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 2016 include Peirce Morrison, Adam Simon, Jacob Rosquist, Logan McKenna, Bryson Contreras, Sarah Chabin, James Chabin and Enna McBride.

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*
07 APRIL – DAILY DISPATCH
Daily Dispatch 2016

Hamjambo Rafiki, (Hello Friends,)

Welcome to our Daily Dispatches from Kenya post. Each day we will try to post a new story of our adventures in Kenya. If we miss a day, please be patient as our internet connection on the slopes of Mt. Kenya can be iffy.

I am looking forward to another fun and adventurous summer with the students as they teach, explore, help build a school classroom and possibly learn as much about themselves as they will about Kenya.

Stay tuned,

Fred Roberts

22 JUNE – FRED ROBERTS
Daily Dispatch 2016

Dear Readers,

Welcome to the first SLIK-Daily Dispatch from Kenya for 2016. For the next three weeks we will be sharing with you our daily adventures, insights, surprises, and experiences. The eight SLIK students come from Toledo, Ohio and Tucson, Arizona, who until meeting in Detroit two days ago were unknown to each other. Along with the new road ahead in learning about life in rural Kenya, what it feels like to teach a lesson to 45 young Kenyans, and how people with so little can lead very rich lives, this group of individuals thrust into a very new situation will evolve and grow into something very different than the group they are this evening. Shared experiences in a far away land have a way of forging strong friendships, and this group is already on their way.

We awoke to a very cloudy morning in Nairobi and after breakfast and changing money from US dollars to Kenyan shillings, we left the big city and traveled north. Slowly the urban environment gave way to one dominated by agriculture. As we passed small towns and major cross roads, vendors of fruit and vegetables stood on the roadside waiting for their next customer. With bunches of bananas or containers of oranges, watermelon, mango, papaya, sugar cane, arrowroot, rice, potatoes, onions, spinach, and many other homegrown produce the hawkers watched carefully for any vehicle that appeared to be slowing down. Vendors hoping to make a sale immediately swarmed the vehicles that did stop. No, we were not in Kansas any more.
The clouds and rain followed us as we continued on the road to Naro Moru, the town closest to Batian’s View. About 30 miles from our destination we stopped at Chaka Primary School, at the urging of my good friend and school principal, Solomon Mworia. When we pulled into the school courtyard there were 600 pupils standing shoulder to shoulder ready to greet us. The students welcomed us with a “Karibu Kenya” in unison, which was on par with the student section at a University of Arizona basketball game. Each of the Americans introduced themselves, with the Kenyan students repeating the foreign name right after. This led to much laughter and many, many smiles. The welcome and enthusiasm shown by the Kenyan students was a great introduction for similar experiences to come.

From Chaka the road climbed in elevation and soon we broke from the clouds and were bathed in bright Kenyan sunshine. Upon arrival at Batian’s View the students met the staff and had lunch. After a tour and orientation to their new home, we had a couple hours of R&R and to settle in. In the late afternoon Peter Kafuna, Co-Manager at Batian’s View, led the students on a hike to orient themselves to their new surroundings. Dinner was a simple meal of goat stew, vegetable stew, and chapatti, the latter being the equivalent of a tortilla or flat bread. If there is one common staple in the mainstay of a meal in the world’s cultures, it is some sort of bread!

The first evening of a grand adventure is ripe for a sharing of apprehensions and fears of the experiences ahead. These new arrivals to rural Kenya, however, really have no idea of what lay in store. They have heard stories and seen photos, but these are the stories of others and they are not yet in the photos. Rather than the students sharing what may be an apprehension or fear, I explained my belief that being in situations that stretch our comfort zone, that make us a bit uneasy, or leave us stifled for what to do next are opportunities for growth. There is nothing to be apprehensive or fearful about when one is ready to step out of his or her comfort zone. The first step is the hardest, and those that follow are all down hill.

Kwa heri,

Fred Roberts
Hamjambo Wote, (Greetings All)

Our first full day at Batian’s View was PACKED! Today we visited all of the schools where the Americans will be teaching, met dozens of teachers, were greeting by hundreds of young Kenyans, walked on dirt roads, walked on worn paths through small farms, walked a bit more, enjoyed a true Kenyan lunch, learned about Kenya’s education system, and enjoyed dinner with all of the school principals and several teachers. I am probably leaving something out, and certainly the details, which will be coming in tomorrow’s Daily Dispatch. In the meantime below are a few photos of the day.

Enjoy,

Fred Roberts

The farm at Jupiter Primary School.

The dinner guests this evening.

Introductions between the Americans and the 5th grade class at Shalom Primary School.

Outside of our lunch restaurant with Head Chef Ester in the center.

Greeting the students at Rongai Primary School.
Today was our first introduction to our surroundings and the people and schools we will be spending much of our time with. Following a dirt road or paths that threaded themselves amongst small family farms, we walked from Batina’s View to Manyatta, Jupiter, and Gitinga primary schools. The teachers greeted us with the welcoming word, “Karibu,” and the children greeted us with cheers, applause and even dances. At Rongai Primary a swarm of 100 students rushed towards us and lined up to shake our hands. As we were preparing to leave the students sang us a song about the days of the week, which was definitely a highlights of the day.

After our Rongai visit we hopped in a van and drove four miles to the final two schools on our tour, the private Shalom Primary school and the public Irigithathi Primary School. The disparity between these two schools was significant. Shalom had well maintained and brightly painted classrooms, with 20 or fewer students to a class and each student had their own desks. Irigithathi had definitely seen better days, and probably not a new coat of paint in several years. The floors were cracked, at least a third of the windows were broken, and the classrooms were dark. Each class we greeted had around 35 students and sitting three to a desk. At these two schools, and in fact all of the schools, the one commonality was the enthusiasm and excitement we felt from the students. I have a feeling that all of the students are looking forward to us being their teachers in the near future. Our time at these schools and interacting with the students and faculty is going to be a very special experience for all of us.

We met many interesting people, in particular Mr. Gichuru, the principal of Jupiter primary school. After retiring from teaching ten years ago he and his wife founded Jupiter to provide a private school education but at a very low tuition. To cut costs Mr. Gichuru uses the produce from his seven-acre farm to feed the children. He has three cows that provide enough milk and several fruit trees, with the savings used to subsidize the tuition.

After visiting the schools, we stopped by a local “hoteli,” or restaurant, for some local food. We squeezed ourselves into the restaurant that was no bigger than a master bathroom in America. It was cozy but it worked. We were served huge amounts of Kenyan food that I can’t remember the name or the ingredients of, but do remember that was all delicious and very filling.

In the late afternoon all of the principals and several teachers joined us at Batian’s View who presented several short classes on topics related to Kenya’s education system and teaching. It was a ton of information in a short period of time, and extremely interesting. This was followed by another wholesome meal prepared by Chef Ngigi, the cook at Batian’s View.
As for who will be teaching where, Sarah and Pierce will be teaching at the Manyatta School in the morning and walk 200 yards up the road to Jupiter to teach after lunch. Bryson and Jacob are at Shalom for the morning classes and Irigithathi in the afternoon, and the schools are right next to each other. Adam and Enna will be teaching at Rongai, and I will be teaching at Gitinga, both of which are public schools.

If this day is a reflection of what is to come, we have a lot to look forward to.

Kwa heri,

*James Chabi*

---

**24 JUNE – SARAH CHABIN**

*Daily Dispatch 2016*

We started the day with heading to the school we stopped at on Wednesday, Chaka Primary. They had a field day where all the students from grade one to grade eight were divided into four teams. Each team was given a color and whatever color the child was assigned, they wore, whether it was shirts, pants, or a scarf. Since I was wearing a blue jacket, I joined the blue team. Once everyone was divided into respective teams, the school blasted local music and everyone took a lap around the muddy field. Then the teams spread out and one person from each team was chosen to represent their team in an activity, such as a sack race, three-legged race, wheelbarrow race, and a competition of who could put on their school uniform the fastest.

While the children were doing these activities, the children on the sidelines would constantly be dancing, singing, cheering, and yelling for their teammate. The amount of enthusiasm was very impressive and increased the fun! Being the Americans on the team, James and I were constantly swarmed on the sidelines. Students always wanted high fives, handshakes, and to touch my hair. It started with a student flicking a strand of hair and running away giggling. It soon turned into everyone petting my hair and eventually I had a nice braid down my back. Many younger children spoke to me in Swahili, expecting me to answer and understand them. However, the older kids spoke to me in English and discussed their classes.
During the field games, the Americans left with the school's principal to get tea or soda next door. There we tried a soda called Stoney that tasted like a stronger version of ginger ale. Then we went back to the children and the Americans competed in some of the games.

We then said good-bye to the Chaka students and drove back to Naro Moru. Just after passing the small town we turned on to a dirt road that ran along a rhino sanctuary. After 15 minutes of bounding along the road the vehicle stopped and about 100 yards away was a large white rhino! It was massive, even at such a far distance. There we also saw many cool birds, impala, and zebra.

Then we returned to Naro Moru and went on a scavenger hunt. We divided into three teams and canvassed the town looking for items like nails, goat meat, onions, light bulbs, sugar, and many other items on the list. It was a challenge communicating with the vendors and making sure we weren't overcharged, but eventually, the girls team won, finding all the items and buying them first.

For dinner we went to the home of Jachintha, an employee of Batians View's. It was small but cozy, and she and her family were very welcoming. We ate beans, rice, chapatti (Kenyan tortilla), and vegetables, accompanied with chai. As with all of our meals here, it was very delicious.

Kwa heri,

Sarah Chabin

Jacob and James in the butchery.

Enna and Sarah Leaving the grocery store with their last purchase.

Peirce, Logan, and Adam making a deal.
After breakfast we walked to Lipela Orphanage and Children's' Home, that seemed to be just down the road. Mr. Roberts had pointed out the side road to Lipela when we first arrived, and it seemed pretty close. During our walk we passed through a row of ‘dukas’ (shops in Kiswahili) selling all the household needs. Outside one of the dukas a driver started up his vehicle, but in front of one of the wheels was a sleeping kitten, oblivious to the danger. James saw the kitten, swooped it up, and put it next to the duka, where it curled up to continue its nap.

Our short walk turned out to be 3.5 miles long, but it was worth it. The owners of Lipela, a Kenyan couple who live in Denmark, and the caretaker, greeted us and gave us a tour. There are actually two Lipelas, one for very young children and one for kids from first grade up to high school, which we were visiting. In total there are 70 children at the homes.

After our tour we were introduced to the younger residents, as the students in grades 6-8 were at school for a special Saturday study session. After playing a bit we set up an art project to make plaster figures. We had tested these plaster molds the day before and while they did not go as planned we decided to try it with the children anyways. Besides, what kid doesn't like to play with wet, sticky stuff?? The children helped us makes frames from tin foil that they loved. We mixed up a big bowl of the plaster and when we began to pour it over the children's objects the plaster dried almost immediately. The project was a flop but the kids loved it and made some very cool tin foil hats. As for the solidified plaster, we broke it into chunks and used it as sidewalk chalk.

Next was “Simon Says” and the kids caught on fast. Most of the children ended up beating us by the end of the game. After that Brewer, Mr. Roberts’ daughter, made shapes out of the tin foil for a scavenger hunt. We went out and hid the shapes around the yard as well as we could. The children split up into two teams and went out the find the shapes, returning much faster than anticipated, so it was time for another game. This one was easy, soccer, or futbol, as it is called here. After futbol we played a few other little games and went back to Batian's View, and luckily this time we went back in a van.

When we got back Mr. Roberts set up one of the elements on the high ropes called The Screamer that we all experienced. The element is a long rope hanging between two trees. Wearing a harness, someone is clipped into the rope and then the others haul up the participant with a pulley system. Once the ‘flier’ is parallel to the ground, he/she will pull a release cord and come swinging down, often screaming. I was dared to do The Screamer with my eyes closed, so of course I had to, which might have just been my worst idea of the day. Not only did I scream, it was really scary and fun!

Kwa heri,

Adam

PS. Following are a few photos from the day.
Today was very special for all of us SLIK students. Ten students from Aguthi Secondary School (High School) joined us for a day of team building and problem solving exercise on the Batian's View challenge course. To start the day each person wrote his or her name on a whiteboard and we were given a group challenge of each person knowing the names of everyone else by the end of the day. The trouble was that I couldn't even pronounce some of their names and none of them could pronounce my name right or even remember it, which made me laugh. Even after the many exercises we did together and time spent in each other's company, I still found it troubling to remember all of their names. To let you know what I was up against, three of the names included Beatrice Wairimu Wanjiku, Nellius Maina Mathenge, and Kelvin Githinge Kamau.
One of the greatest things about today was helping with one of the activities called the Flying Hyrax. This was like The Screamer, but the participant began on the ground and after a short run would be hauled into the air by 10 people pulling on a rope that went through pulley system. Imagine Peter Pan flying and you get the picture. For part of time I was put in charge of that activity, and I got to show everyone how to work it. Since the kids had never experienced something like that before many were scared, but soon came to realize that it was also a lot of fun. It was a great feeling to contribute to the laughter of others and to see all of the smiles.

For many of the activities Mr. Roberts would say “salt and pepper”, which meant that a ‘muzungu’, or white person, and a Kenyan had to pair up. For one activity a little girl named Nakita asked in a very quiet voice if I would be her partner. She wasn't one of the Aguthi students, but the 11-year-old daughter of the Aguthi Headmaster, Mr. Maina, who had joined us. This was very touching because she was basically half my size and she had the courage to ask me.

Even though we were the first pair to be out, she had a big smile on her face. Even after the activity she held my hand and touched my fingers and I suspected she had never been so close to a muzungu before.

During our lunch break Adam, James and I explained to the Kenyans the story of Batman using a whiteboard and markers. We were shocked that none of them had ever heard about Batman. Then again, I probably didn't know a thing about Kenyan cartoon characters! The entire Batman explanation took a good 15 minutes because we wanted to give them the best presentation possible. After we presented there were many confused faces, probably because they couldn't understand our quickly spoken, American accented English, or our drawn pictures were so bad we totally confused them. In any case, it was a lot of fun and everyone was laughing. After our story telling one of the Aguthi students presented a few riddles, which were really hard. Again there were more similes and laughter, which was what this day was all about.

One of the more challenging problem solving activities was called the Pot of Gold. It consisted of a bucket of water in the center of a circle 20’ across. No one was allowed to enter the circle and with a variety of ‘tools’ we had to lift the ‘gold’ out of the circle. After many ideas were discussed our group finally agreed on a plan. On our first attempt, we spilled the ‘gold’. We then made a slight adjustment to the first contraption and completed the task on our next try. It was clear to us that working together was the best to be successful.

The last event of the day was the zipline. None of the Kenyan students had ever seen a zipline, let alone experience one. Hearing the Kenyans scream and laugh as they flew through the air brought me great joy. In America kids have access to these types of activities all the time, but not so here. Seeing everyone having fun together on the ropes course made it extra special for me.
Last but not least was the group challenge of staying everyone’s name. Two brave Americans and Kenyans stepped up to try. No one got all of the names right, but with a bit of help they were able to get the names right. The Kenyans still struggled with my name, which was funny for me. This was not the last time for us to see our new Kenyan friends, as next Saturday we will be going to their school to dig the foundation for a new classroom. This will take our teamwork to a totally new level. Tomorrow is our first day of teaching and although I am very nervous, I am very excited to share my knowledge and to experience teaching in a Kenyan primary school.

Kwa heri,

Peirce Morrison

Ps. A few more photos of day.....

Four way thumb fight!

Playing tag in a 15’ by 15’ square- pure chaos!
Over the years I have developed many close friendships, one of which is with Mama Virginia. A few weeks ago we met on the road and she insisted on hosting the SLIK students in her home for dinner. It was more of a directive than an invitation, which was fine as the SLIK groups have always enjoyed dinner at Mama Virginia’s, and tonight was the evening we agreed upon three weeks ago.

The weather was fine all day until the late afternoon when some clouds moved in. At 6:15 when Mama Virginia’s youngest daughter, Milka, came to walk us to her home the skies opened up with a major downpour. We gave the storm 20 minutes to settle down and when it turned to a light rain we headed out with umbrellas and raincoats. Five minutes later the rain increased, the wind picked up, and while my upper body was dry my pants were soaked. Ahead the SLIK students walked on, seemingly oblivious to the weather. Milka and I were sharing a small umbrella and I said, “This is getting worse, maybe we should come another day.” Milka replied without missing a beat, “Oh, this is not bad and my mother is waiting. You cannot deny her now.” Enough said, and we marched on.

The SLIK students were troopers, even those without umbrellas. James talked the entire way with Christos, Milka’s neighbor who accompanied her to Batian’s View. After 20 minutes we arrived at Mama Virginia’s farm and home, and were ushered into a cozy room ringed by couches and plastic chairs. It was nice to be out of the rain and soon the room began to feel warm and humid. Slowly we dried out as pots of food were placed in front of us.

My friendship with Mama Virginia began in 2008 when I was introduced to a Form 2 (10th grade) student at Irigithathi Secondary School named Virginia Irungu. She was a runner, so the headmaster wanted me to meet her. She lived near Batian’s View and I would see her on my morning runs as she walked to school. In the following summers I would seek her out at school to see how she was doing and how her running was going. In 2010 she finished secondary school but didn’t score well enough to enter a public university, the tuition of which is funded by the government. Nor could her family afford to pay for a private school, which meant Virginia was stuck. Stuck at home, stuck helping on the family farm, stuck with little opportunity to move ahead in life.

During my visit in the summer of 2011 Virginia asked me for help to attend a small college to earn a business certificate. I was skeptical and wasn’t going to part with the needed tuition until learning more. I met with the school’s director to see the curriculum, understand what a certificate would mean, and how this would further Virginia’s future. By coincidence, one of the instructors had been Virginia’s teacher at Irigithathi, and also a good friend of mine. The situation seemed perfect and I committed to assisting. She completed her first year with flying colors, and I knew she wanted to continue. After her second year with an advanced business certificate in hand, she found an entry-level position at a large supermarket. Now, two years into her career, she is one of the managers. Virginia is one woman who will not be returning to the farm, except of course for visits to her mom. I rarely see Virginia now as she works in a town three hours away. What began as an effort to help a young woman create a better life for herself has grown into a close friendship with her mother and entire family. I think I got a pretty deal out of helping Virginia eight years ago.
Back to Mama Virginia’s home, our meal was as traditional as could be, with servings of arrowroot, sweet potatoes, cassava, and mukimo, a mixture of potatoes, beans, maize and pumpkin leaves. If I ever need to carbo load for my next 100 mile run I will come to Mama Virginia’s for my pre-race meal! In addition was an enormous pot of hot chai, sweet tea that is made with milk, tea leaves, and spices.

We filled our plates and the students talked about their day of teaching. Two of Mama Virginia’s grandchildren were also there, who are students at Gitinga primary where James is teaching. Half way through the meal Mama Virginia presented me with a live chicken, a gift of friendship. I continued my meal with a chicken in my lap, which seemed the right thing to do.

The room became warmer, our clothes were dry, and a feeling on contentment coursed through my emotions. The SLIK students were talking with Milka, Christos, and grandchildren, Mama Virginia sat in an overstuffed chair as if holding court, and I savored the moment as one of very different cultures and lifestyles finding common ground in a welcoming home.

After the plates were cleared Milka entered with nine stalks of sugar cane, freshly cut from Mama Virginia’s farm. Not many people grow sugar cane in this area, and I knew it was a special gesture on Mama’s part to bestow such a gift to her visitors. Adam, however, received the smallest stalk, which at the time didn’t seem like a big deal. Seeing the disparity, Milka went out and returned with a huge stalk that made the others seem tiny. Mama Virginia said that in the Kikuyu custom if a woman presents a man with two stalks of sugar cane with the others receiving one, it is an invitation to marry. Mama said this in Kiswahili, to which Milka reacted with great surprise. (I don’t think she had heard this one!) I translated the exchange to the group and there was much laughter, as well as some embarrassment from Milka.

We finally said our goodbyes and walked back to Batian’s View. The rain had stopped and the stars were showing themselves between the clouds. I walked with Milka and she thanked me for bringing my students to her home. I replied that she and her mom were the ones to be honored by hosting the group. Such an experience is not found in a travel brochure or guided tour, only one that comes through a long relationship, and an open and cozy home.

Kwa heri,

Fred Roberts
This was my second day of teaching at Shalom and Irigithathi Primary Schools. After a short meeting with the head teacher of Irigithathi, Jacob and I joined in a social studies lecture. We learned about the origin of the Kiswahili language arising from the mix between Arabic and Bantu cultures. The most interesting aspect of the lesson was the conversation we had about the meaning and origin of a person's name in both Kenyan and American societies. In Kikuyu tradition, (the Kikuyu are the most common ethnic group in this area) the first born is named after the paternal grandfather or grandmother, depending on if it is a girl or a boy. The second child is named after the maternal grandfather or grandmother. The pattern continues to uncles and aunts. Therefore, names like Maina, Kamau, and Wanjiku are as common as Bob, John, or Susan.

The next class of the day was physical education. Jacob and I took part in a 400-meter foot race around the field and competed against the fastest students at Irigithathi. Between the elevation of 7,000’ and the fact that neither Jacob nor I are runners, we were completely defeated and exhausted when we crossed the finish line. The Kenyans, on the other hand, didn't seem like they had run at all and took off to play a game of soccer. That is the way these young Kenyans always seem to be, playful and energetic.

After a refreshing cup of chai tea, we continued on to Shalom Primary for the second half of the day. As soon as we walked through the gates we were swarmed by dozens of small children. Students from grades 1, 2, and 3 clung on to my arms and legs as I desperately tried to make my way through the crowd. They loved to shake hands, give high fives, and fist bumps. As always, the students were curious about us “mzungu” and wanted to know every detail about our lives. They asked questions ranging from where I lived to the name of my favorite Kenyan food. It was a bit overwhelming but very entertaining for all of us.

Once again we participated in a social studies class, but this time the students were slightly older. We gave a brief lecture to a class of 8th graders on their unit of study, which was the United Nations. The conversation, however, quickly changed to American History. The students were interested in periods such as the American Revolution and the Civil War. The students were very engaged, asking relevant questions, and listening closely to all we said.

Our final class of the day was math. We taught a class of 5th graders about fractions and decimals. We gave them practice problems and after a few minutes students were yelling “teacha!” as they desperately tried to get our attention and to check their work. The students were very eager to learn and caught on quickly to the problems. The culture of the classroom here, at least at Shalom, is so different from what I expected. The excitement and enthusiasm fills the room, with no student ever seeming bored or disinterested.
We ended our day with a few minutes in the teachers’ lounge awaiting our ride back to Batian’s View. We had a very interesting conversation with one of the teachers. He was under the impression that all American movies were simply real events being filmed by camera crews. He was amazed to hear about the wonders of “movie magic”, C.G.I. and Hollywood. After a while, the discussion turned to the differences and similarities in both Kenyan and American culture. The teachers were very interested in the American political system and especially the upcoming election. I told them I had no idea about what was going to happen, but I added that politics in America was going to be very interesting for the next several months.

Today was full of new and insightful interactions with people of all ages, and it was only the second day! I trust there will be many more in the upcoming weeks.

Kwa heri,

Bryson Contreras

PS. To the right is the only type of selfie I can take while at school!! As soon as the kids see my phone they come running.

---

28 JUNE – FRED ROBERTS

Greetings All,

Bryson’s Daily Dispatch is the post directly above, and it is a good one. One thing Bryson did not include in his description of the day is that he and Jacob are also spending part of their morning at the Naro Moru Disabled Children’s Home, a short distance from Irigithathi Primary. The facility is run by Italian missionaries and twice a year a team of doctors come to perform orthopedic procedures for students with a variety of disabilities. The children remain at the home for their recovery, and those whom are able walk, often with crutches, go to Irigithathi for classes. Those who remain at the Home have their classes there. Bryson and Jacob are not teaching there, but spending time with the kids playing and helping them pass the time as quickly as possible until they are able to go home.

Until tomorrow,

Fred Roberts
29 JUNE – JACOB ROSQUIST  
Daily Dispatch 2016

Our morning routine is to get up at 6:45 to be ready for breakfast at 7. So much for lazy summer mornings! But getting out of bed is pretty easy with the anticipation of Chef Ngigi’s breakfast waiting for us. Our morning meal is a combination of crepes or French toast, sausage, a variety of fruit, juice, and plenty of hot, sweet chai. This morning, however, Ngigi surprised us with some awesome donuts! Here the equivalent of a donut is called a mandazi, a flaky pastry in the shape of a triangle. Ngigi, however, was able to create the shape of a donut, and they were far better than Krispy Kream!

Our first class at Irigithathi was math. We then had the next class period off, and we stayed in the staff room talking with a few other teachers. The people we work with here are so kind, always asking if we need anything, and ready with a cup of chai during our breaks.

We then went to the disabled children’s home associated with Irigithathi Primary School. I noticed that most of the kids were less than 6 years old. Seeing the kids made me feel both sad and happy. All of them have some type of disability and are limited in what they can do. But you would be surprised how quickly these youngsters are able to move around in leg braces, walkers, and crutches. This was the part that made me sad, knowing the great challenge they face on a daily basis. The scene also made me happy for regardless of their situation, these kids are really happy! Always smiling and energetic. I am not used to seeing something like this, and it made me appreciate the things I have in my life even more than I already do.

While at the home we helped them with simple spelling exercises, reading, and also played with them in the field. We mainly played catch with a small red plastic ball. They also loved our cell phones, especially the cameras. They really liked taking a photo and quickly turning the camera around so they could see the image. Talk about smiles and laughter!

After returning to Irigithathi we played soccer with the 6th grade P.E. class. For lunch the teachers provided us with Kenyan food from a local hoteli, which is the word for restaurant here. It was a very simple meal of potatoes, beans, and spinach all mashed together, and it tasted so good.
After lunch we headed to Shalom Primary School, which is a two-minute walk from Irigithathi. At Shalom we taught a 6th grade science class about the solar system, beginning with the sun at the center and all of the planets revolving around the sun along different orbits. After going over the order of the planets, we opened up the class to questions. Quickly the questions moved from the solar system to that of America. After several ‘America’ questions we played a few rounds of Hangman using the terms learned in the science portion of the class. Last but not least was “Heads Up, Seven Up”, which they all loved.

After school all of the 5th through 8th graders went out the soccer field for a variety of games. After doing some warm-up exercises with about 150 kids, the students split up into groups for smaller group games. The boys played soccer, many of the girls played some intense jump rope games, and others played volleyball. The students organized themselves on their own, with no other teachers out there except Bryson and myself. I thought that without one of their regular teachers out there it would be chaos, but not so. Back home I have a feeling that if 150 kids were left on their own in a large field, it WOULD be chaos.

As all of this was happening I thought about the kids at the disabled home and hoped that they too were having a fun afternoon. Playing with the children there was definitely the highlight of my day, and I look forward to my next visit.

Kwa heri,

Jacob Rosquist

30 JUNE – ENNA MCBRIDE
Daily Dispatch 2016

Hello all,

It is the last day of the month and it is hard to believe we have been here for more that a week—the time has flown by. The way our schedule worked out at Rongai, to day Adam and I didn’t begin teaching until 9:40. So we enjoyed a rare sleep in and a leisurely breakfast.

My first class was fifth grade English while Adam taught seventh grade science. My class involved words related to travel. After reviewing each of the twenty words we played a game where we stood in a circle. I would say one of the vocabulary words, and together we would spell the word out loud. We then added a loud clap after each letter, and soon we were saying letters and clapping to a rhythm.

After that both Adam and I had a free period, so I attempted to teach him how to do a bridge with cards after shuffling them. Next was the morning break and the teachers brought us chai and small cakes. Right then Fred arrived, and we discussed our morning and had chai with all of the teachers.

Fred followed me to my seventh grade science class where I taught the students about plants and animals, specifically pests and how they affect crops. I would put words on the blackboard and
discuss them with the class. After a dozen or so words were on the board we played a few rounds of Hangman. All the while Fred was taking pictures, and all of the kids tried to turn and get in the photo whenever he was about to press the shutter.

I then had a free period and sat in on Adam’s eighth grade science. We have found that this group of students is very, very quiet. I’m not sure if they are still not used to seeing us wazungu teaching or if in fact they are really shy. Our other classes are as boisterous as can be, so maybe as the older students this group needs to be more serious. We are going to work on a few new teaching techniques to see if we can’t instill a more fun and lively atmosphere.

We were done teaching at 12:40 and headed back to Batian’s View for a quick lunch before accompanying Makena and Brewer to Lipela Orphanage, where they are volunteering. We pitched in by peeling carrots, reading with some of the children, and washing dishes. As we were leaving the cook gave us fresh mandazi, very similar to a donut. It was still warm and tasted so good.

We returned to Batian’s View around 4:30 and found the rest of the crew drinking chai and enjoying Ngigi’s mandazis. Chai is a significant part of the day in Kenya, and Peirce announced that he had drunk ten cups of chai during the day! Fred then gave us a very brief lesson on Kenya’s history from the late 1800’s to 1950, and Kenya’s struggle for independence from the British. As he finished, Mama Waweru arrived, an 80-year-old woman who lives next door to Batian’s View. She was 16 when the Kenyans, mostly Kikuyu, began an armed struggle known as Mau Mau. Her husband was accused of being part of Mau Mau and put in detention for seven years. Mama Waweru was forced to live in a village set up by the British, which they said was for their own protection. But the reality is that the British wanted to control all for the Kikuyu during this time. This was not a second hand story, but a narrative from someone who was part of Kenya’s history. In America this would be like talking to a WWII veteran.

We still had a half an hour before dinner so Fred guided us through two complex, but very fun, problem solving activities. We were able to complete the activities but it took all of our attention and creativity to get it done.

After another excellent dinner we moved into the library to watch Finding Nemo. We set up the projector to show the movie in a large wall, and pulled mattresses off of our beds to get comfortable. After such a full day it as nice to kick back, relax, and rest up for tomorrow when we go to Aguthi Secondary School to begin work on a new classroom. Fred told us to be ready for a lot of hard, physical labor.

Kwa heri,

Enna McBride

Our crew with Mama Waweru seated and Mary Wairimu, Batian’s View Co-Manager and translator.
Last Friday 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, a stretch of land between Nairobi and just north of where we are. A 100 mile by 80 mile tract of land, very fertile land, being reserved only for European use. The Kikuyu either lived in the 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 believed 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. The loss of their homeland and having to work on European’s farm galvanized the Kenyans, mostly Kikuyu, to fight back and change the course of British occupation in Africa.

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 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 lived in one hut. They were not allowed to leave the village, surrounded by a moat and barbed wire, except for three hours a 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 older Kikuyu went hungry for much of the time.
During their sojourns from the village the Kikuyu were escorted by armed guards, who made sure food and information were not delivered to the freedom fighters. This, of course, was the lifeline for the Mau Mau who depended on others to keep the campaign alive. With each trip 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/= (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, where Bryson Contreras and Jacob Rosquist 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 were like a character stepping out of a textbook and providing information first hand. In this case she was not a character, but a primary resource of the material used to write 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, to persevere, and to relish the good times with those you care for and who care for you.

Kwa salama, (With peace)

Fred

Logan Makena looks at Mama Waweru’s passbook, something all Kikuyu were required to carry.
Hamjambo,

I am on the SLIK program doing something other than teaching; been there, done that. This is my second SLIK trip and last year I had the pleasure of teaching at Jupiter and Irigithathi Primary Schools. While not teaching, I helped Fred with special projects around Batian’s View, many of which were on the challenge course. I enjoy working with my hands, problem solving, and fixing things. When I talked with Fred about returning to Kenya this year, I challenged him to keep me busy with interesting projects to enhance the challenge course or life at Batian’s View, and so far so good.

For the last few days I have been perfecting a prototype of a home made solar water heater that Fred made before our arrival. The concept behind a solar water heater is simple; putting it together with spare supplies found at Batian’s View and finding proper fittings at the hardware store in Naro Moru is a different matter. Fred’s goal with the water heater is that it is cheap to make, portable, and easy to use. A greater goal is to teach people living around Mt. Kenya to make their own to lessen their dependence on wood from the forest to heat water. The villages that ring Mt. Kenya National Park are many, and very few have electricity. It is common to see women walking down the road with loads of firewood. Multiply that by a few hundred on a daily basis and you can understand the problem.

Today I went to a hardware store in town for supplies I couldn’t find here, nor fashion from what I did have. At Batian’s View I imagine myself on a deserted island, and what I have is that I have. When I finally exhaust my ideas and creativity, it is time to go to town. The hardware stores here is very different from conventional hardware stores like Ace or Home Depot. There are no wide isles where you can meander along until you find what you need. The shop I went to, Duruma Hardware, is not self-service. Outside are water tanks, iron bars, bags of cement, iron sheeting, and people either moving new stock into the shop or carrying things to waiting cars. The ceiling had dozen of ropes hanging down from it all holding different things, such as pipe fittings and small tools.

To get something you wait in line to be helped and I was soon successful. After explaining my needs the employee disappeared down a long dark hallway and returned with a pipefitting. It wasn’t quite right, and after a second trip I had the right fitting. After getting a few other items I was on my way back to Batian’s View to finish the job. I changed some of the connectors and tubing, and covered the heating pipes with clear plastic. This heater is larger than the others, which were able to heat 9 gallons of water a day. The maximum temperature recorded so far is 130°F. I am looking forward to a very hot shower tomorrow, one that requires no electricity or firewood.
My next project was to help Simon Ngodi, a running buddy of Fred's, repair his motorcycle. A mounting bracket for a shield that protects the rider from dirt and mud had cracked. We dismantled the fitting and found some three inch by one inch pieces of steel that were left over from an earlier task. After 30 minutes we fashioned the steel to the correct shape and reassembled the shield. I bet if someone in the states had a similar problem, they would go to a shop or the dealer for repair. No motorcycle shops or dealers here. You just have to make do by using your creativity, known skills, unknown skills, and persistence. The final result may not be pretty or as shiny as the original, but if it works who cares? There are no fashion points in rural Africa.

Kwa heri,

Logan Makena

02 JULY – FRED ROBERTS AND JAMES CHABIN
Daily Dispatch 2016

Harambee!!!

Kenya gained its independence from Britain in 1963 after sixty years of colonial rule. Soon after many of the British expatriates left for England or other countries, suspect of the new Kenyan government. Many of these people had been critical in Kenya’s development, and only in the ten or so years leading up to independence had Kenyans been trained to fill the many roles needed to sustain a functioning government. Knowing there was a tremendous amount of work ahead for his a new country, Jomo Kenyatta, Kenya’s first president, set a tone for the population to inspire nationalism and self-reliance, this coming from his familiar terms of Harambee and Hakuna cha bure. Both are Kiswahili terms, the first meaning unity and pulling together, and the second meaning that nothing comes for free. If Kenya was going to succeed, then everyone would have to put their individual needs aside and work for the good of the country.

It was in this spirit that more than 180 of us gathered at Aguthi Secondary School to begin construction a new classroom. We saw all of the friends we made last Sunday at Batian's View such as Jon, Paul, Dennis, Grace, Flora, Florence, Beatrice and many others. In fact, the entire secondary school student body was present and a lot of parents. To be part of a project that will enhance not just a few people but an entire community is a rare and special opportunity. In addition, working side by side with others from a culture very different from our own doesn’t happen too often. As the day progressed and the more we talked and shared, it seemed that our differences became less and our similarities more.
Us Wazungu arrived at 9 AM, before just about everyone else. There was some activity at the work site, mainly clearing brush and thick grass. Peirce, Adam and I had the task of cutting down five trees using only a machete. None of said trees were over three feet tall, but we were proud of our work nonetheless. At 9:45 everyone was present and the headmaster called the group to the worksite. Several school administrators and parent representatives gave a short speech of thanks for us being there and for the donations of those not present. At 10 AM we finally got to work.

Our goal for the day was to dig a trench for the classroom foundation that measured 2’ wide, 75’ long, and almost 4’ deep. The Americans began whacking away at the soil with a forked jembe, a wicked looking hoe that weighted 8 pounds. The Kenyans watched us with smiles and laughter, but bit-by-bit we got the hang of it. It was, however, really difficult work and we were quickly replaced by the parents who were far superior at digging thanks to many years of farming experience. We were delegated to shoveling the dirt dug up from the trench into the wheelbarrows and taking it away. This was a much more appropriate task for us, and no so hard on the back!

At 1 PM we broke for a traditional lunch of beans, corn, and potatoes called githeri. We have had is many times before and it was as good today as on all the others. We then moved into one of the classrooms and Adam and I told them the story of Batman and Robin in great detail. I feel that they learned a lot and will be well prepared if the Dark Knight appears on their next set of exams. On a side note about the Kenyan education system, the students spend all of high school preparing for a single set of exams at the end of their senior year that determines what university they will attend, or whether they will attend any university at all. A similar test takes place after eighth grade. The entire curriculum is designed for teachers to teach to the test, and the pressure to do well is incredibly high. These two sets of exams are pivotal in determining a Kenyan student’s future.

We resumed digging at 2 PM, and thanks to the parents’ in our absence the project was done by 3 PM. Just like that, the work stopped and the headmaster called everyone over for prayers and a word of thanks. Each of the SLIK students was asked to come up by name and was presented with an official certificate of appreciation. The Kenyan women then joined forces to sing a traditional song that had everyone clapping his or her hands and moving to the rhythm. It was a wonderful way to end the day, and I suddenly realized I was indeed very tired.
Kwa heri,

James Chabin and Fred Roberts

03 JULY – SARAH CHABIN
Daily Dispatch 2016

The departure for our hike today wasn’t until 10 AM so we all got to sleep in. It was a nice refresher and after yesterday’s work at Aguthi I think we all needed the rest.

We left Batian’s View on a route that would take us to a waterfall in the forest of Mt. Kenya. First, however, we walked on several dirt roads eventually taking us to the trailhead. The weather was a little warm (nothing like the Tucson heat) but good for hiking. As it was Sunday morning we passed many churches and heard loud singing. It was very interesting to compare the joyful music I heard today to our traditional church music back home. The structures of the churches were different as well, no stained glass, or anything churchlike from the outside. It looked like a plain building you would see anywhere in rural Kenya, except for a sign indicating that it was a church. As we continued many people were walking home from church in their fancy clothing. One woman was walking on the rugged road in heels while her child beside her was barefoot. It was clear that the duo didn’t have much money, but they pulled out their best for church.
When we got to the trailhead the dirt road turned into a lush forest. Very soon we found ourselves at the base of a beautiful waterfall. The braver of us swam in the freezing water. I was content to walk in knee deep and dunk my head. Then we scrambled up a steep hill to a flat rock overlooking the waterfall and ate our lunch. The rock had a volcanic texture and was almost black, and the warmth felt good on our cold bodies. If we had stayed much longer I’m sure we all would have dozed off in the African sun.

We started walking again anticipating an hour and a half to go. This is what we thought, but it ended up taking an hour longer! We made a few stops along the way to study thick trails of ants. We were told they were Siafu, the Kiswahili word for biting ants. In the center of the stream were smaller ants carrying tiny bits of something we couldn’t identify. Seemingly protecting the smaller ants were very large ants with enormous pinchers along the edges. Fred showed us how fierce these ants were by allowing one to crawl onto his hand and clench his skin. Slowly the ant worked his pinchers back and forth until they penetrated his skin. As soon as a bit of blood could be seen, he said “Lesson over,” pulling the ant from his skin. After that a few of the boys wanted the experience as well, which led to many shouts and words I can’t write. We learned that if you tore off the body of the ant, the head and pinchers could be used as stitches for a cut. With this newfound knowledge we set off at a relaxed pace, taking in our surroundings. It was a very enjoyable afternoon.

Finally, after about five hours and 13.5 miles (according to Enna’s phone), we came to a local lodge, our pick up point. Walking towards the lodge we spotted huge black and white monkeys in the trees and even running across a field nearby. You could tell they were comfortable in their home and not too afraid of us. We climbed into our vehicles and just after leaving the lodge gate we saw our first baboons. They were huge, mighty and definitely intimidating.

Our destination was the town of Nanyuki, in particular a nice café called Dorman’s with free wifi. Driving into town we saw many wazungu, which was weird for we had yet to see any other tourists. What also felt weird was that we had just been walking on dirt roads with barefoot and smiling children, following trails through a dense forest, and swimming in a river fed by snow melt from Mt. Kenya. Within an hour we were in a very urban environment, complete with wifi!

At Dorman’s we ordered hamburgers, French fries, sandwiches, cold sodas, and milkshakes. Everyone dug in, and I realized that for myself, I preferred the traditional Kenyan food we had been eating since day one. For one thing, it is gentler on the stomach and much more wholesome. Everyone was eating with their phones out getting updates on the NBA, social media, and politics. The restaurant was filled with other tourists, all doing the same thing. Thus far I haven’t thought much about politics and my life in America. While I enjoyed the updates and food, I also felt an added stress that wasn’t present since arriving at Batian’s View.
Then we went to a modern supermarket. We loaded up on snacks and the speed of it all was drastically different from our relaxed hike earlier in the day. We met another tourist wearing a KU hat and chatted with them (James was wearing his KU sweatshirt). It was enjoyable to get back in touch with America, but I have also enjoyed the isolation of living in rural Kenya. It proved to be a great day, and left me with much to ponder regarding the choices we make and the pace of life we create for ourselves.

Kwa heri,

Sarah Chabin

04 JULY – ENNA MCBRIDE
Daily Dispatch 2016

Hello all,

Happy 4th of July! No holiday in Kenya, however, so we were all back at school. We all got up around 6:45 to get ready and found that Ngigi had stepped away from crepes to a new menu. Scrambled eggs, toasted banana sandwiches, and a wide variety of fruit. We were also joined by a new volunteer teacher, Megan Thomas, a friend of the Roberts’ family who lives near Nanyuki. She is in her third year of high school in Scotland and like many of us, was looking for a fulfilling experience of volunteering.

At school we also found we had a new schedule, and were teaching new groups of students. In our class with the 4th graders I did something different. The students were learning about plants, so I took them outside to look at and talk about plants. Then I did a short “technology lesson”, showing them my phone and watch and explaining both items. What they liked most was taking photos with my phone and seeing their images on the screen. Adam and I then taught a sixth grade math class covering area and volume. We wrote the needed formulas on the board, and then together we determined the area and volume of several shapes. They did pretty well, and most important was that we were having a ton of fun teaching and learning.

After lunch we went outside to play with the students. I had a volley ball to play with and they loved it! Most the students were bumping the ball around, but a few were standing next to me. One small boy, maybe seven years old, put his hands on his hips, made a quick dance move, and let out a yell. Without a moments hesitation I did exactly the same. Not sure why, I just did. Very quickly several other students joined in. I had stopped copying the young dancer but the rest of the students began to copy me. Not only every move I made, but everything I said, including my American accent, which really sounded awful! Every time I ‘whooped’ they ‘whooped’ as well. Then I said “Go Bears”, and they replied “Go Bears”! The kids were all around us, moving closer and closer. I said, “Adam, you are stuck”! And the kids said over and over again, “Adam, you are stuck. Adam, you are stuck”! Then began a session of high fives and fist bumps until we were able to get away and back to the staff room. “Make my silly face”!
After lunch came the best class of the day, 5th grade science. Adam taught and I took a seat in the middle of the rest of the students. Rather than shying away and leaving the desk to myself, I had two girls sitting on either side, like I was a fellow student. I guess that meant I was “in the club” and no longer just a visitor.

After going over the day’s vocabulary using Hangman, we played a counting and rhythm game called Clap, Jump, Meow, which soon had everyone on their feet clapping, jumping, or meowing together. Next we gave each student a piece of chalk and played Tic-Tac-Toe. The only rule was that after each game the students had to pair up with new challengers. The black board was covered with chalk and the students wiped away old game to make room for their new games. The Tic-Tac-Toe turned into a face drawing contest, and the student did their best to draw my face and Adam’s face. The drawings looked comical and we all laughed at each other.

We were the first back to Batian’s View and we helped Fred set up the ropes course, which was our afternoon activity. After the others returned and sharing a cup of chai, Sarah put on a harness and helmet and was the first to go. The course is a series of cables attached to the trees. Between the trees are obstacles one must negotiate to get to the next tree. After six such challenges, one climbs onto a platform, is clipped in to the zip line, and then enjoys a 250’ ride between two enormous cedar trees. Unfortunately it got too late for Brewer or I to go, not to mention the fact that it began raining. We will get our chance another day.

Dinner tonight was spaghetti, vegetables, potatoes, and goat meat. The food hasn't been dazzling, but consistently delicious and healthy. As we were finishing came out with lumps of fresh sugar cane, which a few of us munched on. Our 4th of July celebrating consisted of watching a movie with several bowls of popcorn.

Happy 4th of July,

Enna McBride
05 JULY – ADAM SIMON
Daily Dispatch 2016

Hard to believe that I have only one more day of teaching. I feel so comfortable at Rongai Primary, whether it is in the staff room shooting the breeze with my fellow teachers or in the classroom with my students. I am no longer hesitant with my lessons and if I need a diversion I have a few games in my ‘back pocket’ to keep the students’ energy high.

Today was a particularly good day, as I was allowed to teach the sixth graders science instead of the eighth graders, the latter of which has been a challenge for me. I guess all teachers have classes they don’t interact so well with, and for me it was the eighth graders. On the other hand, the sixth graders are some of the most fun kids I have ever met, with my fifth graders being a close second.

After science I had PE with the sixth graders and Enna’s fourth graders decided to join us. Some of the sixth and fourth grade boys came up to me and asked all sorts of questions. My favorite was how many kids I had, “I am only sixteen and do not have any kids”. They were astonished that I was just sixteen and said I looked more like I was thirty-five. This really surprised me, and maybe it was because of my facial hair.

Another reason they may have been surprised is that some of the eighth graders are sixteen and seventeen years old. The reason for this, Fred explained to me, is because some students do not begin school until they are much older, being seven or eight when they begin first grade. This may be due to a lack of school fees in the family or possibly the parents don’t believe going to school will be helpful to someone who will likely become a farmer. Another reason is if a family moves from one area to another, the student’s new school may insist he or she begin at a lower grade, to insure the student will do well on the annual exams. A school’s worth is based on the average score of each class, and principals are wary of admitting weak students after fifth grade.

Our day of teaching ended at lunch, and we headed back to Batian’s View. Ever since our day at Aguthi when a few others and myself cut down a few small trees, I have wanted to cut down a large tree with an axe. Fred and I walked around the nine acres of Batian’s View compound but he couldn't find one that needed to come down. As a substitute, Fred pointed out several exposed roots around the challenge course and some low branches that needed trimming. The thick roots required an axe, which was a lot of fun. For the branches I only needed a panga (machete), and while still fun was not nearly as gratifying as using an axe.

We finished our work just in time for chai time, which is probably the calmest part of the day for me. When I say for me, I mean chai time is when I am the calmest throughout the day, but still much less calm than everybody else!
After chai can samosas, Kenyan meat pies, we all jumped in the van and drove about 2.5 miles up the road, stopping just past the same river that flows by Batian's View. From there Fred led us into the forest, sometimes following a trail and sometimes not. We passed through thick stands of pine trees that gave way to large fields of grass. After one such field we pushed our way through some dense vegetation, and quickly descended into a deep ravine. The brush was extremely low, and at times we had to crawl along the faint trail. This certainly wasn't a trail that humans or cows used, but more like a game trail for bushbuck and other forest wildlife. We began hiking at 5 PM and at 6:30 we found ourselves on a trail we had taken before and were back at Batian's View by nightfall.

This evening Ngigi had the night off as Fred's wife, Elizabeth Goodwin, and their college age son, Jake, made dinner. Beef stew, mashed potatoes, homemade bread, and a ginger cake that Makena had made. We all gathered around two picnic tables in their sitting room, and along with the fire it felt very cozy. A very nice ending to what was a really good day, and could have only been better if I had cut down a tree!!!

Kwa salama,

Adam

06 JULY – PEIRCE MORRISON
Daily Dispatch 2016

Today was a sad day for myself and the other American teachers. It was our final day at our respective schools and it was very hard to say goodbye to our students. When we arrived in Kenya and visited the schools, I was terrified to think I’d be put in a classroom full of kids staring directly at you and expecting something grand! I was sure I would freeze and have no clue as to what to do. Amazingly, that time came and while I was nervous, I quickly became comfortable with the kids and it was a great feeling. From then on my confidence increased and I believed I was really making a difference to these kids.

Sarah Chabin and I taught at two schools over the course of eight days, at Manyatta Primary School in the morning and after lunch we would walk to Jupiter Boarding School just up the road. Both schools were filled with energetic kids. One of my favorite moments was arriving at either school and to a chorus of students yelling, "Jambo teacher Peirce"! Even though we were at the schools for a short time, the kids had acted like we all had been long time friends. At the same time, I could hear the kids giggle at the sight of a Mzungu entering their classroom. That might sound scary or rude, but it was honestly great to hear because if they didn't giggle then they probably had become bored with us.
During my days of teaching my love for this country and the people has really grown. Every teacher and student has been so welcoming and friendly to me, it made me feel extra special. Interacting with the kids and teaching was a huge eye-opener. After they did a good job on an assignment, I would put a sticker on their homework, which brought much laughter and excitement. This made me think of some teenagers in America complaining because they didn't get the car or iPhone they wanted. Today when I pulled out a box of colored pencils their faces lit up; there is no better feeling than making a child smile.

Each day when we left for Jupiter, a group of Manyatta kindergarteners would walk Sarah and I to our destination. This being our final day at Jupiter was a particularly cool experience for us. After teaching one period we were taken to their lunch area and we found every class from the “babies” to the eight graders sitting quietly awaiting our arrival. We were given seats at the front of the room and each class presented us with a song they had prepared beforehand. Each performance was very touching and also very funny. During the eight-grader’s performance, as they all sang and danced in a circle, one of the girls grabbed me from my seat and pulled me into the circle. She held both of my hands, encouraging me to dance, which I did to the laughter of the entire school! I couldn't help myself but to burst out laughing as well, and shortly after I had embarrassed myself they grabbed Sarah from her seat and did the exact same thing.

Following the songs and without warning, the headmaster asked me to stand in front of the entire school and give a speech. Having 200 kids all stare at me was pretty scary, but my speech seemed to go over well as the kids laughed and smiled after I was done. I am so happy to have been able to teach in these schools, even if for a short period of time. We were all strangers to each other just last week, but now I feel a powerful and lasting bond. Our final goodbye was hard, but as we were ‘high fiving’ and saying “Kwa heri,” the kids all gathered around us and all I could do was smile and laugh. As we walked down the road one last time to Batian’s View, the sadness really set in. I had met so many kind people, and I realized that I might never see them again. This entire experience has been amazing, and I have learned so much not only about the people I have met and taught, but about myself as well. I hope to return at some point in the future.

Next up is Mt. Kenya!

Kwa heri,

Perice Morrison
Greetings Parents, Family, and Friends,

We had a wonderful and very successful trek up Mt. Kenya. Everyone did a great job with the hiking, carrying their packs, taking care of themselves and others, digging deep for some extra energy when the going got hard, and doing it all with great enthusiasm! We all reached the summit of Pt. Lenana (16,355') in style and basked there for 20 minutes taking in the amazing views. I was so proud of everyone's strong effort, positive attitude, and camaraderie.

For a quick summary of our hike, we began at the Naro Moru Gate on July 7 and hiked five miles up the road to our first camp at 10,000' around 2 PM. To lighten our loads and keep us well fed, five porters helped with the group gear (tents, cooking gear), and Ngigi prepared delicious meals the entire time.

The next day we left camp at 8:30 under clear skies and covered the six miles and 4,000' to Mackinder's Camp, arriving six hours later. This is a particularly difficult section of trail that is steep, rocky, and goes through a stretch called the vertical bog. In the ‘bog’ the ground is saturated with water and extremely muddy. If these challenges weren't enough, with each step we were gaining altitude and ‘thinner’ air, requiring a very slow and steady pace. Once in camp we were able to relax, nap, and restore our lost energy.

Following a good sleep (according to all I asked) and breakfast, we set out from Mackinder’s Camp at 8:30 AM for Pt. Lenana. The distance to the summit is a bit less than two miles, but the elevation gain is 2,200'! The going was slow, really slow, and we stuck together the entire way. Just before noon we were all on the summit enjoying the fruits of our labor. The return trip was ‘payback’ for the hard work of the morning and by 3 PM we were enjoying hot chai and popcorn.

This morning felt like Christmas, as I heard all of the students emerging from their tents and getting their gear ready for the trip down. After a quick breakfast we were soon on the trail, arriving at our pick up point at 12:30. An hour later we were at Batian's View with a hot lunch waiting. The work, however, was not yet done, with the afternoon being spent washing our clothing and gear, all of it done by hand!

Tomorrow is a day of R&R, with a few students planning on spending some time at their respective schools and more time on the challenge course. In the afternoon we will head to Aguthi Secondary School to see the progress of the new classroom and take on the school’s volleyball team in a few matches.

Below are a few special photos of our time on the mountain.

Kwa heri na lala salama, (Good by and good night)

Fred

At the Park Gate. The person on the right is Edwin Van Der Voot, a friend from Nanyuki.
Jacob Rosquist negotiating the vertical bog in his basketball shoes. We couldn't find size 14 hiking boots for Jacob but other than a few slips he did just fine in his Jordans.

Departing our first camp.

The Summit!

Who needs a washing machine?

Hiking up to Pt. Banana

Mt. Kenya between 8 and 8:30 PM.
The SLIK students recently got back from a four day hike to Point Lenana, the third highest summit on Mt. Kenya. We left Batian's View on Thursday at 8 o'clock in the morning and soon arrived at the Mt. Kenya National Park gate. At the gate Fred paid our entrance fees and we all put on our 30-pound backpacks. Mine didn’t feel too bad, but I know we had a lot of hiking ahead and it would definitely feel heavier later.

The first day was spent hiking five miles up the road to the Met station, where we spent our first night. As soon as we began our hike from the gate, we saw a female waterbuck cross the road not more than 20 yards ahead of us. Seeing wildlife so early in the trip was quite exciting. The road we traveled on was rough and mostly up hill. Our entire group consisted of 17 people, the SLIK students, Fred, our new friend Edwin, a friend of Fred's who runs a flower farm near Nanyuki, and seven porters. We all went at our own pace and there was always someone close by to talk with to pass the time. We all took a break when James saw a group of Colobus monkeys playing in the trees, about 100 yards ahead of the rest of us. Unfortunately, by the time we arrived the monkeys had disappeared into the dense bamboo. And while we didn't see any Cape Buffalo, we knew they were around by seeing their footprints in the mud and sizeable droppings. We heard many stories about the buffalo chasing hikers or a herd of buffalo sitting in the road, preventing either hikers or vehicles from passing. Luckily we don't have any stories like this to share.

The hike itself was around four hours and we arrived at the Met station very tired. As soon as we got our tents set up and were served chai and popcorn, and were rained on for a solid two hours. Fortunately there was a nice cabin we could use, which saved the day. The two main activities we embarked upon were playing cards or sleeping.

The next morning we awoke to a group of eight Sykes monkeys investigating our camp. We then embarked upon a long and slippery six-hour hike to our next camp where we stayed for two nights. And when I say slippery, I mean like slipping on ice and falling over slippery! The worst section was called the vertical bog, and between the mud, weird plants, and the fog, it was like a scene straight out of Lord of the Rings. It was very hard for inexperienced hikers like me to keep my balance but I think I did pretty good.
Our next camp was called Mackinder's Camp, a large stone building at an elevation of 14,200’. While we were sleeping in tents, we spent most of our time in the large hut. In the afternoon the clouds broke and we had our first sight of Mt. Kenya, which was amazing. The high peaks looked really intimidating and there were several glaciers lower down. And for this Tucson boy, it was really cold. When we crawled into our tents the first night there was frost on the outside of our tents!

Our original plan was to spend the next day relaxing and taking a hike towards the mountain. Then the following morning getting up at 3 AM and try to get to the summit before sunrise. Because the mornings had been cloudy, Fred thought that even if we did get to the top of Pt. Lenana by sunrise it would be cloudy. So we went for Plan B, which was a much more civil departure at 8 AM the following morning. I think we are all pretty happy to not have to get up so early, especially when it would be super cold!

The hike up to Pt. Lenana was very steep and probably one of the hardest and most terrifying hikes I’ve ever done. It wasn’t like I could get hurt or fall 1,000’ down the slope, but with the high peaks around us, the thin air, and the fact we were on such a high mountain was serious business. Very soon we were close to the top, and to help us get around some jagged rocks, there was railing of anchors and ropes to help us along.

The next thing we knew we were all on the summit. It was amazing to look down at Mackinder’s Camp, which looked like a piece of Lego. The highest peaks of Mt. Kenya, Batian and Nelion, still loomed large above us. The sun was out and took a lot of photos. Peirce had carried up a walking stick, so we used it as a baseball bat and hit stones from the summit to the glacier below.

The hike down was even more fun than the hike up. By 3 PM we were back at Mackinder’s camp and I think that all of us took a much-needed nap. The next morning we hiked down to the Met station in small groups, most of us arriving by noon. There were two vehicles waiting for us and soon we were at Batian’s View having a lunch of fried chicken and mashed potatoes.

Waking up this morning was kind of like waking up the day after a hard session of weight lifting for basketball. While I could still move pretty well, I was really sore and didn’t feel like doing anything. The hard work and the soreness, however, was well worth it because of the beautiful scenery and the sense of accomplishment.

More stories to come from our safari!

*Jacob Rosquist*
Wow, being on safari is a lot of work! So many animals to see and so many delicious meals to share together. Of the hundreds of photos taken in the past two days here are a few to see what we are up to.

Fred

Leopard as sunset.

Cheetah mama and cub.

Three of the hundreds of elephant we have seen.

Yes, safari life is hard. So many choices at the breakfast buffet!

Looking for crocs in the Ewaso Nigro river.
Greetings All,

I apologize for the lack of student written Dispatches since we went on the mountain and then to Samburu, but to be honest I didn't have it in me to ask a student to take time from the day to write. I hope the photos the students have taken will suffice and you can get a feel for all we have been doing.

We left Samburu this morning and spent some time at Edwin's Lilly/Rose farm outside of Nanuyki. Edwin was with us on the mountain and invited us for a tour. He has five acres of flowers and exports 20,000 flowers to Europe each week! Yes, we did stop to smell the roses!

This evening the headmasters and many of the teachers the students worked with joined us for dinner. It was much like an end of year faculty gathering, with the Americans talking about their Kenyan students and the Kenyan teachers expressing their thanks for all the Americans contributed to their students' learning.

Tomorrow is the students' final day in Kenya and I still have a few things up my sleeve to keep them busy and not thinking about their departure. In the afternoon, however, we need to head to Nairobi and the airport for their flights back to the US.

Below are a few photos of our time in Samburu and this evening.

Fred
For this final Daily Dispatch the students responded to one of the two following questions, “Explain how your time in Kenya has influenced you and what you have learned from the experience,” and “How would you describe your time in Kenya to a good friend.” This is what they had to say.

**Enna McBride –**

I would tell a friend that SLIK opens your eyes to let you see all the sides of Kenya as a country and its cultures. You get so many different experiences on the trip- teaching, climbing, hiking, dinners in the homes of Kenyans, seeing the wildlife- and you begin to understand on so many different levels of how things work on this side of the world.

**Sarah Chabin –**

The best part of this trip was realizing that I am very content with who I am and how I feel. There were times when I would run out of energy and want to retreat and be by myself. I said to myself that this was silly, and that I should force myself to be more active and engaged. I was in Kenya after all, and I had to make the most of this experience. I compared myself to the other SLIK students, seeing them outside and doing things, and felt I had to do the same. Half way through the trip, however, I realized it doesn’t matter what other people are doing. This was my experience, on my own terms and it didn’t matter what others were doing. If I felt like going to my room or finding a cozy place to read, I did. When I wanted to go to the river by myself to sing, I did that too. Forcing myself to do ‘things’ for the sake of being active was counter productive. What gave me energy to climb Mt. Kenya or teach all day came from the times I could be on my own, and not because I felt I had to. I also found the Kenyan teachers I worked with thought very highly of me simply because I was an American. It wasn’t really fair to receive such praise because I am only a high school kid. I worked hard and did my best, and realized that it was OK for the teachers to think as they did, but it didn’t change how I thought of myself.

**Peirce Morrison –**

The coolest feeling I experienced here was during a normal break at school and I reached into my backpack and grabbed a Frisbee, just a normal toy to anyone in the US. As soon as the students saw it 30 kids surrounded me looking at this foreign object. Seeing the kids’ faces when I threw the disk was priceless; joy, wonder, laughter, and a group of excited children running as fast as they could to pick up the Frisbee. What I thought was an ordinary Frisbee seemed to be one of the coolest things the kids had ever seen. The young Kenyans I have worked with have changed my life in ways I can’t describe; it is more of a feeling or a new outlook on life. Returning home from this trip I will be more grateful, less selfish, and kinder to be people around me because of how the Kenyans have treated me while in their beautiful country. I hope that I can come back as soon as possible to be welcomed again in this amazing place, and to return the welcome with kindness and gratitude.
**Adam Simon –**
The kids here are always happy to see you, no matter where you are. For instance, when you are walking down the road a boy or girl will see you and then run to get their siblings or friends to see the Mzungu. Then there are the smiles, waves, and shouts of “Jambo, jambo, jambo!” This just makes you feel like you are doing something good, when in reality you are just walking down the road. When teaching the kids are always excited to get called on and they often make jokes that you don’t understand, but that the entire class does! If they were laughing at me, that was fine. I just hope I can make others smile the same way in the future.

On our final day on Mt. Kenya we had a six-mile hike to our pick up point. I wanted to do a bit more so myself and another Kenyan in our group hiked all the way back to Batian’s View, 15 miles. It took us five hours and I even returned before everyone else! Some of the others didn't believe it, but I didn't care. It was a great way to say goodbye to Mt. Kenya and to push myself to do something I wasn't sure possible.

Last but not least, one important thing I have learned here is that food gives us energy and that I shouldn't be so picky when looking through the fridge for something to eat. I won't even take the fridge for granted any more, as very few Kenyans in this area even own one. Yes, I have a car at home and my own bedroom, which is much more than most the people I have met here have. I won't sell my car or give up my bedroom, but I can be more grateful for these things and appreciative of all my family has done to make these things possible.

**James Chabin –**
Without doubt, the best thing about my SLIK experience was the people I met at Gitinga Primary and Aguthi Secondary schools. I learned lots about the culture through them and discovered that no matter where you are, if you get to know people you will find out some amazing things and have some amazing times. I am so grateful for this opportunity to have met and to have become friends with people who only a few weeks ago were total strangers. I have felt so welcomed here and am very sad to leave. The memories and lessons, however, will be with me for a very long time and that is a good feeling.

**Jacob Rosquist –**
The best part of my SLIK experience was seeing the wildlife in Samburu, on Mt. Kenya, and around Batian’s View. When you see the animals in their natural habitat it really takes your breath away, because in America we are used to seeing these same animal in cages and behind bars. I got the full experience while at Samburu when I found a monkey in my tent, saw a cheetah and three cubs, spotted a leopard lounging in a tree, and a pride of lions- all in the same day! The monkeys in the trees at Batian’s View made me smile, as did the monkeys that visited us at our first camp on Mt. Kenya. Not only did we see the animals, we heard the hyrax at night in the trees at Batian’s View letting out their eerie cries. I wondered how such a small and cute animal could make such a noise, and after a few nights the scary noise became as common as crickets in America. I never saw Jacob sit down once during our game drives on safari.
Bryson Contreras –
The best part of the tip was simply interacting with the people here, whether it was with the young students, the teachers, or the kids I met that were my age. The conversations about the smallest thing were the best experiences of all. I remember talking to a teacher at Shalom about American movies and having to explain that they were mostly fictional and created with special effects. My friend thought what was happening in the movies was how things actually were! The students I interacted with were always curious about my life and American culture. The younger kids were especially fascinated with my light skin color and black hair. It was great to share stories with the people here and talk about some of the vast differences in our lives, as well as many surprising similarities. (Of all the photos I sent with the Daily Dispatches, this one of Bryson received the most “Likes”).

Logan McKenna –
Being in Kenya is a two-sided coin. On one side it is peaceful and there is a more relaxed lifestyle. The schedule here is not a full-on 24/7 like in the states, and even the work here is less stressful because of the people I have been working with, always smiling and talking to make the most difficult of work pass quickly. While I am a visitor and a stranger to many, I feel so welcomed and appreciated for the small contributions I am making around Batian’s View and with our different school projects.

On the other side of the coin, as I consider my future ambition of joining the military and be stationed overseas, I will likely find myself in a new and strange country, where I will be an outsider. And being in a uniform will likely create a greater difference between myself and the people I am trying to help. When and if that time comes, I wonder if I will be welcomed as I am here, or if I will be met with hesitation and possibly hostility. Here I have learned to be open to a new culture, to make an effort to greet everyone, and to engage in conversation, even with my broken Kiswahili. I hope the lessons learned here will help bridge the gap between myself and those I meet in other countries in the future.

Fred Roberts –
This is my 30th year of being deeply involved in Kenya, having lived here from 1986 to 1999 and in 2003 my wife and I being fortunate to purchase the NOLS Kenya facility that is now Batian’s View. The first SLIK program took place in 2005 and we have been going strong ever since. As I asked the students to think of how their time here as influenced them, it is only fair I answer this question myself.

Quite simply, it is a passion to share what have gained through my long involvement in Kenya and the Naro Moru community with others. By ‘others’ I don’t only mean the SLIK students, but the Kenyan students, the teachers, and my neighbors here as well. Watching the evolution of relationships being formed, experiences in a new setting being shared, and the insights and thoughts that
arise add fuel to my passion. In turn this influences my drive to continue, to believe in myself as an experiential educator, and to hope that each and every American and Kenyan involved with SLIK grows and learns from the experience. This is my passion, and a calling that will be with me for the rest of my life.

So what has influenced me most during this SLIK program? It is the hundreds of Kenyan students, dozens of Kenyan teachers I consider close friends, my neighbor’s joy in hosting my students in their homes for a traditional Kikuyu meal, the staff at Batian’s View, as well as Enna McBride, Bryson Contreras, Jacob Rosquist, Sarah Chabin, Peirce Morrison, Adam Simon, Logan McKenna, and James Chabin. And above all it is the support I feel from my children, Jake, Makena, and Brewer to pursue this passion, and my wife, Elizabeth Goodwin, who is as passionate as I and who works tirelessly behind the scenes to keep Batian’s View and SLIK running smoothly.