

As soon as I started my application for MIIS, I knew I wanted to take advantage of the opportunity to travel to Rwanda over J-Term. Now, having returned, I can honestly say it was one of the best decisions I've ever made.

It was an absolutely magnificent journey from start to finish. I return with no complaints, only the purest of happiness.

The following are entries from the journal I kept throughout the adventure. Hopefully it reflects the wonder and beauty of Rwanda.

5 January 2018

10:33

It's an eery feeling, something about this country. Knowing the potholes that line the roads that are now filled with fresh rain water were not long ago overflowing with the blood of an innocent people; to know the mud caked on the side of my shoes was once mixed with the spilled blood of a lovely and caring and unjustly targeted and hunted race.

It is hard not to look at the beautiful, green hills now so delicately maintained, paved, plucked, and planted, knowing that 20 years ago, these streets were lined with limp bodies, hacked to pieces by machetes, corpses of children pulled from the arms of their dead mothers, brothers, and sisters at the hands of their neighbors, teachers, and priests. It is hard not to see it now: I can't imagine - I can not begin to imagine - the pain, agony, cries, screams, betrayal, broken trust, and loss carried on their shoulders, living in the souls, singing in the eyes of the entire country's population over 25 years old. On their faces; in their scars; in their limps; in their souls. It can not be ignored.

5 January 2018

11:30

They've been playing Boyz 2 Men & 80s hits at the hostel all morning. They get it.

6 January 2018

09:03

The rest of the group arrives today. We had a good time yesterday. I've been waking up around 7:15 each morning, showering and eating breakfast. Yesterday we used the morning to catch up on readings and then set out for the town. We went to a buffet called 'Fantastic Restaurant' for

lunch. It was absolutely delicious. Everything is fairly cheap, around \$5 for a big plate of food. Many different kinds of beans and potatoes, one scoop of meat.

We sat outside to eat. There were three women with babies in front of the restaurant. Every time a car pulled in, they would immediately come to the windows, with hands extended only to be strictly ignored. They loved their babies. Soon after, a young boy approached Pat. I couldn't hear what he was saying, but Pat kept on shaking his head and saying 'no.'

It began to rain a warm rain. We weren't sure how long or hard it would continue and our next plans included walking to the market. Within a half hour, the rain died down enough to carry on. Despite the rain, the boy never left and proceeded to follow us toward UTC. The boy now approached me and as we walked he said to me over and over, "Please sista, I am so very hungry. So very, very hungry. You will buy me food?" He followed us through the rain for more than two blocks repeating the same lines. We approached the city center and much to our surprise, a familiar face smiled in our direction. I couldn't have been more excited to see JC. He greets us with hugs, then warmly says something to the boy who laughs. They fist bump and the boy turns away laughing and grinning.

We walked around the tiny mall and then headed towards the city center. It was just as bustling as the day before. In the mall, JC attempted to teach us Kinyarwanda. The locals laughed at us, but I think they enjoyed the interaction. Then we walked 5 miles home. We had a good time.

We went to dinner with a big group, there were 11 of us. It was an eclectic crew: two Frenchmen, two Swedes, one Norwegian, JC, a girl from Oregon, and the four of us. I've been obsessing over the hot sauce. They make their own at this restaurant, and it is the best I've ever tasted. After dinner, we all came back to the hostel and continued drinking, chatting, laughing, and playing cards until 2 a.m.

This morning a monkey visited the hostel! They threw him bananas. I've grown much more comfortable in my surroundings by now. I've befriended the staff at the hostel - we laugh and greet each other. They love to laugh and joke and tease.

6 January 2018

15:24

More of the group arrived today. We spent most of the morning catching up on readings.

We left for lunch around 1:30. There were seven of us now. We no longer fit in just one car, so we had to take motos. While it wasn't my first time on a moto, it was my first time riding a moto through Africa. For the frequent travelers in the group, this was no big deal, and at this point, I've just learned to go with the flow - plus I love riding motorbikes so count me in.

Our plan was to get Ethiopian food because we'd seen a balcony with tables and a sign labeled "ETHIOPIAN" in big bold letters. Turns out it was a travel agency. So we just walked around the corner, straight back to the Fantastic Restaurant. Grand meal as usual. We arrived and the young lady who works at the restaurant recognized us, gave me a Rwandan high five and said, "I like you." I was like, dope dude, I've made it in Rwanda. But that feeling came to an abrupt halt when I tried to say 'thank you' and said, "murazeko" instead of 'murakoze.' Once again, it started raining as we were leaving. It began raining harder and harder as we rounded up enough motos so that we could caravan back to Discover Rwanda. It felt so good to be on the bike while HUGE raindrops pelted my arm and chest. I loved it.

Now we are back at the hostel and in is POURING. Thunder and lightening and the whole shebang.

7 January 2018

21:48

We had an interesting afternoon yesterday. Most of the group arrived. We had lunch at the historic Hôtel des Mille Collines.

After lunch, we took an emotional journey to the Kigali Genocide Memorial. It was heavy, man. Much of the history and pictures I had already seen in some of the other museums, but this one is full of information and heart-wrenching facts. The exhibit began with a 10 minute video about the genocide and stories of individuals who experienced it. One of the rooms that I thought was really powerful was full of bones of the murdered. They had cases full of skulls and bones. hardly any of the skulls were fully in tact - many of them missing most of their teeth. A majority of them were severely damaged: some cracked, some with bullet holes, some missing cheekbones, and some missing the face altogether. It really gave visage to the violence and brutality of the genocide. The other exhibit that was especially powerful was the Children's room. Living up to its name, this room showed pictures of children who were murdered in the genocide above a plaque with their name, age, a fun fact about the child (like who their best friend was or what the favorite food was), and then the last piece of information listed was how they were murdered. Some were hacked by machetes. One has smashed onto a wall.

Outside the exhibit were the graves of 250,000 murdered.

I've made friends with many of the locals and begun to pick up a handful of phrases. I've also successfully mastered the art of Rwandan high fives. The group went out to a bar after dinner but instead of going with them (which I heard was a grand time), I walked back to the hotel to eat and watch soccer with the locals.

8 January 2018

11:25

This morning we traveled to the PIH location in Rwinkwavu. We fit 24 of us on a mini bus. I was comfortable - even fell asleep with my head out the window for a bit. The facilities here are absolutely gorgeous. The site overlooks beautiful hills and mountains covered in greens. There are a thousand different butterflies and birds and insects buzzing about.

Class today was mostly introductions. We were given our groups. I'm doing Community Health Worker Empowerment in Income Generating Activities - figured it would be the most related to business.

9 January 2018

22:15

Grandma is dying. Wish I could be there.

Such a strange feeling, that she is finally seeing her end. Almost one-hundred and one years old. Absolutely remarkable. I was never old enough to see the full picture, I just knew Grandma. And her terrible mac and cheese that I loved. When I was born she was already nearing 80 years old, but I can't even imagine what she was like in her prime. I mean, she must have been just absolutely something else. Anyways, I love her.

Probably the wisest and most applicable thing she ever said to me was back when I was considering law school and I explained to her that I wasn't fond of many of the lawyers I'd come to know and was hesitant to surround myself with people like that. Even though she was already living in the dementia ward of a nursing home, she - with all the lucidity and clarity I'd always known her to have - gently took my hand, gazed deeply into my eyes and said, "That's what makes it interesting."

I apply that to so many situations now, and I've taken some risks because of it that I otherwise wouldn't have. I could even argue that's what landed me in Rwanda today.

At such an old age now, she's lost a lot of her cognitive functionality. I noticed an especially dramatic turn in her memory and coherency when my dad of cancer died 8 years ago. She lasted on her own (with the help of a "strictly non-sexual boyfriend") for a few years after that. They were both over 94 years old though, and at a certain point stopped having the strength to take care of each other. Since then, she lived in a convalescent home. They took good care of her for a long time.

I've missed her "crash-bang" for years. She'd make that noise while accidentally hitting pans and pots together while making me my favorite mac and cheese. And I miss how many copies of your publications and articles you'd have stockpiled around your old apartment and I love how many of them I have now. Just as many, many, many times as you told me your stories of the red-cross or about our ancestors in the Klondike or you finding your father's angry eyes in the back

of a crowd that you stood in front of singing, microphone in hand, draped in a beautiful shiny dress.

It's going to be weird not having you around, Grandma. But you'll always be with us and with me in my heart. Go with peace, Grandma. Thank you for always loving me and the family. I love you.

9 January 2018

22:30

Today we jumped in to the program. It's been interesting. We explored a couple different ways to approach, interpret, and analyze programs using methods like the Problem Tree. We then applied our specific project topics to the "learning tree." After doing some further research, our group developed a firm grasp on the problem, its causes, and its affects. What I found most interesting was - at least for our problem - how closely related the causes are to the affects. In other words, the affects were a thin line away from being listed as causes themselves. A very cyclical system.

It is interesting, being part of an education process essentially completely outside my knowledge background. A lot of students are very familiar in the topics we discuss and processes we have been "introduced" to. For example, a main element in our problem is that Community Health Worker (CHW) cooperatives are not generating enough income from their Income Generating Activities. As we were discussing CHWs and IGAs, it took me at least 20 minutes to figure out that IGA stood for Income Generating Activities. The rest of my group was using this and other acronyms so fluently, I had to play a lot of catch up to stay on the same page.

We then developed a series of questions for an interview with the management of two CHWs we are to have later in the week. I think this was the most I've contributed to the group so far. I have a good mind for creating questions that will communicate not only a sense of respect and trust to those we are interviewing but also entice the information we are looking for.

I've been waking up pretty consistently around 6 a.m. since I got here. These facilities are lovely. We are provided with breakfast, lunch, dinner, and coffee/tea breaks. My favorite is the ginger tea with honey and milk... and the meatballs. As with the rest of my experience in Rwanda, the staff here is kind, the food is delicious, and our surroundings are breathtaking - birds, trees, flowers, butterflies.

So far, my favorite part of everyday is from 17:30-18:45, when we walk five minutes down the hill from our rooms and play basketball with the local kids. They have a practice that goes on during that time. Most of the children play in sandals or barefooted. It was so cool to see their coach running the same exact drills I used to run back when I played. These kids are good man. They let us play with them. I could barely hold my own.

11 January 2018

06:25

We had our site visits yesterday. When we were assigned groups, I was worried we wouldn't be able to experience community life as much as the other groups, like the HIV/AIDS or the malnutrition in children under 5 group. They all had plans to visit peoples' homes to conduct their interviews with the community members from there. Although we didn't enter anybody's home, our adventure was equally as eye-opening.

We drove for about 25 minutes. I rode in the back of a safari truck. A majority of the distance was over bumpy unpaved roads.

As we arrived to our first location, the first thing any of us heard (and smelled) were chickens. There were three wooden paneled houses on the property; two about 20 x 30 and the last about 30 x 50. We met two men and one woman at the front of the property, quickly introduced ourselves and then were led to the bigger of the three houses. The closer we walked, the louder the clucking got. Outside the front door, there was a trough for us to wash the soles of our shoes, as not to track in any potential diseases. One by one, we rinsed our shoes, still nobody entirely sure where or what we were being led towards.

We passed through one door and then followed the manager of the IGA (who we later learned is also a veterinarian) down a short hall to yet another door. Still in a state of confusion and disbelief and surrounded by a crescendo of clucking, the young man opens the door.

Behind the door was a room with -and I am not exaggerating in any way, shape, or form- at least 1,500 chickens. They were everywhere. This was the last thing I expected to see when I woke up yesterday. The other rooms in the house consisted of a storage room for stacks and stacks and stacks of cartoned eggs, there was a room for sick chickens (and a white chicken that the other orange/brown chickens wouldn't accept - funny), and a room where the daily/nightly care keeper slept. We were also taken to the other two buildings, which were full of chickens as well. While we were in one of the rooms, I let out a very quiet whistle, and -again I am exaggerating in no way - a room full of 500 loudly bawking, cawking, and clucking chickens fell absolutely dead silent. The chickens immediately froze the second they heard the whistle, looked around in silent confusion, and finally after four or five seconds of my sheer embarrassment, returned to their routine pecking and clucking.

After looking at all of the houses, my group and three of the CHWs sat on two benches to conduct our first interview. It went very well - they gave us a lot more information than we had originally thought and also seemed to be upset with the way the leadership above them operated. Once we finished the interview, they took us to their office where they completed their paperwork. The manager proudly showed us all of his documents and stamps. They also took us to another IGA in their district: a eucalyptus lumber yard. As we trekked 20 feet into the forestry, a mother and her children watched us almost completely hidden by the calming smelling leaves, giggling and waving from a distance.

I just got word that my grandmother passed. I don't know how I feel yet. I'm sorry, I just don't feel like writing right now.

15 January 20

22:30

It's been such a crazy busy and crazy fun week. On the go from sun up until sun down every day.

Last week in class, we studied the concepts of the marketing mix through a social marketing lens. The similarities between social marketing and business marketing, while perhaps definitionally similar, have major differences. The biggest shift I noticed was that of the role of the 'consumer' and how the 'product' is advertised to them. In other words, social marketing is considered customer centric, while business marketing focuses on selling the product and how to best do so. Our group's project is a little bit different than the other groups in that instead of our task surrounding presenting a target market with an idea that promotes a healthy initiative, our task is centered around how to secure more income for CHWs by way of cooperatives and their IGAs.

This weekend was wild cool. In a nutshell, we went to a women's initiative where women come on a daily basis to work on artisanal crafts and yogurt production, and sell around the city. We were lucky enough to Saturday I started the morning early by walking down to the village to find some fruit for breakfast. I headed down the road around 07:00. It was shortly after the sun rose all the way, but most of the town was still asleep. This country is so beautiful; calm, wise, hard-working, communal. I'm so grateful to have seen it, to have been able to experience it.

That was my final entry.

My last week in Rwanda was like a dream.

It is possible that I had more fun in one week in Rwanda than I've had collectively in my entire life.

While still working in Rwinkwavu, we saw elephants in Akagera, made friends with a local entrepreneur who cooked us delicious wood fire pizzas and fish tacos, danced at the local bars, ate my bodyweight in bruschetta, and developed and presented our humble insight on how to potentially improve an already wonderful community health program. Our two weeks in Rwinkwavu were educational, challenging, exciting, and inspiring. During class hours, I learned about the specifics of social entrepreneurship and social marketing and outside of class hours, I -

and the rest of the cohort - were truly able to immerse ourselves in the surrounding community that we were so lucky to work with.

Our program ended on Wednesday afternoon and we returned to Kigali that night. It was nice returning to the smiling faces of our friends we had made the first week. JC happily greeted us and Sarge was happy to see us return as well.

Friday brought the end to the DPMI program and we were set free to travel until our scheduled flights. Another student named Kaitlin and I decided to take a five hour bus ride to the Discover Rwanda Hostel in Gisenyi on Lake Kivu. It was paradise.

When people ask me what my favorite part of Rwanda was, I tell them the story of this day:

I walked down to the lakeside just before sunrise around 6:30 a.m. and it was fairly quiet (except for the hundreds of bats in the trees), but by 7 a.m. the entire lakeshore was bustling with locals jogging, playing soccer, doing yoga (or something like that - not my scene), pumping out push-ups, running, chanting, swimming - just absolutely every kind of active movement imaginable. By 8:30, we were ready to start the day. We'd met up with a Canadian girl named Hillary who asked if she could join us on our day's adventures. During the walk earlier in the morning, we'd run into a local boat guide who offered to take us on a tour around the lake. After eating breakfast, we decided to take him up on it. It was a great decision.

The three of us boarded his wooden boat, with a roof held up by a couple 2x4s and electrical tape. We took off from the shore and headed towards a rock formation in the middle of the lake. Our guide told us that it was called Punishment Island. It was no more than a handful of boulders protruding from the water. This 'island' was where women who were impregnated before marriage were taken to survive on their own volition, usually getting picked up by the Congolese.

Our next stop was unreal. We paid 1,000 francs (maybe a dollar) for entrance into natural hot springs. As we entered, a woman who didn't speak immediately greeted us and two men explained that she couldn't talk, but wanted to give us mud baths. How could we say no? She sat us down on rocks five feet from the lakeshore, and rubbed boiling hot mud from our feet to mid-calves and then covered them in the mud to soak for as long as we could stand. It was HOT. I had to tap out after five minutes. Kaitlin and Hillary enjoyed the hot spring pools enclosed by sandbags and I ventured around the corner to buy some corn on the cob which we ended up sharing amongst ourselves, our guide, and a few of the other local guests to the hot springs.

Following in the footsteps of our first stop, our next venture was just as incredible. We reboarded the boat and went around the lake-bend to a bar/restaurant. It had started to rain, so we quickly pulled up to the lakeside and sought refuge underneath the covered part of the open-front restaurant. We had nearly the entire restaurant to ourselves. Our meal was a freshly caught tilapia straight out of the lake we overlooked. A wonderful woman skinned and gutted our fish right in

front of us and before we knew it, the same very fish were cooked and sitting on a plate in front of us. It was delicious. So *so* delicious. We'd gotten our guide a fish as well, so by the time we were ready to leave the restaurant we were good friends. Hillary steered the boat back to the dock and the rest of us shared music and enjoyed ourselves.

When we got back to the dock, the three of us had a lovely swim in the lake as the sun set. There was a pier that stood about 8 feet above the lake. Many of the locals were jumping off of it and having a blast, so naturally we joined them. The water was clean, clear, warm and refreshing.

We walked back across the street to our hostel, and honestly were ready for a nap before dinner. I walked around the corner and heard a loud, happy scream from down the hall. I quickly walked back around the corner to investigate. Kaitlin was gone, and Hillary seemed a little bit confused. She said that a guy and another girl walked in, and that was all I needed to hear. I screamed as well, rudely forgot to excuse myself, and ran upstairs to find Kelly and Patrick, two of our closest MIIS friends sitting in the room next to ours. What a wonderful surprise! We'd joked about them showing up earlier, but never actually expected it to happen. It was so nice to see their faces again!

We caught up for a little bit and then decided we all still wanted to nap before going out for dinner. As we were making these plans, we heard distant cheering and shouting. We looked at each other from the corner of our eyes, silently communicating that if it was a soccer game or a local event there was absolutely no way we could stay and nap. I asked our friends who worked at the hostel if they knew what the ruckus was all about and they explained to us that it was a local art show, free of charge and welcome to everybody. Another local, however, told us that it was a wedding, also open to the public. Either way, it was enough to convince the lot of us. The five of us made our way towards the noise. For the thousandth time in one day, I couldn't believe my eyes. We drew closer and closer to the noise, finding ourselves nearing an auditorium where we could hear music and cheering - my jaw dropped. The second I peered in the windows, the 'Circle of Life' started playing and I found myself watching a local street dancing competition. We found our way to the front of the auditorium as fast as we could. It was packed with people standing on chairs, dancing on chairs, holding chairs above their heads, smiling, laughing, dancing, enjoying themselves and cheering on their friends. We only caught the last 20 minutes of the show, but were enthralled by every single minute of it.

As the show came to an end, we made our way out of the auditorium and down the road to the local restaurants on the shore of the lake. After dancing a bit in the sand, playing a game of pool, and ordering bruschetta, to our amazement, we were blessed with another surprise: some of the groups that we'd seen performing earlier made their way to the restaurant we were in. We sat front row center as incredibly talented dancers did backflips, front flips, hand springs, and then - again to our complete surprise - pulled us on stage. We had a great time dancing, and the crowd, which at this point was filled with at least 25 locals, danced with us, laughing and clapping with the music.

After a while we returned to our hostel, still in a state of awe from our day. We all headed to our room and ended up skyping another MIIS student who was in Colombia for her J-Term DPMI. We all stayed up and shared stories of our trips until it was time for sleep.

We woke up in the morning and went for a morning swim before getting on the bus and heading to Kigali. This bus ride back was just as beautiful as the ride there. This time, however, we drove through what we learned to be a funeral procession. Essentially, we drove through almost an entire town dancing and running down the street. At first, I have to admit, I was mildly concerned, but the gentleman sitting next to us explained what was going on.

We arrived back to the hostel and were warmly greeted by JC and the rest of the Discover Rwanda Staff. By dinner time, we made our way up the hill to a restaurant called Sundowners, where we'd visited before DPMI began. I ordered an entire pork leg. It was crazy delicious. I ate as much as I could and then stupidly forgot my left overs behind the bar. That is my biggest regret of the entire trip.

We returned to the hostel and decided to enjoy our last night in Rwanda by exploring the night life. We went to a nearby club and danced until our feet hurt.

The next day was our last in Rwanda. We ventured about the city a little bit more, paid another visit to the market, packed our bags, and boarded our planes back to states.

Rwanda, in all of its strength and beauty, is like no other place on earth. I'd forgotten the wonder alive in the world; I'd forgotten that the the world is full of music and joy and dance and laughter. This adventure was full of reminders of the importance of remaining willing to open yourself to the understanding of things close and far and embracing life and the opportunities it offers you.

I'm so grateful to have had this experience; to have been able to explore such a breathtaking, warm, kind, powerful, resilient, wise, caring, and welcoming part of this world. All I can do now is wait for an opportunity to return and until then, share my experiences with anybody willing to listen.





