

Changing  
the world  
one  
child  
at a time

# MAKENA Musings

Newsletter of MAKENA Children's Foundation, Inc.

Spring 2010 Vol. 11, No. 1

## JAMBO



### A Message from the President

Foundation  
President  
Sherri Mills

All six students who took the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education exam in November have qualified for secondary school. Five of the students did especially well, and all received invitations to schools around the country. Congratulations to all our students. (See photographs on the back of this newsletter.)

**Mary Muthoni Wairimu** scored 416 out of 500 on the exam and received an invitation from a top national school, Alliance Girls' School. Mary is an extremely bright child and is well able to take advantage of the opportunity afforded her by the generosity of Tom and Mary Carol Day of Oregon.

**Alice Njoki Kibugi** scored 399, and was invited to Naivasha Girls' School. Alice, like Mary, was recommended to us by Mr. Gitau, Headmaster of a Maraigushu primary school. Since we involved Mr. Gitau in the selection of our students, we have taken several very bright children into the program. Alice will do well, thanks to the opportunity given to her by Anne and John Batzer of Oregon.

**Simon Mwangi Maina** scored 391 on the exam and received an invitation to Karima Boys School. Simon has been sponsored since he was very young by Mr. and Mrs. Jim Adams of Texas. The Adamses were able to meet Simon a couple of years ago, and he quickly won their hearts. You may remember reading about Simon's emergency appendectomy in a past newsletter.

**Evans Mungai Njenga** scored 381 and was invited to a provincial school. As our research found that the school was inferior to Elite, Evans returned to Elite. Evans' sponsor, LaVerne Ramsey, was also able to meet her student. Read about Evans and LaVerne in the "Getting to Know You" feature inside this issue. Thanks, LaVerne, for giving Evans such a wonderful opportunity.

**Peris Njeri Gitundi** scored 368, and received an invitation from a provincial school which was determined to be inferior to the opportunity she could receive at Elite. Peris has been sponsored by a number of people in her short school life. Her sponsors have been our much-appreciated temporary sponsors. However, a few years ago Sharon Burdette and Chris Metcalfe from here in Birmingham took over her sponsorship. Thanks to their faithfulness, Peris has been able to continue her education.

**Hannah Wangui Carrey's** score was below the cut-off of 350 marks, so she joined other secondary girls from our

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## A Day for Celebrating Our Kids

By Anne Batzer

The week in April before the annual Prize Giving Day at Elite Schools, where many of our "Makena kids" are students, is a flurry of activity. Flowers are planted, cracks in the asphalt are filled and banners depicting scenes from Kenya's history and its wildlife are hung with care. Huge red-and-white or green-and-white striped tents are erected to cover the several thousand chairs needed for the attendees.

solos and played drums, displaying their brilliant musical talent. A teen theater troupe presented skits on social issues including topics of domestic violence and "Our Changing Culture." The diversity of the program revealed Elite's commitment to preparing students for a broad future.

Owner/educators of the school, Daniel and Keziah Waithaka, pay attention not only to



Prize Giving Day is a long celebration where the students' academic, artistic, athletic and leadership achievements are acknowledged. There's entertainment, presentation of awards, speeches and lunch.

The year I witnessed the festivities, the entrance to the tent area was filled with tables displaying students' science exhibits. A long receiving line of school and community dignitaries greeted parents as they arrived. Specially chosen secondary students including some of our "Makena kids," all dressed in their baby-blue uniform sweaters, solemnly escorted parents to their seats under the tents.

Parents of the Makena students arrived in a jovial mood. Outfitted in their colorful best, they'd obviously enjoyed the ride together in the two matatus (buses) the Foundation hired to bring them to Nyahururu from their village, Maraigushu.

Preschool and elementary students began the program with a series of charming traditional tribal dances. Directed, not by an adult, but by one of their own tiny peers, the children were costumed and festooned with headdresses they had made themselves. They celebrated their culture with exuberance. It was particularly fun to notice the two Italian students whose little white faces contrasted with those of the black Kenyan children on stage. Regardless of heritage, all the kids danced with the same sense of joy and abandon.

Middle and high school students sang both traditional and modern songs from several genres including rap. Makena students Peter Njore, Martha Waithira and Lucy Muthoni sang

academic issues, but to emotional and societal concerns as well.

Many awards and certificates were presented to students who were each called to the stage to be acknowledged. I will never forget the moment when the student we sponsor, Alice Njoki Kibugi, received the award for being first in her class. (In photo above, Anne is shown presenting an award to another Elite student.) Many of Elite's students come from privileged, enriched environments. However, I had seen the humble home where her widowed mother, Grace Njeri, raises Alice and her six siblings. I had also experienced the keen intelligence in Grace's eyes and conversation. Without access to books, she has somehow managed to prepare Alice exceedingly well for this educational opportunity provided through the Makena Children's Foundation.

Long speeches topped-off the program. Highlight was from Mary Njoroje, Kenya's Director of Basic Education, who spoke of progress in her efforts to raise educational levels in Kenya and challenged the students to do their best work.

But like kids the world over, after such excitement – as the day and the speeches wore on and on – most of the students (and some of the adults) gently nodded their heads and dozed in their chairs as the afternoon heat enveloped all of us. (See photo on back.)

The celebratory spirit was revived when lunch was served in a beautiful grassy meadow adjacent to the tents. Then the "Makena kids" joined their parents in the matatus and headed home for Spring break.

# Getting to Know You

By Mary Jo Baich

Just as a stone thrown into a pond causes ripples to cover the pond's surface, the events of our childhood create a ripple effect throughout our adult lives. A case in point is the Makena Children's Foundation sponsor LaVerne Ramsey. LaVerne and her three brothers were raised by their mother who was the family's single source of income. Like the single parents in the Makena

much. Four children earned four college degrees, resulting in four successful careers.

LaVerne became a certified financial planner. Her life-long passions for travel and photography have taken her all over the world to destinations such as Antarctica, East Africa, Amazon River, Peru and Turkey. Her love for photography and her career dovetailed nicely and gave her the

introvert who is usually smiling. He is active in school and his teachers write that he has great potential. Evans says his role model is the African American, Ben Carson, who was also from a family of limited means. Ben did not have a father in his life either, but he had a very determined mother. Evans is inspired that Ben eventually graduated from Yale, became an accomplished neurosurgeon and a successful writer of three best selling books. In 2008 Ben Carson received the



*Laverne Ramsey and her nephew, Clark Davis, visit with Laverne's "student of promise," Evans Mungai Mjenga*



*Makena student Evans Mungai Mjenga*

program, LaVerne's mom knew that she faced great odds against obtaining college educations for her four children.

However, when LaVerne's oldest brother was 12, he gave a speech that impressed a local businessman in Montgomery, Alabama where they lived. From the sixth grade on, this generous man financed the tuition for her brother to attend Stark University School, a college prep institution. This investment, coupled with the boy's work ethic and good grades, got him through high school, earned him a scholarship to Harvard and an appointment to the Naval Academy. With this education, he went on to have a successful career as a businessman.

While no one else stepped up to pay the tuition for the other three siblings, the ripple effect had been set in motion. Their Mom, inspired by one man's generosity, set her sights on having all her children obtain a college degree. This determined woman, now deceased, accomplished this goal by being a hard working seamstress. LaVerne remembers, "People came with armloads of clothes and she could never say no." It was the values and tenacity she instilled into her children that allowed them to accomplish so

opportunity to capture Warren Buffet on film at the Berkshire Hathaway annual meetings. These pictures, taken yearly since 1990, have been published in two Buffet biographies.

And the ripples of one man's generosity continue for LaVerne Ramsey. She not only recalls the determination her mother had for her children's education, but she has seen first hand the passion her friend Sherri Mills has in promoting education in Africa through the Makena Children's Foundation. LaVerne has responded in kind by sponsoring a Makena child of promise so that he, too, may obtain the best education possible, a dream his mom might not have thought possible.

Meet LaVerne's student of promise, Evans Mungai Mjenga. He is the fourth child of Lucy Nyokabi Njenga, a mother of 7. Her husband died from a heart attack in December of 2004, ending the possibility for further education for Evans.

But in July of 2005 LaVerne became Evans' sponsor. Born in September of 1995, Evans is described as polite and a bit of an

Presidential Medal of Freedom. Way to go, Evans, this mentor is setting the bar high.

On her second trip to Kenya (in 2006), LaVerne took a deceased brother's grandson, Clark, on a photo safari. Upon their arrival in Nairobi, LaVerne met Lucy, Evans' mother. Later when the safari neared Thompson Falls in Nyahururu, LaVerne and Clark spent time with Evans. The Elite High School, which Evans attends, is across the street from this famous tourist attraction. Though it was a short visit there are some wonderful photos to remind them of the connection they have to each other.

LaVerne ends her note to me for this story with the insight: "It is likely, just by the law of averages, that many of Makena's donors have to make sacrifices to fit the tuition for a Kenya child into their budget." She continues, "when you write the check think of the ripples you are making for others in another country and continent."



Our pond ...  
 though not large ...  
 is nonetheless,  
 important.

Our Makena Children's Foundation pond is not large, but it is important because it includes bright, precious children from single-family homes in the village of Maraigushu, Kenya.

Your dollars send these children to an established and well-run school several hours away from their homes to earn an education not accessible to them otherwise. With excellent schooling they will have the tools to get jobs and help their families in ways that would never be possible without it. Your dollars continue the ripple effect and inspire these children to prize education for what it will accomplish in their own and their family's lives. And also to prize it for their own children someday. In time we are confident they will accept the responsibility of continuing the ripple effect for other members of their community. Won't you please help us keep the current moving through the pond until they can do it for themselves?

~ Mary Jo Baich ~

**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., 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 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 \_\_\_\_\_

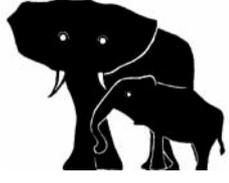
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MAKENA Children's Foundation, Inc.  
4138 Crossings Lane  
Birmingham, AL 35242

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!



## “Will she EVER finish talking?”

*Kids are the same everywhere. Here a group of students nap as they wait for an awards day speaker to conclude her talk.*

### President's Message (Continued from front)

program who have been enrolled at Wellsprings Girls School. Hannah has been with us since she was four years old, and has only been sponsored the first few years. The Makena Foundation has sponsored her with undesignated gifts. Although Hannah is not a scholar, she has worked hard and grown socially, mentally and emotionally. We thank those who are not able to permanently sponsor a child, but who give us what they can when they can. Without them, we couldn't continue to help an unsponsored child like Hannah.



MARY



ALICE



SIMON



PERIS



HANNAH

Really Big News: **Solomon Wanyoike** made an A- on the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education. That means he is guaranteed a place in university and help from his government to continue his education. Congratulations, Solomon! And, congratulations and thank you to Mr. and Mrs. Jim Adams of Texas for providing the opportunity. If the sponsor names seem familiar, it's because they are also Simon Mwangi's sponsors.

As I finish up this message to you, I'm thinking about how fortunate I am to work with all of you who have shown in some way – sponsorship, donations, in-kind gifts, administrative time, encouragement, requests for newsletters – that you care about these children so far away, but nevertheless so precious. Thanks to those of you who have continued to give in these hard economic times. Some of those gifts come at some sacrifice to the donor. Thank you for believing ALL children are precious – not just those in our beloved United States.



SOLOMON

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