethers of a crashed hard drive, I knew it was time to rethink my project. What began as a technological disaster resulted in the biggest happy accident. It wasn't until I was put in a position where I had to start from ground zero, that I began to evaluate what I truly wanted out of the capstone project. I realized that my original proposal lent itself to a safe, easy, and comfortable project, which would fulfill the requirement. I had always thought of the capstone project in this way, as something that I had to do, a burden almost. However, I encourage all of you to change your way of thinking, to see it as an amazing opportunity and platform to create a revolutionary project. It can be a vehicle to explore and master something in your field which you are passionate about. If you begin to think of the project in this way, I guarantee that the project will be unbelievably fulfilling and will act as an inspiration as opposed to a nuisance. The key is selecting and creating something that you are interested in and passionate about. It was this interest and passion that drove me to have a genuinely life changing experience. So please, please, take advantage of this wonderful opportunity, of the resources of the program...you can quite literally change the world because of it!

I don't really know how to begin to thank every one who helped and contributed to this project, and there are many many people to thank.

First and foremost I would like to thank the Honors Program for providing this opportunity. Specifically, I would like to thank Eric Holzwarth who allowed me to change my project entirely and worked through so many logistics with me to allow this originally lofty idea to become a reality. I also could not have carried out this project without the generous Crown Scholar award, so I thank Mrs. Crown for making this project possible.

I also owe a very big thank you to my very supportive parents who were apprehensive (to put it mildly) to allow me to go to Africa. So I thank them for allowing me to take risks and supporting me, however crazy they may have thought me to be. I know they suffered many sleepless nights of tossing and turning, wondering if I was safe halfway across the world, so I thank them for trusting in the good of what I was doing, however scary it may have been.

In order to carry out this project, I had to take a leave of absence from school. However, this was only made possible with the help of my faculty advisor Lizzie Ingram who represented me in faculty meetings when my petitions were considered. If it were not for her support, I would not have received enough credits to take my semester off.

There were many involved in the preparation process as well. My biggest thanks go out to Jonathan Becker and Bruce Marrs who so generously donated

thirty plus masks to take overseas with me. Thanks to both of them for their maskmaking guidance as well. Thanks to Sara Madoff, Jessica Felton, Joan Segal, Shelley Hendler, and Patti Spigel for the many hours spent sitting on my bathroom, painting masks with me.

I also would like to include and thank all of the donors who contributed to building the new Sisonke School. A special thank you to Steven Silverman for an unbelievably generous contribution. If it were not for the goodwill of my community the children would not be sitting in desks learning today.

Lastly I want to thank the community of Port St. Johns for being so open and welcoming me and allowing me to find a home away from home. Thank you to Phillipa Coleburne and Tuba Kocuglu especially for the many email correspondences and making me feel comfortable being so far away. Thank you to Diane, Rich, and Adam for their passion and drive to help the community and for providing a constant springboard for new ideas. But most of all, thank you to my students, the best teachers I could have ever asked for.

CHAPTER ONE: PRE-AFRICA

THE DEVELOPMENT

WHY THIS PROJECT

If you would have asked me a year ago where I thought I would be in October of 2009, I would have quickly and easily answered, “Syracuse, finishing my final semester in the drama department.” I would have responded this way because that was plan—that was what I was supposed to do. But I have since learned that some of the most tremendous and rewarding experiences come when unexpected. This was the case with my capstone project; The South Africa Theater Project.

How did all of this transpire if the plan was to be in Syracuse? I returned second semester junior year from the SU London program. I did all that you do when you are abroad; I lived, I learned, I traveled, I experienced. I came back to Syracuse and immediately launched into a very intense production of The Diary of Anne Frank at Syracuse Stage. While this was unbelievably rewarding in some respects, I found that it was putting me in a very self involved place, which often times happens to me when working rigorously on a production. I felt unsettled about this, but didn’t quite know what to do. I was involved in ‘The Actors Workshop’ at the time, an on campus organization dedicated to using theater with the special needs community. I threw myself into a leadership position, to counterbalance my feelings of selfishness. However, something was still off.

Simultaneously, I submitted my capstone proposal and applied for the Crown-Wise grant, quite honestly choosing a comfortable project, an easy way

out. I proposed to a one woman show that which I had previously worked on. My goal was to get it done as quickly and easily as possible in order to fulfill the requirement. Essentially, I was taking the easy way out, entirely blind to the fact that capstone is and can be a wonderful platform to launch a new project and do something amazing. It wasn't until after I had received the grant that I came to understand this. I was sitting in my dorm room, with a letter announcing that I had received a very large sum of money to execute my initial project. While I was excited, I felt uneasy and selfish using the money in such a self promoting way. I felt that I could put the money to much better use. So there I was, asking myself "If some one handed me a large sum of money, what would I do with it?" My response, "I would do something involving theater, I would help people, and I would travel." And thus...The South Africa Theatre Project was born.

WHY SOUTH AFRICA

So how did it begin? Quite literally, by googling "volunteer drama/teach abroad [insert name of a developing nation here]." I knew I wanted to target a third world community, but I also knew that I needed to specify my search. "Volunteer drama/teach abroad developing nation" was only going to yield so many results. I also knew that my generalized search was a reflection on my generalized ideas behind the project. I needed to clarify for myself why this was important to me and how it connected to what I care about and stand for in the larger scheme of things.

The HIV/AIDS epidemic has always been on my social radar. I've spent the past three summers bicycling down the coast of California, raising awareness about the epidemic while fundraising for AIDS research and services. Because South Africa has such a high HIV/AIDS population and is so dramatically affected by the virus, I decided to focus my attention there. As my google searches became more specific, my lofty ideas surrounding the project became more concrete as plans began to materialize and solidify.

WHY THIS ORGANIZATION

After contacting a number of schools, programs, and organizations, I settled upon the South Africa Volunteers Project. This of course was risky, considering I only had the ever so trustworthy Internet on which to base my decision. I chose this program first and foremost because I had great correspondences with the head of the program. Both hers and the programs philosophy seemed aligned with mine. One of the things I was most wary of was entering a community, seeming like an intruder. When it comes to volunteering and teaching (especially when the outsider comes from a "more privileged community") there is a fine line between sharing/teaching and imposing. I never wanted to take on the assuming position of knowing and understanding how they lived, and I certainly never wanted to make it seem like I wanted to change their ways because mine was better. Essentially, I wanted to steer as far away from the role of "the white privileged man helping the less fortunate" and wanted to prevent and "us vs. them" relationship. Because South Africa Volunteers was built on creating a sustainable

infrastructure from within the community, as opposed to relying on outside volunteers, it seemed like it would provide a great model for collaboration as opposed to imposition. Also, South Africa is crime ridden, so I preferred to be in a more rural and secluded community as opposed to some of the larger, more unsafe cities. The safety factor coupled with my desire to interact directly with a small community, led me to this program. Many organizations have very large volunteer programs in which there is a bit of an agenda; volunteers pay a large fee and must follow a highly formulized program. Ultimately, they don't work closely with the community, but get the altruistic feeling with enough photo opportunities to create a scrapbook of the experience. I'm being cynical, but I felt like this program was established enough to be trusted but small enough to give me the opportunity work closely and connect deeply with the community. Plus, the South Africa Volunteers Project had a number of interlinked programs as opposed a single focus, meaning I could work in both the primary school and orphanage, while spending my free time helping in the sustainable garden located on the premise. They also gave me the liberty to design and implement my own curriculum as opposed to subscribing to a preexisting prescribed program.

THE PREPARATION and CURRICULUM

THE GOALS

Developing a curriculum was both liberating and terrifying. Here I am, a barely twenty one acting major, with the pressure to create an entire curriculum. So I first set goals, outlining why I wanted to do this specific project and what I

hoped the community would gain. The overarching, umbrella goal of the project was to explore theater as a form of outreach, as a vehicle for helping others. I have mostly known theater from a performance perspective. However, I don't believe theater should only be reserved for the stage and those who can afford it. I think it is most effective when taken out of context and brought directly into the community. I believe it should catalyze people to think and feel differently about a subject. It can provide them with a vehicle to communicate about the issues surrounding them. While I understood this intellectually, in theory, I wanted to put it into practice, so that I could viscerally understand this principle.

I knew that I would be working closely with children ages 4-12 in a primary school (the Sisonke School) and boys ages 12-17 at the local orphanage [the Eluxoweni Boys Home]. I also knew going in that the community was unbelievably impoverished, that recreational activities were virtually nonexistent. The community was once described to me in an email as a landscape of issues ranging from dysfunction in the home to drug abuse and everything in between. Therefore, I made it my prerogative to create opportunity through theater; to give the children the empowering tool to create solely using their voices, bodies, imaginations, and the raw materials, which surrounded them. So my primary goal was to use the curriculum as a means to work towards a self generated final production. But how?

THE RESEARCH

First, I drew from what I had learned as a student in classes in the drama department. I thought it would be effective to take the material that I learned as a student and use it to teach others. After all, learning and teaching is really a symbiotic relationship. In order to teach successfully, one must be open to learn. Similarly, students often times teach their teachers. I thought teaching what I learned would provide a clear indication what I did and didn't understand as a student.

In addition to drawing from classes, I also took from lessons and exercises that I had used in past teaching experiences. Over the years, I have taught within several different programs. While each program catered to a different demographic, I was able to glean a lot from what I found to be effective with my students in other programs.

Lastly, I had become increasingly interested in a sect of theater known as 'Theater of the Opressed', which focuses on the role of theater in the community. Augusto Boal, the founder, views theater as a vehicle to engage community members and encourage them to use theater to deal directly with the issues surrounding them. Because I knew the community was so steeped in issues, I wanted to use theater as a means of helping them confront and address these issues from the inside out. His three books (Theater of the Opressed, Theater Games for Actors and Non Actors, and The Rainbow of Desire) combined with

my past student and teaching experience, led to the development of my curriculum.

I first wrote out all of the games and exercises that I had learned either through experience or research and then categorized them. Using these categories, I created a progression of exercises, which I would later tailor to the specific school schedule. I focused a great deal of the curriculum on maskwork and physical theater. First of all, this is where I have the most experience and training. Secondly, I knew there would be a huge language barrier [after all, they speak xhosa, a click language], and I had no idea how much/if any English they would understand or speak. I hoped that an emphasis on physical theater would transcend communication barriers. The maskwork is also unbelievably effective in new groups because it allows people to go to extremes and take risks. I wanted the children to feel at ease. Because you can essentially hide behind the mask, I thought this would be a good tool to get the kids comfortable off the getco.

THE MASKS

So September rolled around and I was due to leave in a month I had my curriculum together, but no masks. The original plan was to make the masks myself. I had taken a maskmaking class during my sophomore year. However, forgot how long of a process it is. This coupled with my lack of arts and crafts savvy left me with no masks. However, it was such a building block and focus of my curriculum. I couldn't bear to eliminate the entire maskwork portion entirely, so I quickly turned to some contacts. After a series of emails and phone

conversations with unbelievably gracious theater companies and maskmakers, I had thirty professional donated sitting in my living room. Because the masks were designed here in the states, for actors here in America, I had to tailor them slightly. I did some more research on the community, culture, and history of African masks and then repainted the masks I had received. After all, it wouldn't be socially sound for me to arrive in this community with thirty masks designed for upper class white college students. The masks still remain in Port St. Johns with the students and I have since maintained a wonderful relationship with my generous donors.

THE FUNDRAISING

I had one final pre-trip agenda, which was neither planned nor expected. Several weeks before I left, I received a desperate plea from the head of the program. She had recently been informed that they had lost the land on their current property and were going to need to find a new location for the following school term. Although she had found a property, she had no money to secure it or begin the building process. While my instinct was to jumpstart a fundraising program, I also felt conflicted. I participate in the AIDS LifeCycle bike ride every summer, in which each participant must raise a minimum of \$3000 to participate. While I wanted to help the Sisonke School, I had just asked friends and family for money for the AIDS cause. I felt uncomfortable asking for more money, especially given the economic climate. After all, my initial incentive for this project was educational, not financial. However, I kept receiving emails and

couldn't bear to sit back without taking initiative. So I designed a fundraising program, headlined by the motto 'a little bit goes a long way'. I tried to highlight the disparity between our and Africa's cost of living, hoping that I could bring over a few hundred dollars at best. Although this didn't seem like a huge sum, I knew a few hundred dollars could build several structures for the school. So I hesitantly pitched the idea, expecting little response. Within three weeks I had raised over \$3500. The new school is now standing, thanks to my unbelievably giving friends and family.

So with money for the school in hand, masks packed, and curriculum somewhat laid out, I was ready to go. My biggest challenge going in was finding the balance between planning enough so that I was prepared and having enough flexibility to go with whatever I was given. After all, the best way to teach is to have a plan with the understanding and expectation to throw it all away and play fifty two card pickup once faced with the actual students. Because, however much you prepare, you can never know what you are going to get, especially when traveling into such foreign territory. Little did I know, that this foreign territory would lend itself to a series of unbelievable projects, experiences, and relationships that I could have never imagined or anticipated. Now that you understand the plan; here is what actually happened:

CHAPTER TWO: AFRICA

THE STRUCTURE

To understand how everything worked and fit together, I will give you a sense of my schedule and the project breakdown. Everyday, for two hours in the morning, I taught English to grades 2-3. I taught drama class in the afternoon four times a week

(I worked with the oldest group, grades 4-5, two times a week. I then worked with grades 1-2 and 2-3 respectively once a week). I also tutored children individually in English (specifically phoenetics) during my free periods throughout the day. Then, after school on Tuesdays and Thursdays I worked with the boys at the Eluxoweni Boys home. On Monday and Wednesday afternoons I attended teacher meetings and later conducted teacher training sessions. Lunch time was mostly dedicated to mask workshops or The Lunchtime Crew, which I will explain later. I spent weekends curriculum building, lesson planning, , interacting with the community or other organizations in the community, and enjoying the outdoors and beauty of the land which surrounded me.

SISONKE SCHOOL

CLASSWORK AND PRODUCTION

I designed the curriculum with the hopes of it becoming stepping stones to a culminating, final production. However, the question and challenge was how to include all ninety students in a cohesive performance. This seemed difficult considering I taught the students in three different sections throughout the week.

Also, the age and development of the children varied so greatly across the board. While I wanted to include the entire school, I also understood that it wouldn't be practically possible to work with all the students at once.

I spent the first week getting acclimated, introducing trust exercises and games, encouraging the students to become comfortable with both the material and me. I tried to gauge their prior understanding and knowledge of theater. So I began by asking them what the words theater, character, and story meant to them. No response. They stared at me blankly. A few of them whispered to each other in xhosa, their native language. I tried desperately to teach them some of these ideas verbally, realizing very quickly that I was going to be learning and teaching by doing, not by talking. So I immediately started to introduce exercises, allowing them to feel and experience as opposed to conceptualize. In the meantime, during this first week, I encouraged them to offer suggestions of a common song, story, poem, or folktale with which we could base our production. Ultimately, we chose a poem, which they all knew and could practice as a group throughout my time there.

Because I was scheduled to work with the oldest group the most, and because they were the most mature, I decided to label them the 'core storytellers', giving them the largest creative role. I prompted them stretch their imaginations and take liberties with the poem; to use it as a building block and then make it their own. Throughout this, they began to learn and understand the fundamental principles of storytelling and character. While they continued to delve deeply into

creating and expanding the story, I used the exercises from the curriculum as a means of molding the story. For example, I used appropriate games, exercises and masks as a vehicle to shape and illuminate the story they wanted to tell, while teaching them the core principles of acting.

Simultaneously I used simplified versions of these same exercises with the younger two groups. Similarly, all of the exercises were taught with the final production in mind. So that when the students were learning the section on 'sound and movement' I had them create a thunderstorm with their voices and bodies. I did this very deliberately, with the knowledge that we were going to need to create a thunderstorm in the show. When I felt like the children had a good grasp on the exercises, I would then explain where it would fit in the show. This way I was working with the three groups independently in order to create a cohesive whole.

I also made sure to make the process as holistic and cross disciplinary as possible, encouraging the students to draw from their other lessons. For example, we took several students poetry and writing from English class, created corresponding physical movements and choreography, and incorporated it into the production. I was also very sensitive to the fact that there were varying degrees of English proficiency among both the students and audience. Therefore, I made sure to incorporate English as well as xhosa in the production. This provided an interesting balance, one, which allowed them to practice their speaking, and

comprehension skills, without excluding any one or pushing them too far out of their comfort zones.

And that was how we developed the production, ‘Ukeke: the Mischief Maker’, the first of hopefully many Sisonke School productions. We performed the production for friends, family, and members of the community outside in an open clearing in town. We didn’t need a theater, we made our own stage. And just as I had hoped, the children used their imaginations, bodies, and voices to communicate an entirely self-generated piece. The piece ended in the children circling around the audience, reciting a poem with which we closed every class. A poem, which I believe speaks to the core function and importance of theater. Together, the children and audience chanted: ‘I take from the heavens all that I need and I bring it into me. I take from the earth all that I need and I bring it into me. And when I have it inside me: I give it away.’”

WORKSHOPS AND CO-CURRICULAR PROJECTS

However, several additional projects spontaneously transpired, which I could have never predicted, no matter how beautifully I had planned. In some ways, these were the most exciting projects, because they were so unexpected. For example, the kids were so taken and enthralled with the maskwork, that I would run mask workshops during breaks. Also, about halfway through my stay, I started working with ‘The Lunchtime Crew’, a small group of children who opted to meet during lunch everyday (hence the name.) The Lunchtime Crew evolved out of both my and the children’s desire to do more theater work outside the

classroom. As I became more integrated into the community, I also became increasingly more aware of the issues within the community. I began to brainstorm the ways in which, theater could be used constructively to address these issues. My first instinct was to work within the school to create a theater group dedicated to interactive educational theater for kids by kids.

The Lunchtime Crew's first project evolved when a very pressing issue surfaced in a nearby community. It came to our attention that our neighbors up the mountain were eating monkeys. This was not only a health but moral issue, bordering on potential cannibalism. I couldn't stand to sit back and watch, without taking action. I wanted to use Boal's model for interactive theater education to create a theater piece about the issue. This type of theater tends to be effective because it is for kids by kids, it is very interactive and physical, is generated from the inside so as to avoid any commentary on how/why the issue is wrong, and then is designed to help the kids problem solve together to figure out alternative solutions. So I turned to the Lunchtime Crew and together we created the monkey skit, which we took to several schools in the community, educating them and working with them to create alternate solutions for a more healthy and safe community.

CONFLICT MEDIATION AND TEACHER TRAINING

As I mentioned earlier, my teaching extended beyond theater. I was originally assigned to assist the English teacher, Lumka, a native of Port St. Johns. In the beginning I would help her with lessons, read a story to the

children, play games with them. However, after a few days, Lumka confronted me. She was having troubles at home and asked if I'd feel comfortable taking over the class entirely for the rest of my stay. I was apprehensive at first because I didn't think I was qualified or prepared. But I agreed. What began as a reluctant agreement resulted in a wonderful learning experience. It gave me the opportunity to connect deeply with the children in grades 2-3, collaborate with a local teacher, and integrate and hone my theater teaching skills.

For example, I was confronted with many disciplinary issues. Unlike the States, I was teaching up to forty children at a time, catering to a broad range of needs and skills (some students could barely speak English, others could read and write beautifully). Discipline issues extended far beyond the talking out of hand that I was used to with children in the United States. In fact, it was a good day and I was lucky if I only had to handle two to three physical outbursts per class. Because the discipline standards are so different, because there are so many students in one classroom, and because the students are very frustrated and unsure of how to channel their energy, they often times resort to physical violence. This is a product of cultural conditioning. In the home and community, children see and are taught patterns of physical violence as a coping mechanism. However, this results in a very chaotic working environment, one that is not very conducive to effective learning. Local teachers are unsure of how to handle the fighting and become frustrated, either ignoring it completely, or at worst, hitting the students

back, further perpetuating a very abusive and unhealthy cycle. At first, I had no idea how to address the issue, and then turned to theater to help solve it.

I began using theater games as a form of conflict mediation. For example, a fight would break out, I would have the students involved come stand in front of the room, and each voice their version of what happened. Then I would invite other students to act out the versions of the story they heard, while the students involved watched a reenactment of the fight happening in front of them. I asked all parties how they felt watching and experiencing it. Because many answered that they felt sad or bad, I allowed them to change the ending of the fight, encouraging them to work towards alternatives to physical violence. The class would then have a dialogue about it and I would force the children involved in the fight to look into each other in the eyes and apologize. The vulnerability of this exercise often times dramatically affected the children, reinforcing the feelings behind their actions, ultimately causing them to reflect upon the repercussions. Gradually, over time, the fights decreased and an increased sense of respect existed in the room, making it easier for me to teach and the students to learn.

Lumka, the teacher I was assisting, observed me doing this and started adopting some of the methods for her classes. Because she found them effective, she asked the head of the school if I could do a teacher training session specifically on theater and discipline. Thus began one of many teacher training sessions. For example, I did one on conflict mediation, another on integrating

theater into the classroom/other subjects, and another on maskwork. For each session I would provide a document outlining the steps of the subject at hand, would conduct mock classes with the teachers so they were actually getting up and practicing the principles, and then finally ending with a question and answer session. I also invited teachers to come in and observe whenever they desired so that they could see the principles practiced firsthand. We had these teacher meetings on Mondays and Wednesdays, but began using Wednesdays a platform to collaborate as teachers. Again, I never wanted to make it seem like this was 'the right way'. Instead, I invited the teachers in, worked with them, got their feedback, and then offered it to them as a springboard for creating new ideas. Because of our obvious cultural difference, the teachers often times challenged me, illuminating ideas I hadn't previously thought of, inspiring me to make proactive changes. We taught each other and shared ideas in order to create new teaching practices founded upon cultural collaboration.

ELUXOWENI BOYS HOME

DRAMATHERAPY AND MASKWORK

While I spent Monday and Wednesday afternoons with the teachers, I spent my Tuesday and Thursday afternoons an unbelievable group of 12-17 year olds at the Eluxoweni Boys Home. When I heard that I was going to be working strictly with adolescent boys who came from at risk or highly dysfunctional homes, I was a bit nervous. I expected them to be volatile and aggressive and didn't expect them be very receptive to the games and exercises. But my

assumptions couldn't have been more wrong. They were wonderfully alive to the idea of theater, bringing an openness and joy to every exercise I introduced. They were kind and sweet, wise beyond their years. Their stories, journeys, and ability to turn their lives around at such a young age were tremendously inspiring. Every week, I so looked forward to my afternoons at the boys home.

My goal for the boys was two-fold. I wanted to provide them with a means of escaping their harsh reality [via the maskwork] but also with the tools to cope with their reality [via the dramatherapy/Boal work]. Therefore, I made sure to balance between the two, always approaching the work with an increased level of sensitivity, constantly gauging where the boys were and what they needed. For example, if I came in one day, began the dramatherapy and it became too overwhelming, I would immediately switch gears to maskwork to counterbalance the intensity of the issues at hand.

However, I had no idea how developed the maskwork would become. It all began during my third session with them. We were doing basic maskwork exercises when I noticed one of the boys was missing. I panicked because I couldn't find him anywhere. Before long, I noticed he had slipped off to the entrance of the home, and with his mask still on, was interacting with locals on the street. My instinct was to yell at him; he had terrified me, I thought I lost him. But before I could yell at him, I realized the brilliance of what he was doing. What good was the maskwork if it was confined to the yards of the orphanage? I immediately rounded up the boys, explained that they were to maintain there

mask characters no matter the circumstances, and led the parade of boys through the streets of Port St. Johns. They made people laugh, they made people scream. In fact, I think they made one woman cry. It was hard to get them back to the home that night, but they returned to the orphanage exhilarated, anxious and eager to go back out onto the streets the next week.

STREET THEATER

How could I not have realized this before? Of course, the boys should be doing street theater. They are orphans, street children. The life of the streets is what they know best...what could be more perfect than street theater for street children? And thus began a series of street theater performances. By the middle of my stay, the boys were building upon the maskwork and constructing skits, which addressed issues that were important to them. The final and last piece, the anti drug skit was a street theater performance surrounding drug and alcohol abuse, an issue that was close to home for most of the boys. By the end of the skit we had a small gathering of townspeople, parading through the streets chanting 'no drugs, no drugs'.

The most rewarding part of the experience was that the boys began receiving small change for their work. During one of their earlier street performances, a large crowd had formed in front of a local shop. There was an empty carton sitting on the ground where the boys were performing. Some one threw some small change into the empty carton, another person added to the pot, and by the end of the show the boys had a small collection going. They returned to the

home that night, bursting with excitement. “We’ve got to do major plannage,” shouted Big Show, one of the older boys. “We’ve got to use this to make money! We don’t need to steal any more or sell stupid candy. We can just do this!” What started off as a goofy street parade amounted to a lifechanging alternative for the boys. It provided them with a viable alternative to make money, one which replaced bad habits and patterns of stealing with self generated, creative opportunity.

It also allowed the boys to gain a new reputation in the community. They had always been looked down upon and viewed negatively, as nuisances. But now, people were interested in what they were doing. And whether the townspeople were laughing at or with them, they were beginning to be noticed, not for their misfortune, but for their creativity and ability to take risks.

COMMUNITY WORK

As people in the community became increasingly more aware and interested in the theater projects, I started receiving requests from other local organizations. Richard Norton, for example, was launching an SPCA branch in the area. He saw the maskwork and was inspired to use it as a foundation for his education program. After many meetings and email correspondences he now has several dog masks, which he uses to educate communities about issues such as animal welfare, rabies prevention, and domestication of animals. I also worked with a local organization called CART [Center for Appropriate Rural

Technology], brainstorming and writing proposals to develop a more permanent theater presence in the community.

LIFE IN PORT ST. JOHNS

THE ISSUES

A more permanent version of Port St. Johns Theater Project could be unbelievably successful in a community such as this. The beautiful thing about this work is that it can be done anywhere. However, it becomes especially pertinent and effective in a community where issues are so rampant. I wish I could have pointed to one of the many community issues and said if we just eliminated this, then all of the rest of the problems would be fixed. However, they were closely tied and interwoven that it became difficult to compartmentalize or separate one from the other. It's as if each issue builds on another.

For example extraordinary poverty is glaringly evident. This largely stems from a lack of opportunity that exists in the community. This is connected to the larger issue of the victim complex, which is so deeply rooted in the history of apartheid. Because the members of the community have been treated like victims for so long, they have assumed the position and have adopted this lifestyle instead of making active changes to pursue opportunity. Children see these patterns and adopt similar ways of living, perpetuating the vicious cycle. Because they are not encouraged to attend school, their sphere consists mostly of dysfunctional homes filled with both physical and drug abuse. Nine out of ten

families are broken, usually with a missing father figure. For the lucky few that are given the opportunity to go to school, they have little recreational outlets once the school day is over. They go to school (usually a government school, most of which are unbelievably corrupt, where teachers beating students is a norm) and then are left to the streets, to a four mile walk home. They typically return home to their dysfunctional families, or if they are lucky to meet their parents at the local candy stand where they work and are left to sit for hours until their parents workday is over. The poverty, lack of opportunity, and overall lack of education lead to unhealthy eating and living choices. The little money that people do have are usually spent on drugs or alcohol, which seem like the quick fix to sea of problems. This leads to the passing down of poor habits from generation to generation as well as unbelievable health hazards and problems. After all, South Africa is one of, if not the most afflicted HIV/AIDS population. So what to do?

THE SOLUTIONS

It seems silly and naïve...but educate! The children I worked with were so eager and had so much potential. It broke my heart to see their lives outside of school. I wanted so much to believe that they could transcend their circumstances. But the truth is that the environment is toxic, leaving the children with little choice but to turn to the default of poor habits. They aren't really given an opportunity to turn their life around. I think the children need to be exposed to other opportunities and alternatives. They need to be encouraged and inspired to

believe that they have the power to choose not to live this way. In the mean time, we can also work together to resolve some of the issues at hand.

After returning home, I would talk to friends and family about the way of life in Port St. Johns, sharing my experience, hoping to raise peoples awareness. They would usually respond like this, “That sounds awful! How could you live among that?”. However, depressing it may have been at times, it also created an unbelievable drive to work towards making things better. Dinner conversation in Port St. Johns was never a polite ‘how was your day’? It was always a heated dialogue about an issue at hand, a meeting or problem solving session on how to make improvements.

And the circumstances dictated a very different way of living, one in which lent itself naturally to positive alternatives. Because the community is so economically devastated, there is no choice but to be creative and efficient about living choices. For example, the school had little to no money for paper, so we recycled everything. Not in a half hearted trendy, I’m being green kind of a way. In more of a survival way, in which we were given no choice but to be mindful and savvy about consuming and expending.

We of course did not have access to the advanced technology, which we so take for granted here in the Western world. There was something wonderfully refreshing about this. I wasn’t distracted and felt more committed to ‘doing’. The irony was, I wasn’t really ‘doing’ a lot, at least not in the sense of how we think of the word. I wasn’t going to five million different classes, meetings, and activities.

Because there is less technology, because there aren't cars to go from place to place, because the community is still so bare and rooted to the rawness of the little that they have, tasks are carried out more carefully and fully. For example, an entire day could be dedicated to getting water from the river, a very rigorous and difficult task when you think about what is really behind it. So living in Port St. Johns taught me to do less, but to carry out what I was doing more fully. And this trickled down to all daily things; the way we ate, the way we showered [or didn't shower], the way we went to the bathroom.

In an effort to spread the idea of sustainability throughout the community, South Africa Volunteers has an unbelievable garden on the premise. This not only helps to conserve money but also provides the people in the surrounding area with a steady food supply. Although the area is wildly impoverished, the grounds are rich and lush. I can't even adequately describe just how beautiful the land is. It is so ironic to see such economic and social devastation set against such a stunningly beautiful landscape. However, the land provides far more than a great Kodak photo opportunity. It provides a great potential opportunity for the people to transcend the poverty, which surrounds them. It provides them with the alternative to cultivate and live off the land. This of course requires a certain awareness and mindfulness. It also requires a knowledge of the land in order to be carried out and sustained successfully. However, the solutions to the problems are inherently there. No, the people do not have a great deal of money, no, most do not have jobs, however, they could easily make up for the inability to buy

groceries by living off the land! It's just a matter being open to seeing alternatives and making changes. This would inherently lead the to a more healthy, productive, and sustainable life. Once again, however, the key, is not to wag a finger and criticize, it is to provide an outlet to help the people help themselves.

THE PEOPLE

I'm making it out to seem as though the people are corrupt and terrible. They aren't. In fact, they were some of the most warm and welcoming people I have encountered. Although we often times had trouble understanding each other, we resorted to the basic fundamentals of human communication and interaction. In some ways, I felt like I connected to the people on a deeper level than I do on a normal daily basis here. Because we couldn't understand each other, we had to fight to communicate. We had to hold each others hands, hug, so that we could establish a shared understanding.

I feel like many people have an idea that South Africa is dangerous and unsafe. Of course we make assumptions about things that are unfamiliar to us. I was asked repeatedly if it was dangerous. I honestly felt more safe in Port St. Johns than I do in Syracuse, New York. Like all places, you just have to be smart and aware. For example, I knew not to leave my compound after dark. Although the community is warm, and friendly, the scene shifts at night. The alcohol seeps in and the men especially transform. So I just knew not to go out after dark.

That being said, I was surprised as to how generally receptive the community was to me. I so clearly stuck out; there was no hiding. For once, I was a White

minority in a sea of the Black majority where English was not heralded as the great or common language. In fact, because the two languages are so phonetically different, I couldn't even pretend to follow along in conversations. I had to learn to accept being a foreigner in the dark.

Because we are for the most part privileged Americans with a lot of power, I think it is important to be put in another place, outside of your comfort zone, where you don't stand as the most understood or powerful.

However, in a lot of ways, I still felt like I was put on a pedestal and treated too well. This was less to do with me being an American and more to do with me being a White person in a post apartheid culture. Although apartheid seems as though it is dead and buried, a great deal of it lingers, which will take years to eliminate and reverse. For example, Whites and Blacks do not interact for the most part. Therefore teacher meetings were fascinating because they left us with no choice but to interact. However much the meetings were designed to bridge the racial gap, a divide still existed. I noticed that I tended to speak and voice my opinion far more than any of the local teachers, which was strange because I was the outsider. Whenever I made a suggestion, they nodded, smiled, and agreed, even if my suggestion was off base. I began to realize that they agreed with whatever I said because of who I was and what I stood for. I learned to silence myself in order to give them a voice. It wasn't until I was able to step back and become a quiet observer that true collaboration happened.

But however hard I tried to fight and challenge the divide, the preexisting racial standards usually trumped my effort. For example, I invited some of my new friends, my fellow teachers, to my goodbye party, which was largely made up of White locals. There was this very strange and awkward moment when my Black teacher friends arrived. Both parties were stunned into silence. It was as though my Black teacher friends were shocked that I hadn't warned them that this was a White party and my White friends were appalled that I assumed I could invite Blacks.

CHAPTER THREE: POST AFRICA

WHAT I LEARNED

ON LIVING

So besides learning the norms and etiquette behind inviting people to a party, living in Port St. Johns taught me more than I can properly articulate on paper. For one, it pushed me out of my comfort zone and into a culture where I learned to be open minded and non judgmental, no matter the circumstance. There were so many things that seemed ‘wrong’. However, I learned to take a step back and refrain from judgment. This in turn allowed me to learn from the people and the land in order to try and understand how and why the community came to be that way. I learned you must first live in a place and interact with the people in order to understand the circumstances before trying to help or make changes in the community. Also I learned that it’s not about making changes, it’s about collaborating and working with the community to find a means for them to help themselves in a way which is rewarding and useful to them.

I come from a place in society where I am used to excess and the idea of more. By placing myself in an environment where there was less, I learned to live more simply and fully. I also learned not to be critical when some of my better habits from South Africa weren’t transferable to life back at home. I wanted to come home and live the way that I did in South Africa, with an intensely heightened awareness of how much water I was using when washing the dishes or a lack of connection to the Internet or my cell phone. But the reality is that you

adapt to your circumstances. When you are given the opportunity to live more lavishly, you do. I had to learn to accept that. While I constantly strive to living in a more mindful and resourceful manner, I try not to judge myself or others when I slip. Because the truth of the matter is, this isn't Port St. Johns and we do have cars and shoes and don't walk for miles barefoot. Does that mean we should go drive Hummers? No. But it also doesn't mean that we are wrong for having an iphone and using it.

That being said, I did see the beauty of not being tainted by technology. I had no idea how the kids would respond to the masks. But the way they reacted, it was as if I had brought a wii to the town. And it was so refreshing to be among children who found such joy in something creative. Because they don't have the distraction of TV and video games, they are much more attuned to their instincts and sense of play. Many times I felt like they were fulfilling the exercises more fully and truly than any college student in my classes. The irony was that they couldn't articulate what they were doing. Because they weren't intellectuallizing, analyzing, or filtering the material like we do in class, they were more connected and committed to it. Although they may not have been able to articulate what they were thinking and feeling, they so clearly physically understood the exercises, that words were unimportant. The students taught me that communication transcends words. I often times had to resort to alternate forms of communication, which mostly led to very deep connections. I learned that it's rarely about what we are saying, it's about what we are doing.

ON TEACHING

So what was I doing there? I was teaching, but I was mostly learning. I learned a great deal about the teaching/learning cycle. For everything that I may have taught the students, they taught me tenfold. I learned that it is important to have a foundation with the flexibility, understanding, and preparedness to throw everything out the window. Because when you allow yourself to do that, you give yourself the opportunity to learn from what you are given, to accept being wrong, and to improve because of your failure. I often times had an expectation or assumption about how effective an exercise may be. It would fail miserably, and when I was open, I was able to collaborate with the children or other teachers to make an effective difference.

By teaching exercises that I had learned as a student, I was able to gain a deeper understanding about the exercises at hand. People say that you reach the highest level of understanding once you are able to teach what you've learned. When you are training in school it is so easy to get caught up in yourself and how you are doing. It is important to take the very things that put you in a self involved place and use them to help others. Once I returned to the States I did a presentation on the project for the drama department, attempting to show the students how the very exercises we learn in class can be taken out of context and used to help others. And that is definitely what happened in South Africa. I found it to be tremendously fulfilling to take things that I learned as a student and use them to reach out to a community in need.

ON THEATER

While that was primary goal of the project, I had also set out to explore theater in a new light. By taking theater out of the Western context of the stage, I learned that theater serves many functions beyond entertaining an audience. At its core, theater is about communication. It is not simply reserved for the sophisticates who can afford it as a form of entertainment. In fact it is more raw, real, and effective when it is not masked by the frivolous theatrical conventions of lighting, sound, and fancy costumes. Because once they are stripped away, it is really just a platform to bring the community together. It is an opportunity to address real issues and make potential changes. It provides people with a creative outlet, to express, think and feel. These are all concepts, which I previously only understood intellectually. Now, I really get it.

THE FUTURE

You may ask: what now? What is the future of this project? Although it is still to be realized, I do know that I will be returning to the community, hopefully sooner rather than later. While the project was successful in many ways, it was not wholly fulfilled. A project such as this is only effective when it can be sustained without outside facilitation. However, I didn't have this knowledge or awareness going in. The work will be complete when I can step back, hold my hands up, and watch it exist on its own, without outside help. It will be finished and sustainable when the community can take it on as its own. Until then, I will

devote my time to someday returning and working in and with the community until it reaches that point of ultimate sustainability.

The beauty of this project is there is need everywhere and that theater can be used to help people in Syracuse, New York City, South Africa. I now know that wherever I find myself in the world I will dedicate my life and my art to this pursuit; to the pursuit of using theater to help people help themselves.

The South Africa Theater Project developed out of my initial desire to explore theater as a means of outreach. In October 2009 I traveled to Port St. Johns, South Africa, a rural community in the Eastern Cape, to put this goal to practice. I spent about two months living and working within the town, providing the children with a creative recreational outlet and the greater community with a means of addressing the issues, which surrounded them. Prior to my departure, I also dedicated a month to fundraising, after receiving news that the school's future was in jeopardy. They had lost the right to the school grounds, and needed a good deal of money to secure a new property. So I came in with \$3500 towards building the new school, a curriculum, a bag full of masks, an open mind and an eagerness to learn. I left a changed person, with a newfound perspective on life, teaching, and theater.

I organized the trip through South Africa Volunteers, a grassroots movement dedicated to a number of interlinked volunteer projects throughout the town. Off the bat, they set me up to work at a primary school, the Sisonke School with students ages 4-12. They also allowed me to spend several afternoons a week at the Eluxoweni Boys home, a local orphanage, where I worked with boys ages 12-17. They gave me the liberty to develop and plan my own curriculum, which was both exciting and terrifying.

In order to build my curriculum, I drew from material I had learned in class as a student, exercises I had taught in past teaching experiences, and research I had conducted. I focused my research on an area of theater known as

Theater of the Oppressed. Theater of the Oppressed developed in the 1970s, when its founder Augusto Boal entered a small community in Brazil with the hopes of using theater to engage them with community issues in order to bring about change. Boal believed that theater needed to return to its roots, the community. By taking theater into communities steeped in issues, Boal gave oppressed communities a voice through theater, hence the name Theater of the Oppressed. He designed a series of theater games and exercises and used them to create theater pieces which he hoped would bring about newfound awareness, dialogue, and ultimately change.

I wanted to explore this realm of theater myself for I only understood it in theory, not in practice. So I took the basic principles of Boal's work and built a progressive theater curriculum which I thought covered the basics and fundamentals. My goal was to use this curriculum as a building block for a final performance. I wanted to give the children the empowering tool of creating a piece of theater solely based on their voices, bodies, imaginations, and the raw materials which surrounded them.

So I spent my days at the Sisonke School using the curriculum as a basis for the self generated final production they would ultimately create. The bulk of the curriculum was founded upon maskwork and physical theater, so as to transcend any potential language barriers. I was lucky and grateful to have collected over thirty donated masks from maskmakers across the country. The masks still live at the Sisonke School to this day.

However, my work with the Sisonke School extended far beyond simple maskwork. For one, the students were so taken by games and exercises that they demanded more. So I began conducting workshops during lunch breaks and after school. I also developed a small group of young actors called the Lunchtime Crew who dedicated their lunchtimes to creating interactive educational skits. The idea of the Lunchtime Crew was to create theater pieces for kids by kids to engage children in other schools with community issues. The skits encouraged interactive participation among the students as a means of raising awareness on a particular issue and allowing the students to problem solve and present alternate solutions to the problem at hand. Our most popular Lunchtime Crew skit was ‘the monkey skit’, a piece designed to educate students about the hazards of eating monkeys, a problem, which surfaced in a neighboring community.

However, we didn’t need to travel outside of our school to seek out issues. Many problems existed within our very own school. For example, I also taught English to grades 2-3 during my stay and found it unbelievably difficult to teach because of disciplinary issues. Behavioral problems extended far beyond talking out of hand. I was lucky if I only had to break up two fights per class. Instead of getting frustrated and giving up, I turned to theater to solve these glaring behavioral issues. I began using theater as a form of conflict mediation, forcing the class as a whole to engage and cope with the problem at hand. Because the exercises I developed focused on the thoughts and feelings behind the aggression,

the children were often times affected by the vulnerability. By the end of my stay, there was a huge decrease in disciplinary issues.

Because the conflict mediation was so effective, the head of the school asked me to conduct a teacher training session, in order to train teachers on the methods used. I created a document outlining each exercise, their purpose and potential outcome. This began a series of teacher training sessions, which allowed the teachers to better understand how and why I was working with the children and gave them insight on how to continue the work once I left. I also invited them to observe my classes and collaborate whenever they desired.

These teacher training sessions occurred on Monday and Wednesday afternoons leaving me with Tuesdays and Thursdays at the Eluxoweni Boys Home. My focus with the boys was two fold. I used Boal's dramatherapy techniques as a means of helping them address their reality, and then counterbalanced it with the maskwork, as an outlet to escaping their reality. The result was unbelievable leading to a series of street theater mask parades, which ended in the construction of more sophisticated street theater skits. By the end of my stay, the boys were creating skits about issues which were important to them and their story. They would then take them out into the streets to use theater to share their ideas with the community. This was effectively exhibited in their 'anti drug skit', which ended in the spectators rallying together, chanting 'no drugs, no drugs.' To me, this was the ultimate true form of theater as a means of

engagement. It was particularly exciting because it allowed the boys to address and share their personal baggage in a fun, creative and expressive way.

It also opened the eyes of the community. As the boys began to make an impression in town, people became more and more interested in the theater work. I began receiving requests from other local organizations, inquiring about the work I was doing. For example, I collaborated with the local SPCA volunteer, to use maskwork as the basis for his new education program. I also worked a great deal with CART (Center for Appropriate Rural Technology) to write proposals to seek out a more permanent theater home in Port St. Johns.

This is my current goal; to ensure that theater lives on in Port St. Johns. It wasn't until halfway through my stay that I realized the program would only be so good if it could sustain on its own, without outside facilitation. I was not able to fulfill the model of a sustainable program in the time that I was there, however I plan on returning to help carry this out.

Until then, I will continue to try to put what I learned and gleaned from the experience to practice. I learned so much simply from pushing myself out of my comfort zone into a new environment and culture. I learned everything from basic words in xhosa, to how to cope with the racial divide which lingers from apartheid, to how to work patiently with students and teachers. My eyes were opened to a sea of problems, but also a number of positive solutions. For example, because of the nature living in an impoverished state, I learned to be

more resourceful, with an increased sensitivity and awareness to reusing and recycling. I also gained so much from learning to live with less.

I also learned a great deal about the true function of theater and the amazing potential possibilities of using theater as a means of helping others. At the end of the day, theater is about the community and the communication of thoughts, feelings, and ideas. It is not about the fancy lights and sets, which the sophisticates of Western culture so closely associate with the theater. It is about using your imagination, voice, and body to communicate an idea and bring light to new ideas in order to bring about change.

However, I would never have understood this if it weren't for my students. For everything I may have taught them, they taught me tenfold. I learned the importance of patience and the power of remaining open minded and non judgmental. I learned to try to never judge or impose change upon people. Instead, I learned to interact and live among them in order to collaborate and find a way to help the people help themselves.

MY BLOG FROM SOUTH AFRICA

Entry One

Hello and welcome!

I've been sending out emails which have been passed around through various circles, so I thought I'd make this a lot easier by creating a blog. so the first few entries are simply copied emails that I've sent my parents which explain my time and adventures here thus far...check it out if you'd like and check back in for more updates!

Entry Two

Hi guysss!

Sorry it took me a little while to get to you...I had awhile at the airport getting through customs and things and then wellll lets just say that Lex and I are similar in that we aren't the best with directions and we she couldn't remember where she parked the car. It was so funny because we are like running around the airport parking lot for an hour trying to find the car and I was just like 'Oh my gosh...this is so me'. Anyways everything here is great. I'm a little tired cause I didn't sleep much on the plane. But the flight was awesome (aside from the grody food...they gave me the same thing several times but I definitely managed okay). Mom, you'd be happy to know that I watched sunshine cleaning!! Also I put the final touches on the actual structure of my curriculum. Let's see what else...oh yea, made friends (lets face it, I couldn't not start chatting with my neighbor) turns out he is a cyclist coincidentally and we talked for awhile. you'll also be happy to know that I'm probably doing something similar to you right now...yup watching football! All of Lex's husbands friends are over having a huge party...too bad its a different kind of football but I guess we are kind of doing the same thing just on different sides of the world now! Anyways...wanted to get this to you ASAP but all is awesome here. Lexi is AMAZING.

Entry Three

OH MY GOSH!!! I feel like I have so so much to tell you guys. The past two days/36hours/whatever this has been has been a total whirlwind in a really incredible way. But let's get some business out of the way first because knowing me I'll get really distracted and caught up in things and totally forrget some important stuff. Numero one: I got here. I think you figured that by now but alas I am here and am totally excited about what I know is going to be an awesomely wonderful adventure. Number shtaeem (like my multilingual theme here?) I have a phone and phone number! Have to wait till tomorrow for it to actually work because it needs a bunch of time to charge before my minutes kick in. But my number is: 073 4765956. Four (xhosa and English) we have internet in the cottage now! This is like such a new thing...like as of yesterday but basically the other two people who I live with (who are totally incredible by the way...one is British

and my roommate is American. He is a 24 year old British dude who has been living here working on the agricultural project but has been at the school for awhile now. The girl/woman I should say is a 33 year old mom of two from Cali who is working at the school as well. We are all cooking veggie stir fry as of right now using veggies grown from the garden at the village down the street that are delivered here every day. We also have our own garden here). We just started cooking, its a bit late but its been raining all day(well more like monsooning) so we lost power and have been snuggling in our room with candles and incense talking in Texan accents and reading books. I'm getting ahead of myself though sooo I'll start back at Lex's

So Lex and Yon are totally amazing—we had so much fun just sitting in their back garden last night. A bunch of their friends were over and it was so nice and relaxing. We had such a great and interesting conversation/story sharing/travel story sharing evening and it was really comfortable and nice and lots of people were in and out throughout the night. Lex and I made homemade sushi with and lets just say fruits and vegetables will never taste the same from here on out...that was the most incredible avocado I ever did have...and I was still in the middle of Johannesburg. The politics/crime/socio economic stuff there is totally complicated and fascinating. you feel it as soon as you get to the city.

Within an hour of being there I realized just how pronounced it is and its a really complicated tangled situation..but I'm learning so much about the history of the area, the culture, and the current politics just from talking to lots of people. All really interesting stuff. Lex's friend who is living with her is working on a sustainable living engineering project and might come out here in like a week to volunteer for a few days which would be awesome cause its what she knows and also cause she's a really cool chick. So yea I slept (kind of) and then headed to the airport..there was a huge delay but all was fine and good...i slept (which by the way, I'm totally whacked out, but its okay). I woke up landing and i have to say it was THE most bizarre landing I ever have experienced. Well it was raining so i hesitate to say that it was stunning but the landscape even in UTT is pretty incredible and there are just huge patches of nothingness and the river. But yeah it took me awhile to realize that we arrived at the airport when we did because I kid you not it's smaller than the corridor of GECEC. It was the most silent and quiet landing...we stepped off the plane picked up our baggage off the plane and walked into a hallway and out to meet whoever was picking us up. And it was so quiet you could hear the insects.

Well I had an adventure getting to PSJ because the taxi service they use was late..but it wasn't a big deal because this woman at the airport was super niice and let me use the phone at avis the car service there. I called tubes and she got in touch with the driver and it was great I slept longer (needed it) and then was awake for the beautiful 2 hour car drive. So even sitting in the airport itself was

such an experience. People have been so nice all around but my first 24 hours was so comfortable and familiar (being in a Jewish community was really very cool b t dubs) and then all the sudden I'm really experiencing South Africa. Joberg is pretty half and half but once I hit Umtata I was so clearly the minority and as I progressed on my journey I began to realize more and more how much of a foreigner I am here and much I stick out...but not in a bad way at all. It was interesting, as I got deeper and deeper into the trip, people became increasingly more friendly. But for one, the language. I didn't hear any africahns in Joberg . here, even in Umtata I only hear xhosa unless they are talking to me or one of the other volunteers. They speak it pretty well and understand everything for the most part but I would say 80% of what I hear among the Black community here is xhosa. The language is fascinating and so cool sounding but its not like Spanish where you can pick up words and kind of figure out what's going on.

So yeah there I am in UTT there is no one else in this hallway of an airport (isn't another flight that comes in till three) except for me and the people who worked there...we made small talk but that was it. It totally wasn't a big deal. I needed the sleep I had gotten in touch with tubes and so I just chilled for awhile. Eventually the driver came and I was on my way. It was kind of like this hybrid bus/taxi service ... like we would pick up people along the way and then they'd get off when they reached their homes.. it was cool.

So the drive; remember how I said this doesn't feel real like five hundred times? Well now it was so real it was crazy. Like this is the real thing. The poverty is overwhelming, I wouldn't even know how to properly articulate it to really describe it. It's very humbling...when you see it in person its really dramatic. I mean I am talking about dirt everything, rondovals and huts that are extremely flimsy, people walking for miles EVERYWHERE, schools that are way overcrowded but the buildings and yards are super star...look like prisons, babies being carried in a blanket tied around their moms waist and women carrying LOADS and balancing them on their head (like I'm talking about up to thirty branches bundled for firewood) But it really is THE most beautiful land and changes over so fast. There are cattle, sheep, roosters, goats loose everything...we had to stop on the main highway several times (also: other animal encounters: there are geckos all over...like I was unpacking my stuff and 3 were just chilling and ran across the desk...and within the first half hour of being here I saw my first monkey) but id say towards UTT its very agricultural then it turns kind of Scottish highlands ish and then you hit the river and its like hills mountains INCREDIBLE vegetation so super thick and that's pretty much PSJ...with a beach, might I add. This place is unbelievable. Our cottage is on top of the mountain that town is situated in and the beach is right at the edge so we can see it perfectly from our verandah. The cottage: WONDERFUL. And we share the property with the school so I got to meet a few of the kids. SO CUTE. They get really excited when new people come but I have a meet n' greet tomorrow. This six year old and I

already have a date to watch Fern Gully cause its both of our favorites. But yea the place is outfitted with everything—full kitchen, stove, mic, hot plates, hot water kettle.

But I digress....so yeah I got out of the car into town for a bit, needed the ATM. Definitely THE only white person for first few minutes of being here. But town is super cool...very busy and bustling with fruit stands and open markets. Then I met tuba who is sooo lovely. The driver dropped me off at the one hostel to meet her so I met lots of cool people there. We are having a huge Halloween fundraiser party at the bar there on Sat so that should be lots of fun. By the time I got back to the cottage Dom and Adam had come back from their day and then needed stuff, I needed a phone so the three of us walked down the path into town...we got what we needed (including this awesome dongal thing, yeah I know it sounds like really phallic) but basically they have this device as of a few days ago and Dom and I split what's called a wireless sim card for it. Its basically top up wireless internet for the laptops and should last us through the month...cost me a total of eight dollars. So yeah basically if I have a laptop available, I can use the internet from our house which is really a surprise. After we got our stuff we sat on these three really cute old ladies porch and had snacks with them until the rain died down so we could trek up the hill...that's when we saw the monkey in the tree, too bad I didn't have my camera. Then headed home, unpacked and that's when the power blew which brings me to the beginning of this email. But AHHH I am just so on cloud nine right now – I can't even describe it and I'm super excited cause I was able to do even more planning/structuring for my curriculum so I feel even more solid in that. But yeah I can't even describe the beauty of this place (and i caught it on an 80mill of rain day...the river is bursting, it's all flooded) but its everything...the people the community the culture the land. Okay this is already a novel...oy. ill be onto update frequently but please write, tell me what's going on there and fwd this to whoever. LOVE LOVE LOVE you and wish you could see this place beyond the picture...maybe you will someday.

Entry Four

Yello! (as they say here) hope all is well there...I've loved all the email replies and updates from every one, its nice to open up my email before heading to bed and hearing what's going on in your respective places.

Okay so lets see, I'm going to try to recount the past few days since my last email but my time barometer has been way off and I feel like so much has happened so quickly. But its pretty cool, time moves unbelievably slowly here (in a good relaxing way) and to be honest I've almost totally lost track of the time (except for when I'm teaching, that would be bad). There is this weird feeling here, this really surreal feeling where I walk around here and I feel like I'm on a movie set and I'm waiting for some one to just come and tear it down and be like

yeaaa it's not actually real. In another sense though I feel like I've been here forever and that this is so normal...which is good because I feel comfortable and adjusted. As soon as I get a long chance on the comp III upload some pictures

But enough of that, let me backtrack. So Tuesday I went in and met the kids, I went to assembly, which is basically where they meet every morning to sing songs and then observed classes. Many of the kids understand little to no English, others are highly proficient...so the range is pretty big. But from the very first time I met them I could tell how warm they all were, and I would say that is the best way I can describe them. They are just the cutest...they are all always hanging on us, pulling our ponytail, trying to get piggy backs, hugging our waists. Because there is a language barrier so much of the connection is physical or non verbal...but I already feel really close to so many of them and we laugh now trying to say each others names. I then met with Tuba and went over a lot of scheduling stuff—basically my schedule is ideal. I'm helping out with a main lesson class (grade 2-3), doing one on one tutoring like 6 hours a week and then working with grades 1 and 2-3 respectively for an hour and a half every week (in periods of 45 min...perfect) and then I have grades 4-5 three hours a week. Then we have teacher meetings on Tuesdays and Thursdays and on Mon and Wed afternoon I go to the boys home and work with them. It sounds busy but actually it comes the end of the day and I'm always like..what its only six?! So we did a bunch of organizing and then Tuba and I headed into town...we came back and it was our roommate Adams birthday so we all geared up to go out to dinner which was nice. Dom and I also worked a lot on our Halloween fundraising party that's happening on Saturday night. We are coordinating all of these games and making costumes for every one...it should be so much fun. I think the coolest thing about living here is that we really don't have that much but so all of our free time is dedicated to making things out of scrap paper, harvesting stuff from the garden...that kind of stuff. Its great though because it doesn't feel like work and you feel like you are being so much more resourceful. I'm hoping to carry some of this back with me when I get home. Oh also, on Tuesday we had a long teachers meeting, which was so fascinating. I feel like a lot of time and energy throughout the day is in having long discussions about school policies or curriculum development. So far it's been nothing but an awesome collaboration but because the school is so new there is constant energy and discussion directed towards how we could do things better...how we keep and maintain the philosophies of the school while making sure the kids are progressing while introducing teaching ideas and methods and ways of life from the states without imposing and vice versa. They deal with so many things that are really tricky situations...how to deal with kids coming in late because they are walking 3 1/2 miles to get here in the morning, kids who don't show up for two months at a time because their parents cant pay the fees, kids who are developmentally behind in xhosa and then you throw English on top of it and what to do?! So this usually amounts to hour long roundtable discussions of bouncing back and forth of ideas..and it's really cool to be a part of that.

Wednesday: Went over the remedial (one on one tutoring) curriculum with Tuba and then had my first tutoring session which was awesome! I really like the tutoring sessions because you really get to know the kids and also its so validating to see them progress and feel like they are doing well. They REALLY struggle big time in class and to have individual time where they don't feel rushed is so important. It was fun, we had balloons on the chair for Adam with a crown from his birthday the day before so I told them each they were the king entering the palace. By the end of the session I had learned that king is Cos(click)li in Xhosa and that a promise for a balloon at the end of a session can be wildly effective. I have to say, all in all, the kids are disciplined unbelievably well. They are also extremely passionate in everything they do (when they sing their national anthem in assembly it feels like some religious experience...its pretty crazy). But I get off topic..so I had my first three kids on Wed then was off the rest of the afternoon...I went down to the schoolyard to kick a ball around with the kids, they all tried on my sunglasses and pretended to be bugs because they are so huge. Then I had the afternoon off and spent a lot of time reading outside because it was beautiful out. I wish you could see just where I live. Its like sitting on my front porch is like looking at some post card from a place you really don't think exists. So I read outside, got some sun, and then headed to town to take care of some organization stuff for Saturday night. Town is a whole other thing in itself: its really dilapidated but extremely busy...there are people everywhere carrying huge bulk things of rice on their heads etc etc. There is always awesome music playing and tons of street vendors. Every one is super friendly...its not uncomfortable or scary. In fact, I have felt so so welcome here, it's been shocking really. Then Adam picked us up in the truck (we have a few of those super rugged trucks between the different projects that Adam, Rich and Tuba use...we catch rides sometimes but every one pretty much just walks here) because he was excited that he had one for the day and drove Tuba home. She lives on top of this mountain and let's just say that the drive up to her farm was about a thousand times bumpier than the pick jeep rides of Arizona. the car hiccupped, sputtered, slid, and everything in between. But we made it up and down and headed home to cook. We all did a pot luck type thing last night where we each contributed a little dish..I made this (may I say) awesome lentil and rice cold salad...it was a hit (and no dad, no one asked where the meal was...they thoroughly enjoyed it...my one roommate said "this is the loveliest little dish I've had in a while" so there. Ps Andrew aren't you proud?!). So after that our friends from the backpackers hostel came over and we all just hung out for awhile...I was tired and fell asleep only to wake up today of the strangest noises outside. As sad as I am that my ipod is temporarily out of commission, I've noticed a lot more of the natural sounds of this place over the past few days and lets just say they are pretty fantastic. Its like listening to one of those 'peace of mind: sounds of the true wilderness' CD's, or something like that.

So today was an extremely full day and this has already gone on for two plus

pages so I think Ill retire. But I did have my first few drama lessons today and I can already tell that this is going to be an extremely transformative thing for both me and the kids. They are sooo unbelievably responsive and excited and passionate. They take to the exercises better than any college kids I've ever seen try to attempt it and its because a. they have no concept of what its supposed to be...I asked them questions about drama, acting, etc. – no response. On an academic/intellectual level they literally no nothing about what it is they are doing. But they don't need to know how to talk about it because they basically embody the exercises. Whether they can explain it or not, they get it in their bodies and it's a pretty unbelievable thing to see. They are loving it because its new and exciting and they are teaching me so much because they are doing the exercises the way they are intended to be carried out simply because they have this innate playfulness and zero inhibition. It's pretty exciting stuff and its all new to them but they are willing and excited to try anything. We are putting on a show at the end and Tubes promised we'd get a video. Other really good news is that just before I came here, the project had to make a big decision to up change the original plans for building the school, the structures are more expensive and they've been so stressed about what to do. For the week that I've been here its been all talk of finances and materials I hadn't realized this but no one here was aware of the extra \$2000 that I put in last week. So I double checked with them that they had included that number in the original figure...they hadn't...turns out that now they can buy the new structures and there is no longer a halt on the building of the school. So once again MAJOR MAJOR kudos to all of you..literally because of you these kids are going to have a school come Dec. I'm headed out tomorrow afternoon to 'the village' which is the rondoval / agricultural project/ traditional mud hut area...its about forty five min from here and I'm spending the afternoon in the garden and the evening there having a more traditional experience. Then Saturday I'm going to be building bricks for the school (the new property is right on the village property) and then will be back Sat afternoon to help organize the event. Sunday we are set to go on a hike to the mud caves or to 2nd beach to see this blowhole thing (not too sure what it is exactly but every one says its beautiful)...this is weather impending. So yea that's the projected weekend plan, I'll write again soon.

Entry Five

So when I last wrote I was about to take off to what is known here as "the village". Friday came round—I had an awesome session with grades four and five. We sat and collected ideas for the show and between poetry that they've written, songs they sing here at school, traditional folktales, and most importantly...their imaginations we've come up with a basic framework that includes a jungle, an old man with a magical stone (to name a few) and has a moral lesson to boot!. I'm more than thrilled with what they came up with cause it gives us the potential to do maskwork, work with animals, their poetry, and

songs...plus the work with using minimal props in creative and new ways and their bodies and voices to establish the environments instead of fancy lights and sets. It should be awesome and we are scheduled to dive into maskwork tomorrow. The younger kids are also going to be involved but will be doing more of the singing songs that they already know kind of a thing (they are having a harder time because of the language barrier). That way, every one is involved but I can work with them separately as classes but still put together a whole show. We are going to try to videotape it so hopefully that will go through and you'll be able to see it whence I come home!

But I digress...so Friday afternoon after school I got my stuff together and headed out to the village, the project, whatever you want to call it. Its basically a 45 minute drive, way up the mountain, 'out into the bush' (they say), through some pretty sad sites, but ironically all set against this stunning natural backdrop. The roads were pretty rough and we had to stop a few times over for the occasional bull or goat in the middle of the road but with Rachel (the five year old daughter of the couple that owns the project) in my lap and some songs for the road, the trip went by all too quickly. I tried to take pics but the road was too bumpy. So we pull up to this circle of huts, this amazing little ring of a community that is situated at the tippy top of a mountain with THE most stunning view of the ocean from any given point of the premise (I know Ive now overused the word stunning but I really don't think this can be beat). Rach was tugging at me, trying to pull me into her room to do a fairy puzzle while Diane (Rachels mom, who runs the project) was anxious to hit the garden. I got the down low, a quick tour (ha they say quick and its like the most amazingly complex tour ive ever gotten) but a "basic briefing" on the workings of the project. Ill do my best to explain , but im still trying to work a lot of the things out and im still blown away by the whole thing so its hard to accurately describe.

First, let me start off by saying that EVERYTHING from the physical structures to the stone mosaic stone decorations in the makeshift bathrooms to the dam in the garden to the water filtration and plumbing system were entirely made by these peoples two hands. So first are the huts which are all centered around this beautiful bamboo walkway with a stone garden in the center. I put my stuff in my hut and was quickly informed (by Rachel herself) that we were having a slumber party so that I would be sharing my very small hut with this bouncing off the wall five year old...Di protested that I needed space but Rachel demanded and I love this kid so I was totally cool with it. Next are the bathrooms, or whatever you want to call them—I got a lot of explanation on the interconnectivity of the water systems but I couldn't even begin to properly explain. Basically you flush the toilet and after a series of processes it's converted into usable water that is pumped into the kitchen to use for cooking and cleaning. Essentially they cook from their toilet. Then is the kitchen... equipped with a wood fire burning stove, there is no garbage can—only composte, various bins labeled for different materials, a place to deposit tea bags (because of course that's converted into something too). There are all kinds of things hanging and drying on the ceiling...wheat, barley, who knows what and labeled jars full of soon to be

kombucha or a chutney or jam. It looks more like a science lab than kitchen, with jars full of different things that are processing. The back of the kitchen is the village shop (run entirely by people in the community who need work..many of whom are infected with HIV/AIDS. I spent a lot of time with a few of the workers and heard their stories...it was a pretty amazing experience) where they sell jams, chutneys, coffees for the surrounding area—of course all homemade and created solely using the things they grow in the garden. Speaking of which, we then move onto the garden—a sort of Dylan's candy bar shop for the fresh food lover. She gave me a basket and told me to have fun (I should mention it was my turn to cook that night—sort of daunting considering I'm cooking for a woman who rolls her own oats and makes her own muesli and bakes bread entirely from scratch like its easy mac). I explained that beans were essential for the dish so it was straight to the 'beans section' and I picked the entire bean content for our dinner. Then we went through all of the different herbs, leaves, and lettuces...basically anything that was growing there was game to use. And there were so many things I had never seen before...this chocolate mint, cinnamon clove whatever its called, purple basil, like four different kinds of garlic, who knows. She tried to explain what tastes were good with what, occasionally tossing me a gooseberry or flower to try. Then onto the veggies—beets, potatoes, sweet potatoes, radishes, turnips, tomatoes, more lettuces, you name it—it was insane. Basically the garden provides for every one that lives there—as if you couldn't tell already, these people are unbelievably resourceful. I can honestly say that this is the model for sustainability—they have truly created a wholly self sustaining community. The last stop was the workshop which contains the 'brick machine', a new creation that they only recently made which allows them to take mud and hay and convert them into bricks—these bricks are not shockingly enough the bricks being used to build the school!

So after the grand tour we sat down to chill and have tea—Diane made from some mint leaf or another and we did some arts and crafts projects with a bunch of the village kids and Rachel to add to our deco collection for tomorrow nights party. Then it was time to start working on dinner and I was making mush (Andrew) but the beans were not in Trader Joes cans so we had to leave two hours to get them to cook up. I should explain here how/why I was appointed cook for the night. Diane is clearly a wonderwoman of a cook who could school Rachel Ray and Jada any day but Luke (her boyfriend, founder of the project) was away for the week, she had been running the entire thing herself and was exhausted. Adam and I felt kind of bad about coming up for the weekend considering this was her break and even though she said she wouldn't, we didn't want her to feel the need to do something elaborate. Plus it was her time to relax for the weekend so we decided we wanted to give her the gift of a break to show our gratitude for having us for the weekend. Now Adam of course came up with this brilliant idea but doesn't even know how to make instant noodles so I became the token cook—which was actually awesome because I learned so much. Diane taught me how to make my own sauce (because we didn't have Classico tomato and basil there) using tamarind paste, water, red wine and the herbs we picked. Somehow this became a delicious

sauce and once the lentils, rice, and beans were all cooked up on the woodburning stove (another cool skill I learned how to light one of those) the village version of mush was complete. I have to say it turned out pretty well. I knew it was okay when Rachel said “mom I Like this supper...you should make it sometime” Now apparently when other people cook, Rachel usually complains, asks why Diane didn’t cook and then refuses to eat and runs away from the table. You should understand that Rachel is an amazingly cool kid but is also pretty difficult (to put it mildly). Needless to say, I took her comment as a compliment. The boys cleaned up and we went to relax.

This relaxing was more like a three hour conversation where I learned SO much about their, the project, the idea of sustainability, their philosophy, and methods of how to best go about bringing about change in the community and how that’s changed over the two years they’ve been here. We talked about the issues that face the community—she told me stories about rapes, abuse, all kinds of crime and the source of it all—the self fulfilling prophecy of the victim complex that pervades the community, which of course is all created and further fueled by the poverty that so dramatically exists here. Basically the goal of the project is to be out in the middle of the crux of the issues so that they can understand it as fully as possible, to get people to shift their perspective in order to progress. All of the programs (the garden, the school, the shop) are designed to support this...to provide people with opportunity and to help people help themselves. Mind you, she throws in the occasional lesson on beekeeping and honey making as well as the story of how she became the mother to the monkey that lived with them up until last month (basically, one of the locals wanted to eat it because yes, they do eat monkeys here...not only a moral/ethical dilemma but more importantly a MAJOR health issue). PS we are planning to visit the monkey shelter next weekend to check up on it. Then Di started asking me about what I was doing exactly at the school and we had an awesome conversation about where theater can fit into the picture. This became the beginning of our weekend of conceptualizing the proposal that I’m currently working on to build an amphitheater on the premise (more on that later). It was late, Rachel’s movie was over and she had fallen asleep..her head in my lap and her feet on Adams and it was time for bed. It’s funny, I feel like I function more on whether it’s dark or light here because once its dark its kind of like bedtime. So even though it felt late, it probably wasn’t really that late...which explains why I didn’t feel totally demolished when I woke up from all the roosters and looked at my cell and realized it was just about am. From the second I woke up I could tell it was going to be a beautiful day...even though part of me was like ahh its early, go back to sleep the other part of me was like it hasn’t been this beautiful of a morning since I’ve arrived..get up and enjoy it. So I woke up just in time to see the sun rise over the ocean and no one else was awake so I spent a good hour or so just exploring, taking pictures...it was really the first day since I’ve been here that it hasn’t been overcast or cloudy when I woke up so I wanted to take full advantage. I must have taken like two hundred or so pictures...a lot of the same thing though so I’ll have to sort through them, but it was just so beautiful. I was feeling really inspired, so I

grabbed my notebook, found myself a comfy spot on the manmade jungle gym and took all of the notes from what we had talked about on Friday and actually developed it into a more organized framework and figured out what exercises to do when to achieve means. At about six Adam woke up, we had a heart to heart and within the hour Di and Rachel woke up. There must have been something about that weather because the first thing Di said was ‘we need to go do something awesome today...we haven’t had a morning like this in weeks lets figure something out’. So by 930 the truck was packed...full out picnic in store, and we were ready to go. I climbed into the back of the truck..I wanted to take the ride back down in the back just for the thrill of it (yea I know mom and dad...I probably should have omitted that little detail) but we drove the 45 min back down (Rachel in my lap, singing the whole time), picked up Dom and our friend Ricky and headed to the beach from which point we picked up a few of Rachel’s five year old friends, parked the car and started our what was explained to me...little hike. Turned out to be more like a trek through the jungle. And I’m really not exaggerating when I say jungle (see pics later for proof). This was no more pretend game of Fern Gully (which Rach and I had been playing the night before)...this was the real deal. So all I knew was that our destination was ‘the waterfall’. Little did I know that we would arrive there 2 ½ hours later after getting lost on the non path of prickles and streams. We also made a pit stop at the swing over the river that we found and played on for about a half hour (SO MUCH FUN). So here we are, a bunch of adults, running around the jungle having the time of our lives while the five year olds are like 30 minutes ahead of us (and they aren’t wearing shoes...how they got so far ahead of us without shoes is beyond me...I was slipping and sliding and I had hiking shoes on). We finally reach the waterfall—Amazing. The kids are already jumping off of these smallish rocks into pools at the base of the waterfall. Diane goes about halfway up the thing and is like...’this is where WE jump from”. So of course I got right down to my bathing suit and jumped in. I’m not afraid of heights but there was definitely an ‘oh shit’ moment before I jumped in but how could I not do it? And it was one of the best feelings, so so exhilarating. The water was indescribably freezing but it was all such an amazing feeling that it just added to the fun of it all. Once the ones who were brave enough to go (we teased the one girl cause she wouldn’t the whole way back) we headed back on the path/non path because we needed to get back to start setting up for the party. So after another round on the swing, a few scrapes, a really nice picnic on the beach (with some monkey visitors), we all piled into the back of the truck and headed home to get showered up and ready for the partayyy.

Okay this is unbelievably long and I don’t want to drag (mmm I think I already did) but I’ll continue tomorrow, promise...the other parts of the weekend are much less elaborate anyways.

I’m going to start a word of the day, ill do it from here on out

Jungle in xhosa: hooshwa

Entry Six

So I'm sitting outside in our garden, it's about 80-85 degrees or so, I can hear chanting from the ceremony taking place on the beach down below, there are bits of mud in my hair (to be explained later), and I'm looking out onto where the Umzibuvu river meets the ocean and I have to say with the day, the week, the two weeks I've had...it doesn't get much better than this.

The past weekend has been unbelievably eventful...mud caves, sulphur springs, the beach, drum circles, storms on the mountain, sunset from the air strip, 2 hours of off roading up and down the coastline, sleeping at the farm, lessons in permaculture, and building a stone wall...to name a few. But before I get to that, here are some highlights from the week:

I think the best part about this week is the sense of comfort and familiarity that Ive come to feel here. Now that Ive been here for a little while Im starting to get to know people a lot better...Im making more and deeper connections (Ive had so many amazing conversations this week) but also starting to recognize faces. It's a small town and now I don't go to the supermarket, the beach without seeing some one I know. It's kind of like Pikesville—only with a whole other vibe. It's the little things like knowing all of the kids names instead of just pointing at them.

Also, I brought out the masks for the first time this week, a point of no return in a way—you would have thought Id brought over The Wii or something. The beauty of it is the kids are SO enthusiastic about it—they really cant get enough, which means that I can count on a knock at my door come 7 am (when the first kids arrive before school)...”can we play with the masks”. It's not really a problem because I'm never up any later than six. Its partially because we have these monkeys on our roof that seem to think that 6 am is the time to partay, but also I usually get to catch the end of the sun rising over the ocean. I kid you not, the kids come into the house now instead of playing soccer during lunch because they want to play with the masks. And its not just the kids here—the boys went totally haywire too. I brought the masks with me on Thursday (totally unsure as to how they would react) and the coolest thing happened. At first I had a small group...maybe 7 or so kids—we ended up going over an hour or so and by the end of the session the group had doubled, if not tripled. The home is located right on the road, in such a place that lots of people pass by it in and out of town. We were working out in the front lawn area because it was a beautiful afternoon so slowly a sort of audience started gathering—a few of the boys even ran into town so a sort of street theater thing started to happen. And they would go out in the masks and come back with a handful more of kids. Ive also become closer with the manager of the program, Patrick, who is actually of the mPondo tribe...if he needs the computer for example hell come here and orally dictate his work and I'll type it out for him.

So I guess the best part of this week have been relationships I've established—Patrick, for one, Papa Rich for another. I've mentioned Rich a few times now I think. Well Rich is my other roommate...he teaches few English classes but also does IT work in town. Since I met him I've called him Papa Rich because he has this paternal thing about him. He's probably in his late fifties or so, this super stoic, very gentle kind of guy. Over the past week I've spent hours and hours just sitting and talking with him...hes unbelievably wise and knowledgeable. He's very quiet seeming at first but once he opens up and begins to share, its pretty amazing. So I've spent a great deal of time with him-learning about his story, the land, the people, etc. etc. He's been here for quite some time now (he used to live out of a tent for a few years but after becoming connected with the project, moved into the house...he also happens to make a stellar veg curry). But we've just now spent the past 24 hours just him and I (Dom has been off with said suitor, Adam went to Durban for the weekend) and its been a real treat.

Another sort of father figure I've found is this guys called John Castello (Dad, hope you aren't offended by my tossing around the term father figure...you still are and will always be my number one dad, even if you make fun of my meals what meals). John runs an inn/guest house in town—I met him really strangely. Here is the story:

So I'm walking down the mountain on my way to the boys home on Thursday and I hear some one calling my name—I don't really know that many people here so I thought I was just imagining things or confusing some word in xhosa but I kept hearing it and it was definitely my name so finally I turned around. Sure enough there is some guy behind me on a motorcycle motioning for me to stop. He goes "I don't mean to startle you but aren't you the one teaching drama up at Sisonke School?" To which I replied...yes. He goes on "Oh what a coincidence I'm so happy I've run into you because I've been trying to connect with you. I don't mean to freak you out but I saw you over at Heathers coffee shop and immediately asked about you because I'm a photographer and wanted to use you in a photo series" So I'm definitely a little creeped at this point. I mean the guy looks totally harmless...he's old enough to be my grandpa (okay well maybe not that old) but he's this sweet sweet looking old man but he knows my name and wants to take my picture...it was all a little weird. Anyways, he must have sensed this because he follows with "I know you are probably creeped out right now but I'm dear friends with Heather (lady who runs a small craft store here who has been nothing but wonderful). He explained that he's a photographer (little did I know that we are talking of National Geographic status) and that he wanted to do a series using the Transkei (wild coast) as a sort of fairytale landscape. He's had the idea for a few months now but said he didn't know who to use. He apparently told Heather that he's never seen a person looked more like a fairy (I don't know how to take that?) The irony is...he didn't even see my Halloween costume! The whole thing still seemed a bit weird so I took his number (didn't give him mine) and figured I'd ask about him at home and the project and see what the deal is.

So after I get back from the boys home I tell Rich about this bizarre encounter and ask him if he knows this John. He immediately replies “John is amazing...he’s been here for years, is one of the most well respected people here in town. If you have the opportunity to work with him, DO” As he’s saying this Di comes running and buzzing (literally) in—she has something I can’t quite make out in her hand and grabs a plate, sets it on the table “SNACKTIME” she says as I stare at an entire honeycomb with five or so bees swimming in it. **HANDS DOWN THE MOST AMAZING HONEY IVE EVER HAD**—warm still with this almost smokey taste to it (there is still some left in our fridge, drowned bees and all) “I’ve just been bee chasing” she says “I dropped some honey off at John Castellon and thought I’d come here” –Yes! Another person who knows him. Diane, like Rich, went on about how amazing of a person and photographer he is so I decided my background check was complete and I called him back—we set to meet for a ‘quick chat’ the following day.

Well this ‘quick chat’ turned into a three hour conversation. Basically, John is this sixty or so old man who has pretty much seen and done it all. He runs this inn but his heart is in photography. In order to get the shots he flies jets and planes over waterfalls, scuba dives for shark series, sails out in his emergency vehicle boat for whale watches, and parasails and skydives for fun. I just found out today actually that he’s published books on the Wild Coast and he’s given me a CD with a bunch of his work so you can see for yourself. (I was told today that only a few people have seen his stuff that aren’t in the books..apparently he doesn’t share his photos with a lot of people, so I guess I should consider myself a lucky girl). So he’s lived here and has been photographing the people and land for years now and in doing so has developed a pretty intimate relationship with some of the most respected and high up people in the tribes of the Transkei. He goes on shoots for series on songomas (sort of spirit leaders here, the people who you typically see with tribal paints and things). In doing so he’s developed a really good relationship with the king and queen of pondoland (which is funny because he pulls up facebook and show me his wall to wall with the princess of pondoland whose profile picture is of her and Michael Jackson not long before he died, I thought that was funny). But because he’s developed these relationships, he’s invited to take pictures at the these ceremonies that are extremely sacred and serious (something that few outsiders are exposed to). He said that if timing worked out and I wanted to try to see a small ritual or ceremony, that he would take me—pretty exciting stuff. He also has promised to take Di and I out together on a whale and dolphin watch. So essentially over the next few weeks, we’ll be going to these obscure beautiful spots and taking pictures, which I’m totally thrilled about because I’m getting to see things that I’d never otherwise even know about. Also he’ll give me a copy of the series, which he suggested could be a nice additive to my resume/portfolio for acting. He has a fascinating story, he’s so warm—he said I could come over when I wanted to be in more of a home environment (he and his wife’s home is absolutely beautiful) and he told me I could use his computer whenever or could call him if I ever needed a ride. We

had a great exchange—he told me about his story, his kids, his work (he also does first aid and emergency rescue work), the land, some history and we also exchanged stories about cycling because he’s a cyclist too! So yes, that indeed is the story of John Castello—I’ll keep you updated.

So before I get to the weekend (ay this is already long!) lets see what else:

School has been amazing, really amazing. Like I said, I have the kids names down finally and I’m establishing more individual connections. Before I think it was more like a “oo who is the new volunteer”, now the kids come and hang out and there is more of a personal relationship instead of us seeming like sort of novelties to each other. Some great school moments: Number one...school lets out at like 1230 on Wed for soccer and this wed five or so of them stayed behind with us and just sat in our room. We read stories, had snacks, even had a guitar jam session. They took Dom’s guitar and were just fooling around and strumming on it, singing songs in English and Xhosa. Tunni sang us this beautiful song that she said her mom sings to her to go to sleep. She asked me if my mom ever sang songs to me to go to sleep and if I would sing them to her. So mom, I sang her the circle game as she closed her eyes and took a mini nap on Dom’s bed. I also think they all come and hang out now with ulterior motives to play with the masks, but its all good. Plus, they like coming and taking pictures on our cameras (I’m sure you’ll see the Gordon photo series where he’s sporting my massive retro glasses). Moment number two – I’ve basically been the resident teacher for grades 2/3 which is actually really cool and unexpected. I had done a practice lesson and the teacher asked me the next day if I wouldn’t mind continuing. So I’ve been doing that ever since, really enjoying getting to them really well because I teach their main lesson from 8-10 every day. Plus its fun creating lesson plans and things because the biggest reward is that at the beginning of the week they were having MAJOR behavior issues. And I’m not talking about minor side chit chat I’m talking about running around the class, hitting and punching, etc. etc. It was so hard not to get impatient and frustrated this one day in particular but I played around with different techniques and ideas and just kept reminding myself to think why the kids were eliciting this kind of behavior. A lot of them for example, are totally lost in class, are probably frustrated, and the two coupled with the already very physical kind of interaction these kids have with one another can create for a really chaotic room. But its not difficult to remind yourself of where these kids are coming from when one kid raises her hand and suggests that I hit the kids to get them to be quiet. It was just kind of a wake up call that here there is a totally different standard of dealing with discipline and it just made me so sad that this little girl thought that the solution to stopping the violent behavior was to hit the kids. So I spent about $\frac{3}{4}$ of that class just trying to control them but somehow over the course of the week we’ve developed this kind of mutual understanding. By Thursday it was a 360—now they sit quietly, I had no physical instances on Thursday or Friday, and best of all they are excited to learn. The biggest payoff was on Friday when these three kids followed me all the way back

to the house on break because they hadn't finished their classwork and wanted to make sure they had completed it. On Thursday we had a teacher training session on classroom management (fascinating to hear the different discipline approaches that probably largely develop from differing cultural perspectives). I wasn't necessarily required to go to the meeting because I'm teaching drama and it was mainly for discipline in the academic classes but I opted to go anyways. We each had to go around the room and say what our tactics were for managing the classroom. It got to Lumka (2/3 teacher) and she goes...I don't know what I do but really we should all do what Arielle does because I came back from being sick and had a new class. Number three—Fridays drama class was unreal...the show is coming together beautifully and the kids are naturally creating and collaborating. I had this whole exercise set up to prompt them through and improve but before I could say or do anything they naturally start doing exactly what I wanted them to achieve through the exercise. Basically, the kids are three steps ahead of me. I was glad to have had such a positive day because Thursday had been a little stressful and out of control.

WHEW! So moving onto the weekend (finally) □ Friday I woke up, classes, went into town for a bit and hung around there (met a pastor who invited me to a church service on any Sunday that I'm around...I had a cool conversation with him), dropped off laundry (lets just say I'm in dire need) As Dom and I are walking through town, friends of ours pull up and ask us if we want to join them for a brai—a brai is a HUGE tradition here...basically a type thing. Imagine the biggest carnivore fest and you have yourself a brai. So of course I wasn't really on board for the food aspect but said count me in because I had heard this was not something to miss. Plus the location was at this place called the creek, which is about 6 km outside of PSJ and they, like the project have a huge garden on site (the creek is this really cool compound with several houses, and art gallery and garden is right on the water). So I had myself some awesome roasted veg and potatoes with herbs and all fresh from the garden. Also sidenote: we had met these friends through the people who run jungle monkey and had originally met them because they had brought this adorable 3 week old puppy over there one day (see pictures) that I basically fell in love with. She had fallen asleep in my arms and when they took her I joked that I wouldn't give her back and was going to take her. Well skip three days to the brie and they go "you know how you said you wanted to take the puppy, well we really need a home for her badly and you got her to sleep and we usually cant—well give her to you, please she needs a home" so we are double checking with property rules/laws but its quite possible that come mid week...we might have a puppy in the house!

So after every one had scarfed down their meat we headed over for this drum circle event. So the drummers show up...they have this title that I cant pronounce or spell out phoenetically but it was something to do with a certain skill level and its tied into a spiritual role of some sort. Well it was a pretty wild experience to say the least. When they were done, the one drummer came up to me (his role, the

sort of apprentice to the said drummer) and he goes “are you Israeli?” I’m like umm no but I’m going there in a month and I’m Jewish. He says “At m’deeber eevreet” Which starts this whole broken but really cool conversation in Hebrew and turns out he’s just traveling around and offered to come and play drums for the kids so hopefully we can work that one out. Headed home after a lovely evening and then came Saturday.

Woke up very very early which was nice because the mist was rolling in over the mountains and I got some cool pictures of that and then headed into town to finish uploading my pictures onto the computer (I promise they ARE coming...plus now there are dozens more from today so we shall see how long it takes. I’m headed tomorrow to try to get the rest of them on). Rich came and met me to take me to Amapondo (the other backpackers place) to go meet Annie (the mutual friend of Anne that I had corresponded with before I came here...she runs the backpackers complex and Rich is good friends with

her and we our plan was to head to the blowhole which is near Amapondo so we thought we’d stop by) Well as we are pulling up to the hostel there are like three pickup trucks that pull out and Rich starts talking to the drivers who are all people who work at Amapondo that he’s friendly with and they are like we are taking a bunch of the residents out to the mud caves does Arielle want to come? So I’m definitely not in the right clothes but I had been wanting to this since I’ve got here so Rich sent me with his blessing and I hopped in the back of the pickup truck. Met so many cool backpackers from all over (a lot of Europeans) and then we arrived at the caves. So we go in and basically cake ourselves with mud from which spot we move to the sulphur springs a little hike away and cake ourselves with more mud. It was actually the best feeling in the world and you could just feel your skin tingling underneath. See pictures for visual but let’s just say I was many shades of gray green black and brown by the time I left. Ill tell you what WASN’T the highlight—drinking the sulphur water...they made us all do it, and well let’s just say it was pretty vile. We hiked back out, hopped into the back of the pickup trucks (still caked in mud) and headed over to 2nd beach to jump into the ocean and chill out for a bit...it was THE perfect beach day. Plus Amapondo looks out onto second beach so by lunchtime I headed back to meet Rich and Annie for lunch. It was so so great to finally meet Annie...she’s was really nice and welcoming and it was cool to finally connect but I have to say the highlight was playing pirates with her three year old son KY. Amapondo in itself is just a really really cool hostel and place to be at...its very rustic and everything is in the open air and the views of the beach are really awesome. So we just laid out in the hammocks for a little and then got a call from Tuba and Sandy that they were at 2nd beach and wanted to know if we wanted to meet them at Delicious Monster (which is the favorite restaurant around here). Had a delicious and monstrous lunch of homemade falafel and headed back home stuffed. The plan was to go watch the sunset at the air strip but Rich was feeling a bit under the weather so he went and napped. Then the storm broke so we just marveled at it from the

verandah and well I'll pick up from here on out in this next section:

I started writing this on Saturday morning. Its now almost eleven and I'm sitting outside once again because the most amazing storm has just passed, its like the perfect temperature and the most beautiful singing and chanting is coming from just over the mountain. I'm trying to get it on my camera as a sound clip, we'll see how it turns out. But even so, just to sit outside and watch the lightning and listen to the frogs and stuff is so invigorating. Okay the past forty eight hours have just gotten even more ridiculous and unreal than the amazing 24 hours I had previously. So last night after the storm, Tuba and Sandy picked me up to take me up to Forest Glade which is their farm up in the jungle on the other side of the mountain (I think I wrote about it before, I had driven up there once). They had invited both Dom and I for a night away/bonfire/gardening sort of a night and day so we were excited to take them up on the offer. Dom ended up helping out one of the teachers and getting stranded in another village so it was just me. Sandy drove down and picked me up and we hiccupped our way up their super long driveway and wound up on their amazing property. Let me try to describe...they have a little one roomed house with two rondovals off of it (one of which is Sandy's art studio, the other his work studio (outfitted with things for stone cutting, gardening, you name it). It was late so I couldn't get a tour of the grounds just yet so we went into the one roomed house for dinner, sleeping, well basically everything because its an all in one room kind of a deal. The set up is like this...their bed, a sofa which I slept on (which was really not that far away from their bed), a kitchen table and sink, no refrigerator, and a desk and three guitars...please note: I didn't mention a bathroom). All decorated impeccably might I add with tapestries over the bed from India and other places they've traveled. We had a delish dinner that Tuba made and then settled down outside on the wicker chairs to play guitar, talk, watch the storm (there was an INCREDIBLE storm both last night and tonight...I think its because of the heat). Just before bed Tuba was like...oh yea the bathroom. Well at night just go pee outside but if you have to really go then go to the long drop, here I'll show you. We walk off into the woods, flashlights in hand and she shows me this treehouse thing in their yard called 'the long drop'. Basically a treehouse with a bucket in it (that also has the most stunning view from on top of the mountain...its just not the most desirable place to sit because of the odors, which I'm sure you can imagine). So after I became acquainted with le toilet (if that's what you want to call it) we went to bed. Woke up very early and man was it hot. We had intended to do gardening but it was seven am and we were already soaked with sweat. But I got a tour of the permaculture garden (AMAZING...I had no idea there was such a science to it...its like this entire huge, and I mean massive garden is a mathematical problem. Everything is deliberately placed... the hibiscus next to the basil because the nutrients from the soil of the two help each other and then cross pollinate with x and y fern so this insect can travel to that plant...etc. etc. you get the point). Then we went over to the veggie garden, equally cool but not as cool as the olive trees and orchards (where we sat up in the mango trees and

talked and ate fresh mangos). Then we had some breakfast, found some shade where I helped Sandy build a stone wall and then took a walk over to their neighbors (well neighbors?) It was like a ten minute walk...Sandys focus is permaculture, the neighbors focus is indigenous plants. So I got a kind of 101, only part of which I retained, on all of the indigenous flowers and plants, which were really beautiful. Then we decided that it was totally a beach day and there was little work to be able to get down so we headed down to second beach. We goofed around, played in the water...happened to run into Jules who runs Delicious Monster (the restaurant we ate at the day before...yes the food is delicious, best falafel, well ill see if im still saying that after Israel...also shes the mom two of the girls we took with us on that hike in the jungle last week), then ran into these two people who work on Tia's farm (Tia is John Castello's best friend here, she runs and organic kitchen/restaurant/farm) had such a nice nice talk with them...they invited me up to the farm sometime, and also ran into TaryLynn (one of the other little ones who was with us on the hike last Saturday). So like I said...Pikesvilleish in many respects. We then laid out and dried out and I was headed home when I got a call from John. "If you aren't busy now...drop whatever you are doing come over I'm taking out my RV and we are going for a drive along the coastline...it's the perfect day for it, lets go). So next thing I know I'm in Johns emergency patrol vehicle heading way out over into the mountaintops, to places more remote than even the village. And it was all along the coast so every single place I turned, every time I blinked seem like a picture that was more beautiful than the last. And this went on for about an hour and a half. We saw jungles, farms, cattle, people from the villages, coastal views like I've never seen before, cliffs, rivers, oh yeahhh and a whale breaching. We headed back just in time to catch the sunset over the air strip which is like the token place to watch the sunset in town. Its kind of on the other side of the mountain so I got pictures of everything in between. Then we took some pictures in this little river bed area for the photo series which was kind of fun and made it up the air strip just in time to see the sun set. It was fun, because it was such a beautiful night, there were a bunch of people from Jungle Monkey there watching too, so we hung out with them a bit. Then the most exquisite storm started so we all watched it a bit from on top of the mountain and headed down when it started to rain.

Like I said, I think the best part about the week has been the relationships I've established. Whats weird about it though is that no matter where I am, whether I'm home, with Tuba and Sandy, hanging out Jungle Monkey, with John, out on a organized trip through the hostels I am way way by far the youngest person. And granted when it comes to the backpacker hostels and stuff I'm usually with people in their thirties and stuff, a lot of times (like the other night at the drum circle..i found myself in a long long conversation with all of the adults...Heather, Rich, Papa G who are all between mom and dad and grandma and grandpas age). I don't know its so funny its like I feel so young but at the same time it feels very

normal and okay and once again I'm sharing and learning so much from the people and places that surround me.

Continuing onward...so we are due to start setup about an hour after we get back and I still have no idea what I'm dressing up as (typical). It's funny every one here had been SO into organizing their costumes so they were shocked when four o'clock came round and I was still costume-less. So I looked in the mirror (I still had mud smudges all over my face) and I'm like...aha! wood fairy (inspired by my day). So I went outside and collected a bunch of leaves and sticks from the yard, threw on my little brown skirt and elf boots, stuck the leaves and things in my hair, and had myself a rockin' costume. Dom (my roommate) liked the costume so much that she switched hers at the last minute and we went as little wood elf/fairies together...which was perfect because we were all coordinated when we were MCing and hosting the party. As if people weren't already loving pointing and being like 'oh the Americans (that's what they call us here...Dom is the American, I the "other American", which I told Adam I find somewhat insulting because it makes me sound really dispensable) but basically our matching costumes made us stand out even more which gave people even more of an excuse and permission to make fun of us (all in a very loving way, of course). It's interesting...people here LOVE the American accent. These people came up to us after the party and were like, 'MC all of our events, we love listening to you talk'. Which I think is hilarious because I don't think our accent is all that beautiful and I'm so used to British people grimacing whenever they hear an American accent. Oy, I digress once again. So we set up everything, put up all the decorations that we and the kids made up and then the guests started arriving. The night included: two rounds of bobbing for apples, a three legged monster race (the caveat: two winners, the group who got to the finish line first and the group who created the best three legged monster...so basically you have a bunch of semi drunk people hobbling around pretending to be monsters. It was quite a site), the pool table of doom, the big pumpkin game (we dressed Adam up as a pumpkin and he had stickers of bats and ghosts with prizes on the back), and last but not least...a tribute to the good ol' bar mitzvah days the mummy wrap (no one here had ever heard/seen it before and they totally ate it up...yay party shoes DJ group!). So basically you bought in for every game, face painting for a few bucks, we also had a bake sale going as well as a few other raffle type stuff going and made a really nice sum for the school, which felt good. Plus it brought tons of kids and adults together to play games and just have a good time. I think it was a really big success—apparently the party kept on until like 5 am but I retired by 1130 once the games were done and I was done my part. I had had a really great time but I was pretty tired and Adam and Rich were heading home too.

Next morning I woke up, walked over to Jungle Monkey to do clean up and hung around there for awhile, I sat in the hammock outside and read for awhile. I had an awesome conversation with this kid Darren and his sidekick (cant remember his name)...they are these two boys who hang around here sometimes selling

jewelry that they make. I may or may not have some samples (hint hint). But they have a pretty amazing story...they are both orphans but make their own beaded jewelry now (they cut the holes and everything). They have remarkably good English and love to come hang out at our house. It's not like they are just random kids we found on the street...they have a connection with the project. But they aren't around too much because the trek from mPande (where they live) is about two hours walking. So I was really happy to see them and they taught me some new words in xhosa and I taught them some new words in English.

I was anxious to do something...a day trip or something because it was still pretty early and was a really nice day. Plus we had talked about going to the mud caves or out to the blowhole. But I think every one was pretty wiped from the night before so they were kind of just lounging around so I was more than excited when Adam asked if I wanted to trek back out to the village to help Diane out, which we did. We had an awesome meal out there and Diane and I continued our conversation from the previous night. Basically she confronted me with an idea...she said she and Luke had always wanted to develop a more creative outreach branch to the program but had been so busy with all of the building and logistics stuff that they never got around to it. So basically my new project is as follows: I'm working on a proposal that will be posted on the website and other forums that basically explains how we want to use theater as a form of educating the locals about things like water filtration and the importance of boiling your water etc. etc. and also as a means of playing out/working out a lot of the issues that surround the area. Like me, they believe that theater can be an extremely effective way of reaching out to people because it hits people on an emotional level that makes them both think AND feel differently about a situation. They want to concentrate the work at the school level for kids and theater is a great way to get them to learn in a fun and playful way. It's also so deeply tied to their roots and culture, however surprisingly has gotten lost somewhere in the mix and barely exists as an art form in this community. So the goal is to give people an opportunity to revive and revisit something that is deeply rooted in the history of the culture and to help educate and get them to think and feel critically about the issues that they currently face. So the proposal is essentially first for a group of engineers to come in and build a natural outdoor amphitheater on the premise. The idea is that we are saying: you have the idea and the design, do what you want, we give you the property, accommodation etc. etc. while you are working. Then the next step is getting either a group or series of groups/organizations to come and actually work with the people. To throw the message out there that we are always looking for people to come in for a month, two months, however long to do this kind of work with the people. We offer them the space, accommodation and they have the opportunity to do their work in a new and needy environment. So basically the second part is a proposal for people like me so hopefully we can get longer staying volunteers or an occasional organization to come and work with the people. I love having this project because there is a huge part of me that wants to stay and really carry out the work here (simply because a. they are so

responsive b. a lot can be accomplished in a month but I feel like its still so short and that there is so much that can/should be done IF I had more time...but I can't, so it makes me feel a little better knowing that I'm at least helping to develop something to try to sustain some sort of theater project here.

Sunday evening was just me and the boys which was actually so so much fun...I told Adam and Rich that when its just me and them at home (which has become more frequent because Dom has met a gentleman caller) I feel like Rich is my dad and Adam my brother...it's a pretty fun dynamic and we have a great time together. I love my one on one time with Dom too...we definitely have a great connection, but she has a hard time with the boys sometimes so its usually either me and Dom and the boys or me and the boys. I can genuinely say I really love every one here...although I will choose the me and Dom option when there is Manchester United football game on (some things just don't change...its just a different kind of football).

As for the kids these days...school is really incredible, definitely difficult at times. There are SERIOUS behavior issues...and its not just like the occasional talking in class. Its hitting and punching which is sometimes not meant to be malicious (many times it is)...they are just so physical here with each other. The kids have a lot going on and a lot of times out of their frustration they just hit. Or other times they get totally lost in class (because kids are all over the board here...its like they may be in grade 2 where they are reading but a lot of the individual kids cant read yet) So they get lost and bored and probably frustrated so they just start running around the room and hitting. So it's been an interesting week trying to deal with that, like I said I learn a lot. This both works to my advantage and disadvantage with the drama—because they are so unbelievably physical they take extremely well to the exercises BUT they also sometimes think that because we are playing games and things, it gives them permission to be physical in not such a constructive way. It makes the day extremely tiring cause I feel like I spend so much time and energy trying to get them to focus...and once they channel that energy its unreal. You have the occasional breakthrough moment like today when I created a rule that they couldn't touch each other at all (because they kept hitting each other and stuff) and then asked them to create a group statue physicalizing the word 'love' and they couldn't help but all naturally gravitate to the center of the room and hug each other. It was a pretty amazing thing to see.

Speaking of breakthroughs, I had my first session at the boys home today—these boys are SO wonderful..ah I just wish I could take them in. They are unbelievably responsive, throw themselves into the exercises and are extremely insightful. Its interesting, I have far less behavioral issues with them which is surprising because a. they are older and usually the older the harder it is for them to be uninhibited and b. they tend to be a little more rough outside of class and stuff. But I was totally shocked when I went there today...they were so warm and loving and

amazing to work with. I ended up staying and just hanging around with them for an extra half hour today just because we were enjoying our time together so much. We had staring contests, they showed me magic tricks, they told me jokes...it was a great afternoon.

I think I'm going to head off to read for a bit, I'm pretty wiped. Looking forward to tomorrow...I get to have drama all morning but then am off from 12 onward and Dom and I have plans to go ferry across the river and head to explore the caves of first beach.

Word of the day (for you dad): ahmahzeeyo = teeth (that's not how its spelled, I just did it phonetically)

Entry Seven

Alright, its been a bit of time since I last wrote so I'll try to recount the week thus far. Monday was pretty low key... Tuesday was definitely a highlight at the boys home. So last week I had gone with the masks and like I mentioned the kids sort of naturally tended towards the entrance of the home where people could see them. Now I'm not doing a show with the boys at the home so it gave me this idea to actually take them out and create a piece of live spontaneous street theater using the masks. So I got there on Tuesday evening and we did some warm ups with the masks. We established how each masks would greet some one, created this little 'mask dance' and then I explained that we would be going into town. Their goal (or intention...for you actor folk who are reading this) was to get people to laugh. So we got in a line and began our parade into town. And it was WILD! The whole thing was so amazing...the kids had a blast, the people in town LOVED it (it was great, we made people laugh we made people scream...) and because its small word got around fast that the boys were doing some drama thing and after a half hour or so people started collecting. So the boys paraded around town, going into shops, and then just before we left we parked ourselves outside of this huge warehouse store that was playing music and the kids just danced. A crowd of about 50-75 people gathered around and there we had it-street theater in the middle of Port St. John. I think it was especially cool for them and they took to it so well and naturally because, well, they are all street children. In some ways this makes so much more sense than doing an 'organized show with them'. I got back on Tuesday night (pretty late because the whole thing definitely took about 2 hours because they kept saying...can we stay for just ten more minutes...until another hour went by and they nearly missed dinner) and its just Adam and I. Adam didn't have the car but both of us were pretty antsy to do something so we started brainstorming randomo things that we could do in the house cause we were bored. And this led to the creation of Fort Sisonke. So we gather every blanket, every sheet we can find and turn the entire verandah into this massive fort. We hung out there for the night...doing work, reading, playing cards (and ghost...don't worry Ian I SCHOOLED Adam) which was so much more fun than just sitting around thinking what to do. I also had overheard Diane talking about

the whole monkey eating issue and her concern that kids in the schools in the very rural areas weren't aware of the problem. So I called her up and asked her if I could get a small group together to do an interactive educational skit. I'll go into details later but we've been working on it during the kids breaks all week and the kids are set to go for Monday (so exciting!)

Now Wednesday rolls around....SUCH an amazing day. It felt like a weekend, only it was Wednesday, which was pretty cool.

I pulled the small group of kids on Wed to get them to start rehearsing for this skit. I explained the problem (that being that people in the rural villages are eating monkeys) and we started a roundtable sort of discussion and debate as to why this is a problem, some of them didn't think it was a problem (so we developed counterarguments to the problem), and possible solutions. We decided that the most effective way to get the message across and to get the kids to interact was to base the skit around how similar humans are to monkeys. Basically what we have now is this really awesome skit of the story of a monkey (that they are acting out with the masks). Within the skit we stop and freeze and ask the audience questions (i.e. when establish that the monkeys favorite food is a banana we freeze the skit, turn to the audience, ask how many of them like bananas, and then get a volunteer up to actually eat a banana with the monkey). This establishes on a very physical and fun level the very message we are trying to get across...that we are no different than the monkeys they are eating. We do a series of these (including a monkey dance which we are going to teach them at the top of the skit). We prompt them with questions and discussion throughout the skit. Once it is over for the first time, we do the skit again, this time freezing it at the moment of conflict (when the human goes to kill the monkey) and ask them to change the ending and create an alternative solution for the problem and then we act out each suggestion. Lastly, we present them with our solution to the problem (the kids came up with this) which is for the human to grow his own garden and live off the land....the kids thought this was the best possible solution because it shows that he is working for his food and doing something productive, pretty sophisticated stuff for a ten year old to come up with). I'm really excited about the project and I think this type of theater could be SO effective here. Its amazing because its for kids by kids, it gets the audience to think and feel deeply about a problem which surrounds them while having fun (I mean they get to act like monkeys), to discuss and debate, as well as come up with potential solutions. Hopefully this will at least raise awareness in the area, if not spur on a bit of change.

So I get out of school on Wed and head immediately into town. There is a new animal welfare program that just recently arrived in town and they are building an animal clinic. Because Diane and her crew were scheduled to go help out for the day, they asked if I wanted to go so of course I said yes. So I head down immediately to the animal shelter—what's going on there is amazing. Basically these guys work all day every day and the goal is to get the shelter up in two weeks (they only just started this week). The day that I was there they had accomplished the following: building two kennels, digging up a trench, and

putting up some huge structure (not sure what it is but I have pictures). I met Richard the head of the project who asked if I would stay to bounce around some ideas about education and how to incorporate theater into the mix. His focus right now is building the shelter, sterilizing the animals...but education is his next big thing. So I explained to him what I was doing with this small group of kids with the preservation of wildlife (monkey skit) and he was so excited by the idea and started getting all of these ideas of how to tie it into his work. He asked me if I could please create a template explaining the process so that people could use it in the future. Basically a lot of the work I'm doing right now is getting some of this stuff down on paper, interacting with the teachers (doing teacher training sessions), so that this can sustain a bit once I leave. I think the hardest thing about this is you come in, implement something but then what happens when you leave? So a lot of the focus this week (as my departure grows nearer and nearer...ah cant even think about it) is on creating some sort of sustainability plan for when I leave. Well we head out after the animal clinic to go into town to get some groceries and things...trying to figure out what to do for the afternoon (cause it was so beautiful out). I didn't have my phone on me because it was out of minutes so we walk around to the hub (this little area where there are shops) and one of the ladies tells me that Tuba had been trying to reach me. So Adam calls her back...turns out they are all about to go on a river boat cruise down the Umzivubu...we had just missed them. We are totally bummed and just as we are about to head home one of our friends pulls up...he happens to be going towards the bridge where the boat is and offers to drive us there...yesss! So we hop in the car (they are already out on the river) so we basically meet them at this bridge, they pull the boat over and we kind of slide down the hill into the mud to get into the boat. And the boat ride was so glorious...it was such a beautiful day and its really cool to have another perspective of actually being in between all of the mountains. So we reach a certain point and they are like okay who wants to canoe back. Obviously Dom and I shot up, got lifejackets on, and within twenty minutes were paddling our way back down the river. We were really lucky because basically they got these canoes last week and were using us as a test run for the 'canoeing down the river' activity that they are going to be offering and charging quite a bit for at the hostel. So it took us like an hour or so to paddle back and we get a call as we are walking down the boat that Rich is heading up to the air strip to see the sunset. It was a super clear day so we all knew that the sunset was going to be spectacular. so it was a perfect night for it. As we are walking up to the house to meet him Papa G rolls around and is like 'I just got a call that a plane crashed on the air strip...every one is fine but they want me to check it out, want to come'. So we head up with him to investigate this thing...basically we roll up to the air strip and there is plane right in the middle of the cattle field, had totally missed the landing strip. Like I said, every one was fine (it had been a few hours anyways so it was pretty much just the plane there). Basically the air strip has two sides to it...one that looks out onto the river and ocean and is just massive cause you are on top of the mountain and feel like you are on top of the world and then

the other side is where you can actually see the sun set. So we went to the one side just because it's beautiful (but you can't see the sunset from there) so we jetted over to the other side quickly so that we could catch it. And man, was it absolutely amazing. I got pictures but they won't suffice. It was such a nice night...the air was really warm and stuff and it was nice because there weren't a lot of people there...just us and Diane and little Rachel. We headed back down the mountain fairly quickly because well we were really muddy and wet from canoeing and had a concert to catch.

There is a musician in South Africa (he's an older guy) who goes by the name of Sid Kitchen and people have been talking about him coming for a few weeks now...they were pretty excited about it because he'd never been to Port St. Johns before. So we all decided this wasn't something to miss and headed over to Jungle Monkey (where the show was), parked ourselves on a comfy couch right in front of the stage, and had THE most lovely evening. I guess you would classify his music as folk...he's an older guy but it was just so relaxing and nice, plus it was still warm out and Jungle Monkey has this sort of open air thing as their main room plus hammocks and a fire pit so it was pretty much a set up for a relaxing night. Plus this guy brought this baby monkey that he had recently rescued so that was a nice added touch. The concert went on till like 1230 which was a lot later than I wanted to be out but it was totally worth it. Plus the sky that night was so unreal—it was so clear and I don't think I've ever seen that many stars in the sky.

Thursday – The highlight was most definitely what went down at the boys home...it was probably one of the most powerful experiences I've had here and it happened totally unexpectedly. But just to go through the day a bit—it was extremely extremely hot so the kids were really irritable which made classes pretty difficult. I pretty much went straight through the day because I am now rehearsing with the monkey skit during breaks and lunch and then we had teacher training and then the boys home. So it was kind of a hard day with discipline and stuff (which was to be expected I guess) but I was pretty wiped and was feeling a little dejected and disappointed from the day cause I didn't get a lot of what I wanted to done because of behavior and stuff. Plus the teacher meeting was super hard to sit through because we were dealing with really tough issues. Basically, the way that the school works is people basically pay what they can. They sit down with families upon enrollment and are like...what is reasonable for you to pay per month and come up with a figure and go from there. The idea is that they don't want kids to be denied education because of financial issues so they've created this sort of system that is really great but is unfortunately abused. Basically we have several situations where people haven't paid the small fees that they owe (some for up to a year now). Now they have outstanding fees, still aren't paying for current fees and the question is whether to allow the kid to return the following year. It becomes complicated because the question becomes can they really not pay anything or are they abusing the system? And if they aren't paying now, how are they going to pay the debt off and what are the chances they will pay in the future. Plus they know some background about the certain of the

families incomes and it seems like they are abusing the system a bit but then it becomes a question as to whether you can judge that and what/if anything is considered valid reason not to pay for extended periods of time. Plus if we waive the outstanding fees we are a. not meeting certain quotas that are set out and designed to pay for our fees and then b. making exceptions and then other parents will think that they can do it and it just starts this whole cycle. But at the same time, should a child be denied education because either their parents are unable or too irresponsible to pay. It totally tore at my heartstrings too because one of the kids too happened to have been the girl who wrote the poem that I shared and its just like you have the push and pull of the kid and seeing them blossom here...like I know how much school means to this kid and why should a kid be punished for something totally out of their control but at the same time the parent hasn't paid since mid 2008 which is really serious.

So I was pretty drained but the boys home was couldn't have been more perfectly timed because the two hours we spent together were probably two of the most powerful hours I've experienced here or really anywhere for that matter. So a lot of the work I've been doing with them is more of the maskwork/storytelling kind of stuff because they've been responding so well to it and I think they just love having an outlet to play and pretend. But I did tons of research on Boal and dramatherapy before I came and was really anxious to at least try some of it with them. At the same time, I was pretty scared cause I know they've been through a lot, I haven't been working with them for that long so I felt pretty intrusive just being like 'okay here we've been playing..now lets deal with your stories and your issues'. But it worked out really well because when I arrived there were only four boys there (the rest had to go into town). So I was like..perfect, the intimacy and small size of the group would be a great opportunity to do some smaller groupwork/trust stuff and lead into some of the more touchy work. So I ask them if they have a special spot on the grounds where they like to go..I'm thinking maybe a little shaded cove behind the garden or something like that. And they are like...lets go to the river, can we go there? They let me take the boys wherever so Im like sure...(the river isn't far at all) and we go to the riverbank on this beachy area where there is no one else there. Its sort of difficult to explain exactly how it all panned out but basically all of the exercises that we did amounted to them each telling their stories and physicalizing different parts of the story or feeling associated with the story. So they were creating these physical images off of the story and it was pretty powerful. But what was most amazing about it was that we used it to connect to each other and the boys were able to open up about their stories and identify with each others story but on a purely physical and emotional level. I cant even properly articulate how difficult but also amazing it was to see them share this because they've all gone through things at such a young age that you cant even imagine. Just hearing them talk about how hungry they were when they were living off the streets, or the abuse they sustained, and how they felt when they finally ran away...I'm not even going to try to go into it because it's not the point...you get the idea that life is pretty hard for them. So to finish it off

on an empowering note we stood on top of the sandbank which is set right in front of the mountain and did an imagination/image exercise dealing with power and using the mountain as sort of an image for them and I think they all felt pretty tremendous by the end of it...which is good cause my biggest fear was having them delve into their stories, rehash things and then feel totally crappy afterwards. Today/Friday – We were originally supposed to go do the skit today but unfortunately the school we are supposed to go to messed up a bit and there was a miscommunication so we couldn't go. They kids were bummed to say the least. So the morning started off pretty rocky because I felt like I totally let them down. There is one kid (Gordon)...he has it pretty rough and he always really takes to the volunteers...he comes over and hangs out all the time but because of whatever he's dealing with he's unbelievably needy (he is always vying for attention) and he can be extremely volatile too. He became really angry and erratic, like every time I tried to talk to him he would cover his ears and run away (all in the name of getting attention of course, but still it hurt to deal with). We explained that we were trying to set up another time to go so that we would keep rehearsing. All of them were totally cool with it except for Gordon who refused to come into the room to rehearse and said he didn't want to do it anymore. So as much as I wanted to chase after him and try to meddle with him, I knew it was just his way of dealing so we had to replace him and keep working. Well, within a few minutes we got the go ahead to go to do the skit on Monday, now for two schools and the CART project and the Living Positive group (women infected with HIV/AIDS) so the kids were all totally excited. I could tell Gordon had regretted his rash decisions and behavior but he still was avoiding every one so we just let him be. I was a bit down throughout the day cause it was making me sad plus the 4/5 (who are the ones doing the bulk of the show) were totally out of control. But the afternoon totally 360'd so it was more than okay. After class Gordon asked if he could speak to me privately and I said sure. And he sat me down and gave me the most heartfelt apology and we had a really good conversation and now both he and the person who 'replaced' him will be able to do the skit on Monday. Well we had to kind of rush the kids out of school because we were set to head up to Elizabeth's house. Elizabeth is the preschool teacher here...her mother passed away last week so we all decided we wanted to do a house visit for her, which was a really eye opening cultural experience. First of all, it was really cool to just see where she lived because I feel like I've gotten close with a lot of the teachers but it's like you know them in a certain context. To see their home and their life outside of school really made a lot of things make sense. Plus, I always just love seeing the different homes and lifestyles here. Also also, tons of the kids live in that particular area so it was kind of fun to be able to see them outside of school and wave to them and play a bit while we were on our way up. That's another definite highlight about the week...the relationships with the teachers. I've really gotten close with all of them over the course of the week so it was nice to spend a good solid few hours with them today. Plus the whole concept of the house visit was really amazing—we sort of just sat there in silence for

awhile...we were there to comfort and support but there was this guest feeling too...they fed us this traditional xhosa dish and brought us all of this food (which brought up all of these interesting things about what its like to be a guest in a house...what you want to eat v. what you feel obligated to eat because well I think one of the dishes had meat even though they said it didn't, and it was like there was so much food but we didn't want to be rude) Disko (one of the teachers) made a speech in Xhosa which was really beautiful because there Tuba and I are, we have no idea what he's actually saying but at the same time totally got it. He translated afterwards and it was a really beautiful speech and it was just really nice and special to all be together, to see and meet Elizabeth's family (I held her grandson...the cutest tubbiest three month old I've ever seen and he fell asleep in my arms...I wish I could have taken a picture but it just wasn't the time and place), and to see her house...she took so much pride in showing us the grounds and things cause they had built everything themselves.

We headed back to town by four o'clock ish and we go into town and I see one of the boys from the home while I was at the supermarket. I asked him what they were doing at the home this afternoon and he said they were just hanging so I asked if I could stop by. I bought some lollipops for the boys before I headed out and went there expecting to just go say hi, hang out and then head back up the mountain. But I get there and of course they are like do you have the masks. Wellll I happened to have taken my backpack to Elizabeth's and still had a bunch of the masks from my last class in there so I did. So then the headmaster comes in (and he had been really strict with me about when I could come and teach and stuff) so I'm like can I do a few mask exercises with them before I head up the hill and he's like 'yea only if I can do it too' So he comes in and starts doing maskwork with us and I was talking about how I wanted us to go into town again before I left to the street theater thing and they are like, now now now. The headmaster turns to me and is like...why not! So we have another impromptu parade which turned into this massive street like show and I didn't think it was possible but it was even more amazing then what he had created on Tuesday. I have pictures and videos to share but by the middle of it the kids were going up and scaring people, blowing kisses to people, totally creating this little skits in the streets and then we all gathered together with like a crowd of (mmm by the middle of it Id say there was a good 75 people or so) and every one is dancing and having a great time and just watching these kids. So there's an empty carton laying in the street right in front of where they are doing their dancing and stuff and some guy watching goes and puts money in it. Well soon enough a bunch of the people watching are actually coming up and giving the kids a rand or two here and there for this makeshift show that they have spontaneously put on. The whole thing was amazing and we get back to the home and this one boy is like...I've got it! I've got major plannage (I really liked that word he created so I had to include it). We can do this instead of selling candy and make money that way! So now they are all like brainstorming about how they are going to use the masks to create these skits in the middle of town and stuff and make money. And especially after

a day of feeling like the work I was doing wasn't really getting anywhere that was the biggest reward to hear. Because basically what the kid was suggesting was how great it could be that they could make money because they were creating and having fun instead of scrounging and stealing. And hearing that, I feel like I can go home feeling like I helped in some way.

As for the weekends plans—we are headed to this waterfall called Magwa Falls early tomorrow morning. Its about 2 hours away so it's going to be a full day event...it's supposed to be unbelievably beautiful. I think we are going to make a firepit and have a brai (I was spelling it wrong as brie before..so a brai not the cheese) so that should be nice. Internet has been hard to come by this week because we haven't had the dongal (the wireless device..I just like writing it cause it's a funny word) so sorry if I haven't written/responded. Will update soon!

Entry Eight

It's a little bit after five am right now and I'm awake because the wind and the rain are so unbelievably loud that you really cant sleep (I think every one in the house is up right now). I guess its only appropriate that Id be writing this update now because rain has pretty much shaped the entire week. It has rained SO much. ..its been pretty constant Friday and unfortunately is supposed to continue on through the weekend. Today is definitely the worst that its been though-I don't honestly know if we are even going to have school today because the kids cant possibly walk in this and even those with transports may not be able to make it up the mountain because I'm not sure the cars can make it through the mud up the hills. I guess we'll see. I'm really hoping that the forecast is wrong because a. we have the show tomorrow and its supposed to be outside (we do have other indoor arrangements in case of rain) and b. we have all of these big weekend trip/activities planned for before I go and I they are all weather permitting. But so far we been able to work around it so I don't see why we cant for this weekend as well.

So I guess Ill start off where I left off...

Saturday – we have big plans to head out to Magwa Falls in the morning and then come home to have a big pot luck/braii get together with a bunch of our friends from around town but of course we wake up and its totally crap weather. So we decide from the getco that Magwa isn't going to happen that day. We (well Dom) made banana pancakes from scratch and we kind of just lounged around the house but Adam and I were both getting a little antsy. We had big plans for the day and wanted to make something of our day so we called up Diane to see if we could come and help out up in the village. So we go and grab a few things from town (saw a bunch of the boys from the home in town and hung out with them for a bit...OOO good story! So I needed to make Xerox copies of a bunch of things and all the places I know of had broken ink cartridges or machines or something but luckily some of the boys were with me and they were like follow us! So they take me to this whole in the wall shop that sells like fake hair, wigs, cosmetics, and plastic recorders(..yess like the instrument, that seemed a bit random and unfitting

but who knows?) and I'm like are you sure I can make copies here. And before I can say anything else I hear some one go 'Nwabisa' and I'm like huhh I know that name and I look at the lady behind the counter and I realize!! She's one of the two women that I had walked up the hill with a few days before and had this really hilarious broken English/xhosa conversation with...it was the cutest thing, I was walking up the hill, she and her mother sort of started talking to me, I talked to them, we taught each other new words and by the time I had reached the school we were like 'I love you in our opposite languages'...anyways small world that I happened upon their store and yes they did have a Xerox machine as well as hair things and plastic recorders...Nwabisa also let me play with her three month old baby who was so so cute) So after errands in town we take Zukes (short for Zukilie – he's this awesome 14 year old kid who lives on the compound that Diane and Luke have sort of taken in..he has a really interesting story. That's definitely been a highlight of the week...learning a lot more about peoples background and family stories...some really sad and hard to hear stuff, but it gives you deep insight and perspective on these kids situations) out for lunch, and then head up to the village. There isn't much to do in the rain (we couldn't work the gardens at all) so we colored with Rachel, had some hot chocolate, made some homemade popcorn and just sort of all curled up and kept each other warm (its been cold too) and headed to bed early hoping that we would have better luck in the morning. The plan was, weather permitting, we would leave the village early, head back down the mountain into town to get Dom and hit up Magwa. (sidenote: I had been working on all of these documents too—trying to put down into writing what I can in a way that's easy for people to understand. Sort of a guide to some of the work that I've been doing..i.e. I created a document on the process of how to go about making an interactive education skit and then used the monkey skit as an example. That way people have it in writing and can at least try to implement some version of what has been started here this month. That has now been distributed up at the village to the teachers at the school where we did the monkey skit and Diane also has a copy. I also had a meeting with Richard (animal shelter) this week who was extremely interested in the interactive theater piece and potentially using masks (specifically dog masks) to create lessons about animal abuse and basing his whole education program around that. So he now has a copy of that and is hoping to implement it as well. I've also created a document on how drama can be effective with conflict mediation. I started using some of the Boal stuff to deal with the fighting and disciplinary issues and the teacher I work with is starting to take it on so in teacher training today we are going to do a training and learning session on how to use drama to deal with fighting and conflicts, how to incorporate drama in subtle ways into the classroom (i.e. in a history lesson taking an event and having the kids act out a 2 minute version of the event, etc. etc.) and also a briefing on the basic maskwork process (because I am going to leave the masks here and at the boys home). Because there its totally unrealistic to write out every exercise that we've done and expect that they'll be implemented I focused on these three things because a. I think they are most

effective b. they are most easily incorporated into the academic classroom (because it's not like they have the staff or resources or training right now to just build a drama program) and c. because these three focus and deal most with the mind/body connection which is the basis of all of the work. The kids aren't realistically going to have a full out drama program right now, but hopefully they will be getting a bit more of this physical/mind/body kind of work in their regular classes in more subtle ways.

So Diane and I spent a lot of time going over this and the proposal for the amphitheater so it was nice to get some of that done. Luke has also been very involved in all of this but has been out of town a lot (to Capetown, Durban, Umtata, dealing with various projects and getting materials for the school together) so I had a long chat with him on the phone about how to try to get at least some of this to sustain while I'm gone. I think that's the big fear...I know that's what I'm most unsettled about. If anything I've learned that yes, it's great that I could come here and do this but in order for it to be most effective and able to sustain on its own, it needs more than a month. They've taught me here that a project is most fulfilled when you can pull out and the people can carry it on their own. Fortunately a lot has been accomplished in a little bit of time, unfortunately the self sustaining model can't be fulfilled for this particular project at this particular time. But I have confidence that even if it's just an exercise, or the use of the masks once a month, that a little piece of it will live on. And I also know that somebody in some way will pick up with at some point...(maybe the boys really will go out and do a street performance once a week now), and make it their own (which is even cooler). I also know that my work here isn't done and I'm pretty sure I'll be back..not sure when, but I know I will.

Okay so that was a big sidenote...(no Andrew I'm not going to say, I digress) but that's really been my biggest concern and focus this week.

So Saturday...we wake up (YAYYY its not raining) and well waking up means starting the day at six and we weren't due to head to Magwa till late morning so Adam, Rachel (another volunteer who was working here before I came...went to Malawi for a month and has just returned...haven't seen her much because her parents are in town now and she lives at the village but anyhoo), and I took Zukes out to Ungazi beach which is the beach right by the village. And it was such an awesome morning because it's so quiet there regardless but especially because we hit it early in the morning there was no one there except us. So we head back down to town to grab Dom and then head out to Magwa (much later than planned). We weren't exactly sure how far Magwa was...the estimate was like an hour and a half and we weren't in a rush to get back or anything so it didn't really matter. Except well we took a scenic detour I guess you could say..more like an off roading adventure (because the roads aren't really roads in this area), which was actually so perfect because we got to see an awesome landscape and some really remote areas. We had some pretty hilarious adventures (no they weren't really dangerous but I'll spare the details for Mom and Dad's sake) and three hours later show up at the top of the falls. It's funny cause we had this whole

picnic lunch planned to eat at the top of the falls and after like two hours we are like..okay, Adam are you sure you know how to get there? And he's like well I have only been here once and it was the day after I arrived here for the first time last year and they just said head towards Lusikisiki and I figured I would just follow the signs (well duhhh we are in the middle of super rural South Africa...there ARENT any signs). The only thing he could remember were tea plantations, so after two and a half hours we hit tea plantations and knew we were in the right spot. Granted our picnic lunch was well gone before we arrived..but oh my gosh was it worth the wait (plus like I said it was kind of imperfectly perfect that we got lost cause we had a great time). So I had heard about the falls but I didn't really think they were that big of deal. Just look at my pictures...which don't even do it justice. I mean the site of them was totally tremendous and its like they are really in the middle of nowhere...unless you knew where to look you would never find them..its not like this tourist spot (we were the only ones there except for the people who were doing their laundry at the top of the falls). You can look at the pictures, which are pretty good I might add (the good ones aren't mine...I stole them from roommates) but it really doesn't show how massive the falls are and how deep the gorge is. And its not like there is a fence so you sort of just go up to the edge of the cliff and its kind of scary but it's just so unbelievably huge. So we hang around there for a bit and then turn right back around (Adam wanted to watch WWE..what a loser...PS WWE is like the most widely watched thing here...I'm telling you the highly Western components of this town are hilarious...WWE and KFC).

So even though it had rained, it turned out to be a really good weekend.

Monday was kind of a downer of a day...we were supposed to go do the skit (once again) and it was raining and they had sent down the wrong truck (the one without the cover) so we couldn't transport the boys up the mountain to get to the village to do the skit. They were bummed, I was bummed and I think they were getting really frustrated with me cause we kept postponing the date. The goal was to do it Wed but it hadn't worked out thus far and I was so worried that Wed was going to come around and something else was going to happen. There was also a major behavioral incident where a girl played a trick/joke on me and then lied about it when confronted. Unfortunately her punishment was that she wasn't allowed to go do the monkey skit. It was not a fun situation...I happen to love this kid...but the point was we gave her the opportunity to have a dialogue about it and she flat out lied when confronted about it and so all the teachers felt that because she lied there needed to be consequences. So that was that and wasn't really a highlight of my week but unfortunately I think it needed to be done.

Well Tuesday was a real treat after a disappointing Monday. First off, I met with Richard

that day (which I told you about earlier) and he was just so excited about having the documents and getting this education outreach program started with the animal welfare shelter. It was really cool to go down there because they've made unbelievable progress over the course of the week on the shelters. Plus the dogs

and puppies were there that day and they are so adorable so that was fun too. I then put up tons of posters for the show (because we are trying to get as many people to come see it as possible, we've sent out letters to all the parents and put up posters all around town, at the supermarkets, in the stalls, by ATM machines, by KFC (of course) etc etc ...so far I think we'll have a great turnout, so long as the weather holds up). Then it was time for the boys home. I'm telling you...every time I go there I have a more amazing experience than the last...these boys really really amaze and humble me (I know I've said it several times but working with them is just such a treat and I learn so much from them). So I get there with a plan...I know they are all going to want to do the masks (the plan was to do another final thing in town on Thursday before I head out of town..and then I told them id buy them all dinner at KFC...my first, last, and only time in KFC..i think I'm the only person here who can say that...but I would do it for the boys). So I show up on Tuesday with the masks, I know they are going to ask to go into town again but I have a plan. I wanted to go and have Tuesday to plan a more structured sort of skit/parade thing so that we'd be doing something different this time. I wasn't sure how they'd respond. So I get there I explain the idea and they are all like yea yea! Lets do it! Meanwhile it's really exciting because three weeks ago, the group started with like six maybe eight kids...by Tuesday there were close to twenty. So we sit down to brainstorm and I'm like okay we need to start with the conflict and then we can build the story from there. So I'm thinking because we have like an hour to put this together and then are going to go do it on Thursday that we'll do something simple, silly. I give them suggestion examples of really stupid conflicts...like I have the monkey and bird mask so I thought we'd do something silly about a monkey and bird. Well one kid raises his hand and says...why cant the conflict be about drug abuse. And the kids are all like yea yea yea. I'm totally stunned..here I am proposing these stupid banal conflicts about birds stealing the monkeys banana and the kids are like ten million steps ahead of me, wanting to do a skit about something that really matters to them and that they have a lot of experience with. So they take off brainstorming...breaking down the characters, dividing out the parts, matching the masks to the parts, and within an hour we have this awesome simple skit about drug abuse, how and why it's a problem and habit here (because parents bring it into the household, the kids take it into the schools, and then its spread around the schools..thats the basis of the skit), and then a follow up discussion about how to address the problem. So the teacher comes down to watch it at the end of our session and he's like..I decided that I'm going to let the boys get out of school early to come see your show with the kids...can they do this at the end of the skit. And I'm totally thrilled! So now I think Friday will be this great culminating thing that will include the play, the monkey skit, and they boys home skit. Hopefully we'll still be able to do it in town today if the weather gets better, if not we'll just work on it again for tomorrow...and even if its not seen, I think its an amazing thing that they boys created it and now hopefully they can create these on their own). Adam came to pick me up in the truck and we sort of blare music out of the

truck and they all climb in and we have this big dance party...it was really fun. Wednesday (yesterday) SUCH a good day. The day started off really well with school...the kids in the grade 2/3 were amazing, the teacher and I were having ourselves a really good time while teaching (I've gotten really close with the teachers, especially the 2/3 teacher...we've learned so much from each other by watching each other teacher...I have some super interesting stories about incidents that happened with discipline and hitting students (or refraining from hitting students I should say),,but I don't really want to delve into that now. So we were having a blast but I was antsy because I was still waiting to hear from Diane who was waiting to hear from the headmaster if we were allowed to go up to the school in Sicambeni (rural village) to do the skits..and I'm like...we are supposed to leave in two hours and we still don't know if we can go? The last thing I wanted to do was disappoint the boys again. So Diane calls and is like I cant get through to him, you guys have the right car, just come up here, you can do it for the people at the shop at least and we'll just show up at the school. And thank goodness we did. Because we got to do it three times (once for the mamas at the shop, once for the entire intermediate level of the school...which was probably close to/a bit over 100 kids, and then for the grade 9 kids). The boys were absolutely BRILLIANT...they did such a good job and the response was really really cool. Got part of it on video so I'll be bringing that home. As a sort of celebratory thing we took the boys back to Diane's house at the village, made them some homemade popcorn, gave them 2 rand so they could play pool in the shop and sort of hung out for a bit and had a really good time. The kids took my camera and took a gazillion pictures of themselves...but it was getting late and we had to get the boys home. But before we left we got a real treat...I don't know if I've mentioned, but one of the newest projects at the village is this beekeeping and honey-making project. They are on the brink of starting it now, have gotten the bee/brood box, and have trained a bunch of the locals on how the process, and are starting it now. So before we leave, Nauta (another local up at the village...sort of similar situation to Zukes) comes and brings in the bee box and teaches all the boys in xhosa about the bee making process. I was so mad because my camera had died but it was just such a cool experience to see this twenty something guy (who a year ago was an inactive, obese alcoholic and is now a working productive and healthy working man) teaching these kids about the process. They asked questions and at the end the treat was a honeycomb for each of us...we sucked the honey right out of the comb (made sure not to eat the wax) and left very happily. It was raining and the kid had all definitely missed their transports...so we took them each to their location which was actually so cool because it gave us time to extend our little road trip (which was full of sing a longs in both xhosa and English..everything from traditional xhosa songs to adam and I singing red hot chili peppers and them making the drums and background noises, and all of us singing 50 cent together?) But it was really cool to take them each to their locations because I got to see where each of them live. And it was cute, they would point out where other kids lived as well. Such a great day (even though it

was raining) cause you could tell the kids felt great and proud (as they should have been) and it was just a really awesome day. We get home, have dinner, had a hilarious evening with the four of us just joking around (the dynamics here are really funny and we aren't all usually in the same room and hanging out..last night we were for quite awhile and it was really a great evening). We all decided we wanted to get out of the house so we went over to amapondo (other backpackers place..where Annie works, where I left for the mud caves a few weekends ago) and had a really nice night...the atmosphere there is just so nice cause its this sort of covered outdoor thing with all these cool fabrics and hanging everywhere and little fireplaces/woodburning stoves, and floor pillows, couches, hammocks...just a nice place to go and hang out) There was this super intense poker game going on there (oh I guess I should add that to the list too...WWE, KFC, poker), so the boys played poker for a bit and we just talked with some of the backpackers and the people who worked there who we've become friends with etc. etc. I came back with Rich on the earlier end, Adam and Dom stayed (because Adam wanted another poker game) but overall...great great day.

I'll probably write once more just before I head out because we have big plans for the weekend including...first and foremost...THE SHOW!!, teacher training today, tomorrow we have Elizabeth's mothers funeral which should be a really fascinating experience, and we also have plans to go to mpande (this supposedly beautiful town that's about an hour away...really remote, no electricity..we are supposed to head out tomorrow right after the show and come back for the funeral Sat morning, but who knows what will happen with the rain), and we also wanted to have a get together here Saturday night as sort of a goodbye thing with all the teachers and people from town who have become good friends over the course of the month.

SOOO all for now. Love and miss you...but will be seeing most of you oh so soon!

STUDENT GENERATED WORK

In an attempt use theater in conjunction with their other classes, I asked the children to write poems, which we then used as the basis for a movement piece. This is a sample of one of the students writing, which we used in our final production

I Always Be Different
Poem By: Tunni

When I am going to school
Everybody and every one always run away from me
Cause I am HIV positive
I always say to them what comes around goes around
I am a person just like you all
I need to do the things you all do
Happiness is all over the place
I will always live my life

PROPOSAL

CART (Center for Appropriate Rural Technology), one of the local organizations asked me to generate this proposal to try to bring more theater into the community. You can find it on their website and other online volunteer networks.

PROPOSAL FOR AMPITHEATER/THEATER EDUCATION PROJECT

GOALS OF PROJECT

- create an outdoor ampitheater
- create an interactive theater education program

WHO WE ARE LOOKING FOR

In order to implement these two projects, which include (designing the space, building the space, designing/launching a theater program, training/education the people so the program can sustain) we need:

- architects, engineers, designers, builders/workers [ampitheater project]
- drama educators, actors who are interested/trained in education, educators with a theater background [theater education project]

WHY THIS PROJECT

-theater, dance, and drama are all components that were once very much present in the Xhosa culture but have become lost over the years. we want to provide the people with a space and opportunity to return to their cultural roots.

-the area is rampant with issues from alcoholism, to drug abuse, to lack of education (to name a few). the people are currently uneducated and unaware of many of the issues which surround them, let alone how to begin addressing them. we would like to use theater as an outlet to educate, bring about awareness, and hopefully catalyze change.

-the community of PSJ has little to no exposure to theater and does not currently have a theater space

ABOUT US/WHY CHOOSE US:

- CART was formed as a centre to tackle poverty in a more holistic way. CART aims to give the local population the skills and technology to allow them to live self-sustainably without the need to seek work outside of their own villages, ultimately allowing the migrants to return to their homelands. CART's primary

goal is to complete the self sustainable model, serving as the epicentre to the surrounding village of over four hundred families. CART aims to empower and actively involve the local community at each stage of the process and in the projects decision making. This approach of involving the community in their own development allows for individuals to gain an understanding of the self and for the environment in which they live.

-Our current projects include: a school (Sisonke School), coffee project (Transkei Gold), jam and chutney making project (Elalani), permaculture gardens, building yard, nutrition kitchen, and learning center

-Our program centers itself on interlinked projects. We provide our volunteers with the opportunity to help out with any of the projects on the compound and encourage collaboration and assistance with other projects in the area.

HOW IT WORKS

We propose the project, you provide the idea, you come and execute it, we provide the support

WHAT WE OFFER:

-space -food -interlinked projects
-accommodation -village mediation

* please note: we are a growing organization and are working on many projects at once. while this is positive in that we are accomplishing a great deal to help the community reach a point where they can help themselves, we want all volunteers to understand that we merely have the energy to provide the basics (those things listed in the what we offer section). you are responsible for covering any additional costs/needs.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON US AND OUR PROJECTS PLEASE VISIT:

- <http://www.cartsa.co.za>
- <http://www.sisonkeschool.co.za/>