

Changing
the world
one
child
at a time

MAKENA Musings

Newsletter of MAKENA Children's Foundation, Inc.

Spring 2005 Vol. 6, No. 1

JAMBO



A Message
from the
President

Foundation
President
Sherri Mills

Our Eighth Graders did well on their exams. Congratulations to Hannah Wanja, Margaret Nyokabi, Mary Nyamburu, Simon Ngure and Peter Njore, our eighth graders who all passed the Kenyan Certificate of Primary Education Exam (KCPE). Please read the article in this issue and rejoice in their success.

Our sympathy to Jane Muigai in the loss of her father. We were sad to learn that Jane, Peter Muigai's wife, lost her father early in February. If you'd like to send a note to her, the address is P. O. Box 1363, Naivasha, Kenya. 20117.

Please write to one of our unsponsored children. We still need a few people who are willing to write to children in our program who do not have sponsors. These children do not receive letters and small gifts when the others do. It is such an excellent opportunity for you and your children or grandchildren to get to know someone from a very different culture. And, think of the difference it would make to the student in Kenya. The names and ages of the children who need an American friend are: Mary Wambui, 14; Mary Wanjiku, 13; Joseph Kariuki, 12; Hannah Njeri, 6.

The Inverness Kiwanis Club (Birmingham, AL) reached out to help a struggling mother. Two years ago when I went to visit the Makena children, many sponsors sent \$10 or \$20 for their students' families to use as needed. Many of you heard the story that one struggling mother received ten dollars. She was three months behind in her rent (\$3 per month) and the ten dollars allowed her to pay off her debt. She was incredibly joyful at her good fortune.

Right before I left to go to Kenya this past October, I received a check in the mail from the Inverness Kiwanis Club. A note in the envelope asked that the \$40 be used to pay this same mother's rent for a year.

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All Graduating 8th Graders Qualify for Secondary School

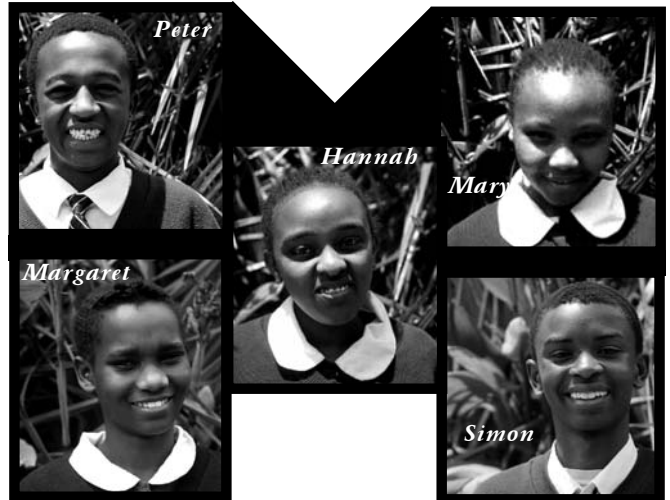
By Sherri Mills

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."

-- Margaret Mead

With the graduation of five Makena children from Elite's 8th grade, our Foundation has proven the power of a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens. All five children sat for the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE) and all passed -- four with flying colors. All qualified for secondary school.

If these children had attended their village schools, they would not have received a primary foundation that would have allowed them to pass the KCPE. If some of the brightest did qualify, it would not have been for a high-ranking national or provincial school. They would have proceeded to their local high school, if the family could pay the fees, and do without the help of their children in the fields.



Many of you who have been with our organization from the early days know that our dream was to take these children from their village school and give them a good education in a highly ranked, private boarding school with the belief that they would then be able to qualify to continue their education in secondary school. We believed completing secondary school would dramatically change their future and that of their families. Most children from small villages do not proceed to high school. Often subsistence farming is their only career path. With the scores made by our 8th graders, the children have proved our belief in them was well founded. They all have proceeded to high school.

Congratulations to Simon Ngure, Peter Njore, Mary Nyambura, Margaret Nyokabi, and Hannah Wanja who continue their educational journeys in good secondary schools.

My husband, Bert Brosowsky, and I sponsor Hannah Wanja, the first student to join our project. Already eight-years-old, Hannah was enrolled in the first grade in 1996. Her first year was difficult as she left her world of the Kikuyu language and joined a world where she heard only Kiswahili and English. As English is the language of instruction in Kenya, Hannah often found herself lost in the classroom. But from the beginning she did well in mathematics, showing us quickly how bright she was. By the second year, Hannah was often in the top five in her class and was reading and writing in both Kiswahili and English. A few years later she added French and is now "Quadra-lingual." Orphaned by AIDS, Hannah's life has not been an easy one, making her accomplishments even more exceptional.

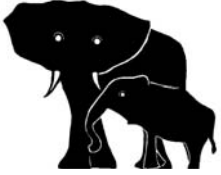
Hannah was invited to a brand new secondary school called Starehe Girls School. Starehe Boys School, founded in the late '50s by a British national who continues to direct the school today, is a prestigious, world-renowned secondary school in Nairobi. Many of you remember when our first graduating 8th grader, Ruoro, was admitted to Starehe, where he is now a senior. The school, exclusively for boys, had been rumored to be planning a sister school for girls. The school opened in January of this year. Only 72 girls from all across Kenya were invited to attend Starehe Girls School's first class. Hannah was one of the 72 girls chosen. Wow! What a long way she has come! And how proud we are of her.

Margaret Nyokabi, sponsored by a couple in Whitehouse Station, New Jersey, scored the highest grade made on the KCPE at Elite Junior School, 449 out of a possible 500. Margaret was invited to a very good Catholic secondary school. Our boys, Simon Ngure, sponsored by a couple in Danville, Indiana; and Peter Njore, sponsored by Teri-E Belf of Reston, Virginia, scored very well on the exam and received invitations to a well-ranked provincial school.

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MAKENA Musings

SPRING 2005



MAKENA Children's Foundation, Inc.
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If you'd like to sponsor or help sponsor a Makena student, please complete the form on the inside of this newsletter and send your donation TODAY to the Foundation at the address above! Your gift will be greatly appreciated!

Creative Teaching -- Kenyan-Style!

By Mary Jo Baich

While visiting the Elite School in Nyahururu in October, where our Makena children attend, I was summoned at 11:50 am to attend the seventh grade physics class by their instructor, Bernard Nduati Gikwa. Arriving at the classroom, I was grandly and cheerfully introduced to the class and 32 faces beamed back a welcome to me. Lighted by the many windows along the outside wall, this second floor classroom was lined with large desks leaving just enough room for Mr. Bernard to stage his lively, interactive, call-and-response teaching methods.

The goal of today's class was to identify and define the terms acid, base (we use the term alkaline) and neutral. Full-sized sheets of paper were quickly passed out with instructions to divide the paper into 24 equal squares, using a pencil and a ruler. Opening a large bag of fresh, and gloriously colored, salmon pink hibiscus, the teacher quickly darted up and down the narrow aisles handing to every two students a bloom with instructions to pluck individual petals and vigorously rub them on the paper, staining each square with color from the bloom. The lesson continued, then, with three to five students gathering around Mr. Bernard's desk every three or four minutes to distribute other plants or solutions that were rubbed or dropped by eye dropper on each of the previously stained squares. Thus, one-by-one, baking soda, oxalis, vinegar and numerous other solutions were given an opportunity to react to the hibiscus-stained paper.

The resulting colors, derived from the stained paper and the solutions commingling, told us whether we had an acid, base or neutral. While we worked, Mr. Bernard strode the aisles checking papers to see that we had correctly labeled the solutions and made the right hypothesis for the color derived. To instill good spelling, words unknown to most of the students were added to the lesson's already posted blackboard vocabulary list. Adding to the drama, Mr. Bernard would ask various students to give him an example of a solution that was an acid, base or neutral. Or we would huddle with a partner giving them one of these terms to which they would reply with one of the paper's findings. To each correct response he would ask the class for a single clap, which turned out to be an enthusiastic, stylized side clap. It occurred to me that this was a great way to release pent-up energy without having the class dissolve into chaos and, of course, a way to nurture class participation.

With minutes remaining in the schedule, he burst into a sing-song chant that went "acid, base, neutral," ending on a higher note to which the kids responded in kind. The next time the round ended on a lower note to which they again mirrored the intended response. With that, the 1 p.m. bell rang for lunch and the class was dismissed with the children humming the science class refrain.



Makena Sponsors: Diverse Lives, Unified Cause

By Mary Jo Baich

Meet Dr. Susan Miller, a clinical psychologist. She has written four psychology books: *The Shame Experience*, *Shame in Context* and *Disgust: the Gatekeeper Emotion*, published by the Analytic press; and *When Parents Have Problems*, a book for kids who have an alcoholic, mentally ill or an abusive parent, published by Charles C. Thomas.

Now she has turned her talent and pen to another genre, a novel, entitled *Indigo Rose*, released in January by Bantam Dell Paperbacks. It is the story of a young Jamaican woman who leaves behind her homeland and her beloved young daughter, Louisa, to escape the poverty of her life on the island. Just as she's adjusting to her new residence in Chicago, and to her position as housekeeper for a well-off, but troubled, family, her world collapses with the arrival of devastating news from home. Indigo numbs her pain through gambling and she hardens herself to the needs of her three young charges, who have lost their own mother to divorce and mental illness. Indigo's gambling takes her into a colorful, but dangerous, world from which she must ultimately extricate herself if she wants to survive.

Susan lives in Ann Arbor, Michigan, and became acquainted with the work of Makena during a Christmas safari to Kenya two years ago where she met Peter Muigai. She was not only impressed with Peter and his dedication to the Makena Foundation, but came to see the tremendous need for these children to be educated. Susan and Judith Saltzman share in the sponsorship of Joseph Njoroge.

Another fascinating sponsor story is that of Carol Flint, who resides in Santa Monica, California. Carol met Peter Muigai five years ago when she was in Kenya doing research for a movie based on a children's book, *How It Was With Doms*. The story is about a little boy and a cheetah. Although the book focuses on a family of British and American heritage, Carol was interested in expanding her research to include a Kikuyu family. Through various contacts, she arranged to meet and stay with Peter's family for a few days and visit his children's school as well as a local school in the nearby city of Naivasha.

It was an eye-opening visit for her. When Carol inquired about ways to help, she learned about the Makena Foundation and its goals. Carol's husband, Steve Jones, works in horticulture and the two of them had an unforgettable trip to Botswana and Zimbabwe a few years earlier. Carol says, "Like many other supporters of the Makena foundation, the combination of the special beauty of Africa and the hardship of the people there, inspired my husband and I to get involved." Carol and Steve sponsor Mary Muthoni.

Carol is a writer and producer for television and is currently writing and producing for *The West Wing*. Her other credits include *ER*, *The Court*, *Earth 2*, *LA Law* and *China Beach*. The cheetah movie, now titled *Duma*, was shot last year in South Africa and will be released in the spring of 2005.

We would love to hear your stories, too.

Please let us know some aspect of your life, travels, place you reside, or family; and, of course, how you came to be part of our Makena family. Please e-mail us.

Love of Kenya Leads to Board Membership/Sponsorship

By Scott Swedenburg

Never could I imagine a college trip to Kenya 25 years ago would one day lead me to Makena Foundation. Sherri Mills and I had been business associates and friends for years when one day she shared with me about her trip to Kenya and all the children from a village there who had few if any learning opportunities. She truly had a passion for these children and their education.

I also shared my love for the country and mentioned that if I could ever help, let me know. Well, it wasn't long before I got that call from Sherri asking me to join the board of a foundation she was forming. Sherri was busy finding people to help make her dream possible for these children.

Helping get the Makena Foundation off the ground has been a lot of fun, the greatest enjoyment for me and my family has been sponsoring Mungai Mbugua. He has truly blessed our family more than he will ever know. We are making an investment that has already paid off for us many times over.



If we're ever feeling sorry for ourselves, one look at his smiling face and any self-pity is quickly forgotten. When we see how appreciative he is of everything he gets, we are reminded of just how much we have and not to take it any of it for granted.

There are very few nonprofits where a donor can experience such a direct connection with the person they help. Makena Foundation allows me to easily see how my gift touches a child and its positive effect. I know my support is giving Mungai an education he would otherwise not have the opportunity to receive. And with that education, he will have so many more doors opened to him. I don't know which door he will choose or the direction his life will take, but I do know his mind has been expanded. He is going to make a contribution to his village, his country and, who knows, maybe even the world.

I have also had the blessing of being a board member for Makena since its inception and have seen Sherri's dream grow. In our first year, we were only able to help just a few children. Now through the gifts of many caring individuals, Makena Foundation is sending 30 children to school and the numbers are growing every year. What a great feeling!

Mungai Mbugua lost his mother shortly after he was born. Less than 2 years ago, he also lost his young father. Mungai started his education adventure with the Makena Children's Foundation in 1998 when he was only 4 years old. He has told the Swedenburgs that he is in the PE Club and especially enjoys football (soccer).

President's Message

(Continued from front)

Can you imagine her joy when she received the money? Imagine the joy for the club in knowing they could make that kind of difference in the family's life. And, by the way, this is not the family of the student the Inverness Kiwanis Club sponsors. They sent money for that family as well. It's so exciting that we can make so much difference, even with \$10 or \$20.



Are you interested in a Kenyan Safari to see wildlife and visit the Makena Children? Do you have any interest in traveling to Kenya for a wildlife safari that would include time with the Makena kids at their school in Nyahururu? The trip, in the initial stage of planning, will take place in 2006 or 2007, and would be organized by International Expeditions, working with Origin Safaris (formerly East African Ornithological Safaris E.A.O.S.) If you think you may be interested in this trip, please email me at makenafoundation@hotmail.com.

Report on Our Graduates

(Continued from front)

However, after investigating the school, Peter Muigai, Vice President of the MCF, was concerned about the school's reputation for behavioral and drug problems. After looking at many options, it was decided that the boys would return to Nyahururu to attend Elite Secondary School, where they will feel very much at home and will be academically challenged by fine teachers and an accelerated curriculum.

When you consider that 700,000 children take this test for 200,000 places, it is understandable that even children who qualify don't always get a place outside their own village high school (some of which are good and many of which are not). This happened to our Mary Nyambura who is sponsored by Sam and Cathy Yancy of Durham, North Carolina. Because the school to which she was invited falls far below the academic standards for which she's been prepared, we are returning her to Elite Secondary School to continue her studies.

Today we celebrate these children's success. Success made possible by the generosity of five sponsors, who we also celebrate. These sponsors enabled five precious children to realize a dream - enrollment in secondary school.

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has." A small group of thoughtful, committed Kenyan citizens started to secondary school this year. Will they be the small group that changes the world?



All the Swedenburgs (from left: Kathy, Jake, Scott and Matt) look forward to their letters from Mungai.



As we went to press with this newsletter, we learned that Makena Vice President Peter Muigai was beginning treatment for cancer. We ask that you keep Peter and his family in your prayers.

MAKENA Musings
is a publication of

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Meet the Kids



Last October, we were able to get all the Makena students together for a photograph. They are:

First row (from left): Mungai Mbugua; John Muiruri, Joseph Njoroge, Simon Mwangi, Peter Gatere, Ann Njeri, Martha Waithira, Hannah Wangui and Peris Njeri;

Second row (from left): Rachael Njeri, John Karanja, Samson Machohi, Simon Gatonye, Solomon Wanjoike, Daniel Kimani; Rosemary Njoki, Isabella Muthoni, Mary Muthoni, Lucy Muthoni, Rose Waithira and Mary Wanjiku;

And third row (from left): Mary Nyambura, Peter Njore, Hannah Wanja, Margaret Nyokabi, John Karanja, Mary Wambui, Mary Gatuku, Peter Kamau, Simon Ngure and Wanjiku Muruthi.

"It's an easy thing to do."

This quote from Andy Sweet, Nancy Rainwater and Adrienne Sweetwater, sponsors of Ann Njeri, sums-up one reason many Makena sponsors give for joining in this effort. Sponsorship means putting your energy into a global "leverage point": so little effort on our part creates a vast and varied positive effect on our world. "These few dollars make such a huge difference in this one child's life," this family says, "we wish her happiness, service and connectedness."

Your gift of \$1,200 provides room, board, tuition, uniforms, personal items for a year, and food staples for the family at Christmas.

It's the personal experience of relationship with the sponsored child, and witnessing first-hand the astonishing progress education brings, that captures the imagination of our sponsors. Teri-E Belf, who sponsors Peter Njore, says she is so gratified by "the letters Peter writes and how he expresses himself, the smiles on his face in photos, and believing I am really helping and inspiring someone to make some dreams possible." Education, Teri-E believes, enables people to make purposeful choices. "I hope for Peter a healthy, happy life in which he feels empowered to make choices that bring his good heart, his education and his personal gifts to all."

Maybe you can't pay \$1,200 a year, but you can share the cost with a friend, family member, church group or civic organization. Even smaller gifts are important, too.

Jim Adams says his dream for his sponsored child, Simon Mwangi, is that he "has a productive life and can pass on some of the love he has received." All these sponsors mentioned their respect for the Makena Foundation itself as another reason for their continued participation. "It is person-to-person, and that is special. The overhead of the organization is very small, so the gifts go to the kids," Jim says. Andy Sweet says it was their admiration for Foundation Vice President Peter Muigai and direct contact with the school in Africa that first prompted them to help. Teri-E Belf puts it this way: Makena Foundation President "Sherri Mills is the angel conduit directly to these children and I fully trust her and Peter Muigai to use the resources we all make available for the highest good of the children."

Please consider a gift yourself and pass this newsletter on to someone you know who might want to join us in this effort to "change the world one child at a time." Thank you.

-- Anne Batzer

Yes, I want to join in the effort and give the priceless gift of education to a deserving child.
Please accept my tax-deductible gift, payable to MAKENA Children's Foundation, Inc., 1248 Garland Drive, Birmingham, AL 35216.

- I want to sponsor a child for one year for \$1,200.
- I would like to share in the sponsorship of a child for one year for \$600.
- I am unable to sponsor a child at this time, but please use my gift of \$_____ to help as needed with tuition, personal care items, uniforms, activity fees or food staples.
- You have permission to mention my support in your publication(s).
- I prefer to make my gift anonymously.
- I am unable to contribute now, but please keep me informed about the work of MAKENA Children's Foundation.
- I would like to share my story relating to Africa or my sponsored child. Please contact me by phone or by e-mail .

Name _____

Address _____ City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Telephone _____ e-mail _____