

Life-changing experience impacts us all

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Imagine my consternation when I Googled Oloirien, Kenya.

The satellite images showed a road, but little else. Nothing, for miles around, aside from some bushes here and there.

Granted, there appeared to be a few farms and farm buildings a few kilometres away.

There, my eldest daughter Lexie spent the last three weeks at a camp run by Me to We/Free the Children. A six-hour lorrie ride from Nairobi, they were really out there.

Perhaps that's the idea and only serves to strengthen their will and further hone their leadership skills.

They passed through Narok and The Great Rift Valley, arguably the cradle of mankind. Many hominids, our distant cousins, have been found there. This crack in the earth's crust, is home to some of the world's finest lakes, mountains and plains, and is home to abundant wildlife.

But this is no safari.

Lexie arrives home today (Thursday) after living alongside the Maasai people who inhabit the area.

They were quite engaged, and put to work mixing concrete and smashing rocks, in order to build a school foundation. They learned Swahili. They also learned, first-hand (or should I say first-head) about the arduous task of carrying water from its source to the village.

While we complained about the stifling heat, those in Kenya were quite cool. The evenings dip down to 10 or 11 and the daytime highs reach 23.

Lexie is my first born, my hero. While I am glad she had the opportunity to do this, being out of touch for this time was a bit unnerving. The only contact we had was sporadic emails from the group leader.

But this was no holiday. And being removed from modern trappings likely made it more real.

The group visited a market and saw what a week's salary (500 Kenyan shillings) would buy. It's equivalent to the cost of a cup of coffee here in King.

They spent a night in the traditional Maasai mud and dung homes called manyattas. Everyone was a bit intimidated at first, but everyone was happy when we realized how much warmer the manyattas were than a tent! They ended the night around a warm campfire listening to Maasai guides and stories about their culture.

The group did get to go on a safari. They woke up in the wee hours and saw the sunrise over the savannah and from there the day only got better! They saw warthogs, giraffes, zebras, hippos, topis, gazelles, and many other interesting animals!

I imagine there is nothing like seeing a wild animal in its natural habitat.

They drove along the rocky road then hiked across the dry but flourishing corn fields, enjoying the view of the Maasai Mara.

They were welcomed in song by the men, women, and children of the community group. The group aims to make their children happy in home and at school by supplementing their income through the making and selling of rungu. These are short staffs, used as a hunting weapon that date back thousands of years.

The kids had the opportunity to cut the wood into rungu shapes, smooth the wood using a rasp, and sand the wood using local flora before finally waxing the wood using a locally made wax.

Some nights we3re spent gazing in awe at the beautiful, bright full moon that lit up the camp. I have seen some beautiful, star-filled skies in my day, but I can't imagine such as sight in this remote, untouched land.

The group visited the Kishon health centre to learn about We charities health pillar. They were given a tour of the welcome room, the doctors offices, the lab, the pharmacy, the emergency room, the optometrists, and finally the beautiful convalescence garden.

?We really took the time to appreciate how lucky we are to have accessible health care in Canada.?

A trip to Oleleshwa school and farm was another eye-opener. This farm grows bananas, lettuces, zucchinis, tomatoes and all sorts of other fruits and vegetables. The farm feeds over 10,000 people per day, in Free the Children schools and Me to We camps. It is amazing to think that only five workers toil such a productive farm.

Our kids tend to take their high school education for granted. This group visited Oleleshwa High School for girls. They were given a tour guided by current students, and even had the opportunity to watch a chemistry demonstration.

?We were blown away by the girls' commitment to education, and amazed that their day starts at 4:30 a.m.! They are so dedicated to their studies, and we really hope that they achieve their various dreams.?

There is no doubt in my mind that Lexie will arrive home with a new outlook on the world. She will likely need a couple of days to get her inner clock back in sync.

From past experiences, Lexie tends to be a bit touchy when she returns, frustrated by our waste of food and silly little complaints.

We could likely learn a lot from the Maasai campfire stories and cherished traditions.

But that's one of the benefits. One has to be totally immersed and passionate about our world in order to become one of its ambassadors.

And I have no doubt that Lexie will, indeed, accomplish great things in her life and career.

I?am pleased that our planet is in the hands of young people like her.