



Newsletter: April 2009 Douglas McFalls

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## I'M COMING TO AMERICA IN JUNE

After nearly 20 months (with a short blip in Boston last March) I'm coming home! My father's memorial service is scheduled for July 4<sup>th</sup> in Vermont (he passed away last September). Because it's been a long time, and it's a pricy trip, I decided to spend the month of June in the U.S. visiting friends & supporters, eating all I can and sharing as much as I can (formally and informally) about all the developments here. I look forward to seeing many of you, catching up on what you have been up to as well. Please pencil me in your stereotypically busy American calendars. I start my "tour" June 3 - 11 in Seattle. I am trying to plan a reception on Saturday, June 6<sup>th</sup> and I'm presenting at University Pres. Church on Sunday the 7<sup>th</sup> at 11:30 a.m. & 7 p.m. I'll take the train to San Fran, then across to Chicago, NYC, and Boston before joining my family in Vermont on the 28th. I look forward to seeing many of you. My number will be – 206.227.0082 (here it is +255.784.491471 – we are currently 10 hours ahead.) See you soon!

**Coconut Shell Workshop:** Ever wonder what to do with all those left over coconut shells? After waiting more than a year for the funding to come through, I finally launched the Coconut Product Exploration Workshop in January. With painters, carvers, basket weavers and tailors, we brainstormed and concocted all sorts of product ideas: wall faces, wee fishing boats, stuffed turtles with zipper pouch bellies, minimalist picture stands, puppets, mobiles, napkin holders and more. On April 23 we will showcase the fruits of our efforts at the Mawazo Art Gallery in Dar es Salaam. Eight artisans and I will travel to Dar to host this event, asking the guests to help select the most promising new designs for our wholesale catalogue and shop.





**Budgeting:** You work hard. You do have a living wage, but at the end of the month where did all the money go? The artisans here are asking the same question. They are earning more shillings than ever, but some still feel they don't have any money. It all seems to vanish so quickly. In March's monthly meeting we considered these questions: What are their dreams? What are they earning? And, where is the money going and why can't they fulfill their dreams? Together we listed those things in their life that require money: food, rent, school fees, medicine, water, loans, etc...some items straddled necessity vs. pleasure: clothes and mobile phones. Then the pure pleasure items: Soda, batteries for the radio, cigarettes, women on the side (really, we talked about the additional cost involved in that, too) and so on. It was interesting. When they were asked how much they spent a month on mobile phones, very few knew. One person said, "20,000 Tanzanian shillings a month" (about \$18). I asked, "What is that over 12 months?" A few said, "120,000 Tsh". I said "NO! It's 240,000 Tsh!" – enough to roof their homes with metal sheets! They were shocked. So the challenge is from now on to document every shilling they spend for April then report back in May!

**Drawing the Line:** One great thing about being fed up is that one is less moved by pleading stories and "Nisamehe" (Forgive me). I've reached that point. With so much abuse of the payment system of compensation and loans and failed attention to order details, we're dropping the ax. This is very good, and also very hard. Last week one of our carvers made the 2 hour – 4,000/= Tsh (\$3.50) trip to the office the day AFTER our Tuesday order receipt day. He said he wasn't feeling well, and that he missed the other carvers who came on Tuesday. But this story is all too frequent. So we said he'd have to wait. Sadly, his choice will likely leave his family without money for the rest of the week. He left furious; I left grieved but also convinced we had done the right thing. Last month, one of our painters needed a loan to send a sick cousin to another town's hospital. However, he had an outstanding loan of 7,000 shillings. The 2009 policy is: one loan a month, and no loans outstanding. He had one; we said no. What was encouraging was that he then chose to work the entire weekend, and by Tuesday he produced enough to pay off his loan, and take a new one, and help his family.



**MaKuYa 2009 is officially on!** We finally received confirmation from the Swiss, Finns and Germans to launch the second annual MaKuYa Traditional Culture and Performing Arts Festival in Mtwara, Tanzania. Last year was a huge success with over 360 performers and 2000+ visitors. Though we are still waiting for other donors, what has been committed is enough to make it happen.

MAKUYA 2009 – AUGUST 14, 15 & 16

[MaKuYaFestival.blogspot.com](http://MaKuYaFestival.blogspot.com) & September 2008 Newsletter for more information





**Tanks at Blowout Prices:** About a month ago I got a text message from Tipape Loomu, the director of our Maasai Boma Schools in Rombo, Kenya. A water project in Rombo was selling tanks at a quarter of their normal price! “Can we afford one for our school at Esukuta?” Though funds are tight with \$500+ required monthly for running costs, for only \$368 the school and the community will have 15,000 liters of safe and available water collected from a pipeline and rainwater (when there is rain), so we bought it and it is now being installed. Tipape’s family (who always graciously hosts me and my guests), also have received a 1000 liter tank through the gift of my friend Pam Hathaway who recently visited and is beginning to source support for more water projects in Rombo.



**Aborted Plans To Move:** I have lived in my office for the past five years here in Mtwara, Tanzania. I was OK with that for a long while because, well, I had no other reason to be here than to work. Since 2003, however, my living room became an office and meeting room and my dining area became a second shop. My minute side garden has become a place for carvers to work and my guest room has become home to Kiluku, our "new" MaKuYa project employee. I was feeling cramped and missed my privacy, so I went house hunting - with a miniscule budget. I vied for two abandoned



houses on the beach, which I offered to make habitable in exchange for two years rent; alas, no go. There was a nice house, furnished, security, and all utilities; \$450 a month. Ouch! Way over my budget. Went to a nicer “local” house, but seeing my skin color they asked an absurd 400,000 Tsh (about \$350) a month without utilities or security! Finally, I found



a place: a cute house built by the English for the now vanished railway line.

It had charm even if the toilet was still outside. I talked the owner down to 100,000 Tsh (still above the price of a comparable places). But then there was a delay. My schedule began to fill up and I began to weigh the financial and time cost involved in making this house into a place where I’d be happy. And, I realized, in all likelihood I’d be with the Maasai in Kenya much more next year. So I pulled the plug on the deal, stayed put, and immediately began to implement some changes and long overdue home improvements. “As I am my witness, this cinder block duplex shall be a designer show house!”

THE PICTURES ARE MY FORMER BEDROOM & “LIVING ROOM” (WITH HALF A DUGOUT CANOE IN THE CORNER)

I will wind up now. I am doing great these days - loving my work and making a lot of progress! There are so many (too many) project and program ideas. The biggest challenge is still keeping my cool when workers fail to remember yesterday's lessons when learning the one for today. It always seems we’re stuck in Business 101.

**Spiritual note:** I’m learning to put my art into everything I do. Example: the seventy-two page MaKuYa festival 2008 accounting report submitted to the donors is a work of art with photographs and great page layout. Seeing the final product through not only accounting but also artistic eyes made the mundane project such a delight. Will that work with a clogged drain?

Lot’s more I could share, but I’ll leave you with this! I look forward to seeing many of you soon!

*Douglas*

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