

**Rachel Brown,
PCUSA Young Adult Volunteer in Kenya,
from her Blog**

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This deserves a more mature title, but how about "A Crappy Day."

It took me a while to get up the courage to suck it up and grab a fist-full of cow manure. If the smell wasn't enough to drive me away, the sight wasn't much better, and out of all of the new experiences I thought I'd have in Kenya, patching a cracked, clay stove with cow poop wasn't one of them. But when the opportunity presents itself, what can you do but take a handful and go at it?

Let me back up. Shurie and I had spent most of our Monday morning doing boring Monday morning chores, like sweeping the floor, taking out the trash, doing the dishes and washing our clothes. Even though I've been washing my clothes by hand for nearly eight months now, I still hate it with the same intensity as that very first time. So when I heard Keith yell at me to come downstairs, I eagerly left my muddy socks to soak a while longer.

"Will you help me in the shamba (garden)?" were Keith's exact words. Not, "can you help me patch the stove," or "I know this sounds gross, but..."

So we went to the garden and began digging a rather large hole. I must not be very good at digging holes, (who knew?) for Shurie and Keith got a pretty good kick out of the sight of me holding a hoe. ("Aye-ya! Common, what's so funny?" I asked with my awkward handhold on the stupid thing, dirt in my hair, and all the irritation I could muster before I started laughing.)

Once Keith deemed the hole adequate, we filled it with water. As Keith began squishing mud between his toes he said, "Leshel, remove your shoes! We are making mud!"

Suddenly I was five years old, scoffing at the other girls with mud all over their fancy Easter dresses or politely coughing with upturned nose as my own sister rolled in the dirt with our dogs. It's no secret that I've never liked being dirty. And while my thoughts raced somewhere between, "Rachel, you could get worms" and "I mean, I do like playing in the mud with my shoes on" I said a quiet, "Sure" and the shoes came off.

We then carried our mud handful by dirty handful up to the outside stove that had cracked from the heat. As we took small balls of mud in our hands and began our work, Maureen came out of the house saying something in Kiswahili with a foul look on her face. I distinctly remember hearing the words, "poopoo fresh" coming from her mouth right before she looked at me and smiled.

I'll admit that I flat out refused to go with Keith and Shurie into the cow pin. I find no shame in politely waiting by the gate, staying out of everyone's way. I'll even admit that I refused to help Keith mix the poop with the mud. Heck, I wouldn't even touch the stuff long after Shurie had stuck her own hands into the mess. Keith kept begging for my help, but my mouth always formulated an involuntary, yet firm, "NO."

I probably stood there watching for five minutes before it happened. There I was again, struggling

between two thoughts: “Rachel, doesn’t that one cow have rabies? There’s no telling whose poop is whose!” and “This would make a good story....”

Keith stopped working and his eyes followed my hands as I bit my lip, held my breath and picked up a big wad of muddy poop. We smiled at each other awkwardly and worked until the stove was completely patched.

Although I ended up washing my hands with bleach and antibacterial soap about 16 times that evening, I can say that I have now officially exited my comfort zone. I never knew that being a YAV could take such extreme heights. But I don’t regret my decision. In fact, I think I’m proud.

Three days later, the stove cracked again...Murphey’s Law?

Posted by Rachel at [1:51 AM](#) [0 comments](#) 