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“CHALK WOULD BE A MIRACLE”



Thank You

for your support and continued interest in the Maasai community at Mara Rianda

'WE DID NOT THINK YOU WOULD COME' Because of the political unrest these are the words that we heard over and over from our Maasai friends whilst on our last trip to Kenya. Our presence in the Mara was even more appreciated during this difficult time. I had wondered whether it would be wise to travel to Kenya. Friends and family expressed concern. However, Pola and I both felt at peace about going. We sought advice from friends in Nairobi and were assured that it was safe to travel.

I had not planned to report back about this trip for fear of becoming boring but have been overwhelmed with interest and concern and requests for an update.

The unrest was between the Kikuyu and the Luo tribes and whilst they are not predominately in the Mara there have been considerable knock on effects. Our flight to Kenya was less than 25% full with tourism having dropped dramatically. On one evening at the camp where we stay we were the only two guests with 78 staff.



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Regrettably the lack of tourism has meant that the safari camps have had to cut down on staff and the local council have suffered a reduction of park fees. In turn they have also had to reduce costs and this has affected Mara Rianda School. The council have made a pre-school teacher, who had a class of 105, redundant as well as the nightwatchman/caretaker and also the school's only two cooks. This has saved for the council about £150 per month but is causing great problems for the school. Fortunately we have been able to provide some temporary assistance.



The Mara Rianda School has more than doubled since our involvement. There are now about 600 children. This is a combination of people moving to the area knowing that the school is now well resourced and also the Government's pledge to supply primary education for all children, though as yet there is little evidence of this being resourced. The lower classes are consequently becoming very full.

There are 105 children in the pre-school class all in one room. Year 5 has 95 children, again all in one room. More classrooms became a priority and I was able to sign a contract for the building of a block of five classrooms. More latrines were also urgently needed and again a contract for the erection of ten latrines was signed. Work has already begun and should be completed by the time of my next visit.

The new headmaster, Paul, is working the children hard in an effort for them to achieve more competitive grades. Years 6, 7 and 8 are now weekly boarders. A boarding block is urgently needed and it was a difficult decision to choose between more classrooms or a boarding block.



At present the classrooms are emptied of desks at the end of each day and foam mattresses are placed on the floor. The girls fill buckets with water and take them to the back of the classroom out of sight so they can wash in some privacy at the end of the school day.

Lighting was desperately needed to enable the children to study in the evening. Following a generous bequest a contract for the installation solar lighting for three classrooms and the teachers' accommodation was also signed and that work has just been completed. I hope to be able to install lighting in the new classroom block as well.

This work is a very major project and I have been asked to pass on enormous thanks to everyone who has supported the Charity. The school is so grateful to all who have generously given, enabling the erection of the five classrooms, ten latrines and solar lighting. Truly a miracle.

Just prior to leaving for Kenya I received an email from Jonathan, he had left Mara Rianda School three years ago and his brother was paying for his secondary education, however he was unable to continue to pay and Jonathan asked if the charity could help him finish his education. On the same day that I received his email I also received an unexpected donation of enough money to pay for a year's schooling; this was followed a few days later by an existing sponsor promising to fund his education. Truly another miracle. Jonathan has now joined the class at Sosio School.

We now have 12 boys at Sosio Secondary School and one girl (pictured on page one; excluding Jonathan). Susan's bursary is not paid for by us but we pay for the extras that living away from home entails as well as assisting with study needs. It is a delight to visit them at Sosio, which is in Kilgoris, about a three hour drive away from camp.



My time in Kenya becomes more involved with every trip. I was asked by Governors' Camp if I would visit another school in the area to see if we could help. I had visited Aitong Primary School on my previous trip. It has no running water and the children drink from a pond or the local spring. I felt uncertain if we were able to commit to supporting another school.

However, the more I thought of this school the more I realised we were already committed. We returned to the school on this trip with some friends from Governors' and engineers that they use. There is an untapped spring on the school ground. Hopefully by the time of my next trip we can have this spring tapped.



It is wonderful to see how “CHALK WOULD BE A MIRACLE” has gone from strength to strength; none of this could be achieved without the amazing support that has been received. We are in the position to provide further bursaries for pupils to attend secondary school from January 2009. If you are a UK tax payer a bursary can be funded by a monthly standing order of £26 for three years. With Gift Aid your donations will effectively be the full amount required to fund one child for four years of education. If you are interested in assisting a child in this way please let me know and return the attached standing order and Gift Aid form.



Financial support is constantly needed, most welcome and always greatly appreciated. In addition to the major projects there is always a need for new books, sports equipment and general school supplies. Should you be able to give any further support to the school would you please make any cheque payable to The Mara Rianda Charitable Trust.

As I advised last year I have deliberately refrained from bombarding you with appeals and updates about the school. However, I continue to be encouraged by so many people frequently asking me for updates. As usual I do apologise if you feel this letter is an intrusion and should you not wish to receive any further letters then please do let me know.



Thank you for your support and continued interest in the Maasai community at Mara Rianda.

Yours sincerely

Handwritten signature of Richard Long in blue ink.

Richard Long
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