

## Project Harambee

2013 wrapup

January 1, 2014



A brand spanking new year, and I'm striving to catch my breath & finish off Harambee's work of 2013. (Please see Progress Report issued in November.) December is not the best time to be away... so many Harambee gifts & alternative gift cards to be sent out. People *will* shop for the holidays, and they love to give our alternative gifts and beautiful crafts and jewelry made by our groups in Africa. However, we really had to be in Kenya: our first **Grow A Doc** student was set to graduate from Mount Kenya University on December 6 & we couldn't miss this momentous event! So off we went, returning in time for the last-minute Christmas rush. Good news: Packing to come home, we again filled our suitcases with items purchased from our women's groups in Kenya, renewing supplies for the next six months & giving the women enough profit to pay their children's school fees for the coming school term (beginning in January) and to celebrate Christmas. This makes me feel like Santa Claus! Because of heavy rains & mud we weren't able to go into Mukuru slum to visit the group there. I felt so badly...but decided we could leave cash with the coordinator. Result: Harambee will have a credit balance with them for our next trip, & their families, too, will be able to breathe easier at Christmas & in the new school term. It was a whirlwind 2 weeks, so hang on to your hat.

***Congratulations** to Antony Otieno. John and I donned our academic robes as proud guests in the graduation procession at MKU. We met up with the other Grow A Doc students, who also were invited to the ceremony. We met the Chancellor, Victoria Wells Wulsin, & I was left wondering how the heck a nice girl from Ohio gets to be chancellor of a university in Kenya. She is an innovator & entrepreneur, receptive to my idea of opening gift shops at the MKU campuses, stocked with attractive & desirable items made by the groups in the slums. Now, to make it happen....*



After the graduation (with 10,000 graduates--YES, for real!), there was an unparalleled traffic jam, lasting from 2 pm 'til midnight. Luckily, our driver knew a way around it, even if we drove halfway to Tanzania before arriving at our hotel. But finally we enjoyed a great party with all the students, presenting Antony with a fine stethoscope engraved with his initials. Students all had fun trying on his graduation duds & fondly anticipating their own turn. Antony will now serve a one-year (unpaid) internship at Mbgathi Hospital in Nairobi.

Sadly, on that day I received notice that the 9-year old daughter of our friend Marie from Women's Power Group in Kibera, died unexpectedly this week. She fell ill; her mother took her to the public hospital & after many hours the child died without having been seen or treated. Cause of death is unknown, as there is no money for testing. Her body lay in the morgue with a fee being charged daily until her mother raised enough money to claim her baby's body & take it to her home village for burial. Please think of what this means to this heartbroken mother, to us all.

We visited Dagoretti Lea Toto clinic to purchase the beautiful crafts made by their support group. Our friend Waithera was late meeting us. Her sister was very ill; the day before she'd taken her to a public hospital, but doctors & nurses have walked out on strike, so Waithera then had to take her to a private hospital. She hired a "boda-boda" (motorcycle taxi), but the driver smashed into a car in heavy traffic, spilling Waithera & her sister onto the road. Fortunately it wasn't on the tarmac side so their only injuries were bruises. This is all in day's work for our friends in Kenya. Later on we were invited to lunch at Waithera's spotless home in Kawangware. She enthralled us with tales of how her grandmother hid rifles for the Mau Mau during the fight for independence!

After buying crafts, the coordinator Wasike & I left by public transport via matatu (small bus, also known as a *suicide sloop*). Walking up the road to the bus stop we passed a broken down matatu being pushed by 5 or 6 young guys. At the stop, Wasike announced the arrival of our matatu. I looked up to see the same bus that had been pushed up the road! "What?! We're riding in THAT? And paying money?! You've got to be kidding!" Wasike laughs and steps into the matatu. I cross myself, utter a frantic short prayer & follow him. It's just a short ride.... My guardian angel sure gets a workout on these trips. All in a day's work....



On Sunday we had a great treat--visited the National Youth Orchestra of Kenya, a volunteer service project building leadership through music. We'd been invited by Kate Fletcher ([www.hekimaplace.org](http://www.hekimaplace.org)), our friend who rescues young girls. She had a group of her girls with her. The performance began late due to local disturbances that snarled traffic (not too uncommon these days). While waiting, Kate, never a shrinking violet, waved her hand & said "Mr. Director, while we're waiting to begin, can you tell about the orchestra, the different components & how they work?" Mr. Wataka, the Deputy Musical Director, was happy to comply. He called the children to the front & we ALL had a very happy lesson about woodwinds, brass, strings, & percussion.



Tuesday, 12/17 Off to Upendo Village in Naivasha, with a little problem: The police stopped a matatu right in the middle of the road at the top of a hill. Cars behind it--including ours-- didn't have time to brake. We were sandwiched in the middle. No one was hurt, but our car's engine was seriously smashed. I phoned Sister Julianne at UV to come fetch us, then pulled out biscuits for all the little kids who'd come to see. Maybe they didn't need them, but they sure were thin & I try never to miss an opportunity for new friends. I wonder if my guardian angel takes vitamins and practices yoga....



We unpacked lots of donated non-prescription meds for the clinic, including vitamins for children & adults. Where so many are malnourished, these are particularly helpful. Special thanks to the McGleams for this help! We gave out a few pairs of shoes, too. Thanks, Katie K.!

A favorite project is collecting donated First Communion outfits to bring here to Africa. Is there anything better than "re-purposing" these outgrown dresses and suits so children here can look and feel special on this memorable day?! The children & their families will never forget their thoughtful friends in the U.S. If you'd

like to donate your child's outgrown dress or suit, please contact us. We'll get them where they'll make a difference. Many thanks. For more details, please see ***Fifty Pounds of Dreams*** on our Facebook page (Project Harambee, NFP).



Red jackets donated by Vicki Matranga multiply in the dark, I am certain! Every time I think we've given out the very last one, another appears. This one went to Pascal, the dedicated worker at Upendo Village who cares for the grounds. He was so grateful. Thanks, Vicki! Your good influence continues.

There is a group of women back home who make "prayer shawls." These are very comforting to those who are ill. They lovingly made several and presented them to me to bring to Kenya. The first, made by Madonna L., we gave to Sister Agnes. She's been a wonderful worker & friend for a very long time. Recently she suffered a stroke & is recovering. She was so happy with the prayer shawl; I'm not sure she'll ever take it off. Thanks, Madonna! Thanks Annette & other crocheters & knitters! We also gave a shawl to Marie. Small comfort after the loss of her child, but much appreciated.



One last small project...we bring with us photos and memory cards from loved ones who have died in the year. Knowing that they are kept in prayer by devout friends around the world brings a measure of solace to families. This year we left cards with the Pallottine Brothers in Nairobi.

Surprise: On December 18th shortly before we left, while walking out to Ngong Road there was a startling sight. I'd never seen camels on this road before, but then I figured the Three Kings were just getting an early start trekking to Bethlehem. On the other hand, it's a long haul out of Africa.

*All best wishes to you for a joyous New Year!  
Ever grateful,  
Keen*

LAST MINUTE FLASH: Recently I attended a milestone Lourdes High School reunion. HARAMBEE was specially honored during the celebrations and as a result we've received donations for SIX more dairy goats! Yippee! I never forget that all our work would be impossible without the compassion and generosity of donors. Thanks to you all, from me and from those you are directly helping. *They know God understands Swahili...because you are an answer to their prayers!*