

Mission with HEART: From Judy Leslie

Dear Family and Friends,

In October, I was fortunate enough to go on a Medical Mission to Africa with HEART (africaHEART.com).

Firstly, I spent a good deal of time this past summer raising money for this mission, trying to get enough Vitamins for 500 orphans and 65 caregivers. Finding someone to donate enough vitamins for 500 children for 1 a day for 3 months, that's 45,000 vitamins, not to mention enough vitamins for 65 caregivers! This was a tall order. Well, I was on a roll. I called every vitamin manufacturer in the USA to ask for donations. Nothing. I refused to give up; we needed these vitamins and I was going to find them!

One hot summer day I finally got a call from a company in Vancouver WA - the Gummy Bear company. I had called them earlier and they said that they had just donated to someone else but would see what they could do. A lady by the name of Katrina Van Horne called and said "I am able to give you 386 jars of Vitamins (46,000) and will send them to your house. We will pay the shipping." I was so excited, I cried. A special thank you to Northwest Natural Products.

Next, Vitamins for 65 care givers. I called a company called 7-day Health Corp. A man named Paul Brucatio answered the phone, I gave him my talk and he said I'll send you what ever you want; I like what you are doing. He sent 47,640 Children's vitamins with iron and 30,000 Vitamins for women. Paul paid for the shipping. He is angel and so is Katrina.

Now to get these to Africa. I had a Vitamin packing party, Soroptimists all. Jeanne, Kathy Ryan, Heather and Bunny all came to my house and we repackaged the bulk vitamins. It was just wonderful. Our Medical team of 7 people each took 50 lbs and I took the leftovers to the HEART office in Auburn to send over with other teams.

The Pharmacists at Medical Camp for HEART in Africa called Vickie Winkler (the president and CEO of HEART) telling her that the kids were out of vitamins. She was able to say "not to worry, we have thousands and thousands on the way." Thank God for our vitamin Angels Katrina and Paul.... Special thank you to my husband Dan, who did all of the research of these vitamin companies and we contacted a lot of companies. Ever need the address of a vitamin company just let me know.

Oct 11th - we're off. 10 hours to Amsterdam, 9 hr lay over then 8 hr flight to Nairobi. Arrived on the 13th in the morning, washed up and had something to eat, unpack, get settled. Everyone is so warm and welcoming. Vickie is such a special woman - another angel. From the minute I met her, felt like I had known her all of my life. Then we go shopping downtown. Everyone looks at us, I mean they stop and look, couldn't figure this out until I realized that most of the people seldom see a white person. We really were so white. Anyway, we shop for souvenirs. Back to the compound for dinner and sleep.

Next day 14th, we're off to the slums. Unbelievable! No amount of briefing could have

prepared me for this experience. These people have nothing, absolutely nothing. No water. No sanitation. No electricity (thus no refrigeration).



A stream running through the slums

First stop the peanut butter factory. This consisted of 2 small rooms with nothing in them except 2 large basket trays full of raw peanuts and a peanut butter machine. There were 4 ladies who were really glad to see us, hugs, kisses the whole works. HEART put these women in business so now they are independent, earn a living, have uniforms for their kids, food for families and health care. We bought all of the peanut butter that they had on their shelves, took their pictures, which they really liked, and we said good-bye.



A lady at the peanut butter factory

We then went to WEEP, which is Woman's Equality and Empowerment Project. These women all are HIV positive and they have lost their husbands to AIDS. They are trying to support their children, educate them and keep them fed and healthy. They are now enrolled in this project, which is designed to teach them a skill and provide them with needed income. They make school uniforms and bed nets as well as items to sell. They have sewing machines and sweater machines, but they have to send their items out to get them embroidered. This reduces their profits, as they have to pay someone to do the embroidery. While there, we had tea with them and each woman told us about her life.

I was particularly taken with a young woman called Teckler. She was about 22 and had 2 children plus her mother died of AIDS and left Teckler her 5 siblings to care for as well. So every cent is spoken for. When she came to WEEP she was full blown AIDS and had a fistula of the bladder. She was so afraid to come to WEEP because of the fistula (she was leaking urine all of the time). HEART arranged for her to have surgery and it was very successful. She told us "You have made me feel like a human being for the first time in my life". We all had tears.

Judy & Teckler
at WEEP



Other stories were as compelling - both sad and joyful. Teckler sold me a shirt for my husband and a purse for me. We brought each woman sugar, rice, beans, bread, peanut butter and oil. Also soap and bleach. We gave each one 500 KS (Kenyan shillings) - about 14 USD.

We went back to our compound, had dinner and talked about our day. Off to bed. What a day! Slums are just awful! We go deeper into the slums tomorrow. I will remember this day for as long as I live.

Oct 15th. Got up and had a lovely breakfast. We are off again to slums. We visited a woman named Grace who was sick with AIDS and pregnant with twins. Single, no income. She was one week over due and in poor health with her AIDS. She has 2 two other children and had lost one other to AIDS at the age of 14. This family had not eaten that day and the children could not go to school because they did not have uniforms, which is a requirement for school attendance. We brought her sugar, rice, bread, beans, peanut butter and oil plus soap and bleach. I asked her what I could do for her and she said she needed food, rent, formula, bottles and uniforms for the children. I asked her if she would like something special for herself and she answered yes, would I please pray for her. Of course I said yes. Many of my Soroptimist sisters, family and friends back home paid for her food, things for her babies and uniforms for her children. Not just for Gracie and her children, but other families as well. For 35 USD we can get shoes, sweater, socks, underwear and uniform per child. Kids are good to school.

We also bought the WEEP women an embroidery machine. Wish you could have seen their

faces when they found out! They got the machine before I returned home to USA. Thanks to all of your generous donations to HEART we were able to pay for this machine. Thank you family, friends and Soroptimists from SIGV. You made all of this possible.

We bought many children uniforms. We are continuing to buy food and rent for Gracie and her family. I hope she will be well enough soon to go to WEEP so she can learn a trade and become independent I will keep checking on her well being and the well being of her children and will keep you all posted. As of this writing I know that Grace was taken to the hospital due to complications. She had her twins (do not know particulars) and they are healthy, testing neg for HIV/AIDS so far. Grace is fine but weak, but with proper nourishment and medical care she should be better soon. I am going to continue to help Grace and her family. Would love to have your help too if you wish. Make check out to HEART and send to me. Most of all she asked that we pray for her.

We returned to the HEART compound forever changed. Our hearts aching and feeling helpless. For the most part, all of the people seemed happy and joyful. They looked just great, dressed up all of the time. The men always wore slacks and a nice shirt and dress shoes. The women always in skirts, never pants. Usually dressed up with heels. They often had very large things on their heads. These people were very social; it always looked like a street party going on. Booths made of sticks or tin where people were selling their goods. Miles and miles of stuff. Garbage everywhere, Music playing loudly, and food being cooked every 3rd booth or so. People everywhere, only work available is the booths. This slum was about the size of Lake Wildwood (about 3.5 sq miles), inhabited with just under a million people. Unemployment is 75% in Nairobi. On the other side of this slum is Embassy Row. Kind of sounds like Washington D.C. The White House with slums in the back yard.

That evening we went to the Windsor Country Club for cocktails. We were the guests of a lovely couple from India. They were very important donors to HEART and wanted to meet our medical team. I am afraid we weren't very social due to the trauma of the day. Guess we were OK as he gave HEART a very generous donation. Back to our African home, dinner and bed by 8:30. Off to medical camp tomorrow.

6:30 AM -off to medical camp in Nyamira. Nyamira is 6 hour drive from Nairobi but our driver took a short cut and it only took 8 hours. Five of us from our medical team choose to ride with the "Transformers" - a group of young people from the slums who want to transform the slums. They are unbelievable. They range in age from 18-30 and are also our interpreters. They go throughout the slums everyday helping about 300 people, making sure that they have food. medical care, rent, uniform money for children. The transformers are a volunteer group so they are not paid. They get money from several groups including HEART. I asked several of them what the biggest problem was and without exception it was hunger and always clean water. Sometimes they too are hungry.

So we finally arrive at medical camp after a life-altering ride. The roads were awful, the scenery breath-taking. We sang and laughed talked politics, about ourselves and our different lives. Life lasting friends from this trip to Nyamira. We sang together, same song, transformers sang in Swahili, we in English. When I think about it, it was a moment in my life to be treasured although at the time we were too involved in the energy of the song. Finally arrived at medical camp dirty, hungry and exhausted. Everyone was so glad to see us. We were guests of Dr.Meesach in his country home. We were blessed with a proper choo (inside

toilet) and bathing arrangements (a large tub the size one used for dishes, a bucket of water and a measuring cup. Step in tub, cup of water, soap up. rinse off cup at a time and you've had a shower). Dinner was interesting, not real sure what it was except goat in sauce and something else in sauce, rice and beans, fruit, and donuts, chai or coffee. Briefing about tomorrow, prayers and off to bed 8:30 PM. Really and truly I slept like a baby.

Up early. Off to medical camp to set up and start our work. This three-day camp consisted of 30 volunteers. Many hands to make this team run smoothly. I personally was assigned to the lab testing urine and blood. My lab partner was a young local lab tech named Alex who was also my interrupter. We tested 710 people in two days. HEART was also able to test for HIV/AIDS during this camp so many children and guardians were tested. As the children were waiting to be tested they were taught many health preventive tips such as hand washing, using soap and prevention of Typhoid and Malaria. At least 50% of the children I tested have had or had Malaria in the past 3 months.



Dee Hartzog and a little girl in the slums.

We encouraged everyone to be tested for HIV/AIDS. Nick, (one of the transformers) did a great job of encouraging everyone to be tested. As a result of his efforts 238 people were tested. There were 19 people positive, 5 of whom were children. This is good, as treatment started immediately. HEART did an amazing job under the guidance of HEART Pres. .CEO and Head Angel , Vickie Winkler. She is truly a gift from God. None of this would be happening without Vickie, and let me tell you, she is right there next to us all, doing the same work, laughing, singing, crying and praying.

All the patients left medical camp with 2 months worth of vitamins. More will be given to the children in the slums and to the WEEP Ladies as well. Medical camp continued for 3 days after we left, treating over 1500 children in all, supplying everyone with vitamins. DR Neil Flynn , DR. Joe Herzog and DR. Rita Patel were the backbone of our team. All hail from UC Davis Medical center. Their dedication, compassion and medical brilliance were second to none. It was an honor to work with them.

Back to HEART compound, dirty hungry and tired. Had a real shower, real dinner (Vickie spoils us) debriefing, prayers and bed by 8:00 PM.

On our last day we went to an orphanage. Nick (CEO of the Transformers) found these

children wandering the streets after they had lost their parents during the uprising last winter. The transformers care for them (31 kids). The children live in 3 rooms - one room has 3 bunk beds which sleeps 16 boys and the girls room sleeps 15 girls. Their ages range from 7-8 months to 8-9 yrs old. They cook in the boy's room and the third room is the laundry room. The transformers get on their hands and knees and scrub the children's clothes on the concrete floor. Lines are strung up everywhere.



Transformers washing clothes for the kids in the orphanage.

The children were precious. We brought them rice, beans, sugar, oil, peanut butter, bread, and some goodies for everyone. Also, they each got vitamins. We also brought soap and bleach. They are in need of help with rent and electricity. While we were there, they were using candlelight in the rooms, as they did not have enough money to pay electric bills and



A little girl in the orphanage. I wanted to bring her home with me.



Outside of the WEEP center on main drag.

were behind in their rent. So much work to be done. If we can get rent under control and food, than we can start getting these kids in uniforms so they can go to school, hopefully ending this cycle in years to come.

Back to HEART as we are hosting the Transformers for dinner as well as 8 members from our Soroptimist Friendship link in Mumias. Jeanne Aldrich and I met these wonderful women in Scotland in 2007. I was absolutely thrilled to see my friend Florence Aseka and the other SI Mumias sisters. We had a lovely evening together. They brought many beautiful gifts for our club and marvelous things that they made for me. It felt like Xmas. We talked and talked just like we had been friends for 20 years. They all touched my heart and I am looking forward to a long and happy relationship with each and every one. I have had nice e-mails from Florence and Brigitte and look forward to hearing from others.



Transformers (also served as interpreters) and my good friends, and Vickie Winkler CEO, President and Head Angel of HEART.



Florence and Judith (sisters in fact) These are our Mumias sisters - wearing their SIGV aprons.

We all said goodbye to the transformers who were our close companions for our whole journey. I will miss these outstanding young people and pray that their good works are rewarded. We also said goodbye to our old and new friends, not without tears. We talked about our evening and packed and got ready to return to the USA tomorrow.

We were up at 5:30 said our goodbyes to Vickie and were off to Nairobi airport to fly to Amsterdam. I flew from Amsterdam to USA on the 25th October, my birthday. Home to my husband and family with a whole new place in my heart for the lovely people of Africa.

Thank you all for your generous support. Every cent that was donated went towards improving the lives of these incredible people. Thank you also for your continuous love and prayers. I hope you all will join me on my next trip.

Judy

P.S. Grace had twin boys and they are healthy. She is not doing well and is in the hospital at this writing. Her children are being cared for by the transformers.

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