the soil that even the tomato support sticks took root and sprouted young leaves.

Soon after we got back from Europe, Jo was approached by the folks from the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF). Would she be interested in helping them in their family planning drive by providing IUD coils to women who did not want to conceive?

The Foundation was attempting to make a pre-emptive move to help the Kenyan population from growing at the furious pace that was already becoming a potential problem and would, within a few years, place it at the head of the world pack in terms of annual growth rate.

In 1985 Elspeth Huxley, who had known Kenya all her long life, and written extensively about it, noted that "Kenya's birthrate is now the highest in the world; the average family size is eight and a half children. This flood of babies is drowning the resources of the country, over-population has become the greatest threat to the nation's stability."

A telling example of the tendency towards large families is provided by farmer, soldier, politician and author Michael Blundell, who tells the story of Corporal Henry Ouma, who fought under him in the Ethiopian campaign. Thirty years later, Ouma wrote to Blundell seeking help with employment for his well-educated son. Blundell did what was requested, and records his pleasure at being thanked with a letter, but adds, "my heart sank when he mentioned that he had 17 more sons, all of whom would want work!" No mention of any daughters.

Later in the same book Blundell states that 55% of Kenya's population is under the age of 18. That figure doesn't mean much until one computes it into over 12 million youngsters who will, in the not very distant future, produce children of their own.

In the late '60s the shantytown around Nairobi was already growing at an alarming rate as rural people, with no land, no income, and virtually

no hope, were migrating to the city on the chance of finding work. Within a few years similar shanty towns, lacking even the basics of decent living conditions, would start to appear in other towns around the country.

Jo was happy to try to help the IPPF, and she set up clinics every Wednesday afternoon. After a month, she told me, "At first it was very hard to get anyone interested, but after a while the nurses began to help, and we now have a steady stream of ladies. I do about ten every time."

But some time later, she said, "It's strange. These women are starting to come back to have the coils removed. It seems that they are quite happy to stop having babies for a while, and obtain some sort of control over their husbands, but then they decide to try and have a baby after all."

The IPPF team arrived from Nairobi the following week to see how Jo was doing, and we invited them over for dinner.

"I'm very interested to hear about your work," said the boss to me. "You say that you interact with farmers daily and meet them at cattle crushes. Do you think you could help us with the family planning scheme?"

I should have seen the trap, but didn't.

"I can try. What did you have in mind?"

"Well, I wondered if you could take contraceptives with you on your rounds and persuade the men to use them. It would greatly help our program."

I foolishly agreed, and within a week two large cardboard boxes of condoms had arrived by bus.

It was soon apparent that the whole thing was a bad idea. I discussed it with Kipsiele, my sounding board for local matters, and he was extremely skeptical when I tried to describe the function and use of "a rubber sheath for preventing children" as I clumsily put it, in the absence of a Swahili word for condom in either my vocabulary or my dictionary. Perhaps there wasn't such a word at that time.

I am no salesman. At any rate, not a single condom found its intended use. I was reminded of my father's attempts at distributing condoms to his

soldiers in Ethiopia 25 years ago. One evening back in Scotland, as Dad and I had sipped glasses of Black and White and he'd instinctively picked up and carefully arranged the 50-odd hairs that he used as a token cover over his bald head, he had told me, "The commanding officer issued a standing order when we were camped at Addis. Translating from the official lingo, the order decreed that it was be a court martial offence for any officer to get the clap. The girls in Addis are stunningly beautiful, but they have a very virulent form of VD. All that there was for treatment was M and B tablets, and they didn't do the trick. It was my job to issue French letters to the guard post and to try and ensure that the troops took them along when they went out on passes. The task was quite hopeless. In all the time we camped there, only one FL was ever taken."

He finished with a graphic, if brief, bit of guidance: "Just be careful where you dip your wick."

One morning at Kibirichia, I did have cause to silently thank the IPPF for their generosity. At the communal cattle crush I was presented with a cow whose udder was covered in blood.

"What happened?"

"She is on heat, and was trying to find a bull. She tried to jump the fence. Her teat caught on the barbed wire and she has cut it. It is very bad," said the owner.

I asked Bernard, the local animal health technician, for water, and washed off the udder. The action of the washing caused it to start bleeding again, and it was now plain to see that there was a nasty three-inch cut down the length of right front teat.

"I shall have to stitch this up," I told the farmer and Bernard. "Bernard, please get some rope from the car, and get a fire going so that we can boil my instruments. I'm going to give her an injection above the cut, so she won't feel the pain of the stitches and will stand still while I work."

Fifteen minutes later we were ready to proceed.

"Tie the rope around her body just in front of the hip bones and the udder and pull it tight," I said, gesturing to her prominent pelvic bones. The cow arched her back as Bernard cinched down on the rope and tied it off. Theoretically she could not kick now.

The stitching itself was a bit fiddly. I had to try to seal the delicate lining of the teat so that milk would not leak through. This required the use of a strand of fine catgut, a suture material that would dissolve after the cut had healed in a few days. The next task was to close the torn skin on the outside. The jagged rent caused by the barbed wire further complicated the matter. After what seemed like ages, as my aching back rebelled at the constant crouch halfway under the cow, I placed the last stitch.

"Now I'm going to put this little tap in the opening of her teat. Make sure that you pull off the cap twice a day and keep it clean. Put it back on when the milk has come out. Each day put in a new tube after you have given her some *dawa* to prevent mastitis."

I dug five tubes of mastitis ointment out of my medical box and handed them to Bernard.

"You'll have to visit this cow every day to give her one of these. She will also need an injection of penicillin every day for five days."

Then I had an inspiration.

I pulled out a condom from the unused box beside the passenger seat, cut off the tip, and rolled the rubber up the teat so that it covered the wound.

"Try to keep that on for a few hours. It will help keep the wound clean until you can get her home and into a clean *boma* and off the muddy road. Take it off tonight when you open the milk tube."

I gave the cow her first injection of penicillin and sorted out the matter of a fee with the farmer.

The condoms languished in our house. Jo and I had decided that it

was time to try and start a family of our own, so they were of no direct use to us. Eventually I shipped them back to Nairobi.

It is not everyone that can say that they stored 10,000 condoms under their bed for several months. Or even 9,999.