

Changing
the world
one
child
at a time

MAKENA Musings

Newsletter of MAKENA Children's Foundation, Inc.

Fall 2007 Vol. 8, No. 2

JAMBO



A Message
from the
President

Foundation
President
Sherri Mills

Dear Makena Friends,

May this newsletter find you all well and happy. For those who have withstood floods this summer, we send you our prayers, to those who have withstood drought, we wish you lots of rain. For those of you who have had neither, we celebrate your blessings.

In Birmingham we have experienced a drought unlike any I've known in a lifetime of living here. Not to mention the record-breaking ten straight days of temperatures above 100 degrees. You can almost hear the grass cry when you step on it. Trees, grass, shrubs, flowers and lakes are so thirsty. I heard on NPR that the drought may continue through November. Shriek!

We hope you'll enjoy this issue of Makena Musings. Included is a heartwarming story about long-time sponsors, Judy and Jim Adams, meeting their student, Simon Mwangi. Don't miss the piece regarding higher education and our efforts to develop a plan for our students who qualify.

Another article of special interest is about Francis Karanja, our volunteer manager of Makena affairs in Kenya. His brother, Charles (pictured below), also assists with MCF activities.



The above-mentioned articles are not all we have to offer. Our hope is that you will enjoy reading the issue from cover to cover.

If you have suggestions for the newsletter, please let us hear from you.

Best Regards,

Sherri

Meet MCF Volunteer Francis Karanja

By Sherri Mills

Let me introduce you to Francis Karanja, who volunteers his time to manage many of the Makena Children's Foundation activities in Kenya. Although Francis lives in Nairobi where he is a Senior IT Consultant for Asyst International (K) Ltd, his ancestral home is in Maraigushu.

Francis spends many weekends with his family members in Maraigushu. He helps take care of the needs of his mother — and his nieces and nephews who have been orphaned by AIDS. Francis' brother, Charles, who is also coordinating activities for MCF, lives at home with his mother. Charles and Francis are able to communicate often by phone and by email.



Francis, who was a very bright young student, received his Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education in 1995 with a mean grade of A-. After attending Strathmore University in Nairobi where he received his certification as a certified public accountant, he graduated in 2001 from the University of Nairobi with a BSC in Computer Science.

Along with several other young professionals in Nairobi, Francis was a founding member of The Leadership Forum Club, an organization to mentor and help young students see the possibilities and opportunities offered by education. They also hope to encourage the children to continue their education to the university level. The participants travel as volunteers to schools around central Kenya to promote their important message. This activity reveals Francis' character and commitment because the concepts of volunteerism and mentorship are rare and little understood in Kenyan culture.

Francis knows well the difference an education can make. When asked what has been the importance of his education, Francis replied, "Education has given me a career, exposure and the foundation of a good life. It has also helped me make informed decisions as well as given me the ability to take advantage of opportunities. In summary, education helps me fulfill my life's purpose."

Francis would like to say to the sponsors of the Makena kids, "They (sponsors) may never know the full effect of their deeds, but the impact they have is immeasurable and eternal. They are heroes because they are ordinary people who are doing extra-ordinary acts. They are the true world changers! May God bless them abundantly."

Francis' knowledge of computer programs like Excel has helped us to better organize some of the Foundations documents and information. The board is certainly grateful for his talents and his willingness to work unpaid to help us attain our goals. He has shown great commitment to our mission.

Francis is engaged to Elizabeth, who is a university student. She is also involved in The Leadership Forum Club, and has mentored one of our students, Hanna Wanja.

One Sponsor's Story

By Anne Batzer

The small, intimate nature of the Makena Children's Foundation is one reason Jim and Judy Adams became sponsors of two boys after their first trip to Kenya in 2003.

"It's so much more personal than larger foundations," Jim says.



That intimate nature took on new meaning for Jim and Judy when they met one of the boys, Simon Mwangi, during their second Kenyan trip in February. Jim brightly sums up their initial experience: "After 15 minutes we were both in love with Simon," he smiles. "It was like we had known him forever."

The meeting was arranged by Makena friend and partner, Peter Muigai, who served as a guide during both of the Adams' Kenyan journeys. Peter's wife, Jane, accompanied Simon to Nairobi where he spent about eight hours visiting with the couple at the Norfolk Hotel. *(See photo above right.)*

"We really hit it off," Jim continues, "Judy offered Simon some gum and he offered it back to Judy first, before taking some for himself. He has incredible manners."

Simon's social skills were particularly impressive not only because he was meeting the Adams and their travel companions for the first time, but the lush hotel surroundings were a startling, unfamiliar environment for the young village boy.

"About every five minutes Simon would whisper in my ear 'May I please go to the restroom?'" Jim says. "After about the third time, I went with him. He would stop and examine every picture hanging in the corridor. He would gently touch items in the hall

and bathroom and say 'What is this? What does it do?' His curiosity was just so engaging."

Supporting Simon's schooling is an easy decision for the Adams. "Education is one of Judy and my passions," Jim explains. "Our own history shows us the difference an education can make."

The Adams grew up within a few blocks of each other in a San Antonio lower middle-class neighborhood. Only one-in-five students at their high school started college. Married for 46 years, Judy and Jim began dating when they were still teenagers. "After we married, Judy went to work so I could attend college," Jim says.

"It was like we had known (Simon) forever."

In a statement that reveals as much about Jim's humility as the value of his education, he says, "We live back in San Antonio now and we are no smarter than others we grew up with who are doing jobs not requiring an education." Jim's schooling resulted in a fulfilling career that has allowed him to travel the world. He served as President and CEO of Southwestern Bell Telephone (now AT&T) and Chairman of Texas Instruments.

Along the way he has found time to support education in his home state at several universities and lead a Texas commission that addressed ways to assist members of minority groups in going to college. He also works with Water for All, a nonprofit organization that uses simple, readily available technology to find clean water for villagers around the world.

But Jim is quick to turn the conversation away from himself and back to Simon Mwangi. "We shared a meal with him and it was delightful," Jim relates. "Judy ordered ice cream for him and it was a very big deal." There was also a brief shopping trip to a Nairobi department store where Simon carefully chose something he longed for: a suit. He also picked out a pair of tennis shoes and one shirt asking Jim, "It's so-o-o pretty, is it too expensive?"

Saying good-bye was poignant. Simon accompanied Judy and Jim on the bus that took them to the airport for the trip home. "We spent enough time with him that I feel like we got to know him pretty well. We established a real relationship. On the bus Simon sat with his arms around us. By the time we left he was sobbing. It was a very intimate occasion and deeply emotional for both Judy and me."



Parents and guardians gather for a meeting to discuss MCF students' progress.

We Need Your Advice

The academic potential of the students supported by the Makena Children's Foundation has proven to be even greater than President Sherri Mills first imagined when she founded the organization in 1997.

Our students have had extraordinary success. Some of our children are rated number one in their class, many others have been selected as class prefects. Two of our students have been accepted into Starehe Secondary School, rated as the top high school in Kenya. One of our girls, a young AIDS orphan, was included in the first class of girls ever to be admitted to Starehe. (At least one third of the Makena students are AIDS orphans.)

The "Makena Kids" have come so far. What's next for them?

Our goal is to insure that each child becomes an employable adult. Some believe a high school education is enough. But it's clear that a number of our students would thrive in a university setting, others would benefit from vocational programs.

In researching this issue, we've encountered two schools of thought.

One says we should look for scholarships to bring some of the students here to the U.S. for college. However, we believe it would be difficult for many to pass the English and SAT tests required for admission to American schools. Also, in a post-9/11 world, the student visa process is extremely challenging.

The second school of thought says we should look for scholarships for the students at Kenyan institutions. (Not many in Kenya have the opportunity to attend college. For example, in 2003 —the most recent year for which we can find data —170,000 Kenyan high school graduates took the college entrance exam. There were places in public universities for just 9,000 of them. Kenya's 15 private universities had a total enrollment of 6,000 additional students at that time. While these seem like overwhelming odds, remember that our secondary students have already overcome similarly daunting statistics and taken their places in Kenya's limited number of high school slots.)

There are vocational programs in Kenya in many fields, but our students would need scholarship help to attend.

We have numerous queries out, but so far we have found no government programs, nonprofit organizations or individuals who offer post-high school scholarships to Kenyan students.

CAN YOU PLEASE HELP US? We know that many of you have extensive international and/or educational experience. What advice do you have for us? Or what contacts do you have that might have important information we need?

Please join this dialogue and email your thoughts to Sherri Mills at sm595@bellsouth.net and Anne Batzer at annebazer@aol.com

Seasons of Sowing and Reaping

The season of gathering is upon us. The seeds of hope and promise sown ten years ago at the beginning of the Makena Children's Foundation have brought education to deserving children. Committed sponsors nurtured this idea into a ripe reality with their donations of money, gifts and letters of caring support. And thus, our kid's horizons moved from narrow and hopeless to the larger realm of possibilities.

Now we begin to see the fruition of our caring, their industry and our mutual aspirations. A couple of Makena's best are already college-bound, even more are wending their way through their high school curriculum and many more are using their creative minds to obtain their elementary education.

Let's take time to savor the bountiful harvest of these growing minds. And let's take time to renew our commitment to these children. Your continued support brings education to the door of children who could never hope to be educated. Your dollars support a child along the way, provide transportation to-and-from school and allow us to provide the supplies and books that keep the hope and promise alive. Won't you please help us in any way possible to continue the harvest?



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., 4138 Crossings Lane, Birmingham, AL 35242.

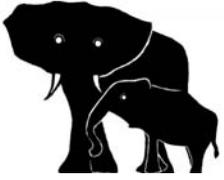
- I wish to lend a hand to the smooth operation of the Makena Children's Foundation with a gift of :
 - \$50 \$100 \$200 \$400 \$600 \$1,000
- You have permission to mention my support in your publication(s).
- I prefer to make my gift anonymously.
- I am unable to contribute now, but please keep me informed about the work of the 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 _____

MAKENA Musings



MAKENA Children's Foundation, Inc.
4138 Crossings Lane
Birmingham, AL 35242

If you'd like to help bring the priceless gift of education to deserving children, please complete the form inside and send your donation TODAY to the Foundation at the address above! Your gift will be greatly appreciated!

One Thing Leads to Another

By Mary Jo Baich

It started with a safari, a trip with friends to observe the wildlife of Kenya. It led to a question asked by Sherri Mills, "What do the children need?" Tour guide Peter Muigai replied, "Education."

This led to first one child, and then another, being educated. From this careful start the Makena Children's Foundation was born. Slowly but surely a board, sponsors and advocates came together to educate the children of Maraigushu who had lost one or both parents.

Ten years have happily passed and the dream continues to unfold. The commitment of the board is as strong as ever, renewed by its ability to overcome challenges and excited about seeing "our" kids mature.

To reacquaint you with the board we begin with President Sherri Mills and her husband, Treasurer Bert Brosowsky. They live in Birmingham, Alabama and are now both retired from their careers.

Sherri's professional life included work in public relations and fund raising for the American Heart Association and Birmingham Regional Emergency Medical Services. The last 14 years of her career were spent at Children's Hospital of Alabama where she rose through the ranks to become a vice president with responsibility for Corporate Communications, Child Advocacy and Community Development. She directed fundraising and operations for the first million dollar telethon in the state of Alabama — the Children's Miracle Network Broadcast that benefited Children's Hospital.

After 25 years of service, Bert retired as Director of the Birmingham Jefferson Convention Complex. For an additional six years he was the Managing Director of the Birmingham Children's Theater and then spent a year as Meetings Manager for the American Society for Reproductive Medicine.

This summer they welcomed the birth of their granddaughter Grace, who also resides in Birmingham. Their other two grandchildren live in El Paso, Texas so Sherri and Bert travel frequently to spend time with them. This summer they also found time to travel to the far-off kingdom of Bhutan and to India.

Besides his work with the Makena Children's Foundation, Bert volunteers 20-30 hours a month at the Convention and Visitors Bureau, which allows him to keep up with all that is going on in Birmingham and use his area of expertise.

Their sponsored child, Hanna Wanja, was the first student in the Makena project. She now attends the most prestigious Kenyan high school where she received one of just 72 academic scholarships offered in the whole country. Hanna is a very serious student who takes every opportunity to learn. She's also involved in many extracurricular activities at school. *(Hanna is pictured at lower right with Sherri Mills.)*

Sherri says, "It has been a great joy to watch these children develop over the years. To experience a child who was so scared she bawled at the first sight of me develop into a poised, articulate, young person is deeply encouraging.

"Many of our children have made astonishing strides in academics and many possess outstanding leadership skills. All are earnest students and rarely have we had to talk to a child about completing his/her homework, a testimony to their commitment. All but the youngest seem to understand the importance of the opportunity they have been given."

Bert adds, "After I traveled back to Kenya last September and spent time with the children, my commitment is stronger than ever. They all seem to be thriving, thanks to the opportunity being provided through the Foundation and their sponsors. This education will enhance their lives even if they return to their village and farm."

In our next newsletter we will look in on the lives of our other board members.



MAKENA Musings

is a publication of

MAKENA Children's
Foundation, Inc.
4138 Crossings Lane
Birmingham, AL 35242
Phone (205) 980-6861
e-mail sm595@bellsouth.net
www.makena.org

Anne Batzer, Co-Editor
annebatzer@aol.com

Mary Jo Baich, Co-Editor
mbaich7@earthlink.net

Tina Horton, Graphic Designer
tunat@bellsouth.net

Sherri Mills, President
sm595@bellsouth.net