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"Mzungu, you're famous now," the group of boda boda drivers shouted at me laughing and pointing to their radios. Mzungu, a Bantu word for foreigner, became my unofficial name the month I spent reporting on HIV for the Daily Monitor, Uganda's largest independent newspaper. Link to the story

The drivers finally had an answer why three Americans were hiking across their island after I made my debut on Radio Ssese talking about my time reporting on the island's HIV medication shortage.

Despite thousands of people in HIV treatment on the island, the National Medical Store shipped the local clinic medicine weeks away from expiration. I was shocked with the lack of accountability securing drugs so many depended on to survive. Later, after we used our first-hand reporting to confront the district health official who claimed shortages weren't foreseeable, I felt a renewed sense of purpose to hold those in power accountable to the truth.

I was never meant to spend my time in Uganda on the Ssese Islands, but I was hooked after hearing a few Daily Monitor reporters describe the people living there. I also felt compelled to cover an area that normally didn't warrant Ugandan national coverage. The islands make up one of Uganda's poorest and smallest district, allowing bureaucratic mistakes to go under reported. It was rewarding to cover a story I thought hadn't been publicized enough.

If I had remained in the capital with the other interns I could have never uncovered the proof I needed for my story or found the people most affected by it. Only by being there to bare witness could I see the real story.

I try to never lose site of this when covering stories back in the States. Many of the stories I work on are data driven and it could be easy to forget the value of talking to the people actually affected by the issue. Luckily I think back to confronting a lying bureaucrat with photographic proof of my question or being thanked by a patient for traveling so far out of my way to cover her story, and I remember burning a little boot leather is always worth it.

I have written mostly about my passion for reporting, but you also could say I have a budding love affair with programming. At first, I didn't think the interest would last, but now I know I could never go back. I fell in love with data journalism once I realized it is more about interviewing the data to develop story ideas than it is about plain arithmetic. Another turning point was when I started using visualization as an exploratory tool in the reporting process, not just at the end of it. I now realize that storytelling and programming aren't separate things but rather intertwined.

Given the opportunity to help you team I would learn as much as I could about reporting and presenting the news. Besides the month of reporting in Uganda, all of my experience has been with student publications or my University. I would love to take these skills and develop them in a professional environment.