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TIYO Essay

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An African Adventure

Experience, as many say, is one of the most important aspects of life. It's a chance for individuals to learn from what has happened to themselves, and I personally place great importance on this philosophy. When the conductor of the Toledo International Youth Orchestra approached me about going to Africa with them, I was excited right away, and after my parents allowed me to go, I knew it would be a trip of a lifetime. All those around me told me this and wished me luck, but I did not know what to expect in a place called Tanzania. I could only pack what the orchestra said I would need and begin my African adventure.

My adventure began with a seven hour flight to London and then a tour of London. London was exciting and like nothing I'd ever seen, but the real adventure lay in Tanzania. So after a nine hour flight, the orchestra finally arrived in the country's capital Dar Es Salaam. After my first step off the plane, I felt the humidity immediately. It was near eight o'clock in the morning but it felt like mid-afternoon. Soon we arrived at our hotel and had our first Tanzanian meal soon after. The meal had the two things we would get at almost every meal: chicken and rice. After the lunch, we piled into our cramped bus, and began our journey to Bagamoyo. On the journey there, I witnessed what a third world country looks like from the inside. I was deeply shocked beyond words. Many of the families had little more than the ill-fitting clothes on their backs and a small dirt shack to call home. It was poverty like I'd never seen before. After hours of driving, we finally arrived at a small music school where we learned how to play traditional African instruments. After dinner, we finally arrived at our hotel once again.

We arose early in order to catch a ferry to the Tanzanian island of Zanzibar. The beauty of the island was breathtaking even at first glance. In the duration of our stay on the island, we were shown a music school there for traditional instruments, and we played our own traditional instruments that night in historic ruins on the beach. We also donated a number of violins to the music school there. The second day on the island we woke up early to swim with the dolphins but unfortunately were able to only see them. However,

the rocky boat ride was quite an adventure. We frolicked quickly to our bus on the island, which we nicknamed the cattle car because of its resemblance to a wooden platform we were herded into constantly. We took the ferry back to Dar Es Salaam, and then that evening, we found ourselves in the city of Tanga, a sister city of Toledo. We played for a school there named after our city, spent the afternoon with the children there, watched them perform that morning and again that night at our concert. We also had several encounters with Tanga's mayor. We donated ten violins to the Toledo Secondary School as well as money to build a music room. The next day we celebrated the Fourth of July at our performance at the U.S. Embassy.

The safari was next. We arrived in a city called Arusha where we stayed in a hotel fittingly named "Arusha Backpacker's Hotel: The Budget Traveler's Paradise." We were all separated into groups of eight or six into large jeeps, and that very day, we began our safari to the Ngorogoro Crater. We saw water buffalo, zebra, wildebeest, and my personal favorite, lion. We also had an exciting encounter with a traditional African tribe native to the crater. That night we stayed on a campground in tents, wondering what other surprises the second safari would bring. The second safari was near a lake close to the campground. We had multiple sightings of animals such as giraffes, elephants, and gazelle-like deer. Soon it began to sink into our minds that our African experience was close to over. All that remained was the journey to Dar Es Salaam, and then the journey to Toledo, Ohio. That night we celebrated the end of our journey with TIMO, the medical mission team from the University of Toledo. The next morning we departed, seeing the majestic Mount Kilimanjaro fade into the distance.

The African adventure that I experienced was nothing less than something that changed my outlook on my life entirely and the lives of others in the world. I saw a very different culture and lifestyle in Tanzania. I realized that I not only take for granted things like a house, clean water, and food, but I also take for granted the things that I really should be treasuring the most such as family, friends, and music. Most of the natives of Tanzania still had a reason to smile and be friendly despite their conditions of living. I may forget much of what occurred on my African adventure as I grow older, but I do hope that the lessons and experiences never fade away.