

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2010

36 REAL FANCY

Once upon a time, there was a little girl in Wilmette who liked to be fancy. Not just plain old regular fancy, Jessie Regunberg was super fancy — tiaras, boas and all. Regunberg is all grown up now, but her over-the-top princess persona lives on in the illustrations drawn by her aunt, Robin Preiss Glasser, for the blockbuster Fancy Nancy children's book series. We get the story behind the story.

By Lisa Skolnik.

Photographs by Tao Zhang. Illustrations by Robin Preiss Glasser

44 WHEN PICTURES MET SOUND

Not since peanut butter met chocolate has there been a sweeter pair than the director of Wilmette Theatre's film program and a producer of its live performances. Then Chad and Jenny Byers got married, ushering in a new life together and a new partnership between stage and screen for the 97-year-old theater.

By Peter Gianopulos. Photographs by Tao Zhang

52 MISSION FOR MERCY

Kibera is a slum in Nairobi, Kenya, with a population of one million, huddled in shacks within a one-mile square area. A young Winnetka volunteer spent six winter months serving there in 2006 but never forgot the little girl who died, and all the other children that came close. Jenn Winter, now a professional photographer, went back to Kenya again in 2009, and in January 2011, will take a team of local volunteers on another mission to build a health clinic for the community.

By Robert Loerzel. Photography by Jenn Winter

58 THE BIG INNING

A rabbi known for injecting baseball humor and other clever quips into his homilies is recruited by a Glencoe publisher to pen the A-Z book on Jewish culture. We go behind the pages with Glencoe Rabbi Steven Stark Lowenstein, *For The Love of Being Jewish*.

By Lisa Skolnik

ON THE COVER: Glencoe resident and Fancy Nancy fan Fiona Wonderlich poses at the home of the "real" Fancy Nancy's mom, Erica Regunberg, in Wilmette.

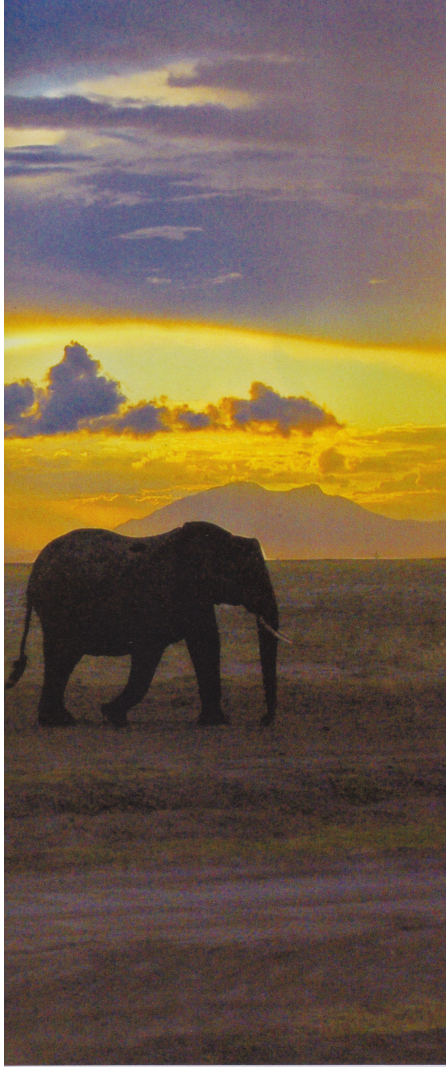


Mission For Mercy

A Winnetka native can't forget the children she left behind in Kenya. In January, she embarks on her third trip back to Nairobi.

By Robert Loerzel

photos by Jenn Winter
www.jwinterphoto.com



The girl named Mercy was very sick.

Less than a year old, Mercy couldn't keep down anything she ate. Her parents didn't know what was wrong, but they worried she might have malaria. It's a common ailment in their neighborhood. In this place, children run barefoot through garbage and excrement. This was Kibera — a slum in Nairobi, Kenya, where a million poor people are squeezed into a single square mile of makeshift shacks.

Mercy's mother, a teacher, took the girl with her to school. That's when Jenn Winter, a volunteer from Winnetka, saw her.



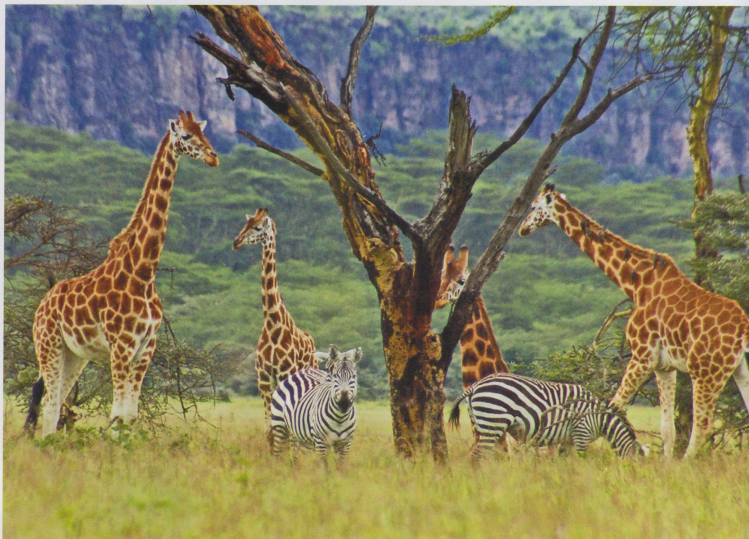
"I came to school on Monday and noticed that Mercy was doing well," Winter recalls.

In addition to the difficulty Mercy was having digesting anything, she was suffering from diarrhea. Her father was walking around the slum, beseeching people to give him money so that he could afford a doctor.

Winter took the girl to a doctor. And when the girl's condition got worse in the coming days, Winter used some of the money she'd brought from the United States to admit Mercy at one of Nairobi's best hospitals. Even there, it wasn't easy to get help.

"There was no sense of urgency," Winter says. "It took us four hours to get her vitals checked."

Mercy was in the hospital for 10 days. And then, Winter heard that Mercy had died. The doctors never determined exactly what was wrong with her.





The death of a child is not big news in Kibera. During the six months Winter spent in the slum during 2006, tuberculosis nearly killed two of the young children she was teaching and caring for at a volunteer-run school.

"It's just a part of life there," Winter says. But the experience of seeing children suffering and even dying in these desperate conditions hardened Winter's resolve to do more. "It was a turning point for me," she says.

Winter, a New Trier High School graduate, returned to Kenya for another two months of work in 2009. And now she is seeking other local volunteers to join her on a Jan. 15-22 trip to the African nation, where they will work on renovating a medical facility for a refugee camp.

Winter, 27, runs a photography business out of her apartment in Chicago's Lake View neighborhood. Wedding assignments pay the bills for J. Winter Photography, but many of her favorite pictures are the ones she took in Kenya. "Each has its own story," she says, as she flips through a stack of prints.

In one photo, a woman stands at the door of a wooden shack. From an American's perspective, it looks like a rickety hovel. But not to this woman.

"She saw us and invited us in for tea," Winter says. "She wanted me to take a picture of her in front of her house, because she was so proud to own it."

In another picture, a girl named Shannon holds her hands up to her face as she smiles in surprise and delight. Although Shannon lives in a country

famous for its elephants, she had never seen a pachyderm until Winter and other volunteers took the children on a field trip. Many of Kenya's poor children rarely leave the slums.

"She had never seen an elephant," Winter says, smiling as she looks at the photo of Shannon. "This is at the baby-elephant orphanage."

The children Winter encountered in Kenya were often happy and playful — despite living in poverty, disease and dirt.

"Kids are kids," she says. "Most of my favorite pictures are when they're smiling or playing."

Winter majored in mass communication at Miami University of Ohio, with a minor in film, but she says photography was her favorite class. After working at a marketing agency, she soon felt the urge to go abroad.

Winter set her sights on Kenya when she saw *The Constant Gardener*. Not everyone would react that way to the 2005 film starring Ralph Fiennes — especially after watching the scenes filmed in the Kibera slum — but Winter wasn't looking for a relaxing vacation.

"I was looking for a life change to put things in perspective," she says. "I wanted to change myself."

Winter used the Global Volunteer Network to find a local non-governmental organization she could work with in Kenya. She lined up an assignment with Volunteer International Community Development Africa.

"I have a lot of respect for organizations like VICDA," Winter says. "It's Kenyans helping Kenyans."

As Winter got off the plane in Nairobi, she wondered what she was getting into. "That was the moment when I thought, 'Oh, crap, what am I doing?'"

Irene Wairimu Ngatia, VICDA's executive director, was waiting at the air-

port for Winter, who was apparently easy to spot in the crowd.

"I think I stood out," Winter says. "She gave me a big bear hug."

Answering questions from Kenya via e-mail, Ngatia says, "Jenn is a very loving, happy person. She is young, but she seems to have a focus and a commitment ... She seemed very flexible and open-minded."





During her 2006 trip, Winter worked with children under 3 years old at the school in the Kibera slum. When Winter returned to Kenya in 2009, she worked in camps where people had been living since violence broke out between the Kikuyu and Luo tribes during the country's 2007 presidential election. These refugees are known as "internally displaced persons," or IDPs.

"They were kicked off their land and burned out of their homes by their neighbors, who happened to be of different tribes," Winter says. "I couldn't imagine a place worse than Kibera until I saw an IDP camp."

Winter persuaded seven friends in Chicago to join her for portions of the 2009 trip, including Tami Hardoby. "She did a really good job of telling us all about her first trip," Hardoby says. "But it's one of those things you can't really understand until you show up. It was sensory overload."

Hardoby worked with Winter to set up a chicken farm in an IDP camp. "I didn't go there with any illusion that we were going to fix anything," Hardoby says. But by the end, she felt like she'd played at least a small part in assisting the people of Kenya. "I would do it again in a heartbeat," she says.

At the end of that trip, Winter took a break from the volunteerism — by climbing Mt. Kilimanjaro.

People are still living in Kenya's IDP camps, and Winter hopes to find 30 local volunteers to lend them a helping hand in January. Volunteers will pay a \$2,500 fee, which includes a \$1,500 donation for the construction of the health facility. The fee also covers room and board, but not airfare to and from Kenya. To register for the trip, contact Ngatia at ngatiairene@gmail.com.

"The most urgent need today is to build a hospital for the displaced families," Ngatia says. "The families, including children and pregnant women, have to walk five miles to the nearest clinic. Women are giving birth at home, and the houses and tents they are living in are very unhygienic."

Each time Winter visits Kenya, she feels reluctant to leave. At the end of her first trip, she says, "It was really hard to say goodbye to my kids. Part of me wanted to stay. But the only way to make things better was to go back and tell people about it."

To make a contribution to Jenn's mission, or to help others take on this important act of service to the children of Kenya, go to www.jennwinter.com. She will be blogging from her travels regularly.

