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Giving Back **Washing the Teeth in Kenya**

By DENISE PLOOF • PHOTOS *By* SERENITY DENTAL & JODY HARDWICK

Fiona works at Leopard Hill, a safari camp (luxury tent) in Kenya, Africa's Masai Mara region. Although she works for guests and travelers from all over the world who come to visit the camp within the 77-square-mile Mara Naboiso Conservancy, she wouldn't smile due to decay on a canine that had turned black. No affordable dental clinics are located anywhere near her. Fiona had lost confidence. She feared others would notice her tooth. She continued to show up for work without ever smiling.

Fast forward to October 2019 when Fiona stood in line to get free dental care offered by a dental team from Arizona who set up a mobile dental clinic for several days in the area. The team was able to fix Fiona's tooth so it looked like the rest. They saw her two days later and she was smiling from ear to ear. "I still cannot believe it!" she said. "This is a miracle for me."

Everyone's Responsibility to Give Back

Dr. Jay M. Bhatt, DDS with Serenity Dental in Gilbert, Arizona, thinks we should all give back to our communities. "I strongly believe it is everyone's responsibility to give back in whatever capacity they are able, whether giving back involves time, money, or a combination of both," he says. That's one reason Dr. Bhatt was part of an 8-person dental team who decided to make the trek to the Masai Mara region in southern Kenya to treat the Masai people – many of whom were in a lot of pain – and desperately needed dental care.

Serenity Dental Opens in Economic Downturn

At Serenity Dental, (GilbertSerenityDental.com) Dr. Bhatt offers a full range of cosmetic, restorative, and general dentistry services for adults and children, with an emphasis on sound, preventative dentistry. Dr. Bhatt opened his practice in 2007 and was an associate for two years prior. After the economic downturn in 2007-2008, he was one of the few dentists in the area who survived. He now has one associate (Dr. Anil Nutakki), three front office staff, three hygienists, two assistants, and his wife Alice is the office manager to round out his team to 11.

African Safari Sparks Idea for Dental Mission Trip

Dr. Bhatt heard about the opportunity to be part of a dental team to treat the Masai people from his hygienist Jody Hardwick. Jody and her husband Jim had bought a safari trip to Africa at an Up with People auction and traveled to Kenya on vacation in 2018. While on safari with the Basecamp Foundation (BasecampFoundationUSA.org), they visited a school and medical clinic. They found out there were no nearby dental services and the costs were prohibitive. "It was our team's obligation and joy to figure out how to provide treatment for what we considered to be one of the most primary of human needs," says Jody.

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He Knew He Had to Help

A year later, they brought a dental team back, with input and support from the Basecamp Foundation who works to ensure the survival of wildlife and the advancement of the Masai people in the Masai Mara land. The team stayed at a Basecamp facility during the trip and organized four dental treatment days – two days each at two locations. The trip was actually 10 days: two days to get there, one day to set up, four clinic days, two days safari, and two days to get back. "After hearing and seeing what Jody experienced, I knew I had to help," says Dr. Bhatt.



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Team of 8 Builds Everything from Scratch

Two dentists, two hygienists, two assistants and two support staff from the Phoenix area made up the team. They raised \$20,000 for supplies, equipment, and expenses to support their trip. Burkhart and others donated supplies. "We are grateful for their support," says Jody. They traveled together to Kenya, carrying 25 bags of dental equipment and supplies to set up a mobile clinic in the Masai Mara. They brought everything and built from the ground up: four dental chairs, two generators, pressure cookers for sterilization, and rented an x-ray machine and computer.

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”

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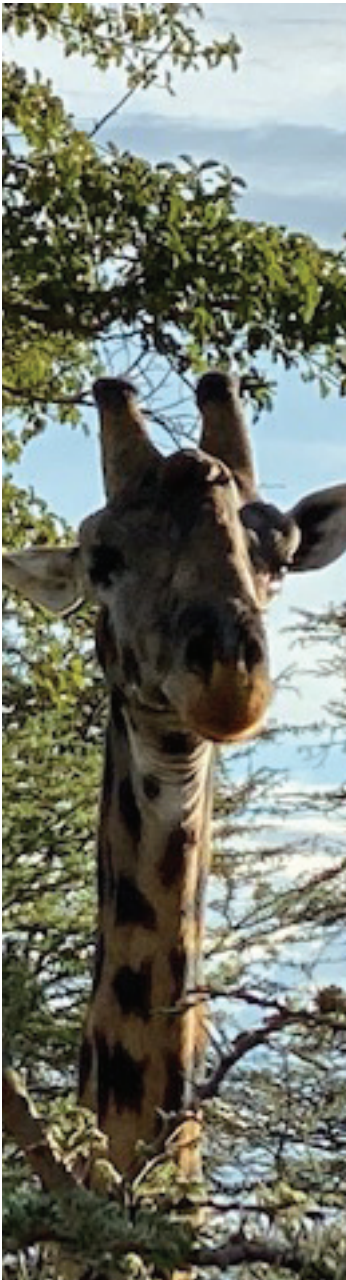
191 Patients & 258 Procedures

The team set up a clinic in a building with a tent cover for two days in two locations. During the four clinic days, they saw 191 patients and performed 258 procedures including extractions, fillings, and cleanings, or as the Masai call it, "washing the teeth" – all at no charge. "Our top priority was to get people out of pain," said Jody.



William
Patient Story

William's tooth hurt so much he was calling in sick to work. The team extracted the infected tooth. When they saw him two days later, he was all smiles and felt great. He no longer had to call in sick because of a toothache.



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Waiting in Line for Treatment in a Primitive Village

Talek was one village where they set up a clinic. With dirt roads, wandering goats and cows as currency, and no clean water, it's a primitive area, but they found the Masai people were kind, humble, soft-spoken, and caring. When the team arrived at 7:30 a.m. to get ready for the 8:00 clinic opening, there were 20 or more people in line. Some people waited all day.

The Reward was Immeasurable

"The most rewarding part of the trip was helping the sweet people of the Mara," says Dr. Bhatt. "Very few people had cars, and some had walked or biked for hours to get dental care they so desperately needed. There were so many people living with pain and suffering and just seeing their smiles after we had helped, the reward was immeasurable." The team is in the early planning stages for the second trip to the region that will likely occur in February 2021.

"If I Don't Help, Who Will?"

"When I see others in need," says Dr. Bhatt, "I hear in my mind a statement my mother used to make: 'If I don't help, who will?' But it's everyone's responsibility," he adds. "There are people locally and globally who need our help and it is all of our responsibility to help in any way we can." ●

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Learn More

Find out more about this trip and how you can get involved at Facebook.com/HardwickDentalTeams/ or send an email to HardwickDentalTeams@gmail.com.



Young Man
Patient Story

The team saw a young man who rode his bike for an hour and a half to seek help. He had not eaten or slept much in four days due to a toothache. The team extracted the problem tooth and he was pain-free.