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A Client's Reflections –  
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### **KENYA ON MY MIND**

By Ty wims

My thoughts began to flutter like acrobatic butterflies as I wearily emerged from the confines of the motionless plane upon arrival in my beloved Kenya. It was like being a resting caterpillar awakened from its tightly woven cocoon. It had been sixteen plus hours in the air and an equal number of years since my last sojourn to this ancient land steeped in natural and cultural magnificence. I anxiously contemplated the possible changes I would encounter since my last union of safari sights and sounds here. Whatever the case, I anxiously embraced my new African Odyssey with hopes for a sign of continued comforting familiarity and wonder as the new adventure stretched before me. Little did I realize that my first herculean trial on this journey would be a quest to track down my illusive luggage. Despite this potentially awkward inconvenience, my reflections of the days that followed have focused on illuminating the many cherished memories of wonder, joy, camaraderie, excitement, and the discovery of the many splendors of nature in vibrant Kenya.

My first impression as the Kenyan sun rose on this auspicious jaunt was feelings of the same welcoming warmth radiating from the people that I've come to respect many years before. Preston Mutinda, like a Masai shepherd gathering his herd of cattle offered a jubilant safari greeting to us all. It was as if time had stopped since my last visit and I had been away for just an instant. In addition to seemingly having escaped the veil of age that befalls us all eventually, he appeared unchanged. I was confident that Preston still represented hope for the future of Kenyan conservation with an exuberance for sharing an appreciation for nature and wildlife.

This initial introduction to our fine unfolding outing would not be complete without shout outs to all supporting players in Preston's all-star safari spectacular. The warm welcome received from the personable Henry and Alex deepened the feeling of being safely with friends and family. As our fearless drivers on this safari caravan, they would make the Swahili phrase, "Zowa, Zowa!!" our favorite signal to move onward. I would most certainly be amiss if I failed to also mention lovely Anne whose professional attention to detail was only surpassed by her caring smile and beautiful charm. Without her calm and persistent efforts, I'm convinced that my luggage would still be lost in airline transit space. From the exuberant camp staff who ensured our hot water bottles

kept us well heated in our occasionally chilly beds to those who served up delicious meals, I for one felt most welcomed indeed. Needless to say, there was a feeling of abundant warmth from every possible source.

As a seasoned traveler on Peg Abbott nature travels, such adventures have either been most harmonious or a test of even the quietest person's patience, depending on the menagerie of fellow participants. The cast of characters in this sub-Saharan safari story were not only civil but I'm glad to admit a joy to join on the bumpy roads of Kenya. Each individual added to the overall texture of our collective sharing in the discovery of new places, cultures, nature, wildlife, birds, and one another. While the animal behavior witnessed was amazing and enlightening no doubt, so was our own human interaction along this trek. We too share ranks in the animal kingdom merry-go-round, whether we personally can identify with procreating lions and grunting hippos or not.

My first indication that I was in the midst of a flock of fine un-feathered folks came while still gathering on our first full day of introductions. When word spread like migrating wildebeest regarding my luggage vacationing elsewhere, the offers of clothes and other sundry items from everyone was overwhelmingly heartwarming. The fact that new acquaintances would be so caring and sharing from the start made my optimism for the days ahead soar. While I did thankfully accept the use of one of Linda's T-shirts, I was relieved that my bags had finally decided that they were with me on this trip. I shuddered at the possibility of needing to shop for replacement gear as proposed consolingly by Peg. Shopping has never been one of my favorite exercises unless pursued on-line. Perhaps my aversion to shopping has deep roots back in my mother's womb during some wildly imagined Labor Day sale frenzy. After all, I was born on the third of September.

Like molten lava periodically bubbling to the surface and running down the sides of an active volcano, thermal blasts of flowing safari memories have continued to keep Kenya on my mind. The locations that formed the stations along the tracks of our locomotive like tour have remained vivid visions, like an African Express train chugging along on a cross country adventure, next stop Amboseli, Mt. Kenya, Samburu, Masai Mara, and,..., *Cucamonga*. Obviously our up close and personal commute with nature has comprised the lion's share of my most vivid recollections. Yet even the most subtle things observed have caused a beaming smile to quietly cross my face in delight when least expected. These mental photographic moments include August teaching Preston Ebonics with the phrase, "waass up?"; the shopping frenzy at the pit stops with the facilities strategically placed at the rear of curio shops; the sight of a rainbow colored hot-air balloon, as I tried to imagine the bird's eye view certainly enjoyed by MJ, Laura, and Ginger; my disappointment at missing the night drive Cheetah kill solemnly told by Marcyes and others; The ominous sounds of Elephants rambling through the Governor's Camp in the middle of the night; Lion's quickly doing the wild thing without caring about having an audience; a dinning hyena happily carrying a Cape Buffalo leg in its mouth as it tenderized this prize morsel in water; Losing count of the times Louise preciously

uttered, “pretty bird”; mischievous marauding monkeys invading the unlocked confines of the room shared by Linda and Marcyes; an exciting visit to a Masai village and their entrepreneurial wheeling and dealing skills that rivaled those I’ve witness in many big U.S. cities; Kenyan sunrises and sunsets with unbelievable amber skies; the unexpected sounds of heavy rain and thunder on the Massa Mara; while checking out of Governors camp, a smiling young Kenyan girl asking me to say hello to Obama upon my return stateside, expressing their kinship as “cousins”; The laugh of Alex, the non-Kenyan, taking delight in all of the wonderful surrounding beauty of nature; Masai warriors dancing and serenading Peg with tribal birthday greetings; the teary farewell as we described our favorite safari moments.

There were so many remarkable aspects of our recent Kenyan adventure. It’s impossible to capture them all in this short remembrance. They are all carefully planted in my garden of time well spent nurtured by the shared warmth from fellow caring gardeners in nature. I’ve come to realize that we are never too far away from those special places we hold dear or the people who add richness to the fabric of a shared time and place. Although we have increased our collection of photographs by which we capture memorable Kodak moments in life, we will also remain forever linked in our hearts. It is this sense of common desire to enjoy and conserve our pristine places in jeopardy of man’s destruction that brought us together on safari. As we remember the grand experience of witnessing the fruits of nature while they still remain fruitful, we must also become advocates of its continued future bounty. Teaching our children to respect our earthly Gardens of Eden is an ongoing challenge in the face of the daunting explosion of iPods, iPads, and just plain old I. So we must become teachers as well.

Preston stands tall as an excellent role model in such conservation endeavors. His most rewarding legacy will be educating the children of these fragile treasures. Planting such seeds of respect for the world of nature has always been a most valuable and worthwhile investment in the future of all natural places. Preston has excellently used his keen awareness of what is truly important in such efforts to bring his fellow Kenyans and tourist alike together with conservation our focus. He has continued to use his many gifted talents to make a significant difference. His efforts should undoubtedly improve the future outlook for Kenya’s wildlife areas. Now if we could just clone a global legion of Preston’s, that would be Akuna Matata.

With the journey made, another Kenyan sunset has graced my panorama of cherished memories. We shared our special moments one last time seasoned by tear drops. What a fine family group of nature lovers we had become. As far as animal behavior goes, we formed a bond of mutual harmony and warmth that was only equaled by that of our Kenyan hosts and the natural world around us. And now as I end my brief introspection on glorious days with my new nature family group, it’s time to move on. Zowa, Zowa!!