

July 10, 2007

The Coughlin's in Africa!

Just a note to our friends at Peace Lutheran to let you know we made it to Mbita! As we begin our third day here we find ourselves plunged into the daily activities. It's been fun to watch Megan teach and see how well the class responds to her. Matt has been a big hit. All he has to do is take out his hacky-sack and a crowd of kids is around him. We had dinner with Liz's host family last night. There is nothing like Kenyan hospitality!

Liz leaves tomorrow to meet up with the rest of her team in Nairobi. She has been here for the past three weeks and has done extremely well considering a few set backs. Somehow it got out that we can sing, so we've been doing a lot of that. Today the whole family will be leading the chapel services at school. We are approaching it like a mini-VBS. We'll see how it goes. Speaking of VBS, we brought the bears to the nursery (3-4 yr olds)yesterday. Matt read a book entitled "The First Bear in Africa". It was a great lead in to your gift to them. There was a lot of enthusiasm and more singing. Mbita is a beautiful place even though the poverty is unlike anything we see in the US. The teachers and children work long hard days. We are having trouble keeping up. Thanks for your prayers. We will try to send some photos once I figure out how to do that.

Grace & Peace,

Bob (for Dianne, Matt, Megan and Liz)

July 11, 2007

Kwa Heri Mbita!

Tomorrow at 5:30am, I am traveling back to Nairobi to meet up with the rest of the team. I cannot believe how fast these past three weeks went by. I'm almost down to the last two weeks of my trip! As my time in Mbita is coming to a close, I'm ready to leave here and keep experiencing more of Africa.

During these past few weeks while serving at Christ Gift Academy I have had many highs and lows throughout my trip. In the midst of everything though, God has remained faithful. If I had to pick my most challenging moments I would say church on Sundays and getting through the weekends. The church my host family attends is VERY charismatic. It's difficult to sum up what this church truly is like in a concise statement. To get a bit of a mental picture across imagine a small building with a tin roof. Under that roof picture sweaty Kenyans, an African sound system, lots of shouting in several different languages, and pastors praying over people until they fall over repenting. Let's just say it was hard not to be judgmental and I am looking forward to returning to my familiar Lutheran Church:)

Being without a partner made it difficult at times especially during the weekend. The host family I was with never had much planned for us to do. They certainly had enough chores and errands to keep them busy, but they treated me so well that there's no way I would ever be able to help them. God taught how to be bored without going insane. The first couple days I was bored, it was extremely difficult. I would mainly start thinking of home and all the things I longed for that I didn't have here. It was hard at times to be submersed into a Kenyan family on my own, without the comfort of another American by my side. Each day as I prayed through it, my attitude would get a little better and before I knew it I was content with being bored and appreciate the time by myself. It was neat to see that God answers even the small prayers like help in getting through boredom. He also has been teaching me patience. Patience with the culture, the students, and myself.

At Christ Gift the days were long, but the weeks went by fast. I taught my sister's class while she was away for a few days in South Africa. The first week I did a lot of observing, and then dove into it the second week. I really enjoyed taking over her fourth grade class and having the opportunity to have a part in their education. CGA is a thriving school. The kids look to it as a second home. On Friday the kids stick around school until we have to tell them to leave. A little different then back in the states! When I wasn't teaching, I mentored students in grade 1 and grade 3 who struggled in class, mainly with reading. I really enjoyed being able to interact with kids more one on one. I also helped with various filing and organizing to help things run smoothly.

I had my first experience with public transportation in Kenya. I have a new meaning of what crowded truly means. We visited my host mom's nephew who goes to a deaf school about an hour ride from Mbita. The ride there I thought was crowded because we were sitting rather close to one another. Every time we hit a big bump I would fly off the seat. Not meaning to of course and the Kenyans around me would stare at me and laugh. The way back was a whole different story. I had to stand in the aisle and hold onto bars that ran horizontally towards the back of the bus. Just when I thought we couldn't possibly fit another being in that thing, two more would join in. We were so uncomfortably close to one another. A seat opened up and Rozelyn made sure that I got a seat. I was fine standing, but because I'm the white girl I get priority no matter how much I try to argue it. I was sitting right in the front and so I got to see everyone board the bus. A woman came on with a child who stared at me the entire time. It was so crowded that he was right in my face. Next a lady came on holding a chicken. I just couldn't believe all that I was seeing. Thank God I don't get motion sickness. At times I wanted to scream out, "stop staring at me, I know I'm white and the ONLY white person on this bus, get over it! God gave me patience and the ability to not let little things get to me. Needless to say, it was an experience and it makes for great stories.

This past Sunday, my parents and brother all arrived in Mbita. I felt so blessed that our entire family was brought together in Kenya. I also was excited that I could have a few days with them in Mbita, before I headed back to Nairobi to join the team. It was good medicine to see my parents, and also reminded me of home and how much I love it. They've been remaining healthy, and we have been the main attraction at school. We are the singing Coughlin's! The kids have really enjoyed our music, especially Matt's.

I had an incredible host family. They did everything in their power to make me feel comfortable and welcome. I was telling my mom that I was coming into Africa ready and expectant to serve people, and it's been the exact opposite. I have been served in a way that is just incredible and they truly love to serve. When I said my final goodbyes to the family Rozelyn got teary-eyed. It made me feel good though because it's difficult not to feel like a burden at times when I am being waited on hand and foot. That's when I realized how much she loves to have guests and make sure they feel welcomed to the fullest. I look forward to sharing stories upon my return.

It's an early morning tomorrow, so I best be getting some sleep. Thank you for your prayers for my health. I've been feeling well ever since. More prayer requests would be that our team would arrive safely back together in Nairobi while traveling from places all over Kenya. Prayers as well for our endurance at this time. I feel that many of us may be feeling a bit homesick after being away for almost five weeks.

Elizabeth