

Teaching at Teso College 1962 and 1963

by Larry Olds



Teso College Administration Building in 1962

I arrived in late January 1962 at Teso College Aloet (TCA) a few days before the first term of the new year. I had already spent a term as a teacher at Makerere College School and learned I was a “maths teacher,” as the British say, not a “math teacher” as we would say in the U.S.A. When I arrived, I moved in the teacher's house furthest from the classrooms with one of my Teachers for East Africa colleagues, Doyle Knirk, who had already spent his first term in Uganda teaching science at TCA. My recollection is that all the teachers at that time were expatriates. We did have two student teachers from Makerere, James Bukosi who was from Kenya and a British classmate whose name I don't recall, who also lived with us during that first term. Before I left Uganda the next year Frank Pakose (he later became headmaster), a maths teacher from South Africa joined us. In 1963 when the West Campus was added to the school several of the teachers from the former technical school also joined us and improved the ratio of expatriates to Africa teachers.

Although all European when I arrived the teaching staff was a diverse lot. The headmaster Johnny Jones and the football/athletics master David Jones were Welsh; the Anglican/Protestant religion teacher Graham Hutchison was from Northern Ireland – Ulster, he would say; the Catholic religion and French teacher Louie Albers was a Dutch Mill Hill priest; the head of English, Barry Bleach, appropriately was English and also the cricket and tennis master – all were old timers compared to the four Americans on the staff. In addition to myself and Doyle Knirk, who I mention above, the other two Americans were Anne Womeldorf who taught English and Dr. Stout, a Fulbright Scholar whose year at TCA as a science teacher ended shortly after I arrived. Doyle and Anne were also part of the Teachers for East Africa program that took me to Uganda. All of the these teachers except Johnny Jones and Anne Womeldorf were gone before I left to return to the U.S.A. in late July 1963.

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Our first home at Teso College Aloet 1962



Basketball practice at TCA in 1962

When I arrived at TCA all of the teachers belonged to the Soroti Club in town 6 miles away which still had a whites only policy. I wasn't interested in joining since I both objected to that policy and didn't drink alcohol nor play golf or tennis at all which seemed to be the main reasons for the clubs existence. It was also the case that no one invited me to join, a fact that served me well a few weeks later. I was interested in starting basketball at the school and set out to get some backboards and rims, as well as supports for them. The school carpenter was set the task of making the four foot by six foot backboards. I found a

welding shop in town that made the rims as I instructed them to do. What remained was finding the supports for the back boards. When I heard that the Soroti town waterworks had old pipe available I went to see the manager who at that time, still months before independence for Uganda, was still a British Civil Servant. He had heard that I wouldn't join the Club and asked angrily why should he help me with the back board supports. I was able to say honestly that no one had invited me to join and besides, I didn't drink. I avoided having to add that I would not have joined as long as they discriminated. The manager mellowed and relaxed, and I drew him the design we needed to have a portable system that could be put onto the ends of the tarmac tennis court for basketball and removed for tennis matches. (Those same basketball back board supports were being used when I returned for a visit to TCA 38 years later, but then they were buried a foot or so under the murum of the new court rather than sitting on top of the tarmac. The rims were moved high on the back boards so they would still be 10 feet off the ground.)



TCA basketball court in 2000

Later that year the Soroti Club abandoned its whites only policy and elected a local Asian business man president. I did join for the latter part of my stay, played some squash and attended a few of the weekend curry dinners with the changing and now diverse membership.



TCA classrooms

I taught maths to all Forms but mostly to the A stream classes. Form 1A was my favorite class, a group I taught both years and from which many of the basketball players emerged. I also taught calculus for one term to the first A level class when it began in 1963. The Form 4A class my first year did fairly well on the Cambridge Overseas Mathematics Examinations, not as well as I would have liked, or as well as other classes would have in the future had I stayed and mastered better what it was the examiners wanted in the answers to their exam questions. One major issue I didn't resolve in that first year stemmed from the difference in style in the American and British approaches to Geometry. I introduced an American approach instead of myself mastering the British approach which might have given the students better examination results. On the other hand I had a remarkable encounter with a former TCA student in Kampala five years later. We met by chance on Kampala Road by the Post Office. I don't recall his name but he was then studying to be a maths teacher, by then involved in learning about the "New Maths." During that 1967 stay I was myself teaching the New Maths which emphasized understanding the meaning rather than rote learning at both a secondary school and a teacher training college near Kampala. I asked him how he was doing with new maths. He replied, "It was easy because of the way you taught us" - one of the most memorable compliments I ever got for my work.

I don't recall whether beginning the last term my first year or beginning my second year at the school, but for one of those terms the headmaster asked me to make up the school timetable for all the classes. It was a task right up my alley. It not only gave me control over my own teaching schedule,

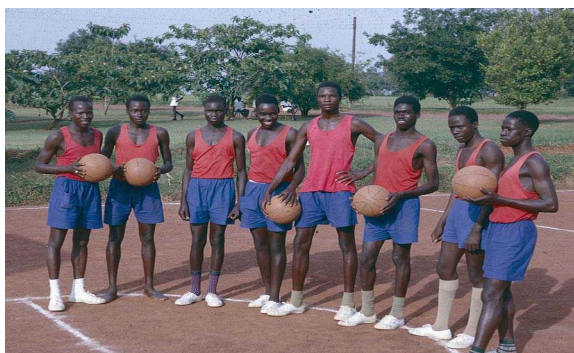
let me put into practice my ideas about sharing among all teachers the good times to teach and the bad. It also suited my problem solving and math skills. I continued to do the timetable the rest of my stay. It turns out Johnny Jones didn't like doing it and didn't much care when the classes he taught were scheduled.



Our second home at TCA

When one of the senior teachers and his family left Uganda, in January 1963 I moved from the teacher's house furthest from the classrooms to the one closest, a slightly bigger house with large well tended gardens. There I was joined by a new American teacher, Keith O'Dell, also a maths teacher, and a young British Volunteer, Andrew Jarvis who was spending a year teaching physics and maths before he began his studies at Oxford. The house was large enough so we also put up two American student teachers from Makerere for the first term of that year.

Because I was also a trained physical education teacher and myself active in sports, I also taught those classes on the school timetable. Now 50 years later as I write I am searching my brain unsuccessfully to find the name that the British, and thus the Ugandans, called what Americans call physical education. In addition to starting both basketball and softball teams I also became the athletics master my second year at TCA. I did have personal experience in school putting the shot and had fooled around throwing the discus a few times, but no experience with running or training runners. It was with this assignment that my one main conflict during my TCA experience developed.



Teso College's first basketball team

Without personal experience in training for running events (but with considerable experience with intense level of training for other sports – I had played college level American football, basketball, and baseball) I consulted several training manuals and developed a stretching and fitness routine. A large group of students came for the first training sessions for the new athletics season. TCA after all had some of the finest runners among students in the country. That year was no exception. After that first day, however, when I led the students through the stretching and fitness routines, most did not come back for the second or third day of practice. I then did not allow them to travel with the team for a weekend competition. This caused a big conflict with head prefect Omaria who was also the athletics captain and one of the country's best in the half mile. Only eight boys who had come to practices made the trip to the meet. Later I learned that the boys did not come back to practice because they were “sick,” which really meant sore from the stretching and fitness routine. They were not used to the movements they were asked to make during training, and didn't understand that the way to deal with the soreness was to continue to stretch and exercise. And in the sports culture of the school practice wasn't a requirement to compete. The team captain and the sport master just picked the competitors they thought were best. In retrospect I came to think my approach to sports discipline was wrong for the circumstance – right if the goal was to be “as good as you can be,” but not if it was to encourage participation and enjoyment.

There were two outstanding members of the team. Omaria for one who I mentioned above. He finished second in the half mile in the national championships that year. The other was Edward Esegu who clocked a 9.4 second 100 yards dash at a meet at Busoga College Mwiri. The world record at that time was 9.2 seconds.

For the first part of my time at TCA I left on many of the weekends to continue my involvement with basketball and other activities in Kampala, most weeks on Friday afternoon after classes making the 220 mile drive in four hours in my

Volkswagon bug. After the first half year or so I greatly reduced the number of trips except for going to Kampala to attend the Independence Celebration on Kololo Hill in October. The rest of my stay I confined my trips to the school breaks except for one or two in conjunction with my role in selecting and coaching the National Basketball Team. We had a training camp for the players during the school break. Two players from



Andrew Aliat at TCA home game

TCA, Andrew Aliat and Paul Nyangan, were on that national team making the trip to Nairobi in April 1963 for the first games by a Uganda team.

Students from TCA participated in the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) exchange programs which allowed a few selected students to attend high schools in the U.S.A. for one year. In 1962, Andrew Aliat was returning from his year. Also returning at the same time as Aliat was an Arab boy whose name I don't remember but who had been in Nebraska. He was the one who reported that before he left many people warned him about how cold it would be in America, but no one warned him about the heat he would face in Nebraska when he arrived in August when the temperatures would be well over 100 degrees.

In 1962 we sent three students on the program. One of them was known then as Atigo. During the second school break in August I collected him from his home – my first trip to a student's home in a rural area – and took him to the bus to begin the journey. He didn't come back like he was supposed to. He was an outstanding distance runner and received a scholarship to the University of Wisconsin where he stayed to finish a degree. He later became a politician Latigo Lal becoming a leader in Museveni's party. I saw him on a trip to Uganda in 1996. One of the students to go to the U.S.A. in 1963 was Edward who I visited in Illinois after returning from my two years in Uganda.

I have other memories of the time:

- taking my turns on duty monitoring evening study and the dorms
- teaching the boys waltz, foxtrot, and polka at dance club then was delighted when they performed traditional dance moves to polka music in a school concert
- starting school basketball and softball teams which played matches against Lango College and Sir Samuel Baker where other American teachers also started those sports



- playing cricket for the first time in the student-teacher cricket match.
- watching some of the school football (soccer) matches but not knowledgeable enough about the game to see the talented play and enjoy the matches. Just as I was leaving Uganda in 1963 I saw Uganda play Egypt, an event that sparked my real lifelong interest in the sport. I have long claimed that I went to Uganda and taught basketball and learned soccer.
- sports trips with the boys in the back of the school truck
- Supervising the Junior Secondary Exams at a remote rural school
- remembering the new beautiful buildings and well kept grounds
- being uncomfortable with the formality of the classroom and being called Sir
- giving as student a 100 on an exam and being criticized for it by other teachers even though by the standards I was using when marking the answers were perfect
- having to adjust to having servants – I was insensitive in terminating my houseboy and then living without anyone in a society with limited job opportunities for the people

The personal side had many rich experiences: time to read, listening to music tapes, dinner parties, rugby in Mbale, occasional outings for dinner and a movie in Mbale 60 miles away, visiting the orange plantation near Lake Kyoga, hippo hunting with Fr. Louie Albers on Lake Kyoga, excursion to Moroto, camping in Murchison Park with Shutters, hitch hiking from Kampala where I had gone for a Ford Foundation fellowship interview to Gulu to join TCA teams in an athletics and basketball meet, hosting other teachers from our Teachers for East Africa program, and social life with my teaching colleagues.



Anne Womeldorf, James Bukosi, British practice teacher, Cook Joseph, and Doyle Knirk at dinner

countries of British East Africa with many more African contemporaries. I assume the number of expatriates teaching at Teso College Aloit dwindled in the following years. But not in my time.

However, because I was at Teso College at the end of the colonial era and my teaching colleagues were expatriates rather than Ugandans, I missed developing the friendships I now wish I had with Ugandans of my age. I would have liked to have more conversations with local people like the wide ranging ones we had when for one term James Bukosi lived with us. To some degree I developed a relationship Frank Pakose after he joined our maths department but we never had exchanges of the quality of those meal table discussions with Bukosi. Many of the American colleagues were in other schools throughout the four



Myself at Murchison Falls

But beyond that, when in looking back at a time, I see I was very young – only 21 when I arrived. My first two years in Uganda, 19 months of it at TCA, was full of wonderful, rich experiences that helped form who I would become. I hope I taught, at least in some small part, as much as I learned.



Myself visiting in a rural area

