

The Margaret Okari Children's Foundation, a 501(c)(3) charitable foundation, is dedicated to improving the quality of life of orphaned children in Kisii, Kenya. We take total responsibility for our children by providing their basic needs including a loving and Christian boarding school environment, education, food, shelter, clothing and health care. This loving care continues until our children have completed their education and are self-sufficient as adults. We are their family, and we invite you to join us and become mothers and fathers of these children.

# Okari Children!

[www.okarichildren.org](http://www.okarichildren.org)

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## Wanafunzi Wabidii! (Great Students!)

### Ronald Ombui and Dennis Abeba Pass Grade 8 Exams

**R**onald Ombui is fourteen years old (upper picture). He has shown exceptional ability in school. He is a well-mannered Adventist young man, obedient at school and we receive good reports about him from his teachers.

In Kenya, we have two major exams, one after completing 8<sup>th</sup> Grade is a major exam you must pass in order to attend a government credentialed high school. Typically in a class of 30, you'll have about 20 who will pass to go to high school. Ronald took the test last November and passed with a high score of 395 out of 500 and has since been enrolled in a government-accredited Adventist High School in Kisii. Ronald's father Ezra was a soapstone carver and his mother Rebecca worked as a soapstone sander. His father died of AIDS in 1996 and his mother in 1997 when Ronald was five years old.

He has four brothers and two sisters, all orphans supported by our foundation. He is originally from Tabaka Village, Kisii, a rural area known for its soapstone trade.

**D**ennis Abeba is also fourteen years old and likewise is an Adventist (lower picture). He is an exceptional student, quiet and well-mannered. He was one of our many day school students, orphaned and living with his grandfather. Dennis previously attended day school because our foundation does not have the money to place all of our children in elementary boarding school. His



grandfather is a subsistence farmer, supporting his entire family from a one-acre plot of land. Dennis had few if any books but has always been very committed to his studies. Dennis has a gift for retaining what teachers directly communicate to him. He hangs onto their every word.

As a result of Dennis's excellent teachers and his own tenacious commitment, he attained a high score of 398 out of 500. We are obligated to support a young man who tries this hard to survive and succeed. We are now paying his full tuition and board at Cardinal Otunga High School, a government-accredited Catholic high school in Kisii. His parents passed away in 1998 when Dennis was seven years old. We know that he has brothers and sisters, but so far we have not been able to locate them. They are either living with distant relatives or surviving on their own, no doubt in very trying circumstances.



### **Pacific Union ASI Provides Seed Grant to Okari Foundation**

The Pacific Union Chapter of Adventists-Laymen's Services and Industries has provided a \$2,125 seed grant to the Margaret Okari Children's Foundation. The funds will pay part of the cost of establishing a deep well on land contributed to our project by the Kenya's Kisii District Government.

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# More News:

**K**enyan Architect **Shamla Fernandez** is preparing architectural plans and a project budget for our proposed Adventist elementary boarding school. We are currently funding full board and tuition for our students in several boarding schools that we do not directly administer. These institutions are saving lives by providing relatively safe environments for our children, but the quality of education is not high, spiritual education is not usually Adventist and diet does not conform to Biblical principles.

We want our preschool and elementary school children under one roof as an Adventist family raised and educated by Adventist teachers. Therefore, our goal is to create a new school initially for 60 to 70 children, but eventually for two hundred children. Labor costs are low, but building materials in Kenya are now very expensive (see insert page).

## **A Model School**

We want to construct and endow a high-quality model Adventist boarding school that is specifically designed to address the needs of young Kisii AIDS orphans. Kenya is in for some tough times. The AIDS pandemic has not yet run its course. Already, in Kisii, about 25 percent of the population has died of AIDS or is infected and will die soon. Our task is to create a safe environment in which to raise children who are healthy and who have a reasonable future. Their future represents the future of Kenya itself. Our project's overhead is minimal. We have no paid staff in the United States and our goal is to create this project with an African staff to keep costs low. We have received a first grant from Adventist Laymen's Services Industries (ASI) Pacific Union Chapter, for \$2,125, toward the \$10,000 needed to sink a well borehole on a school site donated to us by the Kisii government.



**E**dna, one of our girls who is only 12 years old, got pregnant in March of last year. Edna's father died in 1998 and her mother died in 2001. The family is Adventist, but there are now no parents to provide an Adventist home. Edna has a younger brother Eric, who is now 10 and both Edna and Eric were living together in their deceased parent's house. They have two older brothers who are both alcoholic - not much help. The brothers live in their own huts.

Every time I sent Edna and Eric money, through our coordinator Tom Maseno, he would warn them against making it known to their older brothers that they had money. This has been going on since their mother died in 2001. Edna and Eric attend Nyamikenye Elementary school, which is about 2 miles from where they live. They both walk daily to school.

## **Day School Students**

The reason they attend a day school is because, right now, we cannot afford to put them in a boarding school, where our other children are schooling. In September 2004, I received an email from our coordinator informing me that the head teacher sent Edna out of school because she became pregnant. Two weeks later she disappeared from her home, presumably out of shame and embarrassment, and nobody knew where she had gone.

## **Only a Child**

The thought that Edna is only a child, carrying another "child", the baby growing in her womb, just broke my heart. When news of her disappearance got to me, I immediately asked our coordinator to go and look for her. Three weeks later, she was found at a distant aunt's home, about 70 miles from her home.

In December our coordinator emailed me and informed me that Edna had delivered a baby girl, and that she was back at her original home, with her younger brother. I sent our coordinator some money to take to her. The latest report I received is that she wants to go back to school. How? I really do not have an answer. I have more questions than I have answers. I have been agonizing with God over this little girl, and right now her file folder is with Him. I am waiting to hear from our Father as to what He wants me to do with her and her

little baby. I will keep you posted, so stay tuned..... (story written in February 2005)

### Update

Last April, Edna was admitted to TEMAK – Teenage Mothers Association of Kenya. TEMAK operates a day program in which very young mothers remain with their infant children and are trained to be self-sufficient. The program has some residential features since the program trains and coordinates host families who house the young women and their children. Currently there are 15 other young mothers enrolled in this program.

The young women in this program are trained as seamstresses and weavers, traditional occupations in Kenya that will provide enough income for them to become self-sufficient. The program also provides daycare for the babies. TEMAK is located in Kisumu, a city 75 miles northeast of Kisii, near Lake Victoria. Our coordinator took Edna there and told me afterward that she was extremely happy to leave her home, with her baby.

We also made the decision to place Edna's brother Eric in Tabaka Academy Boarding School, a relatively inexpensive nondenominational Christian school where most of our boarding students are currently enrolled.

### Agape Children's Ministry

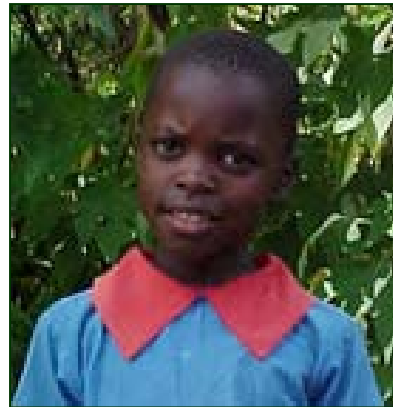
I was referred to TEMAK by Stephanie Midthun of Agape Children's Ministry which operates in Kisumu. This is a ministry that takes in Kenyan street boys who have been abandoned or who have lost their parents. Stephanie has taken our foundation under her wing and has helped us with fund-raising. This organization is also worthy of your support. Their website is [www.agapechildren.org](http://www.agapechildren.org).

**L**ittle Kwamboka and Lillian were transferred to PACE Seventh-day Adventist Boarding School in January of this year. Neither Kwamboka nor Lillian had been doing well in their previous school placement, so we decided to change them to this school which has higher educational standards, although it is also much more expensive. Kwamboka, my

namesake, is eleven years old. She did not receive a good educational foundation, so she



is having a hard time grasping academic subjects. The story of Kwamboka's birth appears on the last page of this newsletter.



Lillian's mother died of AIDS when Lillian was one year old. When Lillian's mother died, Margaret Okari, my late sister, adopted Lillian and her four siblings. Our

foundation is named in Margaret Okari's memory. Lillian turned six last January. She is a friendly, cheerful, fun-loving girl and

she's excited and very enthusiastic about her new school. The latest report we've gotten is that she is grasping things very well.

**Please Join Us** by becoming mothers and fathers of these precious children. They are vulnerable, but they always have a smile on their face and are very grateful. It is important that they survive and prosper.

#### Average costs are low by Western standards:

- \$60 Board & Tuition (Monthly Sponsors)
- About \$720, full cost for one year.
- \$25 Tuition only, one month.
- \$35 Full board only, one month.
- ASI Borehole Project. We are grateful for contributions toward the completion of our \$20,000 deepwater well project.
- Small contributions - greatly appreciated!

**"Pure religion is caring for widows and orphans." James 1:27**

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# School Plans:

**Brief Description:** We have secured a grant of five acres of land from the Kisii District Government on which to construct the Margaret Okari Seventh-day Adventist Elementary Boarding School. We are responsible for paying title fees totaling about \$500. The land is nearly level, of a good quality, and is totally undeveloped. If we can raise the money to build this school, we will be able to house our children under one roof, educate them according to our Adventist principles, and house them more cheaply.

Our ultimate goal is to build a complex of two-story buildings that will house 200 children. David Kisabuli, our Kenyan architect, estimates the cost of this facility at \$995,000 – a large sum, but a bargain by Western standards. Our start-up goal is to build a smaller one-story school that can be expanded later to the larger two-story facility. Initially, the school will house perhaps 75 children. This phase of construction will address several permanent infrastructure needs of the larger school, so it



won't be cheap. It will cost at least \$500,000 to open up the land, build a water supply and a sanitation system, and, construct classrooms and dorms for the first 75 students and suitable quarters for teachers' families.

**Sanitation and Water Supply:** In order to build a school of any size we must first secure a water supply and build a simple leachfield. We are very grateful to have been awarded a \$2,215 seed grant by Pacific Union ASI to sink

a well borehole. ASI, short for Adventists-Laymen's Services and Industries, is a network of Adventist self-supporting projects around the world. The total cost of the well will probably be around \$20,000. We are prayerful that this initial grant will attract additional grants and private contributions specifically earmarked for this project. There is no secure water supply in the immediate vicinity of the school. When this well is secured, we will share the water with our community.

**School Plant:** Our architects have drawn plans for classrooms, a dormitory, and staff housing (see classroom perspective). The buildings will be of sturdy cement block construction with tin or tile roofs, set on a stone-cement slab foundation.

**General Business Plan:** We intend to establish our school as an independent Seventh-day Adventist institution staffed entirely by Kisii Adventist educators. Our cost now to house and educate one child for a year averages about \$720. That money is paid to boarding schools wherever we can find them – Adventist, Pentecostal, Catholic, nonsectarian. We believe our cost to house our students in our own newly-built Adventist school will be about \$500 per year. Space in boarding schools is increasingly difficult to find in Kenya. Our goal is to create a replicable model, to design a successful school that can easily be reproduced in other locations.

**Financial Plan:** Our first goal is to continue nurturing the seventeen students we have placed in boarding schools and twenty-three day students who are waiting for placements. This has not been easy, but with God's help (and your help) we have been able to provide uninterrupted care for these children. We depend on general contributions to maintain our current commitments to individual children.

To build the school, we must receive large grants and many small gifts. We must also partner with charitable organizations that can assist us in building this project. We pray that these organizations will respond to our requests for assistance.

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We are constantly making contacts with individuals and groups that provide expertise to projects like ours. Our founder, Kwamboka Okari, is an indispensable asset. She comes from Kisii and has spent much of her adult life helping the Tabaka area of Kisii District develop a soapstone export trade with the United States.

**Keeping in Contact:** We encourage you to provide us with your land mail and e-mail address so we can keep you up to date on our project. We are faithful to our project partners.

## **BASIC FACTS ABOUT KISII**

Kisii District is located in the Nyanza Province of southwest Kenya. The total population is around 1,200,000. The first SDA missionary to Kisii, Bwana Lewis, settled at Nyanchwa and started a mission there. There are now about 120,000 baptized Adventist members, just in Kisii, perhaps the highest concentration of Adventists in the world. On Sabbath mornings in Kisii, one can hear Adventists singing hymns as they stream toward their churches, many of which are held in the open air.

The land in Kisii is hilly and very beautiful. Its elevation is high, so even though it is near the equator, the temperature is moderate and there is a lot of rain. The soil is red and suitable for growing cash crops like coffee and tea, but land in Kisii is divided into very small plots, and most people living on the land are subsistence farmers growing corn, beans, sweet potatoes, millet and a wide variety of vegetables. Only a few of the roads in Kisii are paved, and because of the rain and mud, agricultural exports are limited. Therefore, people are poor, and many do not really participate in a cash economy.

The people of Kisii, the Abugisii, are all of one ethnic group. There are very few non-Abugisii living in Kisii. Kisii is the name of their main city, and, their language. Educated Kisii also speak both English and Swahili. Literacy is around 40 percent.

The AIDS pandemic has ravaged this area of Africa. The Kisii people have few health resources and those who are poor and in poor health to begin with are especially vulnerable to the HIV infection. In this highly rural environment without medical institutions and with low levels of public health education, AIDS spreads easily through contaminated medical supplies, and through heterosexual contacts. Currently in Kisii the infection rate for HIV/AIDS is above 20%. Other diseases take a toll as well, especially malaria, tuberculosis and meningitis.

The Margaret Okari Children's Foundation focuses on AIDS orphans in the Tabaka region, famous for its soapstone carving. This area has rich deposits of soapstone, which are mined and carved for the export trade.

The Tabaka region is eight to ten miles from Kisii Town, a sprawling municipality of 400,000 souls. The Tabaka region itself is rural in nature. It is famous for its trade in indigenous soapstone carving, which is very beautiful and elegant. The Tabaka region has no paved roads. When it rains, which happens frequently, everything stops, because the roads are impassable. The matatus, vehicles for hire, must be pulled by ropes through the muddy roads, during the heavy rains.

Most of the children our foundation supports are from deceased parents who were Adventist soapstone carvers. We are raising the necessary money to look after their children. We do this by paying the costs of boarding school until they have completed their schooling.

It is extremely difficult to reach out effectively to people who are suffering in a faraway foreign land. However, because we have very strong personal ties with this area of Kenya, we feel we are especially well-suited to do this. We have contacts with honest local Adventists in Kisii, and we have good contacts with the local district government. We believe we understand how to create a low-cost Adventist institution staffed by local Adventist Africans.

**Please pray that we will be successful.**

# This is my story

, a story that set the “wheels in motion,” which are now difficult to stop.

On a beautiful tropical morning as I drove through the village of Tabaka in Kenya, visiting traditional craftsmen from whom I imported soapstone carvings, a man stood on the road, waving his arms in the traditional way a Kenyan hitchhikes. I slowed down and finally stopped, asking him how far he was going. “Not far,” the man answered. It is an answer I have come to expect, since even 10 miles is considered “not far.”

The man hurriedly disappeared as though to fetch some luggage. I waited a few minutes and he did not come, so I got out of my pickup truck and walked towards where he had disappeared. “I thought you said you needed a ride,” I said to him. “I am waiting for my wife who is helping herself” (helping oneself is translated as going to the ladies room). Another 15 minutes and the man and his wife are not back.

Suddenly a lady came from the direction the man had disappeared. Pulling me aside, she whispered, “His wife is having a baby.” Lo and behold, as I followed this woman, I noticed a crowd of women under a tree. Together they formed a human wedge around the soon to be mother. As I got closer, I spotted a newly-born infant crying as she was being handed to her mother, now lying comfortably under a large tree. The local midwives were working to make her feel comfortable. I quickly hurried to my pickup truck and drove a couple of miles to the nearest market center where I bought several wrap-rounds (fabric) for mother and baby.

When I returned, I found the mother sitting comfortably, breast-feeding her newborn baby. I gave the wraps to the midwife, who bundled up mother and baby. In the meantime the husband was standing and watching the ordeal from a distance. Men are not allowed near a setting of this nature.

Mother, father and baby were soon ready for me to drive them home. Their home was about 7 or 8 miles away. The mother named her daughter Kwamboka, after me.

The year was 1993. Five years later, in 1998, Kwamboka’s father died, and the mother died a year later, in 1999, both from the dreaded HIV/AIDS pandemic. Little Kwamboka, then 6, was orphaned, together with her brother Lawrence, then 8. They were both left in the care of an aged grandmother.

In 2000, the grandmother, not having the means to care for the two orphans, came to me and said, “My child, these orphans are now yours; please take care of them.” Without hesitation, I took both of them. I put Lawrence in Tabaka Christian boarding school and left little Kwamboka with her aunt, whom I paid to look after Kwamboka, until she was old enough to go to boarding school. Kwamboka, now 11 years old, attends PACE Seventh-day Adventist elementary boarding school in Kisii.

In 2000 my sister Margaret died from Hepatitis C, another disease that is endemic to Africa, and left four orphans that she was looking after. Upon her death, I took over responsibility for the care of her four orphans. As people learned that I was caring for orphans, they started bringing their children. Most of the parents were personally known to me, as I was instrumental in introducing indigenous Kisii soapstone carving to western art collectors. The great majority of the children are from Adventist families I have worked with for years. God has placed me in a position to do good for Kenya in its greatest time of need.

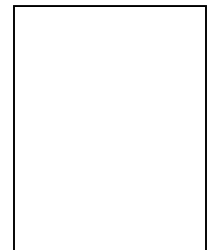


We now have a total of 17 children for whom we provide full school tuition and cost of room and board. We provide some funds to about 21 children in day school who are waiting for full support. If we had the funds we could accommodate many more children. All but one of the children in our program have lost both parents, although we plan to accept children whose parents are still alive but dying of AIDS, which is the best gift we can give

them. With your financial help, we can assist these children. Without it, we can't. Every contribution counts, large or small. There are many orphaned children in Kenya who fend for themselves, or die, at a very young age.

**Kwamboka Okari**

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**HELP MAKE A DIFFERENCE! in the life of an African child orphaned by AIDS**