

The Beginning of Humankind.



It all started with Lucy. Lucy is the skeleton of a woman discovered in Ethiopia 1974, estimated to have lived 3.2 million years ago; the first 'hominid' or upright chimp. I met her at a museum in Addis Ababa on a recent journey in April 2015. Together with my wife, we had embarked on a week tour to the indigenous tribes of southern Ethiopia. Among the approximately forty six ethnic groups just in the Omo Valley, we visited the Ari, Mursi, Karo, Konso, Hammer, Dassech, and Dorze villages. The entire journey, with Lucy in the background, taught me how we became what we are today, and in a nutshell, described our development and civilization as we know it.

The land of Ethiopia is still mostly underdeveloped with plenty of opportunities to see how humans used to live before, even very long before and perhaps even thousands of years ago. In a way, it was as if we were revisiting the Stone Age where people lived from the land, not even having access to running water or electricity or using money for trading. Most people live in substandard huts, sometimes dressed only in goat-skin clothing, and survive from what the land and their animals could feed them. As a contrast to the modern Western world of today, which can be seen as represent the ending of a film, it was like finally watching its beginning, and understand how it all started. It certainly provided a new perspective of life, as we know it from our own and our immediate family history. The presence of nature is overwhelming; the importance of seasons, the availability or lack of water, the meaning of family and a tribal support network. And it was obvious throughout our journey, that there is no insurance for survival; not for the adults and less so for the vast number of children who seemed to pop up everywhere, asking for something sweet.

In such a place, it's not strange that both infant mortality and birth rates are high. Perhaps it's best not to be too sentimental about survival under these circumstances. After all, people are born and die all the time. On the contrary, in such a 'paradise', I had the feeling that we were visiting the Garden of Eden from the Bible, where Adam had not yet tasted the bitter fruits of civilization. I felt there was something magical or spiritual about their lives, and felt truly privileged to be a part of it. I was even a bit envious of their ability to get along and manage to survive without any supermarkets, banks and pension plans. But perhaps I was a little too romantic about their difficult life?



Some of the tribes were hunters and nomads, roaming the wilderness in search for food, with clear gender roles and functions. I watched a young man without clothing at the roadside and he looked strong and healthy, not being bothered by the cold and wind. Women of all ages carried heavy burdens on their backs, with fire wood or straw for the livestock, and seemed strongly motivated to provide for their families. Young boys were guarding the cows and the goats, instead of going to school and learning mathematics. A well-developed, inter-dependent community structure seemed to hold them all together, and the sharing of resources was the explicit name of the game. In addition, there was always time for some kind of belief system with different rituals for the major transitions in life; birth, adulthood, marriage and death. Apparently, spirituality itself was present already at the birth of humankind, as well as the esthetic delight of women and men in the beauty of jewelry and makeup.

Even though the journey to Ethiopia was short, it gave me a glimpse of the long journey for mankind. Every new day, when we hear the hen wake up call, life goes on and the fight for survival continues. It seems we are just a very small part of it all.

Natan Kellermann, April 2015