

TRIALS
OF
YOUNG
ARTISTRY

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Hillcrest School
Grade 11
May, 1999

POETRY

**AGONY
FOR A FRIEND**

January 21, 1999

Across the distance
I hear you—
Calling me,
Crying out for help.
I try to speak,
To reach out in comfort,
To ease the pain and misery,
But words escape me.
My lips move, but produce no sound.
You continue to cry out in anguish.
I will my legs to move to you,
But I am paralyzed.
I cannot go to you,
Cannot wrap my arms around you,
Cannot dry your endless tears.
My legs fail me and
I crumple to the ground in a heap.
I hear myself sob in frustration,
In bitter anger, sorrow.
I cannot help you.
From across the distance
I watch you die.
I hear your screams of terror—
I hear them and cry.
What can I do? What can I do?
Alone
In pain, anguish,
Misery, sorrow, terror.
Alone.

JOSHUA TREE

One Joshua tree stands alone in the barren desert.
A brother walks away down the path.

**GRACE
FOR MOSES**

January 11, 1999

Innocence
Snatched away in the Garden.
It's man's nature to sin.
That's why you ceased to be.

Sin is passed on from generation to generation.
Theology says no,
But medicine says yes.
The killer disease runs rampant here.
Seeking out the weak,
The poor, the small,
The innocent.
You did nothing to deserve it.
You were not in the wrong.
Daddy killed you, babe.
Daddy did the deed.
He drained your life away.

Now released from suffering,
From pain.
You run down streets of gold.

Grace is passed on from generation to generation.
Common sense says no.
Christ's death says yes.
God's grace flows freely here.
Seeking out the weak,
The poor, the small,
The unrighteous.
You did nothing to deserve it.
You were not in the right.
You killed the Son, babe.
Your nature did the deed.
You drained His life away.

Yet He brought you life.
He did the deed.
He gave His life away.
Blame vanishes in the grip of grace..

Today you play with Jesus.

**CANDLE IN THE BREEZE
TO CHUKUDI**

January 23, 1999

AIDS

Asphyxiation

“The oxygen don quench.”

Tears of grief.

Shouts in anguish.

Another life snuffed out

Like a candle in a breeze.

But that breeze is growing stronger;

Building power every day.

You were only one of many.

Shine, candles!

Shine for my baby,

And may this candle,

Dark in the breeze,

Rest peacefully always.



NONFICTION

MY ANGEL ALEX¹

He was so tiny. I marveled at how any person could be so small. Mom smoothed back his straight black hair, and I wondered whether it would become thick and curly like most African Americans'. At that point, we weren't even sure he'd survive long enough for his hair to curl. He was about a month premature, underweight at just over four pounds, and extremely scrawny. His mother had been on cocaine during her pregnancy, causing one of his kidneys to form incorrectly. At just a few weeks, he had already had surgery to remove a mass from the kidney and see whether or not it was functional. The doctors were suspicious of a drug addiction carried from the mother as well and instructed us to be particularly observant with this one. He was placed on an apnea/heart monitor around the clock to alert us to any unusual cardiac activity. So we took him home—medications, machines, and all.

At first, he was just another baby, fourth after Tommy, whom we had taken care of for only a few weeks, Matthew, and David, both of whom we had had for a few months. Alex moved into our all-ready crib in Jonathan's room, since the agency forbade co-ed bedrooms within their foster homes. We set up the worn playpen and dug the car seat out of a box in the storage unit of our apartment. Mom was so excited to have a baby again, even for a little while.

None of us slept very well the first few weeks. Often, one or two of us would wake up to the alarm of Alex's apnea monitor. Poor Jonathan, having to sleep in the room with the siren. The first time the alarm went off, we were terrified. The baby of an acquaintance had recently died of SIDS (Sudden Infant Death Syndrome), and Alex's heart condition put Mom and Dad on edge. But baby Alex made it through those first few weeks without real incident.

Soon he was making funny noises and blowing raspberries like any baby. Everyone loved the new addition to our family. All the ladies at church gathered around when we arrived to ooh and aah over Alex.

“Isn't he a darling?”

“How old is he?”

“What about his mother and father?”

There were always questions: Whose was he? How long would we keep him? Where were his parents? Did he have any brothers and sisters? On and on and on. So much attention. It's a wonder the poor boy didn't develop claustrophobia.

He grew, and grew, and then grew some more. His hair did get curly, so curly it became rather difficult to brush. He adored our cat Patches and would just look at her lovingly for long periods. And oh, how he loved to dance! Lisa would crank up the Amy Grant, gather Alex up into her arms, and prance around the living room, singing at the top of her lungs.

¹ The names have been changed.

The days turned into weeks turned into months. Instead of just being a foster baby, he became one of the family, just like Lisa, Jonathan, and me. His babble turned into distinct words, and in an instant, all thoughts of peace and quiet left the house. There was never a quiet moment with Alex in the house! And things we thought were child-proofed suddenly turned into dangerous menaces.

At eleven months, Alex was back in the operating room with his friends the Medicare surgeons. This time it wasn't his kidney, though; it was his forehead. The bones in his skull had not moved properly into place as they do in most infants and had left a rather prominent ridge down the centre of his forehead. So it was into surgery, where the surgeons rearranged the bones to fit his head. Dad picked me up from school, where I'd just returned from a three-day camp, and took me straight to the hospital to see Alex. His head was wrapped in white bandages, making him look almost as if he wore a baklava to keep the snow from freezing his head. I have to admit that the bandaged head looked rather amusing, but I was so glad to see my baby brother that I didn't care! None of us did!

The doctors finally realized that his right kidney was completely dysfunctional, and at twenty-one months Alex underwent yet another operation, this one to remove his right kidney. He was a difficult patient, as most toddlers are, but the surgery was successful, and Alex came out just as cute and joyful as he'd gone in.

I think the "uh-oh" issue started at about that time in his life. When we sat down for supper one night, Alex sat for a few quiet moments contemplating the spaghetti in his bowl. With a swift movement none of us could stop, he picked up the whole bowl and dumped it on the floor.

"Uh-oh!" was all he said, grinning up at us to see our reactions. From then on, that was Alex's joke—dumping the food on the floor and saying "uh-oh" to see how we would react.

Jonathan and Lisa's favorite trick also sprung from dinner-table occurrences. Grampa had recently taught them the trick to knock on your head at the same time as you knock on the underside of the table. We had Alex confused for months. Every now and then, Lisa or Jonathan would knock on his head with one fist and beat the underside of the table with the other. Alex's eyes would get wide, and he'd attempt to make the same noise with his own head. Sometimes, Jonathan or Lisa would oblige and knock on the table to accompany his knocking on his head. Other times, however, the knock on the head would produce no noise, flabbergasting Alex even further. It kept us laughing for months!

No baby has ever had more fun at Christmastime than Alex. Every Christmas Eve, my mother's two youngest brothers—both bachelors—came over and spent the night so that we could celebrate Christmas Day together. At six o'clock in the morning, there was Alex in his crib, calling for someone to pick him up so that he could get to the presents, in not quite so many words. When we finally got around to opening the presents a few hours later, Alex joined in the fun of ripping off the wrapping paper and distributing it to every corner that seemed bare to him. And when every single spot of carpet was covered with paper, he proceeded to attach the ribbons to his head. What an adorable sight he made!

We never could figure out why on earth Alex was so friendly with the cat. There Alex would sit, on the couch right beside the cat, sometimes leaning over to pat the cat on the head. With one hand stuck in his mouth, he would lovingly stroke the cat with the other. And once in awhile, he could lean over, very gently, and plant a kiss right on top of the cat's furry forehead. The odd thing was how tolerant Patches became over the years. Although she never hesitated to scratch one of us older children, she dared not harm our baby brother.

One of my favorite memories of that time period was listening to "Go West Young Man" on my sister's CD, singing into a fake microphone, dancing all across the room, and watching Alex dance. He actually got quite into the music once in awhile. He would stand in one place, and bounce up and down at the knee—over and over again. We clapped and cheered, and he always obliged us with another dance.

Every morning, Jonathan and I had to get up quite early to walk the two miles to the bus stop where the school bus came to get us for the one-hour ride to our inner-city "highly gifted" elementary school. And every morning when we came out for breakfast before six o'clock, there was Alex, sitting on the kitchen floor surrounded by Tupperware of all sorts. Oh, he didn't mind that it was still dark outside. He was so wrapped in beating his plastic drums that he didn't even notice the time of day!

Nothing was ever dull with Alex around. If his mom hadn't turned up and claimed him, we might have filed for adoption. But she did turn up, and she did claim her baby. Mom and Dad had just recently completed their deputation for coming to Nigeria for our first term, and we were making plans to fly there in August. To Mom and Dad, it seemed the perfect answer to our prayers of uncertainty concerning where Alex would go when we left. But to Jonathan, Lisa, and me, his mother's appearance brought on depression and many fits of tears.

Two weeks before we left Los Angeles, we took Alex to his mother. He had just turned two on July 24th, and we'd gotten his photo taken so that we would always remember him. It took quite a while to unload all of the things we had accumulated for him over the past two years. And then it was time to say goodbye. We each gave Alex a quick hug and headed for the car. None of us wanted to stay inside the cigarette-smoke-filled, beer-stained apartment anyway. But as we got into the car, our little Alex came running onto the front lawn, screaming and crying. He held out his arms, but we just had to bite our lips and leave. The tears streamed down his face as we closed our car doors and started the engine. I'll never forget the look of immense sorrow on his face as we drove away from the curb.

And I'll never feel good about our leaving him either. I might be just a little bit sad if I knew we'd taken him to a loving mother who could



Sara and Alex, by Sara, age 8

provide for him, but we hadn't taken him to safety. He lived in a cramped apartment with his mother, her alcoholic boyfriend, and a half-brother from yet another man. He grew up like any other child from an inner-city family on welfare.

When we went on furlough in 1994, we got to see him for a day. If I was depressed before, I became even more so on leaving his apartment. At five, his language was crass, his attitude negative, and his inability to sit still led to the conclusion that he was an untreated ADD (Attention Deficiency Disorder) case. Yet what could we do to change his situation?

Alex will always be my little brother, even though I will probably never see him again. He will be ten years old this summer, and I hope he has a good birthday becoming a "teenager." I wish with all my heart that I could be there to celebrate with him. From thousands of miles away, we pray continually for our baby, a permanent Blyth family member in spirit if not in name. We'll always love our little Alex.

FICTION

JIRANA

“See you tonight! After supper!” Kala yelled down the long hallway of the mud brick school building. Her plain gray tunic was splattered with various brilliant colors of dye, and she was eager to get home to change. At the other end of the cool, breezy corridor, Jirana was handing out small pieces of paper to every student who happened to pass by.

“The missionaries want to speak about loving one another. I hope you can come tonight,” she told a tall, young man, smiling warmly. As he walked away, she turned to Kala. “Yeah, ok!” she called back to her best friend, pausing in her activity long enough to wave to the tall, thin blonde. Kala’s parents were merchants, wealthy blond-haired-blue-eyed Guwan tribesman who lived across the village from the Watir settlement Jirana called home. The Guwans were famous all over the province for their fair-skinned beauty and elegance, their blond hair and slender figures. The artists of the region, their paintings and sculptures were prized far above any others. And the weavings Kala was learning to create were bartered in the marketplaces for five cows, and some even for seven camels!

“Jiji,” came a tiny voice from the open doorway at the near end of the corridor. “Coming?” Nodding silently, Jirana turned to follow her little sister Lunara out of the building.

The walk to the Watir settlement was not long, but the sizzling heat of afternoon quickly drained all energy from the two sisters. By the time they reached the well in the centre of the settlement, Jirana was practically carrying her seven-year-old sister in her strong, dark brown arms.

“Water, Jirana?” Wrinkles of age creased the face of the woman at the well. With leathery brown hands, she pulled on the coarse goat-hair rope and drew a clay pot from the opening. Cold water splashed onto the red dust of the ground around the well, raising a cloud of steam as the water instantly evaporated. Jirana nodded to the old woman, her mouth too parched to speak. She stretched out her trembling hand to receive the small clay jar of the refreshing liquid.

“There’s plenty for Lunara too,” the old woman assured her as she gulped down every last drop in the jar.

“Thank you, Karata,” she managed to gasp, handing the jar back the elderly woman to be refilled. By the time the soothing drink reached Lunara’s dehydrated lips, the child was barely able to stand. She took a few sips at first, then drained the jar, smacking her lips as she handed the empty jar back to Karata.

“Thank you, baba,” she croaked, smiling gratefully. The woman Karata returned her smile and continued to draw water. The elder of the two sisters slipped her blistering arm around the waist of the younger, and together the two slowly made their way to the small mud hut they called home.

Jirana pushed away the piece of cloth hanging in the doorway and lay Lunara on the nearest bed. Spreading a brown and white woven Guwan blanket—Kala had given the blanket to

her at her coming-of-age ceremony four years earlier—over the adjacent straw-and-feather bed, she herself lay down to catch her breath. The warm, heavy air was oppressive, and breathing was exceedingly difficult.

She awoke with a start, not having even realized that she had fallen asleep. Voices murmured in low tones just beyond the curtained doorway. In a sudden bout of guilt, Jirana hurriedly got up from the bed, scolding herself for forgetting about supper. Pulling away the cloth, she peered out the doorway into the courtyard. In the dim twilight, she could barely make out the stocky forms of her brother Jothan and her older sister's husband Wuntari. The two men stood huddled together, speaking in hushed voices, and Jothan's eyes roamed the compound nervously.

"Jirana!" Wuntari called in a loud whisper, seeing her standing in the doorway. He gestured to his sister-in-law who came running without a moment's hesitation.

"What—" Wuntari had his hand clapped over Jirana's mouth before she could utter another word. He glanced furtively around in the fading light of dusk.

"Hush now, Jiji," whispered Amata, coming up behind her younger sister and laying a gentle hand on her arm. "Where is Lunara?"

Wuntari dropped his hand from Jirana's mouth, and she lifted her chin in the hut's direction. Not another word was uttered as Amata crept to the tiny mud hut and disappeared through the doorway.

Jirana turned to her brothers questioningly. She dared not speak, but she had not yet been told what was happening. Jothan noticed the questions in her big brown eyes and began to explain hurriedly in his anxiety.

"Misha's body was found this afternoon, hidden in the bushes behind the vegetable market."

"Misha? But—"

"She left this morning for the potter's workshop and never returned. When they found her, her face was bruised and battered, and they—" Jothan swallowed and continued. "Someone told the Guwan chief that she had been violated, then beaten to death by a Watir."

Jirana gasped, her eyes wide with horror. In her mind, she saw the body of Kala's sister lying lifeless behind the bushes, her blond hair marred with blood. "Misha was killed? But—"

"Jirana, hush," Wuntari whispered, grabbing her arms and looking her straight in the face. His eyes were wells of sorrow in the fading twilight, and Jirana bit her lip. "Listen to me," he went on, gazing deep into her warm brown eyes. "Listen carefully. Amata is taking Lunara away into the bush. They will be safe there. The Guwans are already on their way here, and only the gods know what will happen." He gripped her arms tighter.

"Jirana, please listen. Jothan suggested we send you with Amata and Lunara, but I convinced him to let you decide. Please understand. If you want to, you can go into the bush. We will think nothing less of you if you do. Really, we won't. We want you to be safe." Jirana was

shocked to realize that there were tears in her brother-in-law's eyes. "But I also know that you will make a good fighter if it comes to that. It is your decision, Jirana. We won't pressure you—"

A high-pitched scream shattered the tense night air. Jirana's face spelled out terror as the acrid odor of smoke filled her nostrils.

"And so it begins," Wuntari murmured to himself. As the trio watched, flame burst from a hut across the compound. The scream sounded again, high and horrible, raising the hair on the back of Jirana's neck. Pain and anguish made their appeal in that scream, and she knew that no matter how long she lived, she would never be able to forget it. It was Karata.

Wuntari gazed at his sister. "What do you say?" Jirana watched the smoke billow from the open doorway of the burning thatch hut.

"I'm with you," she told her brothers. "I'll fight." The muscles in her jaw were tense in determination, and her eyes surveyed the scene unfolding before her. Tall, pale, ghost-like men ran from the burning hut carrying torches and raced from the compound before anyone could grab them. Wuntari's legs carried him swiftly to the low mud hut as flames leapt up from the thatch roof. The doorway of the hut was packed with mud blocks, and although he pried and pried until his fingers were raw and his face streaked with ash, his attempt was in vain. The dry hay above him caved into the hut, and a single whimper escaped from inside the thick mud walls. His face etched with exhaustion, Wuntari slumped against the wall in despair.

It wasn't long before the fire had burned itself out and the hut stood blackened with ash and smoke. A crowd stood around the hut and as wisps of smoke curled up from the roofless ruin, five well-built men struggled to remove just one of the mud blocks. Finally, to a whoop of joy, a block was removed, and the others came tumbling down. Wuntari was the first one inside, crawling over the debris, examining the ashes. All of a sudden, a scream of anguish left his lips, sending Jirana running inside. There—lying in the blackness of the ruined hut—lay the unrecognizable form of a Watir woman, her flesh and hair charred. A choking sob caught in Jirana's throat as she took in the scene before her. The hatred welled up inside her heart, and she clenched her fists with passion.

"More blood will be shed tonight!" she cried in rage, driven by an unseen monster. "I will not sleep until her murderer is dead. My friend Karata will be avenged!" The people surrounding the smoking ruins lifted their arms, their anguish instantly being transformed into a building hatred. Not one of them would sleep until the Guwans were dead!

Torches, rods, spears, knives—all were collected and brought to the centre of the courtyard to be distributed among the warriors. Shouts sounded all across the settlement to be certain that the women and children were gone or leaving. The arrowsmith dipped his arrows into a tin of kerosene and brandished each one to a different bystander.

In minutes alone, the war band was ready, assembled around the fire in the centre of the settlement. Words were harsh and few, and the warriors displayed their hatred with vehemence.

“Are we all one?” Wuntari shouted to his people, raising his spear high into the smoky blackness above his head. The crowd responded with curses and angry shouts. “Death to the Guwans!”

With a mighty roar, the war band surged forward in a sea of anger and hate. In just a few moments, they had reached the settlement boundaries and were rushing through the town. The crowd stopped when it entered the public square, the Watir warriors face to face with their Guwan foes. A hush instantly spread through the ranks as the two groups faced each other, weapons in hand. Jirana’s blood boiled with rage as she beheld the people who had been her friends only a few short hours earlier. These people, whom she had loved and respected, had murdered Karata in cold blood. The thought brought a flame of anger to her eyes, rekindling the fire in her soul.

An arrow whizzed through the air and struck a young man beside Jirana. He fell silently to the ground, his mouth open in an unuttered cry. With a blood-curdling shriek, Wuntari leapt forward across the square. The stillness of seconds before was shattered as the warriors pushed forward from both sides. Chaos and confusion ensued, and the din became unbearable to the younger ones among them.

“You murderous monster!” Jirana screamed, throwing her full weight on a man to her right. She pulled back her fists and struck him repeatedly, blow after blow. The fair-skinned man struck back furiously, but Jirana’s brown arms were better conditioned, and her strength won out. Quickly, she grabbed the knife sheathed at her side and tore it from its leather cover. Raising it high above her head, she cried out in a voice for all to hear:

“Karata is avenged!”

But before she could plunge the knife into the man’s chest, a cry rang out from across the bloody square.

“Jirana!”

In that instant, time stopped altogether. Between the legs of the warriors filling the square, Jirana caught a glimpse of Kala, her pale arms outstretched towards her beloved comrade. The Guwan’s face was masked not with horror, but with grief, and tears filled her sky-blue eyes. A patch of deep purple stained her flushed cheeks, and a tiny stream of fresh blood trickled from the corner of her mouth. But her eyes—oh, her eyes! They spoke of pain and betrayal, confusion beyond measure. And suddenly Jirana knew—knew the depth of pain and guilt the disciples must have experienced as they watched their Lord die, knew the fathomless pit of despair firsthand. Overwhelmed with shame, she lowered her head for a single moment.

All of a sudden, time began again, and agonized voices filled the square. Jirana lifted her head in one swift motion and glanced toward Kala just in time to see the Watir spearhead pass through her bosom. Deep red soaked her dull gray tunic, and as Jirana watched, the young woman’s grieving eyes took on a glaze unlike anything Jirana had ever seen before. Grief threatening to drown her in its depths, Jirana dropped her head to gaze at the man in her hold. Once blind with rage, she now looked hard at the young man. Mataro lay choking in her grasp,

his large blue eyes filled with terror. Mataro—Kala’s brother and the only one Jirana had ever loved.

Revulsion overcame the young Watir woman, and the silver knife dropped from her limp hand. She knelt for a moment, gazing at the weapon she had almost used to kill the one person she loved most. Tears formed in her eyes, and she blindly stumbled to her feet.

“Kala!” she yelled in the direction she had last seen her dear friend. “Kala!”

Through her tears, she could barely make out the form of the Guwan woman, lying still at the feet of two warriors engaged in combat. Jirana rushed forward in a sudden burst of energy, running, running toward Kala with all her strength. Just as she reached her friend, she felt a piercing arrowhead drive its way into her back. Sobbing uncontrollably, she fell, landing in a heap on top of Kala’s still body. She did not bother to cry out, but clung to her friend’s lifeless form.

“Kala,” she whispered as the life drained from her own body. “Kala, I’m sorry. I’m sorry. I’m so sorry.” Her cries were muffled as her head fell against Kala’s chest. And then they ceased altogether. Her labored breathing faltered, and her swollen eyelids slid shut to cover her sightless brown eyes.

And the battle raged on.

SONG

OF

MYSELF

I

The pages are scattered carelessly across the table—
some clean and new,
others covered from top to bottom,
written in the tiniest hand imaginable.

It's all there,

and it's me.

Page after page

—selfishness

—self pity

—bitterness

—jealousy.

But look! Here's a page of love!

A page of

immense joy.

Another one of compassion.

You mustn't read just one—

it isn't me.

It will take a lot of time to see who I am,

perhaps time you would rather

spend elsewhere. I cannot

dictate, but I hope you will read it all,

and not judge by a single page.

Here I am. Please take the pages and

read away!

II

The soft pitter-patter of water droplets hitting the
Tin roof above. A bolt of lightning
Flashing brilliantly across the angry black sky.
The crack of thunder exploding in the
Boiling clouds yonder.
An African rain.

My skin is pale—
yes.

But don't you see the color of my heart?
It's a deep chocolate brown:
African.

Who ever heard of growing sweet corn
when maize is available and so scrumptious?
Why purchase expensive green apples
when you can sink your teeth into
a ripe and stringy mango?

The children on the corner in tattered clothes,
holding out plastic bowls for alms.
The children in the hospital wards,
their cheeks hollow and rib cages visible.
The children gathered in the clammy sanctuary,
clapping and singing to the God of their faith.
The Mercedes zooming down the streets.
The mansions looming on the edges of town.
The poverty.
The affluence.
Africa.
It is me.



How can anyone alive
Take in one single breath
And deny the existence of God?
One needs only to see the intricacies
of the human body to
know that only a supreme Being
could have accomplished such elaborateness.
Or study the behavior of subatomic particles
in nuclear chemistry to
see that God alone could be so organized.
Not even that far.
Who can observe the simplicity of even
the life cycle of a flower without believing
a creative genius is behind it all?

Creation says it all.
Here we are on the only known planet of life,
living in shadows we have created,
refusing to look at the light.
That light is God and His Christ.
What kind of blasphemy are we living in to claim
that we have created any of this?
How simple the mind of a human and
how complex the mind of God.

He *does* exist.
The rainbow screams it in its spectrum of brilliant color.
The canyon proclaims it in its vast depth and breadth.
The robin sings it in its ever-joyful song of praise.
Even the trees of the fields clap their hands.
And He is my God.
I believe.

IV

He draws a tentative line with the very tip of the scalpel,
then slices deep in a very careful gesture.
Blood oozes from the incision, and the procedure is begun.

She probes the swollen leg ever so gently,
not wanting to cause further pain.
Glancing at his chart, she prescribes
some unheard-of medication and moves on.

He grabs a pair of sterilized gloves and yells for a nurse.
The baby is crowning! Ever so carefully, he
takes hold of the head and urges her on.

Medicine.

God's way of bringing healing to His people.
Some have the spiritual gift of healing;
I hope I am one of them.

True—

Doctors can't always heal their patients,
especially here in third-world countries.

But I can dream, can't I?

Doesn't a young girl have the right to
her dreams?

And so I will dream
Of someday being the doctor,
Being a healer.
Someday.





The air pulses with the irregular rhythm
and I dance,
throwing aside all fear and pride,
entering into the throne room of my God and King.
Through the beat, I hear a rich melody, sounding high above all else.
and I sing,
lifting my imperfect voice to the heavens,
singing my praise to the Lord of Hosts.
The music is all-encompassing,
inspiring every living creature to join in the dance,
and even the trees of the field shall clap their hands.
It is a song of joy,
A song of hope,
A song of praise and adoration.
For the Lord is worthy of our praise.

So let the music begin in Asia!
Let the music begin in Europe!
Let the music begin in Africa!
Let the music begin in America!
Let the music begin in Australia!
Let the earth resound with singing!
Let every tribe and every nation sing His praises!
Let us sing now and forever.
Sing!
Sing!
Sing!

VARIOUS

SINGLE PEARL

March 8, 1999

Deeper, deeper, under the pressure of the surging water. Deeper, deeper, beneath the weight of the surrounding sea. Mina kicked his legs again and again, stretching his arms out to the vast ocean beneath him.

There it was—the rocks of the reef jutting up from the coral sea bottom, pointing toward reality and the world of humanity. Mina's eyes roamed the rocks and pink coral, searching, searching. At long last, he spotted it and lunged in its direction, kicking his legs, zooming forward and down, forward and down.

His legs kicked continuously as he strained against the urge to bob, to surface and fill his stinging lungs with warm, moist ocean air. His hand reached out, and his legs kicked to keep him down. He fumbled, almost dropping the delicate shell from his large, rough hand. Frantic, he grasped his treasure more tightly and stopped kicking. The ridges of the shell dug into his palm, sending shooting pain up his arm. He had it!

Slowly, slowly, legs began to move again, kicking, kicking, sending him up, up, up. His eyes stung in the salt water, and the pain in his hand made his head spin in circles. Up, up, up, up to break the surface of the water, to open his mouth and inhale the precious life into his bursting lungs, to gaze at the brilliant light of the midday sun overhead.

After enjoying life for a moment, Mina carefully opened his hand, treading water to keep from plummeting to the depths. He peeked inside and cocked the shell just so. A sunbeam danced off of a particle in his hand, sending dazzling rays shooting into the air around him. And Mina knew. Here was his pearl—his own single pearl.

THE ARCHER

March 5, 1999

The archer fits the flashing diamond arrow on his silver bow, making sure all can see these weapons he is so proud of. Staring straight at the bull, his eyes keen and steady, he slowly pulls back the bow string. The world watches as the light reflects off his diamond ring—that huge gaudy ornament—and his mighty hand grasps the arrow tightly. He spreads wide his enormous legs and takes his stance only years from the wild creature. His broad shoulders are straight and tensed, the muscles visibly tight. Around his waist flashes a chain of exquisite silver links, carrying a thin, silver dagger, sheathed in a diamond-studded leather sheath. He is prepared for anything.

All eyes are fixed on his sturdy form, and he holds steady for another moment. Then—just as it seems as though the bull will get away—his fingers release the arrow. It flies through the air so quickly that only a few notice. The diamonds streak through the still of the night and Taurus is defeated.

KAGORO

January 18, 1999

The warm night air is filled with excitement and joy. Three boys beat out a steady African rhythm on the drums as the rest of the children sing and dance in ecstasy. In the darkness, I can barely make out the faces of my peers, the joy radiating from their faces. I feel myself pulled along by the current. The rhythm flows through me, and I am suddenly part of a different world.

Bodies press tightly around me, moving me with them, and I am sucked into the whirlpool of activity. Resistance is futile. My feet beat out the rhythm below me, causing me to look down at them, surprised. They begin to carry me away in a dance. Then my hands are taken in, and I cannot resist the impulse to clap in syncopation. Before I know it, my voice is also getting carried away. Music and words I do not know escape my lips. The whirlpool tugs on my heart, pulling gently but firmly. At long last, the cold fingers of common sense lose their grip on my heart, and it slips away to join the flurry of activity.

The joy of the moment overwhelms me. We move together as one, lift our voices as one, keep rhythm as one. We are God's people, and in praising Him, we are one.

PROJECT

**AN
AFRICAN
TALE**

**THE DIARY OF
EMILY JANE WILLIAMS**

January 23, 1991

I just got this diary for my birthday. Isn't it pretty? Aunt Sandra says I'm supposed to write in it whenever something exciting happens or whenever I'm thinking hard about something.

It was cold today—under 70 degrees—and dusty. But that's nothing new. Uncle Cal helped Daddy put a ceiling fan in the living room. Mama sure is glad. After all, this weather won't last past February. Mama says in some places it actually snows in February and March! Imagine that! Someday I'll get to see snow.

I heard Mama tell Daddy she's worried that Annie and Zach and Chris and I are becoming "aliens to our own country." I think she means that since Annie and Chris were really small when Mama and Daddy came here, and Zach and I were born here, we don't know America like we should. I'm proud of being born African. Who cares about stinky old America anyway?

Auntie Comfort plaited my hair for my birthday. It was very pretty. Mama got a photo for the album. Even Sam (our dog) liked it. He tried to eat one of the braids. Mama says when we go to America next summer—when I'm ten—she'll get Auntie Comfort to do my hair again so Grampa and Granny will see the African me. It'll be fun to see Grampa and Granny again. I hope we can go swimming at their house as soon as we get to America.

Well, anyway, I've gotta go eat lunch. Kim is reading *Rabbit Hill* to me after lunch. Then she's going to help me with my cursive. Someday I'll be able to write as pretty as Kim. Bye bye for now.

June 15, 1991

We got a baby! He's so cute! Aunt Amanda brought him over this morning from the hospital. He's already a few months old, but his mommy died and he was hurt in a car crash. No one knows who he is, so Aunt Amanda's letting us name him and take care of him. Annie wants to name him Sean, Chris wants to name him Peter, and I want to name him Matthew, but Zach likes the name Jarreth. I don't know why. Anyway, we don't know his birthday either, but Mama says he looks about four months old. That would make him born in February. So Daddy decided to give him the February 10th birthday that runs in the family (Daddy and Grampa were both born on February 10th). Aunt Amanda says we should start applying for adoption now. I guess it takes a long time here to adopt a baby. I hope they let us adopt him. He's so cute!

June 16, 1991

His name is Jarreth! Mama said that since Annie got to name Chris, Chris got to name me, and I got to name Zach, Zach should get to name our new baby. Jarreth Aaron.

August 3, 1991

Zach got bitten by a snake today. His foot got all swollen and red. I could tell Mama was worried. Annie told me I couldn't cry because that's what babies do. But I thought he was going to die! Aunt Amanda gave him some medicine to kill the germs, and she washed his foot. He looks really sick, but she says he'll be all right. What Daddy couldn't figure out is why a viper was around this time of year.

We're going up to Kasharu next week. Mama and Daddy need to check in at the mission headquarters and pick up some things in town. Chris needs new shoes too, so we'll do a little shopping. Maybe I'll get to see Rebecca while we're there! It's a long trip to Kasharu, but it will be fun. Annie better let me sit in the front seat part of the time.

August 20, 1991

We're back from Kasharu. It was cool up there in the foothills. And it rained every single day we were there! Chris got his new shoes. They're black and look really neat. Mama even bought some lasagna noodles so we can have lasagna for Annie's birthday in September.

I got to see Rebecca too, but it wasn't much fun. She was in school most of the time, and she was always with her Kasharu friends. We got to go to a "just-for-fun" football match at her school (I think it's called Oakwood), and our guys (Oakwood) won by three points! Man, those big high school guys are really good at football! I saw Annie looking really weird at one of them. His name's Will. He's tall, has brown hair, and he scored a goal. I think Annie likes him, even though we hardly ever see him. Besides, they're a few years apart. Oh well.

Yeah, we had fun up there. Mama loved showing off Jarreth. The papers still haven't been processed, whatever that means. But we can't adopt him yet. Soon, I hope.

December 28, 1991

Here we are in Muntara, for Christmas again like every year. I actually saw fog tonight! It's cold here. Mama made us bring our sweaters and everything. She dresses Jarreth up so that you can barely tell he's a baby! He's growing fast. Aunt Katharine said that between August and December, he must have grown a whole foot. I don't know, but he *is* bigger.

Mama and Daddy talked to Uncle David and Aunt Katharine about putting Annie in Oakwood next year. She'd have to stay in a hostel, which would be really weird. I just can't imagine not having Annie around. It will be quieter and more boring. But they said, "She's fourteen now. She can decide for herself." Do you think she'll go away? It isn't exactly close. And I won't see her except in October, at Christmas, and at Easter. Who will braid my hair and check my spelling words and math homework for me? I hope she decides not to go.

I got a can of Dr. Pepper for Christmas! I'm saving it for when we get home. I want to share some with Jonah and Kezziah. They'll love it. I think they've only had it once before—I don't remember when. And Daddy gave me the first of *The Chronicles of Narnia*. I haven't started it yet, but Annie and Chris both say it's good. I want to read it on the way home

tomorrow, but I'll get carsick, especially with all the potholes. Oh—guess what! We got a new car! It's a white pick-up truck with four-wheel drive. Daddy says Annie will learn to drive after New Year's. That's scary!

Gotta go. The supper bell's ringing. Bye!

February 10, 1992

Jarreth's a year old now. He's so adorable—when he's not crying or slobbering all over me. He does cry less and is even standing up more. The adoption papers are still in the capital.. Mama says at this rate, Jarreth will never be a part of the family lawfully. I wish they'd hurry up.

Well, I'm ten now. Kim made me a special birthday card that says, "For my very favorite teenager" on it. I thought that was really funny. Annie may be a teenager, but I'm a teenager!

Mama and Daddy are really starting to think about this summer in America. They say of course we can go to Grampa and Granny's house first, but we do have to travel a lot. That means a lot of time in the car. I hope Annie brings a lot of her tapes so I don't get bored. Maybe Mama will read to us in the car. I hope so. We'll have to stop a lot for Zach, though. I wonder if you're allowed to use the bathroom in the bushes in America. Mama also says that Rebecca's family is going to travel with us. Yay! I'm really excited about it!

May 1, 1992

Annie decided for sure that she wants to go to Oakwood next year. I want to cry, but she'll make fun of me if I do. I don't want to act like a baby, but my sister is going away! We're going up to Kasharu on Friday to stay there for awhile. That way she can see what Oakwood is like and meet her dorm parents and stuff like that. It will be good to see Rebecca again, but I don't want to let Annie go.

When we get back from Kasharu, we have to pack to go to America. I can't believe we're going in just a few weeks!! I can't wait to see Grampa and Granny! Do you think Uncle Brian will be there at the airport to meet us? I hope so! Mama told us just yesterday that we can't take Jarreth with us to America. She said that he's not ours to take, and until the government lets us adopt him, we can't go out of the country with him. But that means Grampa and Granny won't meet him! She said that Aunt Sandra will take care of him until we get back. It's going to be a long two months in America without Jarreth.

June 24, 1992

Grampa's house is hotter than I remember. And it's smaller too. But the pool feels just as good. It was a very hot day today—Mama said somewhere in the hundreds. Grampa bought us ice-cream when the truck came down the street. Ooh, you should see America. It's really neat! All the streets are clean! And the petrol stations are clean too! There are big streets called freeways, and so many new cars on the roads! You know what? The streets even had lights at the sides for nighttime!

People talk funny too. They say “y’all” instead of “you” and “hey” instead of “hi.” They’re really friendly most of the time. Daddy says they’re called Southerners and they make the best fried chicken in the world. Granny’s sure is good. But they’re not *all* nice. I heard Uncle Tom talk about “those dirty black folks down the road.” The family looks African, and their little girl is really cute. Zach plays with her all the time. Daddy says that some people here are “racist.” He says it means that they don’t like people who don’t look like them. I don’t think Uncle Tom would work very well at home. There aren’t very many white people there. I read in the newspaper about an old man who shot a little boy who said “shut up” to the old man’s granddaughter. He killed the little boy. And Mama said that Aunt Marie and Uncle Earl got a divorce. I think a divorce is when a husband and a wife break up. Mama said the Bible says not to get a divorce. People who don’t like brown-skinned people, old men who shoot kids for saying “shut up,” and other people who break up marriages...I don’t think I’m going to like America.

It does have good candy. I got some for Jonah and Kezziah; I didn’t get chocolate because it will melt on the airplane. I hope they like what I got—cherry licorice. America has so much candy! Mama and I went shopping one day, and it took me four hours to look at all the different kinds of candy! She spent forever shopping because there are so many different kinds of mustard and cheese, and she didn’t know which one to pick. Not only grocery stores are like that, though. Here they have toy stores and book stores and music stores and even coffee stores! Can you believe it? Who would spend three dollars on a cup of coffee?

Tomorrow we’re going west with Rebecca’s family. I haven’t seen her yet; they’re arriving tomorrow morning, and we’ll start then. I can’t wait to leave the “south.”

July 30, 1992

Finally back at home! I already miss McDonald’s milkshakes. Those were so good! I’m just glad to be done traveling. Rebecca talked to Chris and Annie the whole trip. She said I’m too little to talk to. Annie didn’t even stick up for me. She looked at me and smiled, really mean-like. I almost started crying, but then I remembered what Annie had said about crying. I like the west coast of America much better than the south. The people aren’t as nice, but the beach is really pretty. Still, nothing compares with the bush.

We’re driving Annie up to Kasharu next Sunday. She starts school on Tuesday, but ~~Mama and Daddy~~ Mom and Dad want to get her settled into the hostel in plenty of time. Chris is glad she’s leaving. I should be too; she teases me so much. But I can’t be happy. I’ll miss her.

July 31, 1992

Aunt Sandra fainted! Aunt Amanda can’t tell what’s wrong with her. It’s so scary! She can’t talk or even open her eyes. She’s just lying there on the bed. What’s going to happen? Mom says we’ll have to go up to Kasharu this afternoon and take her with us. If they can’t tell what’s wrong there, we’re going to have to send her to England. All the way to England! Mom’s worried; I can see it all over her face. I barely have time to write. We’re leaving in just a few minutes. I hope God knows what He’s doing.

August 2, 1992

Aunt Sandra is flying to England tonight. The doctors here in Kasharu couldn't tell what was wrong. They just don't have the equipment they need. Uncle Tim said she needs an MRI or CAT scan (some kind of scans of her brain). Someone he knows in England will pick her up and take her to the hospital. She still hasn't opened her eyes. Mom says that we should pray really hard. What if Aunt Sandra dies?

August 5, 1992

Uncle Tim heard from his friend in England. Aunt Sandra isn't doing well. She still hasn't woken up from her coma. The doctors have done some scans and found a worm in her brain. At least, I think that's what he said—some kind of parasite or something. He said the doctor had only seen one case ever like Aunt Sandra's, and that man died. Mom says maybe she ate some pork that wasn't cooked enough. I'm so scared. Aunt Sandra can't die. The doctors have to get the worm out so she'll be fine again. God, please help her stay alive!!

August 10, 1992

Aunt Sandra died last night. The doctors couldn't save her. Aunt Sandra's gone. Oh God!

July 6, 1993

I just found this journal that I'd forgotten I had. I read the entries, and then I remembered getting it for my birthday from Aunt Sandra so long ago. Yes, she's gone now. She's been gone almost a year. What a long year. First, Aunt Sandra died, then we left Annie in Kasharu for school. That was so hard, especially knowing that when we got home, Aunt Sandra wouldn't be there to meet us. Annie had a really good year in Kasharu and loved Oakwood a lot. Mom and Dad are planning on sending Chris there in a year.

Things without Annie during the year were really quiet. I didn't ride my bike all year. Chris never rides his; he always reads, and Zach isn't much company. He's just too little. Kim had to braid my hair every morning when she came for lessons. I know Mom and Dad didn't like having Annie gone either. There was no one to help Mom in the kitchen, and Dad didn't have anyone around to read his Bible school lessons to.

And through the whole year, Aunt Sandra just wasn't there. I miss her so much. Sometimes I'm sitting on the porch doing my homework and I hear her voice. But when I look up, she isn't there. And then I remember where she is—in some cemetery in England. That's where her body is. Mom keeps telling me that she's really in heaven, but...I don't know about the whole God thing. How could He let her die? How could He just sit up there on His throne in heaven and watch her die??

Kezziah's getting married next week. I can't believe it. She's only thirteen! Her husband-to-be is thirty-two. It's so scary. Jonah just laughs and laughs whenever I say anything about it. But Kezziah won't be staying here. She has to go to her husband's village. I'll probably only

ever see her when she comes to visit her parents and Aunt Amanda at the mission. What will I do without Kezziah? I'll be *so* bored.

Jarreth's papers still haven't come through. It's been two years! I guess we just have to keep waiting. Later.

August 15, 1993

Annie left for Kasharu again. Her Anglican friends from Lintu picked her up on their way in. It's going to be another boring year without her, but I guess we'll just have to live. I can't believe Chris will be gone next year. What on earth am I going to do? Kim is leaving next summer for good, and another lady is supposed to be coming to teach me and Zach. But what if she's really strict and really mean? I'm so lonely. I miss Kezziah. Jonah still plays with me, but he's in school a lot now that the government built the new secondary school. He's almost sixteen after all, so he does get pretty busy. I just wish *someone* had the time to play with me! I miss Aunt Sandra.

November 7, 1993

A new family's coming! I don't know their name, but they have a girl my age. I'm so excited! The dad is going to help Dad at the Bible school, and the mom is going to help Aunt Amanda at the hospital. Yes! Another family at the mission! I hope their daughter is really nice. They're coming in January, so Mom says we'll stay in Muntara a little longer after Christmas. Mom says we can even go to the airport to meet them when they arrive. Yay!!

December 26, 1993

Well, it's good seeing Annie again. She gets older every time I see her. Soon she's going to be all grown up and I won't know her anymore. Mom says that's not true. She's only sixteen. But sixteen seems pretty big to me. She hasn't cut her hair since the summer and it's getting really long. It's pretty. I wish I had hair like that.

I got ten books for Christmas. I guess Dad understands how lonely I am. But Mom says that I shouldn't engross myself completely in books, because they're fantasy, and I should live a realistic life. Whatever that means. I love books!! Mom says she has lots of new clothes for me, but she won't give them to me now because they have to still be nice for when we go to America this summer.

Now that's a whole nother subject. I do *not* want to go to America. The whole idea just isn't very appealing, especially if we have to spend much time with Uncle Tom and Uncle Earl. I don't want to hear people make fun of Africans. I don't want to spend a summer in a place where old men kill little boys. I'll never forget that. I'm terrified of walking down the street and getting shot in a drive-by shooting. Those things do happen, you know.

The new family's coming soon! I can't wait to meet them. They come in on January 9th, and they'll drive down bush with us two days later. Dad purposely didn't bring the pick-up for

this trip because there wouldn't be room. I wish we had the pick-up, but it will be worth it to be in the van with a girl my own age!

January 12, 1994

Home at last! That was such a fun trip though! Her name is Kathleen, but she said I can call her Kate. Kai, she is so pretty! She's got short, dark brown hair and brown eyes. They're not American either. I thought they were at first, but then I heard Uncle Morris talk and knew they weren't American. They're Irish and they have the coolest accents! Uncle Morris can even play the Irish bagpipes! I can't wait to hear them!

Kate's not the only kid they have, though. They actually have eight children. Eight! Can you imagine having that many? I thought four was a lot! Kate's number three. Let's see. Sean—Annie loves his name!—is seventeen and goes to Oakwood now, Tanna is fifteen and also goes to Oakwood, Kate is twelve (I'll be twelve soon!) and will go to Oakwood when I do, James and Jenny are nine, Ian is seven, Michael is four, and Brenna is two. They're all really nice. I don't know Sean and Tanna very well because they didn't ride down with us, but the others are so sweet! Aunt Cara is the nicest lady around. She teaches Kate and said that if I want, she'll take me on their field trips and let me help with their projects. It's gonna be so much fun with the O'Rileys next-door!

January 23, 1994

I'm twelve! It sure took long enough. Mom and Aunt Cara sent Kate and me off to buy ourselves some lunch downtown to celebrate. It was great! We had rice and spicy sauce and Cokes. Kate is *so* much fun! Oh, I have to go. Jarreth's in tears about something. I'll write more later.

April 2, 1994

Why do I always forget to write later when I say I will? Right now we're up in Kasharu with the O'Rileys for Oakwood's break. Well, Annie and Sean seem to be getting along quite well. They don't hold hands or anything like that. They're just friends. But they seem to be best friends, just like me and Kate. And Annie's a lot nicer now that the O'Rileys are here. She, Sean, and Tanna offered to take Chris, Kate, and me to the bakery for special Easter scones. And she paid! Wow. I think I like the influence Sean's having on her. She's so nice. Problem is that Chris and Tanna fight all the time. She's really athletic and he's really academic, so they can't agree on anything. When we wanted to watch a movie, Tanna wanted rugby, but Chris wanted to watch some documentary on solar eclipses. Finally, Annie got so frustrated that she picked out a cartoon and put that on instead. It was actually funny.

Sean's teaching Annie how to play the guitar. She's actually getting pretty good at it. She can play a few praise songs, and even a few Irish ones. She likes that. It makes her feel international or something like that. I guess Sean is a good teacher. He played for us, and Uncle Morris played the bagpipe. It was really nice.

Anyway, we're having fun up here. It's nice to get away from the village once in a while. I can't wait to get back, though. Chris said he'd take Kate and me to see a special dance out in the cemetery. Dad doesn't want to let us go, but Mom said yes, so we're going. I'm excited!

June 10, 1994

Grampa's hasn't changed much in the past two years. Mom says we're not going to stay long because we're going to visit Aunt Sandra's brother and sister-in-law in Colorado. It's a long drive from here, but it will be fun to meet them. I miss Kate. She said she'd write, but I haven't gotten any letters yet.

July 15, 1994

Aunt Sandra's family is really nice. Her sister-in-law made a special cake for us when we first came. We stayed with them for three whole weeks, and they showed us the Rockies. We talked a lot about Aunt Sandra and her work at home in Africa. Can you believe it's been almost three years since she died? Their son Philip was born two months after she died, so she never knew her only nephew. It's been really good, but really sad, to talk about it all again. I miss Aunt Sandra all the more.

I got a letter from Kate! It was forwarded from Grampa's. The told me about the coup (did I forget to mention that? There was a coup at home, and the president was assassinated.). She talked about some sort of curfew—they can't leave their houses after 6 PM. Weird, huh? She told me all about the riots in the village neighboring ours—Wunari. They burned down the government official's house in protest to the assassination. They burned tires in the streets and went around breaking shop windows. Sounds pretty scary. I hope they don't reach our house in Rukani.

August 15, 1994

Our house was fine when we got home. And Sam was so happy to see us. Jarreth grew a lot over the summer. I can't believe he's growing up! Soon he'll be learning to read and write! I got him a Curious George book in America. He loves it. Dad got him a tricycle too. I hope we can adopt him soon.

Uncle Morris drove Annie, Chris, Sean, and Tanna up to Kasharu for the new school year. I didn't want to say goodbye to Chris. Now I'll be the oldest at home. I'm glad I have Kate. I'd be pretty lonely without her! Actually, Zach's getting older and a lot more interesting. Kate and I play with him and the twins a lot more than last year.

Kezziah had a baby last December, but we just found out about it! We went to visit her and take her some of the corn from our garden. Talk about CUTE!! Her name's Lydia, and she's *adorable*. Can you believe Kezziah has a BABY?? She's only fifteen! That's so scary. I guess there's a lot of things I don't know about Africa. Uncle Tim says that there's a lot of something called VVF because girls Kezziah's age have babies. He says lots of women get abandoned by their husbands because of it. It sounds awful. I hope Kezziah doesn't get it.

Meredith Willaby came to teach me and the others. She's twenty-four and studied English at school. She plays the piano too, and she sure is good. But she'll only be here for a year because she's engaged to some guy in Canada. No, she's not Canadian; she's actually English. And proper!

October 5, 1994

Kasharu doesn't seem to change much over time. Oakwood campus actually looks a lot nicer, but other than that...I think they repainted some of the buildings, and there's something different about the parking lot.

Well, it turns out that Annie is playing guitar for church now. She's in a music group with a few others, and they lead worship every Sunday. She sounds *really* good. And she has her own guitar now. Mom and Dad gave her one for her seventeenth birthday. That way, she and Sean can play duets together.

Chris got onto the junior varsity volleyball team. They're just starting the season, and he's excited. I can't say I ever thought he'd play a sport! I guess one of his new friends talked him into it, or maybe his roommate in the hostel. Of course, Tanna got onto the varsity team, but she's a sophomore and loves sports, so that's not a big surprise. She also plays really well (that's what Kate said, anyway). Sounds like sports is a big thing at Oakwood.

I haven't seen Rebecca at all. She went to some wild animal park or something out in the bush. Chris says it's a popular vacation spot where you can stay in huts and see elephants, giraffes, zebras, rhinos, hippopotami, and other animals. I wish I could go there. Everyone in America thinks Africa is *all* jungle, and that there are wild animals *everywhere*. But the only ones I've seen are snakes, monkeys, and lions. Mom says in Kenya, they have lots of preserved animals (not like preserved in amber, but like preserved from hunters), kind of like the place where Rebecca is. I wish I could see a giraffe before I leave Africa. Anyway, Rebecca's gone yet again. Maybe she's avoiding me.

We have mission meetings in early April, so we'll be up in Kasharu and Muntara. Kate and I are really excited about it. We might get to go to a Fulani village while we're up in the foothills. Yeah!

November 6, 1994

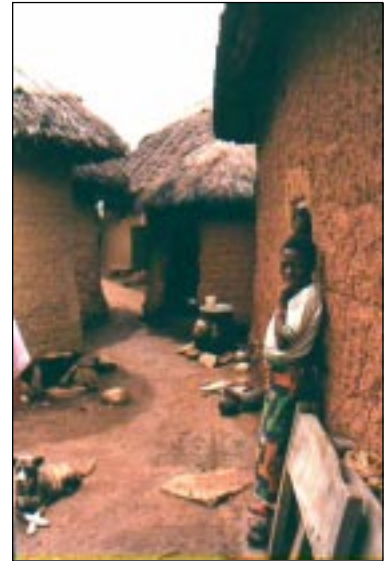
I miss Chris. Whoah, that's weird. But today I just missed him. He turned fifteen away at the hostel. Did they throw him a party? Did he get my birthday card? Did he hide away in a closet when they tried to throw him a party? He did that last year. He sat in a closet for four hours, locked inside so no one would find him. What a party pooper! I really miss him, though. I wish he was here pulling my hair and calling me "dummy" instead of up there so far away.

December 13, 1994

Mom and I took a present to Kezziah today, since we won't be here for Christmas. She's pregnant *again*! We took her a brand-new wrapper outfit and head-tie, and some baby clothes for

Lydia. She was so happy it almost scares me. I mean, she must be so lonely and so poor to be so excited about visitors and some new clothes.

Her hut's dirtier and smellier than it was last summer. When we came, she sat us down and brought us some goat milk. The floor was filthy, and the mat we sat on was almost as dirty. I'd never noticed before, but the hut was so bare. I don't remember it being that bare last summer. I wonder what's up. While we were all sitting down, Kezziah's husband barged in and started yelling at her to give us food. Mom and I stood up quickly and said that we were just about to leave, but he was already screaming at Kezziah. Oh, it was horrible! I wanted to run into a corner and hide. She looked so small and frail all of a sudden. Finally, Mom said, "Sir, we were just leaving. Thank you very much for your hospitality, and peace be with you." She stood tall until he let us by, quiet for once. As soon as we were out, though, he started yelling again. And then Kezziah screamed. I don't know what he did to her, but it hurt her. I wanted to run back and fight him, but Mom held me tightly. She said until she told Dad, there was nothing we could do.



Oh, I want to scream and cry at the same time. Poor Kezziah! What's going on with her? I wish we could save her from that cruel man. How could he be so mean to her?

January 15, 1995

We got three flats on our way back from Kasharu. The road just gets worse and worse every day. They say the speed limit's 100 kph, but how can anyone safely go more than 60 or 70 kph? The government just doesn't bother to repair the roads at all. They spend money on expensive cars and houses instead. I mean, you drive down the road and pass all these half-finished public buildings, but pass by huge government officials' estates. I guess Africa's not all good. Of course, if we'd been in our pick-up instead of the big van, we never would have popped those tires.

Annie taught me a song on the guitar over Christmas break. I can't play it fast, but I do know the chords. You know, the more time she spends away, the nicer she is when I do see her. Chris too. He's only been gone a few months, but he didn't call me "dummy" once over the break! Either Oakwood is a really amazing school or my brother and sister are growing up. Must be the first choice.

March 29, 1995

The government court called Mom and Dad to a hearing for Jarreth. This is the first sign we've gotten from the government, and "baby" Jarreth is four years old! I sure hope it's a *good* sign. Jarreth just gets cuter and cuter. What if they don't let us adopt him? What on earth would we do? It's bad enough going to America without him, but it'll be worse leaving forever and

knowing we'll probably never see him again. God, please, please let them agree to our adopting him.

April 8, 1995

Aunt Katharine took us to the Fulani village this afternoon. It was amazing. I don't think I'll ever forget it. We had to wear skirts and head-ties, and we got to ride there in the back of her pick-up. There wasn't a road—just kind of a path through the bushes—and Kate got pretty scratched up on her arms. The kids were so excited to see us! They ran to the truck wearing nothing but necklaces and earrings, shouting out to Aunt Katharine in Ffuldi. They were ecstatic! Then the women came out in their scant clothing of wrapper skirts around their waists. One woman had an absolutely gorgeous necklace—probably bronze. And another woman had wire in her plaits, making her look like Pippi Longstocking!



There weren't very many men there. The ladies told Aunt Katharine they went west to meet another herd and do some trading. Talk about *weird!* So we didn't get to have any warm fresh Fulani milk. We were all really disappointed. I mean, I'd heard a lot about how good it was. Oh well.

There was one man there who'd just returned from his "hajj" or pilgrimage to Mecca. He was listening to the short-wave radio on a mat (no doubt the only radio in camp), and Aunt Katharine knelt to greet him. We weren't sure if she was tired or whether she kneeed out of respect for the "alhaji," so we knelt too. Boy did we feel stupid! Anyway, at least we met a real alhaji!

Then some of the women took us to see their huts. The huts themselves are made of branches bent and woven together. They look like upside-down baskets—big ones. It was really dark inside, but that's just because it wasn't dark enough outside to have lighted lanterns inside. Against one wall was a whole pile of metal pots. One of the women said that they're signs of wealth. Can you imagine how poor they must be that metal pots mean you're rich? Sheesh. Some of them sleep on beds, but most of them just have mats covered with their special blankets. Fulani blankets are really nice. They're white and have woven designs at the very ends, and they're soft too. But really, except for the mosquitoes, you don't need blankets up here. It sure doesn't get very cold at this particular camp. It's far enough down from the foothills that it's hot all year long.

Some of the little kids sang us a song, and Aunt Katharine translated. I wish I knew Ffulde. It was a pretty song; those kids can really sing! But it was hard not being able to understand the words without a translator. If only I knew another language besides English!

By the time we left, it was getting dark, and the women were getting the evening meal ready. It will probably be maize mush just like every night. I almost felt bad tearing myself away

to go to my own supper of hamburgers and chips. You know, they don't get to eat meat very often. Some people only get meat once a year, at Christmas!

Anyway, it was really neat to go and see the way those people live.

May 31, 1995

Well, Annie's a senior now. She's really excited about it too. I can't understand why. Who in their right mind would *want* to be another year closer to leaving Africa? Chris is glad to be a sophomore. Annie told him it's the hardest year, but he doesn't care.

We're in Kasharu now, but we'll drive home the day after tomorrow. Mom says we need to help Meredith pack up and move out. I guess I haven't said much about her, have I? We didn't get along very well. For one thing, she's British and teaches a lot different from Kim. For another thing, she's an expert in English and doesn't like math. Even worse, she thought I was barbaric for playing with the African kids around. I never told Mom about that, but Meredith sure is high and mighty around Africans. She thinks it's "absolutely, positively horrid" that I learned to speak Jugawai before English. Not that I remember much now...I don't know. I'm glad she's leaving. Next year we'll have a new teacher, Tina Carthy. She's Australian, and Mom and Dad have met her, so she must be good.

Sean is going back to Ireland in two weeks. Kate says he needs to do more secondary school before he can go to a British university. Poor Sean. I know Kate's really going to miss him. So's Annie. Kate's going too. I mean, all the O'Rileys are going for the summer, but the others will be back in August, in time for Tanna to start at Oakwood. It's going to be a long summer.

August 15, 1995

I don't understand why Jonah did it. Didn't he know how disappointed we'd be in his actions? Didn't he realize he could overcome the temptation? Why did he do it? We trusted him with everything. How could he wrong us so? Mom thinks he just needed the money for something and will pay us back. She's so compassionate. But Dad says it wouldn't matter. He said we will forgive, of course, because God called His people to forgive, but we won't ever be able to trust him the same again. It's not the amount that matters after all, but the fact that he stole it. Stole. What a rotten word! He was my friend, one of the only people I could talk to. And now he's gone. For all we know, he could be halfway to Cote d'Ivoire! Jonah, why?

September 1, 1995

He came back. Mom was so surprised that she didn't stop him from coming right in. I called Dad, and the two talked for a long time in the living room. I thought Dad might yell at him, but I didn't hear a word of the conversation from the kitchen. Mom said it's unladylike to eavesdrop and sent me outside to play with Sam.

Jonah left the house looking...I don't know...annoyed? No, he was annoyed, but he was smiling, kind of a bad smile, I thought, especially when he saw me. He's changed. He didn't look

friendly at me but kind of sneered. Last year I was his friend; now I'm only a little white girl without a brain. What happened to him?

Dad told us later what happened. Jonah explained that his aunt in some other village was ill and needed medical treatment. Not sure that Dad would have given him money, he simply took it, meaning to pay us back in the future.

I was pleased with that answer. It seemed appropriate, even though I knew Dad would have given Jonah the money for his aunt. But later I heard Dad tell Mom that he knew of no aunt, and would check around town for further evidence. I don't know what's happening, but I have a feeling that Jonah has no aunt.

September 7, 1995

Dad went around town and found out the truth. Jonah has no aunt in a nearby village. And he never left town! The trader who comes once a week from the capital said that Jonah bought a brand-new pair of very expensive shoes the week after our money disappeared. No direct connection, yeah, but doesn't that seem just a little bit fishy? Dad says to drop the whole matter; he'll deal with it. But we kids aren't allowed to let Jonah into the house anymore.

November 23, 1995



Mom and I went to see Kezziah again today in her new village. Mom had heard she'd had another baby, and I was so excited to see it! Oh, he's adorable! He's about three weeks old and just adorable! She named him Faeren because she said that he will do all things well. It's a nice name, don't you think?

She looks so tired, though. She looks like she's forty, but she's really only sixteen! I'm worried about her. I don't think it was such a good idea for her to be married so young. Anyway, Faeren's a beautiful baby, and Kezziah is getting along with Lydia too. She hardly ever sleeps; I guess her husband gives her plenty to do around the house, and what with a newborn...Mom said we could come back again and visit. Yay!

I think Dad is planning on going to visit her and her husband in their village soon. Remember that other time Mom and I went about a year ago? Mom thinks that Kezziah's husband is being very abusive, and she thinks Dad might be able to help. Kezziah looks more and more tired all the time. And she always has a bruise somewhere on her face. I can't believe how wicked her husband must be! I hope Dad can do something.

December 10, 1995

We're up in Kasharu again for Annie and Chris's break from school. They've changed so much. I don't know if I like the change or not. Annie is so grown up. Well, she *is* a senior, and she *is* going to college next year, but she's still just my sister. All she talks about is going to college. I think she really likes school, but she's excited to go to a big college in America. I wish she didn't have to be gone all the time. Chris won't play with me any more. He says that sophomores won't play games with eighth graders. I hope he changes his mind.

Aunt Katharine took Mom, Annie, Kate, and me to a friend's house today. His name is James, and he lives in a wagon. He does! He's got some disease that made his body really, really small. He's twenty, I think, and just lies down in a wagon all day long. Aunt Katharine says that he's excellent at football rules, strategies, and statistics, and that he coached a team from his wagon. Isn't that cool? Not only that, but he likes contemporary Christian music—the kind Annie, Chris, and I play. He's a really nice guy, and he said Aunt Katharine should bring us again sometime. That would be so much fun!



Annie says that next year is leap year, and there's something called Sadie Hawkins' Day on February 29th, when girls can ask guys out. She's really excited about it because she wants to ask this one guy to the annual senior formal in March. His name's Michael, and he's from Germany, and she claims he's the greatest guy in the world. Yeah,...it sounds like a fun idea.

I wish I could see Rebecca, but she's in America on furlough.

January 11, 1996

Our house was broken into while we were gone in Kasharu! Half of our tapes and CD's are missing, plus Jarreth's tricycle, our laptop computer, and a whole lot of money. Oh, what can we do? Why did this have to happen to us?

January 16, 1996

Jonah was arrested today. The police found him driving a car that had been reported stolen. They went into his house and found many stolen items, including our laptop computer. I watched them flog him, though I can't say I really wanted to watch. They stripped him down to his undershorts and beat him again and again and again. I thought they would never stop. By the time Dad got out there, Jonah was curled up in a ball, bruised and bloody. Dad called off the police and told them to take him to prison, not beat him. There was so much blood, so much screaming and yelling. Dad even gave the officers money to have Jonah taken to a doctor. He

looked awful. His arm was twisted all the way around and his eyes were swollen shut...Oh God, help him!

January 17, 1996

Jonah died in the prison this morning. There was nothing the doctor could do. Too much internal bleeding, he said. He didn't have a chance. He didn't even have a trial, let alone conviction. I could easily see him in jail for his crime, but he's my friend! How could they let him die?

I've lived here all my life. I know that police beat thieves to death if they catch them, but why Jonah? He wasn't really a thief; he just...I don't know.

January 17, 1996

Dear Jonah,

I feel pretty silly writing a letter to a dead guy, but I think it will make me feel a little better.

The terrible thing about your death is not the way you died, or even why you died. The terrible thing about your death is your destination. You know what? I don't know where I would address this letter to if I actually had to send it. I don't know where you are, Jonah. Are you walking along the streets of gold, singing with the heavenly angels, or are you burning in hellish agony? I wish I knew. At least—at least I can have hope. At least there's a possibility that you are in heaven.

Jonah, I'm sorry about what happened. I'm sorry you stopped seeing me as a friend. I'm sorry you took advantage of my family. But most of all, I'm sorry for your sad death, and I'm sorry you didn't die honorably.

I forgive you, Jonah, even though you haven't asked forgiveness. Yes, I forgive you. Go in peace, Jonah. Salaam.

Always,

Emily

February 10, 1996

Jarreth turned five today. Mom's been to court six times in the past eleven months, but it's just going so slowly. I hate African government systems. Mom says it's not any faster in America. She says it took Aunt Kelly three years to adopt Betsy. Three years! And that was in America! It's no wonder we're having so much trouble here. Everything is slower in Africa, even life itself.

February 13, 1996

We're going to America. Dad just told us he has skin cancer, and we have to leave tomorrow. Tomorrow! And there's no way of knowing when or if we'll ever be back. Chris and Annie will stay here and finish up the school year at Oakwood, but Zach and I have to go to America. We have to leave Jarreth! Who knows if we'll ever be back, and yet we have to say goodbye to Jarreth because the stupid government won't let us take him with us! My baby brother is being left behind! I know Aunt Katharine will take good care of him, but that's beside the point.

And what about Dad? He's got cancer! Don't people die of cancer? Grama did. And she was just about Dad's age when she died. Could Dad die? Will the doctors be able to heal him?

I don't want to go to America! I don't know anyone there. I haven't got any friends. I'll have to go to a public school in some big city. It's going to be awful! I can't believe this is happening to us. Aren't we missionaries? Aren't we good people? Why would a just God make us go through this? Why? What kind of God is that? I want no part of Him!

February 20, 1996

The doctors said they can heal Dad. He has to take some kind of medicine every day for a year. They want to watch him and observe his progress for the first few months, so we're staying at least until the summer. Then Annie and Chris will come back here, and we'll go from there, Mom says.

I miss Annie and Chris and Jarreth. You should have seen Jarreth's face when we told him he'd have to stay with Aunt Katharine and Uncle Tim for a while. He cried and cried when we left him at their house in Kasharu. I wanted to jump out of the truck and run back to him, but I couldn't. Annie and Chris were pretty calm about the whole thing. They said goodbye without much crying, even though Mom was crying her head off. It's hard to believe my brother and sister are thousands of kilometers away all the way across the Atlantic Ocean. I miss them! I wish Annie was here to sing me to sleep. I wish Chris was here to read to me from one of his books. I wish Jarreth was here to make me smile! I wish they were here!

I start school tomorrow—something I'm not looking forward to. I don't want to be here. I don't belong in America any more than a giraffe belongs in downtown Chicago. I want to go home. I WANT TO GO HOME!!

March 11, 1996

I hate America. I hate Americans. They're so rude and mean! No one talks to me, but they all make fun of me. They call me "Jungle Girl" and say mean things about my clothes. I guess I'm old-fashioned. They tease me about being the kid of some preacher over in Africa, and they make fun of God. Not that I care anymore if they make fun of God. If He wants to defend Himself, He will. I'm sick of sticking up for Him. I'm sick of all the rude comments and questions. God obviously doesn't care enough about me because He brought me here, so why

should I care about Him? Huh? Why should I care about a God who leads His people to miserable countries like America? I hate Him!

I haven't gotten a letter from Kate yet. I know mail is hard to get back and forth from Africa, but still. Doesn't she care about me? Has she forgotten me completely? Does nobody love me?

April 24, 1996

Isabelle wrote something very nasty in my notebook today. I guess she found it when I left it in the classroom yesterday. "F--- you!" in big letters all over the first page. I cried for an hour when I got home.

April 29, 1996

Someone stole my lunchbag. Mom bought me a really nice bag just for my lunch, and the second day I use it, it gets stolen. Just my luck. Everyone here is wicked. I hate it here. I wish I was dead!

May 6, 1996

The governor passed a new law today about illegal immigrants from Mexico. All of the Mexicans in my school (which is about three-quarters) ran through the halls during class, screaming and banging on the classroom doors. The police came and arrested about twenty of them. They're spending the night in jail. Gives me goosebumps. Kids here are so bad and disrespectful! Can you imagine? Overpowering your teacher, running through the halls, getting *arrested*? They've got to be insane! They *are* insane, all of them. I hate America. I want to die!

May 12, 1996

I got a letter from Kate. She wrote all about how much fun she's having. A new family came last month, and they have a guy our age named Seth. Man, she gushed about him. I guess he's more important than I am. Everyone is. She also wrote that Sam died. Poor pup. With Kate so...distracted and Sam dead, what reason is there to want to go home? For the people? For Kezziah? To save her? I don't know. There's not much point in living anymore.

May 13, 1996

I tried to kill myself, but I just couldn't. I'm too chicken. I'm afraid that I won't kill myself completely, but end up alive and even more miserable than ever. Will the tears ever stop? Will I ever fit in anywhere again? I wish I had killed myself!

June 5, 1996

Annie and Chris are back. I've never been more glad to see them! Annie hugged me like she'd died and gone to heaven. She's really grown up a lot. I like her this way. Chris too. He's gotten a little more friendly, but he's still shy, which is good.

Annie's going to college in August. I guess she did really well in her big exam and got accepted by big colleges like Yale, but she decided to go to a small Christian school somewhere in Iowa.

Dad says we're going back to Africa next month! Yes! I can't wait! I'll even get to start at Oakwood with Kate (and Seth). Mom says we can get a puppy when we get home. I'm going to name it Sylvester if it's a boy and Gwendolyn if it's a girl.

July 31, 1996

HOME! It feels funny coming home without Annie, but I guess that's part of life. She didn't cry when we boarded the plane. I can't understand it, but I think she's excited about being on her own. She said it's something I'll go through too. I hope not.

Chris, Kate, Seth, Tanna, and I start school in a few days. I don't want to leave Rukani. Everything I love is right here, except Annie. Jarreth's going to completely grow up while I'm gone. What'll I do without Mom and Dad? I mean, it's exciting to be going to a hostel and a real school, especially with Kate and Seth. But I'm really going to miss Rukani. That's the understatement of the year

August 1, 1996

Mom and I went to see Kezziah today, but she wasn't there. The neighbors in the village said she was very ill and had been taken to the witchdoctor. Mom and I ran all the way to the witchdoctor's compound and banged on the gate until he let us in. You should have seen Mom. It looked like her eyes were on fire! She demanded that we be allowed to take Kezziah home with us to the hospital. The guy said that we were crazy and tried to push us out again. Mom was so stubborn! Finally, she decided we should go and get Dad to come and get her.

Dad was horrified to hear that Kezziah had been taken to the witchdoctor and was only too happy to go and get her. We brought her to the hospital, and Aunt Cara took care of her until Uncle Warren could get there.

Oh, you should see her! Her skin is yellow, and her eyes are open, but she's not conscious. She has bruises all over her, and even some deep cuts. Mom says it's because her husband beat her. Oooh, I hate him. How *dare* he hurt my friend? How *dare* he?

August 2, 1996

We're going up to Kasharu, but Kezziah's still so sick. Uncle Warren says he's doing all he can, but she's in very bad condition. He says she was probably sick for a long time, and that the witchdoctor's medicine sure didn't help. I hope she'll be okay.

August 30, 1996

Mom called me from Lintu. She said that Kezziah is very close to death. She's still unconscious and getting worse every day. I wish I wasn't so far away! If I thought God cared, I'd pray for her, but I know He doesn't give a hoot.

I love it up here. It's nice being with kids my own age for a change. Kate's still my best friend, but now if she goes off with Seth, there are still other kids around. We're in separate rooms at the hostel too. My roommate's name is Cyndi, and she's a junior from South Carolina. She's really great, and she always makes me feel at home in the hostel. She even puts little notes in my locker during the day.

I'm glad Chris is around. I don't know what I'd do without him. Cyndi's in his class, and the two sometimes gang up on the freshmen and sophomores on my behalf. It's great! Tanna doesn't do that for Kate! Chris goes around telling everyone, "This is my kid sis Emily. Be nice or else. Ya gotta love her." Everyone respects him.

People talk a lot about God here. It makes me wonder if they haven't been through any tough experiences. Something to think about anyway.

I miss Mom and Dad, and Zach and Jarreth too. Mom said Jarreth can read all of the book of Ruth now. He's growing up so quickly, and I'm not there to see it. What kind of sister am I?

Mom also said something about the witchdoctor putting a curse on Dad for taking Kezziah to the hospital. A load of nonsense, I'm sure. Still, knowing the Williams' luck, something bad will probably happen.

My teachers are all really nice, especially the math teacher, Mr. Shultz. Excellent. He weaves stories into his explanations and makes jokes in class. I hope I get him again next year. Bible class is really boring when you don't care to know about God.

September 8, 1996

Kezziah died today. Mom called again from Lintu and told Chris and me. Actually, she told Chris, and he told me. He was so sensitive and understanding when he told me. I cried for hours. She was such a sweetheart! Why on earth did she die? What did she ever do wrong? Chris says everyone must die sometime. None of us is perfect. Yeah, maybe, but why do some people die younger than others? Why?

September 11, 1996

Mom and Dad came up to Kasharu today. Dad's really sick. Uncle Tim doesn't know what's wrong, and we're all pretty shaken up. He got a fever the day Kezziah died—something I'd rather not think about. All the tests came back negative. Uncle Tim just doesn't see anything that would cause a severe fever like this. What if that witchdoctor's curse really did work? Dad's so sick he looks like a skeleton. What's happening to our family? If Dad isn't better by the 15th, the mission's sending him to England. Déjà vu. Last time that happened, the patient died.

September 13, 1996

The mission had a prayer meeting for Dad this afternoon. I figured it couldn't hurt, knowing how ill Dad really is. I told God that if He wanted me to believe in Him, He had to heal Dad before tomorrow. I guess we'll see.

September 15, 1996

Dad left today. Mom went with him to work out all the details. Zach is staying here at the hostel until they get back, and Jarreth's at home with O'Rileys. Chris and I are so scared. He tries to make me feel better, but he's just as scared as I am. When I went to get him for supper this evening, he was outside on the porch swing, staring off into space, and I could tell he'd been crying.

See? There is no God.

September 27, 1996

I heard Cyndi cry herself to sleep last night. Usually, I'm in bed before she is, so I'm asleep when she comes in, but last night, I was still awake. I don't know why she was crying, but she sounded so sad. What does *she* have to cry about? I'm the one with the sick dad. I wonder if I can help her in any way.

September 30, 1996

I guess it wasn't just a one time thing. Cyndi's been crying herself to sleep for the past few days. If she does again tonight, I'll ask her what's wrong and see if I can't help. I don't like hearing her upset. She's so sweet. She really doesn't deserve to be so sad.

October 1, 1996

I talked to Cyndi last night when she cried. She said she's worried about me. When I told her that I knew the doctors would take care of my dad, she said that wasn't what she was talking about. She said that she was worried about what would happen to me. I'm not sure I know what she means, but she said something about not knowing Jesus. When she said that, I almost choked. I started crying and told her I didn't want to know a God who let my friends die and ruined my life. Then all of a sudden, I stopped crying and wanted to yell. If it hadn't been midnight, I would have started screaming. I didn't mean to frighten her, but I could tell from the look on her face that that's exactly what I had done. I stormed off into the living room with a blanket and slept there the rest of the night. I could hear her crying well past one o'clock. It bothers me to know that she's so sad because of me. I don't understand why my not caring about God should bother her so much. I wish I could make her happy, but I refuse to put my faith in such an uncaring God.

October 4, 1996

Mom and Dad are back. Dad is so thin. His cheeks are hollow, and his eyes look sunken in. But he's alive, and that's what matters. Annie called all the way from America to talk to Mom and Dad. I guess she'd been pretty concerned. I'm just glad Dad's back alive! The doctors are amazing!

December 25, 1996

Christmas without Annie for the first time in my life. She sent me a present—a tiny little teddy bear. It's so soft! It has a green-and-blue plaid shirt that says "Jesus Loves Me" on it. I thought about taking it off him, but it's from Annie, and I want to be properly grateful, so I left it on. Mom gave me my very own Bible. There again, I have to be thankful in order not to be rude. How can I explain to them that I want nothing to do with the God whom they have devoted their lives to serving? How can I tell them and make them understand how rejected I feel by an unloving God?

Still, it's a good season to relax with the family. Dad looks a lot better, but he's still quite pale and thin. Mom has dark circles under her eyes, and I noticed a few strands of gray in her auburn hair today. She's been to court in Kasharu every other day in the past two weeks since coming to Muntara. We're coming very close, she says, but I can see the stress is really getting to her. She may be dead by the time we're allowed to adopt Jarreth!

January 11, 1997

Death is just everywhere this year! Cyndi just found out that her family was in a serious car accident on their way home and that her four-year-old brother was killed. Killed! Cyndi's own brother! Why?? Why did it happen? Everyone knows Darren's the cutest little thing in the world. He brought flowers to Cyndi every day. Four short years. That's all he lived. Four years.

But you know the strangest thing? Cyndi isn't angry at her God. She says that God has a right to take His children when He wants them to come home. She's so sure he'll be in heaven when she gets there. I can't understand it. How could she still trust in a God who took away her brother at age four? How can she feel such peace when her baby brother just died? Yes, she cried, and I expect I'll be up many a night in the near future listening to her cry herself to sleep. But she still believes that God knows what He's doing. I wish I had faith like that. But I just can't believe in a God who's so unjust as to take the small and the innocent.

January 13, 1997

Dear God,

I can't run away from you anymore. You were there at Darren's funeral. I saw you comforting Cyndi's family. I saw you standing beside the little coffin. I saw you walk up and down the aisles and touch people gently on the shoulder. And everywhere you went, there was a light left behind, as though you were pushing aside the darkness. When you stopped at my pew, I thought it was the end. I thought you would strike me

down in your wrath. After all, I believed for so long that you were evil, wicked, unjust, an angry God incapable of love.

But instead, you held out your hand for me to see its deep wound. You lifted up the back of your tunic to show me the gashes striping your flesh. You knelt down for me to see the scars on your scalp. You pushed away your robe to reveal the slash deep into your side. Everywhere I looked on your body, there were scars. Finally, I looked up into your eyes and almost drowned in the overwhelming flood of love flowing from them. Love! For me?! After all these years of doubt and slander, you still love me?

“Your pain is my pain,” you said. That was it. That’s all you said: “Your pain is my pain.” And suddenly, the years of anger, of doubt, seemed so absurd. You loved me all the while! You didn’t want me to suffer. My pain was your pain on the cross.

Oh God! Forgive me for doubting you! Forgive me for the years of ignoring you and bitterly slandering your name. Please forgive me! Forgive me, God!

Love,

Emily

February 10, 1997

Six-year-old Jarreth Williams made his first telephone call today. Oh sure, I suppose he’s made a phone call before, but not as such! I picked up the hostel phone and said, “Hello?” On the other end was this high little boy’s voice saying, “Hello, Emily. This is Jarreth Williams. How are you this beautiful day?” I almost dropped the phone. I was *so* happy! Chris and I danced around the room. Can you believe it? Jarreth’s finally my brother! The papers came through! He’s got a passport and everything! All right!!

March 31, 1997

In Muntara once again. Mom just told me about Kezziah’s kids, Lydia and Faeren. Lydia’s already three, and Faeren’s one. Mom says they’re living with Kezziah’s sister who’s dying of AIDS. She’s really worried about what will happen to them when their aunt dies, which apparently will be soon. Mom and Dad both said they’d gladly take them both in, but the adoption process takes so long. So they’re trying to convince Auntie Comfort to take them instead. The kids are so cute. I couldn’t bear to see them starve to death.

God’s been teaching me a lot during Lent. I’ll never forget the scars I saw at Darren’s funeral. Whenever I think crucifixion from now on, I’ll think of the deep gashes on Jesus’ back and the love in His eyes. I’ve been reading Isaiah and Matthew together in the Bible I got for Christmas. They connect really well, you know. Isaiah points right to Jesus as the Christ, not as just another prophet. It’s amazing how perfectly those prophecies came true. It’s been great to read and learn as I go.

May 22, 1997

Graduation is coming up. Tanna's going to be up there wearing her robe. Kate's really proud. I guess I was too when Annie graduated, even though I wasn't here. It's really strange thinking of all these kids leaving Africa to start college in the States. Wow. I hope they're not disappointed in America when they get there. That would be too bad. It's hard for Kate to say goodbye to Tanna, just as it's going to be *really* hard for me to say goodbye to Chris next year. He's become a friend this year instead of just a big brother. I hate to think what I'll do without him.

June 7, 1997

Tanna left today for America. She's not going to school in Ireland like Sean did. Well, she *did* get accepted to Stanford; I don't suppose I'd pass up that opportunity either! Kate's really sad, not that I blame her. I hope she gets over it quickly. I miss how much fun she used to be.

Seth and I are trying to read twenty books this summer. Considering how slowly I read, that's a pretty lofty goal. I've also started reading my Bible every day. I started in Genesis, and I really like it. My Bible teacher at Oakwood suggested I read with a Bible dictionary on hand so I can better understand. So far, it's been working pretty well. After having lived in America for six months, I think I better understand the story of Joseph and how he was mocked and sold into slavery. Hmm. Well, I wasn't sold into slavery, but I guess I was in some modern sense of the phrase. They tried to kill my spirit, but here I am! I believe in God!

Annie sounds so happy from her letters. This summer she's spending with Aunt Sandra's relatives in Colorado. It sounds like Philip's grown a lot since we saw them last. Kai. Little kids do grow up, don't they? Annie says college is a lot of fun, but is a lot of work too. Chris is already getting excited, just from reading Annie's letters. I can't believe it will be him leaving next summer.

August 6, 1997

Sophomore year has come. I still get to room with Cyndi, which is great. She hasn't changed that much over the summer, although she is a bit more mellow. I can't really explain it. I just know she's not as cheerful as she used to be. Maybe someday she'll tell me about it. I hope so. I want to help if I can. I just read a verse the other day that said to carry each other's burdens.

It was easier to say goodbye to the kids and Mom and Dad this time. I think I'm being conditioned. When the time comes to go to college in three years, I'll be so used to saying goodbye it won't be much different. I guess that's what happened with Annie.

It's really neat that Chris is a senior. He gets lots of special privileges and shares them with me. He just gets nicer and nicer every day. I can't believe this is his last year home in Africa. Well, I suppose I'll have to enjoy his presence while it lasts.

Auntie Comfort agreed to take care of Lydia and Faeren. The doctors are giving their aunt about three months to live. It's great that they'll have somewhere to go.

August 28, 1997

Cyndi and I got to talk this evening. She started by telling me about Darren, about his life, and the way he died. She told me a dream that she'd had every night since the accident:

Darren is sitting in the car, then suddenly the car is hit head-on by a lorry. Darren screams as his head breaks the glass and his body is thrown hundreds of yards from the car. When he hits the ground, he cries out for her, and she hears him from a distance, but can't reach him.

In the end, she always wakes up sweating and terrified. I guess she hasn't been getting the peace from God she was hoping for. And this summer was the hardest, she said.

"I kept thinking, *Where's Darren?* When I set the table, I always set an extra plate, then had to take it away when I saw the pained look on Mom's face." I just looked at her and put my arm around her as she began to cry.

"I went into his room every night after everyone was asleep." She paused for a moment, then continued. "It was just the way it had always been, except that there was no redhead under the Sesame Street covers. I sat on his bed and held his teddy bear and cried. Every night."

I was crying by the end of her story, and I didn't dare say anything. Sometimes it's just better to listen and say nothing rather than speak. She cried for a long time. When she finally stopped, I gave her a final hug and let go. She went to bed without another word. I guess Christians grieve too.

September 13, 1997

Uncle Tim offered me a job at the hospital when I told him I wanted to be a nurse. I can come every Saturday and help him with rounds and clinic and maybe even some surgery. Sounds great! I get to start next week.

September 20, 1997

Wow. I got a tour of the hospital this morning, and Uncle Tim explained a few procedures such as how to admit a patient. The wards are so dirty compared to American hospital wards. There are cockroaches and rats running around. And the smell is horrendous. If it doesn't smell like urine, it smells like disinfectant. In some places, I gagged every second because of the rotten vomit on the floor. It's absolutely disgusting. Who knows how I'm going to make it through the year going there once a week!

September 25, 1997

We dissected a rabbit today in biology class. Wow! Was that cool or what? The liver was my favorite part. People's insides (and animals!) are so fascinating! Did you know that the

kidneys kind of “clean” your body’s water? God sure must be a genius to figure out how all our parts can work together!

September 27, 1997



I watched my first surgery today. Wow! Uncle Tim removed a tumor from an old lady’s jaw. It was so incredible! Uncle Tim’s hands worked so quickly and so steadily for *four hours*. I didn’t know human hands were capable of such delicate procedures! It must take a good deal of concentration and practice. My admiration for surgeons has just become adoration. I wish I could do that!

October 1, 1997

We had a special speaker this morning in chapel. She talked about AIDS and what the Bible says about premarital sex with many people. She said that AIDS is becoming a really big killer here in Africa. She described all sorts of people who have AIDS and what they’re going through now. It sounds awful. You just sort of waste away. I mean, you’re fine until one day, you get sick, and because your immune system is down, you die from pneumonia and stuff like that. And there’s no cure. Man, she sure scared us into saving sex for marriage! Not that most of us weren’t already convinced. *We are* Christians, after all.

November 27, 1997

Thanksgiving Day. They don’t celebrate it at school, and my hostel parents, the Rogerses aren’t from the U.S. (Wales, in fact), but the Americans in town are getting together tonight for turkey and football. Chris and I are going with Cyndi and Jennifer (Kate’s roommate). Nathaniel’s going too, and a whole lot of others. Turkey sounds really good right now. It’s impossible to get cranberry sauce here, but Aunt Katharine did make a few pumpkin pies. Ooh, I can’t wait!

Now that I’m looking for AIDS cases in the hospital, I’m noticing how much of the virus there actually is. Uncle Tim has started checking for HIV on a regular basis, and most of the very sick patients we have test positive. It’s so sad. In the past two months, I’ve seen at least twenty-five babies die of AIDS. That’s a lot for such a small hospital! I think there’s a lot more HIV than most people here would like to admit. It’s scary.



December 5, 1997

What a day! This morning our hostel and the Lutheran—Nathaniel’s—hostel drove here to the river from Kasharu. We got stopped by the roadside soldiers five times! They let us go the first three times, but the fourth time, they asked to see our car’s fire extinguisher. Unfortunately, Uncle Gary had forgotten to stick it in the car before we left the hostel. Big mistake! One of the soldiers got into the van and tried to direct us to the police station, or so he said. We drove around for over an hour, singing praise songs and hymns at the top of our lungs. It was so much fun! Song after song, we sang hearty praises. Finally, Uncle Gary looked hard at the man and said:

“We’re Christians. We don’t pay bribes.”

“We will go to the police station,” Aunt Joy went on, “But we won’t pay bribes.”

You should have seen the look on that soldier’s face! He told Uncle Gary pretty quickly to let him out.

“You can go this time,” he said, “since you are Christians. But next time we will not be so kind.” As soon as he got out and Uncle Gary pulled back onto the road, we all began to cheer. It was hysterical!

The next time we got stopped, they asked for all our passports, residence permits, and aliens cards. Well, we discovered that Aunt Joy had accidentally forgotten Kate’s residence permit and aliens card at home. The soldiers were *not* pleased. They had a car and led us to the nearest police station. We sat there for two hours while Uncle Gary took Kate in to explain to the police. Chris had brought a deck of cards, so we played Rummi and sang some more. Aunt Joy brought out some lunch, and we ate while she played a tape on the car tape player. You know, Keith Green was a good musician. Uncle Gary and Kate finally appeared, looking rather exhausted. Later, Uncle Gary told Aunt Joy how tiring it can be to argue with African policemen!



Well, here we are at the river finally. It’s a beautiful evening. There are some women upstream washing clothes, and the soap’s drifting down, so Aunt Joy won’t let us swim until tomorrow. Uncle Gary and Uncle Mark are starting a fire over at the camp, and soon we’ll have supper. They couldn’t find enough wood for the fire and eventually resorted to using dried cow patties instead. Oh, the things missionaries learn to do!

Cyndi and Chris just killed a snake! Uncle Gary says it’s some sort of viper. Ooh. Gives me the chills. I hope there aren’t any in our camp. Or scorpions, for that matter. Nathaniel told me about the time he picked up a scorpion here. It was accidental, of course. Talk about *scary*, though!

Later

Writing by firelight is exceedingly difficult, but it will have to do. Nathaniel and I looked at the stars after supper. He says the constellations are different here than in Maine. You know, I'd never really thought about it, but he's right. Logically, of course, the stars are different from different latitudes, but it just had never occurred to me that Americans don't see the same stars as we do. Annie can't wish on her star anymore. America's further away than I thought.

January 23, 1998

Sixteen today! Yep, I was "sweet sixteen and never been kissed" and proud of it! Unfortunately for me, little Caleb Rogers—Uncle Gary and Aunt Joy's youngest at five years—gave me a kiss, so technically, I'm not sweet sixteen anymore! Uncle Gary and Aunt Joy had to struggle, but they found sixteen red roses to give me! I guess Mom and Dad asked them to do it because it's an American custom, not a Welsh one. Chris, Cyndi, and Nathaniel are taking me out for rice and beans tonight. Yum!

May 21, 1998

I can't believe the school year's already over. Wow. Time goes by so fast when you're having fun. But now that the year is ending and we're getting ready for graduation, I don't want the year to be over. Cyndi and Chris are both graduating, and all I need is more goodbyes. The Rogerses are going on furlough for a year too. I don't know how I'm going to get through this next week and graduation. I guess God will just have to strengthen me.

June 4, 1998

Cyndi left this morning. I haven't cried so much in years. I know there's a good chance I'll see her again someday, and I *know* I'll see her in heaven, but I'm going to miss her excruciatingly. She's had a very difficult year, and I hate to let her go into a whole new world without her normal joy and exuberance. Somehow, I keep picturing her sitting on the floor up against a wall somewhere, hugging her knees and sobbing uncontrollably. I don't want it to be that way, but Cyndi's been so melancholy—is that a good word? Yeah—lately. All I can do is encourage her with letters and get on my knees daily to pray for her.

We leave tomorrow, which is scary in itself. Chris has graduated—*graduated!* He's no longer the shy little kid with big curious eyes, no longer the innocent one, the little angel. Oh sure, he's still a good guy, but he's grown up, and that has made him a bit more aware of life. I wonder if others will notice that in me when I'm that age.

Anyway, we're leaving tomorrow. Chris is going to a college in Washington State, so we're driving from Georgia to Colorado to Washington, then leaving Mom in Washington with Chris and flying back here. She's going to stay there a few weeks to get him settled into college life. I know Zach and Jarreth are really going to miss her. Dad and the boys are staying in Kasharu until she gets back at the end of August. Of course, Zach will be staying here in Kasharu

anyway for school. He won't be in ninth grade—unless he tests out of eighth, which *could* happen but probably won't—but Mom and Dad don't want me to be alone. Isn't that sweet? Jenny and James are coming up too for freshman year. They've really grown up a lot in the past few years. Wow. Time goes by so quickly! Before I know it, it will be *my* turn to leave!

July 25, 1998

We went the roundabout way from Colorado to Washington and got to see the Grand Canyon in—let's see, um—Arizona? Yeah, Arizona. Wow. Talk about the Earth displaying the majesty of God! I've never been in such awe as when I stood at the edge and just took in the view. Wow. Dad ruined it by helping me calculate approximately how many currants it would take to fill the canyon!

So here we are in Washington State. It's been raining all day long, and it's not about to stop. I could never live here. I need constant sunshine to keep me going! Chris' school is really nice, though. The teachers (or professors) seem genuinely nice. And his roommate...well, let's just say I hope Chris brings his roommate home to our house for the holidays! Just kidding.

August 1, 1998

It's good to be home. The new hostel parents, the Farrells, seem really nice. Uncle Todd is a computer expert, and Aunt Bonnie is quite the musician! They have two girls, Ruth and Naomi, and a son, Jesse. Naomi's going into eighth grade with Zach, Ruth's going into fourth grade, and Jesse into first grade. What a cute family! It will be nice having American hostel parents this year!

Mom and Chris are in America, and Annie, of course. I think Jarreth probably misses her the most, although he's been apart from her much more than Zach ever has. Still, it's hard for him. I'm glad it won't be for too long.

August 10, 1998

Our new English teacher is rather good. She makes us write a lot more than Mr. Greely did. We write stories, essays, reports, even poems! It's going to be a great year in her class! Aunt Bonnie is conducting the high school choir this year, and boy is *that* going to be good!

I'll still work at the hospital every Saturday. It hasn't gotten any cleaner, I noticed, but oh well. What can I say? Roaches and rats, here I come! I'm hoping to focus more on surgery this year than any other department. Maybe I'll be a nurse anaesthetist when I grow up.

My new roommate is Russian. Not only is this her first year at the hostel, but this is also her first year in Africa. Her name is Mikhaila, and she's in tenth grade,



even though she's just thirteen. I must say, she's a quiet little thing, the youngest of five, the others of which left home years ago. She sure is a beauty, though. Nathaniel just about fell over backward when I introduced him. I was *not* impressed, to say the least. He'd better get over her. She's *only* thirteen, and he's almost eighteen! Kai. I'll have to show him who's boss around here.

Chris sent me some M&Ms with a short-termer who just arrived from Washington. Oh man, I *love* M&Ms!! Kate and Seth and I pigged out completely, and I took some to school to share with Nathaniel and the others. Zach got his own, so I didn't have to share with him. Mmm!

September 4, 1998

Mom got in safely. She, Dad, and Jarreth left for Rukani the day she arrived. That does *not* sound appealing in the slightest. Poor Mom is going to have the worst jet lag in the history of the world!

October 12, 1998

I got a letter from Cyndi today. It sounds like she's having a *really* hard time over there in America. She has no friends at her college, and her church turned out to be followers of the New Age. Yow! That's always exciting. She said Chris is the only one who is getting her through this because he's just as homesick as she is, so he can sympathize. Oh, poor Cyndi!

November 28, 1998

AIDS is just ravaging my homeland! This morning alone, I watched three AIDS victims die in the ICU. Three in one morning! God alone can save this nation now. Statistics get higher every year, and nothing happens to stop them from doing so.

Fatima
AIDS
Death takes us all,
But you hadn't a chance.
O baby—
So young, so frail.
Death swept you away.
I know not where he dropped you.
Where did your spirit go?
To eternal joy is my belief.
Jesus takes care of you now, baby.
Rest in peace.

December 5, 1998

Every day this year that I went to the hospital, I always saw this little boy with leukemia. The African doctors always made him laugh. I never understood the jokes because of the

language barrier, but he *always* laughed. He was a pretty cute little kid, thirteen. He'd always smile shyly at me when we checked on him on rounds.

Last night, they brought him in with a stomach ache (abdominal pain, I'm learning), and this morning when I arrived, he was unconscious. It was terrible! He was pale and his breathing was shallow. When we got back from visiting the ICU on rounds, the nurses told us he had given up. Given up? *Died?! No reason found at all. Can you believe it? How absurd! The incompetence of the nurses here drives me up the wall!*

What happened?
Last week you smiled at me.
You joked with the doctors.
You were so joyful.
Yesterday you were ill—
Under the weather a bit.
You didn't even open your eyes.
But what happened?
You were gone this morning.
Thirteen.
So young, so young.
Why did you go?
You weren't that ill.
What happened?
I don't even know your name,
But I know your smile
And I hope to see it again
Someday.
For you, my friend,
With love.

December 24, 1998

Nathaniel took me to the Christmas Dinner here in Muntara. Good food, good company, a very good time. It was lots of fun! I guess I don't get treated like a lady very often with Chris gone, so it was lovely to have doors opened for me and my chair pulled out for me. Nathaniel is so thoughtful! It's nice having his family up here for Christmas rather than down bush.

Jarreth has grown so much! He's almost eight. I realize I say this often, but that doesn't make it any less true: how quickly time flies! I remember the day Jarreth was brought to our house all those years ago. Wow. I was so small back then. So small and so naïve. Things change so much, and so do people.

January 28, 1998

I got another letter from Cyndi. She sounds terribly depressed about life in general. She still hasn't made any real friends, and her roommate is an alcoholic. She's decided to transfer to

Chris' college in Washington to have company. I'm really glad. If she'd decided to stay where she is, I would have thought she'd commit suicide soon. Loneliness can be pretty overwhelming. I would know.

March 1, 1999

Kate and I had a long talk today. It was our first real talk in over a year and was so refreshing. I've missed her a lot. Oh sure, she lives in the room next to mine, but we never talk. She's always with Seth. But we talked for hours today. She had a really bad day and told me all about it. I don't want to repeat here what she said because I'm sworn to secrecy, and I can't totally secure this diary (although I can't imagine how embarrassed I'd be if anyone *did* find it!). But she opened up so much. It was wonderful. I hope we can talk like that more often.

April 12, 1999

I saw Mikhaila crying at school today, and talked to her. She sure doesn't talk very much at all, but man did she talk today! She showed me a photo she'd just received in the post of a young couple and a little baby.

"That's my niece," she told me. "She's three months old and her name is Katrina. That there is my sister Alexia and her husband Nikolai. Aren't they beautiful?"

"Yeah," I told her. "You've never seen Katrina then?" Mikhaila shook her head.

"No, I've never seen Katrina."

She went on to tell me about all her brothers and sisters and their children. I guess she was very close to them before her parents moved here. I can't even begin to imagine how homesick she must be. Russia may not be as far away in kilometers as America (or is it?), but it's so much further away culturally. I guess I'll have to try harder to include her.

May 28, 1999

Tomorrow Nathaniel graduates. Will my world fall apart? America is *so* far away! Goodbye is one of the things MK's just grow up with, but that doesn't make it any easier. I hate goodbyes. I always have and I always will. Especially to Nathaniel. How on Earth am I going to say goodbye to Nathaniel? He's been there for me for the past two years. Oh Lord, help me to say goodbye!

June 15, 1999

Summer. Rain. Loneliness. Oh, Kate's here all right. Kate and Seth. But I miss Chris all the more. It's our first summer as a family without Chris, and it sure hurts a lot. There's no one to talk to, no one to joke with. Zach's been a bit slow in picking up the game Rummi. Sometimes I'll turn on one of Chris' tapes that he left and just cry. I wish he was here. Brothers aren't just luxuries that are nice to have around once in awhile. They're necessities.

I'm going to be working at the little hospital here during the long summer months. Aunt Amanda lets me do pretty much whatever I want, which is great. Dad says there's no way I'd be able to do all this in an American hospital. There, I'd have to have graduated from medical school before I could ever watch an operation! Okay, well, that's a slight exaggeration, but still...It's really a privilege to work here. I love being in the hospital with the doctors, the nurses, and, of course, the patients. I'm even feeling at home with the smells. Now *that's* been a challenge! I can't say I know for sure yet whether I'll be a nurse or a doctor, but I think probably a nurse. And surgery is really amazing, so maybe some kind of nurse in the operating room. Whatever God wants, I guess I should be willing to follow His plan, right?

August 11, 1999

Did I say the summer would be long? Wow, did I really write that? Was I nuts? Long my foot! I'm a senior already and can't believe how fast the summer went by. Where did the time go? A year from now, I'll be sitting in some city in America, waiting for college to start. *College*. I refuse to let my mind dwell on that word this year. Or at least, this semester!

Mikhaila's back. She's lost about ten pounds, and she certainly wasn't overweight to begin with. Uncle Gary and Aunt Joy are back too, and when I told Aunt Joy how much skinnier Mikhaila is this year than last year, she vowed to fatten her up a bit. Our music teacher, Miss McDonald, is starting an after-school choir, and I'm thinking of asking Mikhaila to join with me. I don't know. I feel responsible for her, not just because she's my roommate, but also because I'm so much older than she is. I mean, she's only fourteen and I'm seventeen, going on eighteen. And she's so alone here, so far away from home, far away from family and friends. I hope I can help her find her place here someday.

October 22, 1999

I got a letter from Cyndi! You wouldn't believe how full of joy and life she sounds now! She sure sounds a lot more like her old self—before the accident. I guess living on the same campus as Chris has done her a world of good. She even wrote smiley faces all over the page, something she hasn't done since I first came to the hostel and she stuck little notes in my locker. It's good to have her back!

Well, I really hauled in the mail today because I also got letters from Annie, Chris, and Nathaniel. Annie just talked all about how much fun she's having as a college senior. I can't believe she's almost *finished* college, when I haven't even started! I mean, wasn't it not too long ago that she came to the States and we put her into college? Wow. Time goes by so quickly. You know, I just thought of something my algebra II teacher Mr. Shultz taught us in tenth grade. He said, "Mathematically, if a implies b and b implies c , then a implies c . Therefore, the following argument is true. If time flies when you're having fun, and the older you get, the faster time flies, then the older you get, the more fun you have." Mr. Shultz. He sure was a funny guy!

Anyway, my do I ramble! Annie talked about her plans for next year. She's been studying secondary education math, so she wants to get a job teaching high school math

overseas. I hope she finds a job! She also wrote all about this one guy who's in her Christian Thought class named...what was it again? Oh yeah, Luke. Man, she talked on and on about him. I wonder if this will develop into something more. Hmm.

Chris' letter was really upbeat too. He's enjoying his college, and he likes having Cyndi around, even though they're not in many classes together. They make sure they see each other at least twice a week for pizza at the school cafeteria. It's good to know that they're taking care of each other. I know Chris would have a hard time if it weren't for Cyndi, and vice versa. They went to a football game together three weeks ago, and their team won. He went on and on about the game's technicalities; it was really funny because I've never heard him describe a sports event before!

And then there was Nathaniel's letter. He's going to school "at home" in Maine, and he's found a really nice church a few kilometers from the campus. It's a small, country church, non-denominational, and the pastor and his wife were once missionaries in India. From the way he described them, they must be a really nice couple. He also talked a lot about Maine itself—the weather, the landscape, the people. He said that when I come next summer, he wants me to come visit him so he can show me the Atlantic Ocean. I've never seen it except from a plane thousands of kilometers up. That would be grand! I cried when I read his letter. He didn't really say much, but I miss him so much.

December 25, 1999

My last Christmas in Africa for a long time, perhaps forever. Is that supposed to make me happy? Because it doesn't. It's rather depressing, actually. No more dusty Christmases in the bush or in Muntara. No more Christmas dinners. No more exchanging of gifts with the rest of the family. No more being shaken awake at 5 AM by Zach and Jarreth. No more rice and beans for supper. The list goes on and on. I can't believe this is my last Christmas in Africa, my last Christmas at home.



January 1, 2000

What a night! It's 2 AM right now, and I'm lying on my bed after a very long party. The senior class thoroughly welcomed the new millenium. Some of the jerks (I use that term lightly) in my class tried to convince the rest of us that the millenium doesn't start until 2001. Well, no duh, but who cares? This day has been looked forward to for decades, even centuries (do you think?). Who are they to tell us that we can't celebrate?

Wow, a whole new millenium begins. New beginnings in every way, especially for the senior class, who will definitely have new beginnings this year. Isn't it exciting to think that a land of opportunity is opening up with the start of this new millenium? Wow!! Think of all the technology that will be developed, all the songs that will be written, all the people in the bush who will learn that Jesus is Lord! Doesn't that excite you in the slightest? Wow! A whole new life is beginning in this year!

January 23, 2000

I'm going to vote this year!! Yep, I'm finally old enough to vote for the American president! Not that I really want to, but if I change my mind, I'm legally allowed to vote. Yeah! Eighteen hits the spot; what can I say?

I got quite a few birthday e-mails and cards today—even ones from Sean and Tanna! That sure was a surprise! Chris sent me an automated electronic card, which was really cool. He's such a sweet brother! Cyndi sent me ten dollars for me to save and spend when I get to the States this summer. Isn't that thoughtful? Nathaniel took advantage of a Lutheran missionary returning from furlough and sent me two bags of M&Ms. What a friend! All in all, it's been a great birthday, one I'll never forget.

April 29, 2000

I can't believe how quickly this year is going. Didn't I just start school a few weeks ago? And now it's already April, and five weeks until I graduate!! Five weeks until I give all this up and leave Africa for American college. In a way, I'm excited to leave and start a whole new life. That's what it will be, especially if I go to a college where no one knows me. But I'm going to miss Africa so much. And Oakwood—my teachers, my classmates, the underclassmen, the campus. The class of 2000 will split up and go its separate ways. That's so depressing. It wouldn't be so bad if I knew that I'd see them all again in heaven. But I don't have that assurance. Kamin isn't a Christian and doesn't plan on becoming one anytime soon. And what about Mutka? How can I say goodbye to them when I know there's a good chance I will *never* see them again?

I'm learning that I just have to enjoy my time left here. I've got senioritis, yes. Who doesn't? We all want school to be over with, but very few of us actually want to leave. It's rather odd, I suppose. It's going to be a long—but short—five weeks until graduation.

June 9, 2000

Well, here I am. The day has come. I'm sitting here on the floor of the girls' bathroom in my dress and red robe, wearing my matching tasseled cap. In just five minutes, I'll walk down the chapel aisle onto that platform on stage. I hope Miss McDonald doesn't get angry when she sees that I brought Teddy with me. Maybe I'll hide him in my robe until I get onstage. In five minutes, the processional will start, and we'll walk down the aisle. Phil—one of the guys in my hostel—was kind enough to ask me to walk with him. And in an hour and a half or so, I'll be graduated!! They'll hand me my diploma and congratulate me with a handshake. And then thirty minutes later, they'll ask us to stand and move our tassels. Holy cow. Is that really going to happen tonight? Where did the time go?

June 12, 2000

I can't write much right now because I really should be packing. We're leaving tomorrow, after all. But I just had to write once more in this little diary. Mom won't let me take it with me because I already have too much stuff, so she wants to keep it here. I'm leaving tomorrow. Leaving the stormy skies of June in Africa. Leaving the lightning bugs and the flying ants. Leaving the elephants, the African scorpions, the vipers. Leaving the people who will surround you with care when you need it most. Leaving the filth and poverty. Leaving home. How can I say goodbye to what has always been my home? How can I tear myself away just like that? I cannot. I mourn for you, Africa. I mourn for you because you are going downhill so quickly, and nothing is being done about it. I mourn for your people dying every day. I mourn for the babies with AIDS. I mourn for the children dying agonizing deaths of malnutrition. But I mourn most for your ignorance or rejection of my God. I leave you now, but someday I will return, and I will bring my God with me to share Him. I did a lousy job at that in my youth, but I swear I will share Him in the future. Goodbye Africa. Goodbye my home, sweet home.