

2012 Summer of Service

Marigat & Salawa, Kenya

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In the summer of 2012 I had the privilege of spending 11 weeks working with the Mill Hill Sisters of Saint Francis in Western Kenya. While there I split my time between two villages, Marigat and Salawa. The first 6 weeks I lived in the town of Marigat and then for the last 5 weeks I moved to the more rural village of Salawa.

Marigat

After what had seemed like one long continuous day of traveling (in actually it was three) we finally arrived in Marigat!



Antony Mathew, Stefanie Sueda, Myself, and Michael Ashamalla underneath the Franciscan sign at the convent where we lived.

Marigat is a rural town, filled with small shops, a few schools and large farms. Kenyans and animals alike share the roads and its quite common to see herds of goats, sheep

or cows roaming the streets. Some of the shops in town have electricity during the day but most homes are usually without electricity or running water. Homes in Kenya are much smaller as well and a family of six will share a two-bedroom tin or stick house.



Typical home in Marigat made in the traditional style using sticks for the walls and roof



Doing laundry – Kenyan style!

Although the sisters were afraid that it would take us a while to adjust to their way of life we quickly became comfortable with Kenyan culture. This was primarily due to the love, understanding and warmth all of the sisters showed us.



Sister Veronica – the head nurse at the Catholic clinic in Marigat.

In Marigat, I spent the majority of my time playing and teaching at two primary schools, making house calls to the elderly and HIV infected, working in the clinic run by the sisters and helping out in an HIV clinic run by the government.

At least three afternoons a week we would walk 30 minutes to the primary school in Kampi Trukana. Kampi Trukana is a refuge town for the internally displaced people of northern Kenya. The people that live in this village are impoverished beyond description and HIV is rampant. However, despite the intense challenges they face everyday the children are exceedingly friendly and thoroughly fascinated by our Mzungu (white person in Swahili) presence.



Resting after a long walk. The kids were fascinated with our hair and spent hours touching and braiding it.



The faculty in front of the main office building at Alice Ingham Primary School



Stef and Me with some of our girls!

Mike with our 3 favorite students; Albert, Meshach and Praise

Two of the sisters we lived with, Sr. Caro and Sr. Benta are social workers and care for the elderly persons in Marigat. Some mornings we would go with them to make house calls. These trips were some of the hottest and longest mornings for us but they were also some of the most rewarding time we spent in Kenya.



One of the gogo (grandmother) supported by the Sisters. She doesn't have any children and so she adopted us as her own mazungu kids. Her personality was vivacious and we immediately fell in love with her!



The only form of employment for the elderly is cracking rocks, which are then be used for construction. This is backbreaking, exhausting work and never supplies enough income to survive on.



Caring for one of the gogo. This gogo was over 90 and completely desolate. She is paralyzed from the waist down and without the sisters she would waste away. This was one of the most heartbreaking situations for me.

After 6 weeks of living, laughing and loving with the Sisters, students and friends we had made in Marigat it was incredibly hard to say goodbye and leave for the village of Salawa, which is located three hours north. For me, knowing that we might never see those precious people again made leaving all the more difficult! Thank goodness for snail and email - I am still in regular contact with some of my Kenyan friends in Marigat.

Salawa

After dropping Mike and Stef off at the Matatu (Kenyan public transportation) station, Antony and I loaded all of our belongings into the land rover to begin the journey three hours north to the remote village of Salawa. If Marigat is considered rural then Salawa is the end of the earth. The roads are not paved and driving 60 km takes around 3 hours! There are very few job opportunities and like Marigat poverty and HIV is rampant. While it is extremely remote it was also quite beautiful. Salawa is located right in the Great Rift Valley and everything was very green. Also the temperatures were considerable colder. Often in the mornings Antony and I had to wear sweatshirts! This was quite the change from Marigat town.



Most weekday mornings Antony and I would walk to Saint Mary's, the secondary mixed day school down the hill from the convent. From 7-8:15 we would tutor the 30 Form 1 (9th grade) students in math, biology and English.



Our students at Saint Mary's. Antony and I were still in Kenya when they graduated the term and were able to celebrate with them as they moved onto the next term.

After tutoring in the mornings we would walk back to the convent, eat a quick breakfast and get ready for clinic. Two days a week we stayed in Salawa providing care for the

people of Salawa. The rest of the days we would take the land rover and head out all over the Salawa district providing vaccinations and maternal care to mothers and babies who would otherwise go without medical care.



The Kenyan way of measuring height and weight! Some days we would record the height and weight of over 50 babies. The mothers would walk 3 km or more to get to our mobile clinic to make sure their babies received the proper vaccinations and vitamins



Antony testing for Malaria. Everyday we saw at least three cases of Malaria and/or Typhoid Fever. This is due to lack of mosquito nets and poor sanitation.



Recording Weight and Height into the government recording books.



One of our patients - So cute!!!



Our driver Joseph and lab technician Nancy with our trust mobile clinic vehicle in the background. All of the staff were incredible and taught us so much, about infectious diseases and Kenyan culture in general.

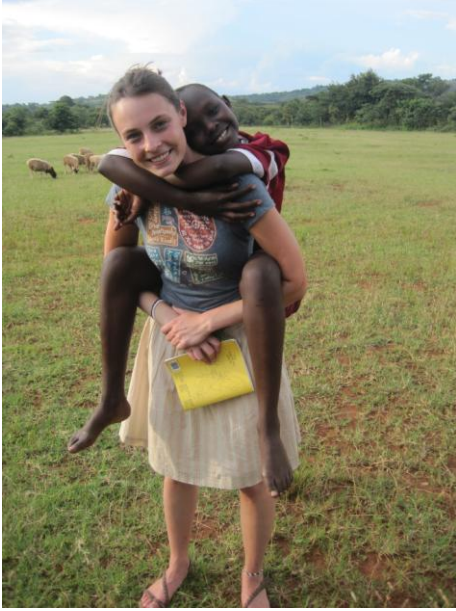
On the weekends and in the afternoons when we didn't go on mobile clinic Antony and I would walk down the other side of the hill and visit with the girls at Philemon Chelagat Girls Boarding Secondary School. These girls hold a very special place in my heart. Even though they have few opportunities they study hard hoping to improve their situation. All of them were eager to hear about life outside of Kenya and we spent many hours laughing, teaching and playing with them.



In Kenya all students study religious education. To give the Sr. Monari a break we took over the class while we were there.



Some of my students - once we returned home we started a pen pal program with these girls. To date we have 50 girls matched with American teens!



Valerie and I! Such a special young woman!



Some of our students in front of their school. Salma was the only Muslim in her entire school. I was surprised at the amount of friendship and respect that was displayed between Christians and Muslims at Philemon.

My trip to Kenya was so exceptionally special that it is impossible to fully describe it in words. The people I met and served taught me so much about their culture, love and the challenges of surviving brutal poverty. I grew up knowing that I wanted to be a physician overseas. However, I never expected that my summer of service would reveal the area of the world that I one day hope to serve in. East Africa and its people will always hold a special place in my heart and one day soon I know I will return.