

SASA

Sasa means **NOW** or **WHAT'S UP** in Kiswahili

every child deserves an opportunity.

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MR. INDISPENSIBLE

by Jonathan ('Jompy') Alroe & Paul Kelly

Over the 15 years that African Leaf has been operating, we have built up a small network of trusted and reliable people in Nairobi who we rely on to help us with day-to-day needs of the children (many now young adults!) and the numerous individual problems which inevitably arise with providing them with schooling, accommodation, healthcare and basic personal needs.



In the early years when the children were younger, they all attended the Rudolf Steiner School at Mbagathi as full-time boarders for their 9 years of primary education, so apart from arranging safe accommodation and supervision during school holidays for those without a responsible adult guardian, we relied mainly on the wonderful Steiner teachers and boarding staff for most things. Over time however, as more and more have gradually left the Steiner School and gone on to different high schools (for 4 years) and then technical or tertiary institutions, we've needed to find more trusted and capable people 'on the ground' to assist each of them – sometimes directly and sometimes as a 'go-between' for illiterate and poverty-stricken guardians (mainly aunts, grandmothers or cousins).

One person who has been a constant for us since the beginning and has become very much "the man we simply couldn't do it without," is Maina (pronounced Minor). This is his story, told firstly by one of our sponsors and supporters Jompy Alroe who visited Kenya for the first time last December with Paul Kelly and got to know Maina quite well:

"Maina came from "up country" Kenya by matatu and on foot, arriving at Nairobi's

satellite town, Rongai. A boy alone, an orphan with about 30 or 40 Kenyan shillings in his pocket. That's about enough money to buy a bottle of soda. He had nothing else – the shirt on his back. There was no employment available, no shelter. Maina was physically fit, except for a congenital defect in one eye. He could only see through one eye and his appearance was slightly marred as the bad eye did not move with the other.

"Destitute, he started spending his days using a discarded bucket to fill the many large potholes on a notoriously poor quality dirt track running up and down either side of a creek near town. He also set about removing large rocks from the road surface to make it navigable. As cars passed by occasionally, he'd hold out his hand for money. To a small degree, this worked. Maina took in some small donations from motorists so he was now able to feed himself and also he spent money acquiring a pick-axe. He used the pick-axe to break and level lumpy rocks that were sticking up through the road surface and too large to remove. Filling holes and breaking rocks – regardless of the weather, this forlorn subsistence went on for months, but for Maina there wasn't a better option.

"A local English-Kenyan landowner used this road to transit into town for his weekly shopping and of course he noticed the gradually improving road surface and this young African man's persistent toil. It dawned on him that the young man had substance and just then he needed a house-boy and odd jobber around his property. He stopped the car. Bingo! Maina had found his way into better employment and housing - a tiny room at the Englishman's staff quarters. That said, Maina's new wage, after deducting the cost of his board was still near subsistence. But he worked hard for the Englishman and he proved highly resourceful, so he quickly moved up in the Englishman's estimation. And he quickly learned to speak English.

"Paul & Eva from Byron Bay had reason to visit Kenya often to administer a small charity they and others had created with the good purpose of educating vulnerable orphan children. They were frequent visitors to the Englishman's property, renting another little house nearby. So Paul and Eva came to know Maina over time. He was helpful, trustworthy and sweet. On one visit, Paul had bought himself a new digital camera and he decided to gift his old camera to Maina. (cont over...)



It was pre-mobile phones and Paul thought Maina might like to take some snaps for fun, but Paul didn't realise that an African man in Rongai with a digital camera at that time was something very rare and special. In his spare time, Maina attended social gatherings in town and photographed the people. Then he went straight into town and had the images printed and went back and sold them. His services as a professional photographer were soon in high demand and he made good money there whilst retaining his employment with the Englishman.

"He then bought a motorbike and employed this as a local taxi. Next thing, he bought a small plot of land upcountry and later again, a block in town. At this point he has excavated the foundations and is preparing to build a home for his wife and two daughters. He is now 38 years old. With financial assistance from the Englishman, he's had corrective surgery in his eye."

Paul continues: "Eva and I have become extremely fond of Maina and his family over the years we've been visiting Nairobi. They've become very much the core of our larger 'Kenyan family' and I feel like he's become a brother to me, as well as an 'uncle' to all the Leaf kids.

"Maina is a few years older than my own son and in his younger (bachelor) years, we became very close friends over time. He was the first person I would rely on for advice on the best way to achieve things when dealing with Kenyan people and to help me find things I needed to buy – often accompanying me on shopping trips to buy items from local markets or shops on our behalf when he knew that I would pay greatly inflated mzungu (white man) prices if I bought them myself.

"On many of our earlier visits he accompanied Eva and I on road trips 'up country' to help find long-lost grandmothers or aunts of Leaf children, so we could try

to arrange for them to accommodate the kids during their school holidays. This usually involved independently investigating and then negotiating return travel costs (matatu fares) with local drivers and buying additional bedding and other necessary furniture from local vendors – with us nowhere in sight – as well as agreeing with the relative on daily caring allowances they would be paid for food etc. He was our translator, trusted navigator (usually having to ask local people for directions as decent road maps were virtually impossible to find) and our negotiator and advisor.

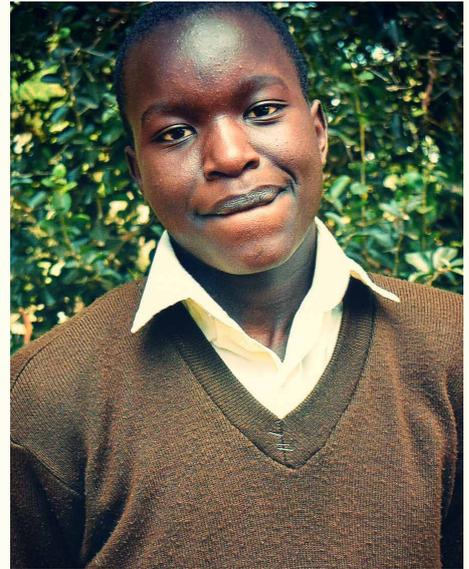
"On one of our first few visits, I was surprised when he asked if he could drive with us into town one day so he could buy a new (foam) mattress and bring it back to his small staff quarters on the roof of our car. I knew his room was tiny and already contained a bed and mattress, so I asked why he needed a new one. He replied that he was planning to ask his then girlfriend Rhoda to marry him and that an essential pre-requisite for a marriage proposal in Kenya was the ownership of a double bed!

"On another occasion which required an overnight stay at an up country hotel, we booked ourselves and Maina into a hotel at Gilgil and after showing him his room, told him that we were going to have showers and would meet him later in the hotel restaurant. After I'd finished my shower and Eva was having hers, he sheepishly came to our door and asked if I could please show him how to work the 'instant hot water' shower in his room. We learned that he had never in his life had a hot shower before, having always to wash himself using a bucket or wash-basin!

"More recently, Maina and his family have provided invaluable help with three of our older Leaf charges. When Brian finished high school and had to wait for several months before he could commence a Diploma in

Tourism Management at Kenyatta University (due to a prolonged strike by university lecturers), we were concerned about Brian being idle for all that time, especially back in the Kawangware Slum where he had chosen to stay. Maina suggested we should enrol him in a 3 month computer skills course, at the same time enrolling him in a course to obtain his driver's licence. His family also agreed to take Brian into their home as a boarder over that time so Brian would have supervision and in the time he was with them he was taught to cook and clean for himself, how to budget his monthly allowance etc. Maina later helped Brian to find suitable accommodation in a small flat near his Uni campus and helped him to buy basic furniture and house essentials. Then late last year, the family 'stepped up to the plate' yet again when we were suddenly placed in a very difficult situation when another Leaf child, Ketty, finished her high school and some accommodation arrangements we'd made for her and her younger sister (still a student at the Steiner School) fell through at the last minute. Again Maina's family offered to take both girls on as boarders for us (Ketty full-time and her sister Purity during school holidays) and we know they're now both in very good hands.

"I really can't thank Maina enough for all the help that he and his family have given us over the past 12 years or so. I'm even reluctant to plan a visit Nairobi nowadays unless I know he'll be around while we're there. He's my Kenyan 'brother', a most trusted friend, a wise advisor, a good husband and father to his own two beautiful girls and a wonderful 'uncle/foster father' and mentor for many of our African Leaf children. He's also very well-known and respected by a great many people – both upcountry and around the Rongai area. He's a truly 'good man' who has not only worked hard to improve the lives of himself and his family, but is readily willing to help us in improving the lives of others."



DIANA, CHRISTINE & JUNIOR

By Eva Shaefer

You may recall that these three teenagers finished Steiner at the end of last year. All of them did well in their exams and accordingly they got entry into good schools that Pamela, one of the house mothers of Steiner found for the girls and Rose, a teacher at Steiner found for Junior.

I will give you a brief account of their respective schools:

Pamela reported to me that Diana was very happy about the school where she was accepted. The school, The Kiseryan Girls Senior Academy, has also some co-curricular subjects on offer that are purely for enjoyment and are not subject to exams. These extra subjects are fine art, pastry, cooking, music, handiwork, beading and also athletics and ball games. I am really happy for Diana, because most of the high schools that Paul and I have visited over the years were in short supply regarding any creative subjects or sport opportunities.

The school started in 2003, check it out, you can find the school on google and they have a twitter account and Facebook. The grounds around the school and boarding are spacious and green, the buildings look well-kept and there are good facilities for teaching, sciences, e-learning and computer studies! Yes, this is the first time that one of our students has these on offer at a high school...mind you, let's hear from Diana if the computers are really working! Anyway, it looks very promising. The Vision of the school is: "To mould young persons through

instruction and knowledge and empower them to serve and change society positively". Although the school emphasizes that discipline is one of their biggies, the school philosophy seems modern and encouraging. Fingers crossed!

Christine achieved the highest marks ever amongst the AL school leavers from Steiner and she was amongst the top finishers in her school year! Pamela found her a very good academic school. It is the Mt Carmel Girls Secondary School near Ngong. Paul and I have visited this school around three years ago when AL teenager Ketty attended there. The facilities are very good, well-kept and clean. The school is quite remote and surrounded by fields and trees. The school prides itself for its high mean grade and highly conducive atmosphere for learning. The school has recently acquired a brand-new bus to be able to take the girls to a swimming pool and to other outings. Their vision is: "to be a dynamic, an inclusive and a learning centre of excellence in teaching, learning and service to humanity." Ketty had trouble at this Catholic School as it is very strict and she changed school after form three. But if one can endure this old fashioned but highly academic system, the world is your oyster at the end of form four. Go Christine!

Junior's mentor Rose found a school for him by the name of Masai Group of schools. I tried to find some information of it on the net but it is only listed in the yellow pages. I did ask Rose to send more info but she did not get back

to me in time for the Newsletter. But I have a little information: Judith, the head teacher of Steiner had told me that Junior achieved 283 marks but that the Government Schools this year require 310 and that it was hard to find a government school for him. So she went to visit a school near Karen with Rose, the Masai Group of schools. It turned out that she knew the owner "who is very nice". Rose liked the school because "it has one stream, more attention for the students and they are strong on discipline". (One stream means e.g. only one Form One class per year. That means Junior's school is small: only four classes, one for each form. Every student goes through high school for four years). That is excellent for Junior because the smaller the high schools are the happier our students seem to be. This is probably because they originate from a relatively small school (Steiner has around 230 students all up) Rose and Judith wanted to know if AL was prepared to pay a higher fee for Junior, as the school is private. When I got back to Judith telling her AL was agreeable with enrolling Junior at that school she texted back saying: "Thank you Eva, that is wonderful news. I just told Rose and she is delighted". On that account also I trust it is a good choice for Junior. Soon, at the end of this first term 2019, we shall hear from these three students how they have settled in and if they like their schools. Each student gets one chance to change school if they do not prosper in the one they have chosen with their mentors.

A FOND FAREWELL TO OUR ADMIN ASSISTANT

All of us on the Board at African Leaf are sad to announce that our dedicated Admin Assistant, Susan Hayward, is leaving us and in fact is leaving the Byron Shire for the Blue Mountains.

Susan has been a constant conscientious and loving supporter to all the work we do at African Leaf and we will miss her greatly. Over the last 10 years, she has produced our newsletters, managed our emails, our website and events to ensure that our sponsors have been kept up to date, that our fundraising efforts have been successful and that our children are being well served

Susan has worked tirelessly, adding countless volunteer hours to her paid role and we could not have succeeded in our efforts without her. Everyone who has been connected to African leaf has been connected through Susan.

Her departure leaves a big hole, but we have been wonderfully fortunate that Kristin Ellis, a relatively recent recruit to African Leaf has agreed to step in and learn the role. Susan and she have already begun the handover. We wish Susan every blessing in her new life, and we hope she misses us enough to keep in touch and visit occasionally.



Susan



Ziggy & Lizzy present cheque for LEAF to Mike McAuley

STEINER SCHOOL STUDENTS PRESENT CHEQUE TO AFRICAN LEAF

As reported in our last newsletter, 2 students from the Cape Byron Steiner School had raised money by selling wax cloth wraps which they had made as well as some items of our Kenyan craftware at their annual fair.

LEAF director Mike McAuley gave a presentation about LEAF at the student assembly and afterwards a cheque for \$505 was presented to Mike.

FUNDRAISING UPDATE

TRIVIA NIGHT

We're happy to let you know that our Annual Trivia Night will be happening again this year. The date is Friday 5th of July at the Byron Bay Bowling Club. So mark it in your diary!!

ART AUCTION CANCELLED

In our last newsletter we announced that we would be holding an Art Auction this year. Unfortunately this has been cancelled.

OCEAN SHORES PRE-CHRISTMAS STALL

Our annual stall over 5 days in December at the Ocean Shores Shopping Centre raised a record-

breaking \$2,196 through sales of Kenyan craft ware and African Leaf gift cards. Thanks to all those who stopped,

looked and purchased! A further \$404 was raised through sales at our Christmas get together.

LESSON 23 LEARNING KISWAHILI BODY PARTS

Eye	Jeech	Face	Uso	Shoulder	Bega
Eyes	Macho	Heart	Moyo	Hand/Arm	Mkono
Ear	Sikio	Stomach	Tumbo	Leg/Foot	Mguu
Nose	Pua	Throat	Koo		

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