

Changing  
the world  
one  
child  
at a time

# MAKENA Musings

Newsletter of MAKENA Children's Foundation, Inc.

Spring 2019 Vol. 20, No. 1

## JAMBO



### A Message from the President

*Anne Batzer*

Like the daffodils pushing up through frozen soil and bursting into colorful bloom, promising things are sprouting up throughout the Makena Children's Foundation.

We hope you enjoy reading about some of the spring happenings that fill us with pride:

We are thrilled that James Muruthi is joining our Board of Directors. I first met James in Kenya in 2006 when he was one of the sponsored Makena Kids. I remember being immediately startled by the brilliance of his intellect. When you read his story, you will see that this is a young man intent on fulfilling his potential. Like so many of our students, his story is an inspiring example of the strength of the human spirit.

It takes a village—a community—to keep this organization running smoothly and people like Laurel Briggs who step up to help are as essential to our work as are all of you who send your ideas, suggestions and financial support.

Makena Board Secretary Brenda Morgan and her husband Ken came up with a creative way to raise funds for us last autumn. Their "sweat equity" meant we ended the year with good financial health.

The students continue to delight us with their willingness to work hard in school, play hard together and question inequality in the world. Their interest in making things better for themselves, their families and all Kenyan children has our deepest respect. Enjoy reading about the accomplishments of our alumni and older students.

And join us in welcoming new little ones to our fold. Along with us, you will get to know them better through stories in future newsletters.

During every trip to Kenya, at least one of our parents or guardians asks me, "Who are these Americans who are willing to help us, even though they have never even met us?" It's a good question. Your generosity—our sponsors and donors—never ceases to amaze us. Thank you!

## Full Circle: James R. Muruthi

*By Mary Jo Baich*

We welcome James R. Muruthi to the Makena Children's Foundation (MCF) Board of Directors. We are excited because James brings many accomplishments to this task—but what excites us most—is he is one of ours!

James' early years of education in Kenya were provided through MCF by sponsors John and Arlene Edwards. It brings a smile to our hearts and minds to see his willingness to lend a hand in the continual growth of this organization.

You may well remember the story of his even earlier years, when he went by the name Ruoro. After the tragic deaths of his parents in an automobile accident, James spent a couple years as a young homeless boy wandering throughout Kenya. He was eventually adopted by one of MCF's founders, Peter Muigai Muruthi, and his wife, Jane.



After completing his elementary and high school education in Kenya, he won a scholarship to Miami University in Oxford, Ohio. James was drawn from an early age to the study of gerontology, he says, because he recalls watching his maternal grandmother and father age. Although James was very young, he notes that because of the brief life expectancy in Kenya, not many of his friends had grandparents. James was drawn with compassion and interest to seeing how his grandmother handled the challenges of getting older.

He first put his toe in the water of gerontology by taking a 101 course at the University of Miami. James says he was hooked. Since that first wade in the water he jumped right in, receiving his Bachelor's and Master's degrees in Gerontology from Miami University and his PhD in Human Development and Family Science at the University of Georgia. He continued his studies as a Post-Doctoral Associate at the Center of Gerontology at Virginia Tech. James has published many papers focusing on his passionate interest in aging issues especially for minority and ethnic groups.

But I ask you, what are the odds of having a connection so very many years ago with young James in Kenya, and then the exhilarating news that James and his wife Bertranna are moving to Oregon to teach here, where several Makena Board members live? Rounding out their family and moving with them is their one-year-old daughter Sanaa, which means "beautiful." (See photo above.)

Further, what are the odds the same university would employ both husband and wife? Initially James' wife, Bertranna, got her job at the University of Oregon in Eugene and James looked elsewhere, since it is uncommon for spouses to work at the same academic institution. But Bertranna made it a condition of employment, and so James was interviewed. At a cocktail party welcoming him and Bertranna to the campus, James was told by his Dean that he got the job with flying colors. James laughingly says his wife is a good saleswoman, but he closed the deal!

They will move to Oregon in June. James will teach an undergraduate course on Ethics and Issues in Family Development and a graduate course on Global Aging and Health. Bertranna, who holds a PhD in Human Development and Family Studies, will be teaching classes on Family Therapy for Couples.

Anne Batzer and I are jubilant, because they will live just a 2 hour drive from us. And Sanaa will now get to know a good many of their family members who live in the Pacific Northwest.

James says it is especially important to him to serve on the Makena Board of Directors as a way to honor his father, Peter Muigai Muruthi.

# Sharing Memories of Their Graduation Days



"It was such a wonderful day. I couldn't have asked for more!" This is how Alice Njoki summed up her December graduation ceremony at Egerton University. Her brother Eric memorialized the festive celebration by taking a selfie with Alice and some of her joyful family members. Alice received her Bachelor's Degree in Actuarial Sciences.

Two more Makena women also completed their educational journeys late last year.

Peris Gitundi (pictured at far left) described her graduation ceremony at the University of Kabianga as a "great success." The same can be said of her achievement: Peris received her Bachelor's degree in Agricultural Economics and Resource Management.

Describing her graduation ceremony at Machakos University as "colorful," Mary Muthoni received her Bachelor's degree in Statistics and Programming. She summed up her years of superior academic work with characteristic humility: "I am grateful to God!"

Spending time with these new graduates is energizing. They are chock full of ideas about how to use their educations to make the world a better place—and full of confidence about the personal independence their educations mean for their futures. We are eternally grateful to their faithful American sponsors and in awe of the brilliant, thoughtful young women they have become.

## Out and About

Education enriches the lives of Makena university students and graduates by giving them a wide variety of experiences.

Clockwise, from top: Mary Muthoni and a colleague are pictured observing African Statistics Day at Eastmark Hotel in Nakuru. Working with the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, Mary is responsible for educating the public about the importance of accurate statistics for understanding the issues Kenyan society faces and for setting goals for solutions. Mary has her Bachelor's Degree in Statistics and Programming from Machakos University.

Practicing nurse Mary Gatuku is seen here enjoying a sunny day with two of her healthy young patients.

Student John Muiruri, who studies Hospitality and Tourism at Chuka University, is serving an internship at the Royal Minni Inn in Embu—rotating through all departments from housekeeping to kitchen to reception. He is pictured here readying a delicious buffet before greeting hotel guests.

Martha Waithira, who teaches elementary school in Nairobi, finds that you CAN go home again! While visiting her family in the village of Maraigushu, Martha gathers ingredients from their shamba (garden) to make the Kenyan staple dish ugali, a cornmeal porridge.



## Check Out Our Updated Website: [www.makena.org](http://www.makena.org)

We've brightened up our website and added a headline that succinctly expresses our heartfelt mission: Education is the Most Sustainable Path Out of Poverty.

We couldn't have done this without the help of Laurel Briggs, founder of Creative Marketing and Design in Jacksonville, Oregon. Laurel brings her Masters in Communications and Marketing, as well as years of experience both in advertising and teaching journalism, to her work of web development and design, marketing planning, and design services for over 400 organizations.

For several years Laurel has helped us with great advice and a willingness to quickly solve thorny internet issues.

She's been a true partner, often volunteering her services to help the Makena Children's Foundation succeed. We are grateful for her expertise and compassion.





# Miles for Makena Raises Funds for Our Foundation

Congratulations to Makena Children's Foundation Board of Directors Secretary Brenda Morgan and her husband Ken for dedicating their 125-mile trek on Spain's famed Camino de Santiago trail to the Makena Kids.

Because so many of you made per-mile pledges last fall, the Austin, Texas, couple raised more than \$7,000.00 to cover our costs in 2018. Wow! Thank you!!

We work from our homes and all Americans working for MCF are volunteers, so our overhead is extremely low. However, inflation affects our work in Kenya. Sponsorships never cover all of our costs.

We believe education is the most sustainable path out of poverty. Please help us accomplish this mission by sending a donation.

Make your tax-deductible donation TODAY, payable to Makena Children's Foundation, Inc.,  
711 Medford Center, #117, Medford, OR 97504.

- ☐ I wish to sponsor a Makena student 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    ☐\$1000
- ☐ 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 \_\_\_\_\_



# Giving Back

The Makena Alumni Club (MAC) continues its tradition of paying it forward: giving back to their community with gratitude for what their American sponsors have done for them. Pictured are Alice Njoki and Duncan Kahoro hauling food stuffs into the Community Recovery Center of Africa (CRCA). This center near Naivasha houses 35 orphans. MAC members donated food and then interacted with the children, singing and dancing in the Kenyan tradition.

After completing this community service project, MAC members completed their daylong meeting by assigning each of themselves a younger Makena student to mentor. We are so proud these alumni and older students have pledged to give their guidance to our young ones.



# Samson Update

By Mary Jo Baich

Makena graduate Samson Machohi is involved with cutting edge climate change work—collecting data on Kenyan greenhouse gas emissions for scientists to analyze. Sam is in his second year of a paid internship with Kenya Agricultural and Livestock Research Organization (KALRO), which focuses on research for all the livestock and agricultural projects in Kenya.

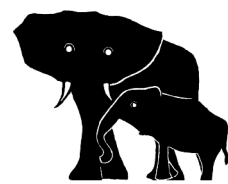


The project Sam is working on is a collaboration between KALRO and Kenya’s Ministry of Agriculture. It’s a fascinating enterprise dubbed KCSAP (Kenya Climate Smart Agriculture Project.) Funded in part by the World Bank, the goal of the project is to build Kenya’s agricultural production and increase resilience to climate change.

Sam is also tasked with using his mentoring and teaching skills to train new KALRO interns. He is developing electronic questionnaires for the organization, with an eye to saving both time and paper. In addition, this busy graduate is using his IT skills to solve computer issues for KALRO.

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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.



## Welcome to the Makena Family!

Because of the generosity of American sponsors, four bright, interesting children joined the Makena Children’s Foundation in January. Pictured in their spiffy new Lizar School uniforms are Harun Maina, Sharon Nyambura, Andrey Mungai and Caroline Wanjiru. Like all of our students, these endearing young people have experienced the loss of one or both parents. In addition, almost all of our students have felt the gnawing pain of hunger and some others have already known the bleak reality of challenges like homelessness and domestic violence. We greatly appreciate the partnership of Lizar’s administrators, teachers and staff who work closely with us to provide the healthy nutrition, nurturing environment and consistent structure our children need to heal and thrive. We look forward to following these kids’ journeys as they learn and grow.



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