

Sawubona!

That's how they say "hello" in siSwati, the first language for most who live in Swaziland, from where our family has recently returned.

We are the Jones family—Scott, Kathy, Jack and Madeline—and we are longtime friends and supporters of Peter and Mary Jean Kopp and New Life Childrens Homes. From the time our own kids were small, Scott and I (Kathy) have dreamed of taking them to Africa to meet the two New Life Homes (NLH) children we support there. For a variety of reasons, this was the year for it, and so in August we boarded the first of three flights that would eventually deposit us in Swaziland.



I can't begin to tell you what it meant to put our arms around our two sponsored kids, to be able to hear firsthand Mukelo's infectious laugh and Nosipho's drawled "yeess." Spending time with them confirmed what we long suspected: that these two must surely be among the most beautiful, smart, and winsome children in Africa.

We were also struck by the cohesiveness and camaraderie of the NLH team, which in addition to Peter and Mary Jean currently includes Tommy and Mandi Bottoms and Tiersa Chaffin. If you haven't met these God-loving, people-serving folks, you can learn more about all they are doing on the African Leadership Partners website at www.africanleadershippartners.org. Click on "New Life Homes" to learn more. Among these five staff there is a great deal of mutual respect for shared passions—for the farm, the school, and above of all, the kids—as well as an appreciation for each individual's gifts.

Our family did our best to make ourselves useful around NLH. Scott, with Jack's assistance, taught a few basic classes in circuit-building and computer programming, and also helped with some projects around the farm. Madeline and I lent a hand in Mandi's Grade 3-4 class and worked on some crafts with the kids.

While in Swaziland, I found myself missing clean floors, closet space, lamp light, paved roads, recycling, and ice. Now that we're back in Seattle, I miss rainbows of clothing drying on the line, happy children playing soccer in my front yard, the laid-back pace of Swazi-time, broccoli and brown eggs bought fresh off the farm, and roosters crowing at the crack of dawn.

Okay, maybe not that last one! You know the story about roosters awakening with the dawn? Complete myth!! Roosters are awake all hours of the night, and they let you know it too.

But hanging out with the kids—all of the NLH kids—was by far the best part of our visit, and we can now understand the wisdom of Peter's practice: when discouragement hits, he spends time with the kids.

Because the kids are at the heart of everything that goes on at NLH.



As these kids are growing up, however, there is an increasing concern for what their futures will look like. At present, NLH is able to meet their biggest needs—for shelter and food, health care and education, and above all, love.

But as more of the NLH kids are reaching their teen years, the question of what comes next looms large. Chief among this concern is how to continue to educate them in a way that will poise them for success. At it stands today, the state of education in Swaziland is, as one NLH staff member put it, bad and getting worse. To be clear: New Life Schools (pre-school and primary) are an exception,

bringing the light of hope to an otherwise bleak academic landscape. We were surprised to learn that about half of the students at New Life Schools are not from New Life Homes but from the surrounding community. New Life Schools have a reputation for excellence, and many local parents send their young children to walk many kilometers, so that they may take part in the best their entire region offers.

But resources—especially well-trained teachers—are stretched thin. At present, New Life Primary teaches only to seventh grade. Beyond that, students—including NLH kids—must attend a local public secondary school where the quality of education is often indifferent, at best. Many students, even the best ones, regress once they get to secondary school. They grow discouraged because teachers are not adequately trained to teach, and student progress suffers. Many public school teachers routinely beat their students.

What Peter and Mary Jean covet most right now are your prayers: for wisdom and guidance, and for the provision of quality Primary School teaching staff.

But even beyond this—beyond primary and secondary school—what we saw was the need to provide for higher education. We would love to see African Leadership Partners, Inc., the umbrella organization for New Life Homes, open a new fund for education, to provide tertiary schooling (beyond high school) for NLH kids. These are bright, spirited children, who deserve a shot at continuing education. One of our NLH kids dreams of becoming a doctor, the other a teacher. Having met them and their brothers and sisters at NLH, we see their enormous potential, as well as this great need.



We have begun a conversation with Peter and Mary Jean about organizing a fund that would provide NLH children a tertiary education. If you would like to partner with us, please drop them a line and they will point you in the right direction.

Joining you in God's grace~

Kathy Jones & family