

**From:** Sue McKenzie [mailto:lensue@hotmail.com]

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I am sitting on a matatu headed from Narok to Nairobi. This is the first time I have travelled alone in Kenya, a scary prospect at best in a matatu, especially as I pass by the carcasses of all the matatus which didnt make their destinations! However, it is Kylas fearless solo travelling which has given me the courage to strike out without Len. As well as helping where I can with the school construction, my real job here is to purchase products which we can resell in Canada - with all profits going directly toward the building of the next classrooms.

My goal is to track down the actual makers of the goods that the curio shops sell. I expect that that journey will lead me into a number of slums in Nairobi and that I will meet many amazing survivors of very hard lives. Heroes, really.

It is now time to update you on the progress of the school and our experiences there. On April 5, we walked the 2 km from our house to the school grounds. Here we found 20 men and women whacking away at trees and prickly pear cactus plants with pangas (Maasai machetes). We were each handed a pointed stick and taught how to move cactus and yellow acacia branches without impaling ourselves on the deadly thorns. We had on our steel-toed boots and our suede work gloves as per Alecs directive about work-site safety. The community members were in sandals, flipflops and bare hands!

So much work was done during that one day to clear the site for the first classroom that when we arrived the following morning six volunteers were already digging the trenches for the foundation. They were all young men hoping to learn construction skills. The work was truly manual labour chain-gang type of work. The men worked in tandem, the one in front using a pick-axe, the other shoveling the loosened earth behind him. There was little for Len and I to do except continue to clean up the debris. This went much faster when two wheelbarrows arrived. That day we were workers and were able to participate in the chai and chapatti break provided by Amos wife, Mama Ashe.

David, the committee treasurer was there the third day, working alongside the young men. As soon as he saw us, he rushed over with his huge, charismatic smile, strong handshake and a big Supa! greeting. He had a surprise for us. He and Nicholas would be sending us a litre of milk from their cows on alternate days. We had no idea how this would occur as we knew David lived 5 km from town. (It was his son, Stephens wedding we had attended.) We were to find out the next morning at 8:20 am when there was a knock at the door. It was Davids fifth son, Leitopa , 11, on a huge bike sized to fit a tall Maasai man. What time had he left home to reach us at this hour 7 km from his house? What time had the cows been milked? This is a kindness and generosity to guests unheard of in Canada!

On Day 4, upon our arrival at the school site, we were greeted with piles of sand, hard-core, stone blocks and a truck unloading a further pile of stones. The trenches were filled with hard-core ( big bits of stone which need to be smashed into something larger than gravel. Excuse my lack of proper construction lingo.) The young community

volunteers were now armed with sledgehammers and standing in the trenches. Once again, working in tandem and in bare feet they took turns smashing the large stones into bits. One would smash for five minutes while the other rested, then without a word they would change positions. The entire trench-load of hard-core was smashed down in this fashion by only 6 men. In one day!

The footings were poured the next day. Sounds easy, doesn't it? Not so. The process began with a community meeting to discuss how to get water to the site. The river is 600 meters away. The women offered to carry the water from the river, at least enough for the cement for the footings. For the women, this task would be on top of the 3 or 4 trips with 5-gal. jugs they make every day for their families.

Next the idea of piping water to the site using donated irrigation hose from community shambas (gardens) and a borrowed pump was discussed. H4H would provide whatever distance they were short. This option was rejected due to the fact that the rains have been sporadic at best and families are irrigating everyday and need their pipes. The final solution was to purchase a plastic tank to hold 3000 gal. of water at a time and to fill it with a tanker truck. That happened once. Now one man with a huge wheelbarrow and several women are carrying water from the river to keep the masons in business.

Once the water issue was solved, Kyla, Nicholas and Amos visited quarries in Narok and managed to get sand, ballast and cement to the site in time to be mixed for the footings. All the cement for this job was mixed by hand in piles on a cleared piece of ground and then shoveled into a wheelbarrow and transported to the trench. There are no machines on THIS construction site!

In conclusion, I need to mention the main people involved in the building of the school. Nicholas, the principal of another school, is the person heading up this project on behalf of his community. He is articulate, speaks Maasai, Swahili and English fluently, chairs all the meetings and welcoming and also does a lot of the translations. Amos is his friend who as Kyla and Greg's tour guide four years ago is responsible for bringing them to his village to meet with the chairman and the committee. James, is the hired fundi under whose capable guidance and experience this project has come together. And finally, Kyla, herself, who has traipsed from quarry to quarry and hardware store to hardware store negotiating prices, all the time climbing a very steep construction learning curve.