

FPT/AGLI Kenya Trip: September – October, 2005
Journal Entries, Linda Heacock

Wednesday, 9/21/05, Nairobi

My first day in Kenya has been very full, at times overwhelming, somewhat challenging... but good! The stark differences in culture are both illuminating and fascinating, yet somewhat of an assault to my Western senses.

David Zarembka and I are staying tonight at the home of Malesi Kinaro in Nairobi.. David is the coordinator/founder of Friends Peace Teams' African Great Lakes Initiative (AGLI). We traveled together on the 20 hour flight from the US. Malesi is the director of Friends for Peace and Community Development (FPCD), the organization co-sponsoring the Alternatives to Violence Project. She will be my primary host while in Kenya.

This morning, having landed in Nairobi at 5:30 am we were driven to Malesi's house by one of her daughters. After a hardy breakfast the three of us went to the Friends International Center for a 10:00 am meeting with Bridget, with Change Agent for Peace (CAP); Norway, and David Bucuro, Friends Peace House, AVP-Rwanda. This was a planning meeting for an upcoming conference bringing together reps from Quaker-related peace groups from all over Africa. It was a great way for me to learn about what's going on generally and to meet with those who are at the core of all that's happening in the name of peace education and activism among Friends in this region. After lunch at a nearby cafe, we returned to Malesi's where I collapsed for a well-deserved 2 hour nap.

Some first impressions/images experienced throughout my long day:

People walking everywhere, along major roads and city streets; unbelievable traffic and driving habits – far worse than NYC!; non-functioning traffic lights; a large group of people, along with the dogs, rummaging through a huge pile of garbage.

Malesi's home and way of life is considered to be middle to upper-middle class, yet 5-6 family members live in this small 3 bedroom simply furnished house that has few of what we would consider modern conveniences. The water pressure in Nairobi is so poor (due to government corruption) that water runs from the tap only 2-3 days a week. Otherwise rain water must be collected from an outside tank and brought in for washing, cooking, flushing, etc.

For dinner we had a great vegetable curry over rice and homemade chapatti (flat bread), Tomorrow we make the long trip across country to Kisumu, in Western Kenya

Friday, 9/23, Kakamega

Yesterday David and I traveled by bus from Nairobi to Kisumu, on the shores of Lake Victoria. The 6 hour ride was on the main road to that part of the country. The condition of the road was worse than I've ever experienced! However the scenery was spectacular as we traveled through the Great Rift Valley, over the mountains down into the valley, and up over mountains again. We passed through many villages and countless rows of open markets. There were hundreds of farm animals - goats, sheep and cows - tethered

along the roads, even in the most remote regions. Last night we stayed with Jim and Eden Grace, Americans from Boston who are the US FUM (Friends United Meeting) representatives to Kenya. They live with their 2 young boys in a very comfortable home (provided by the FUM office in the US) in what would be considered an elite

neighborhood overlooking the lake. The newly established (only last November) Kenyan FUM office is a short walk from their house. Eden and Jim were wonderful hosts and delightful people. They took us for dinner at a nearby restaurant with a veranda overlooking the bay, where I had a delicious traditional dish of grilled Tilapia fresh from the bay served with Masala spice sauce. The highlight of the evening was the large hippo that swam among the rocks in the water just below us, and the spectacular sunset over Lake Victoria.

Jim drove us to the UZIMA Foundation office in Kakamega the next morning. This Quaker-affiliated organization is a registered NGO and was also started by Malesi. It has field offices and programs all over Kenya. I met the office staff who had been advised of my coming and made me feel very welcome. I have learned that all staff board members (of both UZIMA and FPCD) are strongly encouraged to go through all levels of AVP - and most of them have. I continue to be amazed and inspired by the extent of the work being done by Quakers in this country! UZIMA's Youth Empowerment programs include AVP training, peer education, economic empowerment, support groups, and drama outreach programs (youth write their own scripts with themes relating to relevant social issues such as HIV/AIDS prevention). FPCD delivers AVP workshops for all segments of the community - teachers, students, police, prison guards, even local government officials. They also work with orphans and their caregivers, sponsor women empowerment programs, AIDS/HIV programs, and the list goes on.

After leaving the UZIMA office we had lunch at a cafe in Kakamega with Malesi and Janet, UZIMA program manager. (David left to visit his Kenyan wife's family in a nearby town for the next few days.) We then drove to Malesi's other house on the outskirts of town, where I will stay over the next week. This is what we might refer to as a country cottage in a beautiful rural setting. We traveled there by taxi (a small - very old - 2-door sedan), and drove through her village on an exceptionally narrow dirt lane that, in our country, few would attempt with even 4 wheel drive! We passed children playing along side the road, goats, roosters and men carrying carts of sugarcane. I'm feeling so grateful to be experiencing the culture and life of these people - so atypical of the average American.

Friday Evening, 9/23, Hurumbi Village

I enjoyed a delightful, restful afternoon, which I was so ready for! I had an unexpected treat soon after we got back to the house. One of their cows had, moments earlier, given birth to a calf. I went out to the little barn in time to see the momma licking her baby clean. I watched it stand up for the first time, wobbling and stumbling down, and finally taking its first steps - all within the space of a few minutes. I felt a sense of wonder and awe as I observed this little miracle.

Another surprise – Malesi lives in a small village called Hurumbi, which is nestled among a network of little hills, narrow lanes and footpaths, lined with a vibrant array of wildflowers, flowering trees and intermingled with banana trees. There is no power or running water in the village. I'm beginning to think my stay in Kisumu was very much an exception to the lifestyle I will be living over the coming weeks. I am at this moment, writing with the aid of a gas lamp. Water is brought up from a spring down a steep hill next to the house. There is a wood stove in the kitchen used to boil water for cooking. They do have a small gas stove. Of course there is no refrigeration. Malesi has become very attached to a young boy, Kali, who lives in a one room thatched house across the road (typical of most of the other dwellings in the village). He helps with many daily household chores and cares for the animals, garden, etc. In return for his work, Malesi and her husband, John, are paying his school fees and give him money that no doubt insures his family (an elderly grandmother and a younger brother) have enough to eat.

Later in the day Malesi and I had tea and shared personal stories - of our families, our work, fulfilled and unfulfilled dreams, reflecting together many experiences and what has brought us each to this point in our lives. It was a very rich and gratifying connection. It has been a wonderful day. I'm feeling more and more comfortable, and sure in the knowledge that Kenya is where I belong over the next 5 weeks.

Saturday Evening, 9/24/05, Hurumbi Village

Each day is so rich with new, first time experiences! This morning we had a meeting at the UZIMA office with members of the FPCD Executive Committee who had traveled from all over Kenya. I knew it was important to dress for this meeting and I didn't think to consider just how we might travel into town. We left the house and began walking down the lane. It soon became apparent that we were walking the approximately 2 miles to the meeting. I wore my slip-on sandals which are generally quite comfortable. However navigating this ½ mile or so stretch, full of deep ruts and big rocks was a real adventure. I kept slipping and sliding, nearly twisting my ankle 3-4 times. Once I was able to look up on a flatter section of the little road, I was intrigued by the variety of dwellings in the village, from mud huts to small stucco type houses with corrugated tin roofs, as well as numerous garden plots, beautiful wild flowers and banana trees, many children who giggled when they saw a mzungu (white person), and women and young girls carrying baskets or buckets on their heads.

When we got to the main road, I didn't know whether to be relieved or terrorized when Malesi flagged down 2 Boda-Bodas, (old) bicycles with a padded passenger seat on the fender. I somehow managed to straddle the seat, gathering up my long skirt, and hold onto my briefcase size handbag. The road, although now paved, was comparable to a giant washboard. I could hardly believe what was taking place. Was I really going to keep my balance, and what about the driver?? It all happened so quickly, I had no time to think about it - not that I had a real choice in the matter. After an initial period of shock and fear laced with some fast praying, while holding on for dear life, vehicles speeding by on one side, and a several inch drop off (from tarmac to mud) on the other, I finally found myself reaching a state of quiet resolve, then slowly began taking in the experience. It then became a real adventure! I now know I can do this again, and a good thing too, since I expect it will be a primary mode of transportation while here.

Sunday, 9/25/05, Hurumbi

This AM Malesi and I attended a worship service at the Hurumbi Village Friends Meeting. We walked to the service, accessible only by footpath, as people greeted us along the way. Everyone knows Malesi. Some children came up and asked if I could take their picture. Before I knew it there were about a dozen little boys and girls lining up for a photo.

The Quaker church is a one room mud building with rows of wooden benches (no backs). The small group of maybe 25 or so members were singing a beautiful – very African sounding – hymn in Kiswahili as we walked up to the church. The women pastor, Florence, led the congregation in song and prayer, mostly in Kiswahili, as Malesi quietly translated for me. Several members came up to the front of the group and shared blessings and testimonials. Apparently Malesi had been asked to preach a short impromptu sermon. She is one of the church overseers. In typical Malesi fashion she spoke from the heart, in a combination of English, Kiswahili, and the local tribal tongue, on the subject of compassion and forgiveness. It was a lovely, inspiring service and I was made to feel most welcome. Florence asked for my email address and suggested we consider setting up a correspondence exchange between our two Meetings.

I forgot to record what happened yesterday after the meeting at the UZIMA office. The whole group (FPCD Exec. Committee, and office staff) took a “Matatu” to visit the new, not yet completed, AVP – Kakamega Peace Center. The center will be the fulfillment of long held vision originally conceived by Malesi. It is being constructed entirely by Quaker volunteers. This past July a workcamp, funded by Friends Peace Teams and including 4 Americans, laid bricks for the walls of the eight room building. The long range plan calls for adjacent buildings and will include in all, a guest house, peace library, offices and space for conducting workshops.

This afternoon, Getry, who works at the UZIMA office and will be one of the AVP facilitators on my team, came back to Malesi’s house with us and cooked up a great meal. I wanted to help so she gave me a lesson on how to cook ugali – quite simple provided one has the proper type and grind of white cornmeal...and, the right technique – adding the cornmeal a little at a time to boiling water while stirring (fast) and folding as it thickens. We’ll see if I remember when I return home.

Later in the day I went for a ½ hour walk down the footpath behind the compound among banana trees, and strange and beautiful wild flowers I’ve never seen before. I soon realized this was an intricate network of paths, up and down steep hills and leading to various dwellings in the “bush”. Fearing to end up in somebody’s front yard, I turned back and walked down the lane, again greeting lots of giggly children yelling “mzungu, mzungu”! (white person, white person!)

Tuesday Evening, 9/27, Hurumbi

I’m sitting in a “lawn” chair, creatively lashed with sticks, at the top of the steep hill that slopes down from the house, watching the setting sun. It’s quite a site.

We returned late this afternoon from an incredible journey. David, Malesi and I traveled to Uganda and back – an overnight stay – to visit with George Walumboli and his family. George is known as the AVP guru in Africa, one of the very first to be trained as a facilitator. He is head of a Quaker peace project, “Children of Hope”, affiliated with Uganda Evangelical Friends Meeting. The organization is the coordinating body for the AVP program in Uganda, which has trained thousands of people all over the country, including 14 out of 48 members of their national parliament.

No one could have prepared me for this journey and the experiences I’ve had over the last two days! We traveled by Mutatu, a 14 passenger vehicle (in truth the size of our 12 seat mini-vans), into which 19-22 people were crammed at any one time. It took us 6 hours one way over approximately 140 miles. This is partly due to the terrible road conditions, and in part because we had to change and wait for a total of 5 different mutates! We stayed at George’s home in the village of Bodudu, nestled in a small valley along the western slope of Mount Elgon, which is on the Uganda/Kenya border. The mountain has the largest land mass in the world. The landscape is spectacular! There is only one dirt road leading into the valley, which is surrounded by smaller mountains, very fertile fields and whole forests of only banana trees. Malesi calls it the Garden of Eden.

We arrived first at George’s – very simple and sparse – office where he greeted us and drove us up to his compound. We visited the site where his organization is constructing a 2-story voc-tech school and primary school for children orphaned by AIDS, landslides, and/or extreme poverty. This structure is being built entirely by volunteers, including 3 groups of Quaker workcampers to date. The facility will also be used to conduct AVP (Alternative to Violence Project) workshops for this community.

We then went to George’s home where he lives with his wife, Teresa, and their 8 children and other orphaned children they take in (who apparently number from 4-8 at any given time). I had been informed that they have a large house which accommodates many workcampers at a time. So I had made the naïve assumption, large house = material wealth. In fact however, their life style is probably equal to that of their village neighbors – they only have more space. The difference is that George is an educated man and a professional, with a vision and a ministry, who chooses to live simply along side of his neighbors. As is the case throughout the village, there is no running water or indoor plumbing. Electric power is available part of the evening but there are only a few bare light bulbs in the house. The home is quite humble, very primitive by our standards, with bare concrete walls and floors – some of the flooring only mud. Furnishings are also extremely basic and crudely made. I didn’t see the kitchen, attached to the house via an open courtyard, as were the tiny bedrooms, washroom and latrine (consisting of an approximate 5 X 8” opening in the ground). Because the climate is so wet there is clunky, red clay-like mud everywhere. It cakes up on one’s shoes, several inches thick, after a bit of walking.

In the evening we had a traditional meal of ugali, lentils, greens, and mashed plantains or matoke. Despite the fact that I had no bed pillow on my hard bed, and many of the children were still up and playing on their beds (five little girls about the same age were

in one tiny room with a bunk bed...earlier they had shown me their “babies”, tiny dolls each wrapped in a cloth as a blanket), I still fell fast asleep, so exhausted from this long day.

We rose early and George took Malesi and I for a walk before our delicious breakfast of freshly laid hard-boiled eggs, papayas and homemade rolls. Our 45 minute walk took us up – way up! – the mountain road a to where we had a breathtaking view of the valley, and then back down on a foot path that wound through an amazing banana tree forest..

I’ll never forget this place – the wondrous beauty, a way of life and living that defies the imagination, the faces and laughter of the children, the lush green landscape, mountains peppered with little homes (among the banana trees) all the way to the top – and only accessible by foot. I am trying in vain to capture on paper all that I’ve seen, but there are no words to fully convey this amazing experience.

Friday Evening, 9/30/05, Kakamega

For the last few days I have been staying with Janet and Getry. Malesi has returned to her home in Nairobi. I will join her again in a few weeks when she and I will co-facilitate a basic and advanced AVP workshop for UZIMA Youth.

Janet, Getry and Paul (all staff members of UZIMA Foundation here in Kakamega) share a rented house on the outskirts of town. Janet is the field office manager. Kakamega is small enough that one can walk almost anywhere. I had been riding a Boda-Boda to and from Malesi’s but over the last couple of days we have been walking everywhere—to and from the office, to cafes for lunch, and to the market or the cyber café before returning home. I’m getting a really hardy daily workout.

I am experiencing the life and culture of the people first hand, and for this I feel both privileged and grateful. I may not be enjoying the convenience of running water from a tap, the luxury of a hair dryer or reading lamp, or modern transportation, yet I have made real connections with the people and their lifestyle. It’s amazing what we Americans take for granted. I am learning to let go of countless pre-conceived notions, i.e. window screens, radios without static, trash baskets, pillows, kitchen sinks, toilet seats!

Today was a kind of holiday. Janet and Silas took me to the Kakamega Forest which is part of a tropical rainforest that stretches for 250 square kilometers. We were driven there by Nick, a very dependable taxi driver who has become a good friend of UZIMA staff. The (approx.) 35 mile, 1 ½ hour trip was an adventure in itself—on secondary roads, which in Kenya are only dirt, not even gravel. We traveled into very remote areas where the poverty appeared extreme, although the fields were full of rich crops, mostly tea and sugar cane. The rainforest entrance was at a place called Rondo Retreat Center where we were treated to a spectacular display of indigenous flowers, plants and trees on land donated by a former wealthy British colonist. Our guide, Eunice, then led us on a 2 hour hike into the forest. We encountered several species of monkeys, butterflies, beetles, and what felt like the tallest and strangest looking trees on the planet. We also learned such things as the bark from a particular tree that was recently found to be a cure

for prostrate cancer. We tasted various berries and herbs used to treat ailments such as the common cold or flu.

On the return trip home we took a side trip to Malesi's family home, a compound consisting of a cluster of 3 houses where her brother and sister and their families still live. Silas, who is Malesi's cousin (and who cooked sumptuous meals for us while in Hurumbi), had some things to deliver from Malesi. This was a typical middle-class rural home with chickens, cows, and goats roaming around the farmyard, an outdoor oven, and a garden, plus lush floral trees and beautiful bouganvelia vines growing all over the side of the main house. We were offered freshly picked bananas while we waited. They were so good!

Saturday Evening, 10/1, Kakamega

Every day has been another adventure, always rich with first time experiences, unexpected events and encounters. But today was truly a lifetime remembrance. Janet, Silas and I traveled by "matatu" to an even more remote region than our visit to the rainforest--a plateau at a much higher elevation that looked down over the great valley that includes Kakamega. We visited the Orphan Support Group that FPCD (Friends for Peace and Community Development) was instrumental in starting a year ago, and continues to monitor. I will never forget what I encountered there. There are 100 children in the program, orphaned by AIDS, who all come from this rural community, an area of only a few square miles.

We were greeted first by the project coordinator, Aggrey, in his humble 2 room home, where his wife served us tea and hot roasted peanuts. We then drove to the center of the village. As we drove up to the little Friends church, we encountered a gathering of a dozen or so women and scores of young barefooted children. The women were dancing, waving their arms, and chanting a high-pitched, continuous "la-la-la-la-la" (a symbol of their great joy and gratitude over our arrival, which they of course understood to mean continued support). As we walked up they encircled us and invited us to join in (which we did) while all the children gathered around as well. This went on for what seemed like a good 10 minutes. The energy and enthusiasm emanating from these women was very moving. The experience was quite intense and charged with emotion...I literally could not hold back the tears. We had been told by Aggrey that the women are caring for an average of 5-8 orphans in addition to their own children. More often than not there is no father in the home. Their living conditions would be hard for us to imagine, yet the program makes it possible for the children to at least be cared for in a family atmosphere. The support group meets once a month. Caregivers receive individual assistance for material needs and school fees, in addition to emotional and spiritual support.

We all crowded into the one-room chapel, about the size of my living room, sitting in a semi-circle of benches with the children all huddled together on the dirt floor. The children then treated us to a series of carefully rehearsed performances—group dancing and singing, then individual numbers by some of the older girls. They sang songs and recited poems they had written themselves (most in the English they have learned in school). Some of the poems were particularly evocative, impassioned accounts. One

child spoke of sadness and sorrow from being an AIDS survivor, followed by a restoration of hope and renewal through the help she had received. Again my eyes filled with tears. The needs of these children are so great yet their faith remains strong and steadfast. I felt a combined sense of compassion, inspiration, and sorrow.

The women spoke in turn, offering testimony, prayer and gratitude for the support and assistance they had received for the project. Silas, who is a Quaker pastor, offered a prayer. Then Janet re-affirmed the work of the program and pledged ongoing assistance. The women also asked me to speak. My presence as a Westerner naturally was an indication to the group of added potential support. As a member of FPT-AGLI (African Great Lakes Initiative), I had also indirectly become a member of FPCD, who was responsible for the formation of the Orphan Support Group. I spoke to the group about my ministry, offered support and encouragement, and told them how inspired I was by their demonstration of determination and commitment. I later consulted with Janet and made arrangements for a personal contribution.

I have so enjoyed getting to know people like Janet and Silas, and of course Getry and Malesi. Their tireless energy and dedication to the cause of peace and justice is an inspiration. They have sacrificed much in their efforts to welcome me and make my stay in Western Kenya so memorable and wonderful.

Friday, 10/7, Lugari

We are now in Lugari District, a good 3-hour drive from Kakamega, where we are delivering AVP workshops (Basic, Advanced, and T4T) to 20 plus participants from surrounding communities—Friends church members, teachers, paralegals, community officials, and police officers. We have just completed the first day of the advanced workshop. In all, things have gone quite well, despite a number of challenges. It has been an intense, all-consuming experience!

My greatest concern leading up to the workshops was around effective communication and facilitation, given the stark contrast in cultural and language barriers. What I'm finding, however, is that I am being clearly understood and well-received. I am learning to speak slowly and succinctly, and in so doing, have discovered that I am better able to articulate and not allow my thoughts to get ahead of my words. This has been a bit of a revelation—I had to travel half way around the world to learn that if I just slow down, pause now and then, and breathe, I am a far better communicator!

The much greater challenge has been with the kind of conditions I, as an American, have been working under. We are delivering the workshops in a crudely constructed country church that is basically one large open space – the sanctuary – consisting of 7 or 8 wobbly wooden benches that we move about to suit our needs on an uneven concrete floor. The windows are only partially enclosed allowing the coming and going of all manner of creatures—an occasional lizard, bird, and an incredible number of wasps who have made their home in the ceiling rafters. There are easily 60-70 wasp nests (I'm not exaggerating!) No body appears bothered by them as they fly over, and sometimes around, our heads throughout the day. In fact no body has even mentioned this

interesting phenomenon. We are served tea and lunch from a separate, mud hut, kitchen. An outdoor “open-pit” latrine serves our needs as well.

My fellow Kenyan AVP team members, Getry and Susan, and apprentice facilitators, Eunice and Clarence, naturally take all this in stride – this is routine daily life for most Kenyans. So I do not complain! A typical daily routine for me now includes: bathing, and washing clothes, from tubs of cold water and hot water that has been heated from a pot on a wood or coal burning stove; de-briefing and planning AVP agendas each night by a single gas lantern; eating Ugali by hand and using it to scoop up vegetables (greens, carrots, potatoes and/or lentils) and occasionally meat; watching beautiful Kenyan sunsets from the veranda; and on a couple of evenings, walking on footpaths for a couple of miles through fields and bush to the homes of workshop participants who have invited us to visit. In Kenya, if you are a guest in someone’s home, you are always served tea or a meal, depending on the time of day. The expectation is that you don’t refuse and you eat all of what is put in front of you. One night we ate dinner twice. Life has been good.

Wednesday, 10/12, Lugari

I too have begun to take things in stride. I am learning much about the Kenyan people. There is a spirit of perseverance and determination in the face of many odds. The average citizen has experienced their share of hardship. Because of a severe shortage of medical care, and the prevalence of AIDS and other disease, most people have lived through the death of multiple family members by the time they have reached adulthood. I find that those I am living and working among demonstrate a genuine acceptance of and appreciation for the good things life has to offer, instead of dwelling on hardship and diversity. They grieve, let go, and move on. Those I meet often appear to be living life to the fullest, reaping gratitude and joy from the little they have.

Getry and I have become close friends within the few short weeks we have spent together. We laugh and play often, in between our packed training schedule. On one of our off days we went to an open market in a nearby village. We had fun walking among what seemed like hundreds of vendors selling any number of household items, clothes, shoes, fabric, and fresh fruits and vegetables. I searched in vain for an African “leso” (a finished fabric that one wraps around at the waist) but couldn’t find a color and pattern I liked. Instead, I bought a pretty dress for Getry’s 12-month old daughter, Denah, who has just started walking. Getry is only 26, but is already a highly skilled AVP trainer. She has committed her life as a Quaker to a ministry of peacemaking, volunteering full-time at the Uzima office and with the AVP program. She returns home once a week to her village (on the edge of the rainforest we visited) where her mother cares for her daughter and younger siblings. I will not forget my dear friend...she has a kind heart and beautiful spirit.

While in Lugari, we are staying in the home of Alfred and Florence Machayo. Florence plays an important coordinating role for the AVP program in this part of the country. She is very involved with Quaker peacemaking and is the director of an NGO, Education Center for Women in Democracy. She’s also currently running for a seat in parliament. She and Alfred have been very generous in hosting AVP teams, Quaker workcampers,

and other international groups. They are providing us with good food and transportation to and from the workshops. They have a 130 acre farm that produces maize and other crops. Their large but modest home is located in a strikingly beautiful setting and was originally owned by British colonists. The compound is surrounded by wonderful trees, some huge and fairytale like, others profuse with brightly colored blooms of purple, red-orange, pink and white. On clear evenings Mount Elgon can be seen in the distance. There is a veranda that nearly encircles the house, from which we watch the setting sun each evening. What's amazing to me as a Westerner is that despite their obvious wealth and status, the Machayo home shows evidence of considerable decay and disrepair. I assume this has more to do with a deficiency of material resources, much of which would have to be imported, and to the high cost of general maintenance, due to a severely repressed economy. There is no electricity but, unlike the neighbors, we receive 1 or 2 hours of – very dim – solar-powered lighting each night during mealtime.

I am awakened each morning at around 6 a.m. to a symphony of sounds: rooster calls, honking geese, and mooing cows, together with the rhythmic hand-pumping of water from a large tank 20 or 30 yards away. I often peer out the window next to my bed as one or two cows pass within a few feet of my nose, along with the geese, and a trio of domesticated turkeys.

I seem to be continually writing of the conditions of daily life and living in Kenya, though not with any intention to condemn or criticize. I do so only to point out the enormous contrasts to a life of wealth and privilege that I and my fellow Americans take for granted. Wealth in Kenya is measured by land. The AVP participants, and others, whose homes I have been in may only consist of a 2-room dwelling constructed of mud with a floor made of cow dung. However as long as they have several acres of maize or sugar cane, a fertile garden, a few banana or other fruit trees, a couple of cows, and chickens, they are considered fairly well off. One member of our group, Namayi, has such a home with his wife and 3 children, on land that borders the Machayo farm. He is educated and has a small chemist shop (pharmacy) in the village. His mother and siblings live on adjacent parcels of land.

Friday, 10/14, Lugari

Today was the last day of our Training for Trainers workshop. We had 15 participants who completed all levels of AVP. I've found that AVP in Kenya is essentially the same as in the US in terms of the structure and organization of daily agendas, with some cultural adaptation in the exercises. It is what participants bring to the training that is different. After a sense of trust and community builds within the group, they begin to share their stories. It would appear that no one has escaped incidences of overt violence in their lives. The region where our workshops took place experienced what is known as "The Clashes" in the mid-90's as a result of festering tribal conflict and land disputes. Whole farms and livestock were burned to the ground, many were killed and many others fled for their lives. Bitterness and bad feelings continue today among many people who remain in the region, although this may not be expressed in an open and direct manner. Some in our group did speak from personal experience. Other stories were revealed through conflict scenarios that small groups came up with, or in their role-plays (a part of

every workshop). Violent outcomes – or the potential for violence – were shared in countless examples: disputes over land and animals, quarreling between neighbors, domestic violence, alcoholism, and extra-marital affairs. Although women are slowly gaining more of a voice and even empowering themselves through the formation of support groups and other organizations, gender violence and subjugation of women remains a serious issue nationwide.

Some of the role-plays were very powerful with emotions becoming quite real. Although in most cases characters were successful in coming to a “win-win” solution, demonstrating evidence of “Transforming Power” (the core of AVP philosophy), there were a couple incidences where facilitators were forced to act quickly in cutting the role play (and in effectively de-briefing) in order to avoid the occurrence of actual physical harm to a participant. During one such role-play I was facilitating, a man in the role of an irate father-in-law had taken a dry piece of sugar cane from a field next to the church (to use as a weapon—unbeknownst to us) and began beating two of the other characters! Although this conflict was obviously not resolved non-violently, much learning was gained during our follow-up processing and discussion.

I was struck by the often concrete and literal understanding of concepts by participants, despite the fact that all appeared to be educated at least through the secondary level (high school). It was difficult for some to see us as “facilitators” vs. “teachers”. Some folks needed constant validation and approval. Much of this I believe is cultural; even Getry and Susan noticed the extremes. At the same time, and perhaps because collectively they have experienced their share of violence in their lives, people understood the “roots and fruits” of violence in all its forms without question. So they were ready and willing to look at its alternatives and how to apply them. Perhaps this is why our role-play exercises were so effective at each level of the workshops. Over and over again, evidence of Transforming Power was observed and noted by participants.

Following the T4T graduation and lunch, we had a “Thanksgiving” gathering, which was also attended by our hosts, the Machayos. We went around the circle of graduates and each introduced themselves to Florence and Alfred, speaking in turn of their gratitude for the training as well as for the facilitators. Prayers and singing followed. It became another emotionally charged affair for me...and for all. People sang hymns in Kiswahili. I was spiritually moved by the beauty, harmony and meaning in the words, without knowing their literal meaning. It was clearly an African moment.

Florence and Alfred followed with more words of praise and encouragement. I was then completely surprised, and a little embarrassed, by the shower of praise I received as the AVP trainer from the US (my ministry, as an FPT-AGLI member, included raising funds for the costs of each workshop), and then by the presentation of gifts from both UZIMA/FPCD staff and the Machayos. There is a clear understanding that, if it were not for the collaboration and funds received through AGLI, the AVP program/training would not be possible. As in the States and other countries around the world, AVP is completely run by volunteers. Participants are charged no fees and often are given

stipends or money for transportation. Otherwise, particularly in Kenya, they would not be able to attend.

Tuesday, 10/18, Nairobi

I returned by “Easy Coach” to Nairobi on 10/16. It was a grueling 9 hour (200 mile) trip from Kakamega over what felt like the worse roads on the planet. I know I keep complaining about the roads. But even Kenyans, who generally seem to adapt and “go with the flow”, are sick and tired of putting up with such horrendous conditions of transport whenever they must travel around their country. It’s a constant reminder to them of a serious breakdown in infrastructure directly resulting from governmental corruption. The non-stop jarring and jostling over deep ruts and potholes was nearly forgotten however, as I periodically became distracted by the spectacular expanse of the Great Rift Valley, beautiful groves of acacia trees, and the climb over majestic mountains flanking either side of the valley.

I am staying once again at Malesi’s home in Nairobi. She and I (with 2 other apprentice facilitators) have just completed delivering our first day of Basic AVP with a group of 20 youth (“youth” being young adults, ages 19-25). They are all members of various chapters of UZIMA Youth Foundation in and around Nairobi.

Thursday evening, 10/20, Nairobi

Today was the final day of the AVP (Alternatives to Violence Project) Basic workshop. This is a fine group of young people, full of enthusiasm and purpose. They appear to have totally bought into AVP philosophy and concepts. I find myself wondering how easy it would be to recruit 20 youth for the same workshop in the US. These kids have all completed secondary school, and in many cases, college. They volunteer 3 full days (23 hours) of their time to attend a workshop, 6 days if they plan to take the advanced level next week, which most will. Many are taking classes but most are not working due to the exceptionally high level of unemployment – I’m told it is 30-40% among educated young adults.

As a whole our participants are very astute, creative, willing and eager to learn, and full of fun! At times I am reminded of a typical gathering of Quaker Young Friends – normal youth in all respects, yet intelligent, deep thinking and concerned enough about what’s happening in the world around them to commit themselves to becoming peacemakers. They are considerably more sophisticated and upbeat than our Lugari participants, yet there are many similarities in their awareness of the issues and types of conflicts/violence Kenyans face in their day to day lives. They were so quick to establish a genuine level of trust and community that by the 2nd day, as in Lugari, they were sharing personal stories and coming up with real life conflict scenarios. All of the role plays depicted some form of domestic violence, and thus became valuable learning tools. All but 1 or 2 of the group have signed up for AVP Advanced, beginning Monday. I’m really looking forward to working with these kids as they journey deeper into their process toward peace and healing.

Wednesday evening, 10/26/05

We've just completed the 2nd of 3 days of the advanced level workshop with UZIMA Youth. It continues to go well, evidenced by both lively debate and what would appear to be deep reflection. The training is presenting these young people with many questions; some seem almost desperate for answers – how do I deal with drunkenness and violence in my family, how can I personally confront the HIV/AIDS pandemic, what can I do about my *anger*?? It has become clear that many are dealing with the helplessness and sheer frustration coming out of personal experience. And yet they demonstrate a real desire to persevere and take personal responsibility, armed with the new skills they are learning.

I had the weekend free, between the 2 workshops, and it felt like a well-earned respite. Workshop days are long – they include rising around 6:00 am, reviewing curriculum, preparing the day's materials, then de-briefing and planning at the end of each day, which can last until about 6:30 or 7pm. We often walk to the UZIMA office, about ½ mile, unless someone is around to push Malesi's old car (which currently has a starter problem).

There are 5 family members living in Malesi's humble 5-room house. This does not include her older son, Steve, and nephew, Bob (who has been raised as a son), who each live in what used to be one room servant quarters out back. Malesi, her daughters, Lena and Winnie, a granddaughter and niece (Toma, 11 and Sesi, 14) all share 2 of the 3 bedrooms. I have the small 3rd bedroom all to myself for my two week stay, which is somewhat embarrassing under the circumstances. Yet they would have it no other way. I am treated so well. Our evenings are spent watching the news, one or two – very bad – third-world soap operas, and other British or US shows, around the small family TV. We have dinner around 8 pm, and it's usually prepared by the guys, who are great cooks! This is atypical for Kenyan families, but then this is also no ordinary family. Malesi confesses to having little time or interest for culinary tasks. However everyone shares household chores without complaint, including the children who without ever being told seem to know the appropriate time to jump up and sweep the floor, draw water (in heavy buckets from the back of the house and up a flight of stairs), make tea, clean up from dinner. Toma and Sesi are delightful, and are always checking on my needs as well. They must attend school 6 days a week, leaving the house at 6:30am and returning at 5:00pm. I have yet to observe any discord, complaining, or tension among this exceptional family who live in such close quarters. I mentioned this to Malesi and she said she feels blessed to have such a peaceful, loving family. I expect she has much to do with it.

On the Saturday between the two workshops, Malesi's nephew Bob (a recent college graduate and fortunate enough to be employed as an instructor in media broadcasting), accompanied me to the Maasai Market. It's an open-air, very colorful market in the center of Nairobi. The Maasai are a large nomadic tribe which has retained its cultural heritage and traditions. Hundreds of vendors bring their goods to sell each week, many of them traditional crafts they make themselves – hand carved soapstone, teakwood carved animals, baskets, batik wall hangings, and beaded jewelry to name a few. It's

expected that people haggle the prices down, and fortunately I had Bob with me who is an expert at it, and was determined not to let folks take advantage of a naïve unsuspecting tourist. He took good care of me, we had a great time, and I managed to complete much of my Christmas shopping – at an incredible bargain!

Sunday morning Malesi, Sesi and I walked (35-40 minutes each way) to the Friends' Church they attend in Nairobi. It was a 2-hour service packed full of prayers, singing and a 50 minute – very lively – sermon, with lots of “amens” and “praise the lords”. It felt like being in a typical African-American Baptist Sunday morning worship service. Prayers were offered by several church deacons, as well as the pastor. At times the energy was so riveting that numerous others in the small congregation would begin praying simultaneously with the pastor – only at a rapidly accelerated rate! It almost had the feel of people speaking in tongues, only it was Kiswahili. People rise to their feet during all prayers and singing, so we stood the better part of 2 hours. For me, the closest this came to anything resembling Quaker was when the Monthly Meeting Clerk read and signed my “traveling minute” from Richmond Friends Meeting. And also during announcements, when Malesi spoke of the work of Friends for Peace and Community Development, and expansion of the AVP program, all of which is embraced and supported by these Nairobi Friends. Despite the obvious contrasts exemplified in this unfamiliar form of Quaker worship, I can attest to a certain “quickening” of the Spirit, similar to what I’ve experienced each time I find myself among Kenyan Friends, when they gather together in worship, prayer, and song.

Friday, 10/28, Nairobi

The Advanced workshop ended quite well with many of the youth hoping to sign up for the Training for Trainers in the future. The actual date depends solely on when the next Western facilitator returns, with funds to support setting up an AVP T4T. In Kenya, I believe there have only been 4 or 5 other US facilitators. Malesi repeatedly is telling others, and even publicly announcing, that I will be returning again soon, having successfully raised more funds for AVP expansion. Her optimism and many complimentary remarks lift me up and provide me with hope and the faith that I will in fact be coming again – and again? – to contribute toward the continuation of this important work. To date there are only a handful of fully trained Kenyan AVP facilitators (including Malesi and Getry), along with a number of “apprentices”, at varying stages of readiness. AVP in Kenya is still very much in its infancy. However it holds much promise, particularly in light of this latest crop of young people. Many of them show great potential and are already leaders among UZIMA Youth. By virtue of their committed involvement with UZIMA and its various programs such as HIV/AIDS awareness/prevention, and issues relating to gender-based violence, they are already experiencing firsthand the value and effectiveness of the tools of violence prevention.

I might mention that although the AVP program has only recently taken a foothold in Kenya, it is building strong roots in the other countries of the African Great Lakes Initiative (Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda, and Congo), along side of related AGLI programs in trauma healing and reconciliation. In fact in Rwanda, AVP has been fully embraced as a training tool for the nationwide *Gacaca* judicial process. This is a system of restorative

justice implemented in 2004 that makes use of traditional tribal methods of resolving problems through the appointment of local court *Gacaca* judges appointed to preside over hearings, and thus expedite the trials, of the nearly 100,000 people accused of the 1994 genocide in Rwanda.

Sunday, 10/30, Addis Ababa (Ethiopia) Airport

I have a 9-hour layover before my 16-hour flight to Washington Dulles (!). I'm told this is a brand new terminal. As I look around I realize it has the look and feel of a huge stadium that was constructed on a very limited budget with only the barest of essentials. Shops, cafés, etc. are in the center, separated only by partitions that rise less than half way to the cavernous ceiling beneath which is a maize of piping and cheap lighting fixtures.

I appear to be the sole white person and the only woman in western dress. Only moments ago I was surrounded by a hundred or so Muslim women dressed in black from head to toe, and seated on the grey hard plastic benches waiting to board their flight. The men, most of whom were by contrast clad in white robes, and either Muslim hats or turbans, were waiting in line at the gate desk. I realized they were all boarding the same flight when the women quickly followed en masse as soon as the last man was let through. There are soldiers everywhere I look, in blue camouflage with handguns and wooden batons hanging from their belts. This whole scene is very surreal.

Some musings from my journey over the past six weeks:

In spite of many weeks of living and working under physically, and occasionally emotionally, challenging conditions that I never before imagined, my physical stamina and my psycho-spiritual self appears to have remained well intact. It feels as though I have been carried spiritually, by both God and all those who have and continue to hold me and my ministry in the Light. My life will forever be changed from all I have seen and experienced here. I am full of gratitude.

A few nights ago I dreamt about being back home. It finally feels as though it's time to return. Yet it has been an amazing adventure right up until these last days, as I continue to find myself growing and learning through each new encounter or experience. I'm not only learning about Kenya and Kenyans, but believe I have a much better sense of the issues and problems facing all of sub-Saharan Africa. I am even more convinced that I want to continue this work...the need is so great and people are deeply indebted to the help that comes from the US through programs such as AVP and the other AGLI projects.

I am also much more acutely aware of how countries like Kenya, and much of the African continent, with such widespread corruption, and often a total breakdown in infrastructures, is a smoldering hotbed waiting for the next spark which could fuel war, another genocide, or some other monstrous calamity. An hour or so ago, while in flight from Nairobi to Addis Ababa, I read the latest Newsweek article about Asian flu and what would happen if it strikes Africa, which would be the first continent hit due to the

bird migration pattern. I think of the lasting friendships formed working side by side together for weeks. And then I'm reminded of the water used for washing and cooking, which has been carried by hand in the same plastic bucket, across compounds shared by chickens, cows, goats and humans. Together these thoughts appear to induce a welling up of feeling...compassion, sorrow, helplessness, longing. This lump has been in my throat, with varying degrees of intensity ever since I left. The moment the call came to board my flight in Nairobi, I quite suddenly felt the unprepared for rush of emotion as I walked through the gate and down the ramp to the plane, as if I wanted to cry but couldn't. It was something I at first could not name, get a handle on. I had difficulty discerning whether what was trying to surface was the longing desire to finally return home to Michael, my kids, and all that is familiar to me, all that has defined who and what I was prior to arriving in Kenya. Or whether it something else...a deep connection, and to what, or to whom?...that I was leaving behind.

The intensity of the feeling has dissipated now. I'm left only with the thought that floated up as I sat pondering while gazing out at clouds 30,000 ft. over Kenya: the title of the song, *I Left My Heart in San Francisco*. Only I knew it wasn't San Francisco. I again think of home, missing everything and everyone terribly, yet knowing I am not quite the same person I was before I left home 6 weeks ago. I know now I *have* to return; it's just a matter of when.