

Canadian Harambee Education Society

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

Winter 2021 Newsletter #72



CHES AGM 2020

There were nearly 60 CHES sponsors and supporters at the CHES AGM on November 21. This is almost double the number normally in attendance. Of course, thanks to Covid 19, nothing much is “normal” anymore which is why the AGM was “Zoomed”. This permitted CHES-ites who don’t live in the Lower Mainland to attend. It was a delight at the end of the formal meeting to be able to interact with sponsors from elsewhere in BC, Alberta, Saskatchewan, and distant Ontario. And all this in the middle of a pandemic.

Technical issues were dealt with by Director Orrie Babiuk. It was hosted by Executive Director Joy Ruffeski while Founding President Lorrie Williams chaired the meeting that lasted about 90 minutes.

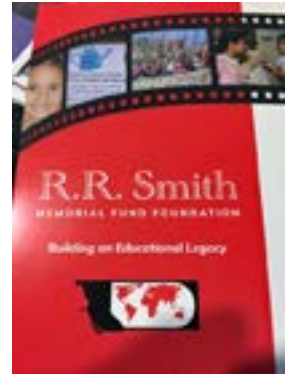
Despite the lack of traditional snacks, it was agreed that future AGMs should continue to be on-line as they offer the opportunity to so many more members to “attend”. It also offers the opportunity for the election of new directors who don’t live near Vancouver. As a result, Robb and Jeanette Taylor from Lumsden SK were elected as new directors as was Maureen Polard from Comox who returns to the board after lengthy absence.

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The R.R. Smith Memorial Fund Foundation - Building an Educational Legacy www.rrsmith.ca

CHES has been very fortunate to receive financial support from the R. R. Smith Foundation again this year. We received a grant of \$2000. The R. R. Smith Foundation supports educational projects in Canada and internationally. Funds are distributed to BC universities and to registered Canadian charities who meet the criteria of supporting public education.



The CHES directors applied for the grant and were very happy to be accepted to help with our education projects in Kenya and Tanzania. R.R. Smith Foundation members are mostly retired BC teachers who see the value of promoting education and social justice in Canada and overseas. The Foundation has over 15,000 members.

We will apply for a grant for the 2021 year and we are hopeful that the directors of the R.R. Smith Foundation will accept our application.

Why Did We Lose CHES Girls in Tanzania Last Year?

Sadly, about 9% (26) of the Tanzanian girls in Forms I to IV who were sent home to sit out Covid-19 failed to return when their schools reopened in July. Happily, all our Form V and VI girls who were sent home returned to classes in June, suggesting that the more education a girl receives, the more able she is to take charge of her own life.

There were a number of reasons for the 26 no-shows including “we have no idea.” Several of them, still in their mid-teens, got married. This might sound unsettling in the Canadian context but to some Tanzanians, it has a certain logic.

CHES draws from the Hanang District of Tanzania, populated largely by Iraqi (farming) and Barabaig (migratory herding) families. It is a subsistence existence for the vast majority. Times are changing rapidly, and cellphone communication, public motorized transport and intertribal marriages are now common. However, some traditions linger.

Tanzania has no old-age security and unless one has worked for the government, the concept of a pension is unknown. As few people in Hanang have paying jobs,



couples realize they have to plan for their senior years when they will no longer be able to toil in the fields and harvest an annual crop.

The answer for eons has been to have many children (6 to 10 is common) and hope that most are girls. Once these girls reach puberty, they can command “bride price.” Depending on the status of the family, the beauty of the girl and the temper of the times, this means that the family of the young man is expected to provide a dowry in cows (or cash equivalent) for the daughter. If a middle-aged couple receives 12 to 20 cows for their daughter, it can add appreciably to their breeding stock. Marrying off five daughters can provide one with a substantial herd that breed and grow over time. In a society where wealth is judged by the size of your herd rather than the suburb of your house or the model of your car, security is thereby assured.

Nowadays such traditions are impractical as the population density is considerably higher, the maize and bean farms are fenced, and the dry climate simply cannot produce the pasturage needed to sustain larger and larger herds. But as we all know, sometimes traditions take time to dissipate.

Our CHES girls are helping to alter such thinking. Many graduates have acquired jobs and husbands. Their families are smaller, with two or three children as the norm. And significant portions of their salaries are devoted to improving and supporting their parents and siblings. One grad I know well made sure she educated her brothers and sisters and built a new home for her parents before she got around to building her own house. Her home has several extra rooms she can rent out, thus ensuring her own security in the future.

In the meantime, consider the reaction some parents had when their daughters were sent home in March. “COVID” was an ominous word about which little was known in the developed world and far less in rural Tanzania. In the minds of some families, there may have been little likelihood of their bright daughter ever returning to school. “If Magretha is not going to get a job and help us in the future, we better revert to Plan B and get some cows in the corral” might have been the thinking. Unfortunate but not illogical. Unhappily, now that cows have changed hands, a changing of minds is not an option.

by Chris Harker



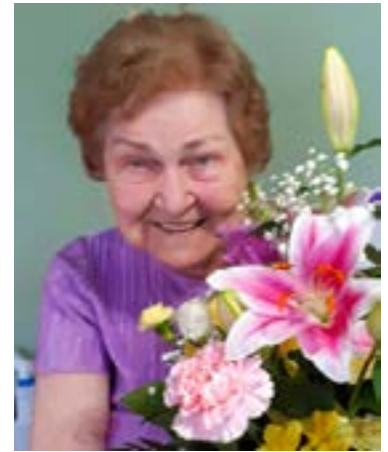
Remembering Nadia

Nadia Anderson was always a staunch supporter of NCHES. She had to be because she was my aunt. She passed away a few weeks ago and we will miss her presence and participation.

During the early years of CHES, Nadia volunteered to be secretary. She remained as a director until her death because she believed in what CHES was accomplishing. When we had fundraisers or at the AGMs, Nadia enlisted the talents of the Melodious Mandolins to play for the function. She frequently helped in the office and even found a source of free postage stamps--forever frugal.

After a visit to Kenya, Nadia's enthusiasm increased and sent her out looking for more sponsors. She always had a CHES brochure in her purse. Her dedication never wavered. Nadia will always be in our hearts.

by Lorrie Williams



CHES Kenya Keeps Girls on Track

With the schools closed for over 10 months, Rebecca, our Kenyan office manager, ensured that the CHES girls were accountable and stayed safe at home during that time. In addition to the workshops in July, she ran workshops again for the girls in October. Topics included: Making Math and Sciences More Interesting to Study, Corruption and its Effects to the Country and Our Society, Financial Literacy, and Technology.

Because CHES girls come from families living in poverty, COVID as well as heavy rains and flooding this past year have had a severe impact on any source of income families may obtain. Rebecca taught the girls how to make liquid soap and shaggy mats that they could sell to help their families survive. She ensured that all the girls wrote letters to their sponsors when they attended the workshops; you should have received or will soon receive your student's letter.



Rebecca had masks made that matched the different colours of the students' school uniforms as required for attendance when schools reopened. She visited all the schools in January and distributed these to the CHES students along with any personal supplies they needed.

Thanks to the care that Rebecca shows to all our CHES girls, your Kenyan students are well looked after through CHES.



New Board Members Robb and Jeanette Taylor

One unintended but positive consequence of the 2020 COVID restrictions has been that our CHES board meetings are now via ZOOM. This enables people from outside the BC Lower Mainland/Vancouver Island area--like the Taylors in Saskatchewan--to be a part of the regular decision making.



Robb and Jeanette's love affair with Africa spans more than five decades starting with Robb's two years with CIDA in Ghana and, after their marriage in 1968, three years in Tanzania. Their first child, Kim, spent the first years of her life in Tanzania and there they encountered their dear friends Chris and Catriona Harker. Kim and her brother Chris, who is now married with teenaged children, have travelled or worked in Africa as well.

In 2000, then both retired from teaching, Robb and Jeanette responded to an ad in the BC Retired Teachers' Association newsletter requesting agents for CHES Kenya. They were accepted and spent six months volunteering in Kakamega, where Bev Ford got them "up to speed" before she headed home. At the end of their time, which they shared with Alinda Ware and John Bowbrick, they travelled south to Tanzania to visit the fledgling CHES operation in Katesh. They let soon-to-be-retired Chris and Catriona know about it, thinking it was something that might interest them. It was, and the rest is history.

Since 1996, Robb and Jeanette have spent time each year apart from 2004 (when they monitored election violence in Sri Lanka) and 2020 in Africa either working, travelling, or escorting safaris. They have sponsored a number of wonderful CHES students over this time and have been fortunate to be able to meet most of them.

As educators they have worked and lived in Canada, in Africa (Ghana, Tanzania, Kenya and Botswana) and in Papua New Guinea, and have travelled extensively in those countries as well as in East Africa, southern Africa, West Africa, South America, North America, Europe, Asia and the South Pacific, meeting up on an almost annual basis with the Harkers, sometimes in quite exotic places.

Now, they write, "We are honoured to be a part of the inner workings of CHES and hope we have something to contribute, even in a small way."

Their contribution will indeed be welcomed and valued.

by Chris Harker



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Maureen Polard: New Board Member

I first met Lorrie when my family moved from Vancouver to White Rock in my final year of high school. What a fun, crazy, madcap year that was. Lorrie masterminded the pranks and I got the blame. Meeting her truly changed my life and we have been friends ever since.



Years later, in December 1983, I travelled with Lorrie's mom Rosalie to Kenya to visit Lorrie at Ekamboli, the school where she had been teaching for some time. I had never been to Africa before, and Rosalie was so much fun to travel with.

After returning from our Christmas holiday in Kenya, I decided to move there to teach at Ekamboli while Lorrie was the acting headmistress. I sold almost everything I owned, quit my job, and off I went in the following month to Africa.

Living in Africa was magic. I remember so clearly our school near the village of Kumusalaba. There I was first introduced to the concept of "harambee" or "all pull together." As our students came from poor families, the school embodied the spirit of harambee. Many students walked long distances to school, most without shoes.

Lorrie and I shared a duplex with a small front room, kitchen and bedroom each. We had no electricity or running water, but we were fortunate to have a well with clean water, paraffin lamps for light, and a brick outhouse with a cement floor with a hole in it. All this was quite a luxury for rural Kenya at that time.

We each were assigned two students, a girl to help in the house and a boy for the garden. These became our first sponsored students. The girls' hut was next to ours and we could hear them singing in harmony in the evenings as they braided each other's hair. It was so peaceful, so African.

We made trips every two weeks to Kisumu in the old truck to buy supplies. Lorrie at the wheel and two boys and I in the open back, we drove down the unpaved road. It felt so free. Our trips always had the same pattern, shopping first and finally the hotel pool, where we swam, had one beer (all we could afford), and met a few fellow expats. At Ekamboli we were the only wazungu (white persons) so we were not used to seeing white faces, only mafrikas (Africans) and it always amazed me to see a mzungu (white person) walking on the street in Kisumu. I stared at them just as the mafrikas stared at us. I felt African.

I was only at Ekamboli from January to September 1984, although Lorrie had been there much longer. There were some crises, many happy moments, but always joy and adventure. We felt as if we were making a difference. There was always our wine, bought in Kisumu, for consolation and celebration.

by Maureen Polard



Life Is Different

Following are excerpts from several letters written in the Fall by girls who were about to graduate from Form IV. For some, this is the end of their education; for others, they will enroll next July in Form V. Regardless, they are leaving the close nurturing that CHES has provided. They write of their personal lives and of how CHES has made a difference. It is interesting to note the many different people who point girls in need towards CHES. Where appropriate, there has been some minor editing.



BENEDICTA: (When I got my marks from grade 7) I was very happy because I passed my national exams (that permitted me to) continue with another level of education but on the other side, I am not happy because my family haven't the ability to pay my school requirements. I was advised by friends to write a letter to get a sponsorship from CHES. When I got the information that I had been selected as a CHES member I was being very happy because you're the one who help(ed) my parents or family from a big problem of supporting me. I want to be selected to Advanced Level in order to reach my goals.

EUGENIA: My mother passed away while I was in primary school. I want(ed) to continue (to secondary school but) I can not go to school because of an absence of money. One day my best teacher came to my home and tell me that she find for me the sponsorship at CHES. (Now I am at) the Sara Williams Hostel and get the best education and I get many friends. Now I finish my secondary education with the helpness of CHES.



ASNATH: My parent refuse to pay my school requirements. My friend (gave) advice and then I am coming to the CHES hostel. Thank you Diane Morris for your sponsorship of me from Form I to Form IV. God bless you and always I pray for you.

ANNA: I live with my parents with a very hard life. (They) have not the ability to send me to school. (In Form I) my uncle and brother paid for me (but were not able to continue). Then the Village Chairperson tell my mother that there is CHES who helps girls. CHES is the only one who supports me to continue with my education.



AGATHA: My mother was very happy to listen to the Head of School. He helped my mother to write a letter to CHES to beg this opportunity. After one month the Headmaster read the names of students going to CHES and my name is one of them.

HAPPYNESS: When I was in Standard (grade) 7, my mother passed away. My father (didn't) want me to continue to school because he hasn't the money. He told me to remain at home and do domestic activities. My primary Headmistress told my aunt that there was the opportunity of scholarship. (I started Form I with no money and then) Headmistress Madam Kavishe told me to come to the CHES House for an examination. I passed well and was selected to be a CHES student. My father and my aunt were very happy and they advised me to study hard to fulfill my goals and one day to help my family. I enjoy my life at the Sara Williams Hostel and learn different things such as planting flowers, vegetables and fruit trees. I thank the body of CHES.



Agness

Agness came from a very happy single-parent family but there was very little money. This explains how Agness obtained a CHES scholarship more than 20 years ago. When she graduated from school, she signed up for a CHES-sponsored computer course, and this, together with her vibrant personality and well-developed interpersonal skills, led Agness to become our office administrator for several years.

Time passed, and Agness met Raymaker. They married and went to Dar es Salaam where Raymaker had (and still has) a great job with a cellphone company. Agness started a small duka (store) selling basic commodities that has morphed into a very successful chicken and egg business.

Raymaker and Agness now have three children: Teddy born in 2009, Derrick in 2013 and Eunice in 2017. At CHES we dream that every girl we educate will have a happy and successful life. Agness, it seems, has achieved these goals.

But wait! Even better is the email we received from Agness just before Christmas. She wrote, "I still remember my promises of many years when I was working at the CHES office. I promised to support/sponsor CHES girl! And the time has come." On Christmas Eve, Agness sent in her first year's sponsorship payment to CHES Tanzania.

It is so heartwarming when one of our grads is doing well enough to herself become a sponsor to help a girl who is so like she was a generation earlier. What a model! We thank Agness, and hope she might be a trailblazer for other successful grads.

by Chris Harker

Check it Out!

When was the last time you looked at the CHES website? There is a wealth of information on the website about CHES.

Did you know that on the home page we regularly update information about what is happening currently in Kenya, Tanzania, and any events we may plan in Canada. As our newsletter only comes out three times yearly, these "headline" articles will keep you up to date before you hear about them in the newsletter! www.canadianharambee.ca



Reactions to the COVID “Holiday”

Here are some comments from student letters, commenting on their unexpected three month interruption of studies due to Covid in Tanzania.

AGAPE: During the Covid holiday I study with my friend in group discussion. Also I was working on my (family) farm harvesting beans, maize, sunflowers and also other domestic activities like washing clothes and dishes, collecting firewood and cooking food. Some effects that occurred during the three month (holiday) was for (some) students to enter into marriage.

AGRICOLA: Thank you for supporting me in my education. I am studying hard to achieve my goals and also to help my family and help other people who need my help.

ANASTAZIA: Corona virus causes a decline of industrial activities like making materials, clothes and other things. Thank you for sponsoring me and paying my school fees.

VICTORIA: The Corona virus was so bad as we were staying home without studying. Due to the hard life that our family faces, it's not easy to study. This made me forget what we learned in school.

I am now studying hard in order to be taught back....

I promise you that I will study hard in order to reach my goal to become a doctor.

HAPPYNESS: Thanks for having a kind heart and helping me. My promise to you is to succeed.

Bequests

Over the past year, CHES has received a number of bequests from supporters who are no longer with us. Some arrive as a cheque while others may be as shares in various companies. Donating in this fashion offers tax benefits to the estate.

All such donations – large or small – are of course welcome and will be used to support our girls. However, spending the full amount on annual school fees is questionable as there is little certainty that any specific amount will be continued in the following years.

We are therefore in the process of establishing a Trust into which these funds will be put. The trust will generate an annual income which can then be used to support CHES girls – more or less forever. There may not be a great deal of income at the outset but we anticipate the Trust will grow in the years to come. The more it grows, the greater the annual income. In addition, this Trust will ensure that should anything happen to CHES as a registered charity that the girls who are then supported will be able to complete their studies with all fees paid until the end of Form 4.

Supporters who may be writing or adjusting their Wills may want to earn the love and appreciation of future CHES girls by considering such a bequest.



COVID-19 Update - Kenyan Secondary Schools

During the past 10 months, the Kenyan government has repeatedly revised the school calendar for students, keeping students, families and CHES in limbo as to when schools would actually reopen. Dates for reopening and the school year changed almost weekly!

In October Form 4 students returned to school and will complete their Form 4 level in March 2021 before writing the national examinations in March/April. However, although other levels were supposed to also start at that time, they did not do so and plans for the completing the 2020 school year were again revised.

After being out of school for 9½ months, Forms 1, 2, and 3 students finally reported back to school on January 4, 2021. They will continue their studies from where they left off in March 2020 and will finish their current form level on July 16, 2021.

All students will begin the new school year and their next level on July 26, 2021 with completion of that level on March 4, 2022. National examinations will be administered in March 2022 for those students completing Form 4.

What does this mean for CHES sponsors of girls in Kenya?

Your student is now back at her boarding school and the 2020 school year now ends in July.

The 2021 school year will go from the end of July 2021 to March 2022.

The 2022 school year will go from April 2022 to December 2022.

We appreciate all sponsors who sent in their 2021 fees in December and they will receive their 2020 income tax receipt, as is the usual procedure. If you chose not to pay for your girl's 2021 fees as you were unsure as to what was happening with the fees, we ask that you do so no later than July 1, 2021, as we will need to pay the schools the tuition and boarding costs at that time. Thank you for understanding the challenges that CHES has had to work through due to COVID-19.

