

Kristin Rients' Sylvia's Children Experience

Through a work friend, I was introduced to Sylvia Allen and subsequently given the life-changing opportunity this past March (due to my healthcare background) to accompany her and a medical team to the medical clinic, primary school and orphanage she founded and has since worked tirelessly to fund and expand in Mbiriizi, Uganda, Africa.

However please do not let the phrase "life-changing" get lost in the surrounding words and paragraph, because the experience and the opportunities that have seemingly fallen into place since my taking this journey have been, for me, nothing short of exactly that - simply and happily "life changing".

I simply said "Yes," and Sylvia took care of the rest. With the itinerary meticulously planned, I packed a bag, got on a plane and my life changed forever. Upon landing, I was greeted by the big smile of our driver - who would also be our guide and trusted companion for the duration of the trip, and someone who I am happy to say has become a person I now hold very close to my heart and will keep in touch with always. We traveled in the comfort of our safari truck to and from the beautiful hotels to the clinic and orphanage, where each day we were greeted by smiling, laughing children who were as happy to see us as we were them.

Through our interactions with them while both working in the clinic and playing with them in the courtyards, we shared smiles, laughter and happiness - and took lots and lots of pictures! Both the clinic and school staff were happy to receive our help and the supplies we brought, and I felt our being there really made a difference to them, to the surrounding community and to the future success of their collective mission.

By the last day, which marked the end of my time with them, I was overwhelmed with tears and gratitude so great that I could barely speak - taken by the surprise at *my* having been adopted by *them* as their "Nanteza Kristin" (which from what I understand means "Aunt" in their culture). I was ceremoniously and lovingly given this tribal name, so many hugs and kisses that I will treasure forever, and the gift of purpose that cannot ever truly be properly expressed in mere words.

I can still hear their little voices saying my name as we said goodbye, and it brings tears to my eyes each and every time I think back on those wonderful moments. From there Sylvia resolved to show us the heart of Africa: expansive landscapes that have remained untouched for thousands of years, and the beautiful animals that inhabit their vast horizons. In her years of experience in facilitating this trip, Sylvia has created a balanced, truly wonderful and eye-opening experience that is just waiting and available to all wishing to make a difference in the world, and in themselves, as well. And the shift in focus which inevitably occurs from the vastness of the experience will undoubtedly transform the lives and thinking of anyone who participates from a perspective of seeing lack in their lives to seeing abundance in all things. This trip is in and of itself **life-changing**.

So often in our lives we search the horizon for opportunities to serve, and often even feel overwhelmed that there is so much to do we don't really know where to start. We, unconsciously even maybe, believe that giving of ourselves or our time is something that might be difficult, or that the rewarding feeling we are searching for is not really something that is attainable for us. But in this it is easy, and it is right here. My decision to take the trip was one of the best decisions I have ever made, one of the best experiences I have ever had, and I simply cannot wait until the day I can return to the all-embracing hands and shinningly hopeful faces that have captured my heart.

Upon my return, I decided to put action behind my newfound faith and make dedicated service to others my life's work and mission by volunteering, and ultimately joining Sylvia in her dream of replicating her successes in Mbirizi and sharing them with other African villages and people. And I use the courage, strength and faith I gained in both myself and in life itself to teach my young son each and every day that he is strong enough, and has been given enough to always, always reach out to help those in need. As he has volunteered his time already, I hope that this experience will serve him in his life and life's work as well as he grows older and sets out into the world to bring positive changes, future learning transformations, and help to those who need someone, anyone to care.

My advice to anyone who is searching, really open to service and helping those in need: if you are looking for your life purpose, or even to spend your time in a more rewarding way, please reach out to this wonderful woman - who truly is the facilitator of purposeful service, self- discovery, and life change.

As every moment is an opportunity to serve, this one is easy and it is here, always waiting - for you. It is an experience in the pure joy that comes from helping someone who has been neglected and is in pain to simply feel better, and it is an experience in seeing a big smile emerge on the face of a small child who once was scared, but now because of you, feels cared for and loved.

My advice to anyone who is even considering taking a step in faith to help another is to just do it. Let go of your fear and instead exercise your faith and your strength. Say "Yes," and watch the magic happen in your thinking, in your experiences, in your life, and in the lives of those you know and love. Your circle of family will be forever expanded, the world will be within your reach, and your dreams will begin to come to light.

Thank you for taking the time to focus on this wonderful mission, Sylvia's Children, and hopefully my words will help to inspire others to take the steps in faith they need to in order to join in the task of helping those in need - in this case, children just like yours and mine who need someone, anyone to show them they are safe, cared for and loved.

Kristin Rients