



Friends of Kenya Schools and Wildlife

Partnerships for Education and Wildlife Preservation

Gwen Meyer's notes from Kenya

November 2004

October 13, 2004 – Nairobi. It's 6 a.m. and Mike Lawrence and I are leaving on a three day trip to visit the four schools supported by the **FKSW** project. Our first stop, though, will be Kachuru, the community where we plan to build a new school during our **FKSW Safari** next January. The Kachuru school will become the fifth in the project. We have a journey of several hours ahead of us, and we want to get through Nairobi before rush hour. The traffic is moving well, but as we leave the city, the lines of vehicles coming in from the north are slowing to a crawl. We're glad we're heading in the opposite direction. October is late winter in Kenya, or the time of "short rains". The morning is cloudy and cool, but as we pass through Thika, the sun appears and instantly warms us.

Shortly before noon, we stop in Nanyuki. Mike runs into a shop and comes out with lunch- a small brown bag of samosas, triangles of dough filled with savory ground meat and vegetables, deep fried until they are golden and crisp. A few minutes later, he pulls off the road to buy a bunch of tiny bananas from a roadside vendor. They are a sweet mouthful. Dessert. This lush, tropical area on the western slopes of Mt. Kenya produces some of the country's best fruit and vegetables, all organically raised, and we admire the baskets of mangoes, potatoes, bananas, passion fruit, onions, and tomatoes for sale by the side of road. Live chickens, available for purchase for tonight's dinner, crowd in small cages on a street corner. A man selling pineapple holds out one in each hand to a prospective customer.

We leave the tropics behind, and half an hour later, arrive in Isiolo, a colorful, dusty town on the border of the northern frontier. The raucous market is in full swing on either side of the main road. Isiolo is Christian on the south and Muslim on the north. As we reach the center of town, I notice the Somali women, tall, thin and covered from head to foot in brilliantly colored garments, some of them with gold and silver threads flashing in the sun. The women are striking, and I can't help but stare. We drive slowly to avoid an accident with swerving donkey carts or one of the many pedestrians crossing the road in front of us. Bicycles, dogs, overloaded buses, belching lorries and vendors selling food, clothing, and jewelry compete for space on the narrow pavement. We leave the town behind and at the next crossroad, turn right onto the gravel road that will take us to Kachuru.



Children in Kachuru

The temperature has risen considerably since this morning. Bumping along the rutted road, we rise over small hills and then drop down into dry river beds. Great numbers of weaverbird nests adorn the acacia trees that dot the landscape. We come around a bend and nearly run into a herd of camels- there must be over 100 animals, many of them babies. For a moment, the Boran herder looks startled, but as the last camel trots safely off the road, he raises his stick in greeting. We drive on, the low, blue mountains ahead of us growing taller as we draw nearer. Every 10 or 15 minutes, a pickup or small SUV approaches from the direction in which we are headed, loaded with people, animals and large plastic water jugs. The riders always wave as they hurtle past on their way to town. No one ever comes from behind to pass us.

An hour after leaving Isiolo, we arrive in Kachuru. FKSW stopped here in January, 2004 to buy cold drinks, and asked to see the village school. The teacher led us to a wooden structure with pieces of tin missing from the roof, and boards falling off the walls. Leaning to one side and looking as though even a moderate wind could easily topple what was left of the school, it was obvious that there hadn't been a lesson taught here for a long while. Nevertheless, the school committee was alive and well, and we talked with them about how we might help them educate their children. We promised to keep in touch. In September, Mike and the chief of the village agreed that we would come this January to work with the community to build a new school.

The members of the school committee are expecting us today. As we drive into town, several men leave the shade of the village's single large tree and come to greet us. A tall man in a white shirt introduces himself as Rashid Jima Jillo, one of the two village teachers. The chief approaches from a small building near the road. Within minutes, others surround us, including most of the 80 children who will attend the new school. Some of them are chewing on pieces of sugar cane. All of them look at us with curiosity. When I ask permission to take a picture, the teacher translates my request and the children immediately arrange themselves in several short rows in front of the dilapidated school and grin at me. After I snap the picture, they crowd around the camera to see the digital image in the display window. Some laugh as they recognize themselves. Others become instantly shy and giggle as they hide their faces behind their hands.

During the next two hours, Mike and I work with the school committee to plan the construction. Mr. Jillo is the only one who speaks English, so much of the conversation is in Kiswahili. I don't understand every word, but know enough Kiswahili to figure out much of what they are saying. We decide to take down the existing structure and use the boards for the new school, but we'll move it a hundred yards away to a spot under a shade tree. The school will be cooler and the tree will provide a shady spot for the children to sit outside in the breeze in between lessons. Mike and Mr. Jillo measure the perimeter for the 20' by 25' foundation and we pile rocks to mark each corner. We'll use the rocks and stones from the abundant supply on the ground around us to build the foundation, and cover this base with concrete- the same method we used for the school FKSW built in Lake Baringo. Before we pick up the rocks, we make sure there are no scorpions hiding underneath. The school will not be large enough to hold all 80 students at one time, so they will be divided into two groups- the younger students will attend school in the morning and the older students in the afternoon. The two teachers will further divide the groups into classes of 20.



Teacher and students in front of the old Kachuru school

For the foundation, we need 6 bags of cement. The people of the village will bring in 2 tons of sand from a nearby riverbed. We'll have to haul water on donkeys from nearby Magado Crater, where the herders from the village take their livestock to drink. It is the only water for miles in any direction. We'll purchase other materials in Isiolo and transport them here. On our list are cedar posts, corrugated tin for the roof, wooden shutters, a door, nails, timber for the walls, hinges, paint and brushes and wood preservative. The community will dig a pit for the toilet we plan to build near the school. They have also agreed to find two fundis (contractors)- one a mason and one a carpenter to oversee the construction. We'll plant neem trees in the school yard for shade, and supply all of the educational materials and teaching aids to stock the school. We'll also build desks and benches for the children.

Our plan completed, we shake hands all around and walk back to where we left the car. Everyone is happy. Mike and I enter a small wooden shop where a young woman is making chapatis. She cooks the flat rounds of dough in hot oil and puts four of them in a paper bag for us. They're too hot to take a bite, so we'll let them cool before we eat them. We say "kwaheri" to the school committee and depart for Shaba and our evening accommodations. A few minutes down the road, we drive past Magado Crater, where in January, we saw a very rare albino olive baboon crossing the road with its troop. It was not white but golden, and we were able to take only one picture of it from a distance before it disappeared into the brush. Mike says others have seen it since and reported that it has a baby, but the baby is black. Today, there are no baboons, but long lines of cattle and sheep are threading their way back to the village after their visit to the crater for water.

We cross the boundary into Shaba National Park and immediately see a group of five black and white Somali ostrich in the distance. Then impala, Grant's gazelle, waterbuck, zebra, gerenuk, and oryx. Walking slowly, parallel to the road, a lone lioness hunts for dinner. She pays no attention to us, and we drive slowly to keep pace with her. We see an enormous elephant footprint, and look around hopefully for the animal, but the elephants are elusive tonight. The sun is sinking behind the mountains. The sky is alive with orange, red, yellow and purple streaks that move and change shape as we drive towards them. Ol Olokwe, the magical mountain that dominates the horizon shines maroon and gold and purple. The first star twinkles. All is at peace and so ends our first day on safari.

A bit more ...

We visited our FKSWS schools at Lake Baringo, Edonyo Narok, Aytong in the Masai Mara and Waso School at Archer's Post. With each school committee, we planned our projects for the January safari. This was a great opportunity to update our information on the schools. Mike visits the schools regularly, but can't always attend to the details. With that in mind, the second priority of this trip was to find a Kenyan to serve as a liaison with our schools.

We had planned to meet with Wanjira Mathai and Judy Kimamo at the Green Belt Movement office in Nairobi to talk about hiring Judy to work with us in that role. As it happened, our meeting occurred just 4 days after the GBM founder, Professor Wangari Maathai, had been awarded the 2004 Nobel Peace Prize. It was wonderful to share the staff's excitement and to offer our congratulations to Wanjira, Prof. Maathai's daughter.

Judy has a degree in biology and runs an environmental program in several schools as part of her work with the Green Belt Movement. She begins working with us this month. She'll help us respond more quickly to requests for supplies and let us know what else the schools might need. Judy will also receive end of year reports from each school. We are so happy to have her help and want to say "Karibu, Judy!" Welcome!

Student Scholarships

The addition of the Kachuru school will bring to 278 the number of children in the 5 schools we support. Ranging in age from 4 to 14, they are Christian and Muslim and represent the Maasai, Turkana, Samburu, Boran, Meru, and Njemps ethnic groups. In January, we'll select 2 new scholarship recipients in each school, adding these 10 children to the 10 we currently support, for a total of \$800 in scholarships for the coming year. Individual donors provide \$40 scholarships annually to 3 of the students, and Marty Smith's Active and Caring Teens (ACT) classes at Roosevelt Middle School supports a fourth. Last spring, Marty's 2 ACT classes raised over \$1000 to give to social service organizations. They generously voted to give FKSWS \$600 and designated \$320 of that amount to support one student for 8 years. The rest of the funds will pay the salary for one teacher for a year, and give a second student a scholarship for one year. We gratefully applaud their efforts for the difference they are making for the students in Kenya.

With the holidays approaching, sponsoring a child in the name of a family member or friend could be a meaningful alternative to traditional gift giving. We will take letters and pictures from sponsors to the students in January. We'll ask them to write letters about themselves in return, and bring back pictures, too! Please contact us if you'd like more information about a sponsorship and how we might get pictures and information from you for the children.

We're happy to introduce...

...Katie Reichert, a returned Peace Corps volunteer who served for two years in Malawi. Katie was a high school teacher in Malawi and also worked on AIDS/HIV education. She's volunteering with FKSWS and is a great help, a valuable resource and a wonderful addition to our team.



Judy, Gwen and Wanjira in the Green Belt Movement garden

January Safari 2005

January 6th - 30th are the dates for the second **Friends of Kenya Schools and Wildlife Safari**. Our big project is the construction of the Kachuru school, but we'll work on smaller projects at each of the other schools as well. We'll meet the new scholarship recipients and have an opportunity to become better acquainted with the people in each village. We plan to spend time in Shaba National Park, the Masai Mara Game Reserve, Nakuru National Park, and Meru National Park viewing the wildlife and enjoying the many wonders the parks provide. We'll also have opportunities to hear people from the local villages talk about their cultures. We've reserved the last 5 days for the old Arab port of Lamu, on Kenya's eastern coast, with time for snorkeling and swimming in the Indian Ocean. And then...Mike always has a few surprises up his sleeve. We'll have to wait and see what else he's planned for us! **We still have room for a few more people to come with us. We promise that it will be the adventure of a lifetime!! It could even change your life! Let us know right away if you're interested.**

We plan to take a second group to Kenya in Summer or Fall of 2005. A safari in the Fall would coincide with the Great Migration of the wildebeests- an amazing experience. If you'd like to come with us next year, or anytime, or if you want more information, let us know. Give us dates that might work for you and what you'd like to see or do. Mike customizes safaris for each group, so we'll see what we can do to accommodate your preferences. Talk to your friends and get a group together. We already have a group forming for January of 2006.

FKSW Activities

We had a great turnout on May 15 for our **Safari 2004 Show and Tell** at the International Student Lounge at the University of Oregon. Over 150 people came to meet Mike and to see photos, slides and the stunning video created by Scott McNeely and Aaron Kaufman. The event was co-sponsored by the African Student Association at the U of O and the International Student Resource Center and Director Anne Williams. We greatly appreciated their generous support. In July, we participated in the Founder's Day Celebration at Wildlife Safari in Winston, Oregon and in early November, we gave a 90 minute presentation for the OASIS group in Eugene. Please contact us if you know a group that might like to hear about our project.

You can help !!!

- \$40.00.....Student scholarship for 1 year (we need 16)
- \$40.00.....Teacher salary for 1 month (we have 9 teachers)
- \$15.00.....Forty neem trees (we need 200)
- \$10.00.....One desk and bench (we need 40)
- \$6.00..... One bag of cement (we need 20)
- \$40.00.....One set of wall charts, curriculum, books (we need 5)
- \$37.00.....*Roof and labor for the new outdoor kitchen at Waso
- \$9.00.....Malaria medication for one village (we need 2)

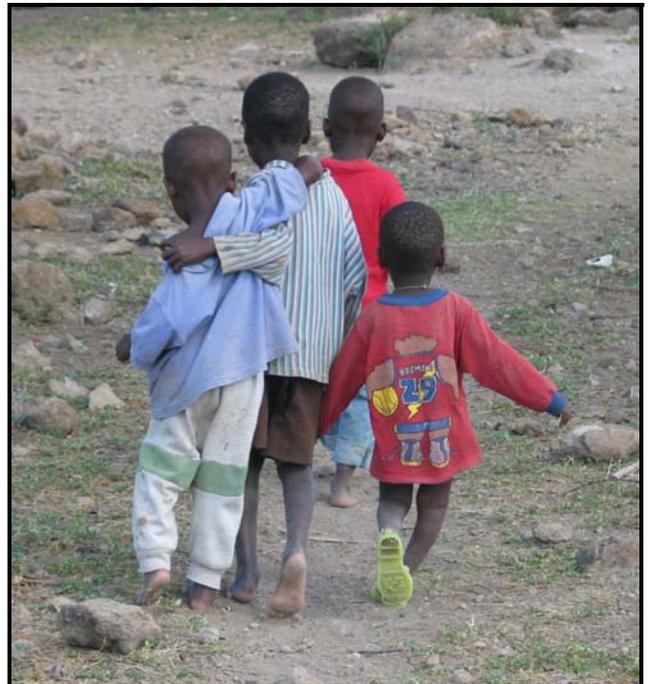
For the new Kachuru School

- \$25.00.....Shutters
- \$80.00.....Lumber
- \$10.00.....Door
- \$19.00.....Cedar posts
- \$80.00.....Tin for the roof
- \$6.00..... Nails
- \$19.00.....Paint and brushes

Asante sana!

*The Kenyan government will provide maize, beans, milk and other food for the children for breakfast and lunch if there is a kitchen to prepare the food. FKSU is helping to build the kitchen at Waso.

Kidogo kidogo hujaza kibabab!
A little here, a little there fills the can!



If you'd like to make a contribution,
checks can be written to:

Friends of Kenya Schools and Wildlife
95363 Grimes Rd. Junction City, OR 97448
Email: jneumeister@earthlink.net Phone: (541) 998-8505
Tax ID # 20-1154327