



# NEWSLETTER

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## HOPE FOR KENYA'S KIDS

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### Message from the President

Four members of our Board of Directors accompanied me on the January trip to Kenya. This has become an annual event which allows us to personally deliver tuition payments to the schools. We also take time to meet with the Principal at each school and visit with our students. These visits allow us to discuss the progress of each student as well as determine whether they have additional needs for books and supplies.



The following articles were written by two of the Board members who participated in this year's school visits.

#### Glenda Edwards ~

My first trip to Kenya was an Elderhostel birding program in 2003. Little did I know that the trip would influence my life and change it in so many ways. My experiences in 2003 eventually brought me to Hope for Kenya's Kids where I am able to realize my goal and dream of promoting and providing education to students in Kenya.

The 2003 trip began innocently enough. I was traveling with my best friend from high school who lives in another state. We had discussed and planned our trip by phone and email for many weeks and were very excited about our upcoming experiences. When I arrived at my departure gate at Tampa International Airport, the music playing was "I Felt the Rain Down in Africa". This brought a smile to my face and later, I would realize that this was a sign of good things to come!

While our group was birding along the cliffs of the Rift Valley near Lake Baringo, we were followed by several boys of various ages. These boys were as familiar with the Rift Valley birds as our guide because they lived nearby and often followed the guides and their tour groups, listening and learning. It was obvious that these boys were very needy and desperately wanted an education, which was not free at that time. Our group was so inspired by these boys that we collected funds and

on two occasions went shopping for school supplies that we had delivered to their local primary school.

One boy in particular stood out as being very articulate and bright. He was the spokesperson for the group and all the other boys gathered around him, confirming the information that he gave to us. The idea of sponsoring him flashed through my mind, but it wasn't until I experienced a defining moment, my spiritual Kenyan moment, that I knew what I needed to do and what I wanted to do. When I returned home, I arranged to sponsor my Joseph, believing that educating one student would have a ripple effect that would eventually educate many.

I found that it was very difficult to arrange for funds to be sent to Kenya because of the exchange rate, mail being stolen or not being delivered, and no guarantee that the money would get to Joseph or that he would still be enrolled in school. I did this for two frustrating years when fate stepped in again and I learned about Hope for Kenya's Kids. I contacted Sandra Fenley and thus began my association with the organization.

Early this year, I traveled to Kenya with Sandra, Shirley, Joy, and Dave. The purpose of this trip was to visit schools and our sponsored students at those schools. It was truly a unique experience to visit each school and to see all the students. Each school campus was physically



different and all were very basic. Sometimes I would wonder how education could happen under such primitive conditions, or how the students could be fed when the food was cooked in huge pots over a wood fire.

For the first two years, the students are enrolled in many academic subjects, such as chemistry, physics, English, biology, math, history and government, geography, Kiswahili, and computer. Some science labs contained equipment and supplies, much of it unused, while others had nothing. The computer labs lacked the most essential equipment – an adequate number of computers. The books in the libraries were usually only text books and some of those were very old. There were no reference books or books for recreational reading.

The students have a very demanding schedule of difficult academic classes. Much of the credit for success goes to the teachers who teach in difficult and sub-standard environments, but the attitude and determination of each student makes it all possible. Test scores document each student's progress or failure. If a student is having difficulty with any class, additional help is available. The student's days are very structured but they do have ample time for studying and recreation.

Each school that we visited was extraordinary in some way but there were some that were the most memorable. The first memorable school was the Murray Girl's High School, mainly because of its location. It is situated high on a rocky hill that overlooks a beautiful valley. Evidently there had been an abundance of rain in the area because the road was well washed! It was a white-knuckle experience to safely reach our destination and another to go back down the hill. After our harrowing ride up the hill, we discovered that our student was away playing soccer!



The next memorable event was our visit to an orphanage. This was probably the most basic school that we visited. The buildings were built of wood and had no floor, only dirt. The message on the outside of one of the buildings was Well....com.....e. Under that was printed: Merry Xmas. Those words truly expressed the spirit of this school. The staff and the students were very excited and grateful for the school supplies that we had brought for

them. The younger children were ecstatic to receive a pencil. These children did not want an I-Pod, new car, or designer clothes - they cherished a pencil! What a pleasure to see the joy and happiness on the students' faces as they clutched their most valued possession!

The school that brought me the most pleasure and will remain high on my list of memorable occasions was Joseph's school. Can you imagine my excitement as I anticipated seeing Joseph for the first time in four years? I had been in contact with him and his older brother over the years but nothing could replace being able to communicate with him face to face. I was eager to find out about his school, his life at school and his family. We were able to talk freely, picking up where we left off four years ago. Because of our connection with one another, I felt that I was truly meant to meet this young man.



*Joseph and Glenda*

Unfortunately, his school had been under poor management for the first two years that he was enrolled there. The school has recently been sold to a private organization which has a good record of being very successful. There were many improvement projects underway on the campus and the new headmaster expected all improvements to be done within the year. Campus beautification included planting flowers around the buildings. These students will be required to work extra hard to recover the deficit of the past two years and I am hopeful that they will benefit greatly from the improvements that are being made. I was able to meet Joseph's brother and spend some time with him. Now I hope to be able to visit with Joseph again in two years – when he graduates!

Even though the facilities at each school are different, the supplies and equipment varied, the uniforms all different, there was one item that did not change with each location – the students. In all cases, we were greeted with curiosity, enthusiasm, interest and many smiling and happy faces. The students did not see the stark conditions that you and I might notice, but an

opportunity for an education that would allow them to change their lives. They were gracious, polite, eager, thankful and appreciative. They will be tomorrow's leaders and we will be able to say "I knew them when".....

Incidentally, upon returning home after my 2003 trip, I contacted a young Kenyan man who was living and attending school in Orlando. He is the son of one of the driver/guides of my 2003 trip. Gabriel came to my home for a visit and my husband and I could see right away that he was in need of a helping hand. He eventually came to live with us so that he could attend classes at our local community college. He is now a registered nurse working in our area. This young man encountered so many problems with college requirements, working, legal status, and high tuition costs but he always had a positive attitude. He exemplifies all the positive characteristics of Kenyan students. Education is their number one priority; they have a strong work ethic and failure is not a word in their vocabulary.

#### **Dr. Shirley Jankelevich ~**

This was my third trip to Kenya and it was quite different from my previous trips since it was almost entirely devoted to visiting as many students and schools as possible within a span of two weeks.

The first business matter at hand after our arrival in Kenya was to hold a Hope for Kenya's Kids Board meeting with our Kenya advisory board. Having a face to face meeting was very instructive and beneficial to us all. We were able to have a healthy discussion of the differences in the philosophies behind the Kenyan styles of running HKK versus the US style. An example is the more relaxed manner of accounting for monies spent in Kenya versus the strict accounting procedures that HKK follows due to IRS requirements for a 501(c)3 organization. Our lengthy meeting allowed us to come to an understanding of our differences and common goals. This information engendered new ideas that included: 1) methods for identifying students in need, 2) holding the students accountable for their school performance, and 3) holding the schools accountable for the tuition payments for HKK students as well as any documents required by HKK in order to continue financial support.

After the board meeting, we began our journey to visit nine schools that were scattered across Kenya. The visit to each school was eye-opening and sometimes very frustrating. One school did not even have working latrines for the students, let alone a facility that was conducive to learning. In spite of the lack of facilities, our student worked very hard and was achieving some degree of success with his studies. On the other hand, another school we visited was well funded and has a good

"reputation". Yet, our student, Grace, who had a fabulous score on her Kenya Certificate of Primary Education, was getting "D's" in most subjects. The principal "knew of the student" and stated that she was doing well and had no problems. When we showed the principal Grace's grades and asked for an explanation, the answer astonished us. The principal stated that because Grace was an orphan and came from a poor environment, she was probably having emotional difficulties adjusting to secondary school and probably was not studying. We then asked to talk with Grace and our conversations with her revealed information that was even more astonishing to us.



**Grace**

It turns out that Grace had to borrow her classmates' books to study from when the classmates were not using them. The reason was that Grace had no money to buy books and apparently no one in the school cared enough to help her or to contact us for assistance. Needless to say, I let the principal know that this situation was totally unacceptable. We asked Grace to give us a list of the books she needed; we then drove into town to purchase the books and delivered them to her. We hope that Grace can raise her grades so that she has a chance of going to university later on

After visiting each school, I became convinced that extensive oversight of each school and each student was essential. This would mean that each school and student must be visited by at least some board member each year. In order to accomplish this, several board members would need to visit Kenya for at least 2 weeks in order to visit all of the schools where we currently sponsor students. Hope for Kenya's Kids currently sponsors 27 students in 14 schools. Visiting each one annually is not a realistic goal since travel to Kenya is costly, many of us work and many have families to care for. In addition, each student at each school often needs unique supplies (e.g. different uniforms, different books). Since the schools don't supply these items, HKK members must

make numerous trips to different specialty stores to buy the items and also arrange to transport of them to each student.

My experiences on this trip fostered the realization that the only way to reasonably accomplish our goal to support students and have appropriate oversight is to limit the number of schools in which our students enroll. The schools to be chosen should only be those which demonstrate academic excellence, are supportive of their students and have shown that they handle our funds responsibly and provide all appropriate documentation.

In summary, this trip was extremely rewarding and informative, and often frustrating for me and the other board members. Fortunately, there are measures that can be taken by HKK to ensure that our funding is being used properly and that our students are achieving their goals.

### **The Future**

As you can see from Glenda's and Shirley's written accounts, this trip provided some challenges. As a result, we met with the entire Board in October and have made several changes to our operating procedures which will mitigate the difficulties Shirley talks about. Specifically, we decided to establish direct communications between the HKK office in Florida and the schools and students. This decision significantly reduces our administrative expenses in Kenya.

As Shirley suggested, we also voted to limit the number of schools we will accept sponsorship applications from. In this way, we will eliminate schools which have been uncooperative in providing student reports and also those which have a history of not monitoring their students' academic needs.

However, the most exciting news is that we are forming an alliance with Upendo Village which is located in Naivasha Kenya. The key services at Upendo Village are temporary shelter, basic health care, home based care counseling, nutrition, food and medicine, community education, voluntary testing, and emotional and social support for clients and caregivers.

We believe that the alliance with Upendo Village will greatly assist us by providing an "on the ground" presence in Kenya which will result in improved visibility into the care and progress of our sponsored students.

We have agreed to accept sponsorship applications from Upendo secondary school students. At a later date, we may consider primary school students as well, since the need is great. We currently have applications from four of their students and are waiting for some additional

documentation. HKK will probably begin sponsoring them in January 2008.



*Children of Upendo Village*

Upendo Village was founded by Sister Florence Muia who was nominated for the 2005 Nobel Peace Prize. With her staff of eight, she serves over 1900 people. Sister Muia believes that addressing educational challenges is just part of the holistic approach that needs to be taken. She says: "By empowering these children through education, we are breaking the cycle of infection." We could not agree more.

Hope is a priceless gift to children in the program. A social worker at Upendo Village was able to step in and rescue one family from the burdens it faced. The mother was nursed back to health at the village and returned home. The sponsorship program then enabled the children to go to school instead of taking on the caretaking responsibilities at home or going out on the streets to seek employment. You can learn more by visiting their web site: [www.upendovillage.org](http://www.upendovillage.org).

We are very excited about our new alliance and our adoption of new procedures to increase efficiency of service.

Thank you for your continued support of Kenya's Kids!

Sandra Fenley  
President