



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.

January 2000 Newsletter

Winnie is Back — for good.

Winnie Barron returned to Brownsville on December 16, 1999, having spent over a year in Makindu as MCC Program Director. During that time Winnie and Dianah Nzomo, as well as many volunteers and Makindu residents and officials, developed and implemented our program which has at its center the welfare of 100 orphans. Winnie turned her duties over to the new Director, Josh Englehardt, who arrived in Makindu November 1. Since that time Winnie has been briefing him and introducing him to the endless number of people who make the program work.

A few of Winnie's exploits have become known, but the majority of what Winnie did was sloggingly hard work requiring meeting upon endless meeting, weekly bone-jarring, life-threatening 3 hour bus (matatu) trips to Nairobi, and often heart-rending decisions on what MCC could and could not do to help the people of Makindu. Through it all, she did a remarkable job. A number of people literally owe their lives to Winnie.

The MCC committee would like to express their thanks to Winnie for doing such a terrific and inspiring job under often trying and sometimes harrowing conditions. The following is her last communication from Makindu, and sort of tells the story of Winnie's love affair with the people of Makindu:

"Had an incredible home visit experience the other day that I wanted to share. The rains here have finally come, thankfully, but there has been almost too much, and the ground cannot hold it all. Two Makindu residents actually drowned in the raging river last week, very difficult to believe as dry as it has been for the past year. I took one of our teenagers home on the bicycle the other day, as she was very sick and weak with malaria. Her home is almost an hour and a half walk from the center. She proudly welcomed me into their compound of three small thatched mud huts, two had been completely destroyed by the recent rains, and the final one, the smallest, was full of holes in the walls and roof, and careening on its mud supports. The child's guardian, her elderly grandmother, told me she had just finished sending her thanks to god for the rain that so decimated her family's compound because it meant that the seeds they had just planted would provide them with food for the coming season. It is absolutely incredible to me still, to hear such a testimony to faith and such gratitude,

sincere from the heart. These are truly remarkable people, very courageous, proud, humble, and gracious, who know how to honor each and every minute, and each gift the universe brings."

By the way, there are plenty of exploits which remain untold, such as the time she stole the Makindu Hospital's ambulance to take a young man to Nairobi for a life saving operation, but that is, as they say, another story.

Winnie will be working on the program from the American end, where her energy and insight will continue to serve the kids and people she loves. And while we said she was back for good, anyone who knows her has to add "I doubt it."

(Editor's Note - In Makindu I saw the love and respect many of the citizens of Makindu have for "Doctor" Winnie, as well as that of the orphans for "Mother" Winnie. I sincerely doubt that anyone else could have accomplished so much with so little as did Winnie. She worked tirelessly for our kids, but further, never shirked from helping any and all. As I walked the streets of Makindu, sometimes on an errand, sometimes just looking, sometimes a bit lost, I often met people - men, women and children - who introduced themselves by saying, "I know Winnie!" and my response soon became "Of course you do!" And then, holding my hand to make a real connection, in quiet tones, they would say how much they appreciated what Winnie and we volunteers were doing for the orphans. Often the only white face, it was not hard for people to know I was with MCC, and I was always greeted with a smile. It is not very often one has the opportunity to work with someone like her and I will always be proud of it.)

From our new Director

The following is the first email from our new Program Director, Josh Englehardt:

Hello to all. Things here are well for me- obviously it has been a bit hectic with Winnie leaving, but I think that we're all feeling comfortable with where MCC is, where MCC wants to go, and how best to get there.

Hope all is well and that the wonderful Oregon winter is... well... tolerable. Let me take a wild guess at the forecast... 50 degrees and rainy...? although I suppose you all could make a fair guess as to the climate in

Makindu... hot and dusty. The rains have let up for the most part, but it's really quite lovely- very green, and the *shamba* looks great. We've got about 75% of it planted, so we're all hoping for a good harvest in March. The beekeeping is starting to take off a bit as well. At last count, we had 3 hives with bees, and since we got the catcher boxes, they just keep coming. The kids are doing well for the most part, although the rains have severely damaged some of their houses.

Dianah has an idea to mobilize the community to help rebuild some of the houses, with our kids helping with the labor. We'll see if we can work it out. Dianah is going to Nairobi tomorrow to take Nzula Mwololo to the hospital for some follow up treatment after her surgery. (Editor's note: Nzula had congenital growths surgically removed from both eyes to allow her to see - see June 1999 Newsletter. I met Nzula at the center and she is a beautiful girl.). Dianah's also bringing Kabibi Salim to town for a night out - we owe her a night on the town as she was too sick to accompany the rest of the kids to Mombasa.

The kids wrote essays about the trip to Mombasa and the following are a few excerpts:

Makau Mulatya writes that "MCC has always held ceremonious events for generations," and that when they left for Mombasa, "everybody looked smart, so smart, in fact, that one could mistake them for wedding goers." He describes Mombasa as "lulling, still, and peaceful yet mysterious under the prevailing circumstances."

Beatrice Musembi stated that "no sooner than hearing that MCC was going to Mombasa than I scratched my ringworm infested, egg-shaped head in a bid to activate it" and "when we were inside the train [on the way to Mombasa I was as happy as Sir Isaac Newton when he discovered the force of gravity."

Beatrice's brother Alfred stated he was "very happy like a pregnant frog to see the tall buildings and sky scrapers" Beatrice also says that, when Winnie and Dianah took the kids swimming, she was "as happy as a barren who has given birth to a new baby boy on Friday."

Mwende Muthini had a lovely description of the coming of morning on the train, "the first rays of the big and rounded sun kissed the tops of the hills, and hazy shadows took their boldness and the greying colors changed dramatically to give red shadows."

Kilonzo Mwemwa, on the other hand, was "happy like a king" to go to Mombasa. Kilonzo also "learned a lot of the history of our exploitation. [at fort Jesus]. I saw large buildings and ivory tusks, and... I learned that fort Jesus is the site of one of the most remarkable events in black man's history- the slave revolt of 1791." Finally,

Kilonzo concludes with "[I] was much exhausted, and sleep kidnaped us. However, we arrived safely and I live to tell the tale as a story for the coming generation."