

December, 2009

Dear Friends & Family,

I apologize that this letter is so late.....we have been REALLY busy since we returned from Kenya in early August!

Our 2nd trip to Kenya was a wonderful & amazing experience. Including the 4 of us, there were 11 people who journeyed to Chuka in July for 2 weeks & this trip was even better than the first one! We knew what to expect this time & we also knew the awesome members of the Kenya team from the trip in 2007. When we met them at the airport, it was like it is with all good friends.....like we were never apart. They are a gracious, kind & caring group of people who are committed to the children in Chuka & who love God. We stayed Thuchi River 'Country Club' again & had running water & electricity about 60% of the time.

God supplied us with enough strength to accomplish many things on this trip & we were thankful! We hosted VBS at 7 locations including a slum in Nairobi. The slum was a very sad & dreary place but the church was happy & bustling! We came prepared to teach 100 children--we had 100 backpacks, 100 craft kits, etc., but over 200 children came! When they saw the vans headed to the church with Americans, they wanted to find out more, so they followed us. It was a little crazy at times – overwhelming too -but we enjoyed the day, especially seeing the huge smiles on the kids' faces when they received their backpacks!! (One older lady asked Layla to marry one of her sons. Layla declined. ☺) The 7 locations totaled over 2000 precious, smiling, respectful & thankful children. They were a true blessing to us. We gave each child either a backpack or a bag of much needed supplies collected by our congregation & community. The poorest area, Tharaka, had over 400 children who received the most in their backpacks which included a fork, spoon, knife, bowl, plate, cup, blanket, T-shirt, water bottle, hygiene kit & school supplies. Needless to say, it was a happy day---to be able to help so many! I will always have a picture in my mind of one handsome boy who was probably around 15. He opened his backpack, pulled out a fork & raised it in the air over his head in celebration---his whole face was smiling! He was beautiful. To him, that fork is priceless.

We were able to see almost all of the 110 sponsored children who live in areas around Chuka. What an improvement over the last few years! All of our kids are healthy & CONFIDENT! We saw no children with jiggers! We found that all of the children are in the top 8% of their classes at school! It is amazing what 3 meals a day & knowing they are loved & cared for can do. Paul, Layla, Jake & I were able to spend time with the 3 children that our family sponsors---Alex, Mukami & Justin. They remembered us from 2 years ago & there are no words to describe the feeling of hugging them & seeing their shy smiles. They are so beautiful & appreciative. They even gave us gifts of fruits & vegetables which was very moving because they have so little--but they wanted to share what they have with us. It was extremely humbling & we were blown away. One of hardest experiences was laying flowers on the grave of Mercy who was one of our sponsored children who passed away at the age of 13 from complications of AIDS in April of this year. Her sister & Grandmother miss her terribly. It is heartbreaking.

The highlight of our trip was spending time with the 17 children in the Kenya Connection Children's Home that we help build 2 years ago. They were all shy at first but within a day, we were welcomed as part of their large & loving family. Mama Ellyjoy & Aunt Pauline are super women! Humphrey could not have chosen 2 more perfect people--he says it was with God's direction & we know that is true. Mama & Aunt prepare 3 delicious meals a day, wash all of the clothes by hand & love each child like their own. The children are thriving & it was a true gift to get to know them. The children range between the ages of four & twelve, except for "Baby" Moses who is almost two. He is "The King" & all of the children love him so much - the only time we saw the children argue was when they all wanted to hold Moses. The children leave for school each morning at 7:00 a.m. & walk 30 minutes to school. The school, Kathagiririni Primary School, is located on the same road as the home. At noon, they walk home for a HUGE

bowl of rice & beans then walk back to school for afternoon classes - except for Ken, who is in kindergarten & only goes to school for a half day. At 5:00 p.m., the children walk home & immediately take off & shine their shoes. They change out of their school uniforms, put on play clothes, & wash their socks. Aunt Pauline must approve each sock's cleanliness before it can be hung on the line or on a bush to dry. They also help clean & have to keep up with their own belongings. Humphrey told us that in the beginning, there was an adjustment period, which we expected. The children were not used to a regular schedule, bedtime & chores & they had family meetings with Mama, Aunt, Humphrey & the other board members where they were told what was expected. The leaders of the children are Maureen & Joy. When the children recite Bible verses or sing songs for visitors, Maureen & Joy lead. Two of our kids, Alex & Brenda, are HIV positive & they receive antibiotics daily, along with a large glass of thick porridge that is kind of like Ensure. It gives them extra nutrients & strength. They both started HIV meds in October & have participated in counseling at the hospital where they are taught how important it is to take the meds forever. We talked with Dr. Nyaga at Chuka Hospital & he says that their prognosis is good, overall. Please keep them both in your prayers. Alex is having some complications from the meds but Brenda is responding very well. Alex is a wise soul and has the most precious smile. He works so hard to make it through the day. Brenda is beautiful and gentle with big dimples. The children in the home are from extremely difficult backgrounds. Two of the girls still suffer from the affects of their previous life & are in ongoing counseling. Humphrey's wife Hellen spends a lot of time with them, as does Daniel who is part of the team & is going to college to be a social worker. He is an amazing young man who we met two years ago & has a true heart for the children. We are so blessed to have Daniel in the lives of the children. A family from our church donated a wooden swing set that we send over in the container & Paul & Jake & a few other members from the team worked for 4 DAYS to put it together but it was worth it! Even Mama & Aunt tried out the slide & swings! We had to teach the kids how to swing & some of them were terrified at first but they caught on fast & LOVED it. One night, we built a small fire & taught the kids about S'mores (we had carried the graham crackers, chocolate & marshmallows in our suitcases). We wish you could have seen the smiles - & what a mess it made - but it was WONDERFUL! We also introduced them to Play Dough, stickers, puzzles, coloring books/crayons & plastic recorders—wow—it got noisy! ☺ We were able to take the kids on a field trip to a safari about four hours from Chuka. We went around Mount Kenya & the view was amazing. It was an awesome experience to watch the kids see their country. Their home, school & church are all on the same road so it was a treat for them to see so much! It was a sad night when we left the home for the last time....lots of tears from the children & from the mission team....we miss them!! Layla especially misses Ken and Jake really misses Godfrey. It is hard to pack 2 weeks of the trip into 2 pages---we have left out so much—visiting local dignitaries to continue to raise awareness about the home, the 'American' dinner that we cooked at the home one night for the mayor & his family, the visit to the hospital, the HOURS spent traveling around Chuka packed in a van talking & laughing w/the Kenyan team, the HOURS spent in Humphrey's 'garage' packing 2000 backpacks to give out, singing The Star Spangled Banner at the hotel in Nairobi on July 4th, the very interesting trips to the market to buy food, the nights we stayed in the homes of our Kenyan hosts who were so gracious, the incredible landscape & the even more beautiful people who welcomed us everywhere we went. There are SO MANY stories to tell....we could write a book. If you want to hear more, just ask us--we will be happy to share! We miss Kenya every single day & communicate with the team regularly through email & phone calls. We miss the kids more than we can say & can't WAIT to go back!! It is evident that God is continuing to help the people of Chuka through our church & community & through prayer from friends & family. We thank you & love you!

God bless each of you,
Paul, Louise, Layla and Jake