

Changing
the world
one
child
at a time

MAKENA Musings

Newsletter of MAKENA Children's Foundation, Inc.

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JAMBO



A Message from the President

Foundation
President
Sherri Mills

Making a journey to Kenya is always exciting and inspiring – and somewhat tiring. My advancing age can be measured by how I experience my trips to Kenya. For many years I traveled alone to do the business of the Foundation.

Because of the expense and distance, I usually stay for two weeks. In that time I can accomplish a year's worth of tasks. Although I am intrigued by cultural differences, am an adventurous eater and a lifelong-learner, after two weeks I find that I begin to feel isolated. When I experience a life very different from my own, hear all around me a language I don't understand, eat a diet that is unlike my own (and excludes chocolate!), listen to unfamiliar music and experience unfamiliar traditions, I can begin to understand how it feels to be a minority. One of the greatest blessings I have received from our work in Kenya is that I do understand what it's like to be different now. I think it is far too seldom that North Americans, especially white North Americans, truly experience this isolation. Experiencing this feeling in Kenya has made me a better person.

I remember one trip when I was alone. I played the same audiotape over and over and over at night, just to hear the English of my homeland, and in this particular case the English of the Southern States – the sound that soothes me like my mother. So now, taking someone with me who shares my culture means being able to debrief at night and brings opportunities for expanding my perspective and understanding.

Since 2006, friends or my husband have accompanied me. This year I had the great pleasure of sharing Kenya and the MCF project with my sister, Jean Garland. Jeani, a first grade teacher in Lee's Summit, Missouri, teaches a unit on Africa each year. After her trip this summer, I think she might narrow the focus of her Africa unit to Kenya. *(See photos from trip inside.)*

My 27-hour trip begins in Birmingham, continues to Detroit, with another connection in Amsterdam, and then a final leg to Nairobi. On this summer's trip, there was a seven-hour layover in Detroit and another three hours in Amsterdam. However, with good company, good weather and on-time departures and arrivals, the trip was tolerated very well. However, when we arrived tired and unwashed in the evening of the second day, it took over an hour-and-a-half to pass through immigration. Our plane was changed to a jumbo jet shortly before our departure date. I wonder if Jomo Kenyatta International Airport was informed, because it was completely overwhelmed by

(Continued on back)

Kenya: Up Close and Personal

By Anne Batzer

There were many "firsts" for Jeani Garland when she accompanied her sister, Makena Children's Foundation President Sherri Mills, on a recent trip to Kenya.

"I had never been in a country so poor before," Jeani says. "And I met people who had never seen a white person. For the first time in my life, I was the one who was different. It was so good for me."



As Jeani describes the greeting she received from the parents and guardians of the Makena kids, she is nearly overcome with emotion. "When Sherri and I stepped out of the car in the village, all the women approached us singing a song of welcome, accompanied by rhythmic clapping. Then, one-by-one, they came up and hugged and kissed us on the cheek. I'll never forget it. They met us this way because they value so highly the education their children are receiving."

Valuing education is something Jeani shares with the women of the village. She's been teaching elementary school for 15 years in her hometown of Lee's Summit, Missouri. Jeani's superb educational skills were helpful on this trip – as was something else she borrowed from her own first grade classroom: a stuffed toy chimpanzee she calls "Zippy."

"I'm not a ventriloquist so the kids can see me talking for Zippy, but he makes them giggle and laugh," she says. Over the years in Jeani's Missouri classroom, she's used Zippy to help a child in need of comfort, such as one newly placed in foster care or another who is dealing with a parent's divorce. "They will talk with Zippy about important things long before they are ready to share it with an adult," she says. "He's both soothing and fun for them."

The children in Kenya responded the same way. "Zippy was such a draw. All the kids wanted to hold him and have their picture taken with him. Even the teenagers were so caught up with what he does. It was a great way for us to laugh together and get to know each other quickly."

Forming relationships has certainly been a key to Makena's success. Cross-cultural respect and

attention to detail are others. Volunteers who travel to assist Sherri on her frequent trips to do the work of the Foundation are surprised at how difficult and exhausting the journey is. The careful work of making sure communication among the adults is clear and that the children's needs are met, take meticulous attention.

"I'm Sherri's biggest fan," her sister says. "Without referring to any notes, she knows each child, who they live with, their grades and what their past concerns have been. It's so

touching to see the way the children respond to her."

Jeani spent time observing in the elementary classrooms at Elite Schools in Nyahururu where many of the Makena children are students. She says she was shocked by what she discovered. Teaching techniques from their British curriculum might be considered old-fashioned in the U.S., but Jeani says the Kenyan children's academic skills are ahead of what she observes in her first grade classroom in Lee's Summit.

"There is a lot of memorization, emphasis on rote learning and repetition, like the way I was taught as a child. In America we tend to emphasize comprehension first," Jeani explains. "In Kenya, this solid foundation of basic skills in the primary grades allows for higher level thinking, deeper comprehension and problem-solving in the upper grades."

The children have few books or hand-outs so they copy everything from three blackboards the teachers prepare each day. "In the first grade, children are writing clearly on narrow college-ruled paper, reading and doing multiplication and division," Jeani says. The experience has caused her to re-think some of her own teaching methods – and also has assured her that the children being educated by Makena sponsors are receiving an excellent education.

Before she left East Africa, Jeani spent some time just talking to the teenagers with Makena sponsorships. "What would you say to American teenagers?" she asked them. Their interesting answers: "Keep your traditions." "Education is the way to a good future, make sure they know that." *(Continued on back)*

Kenyans Pass New Constitution

Compiled by Mary Jo Baich

We all hope that news of the recent peaceful election process in Kenya marks a promising change in its stability. So many Kenyans have shared with us their excitement and desire that their country will now have a more workable and equitable form of government.

We received this letter from the Kenya Tourist Board:

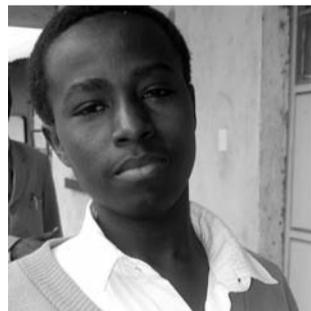
"The much-awaited National Referendum to vote on the proposed new constitution was held August 4th, 2010 after a rigorous but peaceful debate. Kenya's Independent Electoral Commission announced there was a high voter turnout of 71%, resulting in a 67% majority in favor of the new constitution. Voting took place at over 27,000 polling stations in a peaceful and calm manner with no reports of a single incident of violence or of any other disturbances. Leaders from all sides have accepted the results as the will of the people."

International observers and the media have noted the peaceful manner in which rallies were held all over the country in the run-up to the

Referendum. The well-organized conduct of the voting process and tallying of the results by the new Electoral Commission was widely seen as fair and transparent.

The outcome of the Referendum and the free and fair way in which it was conducted marks a turning point for Kenya, creating new optimism and confidence that the country has regained its former international reputation as a law-abiding and politically stable nation.

Now that the Referendum voting process has passed – peacefully with the outcome accepted by all and with a clear demonstration that true democracy has prevailed – we look forward to welcoming increasing numbers of visitors to Kenya."



In addition to the Elite Schools, Makena also supports children at several other schools. Clockwise from upper left: Sherri is pictured with students from Wellsprings Girls School: (back row, from left), Hannab Wangui, Isabel Muthoni and Martha Waitihira and (front, from left) Rosemary Njoki, Mary Wanjiku and Mary Muthoni. Alice Njoki, Naiyasha Girls School. Mary Muthoni Wairimu, Alliance Girls School. Stephen Mungai, Good Shepherd School.



Four Makena graduates met Sherri and Jeani at their hotel in Nairobi. Pictured, from left, are: Simon Ngure, Peter Njore, Lucy Wanjiku and Solomon Wanyoike.

Keeping the Dream Alive

Sherri Mills is a good storyteller! So I always look forward to her return from Kenya, for it's always followed by a joyous phone call in which she brims with confidence over the fruition of the Makena Dream. Being with the children, meeting with their guardians, as well as observing the enthusiasm of the staff at each of the schools our children attend is uplifting and renewing. The Dream Lives On!

Like other organizations, we too have more somber moments. We lose sponsors due to death or illness. Sometimes sponsors notify us of the financial stresses they are enduring. Over the years these events take a toll. We now feel a financial squeeze of our own.

Yes, we know it is the economy, a fact readily apparent to us all; yet our dream is alive and well and our responsibility of educating these young minds is strongly felt. As we saw the attrition of some of our sponsors through their circumstances in life, we decided (as good stewards of the Makena monies) not to add any more children to the school rolls since 2006. Yet, we still have 32 children from the third grade to the third year in high school in the education pipeline.

Six of these students now have no sponsor at all.

While the majority of our students have sponsors who faithfully fulfill their financial commitment and will be there to celebrate their student's graduation, other sponsors have not been so fortunate.

Surely we can rally to get these six children to cross the finish line of graduation from high school. Together, let's find a way to shore up the monies needed to make this happen.

WOULD YOU PLEASE:

- Dig a little deeper by donating a larger annual amount or sending a monthly amount to the Makena Children's Foundation to cover the expenses of these six children?
- Consider paying your tuition earlier or in three equal installments? Monies for tuition are due in Kenya the first of January, May and August. These are critical dates that must be met. Having your donation prior to these dates makes it possible to meet our financial deadlines.
- Consider being a sponsor or partial sponsor for one of these six children? Just put a check mark by the child you wish to sponsor.

We greatly appreciate our sponsors' contributions to the welfare and well-being of the Makena children. We could not accomplish these goals without your generous support. Thank you for helping us achieve the Makena Dream.

~ Mary Jo Baich ~



JOHNSON KAMAU



JOHN KARANJA



MARY MUTHONI



JOHN NJOROGE



HANNAH WANGUI

Yes, I want to help a deserving child achieve the dream of a life-changing education.

Please accept my tax-deductible gift, payable to Makena Children's Foundation, Inc., 4138 Crossings Lane, Birmingham, AL 35242.

- I wish to sponsor the child indicated above with a gift of \$2,000 annually.
- 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 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 .



MARY WANJIKU

Name _____

Address _____ City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Telephone _____ e-mail _____



MAKENA Musings

Fall 2010



MAKENA Children's Foundation, Inc.
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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!



The Makena Kids 2010 - Elite School Students

Front row, from left: Hannab Njeri, Naomi Wairimu, Hannab Virginia, John Muiruri, Christopher Kidali, Peter Gatere, David Maina and Johnson Kamau. Second row, from left: Evans Mungai, Simon Mwangi, Duncan Kaboro, John Njoroge, Joseph Njoroge and Ann Njeri. Third row, from left: Rachael Njeri, Rose Waithira, Mary Gatuku and Peris Ngure. Back row, from left: Simon Gatonye, Samson Machobi and John Karanja. See inside for more student photos.

President's Message (Continued from front)

our arrival. (Of course, we've all had worse travel stories since 9/11.) So it was late in the evening when we reached our hotel, which had been carefully chosen according to our Department of State's Travel Alert. (Actually, the State Department warns against travel to Kenya at this time.) Nairobi hotels, restaurants and clubs where many Americans or Europeans gather are considered dangerous. The restaurants and clubs are not an issue for me, but choosing a hotel that has good security and is not in the center of local activities is important – and very expensive. We have found a good place in the "Up a Hill" area out of the center of town. Each time we arrived at the hotel, the underside of our car was inspected with mirrors on long handles.

When we leave the Nairobi area and go into the "out back," I feel much less vigilant. People everywhere in Kenya are welcoming, gracious and hospitable. Our next hotel is in Naivasha, an old historic resort – once a favorite of the English who traveled there from Nairobi on holiday in colonial times – is now what we call in the U.S. a "fleabag." Yet it's still expensive.

From there we go to Maraigushu for a parents/guardians meeting. What joy to share all these wonderful friends with my sister. We were welcomed before we could even get out of the car by the voices of the women – mothers, aunts, grandmothers and sisters of our students – singing a Kikuyu song. Jeani is loved wherever she goes, and Maraigushu was no exception. My favorite place to sleep in Kenya is in the home of the Waitthakas, owners of the Elite Schools in Nyahururu. I was very excited for my sister to meet these people who I am privileged to call my friends. They brought us up-to-date on the upcoming referendum vote and other local politics. I met with our students while my sister observed classes Kindergarten through Standard Three. We traveled on some very difficult roads to reach all the schools where our children are enrolled. Although the infrastructure has improved since my first trip to Kenya, there is much work yet to be done. There is still no electricity in Maraigushu.

Back in Nairobi we spent our last day with Charles Karanja running last minute errands. Francis Karanja's wife, Elizabeth, and her two darling daughters hosted us for lunch and supper and then it was off to arrive at the airport the recommended three hours before our flight. Just before we were to go through the airport gates, we were stopped at a police roadblock. It was a "shake down" by the local police who often set up these roadblocks, and if they are not paid a bribe, will see to it that we are held up until we miss our plane. Our driver, who was very nonchalant about the situation, paid the bribe and we didn't have a long wait while they fully inspected the car and rummaged through our luggage piece by piece. I am so fortunate to live in the United States of America!

Things were on schedule out of Nairobi and Amsterdam, and then the nightmare of customs began in Detroit. I almost missed my connection home because one of my bags set off an alert – an alert that warned of explosive powders. This required extra TSA folks to look at me, question me and search my luggage – all of my luggage. It also required that I go into the air chamber that blows or sucks – I'm not sure which – any particles off one's body and clothing. I said to one of the TSA officers, "Well, no one can say you guys profile. I'm just an old lady trying to help kids in Africa." I was finally allowed to proceed after they decided the problem might have been my nitroglycerin pills.

So the trip is sometimes arduous. But always rewarding. And having someone along who looks like me, talks like me and loves chocolate makes it easier. My sister and I had lots of time to visit with the children and with each other. She fell in love with Kenya. I knew she would.

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Kenya: Up Close (Continued from front)

When she was back home at Lake Lotawanna Methodist Church where she's a member, she described her Kenya trip to her Sunday school class. "People who saw what I saw would never hesitate to sponsor a child," she told them. "For the Makena children and their families, receiving an education is the fulfillment of a dream they never even dared to dream. I'm just so passionate about it now."

Jeani's friends at church now share her passion. As soon as they heard her stories, they took up a collection and have taken on the sponsorship of a motivated Kenyan student.

