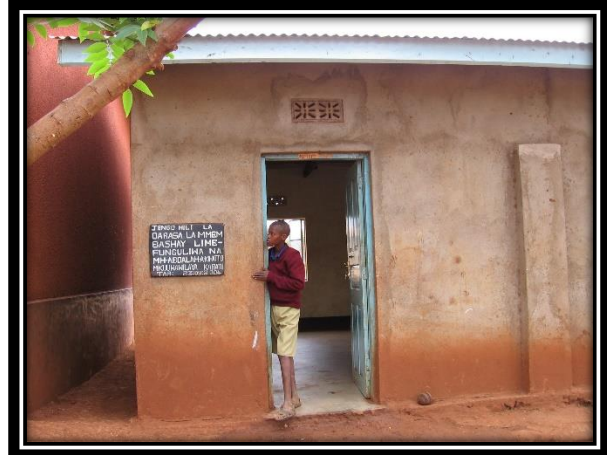


## 7. Safari Land and Ancient Hominids

Our first stop the next day was the Primary School, as promised. The school was built well and the grounds were beautiful, with that intensely red African soil from chemically weathered iron oxide deposits. The students seemed as happy to see us as we were to see them. We visited the sixth grade and the first grade and the library.



The children sang jubilantly for us with strong, sure voices. They asked us to sing for them, and we did so, but dear reader, I am sure you know it was no contest as to who sounded better. Itsy Bitsy Spider was a distinct challenge for our group, but the students loved it and thought it was hilarious, rowdily joining in the motions of the spider climbing up the waterspout. They read to us from their lessons and showed us their books in English and Kiswahili. The school raises corn and crops to sell to help buy books, and the students help with the work.



Our guide said there is a shortage of teachers because the community must help build houses for teachers. When we got to the library, the first thing Myrtle and I spotted was the picture of the white woman sitting at a desk, and of course, we found it offensive. Our guide said he understood how we felt, but the issue of the picture was sensitive. It was the students who wanted her picture there because she had donated the money for the library room and books and she visited every year bringing them more “goodies.”

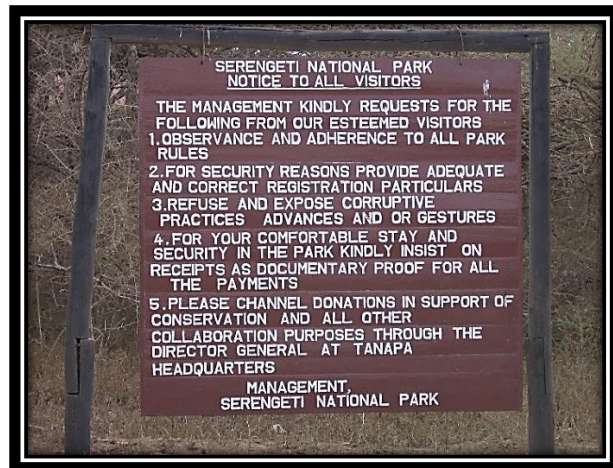
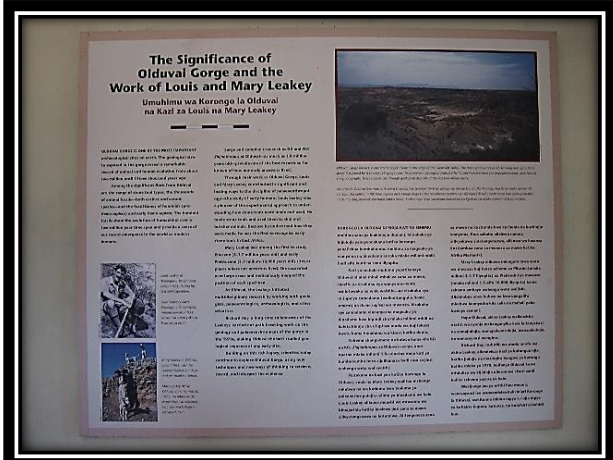


At 10:00 we left for the Serengeti. We passed this very large boma. Our guide said, “The Chief of the Maasai lives here. He is very rich. When there are problems in the tribes, the tribal leaders come to this Chief to resolve the problem.” Our guide also told us about the Bushmen tribe that lives about three hours from here. “There are only about 350 of them left because their infant mortality rate is high from malaria. Also, their health is compromised by smoking a lot of pot and weeds they find in the bush. Children start smoking at age ten. The

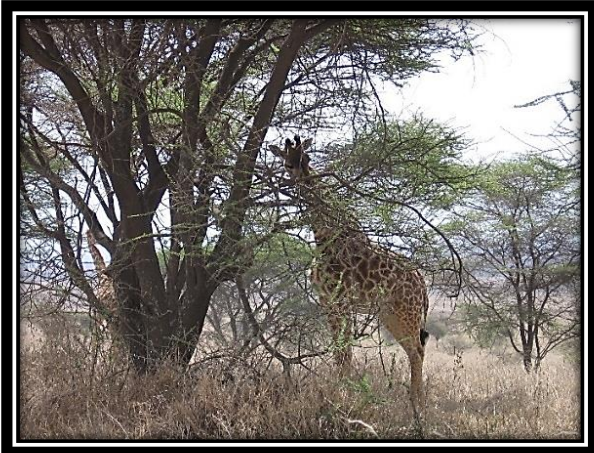
Bushmen believe only in herbs, not medicine. They live a nomadic lifestyle. We saw Zebras and cows grazing together on the savannah, along with Giraffes. Our guide pointed out a Whistling Acacia and said it was an excellent example of some of the complex symbiotic relationships among plants and animals and insects in this part of East Africa. Without the pressure of Giraffes and Elephants damaging the Acacia trees by grazing on them, the ant colonies needed to deter a most destructive tree-boring larvae cannot thrive, and the tree-boring larvae destroy the trees.



We arrived at Olduvai Gorge about 12:30 that afternoon. “Two groups of professors and students from Rutgers come here every June and July to continue excavations,” said the curator. “The Gorge is named by the Maasai for the plant Olduvai. The Olduvai plant is used to make baskets, mats, etc. The root is used by the Maasai for pain.” The curator was knowledgeable and entertaining, and I bought an autographed copy of the *Ngorongoro Travel and Field Guide* from him.



Then, drum roll, it was on to the Serengeti, where we arrived about 2:00 and ate our box lunches at the entrance. A group of Superb Starlings and Kites thought they were entitled to share our lunches. Our drive to the campsite would take a little over an hour, said our guide, but we would stop along the way if we saw something interesting. We saw two female Giraffes almost immediately, and then within about 20 minutes we came across something right along the road that made us want to squeal in excitement: a pride of ten Lions, 5 females and 5 cubs ages four years old and about seven months old, who kept trying to nurse from one female, who was also pregnant.



“The older, larger Lioness is probably the dominant female in the pride,” said our guide, “and the male Lion is probably close, but hiding. Female Lions can have cubs every year. They probably decided to rest here because there is water from the recent rain in the tire track depressions on the road.” As we watched, enthralled and silent, the Lions paid no attention to us, just went about their business of resting and drinking. When they started lying on their backs with their legs and paws in the air just like comfortable and contented cats, it was hard to imagine them as fierce predators.





To be continued . . .