

December 2, 2010

Jambo from Moshi, Tanzania

We started the day with an inspection tour of the work in progress on the guesthouse. Aloysius, the “fundi” (Swahili for foreman, or boss man) was our guide and Father Val our translator. The ground floor is now completely finished and ready to receive furniture and kitchen equipment. The ground floor is made up of a reception area, kitchen, restrooms, room for an Internet café, and a large hall that can be divided for dining and hosting of meetings and events such as conferences or even weddings. It is a truly beautiful building interior and locals who have seen it have reacted, “ooh...you are going to make lots of money”. That is of course the whole idea -- so that they will be able to fund the school themselves going forward.

The tour continued to the 2nd floor where at least a dozen workers (more than usual) were busy at work. The guestroom floor is divided into fourteen guest rooms, each with a private bathroom and balcony. The “high rent” side has uninterrupted views of Kilimanjaro. Last July’s visitors/crew from the U.S., especially the eleven strong backs of the college students from Holy Cross under the direction of Matt Partain, had completed most of the cement block dividing walls that define the rooms. The visible progress in the intervening four months was a little disappointing. The doors and windows were framed, but not yet installed and the crew was currently running plumbing piping and finishing plastering of the walls. Aloysius confidently promises that the guestrooms will be complete (except for the flooring) by Christmas...right on schedule. Given the number of workers on site and activity level we see today, that should be very doable.

We mentioned yesterday the large number of new construction projects in Moshi we could see from atop their new tallest building. One might suspect (including the three of us) that our laborers were perhaps working on another job for some part of the past few months! As anyone who has suffered the project of building of a house will know, yep, that happens. Demand for experienced construction crews is no doubt starting to materialize and we are of course not the top Schilling payer. Our visit today is serving as an important reminder that we have a schedule to meet – the guesthouse must be ready to open by November of next year.

After our tour, we met with the school headmistress, Mama Shayo to review student performance and talk about the coming year. Mama Shayo reviewed her grade book with us and the marks told an interesting story. Most of the 44 students were receiving As, Bs, and Cs, but ten or so consistently had marks of Ds and Fs (actually they use the more common sense letter of ‘E’). Mama Shayo told of the extra efforts of her and the other teacher to work after school and over holidays with roughly 15 children who were struggling much more than the others. Through their efforts, six of them improved their marks enough to progress to the 2nd grade, but it was determined that nine of them are simply not ready and will need to repeat 1st grade. In their culture, they do not just pass a struggling student along for the next teacher to deal with, but address it directly.

After our meeting, Stan made the mistake of lingering outside the classroom to take some pictures a bit longer than the other two. Mama Shayo, looking like she had just remembered something very

important, rushed out of the classroom and said, “Mr. Taylor, Mr. Taylor...one of the toilets is broken” and proceeded to walk him toward the school bathrooms. Hoping it was simply a mistranslation, Stan skeptically accompanied her. Nope, Mama Shayo knows her English quite well – stall #3 was roped off.

You really feel accepted as one of the village when asked to fix a toilet. (post note: a quick trip to the hardware store (street vendor stall actually) to find a replacement hose fitting and Stan had the toilet working in no time).

Kwaheri mpaka kesho,

Nathan, Plumber Stan & Father Val