Still Out of Africa

A quick update on the Very Big Project. The interest and support has been fantastic, with more than 40 donors contributing to my efforts to travel to Uganda and follow this story. I'm especially grateful to Doug Blackburn for his generous coverage of this project in the Tallahassee Democrat.

Fundraising

Exceptional generosity from people like you has amounted to around $3700 collected so far. This is still around $1300 shy of what I need to make the trip, so if you haven't dropped some coin, please click here to make a tax deductible contribution. (You can also use the Donate button on this page. It's at the upper right, or on mobile devices, down at the bottom.)

Aside from air fare, travel expenses include a series of exotic vaccinations; a supply of anti-malarial medications; food and other on the ground expenses; lodging; cash for "tips" to various parties who need encouragement to do their jobs (or follow the law). It adds up.

(The fund is being administered by the Domi Station organization through their non-profit arm; they are acting as fiscal agent for the project. This enables you to contribute with a tax advantage.)

Travel dates

Eagle-eyed readers must wonder: "Aren't you supposed to be

gone and back by now?”

Yep.

The first dates fell through. A new date was set, one that would have me descending into Entebbe Airport right about…now. But that date fell through, too. As to why? The process is pretty opaque, but I’m guardedly optimistic that we are going to make the journey before the end of the year.

The waiting is making me crazy, but it has afforded me more time for fundraising and advance research. Still…ready. to. go.

Research

Lots of progress in this realm. Dozens of books, research papers, articles, etc. on topics such as African history and economics; the many facets of famine, including not just relief efforts but attempting to understand the weaponization of famine as an instrument of war (truly horrific); Euro colonialism in Africa and elsewhere; the emergence of startup incubators and technology hubs in Africa (very exciting!); the peculiar dynamics of co-dependency between massive aid organizations and the governments and people they “serve”; and the role of the humble peanut in transforming agrarian economies in the southern US.

Among the many other rabbit hole tangents that keep appearing beneath my feet, I have become a follower of the English-language press in sub-Saharan Africa, especially Uganda, Kenya, and South Sudan.

As one should expect, the reality of Africa is often at odds with the generally accepted mythos of what has been called the Dark Continent. Africa is modernizing at a remarkable pace, even as millions of people remain essentially isolated by the extreme distances involved; however, even this has been abated somewhat by the proliferation of mobile phones and devices.

And the economic growth rate of much of Africa has far outpaced most of the “developed” world over much of the past decade.

Yet still, outbreaks of violence and famine and infectious disease are an almost constant element on the continent.

It is a layered story, and while I’m trying to maintain a radical neutrality as far as story frame is concerned, I am beginning to see that most of what I thought I knew about Africa was basically a fairy tale. What will I discover? What stories will I find and bring home? Can I do any of this without just being another well-meaning Western interloper who parachutes in for a taste of the exotic just so I can be the life of the cocktail party when I return?

There is serious work on my plate. I hope to honor the expectations of those of you who have supported me, but even more so, to honor the people and places that I’ll be visiting.

It’s huge, this endeavor. But really, the support I’ve received means the whole world to me.

Molto grazie! Grazie molto!

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