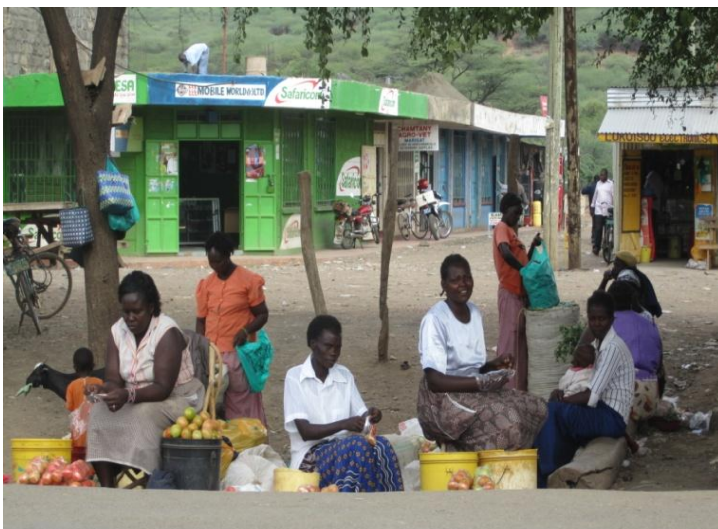


“No journey carries one far unless, as it extends into the world around us, it goes an equal distance into the world within.” -Lillian Smith



Last year, when I began thinking about my summer of service trip, I could only imagine where I would go and who I would meet. When Dr. LaRow recommended traveling Marigat, Kenya, I jumped at the opportunity. I did my research on the area and thought I knew what to expect, but no amount of research could have prepared me for the experience. I have learned not only about the culture and customs of Kenya but have also learned much more about myself. This experience was full of challenges, adventure, and love.



When I arrived in Kenya I found it to be a place full of great poverty and great beauty. The villages that line the road are made up of wood or metal huts. I had never seen such poverty nor had I met so many happy and welcoming people.



I was surprised at how multidimensional the sisters were. These women were leaders in the community for their good work and I saw how religion was integrated into their life as they took on roles as nurses, teachers, and social workers. One evening when we were returning from a daytrip, we came across a crowd in the middle of the road. Some people waved down our truck and asked Sister Veronica for help. She immediately jumped out of her seat and carried a woman who had been hit by a motorcycle to the back of the truck. The woman had a broken leg and was in a lot of pain. Veronica drove her to the hospital and spoke of how God had brought her to that spot at that time to help. All the sisters shared the mentality that their work was never finished and were grateful for their opportunities to serve.



When we worked in the clinic we were able to give vaccinations, weigh babies, and record information. All the mothers would come and shake our hands and welcome us. The women walked such long distances with their babies tied to their backs. They were all so kind! Some women could not afford all the vaccinations or tests they needed, so they had to pick and choose what to get. It was sad to see, and I wish that I could have paid for all of them. Even though the care was cheap it was still hard for them to get those few shillings. Sister Veronica gave so much and helped many people. Sometimes I felt as if we were in the way at the clinic but she made us feel useful and needed. I have learned so much from working there.



The clinic was much different than the ones in America. Hygiene was very different. We would just use dry cotton before injections, and reuse medical bottles. The lack of medical supplies was surprising, but everyone received treatment and was usually healthy. They did not have gloves in the clinic so we had to bring them ourselves. However, some of the patients felt uncomfortable when we used gloves because they thought it meant that they

were unclean. Sister Veronica said that 65% of the people in the greater Marigat division were living with HIV or AIDS., so it was important for us to be as careful as possible.



Sophie was the lab technician at the clinic. In the lab, she would test for typhoid, HIV, malaria, do urinalysis and blood typing. Her lab was bare compared to a Siena College lab.

She even had to reuse the centrifuge tubes used for separating blood. She would be shocked to see how many different technologies and tools we have in our labs. We are fortunate to have so much to learn from. She uses the microscope sent to her from Siena and it is by far the most high tech item in the lab. When we did not have electricity to power the microscope she would use a mirror to reflect the sun onto the blood smears . It was amazing to see how much she could do with very limited supplies.



We met one child, Jechumba, who was very underweight and malnourished. At eight months she was only three kilograms and at nine months she was 3.9kgs. Her wrist was smaller than my thumb! Her mother abused alcohol and could not care for her well. Jechumba was one of twelve children. Her siblings and father wanted to abandon her since she was so small. The mother wanted us to take Jechumba back to America with us because she didn't want the baby. I wish we could have. I could see love in the child's eyes and make our a tiny a smile on her face. I pray that she is healthy and loved now.



The children were always so excited to see us. On the compound hundreds of them would run to the fence and yell "how are you?" (one of the few English phrases they knew) and try to shake our hands. They would come back more than once after you shook their hands.

They were adorable. The students from St. Paul, the school on the compound, put on a musical performance for us to welcome us.



When we traveled to rural villages, many of the children had never seen white people before. They surrounded each of us and would touch our hair, arms, legs, and hands. Some would ask for toys candy or money. Some were very quiet and scared. One said my hands were soft so I must not work enough! Sometimes a child would touch my skin when I wasn't looking but then run away. It was hard when the children were afraid of us.



We would play soccer and games with the children. At one school the students had me write my name on the board and try a math problem. They were funny and laughed when I guessed a wrong answer. All the kids loved when we took pictures and would look at themselves on the screen. They would make thumbs up and would make faces. Some were embarrassed to smile because they were ashamed of their teeth. Half the children didn't

have shoes. The ground is all rocks and thorns but they still run around despite the cuts on their legs and feet. I have never met children so tough, kind, or so happy.



I will never forget my time in Marigat. It has been one of the most memorable and meaningful experiences of my life. Those six weeks have taught me more than I could ever imagine. It was certainly challenging at times, but the hardships I endured are nothing compared to what those people have gone through and continue to go through every day. When it came time to leave I was surprised at how much I would miss: the people, the animals, the landscapes, even some of the food! In just six weeks I had met the most amazing people who became my second family. When I think back to my journey, it almost seems like a dream. I never expected that from this experience, I would be getting much more than I could ever give back. I will carry this experience wherever I go and am grateful for this wonderful opportunity.