

PROGRESS REPORT, 2013

What's happening in Africa?

With much sad and fearful news from Kenya this year, we're holding steadfastly to faith & hope for a better future. So I'll begin with triumphs we're celebrating in 2013. HARAMBEE is now supporting NINE young Kenyans in our **Plant A Seed, Grow A Doc** program. We pay medical education fees (\$5,000 a year--total) & they commit to a contract: To do well at university; to work 3 years post-graduation in a medically under-served area of Kenya; to engage in service work during training; to mentor incoming students in the program.

Our students, who come from extremely challenging backgrounds of poverty, have overcome great odds to get an education; they're very dedicated. We watched them in action at the First International Conference on Justice & Peace, held in Nairobi in June (www.justicepeace.org). They participated in panel discussions, reported research findings, & performed a fabulous puppet show--their service project. They'll go "on the road" to educate youth and adults about HIV, oral hygiene, & other important health topics.

When we had dinner together I had lots of questions, especially about our mentorship policy & accommodation to college life--a major adjustment for them. I asked if males found it a problem to be mentored by young women, as gender bias is still very common in Kenya. Antony Otieno smiled & said "Keen, we are a family; if there are problems we work together to solve them. We all help each other." I thought I'd cry; THEY are showing US how it should work. It was the high point of my visit. What could better demonstrate our "all pull together" mission?! These students are leaders & problem solvers. They have excellent values & will positively impact Kenya's future. Your donor dollars have made this possible; YOU are changing the world!

Two years ago when we first visited student Faith Juma & she commented on the difficulties women still face, I asked her how they could be addressed. She clearly had given this much thought & quickly answered "A student organization to provide a network of common interests & support. In numbers there is power for change." So HARAMBEE provided a startup grant & last year 48 charter members from all over Kenya came to the first meeting of the International Health Care Student Association (IHCSA). Grass does not grow under this woman's feet! This year we provided financial help for members to attend the June conference. Supported by & planned with HARAMBEE, this meeting brought together leaders in education, business, & nonprofit services to promote collaboration for justice & peace.



L to R: First 6 Grow A Doc students: Samuel, Faith, Antony, Stephen, Collins, Esnas. (We picked up 2 more at the conference!); Esnas interviewing puppet; other donated puppets; new student Jackline DO manage to find time to smell the flowers...and drink a Tusker

Left: buying a purse from Lucy. Center: Daniel Mutinda at work. Right: Conference badge holder lanyards made by Waithera G., who supports her 4 children & her dead brother's family.

The conference was a good marketing opportunity for HARAMBEE craft groups. We also invited Daniel Mutinda. Maybe you'll remember him...the severely handicapped man whose hand-painted cards we buy. He later told me "Last week I didn't know how I was going to pay school fees for my children. From sales here at the meeting, we are now ok." This isn't drama, it's everyday life for Daniel & for countless other Africans. With an average per capita income of less than \$1,000 there is no cushion to get through hard times. An illness or accident is catastrophic to most families.



left: IHCSA with Faith Juma, Organizer Extraordinaire (she'll be Kenya's first woman president, I am sure!)
right: Sister Florence Muia, Director of Upendo Village, keynote speaker.
HARAMBEE also invited Stanley Kumwati, Dean of Health Sciences at Mt. Kenya University & Sr. Mary Owens, Director of Children of God Relief Institute as keynote speakers

Below is the letter of application sent by Jackline for assistance from HARAMBEE. It's moving--but quite typical, and worth including here in its entirety.

JACKLINE AKINYI OTIENO

I was born in 1994 April 20th in Nairobi. We lived together with my parents who took good care of me. After two years my brother was born. Few months after the birth of my brother my mother passed away and we were left with my father. Few years later my father also passed away and my grandmother took over the parenthood. Since she could not manage to take care of us my aunt took us in but unfortunately she started mistreating us and therefore prompting my grandmother to take us back. We moved back to Nairobi in Kibera slums. I was taken to a primary school in the slums known as Spurgeon since it was offering sponsorship up to class 8.

When I reached class 4 I got to learn of a school known as Lifespring which was a children's home. I urged my grandmother to take us there since the money she was getting from her small business of millet selling was not enough to keep us. My grandmother heeded to this and we eventually got a chance there. I studied there until I finished my primary education. In December 27, 2008 the results were out and I passed well. The owner of the school then promised to sponsor me to secondary school but it became impossible due to financial constraints. She advised me to look for help elsewhere.

When things got difficult, my grandmother came for me back to the slums. I was full of tears with the reality that my dream of ever becoming a doctor had been shuttered. Hopelessness took the better of me because of the fact that I was definitely not going to be in a position to raise my secondary education fee. My grandmother got overwhelmed by my situation and could not take it anymore, so she decided to go back to the rural area to take care of my sick uncle at the time, she left me 1000 shillings only (\$12 USD) for my upkeep. This is the time my search for a secondary school began even though I did not know where the money was going to come from. Luckily, I got a chance at St Aloysius Gonzaga Secondary school with a full scholarship. Since my grandmother had left me alone, the school enrolled me into the social needs program whereby a house was rented for me to stay in as I go to school. My greatest joy was that the dream I had of ever becoming a doctor was renewed and I made a commitment to work very hard in my academic to achieve this. I sat for my Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education and attained a mean grade of B.

To date, I still stay in a school rented house in Kibera slums. With my grade, I hope to take any medical related course. I would love to one day be in a position to attend to the sick who are poor and cannot access health care in the expensive health facilities.

believe it and he said, this is the best surprise I have ever received. Thank you so much and thank Harambee project for me. I also gave him some money for his food.

Calvince also picked his check this morning with a promise that he will not let Harambee Project down. I wish them all the best in their studies. "

Is that enough to float your boat, or what?! Please remember that all this good is coming from *your* generosity.

In the week prior to the conference we were privileged to show two visiting U.S. friends & supporters, Joan & Sue, several Harambee-sponsored sites, including MERMA School in Kawangware (another of the poorer areas outside Nairobi). The school's principal, Mr. Gethere, operates on a slender budget & is constrained by an increasing number of families unable to pay the \$200 yearly tuition & fees. There Joan interviewed best friends Loreen & Reheema, one Christian & one Muslim. Their devotion to each other, interest in each other's faith, & comfort with describing their differences are a moving tribute to religious tolerance--something all adults might learn.



Joan interviewing Loreen & Reheema; kitchen at MERMA school; school bus--broken with no funds for repair



Next stop: Nyumbani Village in Kitui, a few hours east of Nairobi. A planned community of 125 grandmothers raising their orphaned grandchildren, milk from the dairy goat herd we donated provides protein & calcium for several hundred children in the Village. While there we purchased beautiful baskets woven by the grandmothers, for sale on our website.



lunchtime: John nearly lost his hat to a hungry goat



No rest for the weary...on to Naivasha, in the beautiful Rift Valley north of Nairobi. Upendo Village clinic & community center also is a site of our animal donations, so we again had great fun "christening" goats & giving photos of donors to the new owners of goats named Niccu, Red Neck, Wrigley, Leonidas, Rita, Tumaini, and others. We took lots of photos of the smiling (well, maybe...) goats to bring back & this time I managed to avoid getting knocked over by one of them.



left: Ruth, who is quite ill. Her mother swears that she is kept alive only by rich goat milk



We distributed donated meds for the clinic--thanks again to the ongoing generosity of John M. & the People's Resource Center. Another joyous task: unpacking First Communion outfits. Sure, medicine & equipment are top priorities, but every little boy &

girl should look & feel very special on First Communion Day. So we allotted one suitcase for these lovely donated outfits. Many had hung in closets for years until we urged "re-purposing" them for children in Africa who would never be able to afford new clothes. They'll be kept by the sisters & re-used with gratitude & prayers of thanks many times over many years. Has there ever been a better use for these memory-filled dresses & suits? We'll continue to collect them, so contact HARAMBEE if you can help. Please ask around or put an announcement in a church bulletin on behalf of these kids!

This past week I emailed our friends in Kenya to congratulate them on the Kenyan winners of the New York marathon, Priscah Jeptoo and Geoffrey Mutai. Geoffrey is from a farm family in the Rift Valley. He was known as a boy who loved to run. Because his family had little means, he didn't finish primary school until age 17! No funds for secondary school, but he loved to run and kept on running. As a young guy he was chosen to represent Kenya at an international competition but couldn't go because he had no birth certificate. But he loved to run and kept on running. I don't know how the birth certificate problem was solved, but here he is, at age 32 FOR THE SECOND TIME the winner of the New York marathon, in which more than 50,000 people compete. Kenyans have every reason to be proud! The guy loves to run.

Is there such a thing as too much fun? Probably not, but after gallivanting on dirt roads & dealing with a broken water pump & baboons stealing my laundry, I felt I could use a day scrubbing red dust from my feet & drinking margaritas. No such luck--on to the conference, and then a big adventure: South Sudan.

But first, more to report on animals: In March of this year I addressed sixth & seventh grade students at an Alsip school, St. Terrence. Kids were eager to help & raised several hundred dollars for HARAMBEE. Along with a large donation to Grow A Doc & for a goat they named Redneck, they wanted 3 pigs purchased for our Zambia project. In late October I reported back with photos of the 3 "offspring" below: BBQ, Larry, and Pork Chop. 'Ever see such handsome oinkers?! They're for breeding to raise funds for girls' education in Zambia, but frankly, I'll bet they could have a great future in modeling.



Never miss an opportunity! Our taxi driver learns creative recycling of newspapers: woven "sit-upon" & paper hats. He could hardly wait to get home to show his 2 sons.

I think I'd have to be an ace reporter or novelist to adequately describe our visit to South Sudan. It proved a big adventure just to get there. Obtaining a visa was a marathon task, & there are no flights to the capitol city of Juba after dark because there's no electricity to light runways. Our luggage was examined & I had to explain the non-prescription meds I was bringing to a clinic. 'Hard to know what to think about this, the newest country in the world, where a sense of immediacy and need is present in every breath. We witnessed many struggles of South Sudanese to gain some normalcy in their lives after the end (3 years ago) of a bitter and bloody civil war. What was it about, anyway?

I'll rely on the words of Mike S., head of the Catholic University of South Sudan. He's worked in Africa for more than 35 years: **"The northern military continue to bomb border communities and displace thousands who seek freedom from oppression. Yes, it is partly over oil and other resources, but northern leaders use Islamic ideology and weapons to obstruct the growth of a strong South Sudan and to destroy the largely Christian African communities in the border areas.... Yet communities here celebrate with a renewal of hope and courage, even as they recognize that International pressure on North Sudan is critical to avoid return to open war. There is no easy path to building a new nation. This is the context and background of South Sudan today."**

When the Khartoum government pulled out they took all resources with them & destroyed everything they could. Farmers are returning to fields that were heavily bombed. There is no source of clean, safe water. Juba has no electrical grid; businesses and schools use generators that operate two hours a day. Our tickets were hand-written. Food & water are imported & so terribly expensive. At the University of Juba medical college we saw professors heroically working to train future physicians for the country. There are no textbooks--only single copies in the library, which students share. Amidst the optimism and hard work one senses urgency and a thin edge of desperation. Here is what Father Basilio Lukudu, a priest friend who had been captured and tortured by the Muslims, wrote to me:

"In general there are a lot of urgent needs. The most urgent is support for girl students. Even to register the small one to a lower grade in Juba school is just a nightmare! Most are not able to pay school fees as their parents are jobless. This situation some times leads some of these girls to prostitution with the aim of getting some money to pay for their school fee. That leads them either to pregnancy or contracting HIV virus."

So...what is to be done? It's impossible to see what we've witnessed and do nothing. With thought, discernment, and feedback from you out there, we'll come up with something in South Sudan. What do they need? Everything, and lots of it. It's an accident of birth that we were born here...children of riches and opportunity, and they were born over there, under attack, in severe need, lack of opportunity. These are our brothers and sisters. When they suffer, we all suffer.

Now we'll get moving & hope you will, too. John & I are packing for our December visit to Kenya. We always plan carefully, with full knowledge that something will undoubtedly happen to upset those plans, but other adventures await us. Stay tuned for more! When you visit Africa you see life at the edge. For me it's become the center, and I am ever grateful to you for joining me there.

Keen



University of Juba Medical School. How do you teach without supplies or textbooks...or electricity?



Diagnostic laboratory, microscope powered by sunlight & a mirror



Yet another jacket donated by Vicki Matranga. They seem to multiply like loaves & fishes!



A guest for lunch. Oops...he IS lunch!



. How to win friends & influence children: bring a few tennis balls to a refugee camp. Thanks, Kelly Fox!



To thank us for donated school supplies, children sang their new national anthem for us. Thanks, St. Terrence kids!



with Father Basilio at refugee camp church



bombed out church



donating more meds at a Juba clinic

