

Farwell's friends left inspired, in awe after Africa trip

By Kate Howes
Staff writer

Just do it. That was the attitude with which cousins Lizzie Roling and Traci Trenkamp approached the opportunity to take a 20-day trip to a poor village full of orphaned, disadvantaged children located in a country along the west coast of Africa.

After all, 22-year-old Roling, an employee at Medical Associates in Clinton and Trenkamp, a 16-year-old sophomore at Northeast Community High School, figured if they gave the matter too much thought, they may lose their nerve.

So, in November the two made their plans to leave for Ghana Dec. 8 to visit their friend, Renee Farwell, formerly of Goose Lake, and see for themselves everything she has done to help give the needy children of Ghana the food, clothing, shelter, education, culture and caring every child deserves.

Roling and Trenkamp also were inspired

a new school and give them the advantages Agoe never had as a child.

Since then, MOP officially has been declared a non-profit organization, land was purchased for the building, the first-floor has been constructed, teachers/volunteers have been recruited and thanks to generous donations of area residents, students have uniforms and are obtaining the necessary school supplies.

There still is a great need for more funding.

After seeing in person the faces of the young children who will benefit from the generosity of others, Roling and Trenkamp say they hope people will continue to give and help the remarkable children who left such a lasting and loving impression.

In fact, just seeing pictures of the smiling children on the MOP web site has touched people across the country.

Another volunteer who traveled to Ghana at the very same time at Roling and Trenkamp and was as deeply affected by

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— Elena Arosemena

to donate their hearts and hands to help further Farwell's dream of giving the children better, healthier, more enriched lives.

However, the pair didn't plan on how much the children would forever change their lives as well.

Having grown up with Farwell, Roling, the daughter of Larry and Joan, has been staying informed of the progress being made at Mawuvio's Outreach Programme (MOP), the school/dormitory for children Farwell co-founded with friend Kwame Agoe, who grew up an orphan on the streets of Ghana.

The two met in Aug. 2009 when Farwell traveled to Ghana for a study-abroad program. After hearing Agoe's story and of his desire to give the poor children in Ghana better lives, the two joined forces to build

the experience was Elena Arosemena of Atlanta, Ga.

Arosemena actually found out about Farwell, Agoe and MOP by conducting a random search on the Internet.

The 53-year-old who loves to travel and is a native of the Republic of Panama came upon the site on which visitors can order bracelets and other hand-made jewelry. All proceeds go to MOP and after reading Farwell's name as the director, Arosemena says her curiosity was piqued.

About two or three clicks later, she found herself on the web site face-to-face with the children of MOP.

“It was their youthful energy captured in brief video clips ‘A Magnet Invitation’ that seized my heart,” she shares. “Once I saw (their faces), I knew I was in for some-



Traci Trenkamp, daughter of Tom and Barb, stands with Cici, the grandmother of Mawuvio's Outreach Programme co-founder Kwame Agoe. Trenkamp, a sophomore at Northeast High School, says Cici is a wonderful cook who feeds everyone very well and is a caring soul.

Contributed photo

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During her stay, Arosemena helped with after-school activities, taught poetry and shared with students her favorite places in the world.

Not having any children of her own, being surrounded by dozens of children was a truly wonderful experience for Arosemena.

Being able to share it with Roling and Trenkamp made it even better.

“They are two remarkable young ladies,” she relates. “I was so proud to be with

them. They were 150 percent up for the experience. We had many memorable moments.”

Special moments too many too count

Both Roling and Trenkamp say they experienced lots of special moments with the orphans and other people they met on their trip.

“They all just wanted to be so close to us,” Roling says with a smile. “They were so accepting of us and we found ourselves loving them right off the bat.”

Trenkamp says each day they would engage in a variety of activities with the kids, including art projects, learning Spanish and playing games.

Both girls had their hair braided in traditional African style and say they simply enjoyed experiencing the various customs and watching the children get excited about things taken for granted by youngsters in the United States.

“We took them to the mall to eat pizza,” Trenkamp recalls. “They loved it.”

“Cheese is a big deal for them,” Roling adds. “It's very expensive there, so the fact they were able to eat it was really something special for them.”

Other treats including cotton candy, pop and goodies Roling and Trenkamp brought along such as peanut butter, popcorn and Pop Rocks™ also were a source of wonder and excitement for the kids.

They also attended an end-of-the-year festival, consisting of Christmas music and lots of dancing. Church services were part church, part concert and parts when everyone stands up, dances and is moved by the spirit.

During their stay the girls stayed with Cici, Agoe's grandmother, who they say took very good care of them and prepared delicious meals including rice, chicken and plantains.

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Lizzie Roling, daughter of Larry and Joan, poses on the last day of her visit to Kissemah with a group of students who attend Mawuvio's Outreach Programme. Of the experi-

ence, 22-year-old Roling says it was “amazing” and she cannot wait until she can return. “The kids were amazing,” she notes. “They were so accepting of us and so easy to love.”



Co-founders of Mawuvio's Outreach Programme Renee Farwell of Goose Lake and Kwame Agoe, who was orphaned and abandoned at a young age and grew up on the streets of Ghana, a country on the west coast of Africa, are very much like parents to many of the children in Kissemah Village. Recent visitors to the village and Goose Lake area residents Lizzie Roling and Traci Trenkamp say everything Farwell has done to give the children a better life truly is inspiring.

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In one of her favorite photos from the trip, Elena Arosemena of Atlanta, Ga., poses with children in Kissemah. It was through a random Google® search Arosemena found out about Mawuvio's Outreach Programme and decided to get in touch with co-founder Renee Farwell of Goose Lake. She decided to travel to see the school last month and says the people and children made her feel as if she had known them her whole life.

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True source of inspiration

Roling and Trenkamp admit they don't know how Farwell has managed to remain so committed to this project and courageous to move to another country to help others.

While many people talk about the need for more food, water, clothing, shelter and education for children of impoverished countries, Farwell actually created a plan and put it into action.

A plan, that is, she intends to see through to the very end.

"I don't know how (Farwell and Agoe) do it," Roling relates. "They just keep

Both girls say they will return to Ghana. They also agree, their time there was the fastest 20 days of their lives.

"We were dreading having to say goodbye to everyone," Roling shares. "I remember when we only had three days left and we said, 'Is that all?' We didn't want to leave."

They arrived home happy once again to have running water, yet feeling almost foolish for all the material things with which they have been blessed.

"They're so much more grateful for what they have than we are," Trenkamp notes. "They have almost nothing, yet they take nothing for granted."

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— Lizzie Roling

going. They are such amazing people."

"They're so determined," Trenkamp adds. "They are like those kids' parents. They truly have their best interests in mind."

Roling says it was easier for her and her cousin to go to Ghana knowing their friend already would be there to show them around and introduce them to everyone.

Farwell, however, traveled to Ghana not knowing anyone yet having the compassion and resolve to do whatever she could to help.

Arosemena says the trip reminded her how resilient the human spirit is.

"No matter where we live, what color our skin is, what language we speak and how much money we have or don't have in our bank accounts . . . we all want to be loved, we all want to be recognized, to be validated, to be part of a family or community that cares for us. We want to have fun, enjoy our friends and family and yes, we want to have dreams and aspirations that one day can be accomplished."

Donations to Programme tax-deductible

As of Nov. 19, 2011, Mawuvio's Outreach Programme, a school for needy and orphaned children in Ghana located off the west coast of Africa, officially became a 501(c)(3), non-profit organization recognized by the federal government.

All contributions are fully tax-deductible.

The mission of the outreach programme, co-founded by Renee Farwell, a graduate of Northeast Community High School and the daughter of Steve and Barb Farwell of Goose Lake is to: "provide free education, shelter and care for the orphaned and disadvantaged children living in the Kissemah Village community regardless of sex, age, race or tribal origin."

Staff and volunteers at Mawuvio's

Outreach have taught the children at the school bead-weaving and creating bracelets, earrings and necklaces which are then sold to raise funds for the orphanage/school.

To purchase jewelry visit http://www.etsy.com/shop/Mawuvios?ref=si_shop.

Persons also may become a child sponsor. Sponsors can correspond letters and pictures with a specific child and 100 percent of the funds go to support all the children and adults in Mawuvio's Outreach family.

To see photos of the children, download a child sponsorship form or for an address to which monetary donations may be made, visit www.mawuviosoutreachprogramme.org/support-mop.html.