

Hope for Tanzania Visit 2007

Martin & Philippa and their two children Steph and Elli made a visit to Arusha in July 2007. They had raised £4000 which significantly exceeded the starting target of £2000. The money was used to part fund a minibus and the construction of a new classroom at the Tuishime Nursery and Primary School.

It had been a long time since we had last been in Tanzania, actually 1998. And it was the first time that we had taken our children so we had a certain apprehension how they would cope with the different culture and particularly different food. We arrived in Nairobi after a long flight from London via the Middle East. Then a 4 hour bus journey took us to Arusha where we were met by our friends Felix and Naomi Masenge and taken to their house. What a welcome! The two girls were particularly fascinating to them, and to other Tanzanians due to the love Tanzanians have for children and the light hair colour of the girls.

Philippa launched straight into school life next morning when she went on the early school bus run. After 90 minutes of being jolted on rough roads the bus was filled up to overflowing with the enthusiastic children and she and it arrived at School in time for the assembly and start of lessons. Martin arrived later with the girls to be “mobbed” by a large crowd of children and given a “never to be forgotten” welcome. It brought tears to our eyes to see such love and acceptance of us even though we were complete strangers. What had we done to deserve this?

Having sponsored a number of children since the School was started in 2001 we weren't quite sure what to expect. Did the School exist?, what did it look like?, would we like what we saw? We need not have worried as we were greatly encouraged by the buildings, staff and children. It was emotionally moving to see the bungalow that had been given by the Masenges to start the School back in 2001. It had been built to house them in their retirement but, due to their compassion for the orphans of Arusha, they had given up their rights to it. What a wonderful example of love!

During the first 3 weeks of our visit we went to the School on most days. Philippa was asked to teach many classes, which was a daunting prospect as she had not prepared any lessons and didn't know the Tanzanian school curriculum. Still the teachers seem pleased. The welcome given to Philippa highlighted the value that teachers trained in the West can bring to a country such as Tanzania, providing they have been trained in cross-cultural communication. The girls spent a lot of time with the youngest children playing with them and helping the teachers. They also helped teach games – rounders and volleyball.

Martin became a builder helping in the construction of a new classroom for the oldest year group. Although he wasn't skilled in building, the Tanzanian workforce was more than capable of completing the project on its own. General labouring, encouragement of the local labourers and buying building materials were the type of tasks that he was able to do. Slowly the classroom rose and by the end of the visit the roof had been completed. The quality of construction would have failed all building regulations in England but was adequate for the relatively dry climate of Tanzania.

The educational level of most teachers was not high, although it was high enough for a primary school considering its stage of development. What was more concerning was that the quality of English spoken by the teachers was not high despite the School teaching in the English medium. Indeed children are “banned” from speaking Swahili to encourage them in spoken English.

We stayed with the Masenge family for three weeks meeting Marie, Felicia and Theresa. Felix is a radiographer at the AICC Hospital whilst Naomi is a headteacher at the Kijenge Primary School, a huge school of 3000 pupils. Marie is studying business at college whilst Felicia is a trained teacher. Felicia was married recently to Emanuel who works for a local bank. Theresa is the daughter of Naomi’s late sister who is still at secondary school. Naomi’s sister Peace was staying with the Masenges with her son Myugi, a pupil at the Tuishime School so it was a real houseful. The atmosphere in the family was wonderfully welcoming and we had lovely times of chatting, prayer and bible discussion.

Life in Arusha was generally relaxing and colourful. The local buses, called “dala dala” were cheap but always jammed full beyond the number of seats. At first the girls hated the crush but after a few trips actually enjoyed the experience and by the end were experienced travellers. The worst thing about the centre of Arusha was the hassle that we received from local traders as they pursued us as they tried to sell us different souvenirs. We could hardly blame them for this as they were poor whilst we appeared as “walking banks”. Not that we were but all westerners are obviously much richer in material terms than the average Tanzanian. After all Tanzania is the tenth poorest country in the world! But away from the centre there were never any problems and we always felt safe.

Martin preached at the Arusha Christchurch Cathedral one Sunday in both the Swahili and English services. Whilst the service was quite formal, and not that dissimilar to Anglican services in the UK, the choir was something else. The tunes, voices, music and dance were Africa at its best, a wonderful way to worship God. Martin also visited a number of other churches whose services were much less formal. One was in a half completed industrial building which had no walls but was full of lovely people.

We met many other people: Steve Kweka, a teacher from the Kijenge School who sacrificially works voluntarily at the Tuishime School in administration duties and building of school furniture as he has a great skill in carpentry; Matthew and Rose Mangeshu, a retired agricultural engineer and teacher respectively who welcomed us warmly into their home; Moses and Mary Paulo, who gifted us two goats, one of which we ate whilst we stayed with them. We have sponsored Moses, a Maasai, for many years, through many college courses and it was a joy to see how education has benefited him and his family. He has started to help others which is the result that we always were aiming for. Their children were a real delight.

We visited the birth village of Moses which was off the Arusha- Nairobi road in a semi-desert location. It was like stepping back a thousand years, such were the huts and way of life. We met Moses’s mother who was the matriarchal women in the village and were warmly welcomed into the village. The walk, from where the taxi dropped us off, to the village was extremely hot and without the guidance of Moses we would have been totally lost. Later we met Moses’s sister and her family who live in a hilly village near Arusha.

We enjoyed taking the girls on safari to the Ngorogoro Crater and Lake Manyara accompanied by Felix and the driver/guide Focus. It was a great experience for all of us and we saw most of the animals that we wanted to. The Crater in particular is a spectacular sight and teems with all kinds of animals.

At the end of the 3 weeks we left Arusha travelling by bus to Dodoma, an exceedingly long journey. 30km south of Dodoma, the capital of Tanzania, live Simon and Laura Walton with their girls Grace and Esther. Simon works as a doctor running AIDS clinics and administering the AIDS program in the area. Laura, a teacher, helps at different schools and provides a counselling service for local women. But being mission partners with CMS they do a lot more in the Mvumi area than this and are active in the local church. Laura took us to different villages, schools and churches in the area. The area is extremely dry and desert-like, the heavy rains have failed regularly, and the region has a severe water shortage. We also met an old friend, Mkunge, who now works for the Tanzanian Bible Society. He and Rose were most kind to us during our stay.

Our last few days were spent with Caroline and Elli Shao in Morogoro who were wonderfully welcoming to us in our travels. They were wonderfully hospitable going beyond the extra mile. The time to fly back to England had arrived and we were sent off by Felix, who had travelled to Dar es Salaam to say goodbye.

What a wonderful visit it had been, what wonderful people we had met and how deeply God had burned a concern for Tanzania into our hearts. Little did we realise how life-changing the trip had been and how far reaching the consequences of our time in Tanzania was to be.

Martin Grosvenor