

Notas

The Longest War

The war on poverty is a road with many twists and turns. Too many lead nowhere but some, like Buddha's Smile School (BSS), sponsored by Amistad International, help pave the way toward a better life for thousands of children. Each year, the 220 children who are lucky enough to attend this wonderful school earn a chance to break away from their begging, poverty-stricken lives and emerge into modern India as vital, confident participants.

Last year the first 14 BSS students graduated into middle school, this year there is another group of 10 enrolled in middle school. These students return to BSS daily in their time for additional tutoring, encouragement and a meal. They are not only exceeding in their studies (most of them have topped their respective classes) they have become real life role-models for the younger students.

If BSS achieves nothing more than moving 10-14 poor underprivileged children from kindergarten to middle school each year, they would achieve an annual miracle that over time could change the lives of thousands of the neediest children in India.

This is a joyous year for BSS and also a sad one. One of last year's middle school children was cruelly murdered when he tried to stop three young rapists. Pankaj's murder was an unmitigated tragedy but it was also a shining example of how much this young man's life and perspectives had changed. He couldn't stand by and do nothing—not anymore. Even though he probably knew he might be attacked.

It's Rajan and her teachers' love and tireless attention that lifts these street urchins into believing change is possible and help them realize there is more to life than combing a garbage tip for food and recyclables.

BSS feeds them with more than food. It heals them with more than medicine and it enthuses them with more than dreams. So far, twenty-eight middle school children stand testament to everything that BSS has done and can only continue achieving with your compassionate help.

Written by John Holman, a volunteer who lives in Sydney, Australia. He is the webmaster for BSS's website: www.buddhas-smile-school.org

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Though our little BSS students live with rats and feral dogs in their slums at night, by day at school they live with hope, dignity and love from their teachers.



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Writing and Editing

Heidi Brenner Hayatgheyb

Graphic Design

Lauren Smith
Communications Design
www.laurensmith.com

Mailing List

Lois Lin

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Amistad International
1657 Edgewood Drive,
Palo Alto, California 94303
Telephone: (650) 328-1737
Fax: (650) 289-0692
E-mail: tomamistad@aol.com

Our website:

www.amistadinternational.org
Our blog:
<http://amistadinternational1.blogspot.com>

Our Facebook page:
Amistad International

What is Amistad International?

Amistad, a word meaning friendship in Spanish, is a nonprofit public 501(c) (3) charity helping humanitarian, self-help, and educational programs for impoverished communities in Mexico, Zimbabwe, Kenya, South Africa, China, India, Dominican Republic, Mongolia and other countries.

We believe in empowering people, helping them to develop the skills and knowledge needed for sustenance of life, promotion of health and preservation of cultural identity.

Some of the projects Amistad International currently funds include:

- A diversified program providing Mexico's Huichol Indians with a flying medical/dental clinic, air ambulance, and hot meals for students. Director: Dagoberto Cirilo.
- Paula Leen's outreach in Zimbabwe which includes meals for widows and elderly, the Murwira Childrens' Home orphanage, orchards and garden programs, water projects, and transportation of ill and dying to hospitals.
- Lambano Sanctuary for HIV+ infants and young children in Johannesburg, South Africa. www.lambano.org.za
- Buddha's Smile School, a free primary school for 220 Dalit (untouchable caste) children in Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh, India. Founder, teacher and director: Rajani Kaur. www.buddhas-smile-school.org
- Dominican Republic/Haiti: Dr. Scott Nelson's on-going orthopedic surgeries for the poor and Dr. Terry Dietrich's orthopedic team trips throughout the year. <http://curecaribe.blogspot.com>
- Amri school in Kikuyu province, Kenya: a free elementary school for 150 students founded and operated by Amri community members for the poor in their community. Amistad also sponsors Youth Action for Rural Development's (YARD) micro-loans for small business start up.
- Wings of Knowledge fund founded by Bill and Betty Baxter. Coordinator: Dorothy Baxter Toppenberg. *E-mail: dandetop@att.net*
- Ad hoc assistance to other projects which includes: Urmi Basu's New Light Shelters in Kolkata India <http://www.newlightindia.org>; Bere Adventist Hospital in Tchad, Africa; Achlal School in Ulan Bator, Mongolia, and Community Initiatives for Rural Development (CIFORD) in Kenya. <http://www.cifordkenya.org>

Here's What You've Done



- In the Sierra Huichol our donors provided the following services: 24 emergency medical flights, 84,000 hot meals served to 210 Huichol Indian children at three schools: Tecolote, San Miguel and Tuxpan. 250 ill or injured were transported to hospitals and 12,360 lbs. of food and clothing distributed. Five dental teams provided services to 220 patients. Two ophthalmology teams fitted 150 pairs of donated glasses.
- Paula Leen's Murwira Orphans' Home (MOH) in Marengwe, Zimbabwe is providing a loving home and education for 40 children. MOH is providing food for over 2,000 in the community, including 400 sub-nourished children at Benhiwa School where the Murwira children attend school. In the past 12 months, donors have helped to deliver over 50 tons of food for distribution to the ill, widows and elderly in the area around Marengwe, and also at the hospital in Mutare, and at Des Paul's outreach to the poor in Harare. The orphanage is the only employer in the area, providing work for 80 persons.
- You are providing over 3,000 meals per month for the 150 children who attend Amri School, Amri, Kenya. The students receive a hot nourishing meal each day which includes bread, beans, rice, tomatoes, onions, cabbage, fruit and milk. Donors also provided salaries for 12 teachers, principal, cook and guard and rent of school house.

- Amistad donors helped Pathfinder Academy in Kitale, Kenya, complete their dining hall/kitchen complex. Worthington, Ohio SDA Church provided new chairs and tables for the dining hall. Amistad donors are currently helping to build seven greatly needed classrooms which will be completed in 2010.
- Donors provided 24 scholarships so that all of Buddha's Smile School's '08 and '09 elementary school graduates could go on to middle school. Donors are providing tuition, books, food, uniforms and afternoon tutoring at BSS, located in Varanasi, India. Amistad donors continue to provide monthly overhead expenses (salaries, books, uniforms) for BSS. This year many dug deeper into their pockets, providing a prosthetic leg and medical expenses for husband (Sukdev Saini) of school founder Rajan Kaur after he suffered the loss of his leg following an accident in June.

Left: Amistad delivering food to Mexico's drought stricken Huichol Indians.



International teamwork has resulted in over fifty tons of food distributed by Murwira Orphans Home to hungry in Zimbabwe in the past several months.

We Say Gracias to These Wonderful People and Organizations



Murwira Orphan Home volunteer, Josh Schaa at the moment of orphan Vongai's first smile. Josh, his wife Jenna, and her parents Diana and Bruce Hamberger, helped transform Vongai from a malnourished sad baby into this smiling angel.

The true meaning of life is to plant trees under whose shade you will never sit. —ELTON TRUEBLOOD

• Thank you each generous friend who has taken a special interest in helping us keep our Huichol Aviation Lifelights and hot meals for Huichol children going in Mexico.

• We give enormous thanks to all the members of the big team effort which has shipped over 50 tons of food to Zimbabwe's hungry since last December: ZOPOM of Australia, the Maree Noble and Elizabeth Stumpf Memorial Foundation, Agathos Foundation, Feed My Starving Children Foundation, Pilgrim Foundation, Adventist Women's Ministries of Washington, Ben Dawson and Celina Worley, and the Upper Columbia Academy SDA church, and Amistad worked smoothly together, coordinated by tireless Marc Fulmer, to get the food to Paula Leen's on-site volunteers, who delivered it to the needy.

We have a special debt of gratitude to Margo Rees, our volunteer in Florida who writes the thank you letters to those who give to Murwira orphanage, and also sends out Paula's newsletter.

We hardly know how to give sufficient thanks to Diane and Bruce Hamberger (from Pearce, AZ) and their daughter Jenna Schaa and husband Josh Schaa (from Tucson, AZ) who read about Paula's work in November, 2008 World magazine. The Hamberger-Schaa family have considerable skills between them, from solar power and carpentry, to gardening, sewing computer technology and more! And they put all of their talents to work at Murwira.

As soon as they arrived in Zimbabwe, they began the distribution of 22 tons of food donated from Feed My Starving Children foundation. Then they oversaw the installation of a motor from one of Paula's vehicles into another vehicle. They also remodeled a dormitory for boys, organized the garage and tools, repaired and reinstalled solar water pumps, created a dining hall out of unused space, repaired the plumbing and wrote a manual for volunteers. And this is only a partial list. We could never

tell them fully how grateful we are to them. Volunteer Cesar Plaza (Los Angeles) arrived soon after and continued on in the same spirit, also accomplishing a great deal. We also thank volunteers Greta Schuler (Washington DC), 24, and Magali Schroll, (Belgium) 30, Kourtnei Knobel (Colorado) and Carol and Russ Johnson from Haines, Oregon.

• Thank you Kee Flynn, KeeArts, and your friends for helping expand the micro-loan program at Youth action for Rural Development, Kenya. Kee Arts also helped several other Amistad projects during 2009. Check out www.KeeArt.org to learn how you can enjoy Kee's beautiful art and help Amistad's programs. Kee and Paul Flynn opened their home for a special showing of Kee's beautiful paintings November 7-8. The funds they raised are greatly helping Amistad during these challenging times. We give thanks to Kee and Paul from all whom Amistad serves.

• We thank Yvonne Macias and her company B Green Bags www.bgreenbags.com. For each beautifully made (cool looking too) shopping bag you purchase, a donation will be made to Amistad International to the Amri School for Impoverished Students and AIDS Orphans in Kenya. Each donation will provide one child a lunch at school for an entire month!

• We thank the Maree Noble/Elizabeth Stumpf Memorial Foundation for the funds to provide Malamulo Adventist Hospital, Malawi for purchasing a large shipment of medicines for their hospital, nursing school and satellite clinic near Blantyre. We also thank this foundation for their help to Murwira Childrens Home, and for their support of a nurse for care training and monitoring of parents whose babies have had hydrocephaly shunts placed, and also for helping the children of Lambano Sanctuary in South Africa.

• We are deeply grateful to Lotte Cherin, a volunteer who resources used laptops for our



programs. This year Lotte provided laptops for Amri School, Mutare Provincial Hospital and Des Paul Outreach in Zimbabwe and several programs in Mongolia, including a computer for Afghanastani student, Zahra Ghulami, studying in Mongolia.

- Thank you, Ruth Davis, who is selling Forever Postage Stamps to raise money for Amistad projects around the world. Purchase 100 stamps for \$44 (same as post office rate) and Ruth will donate \$4 to Amistad. Free shipping on purchases of over \$100. E-mail Ruth at info@optimumhealthlink.com
- We give huge thanks to Judith and Hans Steiner and their friends for their visit to Buddha's Smile School in Varanasi India and the funds they raised for the medical fund, books and for the support of BSS graduate students in middle school. Several of these good people also held a fundraiser for BSS on April 28, raising funds for 8 scholarships for BSS students to attend middle school.
- We thank Dr. Reena Bhargava and her children Nikhil and Zoe, living in Palo Alto, California, who have developed innovative science lessons via SKYPE for Buddha's Smile School. The lessons are held in real time by SKYPE between the Bhargava home and BSS. Let us all say thank you to the scientists who make this technology possible!
- We thank Geir Davidson and the students and families of Enge School in Norway who raised \$14,000 USD for Buddha's Smile School to purchase play equipment school bus insurance, and shoes and socks for the students.
- We thank the generous (anonymous) family who are providing the funds to build seven classroom at Pathfinder Academy, Kitale, Kenya. We also thank the Worthington, Ohio SDA church for raising \$3,500 for chairs and tables for Pathfinder's new dining hall.
- Thank you, Dea Banfe, for your helping us grow the micro loan program in Thika, Kenya, at Youth Action for Rural Development. We now have 650 participants who can now buy food and pay their children's school fees.
- We thank Hayden Hanson, 8, of Auburn, California for raising \$44.89 for poor children. All on his own, Hayden told his friends and family about the poor children who need help. Thank you, Hayden.
- Thank you to the Good Works Institute and Ann Down, to Donna and Larry Peters, Dr. Sundeep Rathore, and to Stina and Herant Katchadourian for helping to keep Buddha's Smile School going. In addition, Donna Peters provided 52 blankets for families of students, school uniforms, a video projector, and science videos. We also thank Yvonne Macias, Lisa Reuff and her husband Phillip Schneider and their weddings guests, William Grantham, Diane Franken, Forrest Fleishmann, and Alexa and Joe Horne for their help to BSS.
- We appreciate deeply Amri School Sponsors Wanda and Don Krein and Paula and Russell Owens who made possible nearly two terms at Amri school.
- We thank Terry and Jeannie Dietrich for their help of \$5,000 for providing the foundation of the school library at Pathfinder Academy, Kitale, Kenya. We hope to help Pathfinder build a library on the floor above the classrooms.
- We also thank Terry and Jeannie Dietrich, Judith Steiner, Dr. Will Spiegelman and Dr. Ann Bergman for helping Sukdev Saini obtain a prosthetic leg.
- Thank you Dale and Connie Twomley and Chris and Bill McClure for enabling us to help persons living with AIDS and HIV+ to start small businesses in Kenya. Your gifts are also providing food, school fees and clothing for AIDS orphans among the Meru tribe.
- We thank Michael Freed, 12, of Columbus, Indian who raised \$435 by giving a violin concert which benefitted our Tarahumara Indian outreach in Mexico. Michael's sister, Jennifer, visited the Tarahumara Indians in Mexico's Copper Canyon in 2008 with volunteers Diane McDermott and Elidia Walker. She inspired her brother to give his concert. We also thank Michael's teacher Khin Yee Lo and Michael's mother Michele Freed for their support.



Murwira Orphanage volunteers, Bruce Hamberger (left), and Josh Schaa (right) installing a submersible solar water pump next to an existing hand pump.



We Honor

- Una Yoorin Sicherman Rose's arrival is honored by Carol Sicherman, Sally Lee and Joshua Heisler, Jennifer Izak, Danielle Perrotta and the blessing sent on to the children of Buddha's Smile School,
- The birth of Isaiah Marais is honored by Gail and David Reiner.
- John and Linda Stedman honor Joanna Stedman's birthday and Mother's Day
- Joanna Fernald honors the high school graduation of her daughter Ella Mae who makes her mother very happy and proud.
- Gail and David Reiner honor the marriage of Lisa Jones to Brent Murray.
- Rose Summerton was honored for Mother's Day by Dollie and Veryl Drury.
- Marla White Pestes honors her mother, Deloris White whose Christmas wish is "that someone in need be helped."
- Doranne Cuenco honors the baptism of her son Cameron on October 10, 2009.
- Doreen White honors Katherine and Kelly Fairbanks for Christmas.
- Joan and John Weaver honor the contributions of Kee Flynn and her art which help needy women and children around the world.

We Remember

- Conroy Donesky is honored and remembered by Doranne Donesky Cuenco and Audrey Shaffer.
- Yvonne Macias honors the memory of Buddha's Smile School student, Pankaj Kumar, 12, who's life and dreams ended July, 2009.
- Rose and Virgil Buhler remember the life of Derwood Palmer.
- John and Linda Stedman remember the birthday of John's father, Milton Stedman.
- Marton Coalson is remembered by his grandparents, Evelyn and Bud Reeves.
- Yvonne Miller's life and memory are honored by Evelyn and Bud Reeves
- Linda and Robert Crosier honor the life of Geoff Parker.
- Mary Jane and Robert McBride honor the life of Irene Chericos.

Art for Amistad



By going to the website www.KeeArt.org, Amistad donors can make a donation and also obtain an original painting or an enhanced giclee print by Santa Barbara artist Kee Flynn. Brilliant color and bold composition convey Kee's original treatment of conventional subjects. Her artwork, as seen in many collections, is gloriously vibrant. Sales of Kee Flynn's paintings are considered tax deductible contributions as allowed by law with the proceeds going directly to Amistad International.

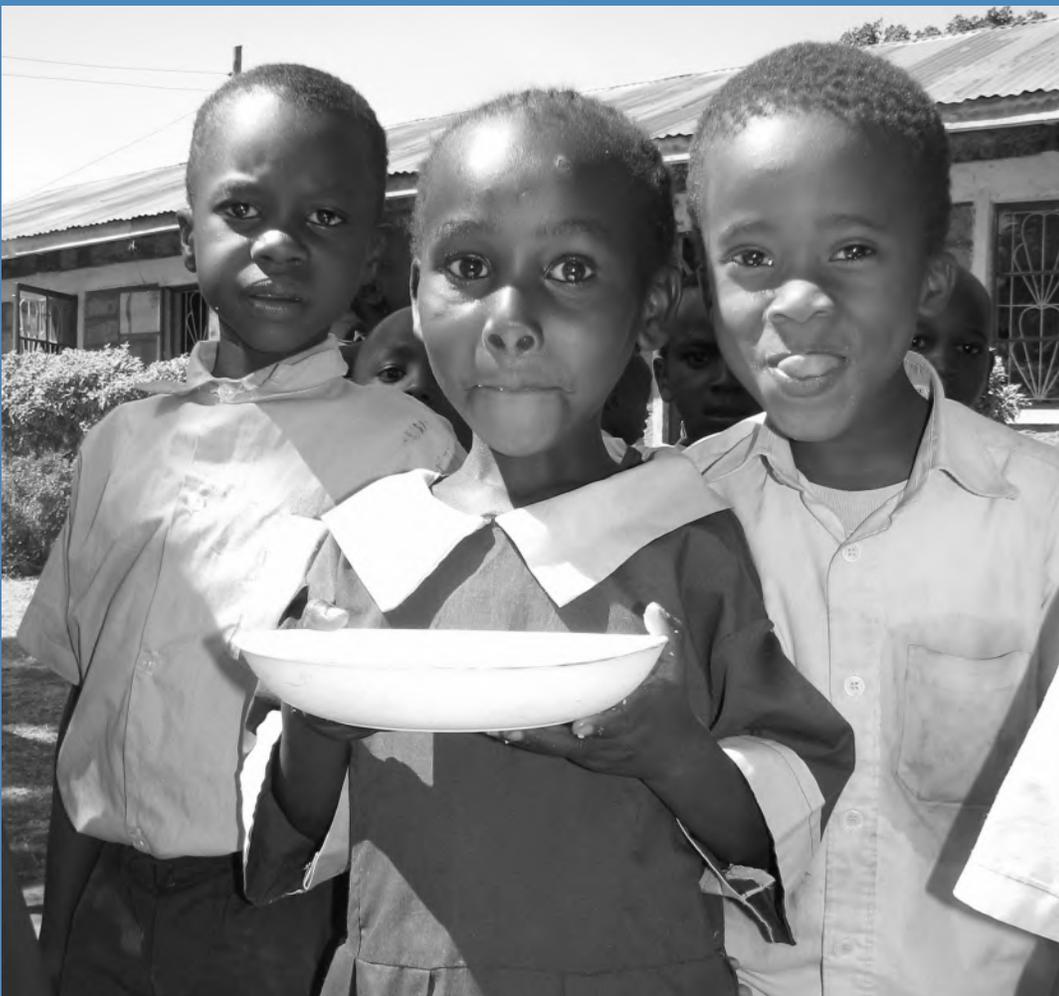
Amri School, Kenya

Impoverished Children Eating and Thriving

The 150 students of Amri School in Kenya are receiving not only an education but also one nutritional meal per day thanks to Amistad International donors. These children, many of whom are heads of household, have little or no food at home and rely on Amri School for their a big hot meal each day. For many of the children, this is their only meal of the day.

The cost for one term to operate Amri School is only \$4,500. This includes all salaries (12 teachers, one principal, one cook and one guard), rent, food costs, and teaching supplies. The teachers are paid a stipend averaging \$50 per month. The staff is extremely dedicated and sacrifice a lot to help these children.

We would deeply appreciate any help for these poverty-stricken students. We do not yet have any funds for Amri's 2010 school year. Please considering helping this school which has no other resources other than our help.



For most Amri students their nourishing lunch at school is their only meal of the day.

Paula Leen's Murwira Orphan's Home: Food Shipments Helping Alleviate Hunger



Murwira Orphans Home founder-director Paula Leen, recovering from a broken arm, had two little companions during her recovery: orphan Tafadzwa who broke his arm falling from a bicycle, and Solomon, 3, who was having orthopedic treatment for his bowed legs.

Paula Leen's Murwira Orphanage in Zimbabwe is surviving due to the unfaltering support of Amistad International donors and despite the devastating conditions that the country is facing. Paula writes: "Unemployment here is 94%. Seven million are undernourished, and are eating bark, wild plants and roots, and bugs and worms. We now have 40 orphans, seven of them under the age of two. Sometimes the children are quite near death when they arrive. Their recovery and healing can be dramatic." One tiny example of such healing is a baby boy whom authorities found in the pit of an outhouse toilet where he had been intentionally abandoned. Police were able to pull baby Moses up by the handles of a bag he was in. He had maggots in his nose and mouth and was very ill. Initially he was hospitalized, but Paula reports that he's now drinking a rich baby formula and gaining strength. Moses is gaining weight and doing well, we're happy to report. "A number of our children have been either emotionally or sexually abused before they arrive," writes Paula. "Some are developmentally delayed, and even though we don't have professionally trained counselors, it is rewarding to see how they thrive with love and care. We have 12 women working in three shifts around the clock taking care of the children. Older children help

with the work. Both boys and girls are learning to wash, iron, cook and clean. The older children take care of the babies and it is wonderful to see how they care for the little ones." Paula is feeding an average of 2,200 people every day in the Mareng/Mutare area. This year Amistad has participated with Agathos Foundation, ZOPOM, Feed My Starving Children, Washington SDA Women's Ministries, and the Maree Noble/Elizabeth Stumpf Memorial Foundation in delivering over fifty tons of food.

Amistad wishes to extend deep gratitude to those who have so generously helped Paula Leen and those around her as they work tirelessly to help the people of Zimbabwe survive, heal, and live. In particular we want to thank volunteers Diana and Bruce Hamberger, Jenna and Joshua Schaa, Cesar Plaza, and Yvonne Wyer for their lengthy stays and contributions of strategic (even heroic) help.

Paula welcomes mature, qualified volunteers. Anyone wishing more information may contact Sandy Schultz, our volunteer coordinator: rifenbark@aol.com. Please take a look at Merikay McLeod's wonderful story about Paula Leen's outreach: http://www.scribd.com/doc/18465792/Retired-with-Orphans-in-Africa?from_email_o4_friend_send=1

400 children at Binehwa school in Zimbabwe are a few of the thousands of hungry helped by the shipments of food to Murwira Orphans Home this year.



Dr. Scott Nelson and His Orthopedic Team's 18th Trip to Haiti



Plastic surgeon Dr. Duncan Miles and burn victim Chantale. Chantale's surgery, done by orthopedic surgeon, Dr. Scott Nelson and Dr. Miles enabled Chantale to be able to stand up. A future surgery by Dr. Nelson and his team will free Chantale's right arm now fused by scars to her body.

Cap Haitien, Haiti: Chantale is a 6 year old girl who was badly burned last year when she sat on a kerosene lantern. Our hearts were saddened when we saw her for the first time last February. Due to the scarring she was unable to stand up, separate her legs or move her right shoulder and elbow. Her caring mother brought her again in June. I promised that I would do something when I returned in September, not knowing if I would have the help I needed to do the case. Fortunately we were joined by Dr. Duncan Miles a plastic surgeon from Loma Linda University. After 5 hours of surgery we were able to excise the scars around the hip joints and rotate some normal tissue into place allowing her once again the freedom to stand up.

The following morning I asked her how she felt and from under her mosquito net she replied,

“Sa va bien et toi monsieur?” “It’s going well sir, and you?” In one of our future trips we will plan to release her shoulder and elbow contractures allowing her the use of her right hand. We were joined on this trip by Dr. Brian Yost, one of my orthopaedic surgery partners from Riverside County Regional Medical Center RCRMC). He also brought with him Louise O’Rourke RN, director of operative services and “Dr. Sagoo 2” one of our excellent ortho residents training at RCRMC. Their expertise, help and donations greatly added to our efficiency, quality of care, and international comraderie.

Dr. Scott Nelson writes us from Santo Domingo, where he been working as a C.U.R.E orthopedic surgeon since 2003. Dr. Nelson’s 19th surgical visit to Haiti is Nov 29-Dec 12, 2009.



Kenya: Amistad Helping Fight Mutilation of Meru Girls

For the last three years, Amistad has been supporting programs led by Kenyan community organizer/agronomist Margaret Ikiara. Margaret's program is Community Initiatives for Rural Development (CIFORD).

Margaret, a member of the Meru tribe, works with the most vulnerable members of her people: AIDS orphans and widows living with AIDS. Her government salaried 'day job' is teaching women how to grow more food through sustainable agriculture. However, not content just to do this valuable work, she also carries out complimentary projects, funded in part by Amistad.

From 2007-2009 Amistad has been sponsoring a program to educate young women against traditional female genital mutilation (FGM) of Meru tribe girls.

This successful two year program was a series of classes to encourage school attendance after puberty, purity, self esteem, and awareness of

STDs, all with the goal of a 'graduation' into womanhood. 62 girls have graduated through the new coming of age rites.

With Amistad's help, Margaret then turned her attention to helping the AIDS orphans and widows living with HIV+. Amistad is providing help for school fees, uniforms, and food for 50 AIDS orphans and to hold seminars and support groups for 30 widows living with AIDS, helping them develop ways in which they could, within the bounds of impaired health, make income for their families.

We are grateful to Dale and Connie Twomley and Christine and Bill Mc Clure for making this new outreach possible.

Here are some of the Meru tribe girls who have gone through healthy modern coming of age rites through CIFORD. The adults in the photo are teachers and sponsors.



Tecolote school kids with Amistad director, Karen Kotoske during her 2009 visit to Mexico's Sierra Huichol.



Huichol Children Thriving in Sierra Huichol

This year I had the opportunity to visit the tiny Huichol Indian village of Tecolote, Nayarit, Mexico, one of three villages where Amistad International sponsors food programs at three Huichol schools. We are helping provide 210 students daily nourishing hot meals.

During our visit we watched as volunteer helpers made hundreds of tortillas, while, on an open fire nearby, they cooked a kettle of beans and another of thick soup, as well as a 10-gallon pot of Atole de Elote, a warm and nourishing milk and corn drink the children love. Just across the

kitchen yard was the new chicken house where the cooks gather eggs daily. The children arrived in an enthusiastic but orderly line, first washing their hands in a big pot outdoors, then filing into the adobe dining room. The children ate with serious concentration; few spoke, for all interest was on the warm, delicious food. It was clear this was their first meal of the day—for some, their only meal for the day.

Thank you, Amistad friends, for providing these children nutritious food to eat.

Amistad Helps Fund a “People’s Co-Op”

Mexico’s Huichol Indians, subsistence farmers in the area around San Miguel Huaixtita, experienced a severe drought during this fall and lost over 1/2 their corn and bean crops. Amistad made an interest-free loan of \$1,350 USD to the village so they could open a low-cost food store. They opened their new “Diconsa” store August 27.

Now the farmers are able buy the basic foods which they weren’t able to grow at 60-100% less than the regular cost, and other basic foods which they need.



The new Huichol Indian low cost co-op food store in San Miguel Huaixtita. Amistad loaned the start-up funds interest free to the village.

Lambano Sanctuary’s Good News

The Lambano Sanctuary is a home for HIV+ babies and children in Johannesburg, South Africa. Amistad’s donors who have been helping will be gratified to learn the Belgium government has provided the funds for the purchase and renovation of a home to be made into a hospice for terminally-ill Lambano children in need of special end of life care. But we are grateful to tell you that most of the Lambano children are doing well because of anti-retroviral medicines, good nutrition and enormous amounts of love from their Lambano family.

Lambano’s staff tells us about an 8 year-old girl with AIDS who arrived at Lambano this year with bronchiectasis—an obstructive lung disease.

She was on full-time oxygen and her growth was stunted; she was only the size of a 4 year-old. After the staff began a rigorous regime of physiotherapy and medication, they were able to take her off oxygen. The pulmonologist is amazed at how well she is doing; he was certain this precious child would die.

Although we mourn that there is a need for such homes for babies, we are grateful for the compassionate mothering staff of Lambano who cares so tenderly for these children.

Please check out Lambano’s web blog address <http://lambano.blogspot.com> for the most current news about Lambano children.



The children, staff and volunteers of Lambano Sanctuary, Johannesburg, South Africa.

Unsung Heroes of Compassion Honored in San Francisco

The founder/directors of two programs that Amistad International assists have been given awards as Unsung Heroes of Compassion from the Wisdom in Action Foundation in San Francisco, California, April 26, 2009.

Tibetan spiritual leader the Dalai Lama presented awards to Rajan Kaur of Varanasi, India who is the founder/director of Buddha's Smile School, and Urmi Basu, the founder/director of New Light in Kolkata, India. Rajan, Urmi and 47 other honorees were the guests at a luncheon of 600 who came to honor them. These Unsung Heroes were selected because "they have set the course of their hearts toward truth and love. In doing so, they have become beacons, lanterns, mentors, inspirations and exemplars for us all."

Since returning to India, Rajan tells us that she has even more strength and energy to teach and inspire her students.

Urmi Basu, founder of New Light shelters for children of sex workers in Calcutta has been written about in an award winning book, *Half the Sky*, by Nicholas D. Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn, (Alfred A. Knopf pub. 2009.)

Filmmaker Alexia Pritchard's film, *Soma Girls* had it's world premiere November 13, 2009 in New York City at the Mahindra Indo-American Arts Council Film Fest 2009. To obtain a DVD of this beautiful film about the girls of Soma Home go to <http://www.somagirls.org>.

Amistad International's donors provided the start-up money in 2005 which enabled Urmi Basu to open Soma Home.

Ivett Gets a Mommy

Right: Little Ivett, a starving girl abandoned at Casa Huichol (CH) refuge in Guadalajara, Mexico, with her new mommy, Maria Luisa, a single Huichol woman who works at CH. Now Ivett is blessed with love, good food and best of all, a new mommy.

Maria Luisa, an employee of Casa Huichol in Guadalajara, Mexico, (a hospice and refuge where we take Huichol Indian patients whom we fly from the Sierra), recently faced a difficult dilemma: A few months prior, a Huichol woman arrived at Casa Huichol, unwrapped a severely malnourished child, and then the mother disappeared. Maria Luisa took baby Ivett into her heart and began to give her tender love, along with the simple diet provided at Casa Huichol. Discovering that she had fallen in love with this tiny child, 25 year-old Maria Luisa had to decide what to do. As a deeply impoverished single woman with no marriage prospects, Maria Luisa wanted very much to be a mother. So, she decided to adopt Ivett.

When friend of Amistad, Kay Prins of San Luis Obispo (herself a mother of a grown adopted son) learned about Ivett's adoption, she and her husband Steve began providing special pediatric nutritional supplementation and clothing for Ivett. Thank you, Kay and Steve!



Muwira Home's Love Transforming Children: Volunteer Greta Shuler's Story

After a year of missing the children of Murwira Children's Home, I was able to go see them again. I hardly recognized several of the younger ones who had grown into plump toddlers running around the yard lined with papaya trees. But that's what a year at Paula Leen's Murwira Children's Home (MCH) will do for the orphans who arrive there, transform them from slender and somber to rosy and playful. Sometimes the change only takes a month.

When I arrived in July, one of the new babies was sickeningly skinny. Vongai's head looked alien on her frail body, and her sad expression made her look far older than two years. The wonderful volunteers who were there when I arrived, the Hambergers, realized Vongai needed much more than food. Her slim limbs were chilled in the cool of July, winter in Zimbabwe, and she never smiled. With extra affection from the Hambergers, and the continued affection of myself and the next volunteer, Magali Schroll, Vongai was smiling and eating. As her body plumped and her eyes brightened, she became beautiful with big dark eyes and a delicate mouth. By the time we left, Vongai would grab your forefinger and laugh. She seemed like a new child.

As much as I adore the babies, my favorite pastime at MCH was climbing the mountain with the older children. "Gomo?" I would ask, saying mountain in the local language Shona, and the children would clamor to the gate. The orphanage backs up to a lovely mountain—green with small cliffs of flat-topped rocks. The children practically run up the foot path, but always make sure to wait for me, Aunty Greta, and the smallest ones—usually Tawanda, who adventurously follows the big kids. The children sing church songs, and Mona Lisa, who's first in her class, even recites passages from the Bible. Brenda, fifteen, helps with the younger ones and answers the multiplication problems I give her—Manu and Teresa count on their fingers trying to answer first. When Brenda says that she wants to be an



Murwira orphan Vongai who arrived at Murwira orphanage malnourished but is now thriving.

airline stewardess, quickly the younger girls agree that they want to be one too. Trinity and Terrence, the twins who are only alike in their sweet disposition, say they want to be pilots. Trinity shyly offers me some wild edible berries, his own mouth stained with the juice. When I decline, he says, "that's OK, Aunty Greta. When you're black, you can eat them." When we arrive at the top of the mountain, we can see all of Murwira. The children shout out to the orphanage workers—just specks below us. We lounge or explore until 5:00, then descend to Murwira. The children must carry water from the well in buckets on their heads for bath time.

I cannot wait to return to MCH next summer. I hope to see the new baby who was found in a pit toilet, covered in worms and human waste. I hope that he, like the other children, will be strong and smiling when I return. It is hard to be away from the children after spending a month with them, but it is even harder to imagine all of what I would have missed if I hadn't gone back.

Greta Schuler is from Washington, DC, and is a two-time volunteer who plans to return to Murwira. Thank you, Greta, for being a wonderful aunty to the Murwira children.

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Amistad International

1657 Edgewood Drive

Palo Alto, California 94303

Phone: (650) 328-1737

Fax: (650) 289-0692

Web: www.amistadinternational.org

Email: tomamistad@aol.com