

REACHING OUT

Journal of the Outreach Committee, Winter 2016 Edition
Chair Lynda Turner, Editor Duncan Mathieson

KENYAN ANECDOTES - 2015

by Lynda Turner

People always ask me what it's like to be in Kenya and not be a tourist. I thought that I would share some of what I face every year.

This year was the hottest that I remember. Even the Kenyans were complaining. It was 35C every day for the three weeks I was in Kakamega.

It is difficult to go to bed when it's still 32C and get up to 28C. What saved me was my fan. It was on all the time I was in my bed sit. However, there are frequent power outages and that is when I really sweated (pun intended). Luckily, although the outages occurred at least 3 times per day, the longest lasted for only about 2 hours. Also the humidity was generally around 20-30% which made the heat more bearable.

Sundays are special. The drums start about 7am, often with singing in the background. The Sheywe Guest House laundry workers, sang below my window with the joy of the spirit and life as they hand washed the guest house linen in cold water. Although they sang in KiSwahili, I knew by all the Alleluias that they were singing hymns.

Funerals are VERY big in Kenya. It is a regular, normal occurrence to not be able to meet with someone as they're at a funeral. When I was getting off the plane in Kisumu, there was a church choir singing in the terminal. They plus friends and neighbours were meeting my plane as it carried the coffin of a local woman who'd been murdered in Nairobi. Also we were held up on the main road through Kakamega as there was a funeral procession. It is normal to hire mourners who scream and cry as they walk. It is also normal to have a three day funeral. It can financially break a family. They may have ignored the deceased in this life but they will give him/her a big send off to the next. At the funeral the attendees are given a pamphlet that describes the deceased in glowing terms. It can be dozens of pages in length and in full colour on shiny paper.

Sometimes cultural differences do show up. One day in coming through the gate to Sheywe, I asked the gate keeper, Fred, to lend me a hand. He showed me his hand and asked what I wanted to do with it.

The most distressing time was driving through a city with no brakes. We were in Eldoret to buy African fabric. At the outskirts, I noticed the driver pumping the brakes with no noticeable effect. As we were heading for another car just ahead of us, I became concerned. The choice seemed to be to hit that car or roll over in a deep, wide ditch. I closed my eyes. Somehow the driver was able to stop without doing either. We limped along until we came to a roadside mechanic (few garages, many roadside mechanics in Kenya). Over the next two hours they took off each of the wheels, looked at them and banged something in the motor with a wrench. We left with still no brakes. The driver who was from the city, said his mechanic would meet us in the city. I have never seen traffic like we saw that day. Not only did we have to watch out for cars but there were people walking on the road and others pulling laden wagons in the midst of the vehicles. At one point the traffic seemed to be coming at us from all directions. My driver got us safely through by turning off the motor each time we had to stop. At the end of our journey a high sidewalk stopped the car. It turned out that the master cylinder had cracked. This is the city, I learned later, which had installed traffic lights to try to control traffic. After 1 month, 126 people had been killed so they turned off the traffic lights. Now I have a story to match my story from 10 years ago about turning onto a major road and the steering going.

Whenever one visits a school, hospital etc. one has to sign a guest book – name, address, and comments. I soon got into a habit of writing “good to be here”.

I have to say that going into a 6×12 lean-to in the market and ordering 40 dozen pairs of underpants is not an everyday occurrence.

When I went to buy supplies for the school kits, I was faced with something that is VERY common in Kenya – a Kenyan cashier and an Asian overseer. The overseer is there to make sure that the cashier doesn't steal. Relations between the two groups are not that great.

Sometimes people just do not think. The last week I was in Kakamega, I was delivering food to Grace Orphanage. Another Canadian non-profit had sent a huge sack of shoes from Thunder Bay. There seemed to be dozens of pairs of shoes. The first out were two pair of snow boots?????

With the exception of the heat, everything went well. I did visit two schools for physically and mentally handicapped students. They were both residential schools. I worked at a similar school in the 1960's and the conditions then were better than I saw this year. Children dragging themselves on the floor because they didn't have a wheelchair, really got to me. Also a primary wish of both schools was for food – this despite the fact that they are government supported schools. Doing something for them is my next project.

Kenya Report 2016

Parishioners Lynda Turner & Ken Rootham, spent the month of March 2016 in Kenya carrying out projects financed by the Parish, SOLID, and various Salt Spring well-wishers. The Friends of Kenya 4th Annual Bridge Tournament, which is held every November, provided money for uniforms for 200 students at four schools. In Kenya children without uniforms are sent home from school.

Money from the Mythical Halloween Party and SOLID provided over 250 hygiene kits at Mwiya Secondary and Daisy and Rise 'n Shine Special Schools.

Salt Spring continues to strongly support the SOLID program of providing goats for HIV+ mothers. This is the 5th year that goats have been delivered bringing the total to well over 300 pregnant nannies. The Salt Spring 'herd' is now over 1000 in number providing nutritious milk, meat, and money to support these mothers and their children. This has allowed the women to become financially independent for the first time in their lives.

For the 6th year layettes were delivered to Kakamega District Hospital. Most Kenyan mothers now deliver their babies in hospital but many have next to nothing for their new baby. The delivery of diapers, clothing, soap, etc. etc. delighted the new mothers.

The main focus of the projects this year was on two schools in the Kakamega area that provide accommodation and education for children with special needs. Daisy Special School in Kakamega received uniforms, hygiene kits, wheelchairs, walkers, and chickens. Ken Rootham built them a new chicken house while he was there.

Rise 'n Shine Special School, located in nearby Shianda, received uniforms, hygiene kits, wheelchairs, walkers, chickens, and a new water collection system. They also received a box of much needed school supplies.

Once again the residents of Kakamega were grateful for the generosity of the people of Salt Spring. The uniforms and hygiene kits allow children to continue their education. The special school teachers were overjoyed that so many of their students were now mobile. They didn't have to crawl on the floor and ground anymore. So – THANK YOU SALT SPRING!



KEN ROOTHAM - 2016

Some aspects of Kenyan culture strike one immediately. The poor are very visible. I spent some time wandering around the extensive shanty towns along the road past the airport. Early in the morning on both sides of this divided four lane highway endless streams of workers trudge along. Off the highway itself there are vast spreads of tin shacks punctuated by occasional blocks of tall apartment flats. Four posted lean-to stands sell anything. Equally depressing to this squalor are the throngs of desperate walking vendors selling things to passing cars caught in gridlock. I read in the national newspaper that a survey was done on the “quality of life” for Kenyans in Nairobi. Nearly half said their life was horrible and couldn’t be worse - this is a city of several millions. One can imagine the scope of the problem from the expansion of the total population from about 8 million in the 60's to over 40 million now with a huge proportion of youth.

Most of my time was in Kakamega in the west, apart from most of the trouble spots. It is a large town where there are certain areas where the police will not go because of drugs and gangs; but there is also a commercial area where one can freely mingle with the crowds. One is told to watch out for marauding youths who can quickly steal valuables. I didn’t have a problem but the dire state of the economy is visible here too. Huge clusters of motorbikes at corners while their drivers wait for employment as taxis. The two main industries in the town were shut down probably because of corruption. In fact the visible wealth is all tied up in elegant church buildings and NGO establishments. The message is not lost on the people. Andrew, who hoped to start a business, told me that when a survey was done on economics students in Uganda asking them what they were going to do, 5% said “go into business for themselves” 10% “work for the government” and 85% “work for NGOs”. It seems there is a time limit from when a helping organization contributes to when it becomes part of the problem itself.

Corruption is rampant in the legal system too. There was a scary moment when it looked like the orphanage would fall victim. When we visited it Patrice, a minister, was promoting a project for me. On talking with one of the workers, Walter, I found out that they had all the labour they needed and it was just a make work project for me, to gain money from us.



It is not easy to help people. One has to patiently wait until the people themselves articulate what they need. In a month's visit there really isn't the time to do this difficult work. By what miracle I do not know I was spared. A second option was the handicap school run by the government. Britain has in the past financed the educational system but because of the corruption had wanted to pull out. The funding of schools is very tight. When inefficient road works cut off the school's water supply the cost of purchasing several trucks of water was a large part of the budget. School supplies are minimal. The tools in the wood working shop were rustic at best. I had to add a piece of plumbing pipe so that I could use their stubby hammer. The school often loses tools to workmen or whoever. For mixing cement there was only a broken-off shovel. The wheelbarrow disintegrated after a dozen runs. The hand saw blade had kinks. Back to the miracle. Two hours before I arrived on my first morning Kellon, responsible for agriculture at the school, had visited the Head Mistress and told her that she must have a chicken coop to prevent the chickens from being stolen. One of the happiest episodes in my life was many was many years ago as a hippie building things with no tools. Here was Br'er Rabbit landing in the Briar patch. Work progressed. It was not long before the friendly staff at the school recognized how happy I was doing this project. There was no need for them to feel grateful for my work, given a choice I would stay there permanently!

Kenyan's have a much warmer society than ours. Given all their problems, they only have each other. In this microcosm of the Daisy Handicap School they have it good. The pay is tiny but they have much more secure jobs than anyone else. The new Head Mistress Rosemary is a pleasure. Kellan came with me to purchase materials as my Swahili was non-existent; we would meet her relatives and friends. At the end of our stay she took me out to a local restaurant. The owner had been a high school teacher but as the pay so small, he could not support his family.

Back to the school. I enjoyed working with the children; there are many entertaining stories. One sixteen year old who could barely speak was often around. One time when we had finished the cement mix and loaded the wheelbarrow (now repaired with baling wire), he ran off with it when our backs were turned. He could run fast because it was down a steep hill. Running after him shouting "STOP!" was not going to prevent him from doing his contribution . . .

This Fall

This Fall Outreach sponsored the Second Annual Mythical Halloween Party. It was to provide uniforms for Kenyan school children. The support from the Parish was stupendous. In March, 2017 - 136 uniforms will be delivered in Kenya.

The winners of the draws were:

\$100 Smile Card - Claire, \$100 Country Grocer card - Lynda and the dinner & over night at Hastings House - Gladys of Vancouver.

Outreach is also supporting the Angel Tree which will provide Christmas support for families named by Family Place.

In addition Christmas cards are being sold by Outreach to provide books for Kenyan school children.

The Parish has always stepped up and provided help where ever it's needed. Thank you.

Refugee Committee 2016

Committee Members: Richard Stetson (Rector), Ide Marie Threadkell, Sue Savage, Carol and Henry Tabber, Ken Strike, Don Cunningham, Owen Benwell, Jane James, Joanna Southwell, Doreen Davidson, and Chas Belknap.

The 2015 refugee crisis in Europe and the Middle East already had our attention when friends of the congregation, Carol and Henry Tabor, approached Richard about helping their friend Katria Alasaly find sponsorship for her nephew and his wife. At the time Zak and Hind (Zakariya Hashem AlAbdullah and Hind Al-Abbasi) were refugees from Mosul living in Jordan.

Our Diocese already had status as a Sponsorship Agreement Holder with the ability to train and provide technical support to local volunteers. With Diocesan support we were able to organize as a "Community Sponsor" under Refugees Immigration and Citizenship Canada regulations.

Zak and Hind arrived in June this year. The committee helped with the finding of an apartment, the accessing of health care, the acquisition of SIN cards, a driver's license for Zak, and other pieces of Government identification. We also helped Zak and Hind find work: first, with temporary jobs, and then with more permanent work at Thrifty's. Most recently we helped with the purchase of a car which will allow Zak to get to job sites.

Our efforts have been supported financially by the Parish's Outreach Committee, their aunt Katria, other individuals who made generous contributions and, significantly, the Roman Catholic Church.

We have taken care to not overwhelm Zak and Hind with 200 new close church friends. But those of us on the committee who have had the opportunity to get to know the couple find them eager to make their new life in Canada. But, most of all we just find them delightful.