

Together we are changing lives... one girl at a time.

## Report from Top Ride School

**By the teachers, students and volunteers**

### **A Message from Principal Peter Waweru**

Top Ride came into being on 13th January, 1998. On that date we enrolled our first eleven students. There were three teachers to welcome them to a two-roomed wooden hall. The first year was very tough, and when it came to an end we breathed a sigh of relief and looked forward to better things to come. Shortly thereafter, we met Debby Rooney and Lisa Stevens, the co-founders of BEADS for Education.

Ever since, the going has become better by the day. Our students number 401. Our teaching staff is now at 21, all of them qualified, highly committed and motivated. They are always available to help, and for that reason the performance of the school on national exams has been good. In 2008, our 43 candidates for the 8<sup>th</sup> grade graduation had a mean score of 330/500, a very impressive average. Our school was ranked 23rd out of 248 schools in the district!

Today we are proud to own a whole block of permanent structures for classes 3-8, with three more under construction for the preschool. These will be complete in a month's time thanks to our many donors. We are also so pleased with our unique shade structure donated by Fabric Architecture of England. Despite our classroom growth, we are still stretched to the limit with our boarding facilities, which now house 174 girls and 62 boys. We are continually thinking of how to improve on it, but for now we say: so far so good. About 140 of our 277

current girl students are sponsored through BEADS for Education. (almost all of the 5<sup>th</sup> through 8th grade girls are sponsored) BEADS is the best thing that happened in the short life of Top Ride, and Debby Rooney is the best person that I came to know. Together, we have changed the lives of girls and made education a joy rather than a burden.

It would be a long list if I tried to name every person who has contributed to our growth, but I will mention just a few: Susan Heersink, who has bought and brought many books, and trained teachers and students in how to use them and the library; Becky Evans, a good lady who has taken very good books from other institutions and spent her own money to send them to Kenya; Sue Little, the owner of Jabberwocky Bookstore in Newburyport, MA, who provides all the books at wholesale costs. She also visited us with her daughter, Morgan, and organized books in the library late into the night. Many generous donors make possible our wonderful library, many programs, building of the teacher's housing and new classrooms. These donors' gifts have been essential in our continued growth. And special to our girls' sponsors who have paid for a girl or two to attend school. By doing so, they help not only the girl, but her whole family—and Kenya in general. It is often said, "To educate a girl is to educate a nation." We cannot get enough words to thank you, especially now there is a financial crisis in your country. Our hearts go to all of you for the many good things that you have done. God bless you in a mighty way.

## Development News

Everywhere you look at Top Ride, development is happening. In the blazing afternoon sun, workmen place another layer of cement blocks on the rising walls of the new preschool building. Across the playing field, which is black dust instead of grass after seven rainless months, the structure of the teacher residences is rising—thanks to the MacLean Family.



Workers are progressing with the construction of a new suite of classrooms on the West edge of campus, and below our beautiful new shade structure.



...And a new teacher residence on the East edge!



It is hard to believe that the school has grown so much, from just a single wood building to a regular campus of multi-story concrete classrooms in just over a decade. The Top Ride community is very grateful for the generous donations that have made this incredible growth possible.



Morgan Little reads aloud to the students. This is one of the students' favorite activities.

## **BEADS Special Programs**

*by Ann Wambui, Directress, Special Programs*

*BEADS for Education Intern (#9)*

In addition to directly supporting the education of girls through school fees, BEADS supports several other special programs. Some of these include a Gardening Program, Book Clubs, Adult Literacy, interactive teaching programs and informational sessions on FGM and girls' rights, AIDS & HIV Prevention, Environmental Education, Local Wildlife, and Mentoring & Career Guidance. In each newsletter, the current directress, a BEADS intern, will talk in greater detail about one of these, as well as giving updates on the program in general.

This marks the first year that an intern has been officially assigned to oversee the special programs, and several of the projects are also in their first year. It is exciting and challenging to work towards positive change in so many areas. We believe that our efforts will change our community and our students for the better, for the present and the future.

### **Gardening**

This is one of the most interesting lessons. Pupils from different classes join me (Intern Ann Wambui) in the evening for the gardening lessons. I always demonstrate to them how to plant vegetables each term. Last term we planted kales and this term we have a nursery for some spices. We give them water twice a day. These skills are useful to the pupils in their daily lives apart from class work and it is also a kind of exercise for healthier bodies.

This project mainly deals with growing vegetables. I first demonstrate to the pupils how to go about it & later we do it together. Mostly I work with class six pupils especially six East girls. After class they go looking for me everywhere so that we can water the young plants together. They are always looking forward to the day the vegetables will be ready for them to "celebrate their achievements."

There is one amazing boy who can't go unmentioned; his name is Rodgers. He does the watering without my supervision. Every time there is no water in the school compound he gets water for plants and makes sure they are never dry. Whenever we meet with him he will ask me, "teacher when are we going to eat the vegetables?" This makes me feel that he has the passion for whatever he is doing. Congratulations Rodgers for the good work.

## Library Update

by Timothy Kiguta – Top Ride Teacher

In 2004, Top Ride was a six-year-old toddler barely able to stand. Textbooks were scarce, forcing the staff to make do with two or three in a class of fifteen – and the storybooks were just not there.

Then BEADS, with philanthropist D. W. hatched the idea of sponsoring a school library. Soon the first batch of 670 classical titles came. Sue Little, the owner of the Jabberwocky Bookstore in Newburyport, MA, provides all the books wholesale. The D.W. Library and Sue Little reading room have been expanding rapidly over the past few years. The walls are now lined with bookshelves marked with sections like “Young Adult,” “Science,” “Biography,” and “Children’s Literature.” Near the desk of the librarian (a BEADS intern position created this year) several shelves are devoted to class sets (20 or more copies) of *Maasai and I*, *Charlotte’s Web*, *Jambo Means Hello* and many other titles, at all different reading levels. Groups of students work at the large wooden table and sprawl on the cool cement floor, doing research in the World Book Encyclopedia or reading for pleasure.



Two girls pursue research in the library.

We’ve witnessed a heightened appetite for reading and enhanced general knowledge. The library has become a hub of activity for not only the learners but also the staff and community around. It’s become the pride of Top Ride and a glowing candle, lighting the minds of those who imbibe knowledge therein. I feel honored to have had the chance to run it for the last six years. And look forward to many more years.

Several programs have been started by the librarians, such as reading aloud, book clubs, and class visits to the library. They will describe each of these programs in greater detail in subsequent newsletters. Thank you to all who have supported us in our growth. Long live Top Ride. Long live the D. W. Library and the Sue Little Reading Room.

## Interview with a BEADS Sponsored Girl Rachel Wanjiru, Grade 7

by Bridget Broomfield, BEADS Volunteer



When I met Rachel last year, she was up to her elbows in the innards of a goat that had just been slaughtered, holding up its heart and saying "ventricles! Ventricles!"

When you read about her career plans below, this might seem less bizarre. Meet Rachel Wanjiru!

### Q. Where are you from?

I am from the Kajiado district, near Kenchic. There are not many people there. Now I stay at Top Ride during the school term.

### Q. Tell us about your family.

I have one brother, named Hanan. We live with our grandparents, Theresa and Thomas Wanjiru. We do not know where our parents are. We live in a house which is near a seasonal river – it is not there most of the year.

### Q. How long have you been sponsored?

I have been sponsored for seven years. My sponsor is Kerry Henkels and I love writing to her and getting her letters.

### Q. What would your life be like if you were not in school?

Boring! If I had never gone to school, I probably would have started working by the age of 10.

### Q. Do you like school? What is your favorite subject?

I like school very much! My favorite subject is science because we get to know more about everything around us.

### Q. What are your hopes for the future – what do you hope to do with your education?

I hope to become a surgeon.

### Q. Wow! That will take a lot of work, and schooling. Do you think you can handle another 12 years of school?

Yes! I will be patient.

### Q. What message would you send to people who are considering becoming a BEADS sponsor?

It is good when you help people who are in need. In many communities of Africa, learning is not prized as it is at Top Ride. The teachers here are concerned with the students and want us to have a bright future.



Young students are excited about being in school.

## Top Ride Statistics

**Principal:** Peter Waweru

**Head Teacher:** Seth Mulamula

**Deputy Head Teacher:** Josephine Wandimi

### Faculty:

Timothy Kiguta	Lawrence Obonyo
Evalyne Mwima	Francis Mwangi
David Nyaga	Nyaga Severio
Alfonse Mutinda	Jeremia Mutuku
Janet Wanyonyi	Peter Ofisi
Patrick Wambugu	Margaret Luyo
Janet Muriithi	Alice Mwampi
Milka Wambui	Sarah Gathori
Cecilia Nasieku	Gladys Mebo

**Matron:** Esther Njenga

**From the Teachers**

*By Francis Mwangi, Science*

Like most scientists, I feel called on to raise a torch to help generations steer clear of the pitfalls that the human race meets along life's path. I do not mean to suggest that science as a subject will usher in successful life by itself, but it's a step in the right direction, aimed as it is at the people who will crew spaceship earth through the next century.

Top ride is honored to have the best science resource center in the region. Our pupils develop scientific skills thorough manipulation of modern scientific equipment like the light microscope (at our disposal thanks to our donors Sue and Ben Heersink), telescope, solar oven, thermometer, stethoscope, and best of all, the World Book Encyclopedia, a wondrous addition to our Douglas Walker Library.

It is through the science department that our pupils are trained in basic first aid lessons, safety precautions, health education, food and nutrition, among many other subjects that require critical thinking and produce well-rounded students. The department is well-nourished with qualified personnel, and teamwork is what drives us. Our hands-on science work is one of the many things that makes Top Ride stand out from the pack.

You would be amazed by our readathon sessions, when we use all of our wonderful equipmen, donated by our sponsors. It is set out for the pupils to manipulate The experience stays with the students vividly, the salt of remembrance.

Thanks to our sponsors, especially BEADS for Education. We believe in making better education possible – join us and share this wonderful experience.

[In each edition we will hear from a different department with general information and updates.]

## Food Spotlight: Ugali

Presented by Grade 5

by Abigal Naserian & Grace Nantoiye

Today we are going to talk about a food called **ugali**. We have it for lunch and supper, thrice a week. It is a grain made from maize, which is grown in Transmara in the Rift Valley Province. When it arrives at school, it is already ground into a powder or meal. But at one point, it was on cobs, like corn.

To make *ugali*, first you must boil clean water. To serve the entire school of 450 students and staff members you need a lot of water and it takes a long time to boil. After the water has boiled you put the meal in the water and you must continuously stir it for many minutes. Eventually the water combines with the grain and you have *ugali*. In the pot it looks like a giant white cake.

It can be served with tomatoes or with fried potatoes, but here at school it is not. Here it is served with *sukuma wiki*, which is a vegetable we will talk about in a future newsletter.



Students line up for a dinner – featuring *ugali*!

During lunch we use the plates that have been donated by the Principal. But for supper, every student has his or her own plate and cup, which are kept in the storeroom. After each meal you must wash your plate and return it to the kitchen. We actually don't enjoy eating *ugali* so much, but we would not mind having MORE of it anyway. Instead of *ugali*, we would suggest the school serve us chicken and chips and we would like sodas to wash it down.

## Volunteers on campus

From October through February, full-time volunteers Jeremy and Bridget Broomfield will be living on campus and adding their various skills to the Top Ride Community.

Bridget is a teacher of English, Humanities and Art, and has worked to start a secondary school in St Thomas, and developed curriculum for a high school International Baccalaureate, which is internationally accredited.

Jeremy brings his numerous administrative, organizational, analytical, and design skills from years of work for the New York State Government.

## Dance Club

**Presented by Grade 7**

*by Carolyn Sironka, Evalyn Nyambura, Rachel Wanjiru, Tracey Njoki, Lucy Nyaguthii, Bernard Ngure*

In our Dance Club, Mr. Fancis, Mdm. Evalyne, and Mr. Ben (assisted by Tracey and Evalyne) teach us how to sing and dance. Because it is a club, it is not required, but it is open to anyone in Grade 4 or above. About 30 students attend the club, most of them girls.

The Club usually meets thrice per week at four o'clock in the evening. It takes place in a big hall (the dining hall) because it is spacious, and we need room to move around. In the dance club we dance to many different kinds of music, and we learn many styles of dance, e.g. Scottish dance, breakdance and traditional dance – including those of the Maasai, Kikuyu, Luhya, and Kamba tribes. Sometimes students will accompany the dance with a drum or jingles.

Why do we go to dance club, when it is not a required course like Maths or Kiswahili? Because sometimes our minds get too full of academics and we need relief. Dancing brings relief to busy minds.

We also like Dance Club very much because in addition to singing and dancing, we sometimes get to travel to music festivals. Our Dance Club has performed all over Kenya, including Mombasa, and Amboseli in the Rift Valley Province. We even performed at the Nairobi State House for the President of Kenya. He smiled and clapped at our performance. It made him happy. While addressing the crowd, he even remarked on how much he liked our costumes!

The Dance Club did something nice which actually made the whole school amazed and proud. It won the first medal (which was Bronze) at the Kajiado Music Festival. The Club was further rewarded with a trip to Amboseli for a week, where we learned some new Maasai songs and dances.

## Report on Grade 8 National Exams

Eighth Grade students are gearing up for the national exams in November. It is impossible to overstate the importance of these exams. Their marks will dictate where students will attend secondary school (high school), and if they will even have the chance to do so. Teacher Timothy Kiguta says, "This test is very difficult; in Kenya it is much more likely for students to drop out during this phase, the elementary school years, than later on in high school."

When exams are this comprehensive, preparations must begin when students first enter school; indeed, there is even school on Saturdays so there is more time in the week for classes! Programs that encourage reading, writing, and critical thinking for students help to arm them for these exams and open the doors to their futures. Now in the home stretch, preparations go from early morning until lights out. As you can see from Top Ride's ranking in the top 10%, preparation pays off. Best of luck to all!