

Mon, 28 Jul 2008 17:26:17 -0400 "Sarah Durnbaugh"

*Well, the end is in sight. It's hard to believe that nearly three months have passed since I began my journey to Nimule. While I'm excited to get home, share my pictures and stories, and see everyone, I'm not looking forward to leaving. The goodbyes have already begun, and they're not fun. In all likelihood, I will never again see most, if not all, of the people with whom I've formed relationships here. Goodbyes seem really final, and I'll be saying a lot of them in these last four days.*

*The good thing is that things have been wrapping up pretty naturally in the past week. At Fulla, the term has effectively ended as far as teaching goes. The students are currently sitting for their exams...they have three weeks of them. I'm so glad that we were able to be with the kids for a full term, start to finish (almost...they'll continue exams until August 8th). It gives my time here a bit of closure in that respect.*

*We've still been going to Fulla each afternoon, chatting and playing Scrabble with the teachers. You'd think we'd have no trouble at all beating people for whom English is a third or fourth language at a word game, but they're really good. The whole time, though, they're saying things like, "America is smelling now," meaning that we're leaving soon and can almost smell home...or, "When have you planned to come back?" or "So you want to leave us all alone in some few days?" As if we need a constant reminder that our time remaining here is very short! My Sr. 3 students have taken their biology exam. I was pretty nervous because the Sr. 3 teacher didn't consult me at all as to what I had taught the students. I was just hoping he was testing them on what I taught! I was relieved, though, to find out that the students (at least the ones I talked to) felt confident that they had gotten all of the questions about respiration right. Woohoo! My Sr. 4 students have their biology exam tomorrow, and I hope they have a similar experience.*



*At Paskwale's nursery things have come full circle. Thousands of the trees that Larisa and I potted, planted, watered, weeded, and carried have now been distributed to community members. We went out into the community on Friday to monitor the seedlings we've distributed. I'm pretty sure we reached every corner of Nimule. It was quite the walk! It was so fulfilling to see the end product of all of our hard work. I wish I could see how this community looks ten years from now. It will be so green! We even got to talk to a few of the families who have planted the trees on their property. They were really excited about it and had taken care to put fences or bricks around the seedlings to keep the cows, goats, and pigs from destroying their new prizes. The best thing is that it's not the end. Good work was going on before we arrived, and it will continue after we leave.*

*Though they've given us a hard time, our biggest compliment has also come from the teachers at Fulla. They said just last week, "You are now Madi American." THAT told me, more than anything, that our endeavors as solidarity workers have come to*

fruition. We are not just visitors. We are part of the community. This fact is another reason why it is so hard to leave. My life here isn't confined to Fulla and Paskwale's. I will miss the women from whom I always buy my mangoes and bananas, the two men at the chapatti stand who we wave to each morning as we make our turn into market, the gaggle of kids that run down the hill to shake our hands each morning on the way to the nursery, our favorite cloth vendor, Rebecca (the woman who does our tailoring), the old men who sit playing mankala in the dirt at the edge of market, the kids at the orphanage, the crazy woman who always stops by so we can see her baby, and SO many others.

I can leave here now, knowing that I did a little good. Most of all though, I can leave here having listened, learned, and experienced. I'm nowhere near finished processing everything that I've lived in Sudan, but I can already tell that this place is inside me now. This hasn't just been some short vacation that I can sum up with a few stories. I honestly don't know how I'm going to begin to answer the people who will inevitably ask me, "So how was Sudan?" or "How was your summer?" when I return. I can't sum up Sudan in a five minute conversation. I can't sum up Sudan in an hour. In fact, I'm not sure I'll ever be able to sum up Sudan. I hope that these emails have provided some insight into my experiences here, and I can't wait to share pictures and more stories. I'm excited to sit down with you and have a real conversation about some of the good, the bad, the beautiful, and the difficult things I've experienced in the last three months, but I'm never going to be able to put my experience in a pretty little package. That would be doing Sudan an injustice. This country, its people, its history, its culture, and its current struggles are so rich, so deep, so complex, and so wonderful. I feel honored that the people of Nimule let me into their lives, even for this short time.

If you've been touched by my experiences, I would encourage you to act. You can visit <http://www.newcommunityproject.org> to find out about the different projects supported by the organization that has given me such a rich experience. I've seen these projects, and I can confidently say that any money you give will do good things for the people of Nimule...people I've met and come to love. All of the money you give goes to help Paskwale buy new seeds to plant, help more women like Rebecca be trained as tailors and receive loans to buy sewing machines, help students like Kadema stay in school by giving them scholarships for school fees, help with the retention of girls in school by giving them sanitary products, help reduce the prevalence of malaria by aiding the production and distribution of mosquito nets...and your money goes directly to these projects. There's no middle man and no overhead...one of the things that makes New Community Project great. I read a book called Emma's War while I was here. It's a true story that takes place in Sudan during the war. One of the things it said really touched me, so I'd like to share. I don't remember the exact conversation, but it went something like this. Emma was a white girl, who, like us, was always battling the assumption that everyone in the US is rich. On one occasion, someone said to her, "Aren't all Americans rich?" She said, "No." Then he asked, "Can everyone find a flushing toilet to use?" She said, "Yes..." He replies, "Then everyone in America is rich." I don't consider myself rich, but what little money I have would go a long way here. Ten dollars could give Paskwale the money to raise 100 trees. Sixty dollars could change a girl's life by giving her one more year of education. One hundred fifty dollars could give a woman in Nimule a livelihood by buying her a sewing machine. Twenty dollars could give someone who grew up during the war without education a chance at a better life through an adult literacy program. There are a lot of noble causes in the world, but these people have touched my heart. They are strong and work so hard for their families and the community around them. They will rebuild this town with or without our help...but I would love for us to do what we can to lighten their load.

This is the last mass email I will write to you. I'm more than willing to continue to share my experiences with you if you have more questions. Right now, though, I want to say thank you. Thank you for all of your encouraging words, your support, and for providing the funds for me to have this amazing experience. I hope that when you hear about Sudan on the news that you think back to these emails and remember that Sudan is not a hopeless wasteland, that not everyone is either starving or militant, and that Darfur is not the only place on the map. Sudan is

*the size of Western Europe, and Darfur is only a small portion of this, yet it gets all of the attention. Yes, aid is needed in Darfur, but the people of South Sudan need their stories told too. Thank you for taking time to read about a place and an experience that has become a part of me. Thank you for coming with me on this journey.*

*Sarah*

*Sarah Durnbaugh of Indianapolis spent the summer of 2008 in Nimule, Sudan as an NCP Solidarity Worker. Her main assignment was to work with Paskwale Ben at his reforestation project by the banks of the Nile just outside of town.*