

My Trip to Kenya

Blog of Matushka Marina Holland

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After the beautiful send-off at the school yesterday, we returned home, had a light lunch, and loaded up the car. As hard as saying goodbye to the kids was saying goodbye to Papathiya and Ann. I love them very much. But we hugged tightly and said our goodbyes and made our promises, and then we were off. Along the way we stopped at a little touristy place with souvenirs. This was a 75 foot wide flat area, at the far edge of which was a small wooden log rail and then a fairly precipitous drop off to the valley 800 feet below. The vendors did their best to get us to buy many, many things, but in the end we got away with buying just a few. I do not like haggling – and we learned that especially wa-sung-gi shouldn't buy something at the first price offered! I was kind of proud of myself though – I wanted a set of coasters that he said were 1500 shillings. I got it for 600! Maybe a local would get it for 200, but at least I didn't pay 1500! Of course, he looked sad as I walked away...perhaps his family will not have dinner tonight...



We stopped at another little place that had cow and sheep skins and hats for sale. FM bought me one; he knew I would need it in Texas, for it gets even colder there than it does in Kinangop!



Seminary Church



Dormitory with mosquito



Health clinic

nets over the beds

We arrived in Nairobi, and saw many levels of poverty and evidences of success in spite of poverty. We wound our way through the city to get to the Orthodox Theological School. Here they brought us on a tour of the seminary and of the health clinic the Orthodox church runs there. The health clinic is for students and local people, and offers free examinations, laboratory work, dental work, immunizations, and health education. It is staffed by volunteers and barely-paid professionals.

Next we were brought through the primary school they run for local orphans and vulnerable children. And this is where me met Virginia, a living saint if there ever was one. Virginia grew up in the slums and known very difficult life. She had a heart for other kids growing up like she had, and volunteered in her neighborhood, just doing what she could on her own, wanting somehow to help educate kids whose parents could not afford to or did not value an education for their kids. Many of these parents have drug and alcohol abuse problems, and are barely hanging on to life themselves, let alone for their kids. She heard that the local Orthodox church (she was not Orthodox herself, but later converted) was wanting to start a school, so she volunteered her services. They did a two-week trial with kids whom she had hand-selected from the slum. It was wildly successful. The kids were so very happy to spend their day at the school, with kind and attentive staff, and space to run and play. After the trial they formally opened a school, with only kindergarten-level students. In age they ranged from 4-7, but all were illiterate. Each year they have added on a new grade level. The first group of kids has completed grade 8 and gone on to secondary school. Many of them come back regularly during the week to give back, helping kids who are now what they once were themselves. The school has been there now for ____ years. The church provides their uniforms (required for all students in Kenya) and school materials. The buildings have been built and furnished with donations from abroad. Just like at St Barnabas, the children we saw here were smiling and energetic and interactive. We entered a class of I think 6th graders. Virginia quizzed them on the topic of the class, and they performed very well!



Today Virginia is the dean of the school. She is responsible for 280 students, and even teaches one of the classes. She does all the monitoring and record keeping. She knows each individual child by name, and knows their families and circumstances, for she is the one who does the home study for each child accepted into the program. Today they no longer seek students; they now have to turn students away, for their program is very successful and popular. She is the one who visits each child at his home, whether with one or both parents, or a relative, or a “Samaritan”, as she calls people who out of the goodness of their heart take in a child who is not related to them. She does “triage” in a way, selecting the students they can help, not selecting students they cannot help for whatever reason, or who have a reasonable chance of success because they have parents who are caring for them at least minimally. She follows them intimately throughout their time at the primary school, and continues to keep tabs on them when they move to the secondary school. She has adopted three kids herself. She is there early, and doesn’t leave till 7pm or later. And yet, when we talked with her, she was energetic and eager and full of obvious love and compassion and zeal. She said she absolutely loves what she does.

Through Virginia we will be able to make contact with people who can facilitate the shipping of our container of goods when it is full. We learned that clothing must be boxed up according to “men’s”, “women’s” and “children’s”. Canned and boxed foods are accepted, if not expired, and the outer container must include the manufacture date and the expiration date. She was a wealth of information and inspiration.

From the primary school we were brought to the 2 year academy across the street, also run by the Orthodox church there. Students who attend come from the general population and do pay, or some receive scholarships. They receive certificates or diplomas in various areas such as sewing, computer technology and information sciences. But $\frac{3}{4}$ of their student body is studying to become teachers. The classrooms again were built and furnished by donations.

One of the people we met at the 2 year academy was an assistant dean named Daniel. He was terribly excited to meet us, for he has been reading FS’s sermons on line for years and had always wished to meet him. He knew about the death of our son, also named Daniel, and has been praying for him and us. He knew from facebook we were visiting Kenya but never expected we’d get to meet. We really, really liked this young man, and exchanged contact information.

FM told Daniel that we’d hoped to do some souvenir shopping, so he escorted us to a shopping district on the other side of the slums. I could have readily believed we were in America at this mall we visited, except we had to go through a security check at the gate to the parking lot. The parking lot is patrolled by armed guards, and at the entrance to the mall we were wanded by security guards. I was so amazed and started to take a picture but one of the guards quickly told me that was not permitted. Inside the mall there were trendy clothing shops by names very familiar to Americans, as well as coffee and internet cafes, and bookstores. We bought a few items, and headed back to the campus, where we were in time for the last part of Vespers. We met the bishop, Bishop Macarius, and visited with him in his home while dinner was being prepared. During dinner, the life of a saint was read while we otherwise ate in silence. The bishop updated the seminarians on some recent events, and then the men all stood up in a group and sang robustly for us. What wonderful voices Africans from everywhere seem to have! I remarked to the bishop how wonderful their performance was, and wondered if they had any recordings? “Yes, indeed!” he said, and invited us back to his home after dinner so he could give me a CD. He also gave FS a Swahili/English gospel book and a couple of other books. Finally, after a very full day, we retired to one of the guest rooms, where we slept soundly until 4:30 this morning. We rose, got dressed and loaded our things back into the van, to head to the airport.

I hadn’t been able for some reason to check in online for my flight, so FS was going to go in and help me with that and with checking my luggage. But it turned out that only passengers and employees can enter the building, so we suddenly had to say our final goodbyes right there at the door, with people waiting behind us in line to enter the building.

There was an odd security check when we first entered the airport. FS and I had to get out and walk to a building with other passengers where our bags were scanned and our faces were looked at. Meanwhile, FM drove through the vehicle inspection lane. We met up 15 minutes later, and drove on to park. Once I entered the building, have said our goodbyes, my passport was checked and my bags were scanned and I walked through a scanner. Then my bags were weighed and processed, and I was checked in myself. They checked my passport against the reservation list. Then I went by another counter where my passport was checked again. Then on to the official security lines, where I removed my shoes and

put everything in the those little plastic bins. I went through another scanner, my passport was checked again, and finally on to the gate. On the way I passed a kiosk advertising fresh COLD drinks. I was parched. I grabbed a bottle of water – definitely not cold – but at least wet. I paid for that and glugged it down. On to the gate. So far so good. I got onto wifi and let everyone know I was waiting to board.

The flight has been uneventful, which is good! We are currently flying over the desert in Sudan. I see black volcanic mountains, according to my neighbor, surrounded by smooth sand and sand dunes. He said it is 115 degrees F down there! And now...over the Nile river! We are 39,000 feet up, and still the river looks huge extending from one side of the plane far to the other side!

There was a page on the announcement system asking for a medical doctor. I saw no one getting up so I let a flight attendant know that I am a nurse, if that would help. They brought me to a child who was perhaps 9 months old. His parents had given him a nut (hopefully at least broken up into a tiny piece!) and he quickly broke out with several large raised bumps on his face. Thankfully, he looked like he was having no breathing problems. I tried to listen to his lungs just by putting my ear against his chest and his back and heard no wheezing, but I couldn't really hear *anything* so.... But he was sitting there calmly on his mom's lap, looking back and forth from one person standing over him to another. Another passenger nearby had Benadryl with her. I took half of a 25 mg Benadryl, crushed it in a teaspoon of water and gave it to the baby. He spit a little out but that was ok because 12.5 mg is a bit high for him. His parents and I talked about not letting him have any kind of nuts again, including peanut butter. I told them he will probably sleep well for the next few hours. I gave them the other half of the Benadryl to repeat the dose in a few hours if needed. Cool.

So the other passenger who had the Benadryl is also a nurse! Her name is Amy and she is on her way back to South Carolina after being on a mission trip! So of course we talked shop for a while. Then as I headed back to my seat, an African woman named Josephine put her hand out to say "asante", which of course, just being back from Kenya, I understood! She is also a nurse, working with an organization in northern Kenya to help abused women and girls! So we nurses exchanged contact information. So cool!

When I returned to my seat, my neighbor asked if I was a doctor. I told him, no, just a nurse, blah blah blah. Turns out he was with Amy, the first nurse, on that mission trip. He is a geophysicist, and a mission team leader, working mostly with water systems in Africa. How many times has the issue of water availability come up in the last two weeks? Amazing. So we also exchanged information. He told me about a company in Kentucky that makes a system using salt and a 12 volt battery to purify water. And a company in South Carolina that makes a solar powered water pump. Just amazing.

Our baby with the hives never did fall asleep. When I went to check on him, he was fussy on his mom's lap, but no obvious hives. I just looked at him from a distance though. An hour later, Amy came and got me and said the baby had thrown up several times, starting a few minutes after his Benadryl, which I hadn't realized. So he probably lost his Benadryl dose. Up close, I could see he still had a few small hives on him, so Amy and I decided to re-dose him with 12.5mg of Benadryl; it had been about 4 hours since his first dose. She also had a Zofran ODT with her, which is for vomiting. So we gave him a 2 mg

portion of that. He is looking pretty sleepy now, so I told dad let him sleep, but periodically try to arouse him; If he is not arousable, or anything else wrong, let Amy or me know. Amy is sitting right behind them. She said she will keep an eye on him. Just to be safe, we asked to look at their medical emergency kit. It has epinephrine in it, if we needed it. Dad estimated his weight to be 8 kg, so I used my Pediatric Emergency app on my phone (Thank you, Dr Starks back at home!) to double check the dosing for his weight and the concentration of the drug. Enough excitement for now. Rereading this, I see that I had just remarked that our flight had been uneventful. Hmm. I guess I'll never say that again!

We have flown over the Sudan desert, Mediterranean Sea, Serbia, Germany.

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