

arts

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PHOTOGRAPHY

WORTH A THOUSAND WORDS

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While he is a corporate photographer by trade, William Jans' photography shows are a far cry from the business world. A performer as well as a photographer, Jans documents his travels through Africa, South America and South-East Asia, by combining still photographs with videos, storytelling, music and tactile elements (at one of his shows, he brought giraffe excrement for the audience to touch).

The Vancouver-based Jans began sharing his travel experiences since he began travelling as a child. In 1989, he put together his first show, performing it for his friends. They found it funny and encouraged him to do it again. Since then he has performed for thousands of people, across the country.

Jans tries to reach out to the people he meets on his journeys. "I don't stand back and watch things happen," he said. "I kind of try to get in there and participate." He said many of the people have been very welcoming. "The people that I'm getting to meet seem to have just as much fun by some *mzungu*, which is the Swahili word for 'whitey', trying to fit in."

He said that one of the tribes he stayed with in Tanzania enjoyed his company so much that they sacrificed a goat in his honour. "I was offered the honour of being able to eat some of the spinal cord, which is what the elders get to eat," he said. "And I gotta tell you, Cheerios are much, much better."

Despite the language barrier Jans said he still tries to be outgoing. "I don't find it hard to get along with people at all. I find it really wonderful and quite easy. Sometimes it's quite hard to understand each other, but it's all very friendly and smiley."

As he learned some of the local language, he realized that some of the locals were making fun of his baldness.

"Because I was learning more of the language, I would sometimes stop and say, in Swahili, 'No, no, I'm not just bald, I'm bold and handsome!' And they would laugh and I get to make new



WHILE VISITING THE DUSTY ENGARUKA PLAINS IN TANZANIA, JANS BEFRIENDS AS MANY LOCALS AS HE MEETS. FROM MAKING THE MAASAI WOMEN LAUGH TO DRESSING IN LOCAL GARB, JANS HAS MANY TALES TO TELL.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF WILLIAM JANS

friends."

But there's also been danger in Jans' adventurous travels. During his time in the Amazon, he shot a video while swimming with anacondas,

electric eels and sting rays. He was also robbed while in South America, which also ended up on film and is now part of his show.

Coming to Montreal: Tales from Tanzania, Oct. 14 and Solo in South America, Oct. 21
For more information, visit William Jans' web site at www.wrjphoto.com.