

10 Jan. 09

Dear Friends and Family,

"In the final analysis it is not what you do for your children but what you have taught them to do for themselves that will make them successful human beings." *Ann Landers*

In the last several months we have heard from several people who have had special events, birthdays, anniversaries, etc., and have had the money sent to Maua Methodist Hospital for one of our projects. I thought I would share a few of their stories.

- Krista collected \$125 in lieu of gifts for her 7<sup>th</sup> birthday to support the AIDS Orphan's Program. Krista is from Chandler UMC, Chandler, TX. She is mighty young to give up birthday presents for others. We are so grateful, Krista! (Mom and dad came on a work team this last year, Drs. Debra and Tom Cherry!)
- 4th grade boys in GAP (God Answers Prayer) group at Chapelwood UMC, Houston, TX raised \$180 for the Aids Orphan program. (Kimberly Hillman came on a work team and her son Reid, was one of boy's in GAP)
- From a 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary; a 90<sup>th</sup> birthday, the money someone receives from having his devotionals published in the Upper Room; the money saved on stamps when Christmas cards were sent by email; Christmas gifts for all members of a family over 15; and from a saint who died.



Krista with her doll her parents bought her from Kenya UMC



4th grade boys GAP (God Answers Prayer) group FROM Chapelwood UMC

Last week I only shared one half of what happened in Maua in December. So here goes!

December 20<sup>th</sup> Bill and I attended the AIDS Orphan's Christmas Party. This time there were over 800 AIDS Orphan's at the party. Fortunately not everyone was present during their time in the Chapel for singing, Bible reading and a sermon. Following the Chapel time there was tea (a cup of milk, sugar & tea and several pieces of bread) and then time in the field for play before lunch. The teens were taken to our Community Health Department and talked and shared which proved to be very fruitful. The children and youth all seemed very joyous and enjoyed the food, fellowship, games and time to share immensely. It has been a great privilege for us to watch this program grow as well as the children. So many lives changed by receiving hope, food and education.



Children playing in the school field



Bill surrounded by many children



Teens sharing problems and solutions

On the same day as the AIDS Orphan's party, we attended Kevin Gitari's "Coming Out Celebration" after his circumcision and weeks of teaching and seclusion. Kevin is Mary and Stanley Gitari's son. Mary is the Nursing Officer In-charge of the hospital, my boss, and the Chair woman of the Women's Fellowship at church and thus the coordinator of the Alternative Girls Rite of Passage. Stanley is In-charge of the Community Health Department at the hospital which includes MCH; all outreach clinics, Palliative Care, Giving Hope and the AIDS Orphan's program. Their son and two other boy's, approximately 14 – 15 years old, were circumcised by Stanley in early December and then spent several weeks in a sleeping room with toilet. During those weeks they were visited by their Mentor, who sees them at least once daily and is responsible for their teaching. The boy's were also tended by Kevin's 1<sup>st</sup> cousin who was with the boy's night and day. Numerous men from the hospital, community and church came throughout the day to teach them all they would need to know to become a Meru man!!!

Male circumcision or the rite of passage from boyhood to manhood is a very significant and important event in the lives of the Meru people. For the boys being circumcised and "becoming men" it is a period of great transition and learning. For the mother it is a time of hosting literally 100's of friends, that come to drink fermented porridge with her, bring food to feed her son and help celebrate her joy and pride in becoming the mother of a "man". I joined Mary for fermented porridge with a group and on my own. With the group, we not only received porridge but a complete meal. Then on the day the new men emerged, there was a big celebration which included lots of food, speeches, prayers, a sermon, dancing and singing and much joy, singing, dancing and thanksgiving.

I was reminded during the weeks of Kevin's seclusion of the high cost of friendship. I am not speaking only of Kenya, for friendship, real friendship always has a cost. But I was always amazed at how many women were at the Gitari home helping to cook porridge and food for all the guests and the numerous gifts that were brought. Fridah, our dear friend, carried a very heavy load of wood for Mary to use to cook the food. All the food for the boy's and guests is cooked over wood! Rose, one of the Senior Nurses I work with, took a week of leave and spent 16 – 18 hours a day at Mary's cooking, cleaning up and doing whatever was needed. I know on Friday night she was working until after midnight and was at Mary's before 6am on Saturday the day of the big celebration. Rose has two children that were home on holiday and that week was the time she would be off with them. However, If they wanted to spend time with their mom, they worked with her at the Gitari's and they certainly did that.

On Friday evening I went to Mary's to help prepare for the big feast on Saturday. I peeled almost a 90Kg sack of carrots thanks to my incredible "Pampered Chef" peeler and paring knife. No, I'm really not advertising for Pampered Chef just stating that because I had such wonderful tools I could do that in less than 2 ½ hours. The other woman could not believe a "mzungu" woman could peel carrots so fast. I had to admit it was due to my tools rather than my talents! For the meal on Saturday I baked 7 pans of rolls. My contribution to the event was miniscule compared to most but I was grateful for a chance to be a part of this special occasion and learn and better understand what is important and why.

For the "coming out celebration, the Gitari's set up two tents in their yard that were beautifully decorated. Leading to the main tent were about 8 Maasai blankets laid on the ground. At about 2:45pm a car drove up and three young men, dressed in identical suits got out and walked over the blankets to their seats. As they walked their path was strewn with flower petals by their sisters and songs of joy filled the air as church woman danced the boys to their place of honor. The three, NEW men had emerged.



Left to right: Benedict, Joseph, Kevin and Mwenda their Mentor 3 mom's, 2 dad's, 3 new men, Gitari's 2<sup>nd</sup> son, Ian, & Beth, their daughter

The 3 mothers and 2 fathers were dressed in identical traditional dresses or shirts. The joy and pride on their faces as their son's emerged as men were as bright as the stars and so filled with love we all felt blessed. There were then speeches or brief talks about different aspects of manhood. Dr. Inoti, our new Medical Officer In-charge at the hospital, shared about health. We heard about loving God, the importance of education, caring for the community, treating woman with respect and other topics. At about 3:30pm there were prayers and food was served. Hands were washed using a garden hose, and bowls were filled to overflowing with delicious food. Everyone enjoyed eating and talking. After the meal the boy's were all presented with a cake (a beautifully decorated cake for each boy) that he cut and then fed his mentor and care taker and then in a wonderful ceremony the young men were presented to their parents. Then they were presented to the pastors (3 pastors – 2 from St. Joseph's Church and the Chaplain at the hospital). Lastly they were presented to the youth, their friends and peers. (For these boy's it was the youth group from St. Joseph's Methodist Church.



Kevin being presented to the 3 pastors & Chr. of Church Mary & Stanley dancing with the women from Stanley's home village

At this point there was entertainment. Women from the Athiru Gaiti Methodist Church, Stanley's home church, sang and danced. The Mary and Stanley joined in with great enthusiasm and had everyone on their feet clapping, laughing and singing! The youth sang and a speaker from the St. Joseph's Women's Fellowship spoke. Then the senior pastor of St. Joseph's Church gave a sermon. It was close to 6pm when the guests were released so they could walk home before dark. What a wonderful day of celebration and joy!

During December Bill and I also had a long time friend, Kimberly Wilton, from El Cajon, CA and two of her grand daughters visit us for 5 days. They were able to see some of our programs and Bill and I were thrilled to spend time with them.

We had lunch at our home for two families that we are close to and were so blessed by their joy and gifts of love to us.

We had a holiday in Nairobi relaxing, reading, walking, eating and not writing any emails. We returned fresh, invigorated and more grateful than ever to God for allowing us to serve at Maua Methodist Hospital and to you for supporting us so we can be here. We are looking forward to what lies ahead of us in 2009 and seeing many of you. This past Sunday and this coming Monday we will participate in the Wesley Covenant Service, my favorite service of the year. Join us in saying the final prayer of the service:

"I am no longer my own, but Thine. Put me to what Thou wilt, rank me with whom Thou wilt; put me to doing, put me to suffering; let me be employed for Thee or laid aside for Thee, exalted for Thee or brought low for Thee; let me be full or empty; let me have all things, let me have nothing; I freely and heartily yield all things to Thy pleasure and disposal.

And now, O glorious and blessed God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Thou are mine, and I am Thine. So be it.

And the covenant which I have made on earth, let it be ratified in heaven. Amen.

In His grip,

Jerri & Bill Savuto  
[savuto@maf.or.ke](mailto:savuto@maf.or.ke)

Maua Methodist Hospital  
Box 63, Maua 60600  
Igembe, Kenya

"I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character." Martin Luther King, Jr.