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# One Woman's God - Appointment to the Maasai

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# ANDREWS

## Nashipai

ONE WOMAN'S GOD-APPOINTMENT TO THE MAASAI

BY MELODIE ROSCHMAN

“How many African tribes can the average American name?” Jordan Arellano asks. I’m taken slightly aback by the question. I do a quick personal count: *Maasai, Bantu, Igbo, Tutsi and Hutu* — and those just because I’ve taken a world literature class. I can name more New York neighborhoods, shades of red or guest stars on “Friends” than I can the historical inhabitants of an entire continent.

My struggle is typical, Jordan says — as are my choices.

“For most people, the Maasai are one of the only tribes they can name, if not the only one,” she notes. “Out of the thousands of different tribes across Africa, the Maasai have managed to stand out; most importantly, because they are so committed to preserving their culture.”

Recently, however, the Maasai face a problem prevalent among traditional cultures worldwide: the struggle to maintain their identity in the rapidly-changing modern world.

That’s where Jordan comes in. Jordan graduated from Andrews in December 2014 and currently is pursuing a master’s in global community development from Southern Adventist University in Collegedale, Tennessee. In order to earn her degree, she has to complete an eight-week practicum, practicing essential skills such as writing grants, performing assessments, writing and performing trainings, and developing research. When it was time to look for a project, her program director Sharon Pittman, a former Andrews student and professor, suggested Jordan go to Kenya to intern with World Vision. The practicum, she says, “was most certainly a God appointment.”



*Taking advantage of an opportunity to explore the land around her, Jordan Arellano enjoys stunning vistas and animal sightings on a day off.*

Jellicoe Stephenson

This wouldn’t be Jordan’s first time in Africa. In 2012, while she was a student at Andrews, Jordan spent a year as a student missionary in Chad at Bere Adventist Hospital. During the year, she lived in a mud brick hut, came to love her Chadian host family, and got sick with malaria — twice.

“That year was both incredibly difficult and inspiring,” Jordan reflects. “I often felt helpless, like I didn’t have a strong role to play. I wasn’t a teacher; I wasn’t a doctor; I didn’t know what work I could do to help anyone.”

That experience inspired Jordan’s passion for development, especially on behalf of women and children, a passion that led her from her undergraduate degree in English to com-

munity development and World Vision Kenya.

As I write this, Jordan is living with her colleague, Jellicoe, in a World Vision office in Narok, a town on the edge of the Maasai Kingdom region on the border of Kenya and Tanzania.

“My typical day is probably not as exciting as one might assume,” Jordan laughs. “Good development can only come from good planning, so there is a lot of office time.” She spends the majority of her time doing coursework for her

practicum and writing proposals, with occasional trips to the local villages to observe ceremonies or perform assessments.

There are still some surprises, however. Despite the fact that she's lived in Africa before, Jordan finds her Kenyan colleagues still have to be patient with our "strange American behaviors." Jordan recalls how the first few days she and Jellique arose bright and early for 8:15 morning worship, only to find themselves the only ones up. "We soon learned that 8:15 is actually 10:00 African time!"

Because Jordan only has eight weeks in Kenya right now, her goals have been simple: to form relationships with people in the community and finish her seemingly endless homework. Those relationships with locals are the core of the work she does; her ability to listen to and understand them is of utmost importance. Because of Jordan's friendliness and positivity, her new friends have given her the Maasai name "Nashipai," which means "happiness." "I really try to wear that name," Jordan says, "because it reminds me of why I'm here and how all of my actions and behaviors are meant to be an example for Jesus."

The Maasai are a unique and vibrant culture known for their colorful clothing, large decorative necklaces, and the herds of cattle they drive hundreds of miles across the plains. Their culture is tight-knit and prosperous. A Maasai friend of Jordan's explained that there are two things the Maasai never count — their cows and children, to do so is bad luck. Recently, though, the Maasai have seen both of these numbers undeniably decreasing, as pasture lands decrease due to environmental factors and industrialization, and many tribe members move to cities in search of more modern livelihoods.

In the face of these changing times, the Maasai seek to simultaneously move forward and preserve their heritage. Jordan, specifically, has worked with Maasai women, a group that face challenges unfathomable to those living in the United States. One of the most pressing of these challenges is Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), a deeply-rooted, coming-of-age ritual in which women of marriageable age have their outer genitalia cut and altered or removed, which drastically decreases or entirely eliminates sexual pleasure.

"It may seem strange," Jordan explains, "but women are actually the primary proponents of the practice because they see it as a mark of pride and honor." Recent legislation by the

Kenyan government forbidding the practice has only driven it underground, making anti-FGM campaigning far more difficult.

Understanding the complexity of a difficult topic like FGM, Jordan notes, is at the heart of effective development work.

"Before studying development, I had assumed that NGOs (non-government organizations) were begging for money from rich donor countries and then giving the poor countries the food, water or relief that they need. But this method is really more about asking a community, 'What do you do well? What works for you?' and then helping them figure out how they can use those strengths to aid and support the areas where they struggle. Of course, donations are important. But World Vision does a great job of using donor money to create self-motivated and *sustainable* improvements in suffering communities." These kinds of efforts empower nations and individuals, enabling them to thrive in their specific situations.

Jordan will take that commitment to empowering others with her after she leaves Kenya. In August, she began a 32-week internship, in Collegedale, with Global Humanitarian Outreach, a small Adventist-run organization, that seeks to connect Americans who are passionate about development and missions with projects and people in the developing world.

Beyond the day-to-day activities, experiences and paperwork, Jordan says her experience in Kenya — and studying development at large — has ultimately shown her the love of God demonstrated largely.

"I have heard and witnessed God's work here in Narok so clearly. This is first seen in the World Vision staff, who are simply bubbling with the love of Jesus. They sing, they dance, they pray, and it is so clear to me that they are driven by the desire to share the love of Christ with others. But it also can be seen in the village. Every community organization that I have heard about, every women's empowerment movement, every child that is able to continue school because of their sponsorships is such a light shining for Jesus. I see his mark everywhere, and it is so humbling for me to be a part of it."

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