

News on Nyumbani



*The first facility for HIV
positive orphans in Kenya.*

www.nyumbani.org

Volume V, Issue 3

Third Quarter 2004

A Second Matthews To Speak at Benefit



TV news anchor Kathleen Matthews will be joined at the podium this year by husband Chris Matthews, a well-known political analyst. Kathleen is anchor for WJLA-Channel 7 and has served as mistress of ceremonies for the past 11 years. She and Chris will be this year's featured speakers. Chris is host of NBC's "Hardball with Chris Matthews" and "The Chris Matthews Show."

The Video "Song of Nyumbani," which documents the making of the stage production of that name, will be shown at the benefit.

Dear Friends of Nyumbani:

Sadly, I must report that despite our desperate attempts to save her, Anastacia died of meningitis. Volunteer Ted Neill has written a tribute to this smart, beautiful child, which you can read on page 3.

Anastacia was buried at Langata Cemetery. Her funeral was attended by many Nyumbani friends and classmates, as well as staff, volunteers, Nyumbani Kenya Board members and her immediate family. Anastacia will long be remembered.

Several other children are sick, but that can largely be attributed to a nasty virus that hit much of the orphanage staff

and volunteers and was exacerbated by the cold weather here in Kenya, where we are going through our winter as you celebrate the warmth of summer. The sick children appear to be doing fine under the care of our skilled nursing staff.

The cold weather also caused us a second problem. It forced the girls enjoying one of the steel shell houses to move back to traditional housing. We had high hopes for these structures because of their cost effectiveness and spaciousness, but we've found the steel structures too cold during our "winter."

Now on to some good news. We are quite happy with the progress our children are making in public schools and how most schools have accepted them. We now have 54 children attending state-funded schools and 32 attending schools at Nyumbani. Progress reports indicate good results, fair to good attendance due to health problems, and good behavior and discipline. One young man, David O., was selected as class prefect.

We also received news that our singing/dancing team - Watoto wa Mungu - was selected as a finalist in the prestigious annual Kisima national music awards. Our group's members are the youngest nominees in the contest. They didn't win first place in that event, but the group received much attention the night of the award presentation, and one of the music videos featuring the Nyumbani children won the

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A Special Guest

As this issue went to press, *News on Nyumbani* was informed that Protus Lumiti, the beloved and respected chief manager of Nyumbani, has been invited to the U.S. to give a speech in September so he will be in Washington, D.C. for the fundraiser. Come meet the man that helped Father D'Ag realize his dreams.

Nyumbani Annual Benefit

Tuesday, September 14

Renaissance Washington Hotel

999 Ninth Street, NW

Washington, D.C.

6 p.m. Reception; 7 p.m. Dinner;

8 p.m. Program



An Inspired Collection from School Children

As fall arrives and school begins, we are reminded that generosity towards Nyumbani's children comes in many shapes and sizes, including efforts by other school children in the world.

One trio of girls in Wisconsin rallied their school, O'Keeffe Middle School, and their community around an effort to put together 58 backpacks and the school supplies to fill them to send to Nyumbani's children, who are now attending public schools.

Sadie Bazar-Leidy came up with the idea after reading about Nyumbani and Father D'Ag in the *Wisconsin State Journal*, which her parents receive.

She then spread the word to friends Abbie Hill and Nev Dzamonja as well as other friends and school mates.

"We cared about this because we couldn't believe these kids hadn't been allowed to attend [public] school so we wanted to make their school experience a little better," she said.

"We also thought about how excited we always are to get new school supplies each year," she explained.

Land's End and Jansport donated the backpacks and students and friends donated the supplies.



From left: friends Natalya Hokin, Sadie Bazar-Leidy and Abbie Hill prepare supplies for shipment.

Songs from the Children's Hearts

By Genilee Swope Parente, editor, *News on Nyumbani*

Like many visitors to Nyumbani, Judy Pancoast came home from Kenya with an expanded view of the world and a heart full of love for the children. However, she also came home with their voices – both musical and emotional.

Judy, who writes and performs children's music and conducts songwriting workshops for a living, helped the children at the orphanage create two songs based on their love for Nyumbani and on how they perceive themselves. The songs were then recorded in a studio thanks to local musician Don Rawzie, who has been teaching the children music for some time and encouraging them to perform.

Back in the United States, Pancoast has been adding background music and preparing to launch the premiere of the songs at this year's fundraiser (see front page) and to radio stations that play her other music.

"My hope is that this effort will not only raise awareness of what Nyumbani is and who these children are, but to break down the fears about interacting with people affected by HIV/AIDS. These songs are full of love and happiness, and they show how strong, but innocent the children are," she said.

The pictures the songs paint were based on what the children themselves had to say. During a week of workshops, Pancoast asked them to choose what they wanted to sing about, and the first song – which is about the orphanage itself – was their choice of subject. The second song was created using an exercise that the orphanage staff says was very valuable to

the children. Pancoast's 10-year-old daughter Louisa wrote the children a letter introducing her mom and asking them about their country and their situation.



Judy Pancoast visits with two of the children and volunteer Ted Neill

Pancoast read the letter to each group of children she was teaching, then asked them to write back to all the children of the world.

"At first, they were hesitant, so we took two huge sheets of paper and had each child answer questions such as 'who are you,' 'what do you like,' 'what do you dislike.' The result is a beautiful song that really talks about what the children are feeling," Pancoast explains.

The songs will be sold on CD, and proceeds will go towards the orphanage. Pancoast herself hopes to return next Spring for a second workshop. And though Judy has donated her time both here and in Kenya, as well as recording and finetuning time here in the United States, she says what she gained from the experience has deeply reinforced her religious background and will stay with her for the rest of her life.

"I really feel like this whole process – from the time my good friend Jan Conway sent me a Christmas card telling about the children – to the time when I finally got to visit the children in April – has been led by God," she says.

"I have never felt anything as powerful as this," she adds. "I always believed there was a need to create music that is between Sesame Street and Britney Spears -- music to encourage children to remain children (instead of graduating to Teen Bop), but to be creative and musical. This visit not only supported that belief, it also showed me how very small our problems are here in the United States and how very large these children have to be to face the things they face every day in Kenya."

Schoolchildren

(Continued)

The girls even had a local shipping company, Send It Now, donate most of the shipping expense so they were able to use the \$200 they collected for that cost for more supplies.

Sadie, who says she plans to become a doctor, called the experience both an exercise in coordination and "very fun. We couldn't have asked for it to be any easier, which makes us want to do another project like this."

"I'm with Stupid"

Remembering Anastacia

by Nyumbani Volunteer Ted Neill

Editor's Note:

Nyumbani suffered a tremendous loss this spring when 7-year-old Anastacia succumbed to HIV-AIDS virus complications. Nyumbani Volunteer Ted Neill, who has been writing for News on Nyumbani since he went to Kenya in 2002, wrote the following tribute to a little girl who had to face her own death at a very young age.

Last month, while Anastacia was in the nursing room, I stopped in to see her. She was belly down on the bed, her face turned sideways, wearing a grumpy scowl. I said hello to her, but she ignored me completely. When one of the nurses asked her why she would not acknowledge me, she promptly answered: "Because Ted is stupid."

Often, the expectation among those of us who want to help children living with the reality of this disease is that these children will always be sweet and forgiving – almost saint-like – while they are suffering. Yet that's as unrealistic as expecting adults to be so.

Anastacia was no exception, and her reaction that day taught me a valuable lesson: How could I have expected someone with terrible abdominal pains who had been vomiting all morning to appreciate my entreaties to be "buddies?"

It's not that Anastacia didn't welcome the attention that the adults at Nyumbani shower on these children who have lost their families or are separated from relatives through HIV/AIDS. It's just that she was one very independent child. One volunteer described her to me as: "A lot smart and a little saucy." She was not one of the children who immediately run up to visitors or volunteers upon their arrival, which is why after two years working at Nyumbani, I still did not know her very well. The most I knew of her was that she was the intelligent girl in cottage G with gorgeous eyes who listened obediently to her housemother and teachers, but who volunteers had to bargain with to get her to do what they wanted—unless they had already won her respect and interest.

One volunteer who earned that trust was Ainsley McCaskill, a Canadian who visited the orphanage in April of this year.

I wrote Ainsley and asked her to write a letter to Anastacia, hoping that if I presented it to her, I could cheer her up (not to mention shed my "stupid" status).

Unfortunately, the first line of the letter that Ainsley wrote was: "Dear Anastacia, I hear you think Ted is really stupid. You are so right and so smart!"

When she read this, Anastacia laughed harder than anyone had seen her laugh in weeks. However, the letter was the last thing that made her laugh as her health deteriorated.

When she was diagnosed with meningitis, Anastacia was moved into the nursing room for 24-hour care. There, a volunteer nurse helped Anastacia write a response to Ainsley. When the nurse asked Anastacia which part of the letter she wanted to respond to first, she grinned mischievously and pointed to the "Ted is stupid" line.

That mischievousness was one of the reasons Anastacia was loved at Karen C, the public school she attended. She impressed the teachers there by remaining number 2 in her class despite the considerable number of days she had to miss because of illness. At the same time, Anastacia's sauciness extended to the teachers she liked. For example, she routinely addressed the oldest teacher, a woman barely over 40, as "cucu," (grandma).

After being moved into the nursing room, Anastacia was put on treatment for her meningitis but did not respond as hoped. I spent about a week working the night shift with a volunteer nurse, Monica, and got to know her a little better. Still, when Anastacia would wake and ask for soda, food, or a bedpan, I felt hapless as I rushed about the nursing room fumbling with my gloves. I always imagined her thinking, "Yeah, he is stupid," a title I cemented one night when I tried to pull a band-aid off and pulled too hard, causing Anastacia to cry out and glare at me.

Monica and I were with Anastacia throughout the last night she was with us. She was in a great deal of pain, and I can't put into words how difficult it was to watch. At one point, trying to see how lucid she was, I leaned down and

asked her if she remembered that this was Ted beside her. She nodded yes. I asked her if she remembered how stupid I was. This time she gave a heartier nod and what I choose to perceive as a small smile.

Anastacia's death has been hard on all of us who had grown complacent thinking that antiretroviral medicines are a cure-all to this disease we face daily. They certainly help alleviate suffering, but they can't always stop the death that is a part of our experience at the Nyumbani home. They don't stop this disease from taking the lives of young, beautiful, talented children like Anastacia and others, and we have to live with that reality.

Yet, one cannot write the previous sentence without acknowledging the progress Nyumbani and Father D'Agostino have made helping other children. So many children now have hope and longer lives because of his work. Thanks to him, Anastacia had a loving home at Nyumbani, and I am grateful for that. I am grateful she was able to laugh at my "stupidness."

Anastacia: we will miss you so much, your eyes, your wit, your spirit. We love you, but God loves you more. Bless you in your journey to Him.

A copy of the latest U.S. financial report and official registration filed by the Children of God Relief Fund, Inc. can be obtained by contacting COGRF, Inc. at P.O. Box 3465, Fairfax, Virginia, 22038-3465, or by calling (703) 934-8534.

Residents of the following states may also obtain this information by contacting: NEW YORK - New York State Attorney General's Charities Bureau, Attn: FOIL Officer, 120 Broadway, New York, New York 10271; VIRGINIA - Division of Consumer Affairs, P.O. Box 526, Richmond, Virginia 22304. Registration with these governmental agencies does not imply endorsement, approval, or recommendation by the state.

Father D'Ag's Column

(Continued from page 1)

award for "Best Video in East Africa." The award is an honor in itself, but it also helps to create awareness of who we are and what we can do. To date, Watoto wa Mungu has produced four musical videos and two CDs, which are on sale locally and abroad (although not yet in the U.S. due to legal issues), with six No. 1 hits on the radio. Who would ever have dreamed in 1992 when we started Nyumbani that we would eventually have such a talented group? We have to thank local reggae singer, Don Rawzi and many other top pop singers for nurturing this talent and giving so much of their time to the various musical projects (see the story on Judy Pancoast, page 2). Some of our children have expressed serious interest in developing their musical talents and want to learn to play instruments (if you're looking for a way to donate, giving a musical instrument would help these young musicians).

Since the last newsletter, I am happy to report that the Kenya National Sweepstake Lottery selected Nyumbani as

a beneficiary for the third time. We opted to receive five computers from that award, which will be devoted solely to teaching the children the computer skills so necessary if they are to take their place in the world today.

On a community-wide note, our laboratory has acquired a new apparatus that brings the cost of testing for HIV down to a more affordable level of \$15 and will soon net similar results for the currently expensive viral load test. Our hope is that the lower costs will encourage more local people to take advantage of these needed tests. The apparatus was made possible thanks to a special grant from Nyumbani-USA, whose newly elected president Ben Palumbo, has hit the ground running. As far as the USA benefactors, we also must mention a most generous gift of several thousand packets of enriched milk/soya/porridge drink for our Lea Toto program. The donor is the well-known Land O'Lakes company, which has offered to help us with the dairy needs of the Village, as well.

As far as my own activities, I recently traveled to Washington primarily to receive the Chairman's Humanitarian

Award from the International Center for Missing and Exploited Children. It was an exquisite affair at the Ritz Carlton, and I saw many old and new friends. My thanks to the Center's Chairman, Sen. Denis DeConcini, who is a long-serving Nyumbani-USA Board member and benefactor.

God bless you for your prayers and efforts on behalf of our children.

Fr. Angelo D'Agostino,
SJ, MD

To donate to Nyumbani, use the enclosed envelope, send your donation to the return address below or call for information on sending items.

Nyumbani-USA

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Father D'Ag and the children say goodbye to Anastacia.