

Mary O Connor – June 2009



First of all my name is Mary O Connor, I'm 19 years of age and currently studying nursing in UCC. In June 2009, I set off on my travels to Bugisi in the Shinyanga region, Tanzania. Its nearly impossible to put into words the experience that I had out there..... but here goes. I left Cork that morning leaving everything familiar behind and striking off on an adventure I had only dreamed about.

On landing in Dar es Salaam I quickly became aware of how welcoming Tanzanians are. Even with all the hustle and bustle of the day to day life they always stayed calm, happy and relaxed – a trait that I am still adopting into my own life! It was onto Mwanza from there, the beautiful ‘city of rocks’ looking out on Lake Victoria. This is where I met Sr. Kathleen and had my first experience with OLA Tanzania.



From Mwanza we travelled to Bugisi where I would spend the next five weeks, and I must say they were the most fulfilling and happiest weeks of my life. Bugisi is a beautiful community with schools, churches, clinic and home to OLA, SMA, Notre Dames sisters and Don Bosco. It is also home to the local people of the Sukuma tribe.



I worked with Sr. Kate in the clinic which ran a maternity service, a HIV/AIDS service, and a treatment centre for the sick. One of the things about the work there that struck me and has stayed with me the most is the gratitude the people showed for the simple ways in which you can help, and the level of satisfaction you get from working with such beautiful people.

Even where there is a great deal of hardship the thing I noticed about the Sukuma tribe was that they never stopped fighting, and never let adversity get in the way of their quest

for happiness. They kept fighting and battling against whatever troubles came their way and that is the one of the great things I brought from my experience.

I will be forever indebted to Sr. Kate for the skills and knowledge she passed onto me as my mentor and as a friend during my time in Bugisi. I learned a great deal from my time there not alone about nursing and caring for the sick, but it also opened my mind to new ways of life and new practices.

I realised the great work of missionaries first hand, and the amount of help they give to the people who need it most. I feel truly privileged to be part of it. OLA are an amazing group of women that I admire wholly and have learnt so much from. I have many fond memories of the OLA in Tanzania and Ireland and feel like I have made a network of friends.



I travelled to Tanzania on my own but I never felt alone. This was down to the people I encountered during my time there; the OLA sisters, SMA fathers, Notre Dame Sisters, Don Bosco fathers, the nurses in the clinic and the Sukuma people for making me feel so safe and welcome. I was very raw to 'Africa' before this summer but my time in Bugisi has given me a very special feeling for the place and I am well and truly struck by 'la maladie africaine'. I would recommend this opportunity to everyone because I really believe that it has something to offer every type of person!