

Douglas Fair, '06

Salawa, Kenya

So Miss Melissa and I got the opportunity of a lifetime: work and live among rural Kenyans in the “shopping center” of Salawa. Let me explain why Salawa is called a “shopping center” and not a city, town, or village. Well simply because it is developed enough! That’s right, the townspeople (although it’s not a town) of Salawa call their area a shopping center because the other aforementioned terms are reserved for places that contain more than what would be seen in America as a mini-mini-mall. However, the upside to living/working in such an area besides the gorgeous terrain which included numerous brooks, lakes, gorges, canopy covered trees, waterfalls, and a small mountain range, is the hometown (or should I say home-shopping center) feeling you get with such a limited population.



An idea of the type of rocky, hard landscape (with a view of the small mountain range in the background).



From left to right, J.B., myself, and Michael -- Two awesome guys who worked at the clinic with us.

Melissa and I never felt threatened, only entertained by the occasional day-drunk who would yell out Wazungoo! (White Man!) and ask us for money – in which case I would simply explain to them that in our culture the women carry all the money, then point to Melissa and take off running (don't worry AMC paid for our muggings, haha). Most of the townspeople knew some English, many were able to communicate well, and none resisted the temptation to shake hands and exchange smiles with a white man (or woman). One Friday when the mobile clinic was not going out because the truck was in need of repair, Melissa and I visited homes with two brothers who were studying to be Mill Hill Priests (a sect of Catholicism that mostly deals with developing rural areas religiously); we were treated like royalty: everyone dropped whatever they were doing to make us tea and sit and talk with us, and upon our goodbyes, they ran to grab a chicken or bag of beans to give us in show of their appreciation for our company.



African children are cute.



Infatuation with the digital camera.

As far as what we did when our truck was not broken, the mobile clinic we worked with ran from Tuesday to Friday, with Mondays being a day when the people could come right to the residence of the Sisters' (with whom we lived and worked) . Our work was elementary, as was the whole clinic in general; Melissa mostly did bookkeeping and recording, and I weighed babies (which, more than once, ended up in wet pants, for me!). The clinic's clients consisted mostly of mothers' and their children, babies from a week to 3 years old, and mothers to be. Most of the services that were offered were preventive, such as immunizations, de-worming (Melissa was a little late catching that boat), and providing Vitamin A.



Ask this little boy why my knee is dark.



Barnibus (J.B.) loved the ipod. “You got Bob Maaaarley?”



He probably would've liked the kiss before I cut his head off.



Yeah, a lot of them cried.



Listening to 50 cent while working.



Would you open your mouth for me? I wouldn't.

The greatest thing I take out of Africa is a greater appreciation for the opportunities I have and dedication to fulfilling the potential, that I, as an American was borne into. It is true, nearly all the life-stories of the people we met were sad ones, but not because they sometimes went hungry, or had to work long hours, or had to walk in the dark to school in the same uniform they have been wearing for many years. Their stories were sad because their lives and life-paths were chosen for them, or should I say, were those that were not chosen by them. Behind all the smiles and generosity were souls that wanted (and were sometime outspoken about) a chance to choose their destiny like so many of us in this country have the opportunity to do.



Mike, his wife, and their son Emmanuel – the whites aren't the only ones to get pissed on.



This ride was not so safe – and what can you expect at 9 o'clock at night for \$.20. But the three of us made it.



That's one of the smaller anthills.



A chicken coop – the chickens return everyday at sunset (don't we wish our dogs were that trained).



The typical homes, which can be completed by one man in approximately 4 months.



That large building is the church, and all the others were places of residence for the sisters, father, and Melissa and I.



Mike and Barnibus took me on a hike one Saturday. See if you can see the church now.



ALWAYS laughing.



My partner in crime, Melissa...or as the sisters liked to call her “May”



And one more thing, they loved to dance...and laugh at me trying.

All in all, the experience was as exciting, as it was fun, as it was a learning experience, as it was humbling, and as it was empowering – thanks so much Melissa, Siena, and AMC.