

The weeks from Mid July to mid August found me on an unexpected but most delightful trip to the United States. The occasion of the journey was a response to an invitation to speak to the parishioners of St. Joseph's Parish in upstate New York. The parish has been very supportive of our school here at Mazinde Juu and sponsors 12 needy students with generous giving for their school expenses. The graduation of 9 of these students marks a substantial investment in the lives of these determined students. They all come from deprived back grounds and the hand stretched out from America became a decisive step up for each of these girls. Blessings on the St. Joseph's Tanzania Team.

For me a highlight of the trip was also to be able to attend a family reunion. We are ten survivors of a family of fourteen, the children of Cornelius J. Milliken and Jean M. Sturgis. There were 80 direct descendents of our parents ranging in age from 89 years to the youngest, a great grandniece of a couple of months old. We had a family Mass where a grand niece made her engagement promise, another reaching into the future.

On my return to Mazinde Juu Sister Evetha, the Head of our school, told me of a curious incident, a runner up to our remarkable performance in the National Exams. An emotional father came to school to express his gratitude to the school for his daughter's stellar academic performance. Sister found the man kneeling in front of her office a somewhat extra ordinary posture considering the time and the place. The staff had tried to suggest that he stand or take a chair to allow Sister access to her office. When she arrived at her office she urged the man to stand, he declared loud and clear." My daughter came to Mazinde Juu as a provisional candidate with only a marginal pass mark. But Sister Evetha took her in and promised that we could do something with her. Now she is in the top ten of her class with a 4.5 G.P.A. I am not worthy to stand here on my feet and will kneel here until I thank her on my knees for all that Mazinde Juu has done for my daughter. "Such is the joy of teaching."



school library inauguration

My family has been very supportive of my work in Africa. In 1964 my mother a widow of 9 years came out to see me having heard that I was sick with malaria. In those years malaria was still a serious malady and often fatal. She brought one of my sisters, Rose, a newly minted nurse to provide medical support. Rose came over shortly afterwards on her own and worked in a leprosy hospital in the far South of Tanzania. Other sisters and brothers have come over some with their families.

When my mother came out back in the early 60's many of the people in the remote area where I lived had never seen a white woman. Their awe of a Priest too was such that they did not even believe priests had mothers and that we sort of just slipped down somehow from heaven. How well we have disabused them of this notion today.

If we say there was a high point on this holiday there was also a counterpoint. I was to meet my brother at a local supermarket in our home town. As I came into the parking lot there was a little white haired lady. very tiny and very frail. She was trying to unload her groceries from an electric grocery cart into her car. The wind was strong and she struggled to keep her balance. I offered to give her a hand which she readily accepted and then she asked me if I would return the cart to the stand in the supermarket. When I asked her how to get it going she said." Just pull the red handle for 'go' the black one to stop."

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So off I went at an infinitesimally speed just a notch above stop. A little green light bleeped "battery down". Kindly customers at the supermarket greeted me with little waves of the hand and a comment "Way to go Buddy". With the entrance just a few feet away the battery went dead. I waited for a lull in the in and out going customers and sheepishly left the cart and lost myself among the milling shoppers. When my brother Joe asked me what kept me so long I replied."Just riding around." Today we had a Thanks giving Mass for the 4th year graduates. It was a two hour joyous celebration. I prayed for all of you who have enabled these children to continue to strive for the limit of their abilities. Lead us to seek beyond our reach is part of our school prayer.

Thank you and God bless you and yours,

Father Damian