

HAPPY TO SHARE

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“Basket Head Boy” swept his palm fronds before his stomping classmates who were draped in brilliantly patterned chitenge cloth. Rapid drumbeats from the sidelines activated and coordinated the traditional dance to welcome visitors to Crossroads Springs. With the boy’s resourcefulness, the basket became a woven storytelling mask. This is why we came to Kenya: to experience the life of 250 orphan children in their school community. Every Class (preK to Grade 7) performed a song, poem or dance; and the Scouts marched proudly in uniform dress, uniform steps, flags and all! Dignitaries, including a pant-suited woman co-chief, delivered speeches of welcome and thanks to donors in North America. We expressed thanks, brought letters from US schoolchildren, and urged the students to study hard, ensuring their future and that of Kenya. Hours of celebration put a small boy to sleep in the comforting arms of a little girl.

Earlier, we had seen the dorms where 60 children sleep at night, cared for by two housemothers; signed the special guest book; met Violet who was learning to sew and make school uniforms; and toured the 2/3 completed classroom building. The spectacular landscape view from on top gave hope for the day the children would complete their education and become community leaders.

Lunch with the Board of Managers reinforced confidence in the current community leadership, as did our overnight stay in the home of Dr. Meshack (founder) and his wife, Helen (school manager). We drank the elixir of Kenyan tea with warm milk from the cow outside the window. We talked about many things, including choosing quality teachers (better dynamic short term than dull long term teachers), criteria for selecting children (one or both parents deceased from AIDS, boarders on basis of distance to avoid rape or desperate family situation), potential of cooking with the shining African sun, and numerous funerals.

All this we silently mulled over the next morning, seated on a bench outside as dawn broke, chickens wandered, and the cow mowed the grass. Such beauty! Such challenges! Such caring and hope!

Then we walked to school. Children came in long patient lines to receive a cup of breakfast porridge, and then crowded in to see our camera screen of East Aurora snow photos. Visiting every classroom, we talked with students. Questions came slowly, shyly, and then eagerly: “What do American students study? What do they eat? Do they know about us?” Giving them school supplies, we tried to convey that their gift of friendship is something we carry with us and treasure.

Sharing refreshments with teachers, we asked why they are here. Some were drawn to orphans because they are orphans themselves, others had met students and teachers at academic and sports competitions and learned of the school’s good reputation, and one said being paid on time was important to him. Meeting with kitchen staff and the

cateress who plans meals, we heard about the nutritious weekly diet and saw beans cooking in a large cauldron. Each child gets one whole fresh fruit a week.

On the playing field we joined in or watched experimentation with new Frisbees ("Freeze bees"), tire rolling and running games. On the porch the youngest children pointed to the "Let's Build It" prayer flags, then pulled us into their classroom to swing with them in dance. We wished we could stay for weeks, even indefinitely, to experience more of this place, this culture, and these children.

One of the children's songs goes with us, as we return to friendraising and fundraising. They sang,

"Happy to share!
Happy to share one another's burdens.
That's why we're here.

Happy to share!"