

Changing  
the world  
one  
child  
at a time

# MAKENA Musings

Newsletter of MAKENA Children's Foundation, Inc. Spring 2014 Vol. 15, No. 1

## JAMBO



A Message  
from the  
President

Anne Batzer

To follow in Sherri Mill's footsteps as the new President of the Makena Children's Foundation felt overwhelming at first. But after my recent working trip to Kenya, I find myself on firm footing indeed.

The trip was an experience of witnessing one student's success story after another. This is what happens when ideals meet know-how, when love intersects with practicality. Sherri has modeled this again and again over my many journeys to Kenya with her.

Love for Sherri was expressed as each of our students took time to thoughtfully find just the right words to express their gratitude, and the families in the village of Maraigushu presented us with a beautiful basket to bring home to her. The words "We love you Makena" are inscribed in the basket's intricate beadwork.

It's such a pleasure to work with our Kenyan team, Charles and Francis Karanja. More than anything I've learned to listen to the questions and seek answers in the interface of Kenyan/American values: That sacred space created when we bring curiosity and respect to our work with those from a different culture. Solutions neither a Kenyan or an American would have thought of on his/her own emerge.

But I did not make this most recent trip alone. Long-time Makena supporter and sponsor



LaVerne Ramsey accompanied me. She brought her fresh perspective, her incisive intellect and her perceptive sense of humor. These were the best of traveling companions. She also brought her professional photography skills and all of us will enjoy the fruits of that work in this and future issues of Makena Musings. LaVerne has my heartfelt gratitude for her willingness to take this long journey with me.

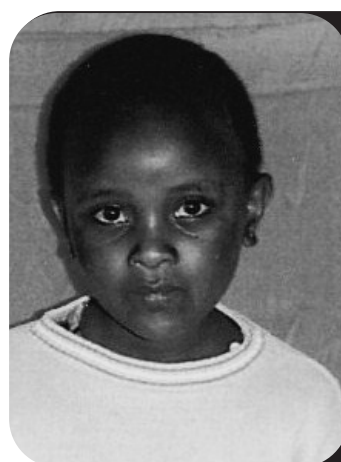
We look forward to sharing all the success stories of the "Makena Kids" with you. And we thank you for your continued support.

## Celebrating Hannah

By Anne Batzer

Lunching with Hannah Wanja Karuku at a Nairobi restaurant is to enjoy time with a professional young woman who is confident and articulate about her future.

Hannah was the first student sponsored by the Makena Children's Foundation. Sherri Mills and Bert Brosowsky met her in 1995 when she was just 8 years old. Hannah had never attended school and spoke no English, which is the language of education in Kenya.



Hannah Wanja  
Karuku was the  
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Children's  
Foundation  
student.

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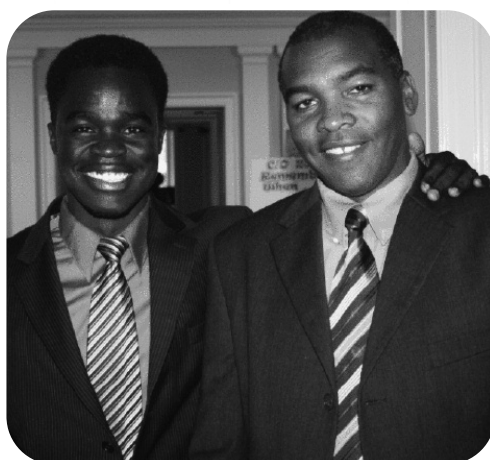
For two years before incorporating the Makena Children's Foundation as a non-profit organization, Sherri and Bert sponsored Hannah in school, working out the issues with funding education in a culture as far away and as different as Kenya.

Hannah has not disappointed! She mastered the English language and was invited to be in the first class of girls ever admitted to Nairobi's prestigious high school, Starehe Academy. She continued her pursuit of academic excellence at Kenyatta University where she graduated in Accounting in April of 2013.

For the next seven months she showed her diligence and persistence by applying for many accounting jobs. This experience is similar to college graduates the world over, but is a particularly challenging one in Kenya where the unemployment rate hovers at around 40%.

Last December, Hannah was hired at K-Unity, a financial institution. She is one of two accountants at K-Unity's branch in Limuru, just outside Nairobi. "I love my job," she says.

But she is continuing on her self-directed course of improvement. Hannah is studying to take the first tier of the CPA exam in June. We wish her well and look forward to continuing to share Hannah's beautiful story with all of you.



## In Memoriam

It is with great sadness that we announce the death of Peter Muigai Muruthi. We honor him and celebrate his devotion as Co-Founder of the Makena Children's Foundation. Peter (right) is pictured here with his adopted son and Makena student, James Ruoro Muruthi.

Dear Sponsors, donors and friends  
of the Makena Children's Foundation:

After 17 wonderful years leading the Makena Children's Foundation, I am retiring. After my resignation in January, the board elected Anne Batzer to lead the organization.

Anne has supported the organization in many ways over the last years. With her excellent writing skills and journalism background, she has played an important part in the improvement of our newsletter, Makena Musings. Her assistance on my trips to Kenya the last few years has been invaluable. Anne and her husband, John, have supported one of our children for several years. Seeing the rapport she has built with this child makes me know she is the perfect person to lead us. Anne's enthusiasm, compassion and creativity will bring her and the organization great success.

Mary Jo Baich, co-editor of our newsletter and a founding board member, has been elected vice-president and will assist Anne in her new role. Mary Jo brings to her role many talents along with her great faith and boundless love. Mary Jo's husband, Ed Baich, will take over the position of treasurer, giving Bert Brosowsky a much deserved rest. My husband, Bert, and I will remain on the board as directors, as will Tina Wilson, secretary, and Scott Swedenburg, board director.

And to each of you, I am grateful for the opportunity to have worked with you as we changed the lives of these deserving Kenyan students. Over and over I have been touched by your generosity and your love for children you most likely will never meet. You have taught me much about the meaning of charity.

Thank you again for all you have done to support me, our organization and the precious children we serve.

Sincerely,

Sherri M. Mills  
Founder and President Emeritus



## More about our leaders ...

**Anne Batzer** brings years of non-profit experience to her new role as President of the Makena Children's Foundation. In her youth, she was a news reporter, but realized her passion is working with struggling young people. Ultimately her career was in Early Childhood Special Education where she became an Autism consultant. She served on several Boards of Directors of non-profit organizations, including two stints as Board Chair. Her community recently honored her with an Imagine Award for Community Peacemaking. Currently she does grant reviews for a large regional foundation. This work evaluating non-profit organizations keeps her current with best practices. She is a successful grant writer.

**Ed Baich** is well-qualified to take up the task of treasurer of the Makena Children's Foundation. Ed was President and CEO of Royal Ten Cate (USA) Atlanta. After retiring and moving to Oregon, he became President of the Sunridge Homeowners Association and Chairman of their water committee. He is a long-time member of Rotary. Ed loves to dig in the dirt and on the business website, LinkedIn, he lists, as his first occupation, man-servant to his wife.



# Looking back upon Makena’s joyful beginning

By Mary Jo Baich

Ever since I have known Sherri Mills, she was always the joyful one! So it was no surprise, when on safari in Kenya, our guide named her “Makena” (a Kikuyu word meaning “joyful one”)! We fellow travelers all nodded in approval.

Sherri’s life goal is always to give back to others and she based her career on this principle. This idea became a part of her avocation, too, and nearly 17 years have passed since she breathed life into the Makena Children’s Foundation.

It began with a safari to Kenya when she asked what we could do for the people of Kenya, and our guide replied, “Help us educate our children.” The project took further root after reading Facing Mt. Kenya by Jomo Kenyatta. In this book Kenyatta relates that the English assumed the Kikuyu were inferior to the white man because they left no buildings by which they were to be remembered. Yet the English never bothered to ask why the Kikuyu lived this way.

Ngai, the Kikuyus’ creator god, however, had instructed them to always leave the land as they found it. So they moved seasonally between wet and dry seasons with the idea of allowing the land they farmed to recover. All these practices we now know are far more pro-environment

than many “modern” farming practices. It is an important lesson: listen carefully and try to see life from another point of view.

Learning about another culture takes time. And, as the education of the children from the rural village of Mariguishu continued there was plenty to learn for us, as well as, for the families of this village. Parents in the village would hug and cuddle their children until five years old, but then this practice stops. Sherri, when visiting the Makena children, would joyously greet the children and when they became comfortable with her, hug them. The children responded warmly to her attentions and eventually some of the parents/guardians took note of what Sherri was doing and told her they, too, would continue to show affection for their children.

Traveling in Kenya on her yearly trips to visit the children, schools and parent/guardians, Sherri told me gave her an opportunity to find out what it was like to be in the minority and it instilled in her an even deeper sense of empathy. Even the English spoken there is not the same as ours and it takes great effort and alertness over a two week stay to be sure you understand what is being said to you.

Although Sherri is stepping down from being president, Sherri and her husband, Bert Brosowsky, our treasurer these many

years, will continue to be part of the Makena board. Their wisdom and advice will always be a guiding force for us. We are grateful for all the energy, dedication and countless hours they have devoted to educating children in Kenya.

Bert has accompanied Sherri many times on her trips to Kenya. The warm relationships he has formed with our Kenyan partners have created strong, enduring bonds.

Sherri Mills would like to express her sincere thanks to all the folks who have helped bring this expression of love to reality. Sherri particularly wants to thank the owners of the Elite School in Nyaaururu: Keziah, Daniel and Ezekial Waithaka who were always receptive to working with us on what was best for the children and accommodating us in countless ways so our children could attend their outstanding school.

Her thanks goes to Peter Muruthi and now to the managing team of Francis and Charles Karanja, whose care of the children is of immeasurable help to the foundation. Sherri would also like to thank those that supported the Foundation and its children, both financially and emotionally and last, but not least, Sherri gives thanks to the Makena Children’s Foundation Board for their advice and encouragement.

## A chance to salute Sherri!

*Sherri Mills has poured her compassion and energy into the Makena Children’s Foundation for 17 years. It has thrived beautifully under her loving care. As a salute to our Founder Sherri — and as a way to show our thanks and appreciation for her gift of caring — please honor her with a financial gift to the Makena Children’s Foundation. If you wish to send a note of thanks along with your gift, we’ll see that she receives your greeting. Thank you for your support.*

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 ☐.

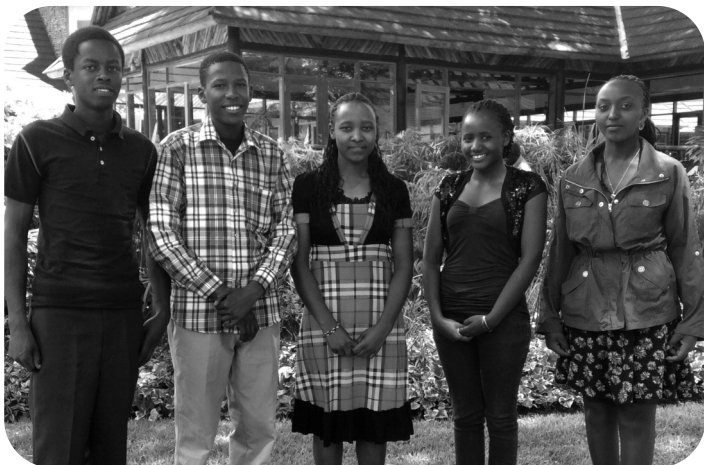


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# Wow! Let's celebrate some more!



We celebrated our five most recent secondary school graduates with lunch and gifts at a beautiful hotel in Naivasha. Pictured are Evans Mungai, Simon Mwangi, Mary Muthoni, Peris Njeri and Alice Njoki. Not only are these students academic stars, they have become fine young adults with a strong sense of morality and a keen interest in helping others. Congratulations to all of them and hearty thanks to their faithful sponsors!

Our students who took the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education Exam (KCSE) in November waited patiently until March 3, when scores were finally released. This challenging test is all day, every day for more than 3 weeks. It is the only yardstick used in Kenya to determine eligibility for higher education. Grades are not factored into the equation.

We could not be more proud of these five students. All of them made scores that qualify them to go on to a university!

**Alice Njoki**, who graduated from Naivasha Girls' High School scored an A. This score puts her in the top 2,700 students out of the nearly 450,000 students who took the exam. She hopes to attend the University of Nairobi and study Medicine or Dentistry.

**Mary Muthoni**, who graduated from Alliance Girls' High School in Kikuyu, near Nairobi, scored an A-. Mary's first choice for higher education is to attend Moi University and study Chemical and Process Engineering.

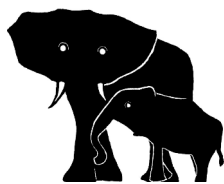
**Evans Mungai**, who graduated from Elite School in Nyahururu, scored a B+. His goal is to attend the University of Nairobi and study Medicine.

**Simon Mwangi**, who graduated from Elite School in Nyahururu, scored a B+. Simon is interested in Forensic Science and is applying to Jomo Kenyatta University.

**Peris Njeri**, who graduated from Elite School in Nyahururu, scored a B. Her first choice is to study Food and Nutrition at the University of Nairobi.

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Spring 2014



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.

## Changing of the guard



After 17 years of leading the Makena Children's Foundation, Founding President Sherri Mills (shown at right with Christopher Kidali) announced her retirement. Following her resignation in January, the Board elected long-time Makena supporter Anne Batzer (pictured above, from left, with David Maina, Naomi Mwangi, Hannah Virginia and Christopher Kidali) to lead the organization. Sherri will continue to serve the Foundation as a member of its Board of Directors. See inside for more details.



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