

As if I started a new life

And there I was, all alone at the airport of Nairobi, Kenya. Did I do well about this? I took a few deep breaths, unable to identify the smell I sniffed, and lifted my two 23-kilo suitcases from the baggage belt onto a cart. I negotiated stoically with the customs officer and after paying a small amount I was able to continue.

Taxi drivers tumbled around me but I had to disappoint them. I looked up the domestic flights departures across the street. My final destination was Mombasa on the Indian Ocean. Again a very extensive customs check and there I flew again. The adventure swept through me, as if I was starting a new life. Friends in Mombasa picked me up and drove me to my hotel in the seaside town of Diani. It was May 2011, it was 33°C outside and I was on the road for fourteen hours.

In February of the same year I visited Kenya with my husband as a tourist and I was literally moved to tears by the enormous poverty. I felt it in every fiber of my body that I had to do something with this. And... where there is a will, there is a way. I made plans, made contacts, saved and researched. My goal was to buy a piece of land to set up projects there.

Two days after my arrival in Mombasa, I walked out of the local bank with mountains of Kenyan banknotes with a Kenyan acquaintance. In a flash I wondered what I had started but my positive I quickly took over. I was in a great adventure. Look at me walking there with that money. To avoid robberies, we switched cars and an hour later arrived at a vacant piece of land where men were waiting. My own modest capital turned out to be enough for one acre of land. I was the owner together with a Kenyan. How fantastic that felt!

“I had found purpose in my life”

The next step was to buy materials; negotiations or rather plays that sparked off. The water well project could begin. It was only when I saw the activity on “my land”, that I realized what I had created. Employment and clean water. I had a great feeling. Running water, so normal for us in the kitchen and bathroom. What a difference it made here. No water, no life. I decided on the spot to convert my private initiative into the official Pamoja Kenya Foundation. It took me blood, sweat, tears and many sleepless nights, but I had - I have - found the purpose in my life: fighting poverty, giving people a dignified existence. I know it's often a drop on a hot plate but better one drop than no drop at all.

It went a long way and I managed to do it. I have followed my intuition and have not let others drive me crazy. Believe in yourself, use your strength and do what you are good at. It works for me. It works for you.



Marion van de Voort (1961) studied tourism and HR (MBO) and traveled all her life. She is married to an aviator who is her stable factor in her life today. In 2000 she decided to start her own business as a freelancer, partly from a practical point of view because she was on the road a lot. When her mother died of a neurological disease in 2016, while Marion was working in Kenya, she subsequently devoted her life to her work in Kenya where she has received a number of awards. Her passion is working with people from different cultures. www.pamoja-kenya.com