

## Our African Adventure Part 1...By Renae Lane

I just returned with a group of 16 travelers from the most incredible trip to Kenya and Tanzania. I've traveled with Security Savings Bank customers for over 25 years, but this adventure will go down as my **"ALL TIME FAVORITE"**! I now understand why this trip has been rated number one for Collette Vacations over the past 20 years. I was a little hesitant at first, but sleeping in tents in the national parks amongst the howling hyenas, trumpeting elephants, roaring lions, and screeching monkeys was the most incredible alarm clock I've ever heard. Preparation was very challenging as we needed complicated Visa's, ETA's, and many expensive vaccinations in order to visit a third world country, but it was all worth it! Former travelers told me that I would have a whole new outlook on life and it was so true, as the people are so welcoming, appreciative, have so little material things, and are extremely happy.

I decided to start part 1 of my story with our guide, Robert Marks, II, who absolutely made our trip! He is a member of the Maasai Tribe. His blood father, the Chief, had 48 wives (36 still alive) so consequently, Robert has 256 brothers and sisters whom he claims to know everyone by name. We met a few of his brothers as we traveled. Robert lost his mother upon his birth and was adopted by Dr. Robert Marks, I, and his wife, English missionaries in his village. They raised him in the tribe until he was seven years old and then sent him to England for boarding school. He returned home every summer to spend summers with his tribal family, but returned to England every year until he graduated from the University of Liverpool as a medical doctor and a zoologist. His adopted parents were good friends of Jack Hanna, best known for his TV show "Into the Wild". Jack paid for **all** of Robert's schooling from the age of seven all the way through college. He still works for Jack Hanna's family, does photography for National Geographic and Into the Wild, guides for Collette Vacations, doctors in the hospital, and is the Director of St. Mark's Children's Home & Orphanage in Arusha, Tanzania. He makes his home in the orphanage with over 200 children who originate from the same place as his birth, the Ngorongoro Crater region. Since he was raised with the Maasai Tribe, he learned to hunt and knew just where to look for the wild animals. I will tell you about that in part 2. He was very proud of his intricate and colorful tribal jewelry as he said it was his Maasai identification and he wore it proudly every day. We drove past his village and he showed us the clinic that he lived in. He said he was fortunate as he had a home with a bathroom and water. His siblings lived in huts made of dried mud and cow and elephant dung. The chief must provide a mud hut for each of his wives and their children complete with bushes for bathrooms and rivers for showers. The women build the huts, cook, and raise the children while the men hunt. The Maasi are nomadic cattle and goat herdsman. All of his family get together in a field to celebrate Christmas as the Maasai tribes are mainly Christians. They all bring something such as a goat, lamb, or cow and they cook a great meal. Cows are a symbol of wealth and their diets consist of cattle products such as meat, milk, blood with honey, and tree bark. We had fairly good meals consisting of a lot of soup.

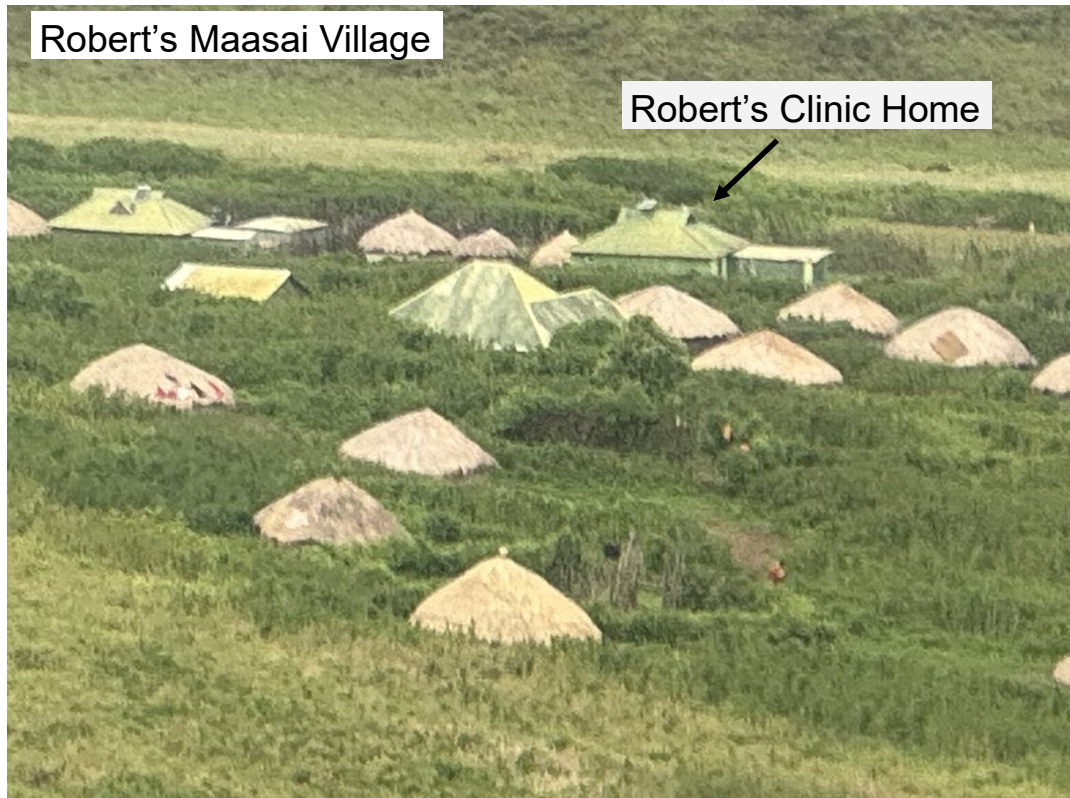
Robert was not married, but traditionally, the Chief would choose his first wife. He would pay his wife's father 10 cows which 5 were payable upon marriage and the other 5 were to be paid after she produced two children. After 4 children, he could marry more wives of his own choosing, of course with more cows, and he would be required to provide a dung and mud hut for each family! Since Robert is adopted, he might be an exception to this rule.

Robert is coming to Iowa next April or May to study the Blank Park Zoo in Des Moines and the Henry Doorly Zoo in Omaha, which he said were some of the best. He has accepted our invitation of staying with the Lane Family for a few days. He wants to talk to the school children and hopes to have a community program in the gymnasium. I will keep everyone informed when he sets the date. This man was incredible and I hope you will have a chance to meet him.

Our African Guide, Robert Marks, II



Robert's Maasai Village



Robert's Clinic Home

## Our African Adventure

### Part 2.. by Renae Lane

On March 25, 2025, Charlene Anderson, Mike Dobson, Brad Hanson, Barbara Dunstone Peterson, Deb Dunstone and Cheryl Rasmussen, left on an early 4-day departure to visit the Maasai Mara National Reserve in Kenya. Maasai refers to the people and Mara refers to the landscape's trees and bushes that dot the savannah plains. They camped amongst the tribal people and had early morning game drives on very bumpy roads. Cheryl, Barb, Deb, and Mike enjoyed a hot-air balloon ride over villages as the children waved to them with excitement.



The rest of us, Donette Adam, Linda Bradshaw, Tom & Kathy Fromme, Brad & Jenny Lane, Steve & Renae Lane, Lisa L. Peterson, Bonnie Radke, and Judy Wyrick-Eaton, left on March 28th and met the our group in Nairobi, Kenya and together we began our 16-day tour. From the time we left Gowrie, we arrived in Nairobi, it was about 44

hours or 8370 miles later!



Needles to say, I built one day in for rest and relaxation, but a few of us decided to take an optional safari by jeep through Nairobi National Park where we encountered the rare white rhinoceros and many other exotic animals. It was



early to bed as the next day we visited the David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust, a wildlife rehabilitation place for orphaned or injured elephants.

We saw their midday mud bath and baby formula feedings by bottles. Then we headed to author, Karen Blixen's "Out of Africa" farmhouse and "Babette's Feast"



for lunch, all inspired by her books and movie starring Robert Redford and Meryl Streep. We hand fed the giraffes at the Rothschild sanctuary and visited the Kazuri Beads Factory, where mothers are employed as jewelry artisans.

All together we went on 12 safaris, starting with Amboseli National Park in Kenya. Overlooking the park was the beautiful snow-capped peaks of the tallest mountain in Africa, Mt. Kilimanjaro. We were very lucky to see the top of this

dormant volcano as many times it is cloud covered.

Yes, we did stay in tents within the national parks. Our first lodge was in the middle of Amboseli National Park and I must say it was “glamping” as we had all the comfort amenities complete with bathrooms, but you never as much as brushed your teeth with the water, let alone drink it. We went to the main lodge for our evening meal consisting of soup and bread, a buffet, and some type of dessert. We had a lot of lamb, fish, chicken, and beef for meat with lots of vegetables such as egg plant, potatoes, and sweet potatoes. The meals weren’t too bad and we never went hungry. When we were ready to head back to our tents, it was mandatory to have a flashlight with employee escort us back just in case of an animal encounter.



We traveled in 3 jeeps while on safari, with the best drivers and guides ever, Joe, Franklin, and Jackson. The trails were very bumpy, muddy, and sometimes we just drove off the road if there was an animal we wanted to see. Robert was our spotter.

We embraced our wild side for several full days of game drives and sometimes twice a day in search of the “Big Five”; the elephant, lion, water buffalo, rhino, and leopard. These



animals are considered to be the most chal-

lenging for big game hunters. Every game drive was exciting and we never got tired of going as we always saw something new. We were able to take close-up pictures of each one. The leopard was the hardest to find as they blend into the trees. We even saw the real Pride Rock and the red-billed hornbill, Zazu, which inspired the movie Lion King. On longer days we had picnic lunches that we packed before leaving camp and sometimes used the bushes or behind the jeep for our bathroom break! Finally, the last



two days of our drives, we found the leopard. Brad told Jenny that she can now wear her “Big 5” shirt officially. The national parks we visited were Nairobi, Amboseli, Serengeti, Tarangire, and Ngorongoro Conservation Area and maybe more.



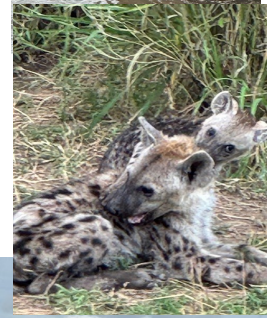
We are leaving Kenya and crossing the border into Tanzania today. Thank goodness our Visa’s and ETA’s were done properly and no one lost their immunization form! We had a full day of game drives in Ngorongoro Crater, the world’s largest caldera and one of the best parks in the world. We enjoyed a picnic lunch in the highlands and watched the hippos bathing in the water nearby.



I'm sure you have heard of the Serengeti in Africa, a Maasai word meaning "endless plains". We spent the next three nights in the Thorn Tree Camp in the middle of the Serengeti amongst the wild animals.



Number one most dangerous or feared insect/animal, according to our guide, is the mosquito, next are the hippos, and then crocodile. I can't say we even saw a mosquito, but we did see a few tsetse flies. We were there during the rainy season. It rained occasionally during the night, but couldn't ask



for nicer weather during the day, 75-80 degrees every day. We were easily entertained when we crossed the Equator and watched the water going down the drain the opposite of ours. The rainy season means migration of the zebras and wildebeests and we saw them as far as our eyes could see. Zebras lead the way as they are the smartest and the wildebeests follow.



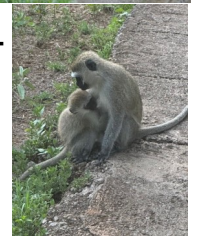
On our way to Lake Eyasi, a salt lake for the next 2 nights. Thousands of flamingos live here but it was too muddy to get close to them. Here we visited the Hadzabe and Datoga



Tribes which I will talk about in part 3 along with the two schools grades 1-7.



Off to Tarangire National Park today. Each park has so many different features but this one is so unique with its brush and trees. The famous baobab tree known as the "Tree of Life" is here and it is estimated to be 5,000-6,000 years old.



We said good-bye to Kenya, Tanzania, Robert, Joe, Franklin, and Jackson with good memories and flew from Kilimanjaro to Qatar (5 1/2 hours) in the Middle East, to Dallas (16 hours) and then to Des Moines (2 1/2 hours) for total of 44 hours including layovers, but well worth it. Guess we can say that we were in Africa, Asia, and USA all in one day! Best trip ever!

**Our African Adventure  
Sponsored by Security Savings Bank**

**Part 3...by Renae Lane**

**The Villages, Schools, and Tribes**

I believe we all went to Africa for the safaris and animals, but quite honestly, it was the people who made this trip so memorable and motivating. We came home feeling very fortunate and blessed! We visited 2 schools and 3 tribes which were all so different and welcoming to American visitors, so I must share our stories with you.



**Mt. Kilimanjaro with Maasai Tribe**

**The Maasai School & Village**

The first school, and the most primitive of the two, was in a Maasai Village where they all live together and teach their family members. Collette Vacations started this primitive school 3 years ago and continues to sponsor with improvements. At present time, they were building restroom

facilities and we were told that part of our trip expense is donated to help similar projects. We brought the children gifts such as fidget spinners, kaleidoscopes, soccer ball and pump, candy, pop-it bracelets and school supplies. After meeting the excited children in grades 1-7, they performed



**Masaai School Children**

dances and sang songs

to us which were led by their teachers. The principal took us to their class rooms which looked like rusty grain bins with dirt floors. The teachers and principal walked us to their village where they told us about their homes made of dried mud and cow and elephant dung and then took us on a home tour. We had to use our cell phone flashlight to see as the window was only a peek hole. This one had 2 bed-



**Masaai Home**

rooms, they sleep on the floor, and use the bushes and river for their necessities. I got a glimpse of the Chief who hiding around the corner and didn't want to be seen. He was a busy man with all those family members. We met the future Chief, his 4th son, who was very outgoing. Of course they wanted to sell their homemade jewelry, trinkets, and their traditional African Tribal Sticks which are used for hunting.

## The Hadzabe Tribe

This tribe was the most interesting to us as they were so unique and typical in our minds of true African culture. They are nomads who move from place to place, and have no earthly goods except their families, bows and arrows, the furs on their backs, and a few clothes that visitors left for them. In case of rain, they find a cave for shelter. Collette sent a scavenger out the day before to find this tribe bringing them honey and cigarettes in return for our visit as money means nothing to them. The families and children were so welcoming with smiles and high fives upon arrival. A hunting story using bows and arrows was told to us using his own language and very entertaining body language. Even though we couldn't understand a word he was saying, we loved and understood his bird story. We joined in on their circle dances and they even taught us how to shoot a bow and arrow. This was a little scary as most of us missed our target getting closer to our feet! They are very superstitious people and are fearful of bad luck, so constantly moving to different areas.

## Datoga Tribe...

The Datoga Tribe lives in northern Tanzania near Lake Eyasi and the Ngorongoro Highlands. They are very skilled in metalworking and gave us a demonstration in melting it into jewelry and other necessities. They are semi-nomadic and their lives revolve around their cattle, goats, and sheep, moving with them in search of pasture. They are very strong warriors and have resisted formal education as to keep their traditional ways.



## Kibaoni Primary School



We had a very welcoming visit from the children ranging in grades 1-7 in the Kibaoni Primary School. They greeted us with high-fives, smiles, and very inquisitive looks. Some of them had never seen white skin and blonde hair so they kept touching us and asking questions. Collette Vacations has been sponsoring this school for over 13 years and they wear the Collette green in their uniforms. Tanzania and Kenya were both British Colonies so English is spoken as well as

Swahili and other native languages. The teachers are specialized in science, music, English, Swahili, math, PE, and teach all ages. The older students sang songs and asked us to tell about ourselves such as where we lived, our families, and our occupations. Then in return, they told us what they wanted to be when they grow up. Most of them said nurses, doctors, teachers, a few pilots and tour guides. We went to Principal Losieku Laizer's office where he told us there were well over 650 students with only 11 teachers with approximately 66 students in each class. Then we visited the 4th graders where they sang the Tanzanian national anthem to us. According to the picture, two of these students look too old to be in 4th grade!



Last but not least we experienced a memorable hot air balloon ride over the Serengeti at the crack of dawn searching for wildlife from above. After an amazing ride, we were served a picnic breakfast in the wild with a champagne toast. I hope you've enjoyed my stories and I invite you to come "Fly Away" with us on another adventure.

Africa was an incredible once in a lifetime journey and "Thank You" to Security Savings Bank for offering this experience to us. I'm working on travel for 2026 and 2027 so please watch the newspapers, our bank newsletters and website, and feel free to text me at [rlane@securitysavingsbank.com](mailto:rlane@securitysavingsbank.com) or call me at 515-351-2096 for more details.

