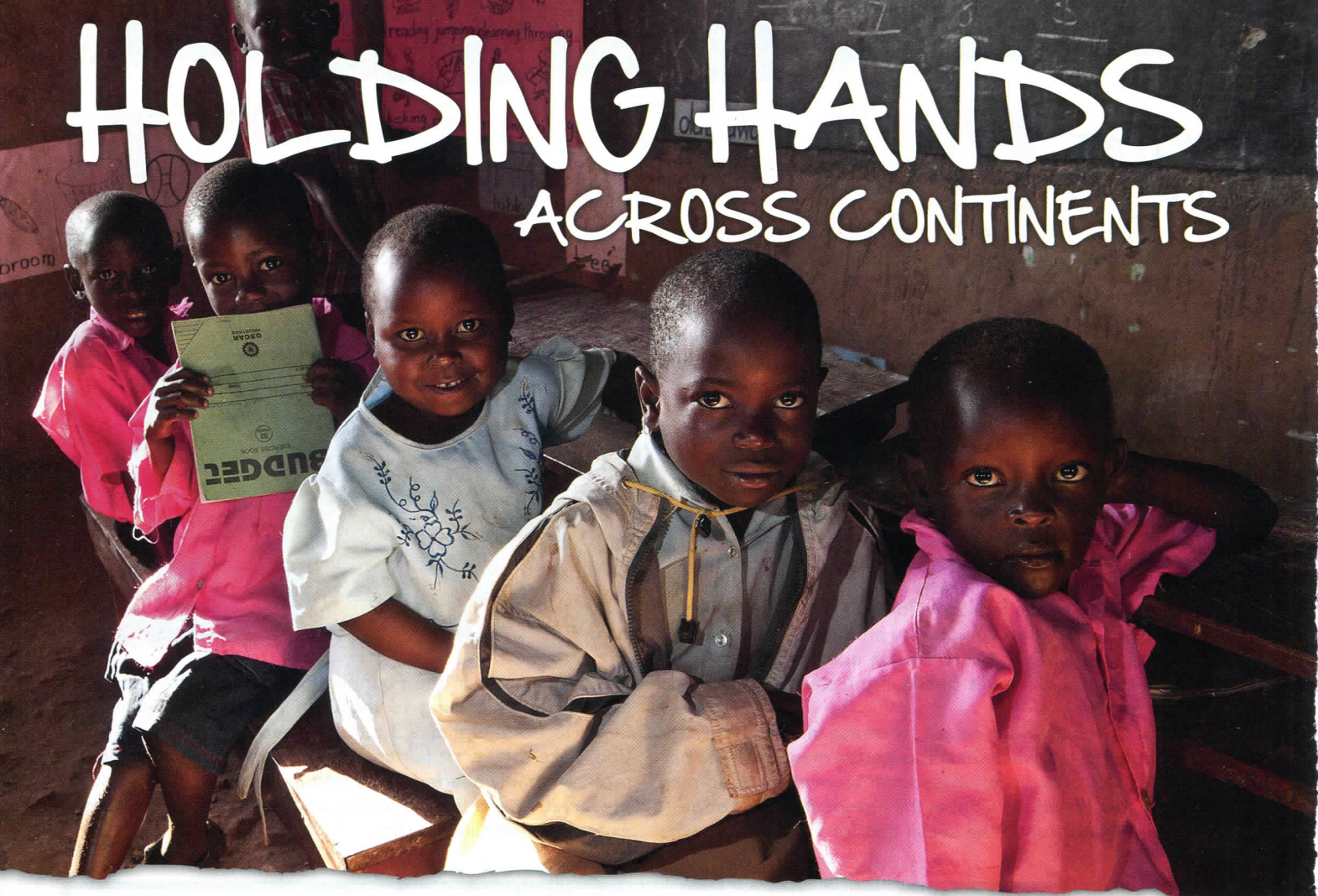


HOLDING HANDS ACROSS CONTINENTS



'One School' forges bonds between children in Boulder and Uganda

BY JANE PALMER UGANDA PHOTOGRAPHS BY KEN DRIESE

Two 9-year-old boys chatting about sports is no unusual thing. But when thousands of miles separate them and the cultural divide is even bigger, the conversation becomes interesting.

"Mostly kids in Uganda like to play around and play soccer," reports Noah Ghiselli, a Boulder student who's been writing to his pen pal, Shaoban Tadesse, for two years now. Instead of playing with a regular soccer ball, Noah has learned, Shaoban and his friends use rolled-up plantain leaves. Noah, whose main passion is playing baseball—and when he is not doing that, collecting baseball cards—writes to Shaoban about his life in Colorado. "I wrote about playing baseball," he says. "But then I had to explain to him what it is."

Theirs is just one of a host of burgeoning friendships between children in Boulder and Uganda catalyzed by One School at a Time—a nonprofit known to all involved as One School. The primary goal of the three Boulder founders, Bay Roberts, Patty Gilbert and Sari Ghiselli, is to rebuild impoverished



Boys at the Kyamulinga School play soccer with a makeshift ball made from wadded plastic tied together with banana-fiber twine.

schools in Uganda, one school at a time. But the three also define their mission as serving local children. "I think it is important for us to have kids here exposed to other cultures, because Boulder is such a bubble," Roberts says. "It just makes their lives so much richer."

Roberts gives presentations about the Ugandan school projects and Ugandan culture at Boulder County schools, and the three women have helped start an African art club at the Boulder Community School of Integrated Studies. The three also facilitate the pen-pal relationships.

Through their letters, the children swap stories of school, sports and the minutiae of daily life.

Kierra Peterson, 16, a student at Watershed School in Boulder, has a pen pal named Joan Nzamukunda, 13, who attends Kukanga school in rural Uganda. The girls share a pastime: gardening. "That made me really happy because I love gardening," Kierra says. But while Kierra enjoys planting flowers, Joan helps to grow essential foodstuffs—cassava and beans—for the 150-odd children at her school who have no money for lunch.

"The kids are so hardworking and they just want to learn, and they don't have the privileges I have," Kierra says. She first became interested in Ugandan culture when Roberts gave a presentation at her school replete with pictures of sparse classrooms and thin, shoeless children. "Words are one thing, but the photos went straight to my heart," Kierra says.

WHAT SPARKED THE CALL TO ACTION

Roberts and Gilbert had no intention of starting a nonprofit in 2005 when they first visited

Children and young women fill water cans near a school in rural Uganda.

Opposite: Students in a classroom at the Kukanga School in rural Uganda. In the dry season, sunlight streams through the windows. In the rainy season, though, the lack of electricity means classrooms are dark.

Below: Juliet Birungi in the girls' dorm at the boarding school she now attends.



"I guess I already realized that people were starving and there are so many inequalities in the world," one Boulder girl says. But hearing how pen pals have to miss school because they lack feminine products, and trek daily through violent slums or polluted swamps to fetch water, hit home in a different way.

the Rock Foundation School in Uganda. In Boulder, the two had heard of a recently orphaned girl, Juliet Birungi, and they'd decided to visit her school in the slums of Kampala to see how they could help. What they saw there sparked a broader call to action.

"It was brutal," Roberts says. "The school wasn't what we think of as a school." The two women encountered temporary classrooms made of plywood with no windows. One textbook constituted the sole reading material for the 500 pupils. The school had no electricity or running water, which meant the girls had to miss classes to make a daily trek for water.

During their visit, Roberts and Gilbert discovered that vandals had ransacked the children's food garden and thrown the school's meager teaching materials into the latrine. "We figured out this school needs security," Roberts says. "Security is the No. 1 thing—without security, you can't keep materials or books in the classroom."

Back in the U.S., the two women set about raising the money for a security guard, but once they'd achieved that goal, their attention was drawn to other issues. "We saw that there were 80 orphans who had no lunches and were falling asleep in the classroom," Roberts says. "We just kept getting more and more involved."

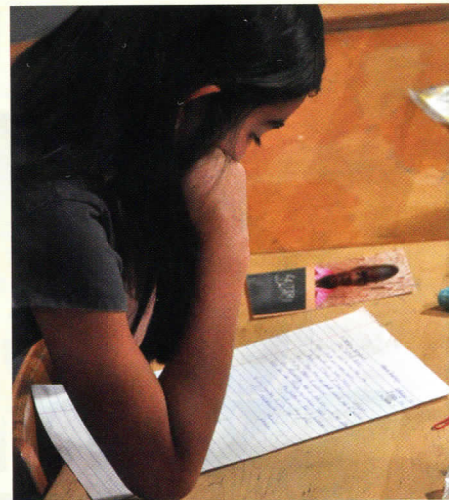
Eventually, the team created One School with the goal of partnering with targeted impoverished Ugandan schools to help improve the children's lives. In the last six years, they have partnered with three schools, and the money they've raised has helped pay for classroom renovations, clean water systems, school farm and lunch programs, and even soccer balls.

OPENING EYES, OPENING HEARTS

Paralleling their work in Uganda has been the team's mission to raise cultural awareness in Boulder County—a region thin on diversity. But once the children connect and learn about the living conditions of their friends, they often want to do more, Roberts says.

"The [Ugandan] girls miss hours of class to get some dirty water," says 11-year-old Marcella Mason. "It breaks my heart." After seeing one of Roberts's presentations, Marcella and some of her classmates at Mesa Elementary bombarded Roberts with questions about how they could help. Within a few weeks, they'd raised \$3,045 by doing bake sales and beading. The funds helped pay for classroom renovation at Kukanga School, the most recent partner school.

It's the day-to-day details that really hit home for Kierra. "I guess I already realized

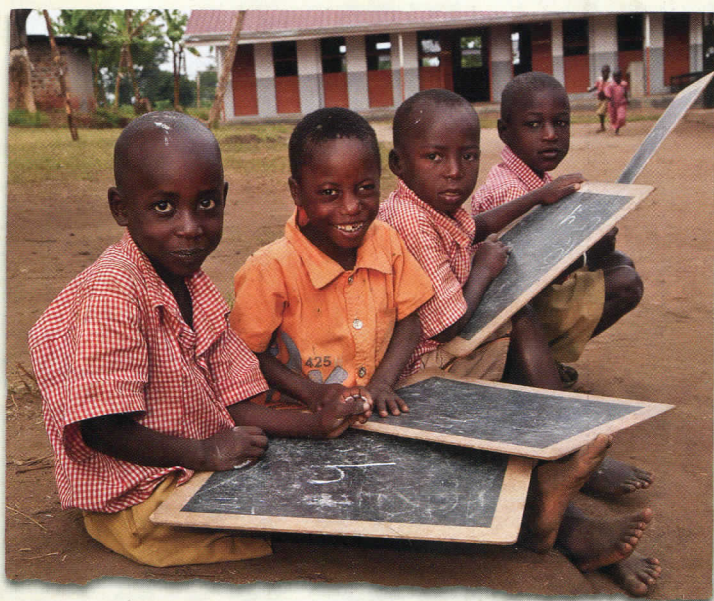


A Boulder student reads and rereads a letter from her pen pal in Uganda.

that people were starving and there are so many inequalities in the world," she says. But those facts sometimes seemed so far removed from everyday life. Hearing how girls had to miss school because they lacked feminine products, or how they trekked daily through violent slums or polluted swamps to fetch water, was different altogether. "Just the little things like the water," she said. "Here I am, and I wake up every day and turn on

Classmates work on their writing lesson at the Kyamulinga School.

Below: At one Ugandan school, funds from Boulder paid the wages of a much-needed security guard. The mere knowledge of a man lurking nearby with a bow and arrow has kept vandals away.



the sink—fresh water right after I get out of bed.” Kierra raised more than \$500 running the 2011 Bolder Boulder—money that funded four lockable doors for Kukanga School. She’s since started volunteering for One School and eventually wants to travel to Uganda.

While recognizing the practical difficulties facing the schools, the Boulder children also see good things in the Ugandan lifestyle. “Their life seems so much simpler—they seem to have time to just lie on the grass or

just play,” says Marcella, who says she and her friends complain about the nonstop merry-go-round of sports, clubs and music lessons that comprise the average Boulder kid’s overscheduled lifestyle. Marcella also envies the children’s attitude toward school. “They want school and we don’t,” she says. “I guess it has made me appreciate it more.”

Kierra is struck by the Ugandan children’s positive attitude. “There are so many little things that could get them down every

day, but they always have smiles on their faces,” she says. “We get stuck on little things that don’t matter.”

Most of all, Kierra longs for the strong sense of community she sees in Ugandan culture. In Boulder, she says, she frequently feels lonely and isolated. “Maybe we can help each other,” Kierra says. “I know living in America that I can definitely raise that money. Maybe they can help me figure out how to create community here.” ♦

Liquor Mart's
ORGANIC ALLEY

SHOP 24/7
 online at liquormart.com

Liquor Mart's Organic Alley features the BEST in Organics from around the world.
 Stop by our Organic Alley in the store or online.

Liquor Mart

www.liquormart.com
 303-449-3374 • 15th & Canyon • Downtown Boulder
 Open 7 days a week: 8am-11:45pm

TAKING IT A STEP FURTHER



Her interest in Uganda piqued through her involvement with One School, Bay Miller, 19, a recent graduate of Boulder's New Vista High School, visited Kukunga School in spring 2011.

Miller says that during her visit, she sometimes struggled to understand the cultural differences. Girls fetching water, for example, face the threat of attack, robbery or sexual assault. One solution would be to allow the boys to accompany them, but this would be culturally unacceptable, she says. "But my priority would be to protect the girls."

Despite the impoverished conditions, she found that people still seemed happy and content. "Everyone laughed and smiled all the time," she says, adding that in Uganda people don't appear to be motivated by material things but by companionship with one another and simply having fun. "It is not like that here."

The contrast with American culture unsettled Miller on her return home. "Here we have all these wonderful things in our lives, and we just focus on the one small negative thing," she says.

Miller hopes to work in politics or international law in the future, and she believes her recent experience has changed her. "I can watch documentaries and cognitively know cultural differences," she says. "But now I soulfully know them."

— J.P.

Jane Palmer is primarily a science and environment writer, but she couldn't resist writing this fun kids-and-culture story. She lives in Eldorado Springs with her husband, Gareth, and daughter, Iona.

Freelance photographer Ken Driese (www.kendriesephoto.com) lives in Laramie, Wyo. Much of his work is focused on using photography to help promote humanitarian and environmental nonprofits. Boulder's Dairy Center for the Arts will have an exhibition of his Uganda photos next year—Oct. 26-Nov. 30, 2012.

For more information about One School at a Time and how to help, visit 1schoolatatime.org.



Watch David Onk's video about One School's work in Uganda at <http://vimeo.com/20180312>.

getboulder.com

NOMAD

BEAD MERCHANTS



Adorn Yourself!

www.nomadbeads.com

303-786-9746

PROVIDING:

- Beads & Beading Supplies
- Tokens, Talismans & Amulets
- Rare Collectibles
- Designer Jewelry
- Repairs
- Custom Design
- Free Classes
- Appraisals

1909 9th St., • Boulder (Corner of Walnut & 9th)