

Crossroads Africa — an a

From the universities of Canada choose 75 young men and women. Let them come from the Maritimes or the Prairies, from Montreal or Vancouver, from downtown Toronto or rural Alberta.

Next find 200 American students. Let them come from the ghetto, the countryside, or the suburb. Let them be white or black, pacifist or militant. It doesn't matter, as long as they're tolerant.

Mix thoroughly and divide into groups. Then take the teams and scatter them about the continent of Africa. Let some live in fine hotels and others in mud huts. Give them jobs to do; teaching jobs, building jobs, healing jobs. Promise them tools but trust in their ingenuity. Leave them for six weeks in the warmth of the African sun.

Such is the recipe for Crossroads.

"Holiday" in Africa

Operation Crossroads Africa is an organization sponsored by private individuals and organizations that sends young people aged 18 to 25 to spend two months in Africa, usually in a work camp setting. They go only to communities which invite them. Each group of North Americans has a counterpart group of African students with whom they live, work and share experiences. Canadian students pay \$500 towards the \$1,800 it costs to send them and promise to share their experiences and knowledge with 50 groups when they return home.

The organization was started in the United States 10 years ago by a Harlem Church minister, Dr. James Robinson. It has since spread across the border into Canada. During the past summer 75 Canadians made the trip overseas along with 200 Americans.

Two persons at the University of Alberta who participated in the program last summer contrast their experiences.

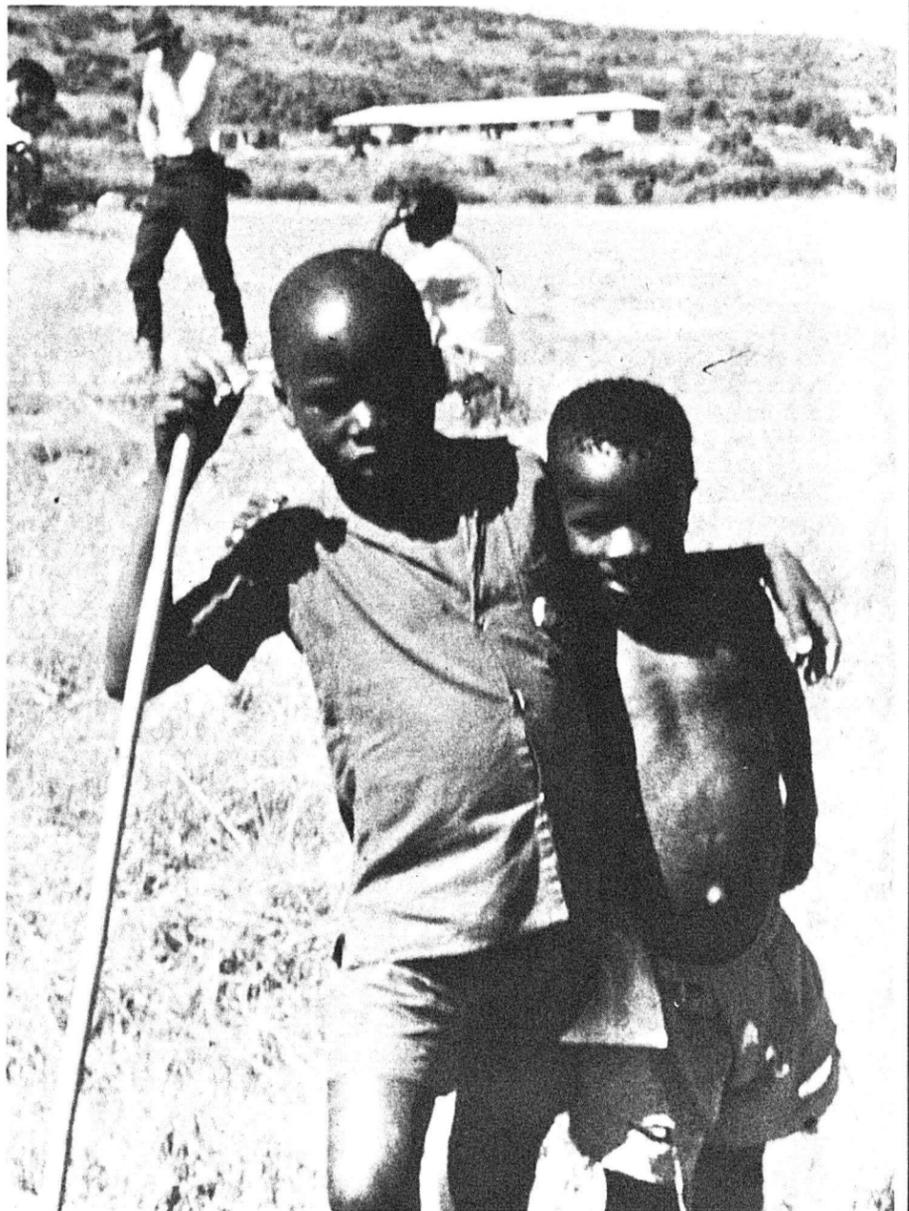
Rosemary McVicar is currently a graduate student in educational psychology. She lived in Kenya, on an island in Lake Victoria. "I was one of a group of 15 who were to help build a science laboratory for the secondary school. The island itself is a stable agricultural community; subsistence living but not the extreme poverty that exists in many parts of Africa. It was, however, largely undeveloped—no electricity or plumbing. Its only road hadn't been built until after the island was connected to the mainland by a pull-yourself ferry in 1962.

"We lived in mud huts like everyone else, at least the girls did: the boys were chased out of their hut by red army ants and had to move into the school. We had iron cots to sleep on but no mattresses and did all our own cooking outside."

Judy Fisher, now a clinical instructor at the University Hospital, was on the other side of the continent in Sierra Leone. Her group, which included medical personnel, was to help with a hospital clinic. The non-medical personnel would dig the foundation for a new hospital building.

Ants in the pills

"The first day was unbelievable. I was just told to work with the nurses. It was such a contrast to facilities here. The work included cleaning two cockroaches and one lizard out of the medicine cabinet and the ants out of the pills. After that I put up gutters to collect more rain water as they had only what was gathered in a single foot and a half long water trough to supply the 30-bed hospital. After these and a few other things like the unswept floors were improved, I started lecturing, stressing nutrition and the basic elements of good health. I was trying to adapt to their foods and conditions as best I could. I couldn't begin to teach bedside care as



BENSON AND OUMA, two of the boys of the island, pose in the foreground while two Crossroaders break the sod for the new science laboratory. The two boys spent most of their time entertaining those who were waiting their turn to work (there were only three picks and three shovels!).

there was not water for washing patients and anyway, there were no basins. We also went out in a Volkswagen van to hold mobile clinics.

"Then in the third week nearly everyone in our group—14 out of 20—got malaria. I had it for four days and then got measles, and was hardly able to work at the hospital after that."

Rosemary's work project was also interrupted. "Our tools were unbelievably bad. New ones had been ordered but hadn't arrived. We had the foundation almost completely dug when they gave out and we had to stop work. Then three days later, Tom Mboya, the Minister for Economic Planning and Development, was assassinated, and we were plunged into the political and tribal situation in Kenya.

Unrest threatened

"We had been to Mboya's home in Nairobi when we first arrived, as the island was his tribal home where his parents lived and he took a personal interest in the area, putting a great deal of his own money into its development. When he was shot, the whole

area went into shock. They relied on him tremendously and his death affected them not only as a tribe but individually. We spent the next week, while his body was lying in state in Nairobi, listening to rumors of riots between Mboya's tribe and the rival tribe which they felt was responsible for his death, and wondering if we would have to leave the country.

"We could do no more work on the building again until the last week when things calmed down enough for the people to get us some brick moulds and cement. We spent the rest of the time except for the final week, visiting people, teaching in the schools and helping the Mboya family cook for the hundreds of guests that descended on them every weekend for various ceremonies.

"I personally learned a great deal from the experience in that it gave me a sense of historical involvement that I had never had before. I also never realized before how strongly the tribal structure affects political, economic and social life in Africa."

The usefulness of the approach has been questioned by many who point to the short length of stay and the failure of many of the work projects.



THE BURRU was a traditional ceremony held 23 days after Tom Mboya's burial. The people of the island drove their cattle down to the sea and back to his home where the rest of the weekend was spent in festivities.