

Mzungu! How are you?

PHOTOGRAPHS:
IMAGES OF KENYA

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Arrival in Africa is like taking a brief step back. Well, more like fifty years back, but let's be honest with each other—fifty years is a brief moment in time. Exiting the airport in Nairobi, Kenya, trusting a man I've never met to take me across a darkened city to a place I've only read about, and to expect him to return in the morning even though I've given him the money in advance—I must have taken the blue pill. Traveling across the Kenyan countryside, I was glued to the window and amazed to see baboons, zebras, and flamingos. And in a strange way it occurred to me that the Kenyan's considered these animals its 'squirrels and deer;' a common sight not worth looking up for. With the beginning of our journey coming to a close, we found ourselves on a farm in the middle of we-didn't-know, moving our things into a mud hut with a grass thatched roof and hand craved wooden bunk beds. This was now home.

For the next five weeks, we (the international volunteers and local clinic staff) piled into a van and drove off into the fields of cane. The drives lasted forever and as the day wore on the temperature climbed, the dust kicked up, and we wondered where we'd be having clinic today. Arrival meant setting up clinic; something that came to mean finding furniture, a structure or shade to set up the furniture, and informing the 'village' we'd arrived. Clinic time was an active blend of acute care, cultural stresses, and translational frustrations intertwined with romping around with the kids, drinking the best coke you can imagine, and more playing with the kids.

In addition to acute medical care, we took time to teach the local schools about HIV/AIDS. The audience included ages seven through teenagers as well as the school staff. To put it simply, when we arrived school was "canceled" and the next three hours revolved around two kids from the USA talking about HIV/AIDS. It was truly amazing to be in the heart of the HIV pandemic and possible area of its conception, and the school staff were still unaware of the details about transmission. Many still thought there was a cure and were confused we hadn't heard—"you just have to have sex with as many virgins as possible." Between the necessary sex-capades and the beliefs of transmission via bewitchment, you can imagine the astonishment of two twenty-two year old mzungus fresh out of their first year of medical school.

During the return trip to the farm, the sun was often going-

down over the ancient landscape of the African countryside. Deep tradition infused the air and the need for shelter and comfort overcame everyone as the deep hues of gold, amber, and violet streaked the sky.

We often saw a glimpse of what was not too long ago our country's own past; people leading the cows and goats home, fetching firewood for the evening meal, and the clamor of people purchasing their last minute items at the open air produce market. I would often lean out the window and take in a breath of the cool air roaring by, think about the fresh chapati and sakuma wiki waiting for us in the main thatched hut, and wonder to myself—why would I ever go back to America?

