



Makindu Children's Centre

A project of the Makindu Children's Program –

A not-for-profit NGO operating in Makindu, Kenya

Headquartered in Brownsville, Oregon – Established 1998.

June 1999 Newsletter

Back in Kenya

Hello!!! I just wanted you all to know that I have arrived back in Nairobi safely, and it hardly seems as if I left!! Not much seems to have changed, and I am looking forward to greeting all of our munchkins very soon. Even my luggage arrived unscathed, including the duct-tape special, which seemed to give everyone here the hysterics. I can't wait to catch up on the news of the center and kids. I'll be off to good ole' Makindu tomorrow on the bus.

The Kids

The Kids are great. Perhaps the best news is that Nzula Mwololo, a lovely 15 year old, with very unusual congenital eye problems has had a successful first operation. Although very scared she was tantalized by the notion that she could "see like the others". Nzula is a remarkable young woman, with an inner vision of wisdom beyond her years and a grace to accompany it.

Her dreams came true as she came through the operation with no complications and when I went to see her, she ran around the corner and LOOKED RIGHT AT ME, grinning from ear to ear! She has never looked directly at anyone because she was so self conscious of the large growths protruding from her eyes. She couldn't wait to get back to Makindu to show her grandmom. The surgery for her other eye is scheduled for June 17th. The Lion's Club is donating the entire expense, a service offered to peoples from the rural villages, of which they are unaware.

When I returned to Makindu, I walked the back streets to the Center and one kiddo spotted me at a distance. Soon they were all streaming out of the center running and laughing...it was great. At the end of the line there was Dianah, holding Ngwenze. She is the 15 month old who's heart condition has improved so dramatically with our treatment of food and love that on June 4th she took her first unaided steps. Even though she struggles with her one-sided palsy, which makes her pretty unsteady, she prefers to be upright, grinning the entire time.

The same day Musyoka, a terribly traumatized boy who we think witnessed his mother's murder, tolerated being in the same room with a few of us, without his guardian. He never talks or plays or allows himself to be held. He

will now take food from my hand. These are small steps, but they are great ones.

The five Mwololo orphans, who live alone with the 15 year old brother acting as guardian, are now laughing and playing with the rest of the kiddos. Just a month ago when they joined the Center they were too malnourished and despondent to come to the Center for food. It was a great day, just lazing around, reading books, doing puzzles, blowing bubbles and dancing. Not much really, just kids being kids, but for THESE kids...what a wonder.

The grades are in for our school kids. We are pleased to announce that Makau is #1 in his class, Msingila #2, Khadija Salim #4, Wendi #4, Monica Musyoka #1, Lilian #2, Fauma Musyoka #3, Collins #4, Bahati Juma #1 and Kasee #4. Makau is so amazing that the Headmaster wants to get him a scholarship to a really good Nairobi secondary school. This is the street kid that wanted to be a pediatrician, and at this rate he will be. Madonna is having a harder time, but with Makau as his "big brother," he has jumped from 50th to 32nd in his class! What amazing kids these are! What amazing leaders they will be. On another front, we've had ongoing problems with some of the teachers who make continuing requests for money and when it is not forthcoming they chase our kids away from school. The guardians had apparently had enough. On their own, they banded together, stomped into the headmasters office and basically lambasted them. They stood up for MCC and their kids and told them to get their act together. And that is exactly the kind of ownership that we have tried to nurture. It was wonderful (and funny) to see. No Kenyan man will argue with a mob of angry Kenyan women.

The Shamba and other Enterprises

The *shamba* is totally unrecognizable from when I left! We are now growing : eggplant, *suuma* (greens), spinach, onions, potatoes, sweet potatoes, tomatoes, lentils, corn, cabbage, casava, pigeon peas, cow peas, beans, carrots, millet and sorghum. We have a papaya tree and banana trees coming along. We are producing enough that we have 4 local contracts with hotels and restaurants for fresh vegetables and salad fixings. We may even get a contract with a United Kingdom exporting firm! In other ventures, Dianah has organized a tailoring shop and the guardians and kids are producing all their own school uniforms, we are

looking into bee-keeping, a potentially very lucrative business, and we will soon start training on *chakkis* (grinding wheel) production.

Dianah Nzomo

Dianah is the codirector and founder of MCC. This woman is probably the most amazing soul I have ever met. She is the area "wiseman" with men and women seeking her advice (the men in secret). Dianah is a single mother of 4 teenagers and an adopted orphan. She was trained as a social worker and teacher. In addition to MCC she has started two women's collectives which have formed a co-op and run successful businesses. A guardian said it so well "Before Dianah I was only nursing the graves of my family members... and now... we nurse hope."

Interestingly, Dianah's favorite movie is "Born Free" in which an orphan lion cub is rescued, raised, taught how to live as a lion, and then freed to the wild by a woman who simply loved lions. Dianah clearly brings that perceptive wisdom to MCC. Dianah and I shared a dream of a lovely MCC building, which would serve the children and be a monument to the center. We now realize that what we need to build (or allow to develop) is not a building, but the children. To nurse them, love them and let them be free to become whoever they are, whoever they can become. And further, to create a Center that Makindu is proud of and profits by, both spiritually and materially.

Volunteers

Betty Kellow returned to Eugene while I was gone, but left a terrific rundown on what happened at Makindu during my absence. She was a wonderful asset to MCC and all of us here, myself, Dianah and the kids, will miss her greatly. Meanwhile, Kristina Grabbe has arrived. She is a gem, send a million just like her. It took her about 2 days to settle in and then she was climbing and swinging in the trees right along with the kids. Leslie Mittelberg of Swahili Imports Inc. and Mark and Janine Smith were here for a day. Leslie had loads of great ideas about what products to make for sale, and the Guardians were incredulous at what Muzungus will actually buy. The laminated pages of pictures which Cheryl Hayworth and Kathleen Swayze created really helped a lot. And now Jill Barr and Shelly Whitsell have arrived and are eager to get started with the kids. It is very exciting here, but there is always a lot to do.

'til next time

Ok guys, more later....I'm pooped. Caught the 4 am *matatu* (van-bus) to Nairobi and ended up in Machakos instead...oops!!! I have a meeting with Rotary here today and finagling on possible donated supplies. Also I'm continuing deliberations with Nyumbani Orphanage here in Nairobi about HIV positive orphans. Interestingly enough, they have discovered they feel

their initial idea of "taking in" and taking care of the orphans was not the best. They are now trying to focus energy on allowing and helping these kids stay within their own community. They will encourage and teach people how to care for these kids without an orphanage. Exactly what we're doing at MCC (grin)!