

# Bluffton man send loads of books to Africa after visit

By *Edwina Hoyle*  
CONTRIBUTOR

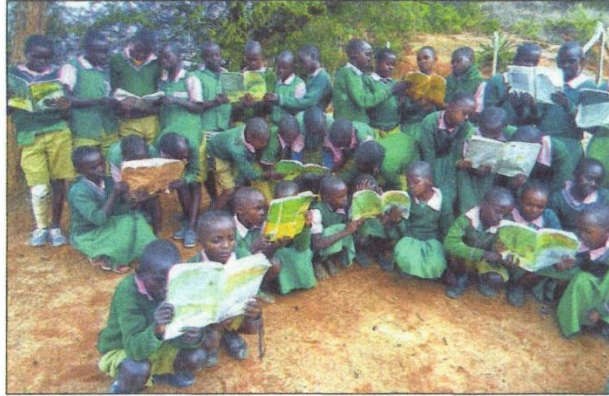
Try to imagine you have no internet, you live in a remote village, and your local school (if one even exists) is desperate for books.

Can you imagine picking up two 30-pound boxes of encyclopedias at a post office, traveling for two hours by public transportation in a Volkswagen minivan crammed beyond capacity with strangers, then loading the books onto the back of a motorcycle for the last hour of your journey over dirt roads – all in torrential rain?

That is exactly what Francis Wanjiku and her father did to deliver books to the Kyalinlini Primary School in Kitui, Kenya, according to Roy Austin of Bluffton, founder of Libraries For Kids International.

Wanjiku is the "super volunteer" working with Austin to supply books to schools in rural areas of Africa.

In September 2018, Austin fulfilled his



COURTESY LIBRARIES FOR KIDS

Students at the Kyalinlini School in Kitui, Kenya, share books received from Libraries for Kids International, a nonprofit based in Bluffton.

bucket list dream of taking a five-week safari trip across five countries in Africa. He went there for the animals, but he came

home with a mission.

Part of his trip was a cultural "experience" visit to a school in Kenya, where

the students' only teacher gave a talk. She said all students learn English beginning in first grade.

When asked by another traveler if they had a library, she responded, "No, but we would love to have one."

That simple declaration stuck with Austin and set him on a mission to help create libraries in the poor schools of Kenya.

Though Austin has developed relationships with several trusted people in Kenya, Wanjiku has become his point person, he said.

"She is invested in this project because when she was in school, she shared one textbook with 30 kids," Austin said.

"That's what it's like over there. It's hard not to develop empathy for kids 8,000 miles away. Encyclopedias are good for kids because they are like Google to us."

Wanjiku sent a message to Austin telling him about how the children reacted when they opened the boxes of books:

Please see **LIBRARIES** on page 15A

## LIBRARIES from page 14A

"The students were speechless. They had never seen encyclopedias before, and learning that a stranger is providing everything at their doorstep for free and willing to give them more is motivating them to work even harder. They started reviewing the books as soon as they opened the boxes. The experience was awesome, Roy. I saw kids hungry for knowledge, endless questions and really curious! Libraries for Kids is going to make a difference, no doubt!"

The next school to receive books is Kongoni, located near Tsavo West National Park in Kenya, where there is sometimes a safety issue with elephants wandering through the schoolyard. Austin said in just one year, he already has a waiting list of 12 schools that want libraries of their own.

Austin said that if a community wants a school, they have to build it and the government will provide a teacher. "Education is very important to them," he said. "My favorite example is the Maasai tribe. They are nomadic herdsman who would move their goats and sheep to different

locations to find grasses for their herds to feed on. But education is so important to them they actually changed their way of life so their kids can get an education. And the kids are really excited to go to school."

Austin said that the need is great and that encyclopedias we no longer use are of immeasurable value in areas of the world that don't have the infrastructure to provide internet so students can benefit from computers and tablets – the things we take for granted.

Libraries for Kids International is a nonprofit organization determined to establish libraries and expand educational opportunities for students across the globe, starting in Africa.

They send not only encyclopedias, but also textbooks, story books and cash donations for the school to cover customs duties.

For more information, visit [libraries4kids.org](http://libraries4kids.org).

*Edwina Hoyle is a freelance writer in Bluffton.*