

Changing
the world
one
child
at a time

MAKENA Musings

Newsletter of MAKENA Children's Foundation, Inc.

Fall 2006 Vol. 7, No. 2

JAMBO



A Message from the President

Foundation
President
Sherri Mills

APRIL AND SEPTEMBER VISITS

After visits to see the Makena students in April and September of this year, I can assure you they are doing well. They always ask that I give you their greetings.

How wonderful it was to have Anne Batzer accompany me on my trip in April. Anne and her husband, John, sponsor one of our children. You can read about her first visit with her student, Alice Njoki, elsewhere in the newsletter. Anne's interest in and knowledge of various cultures made her a wonderful companion. Anne is known in her native Oregon for her dedication to peace and advocacy for special needs children and their families. She is active in mediation in her community.

My husband, Bert, accompanied me on my last trip. He was delighted to see again some of the children he first met when he was in Kenya in 2000. There were only eight students in the program in 2000, and we had not yet made the move to Nyahururu Elite School. Bert met many children for the first time and was taken in like family by the Waithakas at the school. He was greatly impressed by the school plant and the wonderful faculty he met. The children were delighted to meet bwana yangu (my husband).

You may wonder what we do when we make Makena trips to Kenya. Each trip includes a visit with the parents/guardians and a visit to the school to see the students.

At the parents/guardian meeting we discuss how the children are doing, how the process is working, how adherence to rules and regulations impact the effectiveness of our efforts and how we can solve any problems that have come up. We also share friendship and camaraderie and delicious Kikuyu food.

On my last visit we had a lively discussion regarding how to help the children stay focused on learning while they are out of school for holidays. Parents or guardians of several of our best students shared what they do to see that their children keep up with their work. Some find neighbors who will help their children in difficult subjects, some go to other members of the family who are better educated, some make sure that their student has a break from the fields or housework to keep up their reading.

(Continued on back)

A Letter Full of Grace

By Anne Batzer

A slim brown envelope stacked between the bills and holiday catalogues immediately caught my attention when I opened my rusty, rural mailbox one day last December. The nearly-neon colors of the bright Kenyan stamps depicting cashews, sisal and avocados lifted my spirits on that pale Oregon winter afternoon.

But the letter inside the envelope brought me even higher. It was from Grace Njeri Kibugi, the mother of Alice Njoki, the Makena student my husband John and I sponsor. Writing in an elegant script, Grace expressed her gratitude. She also sent us welcome news of Alice's progress — and so much more.



In the few minutes it took to read Grace's letter, every sentimental "peace on earth" holiday card and every sappy "one world" cliché suddenly made perfect, rational sense. Our considerable differences of geography, lifestyle and race instantaneously disappeared. Grace's eloquent expression of her maternal longings reignited our own parental wishes. Knowing the extreme poverty of the Makena families, the beauty of her faith restored us. The gift Grace gave us by sharing her courageous dreams continued, long after the holidays, to inspire and fill us with sustaining hope.

It also was the first expression of the gracious Kenyan hospitality I experienced daily when I accompanied Makena President Sherri Mills on her trip there in April. I went along to assist Sherri in completing work for the Foundation. Connecting with her at the Amsterdam airport was a sentimental reunion. I first met Sherri when we shared an African travel experience on a photo safari in 1995. It was on that trip that Sherri got the first glimmer of the idea to start an educational foundation. Watching her take the personal initiative to respond to human need, and seeing the steady growth of the Makena Foundation, has been an ongoing example for me of the power of one individual to create luminous change. The trip was filled with many precious moments but meeting "our" child, Alice, and her mother, Grace, stand out.

It was our first morning in Nyahururu at the campus of the Elite School and the Makena kids spotted Sherri from afar. They ran to be close to her, to touch her hand and hug her. The older kids approached more slowly but with no less enthusiasm. They gently cut a path through the swarm of younger children to greet Sherri and talk openly, and with great humor, about their lives. I introduced myself to the kids and answered all their questions about my family and life back home in America. Then, I scanned the crowd, "Does anyone know Alice Njoki?" I asked.

Several heads nodded and a group of girls headed toward the dormitory to find her. When they returned with Alice I was immediately struck with her quiet dignity. She was so shy at first she could barely look at me, glancing away when I expressed my pleasure at meeting her. But she didn't leave my side. For the next thirty minutes Alice accompanied me around the campus as the other kids noisily pointed out the soccer field, the computer lab and the library.

Finally, when I wasn't even looking at her, Alice slipped her hand into mine. I smiled at her. "May I carry your bag for you, please?" she whispered. It was such a thoughtful gesture and a sweet moment I will always remember. I gratefully handed her my travel pack and we became instant friends.

(Continued on page 2)

2006 Makena Memories



Clockwise, from bottom: The Makena Kids gather together for a photo.

Keziab and Daniel Waitbaka, owners of Nyabururu Elite Schools, enjoy time with daughter Tabitha, who recently returned home after nine years of study and work in the United States.

Makena Children's Foundation Treasurer Bert Brosowsky bids a fond goodbye to Daniel Waitbaka.

Anne Batzger and Sherri Mills visit with Kenya Minister of Basic Education Mary Njoroge.



Grace (Continued from front)

Back in the village, Maraigushu, where the children had returned home for school break, Alice was there when I awoke the first morning. She had walked the more than five miles from her home to where we were staying in order to spend the day with me. She was proudly wearing the bright pink outfit and turquoise watch I'd given her the day before. By the end of our trip and our time together, Alice was comfortably climbing onto my lap, and giggling at the honest compliments I loved bestowing on her.

I met her mother, Grace, at the day-long Makena parent-guardian meeting. Grace is tiny, but her upright posture immediately communicates her strength. A single mother, Grace is raising seven children in a remote part of the village. She and the other women were cooking lunch over a hot fire. The aroma of the Kenyan dishes, ugali and irio, filled the air.

During the meeting I was impressed with Grace's comments. She was every bit as articulate as she

had been in the letter she had written to us. In a culture where men do most of the talking, Grace stood and held her ground.

On our last day in Kenya, Grace followed her daughter's example and walked the long way from her home to visit us and again express the gratitude of all the Makena families to their American sponsors. "Please tell them," she said, "we are praying to God to help them and their families and to fill them with happiness."

Thanks Giving

By Mary Jo Baich

A familiar and enduring symbol of our Thanksgiving holiday is the cornucopia. (This conical shape actually originated in Greek mythology---as the horn of the goat that suckled Zeus!) But for Americans, this horn of plenty represents all the many blessings of harvest, personal freedoms and diversity we so enjoy in our lives. This is the season of giving thanks for all we have.

We at the Makena Children's Foundation turn to you and give our grateful thanks for all the support you have extended to the children of Kenya for the last nine years. The depth and breadth of the program is due to your generous and thoughtful support. We acknowledge the bountiful harvest you have brought to the lives of our youngsters who, without you, would not have received the lasting gift of education.

This January we will take a short break from adding more pupils in order to shore up the needs and demands of the Foundation. While our pupils shine brightly, and they are our main focus, we have other operational expenses. These include communicating with you; traveling and visiting our students; meeting with their parents and guardians; spending time with the Foundation's Kenyan management team, and meeting with the Waithaka family who run the school where our children attend.

We would greatly appreciate an end of year donation to help with our huge bag of needs.

We acknowledge that for some of our sponsors the yearly sponsorship is truly a sacrificial stretch. Please accept our deepest gratitude. However, others have indicated a desire to support the Foundation at an even higher level.

If you can help us, here are just some examples of our needs:



During each school month-long break (three times a year) the Kenyan management team wants to organize a day of bringing the children together for tutoring, so skills are not lost. The day would end with games, races and prizes for all. This child-centered day will bring some needed team-building competency to our kids as well. Cost? (About \$5 per child or \$200.)



We need new letterhead, envelopes and business cards for our team in Kenya (\$660)
We can always use funds for this newsletter, Makena Musings (\$100)



Money for postage stamps to mail your child's grades to you, and money for printing the children's pictures so you can enjoy watching their growth is always needed.



It's time for a new brochure to inspire others to join our cause. (\$1,000)

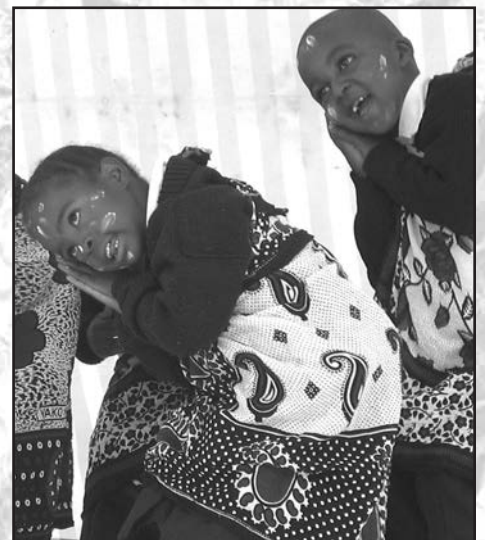
And, finally, we need travel money for our President to journey to Kenya and do the work of the Foundation. (\$2,000 for each round trip.)

Remember that all Americans involved with the Makena Children's Foundation are volunteers and receive no salary. Those who accompany President Sherri Mills to Kenya to assist her do so at their own expense. Thank you for considering these much needed Makena Children's Foundation requests.

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 .



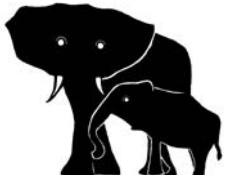
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MAKENA Children's Foundation, Inc.
4138 Crossings Lane
Birmingham, AL 35242

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!

President's Message *(Continued from front)*

On school visits we spend time with each child individually. We discuss their grades, encourage them if they are having academic problems, celebrate with them if they are excelling, ask them to set goals for themselves and give them an opportunity to share any problems or concerns they may have. On my last trip, I was amazed at the openness of the children and how well they articulate their problems and concerns.

A couple of the older students, in the privacy of our individual meetings, took the chance to say how much they appreciated the opportunity they had been given. These comments came without any nudging from any adult. What a full heart I have to see them understanding how much difference their education will make in their future.

When time allows, we also spend time in the classroom. And, when Anne accompanied me, we attended Prize Giving Day and watched as outstanding students (several were Makena students) received awards. Kenya's Director of Basic Education Mary Njoroge spoke, the marching band played, and students danced and sang and put on skits. Afterwards a picnic was provided for all the students, officials and parents.

Having Anne and Bert along made for more productive trips — more one-on-one time for the children, more questions asked and answered, more problems uncovered and solved and new friendships made. Each trip I was grateful for the company of another landsman. Their presence staved off the isolation I usually experience half way into the second week of my visit.

SAYING GOODBYE TO PETER

Many of you know that Peter Muigai resigned. He is doing very well health wise and is now busy with safari work. He told me during my last visit that he thought he would never be well enough to do safaris again. He tells me he feels renewed and is enjoying the work very much.

We are deeply grateful to Peter Muigai for all he has done for the Foundation and the children it serves. He is to be commended for his commitment, hard work and the fine results we've experienced while he was with us. He has agreed to be an adviser to the Foundation.

We are also very grateful to Jane Njeri Muruthi, Peter's wife, who in her own quiet way has had a tremendous impact on our project. Mrs. Waithaka mentioned on my last visit how effective Jane was in dealing with our students.

The change of contacts in Kenya has been a very difficult one for me, as I love Peter and Jane as a brother and sister. I was able to spend time with them on the last trip and my prayer is that every trip I make will include a visit with these dear friends.

Change is sometimes difficult, yet it is the one thing we can count on. Our new management team was introduced to our parents and guardians at our meeting in September. Introductions were not necessary, however, as these two young men grew up in the village of Maraigushu.

In a discussion with the group we talked about change using the Kikuyu word, "gucenjia." We acknowledged that change can be bad or good, and that often it is we who decide whether the change will be positive or negative. Our group understood this well and committed to making our change a positive one.

Charles Karanja and Francis Karanja are the new management team in Kenya. Francis will be the overall manager, serving as liaison to the Foundation. Charles will do the hands-on work of seeing the children are transported to and from school, coordinating the purchase of school supplies and uniforms, visiting the school to monitor the students' progress, etc., and acting as liaison to the parents/guardians.

Although I had met Francis on another visit to Kenya, I had never met Charles. I am impressed with both young men and touched by their commitment to the children of their village. With these new partners we are sure our efforts to educate and support these children will continue to flourish and grow.

In our next newsletter we'll tell you more about our new team. We are eager for you to know them, too.

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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
mjbaich7@earthlink.net

Tina Horton, Graphic Designer
tunat@bellsouth.net

Sherri Mills, President
sm595@bellsouth.net

Kenyan Education Costs Increase

By Mary Jo Baich

It has been nine years — and counting — that Makena Children's Foundation has been committed to educating the children of Kenya. What a great feeling of accomplishment has been realized in the lives of these children, who had no hope of making it through elementary school, much less succeeding at the competitive testing required for high school entrance.

United together our shared dream is becoming their reality. A proud moment for all of us, for sure. It is also a proud moment that we have accomplished this goal, thus far, without any increase in our annual sponsor gifts.

But costs have gone up, both by inflation and by the Elite School's commitment to give our students a competitive edge in passing the high school entrance exam given at the end of the eighth grade. The school has also provided improved science labs for our high school students, which gives them an advantage for college entrance.

Remember how competitive it is for children to obtain a position in a qualified high school in Kenya. Consider that 700,000 eighth grade Kenyan children take a test to obtain one of the 200,000 places for high school.

Over the years, the Wathaika family, who owns the Elite School, has instituted early back-to-school sessions to ready our students for this make-it-or-break-it test. It makes a difference, a big difference in our children's lives as the results have shown. This takes additional money, but it is money well spent.

While the Foundation has absorbed these costs for some time, and the Waithakas have generously given us a discount on the required school fees, it is inevitable that the cost of providing an education to our children would rise.

Beginning in January 2007, Kindergarten-8th Grade sponsorships will increase to \$1300 a year.

For high school students, the sponsorships to cover the cost of advanced science labs (biology, physics, chemistry and botany) will increase to \$1500 a year.

We thank you for your bountiful generosity and sincerely hope you can meet this increased financial commitment and continue fully supporting your child's education.