

Changing  
the world  
one  
child  
at a time

# MAKENA Musings

Newsletter of MAKENA Children's Foundation, Inc.

Fall 2012 Vol. 13, No. 2

## JAMBO



### A Message from the President

Foundation  
President  
Sherri Mills

### Gratitude...

This is the season of the year when we take time out from our busy, often noisy, lives to count our blessings. Speaking of "noisy," I bet most of us – no matter how we voted – are thankful that our long political campaign is over.

As always, there is something to learn from the perspective of our colleagues in Kenya. Charles Karanja, Makena's Kenya liaison manager, emailed his thoughts to us election night as he watched CNN.

Charles said Kenya's burgeoning social media: email, Facebook and twitter were all abuzz. "We are all talking to our leaders telling them to learn from American elections and demonstrate it here at home during our campaign, our election and after our election. Americans did not fight after results, the two contestants did not abuse each other during the debates and Romney conceded defeat and congratulated the President shortly after the results were clear (something African leaders hardly ever do.)"

Thinking forward to Kenya's election, scheduled for March, Charles went on, "We pray that this time things will change and that we will have a free and fair election. God Bless America. God Bless Kenya."

Thank you, Charles, for reminding us that we Americans often take the blessing of free speech for granted.

One blessing I will focus on this holiday season is your presence in my life and in the life of the Makena Children's Foundation. You, our sponsors and supporters, are changing the futures of children and families through the invaluable gift of education. This is no small thing. One way we are celebrating this year is through our updated website. Please take a moment to check it out at [www.makena.org](http://www.makena.org) and let us know what you think about it.

I can think of no better way to wish all of you happy holidays than to repeat the message from Charles: "God Bless America. God Bless Kenya."

## Our Mission, Our Reason for Being

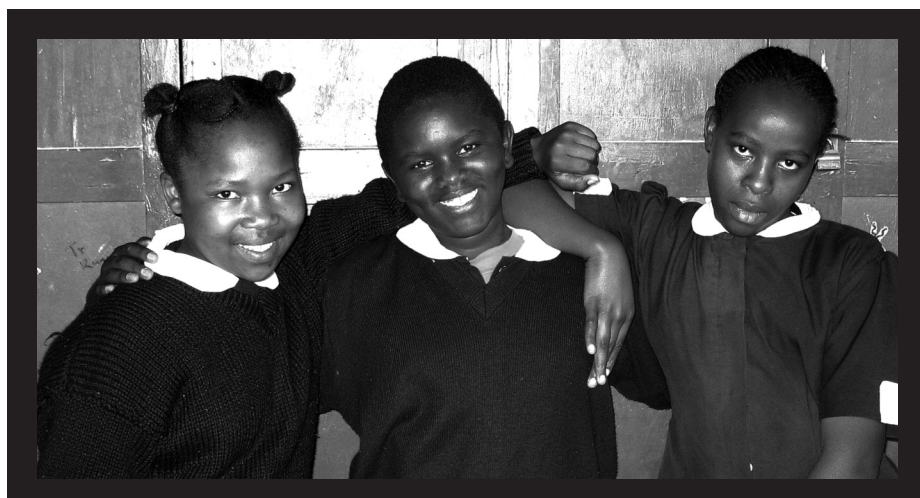
# Changing the world, one child at a time

By Mary Jo Baich

Traveling in a country opens your eyes to understanding the geographic features that help shape a culture. Observing their architecture gives visitors a window to a country's history and the building materials available to them. We keep these visual clues tucked away in our memory for easy recall when that country comes to mind.

crowded with traffic, make it a much longer drive than those few miles might indicate.

The average educational level for the adults of Maraigushu is third grade. Their income derives from the farming of vegetables. While the village is blessed with a nearly perfect climate because of its



But it is the interaction we have with the people that puts an indelible mark on our heart. Years later we can call to mind their faces, often our conversations with them or the impact meeting them had on our lives. We are changed by these social interactions and while noting both the similarities and the differences we find our world views enriched, more accepting.

The launching of the Makena Children's Foundation began in just this way. Visiting Kenya for its scenic landscapes and diverse wildlife led us to know its people and to see their needs. While there are lots of societal issues to be solved in this country, everyone recognizes the value of educating its children.

And so the Makena Children's Foundation began in the small village of Maraigushu, located in the Aberdare Mountains, six miles, mostly straight up, from Lake Naivasha in the Great Rift Valley. This loose knit community is situated at an elevation of 6,000 feet about 50 miles northwest of Nairobi. The roads to this town, in need of repair and

proximity to the equator, rainfall is light and unpredictable. Drought is a frequent, unwelcome visitor. The rolling tree-studded hills of the village are dotted by small plot farms and the work in the fields is done by hand without benefit of any machinery. This area is famous for its red and white onions, as well as its leeks, although many kinds of vegetables are also raised here. The diet of the people is mostly vegetarian, a reflection of what grows outside the kitchen door.

The work of the Makena families is subsistence farming. Outside of the village and closer to the city of Naivasha there are larger to-market farms and a booming cut-flower industry. Nearly half of the neighboring city of Naivasha's 200,000 residents and some of the residents from Maraigushu work in the greenhouses that grow these flowers. Sadly the pay per day for this inconsistent work is \$1.50 US and involves a very long walk for those who live in the village.

(Continued page 2, *Life in Maraigushu*)

# Life in Maraigushu (Continued from front)

The village's 5,000 residents have no electricity and few wells. Water must be carried great distances for both home and farm use. There are a few small dairy farms, and some villagers have a cow and maybe a couple of goats or sheep.

The village has three public grammar schools and a high school but these institutions are rated substandard nationally. In these schools, both books and desks are shared, sometimes by as many as three students. Thus the Makena children travel considerable distance to attend accredited schools. This is the only way the students will be able to pass the national test that allows them to continue their education through high school.

So the question we are often asked is why Maraigushu, Kenya, and not disadvantaged children in our own communities? It is a fair question and it is true that children in our country need help, but often there are numerous organizations that are already lending a very capable hand to them. In this part of Kenya there is no other hand to help them, so if not us then whom?

The Makena Children's Foundation requires that each student's guardian or parent sign a contract and attend meetings to discuss transportation, school uniforms and school policy. These parent/guardians have responded by coming together to lend support to each other and their children. Many of these folks did not know each other before these encounters, but now see themselves as part of a larger community. These families share the challenges of taking on the raising of another child or the struggle of raising children as a single parent amid the crushing poverty. They take confidence that if others can accomplish this goal, they can also.

Now after 15 years and with nearly 50 children having received some or all of their education funded by sponsors like you we are beginning to see some finish college and enter the job market, others are headed to college or further job training and all are on a path to breaking the cycle of intergenerational poverty. Makena Children's Foundation provides money, but also the wind of encouragement beneath their outstretched wings of hope and talent.



*The Makena families reside in the village of Maraigushu, Kenya, an area of subsistence farmers who raise their children and grandchildren without the benefit of electricity or running water. They rely on their shambas (gardens) to feed their families. A few privileged families have a cow that adds milk to their families' nutritional needs. On average, the adults have completed education through the third grade. Jobs are sometimes available at local commercial farms. These mothers and grandmothers walk for an hour — or several hours — to these farms to inquire if work is available. If the farm needs workers, a full day's labor provides wages in Kenya shillings the equivalent of \$1.50.*

# Reaching Higher and Higher

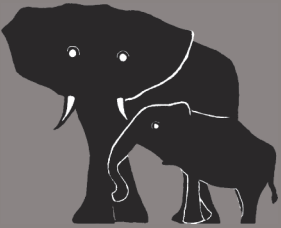
The Makena Children’s Foundation has 12 students who are beginning university or technical school programs. These deserving young people have shown their commitment by completing secondary education and taking the challenging Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) exam.

Even our student who received the lowest score on the KCSE did better than one-third of all the other Kenyan students who took this exam. When you consider these students’ background of extreme poverty and their life experiences of the profound loss of one or both parents, these results are stunning.

Three of our students — Rose Waithira, Joseph Kairuki and Samson Machoi — scored high enough on the KCSE to receive invitations to universities and partial Kenyan government scholarships. These scores mean they were in the top 3,000 students of the 400,000 students who took the exam.

After consideration of these 12 students’ aptitudes, interests and test scores — as well as research into the fields most likely to result in jobs for these young people — university or technical school programs have been selected.

We are grateful to the sponsors who are continuing their support of these students. However, because of the downturn in the economy, we have lost some sponsorships.



## Please help us fund these students’ higher education.

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

- ☐ I wish to sponsor a child/assist with higher education 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 ☐.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

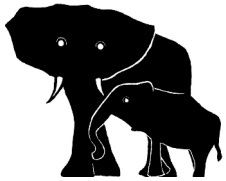
Address \_\_\_\_\_ City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

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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.



## Visit the NEW [www.makena.org](http://www.makena.org)

By Daisy Hering

As new Makena volunteers, my sister Samantha Hammell and I asked Makena Children's Foundation founder and board president, Sherri Mills, if we could take on the task of updating Makena's functional but rather dated website. Sherri readily agreed that the time had come for a more substantive, invigorated online presence for the Foundation.

My sister and I began the process of what we thought would be a somewhat tedious administrative task. We had two primary goals: to make as much information as possible about Makena's mission and good works available to any visitor to the site, and to make it as easy as possible to donate online. What we couldn't have guessed is how close the project would bring us to Makena's children and their palpable dreams of life beyond subsistence without ever having to set foot in Kenya.

Samantha had used a talented web designer, Laurel Briggs of Creative Marketing & Design in Medford, Oregon, for her professional website, and when she approached Laurel about helping with the Makena update, Laurel generously offered to work for Makena at half her usual rate.

Together, we pored over stacks of photographs of Makena children and Kenyan life taken by our mother, Anne Batzer, on her annual trips to Makena country with Sherri. Sherri sent us many more digital pictures, ensuring we'd have at least one of each Makena student. Laverne Davis Ramsay, long-time Makena friend and sponsor, provided breathtaking pictures of African landscapes and wildlife.

As we went through the photos, the task ceased to be monotonous; it became anything but banal. The majesty of Kenya, teeming with life despite its formidable, uncaring geography; the stark despair of poverty for many of that nation's people; and, most especially, the hope and trust in the future, still intact, in the sparkling eyes of Makena's children – these ideas, conveyed wordlessly in one photograph after another, stirred a passion and gave a purpose to our task. The work was something small but something meaningful that we could do for those sweet, guileless faces looking at us through the camera's lens, reminding us that we are all family.

Please take a look at the new Makena website at [www.makena.org](http://www.makena.org). In addition to new information about the foundation and photographs of every sponsored child, you can find links on the website to videos, Makena's Facework page, and Anne Batzer and Sherri Mill's blog about their travels in Kenya. My sister and I hope that visiting the website will help you connect with Makena's children in the same way that creating it did for us. And, if while you're there you feel compelled to donate to the foundation, there's a donation button on every page!

*Editor's Note: The photo above, printed in our newsletter's black and white format, does not do justice to the website. Visit [Makena.org](http://Makena.org) to experience the rich earth tones of Africa that Laurel, Samantha and Daisy incorporated into our stunning new site!*

## Welcome to Our New Board Member

By Mary Jo Baich

The Makena Children's Foundation is very pleased to announce that Anne Batzer will join the organization's board of directors. We are excited to have her on board as she puts her many talents to use for the Makena children.

In the last issue of the newsletter we introduced Anne to our readers, though she has worked as co-editor of the newsletter since 2005. Anne accompanies President Sherri Mills to Kenya on their annual visit to accomplish the work of the Foundation. Anne and her husband John are long-term sponsors of Makena student Alice Njoki, and so it is especially meaningful to both Alice and Anne to have the opportunity to spend time with each other every year.

Anne is a gifted writer and is lending this talent to writing grants seeking money for the Foundation and the further education of our students. She is a vital member of the team and is committed to continuing the established goals of the Makena Children's Foundation. Welcome aboard, Anne!



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