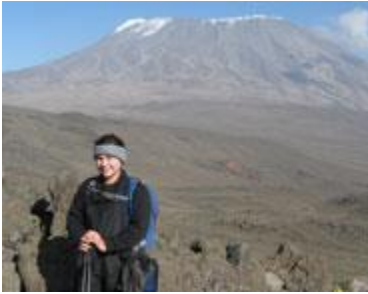


Reaching Africa's Roof

September 25, 2008



Stonehill senior Alexandra Fanizzi felt pushed to her limits during a climb up Africa's Mount Kilimanjaro over the summer. For days she had been nursing a pulled hamstring and to make matters worse- it started to rain.

For his 50th birthday, Alexandra's father Peter decided to fulfill his life-long dream of climbing Africa's highest peak alongside his daughter. Nearing the end of a six-day, five-night adventure, the two knew they were inching close to Africa's roof when they realized the mist they felt against their skin wasn't rain- they were walking through clouds.

For Alexandra, this was her first mountain hike. She and her father had hiked rocky cliffs on a trip to Newfoundland a few years ago but never anything like the 19,340 foot Kilimanjaro.

Always up for a challenge, she trained for three months despite a hectic schedule. As an international studies and Spanish major, Alexandra has kept herself busy at Stonehill. Since February she has been an intern in the Archives and Special Collections Department on campus and also works in the Sports Complex. She is the president of the Spanish club and will be a "Mr. Stonehill" host this year.

She has completed summer internships at AIG Global Investments, Thomson Reuters, and the New York City Law Department. Alexandra studied in Madrid in 2007 as well.

Of all her travels, the trip to Kilimanjaro may have been the longest but it was also the most exhilarating.

"The cool part about flying into Kilimanjaro airport is that you actually fly right over the peak that you're about to climb on. All I could think about when I saw the peak was there is no way I am going to make it," said Alexandra.



Many of the children and teachers Alexandra and her father met when they visited a community center in Tanzania during their first two days in the area, voiced the same reservations.

"Everyone who saw me was saying 'you're going to climb Mount Kilimanjaro?' But even more so they were saying that to my father because he is a big guy so they were all shocked that we were going to attempt it."

The children, all orphan boys, were more excited than shocked during the Fanizzis' day-long visit though. "They were ecstatic when we gave them soccer equipment, jerseys and t-shirts. They even sang songs for us," said Alexandra, who played soccer with the boys for a good part of the day.



Two days later their 19,340 foot journey began. "We first went to our camp site which looked like a regular park but then all of a sudden we saw baboons running around so we quickly realized it wasn't a normal park."

Traveling with guides, who cooked for them and set up their tents, Alexandra and her father hiked for roughly five hours on their first day and were rewarded with some of Africa's stunning scenery and wildlife.

"We settled into a rain forest and saw black-and-white colobus monkeys swinging from trees."

The gorgeous scenery only got better from there as the Fanizzis ate lunch from an area where they had a perfect view of the Kilimanjaro peak the following day.

As they climbed higher and higher altitude sickness became a big concern as most climbers suffer some form of it while an average of ten die each year.

"Our guides told us 'pole, pole,' which means slowly, slowly. The slower you go the more time you have to acclimate yourself to the altitude," noted Alexandra.

"I'm convinced that is the main reason we didn't get sick. The fact I pulled a hamstring actually probably helped me too," added Alexandra, who normally walks fast. "I was in a lot of pain so I was forced to walk more slowly."

Eventually the Fanizzis reached a section of volcanic ruins where lava rocks covered the ground. "There were some areas where you could see where the lava had been flowing and we saw these beautiful flowers everywhere that the guides called everlasting flowers. It was unreal to see them in the lava in the middle of this completely rocky terrain."

By the last day, their climb got steeper and steeper and colder and colder. Hiking through a desert like terrain with extremely strong winds, their trek up to the Gilman's Point was a struggle.

"We kept slipping on the rocks and sand so we'd have to start over," said Alexandra, who was exhausted and in tremendous pain after the six-hour straight climb.



"We got to see the sun rise from Gilman's Point, which was unbelievable, but then I realized we still had another hour to go to get to the next peak."

The tour guides pushed the two to continue onto Uhuru Peak, which is the highest point in Africa and one of the Seven Summits. Due to Kilimanjaro's equatorial location and high elevation, almost every climate type on earth is represented, including the year-round snow-topped Uhuru peak.

"We went from standing in a desert area to standing in snow on the top of Africa. It was such an amazing and rewarding experience."

Asked if she would attempt to climb the 28,251 foot K2 mountain, Alexandra said she is willing to try one day. For now, she has her sights set on skydiving next month with her father, adding to the list of adventures for this father-daughter team.