



HEART

LIFE SURE HAS A WAY OF COMING FROM BEHIND WITH SURPRISES, DOESN'T IT?

I mean who would have ever thought last year that 2020 would be a period of global lockdown, social distancing, virtual conferences and PPE? So much for At-A-Glance and weekly appointment books!

I guess I'm not totally overwhelmed by this unexpected turn of events. In 2018, I retired from Glendora's Foothill Christian School at the age of 66. I was mentally geared up to enjoy a new life mastering bonsai plants, tending the garden, crafting some wooden items for the house and yard, writing occasional blog stories and simply playing the guitar.


I remember well, in the first few months of retirement, waking most mornings wondering exactly what I might decide to do that day. My bride of 44 years, Carolyn, had already retired two years before and quickly found a comfortable role for herself as a full-time Nanny, helping shuttle our two grandsons to and from school, rolling out some new and yummy Rachel Ray recipes, folding laundry and caring for her corner flower bed, called "Mimi's Garden."

Sometimes to lessen my guilt, I'd ask Carolyn if there was anything in particular I needed to do around the house. She would simply reassure me with the most comforting words ever: "Baby, you

Jerry Kitchel: Finding Your Second Wind

can do anything you want today. You're retired! Play your guitar. Read a book. Take a nap." Wow, is this the Garden of Eden or what? Life was so different now, no job pressure, no deadlines, no required meetings to attend, no income goals to reach, no more performance reviews. Every day was Saturday and it felt wonderful for the seven months that it lasted.

My curious life of always learning something new included time spent dabbling in social media. One day in particular, a friend sent me an offline message on Facebook and asked if I could recommend anyone who I personally knew who had skills in fundraising, communication and marketing. A small, but very impactful nonprofit doing work in Kenya, and based in Auburn, CA, was in need of an advancement director to work closely with the founder and executive director. Please don't take this the wrong way, but I was pretty flattered when the question was posed this way: "Can you help us find a Jerry Kitchel? Is there anyone you know—maybe someone you've even mentored—who can help



"I captured this beautiful smile of Juliet, a survivor of AIDS, a widow and a mother of nine children. Her success in recovering her health, in applied entrepreneurial efforts and responsible parenting converge to make her a beacon of inspiration to other HIV positive women enrolled in HEART's empowerment program."





"These two amazing guys are part of HEART's Nairobi team, where they provide security, safe travels, and wonderful friendship for the guests who stay at HEART's lodge."



"Here I am with HEART founder, Vickie Winkler, a public health nurse who, for the last 40 years, has lived a dedicated life in service to the Kenyan people. Wearing a faux-leopard jacket, she was our guest for a dinner gathering this particular evening. Seen here with my daughter and son-in-law, Sarah and Jeff Dykema, and my wife, Carolyn."

HEART with your particular set of skills and experience?"

I recall chuckling and thinking to myself how this position and organization sounded awesome. But there was one major glitch: I had already retired, thrown in the towel, and was barely getting started on a new path, a path that did not include the daily grind I'd known for the past forty years. I honestly thought if I were younger and had more years ahead, this could be a terrific job. There was even a tinge of disappointment, "Dang, I'm too old," I thought. Some of you know what I'm talking about. You look in the mirror and ask yourself, "When did this happen? I was young for so long, now this?"

No, this would be a season in which I'd simply stick to my guns and saturate myself in the newness and unexplored joy that comes with job freedom. I paid my dues, after all. But, whoa, the power of words spoken by those we love and respect. Now there is a force that can move us like a strong wind or mighty nudge. Words can change one's course of life in a flash. And that's exactly what happened last fall in September when I commented to Carolyn, during a quiet Sunday brunch after church. It began when I casually commented, "I'm intrigued by this position with HEART, and I don't know exactly how to feel about it." What I haven't told you, yet, is that I had a good working knowledge of this organization, whose acronym stands for Health Education for



"A huge concern for people who support good charitable work is how well their dollars are used and how well property is maintained and respected. I guess that's why this Landcruiser caught my eye. In spite of its heavy use transporting visitors and missionaries, it sparkles!"



"I remember sitting next to this mom at HEART's community center in Kibera, which is one of the largest slum areas in Africa. The gentleness of her smile and grateful spirit of her demeanor spoke volumes as I captured this shot. At one point, she was near death and today she is on the road to recovery."

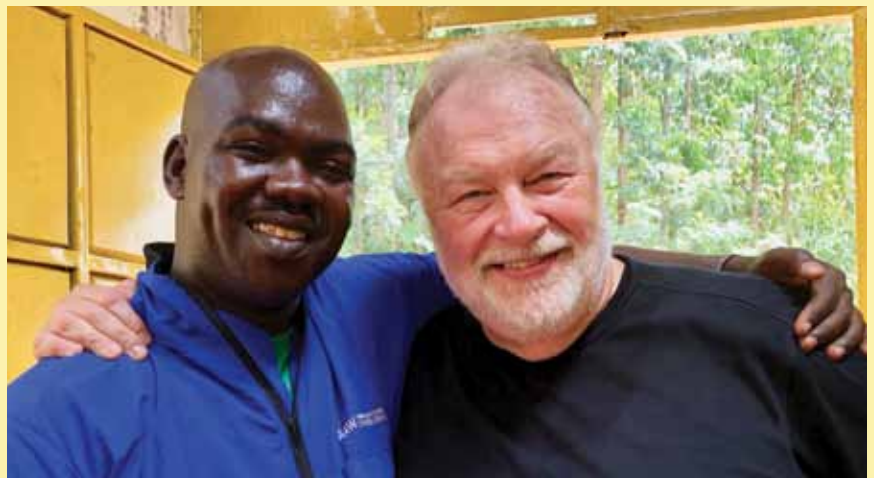
Africa Resource Team.

I had met the founder, Vickie Winkler, who launched this nonprofit nearly 20 years, and had previously met with members of the board of directors about leadership issues. I was very impressed with HEART and all that I had learned about this organization; more on that in a minute.

In terms of my own heart, I've always had an abiding love for Africa and the African people. I had served on the continent for many years in communication roles related to Ethiopia's famine in 1985, Somalia's war-torn refugee crisis in 1992 and Rwanda's evil genocide in 1994. I had made several trips to Ghana in the 90s to help report the accomplishments of a Christian ministry conducting corrective eye surgery for the benefit of thousands who were suffering from cataracts and other visual impairments. There were other assignments and other visits later, everyone of them a blessing and life-changing experience...

It was Carolyn's words that resonated deeply in between bites of Kung Poa Beef and Orange Chicken. "I would love for your grandsons to see their Papa doing what he loves best. You love Africa and still have so much to offer." That was pretty sobering, but then later that day my daughter added to the nudge: "Dad, I think it would be

awesome for you to take on this new job. In fact, I would love to go with you to Africa! I have friends who would love be part of a team of workers." Boy, was my world flipping upside down! All of a sudden, I could hear the comment of my good friend, Mendell Thompson, bouncing around in the



"Joshua Omondi is a talented instructor who trains young men in the art and skill of woodturning to produce income-generating items. His students are the children of moms who have survived HIV/AIDS."



"I'm generally on this side of the camera capturing images for various communication needs. But on this particular day in rural upcountry Kenya in a small village called Nyakach, someone grabbed this photo while I was among those men honored by HEART's WEEP ladies. The celebration included a festive dance, this decorative straw hat and beautifully sung songs. Truly an honor! WEEP, by the way, stands for Women Equality Empowerment Project."



"While visiting Kibera's community center, I and reacted to Vickie's comments. I've had a visionary, so this experience has been remarkable. I'm known as 'Mama Vickie' and her life commitment and love and passion to do the same!"

cranium: "What are you going to do in retirement?" he asked. "You're too young for that!" Mendell, retired this past March from America's Christian Credit Union, but his plans for civic leadership in Glendora remain at the top of his priority list. The power of words fitly spoken! Ancient scripture has much to say about their power and our need to seek wise counsel. My decision would be ultimately influenced by that timeless truth.

Honestly, the prospect of traveling to Kenya and stepping back into the fast and stressful lane of TSA checks, bag inspections, and changed flights, as well as fundraising goals, advocacy messaging and compassion-based dynamics weren't deterrents. In fact, they have been an integral part of my life for the past 35 years. The real question to resolve was really about my own willingness and readiness to switch gears and plunge headlong into the nonprofit world...again! If you've ever worked in the nonprofit world, you know it's hard work. In fact, when it comes to advancement and fundraising, some organizations have reputations for how quickly they cycle through advancement people. I even worked for one of those outfits, dubiously nicknamed, "Revolving Door Ministry." No matter





watched how intently these ladies listened to a few opportunities in life to work with a true entrepreneur. In Kenya, she's loved and widely respected. Her commitment to helping others is serving to fuel my



"In upcountry Kisii, HEART is in the process of buying a second property to develop another "for profit" lodge. The proceeds from the enterprise helps fund programs that help women and children. In this photo, I am being briefed by two HEART staff members who work in that region of the country."

how much you do, there's always more work to be done, more lives to help, more ideas to implement, more changes that require recalibrated plans. Organizations that are doing great things are committed for the long-haul, which is exactly how I saw HEART's approach to helping Kenyan women and their households.

After a good deal of

consultation with those closest to me—as well as a lot of prayer—I accepted the position on October 15, 2019 and have been working 40 to 60 hours a week ever since. And you know something; it doesn't feel like a job, either. It feels more like a sweet spot that exists somewhere between a

"One of the great joys I experience in this new assignment is helping tell the HEART story. One vehicle for doing this is with a monthly podcast called Straight from the HEART, in which I interview Vickie on a number of topics of interest to the ministry's supporters." Straight from the HEART: the podcast is featured on Apple Podcasts and Spotify.



Straight from the

With Vickie Winkler, Founder and Executive Director of HEART, the Health Education for Africa Resource Team.
Co-hosted by Jerry Kitchel, HEART Partner Relations Specialist.

www.africaheart.com
email: info@africaheart.com
phone: 530-885-9600

rewarding vocation and an exciting avocation!

When I spent nearly a month in Kenya last November and witnessed the impact of HEART's work, I was blown away! Over 600 women and nearly 2,500 children have been helped since 2000. These HIV-positive moms have survived death, have been assisted and coached in good nourishment, have experienced improved health, have learned new skills to generate income and are now financially succeeding, so much so that they can support their children and keep them in school with HEART's financial help. HEART has believed since its inception that the best way to impact a community is by helping mothers get healthy so that they can care for their children. In fact, a number of the children who were first supported by HEART two decades ago are leading successful lives and working in professions that range from medicine and education, to law and engineering. This second-generation of children is very involved in their own communities helping others in various dimensions of public service.

So how do I feel about moving beyond retirement and the genteel art of bonsai? Well, it's like getting



a Second Wind! I can't think of anything better to do than to serve others while there's still fuel in the tank, and to know—in some small way—I can still make a difference. I couldn't be more grateful for the people who spoke into my life when I thought my path was clearly marked and narrowly defined. This is a new and exciting path for sure, one that needs to be marked with plenty of prayer for strength, creativity, compassion and drive. But, oh, what joy in the journey. What unspeakable blessings we receive from helping others whose needs we can't begin to fully fathom. ❖



The trip from Nairobi to Frankfurt to Chicago to Denver to Ontario was 34 hours! For a guy who ended retirement rather quickly, I managed to get my second wind just in time for this new life challenge.

About the Author

Jerry Kitchel is a native Southern Californian whose career in nonprofit work has taken him to nearly fifty countries serving in strategic communication, marketing and advancement capacities internationally, as well as more regionally and locally with such organizations as Foothill Christian School, Union Rescue Mission and Azusa Pacific University. Since October 2019, he has headed partner relations for Africa Heart (Health Education for Africa Resource Team), a highly respected nonprofit organization that is helping HIV positive mothers and their children in Kenya. Jerry and his wife, Carolyn, along with his daughter and son-in-law, Sarah and Jeff Dykema, "live under one big roof in Upland, CA," with two grandsons, Arie and Alan. ❖

