



“Nobody Told Me Africa Was a Continent:
Memoirs from the Rainbow Nation”

by: Jessica Schlieff

1.) Pre-Departure

January 17, 2010

When most people set off for an adventure abroad they have plethora of personal goals. They hope to try new things, expand their worldviews, learn foreign languages, gain spiritual insight, connect with humanity, blah blah blah, etc. etc.

That’s all lovely, but when I set off for South Africa this quickly approaching Tuesday, I go with three more pressing objectives in tow:

Objective 1: **To avoid getting eaten by a shark.** Swimming in the ocean is all well and good until someone loses a limb, and I certainly don’t intend for that someone to be me. Thanks for the invitation, Mr. Ring of Death, but this live bait will be chillin’ on the sand.

Objective 2: **To avoid being a victim of crime.** I can do without mugging, rape, murder, ethnic cleansing, human sacrifice, scalping, or--worst case scenario--bike rage, so I plan for this spring semester to involve minimal harm to my person. Mission Safety, Mission Life.

Objective 3: **To embrace my inner black woman.** I have long suspected that the section marked “Caucasian” on my birth certificate was a mistake. I have often felt oppressed by the taboo-ing of clapping, dancing, rhythm, and general happiness in “predominantly” white church worship. I have always thought that the genre “Southern Gospel” had a cruelly misleading title--Sorry, Bill and Gloria. Some may be old souls, but I am a black soul longing to be freed from this scrawny, fair-skinned prison. Hand me a drum and save me a seat in the alto section, South Africa, for I am officially retiring the white-girl foot stomp.

2.) I’ve Been Everywhere, Man. I’ve Been Everywhere

January 24, 2010

We hit the road Tuesday, January 19th at approximately 1500 hours for what we dreaded would be an exhausting three days of travel. Unbeknownst to us, three days would soon turn into four as the words “unfortunately, due to a medical emergency we will be soon be making our

decent into Cairo," came droning out of the intercom.

After three sweaty hours on the runway, the happy announcements continued with "due to flight time restrictions, we will need to stay in the city for the day. Oh, and we will need to confiscate your passports."

Don't get me wrong, I'm sure Cairo is a wonderful place, but I would prefer to visit with—oh, I dunno—my passport in hand, maybe some language and culture skills, and at least a few days forewarning. (There were so many pre-packing questions I would have asked like, "Do I need to don a hijab? Do I, too, need to be armed like our fine bus driver?") But, that was not to be, and as we exited into the Cairo airport, we were greeted by friendly chaps with machine guns. After claiming our baggage we hopped onto a minibus where we were whisked away by one, Mr. Drives-With-A-Deathwish. On the bus we had a lovely chat with a girl from Jo'Burg who informed us that South Africa was a "horrible place," and that she was so glad to be escaping to the UK. We listened to pleasant anecdotes about rufiing in the clubs, sisters getting dragged into cars by men, your everyday muggings, and the nightly echoes of gunshots.

Cairo started to look pretty good right about then. "Maybe," we thought, "we should just scope out things here for 5 months. Who really needs the World Cup anyway?"

But, alas, after 15 hours at the hotel, much-needed showers, new travel arrangements, calls to the fam, naps, amazing fruit, and a mini-break-down on my part, we were back on the plane to Jo'Burg with fresh clothes but no wits about us.

After ten more hours of travel, we finally landed in Cape Town, exhausted and overwhelmed, ready to go home but not ready to get back on a plane. We made it to UCT where we barricaded ourselves—literally with our suitcases—in our temporary dorm room to try to regroup. As the sun went down, our spirits were unwilling and our bodies were weak, and we crashed with some hope that the next twenty-four hours would bring less adventure than the previous sixty-five.

4.) Uncle Sam says, "I Want You, Schleiff!"

March 16, 2010

This week I had my first exams. In the grand scheme of my life, these three exams are small potatoes. Yet, in the grand scheme of the American International Reputation, these tests carried major patriotic obligations. Yes, that's right. It was my duty as a self-respecting Amurhcan to single-handedly combat negative stereotypes inspired by LA and biased media abroad. I felt the weight of the call to prove to my scary lecturers and tutors with their hoity-toity British spelling and obscure comma usage that I did indeed have a brain, and neither Laguna Beach nor Beverly Hills 90210 has eradicated that fact!

I am sorry to tell you, though, that this patriot did not rise to the call of duty but instead, embraced the Cape Townian Spirit, opting for a spontaneous hike up the mountain rather than the wiser, more honorable decision to spend Sunday afternoon pouring over notes. (On my way up Skeleton Gorge, I did give Arkansas some mad props, though. So, I have not completely turned my back on my homeland. Woo pig!).

But wait! Not to fear! I embraced the also ever-so-American skill of merging intrinsic knowledge with major B.S.-ing. That process, in combination with lingering memories from past lectures by Drs. Amy Sonheim, Johnny Wink, Mary Beth Long, and Mrs. April Counts, helped me come out OK in my task. Maybe I will indeed walk away from these three tests with glory to my country's name. Only time will tell. Until then, I will continue to whistle Dixie on my way to class and talk in a really, really loud voice all around campus, just to get our name out there.

5.) Confessions of a Tea-aholic

April 18th, 2010

Today, April 18th 2010, marks the day when I stopped caring about my daily level of caffeine consumption. Last semester I diligently went cold-turkey, a mean feat for this coffee-addict. Well, at least I switched to decaf. After a few days of killer headaches, the shakes, mild narcolepsy, and general grumpiness, my friend Starbucks and I crossed the barrier into the next dimension of healthier living. However, my resolve was shaken up quite a bit, when 'normal' tea re-entered my life in Cape Town.

I don't ever remember a time in my childhood when 'hot tea' wasn't part of the picture. It should be noted that the concept of non-iced-English-breakfast-mixed-with-milk was and is near-heresy in the minds of most Arkansans, but for the child of a quasi-Zimbabwean, it was a staple in the diet. Some children go from the breast to the bottle, but I went for the breast to the bear-(that is to say, the recycled bear-shaped honey container that became the vessel for my beverageal comfort). (Side-note: I'm pretty sure that ten out of ten pediatricians would recommend NOT giving your child caffeinated drinks at infancy, but Mark and Angie Schleiff were still youngsters then and thus, shall not be blamed for my current self-destructive habits.)

After a few years of mere acquaintanceship, I must inform you that Hot Tea and I are going steady once again. Just to put our relationship in perspective for you, on a typical Sunday (like today), I wake up in the morning, and I'm drinking tea. I go to church, and I'm drinking tea while I wait for worship to start. Church ends, and I'm chatting with friends with a nice, warm cup in hand. What better way to follow lunch than with a cup o' tea? I am homeworking in the afternoon and check my watch only to discover that it is 4:00. What time is it? High Tea time!! 6 o'clock church, and...well, you get the picture. Like the Pringles people say, once you pop you just can't stop. It is a slippery slope my friends, a slippery slope indeed.

'Why is she writing this ode to a beverage?' you may ask. Whelp, apparently six-plus cups of tea in one day isn't conducive to sleeping. Imagine that. So, here I am, jittering through this message--too jazzed to rest but too intellectuallazy to hang out with William Faulkner. Such is the life of a tea-aholic.

6.) Don'tcha Come Back, You Stupid Black Cat
May 28, 2010

For five months now at 8 Groeneveld Road, we have had an unwelcome squatter on our premises. Nope, it's not a bergie, a mooching fellow college student, or Leslie Reynolds. It is a small, black, androgynous feline. At first he-she was cute. He-She was loving and cuddly and--unlike 99% of the species--seemed to want love more than food. So, we (I) took pity

on the little guy and gave he-she milk, attention, and a bit of leftover chicken.

Big. Mistake.

It soon became clear that Cat had an acute sense of when we were at home and specifically, when we were on the porch.

Anytime we studied or skyped outside we would soon hear the “pat, pat, pat-swish” of Cat trotting over the neighbor’s roof and leaping into our bushes. Before we knew it, he-she was in our laps, oblivious to the collegiate productivity taking place.

At first this intimacy was cute. However, after a slithering tail shattered three wine glasses and a coffee cup upon the concrete, and after ignorant paws added “hjhsdkjgsjfkjdk” into multiple essays, boundaries had to be drawn.

First, we, the residents of 8 Groeneveld, tried the “ignoring” method. We met hopeful “mews” with apathetic glances and bitter grunts. But the little sucker was persistent. Apparently, an acute awareness of social signals was not included among his-her other abilities.

Next, we tried the “okay we’re getting stern, now” method, speaking in unfriendly voices and giving little pushes when Cat came to the table. Still, Cat kept coming back. Finally, I (to the horror of my female housemates) resorted to the “we really mean business, this isn’t funny anymore” method of soaking the little fellow with water every time it dared to enter our property.

Surprise, surprise, Cat is still coming back. Sometimes, it leaves us presents. (Dear Cat, oops I forgot to thank you for that giant dead rat you left in our yard last week. That was lovely). And other times it sits there sulking, hopeful, waiting for our love to be re-kindled. (It’s not going to happen, buddy.)

Upon further thought, I think the mystery of Cat’s gender is not so mysterious after all. Let her fate be a lesson for women everywhere.