

Broadening horizons and spreading the word about ACF



*Nelly with Rich Fisher & Basia Christ
at the Denver Aquarium*

Several years ago, Leonard and I discussed bringing two of our top students to the U.S to help us in our fundraising efforts and build awareness of our programs. We also wanted to expose these children to a modern world and improve their perception of what is possible for their people in Kenya.

Maasai do not have birth certificates so it took quite a while before we could secure passports. Then we had the challenge of getting the Visas. Unfortunately, this process was a lot more difficult than we imagined and only one visa was granted; for Nelly Lasoi. Nelly has been with us since the beginning of our program and is a dedicated, bright and personable student.

The only city Nelly had ever seen was Nairobi; she had never been on an airplane, driven a car or handled money, yet completely on her own she travelled halfway around the world. She is an amazing, brave young woman. We took a road trip from Colorado to California and she was thrilled to experience many new sights and meet several sponsors. The two presentations that we gave were very successful; we were given many generous donations. The press did a wonderful write up about ACF in local newspapers that truly helped in raising community awareness.

I asked Nelly to describe in her own words what it's like to be a Maasai, living in Kenya. Her story is a testimony of how much our sponsors and donors are impacting these kids. It's not just about education; it's about transforming their entire life!



Connie Humbert, Deb Hoskins, Jan McKinley, Paula Simon, Maureen Morgan & Robbie Larson welcomed Nelly to Colorado

Jambo Sponsors and Donors! Jambo means "hello" in Swahili.



A happy girl in Arches National Park.

Thanks for granting me this great opportunity to write about life in Kenya. Let me first tell you about myself, my culture and how Amboseli Children's Fund has changed my life.

My name is Nelly Lasoi and I am from IIng'osuani Village which is close to Amboseli National Park and the slopes of Mt. Kilimanjaro. I am in form 3 which is equivalent to being a Junior in high school here in America. I come from a large family, with 6 children from my mother and 9 children from my stepmom.

I am the second born and my elder brother is a Hustler in our home area. A hustler is someone that takes any job available. He must do this because he was not able to go to University and have any kind of career.

There are 42 tribes in Kenya and the Maasai are among the best known because we live close to many of the large game parks. The area called “Maasailand” is a dry, arid savannah.

In the Maasai culture girls are rarely educated and often destined for an arranged marriage at a very young age for a dowry of a few cows.

As for me, my parents tried to send me to school but it was always a big financial struggle and the public school in our area was not good.

But for as long as I can remember I wanted to learn and to make an impact on someone else’s life. This was made possible when I turned 11 and Leonard and Shari came into my life. Because I was a good student and my family was in need, they told me I would be accepted into their program. My parents had to agree that I would not be forced into an arranged marriage, nor would I undergo FGM (female genital mutilation). They placed me in a very good private academy and told me that if I worked hard in school, they would help me achieve my dreams.



*A first visit to see an ocean;
Laguna Beach in CA*

A few years ago, Leonard took several students to Nairobi so that we could see our Capitol city, the United Nations and Machakos high school. I was amazed at all that I saw and realized how much education could change my life.

I will be finishing High School next year and then plan to go to University to follow my destiny of taking courses in medicine. Maasai women are not in the work force; they stay home as housewives and mothers. **But I have different plans; I will be the first Maasai women doctor in my village.**

I would like to share my life in Kenya with you.

We go away to boarding school for 3 months at a time, then back home for one month. Only a few Kenyans have cars, so we must take the bus for the long 6-hour ride back to our village. When at home I live with my family in a manyatta (a structure made from sticks, cow dung and mud) with no electricity or running water. Our homes are very small, dark and have no windows. Cooking is done on an open fire within the manyatta and the smoke causes us many health issues.



Nelly said she would never could have imagined a place such as Las Vegas!



John Smead, Leonard Mpaayo, Kathy Smead and Shari Young pose prior to their presentation in Orange County, CA

As the eldest daughter all the house chores await me. So, I get up early in the morning and prepare tea for everyone. Then I go to fetch water in a wheelbarrow or I carry a plastic container on my back. All the eldest girls in the village do this, we walk about 30 minutes to a watering hole. A local project put up an electric fence around this water so that the animals would not be able to drink it or to be a threat to us. We make 2 to 3 trips here every morning depending on how much water we can carry and what we need.

Once I've returned back home, I start cleaning the house, wash the dishes, maybe wash some clothes; whatever needs to be done. We have no washing machines, no dishwashers; all of this must be done by hand. After this I help my Mum prepare lunch for my family. The younger children take care of the calves and play.

Lunch might be rice or Ugali which is a type of corn meal. Once or twice a week we will also have meat which could be lamb, beef or goat. But many Maasai don't take meat because they have no money to buy it and do not want to slaughter their cows.

In the afternoon I fetch firewood which takes a few hours. Then I relax for a bit until 6p when I help my Mum with milking the cows. Afterwards we prepare supper which is mostly rice and greens. If it's a special occasion we will cook chapati which is similar to a flat bread. After dinner



Nelly's visit to the US wouldn't be complete without a trip to Disneyland. Thanks goes to Patti Richardson for securing the tickets, shown here with her daughter Leah & son-in-law Kyle.

we clean up and go to bed as it's dark and we only have the light of the small fire in our manyatta. The next day I wake up early and must do it all again.

In my culture boys are brought up to be warriors; girls are brought up to be wives. We are not allowed to own property; we do not choose our husbands. I am very thankful that these traditions are changing as more of us become educated. I feel so fortunate that Amboseli Children's Fund came into my life. If not for this organization, I would now be married to some old man with several children! Instead I have a new destiny.

All of the Maasai children in the program; both boys and girls now have new destinies. Coming to America has already helped me to have a better understanding of what is possible for a woman and for my people. I want to shape my future so that I can be of help to myself and others. **I will be a Maasai women doctor!**

Umonifanya Ibada.

Thank you for help and support.



Bernie Walsler, Nelly, Lindsey Young and Dakota Sheppard are all smiles for the Thanksgiving Holiday