Wonderful things are happening at the Maranyundo School!

In early November we celebrated two joyous, long awaited events: the graduation of our first class and the transfer of ownership and operation of the School to the people of Rwanda.

First, the girls! They danced, sang, and drummed their way through a historic graduation celebration, demonstrating strength, poise, competence and a joie de vivre that was infectious. They are amazing; and you don’t need to take my word for it.

The head of a nearby secondary school opening in January told us that he was getting discouraged at the quality of applicants, until he interviewed 15 students from Maranyundo. Not only did our girls speak English beautifully, he said, they were lively, energetic and had big plans. They spoke of wanting to be doctors, engineers, and senators and, when asked what they wanted in a secondary school, answered things like good labs and computers and a library. In his words, “These young girls were spectacular. Many of them are clearly what I call ‘glue kids’ the kind of student, especially in a boarding school, whose personality and leadership potential can bind the class in powerfully positive ways.”

Second, the transfer. For the past year we have been working to transfer the ownership and day-to-day responsibility of the school from Boston to Rwanda. We sought a partner to whom we could entrust, not only the buildings and students, but also the mission of the School, which is to provide excellence in education to economically vulnerable girls.

We are honored that the Benebikira Congregation, a Rwandan order of Roman Catholic nuns who have been running the school since its opening, accepted our invitation to receive ownership and stewardship of the Maranyundo School.
As I write this, girls studying for their next exam are sitting in clusters in the shade of a tree, going over their notes together. For the 1's and 2's (7th and 8th grades), it’s the end of the school year. For the 3's (9th grade), the stakes are higher. The national exams given them in early November determine what comes next, high school or not, scholarship or not, with exponentially more candidates than places. The pressure on campus has been palpable for the students and their teachers as well. Even the younger grades’ exams are three hours long, to begin preparing for the nationals, one or two years hence. The girls are so dutiful and so good and, mercifully, silly and goofy when they get the chance!

At year’s end, the 1’s will be given a copy of The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe to take home with them over the holiday, to read and to return to the school library, so that it can be passed on to the grade behind them next year. Not only is a library a novelty here, but having one’s own book (even on loan), to read just for fun, is as well. The 2’s will have a copy of A Little Princess to return again when the next school year begins; and the 3’s, the first graduates of Maranyundo Girls School, will be given a hardcover dictionary to keep and use for the duration of their future studies; a yawn for most US kids, but a treasure here.

Right now, it’s pouring again, a good thing actually, as the rainy season’s been a bit late this year. The storms can be quite awesome with powerful winds, bending trees, and thick sheets of water, usually followed by soft sunshine and myriad short-lived, long-winged very insistent insects, power failures, and Internet loss. None of that lasts long though. “Soon enough, the warmth and energy (human and electronic) of Rwanda returns.”

**Burch Ford** is a respected educator and former head of Miss Porter's School, CT. She served as U.S. Program Coordinator at the Maranyundo School from May through October 2010.
At the graduation celebration, Sister Thierry Dominique, Superior General of the Benebikira Congregation, and I signed a Memorandum of Understanding. As long as we are able, the Maranyundo Initiative will continue to augment the school’s operating budget to support elements of excellence, such as increased teacher salaries, high quality materials, technology and a low student:teacher ratio (30:1). In addition, we will work to raise funds for special programs and scholarships for girls, not only while they are at Maranyundo, but also after graduation.

We intended to announce this support for graduates at the celebration but the Sisters indicated there was no need. I resisted because I worried that perhaps parents would not let their girls apply to schools they could not afford, or girls would lower their sights because they did not want to be disappointed. *When she heard these concerns, Sister smiled and said, “There is no need. The girls already believe in you.”* She continued that they would never not apply to the best school, she said, no matter how poor they are. They know their job is to do their best, and God (I think she means all of us!) will provide what they need.

We were touched by how deeply the news of this transfer was welcomed. We were honored with a gift of cows (not symbolic cows, REAL cows, see photo) the most precious gift one can receive in Rwanda, signifying honor, trust and a lasting connection. We were told by a member of the Parents Committee that they have already begun preparing for their new role as owners and have started fund raising and planning for expansion.

**Your investment is high yield. Because of you, 180 girls with big plans for the future are thriving in the shadows and sunshine of the Maranyundo hills.**

Who knows where they will go and what they will do? Early indicators suggest big returns.

With heartfelt thanks for your past and continued support and warm wishes for the holiday season.

Joyce K. Fletcher
The Maranyundo Girls School is now recognized as a model school of excellence, not only in Bugesera District but in the entire Eastern Province of Rwanda. “May God bless you and bless the work of your hands, for all you have done for the girls at Maranyundo Girls School”

Sincerely,
Sr. Felicite MUKASHEMA

(At left): Madame Jeannette Kagame speaking at the Maranyundo School graduation ceremony:
“The world today is one global village, rich with diversity. Those who understand this and take full advantage of its benefits will certainly go far”

“The story of the Maranyundo School and what it stands for, never really ends. It will continue with each one of you as you go forth carrying in your hearts, beauty, truth and goodness.”

— Sister Ann Fox

STAY IN TOUCH

In an effort to reduce administrative costs we plan to use email as our primary mode of communication in the new year. If you want to stay in touch and not miss any of the news and updates about happenings at the school, please email your current email address to Ryan Reed rrouker@gmail.com or include it on the return envelope. Check out our website www.maranyundo.org for recent photos and news articles.

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