



Global Friends
FOUNDATION

Shedding Sadness for Safari Dreams

By: Catherine Mulvale, Founder and Director, Global Friends Foundation

I look down at tattered shoes that are obviously too big, pants that are torn as well as too short, the man's shirt resting on a boy's shoulders and see nothing but potential. Although his circumstances are dire and he is sad – very sad -- I don't pity him. That sentiment will do him no good.

The dust swirls around us in the burning heat. The 14 year old boy, sitting on a stack of warped and weathered 2 x 4s shares his dream with me, "I want to be a safari guide." For most in his situation, this would be highly unlikely. He is an orphan living in a remote town in Tanzania, East Africa. He lives in extreme poverty in a country that offers too many challenges and too few opportunities. This boy, however, is a survivor. He has the benefit of a strong intellect and a determination that is steely. Unfortunate circumstances will not dictate his future.

It was seven years ago that Isaac Peter Asseno shared his dream with me. At the time, he had recently arrived at the Rafiki Orphan Care Home, the centre built with funding provided by Global Friends Foundation (GFF). Now, at 21, he is more determined than ever. Last week, as we walked under the hot African sun, he looked into my eyes and said in his thickly-accented, deep-timbered voice, "I will be **the best** safari guide in Tanzania. My company will be Rafiki Tours and Safari. You will be very proud."

With funding from GFF, Isaac has been enrolled in an 18 month program at Tanzania's Professional Tour Guide School (PROTS). He is the first Rafiki orphan to be registered in a licenced training program and he will be the first Rafiki orphan empowered to become self-sustaining. This is beyond exciting.

After just 5 months at PROTS, Isaac is already a walking encyclopedia. As we bump over safari roads that lead to vast expanses of animals, flowers and landforms, Isaac's desire to share the knowledge he has amassed is beautifully uninhibited. But, like a true professional, he controls his enthusiasm and gains our attention time and again with friendly invitations that all begin with an irresistible smile, direct eye contact, and a friendly, "Hallo....did you know....?"

Isaac lives in a country that offers too few opportunities. His life is going to be tough. It already has been. He has endured more sadness, prejudice and hardship than we will ever know but he will survive and thrive. He has already shown his resilience.

The days spent with us last week were full of firsts for Isaac. The first time staying in a hotel (with a buffet!), first ride in a Range Rover, first time on safari, and the first time being surrounded by Canadians who unconditionally love him and want nothing but the best for him. When I ask Isaac if he enjoyed his time with us, his answer is simple and fiercely sincere, "Yes, I like it so, **so** much. I am very happy."

Update 2018: Isaac is seeking full-time employment. Even with qualifications, it is difficult to find work. He has been seasonally contracted and received excellent reviews Leopard Tours, the largest safari company in Tanzania. He remains resolute about one day owning his own company.

To learn more about Isaac and the Global Friends Foundation, please visit www.GlobalFriendsFoundation.ca

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