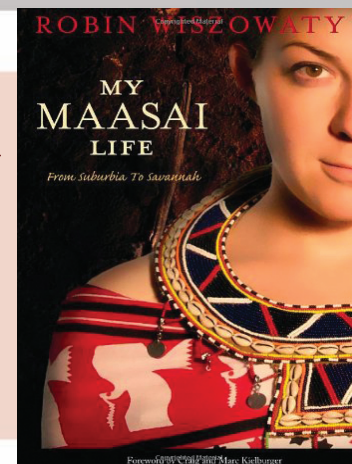
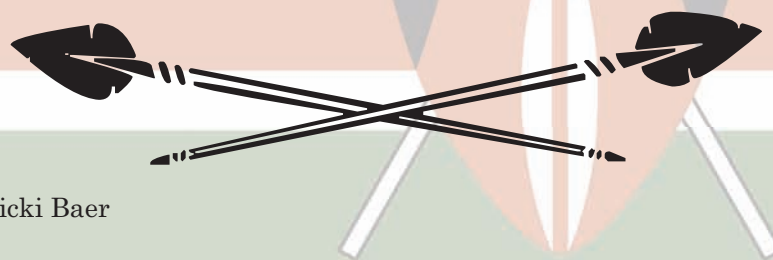


One Woman's Journey From ME to WE That Will Lift Your Heart And Open Your Eyes

# MY MAASAI LIFE: FROM SUBURBIA TO SAVANNAH

BY ROBIN WISZOWATY



Published by Me to We Books  
Available wherever books are sold  
Suggested retail price \$18.95  
\*For every Me to We Book purchase  
a notebook or textbook will be given  
to a child in a developing country

A book review By Lisa Nowicki Baer

A press release came into our offices as so many do on a daily basis. But this one was different. It said, "Would you like to interview Robin Wiszowaty?"

"She is originally from Schaumburg, Illinois and has been living in a small hut in Kenya made out of cow dung with the Maasai tribe."

I immediately pictured myself in such a situation and laughed out loud. Let's just say that I am not a "good little camper." I also, however, knew that I must speak to this woman. Not sure of how her story would fit into a family oriented publication, I replied immediately. "YES!" I would like to speak to Robin. Robin's book arrived within a few days and I disappeared into its pages for the next two weeks.

Robin's story begins like that of so many other young girls growing up in the Chicagoland suburbs. She experienced the usual dynamics of sometimes "best buddies" sometimes not, that exist between brothers and sisters. She played the usual neighborhood games of "kick-ball" and "kick the can" as parents looked on from the comfort of their lawn chairs. Although she knew that this simple day to day life seemed to be satisfying enough to most people she knew it just wasn't the path she wanted to take.

It wasn't until Robin started living the typical college life when her

true path started to finally reveal itself. She passed a flyer posted at school promoting a program called Birthright Israel. The purpose of Birthright Israel is to provide all expense paid trips for young Jewish people to explore, understand and embrace their Jewish heritage. Robin applied to leave for Israel shortly after the attacks of 9/11 and during the height of long-standing Israeli-Palestinian conflict. She thought, what a great way to break out and have a little adventure. Her parents, thought she had completely lost her mind. Knowing that they could not convince her otherwise, they urged Robin to seriously consider her true

reasons for going. Her journal entry reads:

*"...I feel tied to this life. Bound by decisions I never made, decided by people I have never met. Greeted with an outcome, beginning with an end, I am struggling to free myself of an upbringing I did not choose. Instead of looking at the world through the privileged eyes of an American, I want to broaden my vision and see life through a non-Western perspective. I want to discover for myself and break free from a worldview that I don't believe. I want to be cut down, sliced up, bashed and thrown this way and that.....then rebuild myself into a shape that I dictate on*

*my own terms, incorporating new meanings into my world. Until then, I am living someone else's decisions, thoughts and beliefs. I am ready to start living on my own. ..."*

Robin's new desires became reality when just a short while after returning from her trip to Israel, she found herself living with her new 8 person adopted Maasai family in the Republic of Kenya, a country in east Africa bordering the Indian Ocean. Upon arrival she was welcomed by "Mama." She writes:

*"...Mama was a stunningly beautiful, tall woman, she wore multicolored shukas draped around her slender shoulders and a bright blue skirt. Her feet were bare, but her face beamed with a brilliant smile.*

*"My daughter," she cried in English. She hugged my shoulders first on the left, then again on the right: a traditional Maasai embrace.*

*"Tunaenda wapi?" I asked. Where are we going? She looked at me and smiled. "Nyumbani." Home...."*

Her new adopted Maasai family gave her the name "Naserian" which means peaceful person in Swahili. Each day brought new challenges as Robin became a member of the tribe expected to perform vital tasks necessary to everyone's survival. Several times a day she hauled heavy loads of water that women learn to carry from a long strap attached around the top of their heads.



Robin Wiszowaty in Africa with Mama Samuel and Mama Toti.  
Photo courtesy of Me To We



Robin explained, “Mama simply showed me what I needed to do, and let me know when I was falling behind.”

She continued, “If you present something to someone and tell them Oh, this is going to be very hard, you will increase their struggle. But, if you just act like, this is what we have to do and get on with it, the task does not seem as difficult.”

Robin learned to prepare daily meals which mostly consisted of *Ugali*, (a cornmeal porridge), and a special Chai tea that requires women tribe members to learn the art of its preparation. She experienced showers consisting of a single bucket of water to be used for ones entire body and the use of olelehsa leaves in lieu of toilet paper. She shared a bed with her new brothers and sisters who calmed her fears the first night she heard hyenas howling in the night.

Robin enjoyed this simple life that for women of the tribe also included the duties of laundry, maintaining the family kitchen, preparing meals, brewing tea, washing dishes, and general cleaning. She acquired the skill of using a machete, found a deep friendship and courtship with a young warrior from the village named Samuel, endured contracting both malaria and typhoid, witnessed a female circumcision, and saw the devastation of

AIDS in Africa. Through it all Robin began to transform into a woman who realized that what is truly important is life, love, generosity, and people taking care of one another. On the plane ride home to America, after her year long stay in Africa, Robin writes:

“...I discovered that it wasn't about me. It was about people, community and family. ...”

Robin Wiszowaty's book *My Maasai Life: From Suburbia to Savannah* will captivate you. This beautifully written story is so fas-

cinating and intriguing, you will find yourself unable to put it down. Robin reverently describes the beauty of Africa, its troubles and the amazing new family members she meets while discovering the importance of having the courage to

choose one's own path instead of following one that has been chosen for you. Hopefully along the way we discover that the potential to change the world exists in each and every one of us. ■

## Where is Robin Now?

Robin Wiszowaty is currently living in Kenya where she serves as Free The Children's Kenya Program Director overseeing development projects throughout the country. Follow her journeys on [www.MeToWe.com](http://www.MeToWe.com) and follow Robin's day-to-day adventures in Kenya on [Twitter@robininkenia](https://twitter.com/robininkenia)

## What is Free the Children and how can my family become involved?

Free The Children is the world's largest network of children helping children. Free The Children has built more than 650 schools in developing countries around the world. Follow in Robins footsteps and join family volunteer programs to visit Kenya and work to build a new school with your own hands. Find out how you and your family can become involved at [www.freethechildren.com](http://www.freethechildren.com) or visit [www.metowe.com/trips](http://www.metowe.com/trips).

## How can my family start making a difference in the world right now?

Robin highly recommends the book *The World Needs Your Kid: Raising Children Who Care and Contribute* by Craig Kielburger, Marc Kielburger and Shelley Page, now available in bookstores everywhere. This remarkable “kid friendly” book can be read aloud with your family as it explains small actions anyone can take to help make the world a better place. It will help your children discover a passion for “making a positive difference” right now.



A photograph of two women standing in a dry, open landscape with sparse vegetation. The woman on the left is wearing a traditional white dress with large blue polka dots and a colorful beaded necklace. The woman on the right is wearing a modern light green t-shirt and a red skirt with white polka dots and a yellow border. Both women are holding their heads with their hands, possibly adjusting their hair or headwear.

### Ingredients:

6 Cups of water

4 cups of Maize Flour or white cornmeal  
that has been finely ground

Bring 6 cups of water to a boil in a saucepan. Slowly stir in 4 cups of Maize Flour and continue to stir like porridge. Cook over medium heat for ten minutes and then flip it over. Take out of pan and cut into slices. Use your *Ugali* to pick up a side dish like cabbage. Wash it down with a cup of hot chai tea. (For an authentic version of the chai tea similar to the one served in Kenya, use Rishi's Masala Chai Concentrate available at [www.rishi-tea.com](http://www.rishi-tea.com) or at Whole Foods)

## KENYAN COOKING EXPERIENCE!

You can make your own *Ugali* (pronounced oo-gah-lee) just like Robin!





# Note-worthy News:

## Celebrate Love During the Month of February!

By Lisa Nowicki Baer

### The Heart of St. Valentine's Day

**D**uring the reign of Roman emperor Claudius II 268 AD to 270 AD, marriage ceremonies were forbidden by punishment of death to soldiers. Emperor Claudius II believed that marriage made soldiers weak because it caused men to have emotional ties to their wives and children instead of complete allegiance to defending the Roman empire from takeover. At the time, a young bishop named Val-



entine saw the heartache this was causing among young lovers wishing to marry. He began to perform secret marriage ceremonies and became known as the "friend of lovers." He was eventually arrested. While in prison, legend has it that Valentine also possessed saintly abilities and was able to heal the blind daughter of one of his jailers. Now, so grateful for being given the ability to see for the first time in her life, the jailers daughter began to develop a deep friendship with Valentine. Just before his execution Valentine asked for a pen and paper from his jailer and wrote her a farewell message "From Your Valentine," a phrase that continues to live on. Valentine was executed on February 14, 270 AD for refusing to renounce his religion and thus became St. Valentine. Today, February 14th is most commonly known as the day couples celebrate their love. But, it is also a day to celebrate true friendships and all of the loving relationships in our lives.

### February is African American History Month

**F**or seven decades the month of February has been celebrated in cities and towns all across the United States as African American History Month. The purpose is to honor the contributions African Americans have made to all the lives in America and to remember important milestones in African American history. Personally, I am reminded of the crusade for justice by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. during the civil rights movement of the 60's. I can't help but think, he knew that he would probably be killed for what he was fighting for, but he continued on anyway. I am in awe of such courage that operated with "soul force" instead of physical force. The dream of brotherhood and love for thy neighbor. If your family is looking for a way to honor African American History Month, the work of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., and other history changing African Americans be sure to visit the DuSable Museum of Afri-

can American History right here in Chicago at 740 E. 56th place.

#### Plan your visit:

##### Museum Hours:

Tuesday—Saturday, 10 a.m.—5 p.m.  
Sunday, 12 p.m.—5 p.m.  
Closed on Mondays

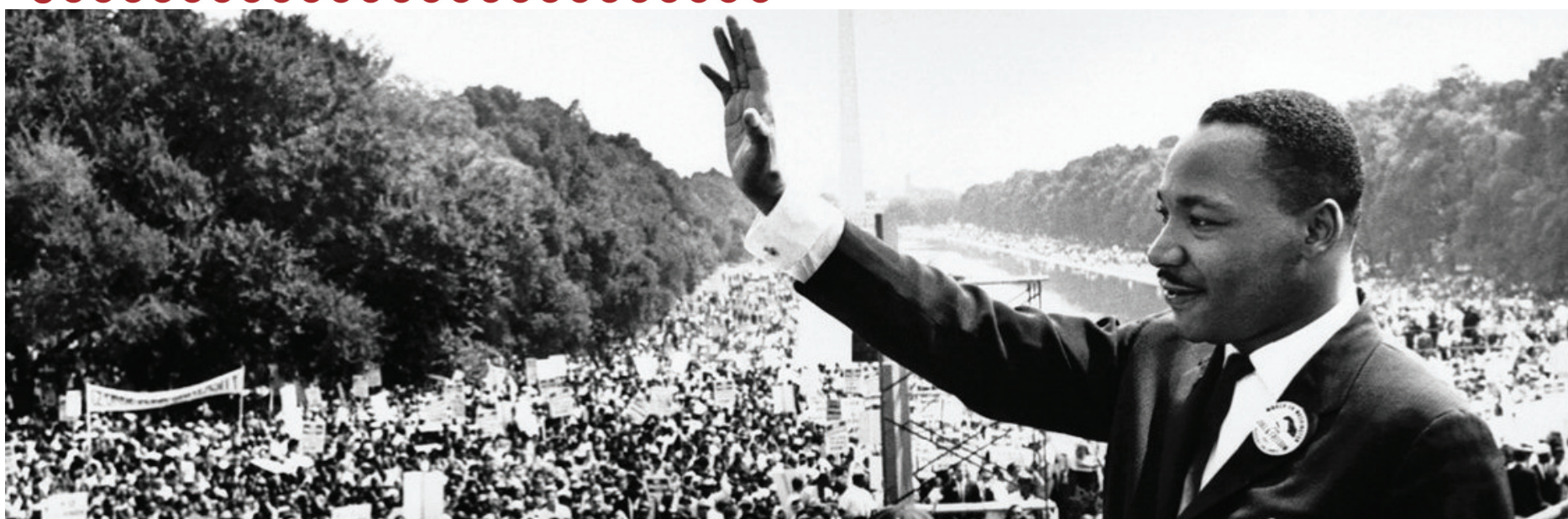
##### Museum Location:

DuSable Museum of African  
American History  
740 East 56th Place  
Chicago, Illinois 60637

##### Museum Admission:

Adults \$10.00  
Students/Seniors \$7.00  
Children 6 to 11 \$3.00  
Children under 5 FREE  
Discounts available for Chicago Residents

For more information please call (773) 947-0600 or visit their website at [www.dusablemuseum.org](http://www.dusablemuseum.org).





## A peaceful, fun loving retreat for the whole family

**I**t's important to remember that we are transmitting a value system to our children through our behaviors. With that in mind, love doesn't always have to come in a heart shaped box. Why not start a family tradition during the month we celebrate love, by going on a fun loving retreat that includes your extended family? Not only will you "get away from it all," but spending quality time with grandmas, grandpas, aunts, uncles, and cousins as well as your immediate family will provide an opportunity to show your children the importance of cherishing those we love by spending time together.

We've got the perfect place. Spend St. Valentines Day week-

end at the Grand Bear Resort (2643 N. IL Rt. 178) in Utica, Illinois. It only takes about 1 ½ hours to drive to this resort surrounded by picturesque landscapes that are usually covered with fresh snow this time of year. Check in to one of their deluxe family suites overlooking the woods and feel your stress melt away. Get wet and wild at their indoor waterpark or blow off some steam at their unique indoor amusement park (admission to both is included with your stay). And if neither of those activities strikes your fancy, you can always hang out at the arcade, go for a hike, or just plain relax. Better yet, don't tell everyone where you are going. Make it a surprise!

**GRIZZLY JACK'S  
GRAND BEAR  
RESORT**  
866.399.FUNN

2643 N. IL Rt. 178  
Utica, IL  
(866) 399-3866  
www.grizzlyjacksresort.com  
Be sure to check out their Cabin Fever Special running now thru February 26th!



Photos courtesy of Grizzly Jack's Grand Bear Resort

### The Perfect Night Out For Two

*One Sixty Blue*.....



**W**hat's not to love about a sophisticated yet comfortable restaurant that offers diners the opportunity to sample haute cuisine paired with the perfect wine at each course. If you are looking for a truly amorous night out for two, One Sixty Blue is the place for you. There is nothing more romantic than being served dinner in seven separate courses, each offering more tantalizing than what came before it, in a setting sans screaming children. Chef Michael McDonald's menu is beyond excellent with offerings such as Kabocha and Red Kuri Squash Soup

which is served at your table with such an elegant flair it's impossible to contain complete giddiness. The wine pairings are out of this world. Each dish is layered with flavor beyond compare. There are two separate sampler menus allowing couples to share and compare. A visit to One Sixty Blue is guaranteed to help you "fan the flame" and keep it going strong!

One Sixty Blue  
1400 West Randolph Street  
Chicago, IL 60607  
(312) 850-0303  
www.onesixtyblue.com



Photo courtesy of One Sixty Blue

## The Art of Loving Yourself



Photo courtesy of Rishi Tea

"In order to love others you need to love yourself first." That doesn't mean that we should become obsessed in our own selfishness. It means that we sometimes need to be reminded that it is necessary to love and care for ourselves first, so that we can continue to care, nurture, and support others. "Just for the health of it," try to appreciate and start loving yourself enough to take good care of your heart. For centuries the consumption of green tea has been touted as one of the best ways to insure good heart health.

Scientific studies have increasingly shown that there are at least 5 different ways green tea may improve your heart health:

- Expand your heart artery and improve blood flow
- Reduce heart attack incidence
- Reverse organ damage from heart attack and stroke
- Keep your arteries clear and prevent the buildup of harmful plaque
- Reduce cholesterol and triglyceride levels

If the taste of green tea doesn't appeal to you, a great brand to try is Rishi. Rishi tea offers an organic green loose leaf tea that is scented with the blossoms of fresh jasmine. What a treat! Rishi Tea is available at all Whole Foods Markets or can be ordered online at [www.rishi-tea.com](http://www.rishi-tea.com). Treat yourself or that special someone in your life to good heart health.