

KENYA – SHORT TERM MISSION
JULY 25 – AUGUST 12 2009

*“Live the experience
Learn the truth
Change the future”*

(Seen on the back of a Masai Mara guide t-shirt)

11 of us set off on a short term mission to Kibera, Kenya. (2nd largest slum in the world after Soweto, South Africa) It has a population of over 1 million, its tiny shacks are built on top of refuse and rubbish, it being little more than a massive rubbish tip. It is heavily polluted with soot, dust and waste with an ever-present network of open raw sewage ditches criss-crossing the site. Human and animal excrement are a constant hazard so that any trip through the slum requires constant attention to where one is putting one's feet! Poor (often non-existent) nutrition and lack of sanitation have led to widespread illness and disease meaning death and conflict are a frequent occurrence. On top of this, 1/5 of the 2.2 million Kenyans living with HIV live in Kibera.

Our team consisted of Steve and Sarah Flashman, experienced and excellent team leaders, Tim and Sally Morgan deputy leaders, Derek and Hazel Mumford, James Derham, building foreman, Hilary Ashley, (all the above 45+) Helen Perry, Tom Flashman, Danny Bianchi, (all 35-)

We went out with 4 main objectives:-

- 1 To help and encourage Pastor Evans and Rose, his wife, in their church and school ministry in Kibera.
- 2 To start to build a new school facility as the local government are building a road through the old one.
- 3 To provide simple medical help and nutrition.
- 4 To encourage David Kereto in his ministry to the Masai Tribe and church.

We departed on a night flight from Heathrow on Saturday July 12th and arrived in Nairobi at 8.15am on Sunday morning. Rose and several young men from the church met us in the school bus with the news that Pastor Evan's father had died the previous day and he had had to go up country to sort out the funeral and pay his respects.

We drove first to our accommodation at Kolping Guest House – a quiet and well-tended compound beyond Kibera where we were shown to simple, twin en-suite bedrooms. After a quick wash and brush up we were taken to Pastor Evan's church

in Kibera itself. It meets in a makeshift hall which doubles up for classrooms in the school during the week. The hall had a wobbly, uneven wooden framework, rusty corrugated iron tacked on the outside and some plywood sheeting inside but only at the front of the hall, the rest was bare corrugated iron. The floor was largely stamped down dirt and dust and the few plastic chairs were reserved for us. Most of the congregation sat on the floor or crammed onto makeshift simple wooden bench desks. Many of the congregation were children and teens, and people were coming and going all the time. The young children sang for us, the teens danced for us and then we all sang and danced and the level of joy was overwhelming in spite of the dire circumstances of all the congregation. I was deeply moved, especially when they sang "We shall Overcome". We were then treated to a drama written by Robert, a smart and articulate final year student from Pastor Evan's Secondary School. It was a direct and hard-hitting piece about the pitfalls of premarital relationships, fickleness of teenage emotion and dangers of abortion. Finally, Steve preached and people were invited to come forward for prayer. We returned to Kolping for a late lunch and then set out on our first visit around Kibera.

Pastor Evans and Rose have a primary school of 200+ children (where we had already been for church) and across the road, not far away, a secondary school also of 250 children approx. Between them they cater for all ages 2 1/2 – 19+. Apparently children in Kenya have to pass the standard government exams at the end of each year before they can move up to the next year. Those who fail to pass repeat the year which meant that a number of the children still at the primary school were much older than we would expect. Generally however, the children were well taught and doing very well academically. In spite of the fact that Pastor Evans rarely had many funds with which to pay his teachers and they all live within Kibera and at a subsistence level.

We picked our way over rubble down a very bumpy road and stopped off first at the secondary school. Mostly single storey corrugated iron huts with home made, wooden bench desks. There were many holes in the walls and roofs for the rain to come in conversely there were few small windows and all the rooms were very dark. No electric light anywhere. It was a miracle to me that the children could see to read the blackboard or their very few books. There was apparently a science lab. It was locked and inaccessible that day. Later Tim confirmed that they had next to no equipment. Sinks but no water, burners but no gas etc. There was one very rickety 2-storey building with holey steps and a broken down rail. (Some of our team repaired that before we left.)

The tour of Kibera continued past shacks, hovels and makeshift shops. There were many people about and lots of filthy, ragged but friendly children everywhere. They called out to us "How are yooooo" and ran up grinning to take our hands and walk up the road with us. We walked round on a circular route, past a wide open space where a football match was in progress with a huge crowd of spectators standing all round the pitch.

We walked through some wasteland and came to the proposed site of Pastor Evan's new school. There were three frameworks of wooden poles. Two had some corrugated iron sheets tacked on some of the walls but not all, two had roofs but no ridges or gables. There was also a small wattle and daub "house" for the watchman. Very necessary because unguarded construction is quickly denuded of materials by other desperate people. The men of our team spent a long time inspecting this site and discussing possible courses of action. It all looked a very daunting job at this stage. Finally we returned by a short cut through some of the dirtiest, smelliest terrain and a hole in a fence which brought us out quite near our starting point. Our "reccy" that day reminds me a little of Nehemiah! We returned to Kolping for showers (we were covered in dust) and our first night under mosquito nets.

Monday was a day of contrasts. We spent the morning looking round a very modern, western style shopping mall in Nairobi whilst Steve attended to essential banking and then we drove to a building supplier to order materials. Sarah also managed to purchase 1,000 worming tablets!

In the afternoon we arrived back in Kibera and had an unbelievable bus ride over terrain I would not have thought a bus could ever navigate. It was narrow and bumpy in the extreme with uneven gradients so steep as to be very alarming. Also it felt very foolish to be in a bus as most people have no option but to walk. The bus drove us all to the building site where the men disembarked and then returned up the main "street" with us, ladies and dropped us off at the primary school. We had brought colouring books and crayons in generous quantities and all 5 of us went into the church-cum-classroom hall where at least 90 small children were crammed into makeshift desks. We gave out pages from our simple colouring books and 1 crayon per child then supervised a swap scheme so that the children could all use different colours. It was a riot but much enjoyed and appreciated by these children who have nothing of their own and whose only toys are those they can manufacture out of the rubbish lying all around them. At one point as I moved around the hall I got my foot caught in a large hole in the floor and fell over. It was a miracle I didn't break my ankle, or at the very least, twist it badly. Praise God I was able to get up unharmed. That was only one of a vast number of practical hazards that confronted the children all the time. The rusty corrugated iron that clad most walls had razor sharp edges and was frequently bent at right

angles and just waiting to scratch someone. Many of the edges were torn and uneven. Nails used to secure the sheets of iron to the wooden poles were often protruding by several inches, their sharp points also just waiting to injure the unsuspecting or careless person. Indeed, early on Sarah was called to an emergency where a small girl had fallen and impaled herself on just such a protruding nail. Sarah and a teacher had to take a deep breath and lift her off the nail then staunch the blood from a nasty wound. Sarah cleaned, disinfected and dressed the girl's leg then prayed for her. 2 or 3 days later I was there when she inspected the result – an unbelievably tiny mark and no infection at all. Praise the Lord.

On Tuesday morning we visited a clinic in Kibera that a team of 14-year-old schoolchildren had financed under Steve's leadership some years ago. A solid structure and thriving ministry and also "Turning Point", a ministry to street children set up by a young couple who had been on a "Soapbox" mission with Steve.

In the afternoon the men went off to the building site and we ladies returned to the primary school. We all went into the youngest class and gave out worming pills (popping them into open mouths like eager little birds!) and stickers to ensure no one got a double dose. Then Sarah and Hazel continued on up the age range and on to the secondary school whilst Sally, Helen and I stayed and sang songs with the children, then told them the story of Hannah and Samuel, using simple bag puppets. We carried on up the age range repeating our programme 3 more times and then played with the children in the playground with skipping ropes we had brought with us.

Thus the pattern of our days was broadly set with Sarah and Hazel dealing largely with medical needs, Sally, Helen and I teaching songs, telling stories, doing simple craft activities and playing games in the playground. Meanwhile the men in our team spent their days at the building site along with increasing numbers of local men who came to help (for a small wage so they could at least feed their families on a daily basis).

Sarah's medical strategy was to treat all the children (and staff) in the two schools, for worms at the earliest opportunity; then provide beans to go with their rice at lunch times to ensure they were getting protein and balanced nutrition; then to provide and administer multi-vitamins to all the children and staff every day for the duration of our stay to give their immune systems a boost; and finally to administer another round of worming tablets just before we left. On top of this Sarah had a constant stream of sick children and adults to attend to and anything beyond simple remedies was treated with TLC and faith-filled prayer. We saw a number of

thrilling, miraculous healings which encouraged us greatly and blessed recipients and their families too. The first such occurrence was a 5 year-old boy called "Wilson". He was carried in to Sarah looking very sick indeed. His eyes were dull, glazed and yellowy, he was totally floppy and listless and had a pulse rate of 200+. As his mother was one of the teachers at the primary school, Sarah was able to get a reasonably accurate medical history and learnt that Wilson had always suffered like this since birth. She suspected a possible congenital heart defect. He was an only child as one sibling had died at birth and another at an older age. Sarah prayed for Wilson then and we all continued praying for him fervently when we heard about his situation. The next day when Sarah took his pulse it had reduced to a normal rate of 100 and continued thus all the time we were there. What's more, Wilson was transformed into a lively, happy and quite mischievous lad with bright, alive eyes and a big grin. Glory to God!

Several times in the afternoons we went in 2s and 3s to visit local families in their homes. The local people considered this a great honour and were always very hospitable. It was a salutary experience for me visiting these homes. My first such visit was to one of the very poorest families. A single mum with no regular work and 3 small children all by different fathers, all long since disappeared. Alfio (7) and Sophia (3) both came to school, Swali (2) was not yet old enough. The house itself was tiny, wattle and daub with big holes in the roof and the blanket on the floor protected by a tarpaulin hung by cords from the holey roof. The mother, Beatrice had very little. There was a tiny kerosene lamp, a small cooking pot with spent charcoal and a dirty plastic container for water (also dirty). Apart from this there were a few rags about and washing hung up on criss-crossing string outside the door although who that belonged to was anyone's guess. Swali, the baby was filthy and snotty. He wore a dress almost to his feet in spite of being a boy and a torn and dirty jumper probably of his brother's as it was far too big and the sleeves hung down below his hands. His feet were bare as were his sister's. Alfio, the eldest did have shoes and a school uniform, almost certainly donated as the children have to have a uniform in order to go to school. On that occasion we took 2 bags of flour as a gift. However, as I looked round I could see there was no fuel to cook with and wondered how on earth they would eat it. Some days later, Sarah and I visited with Rose. We were concerned because Sophia had not been at school for several days. Rose told us that the family had had no food for days so we donated what we had on us and bought flour and sugar as well as a kind of triangular doughnut for each child. Rose handed the doughnuts over immediately and all 3 children tucked in hungrily. They cheered up remarkably after having eaten and were all smiles. It was a gut-wrenching experience. Rose said she would give the remaining money to Beatrice so she could buy fuel.

After church the following Sunday I emerged into the sunlit playground and started to chat to a young mum who was standing alone holding a tiny baby girl. She told me the baby was her 1st child but the girl's father had walked off and left her when the girl was 1 week old. She was at her wits end having no job or income and no means of feeding her baby. She said she was looking for someone to take the baby and asked me if I would have her. I, of course explained that that was impossible but after discussing the matter with Rose, we gave the girl some money with which to feed the baby and herself. Another shocking and gut-wrenching experience....

On the second Monday of our visit, we ladies with Steve and Sarah went to visit another Beatrice. She had heard the Flashman's were in town and looked them up. She was running her own small ministry to children in Kibera having opened her tiny home to orphan babies and young children with HIV. At present she has 19 tiny charges during the day and she and her husband, Kenneth have adopted four of these orphan babies to add to their own family of older children. We approached her home via a narrow alleyway where children were playing supervised by several ladies. Much of the daycare takes place outside as the tiny living room is full of the youngest babies. About 8 or 10 ranging from approximately 5 months to maybe 2 years all sitting in 2 rows on the floor. Outside the older children go up to about 5 years but after that Beatrice tries to get them into school. We were welcomed in and sat on the "sofa" in a row. Beatrice picked up babies one by one and sat them on our laps. My young charge, Baptista was very unsure about my white face so I quickly turned him around so he was looking at his baby friends on the floor. Steve was standing in the corner videoing and Baptista was fascinated by the camera. He wouldn't take his eyes off it! We had brought babygrows, clothes, bubbles colouring books and crayons. The older children quickly got engrossed in colouring on a convenient ledge outside, meanwhile, Beatrice looked through the clothes we had brought with great delight and handed them out according to size. At her command all the tiny babies held up their babygrows for Steve to take a picture. Then we got out the bubbles and they had great fun popping them as we blew them gently over their heads. Beatrice and Kenneth are as poor as everyone else in Kibera and operate their ministry entirely by faith with no outside funding from overseas. It is a daily miracle that they are able to feed all their tiny charges.

On our trips around Kibera, we were always accompanied by local people who ensured our safety and helped us to find our way. These guides were frequently drawn from a small group of boys in their late teens. They had either graduated recently from secondary school or were in their final year. They were a delightful

and articulate group with very high aspirations. Their ringleaders were Robert, the playwright and Boniface the church Youth Pastor. During our stay in Nairobi we were treated to several of Robert's plays. They were all very direct and hard-hitting and put across their message clearly and succinctly. His themes included love, infatuation, arranged marriage, the folly and ignorance of youth, aids, abortion and such like. He acted in all his plays himself along with a group of friends he had gathered together into a drama team. His burning desire at present is to make a film for which he is writing the script. Boniface aspires to be a doctor and another young man called Camolo dreams of being a professional footballer. He was accepted for Kenya's national team but could not afford to take up the place. These boys and possibly a few more have an agreement among themselves that if any of them succeed in breaking out from the poverty of Kibera, they will return and help the others to achieve their dreams too. They frequently accompanied us on the bus and on our trips out and were excellent company. They were most solicitous for our safety and would probably have laid down their lives to protect us.

Towards the middle of the second week, it became apparent that the building work was nearing completion. The men had decided it was preferable to finish one building and make it usable rather than do a partial job on 3. They had done an excellent job together with local help and even managed to concrete the floor and skim it too. Helen and Tom spent a couple of days down at the site painting a mural on one of the outside walls which one day is to bear the words from Isaiah 60 v. 1 "Arise shine for thy light has come and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee," chosen by Rose.

We concluded our fortnight's work with a small dedication ceremony at the new building led by Pastor Evans (who had returned after one week's absence sorting out his family affairs) and Steve.

Our last few days – Saturday to Tuesday were spent travelling down to Masai Mara Wildlife Park where we spent a couple of days on Safari. We saw a large variety of wildlife and stayed in a nearby camp with log cabins. It was a beautiful place to stay and we all enjoyed ourselves.

The best news was reserved for last. Pastor Evans and Rose arrived with the school bus on the last morning in Nairobi at 4.50am to drive us to the airport. Rose who has suffered with severe diabetes for a long time and had not been at all well before we left for Masai Mara had been prayed for by Sarah. She whispered to Sarah that God had healed her and she had been to the doctor who confirmed that her blood sugar that had been 25 for weeks had dropped to 5 which apparently is normal. PTL.

Well that is a very long summary! I have tried to give you an idea of what it really was like as I experienced it. I thoroughly enjoyed the 1st week when I was telling lots of stories, singing and inter-acting with both children and staff. Sadly by the 2nd Tuesday I had a painful laryngitis which robbed me very effectively of my voice and I was no longer able to do any teaching, singing or even much talking. It was very frustrating. By Saturday when that was at last beginning to improve, I started having severe stomach cramps and spent most of the rest of the trip battling a crampy tummy. Fortunately I managed to keep going and didn't actually have to miss the Safari but it all left me feeling very tired and floppy. It wasn't until the final morning that I began to feel myself again.

We had a very straightforward and trouble free journey home and I am pleased to be back. However, it was an experience I am very glad to have had and will go again very readily should the occasion arise. I am busy processing the trip internally, - a task that may take some time! To encounter such abject poverty certainly makes me reconsider life as I know it. I really enjoyed the people, the children, the teachers and the school and was deeply moved by their cheerful joy and warm friendliness. When we arrived at the school each day and pushed open the rickety gate a whole playground full of children would surge towards us with big smiles, outstretched hands and shrill cries of "How are yooooo?" – Unforgettable.....