

My thoughts are changing everyday! I was so excited to get home and see my family, but I've quickly been pulled back and reminded how crazy and hectic my life is! I also long for the meaning that I felt when I was in Kenya. I felt a sense of purpose and importance and now I struggle trying to get through the daily tasks of life that I suddenly feel are meaningless. Anyhow that is my thoughts. If I could trade in my electricity, ice and milk to become a Masai, I would do it in a heartbeat! I can't wait to go back. I still awe at the wonderful simplicity and friendliness of the Kenyan life.

- Melissa -

When I think back on the past two weeks, it is quite amazing that we lived an adventure. I was totally blown away by the Masai and the command that they have over their lives.

What I learned was about the strengths of this community: Youth engagement- how do they get children, youth and young adults to continue to be engaged and participating. It seems that one of the strengths they display is one of community. We recognize that there is a communal experience in a tribal environment. How can we capture the communal spirit in our own work? Americans are known as individualists, not sacrificing individual needs and wants for the good of the community. Is this a constructive or destructive approach? In fact, do we value the life of the community? Another strength is resourcefulness. My guess is the Masai make all visitors feel as welcome and needed as they did with us. How many stories did I hear as a sales pitch was being made? I think they have been carefully taught to recognize and utilize the resources around them. I believe we can be a great resource and the material resources that we provided were great.

The visit to the slums was an eye opener. It reminded me a lot of our struggles with street youth here, although the streets there are much worse. The amazing thing is that there is no protection for children in Kenya. I wonder what they are supposed to do. In this country that seems to value families and communities, how can children be left to fend for themselves? Are there any international human rights groups advocating for these children? Providing for their material and educational needs is a start but what infrastructure exists to protect them? Their accomplishments are great and Esther appears to be a strong and adamant advocate, but there must be a more permanent source of protection.

~ Elizabeth ~

P.S. One thing I will always remember is the Masai said they are "peaceful" and "trustworthy" and we experienced that.

The beauty of the children, of the landscape, the animals—all this was in such stark contrast to the tumult that we were aware of, yet insulated from experiencing. Hope was the message that overlaid all the conflict. Two year-olds reverting to negative from their HIV+ births, 16 year-old street youth looking forward to sitting in their 4th grade class to learn to read, women retired from social work and nursing coming back to run orphanages and educate girls and boys about FGM (female genital mutilation), trees planted along the roadways against deforestation...these are some lasting impressions that should long outlive the current violence.

-- Claire --

The trip was an amazing experience for me. Although there was political unrest at the time, we pulled through as a group and stayed focused on our goal of helping the youth in Kenya. I will never forget how welcomed I felt in the Masai Mara and how strongly I bonded with the youth and the community.

~ Richa ~

I can't seem to get this trip off my mind. I connected with the group so deeply that I miss them tremendously. This profound experience has changed me for life. I now look differently at the so called "problems" of day-to day life here in the states. What used to be big challenges now appear so small. I am eager to share these experiences with others to increase their understanding, global awareness, and interest in reaching out to children in Kenya.

**** Beth ****