

President's Message November 2012

This has been a wonderful month for Iris and me. We were able to go on a long awaited trip to Africa.

Specifically Rwanda to go and look at mountain gorillas, Kenya to work in an orphanage and then go on 11 days of safaris in 3 national parks in Kenya, and then I was able to go for 3 days of scuba diving on the island of Zanzibar in Tanzania. I learned many lessons whilst in Africa. The first is one that I always remember when I get to travel abroad, and that is America is still the best place on earth to live.

Sometimes, being in a third world country can be a bit scary. The night we flew into Zanzibar, we were met by a driver to take us to the hotel about an hour and a half from the airport. Zanzibar had a political issue going on where some people want to separate from Tanzania. The night we got there, the leader of the party who wanted to separate disappeared and no one knew where he was. The people of Zanzibar decided that their form of protest would be to light bonfires on the roads as well as put boulders on the roads to block traffic. We had a good driver, who was alerted to the situation and found a way around the violence, but a couple we met at the airport did not make it to the hotel until the next morning, as they got stuck by the roadblocks.

The second thing I noticed is that when you talk to the people in these countries, they live very simple lives. They are not running around trying to do 12 things every day. They were farming without machines. They would carry their produce to and from the market on the heads of the women or on the back of a bicycle they were pushing. It seemed to be a hard life, but everyone seemed to be happy. They didn't have much material wealth, but family seemed to be very important to everyone. Each generation was responsible for caring for the older generations, similar to what life was like here 50 years ago, with families all living near each other. Our guides on safari would work for 2 months, 7 days a week and then get 2 weeks off to go home and see their family. Two of the three guides that we had were on their way home to see 2 month old babies that they had never seen before.

There seems to me to be no difference in the happiness of the people I met, whether rich or poor. They all seemed very happy. I hope that the lesson I learned from this trip was one I have talked about often at the temple. The quote from Pirke Avot is "Who is happy? The one who is satisfied with what they have." My wish for you is that you have all the happiness you deserve.

With much love, Howie