

Patricia Crossley: Making a Difference
by Lee McKenzie

As I write this in my comfortable, climate-controlled office, working with state-of-the-art computer technology and assured of a dependable Internet connection and electrical source, my friend Patricia Crossley is settling into her part-time home in a village in Kenya. She will have a fairly safe water supply, limited fresh meat and vegetables due to a lack of refrigeration, and intermittent electricity. She will have an Internet connection . . . some of the time.

I met Pat in 1998 when I joined the Vancouver Island Chapter of Romance Writers of America. I shared the excitement of the sale of her first book in 1999, followed by six more novels and several short stories and anthologies. Just being a published author would have been enough to impress me, but there is so much more to this woman.

Pat is a retired teacher with a life-long commitment to education. In September 2001, she went to Kenya to administer a girl's scholarship program sponsored by the Canadian Harambee Education Society. Six months later, she came home with stories about people and places that most of us only dream about. Inspirational stories about people who live in poverty and struggle against all odds to get a high school education. With Pat's help, some succeed. Humorous stories about her adventures with public transportation, such as riding in the back of a truck called a matatu, which is a very unofficial public bus, or skirts hitched and sitting astride a boda boda, a bicycle rigged with a makeshift passenger seat on the back.

Pat also came home with jewelry that year—beautiful necklaces and earrings that were designed and handmade by a man named Julius. Pat was inspired by his talent and hard work and thought her friends in Canada might enjoy wearing Julius's amazing creations. She was right. Thanks to Pat promoting his work, Julius has earned enough money to buy land and send his children to school. To say that I am impressed by Pat's generosity is such an understatement. I am in awe of this woman who travels halfway around the world and has such a profound impact on the lives of so many people.

Soon after Pat arrived home in Canada that year, she began to prepare for her next work term in Kenya, which would be as the Diocesan Education Secretary for an Anglican diocese. Before she returned to Africa in 2003, she arranged to have a container of donated computer equipment shipped to Kenya, and many of her students now have the benefit of attending a school with a computer lab.

For 2004, Pat has a new set of goals. In addition to expanding the computer programs, she has been raising money in support of the Maragoli Goat Project—a collective of women who hope to support their families by raising goats and selling the milk and meat. The village of Maragoli is situated in one of the poorest parts of Kenya, a rocky, infertile area that isn't suitable for crop farming. Now that these women have Pat on their side, I think it's safe to say that the business of raising goats will soon be flourishing in Maragoli.

She is also expanding her territory to support a girls' high school in Uganda. This residential school is a permanent shelter for girls who are fleeing from regions where female genital mutilation is still practiced or who were abducted by the army but have managed to get away.

For at least the next three years, Pat plans to live and work in a part of the world where poverty and orphans abound and HIV/AIDS has reached epidemic proportions. She takes it all in stride as only someone with her generous spirit and quiet strength can, and she makes a difference. Every time I talk to her about her work in Africa, I'm reminded of my many blessings and the blessings of everyone who has the good fortune to have her enter their lives.

You can visit Pat at her eclectic web site www.patriciacrossley.com where you'll find all sorts of information about her and her books, her alter ego, Margrett Dawson, her work in Africa and her impressions of the African people and their landscape. You'll even get to meet Julius and admire his creations. Take a peek and I'm sure you'll agree that superheroine Patricia Crossley—a talented writer and an extraordinary humanitarian—is one of a kind.