

Melissa Krueger, '06

Salawa, Kenya

Douglas and I were able to travel in Western Kenya through Nairobi and ultimately spend our time in a village called Salawa, which is extremely interior and isolated from the city life. Salawa is part of the Baringo district of the Great Rift Valley and approximately an hour and a half from Marigat (where the two other Siena students were volunteering). It was a memorable experience with unforgettable people and a trip that I will forever treasure. While the city of Nairobi is somewhat more developed with jobs, cars, hotels, etc. Salawa is extremely different. The roads are not paved, the majority of people do not own cars, there are no jobs to come across even if desired, children do not have shoes to protect their feet from all the stones and gravel that they play in and people do not have electricity or running water in their homes, etc. I have seen poverty in the United States and this was incomparable. Where we stayed we were very fortunate to have a toilet, running water, and electricity; however this was a privilege not shared by many in the society; we were the lucky ones. We had such an amazing view of the town from our higher altitude, and at night the only light was from the stars, not from cars or street lamps.



View of Salawa from a nearby mountain. The white building is the church and compound ground on which we stayed for six weeks.

We were able to live and work with the Franciscan Missionaries of St. Joseph, the Mill Hill Sisters throughout the duration of our stay. A typical day for us in Salawa included helping in the mobile clinic with three of the four sisters. The other sister taught at the secondary school (high school) on the compound grounds. Some days for the clinic we would have up to an hour or more of travel in the truck on the rough and bumpy roads,

which made the journey seem twice as long. Every Monday the clinic remained in Salawa for nearby people to come, while the rest of the week involved traveling to other villages, which were visited once every month. The clinic mostly deals with immunizing children under 5 years' old, working with pregnant mothers, and treating sick children.



A typical road and the only stores in the village of Salawa. No matter the time of day we could always see herds of malnourished cows and goats roaming for any food.

The women are so amazing; they have to walk miles to get to the clinic with their children slung on their backs walking in the heat. Some women have to walk miles up and down the hills, walking on rocks, after they gave birth only a week ago. We would help at the clinic by weighing the babies and recording into the books. It was heartbreaking to see a number of mothers that couldn't afford the vaccines for their children that cost 15 shillings (20 cents) which would protect from such illnesses as yellow fever and polio. They just don't have the funds at all because there is so much poverty. It was truly something so different than I have ever seen up close before.



Michael Koech Kipyegon, a worker for the clinic with the sisters administering an injection for a pregnant mother. (Note the iPod he is wearing while doing it. Both men working at the clinic loved Doug's iPod, especially for Bob Marley)



Some mothers waiting for injections for their children inside a hut. The blankets on their laps are the slings that they use to carry the children on their backs.

There is so much poverty in Kenya and such a different culture. The woman does everything in the family and for the family. She tends for the children which she starts having at 18 years old, cooks, cleans, and works in the garden, everything you could imagine. The men, however, will not hold the babies until they are at least three months

old, because at that time it is the mother's sole responsibility and her respected time with her new child. They live in huts made out of sticks and mud containing everything they own, which could be carried on their backs if they wanted to leave. The children have only one or two choices of clothing which may still have holes, rips, and dirt all over. The people there wear the clothes until they literally cannot be worn anymore. And here we shop for what is in fashion and throw everything else away, some still with the tags remaining on it. The babies do not wear diapers because they are too expensive. They wear a cloth as a diaper and urinate while the mothers are holding them. On a side note, I did get urinated on once and Doug three times. The river is exceptionally important to the people there as it is used for bathing, washing clothes, and for drinking water. Our water was boiled and filtered, however the people living there do not boil it. We were living there with many more advantages than the people in the village. Despite the economic hardships the people in Salawa were very friendly and welcoming to us. When we would go on house visits we were overwhelmed with tea and food. Doug and I also received live chickens as a gift for coming to visit. They were truly the most hospitable people I have ever met.



Me holding an infant while doing house visits. The older sibling of this little boy is mentally and physically handicapped. The mother is so amazing and handles the situation very well. (This is one of the babies that urinated on Douglas !)

We were in such a remote area of the country that some of the younger children screamed and cried when they saw us because they had never seen a white person in their lives. Most were just very curious and laughed, pointed, and wanted to touch us, especially my long hair. All the children have the best smiles and the most vibrant and contagious laughs. On days when there wasn't a clinic to go to we would go to a primary school where the children are from 5-19 years old. We would give them vitamin A tablets and a drug called Ketrux to de-worm them. Worms like tapeworm and ring worm are a problem there and once again the children couldn't have the medicine if they couldn't

afford the 15 shillings. Children usually attend school from 5–19 years or age, however not that long if the family cannot afford the tuition which is charged for all schooling.



Me at a primary school administering Vitamin A and Ketrux. Since it was difficult to communicate with younger children who only knew Kiswahili and their mother tongue, I would say aaahhh and open my mouth in order to put the pills in their mouths.



Children at one of the many primary schools in Salawa. They loved to have their picture taken and especially to see it afterwards. They would gather around us as soon as the camera came out.



I brought some stickers for the children which they would wear on their clothes, their hands, or even their foreheads. One of the most memorable experiences for me was teaching them dances like the Macarena.



This picture depicts how the children would gather around us, especially when there was a camera involved.



Two of the children we met on house visits.

My journey to Africa was an amazing experience for me and has changed my outlook on life. Living there really opens your eyes to all the opportunities we are given in the United States and how developing nations do not have the same opportunities. What would any one person from Africa think if they came into our cafeterias? It wouldn't be comprehend how there could be so much food for so little people and more importantly how so much food is wasted each and every day. It was really frustrating for me to see all this and not really being able to do anything to change the economic situation. With so many differences I could only give my time and I feel very fortunate for being able to do even that. William Bellamy, the US Ambassador to Kenya , declared during his American Independence Day celebration in his Nairobi residence; “ Kenya will not overcome poverty by struggling every year to cope with wildly escalating amounts of well-intentioned but ill-conceived foreign assistance.”



Sister Margaret, Sister Florence, Me, and Sister Jaclyn inside their convent on our last night in Salawa. The most important thing that I have taken from this experience is the people that I have met.