

Catching a glimpse of our earth's vastness

Mark Pavilons



"Guess what, Daddy?" asked my eldest recently.

When dealing with teenagers, especially teenage girls, I know better than to assume anything. These types of questions are generally loaded.

"I'm going to Africa!"

Momentarily speechless, I merely uttered, "ah, okay."

Lexie is the consummate world traveller, at only 17. She's committed to humanitarian work and causes and this latest adventure involves the renowned, Toronto-based Free the Children and Me to We organizations.

Created by Craig and Marc Kielburger, Me to We calls our youth to action, telling them to "be the change."

Students on the trip to Kenya/Tanzania will experience "vast plains dotted with acacia trees, to rolling hills, lush forests and endless horizons. Travel through the Great Rift Valley to a remote Maasai or Kipsigis community, where you'll spend your days diving into the vibrant and joyful local culture. Volunteer with locals on a project to improve access to education—whether you're laying bricks that will become a school or digging trenches for a well that will provide clean water. Learn Swahili, bead with mamas, meet community elders and hear stories that have been passed on through generations. Embark on a safari in the Maasai Mara or Ngorongoro Crater and get up close and personal with lions, elephants, buffalos, leopards and rhinos as they roam the wild land of the Serengeti ..."

The purpose, of course, is to help change the world. She will learn about rural access to education, women's rights and cultural heritage.

The closest she's gonna get to luxury is the plane ride there and back. The digs offer no running water and electricity is provided by generator. No cell service and no Internet. She'll be completely isolated.

I know they say roughing it can be good for the soul, but come on.

Maybe this is exactly how the world is meant to be explored. I imagine the whole idea of such an excursion is to be totally immersed in the landscape and culture of those on the receiving end of such altruistic efforts.

Our world is vast and just standing there, gazing out over the savannah, I imagine a person feels like a tiny grain of sand on an endless beach.

I get it.

Lately, I've been quite struck by a series on TVO called "Canada Over the Edge." It's a beautifully filmed that explores Canada's remote and rugged coasts, islands, mountains and plateaus.

The latest show I caught was a look at the sparsely populated western coast of Newfoundland. The show visited Stephenville, Port au Port, Corner Brook and Gros Morne National Park.

This is only a part of this massive, ancient island. Gros Morne is a hiker's delight, offering everything from the Long Range Mountains, an outlying range of the Appalachian Mountains, stretching the length of the island's west coast. It is the eroded remnants of a mountain range formed 1.2 billion years ago. The park provides a rare example of the process of continental drift,

where deep ocean crust and the rocks of the earth's mantle lie exposed.

Whether you're interested in geology or not, this is nature's handiwork.

At 1,805 square kilometers, it is the second largest national park in Atlantic Canada.

I'm simply in awe of the unspoiled beauty and ruggedness of this country of ours. There are literally millions of spots that have never been seen or touched by human beings ??ever!

And that's intriguing. We like to think the world is our oyster and we're in command of all its resources. There's nowhere we can't go or explore if we want to.

Really??I?have seen places where rocks and stones dirt has remained as it was in the beginning, some 4 billion years ago.

We humans come and go like the seasons, and when we turn to dust, we are carried away by the four winds. Can you imagine what these mountains, rivers and lakes have seen over the millennia? Nothing, absolutely nothing.

And that's the amazing part.

Africa is considered the cradle of civilization, so why wouldn't we want to explore our very humble roots?

In *The Descent of Man*, Charles Darwin speculated that Africa was the cradle of humans.

He was proven correct in 1924 when the ?Taung Child??was discovered ??the skull of a child who lived roughly three million years ago and was killed by an eagle. Thus arose ?Australopithecus? ? our human ancestor born in Africa.

Of course, human evolution is far from a done deal. There are (pardon the pun)?some cracks in the puzzle. Did we evolve from apes, or did we appear in God's image? Even if we ever find the ?missing link? there will be those on both sides of the evolution argument.

In the end, it may not matter very much.

What we have in our stewardship is a massive, unique, blue-green ball that just begs to be explored, enjoyed and understood. The lessons are there, for the taking. It's simply far too big for any of us to traverse in just one lifetime. I'm making it a point to visit more locales on my second incarnation! Yes, I?know that could be considered blasphemous.

Until then, I?have to live vicariously through my offspring. And if Lexie wants to visit the cradle of our existence and help advance our fellow men, women and children, that's just amazing.

This journey will be a costly one, and will involved some fundraising on our part. Stay tuned!

To Lexie, all I?can say is, ?you go, girl!?