

Patrick Marinello, '08

Marigat, Kenya

"Ladies and Gentlemen please fasten your seatbelts and return your tray tables and seatbacks to their original position as we prepare for our landing." I had heard this phrase recited many times before by flight attendants, but it had a different meaning for Kenya. This simple phrase indicated the start of an experience filled with everything but the ordinary and familiar.



We were headed for Marigat, Kenya – a small town of approximately 3,000 in Kenya's Rift Valley. Sister Martina, our host, graciously greeted us at the airport – holding a crinkled piece of paper with our names printed on it. Our nerves were soon calmed and we knew we were going to be in good hands. For the next six weeks we lived with Sister Martina and four of her fellow Mill Hill Sisters in their convent residence. It was located on the Marigat Catholic Mission compound, which consisted of the Priest's residence, a modest outdoor church, and the clinic.



Karina and I worked in the clinic with Sister Martina. Three days a week we worked on the compound and in the immediate surrounding village. We helped with administrative duties in the clinic and well as helping tend to the patients. The clinic had several missions. They provided HIV/AIDS ART treatment to all individuals who were afflicted with the disease in addition to provide well care and immunization for children and prenatal care for expectant mothers.



The clinic would only charge a modest fee to the patients if they could afford to pay; otherwise they were given treatment for free. The other two days of the week, the clinic went “on the road” and traveled up to 3 hours in a 4x4 vehicle to villages that would otherwise receive no medical care. It was impressive to see the complete lack of medical care in the rural communities and how grateful they were for our services.



When Karina and I were not working in the clinic, we were playing with the children who always seemed to frequent the Catholic Mission compound and interact with the residents of Marigat. We were the only two westerns in the town – so everyone knew who we were. The community treated us with the utmost respect and hospitality. They gave generously of their time, shared stories of their joys and hardships, and tried to make us feel welcomed in their home. One example of such an act of kindness was when a parish member invited us after Church on Sunday to his home (keep in mind it was a 10’x25’ room constructed of tin metal) for a lunch of chicken and soda. This random act of kindness and generosity was so sincere – he wanted to do his part to thank us for volunteering in his town.



Our six weeks in Kenya went fast and every moment was memorable. As we sat in on the plane and prepared for takeoff, I looked out the window knew that Kenya had become a familiar place to me and thanks to Sister Martina and the rest of the Marigat community, a part of me will always remain in Kenya.