

## November 25 The Kawangware Market

The famous slum in Nairobi of over one million people is Kibera. It is near us and has a large African market. I haven't been there yet. However, there is another poor area with a market called Kawangware where the DOVE church is that we've been attending. It is a little further away from me, but closer to Janene & Julianne Waldrop so it's the one they usually shop at on Tuesdays and Fridays. So this past Tuesday I went with them. What an experience!

I walked the half of a mile from our apartment to theirs before we walked on further down the street and up a hill to where we would catch a bus to the Kawangware Market. I was glad that Janene & Julianne are old hands at this having been here from Tennessee since August.

The market stretched for as far as the eye could see. The narrow walking path was fenced in on both sides by small individual "shops". A shop could be an actual storefront into which you could walk, but that was very rare. Second runner-ups for niceness were wooden shanties with some sort of sides and possibly a semi-roof at the back with simple wooden shelves on which the wares were displayed. Others were like one-person kiosks from which a small amount of items were sold. Some consisted of a wooden table or some other object on which were placed the things that were for sale. A few stalls that did not have a roof, were shaded by a tarp or an occasional umbrella.

Although bargaining for a good price was expected, I still like the items that had a hand-made cardboard sign stating the price so I knew I wasn't getting a "special" price as a white foreigner that was double what the Kenyans were paying. Many hawkers greeted us in English seeking to draw us to their own display of goods. Unfortunately, many items of interest were manned by persons not speaking English. Not only could I not find out the price, but I often could not identify the spice or vegetable. However, the name in English is not the Swahili name so I had to walk away still not knowing what it was.

It was hard for me to stay up with the girls when I was in such sensory over-load. I wanted to look at everything, but needed to watch where I was walking due to the irregular dirt path, complete with dry ruts, rocks, stretches of mud, small streams, and what appeared to be raw sewage. I also had to keep my bags and wallet clutched up close through the jostling crowds. The width of the walkway, especially among the vegetable stands, was so narrow that when someone tried to pass me as I stopped to buy carrots, that I lost my balance partially falling onto the carrots. I also had to dodge honking bicycles, human-pulled wooden wagons, and even a car that tried to get through the crowds.

What was for sale? Absolutely everything! Several people sold hot sausages and grilled corn on the cob is another favorite. Kitchenware, cloth material, tons of clothes & shoes (new or used), bottles of honey swarming with bees, hardware, hair accessories, electronics, wooden utensils, used books, jewelry, sheets, towels, rugs,

curtains, furniture, baskets, make-up, and toys were frequent favorites. I noted such services as embroidery stitching, dress-making (Janene ordered a custom-made African dress that would be ready in two days!), appliance repairs & sales, as well as custom curtains. There was even a tiny dirty shack barely wide enough for a very narrow door with a sign above for "Hotel"!

And then there was the food of every color, variety, and size of vegetables and fruits which had been my excuse for going along. Besides buying a pair of tennis shoes, I went kinda crazy over the extremely cheap & fresh assortment purchasing a lot of the carrots, green beans, cabbage, spinach, potatoes, broccoli, cauliflower, sweet potatoes, and pineapple. I could not have carried it all home if Julianne hadn't helped carry some of my bags and if later David hadn't driven me home from their place.

What did I learn? First, forget taking plastic bags. I thought my hands would break so next time I'll take a bag with me such as canvas with real handles. Secondly, I'll return to the market on rare occasions when I need a lot such as before Christmas. Thirdly, I won't go often since it's too much work, too tiring, and takes too long on a weekly or twice a week basis...requiring several hours from start to finish! Or maybe I'll try a quicker trip to Kibera with Theresa or Faustin since it's much closer. Finally, I've decided that Les can't live in Africa and not share this experience.