

First Report

Rotary Ambassadorial Scholar

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I would like to begin my First Report by thanking District 5710 for this opportunity and all the Rotarians who help to make this scholarship possible. In particular, I greatly appreciate the immense support of the Manhattan Rotary Clubs and the many members who have encouraged, mentored, and done so much for me in many aspects of my life--in and beyond Rotary. I am very grateful to serve as your ambassador. I also want to thank District 9350 and my hosts in Namibia and Southern Africa for their hospitality and generosity during my time here so far.

My first two months in Namibia have been fantastic. I am proud to be the first Ambassadorial Scholar hosted by the Otjiwarongo Club in Namibia and I have been warmly welcomed to their small rural community.

In contrast to the majority of Ambassadorial Scholars who take formal classes at a university, I am using my scholarship to fund research toward my doctorate degree at Michigan State University. I recently received my Master's degree in Anthropology and I am currently working toward my PhD in Sociocultural Anthropology and Ecology, Evolutionary Biology and Behavior. During my year in Namibia, I am affiliated with the Department of Sociology at the University of Namibia, and I look forward to upcoming opportunities for interaction with students and faculty at the university.

My research focuses on private conservancies in Namibia—locally planned and collectively managed areas of private land in which landholders pool their resources for purposes of collective wildlife management and nature conservation, tourism, and wildlife utilization. In a broad sense, my research project examines the relationships between environmental conservation and rural change in Namibia and builds on my interests in human/environment interactions, rural communities and grassland and savanna environments. Additionally, I view this research as part of a larger goal to connect people, places and similar issues from Namibia to my home in Kansas and the Great Plains. I am very grateful for this exceptional opportunity.

In many ways, my roles, responsibilities and goals as a researcher and as an Ambassadorial Scholar overlap and interconnect. In both roles I have the opportunity to interact with diverse groups of people, build relationships, learn about different ways of life, and share about my background and country. I have had the opportunity to visit many different farms for example, from some of the oldest German farms in Namibia to some of the newest resettlement farms as part of land reform. On these farms and in these rural regions, I have had opportunities to interact with farmers, farm workers, their families, and various other rural residents, and I have had many interesting exchanges

about the differences and similarities of rural life, agriculture and land issues in our respective countries.

I have also had the opportunity to learn about the fascinating small town of Otjiwarongo, including its many contradictions and disparities. Much of the town consists of dusty streets, lined with colorful adobe-style homes and green gardens. Shops fill only a few streets in the downtown, but include a number of fine cafes, serving strong German-style coffee, fresh bread and tasty food. The streets, sidewalks and businesses are often busy, and most of the faces reflect the town's majority populations of Herero, Damara and Ovambo peoples. On the edge of town are the "locations" or former townships, areas once the required residence of non-white Namibians during Apartheid years, which continue to be the home for thousands of Otjiwarongo's residents. Beyond this part of town, further out into the savanna, the poorest of the poor live in an area of makeshift homes referred to in English by some as "Tin-town". I have had many enlightening opportunities visit all parts of Otjiwarongo and speak with people of incredibly different backgrounds and ways of life. This I believe is one of my responsibilities and rewards as an Ambassadorial Scholar.

The Otjiwarongo Rotary club is small, with less than 20 members, but everyone is friendly, full of interesting stories, and has provided me with many great connections and invitations for my research. After lunchtime meetings at the Otjiwarongo Crocodile Ranch, a number of older gentlemen and I usually proceed to a small German café downtown for coffee. All have captivating perspectives on history and rural issues. One man even surprised me with a story of his visit, 55 years ago, to the Kansas Flint Hills. Although I usually leave these Friday afternoon coffee-drinking rituals nearly overdosed on caffeine, I've had the opportunity to hear many fascinating stories, discussions of politics and perspectives on Namibian history.

In addition to attending every club meeting since my arrival, I also helped set up and volunteered at the club's cake and coffee stand at a recent community event. I am currently working to organize a service trip to a Rotary-sponsored soup kitchen that primarily serves impoverished San (Bushmen) communities in eastern Namibia. I introduced myself to the local Interact club, and now that the students are returning from their school holidays, I look forward to interacting and contributing to their efforts and activities.

I have given Ambassadorial presentations to the Otjiwarongo, Windhoek and Auas Rotary Clubs, as well as the Otjiwarongo Photography Club and to two classes at the Otjiwarongo Secondary School. At the school I was asked to speak about my background, including life in Kansas and Michigan, my experiences in Namibia, as well as the topic of linguistic and cultural diversity in order to complement the week's discussion on language and culture. Toward the end of my presentation, I presented slides with facts on the world's languages, the rapid loss of linguistic diversity, efforts at revitalization, and voiced my interest in the rich linguistic and cultural diversity of Namibia. To end my visit, I told the students that I would really appreciate the opportunity to hear the variety of languages represented in their class. Students were eager to share phrases in Oshihherero, Damara, Oshiwambo, Tswana, German, Afrikaans, Silozi, as well as languages from Nigeria and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Not only was this exercise captivating for me, but feelings of pride seemed to fill the room as the students described their language, ethnic heritage and homes. For me and hopefully

for some other the students, this experience was inspiring and represented the value of cultural exchange and goodwill promoted by this scholarship.

I have begun to feel as though I'm becoming part of the of this rural Namibian community. When I walk around town, people are beginning to recognize me and remember my name—at the bank, the grocery store, the cafes, and in downtown shops. I can now stop in to say “hallo” to acquaintances, for example, in the local hardware shop, the tractor dealership, or the gun, ammunition and outdoors store. These visits also provide great opportunities to improve my German and practice Afrikaans and other languages. In many ways I view myself as an ‘everyday ambassador’—fostering the ideals of Rotary, spreading goodwill and presenting a positive image of my country through my everyday activities and interactions. The Rotary Ambassadorial Scholarship provides me with an exceptional opportunity for research, community interaction and cultural exchange, and I hope that in the remainder of my year in Namibia and Southern Africa I can make positive contributions through my multiple roles and activities. I know that in just a short period of time, many people here have already impacted me. Thank you for this opportunity to serve as your ambassador.