

NEXUS

Volume 27 Issue 1
Spring / Summer 2023



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Ordinary people can make an extraordinary difference

— SIMON AND BETH, A LIFE OF COMMUNITY SERVICE —

~ By Connie Gerwing ~



Simon and Beth in 2020

In 1980, Simon Muendo Ngumbi, a young teacher in Kenya, applied to go to Canada on an exchange program called Crossroads International. His Boy Scout leader in Kenya was involved and encouraged his adventurous young Scout leader to travel. Simon had been involved with the Boy Scouts from his childhood. He was born in 1955 and grew

up in Machakos and Nairobi. He became a teacher because of his interest in working with children, especially through the Scouts.

He found many differences between Canada and Kenya. Our schools had many resources and small classes compared to Kenya. Technology was very advanced here even then. A television was common in Canadian households and schools too and rare anywhere in Kenya. Most people had phones in their homes which was unheard of in Kenya. He was also surprised by the lack of knowledge about Africa. He met people who thought Africa was a small country in Europe or that Kenya is part of Nigeria or that Africans live in trees and don't wear clothes. Children in Kenya, then and now, learn a lot of geography compared to Canadians.

There was clean water everywhere in Canada, coming out of taps, running in rivers, crystal clear in the many lakes. He found it cold even in summer and was amazed that Canadians would put ice in their drinks when it was so chilly. Pets were important and well treated. There was electricity everywhere. Kenya has a few wetter areas but much of it is dry except in the rainy seasons and always hot. Today Kenyans have mobile phones and skipped land lines altogether. Most people still don't have running water in their houses except in parts of the bigger cities and it's not drinkable water.

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Black people were uncommon on Vancouver Island in the early 80's and the children were intrigued. "Why are you black?" they asked. "I painted myself," Simon answered. The children wanted to be painted too, but blue! Others asked him "Are you a BC Lion?" because the BC Lions football team, comprised of tall and heavy men, had visited Vancouver Island not long before Simon arrived. "Why are you buying clothes when people in Africa don't wear clothes?" was another question.

Beth Muendo was born in 1961 and grew up in Machakos. She became a teacher also and met Simon in 1983. Through Simon she too became involved with Crossroads and they hosted many Canadians on exchanges either on their way to or from placements in Kenya, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Zambia, Zimbabwe and Tanzania. She taught them how to survive in rural Kenya—cook on a fire, use a pit toilet, light lanterns, and buy things at the market. After doing that for so many years she finally convinced Simon that it would be okay to leave her family for a time and go to Canada herself. Someone from the Crossroads office came to Kenya and gave her a special invitation, so in 2000 she landed in Toronto.

One of the first things Beth had to do in Toronto was negotiate the subway which was quite intimidating. Her placement was in Peterborough, Ontario. She remembers the food very clearly, mostly because she didn't know what to eat. She had told her host she'd eat anything so they served her pizza, unheard of in Kenya at that time. She wasn't sure about that. She also still shivers at the thought of the cold weather she encountered since she stayed into the fall and early winter.

While in Peterborough she taught English as a Second Language at a Collegiate in Peterborough for three days a week. The other two days she went to Trent University and taught international students about life in Africa. Some days she visited grain, dairy, and poultry farms and even a bison farm in the area because farming is of special interest to her. She also flew to various Canadian cities to visit Crossroaders she had known in Kenya—Winnipeg, Ladysmith, Quebec City, and the Niagara area.

Simon and Beth moved to a shamba (small farm) near the village of Kinyambu, about 200 kms east of Nairobi, in 1989. They began to teach in the area schools and Simon became a head teacher and later a district administrator. Like many Kenyan men he had

to leave his family to go to work every week. Public transportation was not good and sometimes he didn't make it home on the weekend. Beth continued to teach and to take care of the shamba and their four children.

Simon's interest in the Kenya Scouts Association is a lifelong one. He sat on the Scouts board for 15 years as a District Scouts Commissioner and continues to be involved.

Simon and I met when I went to Kenya for a Crossroads exchange in 1980 and we stayed in touch for several years after that through letters. We both married and moved and then lost touch. With the Internet it became more possible to contact people from all over the world and I thought I might try to find him. Because he was on the board of the Kenya Scouts Association, he had an email address and we were soon connected.

I took my son on a trip to Kenya in 2010 after I retired and reunited with Simon and met Beth and their children in Kinyambu. On a visit to Kinyambu Primary School where Beth was teaching I saw that schools had not made much progress in the 30 years since I had been there. I gave Beth some cash that I and a Canadian friend had collected, about \$60, and went off on a safari in Tanzania. When I returned Beth had hired someone to paint educational murals on the school walls and I was surprised at how far a few dollars could go to help. With lots of good ideas from Beth and Simon the three of us decided to see if we could get money to Kinyambu to improve the schools.



Kinyambu Library interior in 2015

I returned to Canada and found that Principal Guy Werbicki at Cardinal Leger School in Saskatoon was looking to raise funds to build a school in the developing world. We discussed it and then contacted Rainbow of Hope for Children who supported the project. The students of Cardinal Leger School raised \$20,000 over a couple of years to fund a library which was built at Kinyambu Primary School.

The logistics of raising funds in Canada, providing charitable donation receipts, and sending that money to someone in the developing world to do a project are complex. Governments around the world have laws to protect against money laundering and other illegal activities so sending large amounts using legal means is scrutinized closely by banks and remittance agencies. An organization like Rainbow of Hope for Children has the mechanisms set up and the oversight from Revenue Canada to send funds to partner organizations in developing countries to fund projects. ROHFC has to sign legal agreements with these groups and oversee projects and the partner groups must provide regular reports on progress. Occasional monitoring trips to the various countries ensure that things run smoothly.



Simon and Beth (right front) with the Kinyambu Rural Education and Community Development (KRECD) organization.

Simon and Beth had to set up an organization in the Kinyambu area called Kinyambu Rural Education

and Community Development (KRECD) to manage the projects. It was approved by the Kenyan government as an official non-governmental organization, an NGO. As chair, Simon has to ensure the accounts are all kept, work with the local district school administrators, architects, suppliers and builders, not a job he trained for. He and Beth know their community and with the others in the group they ensure that projects are done well.

By 2013 the library was underway and we haven't stopped since. The school needed a fence so that motorbikes wouldn't use the school grounds as a short cut to the village. Another school nearby, Nzavoni Primary, was in very bad condition and we built two classrooms there.

KRECD has many good ideas for projects to help the community. Many people in Kenya have small farms as well as paid work and the members of KRECD are no exception. They developed a poultry project to provide local students and their families with a better breed of chicken and educate them in good care of their chickens. They also are

considering a tree planting project which will include mango trees.

During the pandemic ROHFC sent funds to help people at Kinyambu with food, school costs and health needs, needs confirmed by Simon, Beth and the KRECD group.

Simon, Beth and I are all retired now but still very active with the projects in the Kinyambu area. ☺

THE POULTRY PROJECT by Connie Gerwing

The poultry project at Kinyambu taught students and their families how to raise healthy chickens, improved the breed of chickens available in the area

and trained the students in business skills. Each student was given ten chicks and secure housing for them. A poultry expert provided training and local

teachers supervised the students from their schools. The two years allocated to the project were completed successfully but because we had extra funds from our excellent donors we have added a year. It's been a very positive venture for the students and their families which those of us on the monitoring trip in February of 2023 were able to see firsthand.

Year one of the project was a pilot with six students. Those students and families from year one have had the most time to profit from their poultry businesses. The second year of the project had twelve students who benefitted from the first group's experiences during the pilot project. These students and families completed their year in December of 2022 but they are already selling eggs and raising chicks to sell or to increase their own flocks.

Part of the project was to disseminate the information learned about chicken raising to the wider community. At a meeting one parent described how she raised grubs for the chickens to eat using manure. The manure was also composted to provide nutrients to plants. Another parent shared that he vaccinated the improved breed of chickens that were part of the project but not his old breed and all the older breeds of chickens died from the disease. This helped everyone to realize that spending a little on vaccinations was a very sensible expense.

Joseph Isaac is a grade 7 pupil at Nzavoni Primary School. He was in the first year of the project and now has nineteen two months old chicks which he hatched from eggs from the original



chickens. His mother has helped him to market both eggs and chicks and from these sales they have spent 12,000 Kenya shillings on school fees, books, a school uniform, shoes and food. They have also enriched their own diet with meat and eggs.

Yvonne Mueni Ndote is a grade 7 pupil at Nzavoni Primary School. She was also in the pilot project. She has been greatly helped by her mother and grandmother in taking care of the chicks. She now has fourteen fully grown chicks and ten two week old chicks. The project has proved to be very profitable for the family. They have paid for school levies, food and a water tank from the sale of 50 chicks.



Elizabeth Nzuki who is in Grade 6 at Nzavoni Primary School was given ten chicks in the second year of the project and now is left with eight. Two got sick and died. They have started

laying eggs which they sell and pay school levies. They noticed that the eggs they get from the improved breed are bigger than the ones they get from the local breed. The poultry training was an eye opener to them in relation to poultry management. Elizabeth is now more responsible and getting assisted by her grandmother.

This project, developed and managed locally by the Kenya Rural Education and Community Development group, has been very worthwhile for the whole area and the community is very grateful. 🇰🇪

NORTHERN GHANA PROJECT VISIT

~ by Marg Bennett ~

Our trip to Northern Ghana (The group was comprised of board member Margaret Bennett, her husband, Richard and board member, Joe Gubbels) included visits to four schools, where we evaluated successes and assessed future needs. Each school visit also included a courtesy call to meet the local chief or king, to request permission to observe conditions in the schools and to talk to the community members. All of the chiefs and their elders were most welcoming and expressed gratitude for everything that Rainbow of Hope for Children has accomplished for their children, and all that we may be able to assist them with in the future. Each discussion was accompanied by the sharing of kola, a local caffeine containing nut, a sign of mutual cooperation, hospitality, and friendship.

Our first stop was to Nwodua School, outside the city of Tamale, at the request of Janaya Gerwing, a Canadian who is completing an internship there. After some confusing directions given by well-meaning pedestrians along the country road, we located the school at the end of a dusty lane late in the afternoon. We were welcomed by an impressive committee of parents, elders, teachers, students, and other interested parties. We visited each classroom and chatted with staff and students. Then we were shown a 1.5 acre plot of land designated by the chief as the location for the new library—just beyond the junior high school. Afterwards, we were invited to meet with the chief and elders and other stakeholders to discuss the feasibility of such an undertaking. The community is supportive and willing to contribute their labour and expertise in order for their children to benefit from a library.

The second school we visited was the newly-completed Bantambaari School. Fortunately, it was the dry season, and it was possible for our skilled driver to nudge the hired 4x4 through two mostly-dry river beds, over rocky terrain and desert. At one point we lost the trail and had to call for a motorcyclist who had preceded us to the school, to return and indicate the most plausible route for a vehicle.



The school itself sits a distance from the village, a solid cement block and concrete, 2-room structure with a shiny corrugated roof. Washroom facilities are located near the school. Each large classroom, filled with sturdy students' desks, has doors and windows on both sides, to admit the breeze, most welcome in this stifling hot climate. Two dedicated volunteer teachers have been given responsibility for the instruction of the 40 plus students. It is proposed that they be trained in order to receive their professional designation with its accompanying salary. We presented suitcases full of books for the students to use while at school. Everyone was excited to receive such a windfall. This school was constructed specifically for the youngest children, for whom the long walk to the nearest school was prohibitive. At times, mothers had even carried the littlest ones on their backs, and picked them up again after school, in order for them to attend. Having a school next to the village is a huge benefit to children and their parents. The current need is water for the village and the school, a rare commodity in this arid landscape. We met with local officials to request a bore hole for this village, but the possibility remains just that- a request.

The third visit was made to La'angum Learning Centre, an impressively advanced school under the direction of the headmaster Mr. Majeed, and his assistant, Mary Azure. It was encouraging to observe the students engrossed in using simple manipulatives to solve math problems. We spent the entire day, in fact, with the students and staff, ending with a celebration of dancing and drumming. The

following day, we returned to examine the bio-gas digester and to discuss in detail with the engineer, Justin, the problems that have existed, and how to resolve them. Using gas from the bio-gas digester to cook the hot lunches will be a great benefit to the volunteers who currently prepare the meals on charcoal fires. Using charcoal is costly, pollutes, and creates unbearable heat in the confined kitchen area in spite of the walls not being entirely closed in. The new kitchen area with multiple gas jets will streamline the process enormously. The hot, nutritious, and filling lunch is essential to the students' well-being. At the present time, the gas is only available to the teachers' accommodation, due to breaks in the pipeline, but this problem is about to be resolved.




La'angum School organized special entertainment for their visitors

Our final stop was Bongbini School, where 125 kindergarten children were crammed into 1

classroom with 2 teachers and no supplies at all. The other grades were similarly squeezed into tight facilities, the lower grades sitting on the broken concrete floor with their notebooks and pencils in front of them. The head mistress is anxious to construct a separate kindergarten, for which some bricks have already been acquired, to give everyone a little more space. The needs were great in this school, yet the children seemed anxious to learn, and the teachers dedicated, making do with nothing but a piece of chalk and their own ingenuity.



There are few desks in this school in Bongbini

Our visits to all of the schools were informative, encouraging, and heartbreaking. It's wonderful to see progress being made step by step, however, the needs are still enormous. 



The Annual General Meeting will be held by Zoom on June 24, 2023 at 10 AM

Zoom meeting invitations can be obtained by email from president Charlie Matt, rohfc2017@outlook.com

STORIES FROM TABORA

by Connie Gerwing

For the first time since the pandemic a monitoring group went to Tanzania and Kenya to review our projects there and work with our local partners on future undertakings. Our first stop was Tabora, Tanzania where we recently completed a couple of classrooms at Iputi School. President Charlie Matt and one of the students cut the ribbon to open the classrooms while the children cheered. The school looks great.

We also visited the School for the Deaf where we had arranged to build a large cement water tank and helped with food and supplies during the pandemic. Our most recent project was at their Vocational Center where deaf students who graduate from the academic program go to learn skills to enable them to find work when they leave. We visited there in 2019 and saw a lot of learning going on but with very limited equipment. Charlie took the lead on this project and, with the support of Blessed Sacrament School Advent Project, Wainwright, raised enough funds to provide the carpentry shop with some power tools and safety equipment. The sewing shop got new machines, sergers/overlock machines, and a couple of knitting machines. Also, a new computer lab was designed and equipped. The students and teachers are excited by the new equipment. Fr Fabian, Executive Director, has arranged for 40 new double bunk beds to be made and new mattresses purchased for the boarding school. The students in the sewing classes were busy sewing uniforms and making sweaters for the children at the schools and learning new computer skills. It was great to learn the boys were participating in the sewing classes and some girls were enrolled in the carpentry class.

President Charlie and students in the carpentry shop

The Archdiocese of Tabora does a lot of work within their parishes with students with special needs. The School for the Deaf is one of those. Another need has become more important recently, that of caring for children with albinism. Tanzania has the highest rate of albinism in the world. It's a genetic condition and those born with it have little or no melanin in their skin and hair and vision problems that make the intense tropical sun a serious problem. There are also security issues with these children because of witchcraft beliefs among some that their body parts have magical powers.

The Archdiocese has built a secure home for these children who are often brought to them by families wanting to keep them safe. They have a small school, Matumaini, which they want to expand to accommodate the albino children and integrate them into the wider community. If they are accepted by the community the discrimination against them will lessen. This school will accept children from all local families no matter their financial ability and will also include a number of orphans that are cared for by the parish.



Albino children in their home near the school

ROHFC has approved a project to build three more classrooms at Matumaini School which currently has almost 25 students with albinism and 18 who are abandoned children. The school is right beside the secure center where these children live and so they don't have to go far and can feel safe. The government schools are very full and difficult to access for children with any type of disability so this school will fill a great need.

PROGRAMS OF THE RAINBOW OF HOPE FOR CHILDREN SOCIETY

Your support is requested and appreciated for the following projects:

Program Description	Funding Goals	Program Description	Funding Goals
Nwodua Library, Ghana	\$85,000	PAMBE Health, Nutrition, and Sanitation, Ghana	\$7,500
Tabora School for the Deaf, Trades Training Equipment, Tanzania	\$10,000	Kinyambu & Area- Classrooms for Children with Disabilities, Kenya	\$60,000
Matumaini Classrooms for Albino Children Safety, Tanzania	\$56,000	Aeta Indigenous Communities Development Assistance, Philippines	\$15,000
Ambrosina Young Women's Education, Brazil	\$18,500	CIS Scholarships, El Salvador	\$27,000
Grota da Alegria Education, Brazil	\$6,500	Fundahmer Women's Training Center, El Salvador	\$9,500
School of Family Agriculture, Bahia, Brazil	\$10,500	Mt. Moriah School, Jamaica	\$10,000
Eye Health Care, Reducing Avoidable Blindness, Indonesia	\$15,000	Mandeville Housing and School of Technology Upgrades, Jamaica	\$35,000
Paso Puente Dignified Housing, El Salvador	\$10,000	PAMBE Future Projects, Ghana	\$20,000
Emergency & Disaster Relief Fund	\$10,000		

RAINBOW OF HOPE GRATEFULLY ACKNOWLEDGES THE SUPPORT OF ALL OUR DONORS, and

- Several Rotary Clubs, the Knights of Columbus, the Edmonton Community Foundation, the Holy Family Columbus Club, and the Al Gerwing Charitable Foundation.
- George and Louise Bunz, Wainwright, AB., who prepared the NEXUS Mail-out.
- The Peter Van Winssen Professional Corporation, Wainwright, Alta. for donating the cost of the NEXUS mail-out.

We thank you for offering a gift to any one of these projects and we are pleased to acknowledge your donation with an income tax deductible receipt. Kindly send your donation to:

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NEXUS: Produced and edited by Connie Gerwing and Jan Schmitz in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan and Rainbow of Hope's Head Office in Wainwright, Alberta, Canada. The expressed views of the authors are not necessarily the views of the NGO.