

# Making a difference in Kenya



Ann Lipson

*I always found it helpful to have fellowship with like-minded people*

## It's only 21 in Celsius!

What is a retired teacher doing imagining she is 21 again? We all have our quirks and maybe this is mine! I've recently had my 70th birthday and one of my cards encouraged me not to worry about reaching 70: 'After all, it's only 21 in Celsius!'

I started my first teaching job (in a state grammar school in the Midlands in England) a few weeks before my 21st birthday. In those days they were so desperate for Science teachers that I was appointed to teach with a degree, but no Post-Graduate Certificate in Education. I came from a family of Physicists and I loved teaching, so cut my teeth in the classroom – or lab really – under an excellent Christian head of department. Not only did he mentor me as a teacher, but also spiritually. God certainly answered my prayers to be in the place of His choice.

I joined Inter-Schools Christian Fellowship, then the Association of Christian Teachers (so I guess I am a Founder Member of ACT!). I always found it helpful to have fellowship with other like-minded people and I really enjoyed the ISCF sixth form science courses. Being part of ISCF, and then ACT, was important to me – both as a Christian and as a teacher.

## God's choice

After 15 years teaching in England, including being part of the trials team for the Nuffield Foundation Science Teaching project in 1964–1965, I came to Kenya on an ODA (Overseas Development Administration; now the Department



Eager DEC Class One members



A student volunteer enjoying time with the children

for International Development) posting to teach A Level Physics in a girls' secondary boarding school in rural Kenya. The contract was for two-and-a-half years, so what has kept me here for 34 years?

In the UK, I had always taught in mixed state day schools and here was I in a very rural girls' boarding school. We had prayed before I left that the Kenyan Government posting would be to the place of God's choice, so I knew that I was where He wanted me.

Here in Kenya, almost all good secondary schools (and many primary as well) are boarding schools. Many students live a very long way from the school to which they are called and often home conditions are not conducive to studying. They may live in a simple mud walled house with no electricity or clean running water.

## *I came from a family of Physicists and I loved teaching*

Boarding students are in school 24/7 for three months, with maybe the occasional games outing for some. Our school had a good Christian Union which was responsible for Sunday services in school as well as CU meetings. Most schools in our part of Kenya have a Christian foundation, so the opportunities for fellowship and sharing Christian teaching and values are great.

## **Learning to improvise**

In the 70s, my first lesson with my 1st Year students was on how to switch on lights and use water and gas taps in the lab. (Very few girls had electricity at home, or in their primary schools, and for many carrying water from a standpipe or stream was an all-too-familiar daily chore.) Yes, I was in one of the top girls' schools, offering A Level Physics, so we had some facilities, including bottled gas. The generator was on only for prep in the evening and great was our rejoicing when we were eventually connected to mains electricity. Imagine teaching A Level Physics without power! Water was also a BIG problem! It was good to learn to improvise.

I joined the Kenya Students' Christian Fellowship Associates. We were mainly, but not entirely, teachers. I went out to preach at Sunday services in other schools, sometimes travelling great distances on uneven roads. One of the advantages of the ODA contract was the availability of a car loan, so I was able to get a second-hand car. I was one of the very few teachers with a car. Consequently, I was asked to drive brides to Christian weddings and to help take new babies home from the mission hospital next to the school.

## *The aim is to prepare the people to take charge of their own destiny, through God*

When the ODA contracts ended, I was offered a local contract. The salary was not high, but I knew I was where God wanted me. I stayed in the same school, and the same little school house, until I retired – teaching and helping the Christian Union leaders to run the spiritual activities in the school. When I was due to leave the school, I had no intention of going to vegetate in England! I had many requests to remain in Western Kenya, but God led me to join a group of young local Christians, who I already knew, who had started an amazing new venture. Thanks to a timely legacy, I was able to build a house together



A DEC pupil intent on a copy of the *Book of Hope*



Small group counselling for traumatised children

with the Mission Director and his family not far from where we have now established our Mission Headquarters.

## IcFEM

Interchristian Fellowships' Evangelical Mission is an indigenous mission. Most of our staff are local people and know the needs of their own in a way people from outside cannot possibly do. It is a great joy to serve God here. Many consider me as one of them after living here more than half my life! I certainly know a lot about the homes and needs of secondary schoolgirls.

We are situated about 100km to the west of Eldoret, on the slopes of Mt Elgon, in a very beautiful area near the Ugandan border. Although we are almost on the equator, it is not excessively hot here because of the altitude. This is an agricultural area and we grow bananas, sugar cane, maize and beans.

The IcFEM school, farm and hospital site, known as 'Dreamland' [Dreamland Education Centre – DEC], is on the border of Bungoma and Mt Elgon Districts and many of our students and patients come from the mountain. It is called Dreamland because we got the land as a result of a dream and we have many dreams for it – but that is another story!

*IcFEM has a wonderful vision for community transformation*

Mt Elgon District was a place of much unrest before, during and after the disputed December 2007 presidential elections. Schools were closed and people (mainly women and children) ran for their lives – very many came to Kimilili.

IcFEM has a wonderful vision for community transformation. Each village of about 110 households has a Fellowship of at least 25 people. Forty (or more) such Fellowships join together into a Local Transformation Unit. We already have 10 Units and by the end of 2009 may have 20. In January 2009 we had more than 600 Village Fellowships. The aim is to prepare the people to take charge of their own destiny, through God. IcFEM has had a very positive impact, especially in Kimilili, where there was no outbreak of violence – unlike many other parts of Western Kenya – following the December 2007 elections.

## Education matters

As well as our IcFEM schools, we have been able to improve facilities in a number of local primary and secondary schools, thanks to partnership with Children Alone Trust (UK), the Kimilili Trust (UK), Harambee Foundation (Holland) and Educans (Holland). These partnerships include buildings, teachers' seminars and sponsorship/scholarships for needy bright children. Education is high priority in this part of Kenya.

Over the years the Interchristian Fellowships' Evangelical Mission has helped many very needy secondary pupils. These include children from



Three top girls in DEC are now in good secondary schools

Mt Elgon, which is a very poor and sometimes troubled area. The primary scholarship programme currently includes about 25 children (out of 300 pupils) at Dreamland Education Centre. Potential scholars are recommended from their local communities as very needy and bright. They are then called for interview. One girl walked, with her mother, 40km to come for the interview. Thankfully she was selected and is now a boarder.

## Jane and Diana

A number of boys and girls have successfully passed through our secondary sponsorship programme. Jane is one example. She comes from an extremely poor home but, thanks to sponsorship, was able to attend the top girls' school in Western Province (the one where I myself taught for over 24 years). Jane completed her secondary education and is now at university reading for a degree in Computer Engineering.

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Diana is another beneficiary of our secondary sponsorship programme. When we first met her she was an orphan cared for by a Fellowship member in a poor area of Mt Elgon. A friend of mine sponsored her through secondary school, where she was among the top students in Mt Elgon District. Using her own initiative she applied for a Kenya Government scholarship programme for needy girls to study Science. She was selected – one of four in the nation and the only one from Western Kenya – to do an Engineering Diploma. Diana is now studying Electrical Engineering in Nairobi.

## How can you help?

We are currently looking for sponsors to help to give scholarships to more very needy children – our aim is to offer five in each class. Anyone interested in joining in this amazing work can contact Roz Jenkins at Children Alone Trust, [childrenalone@hotmail.com](mailto:childrenalone@hotmail.com)

## *With your help many more needy gifted Kenyan children could be given life-transforming opportunities*



One of the local primary schools helped by IcfEM

We are also looking for schools and Sunday schools that are willing to partner us and especially to help to educate a needy child – both in primary and secondary school. We are also looking for practical and financial help to put up more very much needed boarding facilities.

With your help many more needy gifted Kenyan children could be given life-transforming opportunities to develop their gifts, talents and interests for the benefit of their family, community and nation and, in so doing, bring honour and glory to the Saviour of All, our Lord Jesus Christ.

■ Ann Lipson

### IcfEM information

Visitors are very welcome to come to join in this amazing work in Kenya, or just visit for a holiday. We have a very nice, comfortable Guest House (with both electricity and water). For more information, see [www.gap-volunteers.icfem-mission.org](http://www.gap-volunteers.icfem-mission.org), and current news can be found on [www.icfem-mission.blogspot.com](http://www.icfem-mission.blogspot.com) which we try to keep up to date – power and Internet connection permitting.

The Kimilili Office in Kenya is our International Headquarters, but we also have a small Liaison Office in Nairobi and a wonderful small group of volunteers in the UK co-ordinated from a one-roomed office in Salisbury.

In fact, at the time of writing, the UK office needs more help and would love to be contacted by recently-retired teachers with a little time to spare. Please note: volunteers don't even need to live near Salisbury – they could work from their own home anywhere in the UK.

For more information, please contact us at:

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