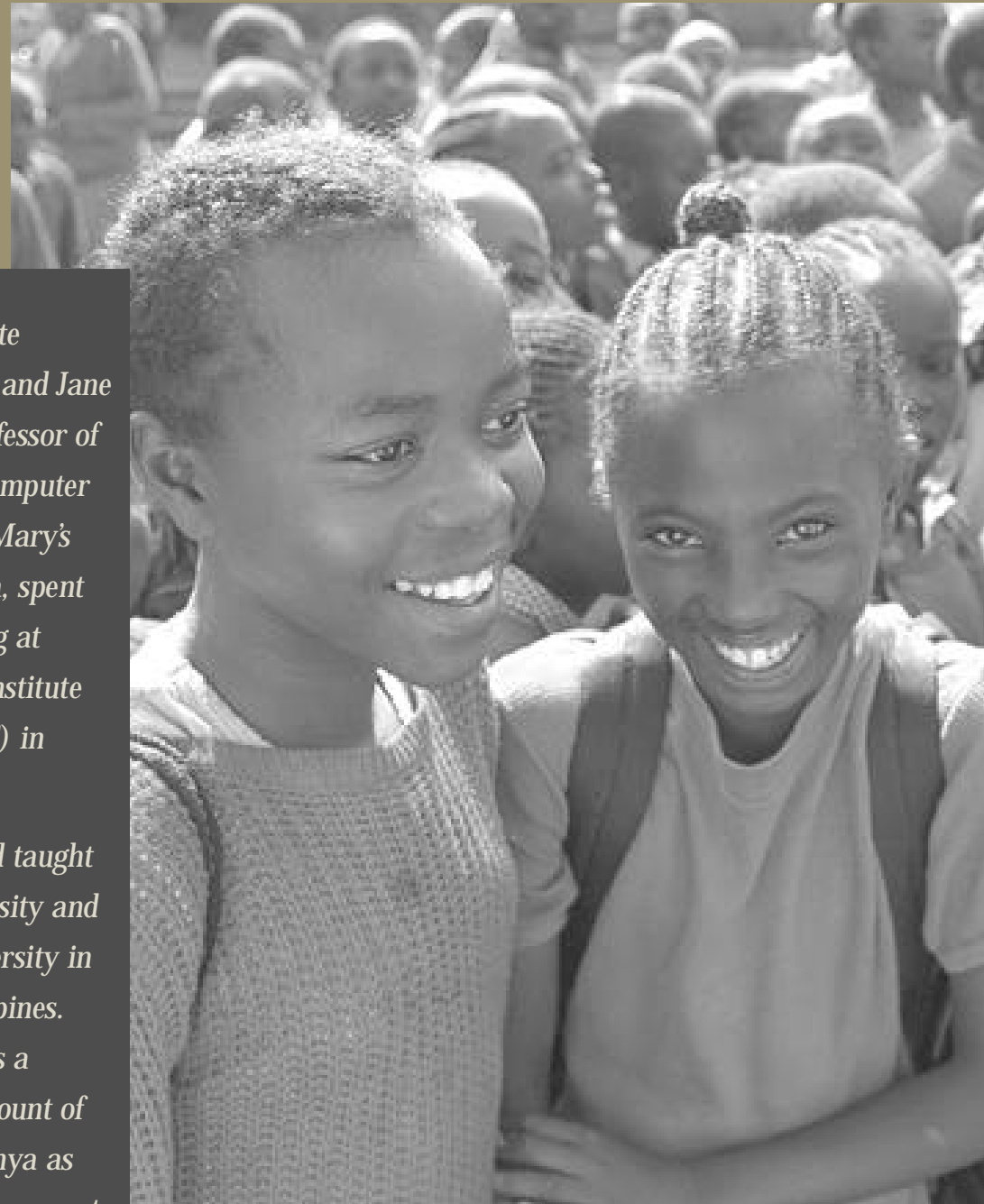


Kenyan Journal

by Jacob Lester

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Students being served at Kangemi School, a Lasallian school near CTIE.

“As a teacher, it was a supreme privilege to examine human ancestry in Kenya. . . . I was as much a beneficiary of learning as were my students.”

In the summer of 1998, I was invited to teach a course in introductory science to students of Christ the Teacher Institute for Education (CTIE), an entity of Tangaza College and a constituent college of the Catholic University of East Africa. CTIE and its community house sit in the central highlands of Kenya, in Karen-Nairobi. The town is named after Karen Blixen (Isak Dinesen), author of *Out of Africa*

Much of the exposure to science that many of these students have is only through technology. While it may be difficult for us to imagine young people arriving at the college level and planning to be teachers without some experience in science, it is a common condition outside the West.

I titled my course “History and Science: Key Readings in the Physical, Chemical, and Life Sciences” and modeled its instruction on the seminar method we use in the Integral Program (an integrated liberal arts approach) at Saint Mary’s College of California. Tangaza has no equipment or laboratories for science, so I had to illustrate examples on the board and validate principles in the field. One field experience included an extended trip into the Rift Valley,

where we studied concepts of systematics and taxonomy in biology. We experienced the astronomy of equatorial African skies and grasped the basics of human origins and evolution at Olorgesailie, one of Louis and Mary Leakey’s early sites for *homo erectus*. While on this trip, we met and communicated with the Maasai people who continue to live as they have for centuries. Truly, it was the opportunity of a lifetime.

As a teacher, it was a supreme privilege to examine human ancestry in Kenya, where humanity began, and to make it clear to my young African students that humans are not only indigenous to Africa but that all people have their distant ancestry in Kenya. I was as much a beneficiary of learning as were my students. Imagine having a classroom of young people whose immediate families are still tribal and living in ancestral villages. Among my pupils were Tanzanians, Dinka (from Sudan), Yuruba (from Nigeria), and Kikuyu and Luo (from Kenya).

My time in Kenya included a four-day safari to the Maasai Mara, an immense preserve in southwestern Kenya at the northern end of the Serengetti Plain. It is the primary range of the Maasai people. I also visited the National Museum of Kenya, which houses the main collection of priceless human artifacts.

It was and is a blessing to share in the community life of the largest and oldest Catholic religious order dedicated to education. The community house was usually buzzing every night after evening prayer with conversation and news of events in this very different world. It was indeed a rare and precious experience.



Top photo: Professor Jacob Lester’s class.
Bottom Photo: Community House where Jacob and Jane lived during their stay in Kenya.

Jacob Lester, Associate Professor of Biology, and Jane Sangwine-Yager, Professor of Mathematics and Computer Science, from Saint Mary’s College of California, spent last summer teaching at Christ the Teacher Institute for Education (CTIE) in Nairobi, Kenya.

Previously, Jacob had taught at Bethlehem University and at De La Salle University in Manila in the Philippines. What appears here is a personal journal account of his experience in Kenya as well as an historical account of CTIE’s early beginnings by Brother L. Raphael Patton, FSC.