

We have been to Hell on Earth!!!!

If ever you have stubbed your toe, had your car breakdown, hit your thumb with a hammer, lost your mobile phone, had a double bogey, missed the cut or even lost your card and think that the world is against you, then please read on :-

Through the good offices and sponsorship of the European Golf Tour Charitable Foundation, I & two colleagues from the European Tour Caddies Association were flown to Mombasa, Kenya to help support the work of a charity there called www.gladshouse.com.



You will see when you visit their website, there are many projects underway and ongoing to help the deprived children from the streets of Mombasa, and, believe me, I do mean deprived!!!

As you will see on their website, two of the projects are using sport to change the children's lives, give them some self-respect and give them half a chance in life - one is football and the other is golf, the latter being the reason we were brought here.

Most of the children, ages ranging from new-born through 25, through no fault of their own, are deprived of food, water, shoes, clothes, sanitation, comfortable housing, parents, love, guidance and security which most of us in the Western world take for granted as a God given right.

Unfortunately, God, in his wisdom, has decided that these children shall live their lives at a level of subsistence - "the means by which one sustains life" - that can only really be described by personally visiting their world, which we were privileged to be able to do.

I christened it "SOBsistence - because it really brings tears to your eyes!!

We had a bit of a mammoth trip, flying on Friday 6/8/10 from London to Nairobi, departing 1020 on Kenya Airways - clearing immigration and customs, a "Safari" in its own right - fill in more forms, queue longer and pay more for the privilege - you can't!! - flying on to Mombasa eventually arriving at our hotel at around midnight local time - 2200 hrs UK time!!

We were hosted by Jan & Cliff Ferguson the latter being chairman of GH charity and we are so very grateful for all their help in making our visit as enjoyable as it was.

Saturday was an unwind day, doing a bit of shopping, changing money etc then making a quick trip to Vipingo Ridge GC to familiarise ourselves with what was to become our "office" for the following week.

After the brief VR visit all three of us decided that, to get a full understanding of the problem before we saw the solutions, we had to visit "The Street" to see for ourselves how the kids had lived before Glad's House intervention. This visit was never supposed to be on our schedule but we insisted, and Cliff, waving his magic wand, made it happen for us.

Early Sunday morning we convened at The Castle Hotel in central Mombasa, a famous watering hole, to meet our guides into Maboxini, the name of the area where the children live. They were Abdul, a social worker employed by Glad's House for some 5 years, and Jenny a volunteer from Essex who had been there since January.

Turning left out of The Castle we were met on the corner by one of the street kids, Martin, who had made firm friends with a crippled pigeon, whose name we never learned. It was so obvious the love and kindness this penniless child of no more than 8 years old, was showing to his new feathered friend, that it very quickly bought a lump to my throat.

Halfway down the street we were warmly greeted by two more urchins, one of whom, John, took an immediate shine to Ken, one of our colleagues, leapt into his arms and was carried for around two hundred yards cuddling Ken around the neck until I thought Ken would be throttled!! All the time he was murmuring "papasa, papasa" in Swahili which translates as "to hold gently", something the lad was so obviously craving in his life!!

At this point I should say that these boys were no more than 6 years old, but both had glue bottles tucked down their fronts and from which they took regular sniffs!!!

(See below – that is not orange juice in those bottles!!)



The reasons for the glue sniffing are threefold:-

- 1) it suppresses their appetites, because their chance of eating anything is less than zero.
- 2) the effects of the glue help them to escape the reality of the Hell in which they live.
- 3) it is readily available and relatively cheap to buy!!

So after about 400 yards, (a drive and a flick for some of you bigger hitters), from the prosperous, bustling, lively centre of Mombasa, Kenya's second city, we were at the gates of Hell.

I have never ever been so appalled at the abject squalor, filth and stench that attacked our senses.

The first person we saw was Wycliffe, a teenage boy who was missing his right arm, the reason it was missing was, that it had been broken, improperly set by the hospital, had turned

gangrenous and had to be amputated!! In spite of his handicap he greeted us with the widest and warmest of smiles and stayed with us on our journey through Hell as our bodyguard!



Another lad of no more than 12 was so spaced out from the glue that he greeted us, but it was so obvious he was not connecting with us because his eyes and mind were in a totally different place.

The next sight to greet us was about 50 X 6 foot cubes of detritus covered in plastic sheets. The detritus consisted of plastic bottles, old food wrappers, tin cans, plastic containers etc. in fact anything that could be recycled. These stacks were the product of the kid's labours which is the number one industry in the street, collecting rubbish from the city & recycling it. However the stench was overpowering as you can imagine, the rubbish being covered in plastic and baking in the very hot sun for about 4 weeks!!



The harsh economics are as follows:-

Each stack was worth about Ksh 40, approximately 35 pence or 25Eurocents.

Each stack takes about a day of hard labour, walking to the waste bins in the city, loading up the rubbish in a plastic bag and carrying the load back to the street and making the stack.

This cash is then used to buy food or glue or anything they can get to help them subsist in their Hell.

The downside to this is that the recycling company only comes to collect about once a month so the kids have to starve until they can get paid!!

Moving on we came upon the homes of the more affluent society of "The Street" – terraces of crude wooden shacks no more than 10 square feet, either side of a narrow, litter filled dirt

walkway, which on a busy day is filled with people aimlessly moving from one end to the other, always accompanied by the inevitable bottle of glue never far from under their noses!!

The homes are covered in corrugated tin with dirt floors, absolutely no sanitation and very little furniture. But one of these was home for up to 10 children because it offered shelter from the sun and rain, and believe me it can rain in Kenya!! And when locked at night it offered a small degree of protection from the police – yes the police!!

The people who build these crude shelters then charge Ksh 1000 per month for the privilege of living in it, so obviously the more inhabitants in the hut the less the cost per capita.

Those who cannot afford this style of housing, build their own shelters from thick, industrial plastic and pieces of wood scavenged from anywhere they can, which is quite effective against the rain but offers no privacy and is like a greenhouse in the hot sun.

In both cases there is absolutely no sanitation and no running water. Any water they do use has to be bought and then carried – the upshot being that very little water is used and the resultant lack of hygiene and personal freshness I will leave to the reader's imagination!!

Of course there are those with no home at all and all they can do is curl up on the ground in the open and get what glue induced sleep they can.

There is an area in the centre of Hell, nicknamed “The Hotel” where people can take their food, if they have any, and use the crude communal facilities with which to cook and, praise the Lord, have a table and chairs and utensils with which to eat!! Invariably the meal consists of rice, beans and some local delicacy called Ugali, which is a maize type concoction which is fairly tasteless and sits on the stomach like a lead balloon!!

At the end of “The Street” the whole area opens up into a quite large grass covered field and, guess what, there is a football pitch!! I use the word “pitch” loosely as there is very little grass and if you think Wembley looks a little rough at times, try playing in your bare feet on a rock hard and rock strewn surface. There was a game in progress with no little measure of skill on display, which I found incredible, given their under nourished and glue driven background!

We were introduced to Mzungu, who is considered “The Street” elder as he had been there for some twenty years. He was a very likeable, sincere man and obviously had the interests of the children very much at heart. He explained that although it was a pretty lawless place – did I say “pretty” – there was a feeling of togetherness and everybody tried to help each other as best they could.

As we were leaving we discovered that there are second generation street kids. This was brought home to us in a most blood curdling, spine chilling manner possible.

There right in front of us was a young girl of about twenty with a pretty little daughter of no more than three years old, both begging for money and guess what, both of them were as high as kites from the glue bottles strapped around their chests.

Before you criticise the mother too harshly, bear in mind that food is at a premium and glue is a very cheap appetite suppressant, so, to stop the little girl's constant demand for food, solvent abuse is her only answer!!

Yes I did say three years old!! - so what chances does that poor little thing have in life?

This is where Glad's House charitable works kick in. The kids are offered day release at the GH centre in another part of town called Mgongo. This is known in Swahili as "Papasa" - to hold gently - and I would find it very difficult to produce a better word to describe the efforts of Glad's House!!

The kids have to make their own way there and their incentive is that when they get there they can take part in various activities, primarily football for the boys and bead making for the girls, they can take a shower after their activities, get fed nutritious food and, using their own labelled tooth brush, get to clean their teeth!! They are then transported home by the local Matatu or 16 seater mini-buses, which on occasions have been known to carry 40 people!

Believe me when I say, there are a lot of kids who would rather stay in the street, in their comfort zone, with football on tap, than venture out into the wide, wide world with all its perceived dangers. But this is where the unceasing work of the GH social workers on "The Street" really pays off, by any means possible the kids are encouraged to take a look at the outside world and what Glad's House can do for them to improve their lives.

To give you an idea of the costs involved 60 kids can be accommodated each day for £30 pounds sterling some Ksh 3,600 – so if you have any cash at your disposal – and yes I know times are tough for us in the Western world – how much tougher can you get than their life on "The Street"??

So I urge you to please, please give - give as generously as you can and please pass this story on to your family and friends and encourage them to do likewise!

This is a list which identifies other items in desperate need in Mombasa, so if you can't give money please try and help in other ways.

Plasters	Plain paper
Burn Plasters	Pencils / Pens
Support bandages	Reading books for ALL ages
Deep heat	Playing cards
Adhesive Wound Dressings	Skin closure dressings

My next episode will centre on the Caddie program at Vipingo Ridge GC and what we found there.

Thank you in anticipation for your donations and your attention.

