

Jambo friends and family

Just enjoying my last night in Mombasa before heading off towards Europe tomorrow morning. Time to share some thoughts about the last week in Malindi with you my friends.

Sunday June 3rd

Arriving in Mombasa, taking a cab towards Malindi. It's raining and I mean it's RAINING and I start wondering if this spontaneous trip to Kenya was such a good idea. The road has up to 1m deep bumps, car ziczacing around 'em. Road partially being flooded.

We arrive in the children centre in Malindi. All 63 children gather for the Sunday service, dressed up in their best clothes, welcoming me with BIG smiles, shy handshakes, some hugs, little posters on the walls and telling about their prayers for a safe journey. When they start singing 'Asante' (Thank you) the bad weather is forgotten, I'm here to visit my little friends and see how everyone is doing. There's not much better than an African children's choir, singing full-hearted, just supported by a self-made drum.

The afternoon it's time to play volleyball with the teenagers and tossing stones with the small ones. Funny as always I arrive mentally very quickly. Life is so simple and pure down here that it makes me feel homey within minutes. Switching off all rational thoughts, just trusting emotions, being a human. Children open up, tell what has happened since the last visit, getting closer, seeking body contact, beading my hair, tickling, giggling, gathering together and we spend some wonderful hours.

All kids look well, healthy, no more fungus on their heads. Most striking is little Charo. He's a little 2 year old boy. Last November he was always trying to get on one of the adult's lap, seeking some motherly comfort. NOW he's a little strong boy, running around with his friends, making handsprings (Radschlagen), looping, looping, looping and finishing with a proud smile. He is so small that it makes everyone laugh watching him.



The older boys show me around proudly and show what has happened at Spirit of Faith within the last half year:

- **The number of children at the centre is now 64.**
- **A new dormitory has been built and will be finished shortly to take up to 30 new children.**
- **The compound looks very neat, some trees and flowers at the entrance, all grass cut short to keep away the snakes**
- **The clinic has been opened and supporting children of the centre, of all schools on the compound and staff.**
- **Next to the 3 classes of the kindergarden the first 5 of 8 classes of the primary school have been opened for children of the centre as well as outreach children living near by**
- **First 30 students have been graduated from the training centre (literacy classes + agriculture + facility management), all found traineeships and a job afterwards. The 2nd course of agriculture and catering started earlier this year.**

- **There're a lot of fields around the training centre where different vegetables and grains are being planted, testing which grow best in Malindi's climate (European spinach doing better than the local one surprisingly) and supporting the centre's kitchen.**

Monday June 4th

I have a chance to talk to Veronica. She and her 5 siblings were abandoned by their parents when they were small, growing up at the other children centre near Nairobi. After years of search they finally found their mother, who is in prison having severe alcohol and drug problems. 2 of Veronica's brothers have a similar lifestyle as their mother, the other sisters are living far away, so it's Veronica who tries to take care of her mom a bit. After visiting her she's now calling regularly, begging to help getting her out of prison, forgiving her of the past. Veronica just found back her mom, full of hope and now this... Veronica also tells about the workshop she attended about HIV education and turns away shyly whenever talking about sexual issues. She sees it now as her duty to educate the mamas of the centre, the older children to break the ban that's forced on people with HIV/AIDS down here. She is one of the local women who'll make a difference...

When Veronica starts talking about her beloved singing her eyes brighten up again. Lately she recorded a CD with 4 songs with the children from the centre as a background choir. Need to get one.



During school breaks the compound is filled with students in red and blue t-shirts. On Monday and Friday there're sports classes, on 'regular' days they were blue-white checkered uniforms. At the end of the day the entire school gathers for a sport competition, red against blue. One girl, one boy of every grade competing against one another. Running to a bucket filled with water, filling empty bottle with it, running around a tree, getting back, emptying it again and running over the finish line. The air is filled with laughter, clapping, cheering, splashing water and ... rain. Wonderful ;o)

Tuesday June 5th

Students of the catering course at the training centre have a practical training today, learning to cook with traditional stoves, gas as well as electricity. They serve the people of the office a 3 course menu, asking for evaluation at the end. I never thought I would eat crème caramel in a children centre in Kenya, how yummy...

Wednesday June 6th

Car got stuck in the mud all day yesterday (road to the centre flooded that it can only be reached by foot via the prison's compound...) so that only today we can finally go on outreach.

- **The streetwork programme is supporting currently 54 families with food + medicine + education for the children to support children with HIV related problems remaining at their families. Children of another 10 families are being sent to school.**

Last year we met Maitha, a single father of 4 children, HIV positive, lying on the ground of his Makuti (mud hut) more dead than alive after having refused taking medication to fight AIDS. We rushed him into hospital, not sure if he would survive the night. After some transfusions, he was ready to get some blood from me which made him strong enough to take the quite aggressive HIV medication. I hardly recognise Maitha, he is walking upright, looking healthy, well nourished, well dressed, just preparing dinner for his children. Being a bit nervous about my 'official' visit ;o) The outreach programme helped him to start a little business, giving 7 boda bodas to him (bicycle taxis), driving one himself and renting the others out. He no longer needs support from the programme. Unbelievable that a bit of

blood and medication has saved this man's life, ensuring 4 children not to become orphans! A true WOW moment.



In total **7 families have been supported by starting up little businesses** so far, some doing so well that they do not need any further support (except children's school fees. Primary school is free down here, however uniforms, shoes, pencils, books still need to be paid, too much for the low income of most), giving a chance to other families in need to join the programme.

On the other hand we meet families where some of the children or relatives died. Some of the newly take ins have not taken their medication correctly, their health status being critical. Koki quickly explains the case history of every family, a lot of sexual abuse, transmitting the virus freely. Women just don't have a voice down here, they dare to say 'no', condoms are a 'no go' for most men, mothers cannot protect their daughters. Most houses don't have lockable doors. One of the girls is meeting her rapist every day on the way to school. No comment. These histories still make me speechless.

Thursday June 7th

Another practical day at the catering class of the training centre, this time serving professionally, the students prepared the 'Blessed Restaurant' with a written menu, flowers on the table and self-baked bread. Really well done!

I'm having a chat with Ria. Nancy (the little girl I support) and Quinta were taken in the centre in 2005 when their mother was close to dying of AIDS and begged Ria to take care of her 2 smallest girls. Due to good medication and food of the outreach programme she survived surprisingly but refuses to take her children back. There's a new law that orphans should stay a few weeks per year at their families if any relatives are known. Nancy has been very homesick since she came back from her mom in april, still wetting her bed every night, stuttering more strongly at school. Ria and me agree that children should be with their parents whenever. Especially with a lovely woman like this mother is. She'll get a donation to start a small business shortly and we discuss if we should link this money to a rule that she has to take back her children. On the other hand we know about the violence in this family. The older sisters have been 'kidnapped' by an uncle to Nairobi, being sent into prostitution. One has returned with 2 children, being a teenager herself. HIV status unknown. Emotionally we don't want these 2 adorable girls to grow up in such an environment, however the mother could end up in jail if she abandons her children officially. There's no right or wrong. Both girls will stay in the centre.

Koki's mother invited me for dinner. Koki's sister is also present, having a huge abscess on one of her legs. Koki asks me to convince her sister that she should follow the doctor's advise that the lower leg needs to be amputated. Other doctor's have another opinion and suggest surgery. Even if Koki is social worker at the centre having quite a good income, emergencies like this ruin her financially that she pushes for the amputation rather than a long treatment. I just couldn't tell the sister that she should go for the amputation. Now her father or older brother is coming from far to convince the sister. Unbelievable that the amputation of a leg is based on finances. Welcome to Kenya!

Friday June 8th

Children gather for an official farewell and we sing together and dance. Ach ja...

Saturday June 9th

Koki is welcoming me proudly in her new house (stone house! 3 rooms!), showing me how to cook traditional recipes. Quick stop at the children centre for another farewell + promise to be back soon + hugging and off it goes to Mombassa again. Water much less on the road. Some work on the roads has been done, some of the larger holes being filled with mud. The sun is shining.

Another trip full of mixed emotions, what a crazy world. I'm feeling very much ALIVE!
Asante sana children & Koki!!

Kwaheri & hope to be back soon

