



VOSH Africa - A Dream Come True

By Joyce Crawley

To go on a mission to provide care for poor people in a country with few resources is always fulfilling - you come back with more than you gave. The Africa mission went ten steps above any mission I've been on and fulfilled a childhood dream.

I was a Tarzan fan. I watched all the old movies and dreamed of adventures, lions, elephants and the Massai Mara. VOSH allowed me to live my dream last November.

Our VOSH mission began with the longest jet flight I'd ever taken. We were in the air for 15 hours. Upon arrival in Nairobi we were met with an amazing team of tour guides from Mi-cato Safaris who set up a welcome orientation at the Hilton Hotel. We didn't know it then, but these guides would become our friends and watched over us every step of our journey.

Kibera Slums

The next day we traveled to a school in the middle of the Kibera Slums. Kibera is six hundred acres (and growing) of mud and filth with a black stinking stream running down the middle. It is an illegal squatters camp, and receives no government sanction or funds.

The smell of wood fires, fried fish, excrement, body odor and rubbish jumps at you, but you expect it because 800,000 people live there. They are the poorest of the poor.

Even with all of this, there is enterprise. On the front of the tin or wood slat huts are signs for barbers, carpenters, hairdressers, butchers, driving schools and even "hotels". The sound of rap music comes from everywhere.

We arrived at Olympic Primary School, a private, gated school in the middle of the slum educating 2500 students. There are no public schools.



The children, dressed in their blue uniforms, "cleaned" the path to our worksite every morning with tiny handmade brooms and dirty water.

We set up and readied our mission for the next day.

This isn't like any school we know - there are 36 teachers with 70 to 80 students per class. The children are amazingly quiet in class and their graduation rate is 100%. They know education is their only way out and the expectations of the teachers are very high. The year end exam scores tell them what school they will be accepted to, so there is a great effort made to learn and score high marks. There are no amenities - no computers, no lunchroom, no gym. Lunch is provided to them by an open air kitchen where vats of gruel are cooked for lunch.

We spent four days lining up hundreds of patients, many of whom were dressed in their best - or in clan costumes. Almost everyone speaks English so there was no language barrier. That made it easier to know more about their life here in this horrible place.

A beautiful young woman holding a child tried to sell me some purses she'd woven. They are decorated with beads and very well done. She has

HIV and this is her only income. The child has so far tested negative for HIV. She only hopes to live long enough to see her child to adulthood, but the likelihood of that is slim. She worries about what will happen to her child when she is gone and has no one to care for her. I buy one of her purses for \$8 and wish her well. The tears come later. Her story is not uncommon here.

The people of Kibera are amazingly resilient. They walk miles to work because they can't afford a bus or taxi, they will sell you whatever they can scrounge or the shirt off their backs so they can send their children to school and live another day. It is something I will never forget and it reminded me how blessed I am.



View from the Olympic Primary school where the mission took place. Kibera slum is the 2nd largest in Africa at more than 600 acres and growing.

We served over 1800 people in the slums, and each was patient waiting in line. We worked each day from early morning to mid afternoon, when we were treated to side trips to a giraffe sanctuary, a tour of the home of the "Out of Africa" author, Karen Blixen and a wonderful HIV Children's Hospital and home outside of Nairobi.



Begging for treats at the Giraffe Sanctuary, outside Nairobi.

The Giraffe Sanctuary

The giraffe sanctuary was great fun. Feeding them was easy - they would either bend down or you could meet them face-to-face on a platform. They are very tame but demanding of the treats you bring.

Children's AIDS Hospital

At the Nyumbani Watoto Wamungu Children's Aids Hospital (in English "At home Children of God.") we were treated to songs by the children. Every time they would end a song, one of the little guys would begin a new one with tremendous gusto so the rest would chime in. I named him "Little Man Africa". He represented his country well and would have still been singing if the nuns hadn't stopped him.

Protus Lumniti is the Chief Manager of the hospital, where more than 70 children a week attempt to get in for treatment. The ones who live here are the ones who need help the most, and many have died here. Protus explained that ages birth to 12 are accepted and can stay there only until age 18. The demand is huge but they can handle only 120 at a time.

Their funding comes from private donations, The World Health Organization and from others all over the world. They depend upon doctors traveling groups to come in and assist as often as possible. There are 120 staff members, including a nutritionist, doctors, consultants, volunteers and the nuns who care for the children. We toured the children's rooms, the doctors quarters and the carefully manicured grave sites of those children who died. The tour was both uplifting and sobering.



Karen Blixen Estate

Another side trip fulfilled yet another dream of mine. "Out of Africa" was one of my favorite books and movies. It tells the tale of Karen Blixen's life on her coffee farm in the Ngong Hills outside Nairobi. It's a love story as much about Africa itself as it is about her life with her husband and her lover. The farm failed after several years, and she finally returned to Denmark, never to return.

The home and grounds have been carefully maintained, although the farm itself is gone. Many of the original pieces of furniture have been reclaimed and are on display.



The Karen Blixen estate, above, was a side trip treat - unfortunately, Robert Redford was not there for the tour.

Dr. Frischman and her daughters Alexa and Leah sit under one of the huge bougainvillea trees on the Blixen estate.

The property is beautifully manicured.



"Little man Africa" (left) gives a thumbs up for the crayons we brought as gifts. Above, the children of the Aids Hospital sing a welcome for us.

The Mountain Lodge

The group was treated to a long drive to our next stop - a Lodge high up in the mountains surrounded by a forest filled with animals. Upon entering our room, we were greeted by monkeys running up and down a platform next to our balcony. Dr. Steve Evers and Linda Ellis discovered within minutes not to leave your balcony door open as a monkey got into both rooms. The monkey trashed luggage, emptied orange juice on the bed and in general destroyed whatever he found.

A large open air viewing bar on the third floor gave us a perfect view of all the animals at the watering hole.



Many of us went on a walking tour through the rain forest. It was both interesting and a little frightening as we stared directly into the eyes of some elephants and some menacing buffalo. All was well as we found our way through the mud to a clearing where coffee and scones awaited us. Our guide was an amazing story teller and we learned about the MauMau warriors and the many wars of Africa.

The Lodge overlooks a watering hole with reeds in the center shaped like Africa. We all spent hours watching the elephants, buffalo, antelope, baboons, and a myriad of other animals come to drink from the safety of our balconies.



The Watering hole at the Lodge provided us with great entertainment as the animals arrived to drink.



An armed guard is required on any forest walk. It can be very dangerous, especially the buffalo who are notorious for charging people - and they usually aren't bluffing. Below, Joyce Crawley, Linda and Paul Carmody enjoy coffee at the halfway point in the forest.



Sweetwaters

Sweetwaters Tented Camp lies in the heart of privately owned 24,000 acres of Ol Pejeta - Sweetwaters Conservancy, enjoying magnificent views across the game - studded plains to the snowcapped peaks of Mount Kenya. For safety, the tents are separated from the watering hole by a fence and a deep ditch.

This is where we learned about why so many wart hogs become lunch for the lions. It seems they put their tail in the air and run when danger is near, but they forget why they are running pretty quickly - so for the predators - lunch is served. We watched and laughed hysterically as they did just that every time danger was near.

Part of the Sweetwaters camp is a chimpanzee sanctuary where Jane Goodall's chimps are kept. We had the opportunity to see them and read their stories. Most had come from horrible conditions or been abused by an owner. Here at the sanctuary they are free to roam and live in families as they would in the wild.

On another little side trip here we were thrilled to meet a rhino that was had been saved from poachers and is now protected in a huge boma. He is so accustomed to humans now that we were allowed to touch him. He had a buddy - a wart hog - who shared his dinner with him and was a constant companion.

Mukuru Slum and Micato's Harambee House

We had seen slums, but nothing like the Mukuru slums. The mud lays 2 feet deep in the narrow streets. Huts on both sides of the road are even worse than what we saw in Kibera. We were headed to Harambee House, funded by Micato Safari's. The home boards children based on sponsorships by individuals and corporations through Amerishare and wholly funded by Micato Safaris. Hidden behind several stone walls, the home is a paradise in the middle of the slum. Clean, new buildings that house kitchen, barracks, and schoolrooms are a surprise after seeing what is outside the walls. The children are provided with the sort of hope and inspiration that, in all probability, they have never before experienced. This place is Micato's dream and they are making it a reality.

The women are talented weavers and opened a shop to us to buy their



The tents at Sweetwater are safe and inviting.



A giraffe just feet away from the front of our tent at the Sweetwaters Watering Hole.



Winnie White and the rhino at the sanctuary.



wares and help the children.

Harambee in Swahili means "all pull together." Anyone can sponsor a child for \$1300 which underwrites the cost of one year in boarding school per child. One hundred percent of all donations go directly to the children and the Harambee projects. If you would like to sponsor a child, contact Dr. Jeff Marshall for information. Email vosh-indiana@indy.rr.com phone: (317) 322-7788.

Massai Mara

If I live to be 100 this place will be the place I say I enjoyed the most in my life. The Mara Safari Club was beautiful, and the tents we stayed in were absolutely posh. We immediately heard grunts as we checked in - hundreds, maybe thousands of hippos live in the river just below our tent. I spent hours watching them as the sun set.

The next morning we set out on our first safari in an open jeep that seats seven. After a 10 minute ride through some heavy bush we saw what we had all waited for - the magnificent plains of the Massai Mara.

Each of us were given a card to mark off the animals we saw, but there were so many of every type of mammal and bird that I gave up. Instead we all took photos. Safaris were available in the early morning and in the late afternoon. Sitting in the jeep within four feet of an African lion sunning herself was one of the most amazing things I've ever done. One walked within a foot of me on her way to the evening hunt. She didn't pay any attention to us.

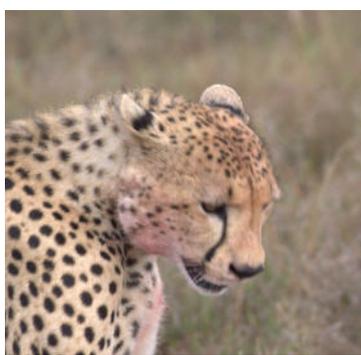
We had been told of the fierceness of the Massai Warriors, and how the wild animals respect and leave them alone. I sort of scoffed at that until I saw it for myself. Two warriors, armed only with spears, walked about 200 cattle in a long row, right through the middle of the plains, and the animals simply parted or slinked off to the woods - including the lions.

We were met at the Massai encampment by the women and a group of warriors who performed their chant and dance for us. They shoot straight up into the air as much as 4 feet from a flat stance. One warrior wore a feathered mask showing that he had killed a lion with his spear when it attacked his wife. It is considered a great honor to wear this mask.

The Massai allowed us into their homes inside the boma encampment. The houses are about 14 feet square and made of mud and cow dung. Inside are two rooms - one for the goats or very young calves, and the other for living and cooking. That room is separated into two spaces for sleeping - one for males, one for females. Children leave the home at age 8 to live in a communal house and go to school. A huge second boma in the center of camp protects the cattle at night.

We had the option of taking several side trips - to Lake Victoria, ride in a hot air balloon over the plains, attend a Sundowner on the side of the mountain with snacks and drinks, or a Bush Dinner. I attended the Sundowner and will remember all my life the beautiful sunset over the Mara plains.

Another trip to Africa is planned in 2010 - **GO**. It will provide you with memories of a lifetime. Thank you VOSH and Dr. Jeff Marshall for making my biggest dream come true.



Honduras - 2008
Another Successful Trip

Honduras is an annual event. With the assistance of Ruth Berkling, the missions are down to a science.

This year's mission helped 3,200 with vision screenings, exams and eyeglasses.

A dinner is held at the end of a mission and awards given. This year's Humanitarian of the year award went to an extremely hard working Ophthalmologist. Dr. Kevin Waltz, who on this trip performed 44 surgical procedures, has been a staunch supporter of the mission of VOSH. The award was presented by VOSH Indiana and VOSH Honduras.

Hailing from Indianapolis, Dr. Waltz makes the Honduran trip every year and has built a team of volunteers who know their jobs and do them with great efficiency. They allow the doctor to perform 8 - 12 surgeries a day during a mission.

Dr. Waltz is a tremendous asset to VOSH and very deserving of this prestigious award.



Dr. Kevin Waltz, recipient of the VOSH Humanitarian Award, 2008

Upcoming VOSH Indiana Trips

Honduras 2009
Feb 14 to 21, Lake Yojoa

Kenya 2010
Nov 20 to Dec 1

Contact Jeff Marshall
website www.vosh-indiana.org
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Thank You

Memories are held in our minds and hearts through the photos we take.

A special thank you to Steve Griffey, who works with Dr. Jeff Marshall. He took almost all of the photos you see here and many of the Honduran trip pictures over the years. His expertise saved Africa for all time when my camera failed. Thank you Steve!

Thank you to all who contributed and went on the Honduras or Africa trips.

Salute to Micato Safaris

These are some of the people who made our Africa trip possible. We now know why they win the top travel award every year. For making our trip absolute perfection, thank you!

Marion Miller

Lindsay Cope

Patrick - our Chief Guide and storyteller

Felix and Jane Pinto

For Their Years Of Service

Verla and Mike Farrar have been on many, many VOSH missions over the years. They've been mentioned here several times and thanked for their tireless support.

Due to some health issues, they have been unable to travel in the last couple of years and are sorely missed by those who enjoyed their laughter and hard work on a mission.

We take this opportunity to thank them for being such staunch supporters of the VOSH mission, and for being such wonderful friends to all of us through the years. We miss you and hope that we see you in Honduras soon.



The Farrar's in Vietnam, 2002

Mission Gallery



Dr. Jeff Marshall & Floortje in Honduras



One of our beautiful African patients



Ruth Berkling, left, and Jo Meyer in the dispensary.



Steve Griffey, our chief photographer.



Jump rope at lunchtime.



Xandra Hamilton displays African rain fashionwear.



Dr. Blair Tanaka, our only MD on this trip.



Monkeys outside our Mountain Lodge room.



Above, magnificent Mt. Kenya.



The children of Kibera.



Above, The open air kitchen at the Olympic Primary school in the Kibera slums cook gruel for lunch.

Right, one of our more colorful patients. Old and young waited for-hours in line to see the doctors.



We saw some interesting costumes - this man claimed to be a priest. We were not able to determine what denomination he represented.



Left, A 3 year old sports her new sunwear and Sunday best.