

A Surprise Journey to Kenya

In January I sat in my hospital bed not sure I'd ever make it to Kenya again. I'd made all the arrangements for a Karibuni Work Party to visit the projects in February, and I was unable to go! When the plane took off in February, with eleven instead of twelve people, I actually sat in the hospital bed and cried!

The doctors said I must set some aims to aid my recovery – get me walking and swallowing again. I didn't need to think long – my short term aim was to have a cup of tea, (I longed to be able to join the other patients with a 'cuppa') and my long term aim was to visit Kenya this year!

So started the work toward achieving these aims which culminated in me going to Kenya in September for a month, and visiting all the projects Karibuni supports. My aim here was threefold – to see my many friends in Kenya; to thank the numerous Kenyans who had been praying for my recovery and to thank them for all their love and thoughts; and to demonstrate that I was better.

The visit didn't start too well! My hostess for the first week had suddenly gone abroad for surgery and forgotten to ask her daughter to meet me at the airport, as had been arranged! So there I was sitting all alone on a broken bench outside the airport with three very heavy suitcases in the pitch dark! However, Joshua Katungu was my knight in shining taxi, and he took me to my host's home, where they had hurriedly got my room ready!

During that week I visited the Conference Office where I gained my new name of 'walking miracle' – very hard to live up to – and then Kibra, Kawangware, Embakasi (where I admired the handiwork of the work party) and Limuru. I was thoroughly spoiled and was driven and accompanied by the Conference Internal Auditor, Timothy Mithieu. He was amazing - really kind and great company. He took good care of me, especially as I was mobbed on several occasions by enthusiastic children all wanting to hold my hands at one time.

From Limuru I was taken to Nakuru to stay with my friend, Meg, and her family. Sunday was my first 4 hour-plus service this year – a Circuit Service with presentations from each church and their junior churches – 20 choirs in all! The service culminated in a harambee (fundraiser) to raise money to build a primary school at Wesley Empowerment Centre, Njoro – a big surprise to me, especially as I had to get up and speak to the congregation twice! They raised over Kes 300,000 – enough to build class 1 by January 2018. The aim is to build a classroom each year until it's a complete school of 8 classrooms.

The following day I visited Wesley Empowerment Centre and saw the staff and children (and admired the handiwork of the other half of the work party). This day I was accompanied by the superintendent minister of the circuit and the chair of the project Board, so was very honoured!

Then on to Kaaga in Meru where I stayed for 9 days with my very dear friend, Eunice and her family. Sadly Eunice's and Justus's second son had died just 6 weeks before I arrived from cerebral malaria, leaving his wife and two small sons, and we spent a lot of time sharing together. This was doubly tragic as their eldest son had died 6 years ago from viral pneumonia leaving his wife and a small daughter. Their remaining son is a great comfort to them all.

While here I visited the Township Programme, meeting Mercy, the social worker, for the first time and quickly learning how very good she is. Later I was given gifts by parents of the children we support – a hat (with JOY in large Kenya flag coloured letters embroidered across the front) and a beaded bag made by one of the mothers, both of which I had to model! Having met the children at the feeding programme – including Grace and Glory, twins who met the work party in February – I went with Mercy on a matatu to visit Maureen Nkatha in a church sponsored hospital in Nkubu, as all the government hospitals are closed due to the nurses being on strike for the last 5 months. Maureen was in the last stages of AIDS and being terribly neglected – the hospital had discharged her as they could do no more for her, but she had to remain in the hospital until her fees were paid. Her grandparents, frail and old themselves, wouldn't have

her back again – and even wished she would die, so she was just left untreated in bed. Her food for several days was left in bowls on and near her bed as she was too weak to feed herself, she was incontinent and left as she was. We did manage to speak to a doctor who told us that needing expert nursing care, including feeding and changing, was not a reason for being in hospital. At least, following our visit, they restarted the ARV drugs and re-admitted her! Mercy planned to take her home, rent a bigger house and care for her with some help. I strongly advised her not to as she didn't realise the implications and commitment involved.

While at Kaaga I also visited Mwithumwiru School, met the wonderful cook who provides the lunches we help to support, the special needs class – and had another gift – a half-size bath mat they had made.

Then a visit to Maua Hospital where I visited three schools for special needs children – heart breaking – we must make sure they are given a bigger share of the gifts we take out, their situations are pathetic.

Ruth, my daughter-in-law, joined me at Kaaga with George from Lindbergs, and we went straight to Marimanti and the Baobab Hotel. The next morning we were joined by George Mwabu, the Director of the project there. Here we were given a tour of the project model farm, where carers of the children have practical training in farming and growing suitable crops in that very hot, arid climate. Ruth, a horticulturalist, was in her element, although she will be growing very few of the crops they produce – sugar cane, white maize, cassava, etc.

We visited the special needs class, leaving gifts for them, and then the School for the Deaf where we were very warmly welcomed. By special request I had to sing again the chorus John and I had shared with them last year – 'The Foolish Man built his house upon the Sand' - which they joined in with sign language. What a privilege!

Then back to Nairobi for a night before we caught (just) the new SGR train to Mombasa! How we caught the train I don't know – I was pushed into carriage 6 and unbeknown to me. Ruth and all the luggage, including the case for the projects, was pushed into carriage 4. We finally met up again in carriage 2 where we had to negotiate sitting together with a couple of Kenyans. The journey took 4½ hours in daylight, instead of the 12 hour overnight journey, and as we went through the Nairobi National Park and Tsavo East and West Safari parks, we saw giraffes, elephants, Thompson's gazelles and camels – brilliant!

We had a night in a hotel before visiting Hunajeza for a few hours, leaving half the lovely dresses, skirts and shorts made by the 'Sewing Box' sewing group in Princes Risborough. This project is struggling as the carers and women's group members who used to volunteer at the programme, are becoming very elderly and frail. They now have to pay the cook to feed the children, and the two teachers at the nursery they have started.

From there we went to Kilifi and visited Upendo where the school and care given continue to be excellent under the new management. The other half of the dresses, skirts and shorts from Princes Risborough were distributed. We visited some families and after lunch left for our short holiday – two nights by the beach at Jumuia, a Kenyan churches conference and holiday centre.

The loving and enthusiastic welcome I received everywhere was incredible and very humbling. No wonder I love going to Kenya.

Note: Since returning home and writing this we have heard that dear Maureen has died from meningitis, another opportunistic infection she caught due to her very low immunity caused by Aids.

Also since returning, the second Presidential election has taken place amid tension, rioting and bloodshed, especially in Kawangware and Kibra where we support two very active projects. Please pray for the people of Kenya and especially the staff, children and their carers.