

Changing
the world
one
child
at a time

MAKENA Musings

Newsletter of MAKENA Children's Foundation, Inc.

Spring 2013 Vol. 14, No. 1

JAMBO



A Message from the President

Foundation
President
Sherri Mills

Spring is a time for hope – new growth is all around us. The seeds that have waited so patiently through the long, dark winter have germinated and pushed their way through the soil to lift their colorful faces to the sun. It is a time of hope in Kenya as well. A new president has been elected and Kenya citizens have not experienced the large tribal wars that killed more than a thousand people and injured many more eight years ago. Kenyans are full of hope as are we who love Kenya. May this be the beginning of a journey to true democracy and the full potential of this beautiful, resource rich country.

Watching the elections in Kenya, I found I was reflecting on all the things I have learned from my experiences as a coordinator of the Makena project. Some of what I learned was the vast differences between my culture and the culture of Kenya. We share many values and yet many differences remain.

On the light side, I've learned that you do not ask a rural Kenyan woman how many children she has. The first time I asked this question of a mother in the midst of a large group of women, hands went to their faces to cover their mouths while they giggled and looked from me to the woman, whose mouth was covered by her hands as she grinned. Thinking I had been misunderstood, I gently asked the question again. More covered mouths and giggling. Finally one of the ladies told me that a Kikuyu woman would never tell the number of children born to her because Evil Spirits might take one from her. And, loving her children, the woman never revealed the number of children in her home.

Once when I arrived at the Nairobi airport, I found a large group of our parents and guardians, some of whom had never been to Nairobi, waiting to greet me outside the airport. Peter Muigai had arranged transport on mutatus so that all who wanted to make the trip would be included. It was a joyful reunion with much laughing, clapping, singing and happiness.

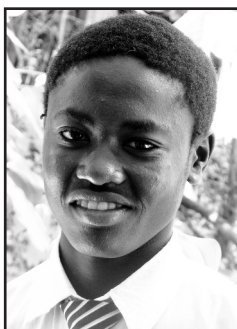
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A Story of Two Good Men

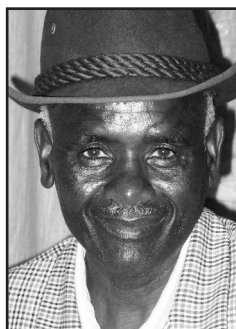
By Anne Batzger

Two men have come together in divergent ways to support Makena student Johnson Kamau.

The first is Kamau's grandfather, Johnson Ndugi. He tells us that when Kamau was just 9 months old, his mother realized she was unable to care for her baby and disappeared. And although she has been in and out of Kamau's life since then, he rarely sees her. Ndugi, who was still raising the last of his own 11 children, took on the responsibility of parenting Kamau and his brother. He relates this story with an attitude of complete acceptance and a relaxed twinkle – a common, admirable response in Kenyan culture to life's inevitables.



Johnson Kamau



Johnson Njugi



Omar Jahangir, MD

Expressing a high value for education, Ndugi says, "I was only able to attend school through class 7. Then, I had no one in my life who could pay school fees." He has managed to support his family by farming and, occasionally, raising a cow.

Although Ndugi is not highly educated, he is a resource for wisdom in Maraigushu. MCF's Kenya Liaison Manager Charles Karanja says Ndugi is a mentor to all the boys in the village. "If any of the boys in the Makena Foundation are having problems at school, I have them meet with Ndugi," Charles says.

"I tell the boys that they must be careful in choosing their friends," Njugi says, "I remind them that they cannot be influenced by careless kids with rich parents. The rich parents can simply afford to put their kids in a different school if they are expelled. Our kids have this one chance to succeed. I remind the Makena kids that they are the hope of their families and the village. Education motivates a person to figure out who he is, to find his own way and be responsible."

Ndugi says he is proud of Kamau. "He's a disciplined person who chooses good friends. I believe he will make it."

The second man who supports Kamau by sponsoring his education is Omar Jahangir, MD, medical director at Elkhart General Hospital in Indiana. Born of Pakistani parents who had emigrated to Africa, Omar attended public schools in Nakuru.

He remembers his Kenyan childhood as "very basic, very simple." The atmosphere in Nakuru was tranquil, he says. "I played a lot of soccer. You've probably seen the kids there playing with a soccer ball made of rolled-up shopping bags. There were no i-Pads, no phones, no nothing."

Omar's father, a pharmacist, demanded excellence. "He is a self-made man who knew that education is what he could give me to take me forth," Omar says, "He pushed me very hard. If I was in academic second place in my class, it was an embarrassment."

His first place achievement earned him a scholarship to Nakuru's prestigious Greensteds International School and, later, another scholarship to medical school in Pakistan, where he met his wife, Sana Zuberi, MD. Omar credits her with encouraging him to persevere and follow their dream to move to America. With his older brother's financial support and his mother's continuing sacrifices, the couple spent nearly two years in Dubai while they passed the series of extremely challenging medical exams that allow them to work here in the States.

Omar's gratitude for his own education, along with his deeply held spiritual beliefs, motivate him to sponsor education for three Kenyan students. "I miss Kenya," he says. "They're such good people. They just need the right resources to overcome poverty and unemployment."

Omar says he believes his life is blessed because of his support for African students. "I believe God is looking and seeing that I am helping. This is a way of giving back all I have received from Kenya, from life. Maybe one of the students I support will one day start their own foundation to help other kids and the world will be a better place."

Feeding Hungry Readers

By Mary Jo Baich

Jeani Garland is not one to let a commitment wane over time! In our Fall 2010 *Musings* newsletter, we told the story of Jeani's trip to Kenya to meet our Makena children (visit the makena.org website and click on the Newsletters link to access the article.)



Jeani Garland enjoys a fun moment with two of her granddaughters.

The sister of Makena President Sherri Mills, Jeani is by profession a teacher. While visiting the schools in Kenya, Jeani was most impressed by both the parents' and the students' understanding that education is the fulfillment of a highly-prized dream. For the children of Maraigushu, this dream became a reality with the establishment of the Makena Children's Foundation.

Jeani noted during her classroom visits in Kenya that children learn mostly by memorization and rote recitation, as there were few books and no handouts even in the private schools that the Makena children attend. Entering a classroom, there are usually three blackboards filled with the day's assignment and the student's first task is to copy this material for their own use.

The luxury of having libraries or books available for pure enjoyment, for increasing reading skills or furthering one's educational knowledge is non-existent. Last year many of you responded to our call for books, and Sherri Mills and Anne

Batzer took more than 400 books over in their luggage and distributed them to our kids during their visit to Kenya. The excitement level at having books in their possession was thrilling, and many of the Makena children expressed a desire to have more books to share with friends and siblings.

Enter Jeani Garland to the rescue! A first grade teacher at Lee's Summit Elementary School in Missouri, Jeani decided a book drive would meet this need. She offered the idea to the school's student council and they quickly organized the fliers to promote the event, using the theme "Books For Hungry Readers."

To promote the book drive, Jeani announced "a fact of the day" each morning, pointing out to all the Lee's Summit children the differences between their school and the schools in Kenya. Understanding that the Kenya classrooms might have one hand-held pencil sharpener or one eraser and imagining what it is like to have 70 students in a classroom were great motivators for bringing in the books!

At first the books came in two or three at a time; then one family donated three boxes of books. After that, a bit of classroom competitiveness took over, resulting in a whopping 1,700 books being gathered in just five days time!

And there was more good news: Enough money also was collected during the week to ship the books from Missouri to Birmingham, Alabama, where the Makena Foundation is headquartered.

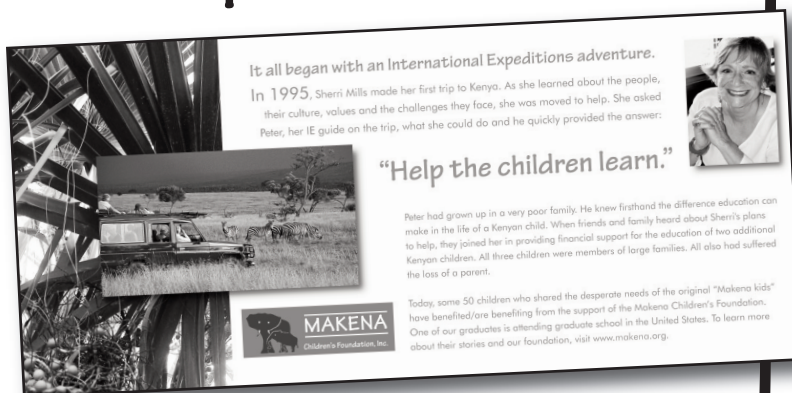
One child offered \$50 dollars to the shipping fund. After receiving this handsome sum, Jeani asked the student's parents if they were aware their child had given such a large donation. The parents said their son had been saving money for some time in order to be able to give to a worthy cause. This child came to the conclusion that there was no better purpose than to make sure other children had the books to read that he did.

For now the books are resting in a safe and free warehouse in Birmingham secured by board member, Bert Brosowsky.

What happens next? Please see the opposite page to learn how you can help feed "Hungry Readers," our Makena Children.

Thank you, International Expeditions!

The idea for the Makena Children's Foundation was first conceived when a group of friends traveled with International Expeditions (ietravel.com) to Kenya in 1995. Always helpful and extremely supportive of our educational efforts, this international travel company has recently agreed to put our Makena Children's Foundation promotional flyer in each traveler's packet before their departure to East Africa. We are so grateful for our partnership with this award-winning travel company. We know this will inspire others to join us in this important work of educating children in Kenya.



LIKE Makena Children's Foundation on Facebook

About once a month, we plan to put up something new and interesting about the Makena Children's Foundation on our Facebook page. You can access it by going directly to Facebook or by clicking on the link on the homepage at www.makena.org. Also, we have recently up-dated the Board of Directors page on the website. Just click on "About," then "Board." We hope you'll like us on Facebook and send us your comments. We love hearing from you.

Halfway There!!!

By Mary Jo Baich

All the books that Jeani Garland and her school gathered during their week-long book drive (see article) have been shipped to Birmingham, Alabama and they are resting comfortably in safe and dry storage.

But this is not their final destination!

These books are bound for Kenya, but they must wait until we get another 1,700 books to fill a shipping container. So this cry of HALFWAY THERE is a challenge to our supporters and readers to help us get those books ALL THE WAY THERE by the end of June 2013.

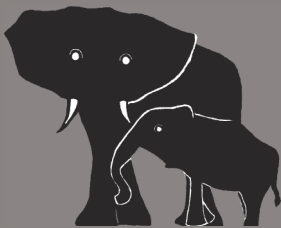
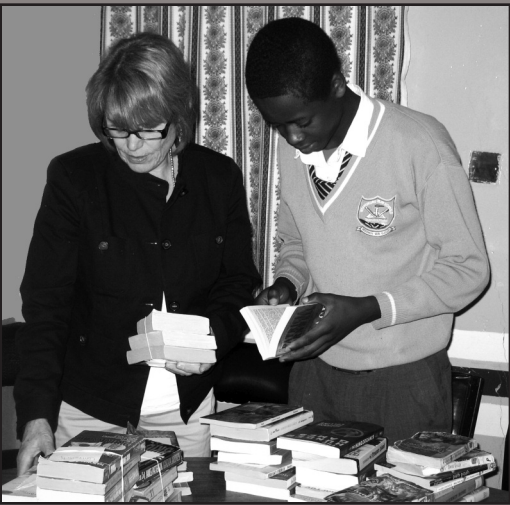
We need children's books. Paperbacks are preferable, but we will take any and all lightly used-books. We need any books for children from infants through college age, covering any appropriate subject.

Gather them up and ship them by the USPS media low rate to:
Sherri Mills, Makena Children's Foundation
4138 Crossings Lane
Birmingham, AL 35242

If your children and their books are long-gone from your household and you don't have time to cruise your local used bookstores, Sherri Mills has offered to take your \$25-\$50 (more if you like) monetary donations, and she will do the shopping for you. Or you may donate to the fund to ship the books by container to Kenya.

Our goal is lofty to be sure, but we do want to **Feed Hungry Readers**, so please help us move these books out of storage and into the hands of kids who will treasure them until their pages are worn thin!

In photos at right, (top) Makena Board Member Anne Batzer looks over a recent book donation with Makena student Evans Mungai Njenga. (Bottom), some happy recipients get a first look at their books.



ALERT! We still are in desperate need for money for our 12 students who achieved such high scores during high school that they have qualified to continue their education through college. We appreciate any donation you can make in support of these deserving students.

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 ☐.

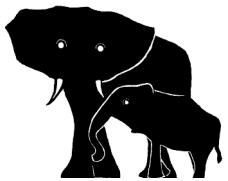
Name _____

Address _____ City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Telephone _____ e-mail _____

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Spring 2013



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.

President's Message *(continued from front)*

I was deeply touched and enthusiastically gave bear hugs to each and every one of these dear friends. Again, there were much tittering, giggles and hands covering the mouths of the ladies. When I finally realized this was a reaction born out of something more than happiness, I asked Peter, "What's going on?" He smiled indulgently and said, "We don't hug in our culture." There, they put their hands on the shoulders of the other person, and sort of air kiss on both sides of the face. These wonderful people have indulged me, however, and some always give me big bear hugs because they know that's what I do in my culture. I so appreciate their indulgence.

For many years now, the once shy stand-offish children of our Makena family run to give me hugs on arrival. I'm glad for them and for me that we can share a warm exchange of feelings for each other. As the boys grow older and are bordering on manhood, I always ask, "May I hug you?" The answer is always a smile and gentle hug.

Once after removing my bright red fingernail polish, my friend Jane Njeri's eyes grew large, as she asked me, "Where did it go?" I explained that I used fingernail polish remover from the U.S. Her eyes grew even bigger as she followed-up. "You mean there is something you use that's only purpose is to take off the color from your fingernails?" Oh my, that gave me lots of food for thought. I always think of that when I hear how soda and vinegar can clean most anything, yet we bring out three or four products when we deep clean our kitchens. Yes, they have taught me a simple life can be well-lived.

As much as I love Kenya, spending time there has helped me to appreciate what it means to be born and grow up in the USA. There are so many things I take for granted, so much that I'm critical of at times. I see how there is no safety net for Kenyan children when a catastrophic event occurs – no social services, no-food programs no medical support. They can easily fall through the cracks. It was only in 2001 that primary school was free in Kenya. Over a million girls started to school that year.

Being a woman myself, I'm struck by how difficult it is to be a woman in rural Kenya. I see women carrying huge burdens of wood on their backs and leaning over at the waist to dig all day in the fields of others. I meet mothers whose husbands have gone to Nairobi for work, stayed there and took another woman. He may not come home but a couple of times a year and maybe then he takes whatever little money she has eked out selling onions or working in someone else's garden. Although there are laws being passed that help protect families, these changes have not reached rural areas. There are no "Deadbeat Dad" programs. Divorce is a bad reflection on a woman in Kikuyu culture, so she stays in the situation.

One of the things I've learned to appreciate is the relative lack of government corruption in our country as compared to Kenya. Kenya is so rich in resources and so fouled by corruption in every corner and every level of society. Police can't be trusted, any kind of government papers take inexcusable lengths of time to execute. Only bribes can motivate public officials or civil servants to move efficiently.

Although we know of corruption in our country, it is certainly the exception and not the rule. It is the other way around in Kenya. Ezekiel Waithaka, a senior administrator at Elite School, received his Master's Degree at a university in Pennsylvania. Although he speaks enthusiastically of many sights and experiences in the US, the one he returns to over and over is that we would go to a policeman on the street for help and would receive assistance. He says in Kenya you would never trust policemen, that you would fear them and avoid them at all costs.

These are just a few of the things I've learned in my 16 years with the Makena Children's Foundation. I hope that I can share more of these experiences in future newsletters.



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