Sunday, April 19, 2009
The idea of the Kenya Bread Loaf International Conference was born in 2007 at the summer session of the Bread Loaf school of English, Vermont. Today is the first day of the conference. Jennifer and I are the last participants to arrive. It is hard to believe that I am actually in Nairobi talking to David and Pat and Ceci and meeting everyone else. Of course having been awake the previous night with the ' unholy' swami, the delayed flight and exhaustion, the day went by in a daze. The visit to the village market which incidentally was much more than a village market was fun, beginning with a visit to the bank to change money for 'Kenyan money' and hearing a Kenyan band playing popular songs from Bollywood! We ended with a fabulous dinner at Pat's and were all more than ready to fall into our beds at the Methodist Conference Centre. Our bus driver, Justus was immensely patient. Well, tomorrow, begins our great Kenyan adventure.

Monday, April 20, 2009. School visit and team teaching.
We wake up refreshed and raring to go. I have chosen to go with Ceci, Millary, Brendan, Roberto and Jennifer to the Aga Khan Academy where David teaches. After a brief meeting with the Principal and Staff, we witnessed a school assembly which was very similar to the ones we have back home. The kids uniforms too, were almost identical to the ones we had had in the past.
I attended David's IB class which was in the midst of a discussion of a play, 'Blood Wedding'. I was yet again, impressed by David's skill, energy, enthusiasm and knowledge. This being the first day of the new term, there isn't too much that we can do, as in most classes, teachers are handing out assignments and discussing papers.

I have opted to team teach a seventh grade English class on Wednesday, with Mr. Jannie Klinehaans, the Deputy Head Teacher of the school. I've decided to teach Tagore's Cabuliwallah. We have a planning meeting at 4.30pm then we shift to the Nairobi Gymkhana where we will stay for the rest of our time here. The day ended with dinner at Westgate where the food was delicious.
Tuesday, April 21st, 2009. School visit and team teaching.

Today I head for Rusinga School where Pat teaches. I choose to observe Pat's seventh grade class and then to team teach with Roberto, standing in for a teacher who is absent.

Pat, like David, is an artist in the classroom, knows each child by name, revises an earlier lesson and then leads kids into a discussion of the prologue of Romeo and Juliet. The class breaks up into small groups with instructions to dramatize and present a stanza of the prologue.

In the class that I teach with Roberto we lead a discussion on two topics that the students must write about: 'The world today is a more dangerous place' and 'Teens think, talk write and sing about love but are too young to know what love really is.' The outcome of the discussion is a discursive essay that the students must write. We ask the students to sit with us in a circle and then ensure that everyone shares their opinions and ideas. Initially the students are a bit shy but soon lose their hesitation and get involved. Time flies and all too soon it is lunch break. In the afternoon, we meet the headmaster, Mr. Mbuthi and are truly inspired. What an amazing man he is...Dinner is at Carnivore a very popular restaurant, however being a vegetarian I ensure I have eaten before we arrive there and restrict myself to passion fruit juice!!!! Everyone else does justice to the meal!!!!

Wednesday, 22nd April, 2009. School visit and team teaching.

I am back at Aga Khan and look forward to my lesson with Grade 7. I observe a French class that Marjorie teaches and am transported back in time to my own school days. After lunch I go to the 7th grade class I am to teach. I get the naughtiest students to help me rearrange the classroom so we are all seated in a circle. I answer many questions about India and my students and school. Mr Jannie their regular teacher arrives and looks a little surprised to see his students so attentive and involved. The lesson begins. I talk to the class briefly about Tagore. We read the story in the circle. It is a long story and I worry that it might be too long. However the children love it and stay focused till the end. We use the Michael Armstrong protocol to discuss the story with each of us studying the text a pointing out a detail to the class. We look at characters next and how they differ from one another. We study the important incidents that shape the story and I am thrilled when the students point out turning points that they experience for
example, one child says he initially did not like the protagonist but later does because 'he is kind' another says he feared the 'Cabuliwallah' but later feels sorry for him and realizes he is a good man. I ask the children to pick out words and phrases they liked and again am surprised by how closely they have read the story. Finally we break up into groups and enact scenes from the story, Mr Jannie like a good sport joins in the fun. The children promise that they will sketch their favorite characters and write about them and hand in the work on the following Friday. I am thrilled that we have done so much in the span of one hour. Later Mr. Jannie tells me he will try this way of teaching again and finds it very effective. We go back to the Gymkhana for a planning session to nail down the program for the teacher workshop the following day at Rusinga. I promise to help Rich photograph the participants for the magazine. Some of us choose not to go out but hang out at the Gymkhana. Ceci and I venture out for a walk on our own, it is an adventure!

Harleen, Uroob, Fatema and Karishma a bunch of amazing 8th graders at AKA.
The planning meeting at the Gymkhana

Thursday, 23rd April, 2009. Teacher Workshop.
All set and raring to go....
We get to Rusinga in time for the school assembly and it is awesome watching the children conduct the assembly and themselves with such dignity. The theme for the day is freedom of choice and responsibility. We come back to the assembly hall once the students have gone to class. After the introduction, the welcome by the Principal, the keynote address by Rich and the ice breaker by Pat and David, we split up into groups for the sessions. The first for my group is Teacher Research by Ceci who has us start by writing our best and worst teaching moments. We share these with the group and then move on to what teacher research is, why it is necessary and its importance. During the break I start taking pictures of the participants till Pat drags me off to talk to a journalist from a local newspaper who wants to interview me. I tell her ABL has changed my life.

Our next session is with Ummi. She gets us started on stories prompted by things we were constantly told as children. It is a fun exercise and I am eager to get back to school and try it out. Rich and I spend most of the lunch break downloading pictures until Ceci comes to tell us we may not get any lunch....we have a delicious lunch and one of the best deserts I have ever eaten!

Brendan and Logan take us through an exciting session of the immense possibilities the use of digital technology in the classroom offers. After tea and another photograph session it is time to head back. Again, we stay at the Gymkhana and spend the evening just hanging out and talking...
Friday, 24th April, 2009. Teacher Workshop.

The day begins with the welcome from the head teacher at the Aga School, a presentation on the AIDS prevention program and the *I am from*.... Writing exercise that Rich and I present. It is a huge success and we are thrilled. I enjoy working with Rich and tell him so...

We go to **Building Characters** with Tamar and Kris and a session with **Meredith and Millery** on the **Socratic Seminar**. Both are fun and very well presented. In the session preceding lunch, I am inspired to write a story based on my best teaching experience. I know that this is what I want to read in the afternoon.

**The Reading.** The reading is good, Ummi, as always, does a great job introducing each reader. I volunteer to read first and get emotional despite my best efforts. Many participants who have not volunteered to read are inspired to do so...We end the day with the distribution of certificates and the group photograph. I feel sad that I will not be seeing most of the students I have come to know and like, again.
In the evening, we head back to Rusinga for the Easter musical. It is a great show and I am amazed by the astounding talent of the students. A relaxed dinner at the Mediterranean brings the day to an end.

Saturday, 25th April, 2009. Student Workshop, Sagana.

We set out for Sagana in the Rusinga bus. The excitement in the air is palpable. There are more than 60 student participants from 5 different schools and we can't wait to begin. The scenery, once we leave Nairobi is breathtaking. Rich and I present a workshop. We are ambitious and hope to have the students complete 'The Kenyan Alphabet' by the end of our session. Fortunately, Rich enlists Brendan's help with technology and we begin...

The students do amazing work and we meet our objective, we have a Kenyan Alphabet by the end of our two sessions with two groups. I am sorry that I can't attend the other two sessions led by Roberto and Tamar and Kris.
The student reading is amazing and I end the day by making a short video of the 4 students in David's school who are in an email exchange with my students.

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We are all sad to say goodbye....

We head back to the Gymkhana to pick up luggage and then to Pat's house for dinner. Diti has put out an amazing spread and showers everyone with gifts...we are all touched and our emotions spill over in the final sharing session just before we say goodbye to Ceci, Logan, Brendan, Rich, Tamar and Kris.

Ummi, Millery, Meredith and Roberto will leave on Sunday and Jennifer and I on Monday.

Goodbyes are always hard and I struggle not to cry as I say goodbye to some of my best friends, knowing it will be a long time before we meet again.

We spend a restful Sunday beginning with a walk through the Nairobi Safari Park, followed by shopping in the Masai Market, a great lunch and ending with a visit to the giraffe feeding centre with Reshma and her husband Nimesh. We visit Reshma's school and home before we head back to Pat's for dinner that Pat herself prepares and another round of goodbyes before the second group leaves. Finally, on Monday afternoon, Jennifer and I check in for our flight back to Mumbai...
Reflections
The week that has passed is surreal. It is hard to believe that it actually happened. I go back to Mumbai, blessed by the bonds of lasting friendships, enriched by all that I have learnt, inspired by the commitment and generosity of all the facilitators and participants, touched by the warmth and kindness shown to us strangers, by so many people who went out of their way to welcome us into their classrooms and lives and above all more grateful than ever for the opportunity to make a difference to my students because of Lou, Dixie and ABL.
David and Pat have pulled off a miracle...

I hope to be able to convince my management to host the next conference.