The year 2021 continues to be an extremely challenging year for Makindu Children’s Program, the Children’s Center, the children, the guardians and the families! COVID-19 persists in Kenya and Makindu town, but all staff and families of Makindu Children’s Center have remained healthy and uninfected thus far. With only one exception, the Children’s Center Director Tom Mwanzia contacted the coronavirus in early June, suffered a mild case, and recovered quickly. He believes he became infected at the Makindu hospital, where he was visiting three children in our program with non-COVID related illnesses. 

Mr. Mwanzia has since shared his experience with the families in a coordinated and expanded outreach to each of the 310 households, to further educate the rural guardians on risks, symptoms, hygiene, and social distancing. Seeing him in person, and witnessing his recovery has had an enormously positive effect on the guardians. Some of the darkness lifted, hope has been restored.

COVID

COVID-19 remains a huge threat to the Kenyan population and the MCC families. COVID-19 education outreach has been conducted with all households. Everyone now truly understands the symptoms and risks, and the measures necessary to stay safe and uninfected. Mr. Mwanzia believes the families have been spared from coronavirus due to the monthly emergency food distribution. Bulk food of rice, beans, maize and cooking oil have been distributed monthly since April 2020. This has ensured proper nutrition throughout the pandemic. Due to a huge increase in food costs, guardians would have been unable to provide steady, reliable, nutritious food to the children in their households. Hospital staff always accompanies the Children’s Center staff to the distribution sites, gives professional medical advice and answers questions. This collaboration with the hospital has ensured that the guardians are well-informed, and can properly care for the children in their homes. With food, health, and understanding during these dark times, hope remains and in fact is growing.

To protect from COVID-19, all 575 children, their 310 guardians, 13 staff and a few volunteers have now received three reusable washable masks. All but 20 guardians are now fully vaccinated. Tippy Tap wash stations were erected near each household and soap has been replenished as needed. Tippy Taps are simple buckets of water, hung from a tree or standing contraption, with a foot lever to tilt the bucket and pour water. Further, as already mentioned each household has been counseled on proper hygiene and sanitation. They have also learned to make soap. The new 5-spigot handwashing station continues to ease the wait times for washing hands before meals at the Center.

NUTRITION

Monthly emergency food distribution will continue through the end of the year. By then, we hope to have distributed goats to each household so that they can have plenty of daily milk as well as income from sales of extra milk or cheese. Hospital staff will continue to accompany MCC on these distributions. Fundraising for goats continues as we have 120 households yet to receive their final goat. At $65 each, we still need $7,800. See our web or facebook page to donate.
The Children’s Center has reopened. Currently, 30-60 kids visit daily for a hot nutritious meal, and appointments are no longer necessary. On Saturdays, at least 200 kids visit for a meal, to do laundry, bathe, and see friends. Cooks add meat to the meals on Saturdays to ensure the kids get protein in their diet. Word has spread that meat is served on Saturdays and so the numbers of children attending regularly has increased. This allows the staff an opportunity to check-in on the children on a more regular basis, and identify any issues that need addressed.

EDUCATION

Tuition, school fees and uniforms have been provided and the kids are thrilled to be back in school. However, COVID-19 remains a huge threat as the Kenyan government is providing no wash stations, no water, no soap, no social distancing and zero intervention, making the kids ripe for COVID-19 exposure and infection. Even so, they are glad to be in school again, learning and playing with their friends.

HEALTH CARE

COVID-19 and the pandemic it has caused has wreaked havoc with Kenya’s health care system just like here in the states. The Makindu hospital is overflowing with COVID patients. Three hospital staff have died from COVID. Supplies are limited. Anxiety and fear continue. The uncertainties of COVID have resulted in people reporting more medical issues and seeking medical advice and treatment more often. The Community Health Volunteers, so
What Died and What Didn’t:
An Adventure for an Unpredicted Cause

By Nicole Anderson Ellis

I was scared to go to Kenya. But for all the wrong reasons, I learned.

My second evening in Africa, seated by the pool at Hunters Lodge on Mombasa Road, I told my fellow-adventurer Catherine about my fears. We had spent the day with our seven teammates, under the warm winter sun, first climbing the Mielu caldera and looking to the horizon, past the long Chyulu Hills, to where Kilimanjaro could, on clearer days, be seen; then riding our bus to the town of Makindu. To the parade. The dancing. A frenzy of schoolyard frisbees and Polaroids and golden dust.

We disembarked at the hotel that evening dirty, and happy, and spent. Beside the pool, behind Catherine’s chair, a large baboon crossed the concrete. We both laughed and sat up straighter. I checked the table for my room key. Michael had been explicit: “The monkeys will steal your *$@#!”

“I was scared to come here,” I confessed to Catherine. She nodded. “Oh. Me too. I was sure I’d never make it home.”

That. Exactly. As I sat in my house in Richmond, Virginia; as I booked 14 hours of flight time, and covered the dining table with our suggested packing list: hiking boots, sun hat, head lamp. The whole time I felt certain I was packing for a one-way trip.

It wasn’t a lion attack I feared. Not until a week into our trip, when I stood amid square miles of acacia thorns, the day fading, the bus and last thread of passable road far behind us, did a clear paw print in the dry soil transform these big cats from purring story book characters to panting, proximate predators. That night, beside our first campfire on the Lakipia plateau, I learned that lions had killed more than half a dozen camels on our host’s ranch in the past few weeks alone. The headlamps were for the lions. The light was supposed to keep us safe on the dark walk from our cots to the shared cho (toilet pit), though I’ll bet I’m not the only one who unzipped her tent in the night and, imagining hungry cats on quiet paws, peed too close to the safety of our tents.

No. What had scared me back in Virginia wasn’t anything wild. I was excited to see elephants, but I hadn’t known enough to fear them. It wasn’t until day four of our walk that a lone and angry bull elephant washed away my naivete about the grey giants, with their complex family culture and melancholic eyes. Bara Bara, our head camelier; he knew better. From my vantage point in a high saddle, I watched his usually cheerful face grow taut as he directed the line of dromedaries to stand between the threatening tusks and my friends on
And Walter knew. That night, by the fire, he told me what he’d seen done by a bull elephant acting that same way. Ears pressed. Foot raised.

But the anxiety I’d felt on my drive to Dulles had nothing to do with goring or crushing feet. And it sure wasn’t death by hippos, which until Kenya I still imagined as tutu-wearing softies. I only learned to fear hippos – more than lions – once we’d seen them twice; first from afar at Mzima Springs in Tsavo West Game Park and then again on the hike. A pink-mouthed family was splashing about in the Ewaso Narok, just down river from our camp. We climbed an upstream waterfall to bathe safely out of reach. But I’d seen the looks on the Kenyans’ faces. And the next evening, miles downstream, when we took turns jumping off a high boulder into a swimming hole where our host’s own children had grown up splashing, I let others swim for half an hour before I believed the dark waters were crocodile and hippo-free.

All those worries, though; they came in-country. Back home my fear was faceless. I simply felt with cold confidence going to Kenya was not just gambling with my happy life, but throwing it away. Before leaving home, I told my ex-husband he was a great parent; if I didn’t return, my daughter would be fine in his care.

Yet I survived the journey over, landed safely in Nairobi, and two days later I sat by that pool sipping coldish Tusker lager and telling my soon-to-be-dear-friend Catherine, “Me too. Yes. That’s exactly what I thought. I thought I would die here.”

As I heard myself saying those words, with the day’s memory of Makindu children in their school uniforms racing across the Center’s desiccated football pitch, I understood, with exuberant certainty what our shared premonition meant: the version of myself who’d walked masked through the airport on my way to an up-until-then imaginary continent; she would never go home.

“It’s the old us that is dying,” I offered. “Oh my god. Yes!” Catherine agreed, our relief loud enough the families across the pool turned to see.

I’d forgotten what travel can do. Real journeys, where you leave behind all the labeled versions of “you.” Without our
homes, our jobs, our families and things; without our communities or even our nations, we so quickly begin to see who we truly are.

In Kenya, the mirror into which we gazed was full of wild things. Some dangerous. Most soft. We saw our true selves on our service day at the center, muddy to mid-calf, exchanging stories of our grandparents’ shamba (farms) with the Makindu Children Center’s farm manager, as we urged the children to move slowly – polepole – in the planting of avocado seedlings. Papaya. Mango. Kale.

In Kenya we saw ourselves in the laughter of our quickly-amalgamated fellow travelers; in our shared awe gazing over a crowded water hole, or verdant rift valley, or bleached pachyderm bones.

In Kenya - with our possessions distilled to what could be strapped to a camel - we noted each useless burden, and one evening, over warm whiskey and G&T’s, we decided to also leave behind the unneeded unseen. The next day, as we walked in the footprints of hidden dik dik and porcupine, we held in our hearts a common question: What are we carrying that no longer serves and what shall we leave behind? And that night, beside the hippo-rich flow of the Black Water, we wrote our choices on slips torn from journals. Each in turn - crumpled or folded, with flourish or when no one looked - they went in the flames. Sparks floating up to the crowded constellations. Released. No more.

Over the remaining days, some folks shared what they wrote. On pink wind-scoured boulders looking back across the valley floor; or in equatorial traffic, with women selling bags of onions at the windows on our bus; or in our huts during the rainstorm at the eco-lodge; it slipped into conversations about life back home. We hadn’t forgotten the jobs that waited. The divorces. COVID. But a new continent gave perspective on what had been working for us and what had not. “So, what I burned…” someone would say, and we understood.

The last night in the wild, the last night we’d dream in the company of camels, without electricity or wifi, just the connection of open sky, Jen noted that in the space our burning had created, we could all plant something new. So what would we carry with us from Kenya? What served us here? What did we crave? These we wrote and folded and tucked away - in a pocket or among book pages – where we’d come upon it back home.

I’ve got mine. I’ve got it right here on my desk in rain-soaked Richmond. I won’t share it here, but I will tell this: I was right. The person who flew to Kenya never returned. Who came in her stead was someone braver, and stronger, who loves herself more. Kenya didn’t make me that way, so much as it allowed me to be my real self. It stripped me – us – down. All of us. So we could see.

And also this: the same way travel peels loose our labels and reveals us, honest and whole; it lets us see others unveiled too. Like the children who welcomed us at Makindu. Just as we recognized ourselves more clearly out of context, so could we see the children at Makindu not as a type, not framed by circumstance, but just as children. Miraculously children. Universally children. Children who value the pleasure of soft garden mud more than they fear reprimand over soiled Sunday clothes.
**UPCOMING FUNDRAISING EVENTS**

**SAFARIS & MOORE**

**2021 FULL**

OCTOBER 5 - 20, 2021 and OCTOBER 20 - NOVEMBER 5, 2021

In-person Events, in Kenya. Safari to Maasai Mara, enjoy outdoor recreation and yoga on the Kenyan Coast.

www.safarisandmoore.com

**2022 AVAILABLE**


**ANNUAL AUCTION**

NOVEMBER 10 at 4:30 pm PST

Virtual show and auction, live streamed online.

www.auctria.events/makindu2021auction

**HYBRID CELEBRATION**

APRIL 10, 2022

In-person and online gathering of donors.

In-person show and auction with dinner in Eugene. Online show and auction.

Check Makindu.org for details

**AMAZING RACE**

Date to be determined. Check website for updates.

In-person scavenger hunt, in Eugene, Oregon.

**PROPER WALK & SAFARI**

SUMMER 2022

In-person Event, in Kenya. Safari to Tsavo West, Laikipia, & Nakuru National Park. Check Makindu.org for details

**CLIMB FOR MAKINDU**

to be scheduled for 2022

very instrumental in informing the social workers and MCC staff of issues and concerns regarding children and guardians, report that almost everyone is suffering from mental and pandemic fatigue. In light of this, we continue to educate and care for the families and give them HOPE that a better day will come.

PROTECTION

Makindu Children’s Center serves the most needy of children, those with no other resources or options. All of the children face harsh daily circumstances—even without the pandemic—including those who have suffered neglect, physical or sexual abuse. There have been critical interventions, when these kids received crucial advocacy and support for medical needs, psychosocial counseling and care. To help the kids exhibiting disruptive, disobedient or destructive behavior, the Children’s Center local board of directors, the local hospital, trained health care workers, children’s advocates and wholesale food distributors continue to work together to keep the community healthy and safe. Small workshops and individual interventions for targeted youth at risk continue to succeed in getting those youth on a more positive productive path.

PSYCHO-SOCIAL SUPPORT

Staff at the Center take great care in providing the children and households with a sense of belonging to a family and community. Usually three large events are held each year, but in 2020 we were only able to host one. 2021 has been the same. December 1, Day of the African Child, is the next scheduled PSS Day. It will be the first since the pandemic began. We remain positioned to make concrete, long-lasting change in the lives of the children we serve, to provide access to the resources they need and deserve, and to give them a sense of belonging in our families and communities.

GUARDIAN SUPPORT

Taking care of the guardians remains a huge priority for Makindu Children’s Program and Center. These generous loving caretakers are the glue that holds the program together, the families together, the MCC community together. They help each other through the good times and bad. They raise the children as their own. They provide safety, love, guidance and family values. They help preserve the culture, traditions and celebrations of the local tribes. By example, they show the children that others care, that people are good, that there is hope. In turn, we provide access to food and healthcare, education on pandemic issues and children’s rights, and economic empowerment through goat rearing, soap making, cheese making and other income-generating activities.
makindu
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Thank you D. Pennell Brooks, Tom Marvel, Doug Lusk, Bob Poole, Cathy DeLong and Marcia Moore for allowing MCP to use and publish your stunning photos of the Makindu kids.

Help give these kids HOPE!