

Swazi Legacy – Trip Reflection

Andrew Walsh

Before I traveled to Swaziland, I heard things about the country that shocked me. I had read online about its difficulties in coping with a massive HIV/AIDS crisis, crippling poverty, and scores of other problems that are typical of nations in the developing world. From my research, I knew all of the depressing statistics about Swaziland's situation. I thought I had a fairly accurate picture in my mind of what it was like there, and that I knew enough in order to empathize. I thought that was enough for stepping into their world. But now after considering all that I have seen in Africa, I suddenly discover that only through personal experience can we truly understand and make sense of the huge impact that poverty, inequality and disease bring to people in what we call "Third World" countries.

Swaziland is a very small country between South Africa and Mozambique. The country's rural areas especially are ravaged by serious issues with things like electricity, plumbing, healthcare, and family breakdown (children becoming orphans due to their parents dying from HIV/AIDS). The number of orphans is staggering and hard to describe, but at times the country feels like it has more orphanages than normal homes. The days we spent working at McCorkindale's orphanage were physically and mentally testing. The children were incredibly sweet and earnest, but also reserved. It was clear to me that those kids must have experienced hardship in their lives to an extent that I could never imagine.

Seeing their situation was incredibly difficult for me. I think one of the saddest moments was when one of the shyest girls (who we found out had been sexually abused) showed me a book of poetry that she was keeping. She was an incredible writer, and her poems reflected the trauma she had experienced. Seeing this truly demonstrated to me how much human potential is held back by poverty and inequality. How much more could we, as humans, accomplish if every child was given an equal opportunity to live, thrive, and contribute? It was incredibly hard to leave that orphanage knowing that many of those kids would probably never have a real home, or people that would always be there to love and care for them. I can only hope that we made a difference in their lives in the short amount of time we spent with them.

What struck me most about Swaziland might be that although people there are faced with such penury, they do not allow their unfortunate circumstances to strip them of their dignity, and they are happy with the little they have. This stands in stark contrast to what I see in America, where it seems many people have an insatiable, never-ending need for more money and material possessions.

I, for one, know that I will never forget my experience in Swaziland with the Swazi Legacy team. Although I have always felt passionate about the need to fight poverty, I am sure that what I have seen on the trip will only encourage me further.

By Cara Pieretti

Going to Africa was an amazing experience. South Africa and Swaziland were beautiful countries with very different cultures. Going on the bike tour in South Africa was unique experience. There I realized how kind the people were and how little kids just wanted love and attention. Going into different villages made me see how thankful I am for what I have compared to some of the South African people. Seeing Desmond Tu Tu's and Nelson Mandela's house was very interesting. Also when we were approached by some guys I was sort of confused but it ended up that they were contortionists. It was amazing how flexible these guys were. The lion park was an amazing part of the trip I loved going on that safari. I also loved being with little lion cubs. I thought that I would never get to pet lion cubs.

When we arrived in Swaziland I was so excited to get started. When we went to McCorkindales the first time I was surprised about the conditions they lived in and how much work there was to be done. Meeting all the kids at McCorkindales was so much fun they were all so sweet and also had a smile on their face. It was so great to see them happy. It was so nice that when we did work they all wanted to help. I had a great time with everyone there and I miss them. After we finished a lot of the work at the orphanage I was happy that we got to help them. Another very exciting part was going ziplining I thought it was so much fun. While ziplining we got to take in the stunning views of Swaziland. Also the next day when we went to the cultural market that was very cool. Seeing a lot of hand crafted things that you could never find anywhere else was amazing. I loved looking at many objects that I haven't really seen before. I love Africa and I really look forward to going back one day.

Clara Lesch

When I first arrived in the Johannesburg I held with me not only my luggage but also a bag of mixed emotions. While I was excited for this journey I was also anxious about what I would encounter in this country that was so foreign to me. As we drove from Johannesburg to Soweto my location had not exactly hit me yet. I anxiously waiting to help the people in Soweto and Swaziland. When we arrived at Lebo's Soweto Backpackers Lodge all my angst about the next two weeks began to fade away. The next day we took a bike tour through the slums of Soweto, each and every child was smiling from ear to ear. From each kid I heard the words "Shoot me, shoot me!" as they pointed at my camera. Even each adult we saw waved, as they said "Sanibonani" and I responded with "Yebo". As we continued biking through the slums I looked at the houses. At first glance these houses looked more like shacks, still everyone I met had a smile on their face. In Soweto I was introduced to a rich culture, I was able to see traditional dance on the street and in the cultural village we visited, I ate traditional food such as liver and maize, chicken feet, and even worms. I believe the best part of the culture in Soweto was the people, not only was everyone I met filled with joy but they also took on every challenge with a positive outlook. We spent two days playing in the playground across the street from Lebo's. I asked one little girl what she wanted to be when she grew up, she said "I want to be a doctor!" then she proceeded to tell me her plan. The plan consisted of four simple words; do well in school. This little girl was the first of many inspirational people I met in Africa.

Our next journey was to Swaziland. We stay with the Salesians in Manzini. At first sight Swaziland did not seem as bad as Soweto but I would soon learn how desperate this country was. The building we stayed in belonged to the Salesians and was very different from Lebo's. The house at the Salesians felt much less like vacation spot. The day after arrival we visited the trade school, elementary school, and high school that the Salesians run in Manzini. When we were in the high school we had the opportunity to talk to students our own age. I asked everyone I met if they liked school, one 18 year old boy responded with, "I believe education is our most powerful weapon in this world." I did not encounter one young man or woman that did not say they liked school. If I asked the same question in my high school I would not be surprised if every answer I received was negative.

The next place we visited was MacCorkindale's orphanage just outside of Manzini. When we got there we were introduced to a little girl standing at the entrance, the man said her name was Jeanie and she was in second grade. Little did I know that this 10 year old girl would change my life. As we were given the tour of the orphanage I had the pleasure of meeting many more kids, ranging from the ages of 5 to 19. I took a picture with a girl named Rosie, she was 16 just like me however she stood below my shoulders, due to her malnourishment. The tour of the orphanage opened my eyes to the horrors some people have to live in everyday. The kitchen was filthy, there were cockroaches everywhere. In one of the boys room I looked behind one of the beds and found an orange that rolled over by itself, inside there were multiple cockroaches and bugs. Most of the boys rooms smelled strongly of urine. As we walked Jeanie would grab my hand and talk

with me. She informed me of her love of school and volleyball, she told me about her two older sisters and two younger brothers that were also at the orphanage. Together Jeanie and her siblings had been at MacCorkindale's since January 2012, I found out later that just two weeks before we arrived at the orphanage Jeanie had attended her mothers funeral. To me this news was shocking, Jeanie never stopped smiling and she always had a skip in her step. In the next few days I began to develop a strong relationship with Jeanie, she showed me a few of her test, which all had scores of over a 95 and she taught me her favorite dance. When I was painting in the house she would come in and sit with me, if I needed help she was eagerly waiting by my side to try something new. One night Jeanie's brother had a stomach ache, none of us could get him to talk or to stop crying. She took his hand and brought him to her room where she dressed him in a tank top due to the fact that he was hot. Jeanie promised her brother that she would wake him up for dinner and kissed him on the forehead as she left the room.

This writing piece hardly makes a dent in everything I witnessed in Swaziland and South Africa, I saw many negative things however the positive has stuck with me. Everyone I met looked at the glass half full and not a day goes by that I do not think of the wonderful relationships I had the opportunity of making. I have a video on my phone of Jeanie laughing when I am feeling upset I like to watch it and somehow it makes my problems seem so small and it reminds me how important happiness is. I am forever grateful to the people of Soweto, Manzini, and the wonderful group I was able to travel with.

Gabriel Cohen

Writing about my experience in Swaziland this summer seems like a daunting task. Without being too cliché, it truly seems that my words cannot do the experience justice. Though reading about the way people live in other parts of the world is one thing, it does not compare to actually being able to interact with these people and see how they live first hand. On one hand, the kids at the Bridging School and other MYC projects seemed a lot like American kids. I wasn't sure what the Swazi kids would be like, but I certainly didn't expect a teen boy crooning Jay-Z's "Young Forever" or a girl singing a Rihanna song with her friend. I was relieved to realize that the kids, though some were reserved, were very easy to relate to, despite our vastly different lives. Unfortunately, the harsh reality was that many of these kids live lives wrought with struggle against poverty, AIDS, and other societal ailments, for no reason other than that they were born into an unlucky situation. Our work at McCorkindale Orphanage included painting and cleaning several rooms, as well as performing necessary repairs to the plumbing, and the purchase of fly tape and roach traps (many strips of fly tape became saturated with flies after just a few hours of hanging). While our help was definitely needed, it was still obvious that there was much work to be done at McCorkindale as well as the other MYC projects. It was particularly heartbreaking to discover the myriad of health problems affecting the children at the projects, some of whom were HIV positive. Unfortunately, there was little that we could do.

Overall, I left Swaziland with mixed emotions. It is disheartening to see how much more work needs to be done, and to realize that no matter how hard we try, there will always be kids in Swaziland that it will be too late for. However, our efforts, though they may seem small in comparison to the problems facing Swaziland's youth, were still able to improve the lives of those kids at least a little bit, and that is what matters most. I am thankful that I had this opportunity to help those less fortunate than me. While one needn't go half way around the globe to find someone to help, my experience volunteering in Swaziland was very rewarding in particular for several reasons. One, I was happy to learn and see that we were not the only ones coming to help the Swazi people, as our party came across other volunteers, including a group of British schoolgirls, and a Peace Corps worker assigned to McCorkindale. In addition, Eastchester High School's Human Rights Club has long helped raise funds for Swazi Legacy – to be able to see where this money was going and to physically participate in labor at McCorkindale Orphanage was quite fulfilling. And finally, it comes with great satisfaction to be able to help these children. Their lives are so much harder than anything most of us ever have to face on a daily basis, yet they somehow find ways to smile and be happy. It is truly a blessing to have the resources that allow me to be able to give a week of my time to help those in need in Swaziland. So while I have since come home and returned to the comforts of Eastchester, those children in Swaziland still have to face their harsh reality everyday. There is no simple "cure" or quick fix to the problems they face, but though I have left their country, they have not left my heart, thoughts, and prayers. Through the continued efforts of Swazi Legacy, I hope we can continue to make a positive difference in the lives of the children of Swaziland.

Up ,up and away to Africa, Soweto, So. Africa and Swaziland. What an amazing adventure. I am grateful to have had the opportunity to be a part of team Swazi 2013 and also grateful to share this adventure with a wonderful group of people, teens and adults alike.

Each day was a different experience and each moment special.. Soweto, So. Africa, Lebo Back packers Lodge, What Can I say , when we first saw our accommodations , how we each had looks of perplexity or maybe disbelief on our faces which instantly turned to smiles and then enjoyment as days passed. The sound of the women in a tiny kitchen preparing our meals,(3 square each day), including chicken feet and other local delicacies. We actually had great tasting food.

The cold nights keeping warm by a fire made of burning twigs inside of a pail, learning that when one person in town had a party the whole town came, uninvited and always the laughter coming from everyone, and constant smiles, we loved where we were.

The four hour bicycle tour which I did not take part in because of a prior injury, but had my own Tour guide in a half car if you can understand that one. Oh I was really getting to know the locals. Visiting Hostels and squatters camps , tasting local food and drink with 20 people eating and drinking from the same plates and cups, (Don't Drink The Water????).Actually riding and walking on the streets where Mandela and TuTu lived, squares where uprisings took place against Apartheid. Going to the Apartheid Museum and trying to understand why this was and how it was to live at that time (Impossible to grasp)

The children , oh the children. Constant smiles and energy so high ,trying to learn and share so much. Who needs to speak the same language to communicate. They taught us so much.

Our trip to the local lion park, and a stop at a village which housed all of the different huts of different tribes and we were schooled on how to respect each of the tribe heads and the protocol for entering each tribal village, another place where I tasted local delicacy, worms to be exact, this time not so tasty.

Final good bye to South Africa, a little tearful.

Then we were on our way to Swaziland. Words are truly hard to find to explain this experience .

Manzini Youth Center, run by some of the most incredible selfless people, priests, brothers, sisters and locals alike.

The wonderful talented special children .Some orphans, some from the street. The wonderful Manzini Schools just for these children ,which by the way run by donations , inconprehensible to me.

The orphanages we visited, children with so little, so happy , willing to share their stories.

The singing , dancing , our kids performing for them. I can go on and on.

Cleaning, painting , playing with the children at the Mc Corkindale Orphanage, indescribable. As I said each and every day and every moment an adventure to cherish.

WE WERE 21 PEOPLE BUT 1 UNITED .

I don't have enough time nor space for this collection to express all that I felt and have taken way with me.





I can say that I hope that the Swaziland Legacy will continue, and that donations , visitors and volunteers will continue to help.

This trip will forever be in my heart.

THANK YOU

Gemma



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Africa Reflection

Jack Flannery

After begging my parents to go to Swaziland in January, I spent hours and hours thinking about what it would be like. In my thoughts and in my dreams, I never saw the emaciated children, the shacks, and the abject poverty that couldn't exist in one's imagination. Sadly it is the unignorable reality of the third world, the world that I encountered for the first time this summer.

On our trip, many parts seemed like my dreams. We saw Germany on our 12 hour layover, and got to experience Frankfurt up close! One word of advice, if you ever visit, never have a German breakfast! On our trip we experienced life in one of the largest poor urban areas on the planet. We saw the streets of Soweto, we interacted with its people and we did what good we could for them. Personally, I became a much better pool player (thanks to Brendan and Kennedy) and we all got to experience a totally different lifestyle. The safari we went on showed me nature that only existed in my imagination. I was used to seeing squirrels, owls, and raccoons on camping trips in New York, not Lions, Elephants, and Giraffes! We visited the cultural village, where we saw painted huts, and cultural dances. I even beat a local warrior in a battle! The total difference between food, neighborhood, nature and culture taught me something. I think about the bonds we formed, the friendships we made and I think about how we crossed race, language and social class. Some of the most potent dividers in society, and I am so proud of our group (that became a family). We accomplished something that even South Africans couldn't do until apartheid ended, we left our comfort zone and grew as individuals.

All my influences, Catholicism, mentors, literature, and of course my parents have taught me the rule I try to live my life by. If you are in the position to help someone else, you must do it, no matter if it goes against the grain of society or what's popular among your friends. I'm not sure if this will ever be read at a fundraiser but if it is one day know that chances are you (and I) are in the top 1% of all income earners. Out of any 100 people of the planet's 7 billion people, you are the wealthiest, you are the most able to help those who weren't born in the greatest county in the world. You are in the position to help the children, and you are morally obligated to do so.

The most fulfilling moment of my entire life was the moment the entire group and all the children watched Mrs. Kenny give Fr. Larry a giant check for \$75,000. We donated over 20 bags of athletic equipment that will improve the kid's friendships, health, and therefore their lives as a whole. We painted, cleaned, and repaired their orphanage, their home. The amount of good we did for the people of Swaziland was unimaginable.

After we left Swaziland, it still was an absolute monarchy where the vast majority of the population lives on less than \$1 a day. After we left Swaziland the children were still being sucked into the cycle of HIV because they cannot afford an education to tell them otherwise. Even so, after we left Swaziland, they were a little better off. They had enough money to pay for their school, for their teachers, their books, their food. They had enough supplies to play with for years. They had a better chance of breaking the cycle that holds the people of Swaziland in its viscous grasp. Because of what our team did, they were just a little better off. That is exactly what our duty



is as human beings, and as Americans. Our duty is to each other and to God, and without a doubt I can tell you that we fulfilled both.



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Kate Deegan

Never Underestimate the Meaning of a Life-Changing Experience

Driving to the airport on June 25, 2013, I had mixed emotions bubbling inside me about the trip ahead. For the past few weeks, I had been repeating the word, “Africa,” inside my head over and over and over again. To me, the word, “Africa,” meant a world of undiscovered adventure, possibility, and education. My personal “journey” began in the South African airport, where I was greeted by a friend of my Dad’s who lives in Johannesburg with his family. As he was welcoming me to his country, he began explaining to me that it is impossible to prepare yourself for a trip to Africa. He explained to me that I had just left a world of bountiful wealth and entered a world of excruciating poverty. His words, although frightening, couldn’t have been more true.

The two weeks I spent in South Africa and Swaziland were the happiest weeks of my life. Everyday, I woke up feeling strong, motivated, fortunate, powerful, loved, blessed, and most of all, a better person. On our trip, we saw both the good and the bad of South Africa/ Swaziland. One memory that stood out to me as the most horrifying was when we witnessed a beating in the park across the street from our lodge in Soweto. With tears streaming down my face and the most horrible feeling in the pit of my stomach, I began questioning the world we were living in. I was so angry with South Africa’s system of justice and even more angry at the fact that beating a man to death in a park where children are playing is considered completely normal. During the next half of our trip, which was spent in Swaziland, I learned the true horrors of a life of poverty. The sights that we were exposed to at McCorkindale’s orphanage left me speechless. When we walked into the room of two teenage boys, the smell was so horrible that you were forced to exit as quickly as possible. Their beds were soaked in urine and had cockroaches crawling all over them. What hurt me the most about this situation was the fact that these boys had never been taught basic self-care. When we cleaned out the pantry at the orphanage, there were cockroaches crawling in the food, pasta strewn all over the shelves, and not a piece of cutlery in sight. We were extremely lucky to have a nurse on the trip with us and after Mrs. Ahern shared her visits with many of the children at McCorkindale’s, my heart broke in two. One of the youngest boys at the orphanage had a hernia in his stomach and when Mrs. Ahern would press on it, silent tears would fall down his cheeks, but not a word of pain was released from his mouth. Another girl, 15 years old, had trouble speaking and we later learned it was because she had been abused by her older brother. A 17 year old boy was suspected of having diabetes and wasn’t even fully aware of it. We had grown so close to these orphans as we worked to repair their house and nothing killed us more than the fact that there was no telling where they’d end up in the future. The most important thing that I learned on the trip was that the children in Africa and Swaziland are born into a vicious cycle of poverty and no matter how many organizations donate money, no matter how many people try to save them from poverty, there are just not enough

hands to save every single child. I wake up every single day with this thought in mind and I feel so helpless because I cannot save these children on my own.

One particular experience that I would like to share involves the same 17 year old boy who has diabetes whom I developed a special bond with. My Dad had provided me with a pair of soccer goalie gloves to give to one orphan on the trip and after learning that this particular boy was a passionate goalie, I decided he was the one. The look that this boy had on his face was the most rewarding reaction I have ever witnessed and I just swelled with happiness to see how grateful he was to be able to say he owned his own pair of gloves. After returning from such a life-changing trip, I have made it my goal to write a short book about my experiences because I want others to learn what I have learned and to see what I have seen. This trip has inspired me to study Global Health in college, it has become the focus of my Girl Scout Gold Award Project, and it has made joining the Peace Corps a goal for my future. Most importantly, however, it has given me an education that a textbook could never provide and a handful of memories that could never be forgotten.

Going to Africa was a great experience. I have to admit, I was nervous at first about going somewhere so foreign, but after meeting our guides, hosts at the back packers lodge, and the people in general, I knew I had made the right decision to go. Every day there was a new experience. Experiences that before this trip we probably only saw on television. The bike tour took us to Nelson Mandelas home, Desmond Tutu's home, (Where we saw people who were as flexible as Gumby lol), and to the museum where we were educated about the native Africans fight for equality. One thing they were fighting for was to be taught in English so they would have the opportunity to attend Universities. We also went to an impoverished township and got to see first hand how difficult life is for some people and how fortunate we are to have the life we have. Luckily Lebos back packers lodge was across the road from a playground which gave out teenagers the opportunity to interact with the children of Soweto, South Africa.

Swaziland was an unbelievably beautiful country, but unfortunately it was an unbelievably poor country. I luckily had the chance to work along side Christina Ahern at the Manzini Clinic. There we saw a culmination of different illnesses. We quickly learned that if someone had an illness that couldn't be treated at the clinic, there was nothing anyone could do for them unless they had money to go to the hospital. The people of Swaziland were friendly and welcoming. Working at McCorkindales orphanage gave us the opportunity to interact with the children. The children were lovable and happy to have us there to lend a hand fixing up their home. One thing I wasn't expecting was to fall in love with the children who were beautiful inside and out. They didn't have much materialistically, but what they had in their hearts was priceless. It was impossible to not be touched by their sad stories. I think it was a very grounding experience. It made me and I'm sure others realize how lucky we are. I don't think I will ever forget this trip and the children and adults we met, who somehow, against all odds, survive and are able

to smile, laugh and be happy at the few things they have and the things we brought them. It was a trip of a lifetime, with or without my frozen shoulder lol.



Megan Delaney

My Swaziland 2013 Experience

I really didn't know what to expect when I signed up for this once-in-a-lifetime trip. All I knew was that it would be a gateway not only for the humanitarian future that I was interested in pursuing, but also for the development of my own human spirit. We live in a privileged society, and as a result we can sometimes be naïve to the trials and tribulations of our fellow human neighbors. To say that this experience was humbling would be a gross understatement. It is one thing to see images of the lives of those living in impoverished conditions, but what the images do not capture fully is the spirit of these strong men, women, and children who do not let their conditions define them. Their lives, especially those of the children, are a constant uphill struggle, but yet every person I came across on this trip was beaming with joy and genuine gladness to see us. These children have not half the opportunities that we do, but are twice as ambitious as anyone I know. When we visited the schools that were funded by Swazi Legacy, I asked some of the students what they wanted to be when they finished schools, many of them answering that they wanted to become doctors, lawyers, or policemen. I went on further and asked if they enjoyed school and what they were learning, and while many of us would be hesitant to say yes, every single student responded with a decisive yes. I found this absolutely fascinating. We tend to take so many things for granted because of our abundance of opportunities and material possessions, but they treasure every single one of their blessings because they know just how important they are to securing a future. Needless to say, while many of the students vocalized their desire to one day visit the United States, it was absolutely heartbreaking to be aware of the fact that for many of them, this shining dream will never come true. What is it that separates us from them? Why is it that for us, many of our dreams are more than within reach, but for them, their dreams are miles away? Things have to change, which is why Swazi Legacy is a one-of-a-kind organization. By funding schools and orphanages such as Mc Corkindales, these kids will have more tools and resources to achieve their dreams, which can impact an entire people and motivate others to change things so that more people in countries like Swaziland are able to secure an education. To be a part of this experience was truly life-changing in a way that I see many things in my life in a different light. I am more aware of everything I have and try to make the most of my opportunities so I can one day make a difference in this world. I want to be able to help others achieve their aspirations so that little by little, we may be able to change the way us humans treat each other, and eventually the world.