

Visible Grace

July 2009

Friends,

I want to tell you what is on my heart. There is a sense of urgency to my writing, and this is important to me. I hope it will be important to you, as well. Please take a minute to find out what is going on with Visible Grace.

Over the past 5 years, we have been through a lot. We have registered as a non-profit here in Oregon as well as in Kenya. We have hosted many fundraisers. We bought land in Kenya! And we recently obtained the title deed. It has been a long journey.

When we registered as a non-profit in 2004, I spent 6 months in Kenya, teaching kindergarten in the village of Mbita, on the shores of Lake Victoria. If I had not yet been addicted to Kenya, this experience surely did me in. The children I worked with were wonderfully charismatic, disobedient, intelligent, fun loving, creative, hilarious...and living in some of the worst conditions I have ever experienced. The school they attend stands as a bright spot in their community. The scholarships they receive from American donors categorically changed their lives for the better.



Though I have met and worked with hundreds of children, these kindergarteners worked their way into my memory and my heart. I will probably never forget them. And undoubtedly, **the biggest lesson I learned that year was that education saves lives.** (The second biggest lesson I learned was to take my malaria medicine.)

Children in Kenya are facing a bleak future. Many adults are dying from AIDS. Many more are being diagnosed with HIV every day. It is estimated that over 11 million children in sub-Saharan Africa have lost their parents to AIDS. Children who are orphaned are left to fend for themselves or to crowd in with relatives or a neighboring family. These families are forced to make terrible choices: how to spread an already inadequate salary. Who to send to school. Who to send to work. How to keep food on the table. How to make crops grow in the midst of a drought.



In my eight trips to Kenya I have met and fallen in love with many people. Their smiles, their stories and their faces are imbedded in my mind's eye. It is these smiles and these stories that I returned home with in 2004. It is these people who have convinced me that I have no choice but to continue to work toward my goal. My goal, my hope, my dream is to provide shelter, love, nutrition and quality education for children who are badly in need of these things. And this is where Visible Grace (then Graceworks) began. With a goal. A dream. A memory. A smile.

Children who receive an education (even just through elementary school) are much more likely to steer clear of AIDS, to stay employed, and to stay above the poverty level. They tend to be more ambitious and make higher salaries. For many reasons, when children lose their parents, they are much LESS likely to receive an education.

With this in mind, we, the board and employees of Visible Grace, desire to care for the children of Kenya. While we clearly cannot eradicate poverty, we believe that the choices we make will have a positive effect on the next generation. **We hope to raise up leaders who will impact the world around them as they grow into healthy, responsible adults.**



We have come so far. Last year we successfully registered as a trust (basically a non-profit organization) in Kenya. This enabled us to buy ten acres of land, and in March of this year we received the title deed. This means we are able to begin applying for building permits. We have hired a caretaker to live on our land, keeping it secure and clearing the land of brush so that we can begin building. We have hired Susan Kimani to work as a project manager in Kenya. Susan is an invaluable friend and resource to us.

Many people have asked us why we are starting our own non-profit, or why we haven't partnered with anyone else in their endeavors. At this time we believe that the best way we can accomplish our specific goals is to continue in the way we are going. I have talked with many people who have done similar things in Kenya, and they have all advised me to get firmly established first, and to move forward slowly. We registered first in the US, and then in Kenya, and then bought our land, so that as we begin to build, we will have as few obstacles as possible.

Our goal is very specific: to provide the best possible education and environment to the children who are least likely to receive it. I have visited many schools and many orphanages. Many wonderful people are dedicating their lives to helping children in need. But I have never seen a children's home that encompasses all of the things we believe are crucial to a child's development.

For this reason we have decided to do things in this manner. We want to be sure we are creating the safest, and most secure foundation possible for these children. After the chaos they have been through in their short lives, they deserve stability and the assurance of a consistent upbringing. Though things sometimes move more slowly than we would like, we are confident that this is the best way to move forward.



Throughout all of this, you, our donor base, has faithfully supported us. Your money paid for ten acres of land! I am continually blessed by the generosity of both friends and strangers. It is humbling to know that people believe in our cause and want to partner with us along the way. Without the personal donations that each of you has given, we would not be able to do any of the work we are doing.



This past year has obviously been a hard one. Many people I know have lost their jobs, and many have taken pay cuts. This has, as expected, affected our giving. Though there are a faithful few who continue to send in donations, our giving, overall, is down drastically from the past few years. And I must be honest with you: we are very nearly out of money. God has continued to provide week by week, to meet our needs. But we have not made it past payroll and overhead- we do not have enough to begin building anytime soon, and I am facing a lack of pay altogether in the near future if things do not change.

I want to ask each of you to give what you can. I know that this may be impossible for some of you. But **I would like you to prayerfully consider giving a donation of any amount.** Every donation adds up, and if everyone gave even a few dollars, it would add up considerably.

Though regular donors are the easiest (and most cost effective) way to raise money, we are of course thinking of other ways to raise support. We have several fundraisers planned over the next few months:

~ A friend of Visible Grace designed a t-shirt which is now on sale at www.ashbyinkenya.blogspot.com. We have men's, women's, children's and toddler sizes in different colours. The shirts range from \$12-18, and they are a practical gift and a great way to raise money and help spread the word about Visible Grace. For those of you who will be unable to attend our other fundraisers in Oregon- this is your chance! Order a t-shirt and we'll ship it to you.



t shirt text:
this shirt
is a fence.
a well.
a library.
and hope.'

~On August 14 we are having a benefit concert in Beaverton, Oregon. The band Burlap to Cashmere is playing at Sunset Presbyterian Church. Tickets are on sale at www.brownpapertickets.com/event/72567. Tickets are \$15 in advance and \$17 at the door. We will also be raffling off a hand-made djembe drum signed by the band!

~We are hosting a poker night on September 19th in Portland. I encourage anyone who is involved in a poker league, or anyone who is interested in playing poker at all, to join us and to invite their friends. First buy in is \$50 and we have some great prizes available for the winners!

~We are also having our 5th annual auction in October. Details about the date and venue are coming soon, but I want you to know that we are working to bring down the overall cost of the event and make it more affordable for our guests. If you are interested in attending our auction, please stay tuned for more details.



I am really excited about these fundraisers. Each of them is a fun, affordable way to get involved with Visible Grace and to make a difference. **Please consider buying a shirt, attending our fundraisers, and giving other donations as you are able.** I promise you that I am doing my best to be frugal in our expenses and to be as creative as possible in finding ways to raise money.

I am so thankful for the people who have surrounded me during the past five years. The time, talents, encouragement and financial support provided has kept me going and made it possible for me to live in Portland, travel to Kenya, work full-time on Visible Grace, and of course, to buy land. To those of you who have donated faithfully: I can never tell you how much your support means to me. You are a blessing.

Please, please consider donating to Visible Grace. We are desperately in need of regular donors who will give to us on a monthly or quarterly basis. We are also in need of people who will help us with onetime costs such as deposits for our events. Another option would be to host your own fundraiser- a poker night, a garage sale, a pop can drive- it all adds up! We can't do it without you.

Thank you for all that you do. Please keep Visible Grace in your prayers.

Sincerely,

Ashby Rauch

**PS- don't forget to buy a shirt at www.ashbyinkenya.blogspot.com.
Thanks!**