

International Experience

In many ways the international aspect of my time in Zambia's capital of Lusaka was the most difficult but also the most enlightening. This was the first time I had ever stepped outside of a Western country and the first time I felt like a true outsider in a country. I resided in a district called Ng'ombe compound and despite what the name may suggest, it is not a military installation or a gated community but one of the poorest parts of Lusaka. I never saw a non-Zambian within Ng'ombe, and it seemed that the locals did not either as every time I walked outside the house or school, without fail, at least three people would point and say "Mzungu! Mzungu!" meaning "White man! White man!" Furthermore, the culture in Zambia is very traditional as well, with a strong emphasis on Christianity and conventional gender roles. This was quite intimidating at first to say the least, but as time went on, I came to appreciate other aspects of Zambian culture. For one thing, Zambian families are remarkably close knit with relatives coming to visit or stay overnight far more frequently than in the West. More than that, however, is how hospitable they are to family and friends, always serving visitors food and making conversation with them no matter the activities with which one was previously engaged. What is more is that everyone is so hard working, I have never met people who work so hard in my life as the family I lived with in Lusaka. The mother of the family (Mercy) works two jobs, one of which is a full-time headteacher, and the father of the family (Isaac) is often out running errands until 10pm at night on weekends or weekdays. This hard work extends to both the children of this family, all of whom are either at the top of (or very close to the top of) their classes in school. The expectation to this is the youngest but she only just turned three, so she gets a pass. It was not just Mercy and Isaac's children who possessed such dedication, all the children at the school I was teaching had such a genuine love for learning that I do not remember seeing in my peers growing up. I suppose what I took away from all of this was inspiration. Despite such minimal material conditions, everyone was happy every day and worked hard every day. It inspired me to greater discipline and prevented me from any sort of procrastination for fear of letting my friends down. I hope to take this inspiration and newfound discipline into my third year of university where it can certainly serve me well.