

Changing
the world
one
child
at a time

MAKENA Musings

Newsletter of MAKENA Children's Foundation, Inc.

Fall 2005 Vol. 6, No. 2

JAMBO

A Message from the President



Foundation
President
Sherri Mills

My trip to Kenya in May was a short but joyous one. First, there was the great joy of seeing our Vice President, Peter Muigai, looking well and feeling strong after radiation treatment for cancer. Second, I was privileged to meet several new students who joined the Foundation in January - one only four-years-old and already a lady-killer. Another joyful experience was distributing sports equipment donated by the Pairs and Spares Sunday School Class of Thalia Lynn Baptist Church in Virginia Beach, Va. Please look for a story and photo in our next newsletter.

Many of the children are very frightened when they first meet me because they have not seen a white person before. I suppose I remind them of ghosts and spirits when they first encounter my very white skin, light red hair and blue eyes. Christopher Kindali, our new 4-year-old student, is an exception. (See photo on back in "I want to help" form.)

Nursery and kindergarten children take classes on a separate campus, and then return to the main campus for boarding at the end of the day. When Kindali returned to campus on the first day of my visit, someone told him I was there. He quickly said, "I want to see her." He was brought to me, and as he approached me he extended his hand with great seriousness. After shaking my hand, he held it tightly, turning it back and forth and then examining the back of my wrist. After a thorough examination, he looked up at my face, made eye contact, and broke into a smile that, in its warmth, rivaled the African sun.

We added five new children in January and they are doing well. Second term reports arrived the day before I wrote this article. Some of the new children seem to be particularly bright and are already rising to the high level of academic expectations of their new school.

With a straight A's report, new sixth-grader Joseph Kariuki, placed second position in a class of 38.

(Continued on back)

One Sponsor's Story

By Anne Batzer

It's Africa's vastness that imprints on the soul of the traveler: its imposing size on a map of the globe; its incomprehensibly ancient history preserved in symbols and customs, clothing and colors; its Nairobi sidewalks with crowded multitudes elbow-to-elbow, and, mostly, its wild animals--like the thousands upon thousands of wildebeests traversing their prehistoric seasonal ellipse.

But Africa's many small moments, too, hang on the heartstrings of the homebound visitor. One such moment is remembered by Mary Lee Comer (pictured at right with her husband, Lee). In 2002 she, Lee, and her guide, Peter Muigai, were in Kenya on the plateau overlooking his hometown of Naivasha. A little girl was walking slowly, eyes downcast, away from the village, toward them. Peter stopped and talked with the child, took out his wallet and gave her a very small sum of money. The little girl turned and skipped delightedly back toward the town.



"Peter explained that she'd been sent home from the village school because her family could not afford to pay for the required supplies, probably just a slate and a writing utensil. It struck me how different her attitude was from American kids who would be glad if they had a day off from school," Mary Lee says.

But even before this moment, the Comers had decided to sponsor a child through the Makena Foundation. In a casual lunch conversation with Peter, who is also Makena's Vice President, they had asked him about the educational challenges facing Kenya's families.

"Mother Teresa is a role model ... (to look not at) the overwhelming needs ... (but to) help one person at a time."

"Education is dear to my heart," Mary Lee explains, "I taught throughout my judicial career." In a distinguished life of service, Mary Lee recently retired from her 18 years as a judge and accepted a gubernatorial appointment as Executive Director of the Indiana Ethics Commission.

It was her spiritual values that took her to Africa in the first place. She was there to attend an international Quaker conference. "Along with viewing the animals, we visited hospitals, schools and missions," Mary Lee says. As many of us are, she was deeply altered by the fresh, artless, open spirit of the Kenyan people, so many dependent on a desperately precarious, threadbare subsistence. She took inspiration from a powerful source. "Mother Teresa is a role model for me," Mary Lee goes on, "she said that if she had only looked out at the masses in Calcutta, at the overwhelming needs, she would have been rendered powerless. Instead, Mother Teresa learned that what she could do, was help one person at a time. In getting to know Peter, I learned he shares this philosophy."

Mary Lee says she likes the Makena Foundation because it is "more intimate than larger organizations, small and grass roots. The children are literally hand-picked by Peter for their aptitude and ability to be successful."



The Comers sponsor Makena student Simon Ngure (in photo at left). Simon's potential was obvious to the schoolmaster of the Githumba Primary School where he was a young student. The schoolmaster noted that Simon rose daily at 5:00 a.m. in order to walk the 3 kilometers to attend Githumba. Each morning Simon chose to walk passed a village school closer to his own home because the little boy believed that Githumba would give him a better education. When the Githumba schoolmaster introduced Simon to Makena Vice President Peter Muigai he told Peter that from the time he was very small Simon would spend his free time gathering with the village elders, listening to their conversation instead of playing with his peers. His incisive curiosity and hunger for knowledge were evident.

The Comers' sponsorship meant Simon could transfer to the much more challenging Elite School and have a chance of passing the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education exam. Each year 700,000 elementary school graduates take this test, vying for just 200,000 high school slots. Simon, who excels in science, passed the test with the second highest score of all the Makena students and is continuing his education.

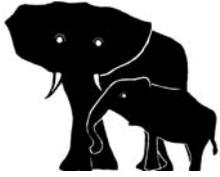
He is the first person in his family to attend high school.

"It's my understanding that Simon's dream is to become a doctor," Mary Lee says. "He's very bright. It's my dream to help him reach his goal so he can serve the people of Kenya."

(Continued on back)

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Fall 2005



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

The Foundation has MOVED.
Please make note of our NEW address above!

If you'd like to sponsor or help sponsor a Makena student, please complete the form below and send your donation TODAY to the Foundation at the address above! Your gift will be greatly appreciated!

Sponsor Story (Continued from front)

And it's the dream of the Makena Foundation that Kenya's children, drawing from the vastness of their ancient African heritage and given the opportunity of a modern education, will together create their own unique solutions to Kenya's challenges of injustice, poverty and disease.

Meanwhile, the Comers' generosity extends around the earth. They also support a young woman college student in the Philippines and, after a trip to the Middle East to study Israeli-Palestinian issues, an elementary student there.

"It's so easy to dismiss the issues of the world unless you have been there and seen it---been intimately touched," Mary Lee says, "If Americans had some personal understanding of the enormity of the need and that just a tiny bit of money can go so far, I think they would be much more generous with their giving."

For now, Simon expresses his gratitude to Lee and Mary Lee Comer by continuing to be an excellent student. But he has one wish for the future. Thinking about them, he says, "I'd like to visit them one day."

President's Message (Continued from front)

Fourth grader Evans Mungai ranked position three in his class of 31, and Alice Njoki, a fourth grader, placed number one in her class of 32. Wow! Many of you know that it often takes a full year for a child coming from a village school to catch up with Elite students. So we are especially excited to see how well these children are doing in their first year.

Makena students are doing well in school. Among our top scholars are, from left: Joseph Kariuki, Evans Mungai and Alice Njoki.



All the reports for second term were better than those received after first term. When first term grades dropped, Peter and I were able to spend some time with teachers to explore the reasons why. We learned that it is not unusual to see a drop in the first term grades. After being out of school for about six weeks for end of year holidays, many of the children have a hard time settling back into their school routines. My sister, who teaches in Missouri, says that is true in the U.S. as well!

We also learned that the testing format was changed for six graders this year. The school changed from a "multiple choice" testing format to a "fill-in-the-blanks" format. Although the "fill-in-the-blanks" format is used in later grades, heretofore, it was not used as early as sixth grade. School officials believe the change will better prepare the children for the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education exam, and, also, better measure what the children know. Some of our students adapted immediately while others needed more time.

In questioning teachers about individual students, I was impressed with the advocacy for the student that each teacher displayed. Even in large classes, the teachers were knowledgeable about each child's strengths and weaknesses and about their personalities and home life.



We've Moved!

Please make note of our new contact information below!

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

Phone (205) 980-6861

e-mail
sm595@bellsouth.net
www.makena.org

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is a publication of
MAKENA Children's Foundation, Inc.

Anne Batzer, Co-Editor
annebatzer@aol.com

Mary Jo Baich, Co-Editor
mbaich7@earthlink.net

Tina Horton, Graphic Designer
tunat@bellsouth.net

Sherri Mills, President
sm595@bellsouth.net

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 want to sponsor a child for one year for \$1,200.
- I would like to share in the sponsorship of a child for one year for \$600.
- I am unable to sponsor a child at this time, but please use my gift of \$_____ to help as needed with tuition, personal care items, uniforms, activity fees or food staples.
- 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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