

First Person } *Kelly Kong Rogers, MBA '05, Volunteer*

Reaching Out ... of Africa

I'm standing in the one-room home of an African family living outside Kampala, the capital city of Uganda. At 10 by 10 feet, it's barely a house by U.S. standards. The family is poor, and four or five people share this tiny space. One of them is sick, too sick to travel to the clinic where I've been volunteering. Community outreach workers dispense medications and keep an eye on the locals who have no family nearby.



Kelly Kong Rogers, MBA '05, (fifth from left) prepares to track mountain gorillas with local guides in Bwindi Impenetrable National Park, Uganda. Her husband, Adam, is on the far left.

It's a scene I'll never forget and one I saw over and over during my time at Reach Out, a clinic that provides nearly free medical care to people with HIV/AIDS. I traveled to Uganda with my husband, Adam, for several weeks last year to explore the country and volunteer in the clinic. Adam completed his MD at the University of Michigan and is a resident at the University of California, San Francisco. He worked in the hospital/clinic treating patients with HIV/AIDS and/or tuberculosis. I worked with Roses of Mbuya, an income-generating initiative for women served by the facility.

It didn't take long for us to notice the stark contrast in resources and labor between Uganda and the U.S. But even with such scarce supplies, it was impressive to see what Reach Out and the locals were able to achieve and how many people they helped. Each workday started with community yoga, stretching, and singing. Some 80 patients came through the clinic each day, and its multi-faceted community outreach program provided food for patients' families, school supplies for children, and, if possible, jobs for unemployed patients.

I have such vivid memories of our initial arrival in Kampala. Chickens, goats, and other animals crossing red dirt roads were interposed with a large, bustling metropolis of more than one million people. Taxis, matatus (hired 16-passenger vans), boda bodas (motorcycle taxis), and thousands of cars crowded the streets. Despite the congestion, the people of Kampala (and Uganda as a whole) were as nice and upbeat as any I've ever met. And the country reported to have the largest number of primates in Africa didn't disappoint, as a family of monkeys often played on the grounds of our hostel.

When we weren't working at Reach Out, we explored different areas of the country, with landscapes varying from flat farmland to rain forests to the rolling hills of western Uganda. Amazing lakes, waterfalls, and rivers run throughout the country, and Adam rafted Class 5 rapids near the source of the Nile River in eastern Uganda.

We also drove westward across the country, watched the gravitational effect of the equator (a very fun experiment!), and tracked mountain gorillas in Bwindi

Impenetrable National Park. While the six-hour hike was extremely rigorous and tiring, our guides from the Ugandan Wildlife Association were patient and encouraged me to "pole, pole," which means "take it slowly" in their local language of Lugandan. I took this literally, and we barely made it out of the park before dusk.

We only saw a fraction of the beauty that Uganda has to offer — and it was breathtaking. But my most precious memories are of the people. We had the opportunity to visit orphanages, schools, and other hospitals. The volunteers and patients we met were remarkable. Their positive outlook, despite difficult and often tragic circumstances, will remain with us for years. We were most impressed by the smiles on the faces of everyone we encountered. Young or old, student or professional, Ugandans generally have a wonderful attitude about life. Truly inspiring. ✪

Kelly Kong Rogers is an associate director of admissions at the Ross School. Her husband, Adam, begins his cardiology fellowship at the University of Michigan Hospital and Health System in July 2009.