Hamjambo Wote, (Greetings All)

Every SLIK group keeps a record of their experiences through their Daily Dispatches from Kenya that are sent to their family and friends on a daily basis. Each dispatch is written from the perspective of a student, which makes for some very interesting reading. The contributing authors to the Daily Dispatches of 2015 include Alex Morrison, Charlie Krejsa, Courtney Hylant, Natalie Janowicz, Sarah Mark, Logan McKenna, Ethan Groff, and Molly Colwell.

If you have never been to rural Kenya, the insights these students offer about their SLIK experience will make you feel like have been there!

Enjoy,

Fred Roberts
The sun rose slowly in the east silhouetting Mt. Kenya in a shower of sunlight. Last night's rain left a chill in the air and I put on gloves and a light hat for my morning run. As I left my house I was greeted by a group of colobus monkeys in the trees by the challenge course and was soon on the dirt road headed towards Naro Moru. Even thought it is a Saturday, I found many students headed towards Irigithathi Primary School. These were the few determined students who were willing to spend four more hours in school where they could get extra help from teachers who were volunteering their time.

A mile from school I was joined by several students running in worn out shoes that looked more like ballet slippers than shoes. They ran beside me, looking up frequently as if to find acceptance in joining me. I smiled and greeted them in Kikuyu, which they translated as “Yea, of course we can run together.” We fell into a steady 8:30 mile pace and one by one the students would slow down and then move to a walk; except for one. The last runner to stay with me was very focused on keeping up with me. I recognized him from the previous day when I taught several classes at his school. Stride for stride we made our way to school, and regardless of the weight of his book bag he moved in a manner seen in some of Kenya's famous marathoners; smooth and steady. As we neared the school gate my running partner picked up the pace as if making his final kick to the finish line. He beat me by a few paces and with a toothy grin said “Kwa heri Mwalimu,” Good bye Teacher.

I continued on my way with a feeling of camaraderie two runners share when they unexpectedly find themselves side by side on each other's normal route. As I thought of my young friend I wondered how many times he had made the trek from home to school and back home. And how many of those trips had he run? And of the other several million students in Kenya how many of them experienced a similar daily ritual, that of running to and from school each day?

Organized athletic competitions for primary school students are few and far in between. The events I am aware of consist of an annual series of meets between schools at the district level, with the top three in each event going on to the provincial level with the goal of reaching the national level. Still too young to join an organized club and work under an experienced coach, primary school runners return home to their lives as students in rural Kenya. They have, however, learned that their talents have taken them far from home and to an increasingly larger stage.

At the secondary school level things become more competitive and those who make it to nationals may be selected for Kenya's junior Olympic team. Along with competing more frequently in Kenya, the cream of the crop will travel to Europe to race against other 16 – 18 years olds from around the world. At the end of secondary school these students become candidates for some of Kenya's elite running camps, often held in the high altitude towns of Iten and Nyahururu. Yet for every young runner who has made the grade to train under some of the best coaches in Kenya, there is another hundred or more who missed the cut off by only a few seconds.
What, then, may have accounted for those precious seconds between those who ‘made it’ and those who didn’t? My thoughts returned to my young running companion. While primary school students may not have access to fancy shoes, all weather tracks, and sleek running shorts, they do have access to their determination and grit. Bit by bit their daily trips to and from school, sometimes as far as four miles one way, steels their spirits and strengthens their bodies. Could this hardened foundation be the base to future success? Is their pain threshold so high that later in life they can hone their strength and style into Olympians? It is hard to tell, but given today’s success of Kenya’s runners there may be a real connection.

Fred Roberts

Kenya 2015! We made it!!

Here we are, in Kenya, with SLIK! And it is! When you picture Africa, you think of poverty and maybe some takes from The Lion King, but it could not be more opposite. Batian’s View, the SLIK base and our Kenyan home is incredible, there is no other word for it. I should probably describe it with some SAT prep words, but I’m too tired.

Today began with a lovely breakfast, where we ate a ton of delicious food prepared by chefs Ngigi and Waithaka, and had our first Swahili lesson. The day had an amazing start, and it only got better from there. We left Batian’s View at 10 AM and went walking, a tad over 7 miles to be exact. During our tour we stopped at four schools. Kids were everywhere. They were so small and polite, and extremely happy to see us. They waved and shook our hands and gave us high-fives. We walked into most of the classrooms and introduced ourselves by writing our names on the chalkboard, which was actually a cement wall painted black. They were so enthusiastic hearing us talk and then laugh at our American accents. I have experienced many things in my life, but this was off the charts; the type of experience that creates a flutter in your chest. You feel so much gratitude and appreciation and excitement. Never have I ever felt so loved by people I had just met.

Each time we entered the gates of a school and visited a classroom, time stopped. Every single student from every single classroom went to the windows or to the door to watch us and greet us. They love to wave; we wave and say “Jambo” and they say “Jambo” and wave back, but because they are so little and excited to see us, all their voices together reminds me of the ‘Time for Tellitubbies’ song.
I see all these kids, and I can't believe it. Many of their school uniforms are threadbare, a few are without shoes, their book bags are worn and tattered. We are standing in a cement classroom in which there are wooden desks, each with three students, and they are just so happy, so joyful. And then you look at the very modest surroundings, no fancy computers or colorful posters on the wall, and see how little they have, imagine that every day must be a struggle. Regardless you can see the pure happiness in their smiling faces.

After our school visits we had lunch in a small restaurant, called a hoteli in Kenya. We squeezed ourselves into two simple tables and bench seats and had our first real Kenyan meal of ugali (a thick maize meal dish) with a stew of sukuma wiki (a vegetable that seemed to be a cross between spinach and kale) and goat meat. We all looked at the fare with curiosity and we each served ourselves a 'test' size serving. It was delicious and we quickly filled our plates. We asked if there were any sodas, which there were not. So the hoteli owner left his shop and found a couple of cokes and sprites for us.

After lunch we flagged down a matatu, a van that is the main form of public transportation in Kenya, and returned to Batian's View. It seemed like a good time to go swimming in the Naro Moru River, which runs along the Batian's View property. We were so hot and exhausted from walking on dirt roads that swimming was a must. Fred told us we should walk up the river and look for good swimming holes. The rocks at the river's bottom were extremely slippery and everyone took a spill at least once, I took top honor of falling over 30 times. We kept track of a while, but we all feel too many times that we lost count.

After our river adventure we cleaned up and played cards. Whenever we have a free moment we play card games. Last night, we sat in a tree fort up in the trees and played card games for over two hours by flashlight. We had so much fun. Something so simple but with all of us together it was the kind of fun that you never want to end.

I still can't believe that I am here. I never thought anything like this was ever possible for me. A new place with new people doing things you never imagined. Africa is much more than I ever thought it would be, and it is only Day 1.

Over and out,

Sarah Mark
Hamjambo Wote, (Greetings to All)

The day began with Fred facilitating several team building activities, or as he called them “fun building activities”. I had gone through the peer-leading program at St. Gregory, and was already familiar with many of the activities. These team-building activities, however, differ with every group, which always makes them so interesting. Effective activities need multiple components; teamwork, trust, understanding, communication and many other things. Fred's main point was to show us activities we could use with our students when we begin teaching, but for our new group it was a great way for us to get to know each other better and work together.

There are eight of us from different parts of the US and have been together for only three days. With each activity we were able to improve our efficiency, for example by reducing the time it took us to complete a task or work together to find a solution to what looked like an impossible problem. The inclusion of everyone was key to start this trip. Some of the challenges put us to the test, and it would have been easy for tempers to flare, but not with us. The support of everyone was great and the objective of this morning was fulfilled in helping us become a closer group.

After the team building came the high ropes course, which was amazing. This magnificent ropes course hangs between the trees above the rest of Batian's View. It is composed of 7-8 different elements each as challenging as the last. They differ so much, testing different components of your physical toughness along as your mental toughness. The goal is to push yourself past where you are comfortable, but not so far that one becomes scared. Everyone's individual comfort level differs, so for some finishing the ropes course is how they were able to push their comfort level. For others, just getting up 30 feet above the ground was as far as he or she wanted push themselves. Everyone completed at least one element, and being there to provide moral support was a great thing. I was able to help belay, which for me is more rewarding than doing the ropes course myself. Along with making sure your climber feels safe and secure, a belayer's responsibility is to provide encouragement and support. You encourage them and are really their lifeline. While a belayer is one the ground, you are really up there helping them through each challenge. It is a very gratifying role.

In the evening the school headmasters where we will be teaching came to talk with us and orient us to our upcoming responsibilities. This is quite exciting, for we will be both students in learning about Kenya's education system and teaching, we will also be the teachers. We have so much to learn and experience, and the headmasters' advice was sp precious. None of us have any formal teaching experience, and our time with the teachers gave us a good idea of what lay in store. My personal goal is to provide my Kenyan students something they don't get to experience every day. It would be easy to lecture out of the teacher's text and have the students answer simply questions, but I want to do more. I want to employ some of the knowledge that I have learned about new styles of learning, and learning through games is a great way to teach and many of these students have never done this before. When you are having fun in the classroom, you don't realize how much you are actually learning. Even though I am nervous to step into a classroom I am also very excited and ready to make my own lesson plans and get in the classroom.

We are having a blast in Kenya!

Kwa heri,

Ethan Groff
As our van pulled into the Equator Curio Market the vendors snapped to attention. It reminded me of a lioness shifting her ears forward to better hear her prey, readying herself for the chase and capture of an unwary gazelle. I may be exaggerating, but some of the students were very nervous about going to the curio market and bargaining for the carvings, beadwork, fabric, and spears that so many previous SLIK students have purchased in the past. As we entered the parking lot my advice was “What ever their price, make a counter offer of 50% less and take it from there. Above all else, have fun, and don't buy anything you don't want.” This is easier said than done considering the students will be haggling with professionals who exist entirely on selling curios to tourists. This is akin bargaining with a smooth used car salesmen working on commission who could sell a chunk of ice to an Alaskan.

First, however, since we were right on the equator we had to witness the influence of the coriolis effect. This is demonstrated by water pouring out of a plastic bowl with a small hole in the bottom. We began right on the equator where our lecturer explained that the coriolis effect created a force that caused water to spin in opposite directions in either hemisphere. He went on to say that by moving only 15 meters from the equator in either direction you cold see the coriolis effect in action. I was skeptical. But sure enough, we walked a short way from the equator into the northern hemisphere the water left the small hole in the bottom of the bowl twisting in a clock wise direction. For emphasis, our guide had two matchsticks in the bowl, and they were spinning around like a clock.

We then went 15 meters south of the equator and prformed the same experiment. The result was the exact opposite, but with the water twisting counter clockwise. When we returned to the equator for the third experiment, the water seemed to drop out of the bottom of the bowl with no twisting at all. The matchsticks also sunk lower in the bowl and didn't spin one way or another. With each ‘experiment’ I looked closely to see how the results could have been manipulated by our smooth talking guide, but couldn't find a thing. Whatever the case, it was an effective lesson and highly entertaining. After we had our group photo taken on the equator, a must for every SLIK trip, the students plunged themselves into the many colorful curio shops open for business.

Visiting the Equator Curio Market is a fun event for me. It is interesting to watch the various bargaining techniques of the students, often reflecting their personalities. A few are happy to pay the asking price, and others will make one counter offer and then be happy with the vendors ‘final price’. Some, however, are out for the best deal possible. The haggling will go on for 15 to 20 minutes, with either the vendor or the student at one point saying “no deal!” Both know, however, that the other wants the deal to be made, so they begin the negotiations anew.
As the students meandered from shop to shop, I too walked around doing my best to look in each shop to a chorus of “Please, come in and see my shop. Looking is free.” I entered the shop of a woman I recognized from previous visits. She had the same items as the other shops, except for one; a large carving of an elephant from wood with a deep brown color and smooth as could be. The elephant’s trunk is held high in the air as if leading its herd to safety. Or maybe it was simply trumpeting. This was one item that I liked and decided I wanted. Rule number one as a buyer, however, is that you never show too much interest in a particular item. I casually asked the shop owner, Alice Njeri, for the prices of a few random items and then even more casually asked about the elephant. She said that for me, since I was the teacher and had brought my students, the price was 5,000/=, roughly $62.50. I was a bit surprised, thinking that the initial asking price would be twice or more than that. Looing at carvings and beaded work wasn’t the only thing I wanted to accomplish, I also wanted to learn more about how the curio business worked, and in particular how it worked at this market.

Alice and I sat down on two small stools outside of her shop and I began my questioning. There are 31 shops at the Equator Market, each of them numbered. It is this order that determines which vendor will approach the next vehicle that arrives. For example if at the end of the day on Wednesday it was vendor #15 who had the first crack at the last vehicle to arrive, on Thursday morning it would be #16. While that vendor has ‘rights’ to approach the vehicle first and to try and coax the occupants into his or her shop, if the visitors decide to go to another shop, #16 has lost his or her chance.

Alice said that before this system many vendors would descend on a vehicle at once. This was intimidating and some tourists even refused to get out of their vans. With the number system the visitors are welcomed by one person, can get out and stretch their legs, and look around before deciding where to go.

The key to making a successful sale, Alice told me, was to get a tourist into your shop. Once inside the vendor could go on and on about what they had and how that particular tourist was a special and will receive the best prices. Next, the vendor watches the client closely to see what interests them. It if is a table of bracelets, the vendor will pick up one or two and put them on the clients wrist and ask what they are willing to pay. The client may say that they are only looking and try to take the items off, but the vendor will continue until the tourists makes some kind of offer. At this point the bargaining will begin. At the same time, the vendor must be careful to not push the client too far and possibly leaving. If the vendor senses this, he or she will remove the item and steer the client to a different item.

I asked Alice how the vendors set an initial price for an item. She explained that normally the beginning price is three to four times the original purchase price. A small carving Alice purchased from the carver for 100/= will have an initial price of 300/= to 400/==. The thinking being that most tourists will counter with a price that is half to three quarters. The bargaining goes back and forth a few times until a price of 250/= to 300/= is agree upon. The buyer is happy knowing that he or she successfully bargained for a ‘good’ price, and the vendor makes a tidy profit. At the same time, Alice said that even if the price is just a bit above the original purchase price, the vendor gives in. She said that even a modest profit is better than nothing, “because I can’t eat the items sitting on my shelf.”
While the three to four times mark up system is the standard, the vendors also profile. The richer the client looks, or the less aware a tourist appears, the higher the asking price. Top-notch tourist companies with large logos on the side of their vans indicate high paying tourists who have extra cash. Alice said that a group such as ours, young students who probably only have set amount of money to spend on curios, will have lower asking prices. It also helps when the tourists speak a bit of Kiswahili or tells the vendor that they are in Kenya for reasons other than to see animals and take photos. It also helps to have a guide, which in this case was myself. The vendors have a sense that I am looking out for the students and will be sure that no one is ‘taken to the cleaners’.

The first impression of the scene is that the vendors are in competition, but this is not so true. While any one of them would enjoy making most of the day’s sales, given the fact that many of the shops have exactly the same items, the vendors work together to extract as much money as possible from a group of tourists.

One example is when a tourist enters one shop and says he or she is looking for an authentic Maasai spear. If that vendor doesn't have it, he will run to the shop where the item is present and will bring it back to his shop. To the client it doesn't really matter where the item came from. The vendor who sells the item will then split the profit with the vendor who actually owned the item.

With 31 shops to visit, at first the students meandered around stopping for short visits to several shops. When a client leaves one shop, the vendor of that shop is not allowed to follow that client into another shop to lure them back. This is a big ‘no, no’. It is as if there is an imaginary boundary between each shop, where one vendor must let go of a potential client and the next vendor has his chance. It reminded me of a clown fish which is attached to its own anemone in the Indian Ocean. The ‘fish’ will hover close to its own territory, but go no further. There is a ‘grey zone’ however, extending directly away from each shop which seems to be fair game in for approaching clients. This is the only area where two vendors may approach one client, which adds to the client’s confusion on which way to go. As if sparing, the vendors will try to win the favor of the client until he or she is swayed one way or another.

To the tourists who visit the Equator Market, it appears that business is brisk with a lot of activity, which is true for that particular group of visitors. Alice explained that there are also dry spells where a day will pass without one vehicle stopping. In fact, ours was only the second vehicle to stop that day. Alice also worries about the international press and how negative publicity about Kenya will scare away tourists. She was very appreciative that the SLIK group was there and said that today a few of the vendors could afford an extra pound of sugar or flour, or be able to put away some savings for their children’s school fees. As Alice spoke not once did she make reference to herself, but rather she was happy that money was being spent and that transactions were being made.

Because Alice knew that I was from Naro Moru, she asked me what else the students were doing in Kenya. I explained that they were teaching in several public schools and that only the day before we had helped with the construction of a new classroom at one of the less fortunate schools. With this she rambled on about how we were the type of visitors that were really promoting Kenya and making a difference. I felt very proud with her comments.
At this point we were all in the van and ready to go, all but Charlie that is. As our driver started the van, Charlie came running out of a shop to the van and in a harried manner asked if anyone could loan him 200/= . Even with all of his bargaining he was still a bit short. Alex quickly gave him a 200/= note, Charlie closed his deal, and we on our way back to Batian’s view. I think that for everyone at the market, buyers and vendors alike, it was a very good day.

And about that elephant I was admiring, I asked Alice to put it aside and that I would be back within the week to buy it.

Fred Roberts

28 JUNE – LOGAN MCKENNA
Daily Dispatch 2015

Hello,

Today we went on a hike to a cave that had been a hide out for Mau Mau freedom fighters in the 1950’s. It was hidden in a forested area and right next to it was a dramatic waterfall. Felix Keymeni and Peter Kafuna, who both work at Batian’s view, and Makena, one of Fred’s children, came on the hike with us. We started the hike from Batian’s View around 10:00 AM and walked for about 10km before reaching the waterfall a little after noon. The start of the hike took us through some bush and field areas before turning into a dirt road, which took us past several small villages. After there were no more villages we entered a densely forested area, following a trail. It is actually quite impressive how many well-traveled trails there around here, even in the middle a forest.

Once we reached the waterfall we explored a little and found a path to the top. The waterfall was about 60-80 feet high and fell from an amazing cavern, which had obviously been carved by the falling water the last thousand or so years. The volcanic rock was polished smooth, much like a slot canyon in the southwest. Everything around the river and waterfall was covered in green moss, which coming from Tucson is quite different and beautiful. Once we had reached the top we stopped and had lunch, and were also joined by a group of five boys who watched us curiously.

After lunch we all walked upstream, sometimes in the water and sometimes on the bank. We spent about 40 minutes exploring before turning back. We left the waterfall and continued hiking towards our final destination where we would meet our van. At the end of the hike was a local hotel/lodge and a wedding reception was in full swing. We found a place out of the way of the wedding party and enjoyed some cold sodas.
For the entire journey we all talked to Fred, Kafuna, or Felix asking questions about the area, the people, the language, and many other things, which were sometimes quite random. I mainly talked to Felix who taught me many new words and phrases in Kiswahili. Even Fred was picking up some new words from Felix.

Near the end of our soda break Fred told us that our next stop was the town of Naro Moru where we would do some shopping. This seemed simple enough. We divided ourselves into two groups and Fred gave each a list of various items and 3,000/=, about $30.00. We then piled into the van and drove to the market.

We got to Naro Moru around 4:30 and we split up to begin our ‘scavenger hunt’, as Fred put it. This wasn’t a trip to Wal-Mart by any means, and to make it more challenging Fred had written the names of some of the items in Kiswahili!

The market was very busy, full of people, cars, motorcycles, street traders, and shops. My group’s first stop was a supermarket, which was about the size of a Circle-K and full of people and packaged foods. We had some trouble finding everything that we needed, but finally we finished and went to our next stop, which was the open market. Before we got to the market we were stopped by two kids we had met at one of the schools we visited a few days before. They not only recognized us, but also remembered our names! They were very excited to see us and for us to soon be their teachers. The open market was full of fresh produce from the local farms and was buzzing with people buying fruit and vegetables. My group had found everything within the first twenty feet of entering the market, but there was one thing left, parachichi. We asked two people what this was but they didn't know. Finally we found out that parachichi was the Kiswahili word for avocado, but we were told that most people in this area simply say avacadoo. But these were no normal avocados, at least by US standards. They were as large as soft balls and cost only fifteen cents each.

With our shopping lists filled we headed back to Batian's View where we relaxed a bit before dinner. For our post dinner activity Kafuna gave us an overview of the evolution of Kenya’s government and the challenges this young democracy has faced. Considering that Kenya gained its independence from Britain only 52 years ago, it is amazing how far the country has come in this period of time.

Regards,

Logan
The sound of our 6:30 AM alarm incited feelings of both nervousness and excitement. Putting on our “first day of school” outfits picked out the night before and departing for our various schools only heightened these feelings. Those whose schools were closer walked, while those of us teaching further away at Shalom and Irigithathi Primary Schools caught a ride with Kafuna in a matatu.

When Logan and I arrived at Irigithathi the school was in the middle of their morning assembly. All eyes seemed to be on us as we tried to pass behind the students to join the teachers. Sweet smiles and waving hands gave me a boost of confidence for the day to come. During the assembly we saw the presentation of the class representatives, as well as the student body president. Later, speaking to the teachers I discovered that this was the first time they had elected students to those positions, which created to promote leadership and responsibility throughout the school.

After the assembly Logan and I went to the staff room in hopes of finding out our classes for the day. To our surprise, we were informed two teachers were absent and we would be taking on class Four and Five for the entire day; by ourselves! Looking at the schedule for class Five, I felt fear as I saw I was supposed to teach lessons on Swahili and early Kenyan history; two subjects I know little to nothing about. However, I had no reason to be afraid and when I walked into class I experienced multiple things that one would never see in American schools. First, as soon as I entered the classroom the entire class stood up and said in perfect unison, “Hello teacher how are you”. The formality of it all as well as being addressed as “teacher” was very new. This formality continued the rest of the day as individual stood each time they answered or asked a question.

By lunchtime I was nearly exhausted from standing up in front of the class and from running around with the kids playing football (soccer) during the breaks and P.E. Luckily, the head teachers invited Logan and me into their office to eat lunch and enjoy a cup of chi. This also gave us a chance to better know the teachers at Irigithathi.

When the final lesson ended I said goodbye to my class and Logan and I began our departure. We barely got 20 yards from the classroom when we were stopped by a crowd of students eager to shake our hands, say goodbye for the day, and discuss topics such as our favorite American foods, our families, and Obama. Eventually we were able to break from the group and make our way back to Batian’s View.
Upon our return we were able to decompress from our day over yet another cup of chi and popcorn. In addition we were able to discuss our first day as a group, sharing our ups and downs and planning for the days ahead. Although tiring, it was a great first day of teaching and we are excited for the rest of our time ahead at the schools.

Best Regards,

Molly Colwell

30 JUNE – ALEX MORRISON
Daily Dispatch 2015

Jamaa na marafiki wangu, (To my family and friends)

Considering the number of times I've sat in a classroom completely confused, today should have come as no shock. However, the feeling of standing in front of thirty anxious elementary age Kenyan children while trying to recall math you learned four plus years ago doesn't get you feeling real great about yourself. Worse than that was being put into a classroom of eighth graders and being told to teach them about the reproductive organs while trying to keep a straight face. Shouldn't have expected less than a few snickers turned into full-blown laughs every time I pronounced a word in my “American” accent.

After getting past the tougher moments of the day, it turned out to be an incredible experience teaching kids something they had never learned before and feeling like I was making a difference in their lives. It's incredible to see how happy the kids are while sitting three to a desk in a room with dirt floors and nothing more than a chalkboard. I don't think I have ever, or will ever, see a group of people find such amusement in nothing more than a blackboard and a piece of chalk. They all compete with each other in a friendly yet highly competitive way to prove to the teacher how much they know, by raising their hands and saying “teacha, teacha, teacha” hoping I will call on them for an answer. They relish in learning new things. I can certainly take note as someone who has not always felt the same way about being in school as they do. I now fully realize just how powerful it is to receive a good education.

What I found just as interesting as teaching, though, was the fact that one frisbee could completely captivate the attention of 150 or so Kenyan boys for half an hour. I can't say I didn't take pride in hearing the ‘oohs’ and ‘ahhs’ when I threw the frisbee over
their heads. Even though hardly any of them knew the correct way to throw a frisbee, it was some of the most fun I've had tossing a simple plastic disc. They find more fun in the smallest of things than anyone I have ever seen, and it certainly is quite an eye opener to the fortunes we have as Americans.

When they finally lost interest in the frisbee, about 30 or 40 of them found a ball to kick around. Others encircled me rubbing my hair, touching my skin, and trying to tickle my armpits. As this was happening others peppered me with Swahili words and burst out laughing at my under sub par pronunciation when I tried to repeat the words. Feeling slightly embarrassed, I let out some shy laughter, but nothing beat seeing the smiles on all of their faces despite having so little. One boy stuck out to me the most, as while all his comrades were finding fun in making a fool of me, he sat there quietly while never letting go of my hand. The whole experience of being a teacher for the first time and hanging out with these kids is extremely humbling to say the least, and I can't help but feel blessed in having this opportunity.

Other than being a teacher, my once held beliefs as a child that the temperature was always 120° or higher anywhere near the equator are very wrong. It's been beautiful everyday and probably hasn't gotten over 75°. I'm feeling very lucky and hoping for many more beautiful days and many more smiles on my Kenyan students in the days to come.

Kwa heri,

Alex

01 JULY – FRED ROBERTS
Daily Dispatch 2015

It was another full day of the American students teaching and learning, and their Kenyan students learning and teaching the Americans new things as well. It is a wonderful cycle of give and take, teaching and learning.

This evening we had dinner at the home of Linus Mwangi, one of the Board of Trustees at Irigithathi Secondary School, where we will be starting the construction of a new classroom on Saturday. Linus and his wife, Mary, welcomed us into their home as they would their own children. We crowded into their main sitting room, the walls adorned with old calendars, a poster of Uhuru Kenyatta, Kenya's current president, old photos of Linus and Mary on their wedding day, and many more of their two daughters. Their humble home was quite cozy and full of family history. The daughters are now in university, of which their parents are very proud.
Linus and a few other local elders were instrumental in the founding of Irigithathi Secondary School (ISS). About ten years ago he and his age mates were about what they could do to help graduating students from the Irigithathi Primary School. While many of the 8th graders at Irigithathi Primary School did well enough to attend secondary school, few could afford the fees. An added challenge was that the two nearest public schools were both five miles away in opposite directions. Getting to and from these schools daily was a tremendous burden for those who made the effort, and many did, as it was the only option. In the rainy season the students often remained at home and hoped the road would be clear the next day.

To help prosperous students join better boarding schools, Linus and others began the Irigithathi Welfare Fund. They solicited parents and community members to contribute to the fund, and each year a deserving and needy student would receive a scholarship to attend a prestigious school. Together they were able to provide scholarships to three students to cover all four years of the students’ secondary school education.

The demand, however, far exceeded the need, so Linus and his partners sat down again to come up with Plan B. Thus, the seed for Irigithathi Secondary School was sown. Their thinking was that rather than sending students away from Naro Moru, why not begin a secondary school here? Using a spare classroom from the primary school and charging a small tuition, they were able to hire one teacher. The first day of class on January 5, 2007 welcomed eight students ready to learn. The first year was shaky for the young school. Money was tight but as the months passed, more and more students joined the school, thereby bringing in more tuition. There was also the realization that in the second year a new class would start, and the need for another classroom. Fortunately a new kindergarten was built at the primary school, freeing up the two-room structure the toddlers used before.

The secondary school was certified by the government in early 2009, allowing them funding based on student population. A principal was hired and six full time teachers. Another classroom was built out of rough-cut lumber next to the current classrooms for the new intake of students and the headmaster shared an office with the primary school head. The steps being made to improve the quality of secondary education in the area were moving forward quickly, and now the focus was on the school’s infrastructure.
Thanks to the fund raising efforts of the Service Learning In Kenya (SLIK) students in 2010, a fourth classroom made of stone was constructed. In the years that followed the SLIK students were responsible for another three classrooms. Today the school has a population of 350 and as you can guess, the need for more classrooms is a priority.

This Saturday, the SLIK students, ISS parents, and many students will break ground for yet another classroom. This one will be for the Form 1 (Freshmen), a class of 58 that are currently using a classroom made of scrap wood lined with plastic sheeting to keep out the wind and a compacted dirt floor. The headmaster explained that when the new classroom is done later in the month, the students will pick numbers out of a hat, the ‘odds’ will move to the new classroom and the students to attend. They are all there because they want to be successful and keep their doors wide open for future opportunities.

As with all of our evening meals with our neighbors, this one was delicious!!

Fred Roberts

Tonight’s fare was mukimo, a mixture of potatoes, spinach, beans, and corn, a rice dish with goat meat, vegetable stew, and chapatti, a form of flat bread. All of the ingredients came from the Mwangi’s farm.

02 JULY – CHARLIE KREJSA
Daily Dispatch 2015

We are already a third of the way through the trip and I feel like I’ve only scratched the surface of Kenya. Today was no exception as we all took part in a few new experiences.

When Courtney and I arrived at our school, Shalom Primary, we got a surprise when the headmaster told us we would be with the “baby” class through class 3. (This is the pre-K group through the third grade.) He explained that the younger students would benefit from being taught by visitors, and Wazungu (light skinned) visitors no less. This was exciting for both of us as it would be less rigorous than teaching the older kids. We began by switching off between 1st, 2nd and 3rd grade classes. The kids were overwhelmed with excitement when we entered their classes. Some classes asked lots of questions, some of which I couldn’t answer.
Eventually it time for PE and as soon as I walked out the classroom door the students attacked me. There were at least 10 kids on either arm pulling me to the playground where we played for at least an hour. Every student asked me to play with him or her and the most popular activity was the merry-go-round. At first a few kids got on it and I pushed it really fast. Swarms of kids came rushing over for the next spin. Just when I felt too tired to do any more pushing the bell rang and it was time for lunch. We spent another hour with the younger kids after lunch and then it was on to our next new adventure.

After school Courtney and I walked over the Irigithathi Secondary School to meet Fred and the rest of the group for an afternoon of different games. Tuesday and Thursday afternoons are reserved for the school's athletic teams to practice and get pointers from their coaches. The girls' handball team came in second in the nation last year and they were all business. The boys' volleyball team was practicing and asked us to join them. The game was close to evenly matched thanks to Logan and Alex's serving, everyone's setting, and Ethan's blocking and spiking. Then we mixed the teams up, so there were Kenyans and Americans on each side. The game was more exciting because the Kenyans were very good at setting so we could come in to make easy shots to the other side.

After a half an hour of volleyball the athletic director came over and said it was time for us to join the futbol (soccer) team. We took the field and a few Kenyans joined our team along with German and another Kenyan who were both in college. We kicked off first and scored immediately. Then the Kenyans attacked and I felt that we were outnumbered and outmatched. However, our defense held them many times. Ethan then scored our second goal from textbook pass form Alex and we were up 2 - 0. Then the Kenyan's style changed and they went on the offence in a big way! I got the feeling they didn't want to lose to us Americans, and I bet if they were playing seriously we would have been beaten soundly. They ended up tying it 2-2 and almost got a third goal if it wasn't for Fred calling us over for a picture before we left.
The German who played on our team was in Kenya for an internship at an agriculture non-profit program. So he showed us where he was working and gave us a tour of the facility. Most of the equipment was broken but the facility was very interesting. The facility processed a local nut to extract oil. The program had earlier made bio-diesel but when the market fell it was no longer profitable. Their next plan was to use the nutrients nut husks to make animal feed. That idea was unsuccessful as well because it was a new product and there were not enough farmers in the area willing to buy the feed. The tour gave us a first hand perspective on the challenges businesses face in Kenya and what a struggle it is to make profit. After the tour everyone was dog-tired and we went home to Batian’s view.

So far our time here in Kenya has been very enjoyable and everyone looks forward to more time with our Kenyan student. I am so lucky to have this experience and I wouldn’t trade it for the world.

Until next time,

Charlie

03 JULY – FRED ROBERTS
Daily Dispatch 2015

MAMA WAWERU

Yesterday afternoon we were honored by a visit from Mama Waweru, as I fondly call her, a neighbor to Batian’s View. Mama Waweru as born in 1936 and her full name is Ester Wanjiku Waweru and is from the Kikuyu ethnic group. Back then Africans were not allowed to own land in the White Highlands, this being reserved only for Europeans. The Kikuyu either lived in the over crowded African reserves set up by the British Government or worked on the farms of Europeans. The traditional homeland for the Kikuyu was much of the land taken by the British government in the early 1900s as they felt that it was unoccupied. Had they done some research, they would have found that the Kikuyu owned all of this land in family units, each called an Mbari.
Mama Waweru was married at the age of 15, not an arranged marriage, as was the custom back then, but as she said, roho na roho (heart to heart). She and her husband lived in the town of Nanyuki, her husband working as a clerk for the East African Power and Lighting Company. This was his day job, and at night he helped the freedom fighters, referred to as the Mau Mau, who lived in the forests of Mt. Kenya. The Mau Mau were referred to as terrorists, trying to scare the white settlers off their farms. In response, the British Government declared a State of Emergency in 1952 and began arresting and detaining any Kikuyu they felt was active in the effort or sympathetic to the Mau Mau cause. Mr. Waweru was arrested in November of 1952 and sent to a detention camp, where he would remain for six years. Being a single woman, Mama Waweru was taken from her home to live in a village set up by the British. The British claimed this was done to protect the Kikuyu, but in reality it was the colonial governments way of tightening their control over the Kikuyu. At the time Mama Waweru was six months pregnant.

In the camp Mama Waweru described how several families had to live in one hut. They were not allowed to leave the village, which was surrounded by a moat and barbed wire, except for three hours each week. During that time they had to collect firewood and water, and go to their small farms to gather their crops. This Mama Waweru had to do this with her load on her back and a child strapped to her breast. What they gathered had to last the entire week. The rule in each home was the children were to eat first, and the adults later. This meant that many of the older Kikuyu went hungry for much of the time.

During their sojourns from the village they were escorted by armed guards, who made sure that the Kikuyu didn't deliver food and information to the freedom fighters. This, of course, was the lifeline for the Mau Mau who depended on others to keep their campaign alive. With each trip, however, Mama Waweru would carry food or even bullets in her baby's clothing, undetected by the guards. At a predetermined location she would leave the goods for the Mau Mau to be collected later under the cover of darkness.

Armed with guns, planes and thousands of soldiers, the British government was no match for the Mau Mau, at least over the long haul. Eventually the freedom fighters were either captured or left the forest, and by 1959 the Mau Mau revolt was over. Through the seven-year ordeal, however, the British government knew that it could no longer maintain a colony in Kenya, and the country was granted independence in 1963.

After Mr. Waweru was released from detention in 1958 he and Mama Waweru returned to Nanyuki where he was able to resume his work with the power company. At independence 10 acre parcels of land were offered to the Kenyans at a fee of 10,000/= (10,000 shillings, which at the time was roughly $5,000.00), which could be loaned from the new Kenyan Government. This had to be paid back with interest at a rate of 300/= ($150.00) per year, which back then was a considerable amount of money.

The Wawerus cleared the land, began farming, were able to keep up with the loan repayments, and by 1985 owned the land. They had seven children, all of whom went to Irigithathi Primary School, one of the schools at which the SLIK students are now teaching. Mr. Waweru passed away in 2002 and now Mama Waweru lives on her farm with her eldest son and his family.
Mama Waweru’s presence and her narrative of the events so long ago was like a character stepping out of a textbook and providing information first hand. But in this case she was not a character, and was actually someone who was a primary resource of the material used to write the history books. For any history enthusiast, this is as good as it gets.

Mama Waweru’s final words to the group was that at times life will be difficult, and at times it will be pleasurable. The key to life is to work through the hard times with the support of one’s family and perseverance, and to relish the good times with those you care for and who care for you.

Kwa salama,

Fred

In honor of the 4th of July in the US, is a fitting photo that I took during my morning run.

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04 JULY – SARAH MARK
Daily Dispatch 2015

Yea! Happy Fourth of July!

Today, like all days at Batian’s View and SLIK, was full of laughs and hard work. Fred let us sleep in until 7:30, which believe it or not is a nice change from our normal 6:30 AM wake up. Then we went to Irigithathi Secondary School to assist in building a new classroom. When we arrived there were only a few parents there but they had already excavated about 10’ of the 73’ trench that was required of the day’s work. The area we had to dig was marked with lines of oil and we got to work. The ground proved to be just a bit softer than solid rock. First we had to break up the soil with a heavy forked hoe called a jembe. None of us had ever used such a tool before, so the Kenyans gave us a few pointers in how to swing the jembe and not over extend ourselves.

The digging was very systematic, with two people attacking a few feet of the trench, one with a jembe and the other a shovel. After one of us wacked away with the jembe, someone else would move in and remove the dirt with a shovel. Bit by bit we made progress, but after about an hour of this we began to tire. By this time more parents had arrived and they took over where we left off.
We then moved on to a more manageable project, painting. This too was much easier said than done, as we first had to scrub the walls with metal brushes to remove the old paint and accumulated dirt. You may be thinking that we then opened cans of paint and went to work. Not so. The paint here is concentrated, with a small portion put into a bucket with water and then stirred until reaching the desired consistency. Now, imagine putting the equivalent of a jar of peanut butter into a bucket, adding water, and stirring until everything is mixed up. Each small bucket of paint required about 20 minutes of stirring to remove the chunks of paint concentrate. It is indeed a lot of work, but done properly a single gallon of paint can turn into over five gallons of paint that can go on the walls.

By this time at least 75 Irigithathi students had arrived and were ready to pitch in. These students had been in class from 7:30 until 10:30 AM to help them get ahead with their studies. They told us that it was voluntary but that every student attended, and on Saturday morning no less! I can’t imagine there would be much of a turnout with Saturday school in the US, and once again I was impressed with the Kenyan students’ commitment to learning.

Fortunately we had plenty of brushes and about six of us shared one of the buckets of paint. I can’t say that it was very artistic painting, and we all had more and more drips and splashes on us as time progressed. We passed the time talking and at one point the Americans broke out with a song from Queen. It was nice to see a huge community come together to build something that is taken for granted in America, a classroom, so simple, yet also complex. And to also spruce up the school’s exterior with a fresh coat of paint. The classroom under construction will be for the freshmen class of 68 students, which is currently occupying only one classroom! I’m sure they are looking forward to the completion of the new classroom at the end of the month so they can spread out and have more room for their lessons and learning.

By lunch time both the trench and the painting were done and we enjoyed a traditional Kenyan stew of potatoes, beans, and corn. Sounds pretty simple and even boring, but after all of our work it tasted great! Following lunch we played volleyball with some of the students. Some of the time it was the Wazungu verse the Kenyans and at others we mixed the teams. We then returned to our Kenyan home and washed ourselves of many layers of dirt and paint.

To top off the day we went to dinner at a friend of Fred’s home, Mama Irungu. We had an amazing meal of arrowroot, yams, cassava, chicken, which was served with a thick chicken broth on the side.
Unlike our other meals in the homes of Kenyans, this evening we ate outside under the beautiful stars. It is refreshing to see the stars at night; they are clear and visible here. I guess that happens in an area where very few people have electricity and there are no streetlights blocking one's view of the stars. On our walk home from dinner, we sang the Star Spangled Banner at the top of our lungs, like a bunch of children on a merry-go-round.

Now, we are going to stay up late and play cards so that we can sleep in tomorrow. By that I don't mean Fred's definition of sleeping in, but we don't have to be at breakfast until 9:30 AM!

Over and out,

Sarah

05 JULY – ETHAN GROFF
Daily Dispatch 2015

Hi Friends and Family,

It seems like just yesterday we arrived in Nairobi but so much has happened since then. We have moved from a group of strangers to close friends in such a short time. We have had amazing times teaching and just hanging out together. Today was just another piece of our fantastic journey together.

Today the teachers from Shalom Primary School came for a program of team building and to experience a few elements on the high ropes course. Between the teachers and the SLIK students there were 32 of us. We began with a few introductory activities to get everyone in the mode of experiential learning and interacting. For Charlie and Courtney, who have been at Shalom teaching, the rest of us didn't know any of the teachers. After a few fun warm-up activities we were laughing and working together like old friends. Between the different problem solving activities and over lunch, we had time to talk with the teachers and engage in some very interesting conversations with these educators from a different culture. Like every other interaction with the people of Kenya, their stories are interesting and their life styles amaze me. The way they live is so different from life in the US. They couldn't have been more friendly and open in our discussions, and they too were surprised when we described our lives at home.
There were three things that stood out to me in our discussions. First, they couldn’t believe that most people in the US have a car and that driving is the primary mode of transportation. Here most people walk or take public transportation in the form of a van, or matatu, that goes between this area and Naro Moru town. Second, I explained that all of our food came from a supermarket. One teacher asked, “But what about your farm, don’t you grow some of your own food?” I had to tell her that the only ‘farms’ people have in Tucson are very small, and that people grow a few things just for fun. Here, Kenyans grow almost everything they need and will buy milk from their neighbors with dairy cows. The few items they do get from a shop are things they can’t grow, like grain for flour, sugar, tea leaves, and fruit, as this area is too cold to grow fruit. Third, none of them could comprehend that there are homeless people in America. One bold teacher asked if any of the homeless were white people, and I told her that most of the homeless I see in Tucson were white and will stand at intersections with signs asking for donations. I felt that another myth about American had been dissolved, but I’m still not sure they believed me.

After helping our on the ropes course and participating in team building activities until lunch, it turned into a great relaxing day for us. The Batian’s View facilitators were running the high ropes elements for the Shalom teachers and Fred told us to take some time for ourselves. We brought out cards and played ping-pong all afternoon. The needed rest was filled with laughs and jokes. This is what made the day more than anything. Even though today’s activities were fun and worthwhile, whenever we can get a break makes the busier days so much better. After finishing the first week of school, this Sunday break allowed us to be ready for our teaching for three more days.

This past week at school was the most learning I have done in my entire life. Learning how to write lesson plans and to teach in a class was nothing compared to actually stepping in front of a class and presenting the information. The first three days of the week I worked at a public school, which was quite an experience to say the least. I taught classes all day because the teachers didn’t seem to care if a teacher was with the students or not. They would take an hour tea break in the morning and never help with my lesson plans, but that was OK. I’m sure that the teachers do care for their students and want them to learn, but between overcrowded classrooms, the difficult teaching environment, and low pay, it would be hard for anyone to be super motivated.
The second half of the week I moved to a private school, Jupiter Primary, which was an entirely different environment. The teachers were attentive and hardworking. The headmaster and his wife, Mr. and Mrs. Gichuru, whom own the school, were constantly moving from classroom to classroom to greet the students and provide encouragement to the students. This caring atmosphere rubs off on the students as they too care about the material and learning. They had a counseling session on Friday where a visitor discussed life lessons and the students were captivated. Teaching in a private school and public school have given me great insight into how different the school systems are, and an interesting perspective during my interactions with students from both schools.

Until next time,

Ethan

06 JULY – COURTNEY HYLANT & NATALIE JANOWICZ
Daily Dispatch 2015

Dear Family and Friends,

Court and Nat logging in on a casual Monday evening to bring you the Daily Dispatch from Kenya. Today was an eventful and adventure-filled day (are any of you seeing a pattern to how great our days are?) kicked off with a typical school day, which is nothing one would call ‘typical’ in America.

For those out of the loop, we arrived in Kenya a week and a half ago and have been cheerfully teaching at several contrasting schools the last seven school days. Natalie, who has been enjoying the laid back nature of Gating Primary school, is teaching in an area which is less fortunate, less organized, and under-funded, yet full of amazing students with a strong desire to learn. Thanks to the efforts of past SLIK groups, there are five stone classrooms, with the other four, the teachers’ workroom, and even the Headmasters office being made of rough lumber and dirt floors. Clearly the faculty and administration at Gitinga have their priorities right to put the students' needs first and are happy to wait until one day when they too can have stone structures and cement floors.
Meanwhile, Courtney has been experiencing a more put-together, fortunate, and positive learning/teaching environment at the private Shalom boarding school. All of the buildings at Shalom are stone with smooth cement floors. The exterior walls are covered with bright paint and inspirational murals in several locations. The school runs like a clock with teachers scurrying from class to class with each ring of the bell.

Tomorrow is our final day of teaching, and for both of us it will be a bittersweet good-bye. Bidding our farewells to the bright faces of the grade school students we have built personal relationships with will be difficult, but we are so glad to have had the opportunity to interact with many the many special students and teachers. Thanks to Mommy and Daddy again for giving us this amazing and life-changing experience.

After school our group drove a few miles up to the base of Mount Kenya and enjoyed scenic hike back down to Batian’s View. After our six mile hike we quickly changed cloths, grabbed our flashlights and kept strolling to the home of Patrick Wamithi, also known as Kazi Doniyo, which in Kiswahili means ‘any work.’ He has been a friend of Fred’s for over 25 years and works part time at Batian’s View. The goofy man that he is, Kazi Doniyo greeted us with his gap-toothed smile and his trademark “Hallelujah!” in response to our chorus of “Jambo!” Upon entering his home, we experienced a reality check. As we walked into the dark, lantern lit 14×14 foot hut, we noticed the walls were insulated with newspapers, calendars from 1996, couches made of wooden planks covered in worn blankets, and a ceilings held up by a few sticks across the main beams. Despite these humble living conditions, Kazi Doniyo is one of happiest and most genuine people we have met. Regardless of size, his house radiates peace and love. Kazi’s wife, Veronica, then brought out a traditional Kikuyu meal, but a bit different from the fare we have enjoyed in other homes. Tonight our dinner was a spicy vegetable stew, moist chapatti (flatbread), the most tender goat meat we have had so far. It was so very simple, but so very tasty.

The newest addition to his happy family is only two weeks old, and we were fortunate enough to hear the story of his birth. One early evening, Kazi Doniyo showed up to Batian’s View with a panic in his voice as he yelled, “Fred, shida kubwa, shida kubwa!!!” which translates to “we have a big problem!” The cause of the commotion was that Kazi’s granddaughter, Njeri, who was pregnant, felt some contractions and they didn’t have a vehicle to go to the hospital. If they had had more time, they could have taken a matatu, but Kazi didn’t think she could wait for one to show up and then the hour drive to the nearest hospital for the delivery, which was in Nanyuki. Soon enough, Fred had Kazi Doniyo, Veronica and Njeri in his car and off they went to Nanyuki. They arrived at the hospital at 7:30 PM and Njeri was quickly admitted. The contractions
had subsided but the doctors wanted her to spend the night. So Fred and Kazi headed back to Batian's View and Veronica stayed in Nanyuki with some friends. Around 10:30 PM, Njeri's soon to be born baby decided that enough was enough, and Njeri soon gave birth to a beautiful, healthy, and tiny baby boy. After dinner, we stargazed down the almost pitch black dirt road back to Batian's View, where we were greeted by Nala and Kiara (the cutest dogs in the world) and ended the night with an exciting round of Euchre.

Signing off, love you Mom and Dad!

Court and Nat J

07 JULY – LOGAN MCKENNA
Daily Dispatch 2015

Hello and Jambo,

Today I left Batian's View at 7:30am and walked to Irigithathi Secondary School where I am helping to build the new classroom we began on Saturday. Nala, one of Fred’s dogs, walked with me along the 7km it takes to get to school. Upon arriving I greeted the three other workers I would be working with that day. The first task was to mix cement, which was no easy task. Remember, where are no cement mixers here so everything is done by hand. We first made a sand platform about 15’ in diameter. This was done by making 35 trips from the huge pile of sand nearby to the platform. The foreman, Wahome, calculated this exact amount. On top of this went gravel, 29 wheelbarrows full to be exact. We then evenly placed 16 bags of cement, each weighing 120 pounds, around the gravel. The bags were torn open with a shovel and equally distributed over the gravel. Working from one side of the platform to the other, water was poured at a pace allowing us to thoroughly mix the concoction. When a section reached the proper consistency, it was shoveled into a wheelbarrow and poured into the trench. Once we had committed to the mixing we couldn't stop until all of it was used up, and it was really hard work!

Next we carried 80-pound building stones from about 20 yards away and place them around the edge of the trench. One of the workers helped me carry stones while the other two mixed the cement that would fill the first foot of the trench. Once the cement began to become firm, I helped hand the stones down to the other workers who placed them in a straight line. Once one layer of stones was in place we took a string and held it tight from one end to the other. This was to make sure that all the stones were straight and in line with one another. The rest of the day on site was pretty much the same – mix cement, carry stones, lay cement between the stones, lay more stones, check our work with a string, etc...
It was really interesting to see how precise they were in leveling and squaring up the corners, even without modern tools. To level they would take a clear plastic tube that was about 50 feet long and fill it with water. They would then lay the tube down between the two points that needed to be level. Then both ends of the tube would be held straight up, one at each point. The water level would stay at the same level at each end, so they would adjust the building material until it was level with the water line. To square up the corners they would lay down three taught strings, measure length and width, and then measure from corner to corner. If the distances were equal then they knew it was square. It was quite impressive to see Wahome and the others work with such precision, and with amazingly simple tools.

Throughout the day I talked with the other workers in broken English and my limited Kiswahili. During one of our breaks three teachers joined us and I chatted with them as well. They ask me about how this style of construction compared to that in the States. I explained that the biggest difference, besides the lack of power tools and machinery, was the procedure of how buildings went up here. In Kenya, at least with this building and others I have seen, the exterior walls go up first. I explained that in the States we start by pouring the foundation and then putting in the framing lumber. Plywood is then nailed to the exterior and sheet rock to the interior, with a nice layer of insulation in between. Lastly, a layer on paper and wire is attached to the exterior and this is covered with stucco. They were quite surprised as this sounded like much more work that what is done here.

On the walk back, around 4:30pm, I walked with a group of high school students from Irigithathi. I also walked back with Nala, who had stayed with me the entire day. The students were quite fun to talk with and had a lot of questions for me. I was asked to visit three of their homes, but I had to decline because of the lateness of the day. They insisted that I should come another day. Once again I was touched with how welcomed I felt in Kenya.

Back at Batian’s everyone was relaxing and soon after we had dinner. Afterwards Fred facilitated a group interview asking us questions about how the trip has influenced our views on Kenya, the States, and ourselves. He explained that last fall he had written a paper for his masters program about the influence of international travel on self-perception. Considering that we were right in the middle of the experience the discussion was quite interesting and everyone had something to say. By this time it was 8:30 and we all went outside to play ‘Ghost in the Graveyard’, with Fred’s daughter leading the way.

Best regards,

**Logan McKenna  (The Irish happy one.)**

PS. I learned that in the local language, Kikuyu, Makena, means ‘the happy one.’ While my family name is of Irish origin and spelled a bit differently, the locals are amazed that I have, according to them, a Kikuyu name.

PPS. Here is a photo of the classroom currently holding 68 students. Once the new classroom is done, 34 lucky students will move to the new one.
Hello friends and family!

After a week and a half at our respective schools, we are all left with great memories. Not only did we spend time teaching, we learned from both the children and the teachers as well. The last day of school was sad for all, as we had to say goodbye to all of the friends we had made, both teachers and students. However, at many of the schools, the last day was not without festivities to send off their American friends.

At Jupiter, where Ethan and I spent the second half of our time teaching, each class did a special performance for us. The performances varied from nursery rhymes sung by the adorable baby class, to elaborate songs, dances, and skits by the Standard Seven and Eight classes. Each performance was unique, making us laugh, awe at the students’ talent, and feel wholly grateful for being given the time to get to know and teach the students at Jupiter.

As if that wasn’t enough they also gave us necklaces to remember them by. These actions reminded me yet again of the generosity I have found in every person I have met in Kenya. I will never forget my time at Jupiter, how all the teachers and students made us feel welcome, and how grateful they were for our time spent at their school. I feel privileged to have been given the opportunity to work with both the students and teachers as they have taught me so many things and presented me with so many new experiences that I would otherwise be without.

Kwa heri ya kuonana, (Farewell to see you again)

**Molly Colwell**
Greetings to all,

Just wanted to let you know, especially the students' parents, that tomorrow morning we will begin our hike on Mt. Kenya. The students are outfitted with all of the camping gear and warm clothing needed for a safe and memorable expedition. We also have five porters coming along to help lighten the load and make the hike more enjoyable. If you want to explore the Internet to find out more about the places we will be visiting our itinerary for the next five days is:

Thursday- Begin hiking from the Mt. Kenya Naro Moru park gate to the Meteorological station at 10,000'.

Friday- Met station to Mackinder's Camp at 14,000'.

Saturday- A rest day at Mackinder’s Camp. I’ll take the crew on a hike around the lower peaks and to the base of Lewis Glacier and to Tyndall tarn. Very early dinner and sleep.

Sunday- Our plan is to get up at 2:30, have chai and a light breakfast, and begin hiking at 3 AM. From Mackinder’s Camp we will hike to Pt. Lenana, ele. 16,355’ with the goal of getting there by 6:15 AM, just at sunrise. It is only a 1.5-mile hike but all uphill!! We will go slow and make sure we are always together. A couple of the porters, who are also good friends of mine, will come with us as well. Hope to be back to Mackinder's Camp by mid afternoon.

Monday- Hike from Mackinder’s Camp back to the Naro Moru Gate for a pick up in the afternoon. Below are a few photos from past hikes to give you an idea of what is in store.

Fred
Day 4 on Mt. Kenya

After returning to Mackinder's Camp at 9:30 AM we had breakfast and relaxed. With the experience fresh in everyone's mind, I passed around my iPhone and asked each person to share a thought about their time on the mountain. As I phrased it, “Tell me something that made your smile, laugh, or a special memory of this experience?

If it was something that made me laugh, it was definitely the night our head instructor, who also happens to be my dad, tell us stories of past experiences at NOLS, our first dinner at Mackinder's when he told us jokes that made our stomachs hurt, or hearing all of his old stories and climbs on the mountain. Especially when we were hiking around the peaks yesterday and he would look up at route and say, “I did that route once and left an ice screw up there so we could rappel down.” Or someone would ask the name of one of the peaks and he would say the name and add, “And there are three really good climbs on that one I did in the 80's.” Fun experiences like that, especially since I hadn't heard these stories before.

Jake Roberts

My favorite part was hiking up to Tyndall Tarn yesterday. The water was icy cold and so clear that we laid on a rock to get closer and drank straight out of the lake. It was the best water I have tasted in my life. That was really cool. Courtney Hylant Just waking up this morning and having it be freezing cold and pitch black. It was amazing to see all the stars, especially the entire constellation Scorpio.

Molly Colwell

OK, this morning when we were summiting I didn't feel very well but I just remained optimistic and that I was going to do it. I had a good time and it was the best experience I have ever had on Mt. Kenya. To reach the summit before sunrise was very special for me. When I normally come on the mountain we are with students and we don't have any time to explore, like we did yesterday. So I am very happy to have visited parts of the mountain that I have only been able to look at in the past. Irene Irungu, a Batian's View facilitator who joined us.

My favorite part of the mountain was hiking up to the glacier yesterday and just lying on the ice for 10 minutes and eating snow and throwing snowballs. I hadn't thought that I would be doing that when I signed up!

Ethan Groff
My favorite part was yesterday as we went to places I had never been to on Mt. Kenya, even thought I had been up many times. Sirimon Thomas, on left, a long time friend of Jake’s who lives in Kenya.

My favorite part was yesterday exploring around the glacier and having the freedom to really explore. And if Fred hadn’t told me to look down frequently and think to myself “What if”? to see what would happen if I fell, I may have tried to climb to the very top. Fortunately with Fred's bit of advice I am here to tell you about it.

Alex Morrison

Well, so, it took a lot of energy to get to the top and once I had my head over the last rock and could see the sunrise, it was worth every minute. It was so beautiful. You could see the line of orange across the horizon just before the sun came up. Seeing the actual sun rise from 16,355' was totally awesome.

Charlie Krejza

The coolest part for me was the second day of hiking from the Met Station to Mackinder's Camp. We had reached the top of the vertical bog (a really wet and muddy part of the trail) there was a cave and it looks straight out of the Lord of the Rings. That was definitely something I will never forget.

Natalie Janowicz

My favorite part was telling jokes the first night and laughing so hard I couldn’t catch my breath. I have been up here with a lot of groups and I haven't had as much fun as I have had with you guys. I’ve been thinking to myself that I am 54 years old hanging out with a bunch of teenagers, having a blast, and wondering if maybe I shouldn’t have a real job and be in an office. Naw, I would much rather be here with all of you. You guys did great, even with the little experience you have of doing things like this. I consciously pushed you a bit harder than you may have pushed yourselves, but with each little nudge, like on our hike yesterday when we could have stopped at Tyndall Tarn, you all responded with enthusiasm so we went even higher and saw even more. That is what I love most about doing this, whether it is on Mt. Kenya or when you are teaching in the classrooms.

Fred Roberts
Today was a surprisingly good day. Last evening everyone came back from Mt. Kenya with stories and lots of smelly laundry. Fred declared at breakfast that today was “Laundry Day”, and we all would hand wash our own laundry. No one was excited to clean clothes and gear, especially what had been on the mountain. After a quick orientation regarding how much soap to use per bucket of water, we all pitched in and it turned out to be a lot of fun.

After we found our rhythm we bonded over handfuls of soap and brightly colored buckets. Rather than actually washing the clothing ‘by hand’, we were soon standing in buckets filled with dirty laundry, soap, and water, stomping away, and laughing at each other as well. I mean, here we are in Kenya, Africa, hand washing our laundry, hanging out with people we never even knew existed until 3 weeks ago.

The phrase “it takes a village to raise a child” popped into my head. I realized we are who we are partly because of personal choices. We are also, however, influenced by many other people; the moms and dads and aunts and uncles and grandparents and family friends and pets and neighbors and teachers and friends, they too have had an equal sharing in the young adults we are today. I started to get homesick, but a second later, all I felt was pure gratefulness. As I emptied dirty water buckets and retrieved more soap and rinsed another sleeping bag, I realized that we all rely on each other and our families, whatever form that may be, even if we don’t mean to or want to. I think that sometimes we feel it unnecessary or even wrong to rely on others, that we can take care of ourselves (especially teenagers), but in reality this is impossible, and is nothing of which to be ashamed.

The washing continued and the pile of dirty clothing became smaller. We were helping each other out, and it was good. We worked as a team, and not in a “Fred Roberts team building” sort of way, but in a family way. Lending a hand was instinctual; it wasn’t forced or done out of politeness, but rather out of a caring and a symbiotic love for one another. We came together as individuals, some of us from distinct villages, others from overlapping villages, and together the simple act of washing dirty laundry was a very meaningful and memorable experience.

For all of you reading this who has been a part of our respective ‘villages’, I want to thank you. What you have done, however magnificent, mundane, or seemingly unimportant, played a part in what landed us here in Kenya. Every ‘bit’ and ‘piece’ that you gave to us, directly or indirectly, has resulted in who we are now. And what are we now? A group of kids from the States helping others in rural Kenya, helping each other, eating good food, playing suspenseful card games, telling stories and then crying because we were laughing so hard. So, I thank thee.

Sincerely,

**Sarah Mark** – Happily raised in multiple villages.
Hello and Hamjambo,

Our trip to Samburu was awesome! On the drive north to Samburu we mostly slept, listened to music, or had some small conversations. Some of the talk was about how we were going to be camping in tents with harsh winds, lots of sand, and the possibly of being ambushed and harassed by baboons. We had known all along that we were going to be camping and Fred kept mentioning how bad the sand was and that last year they had to move camp because the baboons were so bad. After camping out on Mt. Kenya for four nights, we were not the happiest of campers, but still excited and ready for whatever we would find in Samburu. After entering the park we had a 40-minute drive to camp, and Fred was anxious to get there so we could put up our tents and then take a short game drive. Suddenly next to a fancy sign I couldn’t read our caravan of two vehicles turned and three minutes later we stopped at what looked like a fancy lodge. Just as the engines were turned off, we were very surprised to learn that we would be ‘camping’ at a very nice lodge called Intrepids, instead of in tents in a public campground. Shouts of laughter and joy erupted from both vehicles as we jumped out and grabbed our bags. To make the welcome even more amazing, a staff member from Intrepids greeted us with damp towels to cool our faces and remove a layer of dust that had graced our smiles.

The schedule at Intrepids was relaxed yet also very full. In the morning a staff member would wake us up at 6:00am and bring us coffee, tea, or hot chocolate. We would then get dressed and ready for a game drive, departing at about 6:30am and not returning until around 10:30am. On each game drive we divided ourselves into three of the vans so there was plenty of room for the occupants to stand. We would then convoy through the park looking for different animals. As we found an interesting group of animals we would stop and watch for a while. I won’t bother listing all the animals because I’m sure that you will probably see the hundreds of photos that were taken. The two most popular stops were for herds of elephant and lions, the latter most often being in groups of two to four. It was wonderful seeing the animals up close, and they barely took notice of us being there. Watching a herd of elephant graze and interact was like something out of a National Geographic documentary. The younger ones always stayed close to an adult, sometimes it was the mother and at other times it was an older juvenile. Even though they were spread out over an area about 30 yards square, I got the feeling that they each knew where the others were. I imagine it is the same when a family of humans goes into a mall or is at the park. The parents and older siblings go about their business, but always keep an eye out for the younger family members.
After the morning drive we would return to the lodge and have breakfast, which was a major contrast from the more traditional breakfasts that we had been eating thus far. In other words, at the lodge we ate serious Wazungu food! Eggs Benedict, pancakes, hash browns, grilled tomatoes (an English thing), sausage, and Danish muffins, accompanied by pots of tea and coffee. After breakfast we had some ‘down time’ so we would either play water polo in the pool or relax and use the lodge’s wifi, which was surprisingly good given our location. The 1:30pm lunch was more Wazungu food, but unlike breakfast the lunch menu would change from day to day.

Right after lunch we would be off for another game drive. This excursion was similar to the morning except we would go to a different part of the park and due to the time difference would see different animals. On our second afternoon drive we went to Buffalo Springs, a natural spring in which we all took a swim. Not far from the spring a herd of zebra were grazing and a waterbuck stood about 60 yards away watching us. We would return to the lodge just before dark, around 6:30pm, get cleaned up, hang out, and get on the wifi before dinner at 7:30pm. The dinner was a long and social experience. It began with a choice of two soups, followed by salad, then mango sorbet to clear our palettes. This was really weird as I thought they were bringing us dessert before the main course! Not so! Then came the main course of fish, beef, chicken or pasta. Next came dessert, and last but not least a variety of cheeses and crackers, another English thing. Once dinner was over we would hangout, talk, and play cards. At around 11:00pm-12:00am we would call it a night and crash, and then do it again the next day. And we thought we were going to be camping in tents!

Regards and kwa heri,

Logan McKenna
Final thoughts of SLIK and Kenya, Dispatch #1 of 2.

Trying to describe my three and a half weeks in Kenya in one paragraph seems impossible, but I'll do my best. If last summer you told me I'd be spending a large portion of this summer teaching in Kenya I would have laughed. My initial reaction to finding out I had a chance to go on this trip was “wow, that sounds awesome,” but how in the world am I going to go an entire month without playing golf? Now it is more than safe to say that going without golf for a month was completely worth it, and I would have been kicking myself if I decided to skip out on this life-changing experience. From all the incredible people I've met to the extremely humbling experience of teaching in a Kenyan primary school, I can now say that my perspective of my life in America has changed tremendously. Sure, I could have stayed at home and golfed the whole summer, and yes I would have enjoyed it, but what would have changed? Probably nothing.

I now realize that life is more than a scorecard after a round of golf, measured by birdies, bogeys or pars. Watching the kids here have the time of their lives playing with a soccer ball (which is sometimes a tightly wrapped ball of plastic bags) or duck-duck goose, makes me laugh at myself for once thinking the world was over because of one bad round of golf. I will go back to America with a completely different attitude about everything, and realize how lucky I am to drive a car when I please and to eat whenever and whatever I want. Knowing that there are kids here who walk miles to school each day, sometimes after very little to eat, and still have a smiles on their faces, makes me realize that I've got it pretty good.

Now, I can't say this experience makes me want to go live in a shack or give up the opportunities I have to be successful, but it has granted me a whole new insight into the blessings I have and made me realize that life is so much more than country clubs and Chick-Fil-A every day. As Fred told me, both a Mercedes and Toyota get you from point A to point B, and there is no reason to get caught up in having more stuff than those around you. Why spend tens of thousands of dollars on an expensive car, when there is so much more that could be done to improve the world around you with the money saved by buying a less expensive car? Looking back on this trip I can't help but feel extremely blessed to have had this opportunity, to feel more grounded with my priorities, and to know that I am a very fortunate person.

Alex Morrison

PS. See, I knew it was impossible to write only one paragraph!
Kenya is amazing. As a country, it is peaceful, welcoming, and beautiful. The people are some of the nicest I have ever met, and coming to Kenya to teach was the best. Working with kids who have so little and who are still so happy was an invaluable lesson. I have found a clearer perspective of my own life, some of it good and some of it not so good. While learning about myself and the others in our group, we bonded like super glue and paper, forever, but happily, stuck. Kenya gives you chance to step away from your ‘normal’ life and really see who you are and what your life is about. When you think about it, it’s all about perspective. I also learned that perseverance is key- in everything. Don't give up. And last but not least, “Hakuna Matata.”

Sarah Mark

I have searched for words to describe the past three and half weeks of my life, a task that is next to impossible, and have come up with only one: life-changing. As I sit here looking out the window at my new group of friends while I write this final Dispatch, tears flow down my face at the thought we will soon be going separate ways. It’s crazy that just a few weeks ago these people were strangers, and now I can’t imagine my life without them. So, what am I leaving Kenya with that I did not expect? Fifteen new life-long friends; Logan, Ethan, Alex, Charlie, Molly, Sarah, Natalie, Jake, Makena, Brewer, Fred, Elizabeth, Felix, Kafuna, and Wairimu; I will miss them all so much. On top of this, Kenya has given me a new perspective on things. Kenya is so much more peaceful than people believe, and I cannot wait to return in the future.

Courtney Hylant

I don't know where to begin to describe what I have learned in Kenya. I have felt so welcomed into the lives of the people here and have absorbed so much of their culture, language, and lifestyle. It is hard to explain the specifics, but know that I want to keep traveling and learning. While I have learned a ton about Kenya and its people, I have learned a great deal about myself as well. One example is that I don't want to be a tourist traveling place to place taking photos and buying souvenirs. Instead, I want to travel with the purpose of getting to know others, immersing myself in the culture, and becoming friends with those I interact. I had a feeling that three and a half weeks wouldn't be enough, and am staying in Kenya another two weeks to help with projects at Batian's View and the new classroom building at Irigithathi Secondary School. When I do depart in two weeks I know I will be taking with me a true love for living in other countries and making new friends.

Logan McKenna
Final thoughts of SLIK and Kenya, Part Two –

After three and a half weeks in Kenya what stands out most for me is that I have a very privileged life. Before coming here I never considered the things I take for granted on a daily basis, like my phone, my car, my spacious and clean house, etc. The people I have met here have very few material goods, and they are doing just fine. I’ve found that the ‘things’ I used to consider as necessities, are in fact not. From now on I will remember this trip when drive my car or use my phone, and think of how lucky I am to have those things.

The second important realization is my initial perspective of Kenya as an unhappy and dangerous country was totally wrong. After just a few days I realized everyone is happy, even though they had so little. Every person I passed while walking to school would greet me with a smile and “Jambo,” even complete strangers. When we were dinner guests in the homes of Fred’s friends, the owner was very happy to see us and gave us tour of their land, even if it wasn’t very impressive. The fact is that people here are so happy, even if with no money and little land. When we went to Nanyuki, a sizeable town with a lot of people, Fred warned us to look after our belongings and pickpockets, good advice in any urban area, even America. In every other place we went, I always felt safe and comfortable. Everyone was welcoming and wanted to meet us. There was never a time when I felt unsafe. There are so many things I will take from this trip I couldn’t possibly write in this short document, but they are things I will remember forever.

There are, however, a few big ones. First, I will take full advantage of the opportunities given to me. Second, I will think of others first and then of myself. Finally, I want to bring home a more positive vibe to my life. When I meet new people or when I am having hard time, I will use this perspective to help me through the rough spots and have a more positive impact on others. I highly recommend this trip to any high school student; this trip will change your life.

Charlie Krejsa

Okay, this wasn’t your traditional summer experience, not by a long shot. Instead of working for minimum wage or going to school, I spent the last three weeks with some of the greatest people I’ve ever met, making memories, and exploring the world. This trip was simple yet extravagant, and I learned more in my short time in Kenya than I ever learned in a year of school. I learned enough Kiswahili to carry on a decent conversation, which is much more than can be said for my Spanish skills after three years of high school classes. And this still did not begin to describe how much else I learned about a new culture and a new country.
On top of this, these past three weeks have been the most active of my entire life! If walking a few kilometers to school every day wasn’t enough, hiking up Mt. Kenya definitely added to the physicality of the trip. One of Fred’s words of advice when we arrived was to look for opportunities to push our comfort zones. I even remember him telling me this when I was a student in his leadership class a few years ago. Since graduating from St. Gregory in 2013 I’ve realized I haven’t looked for these opportunities as much as I should have. Well, during my time in Kenya I didn’t have to look very far. This trip pushed my comfort zone to a level that I believed was unreachable. This was not in crazy activities or physically demanding work, but in daily interactions with the people you met and our different activities. Interacting with people from a culture very different from my own was a bit intimidating, but the more I did it the easier it became.

This may sound cheesy, but this trip has made me a better person. Through a first hand experience of the Kenyan lifestyle in this rural area has really opened my eyes to the world. The world is not a perfect place where everyone lives in houses with insulated walls and glass windows. The people I have met here are more than happy living in wood buildings insulated with magazines and newspapers stapled to the walls. There is a general state of happiness wherever we go or with whomever we talk to, something I don’t often sense in America. The most important lesson I learned is to be happy with what you have, and don’t worry about what you don’t. I could talk about this trip for pages, but to wrap it up, I loved this trip, I loved the people, I loved the group of Americans I shared this experience with, and finally I loved the students and teachers I worked with.

**Ethan Groff**

My time in Kenya has been everything I imagined, and much more than I ever thought possible. I came here secure of the fact that I would have a great time, make new friends, and learn from new experiences. I was unaware, however, that I would fall completely in love with the country and its people, make seven new best friends, and learn more from the teachers and students than I ever could teach them myself. I am amazed by how comfortable I feel in this country, and how each and every person is so welcoming and generous. I was touched by how almost every person, from a random man on the side of the road to the teachers at our schools, made a point to impress upon us that Kenya is a peaceful country with peaceful people. They asked us that we spread this message to America, which no doubt we will do.
Each day has brought unexpected challenges and opportunities, expanding my horizons and discovering things about myself that had never before been apparent. My time in Kenya has taught me leadership and team building skills, it has taught me trust and acceptance, and it has given me more lasting memories than I can count. I can no longer imagine my life without having spent time in Kenya, and I hope that it will not be my last time visiting this incredible place.

**Molly Colwell**

Hearing my first “Karibu Kenya” upon arrival seems like only yesterday. Time really does fly by when you're having the time of your life. As I tap out my final Dispatch I realize that all of my time here will be cherished and remembered every day forward. From the wildlife, the excited strangers, the hardy meals, the travels by foot, the inside jokes; every moment in Kenya has been a moment worth remembering. I came here with little knowledge of the country and had no idea of what to expect. I had no high expectations and no low expectations. Honestly, I was mostly focused on the people I was leaving behind at home. Now, after spending a month in this beautiful country, my thoughts on arriving home are that I have no idea as to what to expect. I have no high expectations and no low expectations. I am mostly focused on the people I am leaving behind. Thank you, Kenya, for all you have taught me, shared with me, and given me. You are my second home.

**Natalie Janowicz**

You would think that after eleven years of SLIK programs I would have something on the tip of my tongue to wrap up this particular trip. As has been said before, it is difficult to sum up such an experience in a few lines and even harder finding the words. Working with this group has been so positive and rewarding. Many things I value in life are wrapped together in this short time that I often do a reality check to make sure it is actually happening. As an educator, sharing all I have learned during my time in Kenya with those who are genuinely interested is a teacher’s dream. As a facilitator and advocate of experiential education, nudging the students into unfamiliar and exciting territory so they can learn on their own only fuels my desire to nudge a bit more. As an explorer, I hope that by bringing the students to new places, new sights, new sounds, and new realities will encourage them to do the same in the future. And as a member of the Naro Moru community, introducing the Americans to my friends here who welcome them with open arms creates a greater understanding between different cultures. While I regret that this experience is never long enough, it is countered by the fact that the memories and lessons learned will last for many, many years to come.

**Fred Roberts**