

Our Trip to Tanzania

In December 2009, a small group of people went to Tanzania for the International Solidarity Conference. The conference was held in Arusha, Tanzania, and the co-host was the United African Alliance Community Center (UAACC).

In my group was Gail Shaw, my partner, and Emory Douglas (BPP Revolutionary Artist). We took a 15 hr flight on Emirates Air to Dubai. After an overnight stay, we were off to Dar es Salaam - a five hour flight. We were picked up by Gail's son who works and lives in Dar es Salaam. Although we were only in the city one day, we went on an historical tour and visited the places where Malcolm and Che spent time. The next day we took a 2 hr ferry ride to Zanzibar to visit friends. After a short walk through historic Stonetown, we were off to Mwangapwani village for a few days. Our hosts were Aida and Mbarouk, who have a center and run several community programs in their village. We walked through the village, toured the old slave caves and visited the pristine beaches.

We flew from Zanzibar to Arusha and were picked up at the airport by Brother Pete O'Neal in the UAACC van. This was my first time meeting Brother Pete in person. (I spoke to him on the phone and we e-mail each other). The drive from the airport to UAACC was about 45 minutes and there were signs on the road about the UAACC with a Panther on them.

Once at the center we were welcomed by Sister Charlotte (Pete's wife) and their staff. They held a coming home ceremony for us. It was a moving event for me as it was my first time Back Home. Emory had been to North Africa in the 1970's, and Gail had been to Tanzania and UAACC a number of times. The next couple of days were spent at UAACC meeting people who also traveled to the Conference from other parts of Africa.

The conference was a two day event which brought together artists and activists to develop an understanding of both of our histories and struggles. There were workshops led by Brother Ambrose "Dunga" Akwabi on the art of recording and production. Kamau, a young brother from Nairobi, spoke on the history of Hip Hop in East Africa and its progressive roots. I did a workshop on the History of the BPP and the making of a Panther. Emory spoke on being an artist for the BPP. Gail Shaw spoke about her experiences with the BPP as a member of the Berkeley NCCF. Pete and Charlotte spoke about carrying on the legacy of the BPP. We also had a tree planting ceremony to honor our fallen comrades.

The Center is located near the base of Mt. Meru which is about 16,000 feet. Right outside the gates of the Center you can get a good view of both Mt. Meru and Mt. Kilimanjaro, the tallest mountain in Africa. You can see snow on the top of it. Being near the mountains, there are rivers and fresh water. One of the rivers near UAACC is

Usa River. We took a day trip there and Brother Kamau was our guide. We saw monkeys in the wild, beautiful butterflies, and enjoyed the river and the beauty of it all. On another day trip, Kamau showed us a hidden waterfall. The climb was up a steep trail and then down into a gorge. It was well worth it and we spent the day there. On the way back to the Center we stopped at the Mt Meru Game Lodge, a nice hotel with very good coffee and wild animals. Kathleen Cleaver joined us there. She also came for the conference and to visit Pete and Charlotte.

I learned that Tanzania has over 120 different tribes, and it is twice the size of California. It won its freedom from England in the 1960's. Julius Nyerere was their first president and emphasized unity among the different tribes by promoting the national language of Kiswahili. Tanzania was a member of the Frontline states in the struggle against apartheid.

One day we went to Tarangire National Park for a photo safari. Got an early start and drove for 2 ½ hrs. through Maasai land. We saw many villages, children herding cattle, men and women in traditional clothing, babies on backs, and women carrying water or other items on their heads.

It was a rainy day for a safari - the big cats don't like rain and head for cover. Despite the rain, it was a great day. The land was beautiful with acacia and baobab trees. We saw many elephants, impala, zebra, baboons, giraffe and many other animals and were able to take photos of them. The ride back to Arusha was good as I was able to take photos of people and living conditions.

Pete and Charlotte O'Neal are carrying on the Panther legacy through their work at the UAACC. They have a school which is run by volunteers and free to the community. Classes include English, computer science, film production, art, music, health, fashion design and whatever else the volunteers offer. They have a recording studio and support the growing progressive hip-hop community. They recently established the "Leaders of Tomorrow Children's Home" which supports 20 children from age 5-11. They are an integral part of their community. We encourage you to visit their website: www.uaacc.habari.co.tz for more information, volunteer opportunities or to plan a visit.