

Jeena Akkara, '97

Charuru, Kenya

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I extended the six-week period of service to 5 1/2 mo in Kenya. It was positive experience in that I learned about myself and the people in Kenya. Staying longer allowed me to understand the reality behind the myth of Africa.

First going to Kenya, I was overwhelmed by all the positive images of smiles and colors. This picture of the marketplace made me understand the community-centered ideals (vs. individual) collaborative efforts are the norm. Any work performed is most likely done by many people, willingly and gladly. open market (where I got my food) sold all the common foods including maize, beans, spinach, plantains, bananas, and avacados.



The children were one of my favorite aspects of my experience. Their smiles, songs, and laughter made me think that kids everywhere have some of the same characteristics. Some things, however, are drastically different from the U.S. like being hungry, taking care of younger siblings all day, not being educated if one doesn't have money, etc. Those wonderful smiles prevail throughout difficulties.



The majority of my time was spent in the school system (I was teaching in the village of Charurui and going to various high schools to address AIDS) In the interim I helped individuals to plant maize (as shown here). Kayathi and Wawira were constant friends of mine in the village whose smiles I'll always remember.

The man in the purple shirt is named Baba by everybody because he is a father figure to everyone. He was my "second father" during my 6 mo. in Kenya. He epitomizes much of the generosity, congeniality, and laid back attitude of many Kenyans. He often helped me in language barriers and to learn the needs of the community with my role.



To leave such a wonderful place at the end of 6 mo was one of the hardest things to do. This was a goodbye party with many of the women that I was close to (Stella, Kayathi, Muthoni, Mwatumbe + Wawira) who let me help them and let me feel I was part of the community and I think they helped me in ways that changed me. I could never have helped them as much as they did me.



This is a school run by the nuns. Schools were happy places in Kenya and at this particular school singing was a large part of the children's day. The sisters were a wonderful influence on the lives of these children, as they were for John and myself.

This is Musa, the lab tech, working at one of the clinics. Fees at the clinic were kept very low, but only a few could afford the basic lab tests offered.

