



## A Word from Puma

My Dear Friends.

From time to time we all need a reminder to come back to reality - after almost 20 years of going back every year to the Congo, I almost forgot about why I do the work....

During a presentation at Walkersville middle school my reality was challenged. A 6th grade student asked this question- "Mr. Puma, why are you doing this, and what is your goal?"... I stopped. I was shocked. It caused me to wake up and think. I was not expecting that sort of question - especially coming from a 6th grade student... I had tears in my eyes. So I told her a story that I want to share with you.

When we started in 1995, no one in the Congo believed that we were going to succeed. Even the chief of the village told me "Puma, you are not going to succeed in this village, because there is so much witchcraft here."

When I first got to that village there was only one man who knew how to read and write out of over a hundred families living there. They, along with the animals in the village were all drinking water from a small creek. There were no latrines, so when it rained, the run-off contaminated the creek. There were so many diseases.

Then I recall this story; Lukwasa, a very good friend and supporter of Able and Willing, died two years after starting a church in the village to help change their belief in witchcraft. When I asked how he died, they told me that he stepped on a trap from the local witches while he was working in his field by the Lubumbashi river. He felt a prick, like a needle (that so-called witch trap). A few minutes later, his leg started getting numb and started to swell. He went back to his house and his family tried to massage the leg. It continued to swell, and he started to sweat. Then later, he slept and never

woke up. Because his family didn't know the cause they blamed the people in the village for the sudden death of their father. Even now there is friction between them.

The truth is he was bitten by a snake. I came to realize that because of misunderstanding and ignorance many deaths in Congo that are blamed on witchcraft are actually from natural causes. Additionally, the medical practitioners in Congo are promoting this kind of belief; when the cause is unknown, doctors say "go and talk to your your family." The family then turns to the care of a witch doctor, who says that someone close has put a spell on them, which causes friction in families and between tribes. This is only one example of many.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. once said: "An individual has not started living until he can rise above the narrow confines of his individualistic concerns to the broader concerns of all humanity." So more than just building classrooms, and filling them with equipment, the goal is to promote peace, for the well being of all of humanity in the world; for we are all interconnected, and interdependent. Just like they say, "If you do not know where you are going, any road will take you there."



The multitude of Congolese live in the dark because of lack of knowledge. They are at the mercy of the educated few. Education is the key to freedom! Someone has to do the work of raising awareness to stop the exploitation of humanity by promoting education that gives people the ability to make better choices. Friends, as I embark this year, I hope that you will continue to support this work; for alone I cannot do it, together we can. As to why I do this, well if not us then who will do it???

Thank you for all your help.

Wa Mbuyu Puma

## “Miracle Tree” Seeds Donated for Congo Villages

Members of the Universalist Unitarian Church of Frederick (UUCF) presented Puma with 1500 moringa tree seeds. The moringa tree is widely known as the “miracle tree” because the leaves are loaded with protein, all essential amino acids, vitamins, and minerals. The nutrition content of the leaves reads like the label on a common vitamin pill. All parts of the tree - seeds, bark, gum, roots are edible and have many medicinal uses including treatment of high blood pressure and diabetes. The seeds can also be used to purify water and contain a high quality oil that can be used in cooking, making cosmetics, as a lubricant and biofuel.



Ed Rau (left) hands moringa tree seeds to Puma (2nd from right) at UUCF as Sandi Smith-Gill, Cynthia Kuske, and Rev. Robert Hughes observe. In the pot held by Reverend Hughes is a three month old moringa tree grown in Frederick, MD.

Moringa is a fast-growing, drought-resistant tree that grows even in marginal soils and with very little care. It grows in tropical regions of the world where malnutrition is the worst. In one year, a seedling can grow over 9 feet. More information is available at <http://www.treesforlife.org/> or the Moringa oleifera Wikipedia article.

The seeds were presented to Puma during a UUCF service by Edward Rau, a research biologist who specializes in plant varieties for sustainable production. Puma will oversee distribution and cultivation of the seeds in Tshamalale and Poleni villages where schools built by Able & Willing are located. It won't take long for these seeds to grow in Congo. Stay tuned for his report later this summer.

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## We Need Cheap Electricity at Myrt

To make our goals for cheap electricity we need to connect to the public grid. This will allow for the workshops and computer labs to run at full capacity and generate income for Myrt schools by producing affordable quality products for local markets and schools. It will also provide job skills training for students and the extra income can be used to lower tuition, increase student aid, increase teacher salaries, hire more teachers, and invest in school improvements.

The main thing holding up the full use of our shops and computer labs is the cost of fuel, over \$7/gal., to run our diesel generators. The electricity from our two wind generators and solar panel is cheap but does not provide nearly enough to run the shop machinery. The solution is to hook up to the state run hydroelectric power grid. Last year, Puma made progress towards connecting to the grid. All of the necessary utility poles were made in the school shops with cost shared by neighbors in the village. Puma got price estimates for the wire, transformers and other material needed.

Puma estimated that the cost would be \$15,000 to install utility poles, wire and transformers. The school would then get free electricity for two years, after which the state will take ownership of the equipment and charge reasonable utility rates. The cheap electricity will give Myrt School a strategic market advantage in producing goods to compete with high priced and low quality imports. With only \$3,000 in our budget to initiate production, Puma along with Myrt staff and students have an opportunity to prove that Myrt can generate income for the school and gain valuable job skills.

## Waza Teacher Training Seminars

The third edition of Waza Teacher Training Seminar will occur this summer 2010. Three seminars will be organized. Two seminars will be held at Myrt School and the third will be held in Kolwezi, 150 miles northwest of our school. The seminars will target 210 teachers and administrators.

The overarching theme for the 2010 seminars is: What Educational System for the 21st Century for the D R Congo? it will include such topics as Information and Communications Technologies in the Classroom, Global Classroom Collaboration, Decentralization and Education, and the Writers' Workshop. Seminar I will focus on the teaching of Math and Science. Seminar II will focus on the writers' workshop, while Seminar III will be on technology integration.



Faustin teaching a seminar for MYRT teachers  
Content used by permission of the Waza Alliance For Quality Education

Three Waza Board members are going to be in Lubumbashi. Sylvia Hyde, who attended in 2008, Richard Hollowell, treasurer, and Faustin N'Tala, president, who has taught Waza seminars each year since 2008. We are looking forward to a successful third edition of the Waza Teacher Training Seminars. More information will be available on the Waza website. This year Puma is donating \$20/day to cover lodging and food expenses for each person on the Waza team that

chooses to stay at his house next to Myrt School in Tshamalale Village so they can experience living "a la Congolaise." Puma is donating the money from his own personal funds out of appreciation for training of the Myrt staff that will be provided by the Waza team.

## Biology and Medical Books Needed

Experience with a flesh eating disease and other stories of sickness in the Congo has convinced Puma that Myrt School students need to learn biology and the real causes of diseases.



Too often, natural illnesses are blamed on witchcraft. The accused may be a neighbor who has a dispute with the afflicted person and, if found guilty by the village or a witch doctor, may be punished.

A tour of the science lab at Walkersville Middle School inspired Jim and Puma to search for microscopes, textbooks and educational posters for Puma to take to Congo this year. With help from Captain

Priya Rednam and her colleagues at Fort Detrick, and Dr. Gregory Tobin of Biological Mimetics, Inc., they are searching for suitable microscopes and supplies for the school at good prices.

Meanwhile, Puma has contacted two people with technical expertise in Lubumbashi who are willing to help develop the school curricula. Mr. Kashia, who runs the lab at the Catholic Hospital, and Dr. Henri Mukumbi, the director and founder of AMO-Congo, the main Congolese NGO specializing in HIV/AIDS work that conducts HIV/AIDS education each year for our schools.

**We are looking for biology and medical books and educational posters.** Please give Jim Carpenter a call (301-371-5263) if you have some recommendations or donations.

## Walkersville Middle School 6th Grade Students Fund Water Tower

Over three hundred sixth grade students at Walkersville Middle School (WMS) drew posters to raise money for Able & Willing. The students voted with money for their favorite posters, raising \$320. "The money will be used to build a water tower for one of the schools we have built in Congo", said Mbuyu "Puma" WaMbuyu, president and co-founder of Able & Willing. "The tower will hold water pumped by a playground seesaw constructed by our students as a shop project." The school will then be the first in the area with running water. Until then, water must be drawn in buckets by hand from a 30-foot hand dug well.



(L-R) Sydney Giles, Mari Ella Madrid, Kaitleen Borromeo, Puma WaMbuyu (president of Able & Willing), and Chandler Harris. The students' posters were voted among the best by placing money on favorites. Other winners, not in picture, were Kyrie McDougal and Rhea Putamana.

Puma and Jim Carpenter, who has accompanied Puma on four of

his 17 yearly trips to Congo, addressed the sixth grade students. The students listened intently and asked probing questions as Puma described life and school conditions in Africa and his long campaign to build schools in his native Congo. The posters with the most votes were drawn by Chandler Harris, Rhea Putamana, Kyrie McDougal, Mari Ella Madrid, Sydney Giles, and Kaitleen

Borromeo. The six students enjoyed a pizza lunch with Puma, Jim and Julie Dixon, the school media specialist who organized the poster contest.

This marked the fifth year that sixth graders at WMS have raised funds, totaling over \$1600. Last year, the money the sixth graders' donation was used to put a roof on a new toilet facility for one of the Myrt Schools.

## SeeSaw Pump to be put in use this year

In a related story, this photo shows the type of seesaw pump that will be used to provide "running" water for MYRT schools. This dual pumping system was designed and built under Puma's direction by Wambuyu Tech students and will be able to pump water up forty feet into the water tower that Walkersville Middle School sixth graders raised money to build. Additional pumps will be built and sold to other communities as a means of income generation for MYRT school. Profit from a single machine could pay the tuition of 13 elementary students at the Poleni campus for one year. The market demand is high for these pumps, and Wambuyu Tech's pumps are of much higher quality and lower production costs than those produced in South Africa or China



## Poleni Clinic and Nursing School

Work on the new clinic and nursing school in Poleni village will progress in stages as we receive donations from our supporters. We are currently trying to raise \$10,000 for the first construction stage of the 14 room complex.

## Preschool Facilities

Demographics around our first school are changing to include more families with two working parents. Demand for preschool facilities is high and operating costs are low. Last year a classroom for preschool children was added to an existing building. This year, the interior will be finished. The school workshops will supply the furnishings. \$2,500 has been budgeted to finish the project.

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## In Memorium

Last year, we featured a piece about Robie Sangster, a humble but heroic supporter facing the final stages of ALS (Lou Gehrig's Disease). With sadness, we received news that Robie passed away peacefully on August 27, 2009. In spite of her own challenges, Robie remained committed to a higher cause and found strength in her connection to others. Robie crafted the following essay about that faith a decade ago. We have chosen to print the piece in its entirety in celebration of her spirit, and in honor of the estate she left to Able & Willing. That gift is largely responsible for enabling Puma's extended presence in Congo this year, and comes at an important time for the schools. Robie will be dearly missed and appreciated

*This is my belief in the circle, the web of life.*

*My life is a circle. It is held together by many strands that form a web. My circle of life begins to grow at birth and continues the rest of my life. The web is series of interconnected threads within the circle. You can close circles within the web.*

*It does not mean the circle that was created is forgotten. It remains a part of the web. It is a part of the strength or weakness of the web. However if it is closed it means that it will not touch new parts of the web. But, parts of the web can reach out and continue to touch the circle (memories). Outside strands also reach in and touch the web. This is other people who touch my life and when they do part of my life touches theirs. Our webs become entwined.*

*So people, the past and the present make up the circle. The threads weave the complex pattern of one's life. When someone leaves my life I can let a part of me go too. If the threads are long and strong they survive a long time if the other web cherishes the ties and does not sever them. On the other hand, reaching out to others and being a part of their lives can be exhausting and unrewarding when you get little or nothing in return. Or worse, they hurt you intentionally. If this is the case we tend to close the circle. We sever the ties (despair).*

*When my life starts to touch another life again (forgiveness), we can cast the threads out to each other. If the threads are strong they will span the time and distance. If we are weak and we cling to the past too much we may tear the circle. If we hurt each other too much we will again sever the circle. This is the way of the circle.*

*And finally a circle can be torn open by too many strands touching and clinging to it. This is clinging to the past too much and not letting go. You shouldn't want to lose touch with the past, but it cannot play too much in the present or the future. The web of life becomes unbalanced and distorted if it does. So as you can see the web should grow outward not inward. If it is a good life and it touches many lives then the webs you wove into other lives will stay alive as memories. They will close the holes your leaving makes, and your threads recede, but they will be stronger for the circle of memories that remain within them, which was your part of their life.*

*And when the web dies, my threads will be cast upon the wind, but the ones that remain within the living webs of life, remain forever.*

R. L. Sangster January 30, 1999

## Farewell Picnic & Fundraiser

**Sunday, June 27**                      **2 - 5 pm (rain or shine)**  
**Lewis Mill, 3205 Poffenberger Road, Jefferson, MD.**

Come and picnic with Able & Willing before Puma departs for Congo.

Last chance to chat with Puma in 2010!

BBQ served. Bring a dish, drinks, or munchies to share.

Volleyball, swimming, canoeing, hiking

Live music by Brulee band

Displays of art, pottery, green technology, solar cooking, Able & Willing projects

Demo of microscope that Puma is taking

\$20 donation is suggested

## *Please Help*

**We need to keep projects moving ahead.**

The parents in these villages are able and willing to work on building the schools.  
 The students are able and eager to learn. The Myrt School staff is able and working hard.  
 Puma is willing to commit more time to developing human resources.

**I would like to make a tax-deductible contribution of:**

- \$50.00** Pays for 2 bags of cement
- \$150.00** Pays for a 3'x3' classroom window
- \$1500.00** Buys desks for an entire classroom
- Other** \_\_\_\_\_

**Send to:** AWIEF  
 P.O. Box 4303  
 Frederick, MD 21705-4303

**My Address:** \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

- Please send newsletters
- Please send year-end summary of my donations.

Please use my email to save postage and printing: \_\_\_\_\_

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