

**BEN'S MEMOIRS OF ELDORET, KENYA BIBLE CONFERENCE  
And Mission Trip  
Jim Durham and Dr. Ben Bates  
January 17 Through February 3, 2010**

On January 17, after weeks of planning and organizing for our trip to “ELDORET” Kenya, the worst possible “slum area” in the entire nation of Kenya, Jim Durham and I boarded a Delta flight out of Tampa, FL. at 11:30 AM to fly our first leg of flight to Boston, Massachusetts . From Boston we boarded another Delta flight which took us to Amsterdam, Holland; a nine hour flight. From Amsterdam we boarded a KLM flight to Nairobi, Kenya, another 8 or 9 hour flight, arriving at 8:30 PM.. There we were met by Paul Kimani and son, a former deacon of Frank and Snow Serta when they were missionaries in Mombasa, Kenya some years ago. Paul is a national from Kenya. He is in charge of the Navigator (a world wide Christian ministry) in that country, and a very friendly and beloved brother who had arranged our lodging in a Christian guest house which was very nice. There we spent our first night in Kenya and Paul picked us up the next morning and drove us to the air port where we caught our short flight to Eldoret, the place of our destination where we were warmly greeted and welcomed by the Bishop, Rev. Chriss Baraca, who is over (Bishop) of some 80 churches.

We were driven to the Barasa residence, which is in the heart of the slum area where we ministered and were shown to our tiny quarters consisting of two small beds, some nails in the concrete wall on which we could hang our clothes, and a rope strung the length of the room over my bed where other clothing could be hung. Our room looked like a second hand clothing shop with clothes hanging from all walls and over the beds and our suit cases stacked at the end of Jim’s bed which we used for substitute shelving to place items we needed but had no other place to put them. Over each bed were mosquito nets to protect you from mosquito bites. Jim faithfully used his but I never put mine down. Even at that I only heard one mosquito and the “sucker” bit me and I carried the whelp for several days but never heard another mosquito. After taking things from our suit cases the pastor’s wife whom I affectionately called “Mama” had our first meal after arriving in Kenya ready. I became thoroughly accustomed to their daily menu which was Rice, boiled potatoes, shredded Cabbage, some kind of greens, maybe boiled chicken, maybe little tidbits of fried meat, or baked fish (all of which was “season less” and was very bland. For breakfast in the beginning “Mama” prepared for Jim and me scrambled eggs which were badly over cooked to the point of being browned, and plain sliced bread and a substance like our margarine, but far from what we call margarine. The breakfast time drink was “what they called hot tea.” It consisted of 90% hot milk 10% water and maybe a tea bag that hardly stayed in long enough to add any color. And, oh yes, it was so terribly sweet.

I had taken along some coffee and I showed “Mama” how to put some coffee in three cups of boiling water and put in a certain amount of coffee and let it boil for a few moments and then strain it into my cup. My, I felt like I had died and gone to heaven when I had my first sip of good old American coffee.

It was about the second or third day I asked “Mama” if she could boil my eggs. From then on she boiled both mine and Jim’s eggs and peeled them for us. Jim said he rather liked his the way she first fixed them.

I really thought I could eat about anything and not feel squeamish about the matter. I had eaten “Goat guts and gravy and fried “eye balls” on my first trip to Africa and after that I felt I could eat anything. However with almost every bite I would have to wash it down with a drink out of my water bottle. We always had bottled water to drink. My eating problem succeeded in taking off ten pounds. But my dear friend Jim did exceptionally well. Jim has been on more mission trips than I have. His motto was: “If it has been boiled and cooked it can’t hurt you too much.” Although I could never quite convince my mind of that. The menu would not have been so bad if they had had bacon dripping and butter to season everything with. Next time I will talk bacon dripping and a couple of pounds of butter and I’ll do better.

After our meal and introduction to our place of abode for the next many days we were taken on a tour of the conference site. As we drove down through the area where the tent was located for the conference, we were shocked to see the poverty and slum area in which the old church was located before it was burned during the tribal uprising two years ago. The tent was erected where the church had stood. Maybe the tent seated 250,, maybe more. The crowds often grew to many standing outside because there was no room inside.

We arrived in Eldoret about ten on January 19. Our conference began on the 20<sup>th</sup>. Our first service was an eye opener. We walked to the tent for the first service and the hundreds of small businesses jammed together for as far as the eye could see, lined both sides of the dirt road. This is how people existed. Any day worker would do well to make 300 Shillings a day, which would be about \$3.20 a day. Most would make far less.

As hard as I try, I can’t seem to put what I saw with my eyes and experienced during my first few days; even the entire trip, into words you can possibly make good sense out of.

Jim and I both wished that every member of our church and our friends could experience what we beheld the two weeks we were in Kenya. We have met, hugged and shaken hands with some of the most destitute and hopeless people on earth. Every person who reads this will leave on your plate for the three meals you eat daily to feed any one or two of these starving people such as we touched and ministered to and the desperate thousands we saw. To say it was heart breaking is an understatement. I

**will never forget and you couldn't either if you could but follow our two week journey. I wake up every morning thanking God I live in America.**

**In your home you have a clean sanitary bath room with toilet facilities you take for granted. Most of you were born into these conveniences. You never think about there being literally millions and millions who don't have a nice sanitary bath room where you can shower and perform all the other performances of daily routine. The facilities we were introduced to had no shower and hot & cold water. No bath tub. No commode . Our shower was about 2 gallons of warm water in a large pan placed on a stool which "mama" prepared and then come and knock on our door and inform us that one or the other could now have a bath. Some time Jim would go first and some time I would be first. Have you ever tried to bathe in a wash pan with less than two gallons of warm water? Have you ever had to share your bath towel? Have you ever had to undress and hang your clothing on nails driven into the walls. The bath room size was approximately four feet wide and about eight feet long. At the extreme end there was no commode like you have in your home, but a diagonal shaped hole in the concrete. That substituted for what we know as a commode.**

**Jim and I both had come up the "share cropper" way of life. Those of you who have read my book will recall that some of these situation were not totally new to me. I came into the world knowing nothing of modern conveniences. We had a path and an out house and a Sears & Roebuck catalogue nailed to the wall. We had a "Chamber maid " for night conveniences. But all that eventually changed. But for the people we ministered to, they will live and die in the same routine of life that their ancestors passed on to them and will never experience what most of us know, and what they would call luxury.**

**In the very place where our "Pastor's Bible Conference" was conducted; the big tent, was a thriving church house that was burned to the ground. One church was burned with forty people in the building. In this area and for miles around Eldoret; even to Nairobi, one hundred eighty miles away, and many other places, there were more than 10,000 souls beheaded. The churches over which the Bishop is in charge, lost hundreds of members. Only the Bishop (Rev. Chriss Barasa) escaped by the skin of his teeth because he darted out a back door and narrowly escaped with his life.**

**Eldoret, the city, is about seven miles from where we conducted our Bible Conference. We made our first trip into the city two or three days after arriving. It is said that the city of Eldoret claims a population of 450,000. When you see the throng of people scurrying everywhere you don't doubt it for a minute. It is a dirty city with open sewage visible and running by the sidewalks . The smell is memorable. They have businesses of every imaginable kind. The streets are crowded. I had an**

**experience of shopping for “Mama” who had requested that I please buy her a ten pound bag of rice, some sugar, and some cooking oil.**

**Upon arriving I gave “Mama” \$100.00” to help with our food. Later in the week she knocked on my door one day and asked if I could please give her some more money that food was running out. There were always people coming in at meal time for a meal. Jim had sent a large amount of money before we left America to feed the pastors whom we were told would be over 200. However, there was NOT 200 or close to that number of pastors for the conference. However they fed everyone and anyone who showed up at the church during the first week. Some of those people had not had a complete meal in no telling when.**

**Jim and I had one big surprise in that our laundry was done every day. It was neatly folded and put on our beds.**

**Someone asked me upon my return if there is to my knowledge any place in America where there are slums to compare to what we saw during our stay in Africa. To the best of my knowledge and I might be wrong, but never in my entire life have I seen the degree of squalor and depravity I witnessed during my two weeks in Kenya.**

**Our second week was spent traveling in a beat-up fourteen passenger van. There were ten or more people crammed into that van; even up to fourteen at times, plus two large PA speakers, sound equipment, a generator to provide our electricity, and a driver who knew one speed and that was too fast! There were chug holes in the blacktop that were larger than automobile tires and some twelve inches deep. At very high speeds we traveled many miles as the driver would zigzag to miss the holes while I was praying like my life depended on it and believe me it did. I once asked Jim if he was ever afraid back in the rear part of the van and he said NO, I couldn’t see anything for people and all the PA equipment. Well, I could see it all from the front seat and every mile of it was life threatening .**

**Our second week journey took us to five different communities and towns to minister in various churches and even an open air meeting. This was another experience Jim and I will never forget. Jim faithfully taught pastors and those in attendance the basic principals of starting a small business whereby they may supplement their meager or no salary at all. Thank the Lord the pastor has let us know that some of the pastors and others attending the meetings of the first week and even the second week have taken Jim’s words of wisdom and have begun a small business of some kind to help sustain them with food and clothing. The only salary most of the pastors receive is 10% of the offerings received in their churches. Jim and I witnessed a number of offerings received as one by one members walked up to the offering container and dropped in their coins. Never did we see anyone drop in folding money which begins with**

**a 50 Shilling bill which is equal to our \$.65 cents. I was told that an average annual income for average employees is equal to about \$400.00 annually, which would be 30,350.00 Shillings. A husband with a family of four in America not making that much weekly would be below the poverty level.**

**Our evenings were spend in the homes of different pastors during the second week. The houses were very small, having no more than four rooms and most of them three rooms. Cooking would be done in an attached outside room and the food brought to the table. Cooking is done over tiny coal or oil burning, one container stoves. In Mama's kitchen she had three tiny one burner stoves, They were fired with coal, wood chips and one was fired by kerosene and the smoke and oil fumes filled the house as they were fired up.**

**Those doing to cooking sit on the floor or on a six inch high stool as they do the cooking and prepare the food for cooking. It is not the sort of setting that encourages a coming appetite once you know how it is prepared and what goes into the making of the meals. But I suppose after awhile one could become accustom to that way of life.**

**Once upon a time while I was finishing up my schooling I had a driving desire to become a missionary to Africa. I even put out my request but when they reviewed my past health records and learned that I had contracted TB while in the U.S Navy in 1944 I was rejected.**

**I then sent all my flight training records to John Brown University in Siloam Springs, AR. Where there was one of the top missionary aviation training schools in America for missionary bush pilots to be trained and the unbelievable happened...the building containing my records burned and I didn't have copies. It was then that I asked: "Lord, just what is it you want me to do?" The Lord said; "preach!" and for the next *sixty years I have been preaching His word.*"**

**Somewhere along the journey Jim asked me: "Ben do you thing if the Lord had opened the door sixty years ago to become a missionary to Africa you could have survived? Of course my answer was: "Jim at that time I was only twenty six years old and strong and healthy and it hadn't been all that many years since the time I had grown up in deep poverty in far out rural Arkansas and my family had been dirt poor and recipients of government commodities and we ate lots of wild game and what mother could can from a garden. Winters were very cold and long and the wind blew through the rickety thin walls of the shacks we lived in. I still had the vivid memory of those times and feel that had God opened the door, He would have given the grace to make it.**

**My trip to Rhodesia, Nigeria, and South Africa, in 1967 was altogether different in that I was under the care of five Southern Baptist missionary families. Their homes were comfortable. The food for the most part**

except when we were in the deep bush country where we ate with the tribal people, was like eating in America. At least you knew what you were eating. And you knew it was properly prepared and appetizing. But it was a different story when you had your meals in a grass hut with a tribal chief as his wife served your meal. It was always a “guess what” kind of meal. I recall that the missionary who invited me to Africa and was my host for the three weeks, always told me: Ben, don’t flinch or refuse any food that is set before you. Don’t even ask. Just take what is put on your plate and eat it. Those people eat it and they aren’t dead or sick, so eat it and don’t worry. Well, I did but with much trepidation and question. The one tribal dinner I was invited to after we had ministered to about 200 of the tribal people is one I still can’t get out of my mind. It all took place in a grass hut where the chief lived. Bob warned me in English as we approached the table not to show any act of refusing what they served

For lunch. He said you are considered to be a very honored guest and they have prepared their very best dishes for you. They hold me as one of them because I speak their language. Well, here it comes in about four separate bowls. My intuition was killing me. The wife of the Chief served me first, then she served Bob, my missionary host and then the Chief. Their custom is that she cannot eat with the men and if they eat it all, she will not have any food. Here I am with curiosity killing me and I can’t ask. Bob prayed the blessing and the custom was that I would begin eating and they would follow. I shut one eye and started forking up a gravy like meaty substance that was rather stringy, but I got the first bit on my fork and put it in my mouth and began to chew. I went for something else on my plate and managed to get it down and all the time Bob was eating like he was at an “Out Back.” The custom was that not too much talking went on at meal time. You were there to eat and not talk. I literally cleaned my plate because Bob had told me to leave any thing on my plate would indicate that I did not like the meal and they would be hurt and offended.

When I got out and away from the Chief I couldn’t wait to ask Bob what in the world was that food in a gravy like sauce? He smiled and told me that was the “Triple G Diet.” I asked what that meant and he told me that was “Goat guts and gravy.” I arrived at the missionary home we were staying in that night and the wife had cooked a luscious meal and when I sat down at the table I was still in the grass hut of the Tribal Chief and had a hard time over coming the lunch I had eaten.

You can praise our heavenly Father and our IMB and people who liberally give to mission (LOTTIE MOON) through the Christmas offering. If you could only comprehend just one time how very desperate the need is to give sacrificially through the LOTTIE MOON Christmas offering you would make that gift equal or more than you spend on ALL other Christmas gifts. We, some years ago stopped giving Christmas gifts to friends and family. Not because we are selfish. Not because they aren’t precious to us. Not because they aren’t deserving of gifts. But because of

**the dire need for us to give liberally and sacrificially to the cause of FOREIGN MISSIONS through Lottie Moon, and other mission causes where the need is greater than some unnecessary gift we might put under the Christmas tree for someone who probably doesn't really need what we have given and soon it will be forgotten. That's my opinion and I know every one has his own opinion. But my desire for this coming Lottie Moon season is to serve as Chairman of the Christmas offering and try to help every person I can to be liberal in making a gift to the greatest causes on the southern Baptist calendar for the entire year.**

**Excuse the side trip but the information seemed to fit in and now I am back in Africa.**

**It is amusing how things seem to happen. There was one man, a pastor from one of the far away places who seemed to appoint himself as my caretaker. He was at my side almost ever move I made. He always opened the car door for me and saw to it that I was safe and taken care of at all times when we were on the go to and from meetings. He even came back from our week long trip and stayed in the home and slept on the couch in the Bishops home all the time we were there. He was at my side until the end.**

**There were two young men, Sammy and Nicholas, who were my second care takers who were carrying my video camera, my other camera or whatever I needed some one to look after the entire time I was there. I didn't request any special care or treatment. They traveled with us everywhere and were part of the singers and dancers. Yes, dancers. The African can't hear music without moving his body and his feet. It is as much a part of them as breathing. They came to see us the night before we left and said goodbye.**

**One person who stole my heart beside my friend Jack whose watchful eye seemed always to be on me when we were at the meetings or going to town and his name was Alfred. He was our main interpreter for the Bible Conference. I had taken one of my favorite suits that I had outgrown to give to someone. Alfred was somewhere near my size, whereas most Kenyans are very slender and rather small. I ask the pastor to give him the suit. And it was two days later he walked up to me with a big smile and pearly white teeth showing and posed before me with happiness flowing from his countenance as he said: "Dr. Ben, how do I look?" I was shocked because I knew he would surely have to have alteration done on the suit. He said I took it to a seamstress who took the trousers up both in length and the waist, The coat was a little large on him but that is the way most men wear their coats. He looked very nice and my heart went out to him for as I rejoiced that God had put it into my heart to take the suit as well as many other clothing articles and shoes to give to those in great need. My dear friend, Jim, is one of the most kind and liberal men I have ever known. He has a heart that knows no end in**

**giving. He took an entire suitcase of gifts for children, new clothing for the Bishop and Mama and the girls....plus much other new clothing and many school supplies to give away. Fact of the matter he left his other suit case empty in Africa. I have never known a more mission minded and a more committed and selfless Christian gentleman in my entire life. Another thing Jim respected my seniority in years and was very watchful and caring throughout the journey. He did all the lifting and putting my 44 pound carry on into the luggage bins and taking it down for me. Once we were separated and I had to ask a flight attendant (with explanation that I had an extremely bad left shoulder) if she could get someone to store my bag. She took hold of the bag like it was a ten pound sack of rice and put it in the overhead bin. Such dependence did often make me feel awkward and sensitive since I looked healthy and able.**

**Before I left for the mission trip Frank Serda, former member of our church and Snow, his wife, told me that my gray hair would get me an abundance of honor and respect. I didn't pay any attention to what he said until I got to Africa. Frank and Snow were Southern Baptist missionaries to Mombasa, Kenya before retiring. But when we arrived in Kenya I began to see what Frank meant. The Bishop informed me I would ride in the front with the driver when we were going in the car. In the home of the Bishop as we took our places on the couch for our meals, Mama would serve me and then Jim and then any others around the table. After filling our plates Mama would always ask God's blessing on the food. I never heard the Bishop pray in the home. Not only does she ask God grace on the food, she does all the work. I never saw the Bishop turn his head to do one house chores. She was a very hard working lady and so very kind and accommodating. Some of the pastors where we would travel, because of my years and white hair would call me "Papa." But don't any of you get any ideas. Hear me?**

**I did have one an "upper respiratory" problem due to so much dust that occurred when they would dance and move their feet on the dirt floor of the tent. It was pretty bad and because I have an allergy to dust, I began to come down with what I thought would be a full blown case of laryngitis and bronchitis. I even made a trip while we were in the city to a doctor. Really he was a pharmacist. He was in his office dressed in his white coat and his stethoscope around his neck and looked very doctor like. He examined my throat, my sinuses, my chest and took my blood pressure and temperature...just about all an American doctor would do and sent me upstairs to the pharmacy to get antibiotics. Possibly I caught it at the right time because I never slowed down in teaching and preaching. Isn't God good? And I attribute it to all the many prayers of my precious friends here and elsewhere who were praying for Jim and me. Thank you dear people.**

**You will find this interesting. In one of the places we stayed during our second week of travel, we arrive after dark at Jack's home. There was**

never any electricity in any of the churches where we traveled. That was the reason for taking a gasoline generator in the van with us, which was a great hazard if we had had a wreck and a fire started. So when we arrived at these little dwellings the only light was “one lamp” or a lantern. You could hardly see the person across the room. All we had that night was some tea and the next thing on the schedule was go to bed. I was hungry but thinking of what might be for dinner, I sucked it up and perished the thought. There was no light in the room I was assigned to sleep in. Not even a window. I had to use my flashlight to open my big suit case and find my PJs and anything else needed for the night and morning such as shaving stuff and tooth brush. That was one of the very hardest nights and part of the travel. Some one had given me a sack of avocados and that is what they served for breakfast along with tea.

Before we retired I ask Jack where the toilet was and he took me by the hand as though I was a small child and led me, with a flash light, far away from the house (and when I got there I knew why it was far away from the house) to the out house. That was one unforgettable experience. That’s all I will say about that experience.

Arriving at another of our places to minister was a very small church building probably about fifty feet long and forty feet wide and the attendance was about thirty people including children. But when it came time for Jim and me to do our part we spoke to them as if there were a thousand people present. I can never forget what Jesus said: “Where there are two or three people present, there I will be in their midst.” It has been my practice through all my ministry to preach to a few or to a full house the very same way.

Those who attend the services are humble and kind and hang on to every word that is spoken. Every person wants to shake your hand and touch you. You can feel their appreciation and love.

So many times my eyes would fill with tears as I looked over those congregations, large and small and my heart would feel their needs and their hunger and their desperate situations. It bothers me that they will never know anything better. They will live and die young because of the loathsome conditions in the which they were born and trapped. The little children attend school in buildings that are in worse shape than the most terrible buildings you can possibly conjure up in your minds. You can see through the large spaces in the board walls of some of the schools. The floors are mostly dirt. The walls of some of the school are made of mud. They sit on little benches, There are many children in the same room with one teacher to teach them all. On the school yard as they assembled to say goodbye to us there was a great mass of them and when they were given the word to dismiss I thought they would overcome us with their eagerness to touch and shake our hands. They had never seen a (MUZUNGU) in their entire life. That word means “*white man*”.

**We are on our way to another ministry to a people who are hungry to hear more about God and when we arrive we will be warmly greeted and they will sing and go through all of their African body movements as they sway and move their feet in a sort of dance, even the smallest of children will enter into the movements. It is born in them.**

**I was told by some of the pastors that when one genuinely gives his life to Christ, that person is almost certain to grow in the Lord and walk with Jesus his or her whole life. We were told that 90% of all of Kenya's population believes in the Christian faith. When the word is being given the audience listens with rapt attention. In every service we saw God at work in a wonderful and mighty way. In one service during the Bible conference in Eldoret under the tent I had preached and gave the invitation for people to come to Christ. Near the close of the altar call there was a very strange thing happened. A young (maybe 17 years old) girl came with awful disturbance and shaking all over and flailing her arms and making an awful disturbance. The pastor took hold of her and suddenly she fell upon the ground and made the most unintelligible sounds one ever heard and lay upon the ground shaking and making awful noises. The pastor got down by her side and others helped hold her as he prayed for God to overcome the demons who were in her. This went on for several minutes until finally the girl stopped shaking and foaming at the mouth and began to be calm and they helped her to her feet and she looked peaceful and when asked by the pastor if she had overcome the Devil by the power of the Holy Spirit and with a smile on her face she acknowledged the Savior as her Lord and there was a very loud shout and praise over the tent. This was my first time to witness something of this nature and leave the scene believing it was truly a work of God overcoming the work of Satan through the Holy Spirit.**

**There is no telling how many miles we traveled during the two weeks. The worst part about the travel was that there really was not any of the country side or places we went that were spectacular in beauty or much to be remembered for their beauty. But we didn't make a 24,000 mile journey to see the beautiful sights of Kenya, we truly went to minister and bring as many people to Jesus as we possibly could and leave a solid testimony there as we departed. We would have had to cut some of our vital ministry in order to go see the beauty and sites of Kenya, such as the Game Reserve and other noted places. Our one main goal was to minister to as many people as possible the word of God and pray that our Lord would use us to His glory as we made this journey.**

**As our journey began to come towards the end and we finished our second week traveling from town and community to community and sleeping in different homes and living out of our suitcases we both had begun to feel the wear and tear on our bodies and minds. We had been through some of the most difficult and never yet experienced events**

neither of us were accustomed to. After all, we were two Arkansas country boys whose boyhood lives and experiences were almost alike. I had begun to dream of the comforts of home and my bed and being able to sit down to three squares daily, tugging at me. I don't think Jim was too far behind me in those feelings. I wanted a good long hot shower and a soft roomy bed where I could stretch my body all the way out instead of putting my feet upon the foot board of the bed .

Our last couple of days in Eldoret were spent in resting for the long journey home on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of February, 2010. We did some shopping for some souvenirs one of the days. Our suitcases were already past weight limit and we had to look only for small souvenirs.

Finally Wednesday February 3<sup>rd</sup>. came and now that it was finally time to bring our memorable stay in Kenya, with all its great and wonderful memories to a close, we packed suitcases while we looked carefully to see if we were leaving anything. However, that wasn't difficult because our room was not more than 10 X 10, with two beds and a tiny aisle and space at the end of the beds to stack suitcases which we converted to tables to put our stuff on. We were packed and ready to begin our long journey before 10:00 o'clock on Wednesday and all there was left to do was sit and wait for 3:00 o'clock, the designated time for us to leave for the International Eldoret air port only a few miles away. There we had farewell to our farewell party consisting of Pastor Chriss (the Bishop) and his wife, the driver and their daughter, Angel and a couple of the boys who traveled with us. After they left Jim and I enjoyed a hot coke with ( no ice) for drinks. You learn to make believe or drink your bottled water which is also room temperature

Finally time came for that dreaded security check and on to the waiting room for your flight. The flight was short; about forty minutes to Nairobi. There we went through the hassle of security and a very long walk and finally to a long wait for our nine hour flight to Amsterdam, Holland. There we waited five hours for our next 9 hour flight to Detroit...back to the good ole USA! That wait was very boring and tiresome because it was late at night. Instead of being 8 hours the USA, we were only 7 hours.

After going through another trying security check and passing the time we were boarding our Delta flight to the USA. By this time I was so tired and sleepy and wanting my own bed I hardly knew my name. However on this flight something good happened! As we were about to be served our meal I could hear a much welcomed southern talking flight attendants coming up from behind me serving meals. As she stood at my side I looked up at her and said: Honey, where ya'll from?" She smiled big and said "I'm from Hattiesburg Miss." If I hadn't been buckled in my seat I'd have gotten up and hugged her. I told her we had been in the slums of Kenya for two weeks and I was about to starve for some good

food. I asked her without shame....”If by chance I am still hungry after my first serving, could I please have seconds?” She gave me that southern smile and hospitality and said: Honey, you can have thirds if you aren’t full.” Wow! For the next nine hours (for we had two meals on that flight) I mean we are well and the food was extra good.

That was a very welcomed sound when our pilot announced our approach into Detroit. After a two hour or so wait we boarded our final flight to Tampa. It seemed that we would never get there. When the wheels of that plane touched the ground I had tears in my eyes....tears of joy that God had kept Jim and me through about 240000 miles and through more than two weeks of ministry that neither one will ever forget.

I could not have made this wonderful mission journey had it not been for Jim’s surprising telephone call one evening to my home. His words were: “Ben, this is Jim. I know Bettie and Dodie may not appreciate me making this call but I have a question to ask you. I have been invited to come to Africa and I need you to join me to take care of the preaching .” I believe my first words were: “Jim, without asking Bettie and Dodie, I will give you my word right now. . .I will GO!”

Well, Bettie and Dodie , naturally were pleased and happy for me to have this great honor. I had been praying for this to happen again for more than *forty two years*. I couldn’t believe my ears. I was beside myself with joy and I thought the time would never come for us to depart.

I would be ungrateful and selfish not to mention the many wonderful friends at FBC who made the journey possible. Jim said for me not to be concerned about the cost that he would see to that. He did and his one announcement to the people at FBC was sufficient to bring in enough cash to purchase the fare and other necessities for me to have the second most memorable mission trip of my life. I know who those people are who made it possible and I have personally written my deep gratitude of thanks to each of them. You will never know the very real part you had in African missions. God bless you every one. It would still be a dream had God not laid it on the hearts of you who made it all possible. I love you and thank you from the bottom of my heart.

Pictures and stories will be told to the church on March 14 , But the whole story can never be told this side of eternity!

Dr. Ben