

belongings in trunks and bags as they sang the theme of Manchester United, their favorite English soccer team, to the familiar tune of the "Battle Hymn of the Republic."

The day turned into one of celebration as choirs sang, people gave speeches, and we all watched as a ceremonial ribbon was cut. I looked down as I felt a hand clasp mine, and there was Vincent, smiling excitedly.

"Are you ready to go pick out your new bed?" I asked him.



"Yes!" he replied eagerly as we moved closer to the door.

A short time later, he was happily sitting on his new bunk. The joy on his face as he smelled his fresh sheets and pillow instantly made me forget my sunburn, scraped knuckles, and aching muscles. Looking

down the rows of bunks as sunlight streamed through the open windows that let in a fresh breeze, I paused in thankful prayer for what God had allowed us to complete.

Although several years have passed since that trip, the memory continually reminds me of the power of an idea, expressed in a simple question: "Could you use my gift for a mission trip building project?" That idea became a plan, and in time that plan matured into a gift, which was used to purchase steel, blocks, and concrete, which in the hands of many volunteers were formed into a beautiful dormitory.

That's the way it is with planned gifts. Whether for a specific use or unrestricted to be used where they are needed most, they all carry within them the potential to share God's love and change lives for the better in your neighborhood or a neighborhood halfway around the world. All it takes is an idea.

If you would like to learn more about how you can make a planned gift for ministry, contact your local conference planned giving office to find out what your ideas can do for others.

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# The STEWPOT

A POTPOURRI OF PRACTICAL IDEAS to help you become a better steward

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## THE POWER OF AN IDEA

BY RICHARD MAGNUSON

*"Mr. Rich, Mr. Rich! I want to show you something!"*

The small hand clasping mine pulled me forward into a dilapidated shed. Temporarily blinded as my eyes tried to adjust to the dim light after stepping out of the hot equatorial sun, I was first aware of the odors hanging in the stale air within. Cutting through the mustiness was the sour odor of sweat as 10-year-old Vincent led me to a far corner, eager to show me where he slept and the tattered travel magazine that he kept in the trunk under his bed.

As Vincent showed me pictures of faraway places he wanted to visit someday, my mind transported me back nearly 10,000 miles and several years—to a dining room table and a conversation with a church member who said, "I want to put my affairs in order."

In the planned giving work, we provide information and assistance to our members who would like to plan a gift from their estate to support church ministry. Over the years I have grown accustomed to hearing stories about the families of those we are working with, and this meeting with the church member was no different.

The conversation included memories of raising her children, the sacrifices she and her husband had made to provide them with a Christian education, and the way she came to terms with losing her husband unexpectedly. She



Photos Courtesy of Rich Magnuson

STEWARDSHIP is a total lifestyle. It involves our health, time, talents, environment, relationships, spirituality, and finances.

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then spoke with excitement about how, later in life, she found tremendous joy in helping others, particularly serving disadvantaged people through mission trips in some of the poorest parts of the world.

When we began talking about the planned gift for ministry she had in mind, she specified a modest amount and asked if she could direct how the money was to be spent. I assured her that so long as it was ministry related, her gift would be accepted and her wishes honored. A few weeks after that initial meeting, she finalized her plans, nodding in satisfaction when she read the provision concerning her idea for a gift that would go toward a mission trip project.

This was how I found myself in a hot, dark, and stifling room with young Vincent in Isiolo, Kenya, on my very first mission trip, seeing and smelling firsthand the conditions we were there to alleviate. Our project was to build a dormitory for Vincent and his classmates—about 75 boys, ages 6-14, who still lived on the old school campus about half a mile from the new school, where the girls' dorm had been built several years before.

I had been taking a break in the shade when one of the teachers, Mr. Momani, asked if I'd like to see the old campus. I jumped at the chance to take a break from spreading mortar and hoisting concrete blocks as I worked on my portion of a wall that was rising, with agonizing slowness, from the concrete foundation. My aching muscles and the slow progress we were making had me questioning whether or not this trip would be worthwhile. It seemed doubtful that we would be able to complete the building, and we had been told as much by the local project coordinator when we arrived, but he assured us that others would come later



to finish the building. The thought of not completing what we had started was dampening my excitement for the trip.

As we walked across the campus, we were joined by young Vincent, whom I recognized as the same young man who had eagerly met us at the bus on our arrival and insisted on carrying my heavy tool bag to the

worksite. Central Kenya had been enduring years of drought, and the dust was inches deep on the dirt road as Mr. Momani and I talked about the challenge of operating a school for up to 300 students without electricity, running water, or even a kitchen.

We passed a Red Cross clinic, and I learned that about half of the students at the Isiolo school were orphaned due to the AIDS virus, which is still prevalent throughout many African nations. Mr. Momani then added that many of those same children were also infected and received treatment there at the clinic, nodding toward young Vincent who ran on ahead of us.

Later, after seeing Vincent's sleeping area, we returned to the worksite, and I was surprised to see that two new courses of blocks had been laid in just the time I'd been away. Most of us had come to this project with little or no masonry experience, but as we placed one block after another, we gained confidence and our pace increased. By the end of that day, the rows of blocks rose halfway to the steel beam that marked the top of the wall.

Each morning as our bus pulled up to the school gate, we saw Vincent and his classmates lined up to carry our gear to the worksite as it quickly transformed from stacks of blocks and piles of sand into an actual building. As the week progressed, we were surprised when a truck arrived with new mattresses, stacked impossibly high, and later another pulled up, loaded with new pillows and bedding. More local workers appeared and began rapidly installing the steel roofing panels, while welders installed steel doors and window frames into which we quickly began glazing the panels of new glass.

When we arrived on Friday, our last day on the project, neither Vincent nor his classmates were anywhere to be seen. It didn't take long, though, before we heard the sound of singing coming from the road and saw a long line of boys marching in single file toward us, carrying their



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