

A photograph of a village at sunset. In the foreground, a large, dark tree stands on the left. Below it, a small building with a corrugated metal roof is visible. The background shows a hilly landscape with more trees and a small orange sun setting behind a range of hills under a cloudy sky.

# *An expedition to Kenya*

*Chris Burhop*

A *Linkline* publication from St Catherine's, Heald Green

## *Forward by Marion Davies*

Chris Burhop is a member of my old church, in Devon, and it was there that he became interested in the work of Vision & Victory Ministries. He became a supporter but – you know how it is? You give to these things, but never know quite what they achieve. Chris wanted to know, (he is an accountant by training!) and by April this year was keen to come and see for himself. My illness early in the year gave him the encouragement to offer to come and help me, while getting the opportunity to see for himself. I suspect he was hearing the call of God, because the timing was perfect.



What he has written here is entirely the observations he made, I haven't altered any of them. I just know I couldn't have made the trip without him, and am so grateful to the Lord for making it possible.

\*\*\*\*\*

“We’re on a mission from God”, state the Blues Brothers James Belushi and Dan Acroyd in their cult 1980 film. And so was I.

Marion Davies runs a Christian charity based in Kenya whose mission is the promotion of Christianity, improvement in education and alleviation of poverty in Kenya. Her work started in 1982 when she visited the country on the first of her now 30 trips, although the charity wasn't officially launched until 1997.

Back in March Marion was concerned. She had had a difficult year health - wise - serious enough to be life - threatening - which had taken its toll on her energy levels, but with perseverance and her usual tenacity and God's grace she had gradually got to the point where her health, whilst by no means sorted, was at least coming back under control. Drugs had been changed, doses altered, until a degree of balance had been achieved. But she wanted to go back to Kenya. There was work to be done there.

I had volunteered to go with her when she came round for lunch in April. Her visit was part of a road trip to Devon and onwards to Surrey which was designed, so she said, to test her ability and stamina to go back to Kenya again. She had worried the hell out of me recounting the trip down the motorway to Devon when, she said, she had nearly dropped off several times behind the wheel of her car.



She was bowled over by my offer. In fact I had been thinking about going to Kenya to see the work of V&V there since January. She'd been praying for help to go to Kenya and I was it! Prayers are answered!

So on Thursday 28th June, my wife having dropped me off at 4.30am at Exeter Airport, I caught a flight to Manchester to meet up with Marion. After a day mainly watching her get ready we left in the early evening for Manchester Airport. We found the check in, with virtually no queue, and quickly went to the desk. "We're going to Nairobi, via Doha". "Nairobi?" questioned the clerk. "Do you have any plastic bags in your luggage?" Marion and I looked quizzical. Yes indeed we did. Why? "Because it is illegal to take any plastic bags into the country" the check in attendant stated emphatically. "In fact it is punishable by jail". Gulp. We took Marion's cases to one side and she rummaged through them, extracting several plastic bags. My bags were already checked through to Kenya from the Exeter flight so I would just have to take my chances when I picked them up in Nairobi!

Having dropped her bags off we then went to the "special assistance" counter. I had forgotten that we had requested this service, at the suggestion of the excellent Exeter - based travel agent who Marion had always used for her trips. In practice it meant I was able to push Marion through the airport in a wheelchair past all the

usual queues using priority lanes for security etc, right up to the departure lounge. We sat at the nearest chairs we could find, eating our sandwiches and keeping an eye on the updates of the England v Belgium game on my phone until our gate was announced - it happened to be exactly where we were sitting.

We had a comfortable 6 hour flight out to Qatar on a half - full, modern plane & we both managed some sleep. A couple of hours later we were on an older, fully - loaded plane for another 6 hours to Nairobi.

The trip into Nairobi City was slow. We checked in to a guesthouse for 2 nights ostensibly for Marion to recover from the journey.

On the next morning, having met for breakfast, we went our separate ways and I went out for a wander into the city, not without a little trepidation. The guesthouse was close to the city centre. Within 500 yards I had been stopped by a well-dressed, well-spoken man who said his name was John and he was a school teacher at St Joseph's school. There was a big gathering of schools that morning in the park and would I make a donation for text books. He had a clipboard with previous donors on it, the lowest of which was 1,000 Kenyan shillings or about £7.50. Not a huge amount to me but quite a lot here. Naively, I succumbed. I made a contribution of 1,000 ksh to a cause

in Kenya, but I couldn't hand on heart swear it was a good one.

I walked through Uhuru Park. It was badly kept. A lot of rubbish was visible but more than that, there were bodies all over the grass. Sleeping men. Men who had almost certainly spent the night there. I have to say that I was intimidated by them although, whilst they looked at me, they didn't approach me. There was indeed evidence of schools gathering in the park, so perhaps my donation would not be in vain after all. I walked on, past the (literally) gathering vultures.

I visited an art gallery and headed on to Kenyatta Avenue - equivalent to Oxford Street - and then back, meeting up with Marion at 12.00.

She had decided she would like a stroll too so off we went in search of a little lunch from some street hawkers. We bought 4 bananas for 10 ksh each (about 7p), some sweet cakes and some spiced peanuts. Funnily enough everything we asked for seemed to cost 10 ksh. . We walked a bit further then stopped down a side road to eat our lunch, Marion perched on a bollard.

As we chatted, as we had several times before, Marion recounted tales of real miracles she had both been involved in, or witnessed, here in Kenya. Of cripples being healed, of scarce food supplies feeding more than double

what they should have, with more left over and of many more. More than that, of the story of hope that Vision & Victory has brought in the 20 years it has operated in Kenya & of the evangelism that has driven the growth of V&V's churches here.

Lunch over, we continued down the side road towards our guest house.

We were picked up the next day at 10am for the drive to Kariaini by Bishop Simon and his senior pastor Ian. Soon we were on the "Thika Super Highway" which turned out to be a 3 Lane motorway in generally good condition but with apparently random, unmarked speed bumps (on a 70 mph road) for no apparent reasons. The road gradually narrowed from 6 lanes to 4 then to 2. As we turned off for Kariaini the tarmac road immediately disappeared to be replaced with a mud and rock affair which had clearly been badly rutted by flowing water from rainfall. It was about 3 miles to Kariaini on this road and it took 20 minutes. We finally arrived at the Vision & Victory compound. It's an impressive series of block and corrugated roof buildings built into the side of a hill, with a church, a 6 classroom school and "Shamba" or smallholding at the bottom.

As we arrived we could hear a church service in full swing - it was Sunday after all. We went in just for a short while as, Marion explained, she was too tired to stay for the

whole thing. It was a packed building, perhaps 140 people, mainly middle aged through to tots, singing and clapping and listening to a very enthusiastic pastor in Kikuyu language. As the song died down it was our turn to be introduced, with first Marion and then I, both of us having to come on stage and hold a microphone as, in turn, we addressed the congregation, explained why each of us was there and then thanked our hosts, all the while being translated line by line into Kikuyu by Simon. We left promptly, noting that the notice on the doors to the compound said that the service ran from 9.30am to 1pm. Today it ran to at least 2pm, and we could hear some very passionate preaching in Kikuyu.

During our stay we were catered for by Janet. She is the school headmistress and lives on site with her two sons and a daughter in 2 rooms.

In Marion's room were 4 Tupperware - type pots with very chewy chicken casserole, mixed vegetables, spinach and some rice. There was also a bowl of fruit, a thermos of hot water for tea and a jug of warm water to wash our hands plus, to Marion's delight, a 500g bag of salt. (She has a craving for salt and she indulges herself. She says too much salt is the least of her worries!) This was to be our diet almost exclusively for the next 14 days.

During the course of the 2 week trip I heard about Marion's early experiences in Kenya, how she helped to



set up the first V&V church in Kariaini with the previous Bishop David Githongo, and how it had grown now to 40 churches across the country, started schools and sunk boreholes to provide a reliable source of water to whole communities.

My room in Kariaini had been the previous Bishop's quarters. It included a large living room (although it only had a tiny desk and a chair in it), off which was a shower and separate "choo" or toilet. There was a large bedroom with a double bed and mosquito net. The suite was huge by Kenyan standards. Water for the shower and choo was courtesy of a 2000L plastic tank suspended on wooden poles next to my room. It in turn had to be topped up by hand using 5 gallon buckets. Needless to say the shower temperature was "ambient" (about 10°C overnight) but it woke you up in the morning and did the job. You didn't hang around either, conscious of both the temperature and the labour involved in lugging water up to the tank. The choo was also "sparingly flushed".

Marion's main aim for coming on this trip was to teach at a conference of V&V pastors scheduled to start on Tuesday evening and run through to Friday evening. With the growth of the church a conference of pastors was the best way to get a consistent message to them all. This would be the first one Marion had attended for 3½ years,

though there had been many, in different places, before that.

The next day we headed over to visit the V&V building plot outside Thika with Simon, Ian and Njathi, the “top team”. Thika is a growing industrial centre and we spotted factories for Del Monte and British American Tobacco amongst others. But there are so many churches and of all the denominations you can imagine. Perhaps for people who have virtually nothing, least of all other distractions, God seems to have a lot to offer.

When we got to the site the first thing we saw was that someone had already built a church on the plot right next to ours. This was disappointing to say the least but beyond our control.

We parked in front of the new church and walked on a raised path around their plot and then, about 6 or 7 yards away from our wall we hit a swamp. It was explained that the heavy rains had created these conditions. We had to wade through 2 or 3 yards of swamp until we reached a small lump of higher ground and then repeat that several times until we got to our gate. Gum boots were a necessity. We had 3 pairs between the 5 of us. We sent the 3 pastors in first in the boots, taking their normal

shoes with them. Then Simon returned with 2 pairs of gum boots and we waded in. It was hard going for Marion, who after all, is a lady of a certain age. She carried her portable stool with her and used it like a walking stick. After the first few yards she exclaimed “one of these boots leaks!” It had a hole and one of her feet was getting very wet. We plodded on. Inside the walled plot was overgrown.



One of the pastors from the church next door was hacking at some of the vegetation with a machete. It's the rains, we were told. Hmm.

A stick marked the spot where a bore hole survey had recommended a 220m deep hole be sunk at a cost of around £20,000. Marion sat on her stool and we gathered round her. I had brought her previous plan of the site which dated back 3½ years & I unrolled it carefully. On it were scale post-it notes showing classrooms, latrines and a Bishop's house. Drawn in, across the lower centre of the plot, was a big church building. This would need a re-think. Clearly the position of the neighbouring church was now going to dictate the position of our own proposed church.

Leaving Thika we headed to Githima to have a look at an electric bore hole pump system which V & V installed at a cost of £16,000 in December 2016. Prior to this the local population of over 1000 people had to rely on rainfall and a few small and unreliable streams for their water. Since then, in 18 months, it has pumped 1.4m litres of water to the community - a fantastic achievement.

After dinner that evening we reconvened to discuss the building plot. Simon maintained that an electric bore hole system should be the priority. We need water whatever happens. But it would use most of the money in V & V's account. Marion said we should pray about the options available to us. As we prayed, just as Marion said "Lord, let us not waste money" the thought struck me where does the church next door get its water from? We had been told that they had just plumbed in their toilets to the mains sewage system and perhaps, if they had water, they would sell it to us. We left Marion for the evening and I joined the pastors in their office. The answer was a revelation. "That church is on the mains". What mains? "The one we are connected to". What? "Yes, but the standing charge is expensive". How much? "400 ksh (£3) per month". So even if we spend 10,000 ksh per year on water plus 5,000 on a standing charge it would take us more than 100 years to get the cash back from our investment in a bore hole! Silence for a few seconds. "That is why you are an accountant". Unbelievable.

The following day the conference was due to start at 7pm and there was singing as we went in. Marion's theme for the conference was "deliverance". It is broken into 13 sessions of between 1 and 2 hours. After a hymn and a prayer I was invited to do a 2 minute introduction of myself, translated into Kikuyu by Simon. It seemed to go down well. They all seemed to recognise "Newton Poppleford"!



There were sessions on forgiveness, and one on cleansing generational iniquity which is referred to a number of times in the Bible. The sins of our fathers can genuinely be passed down from generation to generation, much as we pass down the physical attributes of our parents' genes. Another session focused on soul ties. These are the spiritual relationships we have with each other, and our forebears.

Generally I slept quite well in Kenya but one night during the conference I did wake briefly to hear mass praying in the middle of the night. Mass praying is something I have never experienced before. Worshippers seem to collectively burst into unilateral praying, out loud, all at

the same time, but not coordinated, just chanting or in some cases shouting their own individual prayers. And when you get 30 or so together it really is something.

On the final afternoon Marion asked for a volunteer who wanted to be ministered to. She was expecting one of the pastors to step forward but a young man's hand shot up. This man had accosted me the previous evening after a conference session asking me to pray for him, claiming he couldn't feel his heart.

Marion started off by interacting with the class, asking them what questions we should ask the volunteer, whose name was Richard. As the questions came in, answered quietly, nervously, by Richard, Marion tried to develop a picture of the cause of the young man's symptoms. These were pressure in his head, shaking and sleeplessness. It turned out that he had been taking drugs after falling in with the wrong crowd. He had attempted suicide 4 months ago, firstly by poisoning and secondly by stabbing himself in the stomach. Having been hospitalized from that, his mother then went mad and attempted suicide. Layer upon layer of his story was peeled back. He had slept with girls (fornication) and, one of the pastors volunteered, last night he had been disturbing in the dorm which had caused all of the pastors to be woken up and begin mass praying for him. That explained that then!



Each time Marion thought she had got to the bottom of an issue, she would pray to Jesus. But the root cause of his troubles seemed to elude her. Each time Richard claimed not to feel any different. He certainly didn't look any different to me. Marion looked slightly flummoxed. She prayed to God for inspiration. A pastor then volunteered another part of Richard's story. Some time ago Richard had been employed to look after some goats. One night 9 of the goats were stolen. Some months later one of them, obviously branded, was discovered at a woman's house. The owner of the goats wanted to make a complaint to the police or the local chief and Richard would be a witness. The thief appealed to Richard's mother to see if Richard would not testify against her but this was rejected. The woman then apparently put a curse on Richard, his mother and another person involved in prosecuting the case. His mother went mad and committed suicide by hanging herself. The other person died within days of the curse and Richard had failed in his own suicide attempts.

This appeared to be the root of the problem. Marion started praying for the curse to be broken. Richard seemed to get more animated. His leg jumped and he said he could feel things happening. Marion urged him to blow out hard, which he did. After around 5 minutes of continuous praying Marion declared that Jesus would continue the work of deliverance that had been started.

Richard wanted Marion to continue, but she assured him he would be ok now. The pastors cheered. There had been a visible change in Richard and he seemed happy, relieved of pain and his eyes shone brightly.

Two days later and we were off to a church service in Ndiko. After staying in Kariaini for the week I had forgotten how bad the driving was in Kenya, on the highway anyway, with cars, matatus (mini buses) and even articulated trucks overtaking around blind corners across solid lines in the middle of the road. We joked nervously that these people were in a rush to meet the Lord!

As we pulled up outside Njathi's church in Ndiko and went inside, singing was in full swing, led by about 10 people on a platform, half of which were holding a microphone. A keyboard player banged out a rhythm on an old Casio or similar and the congregation were lapping it up, singing and waving. Eventually we were welcomed by one of the pastors there and I was invited to tell my story of how I had come to be there with the help of a translator, pastor Vincent, which I did, to loud applause. Marion was then invited up to preach for around half an hour on the faithfulness of God, and ours to Him.

2 hours after we had gone in, we were on our way out. Njathi apologised for the relative shortness of the service, which had been a great experience for me, when they

were used to services lasting at least another hour. The reason was that we were to be taken to Njathi's house for lunch.

Njathi's wife, Lois, together with his daughters Anne and Faith, prepared lunch in the kitchen. Good smells were emanating from the kitchen and I was getting hungry. We were invited to wash our hands in the traditional Kenyan way of having water poured onto them over a hand held bowl. A fruit smoothie was served, of banana, avocado and paw paw, which was very pleasant as a starter.

Njathi appeared after about 25 minutes with his son Zachariah, who promptly apologised and said he'd have to leave to go to a Christian revival meeting. We had a short time to chat to him. He was a pleasant young man, short with a bow tie and glasses, who was studying finance at university with a view to train to be an accountant. For some reason he wanted a picture with me....

Njathi's house was only about 2 years old. His 2 daughters had paid to have it built for their parents from their first year's earnings after leaving university and getting a job, in appreciation of all the sacrifices and hardships they had suffered to pay for their education. Prior to the new house they had lived in a much smaller building opposite. Njathi had inherited the land, with at least a couple of acres of shamba from his father. It included a small tea plantation, banana trees and pineapples.

About an hour after we got there, pots started appearing from the kitchen. 3 types of chicken, including honey and soy roasted drumsticks, rice, vegetables and a type of minced beef stew. We were eating from low tables or on our laps and were offered a spoon only. This meant picking up bones and gnawing on them. Oh well, when in Rome... It was all very tasty. We were offered some water to wash it down with but Marion and I declined - both conscious of the potential pitfalls of local water on our delicate European stomachs



The next day we visited two old friends of Marion's, Alexander and Teofana, who had hosted Marion in 1987 for 4 years allowing her to build a traditional mud hut in the grounds of their home, at Marion's

expense. Marion was delighted to see the hut still standing. It was round, perhaps 15 feet diameter, now with a corrugated rather than grass roof. I took pictures while Marion got the tour. Thieves had broken in by making a small hole in the mud wall some years after Marion had left and apparently stolen everything that Marion had left behind.

Back at Kariaini Marion and I were privileged to see the school at work. We visited each classroom and spoke to the children and teachers. In Kenya if you can't afford a school uniform or books then you can't attend a “free” state school, hence the need for these “private” schools, where there is no uniform but unfortunately also very few books.





I had spotted a little girl called Maureen wearing a sweatshirt from St George's School in Wembdon, Bridgwater, where my old business was based. I took a picture of her to show the folks back home just what happens to donated clothes that go to far - flung places. There are 20,000 primary schools in the UK alone. The clothes these children were wearing were from many and varied countries. What were the chances...?



I had taken a rugby ball and a whistle out with me and over the space of 3 days taught the older children and the teachers the principles of tag rugby, culminating in a teachers v pupils 7 a side match. So much fun!

During the trip Marion took the time to minister to me. It was a very intense spiritual experience and at the end Marion asked how I felt. "Light headed, free" was my reply. Marion found a piece of scripture and read it to me. I in turn found a hymn, The Power of the Cross by Stuart Townend, on my phone and played it to her. It made me weep.



We left Kariaini at 4pm on Thursday 12th July to head back to Nairobi. There was a large contingent of children by the gates to wave us off, saying bye bye as we went, and some chasing the car up the hill to the main road.

The next day our final duty for the trip was to attend a graduation ceremony of 150 student pastors at a Christian university in Kitingara to the West of Nairobi, 14 of whom had been sponsored for the past 4 years by V&V. On arrival we were taken inside a very large hall. Our seats turned out to be right in the front row, opposite the main stage. I was highly conscious of this privilege given that there were perhaps 500 people in the hall. I guess Marion had some VIP status. These seats also had a programme and a bottle of water each. Next to us were some African ladies to our left (one of which we later found out was the university Chancellor's wife) and a pair of white ladies on our right, both American. One was a missionary of some 20 years in Africa. Her husband was to be on the stage as he was on the university board. Next to her was her sister in-law, who was also the wife of the guest speaker. Kind of royalty.

The ceremony started at 10am after 15 minutes of looped "Land of Hope & Glory" at maximum volume. A speaker was 10ft away and the volume level was actually painful. The dignitaries processed to the stage, looking very regal, all gowned up with their full finery. The ceremony started

with some African music. Most of the proceedings were in English but with some Swahili in parts. The music, a singer, a female gospel choir and a small band, were excellent and the audience appreciated them.

The highlight for me was the American evangelist preacher who was guest of honour. His sermon was based on Amos' calling as a prophet. He had left his farm and travelled out of his comfort zone to a strange town where he was challenged. But he stuck to his guns. It was a rousing, inspiring sermon. It talked about how the "roar of Zion had been put into Amos' heart". I resolved to read Amos cover to cover.

It turned out that this speaker was the leader of the Assembly of God denomination churches in the US, with 38,000 churches! AoG, who ran the course in Kenya, had 4,000 churches here too and their course, a 4 year part time Bible study for future pastors and leaders, had graduated 1,900 students since it started in 1985. Marion was impressed. She was also pointed out and had to stand up for applause as the one who had sponsored 14 graduates from this year's class. She was a VIP!



The ceremony ended with an impassioned plea from the other American, the missionary, for the students to go and use their learning. Like a Kenyan athlete, they had not trained for training's sake. They had trained for the race. They now had to go and run the race. This was exactly the analogy Marion had used in her sessions at the conference. "Run the race".

Marion was upset when we left. The realisation that this may well be the last time she sees either these people or Kenya had started to hit home, perhaps for the first time.

The trip to the airport can only be described as a nightmare, but we made it. I accompanied Marion to Doha and then made sure she was checked in to the Manchester flight departure gate before leaving her to take my own flight to London. I know she arrived safe & sound, if exhausted, at Manchester, to my relief and I'm sure hers too! What a trip. What an honour to be part of it.

You'll appreciate that, albeit a long article, this is a brief summary of 2 weeks of adventure.

© Chris Burhop, 2018

# Vision And Victory Ministries

## Aims & activities

- Relief of Poverty and the advancement of education in Kenya through or for Vision & Victory Churches in such ways as are charitable in accordance with the laws of England and Wales
- 

## What the charity does

- General charitable purposes
  - Education/training
  - The prevention or relief of poverty
  - Overseas aid/famine relief
  - Religious activities
  - Economic/community development/employment
- 

## Who the charity helps

- Children/young people
  - Elderly/old people
  - The general public/mankind
- 

## How the charity works

- Makes grants to organisations
  - Provides human resources
  - Provides buildings/facilities/open space
  - Provides services
  - .Provides advocacy/advice/information
- 

## Details

- Charity no: 1085230
- Contact: Marion Davies
- Email: emdav35@sky.com

**A *Linkline* publication from St Catherine's, Heald Green**