



Good morning my name is Susan LaSante. In July I returned from a three-week journey to Kenya. This was my eighth trip but this trip was very different. I was not



part of a mission team. I was traveling alone. In February and April many of you met my friend George from the Korogocho slum. My plan was to spend two weeks with George and one week at the Anajali school in the Kibera slum. I am still processing the experience and learning from it. This morning I would like to share my journey with you. I began a have continued to using excerpts to tell



On Sunday, June 14th, hands on one another connected in a way I prayed for me and my grateful for your American comfort and how much I needed you. I could not have completed the journey without your prayers, emails, text messages, Facebook likes or phone calls. The God in you walked with me in the darkness and the light.

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I stood before you as you put and also on me. We were all still don't fully understand as you journey to Kenya. I was very prayers, but because of my white privilege I didn't truly understand



Richard Rohr talks about the God experience as being a place where you are being held so you don't need to try to "hold" yourself together. When I was in Kenya I quickly learned that I had to let go of the illusion that I was in control and trust that I was being held. This reality began as I stood on the sidewalk at the airport watching darkness descend all around me. I felt safe with two police officers and their large guns nearby, but I had no way of knowing if George would ever arrive to pick me up. I was alone until Wellingtone, a man I had stayed with on my first trip to Kenya,



joined me as he awaited the arrival of a mission team from



America. He called George and learned that he was on his way. We stood talking on the sidewalk until he got a call that his team from America had arrived at a different terminal. Wellingtone was my angel. I was not in control but I was being held.

My journey was a spiritual and emotional roller coaster. On day 3 I wrote, 'You are here Lord, each and everyone of us carries you with us. Help me to remember. Help me not to fear you. You are the drunken man by the motorbike as we left the slum



yesterday. You are the babies I held in my arms. You are the moms and the children we visited.



You are the people picking in the dump. You are all of us here and around the world. You are my faith community. You are my



family, my friends and all those who are praying for me. I am richly blessed to be a part of your community and to know you. This life is a journey and I am grateful to be living it.



When I envisioned an apartment next to the mall with a doorman, it wasn't anything like this, but it has become a sanctuary for me. Each day when I arrive back here, another mark goes in the book. I have survived another day. This is their way of life, giving thanks each day that they have survived. Even George's 7 year old daughter Natasha, prays before she gets on his motorbike , "God, you know I want to see tomorrow." Maybe it is what builds a strong faith in God. I don't think I am ready to



exchange it for my perception of safety living in Littleton. Can one really get to know God living in the suburbs of Boston? I would like to think it is possible.

I still wonder what I am doing here.

There were numerous times today when I held tight to the memory of everyone praying with me last Sunday. I need to tell them thanks, as they have sustained me so many times on this journey.

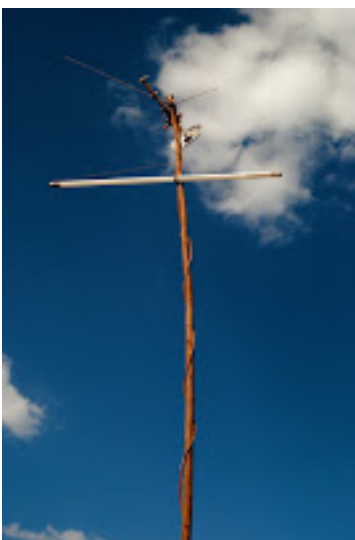
Before I left for Kenya, George asked me if I was okay riding public transportation. I said sure, thinking I don't really enjoy riding matatus, but it is okay. In my mind I didn't even think of motorbikes. I had ridden one before, but the next day we were forbidden from riding them, after seeing a fatal accident and hearing many Kenyans explain why they never ride them. We would get the motor bike at the street corner near my apartment and head toward the round



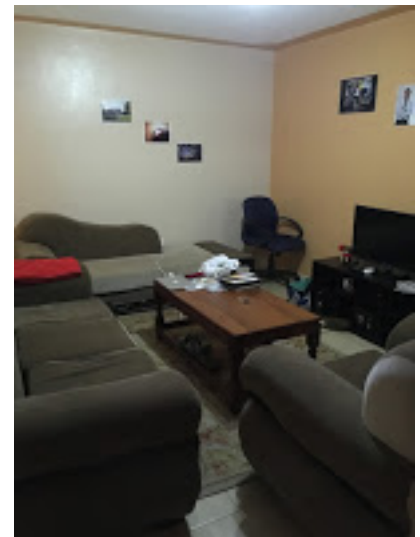
about. Roundabouts are scary in a car, but they are terrifying on a bike. Each time I got on a bike, the image of you praying for me was so vivid as if you were still touching me. I held on to you as we navigated the mud slick paths or the poorest neighborhoods. Your presence sustained me and gave me courage to continue.

When I returned from Kenya I was hesitant to come back to church, because I had been so needy. I share the next reflection from one of my unpublished blogs to give you an honest glimpse into who I am.

Day 5 Is it worth it? I sit here alone in the apartment this morning wondering if it is worth it? What difference does it make whether



I came or not. It is so hard to be here alone, in a strange land. A place where they double the price for me to ride the bus, where people call out things about me in a language I do not understand, where there is real risk and danger each day. Why this journey? Is this what it means to be brave? to be faithful? Is this what transformation looks like? This morning I wonder about this whole Christian thing and sharing the love of God stuff. Sure there are some nice platitudes. Of course I am not alone, God is with me, do not fear, trust in the lord... How do I move



from this place to a place of thankfulness for this opportunity? I feel so broken, so confused. I cry. I find the hills and the valleys so challenging. It will get better.



A journal entry from my last day in Kenya. The lens is shifting, the focus is changing and the story is full of blessings and love. When we arrived at



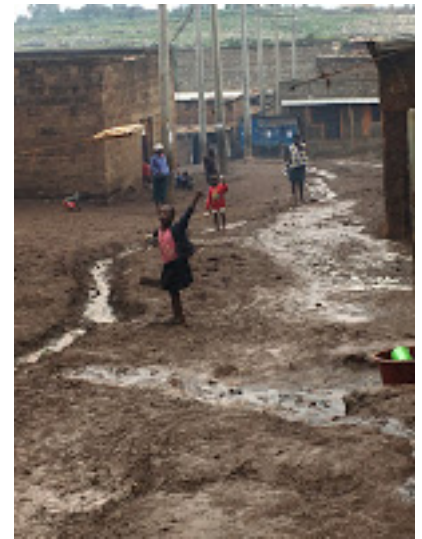
the Anajali School in the Kibera Slum for worship I paused to stop and gaze at the shanties clustered together as far as I could see. I prayed for all

who live there and wondered. I wondered about all those in the world, who do not have a place to live or enough to eat. I wondered how my life contributes to their poverty. My heart wept with the notion that I could not even change this village that was before me, but I did not feel hopeless.



I leave tomorrow to return to the US. This journey in Kenya is almost complete. As I stood

overlooking the slum, I knew I could not change the whole world, nor was God asking me to. I have learned from this trip how important it is to trust Jesus, to let go of control and to follow him, sharing his Love with everyone I meet. It is important to develop my faith and my understanding of the Love that is God. It doesn't matter if I am in America or Kenya or



anywhere else, what matters, is that I continue to expand my capacity to Love. If we all can work together to more perfectly reflect God's love, together we will help Him transform the world. It will happen one person at a time. Will you join me in learning to love more perfectly? I believe it is something worth working toward. We cannot do it alone, but together we can make a difference.





My experience in Kenya has changed me. I now know what it means to be powerless and to put my trust in God. Death and resurrection are hard but they are a gift. As I come up for air, I begin to see beyond the fear to the gifts. What was born was a new understanding of the strength and love available from God

As I reflect again on the experience, I begin to see there was no need to fear, because God was there all along. He

provided what I needed. He was there in Wellington at the airport, as I stood alone in the darkness not knowing if George would even come. I need to continue to step back from these experiences so that what I see is not the fear but the blessings of God. The experiences of no wireless, no water and bedbugs in the apartment and the fear of no one wanting me because of the bugs, was full of blessings. If I step back, I need to remember how the apartment was a safe sanctuary for me each day. I need

to remember Joseph and how blessed I was to have someone who was so attentive, to take care of the issues that arose.



When people heard I had bedbugs, they didn't reject or scorn me, they showed me love and compassion. When I think about the challenges and the fears for the journey each day, I remember how Beatrice had an understanding of what it was like for me and helped guide the plans. I need to let go of the fear of the young men who followed us when we did home visits in the slum, and remember the blessings of

each person I met. God gave me the support I needed to be able to walk through the Korogocho slum and

understand in a new way, what life is like for the poor. This allowed me to

receive deep blessings in my soul from the people I sat with. I long to go back and learn more of their stories. When I felt it was time to leave George early, and move to Kibera, God was there and showed me the way. As I got sicker each day, I experienced how much I was loved and had what I needed to get me home safely. I



was not strong enough to hold it together but I was held by the overwhelming Love of our creator.



I have been pretty honest with you so far about who I am and what this journey to Kenya was like for me. For me the return to America has been more challenging than I ever dreamed. I hate to admit it, but I still need you. I met such beautiful people. I

need to tell you about some of them, so you can help me hold their stories. These aren't just their stories, but they're the stories of the brokenness and the beauty around the world.



Many of you met George and heard his story. This is his wife Beatrice and their daughter Natasha. I never realized how poor George is, until I walked with him in Kenya. They don't always have enough to eat or money to pay their bills. They have no refrigerator. He

gets up early to drive his motorbike before beginning his work at Slum Child Foundation. On a good morning he earns 6 to 10 dollars. Through your generosity, Tree of Lives committed to giving him a stipend for his work with the children in the slum for six months, that ends this fall. Although



George and Beatrice are very poor, they are very generous. On Father's Day each family in their fellowship group at church brought some food to share with others in need. They live their lives knowing they are not in control but that God is holding them.

If you attended Sunday School when George was here you heard the story of a young girl. She is about 18 and after her dad died, her mom needed her help to support the family. Earning money in the slum is hard with very few options. She gave herself to men to earn money to feed her siblings, soon becoming pregnant. Because of the generosity of this faith community, she is now going to hair dressing school and will soon have a new way to earn money.

I visited a lady who told me how she and four of her friends do table banking. They began after being encouraged by George. Each week when they meet, they put a dollar fifty in a pot. Each week someone different gets to take home seven dollars and fifty cents. What they needed most was paper and pencil to keep records, which George gave them. Because of your generosity we gave them thirty dollars. They put five dollars in savings and they each took five dollars, with the expectation that they would bring back six dollars, at the end of the month. As a result of your gift one family is now able to eat twice a day instead of once, and the mom is expanding her business selling tomatoes. Another mom has been able to pay off her son's school fees, so he is no longer harassed for payment and can concentrate on his studies. You are changing the world with your generosity in ways we will never know.

George gave me an update on one of the women I visited. I had listened to her story and had given her a wooden cross, telling her about my faith community and the love and prayers they sent for her. I led us in prayer before we left. George shared how God was working through your love and prayers to bring hope to this woman who now was able to take a step forward.



Your prayers, your gifts and your letters are touching the lives of the children in the Toto Club and all who know them. Thank you for being prayer partners. Please let me know if you would like to become a prayer partner. Yesterday George took the children from the



Toto Club on a field trip to an arboretum outside the slum. He remembers as a child someone taking him outside the slum. He learned about another world, that motivated him to work hard and stay away from trouble. George is hoping the children will capture that same motivation he found.



Your donations helped buy drums for the Toto Club. New girls are coming to learn how to dance and teach the younger girls their dance moves. They even were invited to perform at a nearby event. We can't imagine what this is doing for these girls, but we do know that they are getting off the streets of the slum for a few hours every Saturday and they are in a safe place, with mentors who are sharing the love of Christ with them.

Another woman teaches at the Anajali School in the Kibera Slum. She is 21, a high school graduate and an orphan. She has just over 60 three year olds in her all day class. Kris, a math

teacher from St. Matthew's, has been tutoring her in math. It is really cool to watch Kris and her use Facebook for their tutoring sessions. With technology, today connections and love can be shared from the comfort of home. Let Kris or I know if you might like to help with this.



So in the end was my journey good or bad? At times it may have felt like it was both, but in reality it was neither. It was something much greater. The experience transcended deeper to a reality that "just is" because of God's overwhelming love. A place where regardless of circumstances we are truly alive. My prayer is that we will help each other live in that place, even here in America. I still need you. Thank you for listening to my story. If you ever want to share your story, I would love to hear it.

Let us pray. Please be with each of us as we seek to live authentic lives sharing your Love with the world. Help us to deeply appreciate all that we have and encourage us to find the joy of sharing our abundance with others. As a community of faith may we recognize our need for one another and find ways to connect, so we can hear your call and follow. Amen