

News on Nyumbani



The first facility for HIV positive orphans in Kenya.

www.nyumbani.org

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September 24 Should be on Your Calendar!

This has been a monumental year for Nyumbani and its outreach programs. Come celebrate with us. Find out what has happened and what we are planning for the future.

**Nyumbani's Annual
Fundraiser
Wednesday, Sept. 24
Georgetown
University Conference
Center**

Kathleen Matthews, news anchor for the ABC-WJLA television station in Washington, D.C. will serve as mistress of ceremonies for the tenth time. Mark Shields, political columnist, will entertain us. Shields has 30 years of experience voicing his insight into American politics. If you did not receive your invitation, call (703) 924-8534.

Dear Friends of Nyumbani,

Greetings once again from Nairobi, which is still a wonderful and pleasant place to live, if one moves carefully and thoughtfully. Yes, there is unease in this beautiful country where Nyumbani thrives, but those of us who live here have learned to avoid potentially harmful situations.

Still, it was a nice break to get back to the United States to see friends and family this spring. In May, I was a guest of St. Michael's College in Vermont, where I received an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters. It was amazing to see the many changes to this campus where I once went to school. College President Marc vanderHeyden and his staff could not have been more gracious. A highlight of that trip was to see my revered biology professor, Dr. John Hartnett, come out of "retirement" to join us at a presidential breakfast.

Following that visit, I went to stay with my brother Joe in Virginia. While there, it was my great pleasure to visit several offices on Capitol Hill whose occupants have expressed a desire to hear more about Nyumbani and our outreach programs. Rep. Betty McCollum of Minnesota promised to make a connection with Land O'Lakes in Kenya, which may be able to help with our agricultural endeavors. Senator Richard Durbin, Illinois, was his usual gracious self, as was Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist from Tennessee. With John Noel, CEO of the NoelGroup and TravelGuard Insurance and chairman of the board for the new Nyumbani Village, I

met Rep. David Obey, Wisconsin, for the first time. I also had a chance to meet with the USA Children of God Relief Fund (COGRF) and Village Boards to discuss the present and future. I met with Dr. Joe O'Neill, White House director of the National AIDS Policy and was present at the ceremony where President Bush signed the historic \$15 billion global HIV/AIDS bill.

British Air's suspension of flights to Nairobi enabled me to spend a longer time visiting with relatives, friends and colleagues in the District of Columbia area, something I haven't been able to do for a while. Yet when a flight to Nairobi was finally arranged, I was anxious and ready to see the happy faces of the children and staff at Nyumbani.

Two of our more active workers for the USA COGRF board also secured a flight to Nairobi and spent many days with us in June. Erin Melendy, who runs our administrative operation, and Jan Conway, who lends us her legal expertise, were intrigued by what they saw. (*Read about it on pages 2 and 4.*) The staff and children were glad to meet people from the States who are helping them; and Erin and Jan went home with a new appreciation for what we do here for the children and for the happiness these children bring us in return.

In July, I traveled to Paris with John Noel at the invitation of Department of Health and Human Services Secretary Tommy Thompson to participate on a panel

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about children with HIV-
AIDS.

Back in Nairobi, I was a panelist at the International Aid and Trade meeting to discuss development of local resources to alleviate the problem of street children with HIV.

More recently, the Speaker of the Kenyan parliament Francis Ole Kaparo hosted a reception to launch action for helping orphans and vulnerable children. At a widely covered ceremony, the speaker pledged to donate about \$1,500 to Nyumbani made available to him by a local championship soccer team. He also promised to take the soccer team to Nyumbani for a demonstration for the children.

To close, I want you to know that we are constantly uplifted by the support and enthusiasm we feel from both sides of the Atlantic. When I am visiting the States, I see so many who want to help; when I return to Nairobi, the staff and volunteers, who constantly give of themselves, impress me yet again with their dedication. Nothing that has been achieved would have been possible without both elements in place. God bless you, and I look forward to seeing many of you in Washington for the annual fund-raiser September 24.

Fr. Angelo D'Agostino,
SJ, MD

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Are there any jewelry appraisers in our readership? Fr. D'Ag was given a piece of jewelry as a donation by a visitor to the orphanage. He would like to have it appraised to sell. We would be grateful if anyone can provide assistance. For more information, please contact info@nyumbani.org.



At Home at Nyumbani

By Jan Conway

For the past few years, I've had the great pleasure of doing legal and legislative work for the U.S. Board that supports Nyumbani. I knew I was contributing to a great cause, but I wanted to do more. Consequently, when the opportunity presented itself to visit Nyumbani with my colleague, Erin Melendy, I felt I couldn't pass it up. In reality, the timing couldn't have been worse – I was between jobs; money was tight; I had a broken foot; British Airways had cancelled all flights in and out of Nairobi; and the U.S. Embassy was warning Americans not to undertake non-essential travel to Kenya. Despite the roadblocks, I was determined to make this journey. I returned home feeling like I had just visited a favorite relative.

The notion that Nyumbani is a true “home” for these very special children rings true. The attractive cottages and main buildings are decorated with colorful artwork donated by creative volunteers. The smaller children make great use of the central playground; the schoolhouse is bright and charming; there are plenty of toys, books and games; and no one gets more attention than the four beloved dogs. Erin and I were greeted warmly by both children and staff, and I immediately felt at home.

Since this was a “working vacation” for Erin and me, our goal was to learn as much as humanly possible in one short week. Every bit of information and every idea we gathered would help in our collective efforts to make life better for these beautiful children. There was hardly a free moment from the time Father D'Ag picked us up at the airport to the emotional farewell party the children and staff threw on our last day. As a result, I can assure every Board member and benefactor that your efforts are greatly appreciated and you support a first-class operation.

Our week revolved around meeting with Nyumbani's senior staff – Protus Lumiti, the dignified and most impressive chief manager; Nicholas Makau, the soft-spoken, very capable Program Manager; Matron Sister Tresa, who cheerfully keeps the place running; Sister Little Tresa, who coordinates and courageously participates in outreach programs in the vast Nairobi slums; Sister Annie, who manages the very sophisticated diagnostic lab; Sister Emily, who oversees the schoolhouse and its rambunctious clients; Sister Reena, who patiently keeps the accounts balanced; and Henry Ochido, the program manager for the critically important Lea Toto clinics. And of course the staff could not succeed without the many volunteers from all over the world. As a whole, these dedicated people are intelligent and capable and – most importantly – they love the children, who love them in return. Their heartfelt expressions of appreciation for the generosity of the U.S. board and Nyumbani's supporters left me speechless.

Our precious free time was spent with the children. You quickly learn that, with the exception of their HIV status, they are like kids everywhere. Nyumbani's nurturing atmosphere allows their personalities to shine. It doesn't take long to identify the shy ones, the bold ones, the serious ones, and the true characters. It's not hard to fall just a little bit in love with the ones who choose you to be their special friend.

I also learned a first-hand lesson about the ability of these children to show compassion. Each and every child was concerned with the condition of my broken foot. Over and over again, I was asked what had happened, and as each little one learned the story, I received a tender pat on the shoulder and was told “sorry.” Clearly, the empathy these kids showed to me is a testament to the care they receive from the Nyumbani staff.

While Erin accompanied Sister Little into the slums one day, I sneaked away for a mini-safari to the Maasai Mara. The experience was incredible, but I must admit that spending time away from my primary mission – the children – made me lonely. I couldn't wait to go home – to Nyumbani and the children. It's a feeling that lingers still.



Jan Conway (middle) and Erin Melendy (right) cut cake with the children and Matron Sister Tresa at a farewell party.

Jamahuri Saves One of our Children

by Nyumbani Volunteer Ted Neill

Nyumbani has many heroes both in Africa and elsewhere in the world – people who give their time and talents to benefit the children. Recently, however, the orphanage itself benefited from a different kind of heroic act – one that could have come straight out of an action flick.

That day in May was like most others for Maasai guard Jamahuri. He signed in a carload of Nyumbani visitors – three women and a man – who said they were there to visit one of the children. A second carload of men, however, had arrived with the first, but instead of entering the compound, the men got out of the car and lingered at the gate, chatting with Jamahuri, complementing his glasses and the holes in his ear lobes, which all Maasai men bear.

The men said they were relatives, visiting 4-year-old Sammy W. who has been at Nyumbani about six months. Jamahuri remembers thinking if they were there to visit one of the children, their intentions could not be bad. But he began to think differently when the men edged closer and one man strategically placed himself between Jamahuri and Jamahuri's bow and quiver.

At about that time, the phone in the guard house rang. Jamahuri picked it up to hear Matron's frantic voice telling him to stop any cars coming out of the gate because visitors had kidnapped Sammy. Jamahuri looked up to see a car speeding down the driveway towards the gate. One man at the gate, meanwhile, pulled out a pistol and pressed it against Jamahuri's throat, threatening to kill him if he interfered. Jamahuri watched helplessly as the car cleared the gate, and the four unarmed men leapt into their waiting car. Jamahuri realized, however, that despite the gun at his throat, he was Sammy's last hope. "I thought: If he pulled the trigger, I would be dead in seconds. But if I was dead I couldn't help Sammy."

An opening came when the gunman looked away to see if the car with Sammy had escaped. In moves worthy of any action hero, Jamahuri used that moment to kick the gunman's legs out from under him and roll onto the ground, hoping any gun shots would miss him. Jamahuri had his poison-tipped arrow aimed at the gunman before the man even had a chance to recover from the sudden movement. Instead



Jamahuri and Sammy

of shooting the arrow, however, Jamahuri knocked the gun out of the man's reach, and the man promptly ran away.

Jamahuri let him go because his only concern was the car that had Sammy inside. When the car was forced to wait for a lorry to pass, Jamahuri went to the driver's window and drew the arrow at the driver's neck. The driver gunned the engine and swerved to point it towards Jamahuri.

In an act of will against will, however, Jamahuri – knowing the extremes these people had already shown in kidnapping the child, remained where he was with his arrow pointed at the man and hoped that man would not call his bluff. Jamahuri had no wish to kill the driver because that would only bring bloody reprisals and further danger to Nyumbani. Jamahuri leaned into the window, the tip of the arrow inches from the man's neck, and took the keys from the ignition.

Jamahuri then heard Sammy's cries for help. Although he saw the nuns and other Nyumbani staff running down the driveway to help, Jamahuri says "Something just over came me at that moment." He struggled with the man, got the door open and pulled the man out of the car. On the seat was Sammy, his small body pressed into the seat and his head bent at an uncomfortable angle. Jamahuri swept him into his arms and ran back into Nyumbani, locking the gate behind them.

Jamahuri says that while he was not scared during the attempted abduction, he felt physically ill when he had time to reflect. "I thought, what would my family think? They would say, 'Why did he leave our land [his family has ancestral lands in Samburu] to return as a corpse?'"

A Family Fight

The visitors really were relatives of Sammy, but as Sammy's House Mom Anne says: "It is upsetting that his own family would do that to him. He gets good care here."

There was a reason, however, and a very good reason why Jamahuri's actions, while dangerous to himself, were important to Sammy's survival. Sammy, who is the only child of a couple that died of AIDS, is the sole inheritor of a sizable estate. He is temporarily at Nyumbani while the maternal side and paternal side fight for custody. The paternal side attempted to kidnap him, and since they are members of a Muslim sect that does not believe in medical treatment under any circumstances, they would have denied Sammy the drugs he needs to stay alive. Jamahuri saved Sammy's life by keeping him from falling into their hands, and while the outcome of the court case has yet to be determined, the judge will likely take the paternal family side's actions into consideration.

Meanwhile, Jamahuri, who took a short leave to visit his family and ancestral home, says he is glad to be returning to Nyumbani and that the incident reenforced his decision to work with Nyumbani.

"These children need help of all kinds," he said posing for a photo with a smiling Sammy sitting on his lap. "I'm glad to know I can make a difference."



An Eye-Opening Day

By Erin Melendy, US Administrator

During a side trip while visiting Nyumbani, I was lucky enough to experience first hand the Nairobi slums of Kibera and Kariobange, where I went with Sister Little, Nyumbani's community outreach director. Let me explain why I consider it "lucky."

Service and management of Kenyan slum areas have increasingly deteriorated over the years. I am told this is largely due to corruption in the past government, poor economic conditions, rapid growth and limited resources.

Nairobi has some of the largest slums in all of Africa. Estimates are that 1 million people, or one-third of the population of that city live in the slums, which are just a few miles from the downtown business district. Not surprisingly, the living conditions are deplorable by the developed world's standards. Numerous family members live together in one-room huts made of mud. Sheets of plastic, cardboard and blankets serve as windows and doors, and roofs are made of scrap metal or tin. The huts are built in seemingly endless rows, all connected, and only 5 feet across from the next row.

The huts have no electricity, toilets or

clean water. Running between the rows are streams carrying rubbish and human and animal waste. I saw many women washing clothes in this almost black water, and bare-foot children playing in it.

While walking to meet a client in the slums, we happened to pass a school in session. The children, who saw us passing by their window, began to yell, "Muzungu!!", which means white person or foreigner in Swahili. We stopped to say hello, feeling increasingly guilty for disrupting the lesson – with good reason. There were no less than 50 children in the one small room with one teacher giving separate lessons to different age groups. The room, constructed like the mud huts, had no desks, just long benches, upon which the children crowded together. Each child reached to shake my hand, some holding 2-inch broken stubs of pencils that in America we would have thrown away.

We then visited Lea Toto clients. Each of these families are affected by HIV/AIDS in some way. One woman was cooking food for her family over an open fire in the middle of her hut. After meeting with Sister Little, she asked us if we

would stay for lunch. This woman didn't know where her next meal would come from, yet she wanted to share what she had with us. This truly Christian act of generosity was what touched me most during my trip.

Every person I spoke to that day, even the children, shook my hand and asked me how I was. How was I? The question couldn't have been more ironic or less relevant. On the whole, all of the people I met in the slums were friendly, hopeful and very grateful for what they have.

I walked into the slums that morning anticipating what I was about to see and feeling as if my heart would break. But by the end of this deeply thought-provoking day, I walked out feeling extraordinarily uplifted. As incredible as some people would find it, I loved every minute of this day. It has led to a searching examination of what life is and how I, as an American, should try to live it.



Erin Melendy and friend



Jan Conway and friend

Nyumbani-USA

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