



The Mendonsa family



Happy orphans in their classroom



Naomi's Village



Bob and Ann

IT TAKES A VILLAGE: HOPE BEGINS WHEN A CHILD BELONGS



By Raschelle Loudenslager

Nestled just below Kijabe, Kenya, in the heart of the Rift Valley Region, sits a village offering hope and possibility to every child entering its gates. In January 2005, Dr. Bob and Julie Mendonsa stood looking over a five-acre plot of barren and dry land at the base of a mountainous landscape in a remote area known as Maai Mahiu. On this day, the vision for Naomi's Village was born. Here, the Mendonsas prayed, asking God for direction and provision to buy the land and to provide a home for abandoned and orphaned children.

Bob and Julie, joined by their two young children, first began traveling to Kijabe with Samaritan's Purse in 2003 to participate in short-term missions work. Dr. Mendonsa was a successful orthopedic surgeon specializing in arthroscopy and sports medicine with a practice in Lewisville/Flower Mound, Texas. During these trips Bob volunteered at Kijabe Hospital where he performed challenging surgeries, while Julie and their children served in the community meeting the needs and listening to the stories of the Kenyan people.

"The surgical cases were difficult, nothing like I had ever seen while practicing in the states," Bob explains. "These surgeries required expertise and equipment difficult to find in a Third-World country."

With each passing year on these short-term trips, Bob and Julie began experiencing a deeper level of purpose and calling.

Julie recalls how they felt after seeing the AIDS crisis orphan so many children.

"When we looked deep into the eyes of the Kenyan orphans, it was as though they believed God, too, had abandoned them," she says. "We knew we were given a gift in seeing the deep needs of the children in Kenya and we also knew we were called to meet these needs."

So, in August 2008, the Mendonsas found renters for their home, Bob left his surgical practice, and they moved their family

permanently to Kijabe.

In September 2009, the parcel of land for which they had prayed was purchased. Two short years later, in January 2011 a first-world children's home offering hope and promise opened its gates. Today Naomi's Village is home to 44 orphans, all under the age of 13, from backgrounds of extreme poverty. Many of their parents died from AIDS, tragic accidents, terrorist acts, or family violence. Some children still have mothers living, but unable to care for them due to severe physical or mental illness. The goal is to grow the enrollment to 100 children as new facilities are built.

Statistics show 700 children are orphaned daily in Kenya. Bob and Julie realize the number is daunting, yet through God's strength and the generous giving of others they will continue working tirelessly to help as many kids as possible. They have a vision of raising a small army of like-minded, empowered adults from within the current group of kids at Naomi's Village, who will continue the work of helping build more homes for orphans throughout Kenya. They hope to create a movement from within Kenya to continue saving young lives.

One such life is a beautiful young girl named Ann, born HIV positive in January 2005, about 10 miles from where Naomi's Village sits today. Not long after Naomi's Village opened, Ann's grandmother appeared just outside its gates begging for help for her gravely-ill granddaughter. Recognizing the urgency in her voice, Julie asked Flo, the Naomi's Village social worker, and Bob's sister, who was visiting at the time, to accompany her to the tiny one-room hut where Ann lived to assess the situation.

"I knew from the moment I saw Ann the circumstances were dire and help could not wait long," she says. "

What they found was heartbreaking. Julie

shares, "I knew from the moment I saw Ann the circumstances were dire and help could not wait long. Ann had stopped eating and looked to be no more than 30 pounds at 6 years of age; she no longer had the strength to walk to school."

The three ladies quickly returned to Naomi's Village and went to work completing the necessary steps and paperwork to welcome both Ann and her sister to their new home. A few days later Ann was carried into Naomi's Village. Bob and Julie immediately took Ann to the Kijabe Hospital where tests confirmed their worst fear. Ann's blood work revealed she was not only HIV- positive, but one step from being diagnosed with full-blown AIDS, and was also suffering from tuberculosis.

A fight for Ann's life began. Daily, she was administered 7 strong drugs along with an antibiotic and vitamins, and a high-calorie diet. Bob traveled back and forth to the hospital, holding Ann as she went through the painful and difficult treatments, all the while praying for God to save her life. Several months passed. Gradually, Ann gained weight, her strength returned, and her medicines were reduced. Through God's hand of mercy and the love of a village, Ann not only survived, but began to thrive. On a Sunday church service in January 2012, the chaplain asked, "Has there been a time in your life when you had to wait on God to answer your prayer?" Pastor Bonface asked everyone to divide into groups and share their experiences. Providentially, Bob and Ann ended up in the same group near the very spot where Bob and Julie had stood to pray in January 2005, asking God to help them build a children's home. Bob shares how Ann quickly answered the question, "Yes, for a long time I asked God to rescue me and He

did when Naomi's Village found me and brought me here."

With deep emotion, Bob continues, "We recently started having birthdays for the children in January 2012, and Ann's seventh birthday had been the first one we would celebrate as a Naomi's Village family. Standing there listening to Ann's voice, I looked out over our land, and in that moment I remembered that day in January 2005 when we stood together praying for God to help direct us and provide the resources for us to build this home. And the math came to me suddenly and I realized that 7-year-old Ann was born HIV-positive just a few miles away in January 2005, and a desperate battle began that would not end until over six years later. And through the power of a greater affection, He provided Naomi's Village for Ann and every other child here. We were a part of God's

schools is one to 100, leading to an impossible learning environment.

A recent United Nations study revealed that one-third of Kenyan sixth graders cannot read or write. Families living in extreme poverty use every resource they have just to survive and cannot afford educational fees, leaving their children unable to attend school. "The vision to establish Cornerstone Preparatory Academy was born out of a higher call to make a greater difference by building a state of the art school to educate and empower the lives of Kenyan children," Julie explains. Founded on the principle change starts within Kenya, the school will provide education at no cost to their families. This provision will raise a nucleus of bright young leaders from poverty and empower them to be the change for Kenya's challenges.

Because it does take a village to make

us to train our teachers, who are willing to join us for short- and long-term service.

Lastly, we need financial support in order to build new facilities, sponsor more children, and take care of the needs of others."

There is a little Village on the other side of the world making a big difference in the hearts and lives of Kenyan children. Just as the African Proverb says, "It takes a village to raise a child." And Naomi's Village is changing lives one child at a time.



bigger plan. Every child at Naomi's Village has a story all their own of God's mercy, love, and unmerited favor. Here in the gates of this special place God's redemption is felt, His restoration is seen, His love is poured out, and His grace is unending."

Yet, the work of Naomi's Village is not finished. Fund-raising is currently underway to build a first-world school in a Third-World country. Today, there is an overwhelming lack of quality education in Kenya. This deficit is devastating Kenyan children, paralyzing the economy, and hindering the nation's progress.

Most schools lack electricity, running water, textbooks, and teaching materials. Finding a computer in a classroom is rare. The teacher-to-student ratio in many Kenyan

a difference, the first annual "It Takes a Village 5K Run," to raise money to build Cornerstone Preparatory Academy takes place October 19 in Flower Mound, Texas. For more information, visit www.naomisvillage.org.

"Please help us as we work every day to empower children to move from the place of no potential to limitless potential," says Bob. "We want to remove all barriers standing in the way of children reaching their ultimate success in life."

Bob and Julie listed several ways everyone can help make a difference in their work. "First and foremost, pray for us as we strive each day to bring light and hope to a very dark and broken place. Secondly, we need people—those who can teach and can help

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