

THE FUTURE IS BRIGHTER BECAUSE OF YOU.

On Christmas day in the sweltering heat I knelt in our half-built church. It is summer here and temperatures can reach 38 degrees. I prayed and gave thanks for my good fortune, knowing that the boys and staff of Belgrove Senior Boys School had decided to support another project for my beloved Maasai people here in the village of Rombo, Kenya.

Being Irish, my face was the only white face in the gathering, however, the packed church largely ignored me. Five years later the Maasai have accepted me as one of their own and have given me the name Naraku, meaning 'brought by children'. As a result, thankfully, the women no longer spit at me (a form of Maasai blessing here) and one I am happy to do without.

The Maasai walked up to 40 miles to attend mass that day and give thanks for what little they have. This always amazes me. Their lives are so difficult and painful. Each year more people die here of hunger than Aids, Malaria, TB and polio combined. And yet, they arrived with great hope for the future. They dressed up in all their wonderfully colourful plastic jewellery and bright red dress and walked the long distance, sometimes travelling overnight. They hold their heads high and walk with great dignity.

Now that the New Year has arrived, it is a time for reflecting on the year gone by. I thank Belgrove Senior Boys School for helping me to build a school here (now called Belgrove). Through their support they have changed the lives of over 250 children forever. Next year we hope to have as many as 400 children registered in our new school.

Here in Rombo, Kenya, among the Maasai people, Christmas was just another day. A day when the women still fetched water in large drums on their heads and struggled to provide food for their families. The men searched out new pastures for their animals, since we are still experiencing a drought. There was no Santa Claus here, no presents and no turkey. But still the people have great hope that the future will be better for their children.

The New Year is also a time of hope and also a time to look to the future. I am privileged to be able to continue my work here with the Maasai children and with the support of Belgrove Senior Boys and staff and my friends in Ireland, I will continue to do all I can to improve the lives of these often forgotten people.

So from all the community here in Rombo to all of you we say 'Ashe Oleng' meaning 'thank you very much' and we wish you and your families all the very best for the New Year.

Elaine – Naraku.

cc. Matt Porter, 201 Mount Prospect Ave.