

News on Nyumbani



The first facility for HIV positive orphans in Kenya.

www.nyumbani.org

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Second Quarter 2009

Dear Friends of Nyumbani:

Greetings from all of us in the Nyumbani programs. It is school vacation time here in Kenya so our high school students are back with us: 19 here in the Nyumbani Home and 60 in the Nyumbani Village. What a difference their presence makes! Each time they come back, we exclaim: "How they are growing up. But not without adolescent challenges!"

As I write from my office, I hear sounds of vacation activities coming from the Fr. D'Agostino Multi-Purpose Hall. We just received indoor sports equipment from Irish friends who are visiting—a pool table, table tennis, badminton and rounders equipment—so there is great excitement learning these games, thanks to the enthusiasm

of our volunteers. When I went up to the Village for the Easter celebration, I brought some of the equipment with me, only to learn that our USA volunteer, Mike, was already making a pool table—having learned how to use the Polytechnic woodwork machines.

Easter, the Feast of the Resurrection, is always a special time for us. This year our ceremonies in the Nyumbani Home were enhanced because they took place in the new multi-purpose hall, which lent both space and beauty to our celebration. We started the Easter Vigil outside, with the wind making it hard to keep our candles burning. This situation led to much interaction, as we reached out to each other to get a light. The experience led to a connection with each other in a companionable manner, which was very appropriate to the occasion. Easter Sunday also brought our faithful friends from British Airways, along with goodies, the Easter Bunny and another bunny companion, so fun reached a high peak that afternoon.

Easter Monday took me to Nyumbani Village to celebrate there. I arrived at 8.30 a.m. for Eucharist, after which the manager welcomed me and announced that a mother never comes empty handed! When flour for chapatis (African pancakes) arrived, and we announced that goats were on their way, the cheering nearly lifted the roof. For our Lea Toto children, we hope they, too, experienced Easter Joy and celebrated en famille. While the conditions in which they live are deplorable, one



Sister Mary Owens

reality always consoles me. This reality was recently brought home to me again as a result of a survey done among Nyumbani Home and Lea Toto children: This survey concluded, as previous research has shown, that growing up in family, no matter how materially deprived, nurtures more socialization skills and higher self-esteem. Nothing can replace the family.

While enrollments into Lea Toto continue, a new trend of caregivers seeking transfers out of the program has grown. Evidence is now confirming that more and more families are moving back to their rural

(Continued on back page)

Mark Your Calendar!

"U.S. and Kenya,
United in Purpose and
Hope"

Annual Nyumbani
Benefit

Friday, September 25
Willard Intercontinental
Washington, D.C.

Turn to page 5 for details!



A Trip that Continues in Our Hearts

By Tom D'Agostino (14-year-old Great Nephew of Father D'Ag)

When our parents told us in January they were considering taking us to Nairobi, Kenya, we couldn't believe it. They wanted us to see what our Uncle Angelo [Father Angelo D'Agostino, Nyumbani's founder] had built with the help of so many wonderful people.

Our visits with our uncle had always been special—he made several trips to Minnesota to see us and share his mission and vision about Nyumbani—so the opportunity to witness this firsthand was something very special. We wish he could have been there in person to be our guide, yet his presence was felt so strongly during our journey.

We worked as a family to pull the preparations together—visas, flight arrangements, travel physicals (and vaccinations, as our six-year-old brother Joe dreaded).

Besides the journey itself, we were excited about taking donated items with us. The staff at Nyumbani gave us a wish list, and we got to work gathering the items. One of our parents' friends helped set up a blog where we posted the wish list. The blog also served as a means for us to communicate with friends and family about our visit to Nyumbani. [The site is still up at www.dagsinnairobi.blogspot.com]. The blog was a wonderful way to share the story of Nyumbani with hundreds of people.

On March 25, we set out on our journey with ten boxes weighing about 50 pounds each. The boxes included books, clothing, a photo printer and ink, toothbrushes and toothpaste, scooters and other miscellaneous items for the three programs—the Nyumbani Home, Lea Toto and Nyumbani Village.

We were greeted at the airport by Sister Mary and the Nyumbani school bus which was needed since we were a family of six with 18 pieces of luggage. When customs asked our business in Kenya, and my mom showed them the letter from Sister Mary, they waved us on without question.

Sister Mary, Protus and Sister Julie obviously gave a great deal of thought to our visit—we saw and did it all. We often wondered how they could keep the kind of schedules they kept, and we decided it was God providing them the energy. We

also felt the presence of Uncle Angelo throughout the journey—so many of the people we met had such high regard for him. The older children who knew him missed him deeply, and I think they felt a sense of his presence through us. His picture is found everywhere, and it was incredible to witness the affection for him.

We have begun processing what this trip meant to us as a family, and we know that it may be months or years before we fully appreciate what we experienced. We will never forget the reactions of the children as they saw our



Sister Mary (left) and the D'Agostino family (from left) Joe, Dad Michael, Tom, Rob, Tim, and Mom Sharon.

little brother Joe for the first time and raced to rub his head. They did so, because while they've seen many adults, to see a Caucasian child of just 6 was unusual so he often became the center of attention, but he handled it well and has already said he misses his new friends.

Our brother Timmy (10 years old) is a little shy, but he didn't show it—the

universal pastime of sports was all it took to get Tim involved with the children. He also was impressed with how dedicated the children were to their studies and their chores.

My brother Rob (12 years old) is really compassionate and loves food. He paid particular attention to the food of Kenya and joined the older kids listening to music and dancing. We sponsored a pizza party one night during which my brothers and I performed a few skits. One afternoon, we made one of our favorite Italian cookie recipes for afternoon tea.

My own memories (I am 14) include the drives on really rough roads and how packed the roadways were with people walking. Some were heading to find work. Many women carried water for the day. Children tended to their cattle and goats. Life there is very different in that it is much more labor intensive. I will also remember the wonderful "mums" and "uncles" at the orphanage and how they welcomed us as if we were their own children. I will also remember the "mums" that we met in the Lea Toto program. We didn't speak the language, but we connected in a special bond. The Nyumbani Village was fascinating. I am a science buff, and I could write several columns on how incredible the Village is with its self-sustaining, eco-friendly design.

What amazed all of us the most was the love and compassion of the staff and Lea Toto clients as well as the sophistication of the programs. In a country where even water is a treasured resource, it was heart-warming to see all that has been done.

It is likely this will not be our only journey to Nyumbani—even those of us in the family that don't return there physically will be making the trip over and over in our heads and our hearts. We hope to find a way to contribute at new levels and in new ways, and we hope our journey will inspire others to do the same.



The children of Nyumbani welcomed the D'Agostinos with much enthusiasm.

Bringing Nyumbani to the U.S.

By Susan Dillon Gold

In everyone's life there are times when the thought occurs: "if I could just freeze this moment for a little bit." I had one of those moments on the evening of April 11, as I tucked John, George and Brian, who arrived from the Nyumbani Home, in to sleep in my very own house. It was special because I had thought about this visit since I met the boys in November 2003.

I had planned the event since February 2008, when I returned from a 10-month stay at Nyumbani with plans to go back. Those plans were delayed by the post-election violence and government bureaucracy. I decided that, if I couldn't go there, I'd bring the boys here. This began months of fundraising; frantic emails from Madison, Wisconsin to Nyumbani to get the ball moving on birth certificates, passports and other trip necessities; and many calls to Erin Kennedy with the U.S. board, who was both a sounding board and a life-saver as far as helping with the many administrative details. The original plan was to bring them here in November 2008 but visa difficulties got in the way. At the time, I thought maybe it was Father D'Ag intervening for the boys with: "are you crazy Susan, bringing them to Wisconsin in the winter?!" However, Lea Toto Director Nicholas Makau, who was slated to accompany the boys, did make the trip, and his visit was a great success. He made presentations and formed great connections for Nyumbani that are still bearing fruit.

After fundraising for another plane ticket for an adult to accompany the boys, they got visas and arrived in April 2009.

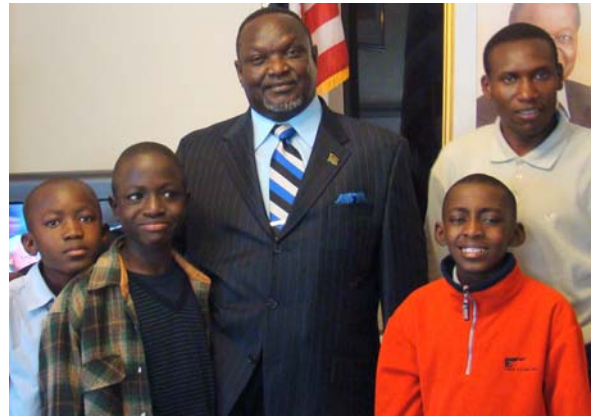
Many people contributed time, money, clothes, toys, and a journal for each boy. They arrived with Uncle Joseph Karani and spent the first five days in Madison. There, they visited the AIDS Vaccine Research Lab on the University of Wisconsin's campus where they learned an experiment—how to extract DNA from a strawberry and a mango—and where they thanked the lab staff for their work toward finding a vaccine.

The boys had check ups with University of Wisconsin Children's Hospital Doctor Jim Conway, who specializes in Pediatric Infectious Diseases, and who said he was very impressed with how healthy and cared for they were. They also spent an afternoon at Blessed Sacrament School, where students had raised over \$1,000 for their trip and where they got to show off their soccer skills.

I think a highlight of the entire trip was seeing favorite American volunteers in their homes. Visiting with people who have been to see them in Kenya was important because they got to see us in our world like we have seen them in theirs. From Chicago, we traveled to Sumner, Iowa to visit Jim Cross, who has been to Kenya three times, is very attached to the boys and donated funds towards their trip here. In Iowa, they rode bikes, visited a school, and shared wonderful visits with Jim's family and friends.

After a day in Chicago, we headed to Washington D.C., where the children were excited to see Lloydie Zaiser, who has spent much time in Kenya and who now runs a service for other people who want to visit (www.k-e-s-t.com). In D.C., every day was an adventure: riding in Lloydie's convertible and on the metro; meeting the staff of the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief and thanking them for medications; touring the Capitol; having their pictures taken with U.S. Senator Russ Feingold (Wisconsin); dancing at a Nyumbani benefit at Sidwell Friends school (See page 4), and where they also got a glimpse of the Obama sisters.

While in the D.C. area, the boys also stayed with COGRF President Marilyn Jerome and dined at Tomi Browne's (see story on page 4 on Tomi's latest venture). They spent time at Holy Trinity School in Georgetown and took tea with the Kenyan Ambassador to the U.S. H.E. Pe-



The boys (from left) Brian, John and George with their escort Joseph Karani (right) and Kenyan Ambassador to the U.S. H.E. Peter Ogego (center).

ter Ogego. Brian made it clear that someday he will be sitting in the Ambassador's chair!

But it wasn't just the boys themselves who benefited from the visit. Their presence here brought the name and faces of Nyumbani to America. It provided people who give so generously but will never be able to travel there a chance to meet the children whose lives are changed by their good deeds.

The 13-hour drive back to Madison was long but the boys voiced not one complaint or argument—they just looked out the windows at America. After a few days in Madison packing and saying goodbye to newfound friends, they headed back home to Nyumbani. We sent them off with hearts full of love and memories, visions of "good roads and nice cars." And I know that they are now safely tucked in at night by their other mums, Mum Terry and Mum Grace.

U.S. Board Members Attend Global Health Summit

The weekend of April 18-19, MaryLynn Qurnell, Patrick and Annette Donnelly, and Marilyn Jerome visited Yale University to attend the Global Health and Innovation Summit. The summit's program was sponsored by Unite for Sight, a nonprofit that works to eliminate preventable blindness from infectious and surgically correctable causes and empowers communities to provide eye clinics and follow-up care.

The April summit was attended by 2,200 participants, as well as some of the most prominent leaders in the field of health. Topics such as global health challenges, social entrepreneurship, training refugees in villages as community health care workers, holistic children's services for orphans abroad, psychosocial care for families with HIV, the HIV vaccine, monitoring outcomes, involvement of community leaders, accountability, financing healthcare and much more were covered.

The exchange of ideas, especially comparing various models of providing care to the poorest around the world, gave the board much to ponder. Many of the best practices discussed were already being employed in the Nyumbani programs. Also, according to COGRF President Marilyn Jerome, "It seemed that everyone we met who had lived or worked in Kenya knew of Nyumbani and Father D'Ag's wonderful work there."

New Audiological Services for the Children

Tomi T. Browne, Au.D., founder of a not-for-profit organization HEARt of the Village, Inc., (<http://www.heartofthevillage.org>) visited the Nairobi and Kitui Districts of Kenya for two weeks in February to launch HEARt for Nyumbani. Browne was accompanied by Dr. Yell Inverso and doctoral students, Kim Basilio, Laura DeJulia, Dana Luzon and Busisiwe Merritt from Salus University. The group visited all three Nyumbani programs – the Nyumbani Home, the Village at Kitui and the Lea Toto programs. Their trip was the first phase of a program to provide audiology services and establish sustainable audiology care to 3,500 of the thousands of HIV+ children in that country. (By comparison, that's about the total number of children in the entire U.S. that are HIV+).

The audiology students described their two-week visit as an “educational and personal experience of a lifetime.” They were there to help test the children for hearing difficulties. The trip was made possible through generous donations of audiometers, tympanometers, supplies, equipment, and professional services, which enabled the group to begin an ongoing program to provide ear and audiological care to this very needy population.

The hearing program is good news on the Kenyan front because, as of this past year, all the children in the Nyumbani programs who need medication are receiving life-saving anti-retroviral drugs. As a result, they have the potential to live long, healthy lives. In the past, ear and hearing care was not a top priority because the battles against more life-threatening conditions had to take precedence. However, times have changed, and the next logical step is to help Nyumbani establish important ear and hearing care.



A grandmother at the Village at Kitui holds one of the newest arrivals while the baby gets her ears checked.

The results collected over the most recent visit clearly support the need for continued audiological services. Of the 319 patients seen, the group identified dozens of cases of ear pathology problems that, left untreated, could lead to serious illness or worse. Also identified were 28 tympanic membrane perforations, 50+ cases of otitis media, and several cases of obstructed ear canals—with the culprits ranging from wax to bugs and beads—as well as children deafened from meningitis and 45 children that had significant hearing loss.

The next step includes a return in June to sponsor a two-day seminar on otoscopy for primary care providers serving the Nyumbani clinics and to give them new, high quality otoscopes. The team will also be providing follow up services on the cases that have been opened, and continuing the process of evaluating each child who needs audiological care. Teams of volunteer audiologists and audiology students will visit the Kenyan clinics three times a year as part of the process to establish a permanent facility.

Those interested in working with or supporting the project can contact Tomi Browne, at tte@msn.com.

Students Hold Fundraiser after Visit to Kenya



In the summer of 2007, New York City high school girls (from left) Greta Anderson, Isabella Trentalancia and Madeline Ford visited the Nyumbani Orphanage in Nairobi. In addition to playing with the younger children, they also spent time with the teenagers—they baked cookies together and shared favorite music. This brief visit and a subsequent meeting with Sister Mary before leaving Kenya, left a lasting impression on Greta, Madeleine and Isabella. Upon their return to New York City, they began to plan a benefit party for the orphanage. After several months and with the support of many friends, they produced a successful evening in the spring of 2008 that raised over \$20,000 for Nyumbani and brought awareness of the situation in Africa to more than 300 New York City teenagers.

Two New Tools for Reaching Supporters

The COGRF Communication Committee led by Jeff Browne created a new information packet to help friends of Nyumbani share facts and figures pertaining to the Nyumbani programs. The packet describes each program, the COGRF mission and the benefits and challenges faced in Kenya.

Also, Marilyn Jerome, president of the COGRF board, recently hosted a video premier at Sidwell Friends School in Washington, D.C. The video *Nyumbani: Kenya's Hope for HIV+ Orphans* was produced by Gaby Grebski, upper school counselor at Sidwell who donated her time, talents and a piece of her heart to document the story of Father Angelo D'Agostino's vision, accomplishments and hopes for the children and families affected by the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

The video begins with a reading by a child of Nyumbani. Narrator Jeff Browne then describes first the HIV/AIDS situation in general and how the Nyumbani programs' successes and ongoing initiatives improve the lives of the children. It closes with a tribute to Father Angelo D'Agostino and offers ideas for ways to answer his challenge to help. Interviews with Sister Mary Owens, IBVM, Nyumbani's Executive Director; Protus Lumiti, General Manager of the Nyumbani Home; and Nyumbani volunteers help viewers understand life at Nyumbani and the impact the programs have toward improving lives and fostering hope.

Among the more than 100 people who attended the event were three boys visiting from the Nyumbani Home (John, Brian and George, see story, page 3) escorted by Joseph Karani. After the film, the boys danced for the crowd; Gaby was recognized for making Nyumbani come to life on the screen; and a new initiative was announced that seeks donors for secondary school tuition—uniforms and books (\$300 to \$500/year).

Through the new information packet and the film, COGRF has better tools for responding to requests for information on Nyumbani and to provide those who want to host a fundraiser additional materials that explain the programs. The film will also be part of this year's annual benefit (see story on page 5).

Annual Event Celebrates Purpose and Hope

By Gail Dalferes Condrey, Annual Event Auction Chair

The theme for this year's Annual Nyumbani Benefit is "U.S. and Kenya, United in Purpose and Hope" to celebrate the bonds between our U.S. supporters and our Kenyan programs and their beneficiaries. The Children of God Relief Fund (COGRF) is pleased to announce the date and place for that benefit is Friday, September 25, 2009, at the historic Willard Intercontinental, 1401 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW in Washington, D.C., which should provide a spectacular setting for our event.

One of the reasons we chose this theme is that in 2008, Barack Obama's election to the White House electrified the Kenyan people, giving them hope and a feeling of kinship with the United States. Hope is a powerful tool. It can bring change to one life, nation and the world, and it is this hope that we see reflected in the eyes of the children of Nyumbani.

But we also celebrate our purpose. We come together to celebrate the accomplishments of the prior 12 months; to recognize the friends who support the Nyumbani children and programs; to honor our founder, Father Angelo D'Agostino; and to catch up with colleagues and friends. Our shared purpose is to support the lives of Kenyans affected by HIV/AIDS through relationships with Nyumbani.

Over time, we have learned much about the critical nature of establishing and maintaining treatment protocols for infants with HIV/AIDS. This has become even more important as resistance to the anti-retroviral (ARV) drugs grows

among those affected by the disease.

Pharmaceutical companies and government programs have become vital partners in making treatments available and developing protocols for improving the lives of thousands of HIV positive children. At this annual event, we gather in part to pay homage to this ongoing partnership, which is vital to Nyumbani and the people of Kenya. We also continue our efforts to raise awareness of the need for improved testing and



2008 Annual Benefit attendees consider their bids for auction items.

enhanced ARV treatment to save children like Sammy, who passed away last year after the virus he carried became resistant to the available drugs. But Nyumbani also now celebrates the fact that many of its children grow into young adults with evolving needs and inspirational goals.

At this year's event, the COGRF board will showcase its latest video effort towards raising awareness: *Nyumbani: Kenya's Hope for HIV+ Orphans*. This film has been a labor of love—a depiction of the story of the Nyumbani programs and our beloved founder Father Angelo D'Agostino. We look forward to sharing the film with you at the annual benefit and other fundraisers.

The other aspect of the annual event that is vital is the fundraising. The global recession has reduced donations to charitable organizations this year, and Nyumbani is no exception. To maintain Nyumbani's programs and continue to meet the challenges faced in Kenya, the event this year focuses on the live and silent auctions. Our goal will be to excite you with diverse and interesting offerings that should entice you to join the bidding — but also have some fun. The silent and live auctions also are a great opportunity to buy holiday gifts for family, friends and other special people in your life.

The board is also glad to welcome back Kathleen Matthews, who has served as Mistress of Ceremonies at many of our annual benefits.

Please mark September 25 on your calendar and ask your friends to do so. A reception and silent auction will begin at 6:00 p.m. followed by dinner at 7:30 p.m. For out-of-towners, the Willard has set aside a block of rooms.

U.S. Board Welcomes New Members

The Children of God Relief Fund board recently added three new members to its ranks. The three came to be supporters by different means—from reading the newsletter to connections with Kenya or congressional members who have supported Nyumbani's efforts.

The new members include:

Dr. Patrick Donnelly, Senior Policy Advisor for Crowell & Moring, who is a specialist in the fields of agriculture and environmental policy for his firm. Prior to working with Crowell & Moring, he spent 15 years in the agrochemical and biotechnology industries, and he has served on the staff of the Agriculture Committee in both the U.S. House of Representatives and Senate.

Ralph L. Moss, Vice President, Government Affairs for Seaboard Corporation, an international food and transportation company that is the largest American investor in African agri-business.

Katie Stuart, granddaughter of Senator Jesse Helms (a Nyumbani supporter) and a development staff member for the National AIDS Housing Coalition. Before her current position, she was Associate Director of Development and Public Affairs with the Alliance of AIDS Services-Carolina, and she has been an advocate for HIV victims, education and fundraising since college.

How can you help the children of Nyumbani?

Donating auction items (gifts-in-kind) is a great way to continue contributions even when funds are tight. We have lined up incredible offerings from generous companies and individuals:

- ❖ Two, one-week summer camp enrollments hosted at Georgetown Prep in North Bethesda, Maryland
- ❖ Vacation packages to local hotels and restaurant dining experiences
- ❖ Unique and interesting African goods to enhance your home or person
- ❖ Fabulous wines

If you would like to promote a local restaurant, bed and breakfast or another service provider, please bring them to our attention. We also seek donations such as tickets to sporting events or cultural events at locations in the Washington, D.C. area. If you or someone you know would like to donate an item for either auction, please let us know via the Nyumbani web site link noted below. Any auction item donated is a tax deduction for the donor.

Learn more at www.Nyumbani.org under "USA Annual Event."

Sister Mary's Letter

(Continued from page 1)

homes because of the exorbitant rise in the cost of living. We are grateful that the World Food Program, as a temporary intervention, has increased the number of Lea Toto beneficiaries by 3,000. Care Kenya is also coming to our aid by providing nutrition for another 100 families in Kibera for a period of three months.

Excitement was high as our three boys from Nyumbani Home, John, Brian and George escorted by Uncle Joseph, set off for a USA visit. Susan and her friends in Wisconsin (see the story on page 3) went out of their way to make the visit memorable, a visit that peaked during the visit to Washington, D.C. where they had the opportunity to visit Sidwell Friends School and where they saw the Obama daughters. The premier of the latest USA video *Nyumbani: Kenya's Hope for HIV+ Orphans* in the same school that evening was another great moment (see page 4). The boys are now happily back with us, full of exciting stories. Our gratitude to all who made this holiday memorable.

With the continuing growth of the

Village—now 47 families of 427 children—we need to start building again. We have also decided to establish a secondary school. Already, we have completed two more family houses and an additional classroom block to enable us to develop a second stream in classes 6 and 7. We have also started putting gutters on houses so that we can harvest rainwater. Building will reach a peak between June and November, when we start building the secondary school, as well as the mechanics unit of the Polytechnic, two more primary school classroom blocks, the convent, and family and staff houses.

The number of visitors this year compared to last year is striking and included groups from different universities, U.K. Rotary Clubs, individual donors and volunteers. One USA group deserves special mention: An audiology team led by Tomi Browne gave us 10 days of screening the hearing of children in the Nyumbani Home, the six Lea Toto Centers and the Nyumbani Village: a total of 319 persons (see page 4). What a gift they provided! Another special visit was from members of the extended D'Agostino family: Sharon, Mike and their four boys. Memories of Father D'Agostino filled the air as they visited our three programs (see page 2).

As always, you, our USA friends of Nyumbani, are in our hearts and prayers. Without your support, and through your prayer and donations, I do not know how we would continue.

May God bless and care for you in whatever way you need.

**Sister Mary
Owens**

To donate to Nyumbani, use the enclosed envelope, visit us online at www.nyumbani.org or call (202) 422-5024 for information.

We respect your privacy. We do not sell, trade or share our donors' personal or contact information. If you wish to be added to, or removed from our mailing list; or require a correction to your information, please let us know at (202) 422-5024 or info@nyumbani.org

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The boys and escort Joseph from the Nyumbani Home on the road in the U.S. Photos courtesy of Susan Dillon Gold and Sally Peterson Snyder

