



HAVE YOU EVER
HEARD THE
STARFISH STORY?

EAST AFRICA 2014 REPORT

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TO READ THE ORIGINAL STARFISH STORY GO TO:

[HTTPS://WWW.GOODREADS.COM/AUTHOR/QUOTES/56782.LOREN_EISELEY](https://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/56782.Loren_Eiseley)



HAVE YOU EVER HEARD THE STARFISH STORY?*

THE GIST OF IT IS, ONE DAY A YOUNG MAN WAS SEEN AMIDST A BEACH FULL OF HELPLESS STARFISH THAT HAD WASHED ASHORE. ONE AT A TIME HE WOULD STOOP DOWN, PICK ONE UP AND HURL IT BACK INTO THE OCEAN.

SOMEONE WATCHING THE MAN CHALLENGED HIM TO STOP WASTING HIS TIME, AS IT WOULD BE IMPOSSIBLE TO SAVE ALL THESE STARFISH.

AS THE ONLOOKER HARPED, THE YOUNG MAN BENT DOWN, GRABBED ANOTHER ONE AND FLUNG IT OUT INTO THE WATER. HE THEN LOOKED AT HIS CHALLENGER AND REPLIED, "WELL, IT MADE A DIFFERENCE TO THAT ONE."

THIS IS HOW WE FELT ENTERING A SEA OF BROKEN HUMANITY IN EAST AFRICA.

AS WE VENTURED IN AND SAW THE OVERWHELMING NEEDS WITH OUR OWN EYES, THERE WERE MOMENTS WE FELT LIKE, "WHAT CAN WE REALLY DO? HOW CAN MY FEEBLE EFFORTS MAKE ANY DIFFERENCE?" BUT WE THEN REALIZED IF WE CAN HELP EVEN JUST ONE, IT WILL MAKE ALL THE DIFFERENCE IN THAT PERSON'S LIFE.

BETTER TO DO SOMETHING THAN NOTHING.

IN THE NEXT FEW PAGES, YOU WILL READ A DETAILED BLOG AND PHOTOS OF OUR RECENT LIFE-ALTERING JOURNEY TO EAST AFRICA WITH OUR FRIENDS PAT & SUSAN BRADLEY, WORKING THROUGH THEIR ORGANIZATION CRISIS AID INTERNATIONAL, MAKING A DIFFERENCE IN MANY LIVES THERE.

WE ARE VERY AWARE HOW VALUABLE YOUR TIME IS, YET WE ALSO KNOW HOW VALUABLE THIS INFORMATION IS. PLEASE TAKE A FEW MOMENTS TODAY TO OPEN YOUR HEART AND READ HOW PEOPLE ARE BEING HELPED, AND THE DIFFERENCE YOU CAN MAKE.

GOD BLESS YOU AND REMEMBER THE STARFISH,







OUR STARFISH STORY

TO LOVE IT TO CARE.
TO CARE IS TO ACT.
TO ACT IS GODLY.

DETAILED BLOG, EAST AFRICA, JUNE 2014

The life-changing experience you're about to read was written on the plane ride home following a four-week ministry journey which began in Scotland & England and finished in East Africa. We will do our best to try and share our hearts in such a way that you can actually grasp the weight of this incredible journey.

We flew from London to East Africa, and upon landing were met by our dear friends Pat & Susan Bradley who have been working in the country for 10 years through their organization Crisis Aid International.

We have been to third-world countries many times before, however the conditions in this East-African nation are far worse than anything we have ever personally witnessed.



The Rescued Girls

We started in the capital city where Crisis Aid bases all their regional work. During the first and last weekends, we spent time loving on & sharing with girls rescued from the red-light district (RLD), who have or are in the process of leaving behind a life of prostitution, being born again and learning skills to assist them in making a better life for themselves – a life with hope & meaning instead of shame & despair.

Crisis Aid has so far opened four Safe Homes (individual houses they've purchased around town) for these girls to live in, helping them get on their feet. (They are currently in process of building a facility to house all the girls in one place.)

Presently there are close to 30 precious girls living in these homes, with over 300 who have previously graduated from the

program during the last seven years, now living productive lives.

Talk about precious, these girls are sponges for love. After having lived in a continual nightmare, they realize the beautiful gift they have been offered, and most are SO grateful, humble, happy and huggable! However some who come continue to struggle with the pull back to their old life – either they miss old friends who haven't come yet, or the drugs. There is a definite commitment to be made in leaving it behind, and that commitment doesn't come without great challenge & temptation.



MANY GIRLS FROM THE RLD HAVE CHILDREN WHO CAME WITH THEM TO THE SAFE HOMES WHEN THEY LEFT THAT LIFE BEHIND. (IN HER FORMER LIFE, THE MOTHER WOULD HIDE HER CHILD UNDERNEATH THE BED WHILE SHE "WORKED".) THESE CUTIES WON OUR AFFECTIONS AS WE LOVED ON THEIR SWEET MOMMAS.

In our times with the girls, we either sat around in a big circle outside in the yard and sang for them (wearing LOTS of bug repellent!), shared about God's grace & love during one of their chapel services, and on the last evening before our departure, we felt compelled to share with them about the pain we endured and still struggle with since losing our son. This transparency caused their hearts to open even more, as they

realized we could relate to some of the pain they have experienced. All of this was through an interpreter.

The girls loved us before, but sharing this part of our journey created a bridge of empathy and trust which helped to affirm them and impart strength to continue moving forward, despite their past and present challenges.

Even though there was a language barrier, there was no barrier with the love, hugs and kisses we shared together. It was beautiful to see many of them walking in a new level of love from and for the Lord.



The Orphanage Crisis Aid built just outside the city was a special treat to visit. The children are girls ranging from 5-16 years old, all whose parents died of AIDS. Each one has been given the gift of a loving, enriching environment without the threat of endangerment – trying to survive on their own or becoming caught up in sex trafficking.

The children were SO happy to have visitors, especially when Susan broke out the Costco-sized bag of candy she brought from the US! :-D What a huge blessing the orphanage is to these beautiful girls, giving them hope for a bright future where they may have had none.



AIDS ORPHAN GIRLS, LOVING THEIR CANDY AND THEIR NEW HOME. :)

The beginning and

ending of this journey was very encouraging and heartwarming, and unbeknownst to us, very needed to prepare us for the week ahead.



The Villages

We pulled together a few things (leaving our mountain of luggage in the hotel storage), jumped into a Land Cruiser with the Bradleys, our interpreter and a driver, and set out to see what is very hard to describe in words.

After several hours' drive through pot-hole-filled roads, we pulled into the first village seeing literally hundreds of mothers and children waiting to receive help.

It all seemed like a bad dream as we walked through a chaotic mass of broken humanity with unbearable needs. But nonetheless we walked with our friends and tried to help as best we could.



VILLAGERS WAITING TO BE SERVED AT ONE OF THE FEEDING SITES.

We had to hold back the tears as we worked knowing tears would not help in this situation, however love in the form of food, medicine, and prayer would. The need is insurmountable but you just do what you can.

Among MANY other projects, Crisis Aid distributes 50 tons of grain each month in villages where they learn of great need and starvation. As they prepare for the monthly distributions at several different sites, they send staff ahead of time into the villages, which are EXTREMELY remote and extremely poverty stricken, to find those in greatest need of aid, and to plan how much grain to deliver.

We are extremely thankful to God for "the troops on the ground," i.e. the local church workers who regularly assist Crisis Aid, bringing help to these poor precious ones.

Whenever the Bradleys are coming into the country, they always make sure to visit some of the feeding sites, which are several-hours' drive outside the city. Word gets out throughout the villages they are coming, and even more than the usual hundreds of families will come, some walking miles and some for days (walking miles to go anywhere is common in the villages).

Although the staff does their best preparing in advance to have enough food for all those registered in the program as well as assess the new worst cases, there are always extra families who show because, "Those white people who I heard care for us are coming."

The way they organize the distribution is like this: As the mothers and children come to the site (which is almost always on a local church's grounds), they are divided into groups by those who can't afford food, those whose children were at one time in the "red zone" (i.e. close to death by starvation), those who have been recently assessed and entered into the program, and finally those who appear very dire but have not yet been assessed – the ones who came because they heard we were coming that day.

Many of the children at the sites have been part of the feeding program for a while, and most are relatively stable now. They were fascinated by the white people (and Jill's long, soft,

blonde hair!). They crowded all around us, and when Charlie whipped out his iPhone to take photos of them then turned it around to show them, O MY GOODNESS! The children's laughter and excitement that erupted was unforgettable!



FUN TIMES AND FASCINATION
WITH THE VILLAGE KIDS :)

THE CHILDREN'S LAUGHTER AND EXCITEMENT
WAS UNFORGETTABLE!



As fun as that was, we then walked to the other side of the yard where the mothers with starving children were waiting to be assessed, and our hearts began to break into pieces.

These mothers are lined up in a "comfortable" area (on a curb or under a tree) to sit and wait until their baby/children can be assessed. The biceps are measured in centimeters (cm), using a special tape measure called a Muac. Anyone whose bicep is under 10 cm is severely mal-nourished, and anywhere near 10 cm is at risk. And of course there is the hair loss, swollen joints, water on the brain, and the very swollen bellies that are full of parasites – all attributed to malnutrition (not to mention the flies!!! OMG!!).

In some cases, the mothers are starving right along with the

children. Some will continue trying to breastfeed their little ones with collapsed breasts and basically nothing to offer. This taxes her mal-nourished body even more, as well as the child who receives no nutrition from the little bit she has, if any.

Susan actually came across one little toddler wandering in the crowd, lifted his shirt and saw a HUGE swollen belly. So we found his mother and began assessing the level of severity, immediately admitting them into the feeding program.

It's just mind boggling how many people are still dying of starvation today. And many of these children would die within weeks, and some sooner, if they didn't get help. But thankfully, like the young man and the starfish, HELP in the form of Crisis Aid is finding some of them and making a difference!

There are literally THOUSANDS of stories of individuals that were days from death by starvation, whose lives have been saved and renewed as a result of these feeding projects.







A happy family, saved by Love.

the other day, it was six months afterwards and he was smiling and happy. He is still not able to walk yet but his body is slowly healing after being ravaged so severely by malnutrition. We left there unable to speak, so thankful for God's grace and for Crisis Aid.

As we journeyed on, the needs continued to appear. We arrived at one tukul (a one-room, round, thatch-roofed home) and inside was a mother with her three children. The children were all assessed as severely mal-nourished, and in the process also noticed the sweet, young mother was almost skin & bones.



Common Tukul homes with false banana trees behind them. Only God knows the amount of suffering that goes on inside.

The feeding program for her village had already taken place for the month, but the great staff Crisis Aid has on the ground there has taken care to enter them into the program for next time. Until then, the Bradleys prayed for her and gave her

enough Birr (Ethiopian currency) to help purchase food (grain & oil) until the next month's distribution.

We entered the home of an older man with three young children (pictured on the following page). His tukul was even smaller and in worse condition than the one we had just been in. Inside he had a charcoal fire built on a very small open "grill" of sorts, cooking some grains he was given. It was very smoky inside, but the smoke did rise through holes in the grass roof, which, since we could see daylight looking up, would obviously also leak in the rain.

It broke our hearts even further to learn that his much-younger wife had very recently been killed in an accident while cutting "False" Banana* leaves around their tukul.

They have a saying in the villages that if a father dies, you lose one person. But if a mother dies, it's almost like losing everything and creates a huge hardship. In general, women run the household while the men try to find day labor to make a buck – literally – about a dollar a day – and that's on a REALLY good day! It was a very heart-breaking situation.

We talked through double interpretation, and Crisis Aid is now taking this small family under their care with hopes to build them a new home (\$1,500-\$2,000 using local laborers), enter them into the food distribution program and help find care for the children so the father can work. We prayed with him, gave him what Birr we had on us to try and help in the meantime. He was so grateful to not be forgotten and have hope to survive.

Each time we drove away from one of these situations, we all sat silently in the car during the slow and bumpy ride to the next stop. Our hearts were swollen into our throats – so broken for the hurting, yet so thankful for another starving family found before it was too late.

* The "False Banana" looks almost exactly like a banana tree, and is in abundance in these regions – they're everywhere (along with coffee trees)! They produce no fruit, and their un-edible leaves are used for many things (umbrellas, thatched roofs, wrapping and bundling items, etc.). The roots, which are very large, can be prepared in several different ways and are a staple food for MANY families. HOWEVER, there is absolutely NO nutritional value in False Banana – it simply fills the stomach. In the meantime, people are starving to death even though their stomachs are "full".



Love is: Surrounding this grieving



ing family with aid and support.

The need is SO intense. However the beauty is, like the starfish story, some people are being helped.

We learned there are almost 3,000 scriptures in our Holy Bible that speak about the poor & injustice. Each of us simply must do what we can.



Speed School

Another incredible project Crisis Aid has going is Speed School, an accelerated learning program which is having phenomenal results. They find villages with no schools and enroll 9-to-12 year olds who have never been taught. In one year the children go from Kindergarten to a 4th grade level of education. We got to visit one of these schools, and it is nothing short of amazing to see how quickly they are learning! They even sang and read to us in English! :) [INSERT PHOTO 10]



Dr. Henok with children from one of the Speed Schools.

Presently there are over 3,000 children enrolled in Speed School!

Also because of searching for eligible children to enroll, they are finding even more impoverished, starving families who they can help. It's a win-win for the village and the lives of many forgotten people.

Educating the children will change the landscape of the nation. But what's so sad is, there are literally thousands of children with no school to attend. When they open a Speed School in a new village, they can only take 25 children at a time. It costs \$2,500 to sponsor an entire Speed School for one year, and they're hoping for many more sponsors, making it possible to open many more schools!



The Party

When we returned to the city after four days in the villages, a dream came true which we've carried in our hearts the last several years. Crisis Aid put on a mid-day outreach "Party" in the RLD where they have worked for 10 years, and invited the young women "working" there to come for a concert and a free hot lunch. These parties are put on every time the Bradleys come into the country, but this is the first time they've had music.

Over 500 girls attended the party (had there been more space, even more would've been able to come in!). They were SO beautiful. SO colorful. SO sweet. SO hungry for love and acceptance! Although most could not speak English, they understood some and loved our music, gulping down the love of God that we poured out.



Party time in the RLD – sharing love, life and lunch!

So many of the women caught up in trafficking are miserable beyond words, yet feel they have no options but to continue working in this way.

Through our dear interpreter in between songs, we briefly shared from Romans 8 about God's grace, and how **NOTHING** could separate them from His love – not the future, **NOR THE PAST**. They **ERUPTED** into cheers upon hearing this wonderful news, tightly grasping the words of hope we shared.

The previously-rescued girls are the ones who mainly evangelize in the RLD now. They are the ones who distributed the invitations, set up the chairs, cooked and served the meals, and with the leadership of Betty, one of the Crisis Aid staff who pastors the rescued girls, many shared stories of how they were able to leave that life and have found True Love, acceptance and peace through receiving the Gospel and the practical help through Crisis Aid.



Local Church Partners

We also had the immense privilege to share in a Sunday service of one of the larger churches in town just before leaving the country. This church is closely involved with Crisis Aid and they partner together in many of the projects within the city. They were much better at understanding English, although we still used our interpreter.

After arriving in the country, we learned the churches have not been exposed to modern English-speaking worship songs which most of the world has embraced. Most of the "hit" songs we mentioned to our interpreter they had never heard of, so we knew we had to find a way to reach the them.

Our M.O. in most foreign nations is to learn one or two popular, simple worship songs in the local language (along with one or two of our own) to try and bridge the gap, then work with interpretation for the others. Since they didn't know the popular songs anyway, we just skipped to our own! :) We learned the chorus to our songs "Worship You Forever" (a.k.a "I Love You Lord") and "Hallelujah, Bless the Lamb" in Amharec, and sang them at all the different times we shared.

Each time we began singing in Amharec, whether it was with the 30-some rescued girls in their little chapel, at the Party with the beautiful women from the RLD, or the precious believers gathered to honor God on Sunday morning at a local church, the response was the same: a massive outburst of joy and excitement (and surprise, I think)!



Our incredible interpreter who helped us translate the songs was Dr. Henok, a former OB/GYN who speaks five languages, and now helps run the daily operations of Crisis Aid in Africa, along with his amazing wife Betty.

Dr. Henok told us before the Sunday service, " 'Wehdeh Hahlo' (I Love You Lord) is becoming a hit all over East Africa!" :) Of course he was kidding, but had been hearing great reports of our time there and how much people were being blessed. All that mixed with God's presence, our Western musical style, along with the words of hope and grace we shared in each setting, brought much joy, refreshing and renewed confidence in God's love to all who heard.



The Difference

The incredible work that is taking place through Crisis Aid in East Africa and other nations, including our own, is nothing short of mind blowing. Our dear friend Pat Bradley has always been a hard-working businessman, and for years while holding down a full-time job, he would take missions trips as often as he could, bringing aid to suffering people groups in many third-world nations.

After doing this for several years with other ministries, he and his wife Susan founded Crisis Aid International ten years ago as a charity organization to work through. Pat continued working his secular job for several more years until he just couldn't do both anymore, and finally recently stepped out to go full time with Crisis Aid.

All the years of working in the business world prepared Pat for what he is doing today. The man continually dreams and ponders new ways to help more people, and he will be the first to tell you, "The ONLY thing I take credit for is getting out of the pew." The rest, he knows, is totally God's grace and love working through him, helping hurting, forgotten people, empowered by the donations of big-hearted givers.

Thousands and thousands of individuals have been helped in so many ways, be it through the feeding programs, Speed School, micro-enterprise, medical outreaches & clinics, sex-trafficking rescue and rehab, orphanages, digging fresh water wells, and the list goes on & on.

Please take some time to visit www.CrisisAid.org and look at ALL the different projects they have going, making a HUGE difference in the lives of these beautiful people.

The Bradleys started with one small feeding project ten years ago, investing their own hard-earned cash. But as they've worked to move forward, God has used them to help multitudes around the world. The only thing stopping them from helping even MORE forgotten individuals, is money. Please ask the Lord if He would lead you to partner with their ministry on a regular basis.

We are forever changed as we return home and are persuaded by the Lord to live with more purpose, more drive, helping more people as we go. If we all step up to make ourselves available and useable, we can make a huge difference in lives all over the world, even our own world close to home.

Remember the Starfish – YOU can make a difference!

Charlie & Jill xo

A sweet send off before leaving the country – rescued girls on our last evening together. From and our new little loves. Behind us, the current



love, exhortation, prayers & pizza with the
front row: Pat Bradley, Charlie, Jill, Susan Bradley,
Safe Home residents along with Dr. Henok.

