Written by Caleb Foster
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When you think of Africa, especially East Africa many things come to mind. Some people think of Safaris, others the rich history which includes British occupation not long ago. Some think of Teddy Roosevelt and his hunting trips. My whole life I've dreamed of Africa. I grew up just like a normal kid, watching Indiana Jones and movies like that, reading "How I found Livingston" a book about David Livingston. Needless to say, my fascination with this continent started early.

As I grew older many of these dreams went by the wayside. More important things came up like college, marriage and buying a home. I was content to let those dreams just be only dreams until one fall day in college. I was attending a seminary in Springfield, Missouri when I got an email from a missionary from Kenya. He invited me to come and visit and work with him. I didn't think twice. Next thing I knew I was headed to Africa for a 3 week trip. It was an unbelievable experience and one I will never forget.

A few years passed and still I had this longing to visit her again. Livingston once said that you can't visit Africa just once, it's like dirt under your nails that you can't ever get out; she's always with you. Fast forward to my senior year of college. I had just gotten married to Jenifer and we were living in a humble on campus apartment. I got another letter from a missionary on the Ugandan border to come and help. This time I went with another gentleman and we worked. We climbed Mt. Elgon and explored many areas that white people have not even been in since the British left. Talk about awesome.

I said all that to say this. Africa is something that calls you to itself. I never in my life would have dreamed I would be spending a year on this Dark Continent. Once you have been there a few times you start to learn the ways, the culture and how to move around. Fast forward again another 2 years. Our church approached Jenifer and I and wanted to know if we would be willing to put our lives on hold for a year and move to Africa to plant a church. To be quite honest with you I needed some time to think. We owned a home in Missouri, had 2 dogs that were like our kids. We are both very close to our families and this was a big decision. With much thought and prayer we decided that yes, this is what we need to do. This decision was met with much preparation and anticipation. It's not all that easy to just shut up your home, find homes for your dogs and get all your business set in order to live in another country.

Let me talk about myself for a minute. This is a side note. I'm a gear nut. When it comes to knives, packs, water filtration etc. I am a NUT. So when we decided to go, I started shopping. I will go into this more in future installments of this column.

After we committed to go I thought to myself, it would be nice to have some medical training to use over there. My first idea was just to take care of my wife and that was it. After a while I thought that this would be something I could really use to help people. So my mission now was twofold. Medical help was in my sights. I decided to go back to college and get my EMT training. The church saw this as a great thing also so they helped fund it. I graduated with the knowledge of basic emergency medical. My old employer also donated a medical pack full of top of the line gear that was worth about $400 dollars. I was blessed for sure.

So now with the medical training done, we were about a month away from the big move. Our minds raced as to what to expect. It's one thing to visit for a few weeks, but a completely different thing to move there for a year. Finally, everything was in order. My family drove us to the Chicago airport and we said our goodbyes. To be honest it was one of the hardest things we have every done. This is the first time Jen had ever been away from home like this, but we had each other and even through the sorrow of saying goodbye to our families, we were excited. This was unknown territory, something I only dreamed about as a kid.

Our flight took us from Chicago to Amsterdam then down across the Mediterranean into Africa. As we flew over I saw out the window the bright blues of the Med quickly turned to desert tan. Then, the desert tan slowly faded into lush green as we approached our new home. We flew into Nairobi then took a transport up to the town of Eldoret. Eldoret is located right in the midst of the Great Rift Valley. It's a place of great beauty. The lush jungles and open savannas were exactly what I pictured in my mind, even more beautiful than I could have imagined!

We found a home to rent, this cost us next to nothing but it was a good home, actually bigger than the one we left in Missouri! With this came our next big challenge; trying to fit in to a culture that we are so different from. We made it our goal not to “Americanize” these people, but rather learn from them and realize that we are not in the USA any more, this is a different place. This took several months to get down. There were many frustrations along the way as we tried to fit in. Just for example; the Africans use a word for white people called “mazungu” this is a Swahili word that means “aimless wonderer” and it was given to the very first explorers. Imagine with me walking down a street and everyone stops and stares at you. One person yells out MAZUNGU! and people stand and stare. This is what we faced on a daily basis. In America, you would never get away with something like that but we kept telling ourselves, we aren’t in America any more.

With the cultural adjustments also came the monetary adjustments, learning the conversion rates etc. It’s a wonderful experience going to the market and haggling with the locals to buy things. It can’t really be explained in this article but it is fun. As we went through the markets we saw dried fish hanging up, that smelled awful. We saw beautiful bead work done by the locals. They are so talented at making things. I kept my eye out for survival items and I can tell you that these folks know how to survive! They make oil lamps from tin cans and carve bows and arrows and make many other things. This is what caught my eye. I bought quite a few of these items for

evaluation and integration into my system. No it wasn't $100 dollar gear but it worked. I like that.

In conclusion of this first article, I want to say that there were so many changes in transitioning to East Africa and the town of Eldoret. We welcomed these things and I believe we are stronger because of them. Sometimes we must get out of our comfort zone to really experience life.

This is the first of a multi-part series that Caleb had agreed to share with us here on the Monkey. In future installments we'll get into some of the gear he selected for his trip, what he sues on a day to day basis, some of the things he's found in Africa, and just some of the unique experiences that he's having over there.

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