



Anita presenting her poem in chapel this spring at RBC.

Kenya was a world of color

Poetry out loud by Anita Garber

Editor's note: RBC student Anita Garber participated in the college's Cross-Cultural Term in Kenya during winter term. She shared the following piece with students in chapel this spring. To hear Anita deliver this prose poem (and it's meant to be spoken and heard!), use this link to our website: <http://rosedale.edu/audio/anita.mp3>

The flag's colors: red, green, white and black, dance and wave in the breeze.

Burnt red earth stretches as far as the eye can see. Dust clouds rise as a motorbike and *matatu* pass. Tin-roofed shanty houses dot the landscape, as dry maize stalks sway in the fields.

Kenya. Yes. I have now been around the world, across the Atlantic Ocean and back again. Words to describe my experience don't fit in my brain. Don't formulate the way normal people explain. Don't fit in the boxes of Good, Awesome, or Otherwise. Can't be crossed out, forgotten or erased, like days on the calendar. Doesn't say anything from A-Z. Just says I was there and now I see.

I see that for most of my life, I have been walking around blind.
I see that I have been living my life around me.
I see that I've spent my life without empathy.
I see that I have weaknesses that I am allowed to let others see.
That life is madness we are all running from.
And that God above is far beyond the word "awesome."

I realize now that Kenya didn't meet my hopes, aspirations or expectations. Didn't give me the answers I planned on attaining. Didn't meet me in the way I had thought. I was sure I knew the plan. How life would go day in and weekend out. What I would experience, who I would meet and so on were all laid out and would go according to the schedule, which hung on the bulletin board on a paper of green.

How do you put words to a different reality: something that's outside of you, apart from you, yet part of your own reality? How do you describe something that you, in part, had a hard time not despising? Not the people or the weather, but your own way of reacting?

I saw a lot in Kenya. I saw that I am in need of love. And in need of a love for others, for the whole human race. I saw people living in squalor and I only turned to (briefly) cover my face. To block the smell, the sight was expected: countless people living unprotected.

People surround me, see me, pass me and greet me. Yet my heart is a stone. They say ignorance is bliss. Well, my life hasn't been full of bliss, but I continue to live in blatant ignorance. Ignorance is in me. I live and breathe it in and walk it out, one step at a time. I see it in my reaction to Mathare, the slums we visited. Seeing the tin-roofed lean-to's with dirt floors and matching children. I looked through walls of steel and bars of plexiglass: distant, sheltered, unattached.

I see clearly something I have been missing. I see that I need to have a want and have yet to have a need on which my life depends. Something that is outside of me, yet a part of my reality. A need for life, for basic necessities. I know no needs; I only have wants for material things that are here today and in a trash heap or landfill tomorrow. My wants are satisfied by others, technology and shopping malls.

I don't know that my search was successful. At least not according to my standards and ideals.

I found a place that I could 'belong.' I found a people ready to love and teach and learn. I found a people in want and in need. And I found that really I don't have a 'place,' a specific place that I need to belong, need to call safe, and be completely at home. I found that where I belong is in the center of God's grace, and He will be faithful, whatever the place.



Anita greets a day guest who arrived for a time of prayer at Regions Beyond Ministries Retreat Center near Thika. Our students lived and studied at the Center. RBC adjunct faculty Abraham Ndungu led the Cross-Cultural Term, with much help and support from Philip Mbatia and Catherine Waweru, who direct Regions Beyond Ministries.

(Photo credit, Aaron Beitzel)

Kenya was a world of color; red clay dirt, green mango trees, yellow bananas and blue skies. And people—scads of people, everywhere.

I found that color was something that made a difference. Color was different. It was me, yet simultaneously didn't include me. For the first time in a long time—for the first time in my life—it didn't include, didn't mean me. Color wasn't something I was, wasn't something I was associated with.

Color wasn't me as I blended in. Wasn't something I needed to defend or acknowledge. Wasn't something I needed to see. It was something that surrounded and engulfed me, yet didn't define me. Color wasn't black, wasn't me. I joined something and became plural. I became a part of 'we': a people, a group, a nation.

To put it to you straight, at times I found myself an oddity as I began to see myself through others' eyes. I was surprised and at times disappointed to find out occasionally that I still spoke English. I found myself an oddity. Not because of what I was—an un-traditional *Mzungu*—but because of what I wasn't. I wasn't a native. I couldn't communicate with most beyond a simple greeting.

Kenya taught me something about color. Color was something that ran beyond skin deep. Something that was in the soil and heart of a continent, a country, a people. Something that was attributed to your life, your goals and your identity.

Identity and color ran together synonymously, like the water that ran in the river below the Center, where people swam, prayed, did laundry. But color didn't confine me. I was accepted as

a native, unless my tongue gave me away. I met many a stranger who looked upon me with dismay when I chose to speak instead of smile and wave. I was the 'native' stranger. Unfamiliar, silent one. Secret English speaker—not of European descent. I was not un-identified, as I was thought to be one of them.

From a vantage point of invisibility, I learned more about God and some more about me. I saw the faithfulness of God in an unfamiliar land. I saw a people who value relationships over things and time. I saw a glimpse of what it means when we say, "He's got the whole world in His hands." I saw my weaknesses more clearly than ever before. I saw the lives. Heard the hopes and struggles and dreams of the poor.

I saw that crazy-awesome things can happen when you let go of you and your expectations and plans. I saw the faithfulness of God in a land far away.

Kenya was a place for me to be for 6-ish weeks. It was a place where God showed me His love, faithfulness and amazing, unending grace.

I went to Kenya on a search for Identity. To find God and to find me. I went searching for answers in the great 'unknown.' Looking to Africa to be my home. To be a place where I belonged. To be a place where I could be known. And to some degree that's what I found.

Anita is from Bainbridge, Pennsylvania, and attends ACTS Covenant Fellowship in Lancaster. She will graduate from RBC this spring with an associate degree in biblical studies with a concentration in music and worship. She plans to continue her education and is considering going into social work.



Before returning home, Anita and some of the RBC students took a few hours to get hair extensions and basically look pretty great for the trip back!

(Photo credit, Aaron Beitzel)



The hair treatment was a group effort. Here, (left to right) Andrew Conte, Aaron Beitzel, Heidi Elliott, and Alisha Shenk lend a hand to finish up Anita's hair.

(Photo credit, Kiera Mininger)