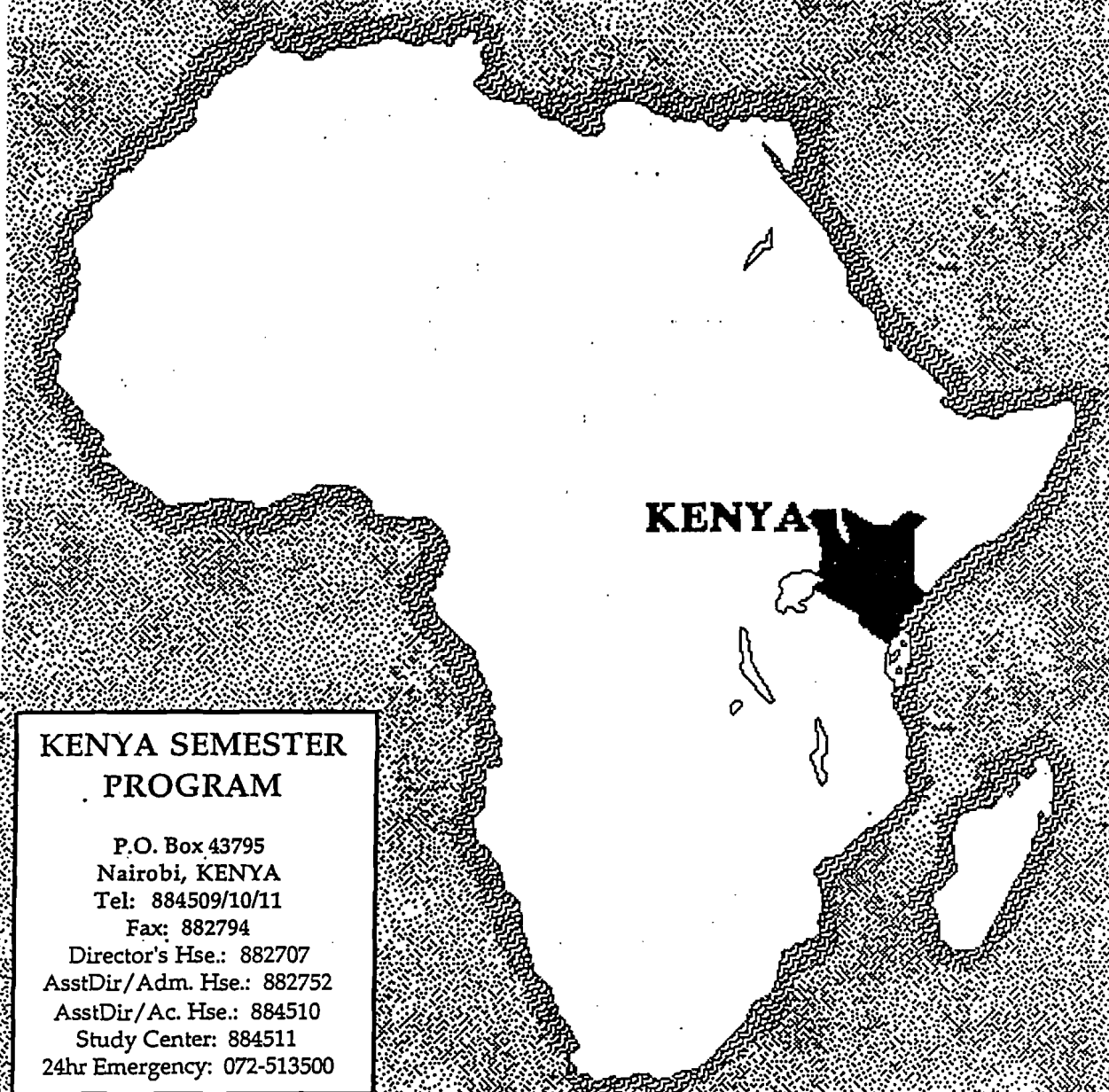


# ST. LAWRENCE UNIVERSITY

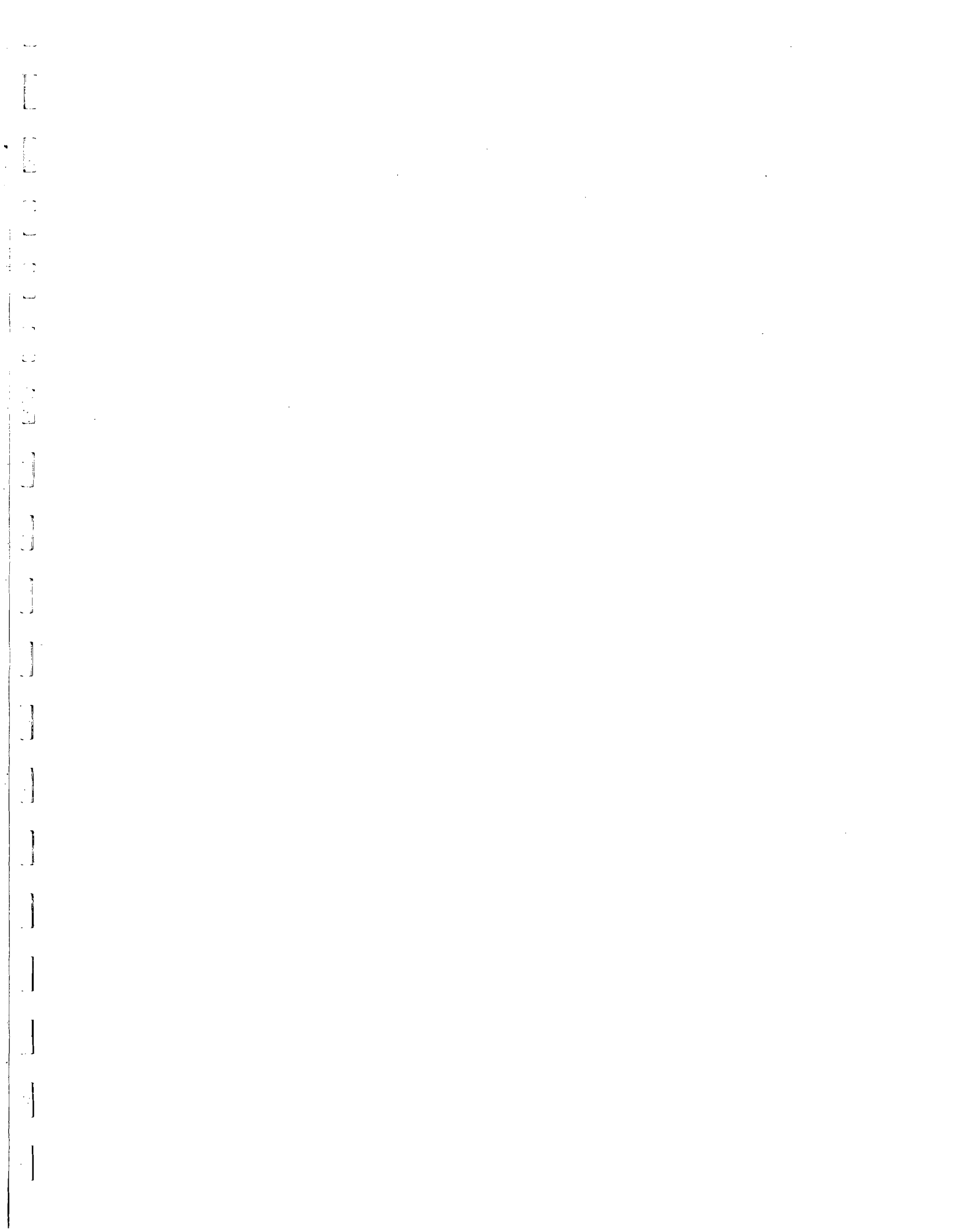
## KENYA SEMESTER PROGRAM



### KENYA SEMESTER PROGRAM

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**ALUMNI REFLECTIONS, JUNE 1999**



## Introduction

Those of you who participated in the Kenya Semester Program during the last decade or so will recognize the cover design of this booklet, replicating KSP orientation materials and readers. High speed information technology and communications has changed many aspects of our program, along with cover designs. Our course materials can come right off the Internet and include up to date research on vital matters such as climate, environment and health. Faculty and students can stay in touch about developing research projects, using faxes and email. Staff can consult between Nairobi and Canton in minutes rather than weeks. KSP alumni from the 1970s, some of whom are pictured in this 1972 photograph of the first group, would be amazed at the ease and speed of communication with home which our current participants all enjoy.

And yet, as you read the personal statements that follow, we think you will see that the fundamental effects of participating in the Kenya program have not greatly changed over the past quarter-century. The experience remains powerful and indeed transforming for the young people who take part. The Information Superhighway is a long way away from Connie ('93), visiting a dying elder during her visit with a Samburu family, or from Brian ('99) as he sits in a slum shack with a destitute mother and malnourished children. Those of us who prepare students to go to Kenya, and who share their experiences with them on their return, can testify to the changes that we see in them. The conversations we had with KSP alumni in June '99 confirm that these changes are not short lived; indeed, many at the reunion identify their months spent in Kenya as the source of significant choices about their life directions, sometimes reverberating over decades. We are honored to be part of this collective history.

We were delighted as well to be part of the '99 KSP reunion, and to share the incredible enthusiasm that began with the first reception and continued through the wonderful slide show, the eloquent testimonials to Paul, and the camaraderie of the closing dinner. Each of us will have our own favorite moments that will stick in our memories as exemplifying the spirit of the occasion. One of mine was Pakuo's presenting President Sullivan with a beaded elder's stick and inviting him to Kenya. Another was the Kenyan Tusker beer that appeared as if by magic on all the tables at the closing dinner, a gift from the Washington, D.C. contingent of Kenyan SLU alumni, including Chachu, Kiros, Joseph, Andrew and others, who drove up to participate in the reunion of a program that had brought them to St. Lawrence. This reciprocity that allows students and faculty to traverse oceans and continents in both directions has marked the SLU Kenya Semester Program for first twenty five years of its existence, and will, we hope and believe, continue to be one of our hallmarks.

We would like to thank the alumni who contributed their memories to this booklet, all those who attended the reunion or sent greetings, and all those who have donated to the three funds for Kenya-related projects.

All-told 121 KSP alumni contributed over \$22,000 to the three funds: \$10,540 was contributed to the Kenya School Project, \$11,210 was donated towards the Kenya Travel Assistance Fund and \$2,480 was gifted to support Kenya Center improvements.

**Asanteni sana na karibuni tena!**

Dr. Celia Nyamweru  
For the African Studies Board

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The KSP program grew out of a Kenya J-term that started in 1972. This photo shows the pioneering students in 1972, who participated in the original program, departing for Kenya.

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Fran Rulon-Miller '77	Fall 1976
Jack Williamson III '78	Fall 1977
Lynne Bezikos LeBlanc '78	1977
Ray Celeste Jr. '81	Fall 1980
Melissa Ingelstrom Carson '83	Spring 1982
Lori Hodgson '83	Fall 1982
Leigh Upson Romano '83	Fall 1982
Jim Markham '84	Fall 1982
Ian Grant '84	Spring 1983
Kathryn M. Eustis '84	Spring 1983
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Kathleen Gasperini '87	Fall 1986
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Justin Paterson (Connecticut College)	Spring 1992
Constance Scharff '94	Fall 1992
Christopher Burns '95	Fall 1993
Kate Beebe '99	Fall 1997 *
Brian Carr '99	Fall 1997 *

\* Kate and Brian's reflections were originally written for a writing class that they took in the Spring semester 1999; this is why they are considerably longer than the other pieces. We decided to include them to bring our record up to date and because they are thoughtful and deeply felt reflections by students recently returned from Kenya.

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*I hear and I forget, I see and I remember, I do and I understand.* This proverb is Chinese, yet it epitomizes the value of the Kenyan experience for me, learning in context. While living within the beauty and hardships of a developing nation, I gained a profound respect for the individual and the distinct "world view" of each person. As I gaining a deeper appreciation for another culture, I began to realize that there were multiple ways to solve any challenge. Perhaps most significantly, while living in Kenya, I gained a deeper understanding of myself—my likes and dislikes as well as my strengths and shortcomings.

Kenyan experiences were very different from any of my previous ones. At Dagoretti Children's Center, I met and befriended orphans, the hardest aspect of Kenya to leave behind. I pushed myself to take those last steps to the summit of Mt. Kilimanjaro when my whole body was silently screaming to seek the solace of more oxygen at a lower altitude. I connected with the Ambundos, my caring African family, with whom I still correspond to this day. From these experiences evolved insights into the commonality of human existence and of the human soul.

I learned that the true essence of the Kenyan experience did not exist on the surface where the hardships of life for many were ever present. The true essence of Kenya and the soul of its people gradually unfolded as I looked and then lived and learned among Kenyans. Dignity, grace, compassion, and ultimately true community were pieces of that human spirit that glistened so brightly amidst the formidable obstacles of third world survival. Upon returning to the hectic pace of urban existence in the United States, the connections of human to human and ultimately of humans to nature seemed removed and obscured.

In my quest to recapture that special Kenyan mystic, I left St. Lawrence and worked for National Geographic Magazine for 17 years. I hoped to return to Kenya professionally. A research assignment on the Endangered Wildlife of Africa led me to Africa's leading conservationists and should have climaxed with a journey to Kenya had student riots not broken out in Nairobi. In 1991 during the Bush Administration, I did go with the White House to the Ivory Coast in West Africa to prepare for a Vice Presidential visit. So far, my return to Kenya remains a dream.

Since leaving National Geographic to teach, I have attempted to bring some of the dignity and beauty of third world cultures into my teachings. I also joined the International Advisory Board of the Sellinger School at Loyola College of Maryland to help create a graduate program in International Business and to encourage others to venture overseas and learn in context as I had.

Perhaps the most precious legacy of my Kenyan experience shines forth in my three children. They have heard stories, seen slides, and listened to my cassette of children from Dagoretti Children's Center singing. My children have learned to enjoy the adventure of traveling off the beaten path despite the fact that my 12-year-old son has a spinal cord injury that he received at birth. Most importantly, they have learned to have an open mind and to enjoy being flexible. We have not gotten to Kenya yet, but have lived briefly in Thailand; and last summer visited Tibet and then followed the Silk Route for 3,000 miles across northern China's Gobi Desert. All five of us have been enriched living with peoples having such varied and nonwestern perspectives.

In 1975 as I boarded the plane bound for the States, I took a piece of Kenya with me in my heart, in my understanding, and in my unique world view. These experiences have enriched my life and better prepared me for the challenges I have been asked to face. As I left Kenya, I did not say Kwaheri (goodbye forever) to Kenya, but very deliberately said Kwaheri Akwanana (goodbye for now). While my return has not happened yet, I have full faith that I will pass that way again.

Gaither Galleher Kyhos (Class of 1977; Kenya Semester: Fall, 1975)

When I discovered that I had been selected to go to Kenya with the St. Lawrence program in the fall of 1976 I was ecstatic. For as long as I could remember in my short life I had always dreamed of going to Kenya. Not just abroad or to Africa, I wanted to go to *Kenya*. I had read endlessly as a child about the wildlife, National Parks and the tribal groups. It had seemed far away and impossible that I might ever actually accomplish my dream. I had never thought about it in any practical terms, I just knew I wanted to visit Kenya.

I spent the summer before in the public library reading up on anything related. I read newspaper microfiche on the political upheavals that lead to independence, novels, non-fiction and whatever I could find.

While in Kenya, I particularly enjoyed my homestays. The first week was spent with a Kikuyu family in a rural village outside Nairobi, then a month with a University professor and his family, before we settled down to life in the Safariland Hotel.

I was incredibly fortunate to have two internships. I worked at the Animal Orphanage at the Nairobi National Park and at the Snake Park at the National Museum. This was really a dream come true for me. I had been a passionate amateur naturalist and herpetologist since second grade when I did a report on snakes. I had such incredible experiences with both of these jobs.

Another major highlight for me was the trip we took during a break in school. The SLU group had a safari to National Parks planned. I had no interest in spending my time with a group of American and European tourists, so a small group of us managed to get our money refunded and put together our own adventure. We rented a Land Rover and took off to Lake Turkana (formerly Rudolf). What an adventure we had! The Land Rover broke down by degrees but we limped on. We camped along the way and met many, many wonderful people. I'm sure many of them had never seen a *mzungu* (white person) before.

Wherever I traveled, I introduced myself as a *mwanafunzi* (student) and it made all the difference in the world. Everyone respected students and it put us in a separate category from tourists or travelers. I learned quite a bit of Swahili also, which stood me in good stead during my travels.

I was indelibly impressed with the friendliness, generosity and warm spirit of the African people that I met everywhere I went. I remember distinctly the unreality of going home, being in the middle of Grand Central Station and thinking, "I have to remember to be suspicious, and distrustful of strangers now. I must keep my guard up."

My time in Kenya was the seminal experience of my college education. There is hardly anything in my life I have come away from with as much enrichment. I wrote a Multi-field Major entitled The Interactions of Human Nature and Human Culture (since there was no Anthropology major). I have continued my studies of cultures other than my own during my career as a professional Firefighter. Somedays I feel very much like an ethnologist studying the male fire service culture with its own language, customs and characteristics.

Truthfully though, I love my career as a firefighter. Oftentimes I think I might not have found the courage to follow my dream down such a difficult path if I didn't have the conviction that came from the experience of knowing that dreams really can come true. Of course, I've learned to have confidence in myself in many ways, but my Kenyan experience taught me, very powerfully, that we should hold onto our dreams, because dreams do come true.

Fran Rulon-Miller

## My Trip

I figured it would be a good idea to read my journal if I was going to write something.

It seems we arrived in Nairobi at 8:00am on August 29, 1977. We had a three hour delay at customs which gave us the chance to read our first local newspaper. The morning headline read: "Amin Has Three Beheaded; Nurse Identifies American Heads".

I'm not sure when we left Nairobi but my last journal entry is dated December 14, 1977. A few of us were at a place called the Palatine Hotel in Malindi. We had planned on going to Lamu but ran out of money.

In between these entries I learned some Swahili, slept in the bush, was adopted by the greatest family in Kenya (the O'Daras), worked for an advertising agency, made friends that have lasted decades, grew up, learned to barter, bought live chickens at market, pretended to eat goat head, hitchhiked hundreds of miles, became a "regular" at Club Chiromo, dodged working women, drank chai and swam at the YMCA, learned Casino gambling, bonded with Bill Elberty, climbed Mount Kenya, saw some exotic animals, commuted in crowded Mutatos, skinny-dipped in the Indian Ocean, did third class on the night train to Mombassa, drank a bunch of Tusker Beer (baridi sana), played the Nairobi Railway Golf Course, chewed the fat with missionaries, survived countless "emergencies", and met Libby Zerega who, six years later, would become my wife. I think I passed my classes.

Was it the best experience of my life? That's a no-brainer.

Jack Williamson  
fall semester 1977

I have a room at home filled with things I brought back from Kenya 22 years ago: batiks, soapstone, Masai spears, a carved box I traded for in Lamu. My husband teases me that you can buy similar things from boutiques in New York City. He doesn't get it.

I'm not sure how to describe the impact of the Kenya program on my life. After all, it was 22 years ago. I got on with my thoroughly Western life. I think that the biggest single factor is how I view the world, even all these years later. Maybe you need to live in the Third World for awhile to begin to understand it or at least understand the questions that the people who live there ask. Development was endlessly debated. Should they adopt more Western ways? Should they be a democratic society? How can a fragmented tribal people become more united? Would everyone be better off under socialism?

On a personal level, I recall the hospitality of the Kenyan people, from my village family to a family I lived with in Nairobi, to the generosity of total strangers. Hitchhiking was safe when I was there and was an accepted means of transportation.

Kenya assaulted the senses. It was a very beautiful place. The temperature was hot and so was the curry. The mud was an extraordinary red. To this day, when I smell a wood fire, I think of Kenya and my village experience. I was very apprehensive about my village experience at first, when I was led down a dark road under a full moon by a Kikuyu stranger. I thought, this is the last anyone may ever hear of me. My fears were put to rest when I entered a hut to find a circle of smiling children who had stayed up late to meet me. There was a fire in the middle of the dirt floor with everyone circled around it. They gave me a bowl of boiled potatoes to welcome me. I remember thinking, yes, potatoes, we are all of one planet.

I have not been back. I wonder how Kenya would seem to me now. I may go back for a visit one day. In the meanwhile, I make my husband watch TV when some program about Kenya is on, hoping that a visual image can convey the feel of the place. It's useless, of course. You have to have been there.

Lynne Bezikos LeBlanc  
Class of 1978  
Kenya Program Alumni 1977

## My remembrances of my semester in Kenya

By Major Ray Celeste Jr., U. S. Marine Corps

I found my semester in Kenya in the fall of 1980 to be remarkably enlightening. It exposed me to many aspects of Africa. I was struck by the amount of tribalism within Kenya. I learned at the time there were about 40 tribes, all of them with their own culture and interests. Nationalism is hard for Africans to understand. Tribalism has prevented Africa from progressing economically as fast as she should.

The peoples of Kenya have always been warm and open towards me. They appreciated my many questions to them in my attempt to understand them. I greatly enjoyed my interactions with them.

I was awed by the sheer beauty of East Africa --the beautiful temperate days, cool nights and diversity of the country. Kenya, a diverse geographically speaking country, has a long serene coastline, a breathtaking fault line called the Rift Valley, a picturesque mountain by the name of Mount Kenya and rolling plains. I remember vividly our trek around Mount Longonot with an incredible view of the Rift Valley!

The scenes of the game roaming about in the National Parks and throughout Samburuland left me thunderstruck. I consider the wildlife of East Africa to be one of the modern wonders of the world. Elephant, lion, cape buffalo, gazelle, cheetah, giraffe, zebra, hippopotamus, wildebeest, and many, many more were delightful to view in their natural habitat. They were an amazing sight to behold.

My semester in Kenya broadened my outlook on African and world affairs in general. I learned to appreciate the American experience much more. The semester

experience has had a positive impact on my life ever since returning. I enjoyed it so much that I traveled two more times to Kenya. I count my blessings on having been chosen to attend such a superbly run and lead program by Paul Robinson.

Melissa Ingelstrom Carson  
Kenya Program  
Spring 1982

I knew that I wanted to participate in the Kenya program as soon as I heard it was available. I was an Environmental Studies/Biology major and I couldn't wait to explore the African environment, especially the birds and mammals. My favorite thing to do then, and now, is to wander around lakes and mountains identifying and observing birds. Kenya had some amazing bird life for me to study—my favorite being the less than attractive marabou stork!

The people in Kenya were warm and friendly and accepting. I had more self-confidence in Kenya than any other time in my life. I felt like I could do anything and survive anywhere. I met people all over on my hitchhiking excursions traveling to and from my internship in one of the parks. I loved teaching outdoor education classes with the Wildlife Clubs of Kenya. I worked primarily with high school students, and although I teach fourth and fifth graders today, that internship greatly impacted my desire to become a teacher.

Every time I think back to the people I stayed with in Kenya I smile. I had fantastic home stay families. I remember my rural home stay family thought I was funny because I liked to carry the chickens around and sit with them. One chicken used to sit on my bed and it was sort of my pet. And then one night, we ate it! I can remember thinking I'd need to find a new pet!

My urban home stay family was delightful. We used to all dance to "Solid Gold" reruns after the kids got home from school! That's the only TV I saw for four months. I remember they threw a big birthday party for me when I turned 21, and invited all my friends. That was the best birthday I ever had!

My Samburu experience was the highlight of the Kenya program. Michael Rainey was a fabulous instructor along with our director Peter Hetz. I was so excited to be a part of the Samburu culture and not just to be reading about it or lectured to about it. I loved speaking Swahili with the elders and climbing Mt. Sabachi (in the rain). Sleeping in caves, living in dung huts, tending cows and sheep, and bathing in rivers have all been unmatched experiences. Thank goodness for Sarah Parker, my Samburu Sis, who endured my claustrophobia in the dung hut!!

My entire Kenya experience made me who I am today. It made me teach, travel, laugh, and love; and I wouldn't trade it or change it for anything in the world. The people I had the privilege of travelling with on the Spring 1982 semester made all my experiences even more valuable. They were a blast!

Thanks for allowing me an opportunity to write about it and remember it so fondly.

Melissa Ingelstrom Carson  
"Missy"

My Kenyan journal is in a shipping container somewhere, in the middle of one of my life's big moves. It has not been opened in a very long time, but I find that I don't need to turn its pages to recall the beauty or the magic that marked my experience in Kenya.

If I close my eyes I can still see the bright lavender of the jacaranda trees; the rich red colour of the dirt roads in the western province, the pink Bougainvillea draped along whitewashed walls. I can still hear African music jangling from kiosk radios and the blast of horns from overflowing matatus. I can still taste Mzee's thick, sweet chai and smell the rich aroma of fish cooked in fresh coconut oil. I can still feel my young cousins poking my skin, wondering at its whiteness.

I remember the sight of our first giraffe, 100 feet in the distance, and the ensuing whirl of cameras as roles of film were shot, only to find later in Masai Mara that we would get so close we could almost touch them. And I remember that great expanse of sky, layers of clouds so high that Canton seemed oppressive in comparison.

There are not many times in my life where I remember the days so vividly. Each place and experience is strongly imprinted in my memory, ready to be recalled...with a smile.

I feel extraordinarily lucky to have had the privilege of experiencing these things. My semester in Kenya remains one of the best experiences of my life. It provided me with a window not only into other environments and the view other people have of their world, their lives, but also how I view my own.

On top of all of this the semester was enriched by strong friendships, firmly entrenched in the shared experience of an extraordinary journey.

For this I am forever grateful, to Paul, to Howard, to Michael and Judy Rainy, my home-stay families and to the other students in my group, all of whom made Kenya such an exceptional, intense and remarkable experience.

Lori Hodgson '83, Kenya Semester Program Fall 1982



Reflections of Kenya By Leigh Upson Romano In Kenya Fall 1982

### The Rural Homestay

My fondest memory of my visit occurred because there was no electricity at my house. My sister had a transistor radio, and she loved to listen to music. On my first night there, she suggested we go outside and listen to the music. When I went outside, I noticed the clear sky. And for the first time in my life, I saw the Milky Way Galaxy; a band of stars stretching across the entire sky. My sister asked me to show her how Americans danced. So there on her back porch, I taught her how to do the Jitter Bug and Carolina Shag. At times, we were laughing so hard we could hardly stand up. Her siblings thought we were pretty funny and were imitating us. And I remember thinking to myself at the time, how glad I was that there was no electricity in the home because it forced us to create our own fun. I remember this often -- while I am raising my children and trying to teach them that they too can create their own fun instead of watching TV, playing video games or staring at the computer.

### The Urban Homestay

I remember having a talk with my father one night about Nairobi. I found myself in the rare occasion of being able to speak with someone who had grown up in the bush and had come to the city for the first time in his late teens. His first impressions included: noise, cement everywhere, lots of people, cars (which scared him), the speed of life and the tall buildings. He commented on the lack of vegetation found in the city, how unnatural (man-made) the surroundings were and how he did not know anyone he saw. Nairobi seemed so foreign to him. He missed his family and friends, the trees, the rolling hills, the quiet. This one conversation has made me more aware of the importance of the extended family and the importance of enjoying the outdoors as much as I can.

### Samburu Experience

While living with the Samburu, I learned about generosity and contentment. I often think of the fact that, in the Samburu society, if someone needs help all they have to do is visit a neighbor and they will help the person in need no matter what. And I saw joy and contentment during my visit. There was a sense of peace in most everyone I met. Both of these traits I find striking and refreshing given the economic

background of the Samburu. I have often thought that they understand life better than we do. Consequently, I have tried to be a more caring and generous person and have tried to be joyful regardless of what has happened in my life.

Essay of Jim Markham (Kenya Program, Fall '82)

One evening near the end of my time in Kenya...

Students are sprawled about the place, writing letters home at the dining room table, lying on blankets and towels outside on the lawn, listening to music, talking or just absorbing the magic of Kenya at twilight. As night falls on the compound in Karen, the stars poke through the blue-black curtain of sky, and a rich silence settles in with the cool night breeze. I open my second Tusker, and head to my bunk to do a little writing. Before long the dusky silence is broken most delightfully by the infectious bounce of solo guitar, a sound I've enjoyed almost every night I've spent at the Center since arriving. Must be Clement or another of the staff listening to the radio in their rooms outside my window. It sounds just like the effervescent guitar-based pop that we love to listen to on the radio. I settle in to do my accounting of the day, having just returned from four weeks of archaeology internship in the Rift Valley. Lake Baringo had been both beautiful and strangely otherworldly; it's hard to imagine that the place I explored for signs of ancient human settlement is part of the same planet as the piece of ground I grew up on in New England.

A riff with a joyous bounce ripples through the air, followed by a catchy syncopated groove. I try to go back to my writing, but the music bug has bitten, and I've just got to find out where it's coming from. I step out into the moonlit Kenyan night and follow my ears...right up to where Clement's room is. Tentatively I knock on the door, not wanting to disturb his evening. Immediately the music stops and I hear Clement call out "karibu." Opening the door, I see him, guitar on his lap, beaming that wide welcoming smile of his. Thoroughly surprised that the music I had been hearing from my room all semester was live and not a radio broadcast, I stammered the obvious, "you...you play guitar!" Again he smiled broadly and fingerpicked a phrase from the song I had just interrupted. A guitar player myself, it was hard to contain my excitement. "Can you show me how you do that," I asked. "Sure," he said, so I ran inside to get my guitar, which I had lugged half way around the world in its heavy flight case so I could play it in Africa. Clement generously spent an hour with me, showing me some of the tricks behind this style of African pop guitar music. I soaked up his instruction like a sponge, eager to learn whatever he could show me. But I also chastised myself for not investigating earlier. Why had I assumed that the beautiful guitar music I had listened to for months was a radio broadcast? Why had I not sought out the source of this music earlier, music which had captivated and thrilled me? How much more could I have learned from Clement had I not delayed?

Clement and I found time to meet once more in the waning days of the semester. I am grateful for his buoyant spirit, his lively music, his generous heart. And I learned a lesson, one of many major life lessons learned in Kenya: Follow what you love. Seek it out, investigate and explore. Take the risk now, and don't wait till later. Seize the day, for the day, *this* day, is the only one we really have.

Seventeen years have passed since the time I spent in Kenya, and now I find myself working as a music therapist with adolescents in a Denver day treatment facility. I hope that some part of the kindness and generosity of spirit that I found in Clement, in Naftal, in Paul and Howard, and so many of the people I met in Kenya, has found a place in my heart, and will in some way find a place in the hearts of the kids I work with, and in the hearts of my friends and family members. I'm deeply grateful for the opportunity to participate in the St. Lawrence Kenya Program. It changed my life. And it lives in me to this day. Salama.



Jim Markham  
Kenya Program Student  
Former Student Coordinator of Program

"I live in Africa not because I want to be called bwana by black men... I live here because it's so extraordinarily beautiful. The beauty of Africa gets into your bones...it becomes part of you. It's awfully difficult to explain"

Karen Blixen Out Of Africa

The first time I read this passage I understood exactly what Karen Blixen was trying to capture. How many times have people not understood my passion towards Kenya? How many times have blank faces replied to my statement that I was returning to Kenya again, and again, and again? Yet inside I was always at peace. I instinctively know when it is time to return to Kenya to get "rebalanced"; to realign my priorities by just being there.

I can remember as if it was yesterday landing at Kenyatta airport. It was February 1983 and there was a warm wind blowing. My blurry eyes were wide as I scrambled up onto the blue lorry with 29 other people I hardly knew or knew what we had in common, except a desire for adventure. The robust, fresh smells of vegetation were soon suffocated with the lorry's diesel fumes. Driving out to Karen, I was in amazement of the orange dirt on the side of the narrow tarmac road. It carried hundreds and thousands of brightly dressed Kenyans. They looked up at the bus of innocent white faces of youth and stopped to wave and flash big smiles. The warm embrace of Kenya then has always been with me.

I was slow to push the envelope and jealous of those who, within hours of arriving, left the SLU Karen compound to explore at Karen *dukas* and Ngong. That level of adventure and confidence eluded me at my arrival. "We should wait to be told what was to happen" was my instinct. Day by day that wore off. Peter Hetz's tremendous Swahili classes the essential tool to immerse myself into a culture and to delve into the people and learn about them. Half the semester was over already. I was a human sponge with Michael Rainy and his contagious passion. I spent endless hours listening, asking questions, trying to understand these northern nomads called the Samburu. I was growing quickly.

The peak of development was during my internship in Kajiado. I was a consultant for Family Planning, aching to understand how a blanket plan could be administered across 40 tribal groups. I studied just one, the Maasai, and learned that it couldn't. One month, on my own living with the Family Planning educator and her family going into the bush every day to watch and observe the education of the Maasai. I fell in love with the ways of the Maasai. With Maa the common tongue, I found that my Swahili was the less known 'foreign language' that I sought to speak in. English was a forgotten tool. It all came together for me here. The connection to the people and the spirit of the land. The inner-peace and balance. On one of my last days in Kenya in 1983, I sat in the back of a pick-up truck driving from Kajiado to Ngong onto Nairobi. I absorbed the falling sun over the plains and the sky that went on forever. This was a new home for me.

I have since returned four more times, 1988, 1990, 1993-4, 1998. Each time has been a re-balancing and a reconnection to the people of Kenya and the land. I always go to Kajiado to see my 'family' there and always to see my Maasai friends in Narok and Kajiado.

I have the fortunate benefit of also sharing the 'inside look' of Kenya with my Dad. My rural homestay in Western, Lamu, chapatis and goat roasted goat, and the Nairobi to Mombasa train among many large and small haunts we shared together. My passion for Kenya and Africa first brought my Dad there in 1987. He has since been back 13 more times. As former chairman of the Biology department at Williams College he is enamored with the environment and the animals. What he has grown to savor is the connection to the people and the land. It is one of the wonderful unforeseen outcomes of my journey in 1983... an increased bond I have with my Dad.

In 1993-94 I brought my then girlfriend, now wife, Juliet to see and live in Kenya and Africa for almost 10 months. It was important for me to have my best friend and wife at least understand my passion for the place. It is a wonderful connection to not only have her understand it, but now also share the passion and enjoyment of the people, place and spirit. We lived with the Maasai and worked on various projects. We keep in contact with our friends and look forward to returning again with our children so that they may come to grow and know all that is special about Kenya to us. I have visions of watching my son wander off with our Maasai friends' children, whistling, herding goats and feeling the peace and rhythm.

The confidence to reach out and explore in unknown environments and be rewarded has helped further my ability to succeed in life both in business and personally. I would now be the one to instantly explore the *dukas* up the road upon my arrival.

One of the common critical denominators throughout my 16-year relationship with Kenya is Paul Robinson and his wonderful family. It has been tremendous to have the Robinson's continually embracing, supporting, and challenging my growth, thoughts, and ideas. I have grown in my understanding of the place and the issues. Not only is St. Lawrence and future program attendees losing an incredible asset, but so too is Kenya.

Thank you St. Lawrence for opening a magical door.

Paul, you opened my eyes and heart to a wonderful people. *Asante sana. Nime furahi, kabisa.*

Ian Grant '84  
KSP S'83

My Kenya Semester, Spring of 1983, gave me a best day/worst night story that lasted for almost fifteen years. It's so long ago now that the details are bound to be inaccurate, which hardly matters when you're telling a story to people who have never heard Swahili or been to Kenya; but apologies in advance to you.

During our Samburu field trip I spent many hours with Pakvo and his brother Daivii practicing my Kiswahili. None of our Samburu guides would speak English, so I thought they couldn't. They did, however, converse willingly in Kiswahili with interested students. I listened and talked and got very, very frustrated at the difficult time I had grasping this seemingly simple language.

The morning we were scheduled to split up for home-stays and meat-feasts, several in our group woke up quite ill. Some last-minute reshuffling found me on my way to a home-stay, walking along with Daivii and two fellow students. Daivii was trying very patiently to explain our adventure to me when all of a sudden, something clicked in my brain and I got it. I understood every word he was saying.

What an incredible day! Daivii explained to me that we were on our way to his and Pakvo's shamba. They had arranged specially for me to come there (or so I understood.) He told me all about their home and their lives, every animal's name, how he and Pakvo disagreed about the prospects for farming. He introduced me to his wife, who was pregnant. I remembered that it wasn't appropriate to talk about a child until they had survived infancy but I couldn't contain my curiosity. I asked him if he wanted a boy or a girl. He looked mystified; I want a child, he responded. A new world was opening up for me.

But as the day wore on, I developed a powerful headache. And I discovered during a "field" trip to the "bathroom" that my period (for which I was completely unprepared) had arrived early. My problem was quite difficult to communicate delicately to Daivii, but he understood that I needed to go back to camp. It was too late in the day to undertake the long walk, he said, so we would try to walk back in the morning. Uncomfortable as this idea was, it was beginning to dim in comparison to the crushing headache I now had.

At dusk we moved inside to the smoky mud and dung house, filled with interested people and at least a couple of vociferous small animals. I tried to pay attention to the plans for the next day: the boys who would take us out herding were thrilled that I understood Kiswahili and promised a great day. At last we laid back to rest. Some time later I woke up shaking violently with fever, my lips and face swollen, flies everywhere, virtually unable to move. My fellow students woke up and tried to explain to our home-stay mother that I was ill. (I think it was Pakvo's wife but I was so sick that I can't remember.) I just lay there, all night long, wondering what would become of me.

Needless to say, I did not go herding in the morning. I think I understood that Pakvo was coming to get me as soon as he could. But oh, I HAD to go to the bathroom, which as you know meant getting as far from the shamba as possible. I think I crawled out of the hut. The next thing I remember is Pakvo lifting me up, incredible mess that I was (and a very big person at the time as well) and putting me in the truck. I also remember that he spoke to me in English, but I may have been hallucinating...

Something like twenty-eight people came down with dysentery within the next few days; I wouldn't be surprised if you read stories about it from other people too. It remains in my memory as the only time in my life I was so sick that I thought I might die.

My "best day" with Daivii, however, the day I understood Kiswahili for the first time, is now a close second to the day my son Danny was born (April 6, 1997).

As much as I adore and am completely indebted to Paul and Howard and Naftal and the Wabwires and so many other people I met during my Kenya semester, I think it was Pakvo and Daivii and the other Samburu guides who impacted me the most. I remember Pakvo as the most peaceful, strong and patient man I had ever met. I wonder if he remembers me.

Understanding Kiswahili changed my Kenya experience and my life. During the rest of the semester, I experienced many things I couldn't have without it, got to know many wonderful people I otherwise wouldn't have, and overheard many things that perhaps I shouldn't have. It was very enlightening and, sometimes, very painful -- but it was definitely worth it.

Kathryn M. Eustis, 5/5/99

The semester I spent in Kenya was an important period of my life. Primarily it was a time of discovery and growth away from the confines of classroom walls. Setting off for Africa with a group of relative strangers was a challenge; getting to know others forced me to look at what truly mattered to me, living in close quarters made me question my behavior and assess the effect, positive or negative, that I had upon others. Without the immediate support of family and close friends, I was on my own for the first time in my life, responsible for decisions and the consequences of my actions.

The structure of the semester allowed for growth: a variety of homestays, settings, safaris and mixing of groups were excellent arenas for interaction. It allowed us, as students to experience different lifestyles, cultures and ways of living in a varied country such as Kenya. Throughout, all the people we met impressed me with their warmth, generosity their interest in me and my culture and above all, their willingness to share their lives, public and private with students. Learning to speak Swahili well, seeking out conversations, exploring the literature and history of Kenya and travelling were facets of daily life. Seeking out the unfamiliar to make it familiar was a challenge that helped to satisfy my curiosity about the world I was living in. There was so much to learn, to absorb, to attempt to understand that it was real period of personal growth: I felt my mind was like a sponge, willing to absorb as much as it could and that still was not enough.

I still ask myself what was it about Kenya that created change, encouraged growth and maturity? Was it the magic of Africa-the vast skies that encouraged periods of solitude and reflection? Was it the fact that I confronted fears and thoughts I had always found easier to push aside? Would the same things have happened had I spent a semester



in Spain or France? Many factors came into play. I made the choice to get as intimately involved as I could in Kenyan life in order to learn about it. This was a wise decision – there are so many experiences that remain entrenched in my memory, all of equal importance but far too numerous to list here. That semester fueled a desire to pursue anthropology, to travel extensively and to continue to learn the ways and languages of other cultures, all the while learning more about myself. Kenya was a gateway to this exploration and that journey is far from over.

Friendships, between students and Kenyans, were forged from a spirit of shared experiences and looking out for each other while allowing all of us to travel on our paths of discovery. The memories that we all have are different, but I feel all of us were touched in some way by our semester abroad. For myself, it was a turning point, I had found a focus in my life, and left Nairobi a stronger, more well-balanced young woman excited by what my future held.

Laura Hacker - Durban  
Spring Semester 1984

## How the SLU Kenya Program Impacted My Life

After having taken as many courses in African studies as an SLU student up until that time had ever completed, I was thrilled upon my acceptance the fourth time around, my senior year in 1987. And I thought I was as prepared as any American 21-year-old young woman can be.

What I found in Kenya were profound friends and rich, fulfilling family lifestyles which opened my mind, heart, and soul to an entirely different way of thinking and understanding. I felt like a small star, suddenly, amongst a galaxy of constellations. Yet oddly, in my smallness, there came a new brightness and a self-empowerment to change my little corner of the world for the better. This, I think, in part was because of the excellent Kenyan program directors, Paul Robinson and Howard Brown. They both demonstrated unique abilities to help students transcend this feeling, assimilate into the culture as quickly as possible, and come out stronger and more prepared for life in the future.

As a scholarship student on a work-study program, it was difficult to assimilate at SLU—particularly at that time when the Greek system was so strong. Yet in the Kenya program, I felt a kinship with the other students: We had all struggled to make it into this program and no matter what our backgrounds, we were all in the same position once we were abroad. The Kenya program taught me to appreciate my fellow-SLU students as well, to be more forgiving, understanding, and accepting of where they were also coming from. This was most unexpected.

As for my lifestyle today, my internship with the Daily Nation Newspaper in Nairobi was the beginning of my career. Today, I am a freelance writer/columnist for various magazines and websites, including National Geographic's Adventure magazine, Powder, Snowboarding, Bike, Blue, Spin, and Madison. I also publish my own magazine called W.i.g.—for Women in General ([www.wigmag.com](http://www.wigmag.com)). My Kenyan internship gave me the experience and qualifications upon graduation to work at the Santa Monica Newspaper, which eventually led me to my own writing career. I'm grateful to my Nation Newspaper employers, specifically Tom Mshindi, who at the time, was an assistant editor, but who took me under his wing despite my slow pace with Kiswahili. He is now the Editor of the Nation and was responsible for the first reportage of the Nairobi Embassy bombing. We still keep in touch.

I will pass on my Kenyan experience, particularly the openhearted and open-mindedness I gained from studying abroad, to my children some day. It will continue to impact my life in ways I can only imagine.—**Kathleen Gasperini, Class of 1987**

Before traveling to Kenya, I was planning to go on to graduate school and get a degree in the area of parasitology and tropical medicine research. My travel to Kenya opened up a new way of thinking, behaving and living for me. It has influenced every career/education decision I have made and continues to do so each day.

As I mentioned above, I was very interested in tropical medicines and possibly continuing on in school to get a Master's degree in a related area. I was particularly intrigued by the effects of parasites on the human body and health, which was one of the reasons I travelled to Kenya. I wanted to learn from observing the effects and through practical implementation of research rather than just reading and viewing objects through the microscope. During my stay in Kenya, I did my internship at the Kenya Medical Research Institute and worked with a group of researchers in the Schistosomiasis Laboratory. Part of the internship included a field trip in which I travelled with a team of four men to several communities where they had set up a research project. Part of this project incorporated public health methodology along with basic experiment methods.

The public health component was fascinating because it dealt with people and not test tubes. I have always been a bit of a detective, which is why science became the focus of my studies. Epidemiology and disease prevention/control are the detective mechanisms in public health. It allows researchers/health workers/development organisations to piece together the clues of a disease outbreak or epidemic and determine the cause. The work the team in Kenya was doing incorporated several steps in order to determine whether or not a new technique combined with community participation could help to control and prevent the disease.

Upon my return from Kenya, I found living at SLU very difficult. In Kenya, people used everything and very rarely wasted food, water and material goods. People struggled day by day to survive. At SLU, it seemed like people did not think about how they wasted food, energy, time and were very happy to ignore the plight of people outside of their own surroundings. I could not do that anymore and decided to embark on a new direction from the one originally planned. I have to give some of the credit for my decisions to Carol Budd who gave wonderful advice on different options opened to me.

I discussed my internship in detail with Carol and decided against school. I didn't want to go back into a lab and look at things in test tubes or on slides. I wanted to experience working with people and getting further practical experience in disease prevention. This desire led to my joining the Peace Corps and working for two years as a science and social science teacher in Samoa. From there the rest is history. I returned from the Peace Corps, went to Columbia University where I earned a Master of Public Health and am now working as the Health Co-ordinator for a Regional Pacific Non-government organisation called the Foundation of the People's of the South Pacific International.

Much of what I learned in Kenya helps me in my current position. In Kenya, I learned to be flexible, open to new and extremely different cultural experiences and how not to impose my world view on others. It is amazing what I gain by observing and listening before talking. This was a lesson provided by many of my encounters in Kenya. Paul, Howard and several of the professors I met at SLU (ALI, where ever you are, thanks!) reinforced this over and over again. People have so much to offer if we are willing to listen and learn. This is something I must do in order to be recognised and respected by the staff I work with throughout the Pacific because Pacific Islanders do not appreciate being taken for granted.

I guess the key message, is when working with communities it is necessary to respect their knowledge. Respect was and is a lesson from the Samburu. This will always be remembered, and I try to live my life by respecting those people I live and work with here in Vanuatu and the Pacific Region.

I am about to embark on a new adventure soon. This one will be extremely challenging as I may not be working except as a volunteer helping people in the Highlands of Papua New Guinea who would like some assistance in improving their health. My husband will now take over being the main breadwinner while I amuse myself doing things I haven't had time to do in the past few years. For those of you who do not know much about PNG, it is a large Pacific Nation, which has over 800 languages and many cultures, not to mention the highest number of HIV/AIDS and TB cases in the Pacific. So, my work will be cut out for me. I am sure my Kenya experiences will again help me deal with the new challenges that arise. I move to PNG in October and will provide information on contact numbers at that time. For those of you who have never been to the Pacific, please feel free to get in touch --it is an incredible region with many interesting sites to see and people to meet.

My semester in Kenya has proven to be a very pivotal creative and life experience for me. In the ten years since I left Kenya, I have grappled with my experiences and found an outlet for my thoughts through creative writing.

Perhaps it was fortuitous that we were encouraged to keep journals while in the Program. I wound up with a lot of great notes and passages. After my return to the States, I wrote some creative nonfiction and fiction stories based on my experiences. As the years have passed, I haven't completed my explorations of the ideas, cultures, people, and happenings I encountered in Kenya.

I am a novelist. In one of my novels-in-progress, I revisit savanna landscape ecosystems and student researchers. However, my mental and creative processing of the subject has transmuted mere fact into contemporary science-fantasy. My novel probes meanings that can be found in landscape, language, symbol, and mathematics, and tests the dynamics of power in human and supernatural dominance-hierarchies.

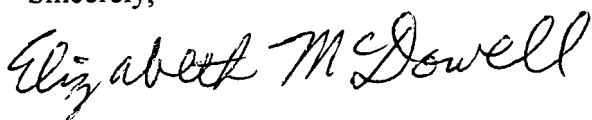
Well, that summary said, it probably doesn't make much sense to anyone. However, I hope that, when the book is finished, my novel will provide an entertaining and thought-provoking romp for everyone. Look for it in bookstores a couple years from now!

Because I work on this contemporary-fantasy novel every day--at least in my mind if not always on paper--memories of the Kenya Program are with me every day as well. I have had no other time period in my life that has been so fundamentally captivating to my imagination--that causes me to grapple with questions raised by incidents and landscapes. I keep peeling back layers of meaning, only to find new and tasty implications beneath, on real and metaphorical levels.

In addition, I often use the Kenya camping recipes that we received--making chapatis and stews. And I frequently drink chai.

Thank you, Kenya Program, for giving me a never-depleted cornucopia of food for my body and for my imagination.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Elizabeth McDowell". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the typed name.

Elizabeth McDowell  
Kenya Program, Fall 1988

## Battle of the Bullfrog

I lived with the Mesopir family in their home on the compound of a veterinary hospital on the outskirts of Nairobi. I don't remember the exact name of where Mr. Mesopir worked on the compound, nor do I remember what his job was exactly. I do remember that I had to be driven to the University of Nairobi by one of the family members because we lived beyond the bus routes. And I remember one of my first nights with the Mesopirs--the battle with the bullfrog.

Mr. Mesopir was an engineer who earned his degree in Moscow, having been granted a scholarship to study abroad. He met his wife there, and upon completion of his studies the family eventually settled in Nairobi. Their eldest daughter Victoria, or Vicky, was awarded the SLU scholarship in the early '90s, and she spent Christmas with my family that year.

Nestled in bed asleep on one of my first nights with my Nairobi 'homestay', following a hearty meal of Russian Borscht (!), a slight rustling under my bed caught my attention. The scratching and shuffling grew louder, and louder still...and I was frozen. I got up the nerve to stand on the bed, and sinking into the mattress, I stumbled to its farthest edge near the door. Then in one daring leap I cleared the room and landed in hall. Passing the bathroom on the left, I headed to Vicky's room further down on the right and timidly pushed ger door open.

"Amanda? Are you OK?"

"Vicky? There's something under my bed!" I managed a loud whisper.

Vicky emerged from her bedroom and we tiptoed back to the rustling down the hall that had jarred me awake. Convinced that Vicky was braver than I, still I wondered whether she was thinking SNAKE, too? As if she heard my thoughts, Vicky paused. "Let's get my dad."

At this point I began to feel foolish: Half the house was ripped from slumber to make battle with whatever pathetic creature had chosen my cosy bed to share! There we stood, Vicky and I in our pajamas, loitering a few good paces behind Mr. Mesopir, who was armed with a broom. I must say his technique was a bit aggressive--he simply took the broom and shoved it under the bed, wildly sweeping it back and forth. But it worked.

A mamouth frog lurched out from under the bed, seraching for an opening, which happened to be where we were standing in the hall. (I only know it was a bullfrog of some sort in retrospect, bacuse at first glimpse the creature was huge and menacing and coming in my direction.) All three of us ran into the living room--Vicky and I to escape, Mr. Mesopir in hot pursuit. While the women instinctively jumped up on the nearest couch or chair, Mr. Mesopir emerged poised and braced for battle. Screams bubbled up from my throat, and the house turned momentarily chaotic as whirling brooms, dancing feet and skittish furniture jumpers jostled for position. Poised like KC At The Bat, Mr. Mesopir swung the broom and sent the frog flying through the screen door. Outside. Calm was restored!

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I studied in Kenya nearly nine years ago (gasp!), and some of the memories are more vivid than others, some certainly less humorous, and some have no doubt been embellished over time. The battle of the bullfrog, for me, is indeed most vivid and, thankfully, still makes me chuckle.

## A Personal Statement on the Kenya Program

One week after a bumpy return from Nairobi, I unfurled a map of Kenya and struck it on my wall. I used tacks and string to show the places I went and the routes I had taken to get there. I couldn't seem to explain anything meaningful about the cultural landscape of Kenya, anymore than I could seem to shake the weird rash on my arm. (Now gone, but not forgotten. Still unidentified. Sometimes referred to at family holidays as the *Kenyan Crud*.) I figured that, if I was going to tell the same stories nine times a day for a year, it was my duty, at the very least, to teach people something about East African geography. If I still had that map I could pull apart the contours, rivers and roads and use them to teach the geography of my life. I would put a leftover roofing nail in the Kenya symbol, so that all the strings of who I was, and who I would become, could converge there.

These days I am more concerned with bugs in my software than bugs in my sour milk, and Kenya seems very far away. On the surface my relationship with Kenya consists of a clay pencil holder, a cousin who knows the words to *Jambo Bwana*, and my whimsical nod when Toto blesses the rains on the local easy-listening station. This vapid connection used to bother me. In an early effort to reconcile it, I encased my journal in a half-inch of duct tape and left it hibernating in boxes of third grade soccer photos, high school year books, and outdated MAC manuals in my parent's basement. Someday someone will cut it out of the silver cocoon and learn more about pastoralism, and me at age 21, than they ever wanted to know.

Oddly, it took a few years for me to see the tangle of strings reaching from Kenya to more parts of my life than I'm able to classify and catalogue. The strings help remind me that behind the post-its on my monitor and underneath the moss on my lawn, I'm more connected to Kenya than it appears. I can trace them into the woods, onto summits, and most importantly back to Africa for several more years, where the place and I finally made the kind of impact on each other I was seeking. Which isn't to say that Africa ever yielded all the answers I hoped it would. But that it started something I am still trying to finish.

Justin Paterson  
Portland, Oregon  
Spring Semester 1992

## *A Fortnight in Samburu*

By

Constance Scharff

I did not fall in love with Kenya. In the fall of 1992, the famine in Somalia was kicking up into a full-blown catastrophe, atrocities in Rwanda and Burundi were threatening to spill over into neighboring states, and tourists were being slaughtered in Egypt. There was so much sadness on the African continent that the emotion was almost palpable. Tragedies of the highest order were being birthed. It did not go unnoticed.

The sentiment of the continent rubbed off on me. The poverty of many Kenyan nationals affected me much more than I had expected, increasing with every passing day. The world began to take on a gray look, in drastic contrast to the bright gold of the savanna and the African sun. Nonetheless, I was becoming depressed by the senseless killing and scarcity of resources in and around Kenya. I felt as if the walls of inadequacy were closing in on me.

... And then, the program took us to Samburu. Dr. Robinson was keeping us apprised of the movement of the droughts and conflicts causing the famines among various ethnic groups in the northern territories in Kenya and bordering nations. The drought was expected to hit Samburu sometime around or after our arrival. I wasn't sure how I would feel going to an area "bracing for famine." But then, how I felt didn't matter. We were going up there anyway.

As those of you who have been to Kenya know, what I experienced in Samburu was not at all what one would have expected given the external situation. Take a grumpy, pessimistic, spoiled girl from California and put her in hut in the middle of Africa with a famine raging just a few miles to the north and you're bound to have problems. Fortunately, I exited the lorry to the welcoming arms and smiling faces of the Samburu, an experience that has left an indelible mark on my psyche.

Unbeknownst to me, there are people in the world who make themselves content with what they have. The Samburu were a clear example of this phenomenon. Unlike the entertainment execs and movie stars who are constantly striving for more, never content with their successes, the Samburu cherished the simple blessings in their everyday lives and began to teach me how to do the same.

Two of the elders took me under their wing, making it their job to teach me the lessons in humility and gratitude that I desperately needed to learn. Laikipia, one of the youngest elders, with his winning smile and charm introduced me to activities I never would have tried on my own. Though completely unable to communicate in anything other than sign language and the understanding of the soul, Laikipia showed me the importance of family and openness. The fact that he teased me by calling me his second wife and checked on me every morning and evening to ensure that the scowl was wiped from my face made all the difference in the world. I would dance only with him on our final night with his people. His presence caused me to feel at ease with the uncertainty of nomadic life.

"Jay Leno," the name I gave my homestay father because of his enormous white teeth and unpronounceable name, taught me how to face fear. When I desperately pleaded to be allowed to leave the group on "God's Mountain" and hike back to the relative comfort of base camp, Jay Leno's speech calmed me. The wisdom of his years was gentle, showing me that it was all right to look at the unknown without cowering and to face it with dignity and faith in my abilities and myself. He gave me leeway to practice my own customs while taking the time to show me his. Most important, he turned a blind eye to my insistence on urinating in the lamb's pen because I was afraid to go where there might be lions!

I don't recall if it was Jay Leno or Laikipia who took me to the home of a dying man. The man was a great and respected elder whose one parting wish was to see his daughter circumcised. We arrived at his home just after the ritual had been completed. The prairie was alive with activity. I knew most of the people in attendance. Many of the students from my group were there. No one would have guessed that a man was passing, there was that much singing and jubilation going on outside the hut. All the men and women sang and danced while I nervously waited for word on the health of the old man. We were there for hours. I couldn't imagine why it was taking the man so long to die.

An aged woman exited the hut. Everyone became quiet as she spread the news. The man had heard our songs, visualized our dances. He was so pleased with the circumcision of his daughter and the gaiety of our celebration, our celebration of life, that he had been reinvigorated. He would not die that day. Jay Leno and Laikipia hooted with exultation and continued on with the dancing. Revelry and hope had maintained life, just as my Samburu guides had taught.

It took years before my insufferable attitude and cynical perspectives changed, before I learned that happiness comes from within me. But I can trace the beginning of my revelation and change to two weeks in Kenya and two men from the tribe called Samburu.

May 13, 1999

Our Kenya Semester was a defining moment in my life. I might go as far as to say *the* moment, but how can I really quantify that with birth, my first swim meet, graduations, and memorable moments such as those? Of my adulthood though, my time in Kenya with the KSP has paved my entire way in life; bringing me to where I am right now in my career, and molding me into the person I have come to be. For that, I am extremely grateful. *But how do I go about explaining and isolating what happened in Kenya to shape my life? . . . I wonder.*

Not a day goes by that I don't think of some experience or other from our semester. I find myself day-dreaming on occasion, lost in a moment from six years ago, and 10,000 miles away. There are a few repeaters that tend to re-surface in my mind:

*Northern Tanzania:* The lorry ride from Olduvai Gorge to *Ol Doinyo Lengai*. Dorobo Safaris' green Mercedes monsters were racing through the savanna at alarming speeds, kicking up clouds of dust in their wake. We were balancing ourselves on the edge of the trucks in order to take in the full effect of the winds. The trucks were barreling over trees without hesitation; it was the dry season and aside from an occasional bird in flight, the land was void of wildlife. As we descended the final escarpment, *Lengai* -- the mountain of God -- came into full view. The twisting embankment teased us with mock-fear as we climbed down, taking extreme caution at every turn so as to not send us careening over the edge. At the bottom, we proceeded with less hesitation and advanced toward the land of ash fallout: basecamp of the active volcano which we would be ascending the next morning.

That entire series of events from Olduvai to *Ol Doinyo* had particular meaning for me since I had spent the bulk of the afternoon creating a children's fable in my head. I later wrote it in Kiswahili for my final exam. I doubt that the trip would be on anyone else's Top Ten list, but it is an event I hold vividly in my mind.

*Northern Kenya:* Our Samburu Fieldcourse had just led us through five days of mountainous adventures. Like many other Samburu, we were escaping to the highlands where rainfall is a constant in this arid world. We had set-up basecamp beside Naiber Keju, and the women of our small group *Sidai* (Samburu for Ostrich, a name given to us by Pakuo because of our mixed colors) were at a meeting with several Samburu women. Kenny and I got the bright idea to make dinner for them, to be ready after the meeting. We thought we were chefs, and organized the most complex menu on Earth. After three days of stale peanut butter and jellies, we were famished and wanted to eat like lords. The two of us must have spent two hours rolling chapatis, cutting vegetables and boiling lentils. Kristin, Michelle and Rashiki were floored when they returned from the meeting to see us covered in flour and carrot peels. We did eat like lords that night, and it made us value the availability of food amidst a culture that often struggles for it.



*Southern Kenya, Taita Hills:* My homestay brother, sister and cousin dragged me out of bed one morning to go "hunt" baboons. In this case, our weapon was a camera (a much more suitable tool). Our chases led us far away from the house and across the main (only) road that cuts through the town of Dembwa, between Mwatate and Wundanyi. We were deep into the forest, as much as that was possible next to a highway. Two packs of baboons intrigued us almost all afternoon; as soon as we got close enough to take a picture, they would swing away atop the trees. Inevitably, whenever we *were* within visual range they acted much like zebras do, turning their pink butts in our direction and laughing the entire time. Silly, really. But then again, that is what baboons are.

There are several hundred more memories that remain a part of me; too many for one page. I now work at the international level, starting tropical reforestation and solar power projects for developing countries. Dozens of my groups are in Kenya, and I relish in the fact that I've spent time there and can visualize what they might be doing at any giving moment. Africa is my second home, and I owe part of that to my time on the Kenya Semester Program. This is why I am returning there for the next two years. Who knows, maybe more. I am sure a lot won't change from before: I'll continue fabricating stories while on trips, cooking feasts for my friends, and chasing baboons around town. Oh yeah, and a few more things . . .

Christopher Burns, '95

Kate Beebe '99, Kenya Semester Program Fall 1997

Ngong Road weaved the way through usual pedestrians, men, women, and children, each following the other's steps rhythmically under the stale heat of the sun. Side street *kiosks* bustled with activity, as people mechanically offered their few shillings in return for tasty goods such as roasted maize, plantains, and oranges. Children wore scraps of western clothing, kicking trash with their feet, laughing all the while. Men sported tailored coats that hung on their slim bodies, as they stood patiently in search for the next available ride into town. Women, of all ages, wore *khangas*, vividly colored head scarves, business attire, and school uniforms. Crackling speakers blared African music, as the people sauntered casually, ran swiftly, stood still, or playfully wasted the day away enjoying this daily scene in town. The commotion never ceased on Ngong road, whether the time of day called for the sun to wake or set.

The Range Rover motored on, dodging the zoo of small polluting cars that dominated the black pavement in both lanes. I sat there and looked out of the window at the scenes that passed, as if I was looking at a small movie screen. I felt like an onlooker or a member of the audience. The reflections of fluorescent colored *matatus* bounced off the pane of my movie screen; I could never stop laughing over the American slang that graced their exteriors. Each *matatu* prided itself upon a name, one that was hip, cool, and fresh to the young urban crowd, but seemed random and often times humorous to American students and travelers. It was common to see names that praised dead American rap stars or names that simply combined two English words together that made

little sense. These names seemed to capture the essence of *matatu* style ridin' (this mode of transportation has defined the word "reckless" in my own personal dictionary).

I have been a witness to this particular scene before. While participating on the St. Lawrence University Kenya Semester Program, the weeks in between the field experiences were spent taking classes at the YMCA in Nairobi; every day the giant, obnoxious, army green lorry would follow the same route down Ngong. Every day, the same pedestrians flashed before our eyes and then *poof!* were gone. It was as if they were treading water and we were the ones swimming swiftly upstream. I remember times when I would just sit there, idle in both thought and action, with the wind whipping at my face in an irritating manner, as the outside world whizzed by at a rapid speed. I would sit there in a braced position to protect myself from the unexpected jolts of the lorry, while peeling the strands of tangled, wind-blown hair back off my face, and stare. These people and this town were so close to my fingertips, yet, not once in my three months did I ever choose to reach out. Instead, I nervously shrunk down farther in my seat seeking comfort in its worn leather.

However, this was all about to change. Christina, Sharon, and I were about to begin our first day at our internships with the Salvation Army. I should have felt excited, nervous but only in anticipation, and optimistic about the four weeks that lay ahead of us, but all I felt was fear. All of a sudden, Njau, our devoted driver, abruptly turned off Ngong and onto a side street, ironically named Cemetery Road. This road would lead us to the biggest shanty town in Nairobi, Kibera. The road quickly veered away from the bustling activity of Ngong, and instead of pedestrians crowding the shoulders, a thick green forest hushed the city sounds as it blanketed both sides of the road.

The sudden stillness that swept through the gentle twists and turns of the road surprised each of us, as the crowded visions of Ngong still raced through our minds. On Cemetery Road, there were no pedestrians to stare at, no music to catch notes of, and no *kiosks* or *matatus* to remind us of the daily scene we observed on Ngong Road. In fact, Cemetery Road was completely deserted. Njau pressed his foot down harder on the gas pedal, appearing anxious to drop us off at the Center so he could begin his next trek across town. Sitting with one hand cradling my chin while propped up by the window's ledge, I drifted off into space. "How had I arrived at this point?" I continuously asked myself. I nervously shifted my hot, sticky legs under my *khanga* and held my stomach as I debated whether or not lunch had gone down smoothly. Were the butterflies dancing, or were they swimming, running, climbing, flying, and shaking too? The road became narrow and continued to wrap its way around the dense forest, offering us no preview of Kibera, as if to keep us in suspense about the world in which we were about to enter.

I had walked into our program coordinator's office only one week ago, giggling and smiling, as the visions of the rural whereabouts of my internship danced happily in my mind. I collected myself, and listened to the arrangements that Paul had made for my last month here in Kenya. I remember standing there watching Paul as he sifted through his papers on his desk in a quick but organized manner. He was allowing himself time to readjust his thoughts to the hordes of students walking in and out of his office all day long, anxious to know where they would be placed. My friend Christina was standing next to me. We were both interested in the same internship, that entailed working with a women's group, projecting efforts to conserve the water and land in rural northern Kenya.

Suddenly, an overwhelming sense of panic crept up my skin, a shiver in disguise, as it discovered the root of my lungs, debilitating me from responding, even uttering a word to the question spontaneously asked by Paul, "How would you girls like to spend the next month in the largest slum of Nairobi?" Bam! I was SPEECHLESS. Excuse me, wait a minute, had I not heard him correctly? The room had become much smaller, the walls were slowly caving in, and my lungs were brimming with tiny bubbles of nerves waiting to burst.

Paul continued to explain that the internship we had hoped for was not very possible due to the current state of the group, and the unstable political climate at that time in Kenya would deter us from accomplishing our goals. And although Paul recognized that this option was drastically different from our original plans, he believed that an opportunity for us to invest our time and efforts in the slums could be a difficult but rewarding challenge. Christina had already agreed before I could even begin to digest this radically different proposition. In fact, she seemed really excited and asked if she could excuse herself to return to a paper that she was working on in the library. I stood there quietly in front of Paul, fidgeting nervously with my hands, trying hard to resist the urge to bawl my eyes out like a child in front of him. I remained concentrated on his blue eyes smiling gently at me as if he understood the emotions swirling around uncontrollably in my head. Did he understand? Could he possibly know what I have been just confronted with?

Disappointment did not confront me as much as fear and the incredible lack of confidence I felt in my heart. For if there was one thing I had learned in our three months in Kenya, it was to be as flexible as one possibly could. No, I was not disappointed. I

was scared. But why was I so scared? Why couldn't I agree like Christina had and then walk out of Paul's office as easily as I had entered? I hated myself for standing frozen in Paul's office while my friend had agreed to this option as if there was nothing to consider or contemplate. I hated my idealistic self for wishing Paul had never mentioned this as a possibility.

Was it the very little I knew about the slums in Nairobi that frightened me? If it was, then why was I not afraid about the other option in rural Kenya? I only knew a little bit about the organization but the fact that the community was settled in the peaceful mountains soothed my soul. Was it simply the mountains and riverbeds holding our adventures of the past three months in their hands providing me with solace that deterred me from deciding right away? Why has this opportunity catapulted me into a world of confusion?

I do know that I have always been terrified of the city. Nairobi, an unfamiliar city, with foreign streets, people, and cars swirling around my dazed state in all directions, knowing that I had to be the one to look straight ahead as to not look foreign myself. It sounds like a game, doesn't it? In Nairobi, the color of my skin followed me wherever I went, and I could feel the hairs on the nape of my neck cringe when a group of us stuck out in the midst of a crowd. The pollution emitted from filthy diesel engines threatened my lungs daily, as was proven when any one of us would go to blow our noses. Envisioning our snot to be green, it was unfortunately black. The street children sat hunched over in dank and dirty corners of two walls converging, bottles of glue permanently clasped in the palms of their hands, bringing the glue to the tips of their noses in a robotic motion, eyes vacant, and lips frothing. Children being led by children,

a world where caretakers seemed not to exist. Disease and addictions ran rampant, and as I came to the decision to intern in the heart of a slum, I knew that I was about to confront these fears with no looking back. However, I had no idea what I was about to experience, for it seems no one does when the world you think has become somewhat familiar in months time turns around and surprises you once again.

In the end, will I have felt fortunate to have had the opportunity to intern within the slums, a place where so many students on the program have avoided its devastation? It is important to emphasize this ability for students on the program to avoid such a concentration of impoverished people simply by the way the time in Kenya is scheduled. On the very first day when all twenty-three of us arrived at the international airport, we were instructed to be observant of the changes in environment as we cruised through the outskirts of Nairobi in the infamous lorry. Paul did not hesitate to point out a shantytown on our trip out to the school's compound, and it seemed only natural for us to look across the bed of tin with horror. This could very well be both the first and last time a student on the St. Lawrence program could come in view of a shantytown. Unless while in the urban homestays when a student's family may choose to familiarize one with the entire city, the slums can remain unknown and invisible to the human eye.

From the back seat where I sat in the Range Rover, I could begin to see a clearing up ahead along side the road that was reflected in the light and pattern of the sky. The dense forest that led us to this point began to thin out as the shoulders became sparse in vegetation. I scooted forward and positioned myself between the two front seats, to allow the vision of the road to seep into my brain, wanting to document it in its entirety. A few stragglers, mostly men donning weathered clothes, lazily moped along the sides of the

road with tattered bags slung over their bony arms. Discolored trash, faded with age, in all shapes and sizes littered the grassy sides, accumulating rapidly as the jeep neared closer to the rim of our destination. As Njau turned the last rolling corner, the suspense rushed out of our bodies as reality came crashing down. We were now face to face with one of my greatest fears- absolute poverty.

It seemed from a distance to look like a bed of cold gray, rusty tin. A bed of tin, so gnarly and decrepit, the idea of lying down on it soon vanished, as it soon came to resemble nothing I had ever laid eyes on before. The Range Rover cruised down the last slope, passing pedestrians with their arms raised high in recognition, and children with their eyes opened wide screaming repetitively "*Howareyou?*" Njau, offering his signature child-like smile, pushed the gas pedal down with force as the jeep began to climb the hill, a motion that would soon become familiar to our daily route. Children, half-naked, ran around with energy I had not assumed existed within the slums, as their mothers sat hunched over in the doorways to their homes wringing clothes free from the murky water that sat in colored buckets and tins. On each side of the poorly paved road, contaminated water ran incessantly through the pores of land, mixing with the filthy trash to create a thick, colorless, and putrid smelling sludge.

I sat there numb to the constructed world on this day, as my body and mind failed to adjust to these conditions forced upon these people who extended their arms out to us as we sat still enclosed within the confinements of the Range Rover. Herds of people roamed the streets, pattering along the cluttered sidewalk filled with an endless array of *kiosks*. This scene was similar to the one familiar on Ngong, but different to an extent. The concentration of people was unfathomable. This I could tell by simply the purring of



the Range Rover's motor as it ever so slowly meandered its way through the tangled knot of people criss-crossing the streets without recognition of a single car's presence. With Kibera being the largest low-income area in the city of Nairobi, the population of 470,000 people packed into a land area of 225 hectares gives clear reason for this suffocation of human existence.

Njau pressed down hard, hard, hard on the horn, while the right blinker continued clicking in an even, mesmerizing rhythm, as we sat there hesitantly waiting for the crowd of people to disperse. Njau impatiently threw up his arms, and then let them fall to rest on top of his head as he waited for the clearance of this cluttered passageway. Njau leaned his head back, and with the grin, he said half-jokingly to us, "*Pole pole, eh?*" Yes, people moved slowly. But really, where do they have to go? The road we were about to embark on spoke loudly, as if the deep, wretched ruts covering the way, specifically asked us, "Where do you think you are going in such a hurry?"

The faces that stared back at our somber expressions seemed blank, routinized to the activity surrounding them. Njau plowed on through the treacherous mud pit of a road with ease, steering the jeep with the kind of determination one would have to reach the end of a maze. A trail of young children, dressed in filthy, tattered dresses, shorts, and t-shirts frantically chased our jeep, weaving in and out of the picture from where I sat smiling at their energetic movements. The children's playfulness seemed to have the ability to bring me into focus, giving me the chance to smile, making me feel somewhat like myself again. It seemed as though every time one child would disappear into a narrow, mud-caked alleyway, he or she would always reappear down the road with at least one more companion. The numbers of children were indeed growing as we neared

the end of the road where a large metal blue gate, with the Salvation Army symbol, stood open welcoming our arrival.

The children's voices screaming, "*Mzungu, how are you?*" carried us all the way to the gate as they continued to wave wildly to us. Reaching their long and skinny arms into the windows of the jeep simply to have that opportunity to touch a *mzungu* [white person], while we sat confined within the jeep's interior, made me feel uncomfortable. At that point I wanted nothing more than the chance to climb out of the jeep and onto the same ground where these children roamed wildly. I suddenly felt trapped in the Range Rover, claustrophobic amidst the still air, as hundreds of eyes broke through the shield of the car with their gazes to enter my mind and not leave. Eyes of young and old men, with scruffy beards and crinkled clothes, that stared blankly and hazily, cheap beer obstructing any sense of clarity. Eyes of young children and women who looked curious and responsive, as if we *mzungus* came bearing great gifts. A group of people stood by the entrance of the community center, graciously directing us to a space in the compound where Njau could park the jeep. Finally, as the roller coaster of a ride into the slums quickly came to a gentle rolling stop, I opened the door with hesitation and anxiousness mixed together, placing my sneakers on the grounds of the community center in the heart of Kibera.

The three of us stood together by the jeep, smiling at each other for reassurance, as Njau carried on with a man in Kiswahili, the language we had been trying to master for three months. All the children, men, and women that had wandered over to the center with curiosity stood apprehensively at the entrance, their arms wrapped around the metal bars of the gate and fence that surrounded the compound. The silence upon our arrival

heavily contrasted with the road we had previously traveled—the music, screaming of children, and passing of drunken men stumbling out of the bars and shouting their welcomes still rang in our ears.

She hurried out of the chapel's office, brushing each step along the paved walkway with such fluidity, and clasped her hands in front of her with utter delight, and as she came toward us with a smile so bright, my entire soul felt at ease in the immediacy of her presence. Taking each of our hands and placing them in hers gently as she greeted us, she spoke with a softness I never knew existed, and welcomed us to her home and the Salvation Army. Her name was Rebecca. "Come in, come in, come in," she said waving her arm to join her in her home for some *chai*. As we began to follow her in, I glanced back at Njau to wish him a nice day and thank him for driving us. He stood there with his eyebrows raised, wearing a heartwarming smile on his face, and pointed at his watch to remind us that he would be back to pick us up at 5 o'clock. Then he got back into the jeep to re-enter the familiar maze of people crowding the streets.

Our first few days at the center entailed many long walks becoming familiar with the area, as well as long conversations with people who either belonged to the Salvation Army or simply volunteered much of their time to the activities sponsored by the center. The instant immersion into the lives of those within the Salvation Army soothed my initial apprehensions immediately. Rebecca was like a mother during those weeks, opening her home as well as friends' homes to us with true African hospitality. As a student unsure of myself going into this internship, it is Rebecca to whom I must give credit for opening my fears of poverty and turning them into passions that have yet ceased. Poverty can bring both rewards and anxiety for those immersed into the depths

of what little material is available to them. Some people I have met, who have endured both the physical and emotional pain, with their incredible sense of light radiating from their eyes, have inspired my desire to seek forth in understanding the complexities embedded within poverty. But those who see little from their cloudy, alcohol induced gazes, have only made me more aware of the magnitude of sadness in the thousands of hearts beating slowly day to day, as their lost souls continue to wander.

During the days, we would eat our meals in Rebecca and Timothy's home on the compound, but otherwise, the three of us were constantly on the move partaking in the activities focused on generating awareness in the larger community within Kibera. The Salvation Army community center provided educational seminars open to the public about nutrition, AIDS prevention, and AIDS self-help groups. All day long, once people became familiar with our daily arrivals and departures, Rebecca and Timothy would act as hosts to eager children and disillusioned stragglers who sought refuge within the confinements of their center.

The Salvation Army community center acted as a safe haven, for beyond the blue gates was a world devastated by impoverished conditions, a community stricken with malnutrition and disease. In fact, the sole reason for our continuous march towards improvement within those four weeks, was the hope and light shed upon the community by the wondrous people of the Salvation Army. A few mornings every week were designated to the check-ups for babies to see if their weights had stayed level, or had dropped or gained pounds. Each of us would accompany a woman's group around the district, speaking with the mothers of children who stood in the doorways of their homes while their children hugged their legs nervously. Babies so small, their ages were

questionable, as they were placed into a baby seat that was attached to a large scale. One of the volunteers would hold the baby up in the air while the others read the scale. The records were kept in a journal to keep track of the baby's improvement or decline in health.

I would easily become lost and disoriented with thoughts on these mornings, as well as on other active crusades through the slums with the volunteers. The very conditions that seemed to deter me from accepting this internship immediately haunted me on our excursions as I placed one foot in front of the other, stepping over human feces, live and dead rodents, waste of all kinds that creeped into my lungs, stinging all known senses. The opportunity to look up to the sky seemed impossible. A baffling concentration of people left stranded without a solid waste system in the area, and the number of latrines available to the population of 470,000 people averaged around one for every 200 people. Numbers cannot make sense, as the acts of the government oppress and dehumanize these people, ridding them from basic necessities.

On some afternoons, we would accompany a group of volunteers in the area and visit homes of people stricken with the AIDS virus. The purpose was to visit AIDS patients who were too weak and poor to receive any decent medical care, and as volunteers we would pray with them as well as offer them food and clothing. Back home in the States, I had never had any sort of experience dealing with and offering support to AIDS patients, so all of this was very new to me. The importance of religion was stressed as well in all of the activities sponsored by Rebecca and Timothy, and although I do not consider myself very religious, the sound of prayer has never sounded more soothing. Standing in a home no bigger than the size of an average bathroom in America,

with little sun shed in the room to offer light, I would stand there and hold my head down, listening to the prayers offered by Rebecca, as she gently caressed the fragile hand of someone stricken with this unfathomable virus.

One visit remains embedded within my mind as the most unbelievable act of endurance to which I have ever been witness. A woman we came to visit sat on the barren floor, making tea for her seven children, as they frolicked in the field outside their home. This was a field that lined one side of the slums, and it was home to the human waste that lingered in the heat that soaked our bodies in beads of sweat. This woman, mother to seven, was dying of AIDS. She had only one arm and no legs from a previous infection left untreated, preventing her from moving as frequently as she would have liked. But she endured the pain, and moved from one point to the other by using her one arm to support herself with a cane. This woman's endurance resembled many of those who I met in the slums during the four weeks spent there. Although the slums of Nairobi do seem wretched with disease and lack of sanitation, on days such as this, spirit seemed to soar through the sky with undefeatable hope. A spirit I had thought never existed prior to my internship. For many women, men, and children, the conditions forced upon them by the negligence of the government is everything they know as familiar. These people call Kibera home.

However, although there were a number of awe-inspiring people within the daily projects of the Salvation Army, there were some encounters that proved to be rather discouraging, as well as disheartening. I learned that there are and always will be aspects of a community that will be both optimistic and pessimistic. People that will lift you high in the sky with true hope for the future, and those who are so barren in spirit that their

encounters will leave you frozen. There were encounters we experienced in the weeks in Kibera that left me particularly speechless when the words that I longed to speak were stifled in the domineering presence of one's depression.

I remember sitting in the center one day with Christina, Sharon, and a few other women, sifting through rice to prepare for a huge destitute dinner we would help serve three hundred people in the spirit of Christmas. A man I recognized from one of the AIDS self-help groups wobbled unsteadily through the gates and came over to where we sat outside. His eyes were soaked in red veins, and his breath reeked of alcohol. Only days before he had been actively involved in training to be an AIDS counselor, and on this day he could neither walk or speak a sentence without stumbling. Why he felt it in his heart to explain to us why he drank so much, I do not know. As he carried on about his addiction to alcohol, speaking as fluently as he could in English, I shifted nervously in my seat as I looked to my friends for words to say.

After an hour of uncomfortable silences filled with broken conversations, the time for him to move on arrived as he stood up shaking our hands with the last bit of might he had stored in his hand. He then said, turning his head back to us where we sat, eyes clouded over by this point with defeat, "Do you know why there is so much AIDS in the community? So many of us are sick, AIDS is everywhere. Because these women, these women, these women only ask of us 20-50 shillings [relative to fifty cents to one American dollar], that's it. I can then have a lady for that amount. They don't care. They are sick, they spread it around. We suffer, now what am I to do?" Without waiting for us to answer, he walked away. How to begin answering this question? Once again, similar to the time in Paul's office, I sat there speechless. But this time I was on the other

side. Instead of being confronted with the option of interning in a slum, I was now being confronted with a man inside the slum desperate and longing to rid himself of his own fears.

Despite all the hope that I stood witness to within Kibera and the Salvation Army's efforts, there is still a sense of overwhelming anxiety and fear instilled in many of the younger people's lives as they stand especially susceptible to such a horrifying disease as AIDS. I remember looking into that one man's eyes, red with what seemed to be a mixture now of blood, tears, and the stale alcohol stinging his eyes, and questioned whether or not he could see the world clearly around him. Maybe that was his point, to drink into an oblivion, blind to the roots of his depression bearing down on his mind.

In reflection of my initial response to Paul's suggestion, fear engulfed my senses, as every ideal in my world seemed to collapse at the thought of investing my time and efforts into what seemed to be an unsolvable problem concerning the utter suffocation of human existence. I felt a lack of confidence as I tried to envision myself in the heart of a slum because all I saw was a small, powerless student from America that could only offer what she felt she had at the time. And unfortunately during the time leading up to this internship, I had grown a strong sense of discomfort during my time in Nairobi and chose to escape the realism of the urban area by any means possible. In a sense I was quite selfish, for I feared the discomfort of the shocking realities of oppression would bring me down from the natural high I was on from the endless number of adventures and experiences offered during the field courses.

I felt weak and frightened for reasons surrounding an unknown. The slums had been an unknown in my semester in Kenya, and I was fearful that I would not be able to



handle the internship with strong confidence. My first impressions of Kibera were based upon my Western views and when I was confronted with the unfathomable environment of the slum, I was naturally horrified. The truth of my transformation of character in the four weeks I spent in Kibera is nestled within the palms of the countless number of undefeatable women's hands, especially Rebecca's, as each one often times led me through both shocking and rewarding experiences. The gentle clasp of a hand offered me the confidence I thought I lacked, and led me through an experience I shall never forget. It was under the guidance of the incredible volunteers, and the endless warmth and spirit carried by their leaders, Rebecca and Timothy, that I was able to put forth all of the efforts I knew at that time in my life existed into Kibera and the Salvation Army.

I awoke to a few gentle taps on my foot. Through blurry eyes I could see Hudson standing at the end of the mattress looking down on me. As I began to orient myself he said that I must hurry and get dressed. He quickly left the room and I slowly emerged from my sleeping bag, wondering what the rush was all about. Hudson's demeanor was usually slow, methodical, and patient. However, this morning there was an air of urgency and tension in his voice. Something was happening.

I began to worry about whether the pre-election violence and rioting had broken out nearby again. Or maybe Paul Robinson, the director of the Kenya Semester Program, had sent a driver to evacuate me for some reason. As I pulled on my jeans these thoughts bounced around in my head, but I couldn't help but look out the window and see what a beautiful day it was. Very few clouds and a crisp blue sky. I had been used to the relatively poor weather that we had been having for some time. The sunny sky began to spook me.

I entered the main room and found Hudson waiting anxiously by the door. He opened it briskly and ushered me outside. I didn't see the program range rover so that was somewhat of a relief, although I still had no idea what was going on. I turned and saw that Hudson had already begun striding down the mud path that led into the slum. I quickly

followed in his footsteps and finally asked him where we were going. He simply replied, "you need to see my friend." I was surprised by that answer because Hudson usually found a way to turn any explanation into a ten minute story. It was for that reason that I became a little more nervous. Why the rush to see *this* friend? I had seen many of his friends over the last three weeks and we never skipped breakfast before. I was frankly a little annoyed with Hudson's ambiguity and rushing around. I was hungry and the sun was very hot, even at this early hour.

As we entered the slum we were greeted by the usual crowd of young children in tattered clothes. I exchanged foolish Swahili phrases with them, and as always they laughed and made fun of me. But that was alright with me. I had become relatively comfortable here, and the community had finally accepted my presence. I would have liked to stay and play with the kids for a little while, but Hudson had his agenda, and we passed by them pretty quickly. Once again, I asked him where we were going and he just said that we were almost there. I sighed and continued to follow him. I remember feeling like a little dog following an impatient master, which was something totally different than how I usually felt around Hudson.

My anticipation of where we were going began to rise. I got excited at the thought that he might have a going away present for me. I *was* leaving in about a week. Maybe we were going to some party at one of the sketchy little bars that were littered throughout the slums. Nothing

like warm Tusker beer at nine-thirty in the morning! The excitement of that thought quickly faded though with the memory of the last party and all of the prostitutes who wanted to, "get to know" an American.

After a considerable walk, we came upon a little shack that was a typical home in the slum. Hudson stopped about four feet from the door and told me that this was the place, and that he wanted me to see his friend inside. I said that that would be fine and asked what his or her name was. Hudson told me her name was Elizabeth. As I approached the door I noticed that Hudson was still standing behind me. I looked back at him and he said that he would wait outside. A little confused, I turned and faced the rickety door. Apprehensively, I pushed it open and entered the small, dark room.

It was a very sunny day outside, so I was essentially blind once inside the windowless room. As I waited for my eyes to adjust, I was forced to rely on my other senses to gain my bearings in the room. The room had a dank and musty odor. The air was heavy and thick with the feel of sickness. From the far corner of the room I could hear someone breathing. The breathing sounded unnatural in strange way. It was being forced, and I could pick up a hint of pain. My surroundings began to come into focus and I could see that there was a crudely constructed bed in the corner, with a shape lying on it. I moved towards the bed and the image shocked and frightened me. It was, who I presumed to be Elizabeth, probably in her mid thirties, with her eyes wide open and

The question that concerns so many is whether or not the outside world does in fact have some role to play in Africa's development process. Does the western world have the right to intervene in African affairs? Does the United States have a simply humanitarian responsibility to offer assistance to African nations seeking help? The related question that plagued me was if I had the right, or in fact a humanitarian responsibility to seek help for the slum community that I worked with in Kenya.

When I returned to America in December I spent a great deal of time reflecting on my time in Kariobangi as it related to this complex issue. The faces of the hungry children, the struggling mothers, the unemployed men and women, and the hopeless adolescents filled my mind for weeks. I thought back about the people pleading for my assistance.

The dilemma I was facing was related to the issue of dependency on, what is essentially, foreign aid. I considered the repercussions that may come about if I indeed sent money to Hudson. If people became reliant on that money, I thought they may never attempt to find employment on their own. However, in the end I decided that those were foolish predictions and I made up my mind to send KDAK some money.

When I first returned to the states many of my relatives would look at my internship pictures and marvel at the extreme poverty. What further concerned them was the fact that I had lived there for four weeks.

I answered barrages of questions, some of which would be construed as being a little insensitive and based on stereotypes of African poverty, but overall, I gathered that many members of my family were genuinely concerned and willing to help.

After a good deal of discussion with my family, we decided to pool some money together and make the effort to get it to Hudson. Once everyone had donated their own shares, we had just over \$500 to wire to Hudson's Nairobi bank account. This worked out to be around 30,000 Kenya shillings, a considerable sum of money for the slums. It was wired to Hudson's account and around four weeks later I received a fat envelope from Hudson.

Inside it was a letter from Hudson himself. In it he thanked me profusely and assured me that the money would be used wisely. That statement was backed with another piece of paper that was essentially an inventory of how exactly he allocated the money. I was most excited to see the other letters inside. There were three letters that had been crudely written by children in the community who had benefited from the donation. It felt so good to see that we had made these people happy and potentially improved their lives in some way. Some were able to pay school fees, others used the money for food or clothing, and others received much needed medical care.

Time passed and thoughts of Kariobangi began to leave the forefront of my mind. I felt as though I had done what I had promised to

do. That was, to find some sort of assistance in the states for the people of Kariobangi. I began to feel much more at peace with the whole experience. Hudson and I did not have much contact for some time after the donation had been received. However, around two months later, Hudson sent me a letter. In it was a brief letter from him and two letters that had been written by children. Essentially, all three individuals were asking for another donation. It was not blatant, but more of a subtle hint that more funds would be appreciated. However, the issue never grew beyond this one incident. I had written back to Hudson and informed him that no more donations would be forthcoming.

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In March of 1998, President Clinton became the second U.S. president to visit Africa. During that visit he committed the U.S. to a "relationship for the long haul" with the continent. He stated, "For too much of this century, the relationship between the U.S. and Africa was plagued by indifference on our part. We have been too separate and too unequal for too long. We must end that by building a better common future." One year later, on March 16<sup>th</sup> 1999, Clinton cancelled \$100 billion in loans in order to reduce Africa's current debt crisis.

I mention this issue for some important reasons. Since my family sent the \$500 to Hudson I have essentially been able to wipe my hands free of any feelings of guilt or responsibility to Kariobangi. I see the same thing in this debt cancellation move. On the surface it appears to be a

historic and dutiful thing to do. However, I feel that actions such as these are short term solutions to long standing problems. Many of Clinton's critics have argued the same point. Essentially, the \$500 donation was a quick and easy way for me to feel as though I have done something for the community in Kariobani. Similarly, America has now done something for Africa by canceling \$100 billion in Africa's enormous debt.

The problem is that African nations are *still* needing to borrow enormous amounts of money. Just as Hudson wrote back to me for more money. I have essentially found myself in a no-win situation. Prior to sending the donation I felt very guilty for not doing anything, and now, after I have sent a fairly large donation I have opened a whole new can of worms and now Hudson is expecting me to send more money to him and his organization.

This whole issue of foreign aid and the relationship between the western world and the developing world is immensely complex. Through understanding that, I have been able to look at my experience in Kariobangi with a better perspective. Although the people of the slum community expected that I would be able to bring something to them that would not have been available otherwise, I now know that that was unrealistic. In other words, I am beginning to feel as though I did in fact do all I could.