

Ramy Sedhom, '09

Marigat, Kenya

In the summer of May 2009, I was blessed enough to be given an opportunity to spend six weeks living and working amongst the company of Franciscan nuns in Kenya, in a small village called Marigat. Marigat is a small town, located in the scenic Rift Valley, infamous for its extremely hot, dry weather. "Winter in Marigat," a famous joke among the natives, was quite the experience as temperatures rose to the upper nineties – talk about some frigid winter months! Nonetheless, the beauty of Kenya and its people, made me happy to call it home during my time there.



This is the city center in Marigat. The roads were not paved and almost none of the town had running water or electricity. At night, kerosene lamps were used to light shops and homes. During the day, people would carry water on their backs from the local rivers to their homes for use during the week.



Me at dinner with the nuns. Names are as follows, starting from the left: Sister Medrine, Sister Veronica, Sister Margaret, Sister Florence, Sister Lily, and Sister Jendrix.

I traveled and worked with my classmate, Christopher Smith during my summer of service. Three days a week we worked in the clinic in the nun's compound and in the immediate surrounding village. We provided the people of Marigat with a wide variety of health care needs ranging from lab services to prenatal care. Chris and I mainly worked weighing babies, giving immunizations, updating patient records and helping in administrative duties. The clinic had several missions, which included care for HIV/ AIDS patients. We experienced firsthand how the nuns attended to the needs of people, not *disease*, displaying true compassion I hope to emulate in my years as a physician.



Providing vaccinations to the school children were one of the services Chris and I gladly provided.

On the other two days of the week, we would travel miles into the dry, desolate land of Marigat in the clinic van to “mobile clinics,” where we would help set up a make-shift clinic for the day in order to bring healthcare to people who lived in areas where it was not accessible. Villagers would literally walk for hours in order to reach these “mobile clinics” because it was the only access to health care they would receive for the entire month. Volunteering in the clinic was truly an eye opening experience. The people of Kenya are truly people in need of assistance and I pray the nuns continue to provide as wonderfully as they do.



This is the “ubra-vehicle” as Chris and I liked to think of it. This land cruiser belonged to the nuns and was used to drive into the most inaccessible areas one could imagine. Whether if it was driving through a muddy terrain, a mountainous region, or across the desert roads, the land cruiser got us there. Inside the land cruiser was all the equipment necessary to set up the “mobile clinic” used to treat villagers who did not live anywhere near quasi-civilized towns.

Below is an example of a typical house for a family of five to seven in Kenya. Although it doesn't look like much, it sufficed to the locals. This particular community was a refugee camp for northerners who were persecuted by a rival tribe. Although it was sad to see such marginal living conditions, it was comforting to see how happy the people were with the little they had. They all felt the love of each other, the community, and to the larger religious community there, the love of God as well.





Frequently, the children and I would share stories about our homes, families, and experiences. Every day we would exchange English lessons for Swahili. At times, I would tell them of my travel experiences and what the world was like beyond their village as their eyes would light up with excitement. Also, as pictured here, Chris and I would quiz them on the Bible, since they were all members of the Catholic Church at the compound, and those who answered correctly were rewarded pieces of candy. Much to our surprise, we were rewarded with experiencing true benevolence – none of these children ever have access to chocolate, yet if someone answered correctly more than once, he would share his sweets with the rest of the group. Talk about good children.

Despite their struggles, the people of Marigat were always friendly, frequently walking up to us on the street just to say hello, welcoming us to their town. After the first few days of work, Chris and I played soccer with a few of the village schoolchildren at the nun's compound. However, what started as a small pastime soon turned into a major sporting event every day for the remainder of our six weeks. Pregnant mothers, their husbands, their children, and even their goats would come to celebrate an afternoon game of soccer in the spirit of brotherhood and love. Although the people had nothing, the modest joys in life, such as soccer, showed us everything. We learned that life is more than materialistic needs. Rather, the intangibles are what made life to the Kenyans worth living. They were rich in simplicity. I brought some of their wealth back home with me and hope I have been wise enough to share it with my friends and family. We surely felt a sense of community with the village inhabitants and I can speak with confidence, on behalf of Chris and myself, that we will surely miss those days for the rest of our lives.



The most beautiful children in the world.

That makeshift soccer ball made out of shopping bags and rubberbands (held by the boy second from the right in the front) was my gift from the children to take home. Needless to say, I loved it.

Before we knew it, our six weeks were over. Yet, what lives on is the need to love. I leave you with the words of a great saint and a perfect role model in service, Mother Theresa:

“Love cannot remain by itself -- it has no meaning.
Love has to be put into action, and that action is *service*.”

