

Canadian Harambee Education Society

We can't do everything . . . but we can do something!

Fall 2019 Newsletter #68



Climbing Kilimanjaro for CHES

It all started with a phone call with my cousin, Smriti, in June 2018. She lives in Nairobi and is a teacher. I mentioned to her how it was on my bucket list to climb Mt. Kilimanjaro and change the family tradition of only the men in the Bali family seeking to summit. My goal was to be the next female of many future Bali females to climb this tallest free standing mountain in Africa. I told her I had no one to climb with me now. Impulsively she quipped, “I will do it with you if you give me enough time to train”.

At the age of 47, I wanted to show my three boys (and my husband) I was not afraid to take on this challenge knowing that there was no guarantee I would reach the top. My cousin reminded me, “Your strongest muscle and worst enemy is your mind. That is the most important one to train.” Deep down, I had doubt that I would reach the top, thinking I would likely be the one inflicted with altitude sickness, which hits climbers randomly, regardless of athletic ability. I understood that the lesson I would need to learn would be acceptance of whatever outcome, appreciation of my position as guest of the mountain, and awareness that success also comes from learning from failure and getting back up.

As we planned for this trek, I thought about why I was doing it. It became clear to me that it was more than just a climb. It was symbolic of my belief that as women, we often underestimate ourselves (as do others) and that we, should have the courage and determination to seek out challenges and pursue our dreams and aspirations. Education is the most powerful tool for advancement and opportunity. As a lawyer, I am a student of law for life, always learning.

Both my cousin and I were well prepared, both mentally and physically, for this seven day hiking challenge. As I prepared I



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decided to add a charity component to my climb and select a charity focused on empowering girls/women. Our family friends, Donny and June Wing, suggested Canadian Harambee Education Society (CHES) and encouraged me to reach out to Catriona and Chris Harker, CHES agents. I sent an email to Catriona and Chris and they quickly responded and suggested we meet. We spent a lovely evening together discussing my climb, the charity, and our family safari trip afterwards. I was convinced this was exactly the organization I wanted to support. I am a former prosecutor and later learned that one of my colleagues also supported this charity which only reaffirmed my decision to support CHES.

We chose to take the Machame route for seven days which would give us more time to acclimatize. There were eight women who planned to trek but in the end, it was only myself and my 43 year old cousin that set off to climb. We had two guides who, incidentally, were both fathers of girls. We also had many porters (two of whom were women) who carried our tents, overnight bags, food, and cooking equipment. They were the real “elite athletes” climbing the mountain with heavy loads on their heads and backs and always at a much faster pace than all of us. We carried 20 pound day packs with snacks and 3 litres of water. Our guides were patient, knowledgeable, and encouraging. Every day they reminded us to remain hydrated and to walk “pole pole”, meaning to take it slow. They told us what to expect each day and prepared us to expect mild altitude symptoms and not to worry as it is a normal side effect. The climb was breathtaking in view and incredible in experience. It really was a “mind over matter” experience. The days of hiking were long and tiring but my cousin and I took it one step at a time and encouraged each other along the way. There were some days of steep climbing and rock climbing, as well as times we had to walk in the rain or wind, and once even having to cross over a stream. We encouraged ourselves not to let our minds tell us what we could and could not do and just do it. We did



not compare ourselves with the other climbers, appreciated and accepted that all things have their own time for unfolding. We accepted the physical aches and pains as temporary and practiced mindfulness and self compassion. We focused on the present moment and the journey rather than worrying about reaching Uhuru peak at 19,600 feet above sea level.

As I continued ascending, I could feel the altitude. I started experiencing headaches, nausea, and loss of appetite. I took relaxation breaths, drank water, and got lots of sleep every night. Every morning I reminded myself to think positive and “pole pole”. When we got to Barafu camp, the camp before summit, my cousin told me she was done. Unlike me, her goal was never to reach the summit. She

wanted to support me in my dream and enjoy the experience for as long as her body let her. At that point, we had witnessed many climbers suffer beyond their comfort level and eventually have to go back down. She did not want to end the experience with the mountain “chewing her up and spitting her out on the other side.” She reminded me that this was MY bucket list goal and insisted that I continue.

It was just the head guide and I who started our ascent to the summit at 12:20 a.m. on Aug. 2. Before leaving I remembered what my youngest son said when he kissed me goodbye: “I believe in you. You can do it!” The assistant guide and young waiter woke up to wish me well and to tell me they prayed for me.

I remember the single file steep incline in the dark wearing a headlamp. I was dressed in six layers of pants and seven layers of tops to prepare for the slow and cold climb. I remember looking up once and seeing a string of



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lights that looked like a lit path all the way up to heaven. I then made the conscious choice not to look up again for fear that my mind would tell me my body it was tired and to give up. I refused to let doubt in and shut down any worry that I would not be able to do it. I felt a strange sense of calm and gratitude to the mountain for letting me get this far. I was ready to accept whatever outcome. I kept my glance downwards, looking at the feet of my guide and trying to match his pace. I remember passing some climbers and I remember my guide asking me if I was okay. I nodded and kept going, keeping up with him. At one point he told me “I am really impressed. I mean it. I will never forget you.” These words meant a great deal from my guide who spoke very little when climbing.

When we got to the top at 6:25 am, there were not many climbers at summit. The sun had not yet risen. My guide said, “Do you know what you did and how you did it? You are a very strong woman.” I felt jubilation, fatigue, disbelief, and relief! I could not believe what I had achieved. I felt like all of my supporters, family, and guardian angels had helped me get to the top. This experience showed me that I, like many women, have an inner strength that we don’t always appreciate or test.

Two days after our descent, I arranged to meet one of the CHES graduates, Adelina Micheal, and CHES Hanang treasurer extraordinaire, Naomi Saulo. Adelina is an accomplished educated young woman thanks to CHES. While meeting Adelina I unexpectedly got a bit emotional. I could see that she has already made society a better place. Adelina is a mom of two boys, ages 6 and 2, works as a Country Coordinator for Volunteers, and is the operations manager for Budget Safari Tanzania. She is an inspiration and the reason why more people should support this non profit charity. There is still time for me to collect donations. If you wish to donate to CHES, please mention “Bali Kili Climb” so that the money goes to my collection. Thanks in advance for any and all support you can provide to this worthwhile cause.

by Nomita Bali



(left to right: Naomi Saulo, Nomita Bali, Adelina Michael)



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Isabella Engede: TOYA Award Winner 2019

CHES Student 2000-2004

Kakamega, Kenya

It feels so very very special to just know you are proud of me and wish my story shared to the world.

Born in a polygamous family of 12, my mother having 7 children of the 12, wasn't anything to smile about. It was all the time the source of pain and shame as we were all below 15 years. Being a third born after two elder brothers, who never accessed education due to poverty, I had to fight all odds to bring change to my family. We lost our mother to suicide in July 1994, it's indeed regrettable when a woman loses hope and chooses death over life struggles. I knew she died in the body but I had to let her spirit live, hardworking, go getter, focused, and self driven woman who fought stigma having been born Ugandan and married in western Kenya. I chose on Education in Grade 3, my headteacher Mr. Galavu held my hand by offering free boarding to me in Grade 4, it was never easy for the good part of my young life I had to fight stigma associated with my mother strangling herself. It was unacceptable and we were alienated from the community, at one time I found myself sitting alone on a whole row in a class.

Good thing life is but seasons. Mr. Galavu my headteacher introduced me to CHES after passing very highly in my KCPE and given an entry letter to Kenya High which was a national school, I had to get a chance to Bunyore girls a school next to home and within my sponsor's choice. I remember my first interview my head teacher had to train me on how to answer some questions given they were to be posed by agents who had 'complicated' English comparing to what we were used to, Like thank you sir/ madam, pardon. Being a smart child I easily made it and confirmation was done to ascertain indeed I was from a needy family. This particular day remains vivid even now. Bev Ford one of CHES agents and who was my sponsor visited my family, a house without chairs and rusted iron sheets that were leaking. Indeed the strongest persons in the world have never had an easy past.

My younger siblings having been malnutrition and contracted kwashiokor were taken into an orphanage in Langata supported by the mother Theresa. They were deported back home after my Father decided to remarry though he was jobless repairing mud houses for families in Kibera slum. CHES paid my fees 85%, my sponsor would additionally send me pocket money when responding to my letters. This is how I would spend; shop for school, fare to and from school, my siblings needed food so I had to shop for them specifically cooking oil, salt, body oil, soap. Big thanks to Bev. You were an oasis in a real desert.

In Form two, I lost my father to death. My two elder brothers were then street boys in kawangware slums in Nairobi. Our step mum stuck with us although till we lost her again 5years later. It's then I learnt of HIV pandemic that had cut short the dreams of my Dad's lineage. CHES taught me assertiveness, self confidence, integrity, and personal health through the workshops that occurred during school holidays. I felt cared for, loved, and encouraged especially when I had to account for my performance to the agents. It is the smallest of acts that touch people's hearts. I successfully completed high school and scored a B+, an entry to Kenyatta University to study Education Arts. CHES sponsored my first semester before I applied for government loan from HELB, which I paid after graduation.

It is my second year when I lost my step mother and so I fully adopted Bev Ford as my parent without her knowledge. My siblings had completed their primary school and I introduced them to CHES for sponsorship again. My brothers had to drop out of school because they lacked a sponsor for their education. Depression tossed them to alcohol abuse; at the university I chose to settle in marriage to find a home for my little siblings. They all made it to university with one sister scoring an A gaining entry to University of Nairobi medical school.

I completed my B.ED ARTS and got a job as a government teacher in Machakos county. I settled to pursue a Diploma in Education management and eventually an MBA in strategic Management as I continued to teach, looking forward to pursuing a PHD in Leadership. My greatest achievement in teaching has been in 2019. I emerged the best overall Teacher Of the Year Award winner (TOYA) in Eastern Region of Kenya within 8 counties and the 5th best in Kenya. The honour of receiving a trophy from permanent Secretary of Education



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was just overwhelming. Indeed life is what you make it. My greatest score was on exemplary students performance and mentorship of the girl child. Being away from my home county as a role model to the girl child in Machakos county I settled to register a mentorship Organization for girls called TABASAMU DADA (smile girl) that is rescuing, nurturing, and transforming vulnerable girls in Machakos county, in honour of Bev and my CHES family. Launching it before the year ends, you all welcome.

I have walked a journey of inspiration and total commitment to bringing change to my family. I am an icon that you can't fail to notice even on social media, PRINCESS ASAMBA where I echo the empowerment of the vulnerable in society. I am a girl who can't be ignored by organizations transforming lives. I represented Kenya in YOULEAD Summit Tanzania to echo the youth economical and governance position within East Africa. It is a journey that is becoming more beautiful because I didn't know it, I could have never known it, it is the fruits of CHES that showed me this path, walked me all through when various sponsors donated their cash to give me education. I am aiming at becoming a global woman through transforming lives, the likes of Lorrie Williams, Bev Ford, Oprah Winfrey, Tyra Banks, and mother Theresa. Just be a humming in a desert dropping a little water consistently and surely even if it doesn't make an oasis it will surely be noticed by the tiniest creature the water drops on. Asante sana CHES!!!

by Isabella Engede



CHES Annual Appeal

In late November we will email our ANNUAL APPEAL to all CHES supporters inviting you to help us cover the numerous “extra” expenses we incur annually. These include student workshops, health needs (hearing aids, glasses, medical emergencies), salaries for our few employees overseas, office supplies and expenses, and necessary professional costs (audits, bookkeeping, insurance). Note that this appeal will NOT be contacting current sponsors.

Did you know that last year 36% of CHES sponsors gave “a little bit more” than the basic \$600 sponsorship fee? We are hoping to see that percentage increase this year.

Students Work Together to Support CHES and the Environment

The staff and students of Lake Hill Elementary School in Victoria, B.C., every year choose February as their “Giving Month”. Under the leadership of Vice Principal Christine Patterson, CHES was the lucky beneficiary of their generosity in February 2019. They were inspired to support our fundraising for the gas stove for our girls’ hostel in Tanzania as many trees are forfeited annually to supply wood to cook the meals for 85 girls daily and over 300 during Tutorial and Student Selection times. This project not only supported our program but also helped to reduce deforestation in Tanzania. Two very worthwhile causes!



“Asante Sana” to all the staff, students and their families who made this donation possible. The photograph shows the Lake Hill Grade 5 Leadership Team who implemented the project with the cheque for \$415.25 which they presented to Director Catriona Harker at their end of year assembly in June 2019.

by Catriona Harker



New Stoves

The Tanzanian government had recently decreed that no cooking could occur with wood or charcoal starting in January 2021. Thanks to the generosity of many of CHES' supporters we were able to implement this directive immediately. At the end of July, specially designed gas cookers were made and brought to the hostel where the cooks were instructed on their safe use. Special cages outside the building were constructed to properly house the large propane tanks and piping installed to connect to the cookers.



What an exciting day at the Sara Williams Hostel in Katesh when the specially designed new gas cooker stoves arrived. Even individuals who weren't involved in cooking meals for the students crowded into the kitchen to witness the event. Who knew that a stove could bring such huge smiles on the faces of Tanzanian cooks!

by Joy Ruffeski

An Agent's Report

David and I were invited by long time CHES supporters, Robb and Jeanette Taylor of Saskatchewan to go to Kenya and be CHES "agents". Our three adult children said "go for it" so we booked our tickets and arrived at the CHES house in Kakamega, Kenya, on November 23, 2018.

Charles, our faithful taxi driver, took me shopping on Nov. 25 to the largest local supermarket. We learned that nearly anything we wanted was available. Also purchased at the outset was a Kenyan SIM card for my Canadian iPhone 7 and for Dave to get his computer going.

The office manager of CHES in Kenya is Rebecca Odiambo. We got off to a good start as she seemed to like our sense of humour. We started interviewing girls to fill the few spaces that had become available because of CHES girls dropping out. The routine was to start at 9:00 a.m. and have tea at 12:00 noon with Kenyan tea served by Joel, the askari. Then we interviewed as long as it took in the afternoon. I found this too challenging and had to have tea at 10:30 and a good lunch at noon.

The house had no WiFi, so internet connection was made by a small modem (a "dongle") connecting to satellites. This was not very unsatisfactory as the connection was dropped frequently as is the case throughout Africa.

We resided in the back of the CHES house quite comfortably. There is also a cottage behind the main house, where the other Canadian agent, Mandy Klepic resided. Neither house had screens to keep out mosquitos, but we all were taking anti-malarial medication. Mandy asked for screens on the cottage and they were put on in the first three weeks. We survived quite well and saw only five mosquitos in the first three days. We were, after all, in a mostly dry season.

December was like a prairie summer in terms of weather - warm to 27 C during the day and a thunderstorm at night. Beautiful climate. However, power outages with every thunder storm. Candles were bought and used and our headlamps were crucial!

Kakamega is located about 20 km from the equator, with the sun rising at 6:40 a.m. and setting at 6:40 p.m., so evenings come quickly. We could sit on the front verandah of the CHES house and watch the constellation of "Orion" slowly becoming distinct in the southeast sky. Simba, the guard dog, often shattered this serenity with his enthusiasm.

All of December until Christmas was taken up with interviewing prospective CHES girls. The girls and usually their mothers appeared in droves on the first day of advertised interviews. We took the first 25 or so to interview that day. The rest came back on subsequent days. Altogether, over 200 Standard 8 graduates applied. Almost everyone is needy, but our job was to seek out the girls who otherwise had no chance of advancement. At 4:00 p.m. each day we met with Rebecca and the Kenyan girls who also interviewed the girls and mothers. We had to decide which ones met the criteria of "brightest" and "poorest". This was a time consuming, difficult task. These girls would later be visited in their home area by "verifiers" who would find out the financial standing of the girl's family and reassure us of the neediness of the family.

Once the final girls had been chosen, an orientation was held on the CHES grounds on two successive Saturdays to prepare the girls and parents for the term ahead. Rebecca introduced the agents and gave us a



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chance to encourage these lucky few. She lectured them on how to be successful for the next four years, which included not getting pregnant! The girls got their official CHES photo taken, received dictionaries and atlases from the CHES library, were assigned to a school by Rebecca, and given a claim form for the uniform for that school. Each girl departed happily with a shopping bag full of tooth paste and brushes, Vaseline or hair treatment oil, bars of laundry soap, and sanitary napkins.

What an amazing day for girls who often had previously not worn shoes, socks, a dress, or uniform. Most were both excited and apprehensive of what was coming at their new school. Most girls had never slept in a real cot or bed before.

Christmas came and went, with agents taking a few badly needed days off!

On January 16 our next phase of work began: to visit the girls in their assigned schools. These were well-established boarding schools. Each had their own character or “standards” or flavour and Rebecca chose the school that would best fit each girl. Over bumpy roads all over Kakamega County we travelled with Charles’ taxi and spent the day speaking to the headmistresses (often having an elaborate tea with them), meeting the patron who was assigned by the school to “mother” our girls and help them out in any difficulty, and finally meeting the girls all over again. Rebecca once more admonished the girls to study and behave well—the hallmarks of all CHES girls.

One highlight visit was to St. Angela’s School of the Deaf. Our girls there were animated and delightful. They gave each agent a name in sign language. Prior to being selected by CHES, some of them lacked shoes and clothes and many had been shunned or neglected by their parents. This school has truly become a home for them. There is a very fine patron there watching over the CHES girls and its Principal, Sister Margaret, is also very capable.

The Secondary School graduates of CHES who have gone to University in Kenya have formed an organization of their own which reports to the CHES Board. This group, CHEBAK (Canadian Harambee Education Beneficiaries Alumni of Kenya), is capable and exciting. An upshot of a meeting with them was a trip to Bungoma Day School, at the far north corner of Kakamega county. A cavalcade of three cars left the CHES house early one morning. We saw mentors from CHEBAK present topics about education and some simple helpful information about how to avoid pregnancies that so often interrupt or ruin the education of a girl. The students sang and were entertained by county staff. To mark the occasion mango trees, which will bear fruit in less than 10 years, were planted. We were fed a sumptuous buffet at a local home of a County Education Assembly woman. What a great day.

Although so busy, we managed four weekends away from the city to see the famous wildlife of Kenya. We used the taxi to drive into Uganda to visit the internationally recognized Uganda Observation and Education Centre near Entebbe where animals are saved from the wild and nurtured until they can be released.

We escaped for two weekends to the Rondo Retreat, found on the edge of the only remaining rainforest in Kenya. Fabulous birdwatching. Now run by a church group, they serve fabulous cuisine and serve as a meeting place for volunteers such as us and ministers on furlough.

We only had one day in the Masai Mara Nature reserve but it was worth going to. There we had a nine-seat game viewing van to ourselves. Animals weren’t in large herds, but co-operated by being near to the trails through the park making photography easy.

There is so much more but space is limited. Suffice to say it was an experience that will never be forgotten.

by Wilma Bell Wessel

Find Us on [Facebook!](#)

Whether you are among the legion of nearly 1.5 billion active daily Facebook users, or an irregular visitor, please take a moment to check out the [@CanadianHarambee.ca](#) Facebook Page. Don’t forget to “Like” us so that our stories appear in your newsfeed.

We have many short stories and photos of current and former students that we would like to post regularly. If you are an enthusiastic Facebook user we’d appreciate you volunteering to help us out as a Facebook editor or contributor for our Page. Send us an email at ches@canadianharambee.ca if you are able to assist.



Agents Attend Board Meeting

David and Wilma Wessel, from Saskatchewan, donated their valuable time to work as CHES Agents in the Kakamega CHES House from late November 2019 until the end of February 2019. While there, they assisted the local committee to select the new Form I girls from the many applicants.

They were only the second set of agents to experience our new office-house complex and while on a holiday trip to B.C. they found time to attend the May Board meeting to make an in-person report. Despite planning that is intended to anticipate every future eventuality, new facilities invariably fall short of important needs here and there. It was helpful to have David and Wilma on-hand and able to expand in person on points they had provided in their earlier written report. Thanks to their visit, changes in CHES Kakamega have already been implemented.



(Directors Lorrie Williams and Orrie Babiuk welcome agents David and Wilma Wessel)

Mwahu Hostel Progress

In our last Newsletter we wrote of the visit of 36 Stelly's Secondary School students to Katesh and how they initiated the building of a hostel for girls at Mwahu secondary school. They worked hard for two weeks and managed to get the 5000 square foot floor laid and the walls built to the bottom of the windows. It was then time to return to Canada for their final term prior to graduation in June.

The day after the students left, the seasonal rains started, which meant the project remained on hold until they ceased. In early June local workers continued working on the walls. By the end of the month they were completed. Since then work has continued but at a slower pace, as funding, as ever in Tanzania, is always an issue. Chris and Catriona Harker are looking forward to seeing what has been accomplished when they visit early next year.

In the meantime . . . Stelly's will send a second contingent to Tanzania during Spring Break 2020. This time the project, a library and adjacent office, is much smaller and closer to Katesh which hopefully means it can probably be completed by the 19 students scheduled to go. As before,

Chris and Catriona will travel to Katesh, in advance, to work on other CHES business and with our local team to ensure that food, accommodation, transportation and building supplies are prepared and on hand when the students arrive.



by Chris Harker



Your Sponsorship Really Does Make a Difference *(as shown in a letter from a former CHES student to her sponsor)*

Hello Chris and Catriona,

How are you there? It's quite a long time since we communicated but I hope that you are okay.

Myself I am fine and proceeding well with my studies as I have now completed my fourth year and in November am going to start a new academic year; my fifth year to accomplish my Bachelor in Medicine! Now I am at Katesh for my holiday of about 3 months then I'll be back to University.

I am very happy to meet with my family again and for sure they are happy to see me also. I arrived at my home on Friday last week and I'm planning to visit CHES house to greet Aunt Naomi and Bernadetha together with the Matron there!

I really remember the trip we had together with you some years back when we visited some of the primary schools here in Hanang' District including Gendabi primary school and Mwahu primary school if I'm not mistaken. Indeed, it was wonderful moment for me.

Thanks a lot for our face to face communication when we met at Kibo palace Hotel at Arusha as you spent much of your time to solve my problem concerning my studies and for sure I realize that it was because of you that I proceeded with my studies and now am about to complete my studies and I promise you that I will help others to accomplish their goals as you did to me. May Our Almighty God bless you.

Much love from Cecilia Philipp Ligogo - a former CHES Girl from Katesh Secondary School.

Hope to hear from you



Lots of Changes

The government in Tanzania has implemented several new initiatives. In addition to changing the structure of secondary school fees they also have supported the initial construction of classrooms, science labs, and dorms by local communities – with the promise that funds to complete said structures would be forthcoming. However, without sufficient monies in the country to do so, most new rooms are not finished or habitable. Classes are often overcrowded with 80 – 100 students in a class the norm.

Impacting CHES Hanang recently was the change in legislation that required a change from a Society to an NGO. Many documents had to be completed and then filed. Thanks to the work of the BOT and trips by the treasurer, Naomi Saulo, to Dodoma and Kilimanjaro to file the documents the process is complete.



 **Please Mr. Postman look and see...If there's a letter a letter for me....** 
(remember the Carpenter's song, Please Mr. Postman)

The students are so thankful that you are sponsoring them and allowing them to receive an education but . . . they would love to hear from you. Everyone loves to receive a letter from a friend in the mail, especially the students. They would love to hear about you and your family, what you enjoy doing, your hobbies, and what you have been doing recently. If you have photos put them into your computer letter or send one or two with your handwritten letter. You will definitely brighten the day of your student when she receives your letter. If you are not sure of your student's address, please contact the CHES Office.

DID YOU SAVE THE DATE!
CHES ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Date: Saturday, October 5, 2019

Time: Refreshments & Social - 1:30 p.m.; AGM - 2:00 to 4:00 p.m.

Place: New Westminster Public Library - downstairs meeting room
716 6th Ave., New Westminster

There are bus stops close to the library on both 6th Street and 6th Avenue. The library is directly across the street from the Royal City Shopping Centre. Spaces are limited in library parking lot.

Notice to CHES Sponsors

All sponsors should have received a printed invoice reminding them that the fee continues to be \$600 for the 2020 school year. Thank you to sponsors who have already sent in their \$600 for the coming year.

We appreciate receiving it by early December 2019 so we have sufficient funds to send to Africa at the beginning of the school year in January. A reminder that funds can be sent by cheque or e-transfer. Please phone our office to receive information as to how to do a bank transfer of funds directly from your bank account into the CHES bank account.

If making donations by credit card through CanadaHelps.org they do charge a fee of 5% from the CHES portion of donations so we ask that you add an additional \$30 to cover this service charge.

American sponsors may send their donations to the Humanist Society at 1821 Jefferson Place NW, Washington, DC 200036 and they will issue a US tax receipt. The money is then forwarded to CHES and we will notify sponsors when it is received.

Additional donations are always appreciated and are income tax receiptable as well. A reminder that we will be starting to send out tax receipts by e-mail starting this fall.

