



## Life training, the Maasai warrior way

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Maasai Warrior Sabore Ole Oiyee, aka "Baby Giraffe" at Grace Cathedral on Sept. 27, with little giraffes

To see from other people's perspectives, and to genuinely remember (or realize) that not everyone's lives is yours, is a gift; or so says the late David Foster Wallace in a commencement speech I read the other day on the Guardian's Promosexual blog, recited originally in 2005. Wallace stated that we should strive to see from other people's perspectives, remember that we are not the center of the universe and that, in fact, other people have bad days, too. So, don't feel so sorry for yourself. Or at least something to that effect is proclaimed by Wallace, but at greater length, with more subtlety and much more eloquence. As Wallace puts it: "I can choose to force myself to consider the likelihood that everyone else in the supermarket's checkout line is just as bored and frustrated as I am, and that some of these people probably have harder, more tedious and painful lives than I do."

Sometimes, though, you are adjacent to a world that is so different from the one that you're familiar with that you don't have to choose to remember that you are not the center of the universe, because the truth of the matter is staring you in the face. Instead, the importance becomes less remembering that you are not the center, but having to come to terms with and decide what you are going to do with this knowledge. Wallace offers an option, which seems still fitting for my own experience: "The really important kind of freedom involves attention and awareness and discipline, and being able truly to care about other people and to sacrifice for them over and over in myriad petty, unsexy ways every day."

Maasai Warrior Sabore Ole Oiye, nicknamed "baby giraffe," towered above me at the Maasai Warrior Training at the Grace Cathedral a couple Saturdays ago, stating calmly, without even a slight smile in his eye, that he has killed two lions in his lifetime. Lifting his two-sided spear, Sabore explained that the blunt side is for throwing; the lion will first need to be declared TKO. The other side is razor-sharp, and ready to spear the lion. The Maasai warriors wear the mane of the lion home, and slide the tail over the sharp-end of the spear as they heroically return to their village.



New Maasai warriors are trained for six to eight years in "the bush," the all-encompassing term that refers to the wild wilderness of Kenya, which surrounds their

village. The warriors learn how to slay lions, which in a polygamous patriarchal society that measures worth in manes and cattle, is extremely important. A woman in the audience asked: “What reasons make you kill lions?” To which Sabore explained, “The main reason is to show that you are brave. And then your friends will say, ‘come and marry my sister.’” They also learn, based on the ancient ways of the nomadic Maasai, basic survival skills – how to protect themselves from wild animals and how to live off of the land.

Before being sent to the bush, the boys, emerging into their adolescence, are circumcised, as was Sabore. Without anaesthesia, the boys’ foreskins are cut off, and they must endure the pain in silence, without crying, to show their bravery. The women also undergo excision (also known as “female circumcision” and “female genital mutilation”), making them worth more cows—the main currency in their village—when they are to be married.

Hellen Nkuraiya, a Maasaian women speaking on Saturday, ran away from her first husband when she was just nine—divorce is illegal in their village—and was given assistance in obtaining an education by a Catholic nun.

Sabore and Hellen are the only two people from their village who have received a formal education. The two are now working with Asante Africa to raise funds to build a school that would have twelve classrooms. The hope is to balance modern education while preserving the traditions of their village, as Sabore explained; he spent only two years in the bush as opposed to the usual six to eight, and spent his other years pursuing higher education.



Most of this information I pieced together at the talk and demonstration on Saturday; some holes in explanations I figured out afterwards when I checked out the [Wikipedia page on the Maasai](#). There was an almost uncomfortable feeling in the small gathering, which was filled mostly with children who wanted to hear the hyena chant and get their face painted, but who were, without knowing it, being taught about a complicated and different culture than their own, along with several adults who clearly had come less for the games—from spear throwing to the carrying-sticks contest—and more to learn and hear the stories of Sabore and Hellen.

These two groups came (or maybe in the children's case were brought) to learn about the Maasai, but what will they do with this new knowledge? And it seems infinitely more complicated than this, or than I might be able to articulate in a simple blog post as opposed to a PhD thesis, as the proliferation of ways to become involved or help features everything from missionary-like work, which claims to come to help other cultures while simultaneously altering them, to doctors without borders, to ecotourism, or to some unnamed activity where one both learns and assists other cultures while doing more than just looking at them like caged animals in a zoo.