Cross-Cultural Journal: South African Dichotomies

By Kendra Heatwole
Foreign Correspondent

The past two weeks have been a study in contrasts. At some points I just felt numb... my constant flipping from wealth to poverty and back again was hard to process.

Kiara Yoder and I stayed with Hannes and Zelda Nel, a wealthy African couple in their home at Table View. The neighborhood was along the northern coast, with a gorgeous view. We had our own suite, hot showers, a live-in maid who did all the laundry and dishes and cooking, and (blessing above all blessings) a radio. I don’t think we turned it off the entire week.

Our dinners were the most amazing aspect -- we had a lamb roast, white lasagna, lobster, calamari, King Clip fish, ribs, spaghetti, and gourmet pizza. They took us to a mall to see some local TV stars (the South African version of American Idol), to their golf club, and to the beach. Each night before bed we had a “cuppa.” We felt like we were in the lap of luxury.

During the day, I drove in to Guguletu, a Xhosa township, and worked at the day clinic which serviced all 200,000 people. I observed the nurses doing their treatments, most of which was dressing burn wounds.

The sterilization techniques were sort of appalling - since there was a lack of latex gloves, the nurses would wash each pair with soap and water and use them multiple times. If the patient had AIDS, they would have to unbandage and cleanse their own wounds under the supervision. It was heartbreaking to watch people trying to use betadine and cotton swabs to wipe away the bacteria growth, their hands shaking with the pain.

There is no pre-medication, and no pain-management. Mothers had to hold down screaming children so the nurses could do their jobs. And burns were just the beginning -- people sat and waited for hours with injuries: a hatchet wound in the knee, an eyelid needing stitches, infected amputations. Meredith Blauch and I would watch as long as we could, but usually ended up leaving before lunch. It was hard to witness and be unable to do anything. Very frustrating, very overwhelming.

The other part of our time in the clinic we spent in the dispensary. Organizations from all over the world sent medicines and supplies, and they were shelved in little boxes all over the walls. After the patients had seen the doctor or one of the two nurse practitioners, they would bring their prescriptions to us; we would gather the medicines, and label them with dosages and instructions. When we didn’t have Vitamin B1, we substituted a multivitamin. When we ran out of amoxycillan, we gave another antibiotic. When we ran out of codeine, we gave a double-dose of Ibuprofen. It was pure guess work -- not science at all.

Everything for one patient was put in a plastic bag, and then the nurse in charge would call the name out to the waiting room. No one had to pay -- the only cost of coming to the clinic was the wait. People began queuing at 4 a.m. Those were my two realities last week -- a mansion and a cement clinic. I was relatively comfortable in both places, but couldn’t wrap my mind around their co-existence.

The Nels were very liberal in their political and social views -- the maid ate with us (she had a full lobster just like everyone else) they support a Zulu candidate for the next presidential election, both are fluent in Xhosa, and they send their daughter to an integrated school. At the same time, it was easy for me to be critical. Their lifestyle was so lavish -- and the people they claim solidarity with can’t feed themselves adequately or pay for aspirin.

The struggle is not in adapting to one particular environment. It is in switching back and forth so often.

The Inside Scoop

Thursday, November 6 - Writer’s Read: Jeff Gundy, 5:30 p.m., west dining hall.
- Orchestra Concert, 7:30 p.m., Lehman.

Friday, November 7 - Mammography Mobile, 8:15 a.m.
- Chapel: Jeff Gundy, 10 a.m., Lehman.
- Coffeeshouse conversation with Jeff Gundy, 10:30 a.m., Common Grounds.
- Environmental Science potluck and practicum presentations, 5:30 p.m., Park Cabin.
- Preparatory Music Recitals, 7 p.m., Martin Chapel.
- Movie: How to Lose a Guy in 10 Days, 9 p.m., SC 106.

Saturday, November 8 - Movie: How to Lose a Guy in 10 Days, 8 p.m., SC 106.
- Middle Eastern Dance and Party, 9 p.m., CC greeting hall.

Sunday, November 9 - Preparatory Music Recitals, 1, 3, and 5 p.m., Martin Chapel and Lehman.
- Michael Card concert, 7 p.m., Lehman.

Monday, November 10 - Chapel: Composing Life, 10 a.m., Lehman.

Wednesday, November 12 - Chapel: Jazz Band, 10 a.m., Lehman.

Sunday, November 9th, at 11 a.m. in Martin Chapel

Celebrate the “Mercy and Joy” of Jesus Christ through the African-American worship experience!

“The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.”

-Lamentations 3: 22-23, English Standard Version

Come as you are!

Led by Melody M. Pannell, Director of Multicultural Services, EMU and Richard A. Pannell, Director of LEAP, EMS

Sponsored by the EMU Multicultural Services Office, Student Life Division

For Rent:

New Townhouse

Three bedrooms
Two and a half bathrooms
Fully equipped kitchen
Washer and dryer
Storage unit
Deck
End unit

Looking for married undergrads or graduate students

$800 down, $800/month

Call Jeff
Office: 434-1647
Cell: 421-3318

The Weather Vane

November, 2003

David B. Garber Jewelers, Inc.

Watch batteries replaced: $4.00

by Water Street parking deck, downtown Harrisonburg