

No Time for Political Complacency Anymore

Have you ever experienced a life-changing moment? One when you knew you would never look at the world the same? Or maybe it was a moment of insight that would forever eliminate your learned automatic responses? For me, that moment came while visiting Kenya in 2007. After I began a new job with the U.S. Agency for International Development, Convoy of Hope invited me to tour a part of Nairobi called the Mathare Valley.

Everywhere I looked, I saw orphans. Children who had lost their parents to HIV/AIDS scrounged through the garbage dumps, searching for food. Most of the homes, if you can call them that, were mere shacks with mud walls and tin roofs. There was no electricity, no running water, no sewage system. It was so dangerous there and the poverty was so extreme that the police and the fire department would not respond if called. It was truly one of the closest things to a man-made hell I have ever seen.

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Our African guide, Rev. Peter Nuthu, had been the pastor of a large church in a wealthier part of Nairobi; then one day, he and his wife visited Mathare. His wife encouraged him to start a weekly program for the children there. Quickly, they realized that this food was the only real meal many of the children had all week! So Rev. Nuthu and his wife left their nice home and church in the better part of town and moved their ministry to the edge of Mathare.

As we stood in the courtyard inside the gates, our new friend explained that we were going to a dangerous place because the people there were so desperate. We were instructed to leave

any of our jewelry behind and to hide our cameras inside our jackets. Then six strapping young men armed with billy clubs surrounded us for protection. As Rev. Nuthu led us outside the safety of his compound through a back gate, I felt like I was walking through a portal into another world.

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From Avoidance to Action

As we walked deeper into the valley, the sights, smells and sounds of human suffering were the most tragic I have ever witnessed or could have even imagined beforehand. Rev. Nuthu led us deeper and deeper until we reached a fetid mountain, a 50-foot-high accumulation of garbage, excrement and death that had been building for years. I stopped still as he led everyone to climb up that enormous mountain of garbage. I hung back with one of my staff members, choosing to stay behind until the rest of the group returned. I did not want to go farther up because it looked so unpleasant and possibly unsafe, but Rev. Nuthu noticed I was missing and turned back around to get me. With an almost desperate expression, he took my hand and said, "Please, come with me; I need to show you something." I mustered the courage and followed him.

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