

48 Windows Campaign (unabridged)

by Billy Jivetti

Kaimosi (Kenya) Friends

I grew up in the Kaimosi Friends Church in Kaimosi, a rural town of 10,000 people in Western Kenya. The Church was an important part of my life. Much of the community participates in this Church. Kaimosi is the home to East Africa Yearly Meeting of Friends Quakers. The Friends Church Mission was founded by Quaker missionaries in 1902 and is now part of the Friends United Meeting (FUM) in the USA. Quakerism in Kenya became popular because Western medicine and education were central tenets of spiritual transformation. Quaker missionaries built the Kaimosi Friends Hospital in 1903. Quakers built the first Christian school in Kenya in Kaimosi. My mother Pastor Rose Jivetti retired in June 2019 after a sterling 67 years of ministry to the Friends Quaker Church in Kenya and the U.S. She was a dynamic preacher and leader of various women's and Quaker organizations including the United Society of Friends Women (U.S.F.W).

Childhood

I grew up in a family of 10. My father's paltry elementary school teacher salary could not accord us the basic amenities of life. For example, instead of a bed, we slept on the floor with several other children from the community. Our menu comprised mainly staple food of cornmeal either for lunch or dinner while breakfast was a cup of black tea with roasted corn or left over from the previous day. Rice was a luxury meal for our family which we could only afford during major ceremonial or holiday events like Christmas day or weddings in Kaimosi town.

We walked about 3 miles to get to the school. I spend my lunch hour sleeping under a tree, because the distance prevented me from going back home for lunch like most students.. As a teacher's child, I was the only one amongst other village children who owned a pair of shoes. It was common for my childhood friend, Hesborn, to borrow my shoes on special occasions, or for music, dance, or inter-school drama competitions in the town.

We walked several kilometers to fetch water for domestic use. Many days, we went without breakfast and lunch – only dinner. We cooked using firewood which produced a lot of smoke in our house. The source of our lighting at night was a kerosene-powered 'lamp' made from recycled aluminum cans. We spent a significant amount of our school vacations cultivating our staple food – corn and beans on our farm. As a boy, I was also charged with additional responsibilities of looking after our cattle and sheep while my sisters ferried water and firewood. Together with my friends, we always sustained injuries from thorns, nails, and insect bites. Our family of 10 lived in a mud-walled, grass-thatched house until 1992 when my father constructed a brick house.

The compass for my thirty-year academic, spiritual, and community development journey has been firmly anchored on Core Quaker values of Simplicity, Peace, Integrity, Equality Community, and Stewardship. These values lead me to be involved in the education and health initiatives in some of the communities Friends Quakers first landed in when they came to Africa.

Health Care

Primary health care is a challenge for most developing countries like Kenya. Vihiga County, where Kaimosi is located lacks basic health care services. It has a mortality rate of 33.4% from childhood malaria, 10% from infant mortality, 33% for young mothers during childbirth plus additional health needs dealing with snake, dog, and spider bites, tetanus, motor-bike accidents, typhoid and dysentery. Every year, we lose close to 30 people who could have been saved by timely diagnosis.

Few people in Kaimosi can afford the \$50 cost for treatment at the Kaimosi Friends Hospital. There is no ambulance service.

Life and Death Stories from My Village

Growing up in this rural region, I have experienced first-hand, the challenges of disease and poverty on most households in our communities, and here are a few.

John-gave land for health care: Early May 2014, one night, John fell outside his house while sick and spent the whole night there covered in blankets because he could not move on his own. In the morning, he was found by our construction workers who saved his life by taking him in my brother Hardly's truck, which is used in the village as an "ambulance", to the district hospital, 15 miles away, and paid all hospital costs. Sadly, John passed on in 2018 due to prolonged illness and hospitalization. We had to carter for his hospital and funeral expenses.

James ,9, and grandmother detained in hospital for over 21 days. James, 9, was abandoned at birth and is being raised by the grandmother, who has worked as a domestic worker at our home for over 25 years now. When he was four years old, he contracted malaria and was admitted at Kaimosi Friends Hospital for two weeks. His grandmother had to abandon her manual labor work and nurse James. My mother reached me in the U.S., and I paid the hospital bill and James was released. I reconnected with James last December. James is so happy and spends a lot of time playing with other kids his age and visits our home frequently.

Evans, 48, lost 3 kids to malaria, in a span of 6 months: Evans is a casual laborer in the community. In 2007, his older child fell sick from malaria. Due to poverty, Evans let the child stay home, hoping that the child would by natural immunity. However, the malaria worsened, and the child had to be admitted at the hospital. However, it was too late, and the child died after a week's hospitalization. Evans family could not afford the \$100 hospital bill. He was forced to work for the hospital, for a year to pay off the debt while supporting his family. Still, Evans lost two more children in a similar manner, because he could not afford the cost of treatment at Kaimosi Friends Hospital. In 2009, I helped Evans construct an iron-roof house for his family.

Elizabeth – The Avid Believer in Traditional Medicine: Elizabeth, 93, is a widow who leads a very fascinating lifestyle. She has served as a traditional birth attender all her life. She only leaves the village on market days or to attend church or funerals. She prefers walking long distances. For the entire time we have lived in the village, we have never witnessed Elizabeth being hospitalized or down with any sickness. Her secret: traditional/herbal medicine. Yes, there are many more residents who rely on traditional medicine for their ailments.

A 50-year old Dream for a Community Health Center

In 1968 my mother Pastor Rose dreamed of a health care facility adjacent to our Church. She had witnessed a lot of maternal and child mortality in our community, but she was helpless. She had joined Kaimosi Friends Hospital as an apprentice nurse trainee in 1952 where she was trained by missionary doctors. Her specialization was in prenatal services, midwifery, and childcare. She was appointed by the Quaker missionary doctors to sensitize and mobilize other women for immunization of their children in the community. In addition, she worked as a trained mid-wife and volunteered as a community health worker from 1955 to 2000 when she retired due to the challenges of HIV-AIDS pandemic which require specialized training and equipment. It is her utmost desire that she witnesses the facility serve the community before her time on earth is over.

In 2010 Pastor Rose's dream for a community health center started to become a reality. With Kenyan government approvals and generous personal donations in hand, Kaimosi villagers prepared the land, transported sand, hand-made bricks, hoisted electrical poles, felled trees and hewed timbers, dug the foundation, mixed concrete with their feet, and mortared the walls. The building is still unfinished and now faces a huge challenge: it has no windows, and bats are moving in.

48-Window Campaign

I am leading a campaign to install windows in the entire structure, a total of 48 windows. Each window costs \$160 which covers the cost of steel and welding materials, design, glass, and labor for fitting the window. The total cost for the windows is \$7680. We aim to commence operation of the facility in Fall 2020 because so many lives are at stake from numerous health conditions. We cannot open unless we have windows. Donations to this campaign can be made to the 501(c)3 not-for-profit called "Pathways Africa -Missouri" which some of us formed to support the health care center among other things. You may send your donations to:

Pathways Africa-Missouri.

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