

MY SECOND JOURNEY TO KENYA
JULY 18-28, 2008
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It has been a year since going on the incredible journey to Kenya. I am so very grateful that I was able to return. There has been much unrest and violence after the election in December, so we weren't allowed to go to the Kibera slums. That saddened me, as I wanted to revisit some of those dear people that I met last year.

The trip this year was an all medical mission trip, sponsored again by Comfort the Children, Int'l. Twenty of us met in Chicago and then on to Heathrow Airport in London. I started out from Wichita on American Airways with 2 other RN's., Beth Condie from St. James and Diane Kruger from Newton. We arrived in Chicago very late, barely made the British Airways flight. My plans to sleep on the way to London were halted by crying child all the way. On the next plane to Nairobi, I sat next to a Kenyan who runs in US Marathons. He told me he came in 3rd in Boston, 2nd in Chicago and 1st in Las Vegas. A really nice man.

The medical trip was comprised of a Pharmacist, Pat Parker from Lawrence, a Dentist, Jeff Armstrong, Lawrence, who did hundreds of extractions during the week. Kenyans teeth are terrible, painful, broken and rotten. Our CTC Medical Director, Dr. Steve Segebrecht (ENT) from Lawrence led our group very efficiently. Jackie Holdcraft, MD from KC was the other physician. The remainder of the group was a dental student, many nurses, medical and nursing students. This was a delightful group which lended great "shop talk" at our nightly gatherings.

Our first night (Sat) was in the Stanley Hotel in Nairobi--- they have a lush breakfast buffet. Several of us took a taxi to the Anglican Cathedral for a service. Then we boarded vans to go to the city market for bottled water and supplies. Also did some SERIOUS shopping in a tiny shop where I purchased many lovely scarves, jewelry, soapstone vases, and other souvenirs for Christmas!

Bags in hand, we drove off to our home for the week --- the Jamuru Conference Center in Lumuru. It is next to St. Paul's Theological Seminary and is used as a dormitory. It was a very long walk from the front desk to our rooms upstairs. We each had our own room with a single bed, tiny closet, desk and bathroom. Great to have a shower, but they don't believe in shower curtains, so water spewed all over the bathroom at each use. The dining room was open to the outdoors with a chef and buffet laden with food. Most of the meals were quite good, especially the salads and dessert (especially, my favorite Flan). After each dinner we had a session in an upstairs Dove Room with a welcome fireplace. The first night Alison Costain, the CTC Kenya director gave us our schedules for the week. Dr. Steve led us in a nice compliance service.

Then off to bed. It's winter in Kenya and I nearly froze in the cold bed, in spite of lots of wool blankets. I came from the uppers 90's in KS to the 40's in Kenya! Got up at 6:15 a.m., dressed in scrubs and off to the big breakfast buffet where everyone was talking about how nice the hot water bottles were to put at their feet. No one told me I was supposed to pick on up at the desk. I made sure to do that every night after that.

Last year we traveled in a big bus with no shock absorbers over the very bumpy roads. But this year we traveled in 3 vans, much more comfortably. We arrived at the Clinic about 8 a.m., after a 45 minutes drive. The clinic is a large cement block building shaped in a U with rooms around the perimeter for Pharmacy, OB'GYN, Doctors, Intake, Dentist and Eye Clinic. In the center of this are many rows of benches which soon filled with hundreds who had signed up, patiently waiting. There were elderly, children, crying babies, all dressed in very warm clothes. At times it was a bit chaotic and noisy, but not disorderly. There were all happy to have medical care.

Since the main language is Swahili, we each were assigned an interpreter. The children in school speak good English, but many of the adults don't. I was truly blessed to have a delightful

interpreter, Sammy Nigi, who graduates from Secondary school and wants to attend college if he can get assistance. He was so good natured, happy and very helpful. Amazed when I told him I was 78, he called me “Mom” from then on. We set up the eye clinic the first morning. We had 200 pairs of reading glasses of different strengths which we lined up in order in the cupboards, also had eye drops and vitamins. When I first got my assignment from Steve I was sure I wouldn’t have much to do. WRONG! The first day I saw 48 patients. Everyone in Kenya seems to have dry eyes, irritates, watery and itch from the wind and the tiny homes with charcoal or wood fires and no ventilation. Sammy and I had them read the eye charts and gave them reading glasses. I used my pen light flashlight to examine their eyes. Found some with severe conjunctivitis, so I wrote prescriptions for meds that they had filled at the pharmacy. Nearly everyone went out with eye drops and vitamins, and many with glasses. It was truly amazing to witness the joy when, with glasses, they were able to read! Many broad smiles of gratitude. I gave every patient a cross and said a short prayer, which often brought tears. Sadly, I had a number who were blind, but at least the eye drops relieved the itching. All the people were so grateful! Made my heart feel good.

Our lunch each of the five days was the protein bars I brought for Sammy and me. The bathroom for the clinic was a one holer! Thanks goodness I brought my own Charmin! On some days someone brought us mugs of hot delicious Chai tea. One day someone brought sacks of warm Chapitima at times. The a feeling of despair that so little can be done with all the needs. That night Alison read a lovely devotion from ““Becoming Human” which brought me back to reality as each of us had tears as we talked about the highs and lows of our days. How blessed it was to bond with others and share our joys and frustrations. A great nights sleep with my friend the hot water bottle at my feet. Thanks be to God for bringing me here to this far away country.

We had four births during the week in the clinic. I observed the delivery of one baby. Later I found out the baby was named Gladys, so I rushed over and held it. Alison again had a lovely devotional with music, followed by small group discussions.

Thursday was a rainy, cool day. Again saw over 40 people, all happy to have these cheap glasses and drops. I left at 3 that day by van to visit with Mary, who led the HIV/AIDS project that I secured funds from several St. James people in Wichita. Took a long, bumpy road in MM. Mary has a degree in Theology, a lovely Kenyan. She proudly showed me her monthly report about the visits, challenges, goals and frustrations of her job. The first home we visited was Samuel. Mary began visiting him in March when he was depressed and suicidal. His wife left him with their son when he became ill. Mary got him help for new meds and now he is a happy, cheerful man who now has a job as a brick mason. He complained that the meds leave him with “coldness” in his chest, so I gave Alison money to get him a hot water bottle to see if that would help.

The project brings a nurse from the hospital and they go door to door to test patients for HIV. The second home we visited was Peter Mins. He has a stroke three years ago and was left with left sided paralysis, so he walks with a cane. His sister live with him to care for him and also has a nice garden. Mary wants to help him in a small business venture..... a kiosk to sell veggies, flour and staples to keep him busy. I prayed for both families.

We had to get up really early on Friday to go to the Masaii tribal area to set up a clinic in the run down metal church. My eye clinic was in a tent. Zane Wileman (head of CTC) asked if I would like to visit one of the homes. I was so excited since I didn’t get to do that last year.

Several of us walked about a mile to the “home” of Elizabeth. She built the hut all by herself. Men herd cattle, women do all the work. The hut was built with sturdy poles in a circle, then covered with cow dung with a roof of grasses and reeds. when I entered, I was shocked by the utter blackness of the house. I had to hold on to others to feel our way into the dark home, only lit by a single candle-like wick in a jar. I was unable to see anyone or anything. The only window was a 4” square. She said because of the cold at night they only have the one opening. With a translator,

she willingly answered all our questions. She has 3 children, but they can't go to school because it's so far away. A preschool is held in the church and hopefully an elementary school will be built someday when funding is available. I almost became claustrophobic in the dark, dirt floored hut. She was so happy that we had some to visit. She explained that she had female circumcision because her husband would not marry her if she didn't..... said it was quite painful. then she donned the Masai bright, beautiful clothes and beads and we took pictures outside. Then we all walked back to the clinic. I bought a beaded belt from Elizabeth. What an experience! I can't imagine living like that, but these people know no better, and are grateful for what they have. The Masai have many strange cultural beliefs, and some are now going to the Christian church.

After dinner Friday night we packed up all our gear and a small bag to take to the Safari. On Saturday morning we drove to Wilson Airport to board small jet planes to go to Masa Mari Reserve which is about an hours flight.. The beautiful lodge sits near a river; the eating area is the open air for sumptuous buffets. Dr. Jackie and I stayed in # 16 one of the canvas cabins right next to the river where about 30 hippos were lacing in the filled pillows, lovely furniture. A truly romantic setting with chirping birds and grunting hippos. We ere on the safari trucks from about 3:30 p.m. till 7 p.m. We saw many zebra, gazelles, baboons, white rhino with a nursing baby, warthogs, reticulated giraffes. A male giraffe (they have a short horn) was eating from a trees---- so graceful are these, my favorite animal. we found wildebeests, cheetahs, male lions, and two female lions and a nest of newly born cubs, and a hyena.

Back to the lodge for a fabulous meal and an after dinner banana drink (like Baileys).... then to the cabin for a wonderful sleep. Up in the early morning before sunrise to go out again to see more safari animals. A delicious breakfast was waiting for us upon our return.

What a vast difference between this lush place and the poor, needy people of Kenya. Somehow it just doesn't seem right.

Then, sadly, we drove back to the airport and took the small plane to the Nairobi airport where we claimed our bags and did some repacking. Tired and weary, we left on the trip to London where we had a six hour layover! Then onto the extremely tiring 10 hour flight to Dallas and another layover to go to Wichita. It was hard to say goodbye to my new wonderful friends. Arrived home at 8 p.m.

Looking back, I am so very grateful for this changing journey. The Kenyans are so gracious, grateful and devoutly faith-filled people. I am glad I was assigned to the Eye Clinic, as when I looked into each of their eyes, I saw God! My heart is full and I already miss my Sammy and all the people. This experience was a labor of love, but by so doing I became more human and aware of this worlds' needs. I feel that when we help each other, we better both of our worlds. I think and pray for these dear people every day and will never forget them.