



**ABSTRACT:** *A Kenyan woman, a retired nurse, and a nurse executive in America are miraculously led together to start a library in Kima, Kenya. Small beginnings grow into the Heather May–Mashood Abiola Children’s Resource Centre (HEMAMA). Named after two infant children lost by the Kenyan woman and the nurse executive, HEMAMA is making a difference in the lives of children in the Kima, Kenya community.*

**KEY WORDS:** *healthcare missions, Kenya, nursing, retirement, vulnerable children*

# GROWING *a Miracle in* KENYA

*By Michael J. Farruggia*

## RETIREMENT KNOCKS

**A**fter her retirement from nursing in the United States, Ruth Cooke decided to become a missionary in Africa. Through her church, Ruth volunteered as the nurse for the Kima International School of Theology, in Kima, Kenya. During one of her mission trips, Ruth met Beatrice Sungu, a local Kenyan native. Beatrice’s husband had passed away and she was looking for a way to support herself and her four children. Ruth acquired a treadle sewing machine



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for Beatrice, providing her the opportunity to work out of her home as a tailor.

One day, Beatrice shared with Ruth her desire to have a children’s library in Kima since books were not available to the children. On a return trip to the United States, Ruth was bubbling with excitement and shared her missions experience with me, mentioning the need for the children’s library.

My spirit felt a tugging and I decided I could help. My parents had given me money that I desired to use for a special purpose. I placed the money in Ruth’s coat pocket and asked her to use it as seed money to start the library. Walking away from Ruth, my spirit quickened and I shared my heart’s desire to name the library “The Heather May Children’s Memorial Library” in memory of my daughter who died as an infant.

Ruth sent the donation to Beatrice, who immediately purchased books. The initial steps in creating the library organization included setting up a FaceBook page, bank account, and

obtaining business cards. Soon others were donating money, books, stuffed animals, puppets, and more. Shortly after starting the library, Ruth shared that Beatrice had an infant son, Mashood Abiola, who passed away as a result of malaria. Beatrice and I both had suffered the loss of a child. We had a common bond that breaches geography, culture, and race; we understood what only someone who has suffered the loss of a child can fully understand. Hearing this news, I requested to have Beatrice’s son’s name added to the library name and Beatrice agreed.

To make the Heather May–Mashood Abiola Children’s Memorial Library (which we called HEMAMA) official, a volunteer library board had to be established to provide oversight to the organization and an application submitted to the Kenyan government to be formally recognized. Following submission of an in-depth organizational proposal, the Kenyan government officially recognized HEMAMA.

To accommodate the library holdings being housed in her home, Beatrice had bookshelves made and a large library sign posted near her home. Great care was taken to ensure the library holdings were spiritually and culturally appropriate. As the library became established, more and more children as well as many adults in Kima started utilizing the library.

### GROWING MINISTRY

It wasn't long before Beatrice let Ruth and I know that many of the children coming to the library were orphans and hungry. It was hard for the children to listen to stories at the library over their growling stomachs. In response, a feeding program was added as part of the library mission. Because of the growing need to feed the children, the Kenyan government is requiring a commercial kitchen be built. Currently, funds are being raised to meet this requirement.

Beatrice additionally shared that several children coming to HEMAMA were lacking basic resources for living, such as food, clothing, and shelter. The children are vulnerable due to one or both parents being deceased or unemployed. For example, one child whose parents were deceased was being raised by a grandparent. Unfortunately, the grandparent fell ill and was no longer able to care for the child. Beatrice graciously invited the child into her home and is raising her. So, in addition to the feeding program, a vulnerable child sponsorship program was initiated.

The sponsorship program helps provide for the children's basic needs of food, clothing, shelter, healthcare, and schooling. Photos and letters from these vulnerable children have been posted on the HEMAMA FaceBook page to share their needs. To date, only a few of the vulnerable children have received sponsors, but we continue to pray that God will call more people to help.

To accommodate HEMAMA's growth, Beatrice and the library board searched for land to build a permanent library structure. Once land was found, a donation was made for its purchase.

Immediately after the deed for the property was received, volunteers fenced the property and planted maize and beans to supplement the feeding program.

As a result of the increased number of children visiting the HEMAMA library, the Kenyan government insisted a latrine be built to accommodate sanitary needs. Building the latrine was a temporary measure to accommodate needs until the permanent library structure can be financed and built.

In addressing its expanded mission, the organization was renamed "Heather May-Mashood Abiola Children's Resource Centre" but is still referred to as HEMAMA. Along with the feeding program, other HEMAMA activities include Bible studies and story and song times. To support these activities, members of the HEMAMA Board and the students from Kima International School of Theology volunteer to help.

The next step in developing HEMAMA is to raise money to build the kitchen, fund the construction of a permanent library structure on the HEMAMA property, and develop a support system to sustain the organization. Plans for funding include individual donations, organizational donations, and grant funding. In the event HEMAMA becomes sanctioned as an official library by the Kenyan government, the library may be eligible for government support. Kevin Trautman, a freelance photographer, heard about HEMAMA and did a photo exposé of Beatrice and HEMAMA. Kevin's photos, posted on the HEMAMA FaceBook page, share the story of HEMAMA with the world.

### MAKING A DIFFERENCE

HEMAMA started off with the prayerful wish of a native Kenyan woman and the support of two nurses. As a result of this step of faith, currently 200 children in the Kima area are enjoying and being ministered to at HEMAMA. The feeding program eases the hunger pangs of 50 vulnerable children while the sponsorship program helps meet more basic needs. A nonprofit application for HEMAMA has been submitted with the Kenyan government and approval is pending. In



### Web Resources

- Facebook—<https://www.facebook.com/heathermay.mashoodabiola?fref=ts>
- Good Shepherd Society—[goodshepherdsociety.org](http://goodshepherdsociety.org)
- The Finishers Project—<http://finishers.org/>.

the United States, with the help from Dr. Debra Cole and the Good Shepherd's Society, *Friends of HEMAMA* gained nonprofit status. A HEMAMA Web page was created and added to the Good Shepherd Society Web site by another nurse, Tiffany Henry. Once the HEMAMA Library is built and funded, long-range plans include a mobile library for surrounding villages with eventual expansion to other Kenyan villages in need of children's reading material.

The Heather May-Mashood Abiola Children's Resource Centre started in 2008 because a local woman accepted God's vision to minister to children and a U.S. nurse followed God's call to serve in Kenya. Other nurses joined in and helped expand the vision. The project has grown into a program inclusive of children's books, education, activities, worship, Bible study, and a vulnerable child's feeding program. HEMAMA's vision is to have a resourceful Children's Library Centre and a caring children's home for vulnerable children. HEMAMA's mission is to upgrade the education level among children and vulnerable children in the Kima community and the district as a whole, as well as to encourage a reading culture. To accomplish this, HEMAMA Children's Resource Centre hopes to feed children physically, mentally, and spiritually in the Kima, Kenya, community.

Some nurses reading this article may wonder how they can make a difference in the world. You may be retired or entering retirement and wonder if your work is done. This story shows how God unexpectedly used people committed to him to make a huge difference in a Kenyan village. Never underestimate what God can do through you as you commit your life to him.