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“CHALK WOULD BE A MIRACLE”

Last month I was fortunate to be able to go to the Masai Mara in Kenya for a short photographic holiday. During my stay I visited the Mara Rianda primary school. I hadn't planned to go. However I was told about the school and as I showed an interest it was suggested that I went and visit it. So one afternoon in an open Land Rover I set off from my camp, with a guide, for 1 ½ hour journey across the plains.

At the school I met the head teacher Mr Lawrence Ngubo Bosire and he proudly showed me around. The school has 318 pupils in classes ranging from school years 1-8. It is built out of breeze blocks and has a number of class rooms. The pupils were all very keen but the facilities were very basic. In some rooms there were 4 pupils to a desk. All the text books were falling apart but were cherished by those using them.



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In one classroom on the wall was a picture from a newspaper. It was David Beckham. Many of the pupils will never earn in their lifetime what he earns in one day.

The school would like more teachers, but it cannot afford them. A teacher earns about £80 per month. No, that is not a typo they earn only £80 per month! We think nothing of spending such an amount on a meal.

Pupils, whatever their actual age, all start in Year One. This was most evident in Year 8 where one pupil was 19 years old. There was only one girl in this class. All the girls of her age that were previously in her class are now married. This particular girl was having great difficulty in persuading her family to allow her to remain. One boy walks 2 hours to school and then back again in the evening. Others also walk a long way. Such is their desire to learn.

I asked the head teacher what the school needed. He looked at me, pondered and then said *"If you mean by a miracle we need chalk, white and coloured, pens and pencils again coloured, exercise books"* and so he went on.

His simple request shocked me: *"Chalk would be a miracle"*.

Since returning home I have constantly thought of the school and felt led to do something.

My initial thought was to take things from the UK. I spoke with a local school supplier, County Supplies, regarding the stationery, Air Kenya regarding the freight costs and the Kenyan High Commission regarding import duty. The latter apparently depends on how I relate to the Customs Officer!

I have spoken with a contact in Nairobi and asked him what supplies are available in Nairobi, he said *"Most things are available, what is not available is the money!"*.

It is now my intention, if possible, to return to Kenya in July and to purchase various school supplies in Nairobi and to personally see their delivery to the school. By buying the items in Kenya it will be putting funds into its economy.

I shall meet all of my travel and accommodation costs but would ask if you and or your firm would be prepared to make a donation in order that I can buy items for the school. I will undertake to purchase the equipment and deliver it. Every contribution, no matter how small, will be gratefully received. Cheques to be made payable to 'Richard Long & Co Re Mara Rianda School'. I will keep you advised of what is raised and purchased with the funds.

All I know is that if *"Chalk"* is a miracle for the school then between us we can help provide an answer.

I have been thinking for a while whether I should send this letter to all my friends. In the end I felt I should but I sincerely apologise should you feel it an intrusion.

Yours sincerely



RICHARD LONG