

HAVE WE FORGOTTEN?

Moses Leon Howard

Have we forgotten most of what happened during our service with TEAA?
Perhaps a bit of Robert Frost will serve to jostle our memory.

A Patch of Old Snow

There's a patch of old snow in a corner
That I should have guessed
Was a blow-away paper the rain
Had brought to rest.

It is speckled with grime as if
Small print overspread it,
The news of a day I've forgotten --
If I ever read it.

Or If I ever *lived* it.

I have appointed myself one of the cheerleaders for the TEAA writing project, TEAAKI. This surprises me because I don't know anything about writing, I am a Biology teacher. But when I read TEAAKI the first thing I noticed was this:

"Welcome to TEAAKI: Stories and lessons learned from the Teachers for East Africa experience of the 1960s."

I was captivated and totally hooked by the genius of this invitation. I want to congratulate the person who first had this idea and who started TEAAKI for it gave us another chance. It meant that our teaching period had not ended but we could extend it. Through our Newsletter and our writing in TEAAKI we can reach out to future generations of African students. Writing in TEAAKI and the Newsletter lets us go on sharing our teaching experiences with students of the present and on into the future.

If you write sharing your experiences in TEAAKI, you don't need to write with didactic intent for I have found that when one writes honestly of genuine experiences there appears in the writing, on the moment, in a kind of invisible ink, a deeper meaning than is read on the surface. Over time, with age and change in the environment, the invisible ink becomes visible and the writing upon further examination reveals its deeper hidden meaning. So the people who read

your writing years from now will discover much more in it than you may intend for a reader to see now.

So it does not matter much what you write as long as you write about stories and lessons gleaned from your teaching experience or your interactions with people of the towns and villages where you taught at that particular time. Your writing will carry in addition to what you consciously put into it far more than you may intend to convey. The invisible ink of your writing tells something of you, the writer.

Of course we are all Americans, but we are quite different. We came from different parts of America. We came with our own unique stories, backgrounds and mythologies. We came with our prejudices but packed them away, hid them. But they were always with us.

I came from Mississippi. When I left there in 1961 they were using dogs, herding young school children into cattle pens in the Fairgrounds in Jackson, Mississippi because these black school children were marching down to the bus station to see the Freedom Riders and the Sit-Ins instead of going to segregated class rooms.

Back then we heard about the “culture shock” of going into a new country where the rules are different. You no longer feel restricted by the social rules that govern you at home but you don’t yet feel responsible for the rules of your host country.

I witnessed a young housewife from America openly experiencing a bit of culture shock in the Airline Curio Shoppe at the Airport in Kano, Nigeria. I was in back of her as she stood by her husband with a little blonde child on her hip and she was watching the black stewardesses and pilots as they walked out to board their planes along with most of the passengers who were also black. She gently elbowed her husband in his side and said, “Honey!” He answered, “Yeah?” and she said in a slightly bewildered voice “Everyone here is Black!” He looked at her and smiled and said, “Well, dear, it *is* Africa...”

If we are going to write honestly about coming to Africa we have to deal with culture shock. What did we do? What mores did we respect? We had to answer questions of whom do we love? How much do we drink? How late do we stay out on school nights? How do we treat the local people? What determined our moral compass? We were free to choose!

We had the British as a standard for teaching and treating “native” servants. We had to decide: Do we follow their lead or do we slowly change what they have in place? What we did then says something about our character. But no one knows of our choices and actions but us. Do we question? Do we reflect? Do we teach more to memorize or do we mix it with problem solving? Do we remember always that we are teachers? Even when we are not in the classrooms, whenever we act, we teach.

What do we see? Do we notice that the upper level economy is not in the hands of African? Do we notice that most of the students we teach have parents who are mostly house servants, drivers or yard care workers or small unit farmers? What do we think of that? Are we invited to the Europeans-only clubs? What do we do when we are asked to join?

I am not accusing. I am just asking. We are all Americans and we are all in this together. We were passionate about teaching in Africa and we still are. That is why we are here now and writing for TEEAKI.

We should all write something for TEEAKI!! Anything we write is important and it will be read with wonder. The reason for interest in our writing is because the independence of the three East African countries will, from that time, from the time of Independence, be associated with the years of our coming to teach.

We Americans came to teach them at their celebration of Freedom, which came almost two hundred years after we attained our own independence from the same Country that held them in bondage. We taught the students who saw their countries gain their independence. We taught the students who became the first free leaders and government officials, the first free teachers who grew up in a free Uganda, a free Kenya and a free Tanzania. That is the major reason why we should write something for TEEAKI.