

ONE TRIP TO KENYA

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Two Men

Leon and Carole Platt have fallen deeply in love with the children of Kenya. During their visits, they have become dear friends with two Kenyan men who look after children—many of whom are orphans.

During the months of discussion about joining the Platts on a trip to Kenya, Carole began pouring stories into my heart through her keyboard. She told story after story of children being looked after by Joseph and Nestor, the two men who care for children in different areas of Kenya. Joseph, a country man, lives in a Maa-sai village. Nestor, a city man, lives in Mosoriot near the city of Eldoret. Both men have been called by God to rescue and care for children.

Carole recounted stories of the children rescued by Joseph and Nestor: some from homelessness and drug addiction near a garbage dump, some from sex slavery, some orphans, and some with parents who were unable or unwilling to care for them. All these children were in need of a safe place, education, and love.

The number of children helped grows each year as these two Christ-centered Seventh-day Adventist men search for, rescue, feed, educate, and love God's children in Kenya. All this is made possible by the belief and support of Carole, Leon, and their fundraising expertise through Education Care Projects—Kenya.

After telling me she organizes trips to Kenya for volunteers to see and



Sharon is one of many children living healthy, happy lives due to the work of Education Care Projects—Kenya.

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help the children, Carole said, “You’d be great, David!”

“What would I do?” I asked. “I’m not very good with my hands, except on a QWERTY keyboard.”

“Tell stories!” Carole said. “Most of these children have not heard about Jesus or the Bible. You could tell them stories. Do what you do so well!”

“In English? I don’t speak their language.”

“Some speak English,” Carole said. “The rest are very comfortable listening to a translator. We use them all the time.”

This is where my adventure began—with an idea and an invitation.

The plan solidified. I was to tell Bible stories to the children in both places, while Courtney presented talks to the young women and Leon and Carole busied themselves with other various projects already underway. Along with telling stories, I was to listen and learn the stories of Joseph and Nestor—the country man and the city man.

While in Kenya, I blogged much of what I learned and experienced; I wrote more than thirty thousand words in less than three weeks! When I returned home, I was to fashion those blogs into a book—this book. It was to be a travel journal of sorts, a compendium of stories, and a testimonial treasure trove.

And hopefully, upon reading this book, people will hear the desperate cries of the children of Kenya and be inspired to become involved.

So now we go to Africa in first person in real time.

Be blessed!

Naming Poverty

Africa—one word with so many meanings: people, poverty, resources, dirt, wealth, war, safari, starvation, children, genocide, beauty, abuse, power, orphans.

Africa is home to every seventh person on Earth. Within its fifty-four countries, nearly two thousand languages are spoken; each represents a unique people group and a distinct culture.

Over the past few hundred years, these ancient cultures have been given a crash course in Western thought and morality. Along with education and modern medicine, Westerners have brought cultures and ideologies that changed Africa both for the better and for the worse.

Today, Africa is a country of extremes. Spiritual darkness and emotional devastation contrast with the joy-filled resilience of rescued children. Opencut mines and rubbish-strewn city streets deface the same landmass graced with beautiful, green rolling hills and open savannas filled with giraffes, lions, elephants, rhinoceroses, leopards, and buffalo.

In Africa, the West is seen as the big brother who could swoop in and save the day, if only he would. Imported via the internet and mass media, Western pop culture paints a picture of a reality that does not exist.

In the West, a starving African child serves as the proverbial picture in the dictionary to define the word *poverty*. “Eat your dinner,” Western parents say. “There are children starving in Africa.” Yet, in reality, many African families live happy, thriving lives.

Poverty, written about by a thousand charitable organizations, parallels with one word—*money*. The internet abounds with scams and

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legitimate claims coming out of Africa, and each seeks the elixir of Western life—money.

Having grown up in the west of the West, I am deeply indoctrinated into this money mind-set. In California, the land of Hollywood and Silicon Valley, I was raised believing I could do anything I set my mind on. Among my childhood peers, making one's first million was an all-too-common goal on the way to maturity.

My first foray into the big world of poverty was a ten-day mission trip to Honduras. Departing my private boarding school in California with a collection of Nike-clad classmates, I walked dusty roads lined with cardboard houses. The first week of our time was spent building an orphanage. The final few days were spent, eyes squinting through Nikon lenses, exploring the Copán ruins.

From that trip, two memories have remained with me. The first is holding a malnourished baby who died days after we returned home. A faded photo is imprinted in my mind. In the photo, our trip leader holds the baby, smiling and crying at the same time.

The second memory is of a barefoot boy who helped us on the jobsite. Each day he approached me and said something in the local language while pointing at my work boots. I would offer him my shoes, and he would shake his head and wave his hands back and forth. On our final day at the orphanage, a local pastor shared the need for lightweight shoes. I returned to my room—as did most of my classmates—and retrieved my walking shoes. Later that day, as we bundled into the bus, the boy approached me and pointed to my boots once again. They were now the only shoes I had with me. I saw the translator and called him over. He explained that the boy wanted the shoes I had worn the day I arrived. “He’s never had shoes,” the translator said. Finally understanding his request, I had to tell the boy those shoes had been given away that morning. His little face fell. For a week, he had tried so hard to get his message through, and while willing, I didn’t understand the request.

All these years later I barely remember the world-famous archaeological ruins at Copán. I remember as if it were yesterday, however, the barefoot boy and the starving baby. The emotions I felt are still with me and bring tears to my eyes even now.

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In the three decades since, I have only had a few opportunities to enter places of poverty. While attending university, I took a break and lived in the Marshall Islands, serving as a teacher. As an adult, I rode the train across Australia and drove to the Outback in Western Australia, where I told stories to aboriginal children.

On another mission trip during my university days, I met and married Jenny, an Australian, thus becoming an Australian citizen myself. After that, I stayed in Australia where I studied theology and worked for the Seventh-day Adventist Church for fifteen years. During that time, my wife and I had three Australian babies who are now (mostly) grown up.

During the past four years, I have spent my working days at government elementary schools where I serve as a chaplain to children, teachers, and parents. They have helped me to understand that poverty is bigger than just money. There's something both nearby and nebulous to it. Poverty is to be without; but without what?

It wasn't until my trip to Africa, recounted in this book, that I was able to put my growing understanding of poverty into words. Like all words in a living language, *poverty* is developing in meaning within all of us.

Each of us drags a tale of a thousand stories long past. Like me, you are the sum total of the stories in your life—not of the stories themselves, but of how you choose to tell them.

So come with me on a journey through Kenya, and perhaps you will discover new meaning in poverty, as I did.