

Christie Ziegler '12

Marigat, Kenya

In the summer of 2011, I was given the opportunity to spend six weeks in Marigat, Kenya where I lived and worked with Franciscan nuns, along with two classmates, Dan Sedhom and Cara Hannigan. Marigat is a small town in the Rift Valley known for its extremely hot, dry weather. It was considered “winter” while we were there, but temperatures ranged from the mid-eighties to over one hundred on some days. Although this was quite the adjustment having never travelled outside of the country before, and coming from upstate New York known for its snowy winters, the knowledge I gained and the love I received from the people made it an unforgettable experience.



Me standing on the equator!



The sisters took us sight-seeing on the weekends. This was at Lake Baringo. Names of the people from left to right are as follows: Sister Nora, Sister Medrine, Dan, Cara, Sister Veronica, and me!

The sisters lived on a compound that included the convent, two guest houses, an elementary school, a social work house and a clinic. On Mondays, Tuesdays, and Thursdays, we would work with Sister Veronica in the clinic, helping mostly mothers, expectant mothers, and babies. This included a lot of bookkeeping, weighing babies, giving oral medicine to the babies, and giving immunizations. As none of us had given immunizations before, it was a very scary experience but the people of Kenya were very understanding and patient with us! On Wednesdays and Fridays, we would travel in a truck to remote villages around Marigat as sort of a “mobile clinic.” As there are no paved roads anywhere near Marigat, and the truck we traveled in was fairly old, these trips were very long and bumpy rides! People would walk for hours, some carrying children on their backs, just to receive the necessary medical care that the nuns religiously provided each month. This dedication and compassion to others was truly amazing and inspiring.



Left picture: me giving an immunization to a three-month old baby for diseases such as tetanus and typhoid

Right picture: this is the mobile clinic (a land cruiser) we traveled in to the remote villages every Wednesday and Friday. The nuns would sit in the front while Dan, Cara, and I would sit on a bench in the back of the truck for the long, bumpy ride!



The land cruiser would travel through unimaginable terrain including up steep rocky mountains, across the desert, through raging rivers, and deep mud!



This is a village near Marigat and the typical home that people of Kenya lived in. This would house an entire family, which sometimes reached up to 15 children. Most people did not have running water or electricity. The children loved to follow us around and interact with us. Many people there had never seen white people before!

Although we loved working in the clinic and helping out those in need, talking and playing with the local children was a lot of fun too! They were all so happy and constantly laughing (mostly at us!). We would visit the school in the compound to say hello to the children or hand out bubbles, stickers, and silly bands. The kids also loved to play soccer so we brought them many soccer balls and a pump. The entire ground was covered in thorns so the balls would pop easily and the children would get thorns in their bare feet but that never slowed them down! It was quite an impressive scene to watch. They would always ask us whether we knew President Obama and loved to touch our skin and hair. Since many children, and some adults, had never seen white people before, it was a very different experience not only for them but for us as well. They would try to teach us some words in Swahili and then quiz us on them later. They were very curious as to life in America and how it compares to their lives. We often talked about the Kenyan soap operas that were on television every night!



This is at one of the remote villages we visited to provide medical care. The children at the school were very afraid of us at first because they had never seen white people before but they soon realized we were very friendly and wanted to touch my skin and hair!

Growing up in America has provided me with so many opportunities and luxuries that I did not fully appreciate until I visited Kenya. Amenities such as electricity and running water, a floor for my house, a bed to sleep on, and a warm meal were necessities to me before I came to Kenya. It wasn't until I saw how happy these people were with the little materialistic things that they had, that I realized how fortunate I really am and how often I take it for granted. The people of Marigat only count their blessings, never their misfortunes, and that was truly enlightening for me. I had come to Kenya thinking I was going to give something to the people there, but instead they have given me so much more... a greater perspective of life. I am forever grateful to the sisters who invited us into their home and treated us like family the moment we arrived. They constantly give up so much of their time and the little money that they have to help others; it was incredibly inspiring. I hope I have learned to incorporate that type of love and compassion into my own life. I feel amazingly lucky to have been able to meet the wonderful people of Marigat and their amazing love for one another and I continue to miss them every day.



Left picture: me washing my clothes by hand.

Right picture: a typical dinner which was usually goat meat every night, mashed up corn (that's the white circle), and boiled spinach. This meal was boiled goat intestines.



Left picture: we slept in mosquito nets each night.

Right picture: this is me washing my hair. There was no running water in our house so we had to go to the convent to shower. There was no hot water and not enough pressure to have a standup shower so we bathed under this faucet.



While it took us a little while to adjust to the Kenyan culture, it was the unconditional joy and love of the people that made our adjustment much faster. It was an unforgettable journey that has taught me more than I could ever have imagined. I will be forever grateful to the wonderful people of Kenya who taught me the most important aspect of life is to love.