

Update 1 – EAMO 2016

Hi Everyone,

Last year was a long one! Fundraising was more difficult, Lyle & I moved house, family celebrations & get togethers were numerous and work was constant. I arrived in Kenya tired but happy - we had raised sufficient funds for the girl's dormitory to be painted inside & out, the windows replaced and the veranda roof replaced. A big thanks to all those individuals and companies donating time and money to make this possible.

As always it is wonderful to arrive in Nairobi and have it feel like home. Before I came away a few people asked how I felt about coming back this year. My reply was it felt like going for a trip up the coast – very familiar and comfortable. I arrive with my 2 very large suitcases and 2 carry-ons filled with goodies for the orphanage, donated or purchased at home. Customs (2 guys standing at 2 benches in a very large 'arrivals' shed) were cooperative (not always the case!) and waved me through. Hezron, my regular very reliable driver greets me with a hug and we start on the 3-4hr trip to Nakuru.

The sights and sounds are familiar – people everywhere, traffic chaotic (or so it seems to me!), sharing the 2 lane highway with people walking, overladen push bikes and motor bikes, donkeys and men pulling wooden carts, buses, cars and zebras! As we pass through police checkpoints people run alongside selling freshly roasted corn on the cob, bottles of water or juice, bags of oranges or tomatoes. We pass through green rural areas with groups of little mud or corrugated iron houses gathered together or behind high walls for increased security, past villages with tiny lean-to like 'kiosks' lining the highway selling vegetables and all kinds of grocery items but in very small quantities



A very obliging Hezron stops in Nakuru for me to stock up on food (I self-cater) and orphanage school supplies – items I know are available here so no need to bring from Oz. Arrival at the orphanage was as the children finished their evening devotions and it was lovely to greet them and be greeted by them with hugs and 'Val-ar-ie – welcome!' When I see their beaming faces, I forget how hard it has been to get here, and know I am the one being blessed this trip. I fall exhaustedly into bed, knowing I need to be up and going the next morning as I only have a week of holiday activities with the children before school resumes. I have already been asked 'Will we do collage this year Val-ar-ie?' 'Will you come to our dorm with games?'. My age is catching up with me and I'm not sure how much longer I can keep this up but the enthusiasm and eagerness of the kids is hard to resist.

The next morning, while the children are working around the property, I wander down to the girl's dormitory to see what progress has been made with the funds we have forwarded for its repair. It is a Sunday here so no workmen are present but it is good to see the new veranda roof in place, the outside painted and the completed metal windows and doors stacked ready to replace the old wooden ones. During the week there is a flurry of activity as out go the old windows & doors and in go the new. The putting of the many, many small panes of glass takes forever!! The windows are large but the panes of glass are small

to provide a security grill. The small panes of glass are also less expensive to replace when broken. Inside each window that opens is another security grill permanently in place. Now, 2 weeks in, while the putty is drying, the outside of the nursery is being painted (maybe we paid for this too!!!). Next week will see the window putty being painted and then the painting of the inside will commence. Even at this stage the dorm is looking wonderful after its facelift and the kids are delighted.



The children work each morning of the holidays so for the next week we have 2 creative arts activities per afternoon each for a different age group, trying to fit 2/grade in during the available week. Pavement chalk drawing, painting, collage, making bead or rubber band jewellery are all popular. The older ones needed to work a little harder this year as I introduced water colour and acrylic painting combined with weaving and collage into one activity calling it 'mixed media'. Of course they rose to the challenge! The grade 6,7,8 boys are some of the most enthusiastic and also have become some of my most constant helpers. They give up play time to arrive early to make up powdered paint or sort collage materials for the littlies. They then help supervise them, clean up thoroughly after and carry all the boxes of goodies back to my flat. They are also the ones who walked with me on our Saturday afternoon walk and brought me water to drink when we arrived back all hot & dusty. I wonder whether boys this age feel the lack of a mother/grandmother figure more keenly? They seem to appreciate both the care & discipline given in equal measure.



The orphanage has changed this year. The emphasis of the orphanage had always been to allow children to stay as long as they wanted even after age 18 when the meagre government subsidies stopped. However, this has become more difficult with the larger numbers in each age group coming through and having large numbers of randy teenage boys and girls on the one property. While I was here last year the decision was made not to keep children after grade 8 if they could be reintegrated back into their extended family. This year many children have been going 'home' during the holidays to learn more about their village life. I

believe this is a good move. The orphanage now feels more Kenyan whereas before it had felt more western. The children will ultimately need to live in a Kenyan culture. The Australian founders are away raising funds much of the year and the Kenyan influence of the manager and staff can be felt. The children are more appreciative of what they have provided for them here now and are becoming more realistic about what their adult lives will be. Some are beginning to see education, not as their right, but as the only way they can move from poverty. Hence, they take their studies more seriously.

Jacob, the young fellow Lyle & I sponsor has gone into grade 9 this year so is in this position. We have continued to sponsor him so he attends an average standard boarding school. He is doing so well, we are currently investigating better boarding school options for him. His young brother, who was at the orphanage, was HIV positive and sadly died of HIV related complications earlier this year. During the holidays Jacob now lives at home with his uncle who spends much time away with work and friends. Jacob's everyday financial needs are provided for in a small way by this uncle but he now looks after himself, buying and cooking for himself. He appreciates the opportunities for friendship and education the boarding school provides, is working hard and is grateful for the revision books & clothes we buy him. Because I was here, he was allowed to stay for 4 days at the orphanage – he had a great time and the kids loved having him. So did I! He ate with me a few times and we enjoyed games of Connect 4 one evening. It's always hard to say goodbye to him and even though he is 17, he hugs long & hard when we say goodbye.

The orphanage also has fewer children now – about 130. One young boy, Johnny, has autism and at 11 is now becoming too difficult to handle in this environment. The government bodies responsible will not find him a more appropriate place to live and so the orphanage has refused to take in more young children until they do. I guess we will wait to see how this plays out in the future.

Thankfully I have had a relatively slow week this week which has allowed me to catch up on work from home (somewhat!!) and sleep. The orphanage wheat has been harvested, dried, bagged and stored. We have been on a delightful walk into the surrounding rural countryside meeting locals along the way – how is such a green place so dusty? I came back with brown hair! I have also had the privilege of having an overnight visit from my Kenyan friend Stella from Nairobi – always a real pleasure!



Next week I commence teaching some of the Lifeskills classes. I had not planned on doing that this year but the teachers have asked me to so they can watch & learn. I enjoy the interaction with the kids and teachers but not the preparation!

Thanks once again.

Love, Valerie