

News on Nyumbani



The first facility for HIV positive orphans in Kenya.

www.nyumbani.org

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Second Quarter 2008

Mark Your Calendar

This year's annual fundraiser has a new venue: the Embassy of Italy, an impressive modern building built in the early 1990s among the trees of Rock Creek Parkway. The location celebrates the heritage of the D'Agostino family.

Returning this year as Mistress of Ceremonies is Kathleen Matthews, former news anchor and currently an executive with the Marriott Corporation.

Also returning to entertain attendees is Mark Russell, a comedic political satirist who combines music with quips on what is happening in the nation's capitol and in current events.

Sister Mary will travel from Kenya to bring attendees a critical update on what is happening with Nyumbani, Lea Toto, and the Village at Kitui.

New to the event is singer/songwriter L'illon, founder of a genre of contemporary pop music who frequently entertains at events along the eastern coast.

**Nyumbani 15th Annual
U.S. Benefit Dinner
Friday, September 26
The Embassy of Italy
Washington, D.C.**

Dear Friends of Nyumbani:

Greetings to you from a Kenya Nation, rejoicing at last in the formation of our new government. The priority now is facilitating the return to their homes of the internal refugees. On our side, we finally made contact with all but 36 of our Lea Toto children. We still search.... We thank God that a harmony has at last been achieved and trust that Kenya will now emerge as a reconciled people, honoring equality, truth, justice, and committed to the gift of difference.



Lea Toto Kibera had the privilege of hosting World Food Programme Executive Director Josette Sheehan on April 3. The purpose of her visit was to gain first-hand experience of the effect of the escalation in food costs—for us in Kenya, aggravated by the post-election crisis. We took her to visit one of our caregiver's homes: a 4 x 3m mud structure where she looks after four orphaned children, one of whom is in our program. To hear her tell how she is coping with the rise in food prices was heart-rending: She can no longer buy milk and fruits for the children and she herself has lost weight through eating less. This is the scenario at present for most of our clients.

Another prominent visitor, this time to the Nyumbani Village, was the British Member of Parliament (MP) Hon. Jeremy Hunt. Jeremy's foundation sponsored the building of the Village Hotcourses Primary School and

finances its running costs. Some time ago, he expressed his desire to spend three days in mid-April teaching English in the school. What an experience for the Village children to be taught by an MP! What was even more affirming for the villagers was that he shared their lifestyle over the three days.

This past term, Hotcourses Primary School has really been making its mark. First, we finally registered and entered 20 pupils for the End-of-Primary examination. Then, all the classes emerged top in the First Term Zonal examinations. The Dramatized Dance entry in the Kenya Drama Festival came in first at District Level and fifth at Province level. Also, 13 boys and girls represented the Zone at the District Sports with one footballer going forward to Province Level. What this means for a school composed solely of orphans is best summed up in the words of one boy: 'We can do something.'

On March 17, Nyumbani Village Polytechnic started classes. Because we were chosen to pilot the new curriculum, two teachers have been seconded to us by the government. This latest development means that our outreach to the surrounding community is now three-fold—medical, farming expertise, and educational, thus realizing more the vision of the Village for integration and mutual collaboration with our neighbors.

Building proceeds at a rapid pace, with the administration block and the guest house extension complete and 20 houses at different stages of completion. Unfortunately, it is not only food costs that have escalated, but also building costs. Currently, we are re-assessing what we can build with the funds at hand.

(Continued on back)



Say A Prayer for Sammy

By Elizabeth McCarthy

I was a volunteer at Nyumbani Children's Home for about a year. During my time there, I was lucky enough to know a very special boy named Sammy. Sammy is a 12-year-old boy referred to Nyumbani through the Lea Toto Outreach Program in 1999. Though his health has never been completely stable, he has been an active child who enjoys playing with his friends in Cottage D, and is known as an excellent dancer. Until recently, he attended primary school.

On the evening of February 9, 2008, Sammy began showing signs of weakness in the right side of his body. By morning he had lost the use of most of his right side, was unable to speak and was almost completely blind in one eye.

After undergoing weeks of treatment, Sammy began showing signs of improvement. With the help of the very dedicated medical staff and Sister Julia Mulvihill, Sammy became eager to eat and to venture out for visits from the sick room to his Cottage. When Sister Julie reported that she was leaving to accompany another child to Italy for corrective leg surgery, Sammy seemed sad, but continued to improve.

I stepped in to watch over Sammy each evening. He began to regain his speech and was able to move his left arm with ease. We would have fun dancing with our arms, and "arm-wrestling" on his strong side. I spent most of our time together acting like a fool just to hear him laugh. His relatives came to visit on occasion, which always put him in a good mood. He became adamant to do things on his own, such as eating, and often yelled at me if I forgot this. We both thought he was on his way to recovery. We were not so lucky.

Shortly after Easter, Sammy entered a comatose-like sleep for two days without waking.

When he woke, he could no longer speak or move, his eyes would not focus, and he was unable to eat. He did little but cough, and he was uncomfortable.

Though Sammy is on anti-retroviral treatment (ARVs), his body is resistant to the drugs. With his suppressed immune system, it is very difficult for him to overcome illness.

As my days with Sammy went by, he showed small signs of improvement. I spent evenings talking with him, massaging/stretching his extremities, and rubbing his head. This calmed him, and helped him to become comfortable so he could sleep.

The hardest part of Sammy's relapse, however, was his frustration. He was still in the sick room but unable to communicate with friends. At one point I realized I was forgetting how he was before he moved to the sick room. He had been there two months.

On April 8, I had to leave Nyumbani and come home. Although leaving is always hard, it was most difficult to leave Sammy since I had spent every day of the past month caring for him. I began with high hopes for his recovery, but had to leave him in a condition that made it extremely difficult—consoled only by the fact he would remain in the hands of our talented medical staff and that Sister Julie was returning to him.

Most recently, someone reported to me that though his condition remains the same, his face seems brighter, and he is more comfortable. Sammy remains in my prayers, and I think of him every day. I miss the fun we had before he became ill, and watching him play with his friends, enjoying life. I wish the best for him, and hope he never has to suffer like this again. He is in God's hands. Please join me in praying for him.

Building the Nyumbani Family

By Mary Lloyd Triplett Zaiser

As with so many people, Father D'Agostino changed my life. The first time I met him was when he spoke at an assembly of students in Bethesda, Maryland at a school where I worked for seven years. Father D'Ag left the audience that day with a challenge—come see the Nyumbani programs for yourself. Little did I know that once you see Nyumbani, it gets into the very fiber of your being.



Mary reading to Amal, Brian and George

My chance to meet his challenge came in June 2006 when I made my first visit to the Nyumbani Children's Home. I was assigned to Cottage D, and it was love at first sight. Now, the children of the cottage have become my children and the mums my sisters—and all of Nyumbani is my second family.

In October 2006, just a month before his unexpected death, Father D'Ag returned to my school. We had time for a lengthy conversation. At one point, he asked me: "What are you going to do with the rest of your life?" It was a loaded question delivered as only Father D'Ag knew how to do—but it made me think. I re-evaluated my priorities and realized my life had to take another tack. I wanted a life filled with purpose, a meaningful existence where I was helping the needy as they were helping me.

Last June, I resigned my job to dedicate myself full time to Nyumbani projects. I have never looked back. This past fall, I founded the company Kenya Educational Service Trips (KEST). Through KEST, travelers can experience all three of the Nyumbani programs—the Children's Home in Karen; the Lea Toto Outreach Programs in the slums of Nairobi; and the self-sustaining, multi-generational Village in Kitui. KEST is a two-week format of travel, service to Nyumbani and education about Kenya. Each trip provides the opportunity for up to 30 hours of service at the Nyumbani programs and closes out with a safari. Please visit the web site at www.k-e-s-t.com for further trip details and some photos of the Nyumbani programs.

KEST has had two well-defined missions, which are to educate people to be good global citizens and to develop a network for financial support for Nyumbani ventures.

My hope is that KEST will be many things to many people. However, I know this reality from having journeyed this path myself: few people can travel half way around the globe to visit a third world country such as Kenya and not be affected in many different ways by what they experience. Each day, the first thing I think of is my Nyumbani family, and I go to bed praying for Nyumbani's success. Father D'Agostino insisted I not settle for the status quo or be satisfied with just going through the motions, but rather to examine my life and my goals, to get my hands dirty, take risks and be fulfilled. My life has never been more purposeful, and I have never felt more fulfilled. I challenge others—in fact I dare you—to visit Nyumbani and reap the rewards of expanding your viewpoint on life.

I Go Forward with Hope and Courage

By David Duncan Odhiambo

I came to Nyumbani when I was 11, which means I have lived most my life here. I arrived with feelings of both blissfulness because of the good things I had been told about Nyumbani and anx-



iousness because I did not know why I came or what to expect.

I had lived previously in a small orphanage situated in the middle of the slums because my mother was too

ill to look after me. Despite the fact I came from the slums, I left behind happy moments and fond memories.

When I came to Nyumbani, there were around 30 children and just a few staff. Protus was the backbone of the Home along with missionary nuns. Though they remain our guides, much has changed since those early days.

First, Nyumbani has changed people's perception of HIV positive children, which I think has been the greatest achievement. Before, we were looked down upon. We did not attend public school. Since then, people have come to accept the realities of the disease. Second, our health situation is perhaps the most notable change. Nyumbani used to lose a child every month.

I have reacted to the changes in my life several ways beginning with accepting my condition and learning to live day by day. Sometimes I blamed my parents; nevertheless, I have come to realize that blaming them will not make things better. What will help is to accept vicissitude and move on.

Our day at the Home starts at 5 a.m. The children prepare for school; we have a common breakfast after which they board a bus to school. There are morning prayers at our chapel for those who wish to attend. This spiritual aspect has been very much emphasized as it is what motivated Father D'Agostino to create Nyumbani. The children come back from school at 5 p.m. I act as the elder brother. After giving them tea, the children join in cleaning our hostels.

There are evening prayers, and we gather for supper after which I encourage the children to watch news. They study until 9 p.m. when they go to sleep. I help them with assignments and encourage them to work hard and become top pupils in their respective classes.

For my brothers and sisters at Nyum-

bani, I can only tell them they should not live in the past. As one author said:

"If we place our attention on that which is life giving and creative, that part of us will be nourished. If we place our attention on negativity that will be cultivated . . . if we look too long into the abyss we will fall into it." As victims of HIV, we have fallen once, Nyumbani rescued us, we should not allow ourselves to fall again.

For a child coming to Nyumbani I would tell her or him to be ready to accept reality, but never to be disillusioned—to be thankful for Nyumbani because here is a new hope and a bright new dawn.

To the youth of the U.S. and the rest of the world, I would say that they have a chance to make things better for themselves and posterity. I would point out that we (the children of Nyumbani) are where we are not because we wanted to be here, but because fate had other plans. However, I would also say that everyone can decide his or her own destiny and for those like us, there is always a second chance. Also, every person should take their second chances to make things better for those behind them.

As for my own personal plans, I have wanderlust. I have been to Holland, and it was amazing. I hope to reach some of the other countries of the world. And I have always dreamt of flying the biggest airbus during my time. Only being a pilot will fulfill that dream. (I hope Sir Richard Branson of Virgin Atlantic can read this). I believe my determination will take me there. I enjoy writing, but it comes second to flying. One place I would visit is the U.S. because it has people from all over the world. Also, I tend to believe that Americans are good and passionate people, just like Father D'Agostino was.

As you can see, I have started thinking of life after Nyumbani—I would like to survive on my own, be a success and give back through efforts such as Nyumbani.

My mentor is Protus Lumiti. He has seen me grow from a little boy to my teenage years and now a young adult. Through his love and support, he has taught me how to be where I am, how to live positively and have hope for the future. He always says to me that when we are healthy and happy, so is he. What more can one ask for?

The greatest challenge in my life has been how people receive me when they hear I am from Nyumbani. Sometimes I get embarrassed, but it is a situation I cannot change. The most difficult challenge to accept is when I see a brother or sister in the last minutes before he/she dies. This has always been painful, but I accept that situation. I overcome challenges by telling myself that I

can live for many years—I am stronger than difficult situations. When the worst comes, I pray to God because he knows better why we are the way we are. This gives me strength to face the world with determination.

I want to take the opportunity of this writing to thank all the friends of Nyumbani in the USA. We are very grateful for your continued love and support. Nyumbani would not be where it is today were it not for your concern. Your generous support has made it possible for us to be where we are at the moment. We pray and hope that you will continue supporting us in every way.

We also remember the late Father D'Ag. Though we cannot see him, we are happy and full of new life because of his vision. He always stood by us to ensure that our rights were respected. He was a bulwark against all social discrimination. It is also through his vision that the lives of Nyumbani's Lea Toto children have improved tremendously. We shall always remember his love and forever be thankful.

Also, thanks to God that we have Sister Mary, who is a mother to us all. We all know how hard it has been for her to step into the late Father D'Ag's shoes, but she has proved more than capable of doing so. We thank her for filling the gap left by Father D'Ag, especially now because our lives are heading towards a promising future. We thank her for her guidance, and we believe that with her, Nyumbani is destined for greater things. We all say Asante!

Thank you also to the Board of COGRF and the people of America for your tireless efforts ensuring that Nyumbani takes steps ahead day by day.

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) 342-8488 or info@nyumbani.org

Sister Mary's Letter

(Continued from page 1)

Added to this is the unexpected devaluation of the dollar. But we trust that God will provide.....

Here in Nyumbani, the rise in building costs has, thankfully, not affected the Multi-Purpose Hall construction. Its truly artistic structure is almost complete, and I believe Father D'Agostino would enjoy its beauty if he were sitting at his former desk as I am now. Our children cannot wait to utilize it to the fullest.

Family Day on April 19 was a very special day for our Nyumbani Home children. Thanks to the efforts of our social worker and her team, 49 children received a visitor. We had a fruitful discussion as to how best to work together towards re-integration of the children. The evening before, Protus met with the children and invoked as a slogan that, if someone does not receive a visitor the following day, it will be 'next time.' As Protus and I were standing bidding farewell to the guests, 3-year-old Nicholas passed by, turned around with a smile and said 'Next time.' What a heart-tug!

Another memorable day was April 25

when a special link between Holy Trinity Parish, Georgetown, was forged through the mutual celebration of a special Mass and planting of trees. This event had been preceded by an exchange of letters and a video between our children and Holy Trinity School children. Holy Trinity was always very special to Father Angelo D'Agostino.

Healthwise, here in Nyumbani Home, we have had several medical challenges recently, many of which, thank God, had a happy outcome as were the surgeries of Simon and John here in Kenya and that of Geoffrey in Italy. Sammy, however, is not recovering. In his case, we are facing the limitation of medical help. In addition to resistance to ARVs, he has had several small strokes. We are now only able to give palliative care. Each day I visit my heart breaks to see a child suffer so much. I ask you to join with us in prayer that we will be guided in our care of Sammy. His situation keeps our human vulnerability only too starkly before our eyes.

Ever-mindful of your support and generosity, and asking God to give you that Hope which sustains in times of challenge and difficulty as we were supported during these past months,

Sister Mary
Owens

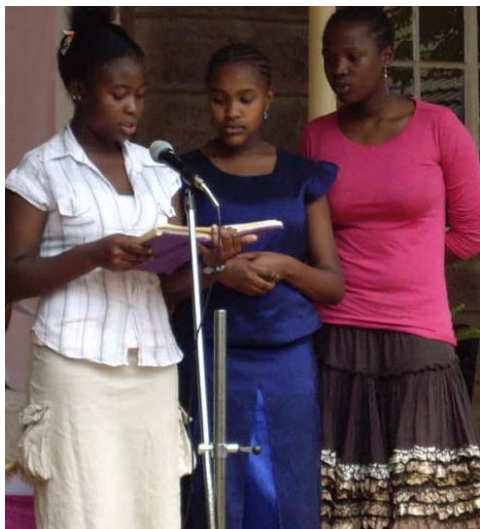
Volunteer Outreach Committee

COGRF is pleased to announce a new initiative designed to help share best practices with volunteers and provide an outlet for continued Nyumbani involvement after volunteers visit.

If you are interested in learning more about this developing program or want to provide your contact information, contact Gail Dalferes Condrey at gdalferes@yahoo.com.

Send Your Memories

The COGRF Communication's Committee is seeking copies of photos and stories that tell the Nyumbani story...about the children, Father D'Ag, Sister Mary, the volunteers or the Nyumbani programs themselves. Please contact Jeff Browne directly at browne@capad.net to share your piece of our history.



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