

50 Pounds of Dreams

How much does a dream weigh? I ponder that as we pack our suitcases for Africa, preparing for another Project Harambee service mission. We're allowed just 50 pounds per suitcase, two suitcases each. We're a nonprofit serving those in need, those affected by HIV. The Africa we see is not the land of exotic animals, romantic sunsets, tribal tales by Karen Blixen. We see poverty, struggle, illness in a continent full of desperate need, and we can respond to very few. We do what we can, following Mother Theresa's directive to "do small things with great love." We try to make the injustices visible to our friends at home. They won't be going to Africa, so I bring Africa to them, and they respond generously in a variety of ways: Katie K.--Linda G. before her-- bringing us children's sturdy outgrown shoes; donations from Steve and Judy H. and many others; Madonna L. and Annette H.'s knitting group with prayer shawls.

Top packing priority is given to medical devices and medicines. But this time we're bending policy (learned from my mother, who never let a rule or regulation get in the way of doing what's right). In addition to important medical items we're taking donated girls' and boys' First Communion outfits. Decided almost on a whim, an appeal to churches and friends yielded three dozen exquisite dresses and suits, some brand new with hefty price tags still attached. They'll be "repurposed" for families who could never afford such fine outfits, then returned to the nuns for safekeeping til next year's Communicants are ready. Our dream is to respond to the dream of each child to feel special--and look special--on a very momentous day. The Eucharist is of central importance, certainly, but when you're 7 or 8, sacramental significance shines brighter when you're well-scrubbed and decked out in a spotless white dress and veil, all dolled up for Jesus. I'm betting He understands, and smiles. And weeps because some of these innocent children will not see 9 or 10.

So I carefully fold and pack these cherished dresses and suits. They may be outgrown, but the memories and meaning they hold are not. Yet families have lovingly surrendered them so that children in Kenya and South Sudan and Uganda can invest them with their own memories and meaning. They are so grateful to generous brothers and sisters across the sea--people they'll never meet but with whom they share much.

Harambee ("all pull together" in Swahili) aims to build bridges across an ocean, across languages and cultures. We believe in *trickle-up*, that together we can change the world, one pair of shoes, one child, one 50-pound suitcase at a time. I am always flying by the seat of my pants, propelled by hope and my flimsy excuse for prayer, cramming suitcases with 50-pounds of dreams. Fifty pounds. That's a lot of dreams.



below: a parish in South Sudan. I wonder where the outfits...and the priests... are now.



Above: unpacking with Sister Julianna at Upendo Village & Sister Little at Lea Toto clinic, both in Kenya. Left: Margaret W. preparing for First Communion. Right: Lucy O., an HIV+ orphan being raised by her grandmother.

This part of our Africa mission continues. To help out, contact Keen at 708 983 4159 or visit www.projectharambee.org.

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